

**GENESIS AND GROWTH OF
MALABAR KUDIYAN
SANGHAM AND THE
PEASANT ISSUES IN
MALABAR UPTO 1947**

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICC	:	All India Congress Committee
AIKS	:	All India Kisan Sabha
AKKS	:	All Kerala Karshaka Sangham
AMKS	:	All Malabar Karshaka Sangham
CDM	:	Civil Disobedience Movement
CPI	:	Communist Party of India
CSP	:	Congress Socialist Party
FNR	:	Fortnightly Report
GO	:	Government Order
ICHR	:	Indian Council of Historical Research
ICSSR	:	Indian Council of Social Science Research
INC	:	Indian National Congress
KCSP	:	Kerala Congress Socialist Party
KGSS	:	Kerala Gandhi Seva Sangham
KKS	:	Kerala Karshaka Sangham
KLRA	:	Kerala Land Relations Act
KPA	:	Kerala Peasant's Association
KPCC	:	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
KS	:	Karshaka Sangham
MDKS	:	Malabar District Karshaka Sangham

MJP	:	Madras Judicial Proceedings
MKC	:	Malabar Kisan Congress
MKS	:	1. Malabar Karshaka Sangham (In Chapter Four)
		2. Malabar Kudiyan Sangham (In Chapter Three)
MLA	:	Madras Legislative Assembly
MLC	:	Madras Legislative Council
MRTPA	:	Madras Ryots and Tenants Protection Act
MSP	:	Malabar Special Police
MTA	:	Malabar Tenancy Act
MTAAD	:	Malabar Tenancy Act Amendment Day
MTB	:	Malabar Tenancy Bill
NAI	:	National Archives of India
NNPR	:	Native Newspaper Report

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to focus on the formation and activities of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham. The Malabar Kudiyan Sangham was formed in December 1922 at Pattambi under the leadership of some leading advocates in the Pattambi Bar like T. Rama Kurup as President and M.M. Kunhirama Menon and P.A. Raman Menon as Secretaries. G. Sankaran Nair was the organising Secretary. The objective before them was recognition of the rights of the tenants over land mainly the *kanamdars*. Traditionally there was an understanding among different layers of people who owned and worked on land. Though the notion of *janmi*, *kanamdar* (intermediary) and *verumpattamdar* existed, there was no denial of rights on produce in a proportionate manner. The recognition of the proprietary rights of the *janmis* over land by the colonial government made the situation complex and complicated. There were a series of tenancy bills presented in the Madras Legislative Assembly which were not passed. This created a lot of discontent among the *kanamdars*. In this context that we have to understand the formation of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham.

The relevance of the study is that most of the historical works and studies of this period do not touch on the activities of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham. Though we find a number of tenancy bills coming up in the Madras Legislative Assembly, those bills could not find a solution. Thus, the significance of the study is to go deeply into an untouched area which makes the study a pioneering one. Some of the works which partially deal with this area are *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Changes: Malabar 1836-1982* by P. Radhakrishnan and *Tenancy Legislation in Malabar (1880-1970)* by V.V. Kunhikrishnan. Some of the suggestions made by William Logan in the Malabar Special Commission Report of 1881 as well as K.N. Panikkar's article "Peasant Revolts in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in A.R. Desai (e.d.), *Peasant Struggles in India* also throw some light on this topic. We get an insight into the working of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham through a number of government files. The initiative for the movement came from the literate section of the Nair community who gradually entered into colonial administrative set up. Here the concept of education and employment, changes with the new understanding of a money economy. The opportunities of a cash salary and its appropriation for socio-economic improvement intensified the demand for establishing full property rights over land. It has to be noted that

in these discussions, the question of *verumpattamdars* were not discussed. Malabar had a distinct identity regarding the land tenure system. Unlike other regions of India, Malabar land tenure system was entirely different. Under the colonial administration the customary agrarian relations had been violently disturbed to serve the interests of the British Raj. The government's earlier attempts were directed to win over the former native chieftains who had remained with them during the Third Anglo - Mysore War. The intervention of the law courts in defining the various land tenures that prevailed in Malabar also added to the complexities of the tenancy question in Malabar.

The study entitled "Genesis and Growth of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham and the Peasant Issues in Malabar upto 1947" is an attempt to analyse the activities of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham (Malabar Tenant's Association) for the enactment of a comprehensive tenancy legislation for Malabar in the context of socio-economic and political perspectives covering a period of more than a century from 1836 to 1947. Malabar, a district of Madras Presidency of India was a geographical and cultural entity. From the first quarter of the 19th century onwards the sub-continent of India was treading through a process of transformation. Malabar was not an exception to this, for it was very well a part of the sub-continent which was subjected to

political, economic and cultural colonialism of Britain such as vulnerable to both coercive and persuasive forays of colonialism. We now accept that colonialism has altered the cognitive domains of both the coloniser and the colonised which produced a situation conducive for colonial domination.

Colonialism had brought in drastic changes in almost all sectors of Indian economy and precisely it brought major changes in agrarian structure. This resulted in continuous tensions all over India which later developed into unorganised and organised struggles of the peasantry. During the late 19th and early 20th century, the peasantry rose in revolt even without a coherent political ideology. When the National movement developed the peasant masses gradually got associated with it and participated in the anti-imperialist struggle side by side with the struggle for redressing their own grievances.

By the treaty of Seringapatam in 1792, Tipu Sultan ceded the province of Malabar to the English East India Company. Malabar was incorporated first into the Presidency of Bombay to which position it remained till 1800 and subsequently transferred to the Presidency of Madras. It was during the Mysorean invasions that the agrarian structure of Malabar was disturbed for the first time. The customary land rights of various classes had been disturbed during the short-lived Mysorean rule [from 1760 to 1792]. The

Mysorean rulers introduced a land tax which encroached on the customary shares of *janmis* and the *kanamdars* (who formerly used to divide the *pattam* equally) but left the share of the *verumpattamdars* intact. Since many Brahmins and Nairs had fled, lands were actually in possession of *kanamdars*, now mostly Mappila Muslims. Therefore, in all probability, it was with the Mappila *kanamdars* that the Mysorean revenue officials made the first settlement. Those who rebelled or resisted were hanged. The Mysoreans did not spare even their co-religionists.

With the extension of British colonial rule to Malabar in 1792, the British reversed the land policy followed by the Mysoreans, leased out lands to petty Rajas of numerous principalities, who were supporters of colonial government during Mysorean invasions. The misinterpretation of the tenures and their ruthless implementation through colonial administrative machinery had resulted in widespread discontent among tenants and sowed the seeds for agrarian revolts known as Mappila Outbreaks. While the Hindu peasants were passive in their sufferings because of their submissiveness and respect for traditional authority, the Mappilas who had enjoyed temporary superiority during the Mysorean rule could not tolerate it and resorted to violence.¹

¹ P. Radhakrishnan, "Peasant Struggles and Land Reforms in Malabar", *EPW Vol. 15*, No: 50, December 13, 1980, p.2096.

Later the colonial government realised that they had misinterpreted the traditional land tenures that prevailed in Malabar. But they were not prepared to rectify their error mainly due to political considerations. They considered politically unwise to go against the interests of a class of loyal landlords who were supporting them. As a result of British colonial policy in the 19th century with respect to the social structure of agrarian relations and as a consequence of the impact of new economic forces, Malabar evolved a distributive system of land tenure, which however, embodied features similar to land relations elsewhere in India. The agrarian structure as evolved by the British constituted a class of landlords (big *janmis*) who had absolute ownership of the land, recognised by the law courts and enforced by law. This differed from the pre-colonial system where the *janmis* had overlordship and a share of the produce, but no absolute rights over the soil.²

The interpretation given by the British to the traditional land structure and introduction of the concept of private property in land helped the creation of the parasitic big landlordism. This created fertile conditions for the landlords to continue and intensify the pre-capitalist extortion of rent and other feudal forms of exploitation. In Madras, this importation became concretised in

² William Logan, *Malabar, Vol. I* (Trivandrum, 1981), Chapter-4.

the definition of the *janmi*. But this legal view itself only means that the landowner can do with the land what every owner of commodities can do with his commodities. Moreover, the use of this power depends wholly upon economic conditions, which are dependent of their will. The *janmis*, therefore, received a legal power to utilise the land on the basis of free private ownership and contractual relations without being historically developed into bourgeois class. While the bourgeois property relations did not develop, the *janmis* tried to use the unrestricted rights to strengthen his extortion of pre-capitalist rent and to maintain his feudal oppressive powers. At the same time, inexorably higher levels of commodity production, relation of exchange and commercialisation of agriculture worked to undermine his feudal powers and to force him to cede some grounds to the new class forces growing within the womb of Kerala society.

Some published works dealing with peasant issues are available. But none of the earlier studies have touched the very sincere and tireless work and activities of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham in detail. Hence, this study attempts to make good this short coming by highlighting the activities of the Kudiyan Sangham for the enactment of a comprehensive tenancy legislation for Malabar. In the backdrop of marginalisation of the peasant class in

the colonial period, I feel a study of this kind assumes great significance.

This study is the result of my research on the above theme. The conclusions of the work are drawn from my readings of primary sources. The thesis is divided into four chapters.

The chapters are: 1) Malabar Rebellion, 2) Disintegration of Traditional Society, 3) Formation of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham and its Activities and 4) Peasant Issues in Malabar from 1930 to 1947.

Source Materials

The source materials for this study obtained from a variety of sources. The source material consists of Government Orders, official reports like Special Commission Reports, Legislative Department Proceedings of the period, Debates in the Madras Legislative Council, Native Newspaper Reports, Fortnightly Reports, Newspapers etc. The documents kept in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) Library, the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) Library; the National Archives at New Delhi were consulted. The Tamil Nadu State Archives at Egmore houses a number of documents regarding the Legislations in regard to agrarian relations. Mathrubhumi Newspapers since 1923 are a storehouse

of information on this topic. In this connection a lot of books are available in the Department of History Library and C.H. Mohammed Koya Central Library of the University of Calicut. The Regional Archives at Kozhikode was also utilised extensively.

Previous Studies

A large amount of historical works have been produced on the topic. These works have brought out various facets of political, economic, social and cultural life of the people of Malabar prior to 1947. A look from a distant angle would make us oblivious of many details inscribed on the subject. Mappila Outbreaks and Mappila Rebellion are topics which had received attention from a number of scholars including foreign scholars.

Among the works which examine the historical background and causes of the rebellion, the most significant one is that of K. Madhavan Nair.³ As an active freedom fighter who had occasions to visit a number of places where the revolts occurred, Madhavan Nair's account on the early incidental characteristics of Mappila community, Khilafat movement, agrarian discontent and circumstances leading to 1921 Rebellion gives a fairly comprehensive account of the Mappila Rebellion.

Conrad Wood in his extensive work traces the historical background of the revolts and makes a deep probe into the causes and forces that led to the revolt.⁴ This work utilizing numerous original sources, gives a detailed account of the revolts, victims,

³ K. Madhavan Nair, *Malabar Kalapam* (Mal.) (Malabar Rebellion) (Manjeri Kalyani Amma) (Calicut, 1971).

⁴ Conrad Wood, *The Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis* (Delhi, 1987).

agrarian issues involved, legislative measures taken, land policies of the colonial government and the class of beneficiaries.

The Mappila Rebellion edited by C.R.F. Tottenham should be approached with caution, not primarily for the materials it contains, but for what it may not include.⁵

History of Malabar Rebellion written by R.H. Hitchcock falls into a different category from the compilation of Tottenham.⁶ This was written immediately after the suppression of the rebellion under orders of the Government of Madras. This book has been used with extreme caution to avoid being influenced by the obvious bias of the author.

Stephen F. Dale in his work questions the common notion that the Outbreaks were solely due to economic grievances and agrarian discontent.⁷ By citing a number of evidences, he argues that economic grievances were not the main cause of the Outbreaks.

Robert Hardgrave in his book identified a multiplicity of explanatory factors such as agrarian discontent, the perceived threat to Islam, the Congress-Khilafat agitation, inflammatory

⁵ C.R.F. Tottenham, *The Mappila Rebellion, 1921-22* (Madras, 1987).

⁶ R.H. Hitchcock, *A History of the Malabar Rebellion 1921* (Madras, 1925).

⁷ Stephen Frederick Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier, The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922* (Oxford, 1930).

newspaper reports and provocation by colonial officers and police as factors leading to rebellion in 1921.⁸

P. Radhakrishnan in his work traces the various stages of peasant struggles and the role of the movements in agrarian legislations.⁹ He is of the view that the progress in the land reforms had been due to the organised struggles by peasants.

The Tenancy Committee of 1927-28 was asked to examine the problems of the tenants and prepare a draft bill for the purpose. But the committee was not helpful to the interests of the tenancy, it even went back from recommendations of the earlier committees regarding the extent of benefit to be given to the weaker tenants. The subsequent committee on Malabar land tenures attempted a detailed examination of land tenures. The committee's report contains history of tenurial developments and tenancy legislation from the inception of colonial rule till 1938.¹⁰ The committee was not able to arrive at an unanimous opinion on most of the major issues.

William Logan's Malabar Manual in two volumes is a monumental work.¹¹ He also suggests some practical measures to

⁸ Robert Hardgrave. L., *The Mappila Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Uprising in 'Malabar'*, *Modern Asian Studies*, II, 1, 1977.

⁹ P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social changes - Malabar 1836-1982* (New Delhi, 1989).

¹⁰ *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee 1940*. (2 Vols, 1940).

¹¹ William Logan, *Malabar Manual 2 Vols* (1887).

improve the conditions of peasantry. Madras District Gazetteer, Malabar by C.A. Innes and F.B. Evans supplements information regarding Malabar.¹² Some of the tenancy questions of Kerala including Malabar had been discussed by T.C. Varghese in his work.¹³ Recently some of the academic questions involved in the agrarian problems of the 19th century have been traced by K.K.N. Kurup.¹⁴ But this monograph is particularly concerned with the approach of Logan to the 19th century agrarian problems.

The other notable studies on the topic are those of Roland E. Miller's, *'Mappila Muslims of Kerala'*,¹⁵ D.N. Dhanagare's *'Peasant Movement in India'*,¹⁶ A.R. Desai's *'Peasant Struggles in India'*,¹⁷ K.N. Panikkar's *'Against Lord and State'*¹⁸, E.M.S. Namboodiripad's *'Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow'*,¹⁹ M. Gangadhara Menon's *'Malabar Rebellion'*,²⁰ Sunil Sen's *'Agrarian Relations in India'*,²¹ K. Saradamoni's *'Matriliny Transformed, Family Law and*

¹² C.A. Innes and Evans F.B., *Madras District Gazetteer, Malabar* (Madras, 1951).

¹³ T.C. Varghese *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960* (Bombay, 1990).

¹⁴ K.K.N. Kurup, *William Logan, A Study in the Agrarian Relations of Malabar* (Calicut, 1981).

¹⁵ Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* (Madras, 1976).

¹⁶ D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India: 1920-1950* (New Delhi, 1983).

¹⁷ A.R. Desai, *'Peasant Struggles in India'*, (Bombay, 1979).

¹⁸ K.N. Pannikar, *Against Lord and State* (Delhi, 1989).

¹⁹ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Calcutta 1967).

²⁰ M. Gangadhara Menon, *Malabar Rebellion 1921-22* (Allahabad, 1989).

²¹ Sunil Sen, *Agrarian Relations in India* (New Delhi, 1979).

Ideology in 20th century Travancore,²² Arunimas's *'There Comes Papa'* etc.²³

Chapter one is an exposition of situations in which the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 took place. The Malabar Rebellion is considered as the first serious attempt against the British rule in India since the great Revolt of 1857. It was a tragic episode in the midst of the National movement is now considered as a part of our freedom struggle. Its connection with the country's freedom movement owes to its occurrence along with the Non-Co-operation movement and it was partly originated from the Khilafat struggle which had been launched by the Congress to express solidarity with the cause of the Muslims. The Rebellion of 1921 was the only occasion when the British power was in the military sense successfully challenged and an independent government though confined to a small area and lasting for a short period was established.

Apart from the aspect the Rebellion had another dimension also. The 1921 Rebellion was preceded by a series of revolts known as 'Mappila Outbreaks' or 'Mappila Riots' in the 19th century. The Rebellion and those earlier revolts are unique in one sense, i.e., in respect of the participation of an over whelming number of

²² K. Saradamoni, *Matriliny Transformed, Family Law and Ideology in 20th century Travancore* (New Delhi, 1998).

²³ Arunima G., *There Comes Papa* (New Delhi, 2003).

Mappilas, mostly Mappila peasants. The Mappila Outbreaks that occurred from about 1836 to the close of the century and the subsequent Rebellion of 1921 in the midst of Non-co-operation and Khilafat movements were spontaneous expressions of opposition to, and protest against, the landlords and the government. Mappila outbreaks that rocked south Malabar in the 19th century were civil disturbances of violent nature. The Mappila tenants of Ernad and Walluvanad taluks, vulnerable to rack-renting and eviction at the hands of Hindu *janmis*, supported by British courts, rose against them. They had numerous agrarian and economic grievances against their hard masters (Hindu landlords and British government), which led to open revolt. The agrarian grievances and dissatisfaction against the arbitrariness of the British imperialists made the Mappila movement anti-feudal and anti-imperialist. The Rebellion of 1921 was a continuation of the agrarian conflicts of the 19th century. While the earlier risings were localised in extent and limited in scope the latter embraced almost the whole of the Mappila peasant population of Ernad and Walluvanad taluks. The Rebellion of 1921 cast a shadow of gloom over the whole national movement. All further developments in Malabar and Kerala bore the marks of the violent upheaval in Malabar and of the resulting tension in the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Rebellion, therefore, must be

reckoned as a turning point in the modern history of Kerala and as a significant event in the history of Indian National movement. As such it deserves a systematic, dispassionate and objective study.

The second chapter is an attempt to assess the social transformation of Malabar on its exposure to modernity. Simultaneous with the British conquest of India steps were taken to introduce modern administrative apparatuses for the better governance of the region. The efforts of the Evangelicals to 'civilise' the Indian population was complemented by the governmental policies to spread modern education in India. This was, in effect, an attempt on the part of the government to get a low paid and submissive colonial salariat. The Basel Evangelical Mission was the chief agency engaged in imparting education in Malabar. Modern educational institutions were opened to everyone irrespective of caste and creed. Periodically those with enough resources were able to send their children to such institutions. Thus, modern education, employment opportunities, beginning of industries etc. created the conditions for the growth of middle classes fulfilment of whose ambitions largely depended upon the government.

In continuation of the ongoing process the beginning of the publication of periodicals and reading rooms had considerable influence in shaping the mood of the people. From the ranks of the

literate sections the message of the necessity of social change trickled down to the level of the illiterate leading to a social awakening. Break up of the *taravads* and the Marriage Regulations bills inflicted a severe blow on the traditional society. All the conservative notions of society were criticised in the light of the alternative modern notions. This alternative was supported and protected by the judicial system and the 'Pax Britanica' (British Peace) introduced by the British in India. The judicial system as well as the modern administrative structures offered equal treatment to all members of the society irrespective of their high or low born status. It also protected the right of the individual.

In congruence, the new cultural practice put afloat the notion of man. These new notions were powerful enough to break the barriers of the hierarchical society in which the notion of 'caste' and a culture based upon it had a leading role. This, in turn criticised the concept of caste, untouchability, life cycle, rituals, superstitions, beliefs etc., which were projected as the root cause of Indian backwardness. Thus, all the Indian practices were 'identified as the index of backwardness' and the alternative opened to the Indians were believed to be social transformation, which is projected as a marker of progress and dynamism. The forces of transformation unleashed by the new thinking shattered thoroughly the decadent society and released new forces that

reformulated and defined the nature of the various constituents of the emerging society.

Chapter three throws light on the genesis and growth of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham (Tenant's Association) and its activities for the enactment of a comprehensive tenancy legislation for Malabar in the post Rebellion period in south Malabar. Generally speaking, the peasant struggles in Malabar had passed through different phases. In the first phase, the peasant struggles were waged by the Mappila peasants alone who lacked proper organisation, leadership and ideology. In its second phase, these struggles were spearheaded by the *kanamdar* tenants who belonged mostly to the Nair caste. Like the Mappilas they were also stronger in south Malabar. With the formation of the Kudiyan Sangham the peasant struggles gathered a new strength, vigour and momentum. The period 1921-30 witnessed the most active and vocal phase of the Kudiyan Sangham centering around Malabar Tenancy Act and the government's opposition to it.

In 1920's, the most crucial period of the national movement a burning issue of the period was the tenancy question. The public platform was reverberating with reports of landlord oppression and exploitation, tenants' grievances and appeals for tenancy reforms. The tempo of political activity in Malabar soon touched a new high as the combination of the Non-Co-operation, the Khilafat and the Tenancy movements emerged. The focus of the tenancy was on

eviction, over leasing and illegal forms of rent extraction. It was in this way that the first anti-feudal mass movement began to take shape, the movement for tenancy reforms. The emergence of the English educated middle class altered the character and tempo of the tenancy agitations made so far. Committee after committee studied the problems, drafted bills, made recommendations etc. with a view to solving the problem of land relations in Malabar. The Kudiyan Sangham led deputations, meetings held and other forms of agitation resorted to by the well to do peasants (mostly *kanamdars*) from whose ranks are drawn the professionals and government officials.

English education opened the doors of bureaucracy to the members of Nair community. More over, most of the national leaders themselves belonged to the Nair caste. The very founders of the tenancy movement in Malabar belonged to this emerging section of the Nairs. G. Sankaran Nair, one of the pioneers who organised the Kudiyan Sangham had expressed the hope to wipe out oppression by the *janmis* through enacting tenancy reforms. It was, however, a mass movement in a general way, since the target of attack by the agitators was the *janmi*. As a result of their organized struggle the Malabar Tenancy Act was passed in 1930 granting fixity of tenure to the *kanamdars* tenants.

The fourth chapter focuses on the various peasant issues in Malabar since the passing of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 upto

1947. The passing of the Act of 1930 closed one chapter of the tenancy agitation by conceding the demands of the intermediary *kanamdars*. The large mass of peasants, the *verumpattamdars*, who actually cultivated the soil, were kept out of the purview of the movement. The leaders of the movement did, of course, subsequently (after 1930) join hands with the *janmis* against the mass of peasantry but they did the preliminary job of making the struggle against the *janmis* a national and popular movement. There is no doubt that it was the tenancy movement that gave our peasants the first elements of class-consciousness, the consciousness that they should unite as a class and fight their enemy, the *janmi*.

The year 1930 opened a new chapter in the politics of Malabar. It was in this year that a large number of young political enthusiasts entered the arena of politics. The young political workers who were disillusioned by the compromising attitude of the Congress leadership thought of making an alternative forum by incorporating the peasants and workers in the struggle. Such feelings at national level gave birth to the emergence of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1935. The Malabar units of the Congress Socialist Party was formed by these young radical political activists. Their programme was to organise the peasants and workers, thereby ensuring mass participation in the freedom struggle. The Congress Socialist Party when formed its units in

Malabar had the main aim of making the Congress an instrument of struggle as it was thought unwise to make the Congress a forum for compromise with imperialism.

In contrast to the first two phases, the peasant struggles in the third phase were stronger in north Malabar. The socio-economic background and the political sequences leading to the emergence of a peasant organisation and subsequently the birth of the Communist Party, throws up exciting prospects for a detailed study of the history of the militant mass movement in Malabar. In a sense, the national consciousness and the growth of an organised national movement that led to the growth of this militant mass movement are important aspects of any research project.

The peasants and the working class in the country were becoming militant on the political plane. The Congress Socialist Party in its early phase functioned as an integral part of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). But later the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) under E.M.S. Namboodiripad and P. Krishna Pillai tried to impose their hidden agenda of a communist domination. By 1939 the majority members of the Congress Socialist Party bid farewell to the organisation and transformed it into the Communist Party. By September 1940, the agitations reached their climax and the left dominated Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee gave a call to all its units to observe September 15, 1940 as a Protest Day. Their protest day rallies

were held every where and unfortunately this resulted in violent clashes between the mob and the police at so many places in Malabar. The Communists were determined to retaliate and pull down the already shaky British administration and along with it throw off its pernicious ally, landlordism. The historic 'Kayyur Riot' was but one manifestation of this resolve. Likewise, immediately after the Second World War in 1946, the middle, poor and landless peasants began militant struggles against the rich landlords, black marketeers and hoarders. Simultaneously with it, the Communists also gave a call to the peasantry for forced occupation of wastelands belonging to both the government and the *janmis*. The Karivellur incident is an instance of this new militant attitude of the peasantry. While these struggles were organised, the agitation for a new tenancy legislation was also kept alive.

CHAPTER TWO

MALABAR REBELLION OF 1921

The Malabar Rebellion of 1921-'22, still a controversial subject, is also the topic most enquired into and researched in the history of modern Kerala. The rebellion has been a topic of lively interest. But from the very beginning every attempt to examine and explain the rebellion has had to face the fact that it was an extremely complex occurrence, which could not be viewed as a simple act of revolt. This complexity was soon confounded by a host of contradictory reports, statements and declarations about the rebellion which made everything about that upheaval obscure, confused and complicated. Arguments on the character and causes of the rebellion had generally been focused on whether they were communal or agrarian, or whether they were motivated by economic or religious imperatives. Both contemporary perspective and modern historical research are by and large enclosed within this problematic, differences in emphasis either on economic or ideological aspects notwithstanding contemporary observers and political activists also followed a pattern of interpretation which emphasised either religious or agrarian causes. Many of them, however, tended to recognise a variety of

motives, including police repression, religious fanaticism and agrarian grievances which influenced rebel activities. Even those who have not failed to recognise the influence of religion, they, however, looked upon it as only an internal force, an instrument in the hands of the vested interests who distorted and misinterpreted the agrarian uprising as communal one.

However, the Malabar rebellion is considered as the first serious move against the British rule in India since the great Revolt of 1857-'58. It was the handiwork of the Muslim community of Malabar inhabiting the Ernad, Walluvanad, parts of Calicut and Ponnani taluk, forming part of the Madras Presidency. For a period of several months, from August 1921 to early 1922 British administration was effectual only in the range of gun in an area of hundreds of square miles inhabited by Mappila population of about 4,00,000.¹ The Malabar rebellion extended over the whole of the Ernad taluk and to parts of neighbouring Walluvanad, Ponnani and Calicut taluks, an area of over 2000 square miles, about two-fifths of the district of Malabar. On the north of this area there was neither military force nor natural physical barrier to prevent the rebellion spreading across the Calicut taluk to Kurumbranad taluk. The unaffected parts of Walluvanad and Ponnani must therefore be something within this area either in the country or the people to

¹ Conrad Wood, "Historical Background of the Moplah Rebellion, Outbreaks, 1836-1919", *Social Scientist*, III, 1 August, 1974, p.1.

account for the rebellion and for the spirit which kept it alive for more than six months.²

The commencement of the Khilafat-Non-Co-operation movement served as the occasion for the rebellion. The Khilafat-Non-Co-operation movements were started by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi seeking the immediate redressal of Punjab atrocities and the ill-treatment meted out to the Khalif of Turkey in the post I World War period by the Allied powers. This was in response of the national leadership of the Indian freedom struggle who lost faith in the words of the British administrators of India who offered to consider the Indian issues positively after the victory of the Allied powers in the I World War. Instead the government proceeded with repressive measures that led to the 'Amritsar Tragedy'. These developments led to the launching of the Khilafat-Non-Co-operation movements throughout India by the Indian National Congress.

The activities of the Indian National Congress earlier, confined to the limits of Calicut city among the English educated professional classes such as lawyers. The outbreak of the I World War and the fight against the Turks had already created much hostilities and contempt among the Mappilas against the British

² R.H. Hitchcock, *A History of the Malabar Rebellion 1921* (Madras, 1925), p.1.

government in India. A wave of discontent and unrest was sweeping over the entire region. Now it was augmented by the violent preaching of the Khilafat agitators and members of Non-Cooperation movement. Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali were permitted to visit Calicut. Both Muslim and Congress leaders like Shaukat Ali, Gandhiji and others, toured the area and addressed the masses. Gandhiji was still professing and preaching non-violence; Shaukat has begun to hint at other methods.³ The speeches did immense mischief by appealing to the Muslim prejudices of the Mappilas. For example, they said at a mass meeting at Calicut that if the Mappilas were strong enough they ought to fight and, if too weak, they should emigrate rather than continue, under the British Raj. By February 1921, the results of almost unchecked agitation, both by Hindus and Muslims, were sufficiently disquieting. Besides this, there was volunteer movement and the carrying of arms in these areas in a pronounced manner. The volunteers preached that the Amir of Afghanistan would come to overthrow the British government, that the Mappilas should help Gandhiji and Ali brothers and that government offices should be done away with and British courts boycotted. The priests seem to have been in remarkably close touch with the development of the Khilafat agitation throughout India and to have passed on at once anything calculated to inflame the feelings of their hearers. On account of

³ R.H. Hitchcock, *op.cit.*,p.19.

all these there was much excitement and signs of disturbance among the people. The district authorities found themselves facing a situation which grew steadily worse.

"We hope the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police will devote special attention to the Ernad and Walluvanad taluks and would always be prepared to meet any situation that might arise as the result of the insidious Khilafat propaganda that is abroad. They can do no better than rigorously exclude from the taluk peripatetic and emotional lectures whose one idea is to inflame the Mappila mind. To make matters more interesting, they have imported a red-hot 'Khilafatwalla' from Travancore who is not perhaps, unknown to the Manjeri police who might have heard him through his speeches".⁴

But the return of delegates from the Nagpur conference in January 1921 resulted in more serious views being taken of their religious duty to the Khilafat agitation by the Mappilas. Non-Co-operation was ignored by them and was scarcely mentioned at meetings even by the Hindus; the tenancy question was introduced as likely to appeal to the poorer Mappilas; many of them neither were nor ever would be tenants but were quite ready to fall in with any suggestions which promised a chance of looking the rich and

⁴ *The West Coast Speculator*, Tuesday, 11 May, 1920, p.175.

for the same reason to support the Khilafat agitation as meaning eventually Mappila Raj in Ernad and a return to good old days.⁵

The message of the Khilafat-Non-Co-operation appealed greatly to the illiterate Muslim peasants and common men of the interior regions of south Malabar where Khilafat committees came to be established in quick succession. The enthusiasm showed by the Mappilas of the interior regions of Malabar for the Khilafat-Non-Co-operation movements prompted the government to take repressive measures. The recourse to the policy of repression and the *pro-janmi* attitudes on the part of the administration justified the anti-British feelings in the minds of the people of Malabar. The identification of the specific issue of Malabar in the form of 'tenancy issues' and its integration with the national issues, provided a common rallying point along with grass root level association and bonds of unity. Thus, the politically mobilised illiterate Mappilas were mentally prepared for a show down as the police repression continued rigorously to strike terror in the minds of the people.

Incidents significant of coming real trouble occurred at the end of July and the beginning of August. Because some cruel incidents took place in Malabar in 1915 and 1919 against the Hindus in general and the Tiyyas in particular. In 1915 some

⁵ R.H. Hitchcock, *op.cit.*, p.19.

Mappilas kidnapped a Tiyya boy aged 10 to 12 and converted him to Islam, without the knowledge and approval of his guardian. The District Magistrate when the facts were proved, fined the Mappila responsible Rs.50/-. A plot was formed to murder both the Magistrate and the boy, to commence dacoities and to collect arms and followers for an outbreak. The plot was discovered and prompt action was taken to put down the rising. The Collector was ambushed in this action and narrowly escaped with his wife. The Mappilas in their traditional manner 'went out' in approved Shahid fashion for a holy war with the government. However in an encounter they were soon severely dealt with by the troops. The rising was suppressed with a number of deaths on the side of the Mappilas. Four years later in 1919 in the Malappuram area some youths led by Purappurath Valiacheck Haji, a man of 65, who had previously in the police, murdered several Hindus for no reason except Muslim fanaticism. The gang were rounded up by the police in a farm house and all shot dead.⁶ In order to avoid such cruel incidents the government tried to arrest those persons who were involved in such maltreatment of Hindus, especially Tiyyas. There were threatening demonstrations from Mappila crowds on two occasions when the authorities wanted to arrest some persons who were involved in case of theft and maltreatment of Tiyyans.

⁶ History of the Mappila Outbreaks, An Extract Summary from the Malabar District Gazetteer, Published by the Government of Madras (Tamil Nadu Archives), p.6.

The strength of the demonstrators at one time rose up to 2000. There were signs also such as the making of special knives and preparing themselves for a 'Jehad'.

The Rebellion

The most formidable of the Mappila outbreaks took place in the year 1921-'22. It was the direct outcome of the Khilafat agitation and Non-Co-operation Movement. During the disturbances the District Magistrate permitted Congress and Khilafat workers to enter the disturbed areas and speak to the insurgents. Gandhiji; Shaukat Ali, Abul Kalam Azad and Hakim Ajmal Khan addressed public meetings which were attended by the Mappila peasants; Ali Musaliyar, who had spent seven years in Mecca and built madrasas in Malabar emerged as a prominent leader of the Khilafat agitation. The government panicked, prohibited Khilafat meetings and arrested K. Madhavan Nair, P. Moideen Koya, U. Gopala Menon and Yakub Hassan early in February 1921. Little did they know that the Khilafat agitation passed into the hands of local Mappila leaders who often came from the Thangals and the Hajjis.⁷

The government decided that an attempt should be made to nip the trouble in the bud itself. Thus, the Malabar Rebellion began

⁷ D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India: 1920-50* (New Delhi, 1983), pp.78-79.

on 20th August 1921 by a surprise night raid on Tirurangadi mosque and its neighbourhood in order to effect the arrest of about 24 known ring leaders including Ali Musaliyar. The raid was partially successful. The British were determined to take Ali Musaliyar into custody, as his sermons were aggressively anti-British in tone.⁸ The search warrant was issued in the context of the Pukkottur incident of 29th July 1921. This incident can rightly be considered as the curtain raiser of the Malabar rebellion. Pukkottur was a thickly populated village, about five miles northwest of Manjeri in the Ernad taluk of south Malabar. It was inhabited predominantly by the Mappila peasants. The major part of land in the village belonged to the Nilambur Raja, one of the richest landlords in south Malabar. He maintained a palace at Pukkottur and the sixth Thirumulpad, a member of his family lived there to collect rent. In the last week of July 1921, Kalathingal Muhammad, a tenant and erstwhile rent collector of Nilambur Raja, accompanied by a number of Mappila peasants approached Thirumulpad for the realisation of a sum of Rs.350/- due to him. After paying the money partially to escape from the fury of the people, Thirumulpad registered a case of house breaking and theft of a rifle against Muhammad, whose house was consequently searched. No rifle was found in the search. Muhammad and his supporters interpreted this incident as the expression of an urge to

⁸ Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* (Madras, 1976), p.186.

contain the growing popularity of the political movement. The Circle Inspector of Manjeri, who was inquiring into the incident summoned Muhammed to the Kovilakam on 1 August, 1920. Muhammad went to meet the Inspector accompanied by a large number of men most of whom were arrived with country made swords, spears, big draggons and batons.⁹ Madhavan Nair estimated those who accompanied Muhammad at 200.¹⁰ Sensing the hostile mood of the people the Inspector thought it wise to withdraw from the scene after giving an assurance of no action against them. But the Inspector, later, submitted an alarming report of the situation in Ernad. E.F. Thomas, the District Collector, shared the opinion of the police and requested the Madras Governor for military assistance for the maintenance of peace in the district. The anxiety and impatience of the Collector was not shared by the Governor.¹¹ The Governor forbade the District Magistrate from taking general action against the Mappilas and authorised him to arrest the leaders in order to obviate any further trouble.¹² Thus on 16th August 1921, the Government of Madras telegraphically approved the Collector's plan - "for surprise concentration of troops and police at Tirurangadi and to carry out

⁹ Tottenham, *The Mappila Rebellion, 1921-22* (Madras, 1922), p.15.

¹⁰ K. Madhavan Nair, *Malabar Kalapam* (Mal.) (Malabar Rebellion) (Calicut, 1973), p.96.

¹¹ Tottenham, 32-34 in Ibrahim Kunju (e.d.,) A.R. Desai, *Peasant Struggles in India* (Bombay, 1979), p.17.

¹² A.R.Desai, *Peasant Struggles in India* (Bombay, 1979), p.17.

search for arms under Section 3 of Act XXIX of 1854 ... important that in all you do at present you should avoid appearance of special campaign against Khilafat and deal with the matter on the basis of threatened Mappila outbreaks".

The anxiety of the government of a mixing of issues of Khilafat and threatened Mappila outbreak was expressed in the Order of the Madras Governor itself. The Madras administration turned down the original request of Thomas for systematically disarming the Mappilas and making widespread arrest of Khilafat workers.¹³ The anxiety and impatience of the District Magistrate was not shared by the government. A.R. Knap, a member of Governor's Executive Council, who visited Kozhikode to make an on the spot enquiry, did not consider the Ernad situation really alarming. But for Thomas it was on the verge of an outbreak that required immediate disarming of the people. What distressed him most was perhaps, not the communal tension in Ernad, but the progress of Khilafat and Non-Co-operation movements and the slight and disregard with which the public and the leaders treated him.¹⁴

Tirurangadi Incident

¹³ Tottenham, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ A.R. Desai, *op.cit.*, p.618.

Empowered by the governmental sanction District Collector E.F. Thomas proceeded to Tirurangadi, taking with him a contingent of army and police and carrying warrants for the search of mosques and houses to confiscate war knives and reached there in the early morning of 20th August. Immediately, he set out searching houses for arms and arrest of eighteen Mappila leaders including Ali Musaliyar. The search was unsuccessful as they could arrest only three insignificant Khilafat volunteers.

"One of the rebel leaders, Ali Musaliyar subsequently captured and tried. A passage from the judgement: "Fanaticism, agrarian troubles and destitution were not causes of the rebellion. Influence of the Non-co-operation and the Khilafat movements drove them to the crime. Ali Musaliyar preached that the Amir of Afghanistan was coming to conquer India, that Gandhiji and Ali Brothers were determined to help him, and that the Mappilas should help Gandhiji and Ali Brothers. Government officers should be murdered and the British courts boycotted".¹⁵

Soon the news of the search and arrest spread like wild fire in the adjoining regions along with the rumours of the firing and destruction of Mampuram mosque, one of the oldest and most important religious centres in Malabar. During the search, the

¹⁵ Summary of the Confidential History of Non-Co-operation and Khilafat Movement in the Madras Presidency 1919-1920, Published by the Government of Madras (Tamil Nadu, Archives), p.225.

police and soldiers broke open the Khilafat office and destroyed the furniture and pulled down the Khilafat flag hoisted there and trampled on it.¹⁶ Hearing the news of the outrages, people rushed to Tirurangadi from the surrounding areas, who were pacified and sent back home by K.M. Moulavi and other Khilafat leaders.¹⁷

The rumour was so powerful that it kept the Mappilas excited and ready to avenge the insult thrown upon the Islamic sentiments by firing at the mosque.¹⁸ As the sentiment was widely shared by mid-day of 20th August, large number of Muslims from different directions converged on Tirurangadi. In the mean time, news came of a mob of about 2,000 advancing from Tanur to Tirurangadi. A group of policemen deputed to prevent the Mappilas of Tanur from joining the Tirurangadi group, was fired, without any call to disperse or warning, killing four people and severely injured some others. The Tanur Mappilas were unarmed except for the stick they carried. The government communique itself admitted that the police charged with fixed bayonets and were met with sticks in self defence.¹⁹

¹⁶ Evidence of K. Madhavan Nair in court cited in A.K. Pillai, *Keralavum Congressum* (Mal) (*Kerala and Congress*) (Trichur, 1935), p.428.

¹⁷ K.M. Moulavi, *Khilafat Smaranakal* (Mal) (Khilafat Reminiscences) Appendix in K.K. Muhammad Ali Musaliyar *Khilafat Lahala of 1921*, pp.85-87.

¹⁸ K.N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State* (Delhi, 1989), p.145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The unprovoked firing at an unarmed crowd by the police greatly agitated the people. For the Mappilas assembled at Tirurangadi who had remained calm until about 02.00 pm despite provocations, the news of the firing, proved to be the last straw on the camel's back: Nothing could dissuade them from proceeding to the police camp to gather information. To pacify the people Ali Musaliyar and two others agreed to meet the Collector and requested the release of the arrested persons. In spite of an earlier decision the entire crowd followed the emissaries to the Cutcherry.²⁰ The crowd was stopped at the eastern road and was asked to sit down. The people obeyed and sat down peacefully. At this time, order was given to open fire at the crowd. In the unprovoked firing, seventeen people were killed and seven were wounded.²¹ The infuriated people rushed into the military lines and attacked the soldiers with whatever came to their hands and killed two Europeans and an Indian constable. On hearing the news of firing, the people returning from Tirurangadi had destroyed the Parappanangadi railway station, removed railway lines and cut telegraph wires. The officers, police and troops withdrew to Calicut next day walking along the railway track. There were rebel activities within six miles of Calicut. The district was for a time cut off from communication with the outside world and with a large

²⁰ K. Madhavan Nair, *op. cit.*, p.91.

²¹ Koyatti Moulavi, *Malabar Lahala* (Mal.) (*Malabar Rebellion*) (Tirurangadi, 1952), pp.24-25.

Mappila population at Calicut, the situation itself was far from reassuring. Ali Musaliyar had arrogated to himself the title of 'King' at Tirurangadi. At Pandikkad the local Khilafat ring leaders, divided the country into 'Khilafat kingdoms' and appointed 'rulers'.²²

Disorder rapidly spread through Ernad, Walluvanad and Ponnani taluks. Between 20th and 25th August insurrections took place almost all over these places. The people looted treasuries, burnt records, government offices were destroyed.²³ Police stations looted of their arms; many Hindu houses were dacoited and their inhabitants illtreated or murdered; liquor shops were burnt; most of the main roads blocked with trees and bridges and culverts broken down. The murder of Hindus for refusal to accept Islam were, however, more frequent from September onwards, when troops were already operating against the various gangs into which the rebels broke up. In Ernad and Walluvanad, the Mappilas established their Raj, issued: fatwahs', restricted looting and collected taxes. In the face of severe oppression the Mappilas tried to organise guerilla warfare. At this point they attacked and killed the Hindus.²⁴ Yet the fact is that hundreds of Hindus were killed when the Congress Khilafat alliance was continuing. E.M.S. Namboodiripad writes that; "in a region inhabited by about four

²² Malabar District Gazetteer, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²³ K.N. Panikkar, *op.cit.*, p.147.

²⁴ Sunil Sen, *Peasant Movements in India Mid- Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New Delhi, 1982), p.58.

lakh Hindus only 600 were killed and 2500 converted.²⁵ This had created the impression that the British administration had just ceased to exist in Malabar.

On 25th August, H.M.S Comus arrived at Calicut from Ceylon on the request of the government to protect the town from the rebels. The first Bangalore regiment reached Malappuram. Soon another column was sent. Both of them met at Tirurangadi. A battle took place. Several rebels were killed and their leader Ali Musaliyar surrendered. Meanwhile a gang under V.Kunhamad Haji brutally murdered two men of the police order, a head constable and a retired Mappila police Inspector, Khan Bahadur Chekkutti Sahib.

Military posts were established at Vandur and Pandikkad and two movable columns marched through the country trying to get into contact with the rebels. The rebellion in this area was dealt with mainly by the Malabar Special Police, Burma Rifles and Gurkha soldiers well trained in jungle warfare, accompanied by a wireless section and armed cars. A special police force of 350 local men also was raised. The force also made a raid of Melmuri and accounted for 246 rebels. It was really a serious blow since Pandikkad and Pukkottur were struck. A form of Martial Law was declared.

²⁵ A.R. Desai, *op.cit.*, pp.621-22.

**Extracts from G.O's relating to Non-Co-operation and
Khilafat and Malabar Rebellion (1921) in the Madras
Presidency**

Abstract of G.O.

Martial Law-Ordinance -Proclamation issued.

Reference: G.O.No:550 (Ordinary), 29th August 1921, Public
Department, Government of Madras. Malabar Disturbances.

Telegram- From the Government of India, Home Department,
dated 26th August 1921, No:2874.

Proclamation

Martial Law- Malabar

It is hereby proclaim, under section 2 of the Martial Law
Ordinance, 1921, that a state of Martial Law exists in the taluks of
Calicut, Ernad, Walluvanad, Ponnani, Kurumbranad and Wynad in
the district of Malabar.

[By order of the Governor in Council]

N.E. Marjoribanks,

Acting Chief Secretary to the

Government of Madras²⁶

Special courts were set up to deal with enormous number of
criminal cases. Court martials were employed mainly in case of
rebel leaders. Martial Law Regulations and summary courts were,
however, but sparingly used. For a number of offenders a scheme
of suspended sentence and instalment fines was originated. The

²⁶ G.O. Madras, No. 550 (Ordinary), Public Department, 29 August,
1921.

total number of reported murders was 468, dacoities 5941, arson 352. Three hundred and twenty (320) Hindu temples were destroyed and in Ernad taluk alone 300 cases of forced conversion to Islam were reported. A most distressing occurrence which took place on the 10th November, 1921 resulted in the death by asphyxiation of 70 Mappila prisoners in train between Olavakkot and Pothannur while they were being conveyed from the disturbed area to the Bellary jail.²⁷ However, the problem created by them was overcome with great difficulty.

Thus the initial ire of the rebels were directed against the symbols of authority that was responsible for rural suffering and insecurity. It was also directed against Hindu landlords. Thus began the Malabar Rebellion at Tirurangadi which soon spread to Ernad, Walluvanad and Ponnani taluks with a startling spontaneity. The District Magistrate characterised the rebellion as an outburst of religious fanaticism directed against European officials and lately against Hindu *janmis* and others. The almost simultaneous widespread incidents of insurrection which characterised the revolt of 1921 was a marked departure from the earlier uprisings which never extended beyond their local confines. Hence the British administration considered it as organised and preconceived and the action to vindicate law provided the occasion.²⁸ The response

²⁷ Malabar District Gazetteer, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁸ Tottenham, *op.cit.*,p.71.

of the Mappilas to the events of 20th August at Tirurangadi does not indicate the existence of any definite plan or even adequate preparations. It had all the characteristics of a spontaneous action, which indeed was not based on the same perceptions and considerations in all areas.²⁹ The tragedy of the Malabar rebellion lay in the fact that it did not live upto its secular ideals. From 1930 onwards the Mappilas turned gradually to the Muslim League and hardly played any significant role in the peasant movement.³⁰

About the rebellion C. Rajagopalachari opines that "the men who would have done the most effective service in the cause of non-violence were shut up in jail from February upto the time of the disorders and those who were not in jail were prohibited from organising or addressing gatherings in this area. The land that organised themselves for anti-government assaults on men and property and in the destruction of bridges and roads and other communications seem to have gave and under provocation or unable to bear searches and arrests in patience. They were assisted in their work by a number of demobilised soldiers returned from the war. They seem to have gone to private houses only for obtaining such fire arms as were available and offered no violence. Public buildings and records were mercilessly destroyed. The attack on the Nilambur family was not anti-government but was

²⁹ K.N. Panikkar, *op.cit.*, p.151.

³⁰ Sunil Sen, *op.cit.*, p.58.

the work of a rebel tenantry. No insults to women are reported except in a few unauthenticated stories. The statements made about the murders of Hindus as a large scale are untrue.³¹

Nature of the Insurrection

The insurrection began with the unprovoked firing by the police upon an unorganised mob at Tirurangadi who went to the Cutcherry along with their leaders for the release of some arrested volunteers. The firing took place at a time when the mob peacefully followed the instructions of the authorities. There is sufficient reason to believe that the number of the mob who assembled at the Cutcherry bewildered the authorities. In their bid to disperse the people, they resorted to the strategy of terrorising the people by firing at them. Instead of getting dispersed the mob overran the numerically inferior forces stationed at the Cutcherry against severe casualties. The mob was attracted to Tirurangadi through the rumour of the firing and the destruction of the Mampuram mosque. They have already heard of committing of such crimes by the British in Turkey through the propaganda work of the Khilafat. Most of them went there from the weekly fair at Kottakkal. Such crowd cannot be expected of coming with lethal weapons to break law. Whereas, the administration from the very

³¹ C. Rajagopalachari, *The Hindu*, Madras, 14 October 1921, The Riots and After.

beginning wanted to consider it as an act of the outrageous and fanatical Mappilas which has to be dealt with sternly as a law and order problem. Hence, the district administration proposed a policy of systematic disarming of the people through 'village to village' combing. At the same time they were also very particular that the attempt should not lead to a revolt in the area as by that time the message of Khilafat and Non-Co-operation reacted the area. Still they were more accustomed to a policy of repression to be followed in the area, as they were suspicious of the designs of the, 'ferocious Mappilas' of the 'fanatic zone'. The government from the very beginning dismissed it as an attempt of the fanatic Mappilas which has to be dealt with strongly as a law and order problem.

Some authorities suggest that an analysis of the British actions will prove their own responsibility bringing about the rebellion. They suggest that there was a deliberate attempt of the government to disturb the communal harmony and separate Hindus from the Muslims.³² The British administration all along had been suspicious of the Muslims while keeping a lenient attitude towards the Hindus. The unexpected togetherness of Hindus and Muslims must have produced a great shock to British administrators and it is only likely that the administration wished

³² C.K. Kareem (e.d.,) *Malabar Lahala* (Mal.) (Malabar Rebellion), Special Edition of Charithram (Quarterly) (Trivandrum, 1971), p.31.

and possibly attempted to and to restore the former condition. The conspiracy theory, relating to Tirurangadi incident and the enthusiasm of the officials to destroy the Khilafat flags and offices and also the attempt to deal with the Malabar problem as an incipient Mappila outbreak justify the assumption. However, some other authorities like R.E. Miller rule out the possibility of an official divide and rule policy for want of positive evidence towards that direction.³³

Another reason suggested for the occurrence of the Malabar rebellion was the policy of repression pursued by the administration. The ill advised and poorly planned decision to send a force from Calicut to Tirurangadi for the search and arrest of Muslim leaders that provoked the rebellion. Moreover, as a befitting climax, the force withdrew to Calicut strategically after creating the impression of disappearance of British administration and leaving behind the whole area in the hands of the rebels. By sending such an expedition to Tirurangadi where is located one of the important and ancient mosques (Mampuram mosque), an important centre of the Khilafat, the authorities seemed to underestimate the sensibilities of the Muslims. This might have happened because of their preference for a deliberate policy of repression against a peculiar community. K.P. Kesava Menon

³³ Roland E. Miller, *op.cit.*, p.186.

attributed this factor of repression for changing the mood of the people from following non-violent way to a policy meeting 'violence with violence'.³⁴ Some others suggest that 'non-violence' never had developed into acceptable creed among the Muslim masses.³⁵ At the same time police repression served to enflame the already serious situation and provided the occasion for opening events of the rebellion. The foremost cause of the Mappila disturbances in Malabar is the neglect on the part of the government of educating the Ernad Mappila, and condemns the present system of isolation of different communities.³⁶ In the words of C. Rajagopalachari, the disorders were the work of four distinct classes of men. (1) An oppressed tenantry, (2) Some Musalmans who felt the Khilafat wrong and never believed or understood non-violence or the theory of suffering, (3) Men who were never ready for an opportunity to loot or rob and (4) Religious fanaticism.³⁷ The agrarian grievances and dissatisfaction against the arbitrariness of the British imperialists, made the rebellion anti-feudal and anti-imperialist. It was not the result of the Hindu-Muslim animosity as is sometimes held Government adopted repressive measures, to put down the revolt. Hindu landlords extended 'aid and assistance'

³⁴ K.P. Kesava Menon, *Kazhinjakalam* (Mal) (The Past) (Calicut, 1961), p.116.

³⁵ K.N. Panikkar, *op.cit.*, p.147.

³⁶ *The Kerala Kesari*, Badagara, 16 September, 1924.

³⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *The Hindu*, Madras, 4 October, 1921, The Riots and After.

to the British government. They feared organised peasant revolt in the Malabar coast.³⁸

Mappila Outbreaks

One of the significant features of the Malabar rebellion of 1921 was its peasant orientation. This feature helps us to connect it with the earlier incidents referred as "Mappila Outrages" by the British officials in the Madras Presidency in which the insurgents were drawn largely from the ranks of poor peasants, agricultural labourers, artisans and petty traders.³⁹ The Malabar rebellion occurred not because non-co-operator or other manipulators had provided a blueprint of insurrection to organise Mappila fanaticism. It occurred because the Ernad Mappilas with grievances unsolved, because the administration was prepared to take his subordination for granted, had for long been waiting for a sign of the collapse of the power which sustained the *janmi* and in August 1921 the omens seemed sufficiently clear that the moment of opportunity had arrived.⁴⁰ One of the main leaders of the agitation in Malabar and also of the 1921 rebellion that followed was Ali Musaliyar who preached 'Khilafat, Tenany and Swaraj' as the panacea for the material problems of the poor Mappila peasantry and claimed that

³⁸ Sukumar Sarkar, "Origin and Nature of Mappila Uprising", XXXII Session, *Indian History Congress*, National Museum.

³⁹ Stephen F. Dale, *Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922: Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier* (Oxford, 1980), pp.228-32.

⁴⁰ Conrad Wood, *The Malabar Rebellion of 1921-22 and its, Genesis* (New Delhi, 1987) p.238.

he was told in dream by Mamprathu Thangal (a Mappila saint much revered all over Malabar) that the time for establishing the Khilafat had come.⁴¹ The emergence in quick succession of organisational talent that marked the disappearance of British authority in the interiors of south Malabar and attempts to redress the grievances of the Mappila peasantry indicate the peasant orientation of the rising. Almost all accounts confirm that the public meetings held during the campaign in Malabar were well attended and that the bulk of the audience at these meetings was from the Mappila peasantry while Hindu participation was negligible.⁴² The Khilafat was appropriated in the vocabulary of the rebels less as a pan Islamic grievance and more as a new and completely alternative social order, the millennium of Islamic egalitarianism and the alleviation of all distress; the latter was a tangible concept, more rapidly understandable than the abstract appeal of pan Islamism.⁴³ It signify the identification of the insurgents with a community Islamic in origin. ⁴⁴

The peasant orientation of the Malabar rebellion of 1921-'22 help us to relate it with the organised violence by the members of the Mappila community of Malabar against the *janmi* and British rule during a century preceding it and attempts to address

⁴¹ D.N., Dhanagare, *Peasant Movement in India* (Delhi, 1983), pp.78-79.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Conrad Wood, *op.cit.*, p.239.

peasants issues after the suppression of the outbreak of 1921. These disturbances represented a continuing problem for the British administrators leading to a number of reports as to their implications and the repressive measures required to maintain order. The misinterpretation of the land tenures and their ruthless implementation through colonial administrative machinery had resulted in widespread discontent among tenants and sowed the seeds for agrarian revolts known as Mappila outbreaks. While the Hindu peasants were passive in their sufferings because of their submissiveness and respect for traditional authority, the Mappilas who had enjoyed temporary superiority during the Mysorean rule could not tolerate it and resorted to violence.⁴⁵ The history of the Mappila outbreaks begins from 1836 when the first incident took place in the Pandalur area. From that time onwards there had been a chain of violent disturbances at frequent intervals against both Hindu landlords and the British. Between 1836 and 1852, twenty two outbreaks took place, besides numerous abortive risings and conspiracies. The trouble varied from small incidents involving a few individuals to major outbreaks involving a large number of participants in several instances. For the Mappilas, the outbreaks were an expression of futility, heroic but unproductive.⁴⁶ As the British resorted severe punishments like deportation,

⁴⁵ P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles and Land Reforms in Malabar*, EPW, Vol.15, Nov.50, Dec.13, 1980, p.2096.

⁴⁶ Roland E. Miller, *op.cit.*, p.190.

collective fines and pro-scribing of weapons, the frequency of the events was considerably reduced.⁴⁷ The century 1821-1921 registered a total number of fifty one Mappila outbreaks and the Malabar Rebellion of 1921-22 forming the last and the greatest of them.

The uprisings were spontaneous in origin and had no set pattern. Whereas the uprisings were marked by the presence of certain conspicuous elements, the decision to become a Shahid, the resort to a shrine for blessing, the attack on a Hindu landlord and family, attack on a Hindu temple, attack on British soldiers and fighting to the last man. The outbreaks may be attributed to three main causes, poverty, agrarian discontent and religious fanaticism. Leading a miserable state here on earth, the Mappilas are easily fascinated by the wondrous joy and blessed life in paradise. Their frenzied bravery and preparedness for death to enter into the "blessed world" by their violent Jihad is something unimaginable. It almost passes belief. The Shahids or swints predestinate, prepare for death. They set their houses in order, divorce their wives, led in white robes of martyrs and go out to die fighting against the unbeliever.

Participants in the December 1843 Pandikkad outbreak complained of the oppression of the *janmis* and governmental

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

officials meted out to the members of the Muslim community.⁴⁸ The letter of the District Collector H.V. Conolly to the Judicial Secretary also propose the intolerable tyranny of the high caste people as the reason for that forced the people to take the law into their hands.⁴⁹ Although Hindu *janmis* and revenue officials were the main targets, the uprisings were hardly directed against the Hindus in general.⁵⁰ Majority of the rebels came from the ranks of tenants or agricultural labourers. Some of them faced the prospect of losing their land through eviction and a few others were forced to become tenants at will. In 1896, F. Fawcett, the Police Superintendent of Malabar reported that three quarter of these who involved were "more or less really poor".⁵¹ Thus the participants were really drawn from the rural poor. The wealthy Mappilas, landlords, traders or substantial *kanamdars* generally kept aloof, except for manipulating.

With rare exceptions these outbreaks have already blazed out within a radius of some fifteen miles from Pandalur Hill in the Ernad taluk, 'the fanatical zone' in Malabar. The outbreaks starts from 1836 when the first took place in Pandalur area. It was because of merely a crime. It was the case of a Mappila,

⁴⁸ Anonymous letter left by the participants, Quoted in Conrad Wood, p.21.

⁴⁹ Conrad Wood, *op.cit.*, p.21.

⁵⁰ K.N. Panikkar, *op.cit.*, p.87.

⁵¹ Conrad Wood, 5 June, 1896, MJP, No:1567, p.15.

murdering a Hindu and wounding three others. He was shot dead by a taluk peon. In 1849 there was a violent outbreak in Manjeri and Angadipuram. It was one of the bloodiest tragedies of the whole long series.

In August of that year five fanatics under Atan Gurukkal, murdered some persons, caused disturbances, seized and took shelter in the Manjeri Karanamulapads temple. Soon their number swelled. It became necessary to send troops to capture them. The well arrived sepoy in overwhelming numbers refused to face these handful of 'Shahids', armed only with war knives. The storming party led by Ensign Wyse ended in a failure. He and his little band were slain. The troops posed in reverse fled in panic. Detachments of His Majesty's 94th Regiment and of the 39th N.I. were brought up by forced marches from Cannanore and Palakkad and encounter took place on 4th September 1848. The losses of the troops were trifling but of the sixty four fanatics not one lived to tell the tale. Thus ended the outbreak of 1849.

This was followed by two other outbreaks between 1849 and 1852. In the disastrous outbreak at Kolathur in the Walluvanad taluk, the sepoy once more broke and fled and even a detachment of British troops fell back momentarily before the onrush of the Mappilas. In 1852 disturbance at Mattannur in the

Kottayam taluk, 'not only men, but women and children the very infant at the breast' were put to the sword.⁵²

The next great outbreak was in 1852. It took place when the British authorities attempted to arrest Sayyed Fazl, the Mambram Thangal, the high priest of the Mappilas. He had acquired an even greater ascendancy over the ignorant Mappila mind than his predecessor. His very presence in the district had led to the repeated deeds of horror. The government wanted to pass an order of arrest on him. On the very day that the order was passed, ten to twelve thousand Mappilas, many of them armed, assembled at Tirurangadi in attempt to arrest him would have led to terrible bloodshed but fortunately, Mr. Conolly, the District Magistrate, prevailed upon him to leave Malabar peacefully. He sailed for Arabia on 19th March, 1852. This incident had severely shaken the prestige of the government. After this the condition of the Hindus had become more lamentable and instigating the rebels for their personal ends.⁵³

There were repeated requests from the side of the Mappilas for the redressal of their grievances. When the Mappilas complained of illegal exactions for the constructions and repairing of temples and the government stated that under the present

⁵² Malabar District Gazetteer, *Op.cit.*, p. 9

⁵³ K.N. Panikkar, *op.cit.*, p.87.

system of administration of justice those private matters are beyond the reach of the governing.⁵⁴ The government could not continue their policy of insensitivity for long as the outbreaks continued even against the repressive action of the government. Thus, in February 1852, the government of Madras appointed T.L. Strange, a judge of the Sadr Adalat with long experience in Malabar, as the First Special Commissioner to enquire into the Mappila disturbances. In September 1852 he submitted his report. In his report, presented to the government in 1852, the Commissioner attributed the Mappila outbreaks in south Malabar not to any opposition of tenants by the landlords but to the Mappila tenantry's proveness to evade their obligation. Rejecting the explanations that the disturbances had their origin in agrarian depression or Mappila destitution, Mr. Strange found their cause to be religious fanaticism. He recommended a severe policy of further repression of the Mappilas and proposed draft legislation for retributive punishments not only for the rebels themselves but also for their accessories and sympathisers.⁵⁵ But the Commissioner did not recommend any redefinition of the land rights of the various classes.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Correspondence, 1, p.146, Statement of W.Robinson Miller, p.112.

⁵⁵ Hitchcock, *op.cit.*, p.12.

⁵⁶ D.N. Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.62.

After 1852 repressive measures were put into effect on the lines laid down by the Special Commissioner. His recommendations were partially incorporated into Mappila Outrageous Act which empowered the government to adopt emergency measures against all suspects and to impose collective fines on the Mappila populations where disturbances occurred and made illegal the possession of Mappila war knife. At his suggestion a special force of police was raised and Acts XXIII and XXIV of 1854 were passed into law. Deadlines were fixed for the Mappilas to surrender arms and by the end of January 1855 as many as 7561 weapons of all kinds had been surrendered throughout Malabar. A few months later, H.V. Conolly, the District Magistrate and provisional member of Councils who had been critical of the Mappilas surprised the surrender of arms, was in turn, barbarously murdered in the presence of his wife, at his Calicut Bungalow in 1855 by four Mappila convicts.⁵⁷ His assassins were captured and publicly hanged, the bodies burned and the ashes collected and buried within the walls of the jail.⁵⁸ In relation to his observation about the Mappilas, H.V.Conolly was noted for his honesty and fairness. He believed that there was a general exaggeration as to the number of weapons possessed by the Mappilas⁵⁹. He also recommended for the recruiting of Mappilas into the government

⁵⁷ C.A. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer* (Madras, 1951), p.80.

⁵⁸ D.N. Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.63.

⁵⁹ Correspondence 1, pp.34-36

services, which was objected by the Hindus. It is also noticed that the provisions of the Mappila Outrageous Acts were misused by minor government officials in collusion with the *janmis*. Thus, the dispossessed were also being systematically disarmed and as if this was not enough, the British also interfered with a sensitive aspect of the Mappila's religion by burning the rebels bodies.⁶⁰ The Mappila community as a whole, and the peasantry particular, had to adapt to the new conditions of repression (Two forms of adaptation noted in the region was increasing the number of Muslim population through proselytisation and the increasing role of mosques and Thangals in their day to day existence. Construction of mosques served as a defence mechanism to escape from eviction). These two forms of adaptation served to reinforce the religious identity, unity and morale of the Mappilas and helped to a certain extent to put some check on the evictions and extra legal forms of harassment employed by the *janmis*.⁶¹

Notwithstanding the heavy penalties of Mappila Acts, outbreaks still continued though at longer intervals. In 1873, Kolathur was the scene of another tragedy. In 1880, there was another outbreak at Mattannur. Mr. Logan, District Collector and Mr. Wigram, District Judge of south Malabar, reported that the agrarian difficulties of the Mappilas were the root cause for the

⁶⁰ D.N.Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.67.

frequent troubles. Eviction was especially cited as the most fundamental of them. They laid that Mr. Strange had given far too little weight to agrarian discontent as a cause of the disturbances.⁶²

The official land policy of the British, which made the *janmi* 'the landlord of the soil' survived in tact and the theory of 'Mappila fanaticism' continued to guide administrative action. This led to the indifference of the British authorities towards the whole question of land tenure in Malabar until about 1880. Collector Innes took the position that agrarian discontent, poverty and fanaticism were the interacting elements in Mappila disturbances, fanaticism providing the main impetus, when he described the progress of an outbreak. In the meanwhile in 1875, some educated Mappilas sent an anonymous letter to the government directing its attention to the grievances of Mappila peasantry against the landlords. Reports also reached the Madras administration emphasising the presence of agrarian disturbances behind the outbreak of 1880 in Ernad. The reports of the then District Magistrate, William Logan and of other experienced administrators of Malabar specifying the relation between tenurial problems and Mappila outbreaks were available to the government by that time. The government responded quickly. On 5th February

⁶² Malabar District Gazetteer, *op.cit*, p. 10.

1881, Mr. William Logan, former Collector of Malabar was appointed as the Second Special Commissioner to enquire into land tenures and tenant rights in Malabar and to consider the best means of removing the another long standing grievance of the Mappilas, the difficulty of getting from their Hindu landlords, sites for mosques and burial grounds.⁶³

William Logan took up the assignment as Special Commissioner, after relieving himself from the charge of District Magistrate. He conducted extensive tours in the interiors of Malabar and contacted as many people as possible and inspired them to submit their problems in the form of a petition to the Special Commissioner. Logan traced the history of land tenures on the basis of historical evidences. He submitted his report on 16th June 1882. The report, prepared on the basis of the petitions received by him from the Mappila tenant cultivators of the southern taluks of Malabar had been an extensive one proposing substantial changes in land relations through legislation. In his report he rejected the opinions held by earlier British administrators of Malabar in relation to the rights of *janmis* over land. For them the *janmi* in Malabar had been the proprietor of land having a genuine right over a large share of the produce.⁶⁴ After thoroughly examining all the available sources relating to

⁶³ G.O. Madras, 25 January, 1881, Judicial No.170.

⁶⁴ *Report of the Special Commission*, 16 June, 1882, p. 70.

Malabar tenures Logan came to the conclusion that in Malabar *janmi* never implied an absolute property right to the soil and that the *kanamdar*, the *verumpattamdar* and the *janmi* had all shared the net produce equally.⁶⁵ So he thought the stupid theory the Divine Right of Landlords should be knocked on the head.

Logan is of the view that the misinterpretation of the traditional land tenures existed in Malabar and the wrong land tenure policy pursued by the colonial government had destroyed the old customary relation between *janmis* and tenants. Resultantly the *janmi* had thriven at the expense of tenants leading to widespread agrarian discontent. Some officials like Collector A. Mac Gregor, predecessor of Logan also believed that the root cause of Mappila outbreaks were agrarian.

Logan was convinced by his extensive study of the situation that agrarian disturbances stood at the root of the Mappila problem. He highlighted the problem of insecurity of the peasants in general and felt that the Mappila uprisings were an attempt to "counteract the overwhelming influence, when backed by the British courts of the *janmis* in the exercise of the novel powers of ouster and of rent raising conferred upon them."⁶⁶ Logan recommends that the persons who ought to be protected are the

⁶⁵ D.N. Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.68.

⁶⁶ *William Logan, Malabar Special Commission 1881-82, Malabar Land Tenure Report, 1886*, p.584.

actual cultivators and the agrarian discontent can only be satisfied by giving security of tenure, and payment of compensation at market value through appropriate legislative measures. The Mappila outrages were more endangered by the overwhelming influence of *janmis* especially in the matter of evicting tenants for rent. Thus, Logan was critical of the new law courts and magistrates and other administrators who failed to grasp the true nature of land tenures and the special structure existed in Malabar. A *janmi*, who, through the courts, evicted whether fraudulently or otherwise, a substantial tenant was deemed to have merited death and it was considered to be a religious virtue, not a fault, to have killed such a man and to have afterwards died in arms fighting against an infidel government which sanctioned such injustice.⁶⁷

While holding the view that evictions constituted the most important cause of Mappila uprisings. Logan also criticised the earlier Special Commissioner, T.L. Strange for mistaking the symptoms for the disease itself.⁶⁸ Strange rejected the issue of agrarian disturbances forming the cause for uprisings on the ground that although evictions and exactions affected Hindus and Muslims alike, only the Mappilas and not the Hindus had been in rebellion.⁶⁹ Because, the Hindus were passive in their sufferings

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ D.N. Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.68.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

because of their submissiveness and respect for traditional authority. Logan exploded this fallacy with the help of the crime statistics of the Malabar district. He argued that between 1865 and 1880 the number of crimes had doubled in the Malabar district, particularly in the southern districts, and that the largest number of those evicted for gang robbery were Hindus.⁷⁰ Thus Logan showed that during the period under consideration both the Hindus and Muslims were rebelling in different ways. Thus, Logan had constituted a strong case in favour of the tenantry in Malabar. This had adversely affected the cause of the *janmis* in Malabar. The argument of Logan that the *janmis* of Malabar are not entitled to exercise absolute property rights in soil question the rights of *janmis* to be considered as owners of land. This observation puts him on a par with other claimants to the soil like *kanamdars* and *verumpattamdars*. He categorically affirmed that the rights of *janmis* were actually bestowed upon him by the law courts which approved of the rights of the individual to own property. This right go against the long standing tradition prevailing in Malabar. Hence, Logan was later, considered to be a real threat to their rights by the *janmis*.⁷¹

In his report, Logan argued strongly for the tenurial security not only for the middlemen like *kanamdars* but also for those

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Cochin Tenancy Commission Reports.*

below them, the *verumpattamdars*, who were the worst sufferers of *janmi* oppression. He proposed for the enactment of comprehensive legislations that would ensure the 'genuine' rights of all sections. He also recommended strongly for the introduction of new technologies, diversifying of crops and for reclamation of waste lands that aimed at the comprehensive development of Malabar. The thorough evaluation of the agrarian policy of the government and its criticism contained in the report had embarrassed the higher officials. The government sent the report of Logan to many experts and most of them like the Chief Justice Charles Turner rejected his proposals. The government shelved the report of Logan. In the meanwhile, the Mappila peasants reviewed their rebellious activities by looting *janmi* property, burning landlord's houses, seized and defiling Hindu temples and attacking army barracks. The government in its turn, resorted to repressive policies including disarming them.⁷²

Logan's report, the first serious attempt to study land tenures, can be considered as the original contribution on the subject of history of land tenures in Malabar. The report becomes the basic document and all the subsequent attempts to study land tenures in Malabar, both official and academic are based on this report of Logan. However, the report of Logan compelled the government to go for a face lift. The seriousness of the problem

⁷² D.N. Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.69.

did not permit the government to delay the remedial measures indefinitely. The government thought that the issues were not such as can be disposed of in a hurry. Therefore, the matter was not finally disposed of. However, the government had hardly begun to consider its agrarian policy in Malabar.

The official stand was unrelenting to the aggrieved Mappila peasantry. In view of the intricacy of the subject and the great importance of the interests involved, the government appointed a special committee in January 1884 under the presidency of Raja Sir. T. Madhava Rao to consider the whole question of Malabar land tenures and advise the lines in which legislative action should proceed.⁷³ The Commission consisted of four members such as William Logan, Herbert Wigram (District and Sessions Judge of South Malabar), C. Sankaran Nair (Vakil, Madras High Court) and P. Karunakara Menon (Deputy Collector). The Commission in their report dated 17, July 1884, adopted much the same views as Logan. In this committee also Logan stood for the rights of the tenants and others for the rights of the *kanamdars*. This committee recommended fixity of tenure to persons who held lands directly under the *janmis* for a stated period of years but failed to arrive at any definite conclusions. This report too was not acceptable for the government.

⁷³ G.O.Madras , 29 January, 1884, Political No. 53.

The views of the Commission were subjected to a very trenchant criticism by Charles Turner, the then Chief Justice of Madras in his Minute on Malabar Land Tenure. In view of the strong observations made by Charles Turner, the government appointed another committee presided over by Master, a member of the Executive Council of the Governor in 1885, to consider the whole matter in the light of Charles Turner's criticism. It included well-known persons as T. Madhava Rao, Justice T. Muthuswami Iyer, Justice S. Subramanya Iyer, the Honourable H. Sheppard, Hutchins, W. Wilson (the Advocate General) H.T. Ross and C. Sankaran Nair (Advocate). While the representatives of the *janmis*, *kanamdars* and *verumpattamdars* ensured their berth, the commission was conspicuous by the absence of Logan. The commission proposed for a draft legislation to provide compensation for tenants improvements on land and submitted to the government on 9, February 1886. The government placed it on the statute book as the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act I of 1887. Most of the members of the committee recognised the 'occupancy rights' of the tenants and actual cultivators as 'justified' neither by historical considerations nor by political necessity.⁷⁴ Thus the main achievement of the 1885 committee was prolongation of Malabar's basic agrarian conflict for another forty four years. The Malabar Tenancy Act was passed in

⁷⁴ D.N. Dhanagare, *op.cit.*, p.69.

1930.⁷⁵ No doubt, it fell far short of Logan's report. But it was the ultimate result of Logan's enquiries. In fact, tenancy legislation was not undertaken until 1929.

The study of the nature of Mappila outbreaks of Malabar had showed the prominence of the agrarian issues in those spontaneous violent incidents. The government on their part, instead of settling the issue in an impartial way put weight on the side of the *janmis* and the other vested interests as they were considered as the natural allies of the alien government. The *Mitavadi* vehemently criticises the government for supporting the *janmis* against the tenants. It writes: "the local government have played themselves into the hands of the *janmis*. Slowly and steadily the idea is gaining ground that to the government, the *janmi* is everything and the tenant is nothing".⁷⁶ More over, the English and their legality also kept the needle in favour of the *janmis*. This created a sense of insecurity on attitude of revenge and a feeling of marginalisation in the minds of the illiterate Mappila peasantry. However, their experiences during and after each violent occurrences, the practice of collective fines, rigorous policy of suppression and disarmament gradually turned out to be a deterrent to the participants, sympathisers and believers alike. At the same time, the necessity of politically oriented articulation of the agrarian issues also loomed large. The articulation of class

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Mitavadi*, Calicut, 2 May, 1921 and 22 April, 1922.

interests which had been the legacy of the reports of the tenancy commissions following the Logan Commission served as the context of the emerging fight for the tenancy rights as a sequel to the national movement for freedom. The Mappila Muslims also looked upto the peasant organisations, trade unions and political parties as a viable alternative for the redressal of their grievances.

CHAPTER THREE

DISINTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

The establishment of British rule and the gradual development of a colonial political economy brought about radical and lasting changes in Indian society and culture. It was unlike all the previous conquests as it brought with it a new world view, modern science and technology, beliefs and values. New communication facilities, latest techniques of conquest and weaponry enabled them to integrate the whole of the subcontinent as never before and brought it under a uniform system of governance.

Malabar was brought under the direct control of the British. After taking over direct political authority in Malabar, the British introduced the institutions required for the proper governance of a modern state. In administration, the model existing in British India was introduced and laid the foundations of a modern state by surveying land and initiated a systematic assessment of revenue based on the nature of land and cultivation. They created a modern bureaucracy, a system of policing and developed various

systems of communication like railways, post and telegraph, roads and canals. A thorough reorganisation of the judiciary was also undertaken which instituted modern judicial concepts in place of administration of justice based on tradition, customs and conventions.¹ Selection of personnel for civil and military administration was made on the basis of new rules and regulations. The adoption of the notion of 'merit' as the criterion for civil and military appointments gave opportunities to the lower castes also to enter the bureaucracy of the British. This practice ended the exclusivity of the Nairs and other upper castes in appropriating the modern opportunities. This does not mean that the traditional upper castes of Malabar were ruthlessly suppressed by the British. Instead, they were conciliated and accommodated in the bureaucracy as it was more economic and diplomatic. Thus, as was rightly observed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the authority of the British was superimposed over the traditional power structure of Malabar i.e., '*Jathi*', '*Janmi*', '*Naduvazhi*' domination.² At the same time, because of the economic measures introduced by the company the economic authority of the upper castes was considerably reduced.

¹ K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala* (Delhi, 1988), p.131.

² E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* (Mal.) (Trivandrum, 1947), p.43.

Colonial authority was imposed over a traditional casteist society. Caste is undoubtedly an all India phenomenon in the sense that there are everywhere hereditary endogamous groups which form a hierarchy, and that each of these groups had a traditional association with one or two occupations.³ The British rule made it (caste) rigid codifying many localised and pragmatic customs into a unified and Brahmanised Hindu law and classing people into immutable castes through the operation of the courts and ethnological survey.⁴ The spirit of hierarchy and ritual distinction became more pervasive in the 19th century. Caste came to preoccupy Indians and the British, though in different ways, in the 19th century. It was projected as a marker of backwardness of Indian society as well as a signifier of the essential social significance of Indian civilisation. However, it is striking that most explicit critics of caste condemned it for its divisiveness portraying it as a barrier to the gradual unification of the Indian people under the essentially beneficent modernising rule of the British.⁵ Sumit Sarkar has highlighted the marginal nature of the issue of social justice in the general fabric of social reform of 19th century. The reason he has fixed in the preponderance of upper caste members in these reform movements and the colonial context. He has

³ M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Madras, 1966), p. 3.

⁴ C.A. Bayly, *India Society and the Making of British Empire* (Delhi, 1998), p. 86.

⁵ Nicholas B. Dirker, *Castes of Mind* (Bombay, 2003), p. 232.

observed that "The social injustice argument while not absent, remained secondary.⁶

The traditional social structure of Malabar was very complex and had a stratified caste order. It kept the Brahmin at the top of the social scale. Age old practices of Kerala such as *Devaswom* and *Brahmaswom* made the Brahmins the custodian of land. The temples had extensive property donated by chieftains and devotees. For the day to day functioning of the temple it required the services of various caste groups.⁷ Being a superior status group, the Brahmins were able to impose restrictions upon the rest of the society in relation to purity and pollution. Thus, the Brahmins ensured the essential services they required from the other sectors of society while creating a feeling of obligation on the part of the other sections towards the Brahmins.⁸ The Brahmins, later, styled themselves as *janmis* and claimed a considerable share of the produce without directly participating in production.⁹ Simultaneous with the emergence of land owning class, there emerged a new class of intermediaries. This class neither owned the land nor cultivated it. The temples leased out land to the intermediaries known as *kanamdars* or overseers. The Nairs

⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (New Delhi, 1999), p. 365.

⁷ Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala* (Calicut, 1978), p 23.

⁸ M.R. Raghava Varier, *Keraleeyatha Charithramanangal* (Sukapuram, 1996), p. 15.

⁹ E.M.S. *op.cit.*, p. 4

constituted this class of overseers.¹⁰The land was actually cultivated by another class of people who were either backward castes or Nairs who held no *kanam* holdings. The *janmi*, *kanandar* and peasant shared the procedure equally working out a social equation on the basis of mutual dependence and reciprocal interests within the confines of a feudal system of exploitation.¹¹ Thus, they were able to establish a dominant position in Kerala society. Simultaneously they have evolved cultural practices and customs that enabled them to keep the property of the *illams* as undivided.¹²

The Namboodiris entered into matrimonial relations known as *Sambandham* (informal marriage of the Namboodiris) with the Nair women.¹³ There were many sub castes in the Nair community which came upto 130 in 1891 (Census of India 1891). Edgar Thurston also approves the existence of which some were included in the list of backward communities.¹⁴ Some affluent Nairs were *kanamdars* or overseers of Namboodiri *janmis*. The Nairs followed

¹⁰ William Logan, *Malabar Special Commission Report on Malabar Land Tenures*, NAI, 1881, para. 27, p. 17.

¹¹ K.N. Panikkar, "Peasant Revolts in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, in A.R. Desai (e.d.,) *Peasant Struggles in India* (Delhi, 1979), p. 604.

¹² For details See unpublished Ph.D Thesis, E.K. Swarnakumari (Calicut, University, 2001).

¹³ Among the Brahmins only the eldest son could marry, others had maintained informal relationships with the Nair women. This is called *Sambandham*

¹⁴ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, Vol. V (Madras, 1909), pp. 296-97.

matrilineal joint family system of inheritance which is popularly, known as *Marumakkathayam*. It meant inheritance by the children of sisters as opposed to inheritance by the sons and daughters. The *Marumakkathayam* system does not recognize the relationship of husband and wife, father and child. They belonged to a different household and do not enjoy right in the property left by the husband and child.¹⁵ All the children of the female members lived together in the joint family or *taravad*. Inheritance of the property is traced through the female line in the matrilineal system. The joint family consisted of a mother and her male and female children and the children of those female children and so on. The children of the male members of the *taravad* belonged to the household of their wives. The property of the *taravad* was the property of all the males and females that comprised it.¹⁶ The property of the joint family was impartible. No one member could claim a specific share of the property nor could partition be effected without the consult of all members. But when *taravad* grew unmanageable it was divided into '*Tavazhi*'. A group of persons tracing its descent from a female of the *taravad* is designated as '*tavazhi*'.

¹⁵ M.P. Joseph, *The Principles of Marumakkathayam Law* (Kottayam, 1918), p. 1

¹⁶ P.V. Balakrishnan, *Matrilineal System in Malabar* (Calicut, 1981), p. 5

This matrilineal unit had a male as the head of the family. He was in charge of the whole property of the family and was to attend to the day to day administration of the *taravad*. He was known as *Karanavar*. He was succeeded by the next senior male member of the *taravad*. He was responsible for the welfare of all members of the *taravad* and to meet the requirements of each of the members of the *taravad* in an impartial way. Even the self acquired property should merge into the property of the joint family or *taravad*. No one could ask for an individual share even if there was disparity in the earnings of different members. No one had the right to alienate the property of the *taravad*.¹⁷ There existed very wealthy *taravads* such as Echikonen, Koodali, Kodoth, Kalliat which possessed large estates of property. There were also very poor families. The great majority of *Karanavar* probably 9/10, were small tenant farmers, cultivating a few acres on a precarious tenure at a rack rent and law which required such a man from the produce of his farm to feed and provide for all the descendants of all his female relatives from birth to death whether they work or not.¹⁸

Keynote of the colonial administration after 1858 was a non-intervention in social questions which supported the cause of the

¹⁷ T.K. Gopala Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk* (New Delhi, 1983), p. 91.

¹⁸ *Malabar Marriage Commission Report 1891*, Legislative Department, National Archives of India (New Delhi) p, 32.

privileged classes against the unprivileged. The alliance between the privileged classes and the British protected the larger interests of the imperialists. As a part of their administrative policy in Malabar the British created a powerful landed class known as the '*janmis*' who were the erstwhile rulers and *naduvazhis* of Malabar. They were now considered as *janmis* of their old territories who were to pay revenue to the government. The British judicial system upheld the absolute and unqualified right of these *janmis* to the soil and maintained that they could evict their tenants at their pleasure after the expiry of the contractual period of tenancy.¹⁹ In the traditional society they were having a specific role to play i.e., the role of rulers. As that role was now assumed by the British, this class should have ceased to exist. Even though they did not have any constructive role to perform, they were even emboldened under the British administration. Such efforts of the British helped to create a solid class of British supporters in Malabar.

The integration of Malabar with British India exposed it to modern administrative apparatuses and experiences which gradually initiated a process of restructuring of the existing society. These experiences were diverse. It ranged from modern administrative structure to various cultural practices. A thorough overhauling of the administrative structures and communication

¹⁹ K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p. 4

facilities were followed by cultural institutions. In this government as well as private enterprises were allowed to function. Thus, a project of familiarising the people of the region to 'modern education' and new cultural values was initiated. The number of persons directly exposed to modern education was comparatively limited. Even then, the necessity of sending children to such institutions has trickled down to the society through the activities of the Evangelical's administrative officials etc. The prospect of better employment and social respect attracted the attention of the people.

William Logan provided a brief sketch of the traditional system of learning as existed in Malabar.²⁰ He maintains that education was imparted at that time to boys and girls alike. They were given training in writing and after that were taught Amaram. Amaram is a collection of verses telling the names of all things in heaven and earth and under the earth. This would be followed by grammar and reading of epics like Ramayanam and Bhagavatham. A pupil who advanced this much is regarded as far advanced in learning. Thus the main business of traditional education seems to be preservation of age old customs and tradition. Kathleen Gough approves this when she says that 'literacy in Kerala was not to investigate the natural world but to conserve custom, to organise

²⁰ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, 1995, pp. 119-120.

and sanction the feudal kingdom and to provide artistic entertainment to the ruling castes'.²¹

The traditional system of education disappeared when it failed to satisfy new requirements. The Basel Mission was the principal agency that was engaged in imparting modern education in the region. No discrimination was showed by the mission in enrolling students to the educational institutions started by them. Possibilities of appointments in the bureaucracy attracted the people towards modern education. The annual report sent by Herman Gundert from the Thalassery Mission station speaks of the four schools started in the neighbourhood of Thalassery.²² All expenses required for imparting education was met from locally mobilised funds and fees collected from students.²³ Later, schools were started in different parts of Malabar. Higher educational institutions like the Victoria College, Palakkad and Brennen College in Thalassery were started in 1885 and 1891 respectively.²⁴ These educational institutions offered the people of Malabar exposure to modern education. These institutions gave the students an opportunity to interact with scholars coming from diverse social background which helped them to shed off many of their parochial

²¹ Kathleen Gough, "Literacy in Kerala", in Jack and Goody (e.d.) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, 1968, p-141.

²² Herman Gundert, *Basel Mission Annual Reports 1840, 41 and 42*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ K.K.N. Kurup, *Athunika Keralam* (Modern Kerala) (Mal) (Calicut, 1995), p. 28

feelings. Nairs were among the first to accept modern education. This was largely due to the governmental policy of recruiting educated young men in the various governmental establishments. Moreover, the factor of getting cash salary which was very scarce at the time was also an additional attraction. So far cash dealings and purchases for the *taravad* were made by the *Karanavar*, that too was meant for meeting the requirements of the whole *taravad*. Thus regular employment opportunities as well as personal income by the way of salary oriented the ambitious and enterprising youngsters towards modern education.

Malabar under the British witnessed new trends in the economic sphere. As early as 1860 a shift towards capitalist enterprise was started in Kerala.²⁵ This shift has resulted in the growth of a capitalist class cutting across caste distinctions except the depressed castes. Growth of trade, markets and beginning of industries led to urbanisation as well as new avenues of economic development. Plantations, tile factory, coir industry, timber depots etc. were started under the initiative of the British.²⁶ This gave many people employment. Daily wages and monthly salary in these establishments created a new orientation towards modern existence. It made impossible the strict adherence to most of the

²⁵ Therena George and Michael Thrakan, *Development of Tea Plantations in Kerala* (CDS, Trivandrum, 1985), p. 135.

²⁶ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Keralathinte Desiya Prasnam* (Mal.) (Kerala's National Problem) (Trivandrum, 1955), p. 129.

practices like purity and pollution. The percolation of modern notions into the society and the shattering effects of the new economy created the new condition of following the vocation of one's choice. Skill and efficiency determined the destiny of the individual. The spirit set into motion by the new economy was powerful enough to question the sanctity of the traditional observances and world views. Max Weber rightly observed, "The emancipation from economic traditionalism appears, no doubt, to be factor which would greatly strengthen the tendency to doubt the sanctity of the religious tradition as of all traditional authorities."²⁷ Traditionalism was the only obstacle which restricted the free development of the individual in the Malabar society. Thus the colonial takeover resulted in the manifestation of the internal contradiction of Malabar society to the surface level. The traditional elite tried to utilise the new situation while retaining the casteist social identify.²⁸

A thorough reorganisation of the judiciary was also undertaken by the British in Malabar It instituted modern judicial concepts in place of administration of justice based on tradition, customs, and conventions.²⁹ The British organised a hierarchy of courts actually meant for the realisation of revenue systematically.

²⁷ Max Weber, *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Great Britain, 1976), p. 36.

²⁸ M.N. Srinivas, *op.cit.*, p. 55

²⁹ K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p. 29

This experience of a codified legal system as part of the government was a new phenomenon in the region. The Pax Britania and legal system introduced under the British offered equal treatment of the people irrespective of their caste and religious status. They disposed of cases in accordance with British legal practices which protected the rights of the individuals.

Another important development was the beginning of the print media and its wide circulation in the country side. Herman Gundert was the pioneer in this activity. He published two magazines simultaneously from Nettur (Rajya Samacharam and Paschimodayam) from 1847 onwards³⁰ In 1884 Chikulath Kunhirama Menon started publishing Kerala Patrika.³¹ These and other periodicals in general inspired the people to have a look at the world outside instead of getting satisfied with the age old customs and practices. Thus they became the propagators of the new knowledge which created a favourable atmosphere towards the new knowledge and the ethics which it entailed. Thus, we come across the beginning of a number of reading rooms which spearheaded the means imparting non formal education. Such centres carried out discussions and debates on vital issues that faced the people and which questioned the authority of the

³⁰ G.Priyadasan, *Malayala Patrapravarthanam Prarambaswaroopam* (Mal) (Trichur Sahitya Academy, 1965), p. 18.

³¹ Ibid, p. 154

conservatives and other exploiting groups. The measures of the government such as the beginning of administrative and judicial structures, educational institutions etc., inevitably led to the development of a public sphere. This public sphere facilitated the articulation of counter discourses which brought knowledge to the doors of the common men. Thus, the discussion of circulation and accomodation of diverse ideology became the keynote of the newly emerged public sphere. This created a new cultural space where different sections of people were able to associate freely and discuss matters of several interests.

The effects of the new economy, the sentimental attachment to the egalitarian notions of society debated in the newly emerged public sphere, the disenchantment with the decaying matrilineal joint family set up made it unfavourable for the *Marumakkathayam* system to sustain the virulent attacks of its evil practices both by the governmental machineries and the younger generations of the *taravads* made it more and more vulnerable. Thus, the late 19th century witnessed an attempt on the part of all sections involved in it for the abolition of the system. These measures hastened the disintegration of the matrilineal system as existed in Malabar.

Among the various causes for the disintegration of matriliney a pre-eminent position is attacked to the growth of modern education. Colonial take over of the region has seen a tremendous

increase in the number of modern educational institutions. Old system of education was considered unsuitable for the present circumstances. When compared to the wide range of areas covered by modern education the old system was considered very backward and unfit. It revealed to the aspirants a whole new world which could be emulated by them. The ideas of individualising freedom and liberty fanned their fancies. Moreover, English education promised them better employment, cash salary and liberation from the suffocating and degrading situations prevailing in the *taravad*. Every educated and employed male member of the *taravad* thought of protecting his 'wife' and 'children' independently. They desired to carve out an independent homestead where he can maintain his wife and child decently. This mentality of the younger generation and various issues related with the problem find their place in the contemporary literary works of the times.³² Saradmoni observed that modern education has an influential role in bringing the matrilineal joint families to disintegration.³³ The study was conducted primarily to highlight the position of women and to shatter the myth of high status of women in matrilineal joint families. She argues that it is not even the change in the system from matrilineal to patrilineal, which gave women the strength to come forward from the past traditional life but modern education, enactment of new legislation

³² O. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha* (Kottayam, 1971), p. 25

³³ K. Saradmoni, *Matriliney Transformed, Family Law and Ideology in 20th Century* (New Delhi, 1999), p. 7.

and emergence of nuclear units that made women more self-reliant. Educational achievements have brought greater freedom. Women have been able to acquire literacy and take salaried employment. In the old system they lived under the control and authority of the *Karanavar* and they were economically dependent. Through employment modern women have attained an increasing degree of economic independence. They were able to break traditional values and family restraints and build up their own future. These influences had been more directly felt in the urban society. Then, there had been a continuous trickling down of these ideas to the villages.³⁴ The change of occupation helped the educated people to dwell away from their *taravad*, as a nuclear family with their own wife and children. They hesitated to attend to the comforts of the members of the *taravad*. They preferred the welfare of their children more and more and felt inconvenient going back to the countryside and adjusting to the life there after retirement. Hence, they naturally carved for their own share in the *taravad* to set up a separate home for and settling down comfortably with their wife and children.

Impartibility was an important feature of the matrilineal joint families. This principle should have operated on the basis of fact that partition would break up the family, its status and wealth. All possible means was taken up to prevent extinction and

³⁴ Raghuvir Singh, *Social Change in Indian Society* (Delhi, 1977), p. 12.

disintegration of the family. Still the joint family disintegrated. The desire for separate property was attributed to be an important inspiring factor for its disintegration. Scholars believe that the *marumakkathayam* joint family had an inherent tendency to change into individual property.³⁵ A significant internal development is the increase in the number of members of the joint family. Increase in number leads to a split into *tavazhis*, as noted earlier, each headed by a female. Instead of crowding together under one roof the *tavazhis* moved off to branch houses and established themselves there. The Koodali family of north Malabar had such a history. It originally belonged to the family of Nettur, Thalassery. Later, it was established as an independent family at Koodali, a fertile plain lying on the trade route to Kannur.

The first reference to division of property of the joint family is seen in 1810. The provincial court of western division held while deciding the personal liability on debt that the *Karanavar* was not entitled to a larger share than any of the other members.³⁶ What the judges favoured in this case was division of property among the branches of the family. In 1813 the court dismissed the plea of junior members of the joint families for a division of the family

³⁵ Testimony by K, Madhavan, Freedom Fighter of Kanhangad sketched various internal contradictions that emerged in the joint families including misdeeds of the *Karanavars* and distrust of him by the *ananthiravans* (nephews), discriminatory attitude of the *Karanavar* etc. (Letter from K. Madhavan to Dr. E.K Swarnakumari dt. 17.10.1978).

³⁶ Lewis Moore, "Malabar Law" quoted in P.V. Balakrishnan, *Matrilineal System in Malabar* (Calicut, 1981), p 288.

property as inconsistent with the law of *Marumakkathayam*. But a gradual shift towards division of family property is reflected in the court proceedings during this period.

In the matrilineal joint family set up nobody was allowed to keep income as personal. It should lapse into the common pool to be used for the better interest of the whole family. Against the background of changing values, the junior members of the joint families with their independent income and new cultural and ideological perspectives, acquired by them affected the solitariness of the *taravad*. There now emerged a widespread complaint of misuse of *taravad* funds by the *Karanavars*. At the same time, they even complained before the courts for the removal of erring *Karanavars*. Thus, discontent and irresponsibility was growing in the joint family. The nature and extent of this irresponsibility in managing family properties can be inferred from the fact that during the 18 months between 1907 and 1908, the Nairs of Travancore alienated by sale, mortgage and hypothecation nearly 19 lakhs of rupees worth of property more than they purchased when, in theory, joint property was impossible and alienable except with the consent of other members or for genuine family need.³⁷ This tendency was probably common to all communities practising the joint family system, even if, in varying degrees depending on

³⁷ *Report of Travancore Marumakkathayam Committee 1908*, para. 105

the extent of their ownership of property. Members lost interest in work and led an idle life. *Karanavar* started the practice of bequeathing family properties for his wife and children. A person went abroad and made fortune and strenuously resisted the demand of his relatives to bring into the common account or perhaps he thought that his share of the common stock would be more profitably employed by him as capital in mercantile venture.³⁸ In spite of the conventions and precedents self acquired property was being regularly bequeathed to the wives and children.

In addition to this the irresponsibility shown by the junior members (*ananthiravans*) has also greatly damaged the interest of the family. They did not feel any responsibility till they were called on to manage the family estate in their turn as *Karanavar*. This irresponsible nature made them incompetent by the time they were called to become *Karanavar* and they were eager to misuse the powers they got. Consequently the family estates often fell into the hands of incompetent and unscrupulous managers who ruined it irreparably. By this time the society also changed considerably. New ideas were infused into the minds of the community. The joint family system in its strictest sense loosened its hold on the people and the desire to possess individual rights to

³⁸ P.V. Balakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p. 172

property steadily gained ground. Thus the matrilineal joint families survived as an anachronism an institution that was unsuitable for the changed social structure of colonial Malabar. Thus as an answer to the new situation independent homes for each married couple came to be established wherever feasible. These separate homesteads became parallel establishments and tended to destroy the solidarity of the joint families born of common living, and interest. Decision making in family matters involved equal participation of both men and women. Men and women of the family were treated as equals because both made crucial contribution to its economic life.³⁹

The Nairs have always been acknowledged to be a military class. They were a fine race of fighting men and even in Portuguese times they wandered about well armed in large bodies offering their services to those who paid them well and cared for them. As the old national army disintegrated, the Nairs lost their traditional occupation.⁴⁰ The necessity for martial life had been removed under the protecting aegis of the Pax Britanica. Logan observed in his Manual, "the martial spirit of Nairs in these piping

³⁹ K. Saradmoni, *op.cit.* p. 98

⁴⁰ Hilde Ranakers, "Change and Continuity in a Matrilineal System," *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. XI, Part - 4, March / June / Sept, Dec, 1984.

times of peace has quite died out for want of exercise. The Nair is more and more becoming a family man".⁴¹

Another important single factor that contributed to the disintegration of the matrilineal joint family in Malabar was the system of legal marriages. The period between 1887 and 1896 witnessed debates on marriage, morality and matrilineal families. During this period the English educated minority in Malabar showed an interest in legislation and liberal principles of contract. The Malabar Marriage Act enacted in 1896 was a product of this changing perception. Marriage was seen offering a panacea for the predicament of the household and the lengthy debates contributed to the creation of a new familial ideology. The power struggle within the matrilineal household between the head and the younger members reflected the ideological demands of individual freedom. G. Arunima argues that this youthful clarmour for an individual identify that derived sustenance from a liberal ideology of freedom and progress was a further expression of gender inequality in Malabar.⁴²

C. Sankaran Nair, an eminent Vakil and a nationalist was the author of Malabar Marriage Bill of 1887. The aim of the legislative measure was stated as the registration of marriages and legalising

⁴¹ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, p 138

⁴² G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa* (New Delhi, 2003), p. 128

of divorce proceedings. The reason behind the introduction of the bill was the idea that conjugal unity would make the Nair unions hitherto considered concubinage by the High Court respectable and these could then receive the status of Hindu marriages.⁴³ The sensation created by the introduction of the bill pressurised the government to institute a commission to enquire into the issues of marriages in Malabar. To this end the Malabar Marriage Commission was set up in 1890. The commission was to look into both the nature of marital relations among the matrilineal Hindus and the possible need for legislation to provide a marriage law for the community.⁴⁴ The memorandums filed by the respondents to the commission brought forward diverging views on the issues of marriage, inheritance, divorce and maintenance. The supporters of the legislation expected that marriage would improve the moral fibre of the matrilineal society and rescue Malabar from a state of uncivilized barbarism. But the conservatives who opposed the move considered the legislation as an interference with the customary observations of caste, a blow at the root of household relations and the common right over family property.

There was also an intermediate group whose members desired the establishment of more permanent conjugal unions without risking the wrath of the majority of the community that

⁴³ Ibid,

⁴⁴ *Malabar Marriage Commission Report*, p. 13

opposed institutionalised monogamy for fear of losing their property rights.

O. Chandu Menon, the author of the famous Malayalam novel and district munsif along with five other members of Malabar Marriage commission, argued against the objectionable representation of conjugality in Malabar as concubinage. For him, "*Sambandham*" was the Malayalam equivalent of the English word "marriage" which conveyed the idea of the union of man and woman as husband and wife.⁴⁵ Chandu Menon argued that the High Court judgement of 1869, that deemed all *Sambandhams* to be "concubinages", was part of the plot between the Brahmins and the colonial state to undermine the chastity of Nair women.⁴⁶

The debate on the legality of the *Sambandham* union between Namboodiris and Nairs marked a break in the ideas constituting Malabar Law. It also brought out the rivalry and tensions between the two high castes out in the open and in a manner in which it was to dominate the politics of the subsequent decades. The Namboodiri fear with regard to the legalisation of the *Sambandham* union was that in such a case the Namboodiri husbands would have to maintain their wives and children. There were objection to *Sambandham* union from the side of the Nairs

⁴⁵ Memorandum of Objections from O. Chandu Menon, p. 5

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8

also. One group argued that matriliney was a Namboodiri construct, devised by them to have arbitrary sway over the Nairs. The others feared that the legislation would lead to ending the relationship between the two castes which had hitherto been very fruitful. After a tumultuous period of six years engrossed in heated debates on various issues related to the *Sambandham* union, the Malabar Marriage Act was passed on 27 May, 1896.⁴⁷ The Act sanctioned the registration of customary *Sambandham* union as legalised marriage. The Act provided an outlet for the young men to establish an independent status. With or without marriage, professional men had begun to assert their individuality in relation to the household and its property.⁴⁸

The British occupation of Malabar had far reaching consequences. This raised a number of challenges to the traditional patterns of life. The colonial understanding and interpretations of the society began a new narrative and discussion about the tradition and culture of this region. Specific demarcation of communities and castes emerged and the beginning of census was a serious step towards this endeavour. By the end of the 19th century, emerged a number of social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Vagbhadananda, Sivananda

⁴⁷ Robin Jeffry, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance, Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908* (London, 1976).

⁴⁸ G. Arunima, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

Paramahansa, Sivananda Yogi who talked against untouchability and caste inequality. What they envisaged was a casteless society with human beings as the central point. Though distance pollution and untouchability are not in existence, social inequality remained a distant reality. The organisation and direction of each community ended in creating a social identity as one's own. Thus, the social reform movements of these social reformers worked for the eradication of certain outdated customs and conventions. By this time, Malabar felt the touch of nationalism. The gradual awakening to the concept of one nation inspite of admiration for colonial system of education pulled the educated and the employed to think and work for political freedom.

The main stream of socio-religious reform movements which had originated in Bengal and other parts of India had an impact on Kerala society. During the last quarter of the 19th century some of the philosophers and intellectuals in the Kerala society were demanding reforms in the traditional socio-religious structure with an absolute commitment to humanism and liberalism. Their activities inaugurated an era of intellectual awakening. The aspirations of the emerging new middle class were further reflected into teachings of Brahmananda Sivayogi, Chattambi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru and later in Vagbhatananda. These philosophers and reformers were against traditional institution of

caste hierarchy, superstitions and Brahmanical priesthood. The intellectual milieu created by them in the Kerala society led to advocacy of civil liberty and social justice particularly to the weaker and depressed sections of society.

The philosophers of the 19th century Kerala highly influenced the Kerala society. They were not English educated but possessed a deep knowledge in traditional scholarship of Sanskrit literature, language and philosophy. Although they did not have a realisation of the servitude enforced by the colonial system and its cultural hegemony they fully realised the social reality of the depressed castes and classes in their society. Therefore, they were great critics of the institution of caste, priesthood and sectarianism. They represented the aspirations of the emerging new middle class who demanded social justice, civil liberty and equality. Although Sree Narayana Guru belonged to the untouchable caste of Ezhavas, he was respected as a unifying force in the society by all.⁴⁹ He was also a great advocate of western education, particularly for the depressed castes. He stressed the ideas of enlightenment through education and strengthening of community through organisation.

⁴⁹ K.K.N. Kurup, *Nationalism and Social Change: the Role of Malayalam Literature* (Thrissur, 1998), p. 6.

These Sanyasins and philosophers had introduced an intellectual milieu for social change and reforms in Kerala society. They further augmented the spirit of rationalism and created a political consciousness against the colonial subjectification. They had further shown a positive desire for civil rights among the depressed sections. A common feature of these movements was their caste ideology. They were responsible in creating an awakening against the social inequalities, superstitions and meaningless rituals. Their teachings were more based on rationalism and philosophical wisdom. They criticised traditional institutions like caste and matrilineal joint family and gradually rejected them. The emancipation of women through female education and several reforming measures related to gender equality, were conceived as part of the programme of national movement. It was also advocated for the freedom of individual from the clutches of orthodoxy and superstitions. Therefore, the intellectual movement, western education, growth of nationalism, tenancy movement, etc., were demanding radical social change in Kerala society. A new society was envisioned, with progressive ideals.⁵⁰

The new administration formulated an educational system, uniform judiciary and an infrastructure for revenue and military

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

matters. A region which was familiar with age old tradition, customs and manners based on caste regulations was being introduced to the colonial ideas and this was bound to create a lot of dislocation and change. Such changes were evident in the tenurial pattern. The traditional agrarian structure based on a three-tier system of *janmis*, *kanamdars* and the *verumpattamdars* (actual cultivators) was on a mutual understanding. In the hierarchy of tenants and sub tenants, a close relationship between the agrarian classes and castes could be traced. The advent of English gave a severe blow to the customary system. The colonial initiative generated new forces, which led to a thorough shake of the traditional rights, and privileges of different social groups. The *Kana-Janma-Maryada* started disappearing and in its place emerged a new order based on new values and ideas. This was the result of a systematic organisational venture by the British.

The change in the landlord tenant relationship was an indirect attack on the *taravad* system. The tenants had to face the heavy burden of revenue, eviction and exploitation by the landlords. The British courts recognised the *janmis* as the absolute proprietors of the soil which placed immense powers in the hand of the landlords. The oppression of the *janmis* and the poverty of the cultivators developed a feeling of frustration. The opposition and demands made by the tenants compelled the British government

to pass various tenancy reforms which undermined the power of the *janmi* system. This shattered the very foundation of the *taravad* system.⁵¹ Besides the Mappila outbreaks of the 19th century were violent expressions of rural tension and agrarian grievances. These outbreaks, however, invited the attention of the British government towards agrarian problems. The government felt it necessary to find a solution to the Malabar land tenurial system. The matter of tenancy legislation became a live issue because of the Mappila outbreaks.

The debate on tenancy reform further highlighted the necessity of introducing changes in matrilineal system. The tenancy legislation in Malabar had a long and chequered history. The relation between the landlords and tenants were originally governed by custom. But since the arrival of the British they wanted a class of loyal collaborators and they made the *janmis* the lord of the soil, investing him with arbitrary powers over the destiny of the tenants.⁵² In 1880, the government received an anonymous petition enlisting the grievances of the tenants and warning the government of the possibility of 'bloody' conflict, unless *janmis* were not controlled by it.⁵³

⁵¹ P.K. Jyothi, *Marumakkathayam Land Monopoly and British Policy in Malabar (1800 to 1933)*, unpublished Ph.D Thesis (University of Calicut, 1992), p 4

⁵² A.K. Poduval, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁵³ A.K. Gopalan, *Manninu Venti* (Autobiography) (Mal.) (Kozhikode, 1965), p. 546l.

The appointment of William Logan Commission for the said purpose, his drastic and revolutionary recommendations and his soft corner to the actual cultivators opened a debate on land tenurial system in Malabar. The government was not ready to accept those progressive recommendations of Logan, because, they rightly feared that his recommendations would naturally diminish the influence of the *Janmis*. So, the report was shelved. But the seriousness of the problem did not permit the government to delay the remedial measures indefinitely. Consequently, T Madhava Rao Commission was appointed to consider the whole question of land tenures and advise the lines in which legislative action should proceed. The commission in their report dated 17th July, 1884 adopted much the same views as Logan and failed to arrive at any definite conclusions. The views of the commission were subjected to a very trenchant criticism by the then Chief Justice of Madras, Sir Charles Turner in his Minutes on Malabar hand Tenures. In view of the strong observations made by Charles Turner, the government appointed another Commission presided over by Master, a member of the Executive Council of the Governor for the same purpose. The Commission recommended that it was necessary to give the tenant on eviction the full value of his improvements and accordingly a bill was drafted to that effect and submitted to the government on 9 February, 1886. The government placed it on the statue book, as the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act I of 1887. This Act

also failed to check the growing practice of evictions. Evictions were growing on, mostly without any compensation. Now the government felt that further legislation was necessary to ratify the defects of the Act. R.S. Benson was placed on special duty for the purpose, drew up the draft of a bill. Subsequently, the government considered that the mere amendment of the Act might not be sufficient and that it was necessary to have further legislation to amend the whole law of landlord and tenant in Malabar. Accordingly, in 1899, T. Ross, I.C.S was placed on special duty to draft a comprehensive tenancy bill for Malabar in which was to be incorporated the Act I of 1887 drafted by Benson. Unfortunately, Ross died before the work was finished and the government dropped the idea of comprehensive tenancy legislation. Benson's bill was, however, taken up and passed into law as Act I of 1900 which had the effect of repealing Act I of 1887 and re-enacting it with considerable amendments. Unfortunately, this Act could not solve the evils. So, in the absence of any effort to change the land tenurial system, it continued as it was earlier, with all the evils attached to it.

The colonial tenancy legislations and judicial decisions were welcomed by the progressive groups and existing social practices were changed in favour of modernity, property rights, inheritance pattern and centres of authority changed but the ritualistic and cultural identity remained. The initiative taken by an active section

had to be accepted gradually by the orthodox section due to the economic dimensions involved in it. The Nairs utilised the openings created by the colonial government. They slowly came out with an ideological grip, demanded for endogamy set up nuclear family units, which in turn gave up a blow to the joint family system.

The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 was the first legal step which encouraged the disintegration of the *taravad*. The Act contributed to the stability of the Nair marriage providing the right of maintenance to wife and children.⁵⁴ The Hindu Education Gain Bill, passed in 1898, declared the gains of learning by a Hindu to be his separate property.⁵⁵ In the same year the Malabar Wills Act was passed. This legislation extended the provisions of the Hindu Wills Act of 1870 to Malabar. This Act was applied to the persons governed by *Marumakkathayam* and *Aliyasanthana* laws of inheritance. The Act permitted the above persons to give away their self acquired property to their heirs by will. The Malabar Succession Bill of 1913 dealt with the self acquired property of the members of the matrilineal extended families of Malabar. It provided for setting apart half of the self acquired property to wife and children and the other half to the *tavazhi*.⁵⁶ The idea of partition was given concrete shape by the Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act passed by the Madras Legislature in 1933.

⁵⁴ Madras Act No. IV of 1896, Preamble

⁵⁵ G.O. Madras No. 4 dated, 19.01.1898, Legislative Department, Para. I.

⁵⁶ G.O. Madras No. 150, dated, 5, September, 1913, Legislative Department.

This Act was later amended by the Kerala legislature in 1958. This act gave permission to any member of the Malabar joint families the right to claim partition.

However, we have practically no information on the impact of the Regulation on families, women, and men, how they adjusted to changing situations. On the otherhand, we have expert opinions telling us that capitalism and the economy based on competition and markets which is its foundation and colonialism caused the disintegration of matriliney. It cannot be denied that colonialism and the institutions they built and the ideas they spread had an important role to play in changing or weakening matriliney. It was men from the upper strata in the matrilineal communities who began to demand reforms and laws. Behind these demands was their keenness to establish their power everywhere, including over family. Developments outside the *taravad* in the society at large, not merely helped them, but they were able to manipulate the changes in their favour.⁵⁷

In the last decades of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century words like progress, civilized society etc. were frequently heard. Hence, these two centuries were a period of transition in India. A class of educated people rose against the evils of the joint family system and demanded reforms. The introduction of modern education aided many people to enter into government

⁵⁷ K. Saradmoni, *op.cit.*, p. 158

services. Women also began to have education and they began to realise the need for their progress. Moreover, the modern education made the people to develop individualism. The educated class began to live with their wives and children and their attention centred around them. The entry of the educated class into government services made them to move from their *taravad* and set up nuclear families. Thus, the process of disintegration of the joint family system was set in motion due to the rise of the educated class and also due to change in the social and economic fields. The changed social situation helped the individual to break through the orbit of their traditional caste loomed occupations and free them from moral obligation of growing under ancestral shadows. This led to the disintegration of traditional matrilineal joint families of Malabar into nuclear families.

CHAPTER FOUR

FORMATION OF MALABAR KUDIYAN SANGHAM AND ITS ACTIVITIES

Kerala stands top with respect to the implementation of land reforms among the states in India and it has even been cited as a model for others to follow. Kerala had succeeded in completely abolishing tenancy and landlordism. In Kerala, the Tenancy Act went into the statute first in Travancore in 1896, then in Cochin in 1915 and lastly in Malabar in 1930. But the tenancy movement took stronger roots in Malabar than in Travancore and in Cochin. They lagged behind Malabar. The land tenure system in Malabar had features which were unique and had no parallel in the country. The tenancy problem which was agitating the minds of Malabar tenants had become acute in the closing years of the 19th century.

When we discuss the long history of peasant struggles and tenancy legislations in Malabar, it is necessary to state that these struggles had three phases. In the first phase, these struggles were initiated and led by the Mappila tenants, and those in the second phase were spearheaded by the *kanam* tenants who belonged mostly to the Nair caste. In the third phase the struggles

were no longer confined to an interest or caste group, but took to the nature of a well organised class struggle. Like the Mappilas the Nairs were also stronger in south Malabar. While the Mappilas had waged their struggles all alone lacking proper organisation, leadership and ideology, the demands of the *kanam* tenants were backed by the nationalist movement. Moreover, most of the nationalist leaders themselves belonged to the Nair caste, which occupied the middle stratum of the social structure and upper stratum of the peasantry. The entry of the middle class into the arena of political activity gave the peasants which they had been lagging in, ever since the days of Velu Thampi and Pazhassi Raja, the leadership in militant struggle.¹

The influence of English education played an important role for the emergence of this phase of struggle. The rise of English educated middle class during the end of the 19th century altered the character and tempo of the tenancy agitations made so far. In the traditional Malabar society, the Namboodiris had a dominant position as landlords. Because of that they considered English education as an anathema. This was not the case with the Nairs, especially those who came from the *kanamdars* families. The favourable impact of English education policy in Malabar could be seen on this particular section of the Nairs. The new education

¹ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Calcutta, 1967), pp.137-138.

opened to them the doors of English bureaucracy in Malabar and made them assertive and aspiring.²

This emerging class of Nairs began to ridicule the social and economic supremacy of the Brahmins as landlords. The very founders of the tenancy movement in Malabar belonged to this emerging section of the Nairs. They wanted to wipe out oppression by the *janmis* through enacting tenancy reforms. They had the strong conviction that the tenurial situation made the condition of the Nairs pitiable. Among other things, it provoked the Nairs to condemn as a disgrace and fight against the Brahmin practice of *Sambandham* or informal marriage of the Namboodiris with the Nair women which was until then considered a pride and privilege by the Nairs.³

Presumably, the growth of education and literacy convinced the members of this community of the depth of degeneration that had crept into their traditional social system. As *kanam* tenants usually held land for continuously long periods, they developed some sort of sentimental attachments to the property, being the place of their birth, or the family graves of ancestors and family deities. This factor made the thought of eviction very painful and problematic. Therefore, they criticized the practice of *kanam*

² P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change: Malabar (1836-1982)* (London, 1989), p. 70.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 77

eviction. The exploitation and opposition by the *janmis* had taken the form of arbitrary evictions, *melcharths* (over lease) and exorbitant renewal fees besides the customary dues. Moreover, for putting his signature in *kanam* documents the *janmis* demanded money for "Oppavakasam" (Signature right), "Anandiravakasam" (Nephew's right) for nephews and "Thandasthavakasam" (Mediator's rights) for mediators.⁴

As a result of the British colonial policy in the 19th century with respect to the social structure of agrarian relations and as a consequence of the impact of new economic forces, Malabar evolved a distributive system of land tenure, which however, embodied features similar to land relations elsewhere in India.⁵ The interpretation given by the British to the traditional land structure and introduction of the concept of private property in land helped in the creation of the parasitic big landlordism. This created fertile conditions for the landlords to continue and intensify the pre-capitalist extortion of rent and other feudal forms of exploitation. Before the coming of the British, the *kanamdars* and *verumpattamdars* had a much more stable interest in the land. They had a sort of permanent right of occupancy. But in the British period the *janmi* can evict his tenant at will. This situation

⁴ K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan Jeevacharithram* (Biography) (Mal) (Kottayam, 1971), p. 216.

⁵ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. II (Trivandrum, 1981), p. 41.

emerged as a result of the introduction of British legal system. British judges, from the very beginning, entertained the rights of the *janmis* following the tenurial system existed in Britain.⁶ This right of ouster which is the cause of all misery of the tenants was first conferred on *janmis* gratuitously by the British Judges, at the beginning of British administration in Malabar. Coming from England and familiar with their own land tenures they unfortunately thought that *janmi* was a landlord of the British type. Peaceful relations continued for sometime but they did not last long. In the recent Malabar Rebellion we had the practical manifestation of this unhappy, and dangerous relationship between the *janmis* and tenants. The cruelty of the *janmis* and consequent sufferings of the *Kudiyans* (tenants) had much to do with it.⁷ Later on, the colonial government realised that they had misinterpreted the traditional land tenures that prevailed in Malabar. But they were not prepared to rectify their error mainly due to political considerations. They considered politically unwise to go against the interests of a class of loyal landlords who were supporting them. Their efforts to solve the problem had no effect at all. During the years between 1800 and 1900 the only legislation enacted in respect of Malabar land relations was the 'Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act I of 1887',

⁶ T.K. Ravindran, *Malabar Under Bombay Presidency, A Study of the Early British Judicial System in Malabar* (Calicut, 1969), p. 51.

⁷ *Election Chronicle*, Madras, 4 August, 1923.

which provided compensation for improvements effected by tenants and can be considered as the first land reform measure implemented by the colonial government. But a serious defect of the Act was that it did not lay down any precise guidelines for determining values of improvements. To rectify the defect, an amending Act was passed in 1900 by formulating in clear terms the basis for the payment of compensation. These Acts did not solve the vital problem faced by the cultivating tenants in Malabar⁸

In view of the mounting tension among the agrarian classes, the government had desired to take immediate steps to secure permanency from arbitrary ejection to all. But the government did not undertake a comprehensive legislation for safeguarding the interests of the peasantry. The above mentioned relief acts did not register any improvements in the condition of the tenants. All the malpractices and oppression of the landlords noticed in the mid 19th century continued unabated. Hence the conditions of the cultivating tenants in Malabar had become extremely miserable. There were signs of mounting tension among the agricultural classes.⁹ It is to be noted that in all legislations, the unorganised and the ordinary peasant community consisting of small

⁸ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *Tenancy Legislation in Malabar (1880-1970)* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 49.

⁹ *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report, 1929* (Madras, 1929), pp.52-61.

kanamdars and *verumpattamdars* was ignored or left out of the purview of legislation.¹⁰

In fact capricious and arbitrary evictions considerably increased during the post 1900 period. The traditional *janmi* families like the Zamorin of Calicut, the Raja of Nilambur, Kavalappara Nair, Kadathanad Raja, Kottakkal Kizhakke Kovilakam, the Raja of Kollengode and Poomulli Namboodiris and others controlled vast extent of lands in Malabar.¹¹ They even indulged in practices like *melcharths* and evictions. There were several factors which contributed to this spurt. The most important reason seemed to be the attempts of the *kanamdars* to secure fixity of tenure and the consequent emergence of a tenant movement, the scarcity of grain and the increase of prices during the I World War.¹² The revenue settlement effected in 1904 had increased land revenue. Following this increase of land revenue the landlords were tempted to resort to exploitative methods to increase their profits. In other parts of the country, occupancy rights of some sort had already been conferred upon the tenants. In Bengal, Punjab and North Western Province, Tenancy Acts were passed in 1885, 1889 and 1901 respectively. The Travancore state

¹⁰ B.A. Prakash, *A Survey of Studies in Kerala Economy: Agriculture* (Thrissur, 1986), p.18.

¹¹ *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report 1929, op.cit.*, pp. 52-61.

¹² K.N. Panikkar, "Peasant Revolts in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries" in A.R Desai (e.d.) *Peasant Struggles in India* (Bombay, 1979), pp. 615-16.

had conferred occupancy rights on *kanam* tenure as early as 1896 and Cochin state in 1915. The Zamindari tenants in Malabar naturally knew the way the wind was blowing.

The subject of tenancy law for Malabar was again examined from time to time. The local British officers appraised the government of the grave agrarian situation. The newspapers repeatedly wrote about the necessity of immediate and decisive remedial measures. They strongly supported and pointed out the urgency of tenancy legislation in Malabar. The government should also consider how many isolated murders have taken place in the past on account of tenants being driven to madness of *janmis*. It considers that the measure is urgently required for securing peace and safety in land. The *Kerala Sanchari* and the *Mitavadi* warned that if the government continued to be hesitating, halting and debating on the tenant question and pursued a policy of neglect, in difference and drift, a storm might break out any day.¹³

In 1911, the government called for a report on the working of the Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act and this led to the reopening of the larger questions of a comprehensive tenancy law for Malabar. In the meantime, a tenant movement to secure fixity of tenure to *kanam* tenants was growing rapidly. The earliest of the attempts to protect the interests of the *kanam* tenants was

¹³ *Mitavadi*, Calicut, 2 May, 1921.

probably in 1912, when T.M. Nair, a member of Madras Legislative Council (MLC) and later one of the founders of the Justice Party prepared a tenancy bill to confer fixity of tenure on *kanam* and *verumpattam* tenants. As Nair resigned from the Madras Legislative Council in 1913 his bill had a premature death.¹⁴ Subsequent attempts upto 1922 remained almost at the level of occasional meetings.

The question of tenancy legislation formed the subject of a note by Charles Innes, the then Malabar Collector, who was highly critical of the Act. In 1915, Innes made a report reviewing the various difficulties under which the tenant was labouring. According to him, the main evils which required remedying were insecurity of tenure, rack renting, exorbitant renewal fees, social tyranny and miscellaneous actions. He examined the statistics of population and the land available for cultivation and came to the conclusion that it was a matter of economic necessity to give fixity of tenure to the tenants. He accordingly recommended that fixity of tenure should be given to all cultivating tenants who had been in possession of land in a village for a period of 15 years and to non-cultivating tenants (tenure holders of intermediaries as they were called) who had been in possession of a holding or part of it. Innes was severely criticised by his successor Evans, who reported that

¹⁴ P. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

there was not political or economic reason for undertaking legislation. The government agreed with Evans and once again dropped the question of tenancy legislation.

The Tenants' Association

The agitation of the Home Rule League and the district political conference held in Malabar after 1916 had brought a new political awareness in Malabar. Some of the educated Nairs belonging to prominent tenant's group thought of employing constitutional measures to solve their grievances. With the result, the first Malabar Tenants' Association was formed in 1916.¹⁵ It seems that the *kanamdars* drawn from the landed gentry formed its leadership and hardly tried to mobilise non-occupancy tenants. The tenancy movement was mainly the making of *kanamdar* vakils, bankers and politicians rather than the actual cultivating tenants (implying *verumpattam* holders or share croppers) and landless labourers. Even so, the movement of the *kanamdar* tenants posed a new challenge to the dominant position of the *janmis* in rural society.

It was into such a situation that nationalist politics entered in Malabar. The first district conference of the Indian National Congress, was held at Palakkad in 1916. From that year onwards

¹⁵ D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India 1920-50* (New Delhi, 1983), pp. 78-79.

district conferences were convened annually. The political agenda of the Congress in Malabar hardly sympathised with the sad plight of rural tenants because of the upper class domination within the Congress. The tenancy question was first raised in this district conference, but the landed interests in the Congress did not allow its discussion till 1920. Hence, when some one brought up a resolution on the tenancy problem, there was no one to support it obviously because of the efforts of the organisers to avoid the controversial issue.¹⁶ However, the persistent efforts of the Congress leaders to avoid the tenancy issues so as to keep up the unity of the movement might have contributed to the declining popularity of the Congress conferences. Because of that the fourth conference of Badagara in 1919 was a poor show with only 270 delegates attending it, as against 454 at the first conference at Palakkad.¹⁷ Therefore it turned out to be a formidable task for the tenancy activists to carry out organisational work in the face of strong opposition by the powerful *janmis*.

Between 1916 and 1921 the leaders of the *kanamdar* tenants gradually captured control of the Malabar Congress by ousting the *janmi* landlords who had previously dominated it. With this the demands for passing resolutions on the *janmi-kudiyam*

¹⁶ Moyrath Sankaran, *Ente Jeevithakatha* (Mal.) (My life History) (Calicut, 1965), p.84.

¹⁷ A.K. Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

(landlord-tenant) relations voiced in each of the district conferences. But the tenancy agitation was not launched till 1919. The hardcore of the tenancy agitation consisted of a few lawyers, intellectuals and journalists from Calicut who came from *kanamdar* tenant families. They preferred Gandhian methods of political legislation.¹⁸

In this context, it is necessary to cite the role played by M.P. Narayana Menon who actively organised the tenants against the landlords. He entered into politics as the leader of the tenants and later became an active worker of the Congress committee in Ernad taluk. He was a great champion of nationalism and Hindu-Muslim unity. Because of his extreme love towards the Muslim brethren that the Muslims of Malabar called him as the "Abuthwalib" of Malabar.¹⁹ He realised that the tenants could not be liberated from the exploitation and oppression of the landlords without proper organisation and because of the lack of such organisation that the rights and privileges of the tenants remained unheard and unsolved till yet. So, he tried to organise the tenants through the Congress committees. For the said purpose he desired to form Congress committees in taluks and villages. But in those days Malabar Congress committee was dominated by the landlords.

¹⁸ D.N. Dhanagare, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁹ M.P. Sivasankara Menon, *Malabar Samaram, M.P. Narayanan Menonum Sahapravarthakarum* (Mal.) (Angadipuram, 1992), p. 10.

Very soon the desired opportunity came when he was elected as the Secretary of the Ernad Congress committee. M.P. Narayana Memon with his close Muslim friend, a renowned Arabic scholar and poet, Kattilasserri Muhammed Musaliyar, actively worked hard to attract both the Hindu and Muslim tenants to the Congress. With the growth of confidence among Muslims and lower castes that Congress would take up their issues they would not resist themselves joining Congress.

By this time, the Khilafat movement, emerged from the I World War. By 1920 the Congress and the Khilafat alliance had become effective and committees for a joint campaign for Non-co-operation were set up all over the country. The Congress and the Khilafat organisations found their way to Malabar. They did their best to win the strong political support of the Mappilas in Malabar. Indian national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Shaukat Ali, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad and Hakim Ajmal Khan visited Malabar to promote the local campaign.²⁰ Gandhiji took the initiative to organise Hindu-Muslim unity. A number of Congress and Khilafat committees were formed in different parts of Malabar and the campaign began systematically. Some office bearers of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee also served as the office bearers of

²⁰ D.N. Dhanagare, *op. cit.*, p.78.

Khilafat committees.²¹ The tenant association, Khilafat and Congress committees all worked together. There is no convincing evidence that the organisational network of the *kanamdar* tenants, who initiated the tenancy agitation was separate from that of the local Khilafat and Non-co-operation committees.

The tenancy movement in Malabar coincided with the nationalist movement thus embraced all castes and communities.²² The fraternisation of Hindus and Muslims was also evident. The politicisation of the middle class and their entry into politics gave the tenants the much needed and long awaited leadership. The Home Rule, Congress and Khilafat Committees all merged with one another and were made use of by the middle class. In fact this coalition had created a sense of solidarity among the peasantry. It also provided them an effective organisation. They even challenged the caste superiority and feudal supremacy. It is true that the interaction between the national and political issues with the local issues in Malabar was the secret of the success of these movements. One of the main leaders of the Khilafat agitation in Malabar and also of 1921 Malabar Rebellion that followed was Ali Musaliyar, who preached "Khilafat, Tenancy and Swaraj" as the panacea for the material problems of the poor Mappila peasantry.²³

²¹ V. Gopala Menon, who was Congress Joint Secretary was also the Joint Secretary of Khilafat committee.

²² E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *op. cit.*, p.138.

²³ D.N. Dhanagare, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

As the tripple agitation got fused together, in some places the *kanamdars* even boycotted the *janmis*. The editor of *Matavadi*, C. Krishnan, a Tiyya advocate and one of the few non-Nair tenant leaders urged the government of Madras to redress the grievances of the tenants. The *Mitavadi* strongly supported and pleaded for the urgency of tenancy legislation in Malabar. It writes: "We already see around us signs of an impending agitation which, if they are wise, the government would avoid by timely legislation; mere assurances will not, however, satisfy the people, for such assurances have proved abortive in the past; and what we want is that the government should give practical proof of their desire to remove the legitimate grievances of the tenants".²⁴

In the meanwhile, the fifth district conference of the Congress was held at Manjeri in the Ernad Taluk in April 1920 in which the first resolution demanding tenancy reforms legislation was passed.²⁵ This conference which preceded the Malabar Rebellion was attended by a large number of Mappila tenants. This conference was the first example of peasants being mobilised by the radical middle class in support of a militant political time. It is significant that, together with the issue of Non-co-operation there was the issue of tenancy reform before the political conference, the opposing camps on the issue of Non-co-operation more or less

²⁴ *Mitavadi*, 22 May, 1922.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

coinciding with the two camps on the issue of tenancy reforms as well. The Manjeri Congress linked for the first time the nationalist movement in Malabar with some issues like Khilafat and tenancy that agitated large sections of the people in the district even before the conference. In already noted, tenants agitation of a kind had started from 1915-16, but they remained confined to *kanam* tenants, mostly Nairs, belonging to the middle classes. With the passing of the resolution in favour of the tenants at the Manjeri conference they came to be identified with Congressmen who favoured the Non-co-operation movement. Immediately after the conference in May 1920, in response to invitations sent out by K.P. Raman Menon, a number of vakils and tenants met in Calicut to initiate the formation of a '*Kudiyam* Sangham' (Tenants Association) with K.V. Gopala Menon, P.K. Kunhirama Menon and C.K. Nair as its Secretaries. A few units of this association were formed at various places in Malabar and the association formulated '*Kudiyam's* vow' to be taken publicly by the agitating tenants.²⁶

In the Manjeri conference, a resolution demanding legislation defining the relationship between landlord and tenant and safeguarding the interests of the tenants was moved and adopted. This had a special significance in the sense that since 1916 itself, attempts were made to pass resolutions on tenants' question. But

²⁶ K. Madhavan Nair, *Malabar Kalapam* (Mal.) (Malabar Rebellin) (Calicut, 1971), p. 88. See also the report in *Madras Mail*, 28 May, 1920.

they were invariably defeated until this time. The massive participation of the Mappilas who were recruited to Congress through tenancy movements proved all attempts made by the landlord class for a compromise futile this time. The defeated landlords convened a meeting of the '*Janmi Sabha*' and expressed their objection to Manjeri conference and they sent the resolution to the Governor.²⁷ A major factor that brought the Mappilas into the vortex of nationalist politics was the intensive mobilisation of them around the question of tenancy issues. It can not be denied that in the first six months of the political agitation during 1920-21, it was tenancy reform which attracted the most attention. Calicut was the epicentre of this tenancy movement. The most important activity of these associations was the organisation of public meetings in which the grievances of the tenants were geographically described.²⁸

The first All Kerala Provincial Conference of the Indian National Congress was held at Ottappalam in Walluvanad taluk from 23rd to 26th April, 1921 in the very next year after the Manjeri Congress. T. Prakasan presided over the conference. As a part of it, a Khilafat conference, a Tenant's conference and a Student's conference were also conducted. The Non-co-operation Movement

²⁷ T. Muhammed Ali, *Social Life in South Malabar (1921-47), Relief, Reform and Nationalism*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Calicut University, 2003), p. 153.

²⁸ K. Madhavan Nair, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-99.

was then in full swing. A large number of students had already left their educational institutions, while a number of lawyers had given up their practice.²⁹ For the first time a Congress conference was being held in Malabar after systematic organisational and agitational activities. As at Manjeri, so at Ottappalam assembled thousands of peasants from all over Malabar. The most significant aspect of this conference was, however, that delegates came from all over Kerala and were not confined to Malabar as they were at Manjeri. The conference was the first all Kerala gathering since the days of *Mamankam*.³⁰

The Kerala Provincial Conference of the Congress commenced its session at Ottappalam on the 23rd April, 1921. This was followed by the Tenants' conference under the Presidentship of Mr. K.P. Raman Meon and in that conference a resolution intended to "redress the grievances of the tenants" came up for the consideration of the main political conference. They discussed about whether legislation should be asked for now and by a large majority it was resolved not to ask for any legislation from the present government.³¹ Any way this resolution had to be given up for the sake of unity. Someone suggested that the resolution would

²⁹ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Report of the Emergency Committee appointed to investigate and report on the police tyranny in Ottappalam on 26 April, 1921, *The Hindu*, Madras, 11 May, 1921.

be "for the redress of the grievances of both *kudiyans* and *janmis*." This brought to light the conflicting interests of the delegates. Therefore, under the mediation of the president it was agreed to postpone the issue without definite decision.³² This incident points to the fact that the tension between the tenants and *janmis* remained unsolved even after the split at Manjeri. A.K. Pillai, who was present at the Ottappalam conference, clearly records his dissatisfaction at the way in which the problem of tenants' grievances was pushed up for the sake of unity. Many people had opposed the move to dilute the resolution with the inclusion of *janmis* grievances and it is clear that a number of tenants who attended the conference might have shared Pillai's dissatisfaction with the way in which the resolution was dropped for the sake of unity. They might have even felt resentment at the failure of the Congress to carry the cause of the tenants which the Congress had boldly taken up at the Manjeri conference.³³

The *Kudiyani* conference and the Khilafat conference were held on the third day on 25th April, 1921. K.P. Raman Menon presided over the *Kudiyani* conference which decided to extend the *Kudiyani* association's activities throughout the new Congress province of Kerala.³⁴ A resolution was passed supporting the

³² A.K. Pillai, *Keralavum Congressum* (Mal.) (Kerala and the Congress) (Thrissur, 1935), pp. 431-32.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *The Hindu* (Weekly), Madras, 28 April, 1921, pp. 12-13.

organisation of non-co-operation against *janmis* who evicted.³⁵ This was reiteration of the decision taken by the *Kudiyans*' association in January, 1921. K.P. Raman Menon who introduced the resolution spoke at length about the sufferings of the tenant at the hands of the *janmis* and their *karyasthans* (managers) and combined that the only remedy for the troubles of the *kudiyans* was to get legislative protection for their rights in the land that they occupied. He wanted to declare it as the opinion of the conference. P.A. Krishna Menon who spoke supporting the resolution reminded the delegates how such a resolution brought up for consideration at the second district conference had to be given up as "some persons" threatened to leave the meeting. He pointed out the necessity for enquiring into the *janmi-kudiyans* relationships in Malabar and for enacting appropriate legislative measures on the basis of its findings. Some *janmis* who attended the conference spoke opposing the resolution and twenty one *janmis*, submitted a letter to the president of the conference recording their unanimous and strong protest against passing the resolution. However, when the resolution was put to vote it was passed by a huge majority.

Referring to the resolution of the tenants not to co-operate with the *janmis* in Malabar and the obstinate attitude of the *janmis*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*

the *Mitavadi* writes: "It is for the government to step into legislation in the spirit of times, regardless of the howl, vested interest would necessarily set up. We hold the government also responsible for the present situation jointly with the *janmis*. Rightly or wrongly the belief is widespread that the local government have played themselves into the hands of the *janmis*. Among other things, agrarian grievances wherever found, would be redressed, still remains to be ratified by the local government in so far as Malabar is concerned. The tenants are demanding the possible now, and if the policy of neglect, indifference and drift is continued, sure as night follows day, they would demand the impossible. Let the government take note of the coming storm. We are not alarmists but have the misfortune to have correctly read the political barometer.³⁶

During 1920-21 there were also growing attempts to organise the Mappila peasantry. Soon the tenants' agitation spread to the interior villages. An Association for the Redress of Grievances of the *Kudiyans* of the Zamorin's Estate was formed near Kottakkal in Ernad taluk through the initiative of the Mappilas of the area. This association naturally came in contact with the *Kudiyans* Sangham formed at Kozhikode and the Congress leaders of the Sangham were invited to speak at their meetings and guide

³⁶ *Mitavadi*, May, 1921.

them in general. It is evident that some of the non-co-operation tactics adopted by the association was the result of this contact and guidance. The tenants of this estate generally had complaints against the estate manager regarding the collection of excessive renewal fees and rent. A tenant of this estate who had been remitting rent regularly was evicted from the estate land.³⁷ The association decided that no one should undertake cultivation of the land and no one was to work even as casual labourer on that estate. They left the land uncultivated. It was tantamount to the boycott of the landlord and the estate did not get any tenant to cultivate that land. This was brought to the notice of M.P. Narayana Menon. Immediately Narayana Menon and Kattilasserri visited the estate and consulted with the manager. But all their attempts to solve the problem ended in failure. At last, the Zamorin came to know about it and he dismissed the manager. Thus the problem was peacefully solved. This was a tremendous victory for the association and also for Narayana Menon.³⁸

The activities of the Zamorin's estate tenants helped not only the tenants of that estate but also other tenants of that area. Huge meetings of the tenants were held under its auspices at places like Ponmala, Kodur and Kuruva, all in the interior parts of Ernad taluk.

³⁷ K. Madhavan Nair, *op. cit.*, p.88.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Later this Association was merged into the All Kerala Kudiyan Sangham, The tenancy revolts achieved strength and momentum with the establishment of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham.

Their agitation effectively put an end to such practices like *melcharths* and unjust evictions in eastern Ernad. Some *janmis* came forward to give back the lands to the tenants who had been evicted from those lands. There were indications that the *janmis* themselves may demand legislation for systematising the *janmin-kudiyam* relations.³⁹ These attempts to unite peasants and labourers to exert pressure on the government to make themselves secured from the hapless exploitation of landlord official collaboration paved the way for the expansion of the Congress activities into the rural peasants of south Malabar. The culmination was the formation of district wide tenants association, i.e., the Malabar *Kudiyam* Sangham.⁴⁰ After elections Narayana Menon gave up his practice as pleader at the Munsif court at Perinthalmanna and started working full time for the cause of the tenants. Kattilasseril also worked with him for the tenants. Thus, having made the organisational basis, the tenant leaders like Narayana Menon looked forward to political developments to further their aims.

A meeting convened at Kottakkal in September 1920 was attended by about 5000 tenants.⁴¹ Similar meetings were held throughout Ernad and Walluvanad taluks, including a mammoth

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁴⁰ T. Muhammad Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 198

⁴¹ K. Madhavan Nair, *op. cit.*, p.83.

public meeting at Pukkottur, which was a hot bed of the rebellion in January 1921. In that meeting both the tenancy and khilafat issues were discussed. In these taluks the bulk of the peasants being the Mappilas, those meetings assured the character of tenant-cum-khilafat agitation. Most of the khilafat leaders namely Kalathingal Mammad, Kunhikader, Kattilasserri, Chembrasserri Thangal and so on were active workers of the tenant movement also. The political developments in 1921, as discussed earlier, led to the merger of khilafat and tenant interests representing anti-imperialism and anti-landlordism. The coalition created a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the peasantry. It also provided them an effective organisation. The peasantry having thus acquired solidarity and organisation, the conflict arising out of economic antagonism developed into widespread rebellion against the landlords and the British imperial power. It was thus that the first anti-feudal mass movement began to take shape - the movement for tenancy reforms. Thus the politicisation of the Muslim peasantry finally culminated in an open rebellion. Nobody can deny the deeprooted agrarian discontent of the Mappilas behind this rebellion. Even Lord Reading, the Viceroy recognised the influence of the agrarian conditions on the rebellion.⁴² It may be recalled that it was the combination of the political struggle of the entire people with the anti-feudal struggle of the peasantry for tenancy reforms that

⁴² K.N. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p.624.

made 1920-'21 in Malabar memorable for its glorious national upsurge. In the concluding article under the heading "Malabar land tenures and its results" a correspondent in the *Margadarsi* says among other things as follows: "It is high time to alter the present system of land tenures which destroys all the social and spiritual heritage of Malabar. If those who are in authority intend to perpetuate the present system the backbone of Malabar will be broken and the unrest resulting therefrom will produce serious consequences."⁴³

After the 1921 Rebellion the need for tenancy legislation and a reconsideration of landlord tenant relation was keenly felt. The tenant activists held that the rebellion was due to the unrest in the agrarian scene and emphasised the necessity of reform. The newspapers evinced keen interest in tenancy problems of Malabar and supported the cause of agitation. In a note, the *Kerala Patrika*, drew the attention of the strained relationship now existing between the *janmis* and tenants in Malabar. "The tenant association has resolved upon non-co-operation with *janmis* and many of the *janmis* were trying their level best to oust their tenants from their holdings. If *janmis* persisted in this, it will mean much misery to peaceful tenants and it would likely to lead to lawlessness in the country".⁴⁴ The note suggested the necessity of

⁴³ *Margadarsi*, Calicut, 1 October, 1920.

⁴⁴ *Kerala Patrika*, Calicut, 29 January 1921.

early government intervention in the matters and advised members of the Legislative Council, to expedite introduction of a tenancy bill and to try and prevent all agitations and troubles till the question was satisfactorily settled. As we have seen elsewhere that the *kanam* tenants had wrested the political leadership from *janmis* especially in south Malabar with the tenancy leaders capturing the Congress leadership. The question of tenancy in Malabar captured a dominant place in the political agenda.

In accordance with the Government of India Act of 1919, the elections were to be held at the end of 1920. Manjeri conference of the district Congress had definitely rejected the Reforms and the Non Co-operation Movement demanded boycott of all councils and elections to them. However, some Congressmen stood as candidates to the Madras Legislative Council (MLC). K.P. Raman Menon, one of the most prominent Congress candidates from Malabar withdrew his candidature, though another prominent person Mannath Krishnan Nair continued as candidate. In the elections held on 30th November, 1920, M. Krishnan Nair was one of the two candidates elected from the general constituency. It had been made known that M. Krishnan Nair contested the elections as a representative of the tenants of Malabar.⁴⁵ M.P. Narayana Menon had been an active participant in the tenancy

⁴⁵ K.P. Kesava Menon, *Samakalinaraya Chila Keraleeyar* (Mal.) (Kottayam, 1974), p.61.

agitations from 1917, it is obvious that he worked for the election of M. Krishnan Nair because of his interest in the tenancy issues.

Formation of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham

The period 1921-30 witnessed the most active and vocal phase of the Malabar Tenant's Association, centering around the Malabar Tenancy Bill and the government's opposition to it. When the Justice Party formed the first Ministry in Madras in 1921 immediately after the first election to the Reformed Council, some lawyers of the Pattambi Munsif Court thought of finding a solution to the tenancy problems through legislative means. They wanted a comprehensive bill giving the right of occupancy and fair rent to the tenants, abolishing *melcharths* and granting the right to purchase homesteads. An immediate result of their effort was the formation of the 'Malabar Kudiyan Sangham' (MKS - Malabar Tenants Association) at Pattambi in 1922 with T. Rama Kurup, a prominent lawyer of the Pattambi Bar as President and lawyers M.M. Kunhrama Menon and P.A. Raman Menon as Secretaries. This was followed by the launching of the newspaper *Kudiyan* (Tenant) with lawyer M.M. Kunhrama Pathiyar as Editor. In December 1922, the 'Malabar Kudiyan Sangham' (MKS) organised the first Malabar *Kudiyan* conference at Pattambi.⁴⁶ It was presided over by C.P. Reddy, a prominent member of the Justice Party and of the then Madras Legislative Council. It was attended by important tenant leaders. Among those present were Mannath

⁴⁶ P. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.78.

Krishnan Nair and G. Sankaran Nair. M. Krishnan Nair had entered the MLC after his Diwanship in Travancore. G. Sankaran Nair had entered the legal profession after giving up his headmastership in the first English school founded by the Nair Service Society at Karukachal, eight miles east of Changanassery. For five years he served as the headmaster of that school.

In June 1921, G. Sankaran Nair entered the legal profession by starting practice at Payyoli in north Malabar. Later he moved on to Calicut and worked as the junior of the then leader of the Calicut Bar K.P. Raman Menon. That was a time, when under the auspices of the MKS which was started at Pattambi by some of the leaders of the local Bar and a few public spirited gentlemen of the areas round about, an agitation had been started in Malabar for getting a comprehensive land legislation passed. Sankaran Nair was attracted towards this movement and he attended the first Tenant's Conference organised by the MKS held at Pattambi in December 1922. A large number of concrete cases of *janmi* oppression and tyranny were revealed at the conference by many sufferers present there. Sankaran Nair was deeply moved by those startling revelations and as a result, he volunteered to the *Kudiyam* Sangham to do his very best to get the legislation passed. The

Sangham then invited him to join the movement and take up the work of the organising Secretary of the MKS.⁴⁷

After a few months, it was found difficult to carry on the Sangham along with his practice, and so, he suspended his practice and became a full time worker of the Sangham. This marked the beginning of the organised agitation of the *kanam* tenants. The organisers of the Sangham had given adequate publicity to their venture. It took eight long years to achieve its purpose. Sankaran Nair had to face terrific opposition at every stage from the *janmis*. The Malabar landlord had the active help and support of the British government in maintaining their rights and privileges and that accounted for the formidable character of the opposition against him. In effect, therefore, for Sankaran Nair and tenants, it was a direct fight against the combined might of the Malabar *janmis* and the British government.⁴⁸

The method employed by him to win popular support to the movement was requesting the support of the leading political leaders and inviting them to preside over their meetings. Detailed articles were prepared by the activists who got published in leading newspapers in Kerala as well as outside. G. Sankaran Nair used to visit the offices of the leading newspapers like the Madras

⁴⁷ K.P.S. Menon, *G. Sankaran Nair: A Pioneer of Land Reforms (A Sketch)*, pp.3-4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

based *The Hindu*, *The Justice* and *The Madras Mail* in English, and the Calicut based *Mathrubhumi* and *Mitavadi* in Malayalam and impressed upon the editors of those papers the necessity for tenancy reforms. News connected with the Sangham work were published in its own bulletin, *The Kudiyan*. After every meeting of the MKS, a report of the meeting was sent to those papers. *The Hindu*, a nationalist daily, evinced keen interest in the tenancy problems of Malabar had supported the cause of the agitation. G. Sankaran Nair, even wrote articles to the *Swarajya*. Copies of pamphlets were made available to the public in large numbers on the disabilities of the tenants and soliciting their support. Both the press and platforms were used to unleash a propaganda campaign for tenancy legislation. In an English article the *Mitavadi* writes; The fact cannot any larger be impressed that the land system had filled the country with discontent, poverty, unemployment and bitterness of feelings, which acted like a Khilfat agitation. Agrarian discontent was a remote sub-conscious cause of the outbreak, it had prepared the ground for an outbreak; if it had not existed the rebellion would not have assumed such immense proportions but would have met with a strong internal opposition from the inhabitants who might something to lose in a chaos. The government and legislature must rise equal to the purpose getting rid of the *janmis* to the many people of Malabar."

The tenants on account of their helpless position had not come forward to stand up and fight. Sankaran Nair had, therefore, an uphill task in organising and infusing in them the spirit of resistance. He started tenants associations throughout the length and breadth of the district, secured the support of leaders of public opinion in the country, fought elections to the Legislative Council on the tenancy issue, went to Sabarmati and stayed with Gandhiji in his Ashram seeking his support and blessings for the movement, interviewed more than one Governor of Madras and the members of their government to enlist their sympathy for the tenantry, addressed the meetings of the Congress Working Committee and other political parties, praying for their help in the passing of a tenancy law and last, but not the least, interviewed every member of the MLC for his vote.⁴⁹ He interviewed them not only in their temporary residence at Madras, but also in their homes in the various districts. Thus, his method of doing propaganda among the members of the Legislative Council was something original. As the tenants were afraid of their landlords, they hesitated to attend the meetings of the Sangham. Nobody dared to give any financial help to the Sangham fearing the wrath and revenge of the *janmis*. Therefore, the meetings of the Sangham were held in the early period during festivals and ceremonies associated with the household. But due to the persistent campaigning Sankaran Nair

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

could organise about 100 local units of the Sangham within a period of eight years in Malabar.⁵⁰

The condition of Nairs under the social dominance of Brahmin *janmis* drew the special attention of the leaders of the tenancy agitation. Resentment against the Brahmin practice of *Sambandham* reached new high during the twenties of the 20th century. The effect of such social system were regarded as demoralising and sufficient moral indignation was aroused among Nair tenants against Brahminism and landlordism. Even the privileged caste like Nairs suffered various inequalities from the Namboodiris. Leading men among Nairs as well as Tiyyas felt that radical changes in the social order were possible only through the changing of terminal conditions.⁵¹

Since the British rule was established the British have been helping the *janmis*, and the latter have therefore gained power. All the rights of the *kanamdars* and *verumpattamdars* had suddenly fallen down to the ground. It came to be noticed that some *janmis* resorted to *melcharths* not for monetary considerations, but to wreck vengeance against their unrelenting tenants. The tenants are trying to establish their rights, the *janmis* are giving troubles to

⁵⁰ G. Sankaran Nair, "Kudiyam Prasthanam Malabaril" (Tenancy Movement in Malabar) in Malayalam *Encyclopaedia III* (Kottayam, 1972), pp.286-91.

⁵¹ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* (Mal.) (Thrissur, 1969), p.359.

the tenants. This *janmi*-tenant agitation in Malabar could be solved only through constitutional settlement. The *Mitavadi* says, "The struggle between landlords and tenants would break out and we are even afraid of that the cult of non-co-operation might become a feature of our rural life; non-co-operation against the landlord and not against the government. We hope the tenants would not be driven to that course and that even the Madras government would take note of the dark clouds that are slowly banking up, and embark upon measures calculated to give the tenant the relief he has for long been seeking without any favourable response from those and whose hand that gift lies. A responsible government cannot afford to brush aside the wise cause of Sir. Sankaran Nair and may not hope that at least the government of India will make up and enquire what is happening in Malabar.⁵² In accordance with the desire and the prayer of *janmis*, the tenancy bill is being delayed.

The election to the second Reformed Council held in October 1923 witnessed the first active phase of the MKS. This election was considered as a testing point of the tenancy agitation and the activists made use of this occasion to propagate their views. There was a special reason for this. Of the two persons elected to this Council from Malabar in 1921, M. Krishnan Nair, though himself a

⁵² *Mitavadi*, 8 May, 1922.

janmi, represented the *kanam* tenants. In his election manifesto he had promised to work for a tenancy bill for Malabar on the model of Travancore and Cochin legislations and accordingly he drafted one. In this bill he proposed to confer occupancy rights on all *kanam* tenants, whether cultivating and non-cultivating excluding *verumpattam* tenants who had been in occupation of their holding for not less than 25 years either directly or through predecessors. Accordingly, he presented the bill in the MLC in 1921 itself. But it was not taken up for consideration till the Council was dissolved in July 1923 for re-election. Although sanction was given for the reintroduction of this bill, the government decided to oppose it on the ground that the cultivating tenant was the person to be protected and not merely the *kanam* tenant, and the government after an enquiry, were not fully convinced of the necessity for the legislation.⁵³ The government thought that under the then political situation of Malabar such a measure was not required.

There is nothing very surprising in the government's attitude. The *Mitavadi* in a leading article in English under the heading "Sir Sankaran Nair on the situation in Malabar" writes: slowly and steadily the idea is gaining ground that to the government the *janmi* is everything and the tenant is nothing; this is an erroneous

⁵³ G.O. Madras, No.2233-34, Law (General), 11 September, 1922.

idea certainly, but if does exist in the mind of the both very straight; they ought to pay head to be caused at least of men like Sir Sankaran Nair ... whom nobody can call agitative and proceed to straightly undo the grievous wrongs, Malayalee Society labours under." The government did not take a systematic view of the policy of granting some liberal privileges to the tenants. It is not just and proper on their part to be neutral on this important question and fail to support and render justice to the tenants, carried away by the alluring words of the *janmis* who form a small minority. The time had come to introduce legislation capable of safeguarding the interests of both *janmis* and tenants. The *Mitavadi* says, "We would venture to point out that the time has come to embark upon such legislation and it is impolitic to ignore this opportunity and to stick to the policy of drift that has already intensified the agrarian situation".⁵⁴ The *Fortnightly Report* also warns the government and writes: "An agitation which has been started for the reform of the tenancy laws of the district conceivably lead to trouble if it was allowed to permeate the rebellion area."⁵⁵ So the tenancy law in Malabar should be modified in a way beneficial to the tenants. Moreover, tenancy laws have been passed in the sider states of Travancore and Cochin and that this matter has not received the attention of the British

⁵⁴ *Mitavadi*, 22 May, 1922.

⁵⁵ *Fortnightly Report* for the first half of February, 1923.

government in Malabar. The question of tenancy had been agitating Malabar for the last fifty or sixty years and plenty of materials are already available for the government to make up their mind upon this question.

The *Kudiyān* points out "How all efforts hitherto made for an amicable settlement between *janmis* and tenants absolutely failed on account of the obstinacy of the *janmi* attitude in the matter. It urges that the introduction of the tenancy bill in the Legislative Council should not be delayed on any account, because inexpressible suffering throughout the land will be the result if the law is not passed during the life of the present Council.⁵⁶ So, the measure is urgently required for securing peace and safety in the land. The *Mitavadi* protests against the inordinate delay caused in allowing the introduction of the bill. It points out "In no other country will a government with such an attitude be allowed to breathe freely for twenty four hours. The attitude of indifference in this matter is going heavily to turn the scales against the government. Extreme politicians will make capital out of it. There is no secure foundation for peace or prosperity in Malabar without a loyal tenantry free from the oppression of the *janmis*".⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Kudiyān*, Pattambi, 19 October, 1922.

⁵⁷ *Mitavadi*, 6 November, 1922.

In the meantime, in December 1922, M. Krishnan Nair had given notice of revising the bill as the Malabar Tenancy Bill for conferring occupancy right on all the *kanam* tenants and the *verumpattam* tenants, who were in possession of their holdings for six years or more. The bill prohibited *melcharths*. It also contained provisions for fixing the rent and renewal fees.⁵⁸ This was mainly because he might have prompted by the ensuing 1923 election. The paper *Yuvabharatham* comments: "Law will be shortly enacted unsatisfactory alike to these *janmis* and tenants, satisfactory alike to vakils and government. Now the tenants suffer. The *janmis* harass them If only the tenants would stick to their vow (not to take *melcharths*, etc.) there will be no need for any tenancy legislation".⁵⁹ Now the government realised the trends of new movement in deciding the tenancy question. Because, the MKS by this time had emerged as an unavoidable movement.⁶⁰ The paper *Lokamanya* observes that "*janmis* and tenants are both natives of the soil and their interests are interdependent. Even if a fourth rate bill is passed by the legislature, it will not bring tenants ought to equally to realise the fact that the fox only cares to stimulate the fight between the *janmi*-tenant goats and to strain out and to drink the blood of them. There is no use to put your quarrel between yourselves. There is no need to depend upon a third

⁵⁸ *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee Vol. I* (Madras, 1940), p.6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Yuvabharatam*, Chittur, 17 June, 1923.

party. Let the intervening mediator be transported to the island itself".⁶¹

In the election of 1923, M. Krishnan Nair, K. Raman Menon and Ambattu Sivarama Menon were the candidates. The first two were quite popular among the tenants. The MKS was not a strong and united organisation during this time. They could not unanimously support a candidate. Krishnan Nair had shown great interest in tenancy issues by submitting a tenancy bill. In his election appeal he sought the support of the tenants for enabling him to get the bill passed by the next Council.⁶² The candidature of Krishnan Nair was approved by all. But there were difference of opinion over the matter of support to K.P. Raman Menon and this was owing to the disunity persisting in the Sangham.⁶³ Raman Menon had created some awareness among the tenants and formed the first *Kudiyam* Sangham in Malabar. In his election appeal he stated that the main issue for the Malabar voters was the stipulation of *janmi-kudiyam* relations, he stressed the need for taking up the issue in the Council badly and effectively.⁶⁴ Finally the MKS decided to support Raman Menon and Krishnan Nair after several meetings and consultations. Nevertheless, the election of 1923 raised great expectations in the minds of the tenants and

⁶¹ *Lokamanya*, Trichur, May/June, 1923.

⁶² P. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.80.

⁶³ V.R. Menon, *Mathrubhumi* Charithram (Mal.) (Calicut, 1973), p.84.

⁶⁴ *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 11 September, 1923.

every effort was made by the tenant leaders to convert votes for Krishnan Nair and Raman Menon.⁶⁵ The election campaign gave a fillip and new enthusiasm to the spread of the organisational network. Ten thousand pamphlets were distributed in Malabar for propaganda.

In the election that followed only Krishnan Nair was elected to the MLC. Now the *janmis* declared that the election was a trial of strength between them and the MKS. They also felt the necessity of organising a *Janmi Sabha* to counter the MKS, for evicting the tenants and entrusting the lands to others. G. Sankaran Nair said, "never before they had been so organised and active".⁶⁶ They elected Madhava Raja as their candidate. Apart from using the press and platforms, many *janmis* forced their tenants to vote for Madhava Raja. Some *janmis* even waited at the polling booths to see whether their tenants were voting for Madhava Raja. In fear of persecution many tenants had voted for Madhava Raja. Those who had doubts about the loyalty of their tenants, either threatened them with eviction or prevented them from going to the polling booths.⁶⁷

By this time the *janmis* also became alert on their privileges. The tenancy movement, in fact, changed the life style of many

⁶⁵ V.R. Menon, *op. cit.*, p.81.

⁶⁶ *Mathrubhumi*, 6 November, 1923.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

janmis. The tenancy leaders by virtue of their English education and professional achievements exerted great pressure on the government officials and legislative circles. The *janmis* also felt the necessity of imparting English education for their children, so that they can also compete with the tenants. Thus both the landlords and the middle class took to the path of English education. If the landlords were interested in perpetuating their feudal interests, the middle class were interested in demolishing the feudal structure. This was a social controversy in Malabar society.

In 1924, a peasant organisation was held at Puduppanam near Badagara with K.V. Reddy as Chairman. A large number of *verumpattam* tenants participated in it. According to the decision of the MKS about one hundred tenants marched to Madras under the leadership of Mulayil Kurumban.⁶⁸ They submitted a memorial to the government of Madras. They did not go beyond that. The Congress leaders who shaped the programme were still hanging on moderate policy and their method was only to submit a petition to the government.

The resurgent tenancy agitation after the Malabar Rebellion got a new direction in 1924. Krishnan Nair had begun his efforts to formally introduce his bill in the MLC soon after the second

⁶⁸ N.E. Balaram, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam* (Mal.) (Communist Movement in Kerala) (Trichur, 1973), p.79.

Reformed Council was constituted. The bill eventually introduced in the Council in August 1924 was watered down considerably by a Select Committee. While the bill was being discussed in the Council, most of the officials to whom it was referred to, questioned the need for such a measure and stated that the *janmi* was the absolute proprietor of the soil and that no case existed for giving fixity of tenure to the *kanam* tenants.⁶⁹ The main opposition was raised by Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the then Law Member to the government of Madras. His plan was to prepare some amendments to the bill which would destroy it and place it before a representative meeting of the *janmis* and tenants for their approval.⁷⁰ Because of the influence of the tenant leaders the Congress sympathised with the tenants and that drove the *janmis* away from the Congress. The Congress leaders and the tenant leaders worked hand in hand. The open espousal of the tenant cause by the Congress made the *janmis* bitter opponents of the organisation and most of them turned to the British government for favour. Although the bill was amended by the Select Committee, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer issued a dissenting note stating that the bill as amended by it was so defective that it was incapable of being improved even by enactments. But the

⁶⁹ G.O. Madras, 366 Law (General), 5 February, 1926.

⁷⁰ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, "G. Sankaran Nayarum Kudiyan Sanghavum" an article in *Desabhimani* (Mal.) (G. Sankaran Nair and the Tenants Association), 8 February, 1981.

Government did not want to oppose to the introduction of amendments in the bill.

During the course of the discussion of the bill two schools of thought came forward on the question of tenancy legislation. The advocates for tenancy legislation argued that the Malabar *janmi* was not originally the sole or absolute proprietor of the soil, that the *kanamdars* and the actual cultivators were co-owners with him, they were never in touch with the land and did not reclaim all lands he now claimed to be his. For the improvement of the condition of lands they advocated the granting of permanent tenure to *kanamadars*. On the other hand, most of the English officials to whom the bill was referred for their opinion, held that the *janmi* was the absolute proprietor of the soil and had the right to evict the tenant at any time. But they also made it out that if any class in the tenorial structure deserved protection it was the actual cultivators and not the non-cultivating tenants. The Board of Revenue also supported this view point by stating that no legislation was justifiable which proposed to deprive the landlords of a right and confer it on tenants without compensation to the former. Even if the *janmi's* power was curtailed, the Board remarked that "it was to create another equally unproductive class of landlords, the tenure holders - an upstart race which will lack all

the bitter instructs which *janmis* may and often to inherit."⁷¹ Among official circles the idea was not to do anything to help the *kanamdars* who occupied an intermediate position. They felt that the actual cultivator required help although they remained non-vocal and inarticulate.

Commenting the relationship between the *janmis* and the tenants the Election Chronicle observes that "the relationship that not exists between the *janmis* and *kudiyans* is not what existed before the time of British administration of Malabar. At that time the *kanamdars* and the *verumpattamdars* had a much more stable interest in the land than they have today. They had a sort of permanent right of occupancy. Today *janmis* can evict his tenant at will. This right of ouster, which is the cause of all misery of the tenants today was first conferred on *janmis* gratuitously by the British Judges at the beginning of British administration in Malabar. Coming from England and familiar with their own land tenures they unfortunately thought that *janmi* was a landlord of the English type. Peaceful relations continued for sometime, but they did not last long. Interference by Legislature had become necessary. As long as the present relationship continues between *janmis* and

⁷¹ G.O. Madras, No. 366 Law (General), 5 February, 1926. See opinion of the Board of Revenue, in V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op. cit.*,). E.F. Thomas, who remarked. "I do not concede the necessity for the measure; See also opinion of Justice Jackson who regarded the bill as confiscatory, opinion of Board of Revenue, p. 61.

kudiyar, Malabar will be a hotbed of troubles. The peace and safety of Malabar depends on the settlement of the tenancy problem. Will the Legislature do this? If this is done, blessed in Malabar, tenancy problem will have been solved."⁷²

After the ground had thus been prepared by G. Sankaran Nair, the leader of Malabar tenants in the MLC, Sir. M. Krishnan Nair introduced his MTB in the MLC in the year 1926. Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was opposed to this measure and the principles underlying it. He therefore left no stone unturned in wrecking it in the Council. The bill was debated in the weeklong meeting of the Council in July 1926. Regarding this meeting the *Fortnightly Report* comments: "The MLC is sitting and has been occupied mainly with the discussion of the MTB, a private bill, whose passage has so far been by no means smooth."⁷³ Sir C.P. then mustered his strength in defeating the measure in the Council. There again, he lost with a large majority against him and his government. The Legislative Council had no option but to reject them as they came up. But after a very careful and anxious consideration, they made such changes in the Select Committee draft as appeared to be fair and equitable. Referring to it the *Fortnightly Report* says, "Consideration of the MTB was resumed on 28th August, 1926 and will be taken up again on the 2nd September

⁷² *Election Chronicle*, Madras, 4 August, 1923.

⁷³ *Fortnightly Report* for the first half of July 1926, Public Department.

1926.⁷⁴ When the *janmis* realised the trend of the future of the bill, Raja Sir Vasudeva Raja of Kollengode convened a meeting of *janmis* in July 1926, presided over by more than a hundred *janmis* from different parts of Malabar, requested the Governor not to pass the bill. Sensing trouble, the *janmis* led by the Kollengode Raja, went on deputation to the Governor at Ootacamund on 6th August, 1926 and informed him the factors which could adversely affect them.⁷⁵ They secured an assurance from him to be very considerable to the *janmis*.

After a long and protracted debate in the MLC the bill was passed by the Council on 2nd September, 1926 by a majority of 44 against 23.⁷⁶ While His Excellency the Viceroy received the telegram intimating the passing of the MTB Sir Sankaran Nair was with him. The viceroy spoke to him soon after reading the telegram as follows. "I do not understand why the Madras government are joining the *janmis* and throwing obstacles in the way of this bill. This is an enactment very favourable to the agriculturists. Moreover, a great majority of the members of the MLC have voted in favour of the bill. If in such a matter the government are trying to throw obstacles in the way of the bill till

⁷⁴ *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of August 1926, Public Department.

⁷⁵ G.O. Madras, No: 530, Law (General), December, 1926.

⁷⁶ *Fortnightly Report* for the first half of November, 1926.

they have their own way with it, where is the necessity for these Legislative Councils and such things?"⁷⁷

While the tenants were celebrating their victory by organising meetings in different parts of Malabar to felicitate M. Krishnan Nair and G. Sankaran Nair for their selfless work for a tenancy legislation, suddenly, the Governor withheld his assent to the bill under section 81(1) of the Government of India Act.⁷⁸ The Governor did this on the pretext that the measures passed contained "various inconsistencies, ambiguities, and other grave defects of from which would seriously increase litigation and indeed render the bill unworkable in practice if it became an Act."⁷⁹ It has been said that Sir. C.P. Iyer carried his vengeance, who was the then Law Member to the government. The Governor's veto is the only remedy for it under the reforms that it is the only hope of the *janmis* now. Not being democrats the *janmis* believe that the government can be counted upon to support them in their efforts to crush the middle class tenantry.⁸⁰ The government of Madras declared that they would appoint a committee themselves to ascertain public opinion and ask that committee to frame a bill to be introduced in the Council later.

⁷⁷ *Mitavadi*, 11 October, 1926.

⁷⁸ G.O. Madras, No. 2600 Law (General) (Mis.), 23 August, 1927.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Mitavadi*, 9 August, 1926.

The Governor's action, on the other hand, further strengthened the organisational solidarity of the tenants and the Governor was informed of their determination "to fight this question out to its logical conclusions."⁸¹ In effect, the veto helped the tenants to reaffirm their faith in the movement to win their rights that their counterparts in other parts of the country had already secured. The tenants this time accepted the challenge and organised an effective boycott of the government committee when it was appointed. They went further and started an agitation for the dismissal of Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer and recall of the Governor and reaffirming faith in Krishnan Nair, Sankaram Nair and the MKS.

There is nothing very surprising in the tenants defeat when all the big officials joined the strong and influential *janmis*, there is no use in making any further effort in the MLC, twenty years ago such a bill would have been passed, it is the changed attitude of the authorities that is greatly distressing. All the Madras papers except the Madras Mail have strongly condemned the action of the government. Other papers like 'Malayala Manorama', Kottayam (6 November, 1926), 'Sree Vazhumcode', Thangasseri', (6 November, 1926), 'Navabharati', Thiruvalla (9 November, 1926), 'Samadani', Thiruvananthapuram' (9 November, 1926), 'Kottayam Patrika',

⁸¹ *Mitavadi*, 1 December, 1926.

Kottayam, (10 November, 1926), 'Nazrani Deepika', Mannanam (11 November, 1926), criticise the arguments advanced in support of vetoing the MTB, express sympathy with the hard lot of the tenants and generally found fault with the attitude of the government in the matter. The 'Yogakshemam', Thrissur (3, November, 1926) and the 'Vasumati', Calicut (8 November, 1926) support the vetoing of the bill.⁸²

In the meanwhile, the government appointed F.B. Evans, second Secretary and a highly reactionary British civilian officer of the government of Madras, to proceed to Malabar to take evidence and also to discuss amendments with the district authorities and persons interested in it.⁸³ F.B. Evans, whose anti-tenant views were so notorious that the tenants throughout Malabar felt it necessary to protest immediately against his appointment. According to him, the tenancy agitation in Malabar was not due to any change in the economic situation that occurred since the government decided in 1918 that there was no case for legislation. He regarded the agitation as communal. To him, in north Malabar, it was Tiyya versus Nair, in south Malabar Nair versus Namboodiris and Samantan, and in Calicut a mixture of both due to the shape of party politics in Madras since the introduction of reforms.⁸⁴

⁸² *Mitavadi*, 8 November, 1926.

⁸³ K.P.S. Menon, *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁸⁴ G.O. Madras, No. 530 Law (General), 14 December, 1926.

When he reached Palakkad he went straight to the residence of Raja Sir Vasudeva Raja of Kollengode and held a conference of the *janmis* attended by many Namboodiris. The *janmis* had boycotted the Select Committee and insisted on maintaining their status quo. He stated to them that there was no need of any tenancy legislation.⁸⁵ He then went to Malabar and a meeting was held in the Town Hall, Calicut. There Sankaran Nair confronted Evans at the meeting and exposed the extremely reactionary character of the so called amendments. So the meeting ended in a thorough failure for the government. In the meeting Sankaran Nair stated: "It is not the government whom should be greatly blamed for the rejection by them of the MTB. It is Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, an Indian and a responsible government officer, who was the cause of this bill being treated like this. From the introduction of the MTB into the MLC till it was passed there, all the efforts of Sir. C.P. were turned against it. In the days when he was going about as a Congressman, he came to Calicut and preached that a tenancy law was necessary for Malabar and that special efforts should be made towards it. It was when the bill was under consideration of the government that this gentleman, who was a very responsible person in charge of this matter, went about accepting the hospitality at *janmi manas* (houses) like Desamangalam, Poomulli and at Kollengode etc. Even on the

⁸⁵ *Mathrubhumi*, 10 April, 1926.

occasion of passing of the bill by the MLC, he had at several times given out that he would get the Governor to veto it. It was Sir. C.P. who caused F.B Evans, who was adverse to the tenants' cause, to be sent to Malabar as a Special Officer in the matter and caused a report adverse to the bill to be submitted and did such other things. Therefore, so long as Sir. C.P. continues as the Law Member it will be difficult to get a tenancy bill passed. There is no doubt that even the causing of the vetoing of the bill by the Governor a week before the election of the new members of the MLC was itself, a diplomatic move made by Sir. C.P. the advice of a *janmi*, in order to bring about the defeat of M. Krishnan Nair, the representative of the tenants, and to get help for V.V. Raman Iyer who was put forward as their representative by the *janmis*. However, although the bill has been vetoed by the Governor, the tenants should put forth their best efforts to get a tenancy law passed".⁸⁶ "Though the government consented", reported Sankaran Nair, "in February to change the policy of wholesale obstruction by agreeing to frame amendments to the bill, F.B. Evan's proposals cut at the very root of M. Krishnan Nair's bill and were calculated to add insult to injury".⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Mitavadi*, 29 November, 1926.

⁸⁷ G. Sankaran Nair, An open letter to the Governor of Madras, in *Mitavadi*, 1 December, 1926.

Referring to the conference held by F.B. Evans at Calicut, the *Mitavadi* recalls that the representatives of the *janmis* of Malabar had already on several occasions almost unanimously conceded that there was no objection to the grant of permanent rights to *verumpattam* tenants and *kanam* tenants in possession. But Mr. Evans said that the government had refused to accept all these in the conference. With regard to the concessions offered by Mr. Evans, the paper remarks that "to make such offer is not only to ignore the grievances of tenants but also to insult them. We greatly deplore the fact that *janmis* by making use of the ignorance of the authorities here and some other evil advices have been able to render fruitless all the efforts of tenants. The meaning of all this is only that the time has not yet come when the voice of the people will be heard.⁸⁸ The paper suggests that Mr. G. Sankaran Nair who has higher to advocate the cause of the tenants with diligence should be nominated by the government as the tenants representative in the Legislative Council for the duration of the consideration of the MTB. The tenantry of Malabar will not be satisfied unless this is done".⁸⁹

The disappointed tenants infuriated by Evan's appointment and amendments attended in large numbers at the protest meetings organised in different parts of Malabar. Of this a meeting

⁸⁸ *Mitavadi*, 15 March, 1926.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 July, 1929.

held at Tikkodi in north Malabar in April 1926, presided over by the *Mitavadi* editor C. Krishnan, a Tiyya leader and advocate was probably the most significant. Both the Nairs and Tiyyas worked unitedly for organising it. It is to be noted that it was organised with the silent co-operation of the resurgent younger members of *janmi* families. The most significant of them was that the fifth annual conference of the MKS held at Mullassery in Ponnani taluk on 13th February, 1927. It was presided over by K. Thulasi Ram, a prominent member of the MLC and which was attended by about thousand tenants and their leaders from different parts of Malabar including M. Krishnan Nair, C. Krishnan and G. Sankaran Nair. The most important development of this conference was the adoption of resolution on non-co-operation with the *janmis*.⁹⁰ Following this Sankaran Nair stated that in the history of Malabar tenancy, two names would be remembered forever, that of M. Krishnan Nair, as a selfless person who worked for the progress of the tenants, and of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, as an enemy of the Malabar tenants who worked for their ruin.

There was a long and protracted debate and discussion at the various stages of the bill in the Council. The government was not ready to come to a decision on the bill. The government was most reluctant to legislate on the matter for they knew the

⁹⁰ *Mathrubhumi*, 15 February, 1927.

difficulties and complexities that lay in their way. Hence, the government had been delaying unnecessarily and if it had only left the Council its own way, the bill would have been passed long ago. The tenants take no steps for the improvement of the land owing to the insecurity of tenure. The only remedy for this state of affairs is the grant of permanent occupancy right to the tenants.

The Raghaviah Committee

In the wake of mounting pressures, the Governor appointed a committee in September 1927 headed by Diwan Bahadur T. Raghaviah Pantalu as President and seven others as its members.⁹¹ The members of the committee were Diwan Bahadur T.C. Narayana Kurup, Diwan Bahadur, Sir T.C. Desikachariyar, H.R. Pate, Sir Venganad Vasudeva Raja (Valiya Nambidi of Kollengode), Kotieth Krishnan, C.V. Krishnaswami Iyer and Khan Bahadur Haji Abdul Haji Kasim Sahib Bahadur.⁹² The committee was asked to examine the whole question of tenancy and also to enquire into and report upon the disabilities of the tenants in Malabar in general, the extent of unjustifiable evictions by the *janmis* in particular, the necessity for protection to *kanamdars* and on the best means of remedying their grievances.⁹³

⁹¹ G.O. Madras, No. 2708 Law (General), 1 September, 1927.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee 1927-1928, Vol. I, pp.1-2.*

Accordingly the committee should take into consideration of the question whether the disabilities can be remedied without granting the right of permanent occupancy of the soil and to what extent they could fix the tenure secured by the actual cultivators of the soil.⁹⁴ It should also consider that in case the right of permanent occupancy is to be made, to whom it should be granted. It should also make available the various devices employed to collect rents and other dues from those on whom such rights are conferred by the *janmis*. The committee was also requested to suggest other measures to enhance the cordial relations between the *janmis* and *kanamdars* and other tenants in Malabar and such other means to secure fixity of land tenure and security from arbitrary evictions.⁹⁵

Since this committee was filled in with the *janmis* and their supporters majority of the members had a natural affinity towards their class. The MKS decided to boycott the committee. A meeting protesting over the appointment of this committee was held in the Town Hall, Calicut on 22nd July 1927 and campaign was organised against it throughout Malabar.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan Jeevacharithram* (Mal.) (Kottayam, 1971), pp.224-26.

The meeting held by the Raghaviah Committee at Calicut on 18th August, 1927 was also boycotted by the MKS leaders.⁹⁷ The District Collector of Calicut invited C. Krishnan to participate in the meeting as tenant's representative, but he declined the offer.⁹⁸ In response to the demands of Sangham the government agreed to include two MKS members in the committee. Even this concession did not satisfy them and they decided to stick to their earlier decision of boycotting the committee. Tenants were asked not to give replies to the questionnaires circulated by the committee. M. Krishnan Nair moved an adjournment motion at the meeting of the MLC held on 27th August, 1927 regarding the constitution of the committee and its personnel. The MKS sent a deputation to Ootcamund in October 1927 and appraised the Governor of the absence of its nominees in the committee. In face of total non co-operation and also considering the objections regarding the personnel of the committee, the Governor adopted a conciliatory attitude and Row Sahib V. Krishna Menon was added as a member of the committee in October 1927 itself.⁹⁹ The Governor also held discussion with this delegation of the MKS and assured that he would hold a Round Table Conference of the *janmis* and tenants to discuss the recommendations of the committee. This was a great victory for the MKS.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ G.O. Madras, No.3248 Law (General), 15 October 1927.

Meanwhile, there were some other happenings favourable to the tenants. The Congress took the initiative to hold an All Kerala Tenant's Conference at Ernakulam in April 1928. It was presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai, a great nationalist leader. By this time an All Kerala *Kudiyam* Sangham was also formed in 1928 under the initiative of K.T. Mathew, M.B. Saleem, K.M. Ibrahim and others. A resolution demanding permanent rights for tenants was moved by K.T. Mathew. The tenancy leaders had also started an agitation for the dismissal of the Law Member, Sir C.P. and recall of the Governor. About this time, the Law Member Sri. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's term was expired and M. Krishnan Nair was appointed as the new Law Member in his place.

The Raghavaiah committee conducted an investigation tour all over the Malabar district, examined witnesses at Palakkad, Calicut and Tellicherry and submitted an elaborate report to the government in the middle of the year 1928. It is highly necessary to let the poor tenants with confidence to state their case without fear before this committee. Formerly when Mr. Logan made inquiries, what befell some tenants who told the truth, it might happen today also. Fortunately it did not happen so. In his report the committee observed that the main disability pressing hardly upon the tenants in Malabar was insecurity of tenure. The committee was aware of cases of unjustifiable evictions and

believed that such evictions were likely to increase in future on account of changes in social and economic conditions. However it did not recommend the grant of permanent occupancy to prevent evictions.¹⁰⁰ The committee was finding out a compromise between the various classes. They wanted to see that the *janmi* was not expropriated. It was afraid of the intermediary agitator. It sympathised with the poor cultivators. No security was recommended to persons in possession of dry land.¹⁰¹

The commission recommended that qualified and optional fixity of tenure subject to the conditions set forth might be leading to certain arbitrary evictions. They also recommended the fixity of fair rent and renewal fees. As compensation, the landlords were to be given special facilities for the collection of rent and renewal fees a charge on the holding. The committee members were fully conscious of the fact that their report was not the last word on the subject, that their recommendations were only one step in the right direction and that many more steps might have to be taken before the ultimate goal was reached.¹⁰²

The election of 1928 to the MLC had great importance because the Raghavaiah committee recommendations had been submitted then to the government. In this election K. Madhavan

¹⁰⁰ *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report 1929* (Madras, 1929), pp.152-61.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.77-82.

Nair was elected as a Congress candidate. He was one of the Congress leaders of Malabar who considered the tenancy legislation as a progressive measure for promoting nationalism.

In the meanwhile a deputation of the Manjeri Hithayathul Muslim Sabha represented that the Raghavaiah committee report was detrimental to the interests of the tenants.¹⁰³ The leaders of the tenancy movement then sought the help of the Congress High Command to ensure the participation of the Congress members in the discussion of the tenancy problem, to discuss the matters connected with tenancy reforms. G. Sankaran Nair went to Delhi, appraised the Congress leaders about the tenancy situation and persuaded the Working Committee to allow Congress members to participate in the discussions either to oppose the government bill or to make necessary amendments on it. The permission thus secured was considered a great gain and also as a success by the MKS.¹⁰⁴

The Round Table Conference assured by the Government was held at Madras from 7th to 10th of January 1929 with seven *janmi* representatives and seven tenant representatives. It was inaugurated by the Governor and presided over by the Revenue Member and a tenant sympathiser Norman Majoric Banks. This

¹⁰³ G.O. Madras No. 80. See petition from members of a deputation of the Manjeri Hithayathul Muslim Sabha, 6 November, 1928.

¹⁰⁴ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.89.

conference had been adjourned after a discussion which seemed to show more points of difference than of agreement between the parties. It is reported that nevertheless there was an inclination to a compromise which will depend on the attitude of the government. The *janmis* evidently entered the conference with justifiable assumption that the government would strongly support their sentiments and superstitions as well as their material rights and would oppose all demands of tenants. They put up the counter charge that the Raghaviah committee did injustice to the *janmis* and favoured the tenants. They withdrew even the minor concessions which they had afforded to tenants during the consideration of the bill that was subsequently vetoed by the Governor. The tenants are said to have formulated their amendment to the committee's definition of fair rent and renewal fees. The *janmis* would use this opportunity of extinguishing all *kanams*. It will be a tragic end to the agitation.

After some days of the Round Table Conference, a tenants' meeting was held in Madras, in which leaders like C. Krishnan participated. After the consensus arrived at the conference, the government conceded the demands of the tenants and brought a bill themselves embodying those demands. Main recommendations of the Raghaviah committee were accepted by the government with some variations. Some of the proposals

relating to the rates of fair rent, renewal fee and grounds for eviction were modified by the government. The bill in the modified form was introduced in the Legislative Council on 6th August, 1929 (Bill No. 9 of 1929).¹⁰⁵ The bill was referred to a select committee consisting of prominent persons like M. Krishnan Nair and K. Madhavan Nair. After reconsideration the bill was passed by the MLC in the modified form on 13th October 1929 known as the Malabar Tenancy Act.

It is to be noted that the attitude of the government towards the *kanamdars* had undergone a favourable change because of the fact that the agitation was championed by the educated middle class consisting of lawyers and government servants. It became a political necessity to concede the demands of the middle class agitators. The paper *Sudarsanam* observes: "*Janmis* are not and have never been mere proprietors of land in Malabar but they are and have always been the leaders of the real cultivators or tenants. The *janmis* have satisfactorily discharged their responsibilities and the latter even now recognise and accept the leadership of the former. The real trouble arise from those who have acquired modern education and who are government servants, vakils and political agitatatos. Seventy five percentate of the agitators are not toiling on the land. They have nothing in common with *janmis*. Their aim is to prepare the people of

¹⁰⁵ G.O. Madras, No. 3578, Law (General), 13 September 1920.

Malabar for certain social and political revolutions. Their aim is evidently power. As soon as this sword of power is won, they will begin to use it against the government and against religions customs. Thus, this law will, ere long bring about a great social and political revolution in Kerala".¹⁰⁶

While the Malabar Tenancy Act was pending with the Governor for his assent, both *janmis* and tenants made representations to the Governor by arranging deputation and other means. The Governor after a thorough examination of the bill requested the Legislative Council to make alterations in the Bill regarding the provisions of ascertaining fair rent of garden lands, pepper and the provision relating to payment of rent in advance, by cultivating *verumpattamdars*.¹⁰⁷ The Legislative Council accepted these recommendations made by the Governor in January 1930 "with the modification that the provision relating to the payment of rent in advance was subject to a provision which exempted existing cultivating *verumpattamdars*, who had been in possession for a continuous period of not less than 3 years without any such payment from its operation".¹⁰⁸ But the Governor viewed the provision as prejudicial to the landlords and returned again the questionable clause of the bill to the Council for deleting the same. Accordingly, the Council deleted the clause on 1st March 1930. The

¹⁰⁶ *Sudarsanam*, Trichur, 24 October, 1920.

¹⁰⁷ K. Madhavan Nair, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

revised bill received the assent of the Governor on 28th March, 1930.

The landlords were prepared to fight to the last and organised a deputation to the Viceroy, to withhold his assent. They engaged Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer to represent their case. The tenants quickly realised these tactics employed by the *janmis*. G. Sankaran Nair protested before the Viceroy against the unfairness of allowing Sir. C.P. to lead such a deputation in view of the fact that he had access as the former Law Member who had great influence among officials to all the private government records on the subject which the tenants had not. The Viceroy was convinced of this unfairness. So he agreed and so the *janmis* were forced to find out a new leader for their deputation in Mr. R. Rangachari. In the meanwhile, the *janmis* also worked up the member in charge of the bill in the Viceroy's Council and got it sent back twice to the government of Madras for reconsideration.¹⁰⁹

Sankaran Nair had to stay in Simla for seven months to counter the *janmis* effort to move the Viceroy to withhold assent to the bill. After hearing the *janmi* deputation led by Rangachari and the tenant deputation consisting of G. Sankaran Nair, the Viceroy essentially gave his assent to the bill. The direct outcome of the Raghaviah committee's report was the passing of the Malabar Tenancy Act IV of 1930 which came into force on 1st December,

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

1930. With the passing of Act, the main demand of the agitating tenants were met. The Act provided for permanent occupancy rights to all *kanam* tenants. It forbade eviction except for certain reasons. It laid down norms for fixing fair rent and put an end to the practice of *melcharths*. Besides permanent occupancy rights, the homestead dwellers were permitted to purchase the right of landlord. The amount to be collected at the time of renewal of a lease was fixed.¹¹⁰

The Act of 1930 must be regarded as an important epoch in the history of tenancy legislations. The enforcement of this Act marked the close of second phase of peasant struggle in Malabar. This Act was the second milestone in the history of tenancy legislation, the first was the Malabar compensation for Tenants Improvements Act I of 1887. The long cherished dream of the *kanam* tenants of Malabar finally fulfilled by the passing of this Act. It was this agitation which gave the Malabar peasants the first elements of class consciousness.

¹¹⁰ G. Sankaran Nair, *op.cit.*, pp.226-91.

CHAPTER FIVE

PEASANT ISSUES IN MALABAR FROM 1930 TO 1947

Generally speaking, the peasant struggle in Malabar had passed through different phases. In the first phase, the Mappilas of south Malabar had fought the struggle alone which finally culminated in the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. In its second phase, the leadership was snatched by the Nair *kanam* tenants, who utilised it for securing their own special interests. It is interesting to note that while the peasant struggle was originally by the *verumpattam* tenants to prevent the encroachment into the customary rights, its leadership in its second phase was spearheaded by the *kanam* tenants. The agitation of this phase was not a mass movement in the full sense of the term, the overwhelming majority of the *verumpattam* tenants were kept out of its purview and the demands were mainly confined to those that concerned the *kanamdars*. The demands of the *kanamdars* were taken up by the national movement leaders in their efforts to enlist the support of the workers and peasants into the struggle for independence. Thus the passing of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930, which while curbing the rights of the traditional *janmis*,

created a new class of landlords and marked the close of the second phase of the peasant struggle in Malabar. Nevertheless it was this agitation which gave the Malabar peasants the first elements of class consciousness-the consciousness that they should unite as a class and fight against their enemy, the *janmi*.¹ This class-consciousness was put into practice in the third phase with great zeal when the peasant struggles were carried forward mainly by the vast majority of *verumpattamdars* who remained the meek camp followers of the *kanamdars*. Thus the Malabar case clearly contradicts the initial vanguard and the initial lethargy and the later revolutionary zeal attributed to small peasants.

In contrast to the first two phases, the peasant struggles in the third phase were stronger in north Malabar. In this phase the peasant struggles were no longer confined to an interest or caste group, but look to the nature of a well organised class struggle, with interests of the lower peasantry at the fore and the *verumpattam* tenants in the forefront. As the struggles got politicised they were transformed into a broad-based social movement directed against landlordism and caste system on the one hand and imperialism on the other. The role of *verumpattam* tenants belonging to the lower strata of Hindu society in particular to the Tiyya caste, became especially spectacular in this fight

¹ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Calcutta, 1967), p.118

against social evils. The tenants' association sought to organise all categories of tenants, particularly the Tiyyas against enhancement of rent, illegal exactions and renewal fees and extended its base in north Malabar. This period of tenancy agitation also witnessed the formation of caste organisations like the Nair Service Society (NSS) of Nairs, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam of Ezhavas and others. It was the formation of the caste organisations of these sections of people that together with the tenancy movement laid the first basis for the rising peasant movement. So, the peasant movement of this phase was based on the small *kanamdars*, *verumpattamdars* and the agricultural labourers. Though there were Nair leaders also, the bulk of the second level leadership came from the Ezhava caste, who also formed a sizeable section of the actual cultivators.

It may, however, be pointed out that the Mappila small peasants were located in south Malabar and the Nair middle peasants were located in North Malabar and that these two categories were not involved in the same struggle. Be that as it may, it is not true that the small peasants of north Malabar were initiated into collective action because of Nair middle peasantry. In fact, the small peasants, Tiyya *verumpattamdars* of north Malabar got involved in the peasant movement not simply to ameliorate their economic condition. Theirs were a cultural revolt [being

untouchables], a political mobilisation [being part of the national movement] and a movement for economic settlement [being economically deprived]. It is of capital significance to recognise this fact because given the existential conditions of the rural masses and the political context, it was impossible that an exclusive peasant movement involving the totality of peasantry irrespective of caste and pursuing a unilinear goal, could have taken place in Malabar, may, anywhere in India, at that time.

In a sense the national consciousness and the growth of an organised national movement appeared rather late in Kerala unlike in Bengal or Maharashtra. The south in general and Kerala in particular was slow to react to these impulses. Consequently, the Congress and the national movement started late in Malabar. But in the case of Malabar a section of the political activists had paid serious attention to the agrarian problems from the very beginning of the national movement. Moreover, the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 exposed the tenants at the bottom to competition and had to become tenants not only of the traditional landlords (*janmis*) but also of such protected tenants (*kanamdars*). Their position became worse in the agrarian hierarchy since the migration from other sectors increased the number of people who sought their livelihood in agriculture. On the whole, therefore, it must be stated that tenancy reforms did not constitute a change in basic economic

relationship. They only reshuffled the upper levels of the tenurial hierarchy and exposed the tenants at the bottom, to competition and exploitation. They had no protection of law with regard to fixity of tenure and fair rent. The Congress Socialist Party [CSP] and the left wing leaders made a conscious effort to mobilise the poor peasants on class basis. As a result village level units of the peasant union were formed throughout Malabar by 1937.

The sustenance of a militant peasant movement which emerged in 1930's with its major anchorage in north Malabar was possible as it was 'ideologically and organisationally linked with the anti-imperialist struggle and led by radical political leadership. The continuous linkage between peasant mobilisation and the agrarian programmes of the Indian National Congress (INC), the Kerala Congress Socialist Party [KCSP] and the Communist Party of India [CPI] gave the peasant movement an ideology and an organisational base. This is equally true of the movements of agricultural labourers in Travancore and Cochin since 1930's. As we have already pointed out, the tenancy movement was dominated by intermediary group of *kanam* tenants who represented the upper strata of tenants, the years 1934 to 1940 witnessed the rise of workers and peasant's organisations consequent on the formation of the Congress Socialist Party. This period also witnessed the growth of a revolutionary ideology of

scientific socialism in Malabar, and the emergence of a generation of revolutionary cadres who gave enthusiastic leadership to the peasant masses consisting of *verumpattam* tenants and other inferior tenure holders.²

It is true that this was a mass movement in the full sense of the term, since its demands were confined to those that affect the *kanamdars*; the large mass of peasants, the *verumpattamdars*, were kept out of the purview of the movement. It was, however, a mass movement in a general way, since the target of attack by the agitators was the *janmi* - the common oppressor of the entire peasantry³. The leaders of the movement did, of course, subsequently (after 1930) join hands with the *janmis* against the mass of peasantry, but they did the preliminary job of making the struggle against the *janmis* a national and popular movement. Hence, though the organised peasant movement of the last three decades has had to content with the treachery of the original leaders of the tenancy movement and evolve a new leadership there is no doubt that it was the tenancy movement that gave our peasants the first elements of class consciousness.⁴

It has already been mentioned that the early tenancy movement was concerned more with the demands of the

² V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *Tenancy Legislation in Malabar (1880-1970)* (New Delhi, 1993), p.77.

³ E.M.S Nambudiripad, *op. cit.*, p.118.

⁴ *Ibid.*

kanamdars (who are a privileged minority among tenants) than with the demands of all tenants. The Tenancy Act that was passed in 1930, therefore, did not give any real relief to the majority of tenants. The fixity of tenure granted to *verumpattamdars* was so conditional, and the rate of 'fair rent' fixed for them was so high that their position remained more or less the same before.⁵ The demand was, therefore, formulated that all tenants including *verumpattamdars* should get full and real fixity of tenure, that the rate of 'fair rent' should be reduced and that other changes should be made in the provisions of the Act. Malabar taluk and local peasant conferences were held to formulate these and other demands and peasant organisations of district, taluk and local levels were formed. The socialist led Congress committees and Congress conferences also supported to these demands. Thus was brought about that co-ordination of the independent class organisations of the peasantry with Congress committees which laid the basis for a real anti-imperialist united front with the peasantry as its main driving force.⁶

In order to initiate and sustain an intense process of mobilisation the concerned collectivity should be experiencing acute distress. The Depression years of 1929-'32 provided such a context characterised by large scale evictions, rack-renting and

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.150.

⁶ *Ibid.*

indebtedness due to steep fall in the prices of agricultural commodities, and the constant rise in the revenue rates due to the resettlement undertaken in 1929. A.R. Mac Ewen, the District Collector of Malabar recommended the upward revision of the revenue and it was enhanced by 18.75 percent for wet lands and gardens. The assessment of waste land cultivators was also doubled. The increase in the revenue resettlement was also due to the reclassification of lands. The reclassification of 'dry' plots as 'garden plots' resulted in a ten fold increase in the revenue rates of garden plots in north Malabar. This particularly hit the subsistence farmers as they were engaged in converting the dry lands and cultivating the fruit bearing trees.

The tenants and agricultural labourers were the immediate victims of economic depression of 1929-32. The depression greatly added to the miseries of the people. The years preceding depression being 'boom period', people tended to spend money in converting 'dry' into 'wet' and in making improvements. The prices of commodities continued to decline steadily for five or six years.⁷ This also increased rural indebtedness. The revenue enhancement combined with the economic depression led to an increasing impoverishment of the peasantry. Since the tenancy bill did not offer as much benefit to north Malabar as it did to the south, the

⁷ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.78.

total number of renewals and melcharths also varied in those two regions.⁸

This situation brought about significant changes in the nationalist movement in Malabar. Though Kerala as a whole played a prominent part in the anti-imperialist struggle, it was in Malabar that intense activities were launched. It is interesting to note that a large number of young men belonging to the traditional land owning families were attracted towards the freedom movement.

In the absence of any land reforms, the *janmis* continued to maintain their ownership in vast estates running into thousands of acres. The real problem was not scarcity of land, but the land, including forest, fallow and pasture lands, was under private ownership of the *janmis*. This constrained the peasants in many ways bringing more lands under cultivation, cutting green manure from private forests, collecting wood for fuel, grazing the cattle, etc. In all these contexts, the *janmis* interfered and used social and legal sanctions, against peasants who were recalcitrant. The Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 was very limited in its scope; it could only safeguard the interests of *kanamdars* who constituted the upper crust of the tenantry. The Act did not confer fixity of tenure on non-cultivating inferior tenants and declined the right of

⁸ *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee*, No.15, p.103.

renewal to superior tenantry which tend to be known as mere mortgagers. While the Act did not confer security on inferior tenants such as cultivating *verumpattamdars*, the most popular category of tenantry, the influence of the families wielded over bureaucracy and the law courts nullified the benefits of the Act in practice. Thus in the absence of any substantial peasant mobilisation and due to collusion of landlords, bureaucracy, law court and political power structure the domination of the *janmis* was total and absolute. The overwhelming majority of the *janmis* were Namboodiris, Nambiars and Nayanars. Being superior castes they had a natural advantage over their tenants – they were ritual, cultural and social superiors in society. Not only did they own vast estates but they lived in big mansions, maintained elephants, practised polygamy and kept several concubins.⁹

In the beginning the struggles were against social restrictions and for social freedom and then against economic exploitation. Anti-landlord struggles were also anti-imperialist struggles. The Congress resolution passed at Karachi in 1931 identified the masses with the Congress and adopted a basic policy declaration which provided for tenancy reforms among other things.

⁹ T.K. Oommen, *From Mobilisation to Industrialisation, the Dynamics of Agrarian Movement in Twentieth Century Kerala* (Bombay, 1985), pp.40-44.

On the model of the famous salt satyagraha launched by Gandhiji with the historic Dandi March on 12 March, 1930 a jatha [procession] under K. Kelappan started in Malabar on 13 March, 1930 from Calicut to Payyannur. The whole of Kerala was stirred by this incident.¹⁰ The Civil Disobedience Movement [CDM] in Malabar brought to the forefront a group of people experienced in the actual political struggle but disillusioned with the Congress for its compromises and with no faith left in the efficacy of Gandhian methods for wresting independence from the British. It was at this time when the middle class of India were attracted to socialism as a result of world economic crisis. The influence of socialist ideology led them to perceive the class divisions and contradictions in society. This coupled with the feeling that the CDM was a failure mainly because it was not broad based enough to include different sections of society like the workers and peasants led them to organise these sections in different class organisations.¹¹

Formation of the Congress Socialist Party

The decision of Gandhi to drop the CDM in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Gandhi Irwin Pact signed on 5 March, 1931 created discontent among his followers. The young

¹⁰ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.80.

¹¹ K. Gopalankutty, 'The Integration of Anti-Landlord Movement with the Movement Against Imperialism: The Case of Malabar, 1935-'39', in Bipan Chandra (e.d.), *Indian Left* (Delhi, 1984), p.202.

political workers who were imprisoned in Cannanore central jail in connection with the CDM had established contacts with the Bengal revolutionaries, who were in the same jail, instilled in their minds a new political philosophy radically opposed to the Gandhian ideas. They felt that the Congress had not approached the masses in the right way by mobilising workers and peasants. The agitation against high rates of land revenue provided an opportunity to the Congress activists to study in depth agricultural debts, landlord-tenant relations and economic and social conditions of peasantry. The attempt of these young radical political activists in search of an alternative for wresting independence from the British culminated in the formation of the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party [CSP] in May, 1934.¹² Their programme was to organise the workers and peasants, thereby ensuring mass participation in the freedom struggle.¹³ The imbibing of the socialist ideology led these radicals to view society as made up of classes. Hence they decided to organise the peasants and workers in separate class organisations. Consequently peasant organisations developed in Malabar. The CSP with its units in Malabar had the main aim of making the Congress an instrument of struggle. The decision to form the Kerala Congress Socialist Party [KCSP] was taken under the presidentship of Sri. K. Kelappan

¹² *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 11 May, 1934.

¹³ V.M. Vishnu Bharatheeyan, *Adimakal Engane Udamakalayi* (Mal.) (Trivandrum, 1980) p.70.

at the Congress meeting at Calicut on 12 May, 1934. C.K. Govindan Nair was elected as President and P. Krishna Pillai as Secretary. After the formation of CSP, its members began touring the countryside forming Karshaka Sanghams [Peasant Associations]. Earlier demands centred around issues like high rent, heavy land tax and debt. It was to fight against such social oppression and exploitation that Karshaka Sanghams [KSs] emerged at the village level from 1935, which spread to the whole of Malabar in the next three years.¹⁴

Organization of Karshaka Sanghams

As early as in 1933, when Gandhiji visited Kerala, the Congressmen had organised in Walluvanad taluk an agitation against the enhancement of land tax following the resettlement. A committee was formed to pressurise the government to revoke the tax enhancement. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was one of the secretaries of this committee constituted for agitation.¹⁵ Meanwhile, a public meeting held at Calicut in November, 1933 presided over by Manjeri Ramaiyer, and where about fifty persons participated, including U. Gopala Menon, M Govinda Menon, T. Hassan Koya Mulla and E.M.S Namboodiripad resolved to form the

¹⁴ K. Gopalankutty, *Movements for Tenancy Reform in Malabar: A Comparative Study of Two Movements, 1920-1939* in D.N. Panigrahi (e.d.), *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1984), p.150.

¹⁵ E.M.S. *Namboodiripad, How I became a Communist* (Trivandrum, 1976), pp.152-53.

Kerala Karshaka Sangham [Kerala Peasants Union] in the whole of Malabar, with taluk and village sanghams as its units for safeguarding the interests of the peasantry and to immediately appraise the government of their hardships due to the increase in revenue rates. It also formed a working committee authorised to enrol more members.¹⁶

Following this the first conference of the Malabar District Karshaka Sangham was held at Pattambi in March 1934.¹⁷ This conference was presided over by Prof. N.G. Ranga, the General Secretary of All India Kisan Sabha and it marked the beginning of an organised peasant movement in Malabar. It appointed an economic committee under the charge of E.M.S. Namboodiripad to study the problems faced by the peasants. This was followed by the formation of a Kerala Peasants' Association (KPA). E.M.S. was its President and C.K. Govindan Nair, the Secretary. The immediate attempt of the peasant union was to oppose the exploitation by the *janmis* such as illegal extortions, the threat of evictions and the unsympathetic attitude of the Madras government to the genuine demands of the Malabar peasants etc.¹⁸ The task of the peasant union was the difficult one of

¹⁶ *Mathrubhumi*, November, 1933.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ T.J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala, A Study in Political Adaptation* (New Delhi, 1982), pp.67-68.

organising the working class and the peasants. These sections were brought to the union by slow and painstaking methods.

The situation was ripe in 1935 to form Karshaka Sanghams. It was to fight against such social oppression and exploitation that Karshaka Sanghams [KSs] emerged at the village level from 1935, which spread to the whole of Malabar in the next three years.¹⁹ The formation of village units of KSs followed the touring of villages by groups of peasant activists. This was then followed by taluk level consolidation. The taluk committees held periodic meetings and organised annual conferences.²⁰ With the formation of the All Malabar Karshaka Saghams [AMKS] in 1937 the KS became a three tier organisation with the village KS as the smallest unit, the taluk KS above it, and AMKS as the apex co-ordinating body.²¹ The progress of the peasant struggles during the years 1935-40 was closely bound up with the emergence of the KS as a strong peasant organisation. In organising its activities the KS fully utilised the prevailing discontent among the peasants and their oppression by the *janmis* and the government.

The Faizpur Congress in 1936 adopted a resolution recommending 'fixity of tenure with heritable rights for all tenants'.

¹⁹ K.A. Keraleeyan, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanam", (Mal.) (Peasant Movement in Kerala in *Prabhatham*) (Calicut, 1929).

²⁰ K. Gopalankutty *op.cit.*, pp.203-204.

²¹ P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change: Malabar 1836-1982* (London, 1989), p.92.

The CSP activists undertook to intensive propaganda work among the peasants who regarded themselves as a low status group. Their caste, social position, economic status and illiteracy made them subservient to the landowners. Thus both peasants and workers were organised in class basis. The primary school teachers, unemployed youths, women and writers were all organised.

It was in Kolancherry amsom of Chirakkal taluk that the first unit of the KS was formed. It was the first village KS in the whole of Malabar. It was a major event in the peasant struggles of this period. To put an end to all kinds of illegal practices practised by a local *janmi* and encroachment upon the properties of their tenants about 28 peasants of that village organised a meeting in the house of Vishnu Bharatheeyan, one of the founding fathers of the peasant movement in Malabar under the presidency of Pattathil Padmanabhan.²² A working committee of eleven members was constituted. Bharatheeyan was elected as the President and Keraleeyan as Secretary of this unit.²³ This was but a logical development which indicated the arrival of the political stage in peasant struggles as this and subsequently local level peasant unions were explicitly supported by the KCSP. In the same year an

²² P. Narayanan Nair, *Aranoottantilude* (Autobiography) (Mal.) (Through Half Century) (Kottayam, 1973), pp.174-75.

²³ A.K. Poduval, *Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanam* (Mal.) (Peasant Movement in Kerala) (Trivandrum, 1975), p.35.

inter village peasant union covering four villages was also formed. This was followed by the establishment of a network of peasant unions in the neighbouring villages in the same taluk. With this the peasant struggles took a different turn from the general and abstract enemies, imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and feudalism, peasant mobilisations came to be anchored around concrete issues and specific enemies, the more rapacious and oppressive *janmis* and bureaucrats.

The first taluk level conference of the KS of Chirakkal taluk was held at Parassinikkadavu near Cannanore in November 1936 at which the Chirakkal taluk KS was formed. It was the first taluk KS in the whole of Malabar. It was presided over by barrister A.K. Pillai.²⁴ Following this conference numerous peasant conferences were organised at the village, taluk and regional levels throughout Malabar, including Kasaragod taluk which was then part of South Canara.²⁵ There was a tremendous growth of KSs in the next two years. Before the commencement of the II World War there were more than 150 village KSs and a taluk sanghan in each taluk²⁶. This Chirakkal taluk conference urged for an effective tenancy legislation. The conference made as its aim the starting of a KS in every village and a member for it in every family.

²⁴ *Mathrubhumi*, 4 November, 1936.

²⁵ A.K. Poduval, *op.ct.*, pp. 21-22.

²⁶ N.E. Balaram, *Kerlathile Communist Prasthanam* (Mal.) (Trichur, 1973), p.83.

Similar taluk level conferences were held to highlight the economic hardships of the Malabar peasantry. The Kasaragod taluk KS was formed in 1937 under the leadership of Kisan leaders like K.A. Keraleeyan, V.V. Kunhambu, T.S. Tirumumbu, N.S. Namboodiri and K. Madhavan.²⁷ In 1939 the Kasaragod taluk KS's second annual conference was held in a big way at Kottakkal. This conference was presided over by N.G. Ranga and inaugurated by Moidu Moulavi, an eminent KPCC leader. The leftist leaders like A.K. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai, K.A. Keraleeyan, P. Narayanan Nair and K.P.R. Gopalan also attended the conference. With this peasant movement was galvanised in the whole of north Malabar.²⁸

After this taluk level consolidation the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham [AMKS] was officially formed in May 1938 by convening a meeting of the representatives of all local KSs. P. Narayanan Nair, the CSP activist who had participated in most of the early taluk level conferences was elected President and K.A. Keraleeyan its Secretary. At first the office of the AMKS was fixed at Kozhikode but later shifted to a central location at Kalliasseri.²⁹

The methods and techniques used by the KSs included pamphleteering, touring villages in small batches and holding meetings, jathas (processions) were undertaken to the houses of

²⁷ K.K.N. Kurup, *The Kayyur Riot* (Calicut, 1978), pp.30-31.

²⁸ K.K.N. Kurup in *The Kayyur Martyr's Memorial Souvenir* p.3.,

²⁹ P. Narayanan Nair, *op.cit.*, p.177.

janmis for seeking redress of grievances and the submission of petitions to the government.³⁰ Massive peasant conferences at the village, taluk and regional levels, processions of peasants and youth singing revolutionary songs and shouting rousing slogans and organisation of hunger procession were more or less regular features of its programmes. The demands of the peasantry remained more or less the same throughout. These included ceiling on rent, abolition of feudal levies and illegal exactions, use of standardised measures instead of fake ones, and amendment of the MTA of 1930 in a comprehensive way.³¹

One of the techniques of peasant mobilisation was jathas to the houses of almost all prominent *janmis* for the redress of grievances.³² From 1936 onwards KSs led peasant jathas to the houses of local *janmis* demanding the withdrawal of illegal exactions. Thousands of peasants participated in such jathas taken out at various places in Malabar. For instance, one such jatha which started from a place called Bakkalam in Chirakkal taluk to the house of a local *janmi* of Karakkattu Veedu situated about 20 miles away, is recorded to have been participated by no less than 7,000 peasants.³³ Such processions were taken out to almost all the prominent *janmi* families in north Malabar including the

³⁰ K. Gopalankutty, *op.cit.*, p.151.

³¹ P. Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.*, pp.92-93.

³² K. Gopalankutty, *op.cit.*, p.204.

³³ T.V. Krishnan, *Kerala's First Communist: Life of Sakhavu Krishna Pillai* (Trivandrum, 1975), p.82.

Vengayil Nayanar, Chirakkal Kovilakam, Kottayam Kovilakam, Koodali House, Kurumattur Nambiar etc.³⁴ These jathas were given enthusiastic receptions on the way by the local units of the peasants' union. These jathas also helped to an extent to the spontaneous display of brotherhood and comradeship among the peasants which in turn, also helped to cut across the barriers of caste. The slogans raised in these jathas were of both anti-feudal and anti-imperialist in nature. The leaders of the KPCC who led these peasants in this period were out and out leftists.³⁵

While the peasants and the working classes in the country were becoming militant on the political zone, two powerful trends were emerging. The first was the gradual slipping away of the Congress organisation into the hands of the leftists and the second was a logical outcome of it, the formation of the Congress Socialist Party [CSP]. In Kerala, the socialists always had an upper hand and this was maintained till the formation of a Communist party by the end of 1939.

Massive inter caste dinners for which the peasants carried head loads of vegetables and rice were unique and recurrent feature of the conferences organised by the KSs, which went a long way in weakening inter caste barriers and promoting class solidarity. Staging of plays with revolutionary themes often

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

highlighting the evils of landlordism and exploitation of the peasantry was another method for weakening inter caste barriers. It is therefore, hardly surprising that in north Malabar where peasant struggles were the most powerful, caste distinctions have all but disappeared except in the case of Namboodiris and the Harijans.³⁶

The All India Kisan Sabha [AIKS] which was organised in April 1936 at Lucknow was responsible for laying the formation of the KS units in different parts of India. Its aim was complete emancipation of the peasantry from economic exploitation. This gave a filling to the peasant struggles in India. Following this hunger jathas were organised in different parts of the country. In this context, a hunger jatha led by A.K. Gopalan deserves special mention. Early in 1936 he had organised a hunger jatha of the unemployed from Kuthuparamba to Tellicherry to see the Sub-Collector.³⁷ Stirred by the success of this venture he had organised another jatha from Cannanore to Madras on foot in July 1936 for presenting a memorial to the government regarding rural poverty. After the fashion of the hunger march to Madras, taluk level marches were organised in Chirakkal, Kottayam and Kurumbranad taluks between September and October 1936. Peasant activists

³⁶ P. Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.93.

³⁷ A.K. Gopalan, "In the Cause of the People" (Madras, 1973), p.15, in V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op.cit.*, pp.88-89.

like K.A. Keraleeyan and K.P.R. Gopalan took upon themselves the task of singing 'hunger songs' which had a profound mass appeal.

The year 1937 was very significant as far as Malabar KS was concerned. The pretension of championing the cause of the peasantry, as announced by the Congress in the Faizpur session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in 1936 and in its election manifesto was fully exposed. The peasants had great expectations from the Congress and they pinned their hopes on it. The peasant leaders engaged in propaganda work for the Congress and exhorted peasants, workers and middle class people to join the Congress for strengthening the main stream of the nationalist movement.³⁸ The peasants began to view the Congress as "their own organisation". They worked for the success of the Congress candidates in the 1937 elections.³⁹ When the Congress party backed by the peasants and workers' organisations won the provincial elections and formed a ministry in Madras in July 1937 under C. Rajagopalachari, raised high hopes in the minds of the peasants.⁴⁰ After the installation of the Congress ministry, the demand for amending the MTA of 1930 was raised in the peasant meetings all over Malabar. This was evidently due to the faith in the Congress ministry and the new hopes raised by their

³⁸ P. Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.95.

³⁹ K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.12.

⁴⁰ A.K. Gopalan, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

assumption of office. But the ministry failed to provide any relief to the peasants other than the mere passing of the "Agricultural Debt Relief Act". The passing of this Act was welcomed by the various units of the KSs.⁴¹ Peasants used to go to the houses of the Congress activists rather than the village officers to know the details about the Debt Relief Act.⁴² Complaints against *janmi* atrocities began to be lodged with the Congress members.⁴³

But the betrayal on the part of the Congress leadership disappointed the leftists within its ranks and alienated the entire body of peasantry which soon came to realise that any improvement in their conditions was possible only through their own organised strength. Consequently, towards the end of 1938, movements for amending the MTA of 1930 were organised by the KSs. Later on, this agitation for the amendment tended to be more and more militant. On 1 September, 1938, which was observed as All India Peasants Day, the KSs throughout Malabar passed resolutions in support of the amendment. They observed 6 November, 1938 as Malabar Tenancy Act Amendment Day (MTAAD), when a uniform resolution with demands for amendments was passed.⁴⁴ The AMKS appointed a committee with R. Ramachandran Nedungadi as Convenor to enquire into the

⁴¹ *Mathrubhumi*, 22 December, 1937.

⁴² *Ibid*, 26 March, 1938.

⁴³ Vishnu Bharatheeyan, *op.cit.*, p.113.

⁴⁴ Prakash Karat, "Organised Struggles of the Malabar Peasantry, 1934-'40", *Social Scientist*, March, 1977, p.8.

tenurial problem. This committee submitted its recommendations for amendments and these demands were endorsed in the KPCC meeting at Calicut as 20 November, 1938. The government was asked to bring in land legislation incorporating these demands. The second annual conference of the peasants held in 1938 in Chirakkal taluk passed resolutions demanding the amendment of the tenancy act. Simultaneously such resolutions were passed by the ninth Kerala Political Conference.⁴⁵ On this occasion a draft bill incorporating all the amendments demanded until then was printed and circulated.

In view of the persistent agitations kept alive by the peasant association the government of Madras gave notice in October 1938 for the introduction of a bill in the Legislative Assembly to amend the MTA of 1930. This was not a new legislation intend to alter the agrarian relations of Malabar but only an attempt to remove certain difficulties experienced during the working of the MTA of 1930. As it did not touch the vital problems faced by the peasantry, they demanded the introduction of a new bill to implement their actual demands. The government had to withdraw the bill as it drew protests of peasantry from all over Malabar in the form of meetings and demonstrations.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Mathrubhumi*, 10 May, 1938.

⁴⁶ EMS Namboodiripad, *A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala* (Bombay, 1943), p.22.

In the same year the Congress socialists secured an increased hold over the KPCC. The CSP activists urged complete disregard of landlords in several meetings.⁴⁷ Joint meetings of the Congress and the KSs were organised. In the meetings of KSs, speeches were made exhorting peasants to rally round the Congress and strengthen the anti-imperialist movement.⁴⁸ Peasants used to attend in large numbers the meetings organised by the village Congress committees.⁴⁹ The leaders of CSP used to travel in the interior often forming village Congress committees and KS units. The Congress members were asked to extend help and co-operation to peasant movements.⁵⁰ Resolutions condemning British imperialism were passed in these meetings. The British government was characterised as a staunch supporter of feudal elements. Likewise, the feudal lords were characterised as the "pillars supporting British imperialism". It was stated that in order to abolish the latter it was necessary to abolish the former. The appearance of police on the side of *janmis* during demonstrations was pointed out by the KCSP activists as an example of this relationship.⁵¹

It should be stated that the integration of the two movements one against landlordism and the other against

⁴⁷ *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of November, 1938.

⁴⁸ *Mathrubhumi*, 29 June, 1938.

⁴⁹ Vishnu Bharateeyan, *op.cit.*, p.111.

⁵⁰ *Mathrubhumi*, *op.cit.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11 May, 1937.

imperialism was possible only because the KCSP members did not view the socialist ideology as opposed to the ideology of nationalism and also they did not view the national movement as a reactionary force. Apart from a strong and sustained campaign against payment of rent to the *janmis* and revenue to the government, social boycott which had until then been a powerful weapon in the hands of the *janmis* was now wielded by the peasants effectively and applied against the recalcitrant *janmis* and, for that matter, any villager who did not support the KS programmes. However, the Mappila tenants held aloof from the movement.⁵²

The peasant agitations for a comprehensive tenancy act had seriously strained the relationship between landlords and tenants in Malabar. The *janmis* viewed these agitations with great alarm and suspicion. In fear of these developments the *janmis* of north Malabar held a conference at Kottayam palace near Tellicherry on 22 January, 1939. In that meeting they expressed their tension about the tactics and techniques of the peasants and requested the Congress leadership to take action against those Congressmen who stimulated the peasants to the path of agitation.⁵³

In October, 1938, at a meeting of the KS, it was resolved to send a deputation to the District Magistrate of Malabar, in the

⁵² *Mathrubhumi*, 22 and 27 December, 1938.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 26 January, 1939.

second week of December to demand amendments to the Act of 1930. Following this, there was the march of two jathas, each of five hundred red-clad peasants to Calicut representing the southern and northern regions of Malabar and a third jatha of a hundred and fifty persons to Mangalore, representing the Kasaragod taluk.⁵⁴ The captain of northern jatha was Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair, the KPCC volunteer captain and of the southern jatha, E.P. Gopalan.⁵⁵ The two jathas started their march on 11 December, 1938. The northern jatha started from Karivellur in north Malabar and the other from Kanjikode in south Malabar. They were given receptions en route by Congress committees, KSs, students and youth organisations. The two jathas converged at Chevayur near Calicut where the All Malabar Peasants' conference was in session.⁵⁶ After the meeting, the jathas resumed their march to Calicut and a meeting was convened at the beach presided over by P. Krishna Pillai. Resolutions demanding the amendments to the MTA of 1930 were passed at this meeting.⁵⁷ At the end of these jathas memorials containing the grievances of the peasantry were presented to the respective district Collectors. The merger of Kasaragod with Malabar and the extension of the MTA to Kasaragod were also demanded at the Kasaragod jatha.⁵⁸ In the

⁵⁴ *Fortnightly Report* for the first half of December, 1939.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Marthubhumi*, 21 December, 1938.

⁵⁷ A.K. Gopalan, *op.cit.*, p.83.

⁵⁸ K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, pp.88-93.

meanwhile, the peasant association had already indulged in a signature campaign for the amendment of the tenancy act and altogether collected about two lakh signatures and sent them to the Revenue Minister of the Government of Madras.⁵⁹

As a result of this pressure, the government decided to consider the necessity for legislation of a more comprehensive nature. So, it did not introduce the bill for amending the tenancy act of 1930. In order to study the situation, the government deputed T. Prakasan, the Revenue Minister in the Congress Ministry to visit Malabar towards the end of December, 1938. Consequently, T. Prakasan visited parts of Malabar to see things for himself in the last week of December, 1938. The KS forwarded to him a copy of the memorandum sent to the Collector of Malabar and the draft of a tenancy bill prepared by them. The memorandum enlisted various grievances of the peasants.⁶⁰ Based on the report of the Revenue Minister in July, 1939, the Government appointed a 'Non-official' committee with K. Kuttikrishna Menon as Chairman and eight others as members. The committee thus appointed was to recommend reforms in the law and the system of tenancy in Malabar. The committee was asked to enquire into: (1) the working of the MTA, (2) the advisability of the abolition of the system of intermediaries with or

⁵⁹ *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of December, 1938.

⁶⁰ *Mathrubhumi*, 29 December, 1938.

without compensation, (3) fixing of fair rent and standardisation of weights and measures, (4) fixity of tenure and end of evictions, (5) compensation for improvements effected and (6) extension of the Act to cover fugitive cultivation also.⁶¹ There was some kind of *janmi-kanamdar* alliance in the committee. Their interests were fully represented, but those of the *verumpattamdar* were not.⁶² The committee had two *janmi* representatives (who were the *janmi* representatives in Madras Legislature) and a dozen others who represented the *kanamdars*, but not a single Malabar Karshaka Sangham representative. Three of the MLAs appointed to it were E. Kannan, a Harijan, KPCC President Muhammed Abdur Rahman Sahib and Secretary E.M.S. Namboodiripad, all left wing legislators, strongly supported the peasantry and the MKS. The appointment of this committee was welcomed by the KS units in various meetings. Though the MKS was dissatisfied with the composition, it decided to use it as a lever for building up a mass movement. The KS units were instructed to present memoranda and to submit evidence before the committee, to conduct meetings in every village to discuss their grievances and also to send protest notes to the Revenue Minister for not including a MKS representative in the committee.⁶³

⁶¹ K.Gopalankutty, *op. cit.*, p.151.

⁶² *Mathrubhumi*, 19 December, 1940.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13 July, 1939.

The committee submitted its majority report in December, 1940. Its recommendations turned down the main demands of the peasantry, such as abolition of renewals to the *kanamdars*, abolition of one year's rent as deposit by the *verumpattamdars*, and reduction in rent rates. The three members supporting the peasantry appended dissenting minutes.⁶⁴ Of them the dissenting note by E.M.S. Namboodiripad is still a valuable document. He highlighted the evils and irrelevance of landlordism as a social institution and strongly pleaded for its abolition as a pre-condition for any economic development. He dwelt at length on certain basic question of land tenure, such as 'whether landlordism as an institution serves any useful social function or whether it is parasitic in nature, whether its continuance is a necessity for society at large, or whether it should be ended with or without compensation.'⁶⁵ Even these recommendations, which fell short of KS demands, were not implemented as the II World War broke out and the British government found it convenient to postpone the issue till the end of the war. Due to the pressure from the *janmis* the government shelved the report for more than a decade.

The basic thrust of the movement came from the small tenants and the *verumpattamdars*. In fact, they comprised a sizeable section of the KS members. There were village, taluk and

⁶⁴ *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee*, Vol.II (March 1940), p.9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. I (March, 1940), pp.71-84.

district level leaders that the members were all actual cultivators. In the interviews before the committee they all emphasized that the amendments should benefit the 'actual cultivators'. At the same time it was stated that the abolition of intermediaries was only a distant dream and that 'it was not practicable now'.⁶⁶ The landless labourers also participated in the movement. They were drawn in as a result of increasing politicisation and the propagation of the feeling of unity with the notion that "all the toiling masses were one". There were however, no movements for better wages or for better working conditions for the agricultural labourers.

The role of Malabar Karshaka Sangham which was formed in 1937 in organizing the peasantry against the imperialist rule and landlordism could not be underestimated. The Sangham was organised in order to redress the grievances of the peasantry, and to give a new political consciousness to them, the radical section of the Congress party also helped to make the sangham a popular movement.

The CSP played an important role in rousing the peasantry. As a result of their work KS units were formed in the villages. The All India Kisan Sabha was responsible for laying the foundation of the KS units in different parts of India. Even though these units were formed against landlordism it is interesting to note that a

⁶⁶ *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, Vol. II, pp.56-96 and 321-323.*

section of the landlords gave their wholehearted support to these movements. A group among the landlords who were dissatisfied with the *Marumakkathayam* system supported the peasant organisation. The other group who supported this movement was those who became liberal minded as a result of western education. The articles published in the nationalist papers like '*Prabhatam*' helped in propagating the ideas of sangham.

Between the years 1937 and '42 KS had become a powerful organization in Kerala. It initiated the peasants to awake from their long slunder. The government as well as the landlords used vigorous methods to suppress the movement. They charged forged cases against the members of the KS. But because of the co-ordinated action they were able to face every critical situation. The majority of the members of the KS were leftists. It was because of their influence that the sangham after 1939 turned out to be an association of the Communists. The members were greatly influenced by the new ideology of Marxism and Leninism.

When the II World War broke out, the KS rendered valuable service in helping the peasants. It was a great blow for the peasants when the prices of the articles rose up. They were not able to meet their expenditure with their small income. Sangham protested against this situation by participating in the observance of the 'Anti-Repression Day' organised by the KPCC. In this way

the KS was responsible to create political consciousness among the peasants of Malabar. Through its activities the nationalist movement was brought to the common people.

The crisis that was brewing within the Congress party since 1937 came into the open with the outbreak of the II World War. The radicals in the party were not satisfied with the mild protest of the CSP, which called upon its members to send to the district Collectors individual postcards opposing the war. An ideological rupture became obvious in KPCC by 1939 and the 'rightist' group of Congressmen openly criticised the leftist controlled KPCC. The rightists formed a separate organisation called Kerala Gandhi Seva Sangham (KGSS) with K. Kelappan as its leader. Against this, the leftists in December, 1939, held a crucial and secret meeting of about 90 prominent workers of the KPCC at Pinarayi in Tellicherry to consider the formation of Communist Party of India (CPI). They decided to think up the popular agrarian and working class struggles against economic crisis and suffering, brought out by the war with the fight for national independence.⁶⁷ The formation of the party was declared through the writings in tar on walls etc, on 26 January 1940. All the prominent workers of the CSP attended this meeting and declared themselves as the members of Communist party in Kerala. Thus all the state branches of the CSP got itself

⁶⁷ N.E. Balaram, *op. cit.*, p.83.

transformed into the Communist party. The ideological change following the inception of the Communist party made the KS a militant organisation.

In 1940, a war year and after the Congress ministry had resigned, witnessed a qualitative change in the peasant movements in Malabar. The first phase of organising the peasants under their own class organisations and leading them in the struggles for the redress of immediate grievances was over. This brings us to the second problem, the problem related to widening of the social base of the Congress by bringing the peasants into the anti-imperialist movement.

Thus the Kerala left leaders had succeeded in bringing up peasant-worker unity from the very beginning. The trade unions and Karshaka Sanghams joined hands on all important occasions like that of observing 'Demand Days' or 'Protest Days', etc. The leftist leaders during this period had understood the fact that if the anti-imperialist struggle had to be carried forward, they had to build up working-class and peasant movements throughout Kerala. The formation of the peasant and the trade union movements and the setting of Congress Socialist Party units throughout Malabar were all the result of this awareness.

Another important factor was the emergence of a powerful 'Teacher's Union' in Malabar along with the peasant and workers unions. In fact, the elementary Teacher's Union had started much earlier than any other unions in Malabar. But it was only after 1935 this union became a purely anti-imperialist force and got involved in the struggles waged against the British government. Gradually the Teacher's Union became a powerful state-wide organisation and its cadres not only participated in the struggles against the government but also gave political study classes to the peasants and students and became their leaders.⁶⁸ It was the Teacher's Union leaders, who mainly belonged to the middle class Nair and Nambiar families became the local peasant leaders and came forward to give leadership to the peasants in their struggles.

The refusal of Britain to give an assurance to grant independence to India after the II World War disappointed the freedom fighters throughout the country. On account of the underground activities of the Communists and the extraordinary situation created by war, the government strengthened its repressive measures everywhere against peasants, workers etc. The black marketing of essential commodities made life miserable for millions of people who lived on the verge of starvation. On 12 September, 1940, the District Magistrate of Malabar promulgated

⁶⁸ A.K. Gopalan, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-100.

an order under the Defence of India Rules banning meetings, processions or assemblies in the district of Malabar. In these circumstances, the KPCC most consisted of the leftists decided to observe 'Civil Liberties' or 'Anti-Repression Day' on 15 September, 1940.⁶⁹ In reality the programme was planned by the Communists. Following the ban, they gave a call for observing 15th September, 1940, as "Protest Day". Defying the ban order this time, they organised public meetings and processions in several places. The attempts of the police to disturb and disrupt these meetings and processions resulted in police-public confrontations, clashes and riots in several places of Malabar such as Morazha, Mattannur, Payyanore, Cannanore, Tellicherry, Badagara, Trichur, Pattambi and Malappuram.

The Kayyur Riot

Following the violent incidents of the 'Protest Day', the police force in Malabar turned trigger happy and unleashed assaults and atrocities on whoever they thought were against the British, spreading a wave of terror throughout the region. While the leaders of KS had either gone underground or been put in jail, the Communists were determined to retaliate and pull down the already shaky, British administration and along with it throw off its pernicious ally, landlordism. The historic 'Kayyur Riot' was but one

⁶⁹ *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of August, 1941 and first half of September, 1940.

manifestation of this resolve. The militant role of the KS under the Communist-Marxist-Leninist ideology contributed to the Kayyur riot. Kayyur is a remote village in Kasargod taluk. Most of the people of Kayyur village lived on agriculture. Many of them were illiterate peasants and agricultural labourers. The Kayyur units of the KS and the Congress founded in April 1937 became a powerful unit of the sangham and no landlord was dared to evict even under the decree of a court.⁷⁰

After the violence on the Anti-Repression Day, the KS was banned and the landlords again found an occasion to take repressive measures against their tenants and members of the KS. On 12th March, 1941 the Communists in Kayyur organised a demonstration against landlords and government and also its war time activities by shouting slogans against imperialism and war.⁷¹

Let British rule perish
Let landlordism perish
Let peasants succeed
Let revolution succeed
Let Soviet rule triumph
Do not pay rent
Do not join the army and
Do not contribute the war fund.⁷²

⁷⁰ K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.39.

⁷¹ K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala* (Trivandrum, 1989), p.5

⁷² V.V. Kunhambu, *Kayyur Samaracharithram* (Mal.) (History of Kayyur Strike) (Trivandrum, 1974), p.67.

They also demanded the release of the prisoners connected with the Morazha and Mattannur cases. On 26th March, 1941, a police party arrived in Kayyur at 03.00 p.m. and arrested the two accused leaders T.V. Kunhambu and T.V. Kunhiraman. On 27th the news spread and the party workers and the villagers in the surrounding areas decided to hold a protest meeting and demonstration on 28th afternoon at Pookandom in Kayyur. On 28th March people assembled at Pookandom about 01.00 p.m. and marched to Cheriyakara showing slogans mentioned above.⁷³

While the march was returning they saw the police constable Subharaya from Chandera police station who took the leading role in the police atrocities. The youngsters in the procession demanded him to join the jatha and hold the flag. He refused initially but was compelled to join the jatha and hold the flag. The constable tried to escape, when the jatha reached Edathil Kadavu, he broke the flag stick and beat one Palayikottan who was just in front and ran away along the footpath. At that time, Potavara Kunhambu Nair accompanied by five or six persons came from the opposite direction. Seeing the constable followed by the volunteers, Kunhambu Nair tried to stop him. There was a hillock on one side and river on the other. So he was forced to jump into the water with the hope of swimming across the river. The mob

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

pelted with stones and he was drowned.⁷⁴ The Fortnightly Report states that, 'there had been a serious disturbance in south Canara district when the Karshaka Sangham organised an attack on police constable, which had resulted in his death'.⁷⁵ After the crime had committed all those who had taken part fled to the surrounding jungle and it had been necessary to call out the reserve police and three platoons of the MSP to come out. This led to a long and terrifying police manhunt in a number of villages and the arrest and trial of sixty persons, of whom eighteen were sentenced to imprisonment of varying periods and four (viz., Abu Backer, Madathil Appu, Koyithattil Chirukantan and Potavara Kunhambu Nair) were hanged to death at the Cannanore central jail on 29th March, 1943.⁷⁶ Four young patrons of Karshaka Sangham implicated in the case were later put on the gallows. Following these riots the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham and the Kasaragod Karshaka Sangham were banned. As a result of these riots the KPCC was also dissolved.

The British government used all its repressive measures after the Kayyur riot in order to arrest the accused. But actually they were afraid of the rising tide of the Communist ideology in these areas and decided to curb it by using all sorts of repression. While

⁷⁴ V.V. Kunhambu, *op.cit.*, p.69.

⁷⁵ *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of July, 1941.

⁷⁶ *Mathrubhumi*, 30 March, 1943.

the events of the Protest Day resulted in the dissolution of the KPCC by the AICC and the appointment of an adhoc committee, the Kayyur riot brought an indefinite ban on the AMKS and all its units. However, the formation of the All Kerala Kisan Sangham in 1942 with representatives from Travancore and Cochin areas as well clearly proved the inability of the government to crush the peasant struggles. Although the Karshaka Sangham was banned following the riots in Malabar, its units functioned actively and participated in anti-war propaganda in remote villages.

The Kayyur riot was a significant episode in the history of the peasant struggles and the Communist movements in south Canara in particular and India as a whole. The class struggle and the national movement came to a close affiliation under the Communist leadership. The strong anti-imperialist movement and the militant struggles as described above under the leadership of the Communists created a class solidarity and consciousness among the peasants.

Karivellur Incident

The post war crisis had completely torn the rural life into acute poverty, agony and distress. Thus millions of people faced scarcity of food and reached at the verge of starvation.⁷⁷ The purchasing power of the rural population was considerably

⁷⁷ K.K.N. Kurup, *Op. cit.*, p.11.

deteriorated. Hoarding and black marketing were common. So the post war crisis spread social unrest among the peasants as a whole. Thus post war period marked a new turn in the history of the peasant struggles in Malabar. In all parts the condition of peasants and workers were worst. The capitalists and the landlords tried to make a good fortune out of the situation. The landlords introduced more repressive measures. Thus the political and economic conditions were very much favourable for the advancement of the peasants and workers.

Post war sufferings accompanied by hoarding and black marketing increased the miseries of the people. So a meeting of the Communist party was held at Calicut. It was decided to implement the agitation against black marketing and also to detect surplus food grains available in the areas. The Kisan Sangham organised various demonstrations against hoarding and black marketing. The activities of the earlier Karshaka Sanghams and other political parties were responsible for mobilising the peasants of this area in the anti-imperialist movement. Therefore, the peasants had been well organised against imperialists and the landlords. The middle, poor and landless peasants began militant struggles in 1946 against the rich landlords, black marketeers and hoarders.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.104.

The Karivellur incident was an important example for the new militant attitude of the peasantry. Karivellur, the northern most village of Malabar had played a significant role in the nationalist and peasant movements in Malabar. This village was a deficit area in Malabar. Rama Varma Valiya Raja of Chirakkal was one of the absentee landlords of Karivellur village. He procured nearly 10,000 seers of paddy as rent in kind from his tenants and kept it in the granary at Kuniyan. It was the period of scarcity of food grain and famine. As per rules no food grains shall be transported without the written permission of the grain purchase officer or other officers authorised by him.⁷⁹ Due to the acute shortage of food grains in that year (1946) the Kisan Sangham requested the Raja for handing over the entire quantity of paddy received by him as rent for the distribution to the villagers at a fair price through the local co-operative store. But the Raja did not agree. Instead, the Raja obtained a permit on 4th December, 1946 for the transportation of paddy from Karivellur to Chirakkal for domestic consumption. The Kisan Sangham tried to obstruct the transportation of paddy. In this circumstance, the Raja requested for police protection and it was granted. A big crowd assembled near the granary shouting slogans against the removal of paddy. The crowd and the leaders demonstrated against the removal of paddy and resisted the transportation. So, the special police fired

⁷⁹ K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.26.

at them resulting in the death of two sangham volunteers viz., Thitil Kannan and Keeneri Kunhikannan on the spot. Following this some other minor cases were reported in places like Chirakkal, Malappuram, Kavumbayi, Kalankotta, Kandakai, Mangat Paramba, Kurumbranad, Hosdurg, Madikkai etc.

Following this incident there was great oppression in Karivellur and surrounding areas including the southern part of the Kasaragod taluk. In the militant action of the sangham at Karivellur, Kisan volunteers from Cheruvathur, Pilicode, Kayyur and Nileshwar had participated and out of the 75 accused 32 were from the Kasaragod taluk.⁸⁰

On 5th August, 1946 through a resolution known as 'Forward to Final Struggle' the Communist party stated that the Indian freedom movement had entered in its last phase.⁸¹ The working class strikes, the Royal Indian Navy revolt and the peasant uprisings in different parts of India had heralded a period of mighty battle which might lead to the end of the imperialist feudal reign in India and the dawn of Indian freedom.

The Quit India Movement had paved for rapid uprising in Malabar. This invited immediate attention of the government to

⁸⁰ T.N. Ramakrishnan, *Reforms and Agricultural Development, A Case Study of Kasaragod District*, Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis (Mangalore University), p.60.

⁸¹ *People's Age*, Vol.V, No.4, 11 August, 1916, Quoted in K.K.N. Kurup (e.d.), *Agrarian Relations in Kerala* (Trivandrum, 1989), p.18.

the problem of maintenance of law and order. Thus on 23rd January, 1947, the government of Madras promulgated the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance.⁸² This was for preventive detention, imposition of collective fines, control and certain other purposes. Vast powers were given to executive authority against the individuals. Under the provision of this ordinance the government started a repression against Communists. The *Fortnightly* reported that the food situation continued to give certain amount of anxiety to the newspapers.⁸³ The *Swadesamitram* urged the government to formulate short-term proposals for increasing agricultural production and to take action in regard to the peasant troubles.

The post war period had resulted in abnormal rise in the prices of the agricultural products and this eventually led to hoarding and black marketing. Rack-renting, indebtedness and large scale of eviction were the peculiar features of the period. This created crisis in the agrarian structure resulting in powerful conflicts. Under the leadership of the Communist party, the workers and the peasants started militant agitations in many parts of the Malabar district.

The government of Madras appointed Raghavendra Rao as the Special Officer to investigate the land tenure system in the

⁸² G.O.No.66, dt., 4 June, 1947 (Legal)

⁸³ *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of February, 1948.

ryotwari areas of the Madras Presidency in 1946.⁸⁴ He studied the land tenure system of the ryotwari areas and recommended that the conditions of the small peasant proprietors should be improved by ensuring fair rent and freedom of eviction.⁸⁵ As per the recommendations of this committee and the pressure from the agrarian classes, the government resorted to certain measures to protect the tenants from eviction which was the powerful weapon in the hands of the landlords. By this time the government of Madras was aware of the fact that the tenants needed some more protection from eviction. So in 1946 as a temporary measure, to help the tenants the Madras Ryots and Tenants' Protection Act was promulgated.⁸⁶ This Act was to provide a temporary protection of certain classes of tenants and ryots in the province of Madras. The Communists were actively engaged in organising the peasants for bargaining their rights with the landlords in various parts of Madras state, particularly in Malabar.

In the same year a Malabar Kisan Congress (MKC) was formed under the leadership of Congress. Vishnu Bharatheeyan, a peasant activist was elected as the President and Ramachandra Nedungadi as its Secretary. The KPCC in April, 1947 had set up a tenancy sub committee to suggest amendments to be effected in

⁸⁴ G.O. Madras, No. 403, Revenue, Madras Government, dt., 22 June, 1946.

⁸⁵ *Report of the Special Officer on Land Tenure in the Ryotwari Areas of the Madras Province, August, 1947* (Madras, 1961), pp.3-9.

⁸⁶ V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.110.

the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930. The recommendations made by this committee were placed before a special session of the KPCC. On 31st July, 1947, the KPCC approved the recommendations and drafted a tenancy bill in response to the wishes of the Malabar Kisan Congress. However, the Tenancy Amendment Bill was introduced in 1950 and it was enacted in 1951, effecting considerable alterations in the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930.

After the II World War when the Congress Party came to power in April 1946 with T. Prakasan as Prime Minister in Madras, instead of bringing success to the suffering peasantry it tried to crush the peasant struggles in Malabar. The wave of repression, however, had only temporary success in putting down the peasant struggles which soon re-emerged in a more militant manner after independence. The Congress government even after the transfer of power in 1947 failed to ameliorate the conditions of the peasantry. The formation of Karshaka Sangham marked a turning point in the history of peasant movements in Malabar. It articulated the grievances of all actual cultivators and stood for safeguarding the interests of the peasants working in the land. The postponement of the issue of tenancy legislation owing to the intervention of the II World War set them ready for a vigorous struggle for future.

The Kerala state was formed on 1st November, 1956. The new Ministry came to power in 1957 led by the Communist party felt it necessary to remove the dissimilarities in the legislative provisions between the different districts. The Kerala Land Relations Act of 1969 was brought into force from 1st January, 1970. Thus from 1st January, 1970, the tenants became owners of land. This Act abolished both tenancy and landlordism not only in Malabar but also in Kerala.

The present study enables us to draw some conclusions about the forces behind tenancy legislations in Malabar and the different categories of tenants benefited by legislations at different stages. Anyway, the structural change effected by land reforms in Kerala is considerable as landlordism is abolished. The tenants were freed from the age-old feudal relics of rent-realising landlordism. New articulations in class formation were made possible by the reforms. Minimum wages had also been fixed for the agricultural labourers. Poor peasants and landless labourers attained more freedom and power in the society. This had its effects on rural power structure also, since land reforms served as an instrument of institutional changes.

Thus, land reform was one of the objectives declared by the Indian National Movement to mobilise the rural population in the main stream of the freedom struggle. 'Land to the tiller' was the

slogan of the land reforms but the tenant who cultivates the land by the sweat of his brow or aspirations of life, sharing either the crop or paying a fixed rent to the landlord was unlikely to achieve this goal.⁸⁷ Resistance was bound to face for any such attempt in a feudalistic society on land ownership, land control and use of land continue with slight change in almost all Indian states even today. The success of the tenancy reform was the result of an increase in the awareness of the tenants brought by the tenancy movement. Thus, wherever powerful tenancy movements were organised, backed by political ideology, the slogan 'land to the tiller' was realised. Pre-independence and post-independence period marked agrarian discontent in various parts of India. Many provinces of British India passed tenancy legislation, which resulted in temporary relief to certain classes of the peasantry. Politically, economically and socially the peasantry was very weak to recognise their rights and also to insist on the rights. Various tenancy laws passed by the state contain loopholes and these loopholes were exploited by the landlords with the help of the bureaucrats.

⁸⁷ Abdul Aziz and Sudhir A. Krishna (ed.), *Land Reforms in India, Karnataka* (New Delhi, 1977), p.21.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Malabar has carved out a commendable space in modern Indian history on account of it having witnessed a series of peasant struggles against the state-landlord collaboration from the second quarter of the 19th century and upto the second quarter of the 20th century. Malabar had an agrarian background where people depended mainly on agriculture, thus linking them to land. In agrarian societies land is the most important means of wealth and source of power and prestige. Rights in land are often hereditary with power and prestige. Therefore, changes in tenurial system and the pattern of ownership would have far reaching effects on the social order. The Indian peasantry appeared as a formidable force against foreign domination after the imposition of British authority. The British made drastic changes in the land system with the view of collecting more revenue and of creating a class of collaborators of their Raj. The British rule had thoroughly transformed the agrarian relations in Malabar.

The system of land tenure in Malabar is without a parallel elsewhere in the country. Its very novelty and uniqueness are a challenge to a proper understanding of all its intricacies for persons

hailing from other parts of the presidency. Since the British rule was established in India, the English had been helping the *janmis*, and the latter had therefore gained power. The earlier British officers were anxious to keep the Brahmin landlords satisfied. All the rights of the *kanamdars* have suddenly fell down to the ground. The tenants had started demanding for their rights and the *janmis* were giving trouble to the tenants. The government had not made an attempt to redress the grievances of the Malabar ryots. In fact, *janmis* and tenants are both natives of the soil and their interests are inter-dependent.

The evolution of monopoly land holding in the wake of the establishment of colonial government could not but generate agrarian tension in rural areas as landlords were rather encouraged to resort to eviction, depriving the peasant of his valuable possession.¹ The insecurity of tenants, burden of rent, growth of sub-infeudation and absence of production improvements were common in Malabar as elsewhere in India. Malabar had the highest percentage of tenants, the most complex land system and the worst form of landlordism. Moreover, in the whole history of colonial rule, it would be difficult to find a revenue policy more merciless than the one adopted by the company for the conquered territory of Malabar. The traditional society of

¹ Herbert Wigram, *A commentary on Malabar Law and Custom* (Malabar, 1982), pp. 93-109.

Malabar indeed reacted violently in the form of revolts against the colonial government. Malabar had a high proportion of tenant cultivators when compared to Madras province as a whole. One important peculiarity of Malabar was that a major section of the cultivating tenants were the Mappilas. The Mappila Outbreaks of the 19th century had emerged in these circumstances. In the 19th century violent outbreaks were staged by the Mappilas. The Mappila outbreaks of a peculiar kind started in 1836 and continued with short intervals upto the first quarter of the 20th century.² Finally, it culminated in the greatest sustained armed revolt in 1921. These outbreaks were violent expressions of rural tension and agrarian grievances.

The outbreaks, however, invited the attention of the British government towards the agrarian problems. The government felt it necessary to find a solution to the Malabar land tenurial system. Though the government appointed Thomas L. Strange, a Judge of Sadr Adalat with long experience in Malabar, as the first Special Commissioner on 17 February, 1852 to enquire into and report on the Mappila outbreaks, it could not solve the problem. In accordance with the views of the district officials familiar with the agrarian conditions in Malabar, the government was forced to appoint Sir William Logan, as the second Special Commissioner in

² M. Gangadhara Menon, *Peasand Movement in India* (Delhi, 1983), p. 60.

1881, to enquire into and report upon the general question of the tenure of land and tenant rights in Malabar and the alleged insufficiency of compensation offered by the landlords and awarded for improvements made by tenants.³ William Logan, in his Special Commission Report highlighted the connections between rural poverty and Mappila outbreaks. His main purpose was to analyse the historical problems involved in the tenancy question but to adopt some practical measures to improve the conditions of peasantry. British officials in general as well as administrator-statesmen in particular desired to protect the class of *kanamdar* tenants. The native officials had their sympathies with the *kanamdars* primarily because most of them belonged to that rising middle class. This middle class had already taken to English education and nurtured social and economic aspirations. The government actually did not want to oust the landlords from their power and position. This led to the postponement of a decision by the government on the question of tenancy legislation.

A complementary development in the late 19th century Malabar was the setting in of the process of disintegration of the matrilineal joint family system. This had a tremendous impact on the prospects of the *kanamdars*. Social reform movements were very active in this region which helped considerably in integrating

³ G.O. Madras, 1882, Vol. I.

the region into British India. Most of the themes of the social reform such as the rights of the individual, reforming of customs and traditions, necessity of modern education, marriage reforms etc., were widely popularised in the region leading to a re-negotiation of the age-old customs and traditions. The introduction of various administrative structures, transport and communication systems and other modern facilities brought to the doors of the people the experiences of modern governance and rule of law which gradually initiated a process of restructuring of the existing society. The changes in the conceptions of proprietary rights made the peasant-landlord relations more antagonistic. It also drastically altered the notions of property of a traditional matrilineal joint family. Its indivisibility was questioned more and more on moral and economic grounds as the influence of cash economy has reached even to the villages with its immense potential for restructuring. The process of instituting modern educational institutions attracted a section of the population towards it as it offered possibilities of appointments in the bureaucracy. These groups were normally located in the cities where it was possible for them to lead a social life bounded by customs and traditions. Non-agricultural life-styles in an urban setting became a desirable alternative for these upcoming elite from the countryside. Moreover, they nurtured the modern notions of the rights of the

individual, new matrimonial regulations, nuclear families, new notions of property, etc. The difference between the public and private domains became more distinctive and disastrously affected the joint family set up. The search for a wider identity of the nation by these sections marked their desire to move out of the confines of the joint family. The emerging sensibilities of this period reflected through the new literary genres expressed vividly the anxieties, ambitions, tensions and sentiments of the emerging groups in this great age of transition.

The growth of political awakening and the nationalist movement gave a new spirit to this English educated middle class to take up the cause of tenancy legislation in the beginning of the 20th century. They changed the course and content of the tenancy agitation. Besides the postponement of a decision by the government on the question of tenancy legislation imparted some sort of organisational unity to the tenant's association called 'Malabar Kudiyan Sangam'. With the devotion and skill of some of the founders of the tenants association like G. Sankaran Nair, the movement became strong and intense.

The tenancy movement in Malabar played a vital role in the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist movement. After the British takeover of Malabar they introduced drastic changes in the land tenurial system with the objective of collecting more revenue and

of creating a class of loyal collaborators of their Raj. By the transformation of the *janmis* as the 'lord of the soil' the British suppressed the agrarian classes under them which in turn destroyed the '*kana-janma-maryada*' existed previously. The tenancy problem which was agitating the minds of the Malabar tenants had become acute in the closing years of the 19th century. The efforts of the British government to solve the problem had no effect at all. During the years between 1800 and 1900 the only legislation enacted in respect of Malabar land relations was the Act of 1887 and its amending Act in 1900 which provided full market value for improvements effected by tenants. However, these acts could not solve the problems of Malabar tenants.

The emergence of English educated middle class in the closing years of the 19th century led to the disintegration of matrilineal system in Malabar. The very founders of the tenancy movement in Malabar belonged to this emerging section of the Nairs. G. Sankaran Nair was one of the pioneers who organised the 'Malabar Kudiyan Sangham'. He wanted to wipe out oppression of the *janmis* by enacting tenancy legislations. The role of Kudiyan Sangham was only for a short period from December 1922 to December 1930. The aims and objectives and its active operations is very significant. The Malabar Kudiyan Sangham was organised in December 1922 with the objective of enacting a comprehensive

tenancy legislation for Malabar tenants by giving the right of occupancy and fair rent to tenants, abolishing *melcharths* and granting the right to purchase homesteads. The leaders of Kudiyan Sangham had enjoyed considerable influence in official circles and among members of the Legislative Council. The Sangham leaders established contacts with Khilafat and Non-co-operation movements. 'Khilafat, Tenancy and Swaraj' was the slogan of the populace of that time. They made use of press and the plat form with remarkable skill and compelled the government to concede their demands. Thus, the Malabar Tenancy Act was passed in 1930 by the Madras government. This Act conceded all the grievances of the intermediary *kanamdars* and the vast majority of actual cultivators were kept out of the benefits of the act. The omission of the *verumpattamdars* by the government in giving any substantial benefit did not evoke any sympathy on the part of the *kanamdars* who had spearheaded the tenancy movement. The role of Malabar Kudiyan Sangham came to a close with the passing of the Act. After 1930, the *kanamdars* began to act as the landowners. Thus, the passing of the Tenancy Act of 1930, which while curling the rights of the traditional *janmis*, created a new class of landlords called the *kanamdars*.

The Malabar Tenancy Act was a victory for tenants and the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham, but mainly for the superior tenants

who spearheaded it Malabar is one of the few places in India where land relations were intensively and effectively articulated by an educated middle class as early as in the first quarter of 20th century. Though the British administration stood solidly by the *janmis* throughout nearly a century of agitations by the illiterate, impoverished, and inarticulate Mappilas, when the educated, affluent and articulate Nairs appeared on the scene, in less than a decade it conceded to their demands as a matter of political expediency.

The tenancy movement in Malabar coincided with the national movement which embraced all castes and communities. The Kudiyan Sangham, Khilafat and Congress committees all worked together. In the 1920's many Muslims had actively joined the Congress in response to Gandhiji's call to Hindu-Muslim unity. There is no convincing evidence that the organisational network of the *kanamdar* tenants which initiated the tenancy agitation was separate from that of the local Khilafat and Non-co-operation movements. The politicisation of the middle class and their entry into politics also gave the tenant the much needed and long awaited leadership. In fact, this coalition had created a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the peasantry. It also provided them an effective organisation. It is true that the interaction

between the national political issues and the local issues in Malabar was the secret of the success of these movements.

The Revenue Settlement of 1929, which increased the revenue rates by $18\frac{3}{4}$ percent, and the Economic Depression of 1929 added to the miseries of the people. As a result, in the 1930's, a new social, political and economic situation had developed in Malabar owing to the nationalist movement and the international situation created by the Great Depression. It was under such circumstances that the Civil Disobedience Movement was launched in Malabar. The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar brought to the forefront a group of people experienced in the actual political struggle but disillusioned with the Congress for its compromise and with no faith left in the efficacy of Gandhian methods for wresting independence from the British. The search for alternatives led them to the formation of the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party in May 1934. The Congress Socialist Party felt the need for organisational work among the peasants and the workers. The leaders of the Congress Socialist Party, most of them belonging to the upper caste middle class families, identified themselves with the exploited classes and set themselves to the task of organising the workers and peasants. Their efforts subscribed to an active peasant movement in Malabar as part of the nationalist movement. The peasants were mobilised against

landlordism and imperialism under the organisation of Congress Socialist Party in Malabar. They vociferously demanded tenancy legislation to lessen their economic and social misery. The rich peasants also joined the peasant movement as they were also subjected to inferior status and many social hardships.⁴ During this phase the struggles were no longer confined to vested interest or caste group. This struggle was carried forward mainly by the vast masses of the *verumpattamdars* belonging to the lower strata of Hindu society. The case of *verumpattamdars* thus remained to be taken up the Congress Socialist Party. The lower layers of the tenantry thus became a target of mobilisation by the Congress Socialist Party and later by the Communist Party. This movement further developed with National Movement at its background.

The formation of the Karshaka Sangham represented a turning point in the development of the national, political and class consciousness of the peasantry in the district. The politicisation of the peasantry including agricultural labourers was achieved by constant contacts and meetings. The propaganda classes, touring the countryside forming Karshaka Sanghams at village, taluk and district levels, pamphleteering, holding meetings, organisation of jathas to landlords houses and the demand for standardisation of measurements, etc., lent some sort of unity among the peasant

⁴ Mathrubhumi, Calicut, 11 May, 1934.

masses. The movement for amendment to the Act of 1930 was one of the methods of redressing peasant grievances. The Karshaka Sangham forced the Government of Madras to appoint a Tenancy Committee to report on tenancy issues. Accordingly, the government set up a Tenancy Committee with Kuttikrishna Menon as Chairman in 1939. This committee submitted its report in 1940. But the recommendations made by this Committee also fell short of Karshaka Sangham's demands. Even those recommendations were not implemented as the II World War broke out and the British government found it convenient to postpone the issue till the close of the war. During the course of the War, the anti-imperialist and anti-landlord struggles were integrated into one struggle.

All the prominent workers of Congress Socialist Party in a secret meeting held at Pinarayi (Tellicherry) in December 1939 declared themselves as the members of the Communist Party in Kerala. Under the Communist leadership the peasants developed a militant attitude towards landlordism and imperialism. This led to riots in different parts of Malabar. On account of the militant activities of peasants, the Karshaka Sangham was banned by the government and its leaders went underground. The nationalists and the peasant activists were hunted out by the police subjecting them to inhuman repressions. Militant resistance to the police was

organised for the first time by the Communist Party in Malabar following the Anti-Repression Day. The agitations for wasteland cultivation were launched vigorously during this period. At some places the cultivators had resorted to the direct action of encroaching the wastelands of landlords. The landlords sought the help of Malabar Special Police (MSP) to harass and intimidate the peasants who cultivated waste lands. The sense of militant nationalism fostered by the philosophy of Marxism and Leninism could be seen behind the Kayyur riot which occurred in March 1941 in Kasaragod taluk. The Kasaragod unit of Karshaka Sangham was banned after the riot.

However, the anti-imperialist struggles were suspended in July 1942, when the USSR joined hands with Britain. The removal of the ban on the Communist Party and the release of its members were welcomed. Despite the official position taken by the Communists, the peasant activists continued their agitation against black marketing and hoarding. This finally culminated in riots in different parts of Malabar. The burning problem faced by the rural population was scarcity of food grains. The Kisan Sangham initiated a programme against shifting of paddy from famine affected villages. The agitation against shifting of paddy in Karivellur ended in shooting by the police and two persons died on

the spot. A case was registered against several peasants and agricultural labourers for rioting against the state.

In the post war period the Communist Party endeavoured to keep the peasants continuously engaged in struggles against landlords and imperialists. Instead of amending the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930, the government passed an ineffective Protection Act in 1946 for giving more protection to the cultivators from evictions and consequent evils. Independence did not change a great deal for those at the bottom of the agrarian structure. Demonstrations on the issue of food availability and pricing, as well as militant intervention in food distribution continued. Slogans like "land to the tiller and power to the people" were raised. Until its final amendment in 1954 the Act of 1930 remained the centrepiece of struggles specifically focused on land.

After the formation of the Kerala state on 1st November, 1956 various tenancy legislations and land reforms were undertaken. The organisational strength of the peasantry of Kerala compelled the government of Kerala to introduce comprehensive land reforms. Finally as a matter of state policy the land monopoly system (landlordism) was abolished in 1970 throughout Kerala. The peasantry had been in the forefront of agitations which received support from socialists and communists.

GLOSSARY

<i>Adalat</i>	: Judicial court
<i>Ananthiravakasam</i>	: Nephew's right
<i>Ananthiravan</i>	: Nephew
<i>Cutcherry</i>	: Judicial Court
<i>Janmi</i>	: Absolute owner of land or land owner
<i>Janmi Sabha</i>	: Association of janmis
<i>Jatha</i>	: Procession
<i>Jathi</i>	: Caste
<i>Jehad</i>	: A holy war
<i>Kanam</i>	: Mortgage or lease
<i>Kanamdar</i>	: One who holds land on kanam tenure
<i>Karanavar</i>	: Head of matrilineal Hindu family in Kerala
<i>Karshaka Sangham</i>	: Association of peasants
<i>Karyasthan</i>	: Manager of the property of a landlord
<i>Kisan</i>	: Ryot or peasant
<i>Kisan Sangham</i>	: Association of peasants
<i>Kovilakam</i>	: Palace
<i>Kudiyam</i>	: Tenant
<i>Kudiyam Sangham</i>	: Association of Tenants
<i>Mana</i>	: House of a Namboodiri
<i>Marumakkathayam</i>	: The matrilineal system of inheritance practiced in Kerala.
<i>Melcharth</i>	: Overlease or the eviction of a tenant in

favour of a new one.

<i>Naduvazhi</i>	: Chief of a region (nadu) or chieftain
<i>Oppavakasam</i>	: Signature right
<i>Sambandham</i>	: Loose or informal marriage relation
<i>Shahid</i>	: Martyr
<i>Taluk</i>	: Subdivision of a district
<i>Taravad</i>	: A joint family unit
<i>Tavazhi</i>	: Subdivision of a taravad on female live.
<i>Thandasthava kasa m</i>	: Mediator's right
<i>Verumpattamdar</i>	: Tenant-at-will

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