PRINT CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF REFORM AND MODERNITY AMONG THE *TIYYAR* IN MALABAR, 1845-1947

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

Submitted by

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Under the Supervision and Guidance of

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled **"PRINT CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF REFORM AND MODERNITY AMONG THE *TIYYAR* IN MALABAR, 1845-1947"** is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of **Dr. Muhammed Maheen A.**, Professor, Department of History, University of Calicut and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis are undergone plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

Jasna P. J.

Calicut University,
Date: 03/07/25

Dr. Muhammed Maheen A.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to Certify that the thesis entitled **"PRINT CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF REFORM AND MODERNITY AMONG THE *TIYYAR* IN MALABAR, 1845-1947"** is a bonafide record of research work done by Jasna P. J., submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History and that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other titles and the thesis is a record of independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my guidance.

Both the examiners have not recommended any modifications or suggestions and therefore the original thesis is resubmitted as such. The soft copy attached is the same as that of the resubmitted copy.

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Jasna P. J.

Contents

Abbreviations

BEM	-	Basel Evangelical Mission
LMS	-	London Missionary Society
CMS	-	Church Missionary Society
SNDP	-	Sree Narayana Dhrama Paripalanan Yogam
KCSP	-	Kerala Congress Socialist Party
NSS	-	Nair Service Society
KRA	-	Kerala Regional Archives
CDS	-	Center for Development Studies
BGEM	-	Basel German Evangelical Mission
KSA	-	Kerala State Archives

PRINT CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF REFORM AND MODERNITY AMONG *TIYYAR* IN MALABAR, 1845-1947

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Abstract

The Thiyya community in Kerala, historically marginalized and outside the Varna system, faced exclusion and discrimination, being classified as avarna (untouchable). Despite internal differentiation within the community, including variations in inheritance practices and regional distinctions, the Thiyyas shared cultural ties with other marginalized communities like the Ezhavas and Billavas. Colonial rule, particularly through Western-style education and miss ionary efforts, played a pivotal role in advancing the social status of the Thiyyas by opening new opportunities for employment and social mobility, especially in government jobs. Key reformers such as P. Palpu, T.K. Madhavan, and Kumaran Asan helped challenge caste discrimination through education and social reform, while missionaries, including Dr. Paruamma, advocated for women's rights. This period marked a shift in the Thiyya community's social standing, with increased access to education and new opportunities that bridged caste divides. The printing press, introduced by the Basel Mission, became a crucial tool for spreading reformist ideas. Publications like *Mithavadi*, led by figures like C. Krishnan, provided a platform for the Thiyyas to voice their concerns, promote education, and fight caste discrimination. Print media also played a significant role in democratizing knowledge, fostering literacy, and engaging the Thiyyas in broader social and anti-colonial movements, which helped shape a new middle class within the community. The Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, led by Sri Narayana Guru, played a transformative role in uplifting the Thiyya community, promoting education, unity, and social equality. The SNDP worked to break caste barriers, advocating for temple entry rights and economic empowerment. Guru's teachings on social equality, anti-casteism, and Sanskritization, where the Thiyyas adopted higher-caste rituals to improve their status, were key in shaping their social mobility. Despite some decline in the SNDP's influence, the legacy of Guru's reforms and the contributions of intellectuals like C. Krishnan continue to inspire efforts for social justice and equality in Kerala. In summary, the Thiyya community's upliftment was driven by colonial education, social reform movements, the rise of print media, and the leadership of figures like Sree Narayana Guru, challenging caste discrimination and contributing to the community's social and economic advancement.

Keywords: Marginalization, Western education, Print media, Democratisation, Social Mobility

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സംഗ്രഹം

ചരിത്രപരമായി അരികുവൽക്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ടവരും വർണവ്യവസ്ഥയാൽ പുറത്തുള്ളപ്പെട്ടവരായിരുന്ന കേരളത്തിലെ തിയ്യ സമൂഹം. നിരവധി പുറംതള്ളലുകളും വിവേചനങ്ങളും നേരിട്ടവരായിരുന്ന അവർ. പാരമ്പര്യവും പ്രാദേശികവുമായ വ്യത്യാസങ്ങളും സമൂഹത്തിനുള്ളിൽ തന്നെയുള്ള ആന്തരിക വ്യത്യാസങ്ങളുമെല്ലാം ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നിട്ടും തിയ്യർ, ഈഴവർ, ബില്ലവർ തുടങ്ങിയവർ മറ്റ് അരികുവൽക്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ട സമൂഹങ്ങളുമായി സാംസ്കാരിക ബന്ധം പങ്കിട്ടു. കൊളോണിയൽ ഭരണം, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് പാശ്ചാത്യ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസവും മിഷനറി ശ്രമങ്ങളും അവരുടെ തൊഴിലിനും സാമൂഹിക ചലനത്തിനും, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് സർക്കാർജോലികളിൽ പുതിയ അവസരങ്ങൾ തുറന്നുകൊടുക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ഇത് തിയ്യരുടെ സാമൂഹിക പദവി മുന്നോട്ട് കൊണ്ടുപോകുന്നതിൽ നിർണായക പങ്ക് വഹിച്ചു. ഡോ.പി. പൽപ്പു, ടി.കെ. മാധവൻ, കുമാരനാശാൻ തുടങ്ങിയ പ്രധാനപരിഷ്കർത്താക്കൾ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസത്തിലൂടെയും സാമൂഹിക പരിഷ്കരണത്തിലൂടെയും ജാതി വിവേചനത്തെ വെല്ലുവിളിച്ചു. അതേസമയം ഡോ. പാറുവമ്മ,സി.കെ രേവതിഅമ്മ എന്നിവർ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ അവകാശങ്ങൾക്കായി വാദിച്ചു. വിദ്യാഭ്യാസത്തിലേക്കുള്ള ഈ വിഭാഗത്തിന്റെ വർദ്ധിച്ച പ്രവേശനവും, ജാതിവിഭജനം കുറയ്ക്കുന്ന തരത്തിലുള്ള പുതിയ ഇടപെടലുകളും ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ തിയ്യസമൂഹത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹികസ്ഥാനത്തിന് മാറ്റങ്ങളുണ്ടാക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ബാസൽ മിഷൻ അവതരിപ്പിച്ച അച്ചടിശാല പുതിയ സാമൂഹിക പരിഷ്കരണത്തിനുള്ള നിർണായക ഉപകരണമായി മാറി. സി.കൃഷ്ണൻ നയിച്ച മിതവാദിയും അതുപോലുള്ള മറ്റ് പ്രസിദ്ധീകരണങ്ങളും തിയ്യർക്ക് അവരുടെ ആശങ്കകൾ പ്രകടിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനും, വിദ്യാഭ്യാസത്തെ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനും, ജാതിവിവേചനത്തിനെതിരെ പോരാടുന്നതിനും ഒരു വേദിയായി മാറുന്നുണ്ട്. അറിവിനെ ജനാധിപത്യവൽക്കരിക്കുന്നതിലും, സാക്ഷരത വളർത്തുന്നതിലും, തിയ്യരെ വിശാലമായ സാമൂഹിക, കൊളോണിയൽവിരുദ്ധപ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങളിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിലും അച്ചടി മാധ്യമങ്ങൾ പ്രധാന പങ്ക് വഹിച്ചു. ഇത് സമൂഹത്തിനുള്ളിൽ ഒരു പുതിയ മധ്യവർഗത്തെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്താൻ സഹായിച്ചു. ശ്രീ നാരായണ ഗുരുവിന്റെ നേതൃത്വത്തിലുള്ള ശ്രീ നാരായണ ധർമ്മപരിപാലനയോഗം (എസ്എൻഡിപി) തിയ്യസമൂഹത്തെ ഉയർത്തുന്നതിലും, വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, ഐക്യം, സാമൂഹിക സമത്വം എന്നിവ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിലും പരിവർത്തനാത്മകമായ പങ്കുവഹിച്ചു. ജാതി തടസ്സങ്ങൾ തകർക്കുന്നതിനും, ക്ഷേത്രപ്രവേശന അവകാശങ്ങൾക്കും സാമ്പത്തിക ശാക്തീകരണത്തിനുമെല്ലാം വേണ്ടി എസ്.എൻ.ഡി.പി. പ്രവർത്തിച്ചു. സാമൂഹികസമത്വം, ജാതിവിരുദ്ധത, സംസ്കൃതവൽക്കരണം എന്നിവയെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഗുരുവിന്റെ ഇടപെടലുകൾ നിർണ്ണായകമായിരുന്നു. തിയ്യർ അവരുടെ പദവി മെച്ചപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിനായി ഉയർന്ന ജാതി ആചാരങ്ങൾ സ്വീകരിച്ചു. അവരുടെ സാമൂഹികമായ ചലനാത്മകതയെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിൽ അതെല്ലാം നിർണായകമായിരുന്നു. എസ്.എൻ.ഡി.പി.യുടെ സ്വാധീനത്തിൽ ചില ഇടിവുകൾ ഉണ്ടായിട്ടും, ഗുരുവിന്റെ പരിഷ്കാരങ്ങളുടെ

Maheen

Dr. Muhammed Maheen. A
(Research Supervisor)

പാരമ്പര്യവും മഹാകവി കുമാരനാശാൻ, പൽപ്പു, സി. കൃഷ്ണൻ എന്നിവരെപ്പോലുള്ള ബുദ്ധിജീവികളുടെ സംഭാവനകളും കേരളത്തിൽ സാമൂഹികനീതിക്കും സമത്വത്തിനും വേണ്ടിയുള്ള ശ്രമങ്ങൾക്ക് പ്രചോദനം നൽകി. ചുരുക്കത്തിൽ, കൊളോണിയൽ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, സാമൂഹിക പരിഷ്കരണ പ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ, അച്ചടി മാധ്യമങ്ങളുടെ ഉദയം ഇവയെല്ലാം ജാതി വിവേചനത്തെ വെല്ലുവിളിച്ചു. സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹികവും സാമ്പത്തികവുമായ പുരോഗതിക്ക് സംഭാവന നൽകിയ ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിനെപ്പോലുള്ള പരിഷ്കർത്താക്കളുടെ നേതൃത്വവും തിയ്യസമൂഹത്തിന്റെ ഉന്നമനത്തിന് കാരണമായി.

കീവേർഡ്സ്: അരികുവത്കരണം, പാശ്ചാത്യവിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, അച്ചടിമാധ്യമം, ജനാധിപത്യവത്കരണം, സാമൂഹ്യ ചലനാത്മകത.

Introduction

The medieval world, dominated for centuries by feudalism and religious authority, eventually gave way to transformative periods such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution, each of which reshaped intellectual and cultural landscapes across the globe. Before the Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century, most societies were agrarian, with economies centered around farming and local trade. The majority of people lived in rural villages, and social structures were deeply rooted in the feudal system, where land ownership and power were concentrated in the hands of a few nobles and monarchs. Technology and production methods were largely traditional, relying on manual labour and animal power. Although the Renaissance and Enlightenment fostered significant advancements in art, science, and philosophy, their impact on widespread industrialization was limited. Social mobility was constrained, and economic activity was confined to local markets, with few global trade networks compared to later periods. However, the era did see the rise of early capitalist thought, particularly in the works of thinkers like Adam Smith, alongside the expansion of global exploration and developments that would eventually lay the groundwork for the technological and economic changes of the Industrial Revolution.

Originating in Europe, the Renaissance marked a revival of classical knowledge and ideals, with humanism, the celebration of human potential and achievement, as its central tenet. This period witnessed a flourishing of art, literature, and science, with renowned figures such as Leonardo da Vinci and Galileo Galilei advancing the frontiers of both creative and scientific thought. The Renaissance set the stage for the Enlightenment, an era characterized by an emphasis on reason, individualism, and critical thinking. Enlightenment thinkers challenged traditional religious dogma and absolute political power, advocating for the primacy of science,

freedom of thought, and government predicated on the consent of the governed. These ideas formed the intellectual basis for modern democracy and secular governance.

At the same time, the Scientific Revolution, driven by breakthroughs from figures like Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton, radically transformed humanity's understanding of the natural world and the cosmos. These discoveries not only changed how people viewed their place in the universe but also set the stage for further technological advancements and exploration.

Collectively, these movements represented a significant departure from the medieval worldview, ushering in a new era defined by intellectual curiosity, technological innovation, and the exchange of ideas. They laid the foundation for the modern age, marked by a dynamic approach to knowledge acquisition, exploration, and progress.

During the 18th century, several significant events shaped world history, one of which was the Industrial Revolution in England. The Industrial Revolution first took root in England in the seventeenth century, eventually extending to Western and Central Europe. However, the process of industrialization, which gradually extended to other European nations, varied across different nations.[1] Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, discovered a sea route to India in 1498, which facilitated the entry of European powers, including the English, French, Portuguese, and Dutch, into the Indian trade. In addition to trade, these European powers, particularly the British, also engaged in missionary work in India.

Initially, the British and other European traders arrived in India for commercial purposes. However, the Industrial Revolution in Britain fueled an increased demand for raw materials for its factories, as well as a need for markets to sell its manufactured goods. India emerged as an ideal solution, offering both resources and a large market.

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1 Ranjan Chakrabarti, *A History of The Modern World: An Outline*, New Delhi, 2012, p.123.

Concurrent with this, India experienced internal strife due to the decline of the Mughal Empire, creating an opportunity for the British to exert control over Indian territories.

The British gradually expanded their influence in India through a combination of wars, forced treaties, territorial annexations, and strategic alliances with various regional powers. Their administrative and economic policies were designed to consolidate their hold on the country. Land revenue systems were introduced to keep farmers in check while generating substantial revenue for the British. They also promoted the commercialization of agriculture, encouraging the cultivation of cash crops and raw materials needed for British industries.

Having established firm political control, the British monopolized trade with India, thereby eliminating foreign competition. They procured raw materials at low prices, while Indian artisans and weavers were forced to purchase these materials at inflated rates. Furthermore, the British imposed heavy duties on Indian goods entering Britain to safeguard their domestic industries. Investments were made in enhancing India's transportation and communication networks to facilitate the efficient transfer of raw materials to ports and finished goods to markets.

The introduction of English education aimed at creating a class of educated Indians who could assist in administering British rule, thereby strengthening their political authority. These policies allowed the British to establish, consolidate, and sustain their control over India.

European colonialism in India is widely regarded as an oppressive and exploitative political and economic system. Among the various European powers competing for colonial possessions, the British established a vast empire in India, subjugating local rulers and populations through a combination of military force and diplomacy. The introduction of a new civil administrative system, judiciary, police force, military, English education, and the so-called "civilizing mission" led by Christian missionaries, alongside new infrastructure, brought about profound changes in India. These measures were primarily designed to maintain colonial control and

facilitate the extraction of the country's rich resources. However, these changes also had certain positive dimensions that can be understood within the framework of modernity. It is undeniable that colonial rule helped shape the physical, intellectual, and cultural environment of modern India, fostering a transition from traditional to modern and from conventional to rational modes of thought.

Modernity emerged in India closely intertwined with colonial rule, as colonialism served as the main driver of social modernity in subjugated societies. This historical process led to deep changes in the economic, social, cultural, and political structures of the regions under colonial dominance. Social reforms, education reforms, land reforms, advancements in transport and communication, and the spread of print technology are often regarded as key aspects of colonial modernity. Understanding universal modernity helps us to discern the distinct forms of our own specific modernity, which varies across nations depending on local circumstances and cultural practices. Modernity encompasses a commitment to reason, aspirations for freedom, a quest for power, and resistance to power, all elements central to its expression.[2] According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, colonial modernity influenced far more than economic and institutional reforms, extending its impact to ideas and practices in education, health, family life, gender roles, religious beliefs, and social reform.[3]

Colonial modernity introduced a new worldview that fundamentally transformed the indigenous way of life, causing a profound ontological shift. Evangelicalism, education, the printing press, economic restructuring, administration, and legal reforms became instruments through which socio-cultural reconstruction was enforced. These mechanisms reveal how people were conditioned to perceive

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2 Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Essentials Writings 1985-2005*, New Delhi, 2015, p. 151.

3 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British India,' in David Arnold and David Hardiman (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, New Delhi, 1994, p.88.

their identities through the lens of colonial representations, ultimately aligning their self-perception with colonial constructs.

Before colonial rule, Indian society was organized around an agrarian economy, which included garden land cultivation, crafts production, trade, and shifting agriculture, with wetland farming as the dominant mode of production. Control over resources, including labor and its products, established a hierarchy of tenurial relations. This system interconnected domestic segments of hereditary occupations (Jathis) within a historically contingent framework of wealth and power.

Colonialism, however, introduced the commodification of land and labor, dramatically altering the socio-economic structure of society. This shift had profound impacts on social institutions and values, disrupting traditional family structures, inheritance laws, and social relationships within communities. The rise of a market economy led to significant changes in how resources were managed and distributed.

The various mechanisms of submission under colonial modernity, including evangelicalism, colonial administration, education, and reform movements, although distinct in appearance, were all fundamentally aligned with the broader objectives of colonial control. The ethical imperatives of evangelism, the essence of colonial administration, the aims of education, and the reformist agendas all reflected underlying power dynamics rooted in the colonial system. A closer examination of these structures reveals that the forces driving contemporary Western civilization were closely intertwined with the totalizing power dynamics that characterized colonial rule.

This study explores how the Thiyya community of Malabar, under colonial rule, carved out a path of progress by navigating various forces of modernity. It also examines the role of print media in facilitating the community's engagement with modernity. In essence, it sheds light on how the educated Thiyyas of Malabar became integrated into the political, juridical, socio-cultural, and intellectual frameworks of British colonialism.

The British introduced English education in India to create a class of educated Indians who could serve as intermediaries between colonial authorities and the local population. This class, trained in English, became integral to the colonial administration and eventually formed a middle class that adopted European cultural values, reshaping their social identity and status within the colonial system. In Malabar, the Basel Evangelical Mission (BEM) played a pivotal role in education by establishing schools in towns and rural areas. BEM schools in places like Kannur, Thalassery, and Kozhikode were instrumental in promoting modern, inclusive education, welcoming students of all castes, religions, and genders, unlike traditional caste-based institutions.

The Thiyya community of Malabar was among the most significant groups to benefit from the educational initiatives of the Basel Evangelical Mission. Prior to the introduction of Western education, the Thiyyas, like many other lower-caste communities, had limited access to formal education within the traditional social structure. However, through the opportunities provided by Basel Mission schools, many Thiyyas were able to acquire modern education, which opened doors to a variety of professional opportunities under British rule. This education enabled them to secure positions in the colonial administration, pursue higher studies abroad, and establish businesses and industries. The access to education and the subsequent social mobility that the Thiyya community experienced was a direct result of the British colonial system, which, while serving colonial interests, also inadvertently facilitated the upward mobility of certain sections of Indian society, including the Thiyyas.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital provides a useful framework for understanding the modernity of the Thiyya community in Kerala. Cultural capital, in its three forms—embodied, objectified, and institutionalized—plays a central role in shaping the social and economic mobility of marginalized groups. The Thiyya community, once relegated to lower social strata, has experienced significant transformation through the accumulation of cultural capital, particularly in education. The rise in educational attainment has allowed members of the Thiyya community to

break free from traditional caste-based occupations, entering more prestigious fields like medicine, engineering, and administration. Education has also translated into institutionalized cultural capital, with many Thiyya individuals gaining access to higher learning and acquiring professional qualifications that enhance their social mobility and integration into Kerala's middle and upper-middle class. This shift has been accompanied by political empowerment, with the Thiyyas playing a crucial role in Kerala's Leftist political movements and development policies, further strengthening their social capital. Example: the activities of A.K.Gopalan.

The medium of print, introduced to Malabar as part of British colonialism, was strategically utilized by the educated middle class of the Thiyya community for their social and cultural upliftment. Leveraging newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, members of this community actively advocated for social reform and highlighted the need for change within their own social structure. In addition to periodicals, novels also became an important tool for conveying progressive ideas. Notable examples include *Vivekodayam* and *Mithavadi*, which played a significant role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing the community for social change. Through these printed works, the Thiyya middle class sought to challenge traditional norms, promote education, and assert their rights within the broader colonial framework.

The advent of the printing press played a critical role in shaping human culture and accelerating the modernization of society. Before the invention of the press, knowledge was largely controlled by the elite. However, the introduction of printing made knowledge more widely accessible, empowering ordinary people to engage with the ideas of figures such as Homer, Socrates, and Plato, as well as Indian classics like the *Bhasakalidhasyan*. This newfound access to knowledge helped broaden perspectives, dispel superstitions, and set society on a path toward progress.

Print media, particularly local newspapers, became crucial tools for the Thiyyas to engage with issues related to caste, social identity, and political participation. The community, traditionally seen as lower-caste, began to use print to

redefine their identity and advocate for their rights. This process was closely linked to Kerala's social reform movements, which sought to uplift marginalized groups. Intellectuals and activists from the Thiyya community contributed to the creation of a new, collective identity that transcended local ties and fostered a sense of unity in their struggle for equality.

The print revolution in Kerala also reshaped caste politics. As colonial-era reforms, including English education and the printing press, led to the production of literature that critiqued the caste system, the Thiyyas engaged with these new ideas. Reformers like Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali, who called for the abolition of caste discrimination, influenced the Thiyyas' political mobilization. Through print, the Thiyyas participated in broader social debates, strengthening their collective consciousness and political agency.

The growth of print also fostered the development of Thiyya literature and intellectual thought, which reflected the community's aspirations for social justice and equality. This literature became a means to educate and unify the Thiyya community, helping them articulate their vision of modernity. The colonial influence, combined with the spread of print, undermined traditional power structures and allowed the Thiyyas to challenge both colonial and caste hierarchies, leading to the creation of new social and political institutions that represented their interests.

Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities and the role of print capitalism offer a powerful lens through which to understand the transformation of the Thiyya community in Kerala. Print media played a central role in the formation of a collective identity, the articulation of political demands, and the pursuit of social equality, all of which were key to the Thiyyas’ journey toward modernity.

During the colonial period, there was a growing awareness among the Thiyya community about the dynamics of British imperialism and its impact on their social and political status. As political consciousness developed, the community exhibited a complex and sometimes contradictory stance towards colonial rule. On one hand,

many in the Thiyya community believed that British colonialism was beneficial for their social upliftment, providing them with access to education, employment, and opportunities that were previously denied under the traditional social order. On the other hand, they often faced discriminatory practices from the colonial authorities and higher caste groups.

A clear example of this contradiction can be seen in the incident involving J. Thoran, the Collector of Kozhikode, who, on the instructions of the Zamorin, issued an order barring members of the Thiyya community from using the road around the Thali temple in Kozhikode. This action symbolized the deep-rooted caste-based discrimination still prevalent during colonial rule. However, in response to this injustice, C. Krishnan, a prominent intellectual from the Thiyya community, vocally opposed the discriminatory order and defended the community's rights.

At the same time, Krishnan, like many other leaders, also encouraged the community to remain loyal to the British government, reflecting the complex relationship between colonial authority and the aspirations of marginalized groups. This dual approach was part of a broader strategy of negotiation and assertion of rights. Memorials, such as the Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava Memorial, were regularly used by the Thiyya community to petition for their rights and highlight their grievances. Through these efforts, they were able to secure several concessions and rights under British rule, despite the ongoing social and political challenges they faced.

M.N. Srinivas's theory of Sanskritization is an important concept in the study of social change in India, particularly in relation to caste dynamics. Sanskritization refers to the process by which lower-caste groups, in an effort to improve their social status and gain respectability, adopt the customs, rituals, and practices of higher-caste Hindu groups, particularly the Brahmins. This often involves the imitation of upper-caste religious practices, dress, language, and social behaviour, with the goal of being

seen as more "respectable" and gaining access to the privileges and status enjoyed by higher castes.

In the context of Kerala, the Thiyya or Ezhava community, a large and historically marginalized group, provides an important example of how Sanskritization played out at the local level. The Ezhavas were traditionally seen as a lower-caste community, involved in occupations like toddy tapping, agricultural labor, and various manual trades. As part of their social mobility, many Ezhavas engaged in the process of Sanskritization to improve their social status and challenge their marginalization within the hierarchical caste system of Kerala.

Before proceeding, it is essential to clarify the terms "Thiyyas" and "Ezhavas," which both refer to the same caste or community. The Thiyyas are primarily located in the Malabar region of Kerala, whereas the Ezhavas reside in central and southern Kerala, the area historically known as the Kingdom of Travancore.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are only a few studies on the Thiyya community in Malabar and the modernity they experienced as a result of colonialism. While numerous general studies explore social reform movements and caste organizations in Kerala, there is a noticeable gap in historiography when it comes to research focused specifically on the social conditions of the Thiyyas during the colonial era. An in-depth examination of this aspect remains largely absent. The present research seeks to understand the modernity achieved by the Thiyya community in Malabar through the lens of print media as a key tool.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Mithavadi and *Vivekodayam* magazines are not fully available. A significant number of archival sources relevant to this study are fragile, both in the regional and central archives of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Additionally, secondary sources are insufficient, presenting a challenge for the current research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The historiography of Kerala includes a diverse array of studies on social reformers and movements, offering valuable perspectives and insights into the process of social change. While these works provide a wealth of information on various reforms, the particular focus of this study on the Thiyya community of Malabar has not been thoroughly examined. Although a handful of scholars have briefly addressed aspects of Thiyya life within their more general research, this specific subject remains largely underexplored.

In his book *Castes and Tribes of South India*, Edger Thurston provides a comprehensive analysis of the origin of the Ezhavas. He offers a detailed exploration of the etymology of the term "Ezhava" and traces the community's origins. Additionally, *Survey of Travancore and Cochin* by Ward and Conner also provides insights into the Ezhavas' history. While this book, published in 1893, does not cover the more recent developments concerning the Ezhavas, it still offers an in-depth account of the community's beginnings.

Robin Jeffrey's work *Politics, Women and Well-Being* offers valuable insights into the interactions between the English and the Thiyya community of Malabar. Jeffrey explains that the Thiyyas "formed a smoother relationship with the European rulers than other Hindu groups in Kerala." Unlike Kerala's princely rulers, the British readily employed Thiyyas, leading to the emergence of the Thiyya assistant as a close companion to many British officials. The study also examines the matrilineal and patrilineal systems practiced by the Thiyyas. Jeffrey notes that relationships between Thiyya women and colonial officials led to the emergence of "White Thiyyas", a situation beneficial to the community during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but regarded as a source of embarrassment by the twentieth century.

Another significant work, *The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, written by Robin Jeffrey and published in 1994, offers a detailed examination of Kerala's socio-political landscape. The book remains

one of the most thorough attempts to trace the profound social changes that have shaped Kerala since the mid-nineteenth century. While it focuses on more than just the Nair community, it also addresses the social and political histories of other groups, including the Ezhavas. The book sheds light on the societal restrictions imposed on the Ezhava community and their struggles to overcome these challenges.

Another important work is *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*, authored by Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, and published in 2000. This book explores the journey of the Ezhava community as they moved away from their nineteenth century social identity, seeking upward mobility. The authors examine how this process has led to complex interactions with modernity, colonialism, and globalization.

Filippo and Caroline Osella delve into the intricate and often contradictory nature of the Ezhavas' modern identity, both within their local context and on the global stage. The study sheds light on how the Ezhava community's rise challenges traditional social structures, while also revealing the ongoing struggles they face, marked by monotony and material hardships. The work captures the tensions experienced by previously marginalized groups as they navigate the dual forces of tradition and modernity.

Dilip Menon's work *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India* is of particular significance, as it delves into the formation of the Thiyya community as an influential group within the social, religious, and political landscapes of colonial Malabar. The construction of temples, campaigns against the toddy trade, and efforts to combat upper-caste discrimination were key initiatives aimed at elevating the Thiyyas to a status comparable to that of higher castes like the Nairs.

Scholars have examined the structural transformations in Malabar society from a range of perspectives. One prominent area of study focuses on Malabar’s economic transformation during the colonial era and the shifts within its agrarian structure. Noteworthy contributions in this field include the works of K.N. Panikkar,

P.K. Michael Tharakan, K.K.N. Kurup, K. Ravi Raman, T.C. Varghese, and P. Radhakrishnan. While there are also studies addressing socio-religious life, these are fewer in number compared to the extensive research on economic changes and land relations.

In *Tradition, Rationality, and Change*, M.S.A. Rao provides a thorough analysis of the role of education as a transformative force for lower communities, facilitating social change. The work explores a broad array of topics related to economic development, social stratification, family structures, and marriage systems of the period. P.K. Michael Tharakan's article, *Colonial Rule and Educational Development in Nineteenth Century Travancore,* published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, serves as a significant source and model for examining the colonial educational systems in Travancore and Malabar.

Several studies focus on the missionary activities in Malabar, particularly the role of the Basel Mission. Jayaprakash Raghavaiah examines the Basel Mission's industrial investments and their influence on social change. The anti-caste ideology promoted by the Basel Mission, as well as its initiatives to introduce modern Western education, are thoroughly discussed by K.K.N. Kurup, Wilma John, and other scholars.

P. Chandramohan's *Developmental Modernity in Kerala* is a pivotal work examining how the Ezhavas of Travancore engaged with and embraced colonial modernity, shaping social conditions that contributed to the rise of a middle class in the region. The author highlights the role of SNDP Yogam in social, religious, and educational activities among the Ezhavas. Chandramohan argues that the formation of a middle class and new intelligentsia aimed to "dismantle the caste hierarchy, decentralize the prominence of caste, and shape a new society based on inter-caste cooperation and individual relationships." While this study does not specifically address the Thiyya community in colonial Malabar, it serves as a valuable reference for this research.

In his Malayalam work *Keralacharitra Niroopanam*, Kambil Anandan discusses the origins of the Ezhava and Thiyya communities, arguing that they were indigenous to Kerala rather than migrants. K. Damodaran's *Ezhava Charitram* presents a historical account of the Thiyyas, while P.K. Balakrishnan explores the social conditions of the Thiyya community in *Jathivyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum*. Edgar Thurston's *Caste and Tribes in South India* provides a general description of the Thiyyas' social, cultural, and religious life. Additionally, K.G. Narayanan's *Ezhava Thiyya Charitra Padanam* offers insights into Ezhava-Thiyya relations and their historical context. K.K.N. Kurup's work *Modern Kerala* discusses the role of English education and its influence on the progress of the Thiyya community in Malabar.

R.S. Velayudhan, another prominent scholar, authored a book titled *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam Charithram*. This book provides detailed insights into the circumstances that led to the formation of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, an organization aimed at benefiting the Ezhava community.

Similarly, George Jacob, another scholar, wrote *Religious Life of the Ezhavas of Kerala: Change and Continuity*. In this work, Jacob examines the religious life of the Ezhava community, illustrating how they were once bound by outdated beliefs and superstitions. The book traces the transformation of their religious practices, highlighting how they gradually moved away from these blind beliefs and began to adopt the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. Narayana Guru is known for his philosophy of worshiping God in the form of light, which is also explored in this book, offering a comprehensive understanding of the shift in the Ezhavas' religious outlook.

A. Aiyappan's renowned work *Izavas and Culture Change* examines the social mobility achieved by the Thiyyas in colonial Malabar. He argues that British rule and the spread of education significantly advanced the Thiyya community. Aiyappan writes, "For the Izavas and other lower caste groups, the decline of traditional village councils and the diminishing authority of upper castes served as a path to social

liberation." English education and equal laws "opened doors to equality." In summary, he suggests that "European influence disrupted caste divisions in multiple ways." Another key study by Aiyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, investigates the social conditions and transformations in the lives of the Thiyyas in a village in northern Malabar.

P.K. Balakrishnan's notable work, *Jaathivyavasthitium Kerala Charithravum*, provides an in-depth exploration of caste and politics as central forces shaping all aspects of society. With unmatched authenticity and approach, this work suggests that the importance of caste in the past has been largely illusory. Balakrishnan primarily discusses Kerala's social history, spanning from the formation of agricultural villages to the period between the 1850s and 1910s.

G. Priyadarshan's *Malayala Pathrapravarthanam Prarambha Swarupam* (1982) offers a concise history of the early Malayalam press. Beginning with *Rajyasamacharam*, the first Malayalam periodical, the book details the initial publications in the language. Priyadarshan's later work, *Kerala Pathrapravarthanam Suvarnaddhyayangal* (1999), honors the contributions of notable editors from the early days of Malayalam journalism. The sections on Chengalath Kunhirama Menon, V.C. Balakrishna Panicker, Murkoth Kumaran, Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar, C. Krishnan, and Muhammed Abdurahiman are particularly relevant to this study. However, the author's deep admiration for these pioneers may have influenced a more balanced critique of their contributions.

Dr. N. Sam's *Malayala Pathrapravarthanam Pathonpatham Noottantil* (2003) examines the first 54 years of Malayalam journalism, situating its development within the broader evolution of journalism worldwide. Shibu Muhammed's *Charithrathinte Mudranangal: Malayalapathrapravarthanathinte Vikasavum Parinamavum* (2007) takes a Marxist approach to the history of Malayalam journalism, highlighting the internal contradictions in the nationalist press and uncovering underlying vested interests, aspects that are particularly relevant to this study.

C. Kesavan's *Jeevitha Samaram* is an autobiography that offers a unique perspective on personal experiences. In his autobiographical sketches, the author candidly recounts the harmful traditions prevalent in society and the struggles waged against them. The work also documents the progress made within the state. This book serves as an excellent example of how a biography can provide insights into historical events and societal changes.

K. Balakrishna Panikkar, in his work *Sree Narayana Prabanthangalilude*, offers a broad analysis of the vision of Advaita, exploring it along with various other themes. This book also attempts to elucidate the divine principles presented in *Darsana Mala* and *Atmopadesa Satakam*. Sukumar Azheekode's essay *Sree Narayana Guruvinte Kavana Hastam* and M.K. Govindan's *Narayana Gurudevante Kavitha*, both published in *Narayana Guru Samhara Grantham* by P.K. Balakrishnan, provide brief insights into the overall nature of Narayana Guru's poetry.

In *Narayana Guruswami*, M.K. Sanu reflects on the aesthetic beauty of Guru's poetry, while P. Parameswaran, in *Sree Narayana Guru Swami Navodhanathinte Pravachakan*, offers a detailed examination of the philosophy of Advaita. Nithyachaitanya Yati, in his work *One Hundred Interpretations of Advaita,* describes Parameswaran's work as a compilation of divine mantras that connect deeply with the philosophy of Advaita.

A significant work in this context is *Politicisation of Caste Relations in a Princely State: Communal Politics in Modern Travancore (1891-1947)*, written by A. Shaji. The book explores the socio-political movements in Travancore, which was part of present-day Kerala before its unification. These movements, driven by the major communities, led to a profound shift in the region's social structure. Over time, the traditional hierarchical social structure was transformed from a pyramid into a more horizontal, pillar-like structure. This change was the result of continuous struggles and assertions, where certain communities successfully elevated their status from being victims of caste discrimination to becoming those who set the rules. The

book highlights the active political involvement of the Ezhava community at various levels, showing how they played a key role in this transformation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the social position of the Thiyyas within traditional Malabar society.
- To explore how colonial education and modernity contributed to creating a social space for the Thiyyas.
- To assess the extent of the Basel Mission's efforts in uplifting the Thiyya community.
- To analyze how the Thiyyas became part of the middle-class elite in Malabar.
- To examine the extent to which the print medium contributed to the upliftment of the Thiyya community.
- To examine the significant efforts of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in uplifting the Thiyya community.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

This study hypothesizes that British colonial rule, the rise of employment and business opportunities within the colonial capitalist system, along with the access to English education, together formed the socio-economic environment that enabled the Thiyyas in Malabar to emerge as a middle class and transition toward modernity. This version of modernity, shaped by colonial influences, was primarily technological, cultural, and intellectual in nature, thus referred to as "colonial modernity", distinguishing it from the European model of modernity. The print medium, introduced to Malabar by colonialism, facilitated the Thiyya community's entry into modernity. Although the Thiyyas adopted aspects of colonial modernity, they preserved certain elements of their traditional heritage. As a result, this study suggests that the social reform movement remains an incomplete project, as it has not yet fully

realized a state of “complete modernity.” This perspective highlights that while significant strides were made, the transformation remains unfinished, leaving traditional aspects still interwoven with the newly embraced modernity.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study is a descriptive analysis grounded in a critical and thorough examination of data gathered from various sources. To verify source authenticity and data accuracy, both external and internal criticism methods are employed. Statistical data is incorporated where necessary. Given the nature of this work, an interdisciplinary research framework is essential, particularly integrating historical, economic, and sociological perspectives. For its research methodology, this thesis employs Marxist and culturalist analyses and interpretations, despite their theoretical incongruence. Additional data collection methods include field visits and interviews.

SOURCES OF THE STUDY

The current study primarily relies on an analysis of contemporary writings, including publications such as newspapers, periodicals, diaries, autobiographies, and biographies. Another category of sources comprises archival documents, census reports, school records, and church records. Additionally, interviews with Thiyya scholars and community leaders provide valuable insights for this research. Oral history serves as a crucial source of information. Important secondary sources have also been utilized for reference and discussion. Photographs offer significant information that illustrates the social and cultural aspects of the Thiyya lifestyle. For instance, changes in the dress code among educated middle-class Thiyyas reflect narratives of cultural and social mobility.

Contemporary Malayalam literary works contribute further to this research. Novels like *Saraswathi Vijayam* by Potheri Kunhambu, *Sukumari* by Joseph Muliyil, and *Vasumathi* by Murkoth Kumaran depict the traditional social conditions and transformations of their time. M. Mukundan’s novel *Mayyazhippuzhayude*

Theerangalil also serves as a reference to social issues in colonial Malabar. These literary works highlight caste dynamics, the social oppression of untouchables, and anti-caste viewpoints and activities.

Newspapers and periodicals such as *Mithavadi, Vivekodayam, Yoganatham, Janmi, Mathrubhumi Weekly, Gurupadham, Keralakaumudi Weekly, Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, Deeepam,* and *Prabhatham Magazine*, along with various commemorative publications related to the Sree Narayana Temples of Malabar, reflect the socio-economic conditions of the Thiyyas in North Malabar. These contemporary publications serve as invaluable sources for examining the social and intellectual changes within the Thiyya community**.**

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 offers a comprehensive overview of Malabar society in the 19th century, tracing the origins of the Thiyya community and examining their social conditions during this era. This chapter delves into the historical context in which the Thiyyas emerged, shedding light on their position within the social hierarchy and the cultural and economic factors that shaped their lives. By exploring the community's social structure, practices, and interactions with other groups, this chapter provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges and constraints the Thiyyas faced, setting the stage for examining their subsequent transformations.

Chapter 2 explores the introduction of modern education in Malabar as an aspect of colonial influence and examines how the Thiyya community embraced this education, fostering a sense of modernity and social advancement. This chapter delves into the transformative effects of education on the Thiyyas, highlighting how access to new knowledge systems empowered them and enabled their integration into emerging socio-political frameworks. Through this educational shift, the Thiyyas gained greater agency and began to challenge traditional structures, paving the way for their engagement with modern ideals and practices.

Chapter 3 examines the pivotal role of print media in the modernization of the Thiyya community in Malabar, with a particular focus on the significance of *Mithavadi* magazine. This chapter analyzes how the emergence of print media served as a powerful tool for spreading new ideas, fostering awareness, and challenging established social norms. *Mithavadi* magazine, as one of the key publications of the time, provided a platform for the Thiyya community to articulate their perspectives, advocate for social reforms, and engage with broader intellectual movements. Through this medium, the Thiyyas were able to express their aspirations, assert their identity, and participate actively in the processes of social and cultural transformation.

Chapter 4 explores the profound impact of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, an organization founded by Sree Narayana Guru, on the upliftment of the Thiyya community in Kerala. This chapter discusses how the SNDP Yogam became a crucial instrument for social reform, promoting education, self-respect, and unity within the Thiyya community. By advocating for equality and challenging oppressive caste practices, the SNDP Yogam empowered the Thiyyas to transcend social barriers and embrace a modern vision of progress. The chapter highlights the organization's role in fostering a collective identity and advancing the socio-economic standing of the Thiyya community in Kerala.

Chapter 1

The Thiyya Community in 19th Century Malabar: Origins, Social Structure, and Challenges

The word "Malabar" is of mixed origin; the Dravidian word "Mala" means a hill or mountain, while "bar" likely derives from the Persian word "Barr," meaning country. Arab navigators from the sixth to the eleventh century referred to the region as "Mala" for coast, using variations such as Malibar, Manibar, and Munibar.[1] Those who later visited the area in search of pepper and spices may have coined the full name "Malabar,"[2] which aptly describes the region's hilly and mountainous terrain.

Malabar was historically bordered by the South Canara district to the north, the Cochin State to the south, the Arabian Sea to the west, and the Western Ghats to the east. Covering an area of 5,795 square miles,[3] Malabar was divided into nine taluks: Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani, and Palakkad.

Malabar came under the control of the English East India Company following the treaties signed with Tippu Sultan at Seringapatam in 1792. Initially, the area was governed by commissioners and supervisors from the Bombay Presidency. However, in 1800, Malabar was transferred to the Madras Presidency, bringing it directly under British rule. By 1931,[4] Malabar had a population of 3,533,944, of which Hindus comprised 2,303,754 (65.18%), Muslims 1,163,453 (32.92%), and Christians 65,894

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1 William Logan, *Malabar Manual-Vol. I* (Reprint), Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 115.

2 W.W. Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.VI*, Rondoss, 1881, p. 240.

3 W.R. Cornish, *Report on the Census of the Madras presidency 1871,* Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 346.

4 M.W.M. Yeatts, *Census of India 1931- Imperial and Provincial Tables*, Vol. XlV, Part II, Madras,1931, p. 4.

(1.8%). The population density ranged between 600 and 650, making it one of the most densely populated regions in the presidency.[5]

Ecologically and geographically, Malabar holds a distinctive place in the subcontinent. These factors significantly influenced the settlement patterns in the region. The undulating terrain led to the scattering of paddy fields among hills and hillocks, resulting in the formation of small holdings of paddy fields and garden lands with houses. The availability of water in nearly all fields, regardless of the land's nature, facilitated the development of individual occupations.

HILLS

The Western Ghats are the crowning glory of Malabar, with an average elevation of 5,000 feet, occasionally reaching peaks over 8,000 feet. These ghats run parallel to the coast from the extreme north of the district to Vavulmala (or Camel's Hump) near Kozhikode. At Vavulmala, they sharply turn eastward, bend northward around the Nilambur Valley, and then retreat inland to the Vadamalas, north of the Palakkad Gap. South of the gap, they rise again into the Tenmala or Southern Hills; with elevations of four to five thousand feet, eventually swelling into the towering Anamalai range. The highest peaks of the Malabar section of the Western Ghats, including Mukurti (8,380 feet), Nilgiris Peak (8,118 feet), Gulikal Hill (8,096 feet), and Anginda Peak (7,828 feet), are located on the Nilgiris boundary, overlooking the Nilambur Valley.

PASSES AND THE PALAKKAD GAP

Many passes cut through the Western Ghats, serving as vital connections between regions. The Perumbadi Ghat provides access to Coorg, while the Periya and Tamarasseri Ghats connect Malabar with Wayanad and Mysore. The Karkkur Ghat links the region to the Nilgiris district. Among these, the Palakkad Gap stands out as

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the most significant, spanning nearly 20 miles in width and rising to about 1,100 feet at its broadest point. This gap is believed to be of tectonic origin and has a notable impact on the climatic conditions of both Kerala and Tamil Nadu.[6] The plains of Coimbatore benefit from the South West Monsoon rains, while Central Kerala receives rainfall from the North East Monsoon, largely due to this natural passage.

The Palakkad Gap also played a crucial role in the development of several harbor towns along the western coast, including Calicut and Cochin. These harbors thrived due to the steady flow of agricultural and industrial goods from the interior, made possible by the easy passage through the gap.[7]

THE RIVER SYSTEM

The network of backwaters near the sea complicates the river system of Malabar, which is otherwise straightforward yet extensive. With the exception of the three major tributaries of the Cauvery that drain the Attapadi valley and nearly all of the Wayanad taluks, all the rivers in the district flow from the Western Ghats' watersheds to the Arabian Sea. The sole exception is the Ponnani River. The Valapattanam River in Chirakkal taluk, although not the longest river in Malabar, likely discharges the greatest volume of water into the sea.

The Beypore River, also known as Chaliyar, stretches 96 miles and was historically renowned for its gold-bearing sands. It is the only river in Malabar that draws a significant portion of its waters from above the crest of the Ghat ranges. The Kadalundi River, which is connected to the Beypore River by a creek, flows through the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks, originating in the wilds of the Silent Valley, and empties into the sea at Kadalundi after a course of approximately 75 miles.[8] The Ponnani River, while the longest of all the rivers that reach the Arabian Sea through

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6 K. Gopalankutty, *The Palakkad Gap*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1974, p. 17.

7 William Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 6.

8 C.A. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, Madras, 1951, p. 5.

Malabar, is of less commercial significance compared to either the Valapattanam or the Beypore River.

ISLANDS

The Lakshadweep, meaning "the hundred thousand islands," are a group of islands near Malabar, located between 139 and 218 miles off the coast. This archipelago consists of four inhabited islands and ten uninhabited ones. The islands are arranged in a crescent shape, generally stretching from north to south. Typically, a shallow lagoon, enclosed by a reef, is found on the western and northwestern sides of these islands.[9]

FLORA AND FAUNA

The flora of Malabar is diverse, spanning a range of soil types and climates, from the tropical coastal zone to the cool mountaintops of the higher ranges of the Western Ghats. With rainfall levels ranging from a minimum of 50 inches to over 300 inches in some areas, the region's plant life requires systematic and expert study. The renowned Hortus Malabaricus, a comprehensive botanical treatise compiled in Cochin over two centuries ago, documents numerous trees and plants of the West Coast. This monumental work, published in twelve volumes, was created through the collaboration of Dutch Commander Baron Van Rheede and Carmelite monk Mathew, and it lists plants under their local names.

Along the coast, the coconut palm is the most characteristic tree, although other species such as jackfruit, mango, cashew nut, talipot palm, arecanut, and casuarinas are also common. The coconut is believed to have originated in Ceylon, while the seeds of custard apple, guava, pineapple, papaya, and cashew nut still known locally as the "foreign mango", were introduced to Cochin from Brazil by the

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9 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Portuguese admiral Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500 AD. Flowering trees are a particularly striking feature of Malabar's flora.[10]

SOCIETY IN MALABAR

Malabar society was deeply rooted in a caste-dominated structure, where the Brahmins, Kshatriyas (or ruling chieftains), Ambalavasi (or intermediary castes), and the Nairs formed the political and social elites.[11] These groups held significant religious, political, military, and judicial responsibilities. The Brahmin community, in particular, wielded considerable power, largely due to their land ownership.[12] Traditional Brahmanical literature, such as the *Keralolpathy,* promoted the belief that all land belonged to the Brahmins, having been granted to them by Lord Parasurama.[13] Brahmanical prose narratives also reference the settlement of Sudras, the establishment of *maryada* (customary laws), and the *janmamaryada* and *janmam* systems, as well as transactions involving *adiyar*. Another work from the Brahmanical tradition, *Kerala Jatinirnayam*, discusses the formation of caste, the system of land grants, and Brahmin land ownership.[14] While these accounts are often considered legendary, there is evidence to support the claim that Brahmins were the majority of landlords in Malabar. The following table shows the land distribution in Malabar based on the caste hierarchy.[15]

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10 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

11 K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry, Nationalism and Social Change in India*, Allahabad, 1991, p. 9.

12 Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kerala Charithram Randam Bhagam* (Mal.), Vallathol Vidhyapeedam,1991, pp. 225-256; M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Reprint), New Delhi, 2005, pp. 37-39.

13 M.R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Keralolpathi Grandhavari*, Calicut University, 1984, p. 2.

14 K.S. Madhavan, 'Self Perception of Jati in Pre-colonial Keralam' in P.K. Poker (ed.), *Calicut University Research Journal*, Calicut, Nov. 2001, p. 33.

15 T.M. Thomas Issac and P.M. Michael Tarakan, *Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore 1888-1939, A Study of Social Basis and Ideological Reproduction,* working paper no 214, Center for Development Studies (C.D.S), Thiruvananthapuram, 1986, p. 5.

Occupation	Tenure	Caste
Priests, rulers and administrative officials	*Janmam* (ownership) rights in land, South Canara; *mulavargadar*	Brahmins, Rajas, aristocratic Nairs,
Militia, (in charge of law and order), petty officials	*Kanam* (superior lease) rights	Nairs and Nambiars
Petty producers, traders, artisans, dry land laborers	*Verumpattam* (inferior lease) rights, South Canara: *chelugeni*	Non-aristocratic Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians, and Muslims
Wet land laborers	Agricultural labor	Ezhavas, Pulayas, Cherumas

The Brahmins held an economically dominant position through the *Janmi* system, which granted them *janmam* rights.[16] Under this system, Brahmins distributed land to the Nairs under a tenure known as *Kanam*. According to tradition, Parasurama brought Sudras (Nairs) from outside the region, instructed them to follow the matrilineal system, and tasked them with protecting the interests of the Brahmins.[17] The duties of the Sudras were to serve the Brahmins and cattle, as well as to cultivate the land.[18] The acquisition of economic power by controlling the chief means of production (land) and the ritualistic subordination of lower castes through the practice of *jatimaryada* (caste duties)[19] elevated the Brahmins to a near-divine status in society.

The Brahmins strongly opposed any British legislation in Malabar that threatened their *janmam* rights over landed property. They argued that *Devaswam* properties were set aside for the maintenance of temples and that they were the rightful

16 K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innalekal* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, pp. 118-153.

17 M.R. Raghava Varier, *op. cit.,* p. 31.

18 K.S. Madhavan, *op. cit.,* p. 31.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

proprietors of these lands.[20] The Brahmins followed the *Makkathayam* system of inheritance, wherein the law of primogeniture was strictly observed to prevent the fragmentation of property holdings. Under this system, only the eldest son was permitted to marry within the caste,[21] while others were allowed only concubinary relationships with Nair women, without the responsibilities and obligations of matrimony.[22] As custodians of the *Dharmasastras*,[23] Brahmins were the lawgivers and interpreters, and they held the authority to pass judgments as *Vaidikars* in significant civil and criminal cases.[24]

In spiritual matters, including methods of worship, the Brahmins held absolute authority. They maintained a monopoly on scriptural knowledge, further solidifying their dominance over other castes. This dominance extended to practices within Brahmanical temples, where Nair women were expected to remove the cloth covering the upper part of their bodies while offering prayers.[25] However, the traditional *varna*[26] *system*, in its entirety, was foreign to Malabar. The Vaisyas, or their counterparts, were absent from the social hierarchy of Kerala.[27] The Sudras in this region were represented by the Nairs, who were divided into higher and lower sections. Together, the Brahmins, intermediary castes, and Nairs constituted the caste Hindus, known as *Savarnas*, in Malabar society, accounting for 24.3% of the Hindu

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20 O.M. Narayanan Nambudiripad, Welcome Speech, Twentieth Annual Conference of Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha, Angadipuram, Quoted in Mathrubhumi weekly, December 27, 1928. (n.p)

21 E.M.S. Nambudiripad, *Keralacharithram Marxist Veekshanathil* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, p. 212.

22 C. Achutha Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam, 1911, p. 193.

23 K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *Kochirajya Charitram* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1912, p. 640.

24 *Ibid.*

25 P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathonpatham Noottantile Keralam* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1988, pp. 723-804.

26 M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 63-69.

27 M.S.A. Rao, *Tradition, Rationality and Change*, Bombay, 1972, p. 118.

population in Malabar in 1871.[28] The following table shows the male and female population of Malabar based on caste according to the 1881 census.[29]

Caste	Male	Female
Ambalavasi	538	469
Asari	20,274	22,125
Nambudiri	885	1,018
Illuvan	60,732	63,056
Embradiri	571	170
Kaniyan	17	25
Nambisan	1,151	1,207
Nambiar	191	191
Nair	151,944	163,276
Pillai	426	407
Tattan	6,195	6,579
Tien	201,114	203,177
Kavuthyan	623	631

The Namboothiris, or Brahmins, designated the Nairs as Sudras. However, William Logan notes that the Nairs were traditionally regarded as Kshatriyas within the society.[30] The Nairs served as the traditional militia and were responsible for enforcing caste rules, including administering capital punishment for violations.[31] Over time, they became tenants under the Namboothiris, often subletting their holdings to the Ezhavas or employing the Pulayas as serf laborers.[32] Despite their

28 W.R. Cornish, *op.cit*., p. 347.

29 Lewis Molver, *Imperial Census of 1881, Final Census Tables- Provincial Series-Caste,* Vol. IV*,* Presidency of Madras, Government Press, 1883, pp.167-172.

30 William Logan, *op. cit*., p. 116.

31 Francis Buchanan, *Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*- Vol. II (Reprint), New Delhi, 1988, pp. 90-99.

32 George Woodcock, *Kerala, A Portrait of Malabar Coast*, London, 1967, p. 102.

alliance with the Brahmins, the Nairs did not escape all societal disadvantages. The sambandham relationship between Brahmin men and Nair women did not provide the benefits of a formal marriage, leaving Nair women and their children vulnerable and unprotected. The majority of the Nair community adhered to a matrilineal system of descent.

In the social hierarchy of Malabar, the Thiyyas were positioned below the Nairs. While the Nairs were classified as the Sudra caste, the Thiyyas were considered *avarna*, meaning they were outside the traditional *varna* system. The Thiyya community was diverse in terms of economic and social status.[33] Most Thiyyas were either subtenants or landless laborers working for high-caste landlords, primarily from the Brahmin and Nair communities. However, there were also affluent Thiyya landowners, such as the Kallingal Madam family in Calicut, who were prominent landholders, second only to the Zamorins. This family engaged in foreign trade with countries like China[34] and owned ships, earning them the title of *Moopan* from the Zamorin.[35] Additionally, the royal family of Kadathanad appointed Thiyya members as 'masters' in their courts.[36]

The Thiyyas were also known for their expertise in traditional Ayurvedic medicine and astrology and were knowledgeable in Sanskrit literature, fields typically reserved for higher castes.[37] Despite this, there was notable differentiation within the Thiyya community itself. For instance, Ezhavas in Palakkad were considered lower than other Thiyyas, leading C. Krishnan, a Thiyya leader from Calicut, to question the viability of unifying the Thiyya/Ezhava community along the west coast. Krishnan

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33 Thiyyas, Billavas and Ezhavas belong to the same category. They were referred to as Ezhavas in south and central Kerala including Palghat district and Valluvanad region and Thiyyas in north Malabar and in Kasargod- Hosdurg regions they are known as Billavas (For details see, P. Bhaskaranunni, *op. cit.,* pp. 357-377).

34 K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1971, pp. 39-40.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

36 M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making, A Study of Sahodaran Ayyappan*, Palakkad, 1993, p. 3.

37 Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India-Vol. I* (Reprint), Delhi, 1975, p. 94.

also observed that Thiyyas from North Malabar looked down upon their counterparts from the South.[38] Despite these internal distinctions, the Thiyya community overall maintained a lower occupational and ritual status within the broader caste hierarchy of Malabar.

Below the Thiyyas and similar castes were those without land, who struggled to make a living. These individuals, including the *Cherumas, Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Nayadis*, and others, could be considered the most marginalized or depressed classes.

The *Cherumas* and *Pulayas* were often subjected to conditions akin to agricultural slavery, subsisting on minimal sustenance provided by their masters.[39] According to the 1857 census reported by Logan, the *Cherumas* numbered 187,812.[40] Logan described their clothing as scant, noting that in many areas, men wore only a fringe of green leaves around their waists, a practice that had largely fallen out of use. The homes of these agricultural slaves, known as *Chala*,[41] were rudimentary, reflecting their low status. They were bound to the land like cattle, receiving no sympathy or support in times of illness, old age, or poverty.

Francis Buchanan observed that most field labor was performed by Cherumas, who were considered the absolute property of their masters, known as *Devarus*. They could be employed in any manner their masters saw fit and were subject to being sold or transferred at their masters' discretion. Edgar Thurston also noted that *Cherumas* were bought, sold, and hired out with their consent. Furthermore, they were restricted from approaching places frequented by caste Hindus and were denied the right to worship the deities worshipped by higher castes.[42]

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38 K.R. Achuthan, *op. cit.,* p. 48.

39 Logan, *op. cit.,* pp. 176-177.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

41 Francis Buchanan, *op. cit.,* p. 370.

42 Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (Reprint), Madras, 1989, p. 446.

Another segment of the depressed classes was the *Parayas*. Like the *Cherumas*, they were bound to the soil as serfs and agricultural laborers. Their traditional occupations included the manufacture of wickerwork, bamboo mats, and Cadjan umbrellas. The *Parayas'* homes, known as *Cheries*,[43] were situated on the outskirts of villages, away from the residential areas of other castes. These separate quarters were referred to as *Paraya cheri* or *Paraya village*, reflecting the belief that their presence would pollute the Hindu communities.[44]

The Parayas were typically relegated to menial and degrading tasks and were often denied the right to cultivate land for their own benefit. They were subjected to harsh labor conditions for minimal wages and were frequently mistreated and beaten by their masters. Their living conditions were extremely poor, with scarce means for food and clothing. Many *Parayas* went about almost naked or dressed in rags.

One of the most distressing aspects of their existence was their diet. As Abbe Dubois described, "they contested with jackals, dogs, and crows for carrion, taking semi-putrid flesh to their homes to share among themselves without rice or any other food." Dubois also compared their plight unfavorably to that of the helots of Sparta, suggesting that the *Parayas* were even more poorly treated.[45]

Like the *Cherumas* and other marginalized groups, the *Parayas* were excluded from worshipping the deities of caste Hindus or even from attending shrines of lower castes such as the Thiyyas. They were also barred from entering residential areas of higher castes or public places.

The *Nayadis* were another marginalized group in Malabar, holding the lowest position in the social hierarchy.[46] According to Logan, the *Nayadis* were subject to a

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43 William Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 85.

44 W.R. Cornish, *op. cit*., p.168.

45 Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Oxford, 1897, p. 56.

46 Edgar Thurston, *op. cit*., p. 447.

pollution distance of 72 feet,[47] the maximum limit for atmospheric pollution. Even the *Cherumas* avoided contact with them.[48] The *Nayadis* constituted a small population in Malabar, with only 417 recorded in the 1921 census, including 200 males and 217 females.[49]

This description reflects the broader social structure of Malabar at the time of British colonial rule. The society was hierarchically organized, with Brahmins at the top. Below them were various communities, each with different degrees of servitude and associated privileges or disabilities. All groups were tied to the land in various capacities, such as *Janmis, Kanakkar*, *Pattakkar*, and *Adiyar.* The Brahmins and upper castes (savarnas) were the primary beneficiaries of surplus wealth, while the polluting and depressed classes were relegated to labor and bonded servitude. Slavery was a fundamental aspect of this society.

Colonial administrators and ethnographers observed that communities like the *Cherumas* and *Parayas* were effectively enslaved.[50] While indigenous scholars contested this characterization, they also revealed the existence of a large number of agrarian bonded laborers known as *adiyars*, who were bound to the land as permanent slaves from birth.[51] *Adiyars* were considered part of the land itself and could be bought, sold, or transferred at their masters' discretion. This condition persisted in Malabar until the end of colonial rule.[52] Although typically a husband and wife would not be sold separately, children could be separated from their parents, and siblings from each other. [53]The price of a slave varied by region and crop patterns. While the

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47 Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 118.

48 *Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Counsil Third Session*, Vol. XXII, 1925, p. 790.

49 Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 124.

50 William Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 176; Buchanan, *op. cit.,* p. 493; Thurston, *op. cit*., pp. 441-453.

51 Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *op. cit.,* p.40; Raghava Varier, *Madhyakala Keralam* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, pp. 23-32.

52 *Mathrubhumi,* Weekly, 29 October, 1927. (n.p)

53 Buchanan, *op. cit.,* p. 101.

right to kill a slave had been abolished by the 19th century, deeds of transfer still included the provision "you may sell or kill him or her."

Adiyars were not employed as domestic servants due to the notions of *theendal* (unapproachability) and *thodil* (untouchability). Malabar society practiced strict pollution rules, which were central to the caste system. As the 'pure race,' Brahmins could not pollute; they could only be polluted. All other castes, save the very bottom, could both pollute and be polluted. A memorial from Brahmin inhabitants of Palakkad during the Kalpathy agitations provides insight into Brahmanic perceptions of pollution, stating, "In Malabar, except for high-caste Hindus, distance pollution is observed, with the distance varying according to the individual's caste. This custom applies not only to Brahmins but also to lower castes and extends to temples, tanks, and even dwelling houses."[54]

Even towns and marketplaces were considered polluted by the presence of certain castes like *Cherumas* and *Nayadis*.[55] Logan noted that the Hindu Malayalee, due to stringent caste purity practices, preferred to avoid towns where low-caste individuals were prevalent.[56] In Malabar, the concept of unapproachability was so strict that spatial measurements, such as *Thiyappad* and *Cherumappad*, indicated the distance within which individuals of lower castes could not approach higher castes. While Nairs could approach Brahmins without touching them, Thiyyas were required to stay 36 paces away from both Nairs and Brahmins, and were polluted by the presence of a *Pulayan*.[57] Historical accounts and colonial reports indicate that pollution rules were enforced so rigorously that crossing the pollution distance from a Nair could result in severe punishment.

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54 File corresponding on Kalpathi dispute, GO.No.206, Local Self-Government Department, KRA Kozhikode, 20.01.1925. (n.p).

55 Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 82.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

57 J.H. Hutton, *Castes in India*, Bombay, 1963, p. 79; C. Achutha Menon *op. cit.,* pp. 195-196.

The concept of pollution by touch or approach was the primary cause of the numerous disabilities faced by the depressed classes. Caste Hindus imposed restrictions on these marginalized groups not only in private homes and temples but also in public spaces. These practices were well-documented by foreign observers and colonial ethnographers.

Alexander Hamilton notes, "If a Pulaya or Thiyya encountered a Nair on the road, they were required to step aside to allow the Nair to pass, lest the air be tainted…"[58] Barbosa further describes the social divisions in Malabar: "In the kingdom of Malabar, there are eighteen distinct sects of Gentiles, each so differentiated from the others that members of one sect will not touch those of another under the threat of death, dishonor, or loss of property."[59] Logan provides additional insight into the public exclusion of untouchables, stating, "When traveling from one part of the country to another, *Cherumans* wade through marshes and mud, often up to their waists, rather than risk offending their social superiors by accidentally contaminating them while using public roads."[60]

A review of the literature highlights the strategies employed by the *savarna* community to maintain the lower classes at the bottom of the social hierarchy and to keep them from benefiting from their own labor. Concepts of pollution and purity permeated worship practices and belief systems. Brahmins and other *savarna* classes-controlled temples and their extensive property, *Devaswam* for their own benefit. They worshiped deities such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Vigneswara, Subrahmanyan, Sasta or Ayyappan, Hanuman, Bhagavathy, and acted as priests. Ambalavasies, or intermediary castes, assisted Brahmins in performing rituals. While Nairs had the right to worship higher deities, they were not permitted to ring the temple bell or show

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58 Alexander Hamilton, *op. cit.,* p. 108.

59 Duarte Barbosa, *Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Sixteenth Century*, Henry Stanley (Trans.) Cambridge, 2009 (Reprint), p. 103.

60 William Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 148.

reverence from the *Namaskaramandapam*, indicating their intermediary status in the caste hierarchy.[61]

Lower castes like the Thiyyas had their own religious practices and institutions. They were excluded from savarna temples and instead celebrated in their own sacred spaces, such as *kavus* (sacred groves) and *kazhakams*. Their rituals included festivals like the *pattu* (song) festival, the *pooram* festival, and the *perumkaliyattam. The Teyyam* or *Teyyattam* cult, popular among lower castes, encompassed various forms of worship, including mother goddess worship, spirit worship, serpent worship, hero worship, tree worship, animal worship, ancestor worship, and *gramadevata* worship. It also integrated many Brahmanical deities.[62] *The Teyyam* cult often involved sacrifices of cocks or fowls, and while lower castes like the Thiyyas were required to seek savarna consent for their festivals, they had to make traditional offerings of betel leaves, arecanuts, and coins to Brahmanical temples without being able to participate fully in their rituals.[63]

The depressed classes, including *Pulayas*, *Parayas,* and *Nayadis*, worshipped spirits considered evil and were restricted from approaching *savarna* temples or religious institutions of the *avarnas*. Nonetheless, they were expected to make offerings to these temples and Thiyya shrines, often placing valuable offerings on stone slabs *(adimakkallu*) at a distance.[64]

Savarna dominance extended beyond ritual and ceremonial control, affecting aspects such as food, drink, clothing, and living conditions. Fernand Braudel's concept of the *Longue durée*, emphasizing the slow evolution of material life, is

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61 A.K. Gopalan, *Ente Jeevitha Katha* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p. 37.

62 K.K.N. Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero worship in Kerala*, Calcutta, 1973, p. 47.

63 K.K.N. Kurup, *Aryan and Dravidian elements in Malabar Folklore*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1977, p. 10.

64 Mathrubhumi, Weekly, 1 November, 1932. (n.p)

evident in the traditional Malabar society, where Brahmanical hegemony was apparent in customs, language, and social practices.[65]

A *Paraya's* house is called a *cheri*, while an agrestic slave, known as a *Cheruman,* lives in a *chala*. Skilled artisans like blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, weavers, and toddy drawers (Thiyyans) reside in homes termed *pura* or *kudi*. Temple servants live in *variyam*, *pisharam*, or *pumatham.* Ordinary Nairs have houses called *vidu* or *bhavanam*, whereas those of higher caste authority dwell in an *idam*. The Raja resides in a *kovilakam,* while indigenous Brahmins (Nambudiris) live in an *illam*. Higher-ranking Brahmins refer to their homes as *mana* or *manakkal.*[66]

Logan notes, "All the excellences are the birthright of the Nambudiris, and everything low and mean is assigned to the lower orders of society. A Nair speaking to a Nambudiri must not refer to his own food as 'rice' but as 'stony or gritty rice,' and his money as 'copper cash,' among other terms."[67] Similar practices applied to the interactions between lower castes and higher social classes.[68]

Lower castes were restricted from using quality materials like wood or tiles for their homes. They were also prohibited from building on the ground or in areas where corn was grown and instead were forced to live in the woods or build their homes high up in trees with grass and straw.[69] The clothing of the depressed classes was minimal, often consisting only of a small piece of straw fastened for modesty.[70] Logan observes, "The caste (*Cheruma*) is very scantily clad; in many places, men do not wear cloth around their waists but instead use a fringe of green leaves."[71]

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65 William Logan, *op. cit.,* 65.

66 *Ibid.,* p. 85.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

68 Barbosa, *op. cit.,* p. 135.

69 Alexander Hamilton, *op. cit.,* p. 108.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

71 William Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 148.

As K.N. Panikkar highlights, these distinctions in dress, language, and food reinforced sectoral identities based on caste, creating channels for conveying ideas of mutual exclusivity.[72] The colonial state's administrative ideology and 19th-century missionary discourse interacted with this Brahmanical view of society and the life of the untouchables. This interaction significantly contributed to the development of a new social environment based on social equality and justice.

THIYYAS IN MALABAR

Below the Nairs on the social ladder were the Ezhavas in the southern parts and the Thiyyas in the northern parts of Kerala. The Ezhavas, Thiyyas, and Billavas belong to the same community. In Travancore and Kochi, they are known as Ezhavas; in Malabar, they are called Thiyyas; and in the Hosdurg and Kasaragod regions, they are referred to as Billavas.[73]

In the caste hierarchy, the Thiyyas occupy a position at the bottom, being outside the Varna system altogether and therefore classified as avarna. They were regarded as unapproachable and untouchable, which led to numerous civic and religious disabilities.[74] Among the untouchable communities, the Ezhava or Thiyya group constituted the uppermost layer, positioned just below the Nairs, as previously mentioned. Being the highest among the excluded classes, their status would be considered in the middle of the broader caste hierarchy.[75]

ORIGIN

The origins of the names "Ezhava" and "Thiyya" are believed to be linked to Ceylon, the present-day Sri Lanka. The word "Thiyya" is thought to be a corrupted

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72 K.N. Panikkar, *Communal Threat, Secular Challenge*, Madras, 1997, p. 26.

73 File corresponding on the different names of Thiyyas, Bundle no. 66/17 Public Department Files, Nalanda Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, 1959. (n.p).

74 M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movement and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 5.

75 *Ibid.,* p. 6

form of *Dweepan*, which means "one who belongs to the island," referring to the Ezhavas as islanders. Given this etymology, it is suggested that the Ezhavas may have originally come from an island, most likely Ceylon, the closest island to India.[76]

Another interpretation relates to the word "Ezhava," which is believed to be derived from "Chovan" or "Chekon," with "Chovan" itself stemming from "Sevakan," meaning "servant."[77] This has led to the theory that the Ezhavas may have migrated from Ceylon. The term "Izhava" is also believed to signify people living in "Izham," a corrupted form of "Simhalam," the ancient name for Ceylon. The northern part of Ceylon, known as Jaffna, was historically referred to as Izham. This supports the notion that the Ezhavas migrated from Ceylon during early migrations, eventually settling in Malabar.[78]

William Logan, in his Malabar Manual, posits that the Ezhavas came from Ceylon during the 1st century A.D.[79] This view is supported by European scholars like C.A. Innes,[80] Edgar Thurston,[81] and Caldwell,[82] as well as Indian scholars like L.K. Anantha Krishna Aiyer,[83] P.C. Alexander,[84] T.K. Velu Pillai,[85] V. Nagam Aiya,[86] and C. Achyutha Menon.[87] Additionally, K.M. Panikkar suggests a Polynesian origin for the Ezhavas.[88]

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76 K. Thulaseedharan, *Studies in Traditional Kerala Society*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1977, p. 53.

77 K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala-Vol. IV*, Ernakulam, 1933, p. 424.

78 Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of South India-Vol. I, op. cit.,* p. 392.

79 G. Rajendran, *The Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1974, p. 21.

80 C.A. Innes, *Madras District Gazetteers, Malabar and Anjengo*, F.B. Evans (ed.), Madras, 1908, p. 124.

81 Edgar Thurston, *op. cit*., p. 277.

82 R. Bishop Caldwell, A *History of Tinnevely* (Reprint), New Delhi, 1982, p. 4.

83 L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer, *The Tribes and Castes-Vol. I*, Cochin, 1909, p. 277.

84 P.C. Alexander, *Buddhism in Kerala*, Annamalai Nagar, 1949, p. 123.

85 T.K. Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, Trivandrum, 1940, p. 845.

86 V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, Trivandrum, 1906, pp. 298-299.

87 C. Achutha Menon, *op. cit.,* p. 203.

88 K.M. Panikkar, *A History of Kerala (1408-1801 A.D.)*, Annamalai Nagar, 1959, p. 12.

Contrarily, M. Srinivasa Aiyangar disputes the theory of Ezhavas originating from Ceylon, arguing that such a small island could not support numerous castes. He criticizes the etymology proposed by Caldwell, calling it a fanciful theory.[89] Aiyangar offers an alternative explanation, suggesting that the word "Izham" comes from "Izhu," meaning "to draw," and that those involved in this occupation became known as Izhavas.[90] Another theory suggests that the Ezhavas descended from a combination of the Pandyas and the Canarese. According to this account, a Pandya princess named Alli married a Carnatic prince named Narasimha, and after political conflicts, they moved to Ceylon. Their descendants later migrated to Travancore, adopting the name Ezhavas, which connects to the term Izham or Ceylon.[91]

William Logan also credits the Ezhavas with introducing the coconut palm to Kerala and cultivating it in Travancore, where they were native.[92] Historian Fawcett mentions a community in Malabar known as *Thandans*, who shared characteristics with the Ezhavas. *Thandans* were once employed by local chieftains to enforce punishments, carrying weapons like swords and spears. Over time, as their role in the army diminished, *Thandans* turned to tapping as an occupation, becoming the ancestors of the Ezhavas.[93]

Another version of the Ezhavas' origin involves a religious debate in Chidambaram between Manickavasagar, a Saivite devotee, and the temple priests. The debate led Illa, the king of Ceylon, to convert to Saivism, and it is believed that the Ezhavas are his descendants.[94] The Ezhavas were also known as *Chegons*, as documented by the Dutch East India Company. According to one legend, during the

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89 M. Srinivasa Aiyangar, *Tamil Studies*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 412.

90 *Ibid.*

91 N. Subrahmanya Ayyar, *Census of India 1901, Travancore*, Vol. XXlV, Part I, Trivandrum, 1903, p. 278.

92 William Logan, *op. cit.,* p. 69.

93 L.K. Anantha Krishna Ayyar, *op. cit.,* p. 5.

94 Edgar Thurston, *op. cit.,* p. 278.

reign of Cheraman Perumal, two *Chegons* (Ezhavas) were sent to Kerala along with their wives, and their descendants became the Ezhavas of Malabar.[95]

Another theory traces the Ezhavas back to the 3rd century B.C., when Emperor Ashoka's son Mahindran and daughter Sangamithra spread Buddhism in Ceylon. Tamil people, already in large numbers in Ceylon due to close ties between the Pandya kingdom and the Sinhalese, were converted to Buddhism. Some of these Tamil converts migrated to Travancore and became known as Ezhavas due to their connection with Izham.[96]

A mythological account from the prose manuscript *Soundikotpatti* suggests that the Ezhavas were born from seven cousins fathered by Lord Shiva with celestial women. After preparing palm wine for Shiva, they accidentally killed a Brahmin, leading to their curse and subsequent loss of social status, relegating them to the status of untouchables.[97]

Economic and political pressures may have driven the Ezhavas to migrate to Kerala. In Tamil literature, such as *Silapathikaram* and *Manimekalai,* the word "Uzhava," which means cultivator, is mentioned. It is possible that "Uzhava" evolved into "Ezhava" over time, leading to the theory that Ezhavas were originally cultivators from the former Chera kingdom, now known as Travancore.[98]

Francis Day suggests that the Ezhavas were descendants of the *Panchamas,* an impure race, possibly one of Kerala's aboriginal tribes.[99]

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95 Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, Major Herber Drury (ed.), Madras, 1862, pp. 127-128.

96 Mary Elizabeth King, *Gandhian Nonviolent Struggle and Untouchability in South India :1924-25 Vykom Satyagraha and the Mechanisms of Change*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 34.

97 A. Aiyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, Bombay, 1965, pp. 120-121.

98 K.V. Eapen, *A Study of Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1971, p. 40.

99 Francis Day, *The Land of the Perumals of Cochin: It's Past and Its Present*, Madras, 1863, p. 252.

There are thus three primary theories regarding the origin of the Ezhavas: one that they came from Ceylon, another that they were natives of Travancore, and a third that they originated from Java and Sumatra and were followers of Buddhism. According to Vivekodhayam, the name "Chovon" or "Chokan" is derived from the Sanskrit word "Sevakan," meaning servant, indicating their community status.[100] Northern ballads also suggest that the Cheraman Perumals invited the Ezhavas, who originally lived in Izhathunadu (Ceylon), to Kerala.[101]

CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES AMONG THIYYA COMMUNITY

Paul Radin's approach to ethnohistory emphasizes the use of both anthropological fieldwork and historical sources to study Indigenous cultures, focusing on their worldviews, social systems, and transformations over time. Radin's work often combined the perspectives of both the ethnographer and historian, exploring how societies adapt to and resist external influences while maintaining their cultural identity.[102]

In relation to the Thiyya community of Malabar in Kerala, Radin's ethnohistorical method could be applied to understand the Thiyyas' historical development, social organization, and cultural dynamics within the broader context of colonial and post-colonial Kerala. The Thiyya community, historically seen as a lower-caste group, navigated the complex caste hierarchies and socio-political systems in Kerala, especially during the colonial period. Radin's approach would be helpful in exploring how the Thiyyas interacted with the changing political structures, including colonial rule and the rise of caste-based reform movements, while also preserving their unique cultural traditions.

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100 *Vivekodhayam,* Magazine, Vol. V, No. I, August 1909, p. 44.

101 K.V. Achuthan (ed.), *24 Vadakkan Pattukal* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 2014, p. 26.

102 Paul Radin, *The Method and Theory of Ethnology- An Essay in Criticism*, United State of America, 1987, pp. 130-137.

Radin's focus on the narratives and oral traditions of marginalized groups could shed light on the Thiyyas' folk traditions, rituals, and stories, offering a more nuanced understanding of their history and cultural continuity despite external pressures. Like the Indigenous groups Radin studied, the Thiyya community's traditions could be explored through a combination of oral histories, colonial records, and social practices, creating a comprehensive ethnohistorical portrait of their evolution and resilience in Malabar.

The caste hierarchy in Malabar placed the Namboothiri caste at the top, followed by Ambalavasi castes and various Nair castes. Below these were the so-called "polluting" castes, with the Thiyyas near the top and castes like *Cherumars*, *Pulayas*, and tribes at the bottom. These lower social categories were treated as outcastes and untouchables. This ritual hierarchy generally mirrored access to economic resources and power, although there were regional variations within Malabar.[103]

Despite being considered a polluting caste, some Thiyyas were wealthy farmers and landlords who wielded power over other lower castes as landlords and intermediaries. Economic status significantly influenced the social standing of the Thiyyas, similar to other communities. However, most Thiyyas lived in economically backward conditions, primarily as farmers and laborers.

The Thiyyas followed the *marumakkathayam* (matrilineal) system of inheritance, while the Ezhavas practiced *makkathayam* (patrilineal) inheritance. There were no intermarriages between the Thiyyas and Ezhavas, as the former considered the latter an inferior group. Even within the Thiyya caste, there were distinctions between the Thiyyas of South and North Malabar, which were evident in their customs, manners, and marriage ceremonies. The Thiyyas of South Malabar followed a patriarchal system where inheritance passed through the male line, and after

[103] Jillet Sarah Sam, Place *and Caste Identification: Distanciation and Spatial Imaginaries on a Caste-Based Social Network*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Maryland, 2014, p. 33.

marriage, the wife lived in her husband's house. In contrast, in North Malabar, the marumakkathayam system was practiced, with inheritance passing through the female line, and after marriage, the wife lived in her own home, called a *tharavad.* Polyandry was also practiced among some Thiyyas to prevent the partition and dispersion of family property.

Economically, the Thiyya community was divided into classes. The first class comprised rich agricultural landowners who received traditional Sanskrit education, including several Sanskrit scholars. Agricultural production, toddy tapping, agricultural labour, weaving, bullock cart riding, woodcutting, and coir making were traditional occupations of the Thiyyas. While there is a general perception that all Thiyyas were toddy tappers, only a few were involved in this profession, though the toddy business was primarily their monopoly. Other castes did not engage in the toddy trade. The Thiyyas benefited significantly from the liquor business, especially under colonial rule,[104] with Thiyya individuals like Karayi Bappu, Karayi Kutti, and Mookoth Ruamunni becoming prominent figures in the industry.[105] The following table shows the occupations held by different castes in Malabar according to the 1921 census.[106]

Occupation	Namboothiri	Nair	Thiyyas	Mappila Muslims	Cherumas
Rentiers	42.1	5.9	-	1.8	-
Cultivators	9.0	50.4	20.9	33.4	0.5
Agricultural labors	-	17.2	4.4	23.8	91.2
Toddy drawing and selling	-	-	7.0	-	-
Trade and commerce	-	-	-	23.7	-

[104] *Gurudevan,* Magazine, Vol.33, Issue.1, June 2005, p. 38.

[105] *Ibid.,* p. 39.

[106] J.T. Marten, *Census of India,1921, Volume I, Part II- Tables,* Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta ,1923, pp. 244-252.

Occupation	Namboothiri	Nair	Thiyyas	Mappila Muslims	Cherumas
Public administration, learned and artistic professions	35.4	18.5	9.3	11.6	-
Others	14.4	8.0	18.4	5.7	8.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Most Thiyyas were involved in other occupations such as agriculture, weaving, and coir manufacturing, working hard for their survival in a caste-ridden society. Thiyya women actively participated in agricultural work, weaving, and coir manufacturing but remained subservient to upper-caste landlords, with no freedom or social dignity. Most Thiyyas lived below the poverty line during the pre-colonial period,[107] although a few powerful Thiyya families in North Malabar, such as the Kinathi, Vachali, and Koyyathi tharavads, behaved like Nair landlords and exploited tenants within the community.[108]

The normative theory of social exclusion by Brian Barry focuses on the moral and political aspects of exclusion, arguing that individuals should not be deprived of the resources and opportunities necessary for full participation in society. Barry emphasizes that social exclusion is not just an economic issue but also a matter of political and social justice, with exclusionary practices undermining equality and citizenship. In the context of the Thiyya community in Malabar, Kerala, this theory can be applied to understand their historical marginalization and exclusion from dominant social, political, and economic spheres.

The Thiyyas, once considered part of the lower caste system, faced social exclusion from higher caste communities, resulting in limited access to education, land, and political power. Barry's theory would critique these forms of exclusion, arguing for the recognition of the Thiyya community's rights to social and political

107 *Gurudevan, Ibid*., p. 62.

108 Chambadan Vijayan, *Gurudevasishyanmar* (Mal.) Thalassery, 2007, p. 20.

equality and participation, emphasizing their need for inclusion to fully contribute to and benefit from the broader social framework. The historical struggles of the Thiyya community reflect the broader principles of Barry's theory, advocating for a more inclusive society that recognizes the dignity and rights of all its members.[109]

The Thiyyas had no right to enter temple premises or worship upper-caste gods like Shiva and Vishnu, so they worshipped deities at the inferior stratum of divinity, such as Muthappan and Kuttichathan. The Thiyyas and Ezhavas faced numerous social restrictions during the pre-colonial period. A census report from Travancore indicates that there was not a single Ezhava in government service, even as a peon, in the last decade of the 19th century due to caste discrimination. This lack of opportunity forced figures like Dr. Palpu to leave Travancore and seek employment in Mysore State.

The condition of Thiyya women was pitiable, with only a few receiving primary education, and they were not allowed to attend school after puberty.[110] However, some women from prominent Thiyya families received Kalari training and Sanskrit education, particularly under the leadership of Vagabhadananda and Uracheri Gurukkal.[111]

The Thiyyas of North Malabar, especially those in the region between the Valapattanam River and the Chandragiri River, followed a unique administrative system known as *kazhakams*. There were four *kazhakams*, which originally served as administrative and cultural centers for the Namboothiri Brahmins of Kerala. Later, this system was adopted by non-Brahmanical caste groups like the Thiyyas, Maniyanis, and Moosaries. The Thiyya *kazhakams* had a particular structure and characteristics compared to those of other communities, and the Thiyyas had an

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[109] Brian Barry, *Democracy, Power and Justice: Essays in Political Theory*, Oxford, 1989, pp. 156-186.

[110] *Yoganatham,* Magazine, Vol.23, Issue.1, Auguste, 2002. p. 51.

[111] *Gurudevan,* Magazine, Vol.58, Issue.1, October, 2020, p. 41.

ancient self-governing system based on *gotra* or *illam* administration. Some of the prominent Thiyya illams in North Malabar were Nellikka, Pullanchi, Vangeri, Koyikkalar, Padayamkudi, Tenankudi, Manankudi, and Vilakkankudi.

Thiyya settlements, known as "Taras," consisted of two or three villages,[112] each with six to ten Thiyya *tharavads* (ancestral houses). The administration of a Tara was controlled by the *Karanavars* (heads) of four important tharavads, known as *Tarayil Karanavars*. The executive head was called *Nalappadi*, and the *Tarayil Karanavars* held meetings to administer justice. A kazhakam was a unit of four Taras, and when 32 Taras joined together, it became a *kottila*. There were two *kottilas*, one at Andallur near Thalassery and the other at Nilamangalam near Nileswaram.[113]

Kazhakam also served as a traditional socio-religious organization and a center of worship for several Thiyya folk deities. The non-Brahminic centers of worship were known as Tanam, Tara, Palliyara, Mundya, and Kavu.[114] As the number of Tanams increased, the *kazhakams* acted as higher controlling authorities. The Thiyya community had four main *kazhakams*: Kuravantatth Ramantali, Ramavilliam at Elambacci, Nellikka Turutt at Chenvatur, and Palankunnu at Kotikulam.[115] These kazhakkams primarily emerged in the *kolaswaroopam* or *Alladaswaroopam.*

Kazhakams functioned differently depending on the time and place. During the Perumakkal period, *kazhakams* acted in the public interest and served as worship centers. As local chieftains became more powerful and the caste system became more rigid, *kazhakams* took on an administrative role among the Thiyyas and other caste groups in North Malabar. The *kazhakam* played a crucial role in maintaining community cohesion.

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112 P. Bhaskaranunny, *Pattompatham Nootantile Keralam* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1988, p. 221.

113 Moorkoth Kunhappa, *Moorkath Kumaran* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1975, p. 9.

114 V. Kuttiyan (ed.), *Neripp, Madikkayude Anubhavacharitram* (Mal.), Madikai District Panchayat Publication, Karnataka, 2010. p. 16

115 K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.,* p. 20.

Kazhakams were responsible for conducting marriages, funeral rites, and settling family disputes and property issues. They also served as a judiciary. If a *kazhakam* failed to resolve a problem, the matter was referred to Thrikuttam, which had a temple above it. Thiyya *kazhakams* generally worshipped Bhagavathis like Poomalabhgavathi, Padakathi Bhagavathi, and Cheerumbha Bhagavathy. Unlike temples controlled by Namboothiris, which barred low-caste people from worship, *kazhakam* temples welcomed everyone, regardless of caste.

The Thiyya *kazhakams* also fought against the exploitation of peasants by the jenmis of Kerala.[116] The *kazhakams* had several priests and officials, such as Antitiriyan, Thandan, Karanor, Velichapatan, Kuttayikkan, and Samudayi, who were responsible for various duties. Other traditional officials attached to the *kazhakams* included *kotakkaran* and *kalayakkaran*.

Antitiriyan

The *Antitiriyan* is a religious official associated with the *Kazhakam*, primarily responsible for lighting the sacred lamp at dusk in the *Kavu* shrine of the Thiyyas. As a member of the priestly class, he also performs other sacred ceremonies. Typically, there are two or more *Antitiryans* in service.

Tandan

The *Tandan* is a subordinate official to the *Antitiriyan,* assisting in lighting the *Kavu* lamps and conducting other ceremonies. Often referred to as *Kaikolan*, the *Tandan* is also responsible for collecting donations, offerings from devotees, and other

[116] The Kayyur rovolt actually started from kayyur mundya. The collection of money from kayyur mundyn was selzed by local janmies, it was strongly objected by Madathil Appu the leader of Kayyur Revolt, it is to be-noted that kazhakkam played a key role in organizing the peasants of North Malabar even before the emergence of peasant union and Nationalist Movements in North Malabar. (For details see, K.K.N. Kurup, *The Kayyur Riot: Terrorist Episode in the Nationalist Movement in Kerala,* Calicut*,* 1978, p. 28).

materials from the public. Additionally, the *Tandan* executes the decisions of the *Antitiriyan* and *Kazhakam* leaders.

Achanmar

The *Achanmar* are the elders or *Karanavars* of the *Kazhakam*, representing various Thiyya *Tharavades* (ancestral lineages). Each *Kazhakam* had eighteen *Achanmar* who formed the *Sabha,* the administrative body that managed social relations and settled disputes within the community.

Velichapadan

The *Velichapadan* dedicates himself to serving the gods and goddesses, acting as an intermediary between devotees and the divine. Typically, there are five *Velichapadans* in a *Kazhakam*, and they undertake oracular duties, often wielding a sword during rituals.

Kuttayikaran

The *Kuttayikaran* is an official who represents the *Sabha* of the *Kazhakam*. His duty is to implement the decisions made by the *Achanmar.*

Samudayikal

The *Samudayikal* are senior officials who assist the *Achanmar i*n making major decisions.

Kottakaran and Kalayakaran

The *Kottakaran* carries special umbrellas during religious rites but does not receive a regular income, only meals and a certain quantity of paddy. The *Kalayakaran* is another official, responsible for bringing toddy for religious celebrations.

All the above-mentioned officials received customary remuneration, such as food, rice, betel leaves, and other materials from the *Kazhakam.* Their positions were considered a social and religious honor within the community.

Kavu Thiyyas

The Kavu Thiyyas were a separate, lower-ranking, and polluting community who provided barber services to the Thiyyas. They also served as *Parikarmi* (ritual assistants) for the Thiyyas.[117] Physical contact with Kavu Thiyyas necessitated ritual purification (*batt*). Although regarded as a lower caste by the Thiyyas, Kavu Thiyyas were allowed to sit in the pandal during feasts on special occasions. Marriage and other social relations between the Thiyyas and Kavu Thiyyas were typically forbidden, though informal unions occasionally occurred between Thiyya men and Kavu Thiyya women. Offspring from these unions were considered Kavu Thiyya children.

Thiyya and Vannan Castes

The Thiyya and Vannan were separate castes without marital relations. The Vannan provided laundry services for the Thiyyas and were responsible for giving new clothes to temple officials and Karanavars during religious festivals. Reflecting caste hierarchy, Vannan men addressed Thiyya men as *Achan* (father). Despite their lower status, both communities shared religious practices, such as the worship of Muthappan Theyyam, and possessed the right to have Muthappan shrines called *Madappura*. The Vannans played a significant role in conducting Theyyam rituals, while the Thiyyas supplied tender coconut and toddy for the celebrations.

Vannathi Mattu

The *Vannathi Mattu* was an essential custom among the Thiyyas, signifying the social relationship between the Thiyya and Vannan communities. According to

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[117] I.R. Krishna Methala, *Moorkoth Kumaran Jeevitham Samaramakkiya Nethavu* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2016, p. 25.

this tradition, Vannan women (called Vannathi) would provide fresh or clean clothes to Thiyya women during menstruation.[118] Refusing to provide these clothes was considered an expulsion of the concerned Thiyya family from the community, highlighting the importance of this custom. In return, the Vannathi received paddy, rice, turmeric, and other commodities from the Thiyya family.

Pandal Mangalam or Thalikettu Kalyanam

Pandal Mangalam, or *Thalikettu Kalyanam*, was a customary pre-puberty imitation marriage conducted by the *Karanavar* or *Achanmar* for Thiyya girls.[119] If this ceremony was not conducted, the family would be excommunicated. The ceremony involved the girl taking a bath and sitting on a pedestal in the pandal, where the Karanavar would tie a thread with a *Tali* (sacred necklace) around her neck. After the ceremony, a feast was served to relatives and guests.

Marriage Customs

Arranged marriages were customary among the Thiyyas. The bridegroom's family would visit the bride's house and exchange a *Podava* (a traditional cloth) and a *Thorthu* (a towel) as a sign of engagement. The male members of the bridegroom's family, accompanied by a *Kavu* Thiyyan, would visit the bride's house and offer betel leaves, areca nuts, and tobacco to the elders. Following the engagement, relatives and friends were invited to the marriage ceremony. The wedding invitation, called *Kettuvekkal,* involved placing a bunch of betel leaves, areca nuts, and tobacco on the doorstep of the house. In return, the bridegroom received a *Pudava* from the *Tharavad* (ancestral home). The *Pudamuri* (cutting of the dhoti) was a major function of the

[118] Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes in South India-Vol.VI,* Delhi, 2010, p. 36.

[119] *Ibid.,* p. 37.

marriage that took place in the afternoon. The bridegroom was also expected to give *Kanjipanam* (a customary gift) to the bride's family.[120]

Traditionally, the bride had no role in the marriage. She usually stayed in her own house, with the bridegroom's family bringing the *Pudava* to her. The bride, wearing the *Pudava* and holding a *Kettukuda* (palm leaf umbrella), would accompany the bridegroom to his house. In the groom's family, brides had little freedom or privilege, and women were not even allowed to sit on the veranda of the house. As a result, marriage was often not a positive experience for women. Divorce, primarily in the interest of men, was also practiced among the Thiyyas.

The above discussion provides an overview of the caste-based social divisions and the social status of the Thiyyas in Malabar. Although the Thiyyas were considered a ritually superior group among the untouchable castes, they were socially, economically, and educationally marginalized. Their primary occupations included agricultural work, toddy tapping, and the manufacture of coir and jaggery. Despite a few Thiyyas becoming Ayurvedic physicians, Sanskrit scholars, astrologers, and traditional teachers (*Asans*), the majority lived in poverty, dependent on daily wages. Social restrictions and caste discrimination kept them as *Avarnas* (those outside the caste system).[121]

Potheri Kunhambu, a member of the Thiyya community, vividly portrayed the conditions of the Thiyyas during this period in his novel *Saraswathivijayam*, which depicts the social conditions in Malabar caused by caste discrimination and the struggles of the depressed classes, especially the Pulayas and Parayas. Kunhambu argued that while the British influence in Malabar led to some improvement in the

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120 Bijina M., 'The Role of Thiyya Kazhakkams in the Traditional Society of North Malabar', *Insight - An International Journal for Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2023, p. 3.

121 C.K. Revathiamma in her work portrayed the condition of Thiyyas. She argued that majority of the Thiyyas in North Malabar were Coolies. But their condition was more or less good when compared with the Avarnas in other parts of Kerala. (For details see, C.K. Revathiamma, *Sahasrapoornima* (Mal.), Thalassery, 1977, p.16).

condition of the Thiyya community, it primarily benefited only five percent of the people, leaving the majority still in a state of survival.[122]

The Thiyyas, though numerically strong, remained a socially and economically marginalized caste in the traditional society of pre-colonial and colonial Malabar. They were denied access to temples, public roads, government jobs, and even the right to wear clothes and ornaments like their immediate upper castes. Although a few Thiyyas were traditionally rich landlords and had knowledge of Sanskrit and Ayurveda, they were still considered a polluting caste and a*varnas* in the caste hierarchy. Interestingly, despite being treated as a polluting caste by the upper castes, the Thiyyas themselves perpetuated caste discrimination by considering castes below them as polluting. It was only through modern education, new employment opportunities, and social reform movements that the Thiyyas began to challenge upper-caste domination. However, the majority of the Thiyyas continued to exist within the traditional socio-economic structures of nineteenth and twentieth-century Malabar.

[122] Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswathivijayam*, Thalassery, 1937, p.3.

Chapter 2

Colonialism, Modern Education, and Modernity: The Transformation of the Thiyya Community in Malabar

By the eighteenth century, the British arrived in India as traders and gradually established their influence in Indian society, bringing with them numerous apparently progressive ideas. The impact of foreign rule was felt throughout the country, with the British abolishing many allegedly inhumane social practices. They were instrumental in introducing modern knowledge and promoting values such as the equality of all citizens before the law, the right to due legal process, and the freedom to practice and propagate one's religion. Furthermore, the British extended humanitarian efforts into new areas, resulting in the abolition of heinous practices like *sati*, human sacrifice, and slavery. This process marked the beginning of what is often termed colonial modernity, as it also saw the advent of modern education and science. The British colonial era introduced concepts like civic liberty, liberalism, and human rights to India, alongside Western-style legal systems that influenced the development of modern education.

British rule in Malabar was established after the Treaty of Seringapatam in 1792, with the region coming fully under British control following the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. A number of administrative reforms were introduced to solidify colonial supremacy and extract revenue. Policies related to agriculture, forestry, industry, transport, communication, education, and other sectors were designed to appropriate local resources for British interests. The colonial authorities sought to create a local class that would support their rule, and the introduction of English and modern education, initially promoted by missionaries and later by the British government, played a critical role in forming this supportive class.

The Thiyyas of Malabar, a marginalized group under the traditional caste system, emerged as a key class supporting the new colonial rulers. British hegemony generated a discourse on caste and social conditions, shaped in large part by English officials and missionaries. While the British sought to perpetuate their rule, the missionaries aimed to evangelize and convert the local population to Christianity. However, despite their efforts, the conversion of locals to Christianity was not particularly successful. Nonetheless, the British "civilizing mission," implemented through modern education, government policies, and new cultural practices, brought benefits to many, especially marginalized communities like the Thiyyas.

The critique of the caste system, initiated by colonial authorities and the Basel Evangelical Missionaries, was embraced by the Thiyyas, who had long suffered from upper caste discrimination. This led to the rise of social reform movements among the Ezhavas in Central and South Kerala and the Thiyyas in Malabar, highlighting the ongoing debate over caste. The ideological foundation of these movements was based on the writings of Sree Narayana Guru, C. Krishnan, Vagbhatanda Gurudevan, and other reformers and intellectuals who criticized the oppressive social system. Contemporary literary works like *Saraswathivijayam* and *Sukumari* depicted the Thiyyas' protests against caste discrimination, although these novels presented differing views on the colonial legacy.

Despite its focus on economic exploitation and political domination, British colonial rule in Malabar also led to the formation of a new intellectual and cultural space. This modernity allowed the Thiyyas to resist caste-based controls and secure a new social standing. While the historiography of British colonialism rightly emphasizes its negative impacts, it is also important to recognize how it served as a constructive force for certain marginalized communities, such as the Thiyyas of Malabar. While not all Thiyyas experienced the benefits of colonial rule equally, this period represents a significant turning point in their history, marked by key initiatives and transformations.

Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber are each considered prominent classical theorists of modernity; their distinct perspectives on its origins and defining characteristics offer valuable insights into the complexities of this historical period. According to Marx, modernity is a product of capitalism, which is a mode of production characterized by institutions and systems of exchange focused on profit accumulation. Central to capitalism are domination, exploitation, and the resulting class struggle. This makes modernity, for Marx, a problematic period in human history. Durkheim, on the other hand, attributed modernity to industrialism. He argued that the division of labor brought about by functional differentiation in industrial society was what shaped the modern world.[1] For Weber, Capitalism, technology, and bureaucracy drove the rationalization process, which, in turn, shaped the conditions of modern life.[2]

A leading contemporary theorist of modernity, Anthony Giddens, explained that modernity is produced through the interaction of various institutions, particularly four: capitalism, industrialism, the political system, and military power. According to Giddens, capitalism manages production and distribution, industrialism handles the use of machine technology in production, the political system governs the flow of information and supervises citizens, and military power suppresses anti-institutional activities. He also argued that the separation of time and space, along with the disembodying of traditional relationships, brought about modernity, which emerged in seventeenth-century Europe and eventually spread globally.[3]

Colonialism created a distinct social space for the Thiyyas in Malabar. The concept of "space" here refers to social identity, distinct from the identity formed by place or geographical location. Space is a product of human interactions across

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1 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Laboure in Society*, W. D. Halls (Trans.), New York, 1984, p. 49.

2 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, T. Parsons (Trans.), London and New York, 1992, p.13.

3 Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 17.

different spheres of life, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre argued that space is a social product, representing social relations such as personal, familial, sexual, and productive relationships. He examined the dialectic between social space and human action, noting that capitalism forms the foundation of this new space.[4]

This space, which converges people from different geographical areas into a common framework, is a universal aspect of modernity. The expansion of capitalism, European governance systems, legal frameworks, Western culture, and Western education across geographical boundaries created new spaces in which certain nations and peoples dominated others. According to Lefebvre, social space encompasses the "means of production," "means of control," and thus, the "means of domination." [5]In the case of Malabar, the social space of the Thiyyas was shaped by the capitalist demands of colonial powers. The need for revenue accumulation to support capitalism led to the creation of this social space. Colonialism also generated new social relations, gender concepts, and methods of production. The Thiyyas of Malabar found Western ideals, practices, and values more acceptable for their own progress within this new social space.

The concept of progress refers to the improvement in the quality of life and represents social advancement or change resulting from transformations in existing socio-economic structures. In Kerala, two major stages of social change were Sanskritization and Westernization. The migration of Brahmins to Kerala and their settlement significantly altered the social fabric of the region. After the eleventh century, Brahmanical dominance became well-established in Kerala, accompanied by Vedic beliefs, customs, and practices. The Brahmins assumed spiritual leadership and controlled temple-centered agrarian settlements. This era also saw the establishment

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4 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Ronald Nicholson-Smith (Trans.), Oxford, 1991, p.73.

5 *Ibid.,* pp. 26-32.

of a caste-based social division, with the Thiyyas and Ezhavas being regarded as lower, polluting castes in the hierarchy.

According to M.N. Srinivas, social change in India occurred in two phases: Sanskritization and Westernization. Sanskritization refers to the process by which lower Hindu castes, tribal groups, or other communities adopt the customs, rituals, ideology, and lifestyle of higher, frequently twice-born, castes.[6] This process resulted in several societal changes, including the upward mobility and improved status of lower castes. Sree Narayana Guru followed the path of Sanskritization by constructing temples for lower-caste communities and promoting Advaita philosophy. These reform activities played a key role in improving the conditions of the Thiyyas and other marginalized groups. While Sanskritization helped alleviate some caste-related issues, it mainly led to positional changes within the existing system rather than any significant structural transformations.[7] While the theory has contributed to understanding social mobility in India, it has faced several criticisms.[8]

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6 M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1966, p. 6.

7 *Ibid.,* p. 6.

8 Major criticisms are levelled against him is that the theory overemphasizes Hindu rituals and practices. Srinivas focuses mainly on the religious customs of the Hindu upper castes, like adopting Brahminical rituals, vegetarianism, and using Sanskrit. Critics argue that this view ignores other ways people can move up in society, such as through economic success or political influence, which don't necessarily involve adopting Brahminical customs. Another critique is that Sanskritization does not account for the economic and political factors that also contribute to social mobility. The theory tends to overlook how wealth, land ownership, and political power influence a person's social status, instead focusing mainly on cultural practices. Critics argue that caste and class are connected, and upward mobility often involves more than just adopting religious customs. Srinivas's theory also tends to idealize Brahminical culture, presenting it as something that lower castes should aspire to. Critics argue that this idealization overlooks the oppressive nature of the caste system and doesn't challenge the hierarchical structures within it. The focus on mimicking higher castes can unintentionally reinforce the idea that Brahminical practices are superior. Sanskritization has also been criticized for excluding non-Hindu groups, such as Muslims, Christians, or Scheduled Tribes, and their own processes of social mobility. Since the theory mainly deals with Hindu caste dynamics, it doesn't fully explain how caste-like structures exist within non-Hindu communities or how social mobility works there. Moreover, while Sanskritization is often seen as a way for lower castes to improve their social standing, it can reinforce the caste hierarchy by focusing on external changes in behavior rather than challenging the core issues of caste-based discrimination. This process often fails to address deeper social inequalities, as lower castes may adopt upper-caste practices but still face discrimination. Another limitation is that Sanskritization may only offer a narrow form of social mobility, mainly focusing on cultural practices. Even if lower castes adopt upper-caste customs, they may still face exploitation and violence. The theory doesn't fully address the structural aspects of social

The second phase of social change was driven by Westernization. This term refers to the changes in Indian society and culture brought about by over 150 years of British rule. Westernization encompasses changes across multiple levels, including technology, institutions, ideology, and values. British colonial rule introduced numerous transformations in Kerala, with modernization being one of its most significant outcomes. Through Westernization, many of the outdated customs and social evils began to decay.

Westernization affected society at various levels, including technological advancements, institutional reforms, ideological shifts, and value changes. One of its most positive effects was the dismantling of prejudiced and cruel customs. Westernization also introduced the concept of humanitarianism, a social and moral principle emphasizing concern for the welfare of all people, regardless of caste, creed, economic or social status, religion, gender, or age.[9] Egalitarianism and secularism were integral aspects of this humanitarian approach. In Malabar, as in the rest of Kerala and India, colonial influence played a vital role in reducing social inequalities.[10]

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inequality, which means it doesn't offer a complete solution to caste-based discrimination. The theory also overlooks the roles of gender and class in shaping social mobility. Women and lower-class individuals within any caste often face additional barriers that are not addressed simply by adopting upper-caste practices. Critics argue that the theory fails to account for the complex ways caste, class, and gender intersect in social stratification. With the rise of modernization, urbanization, and globalization, many argue that Sanskritization is less relevant today. In urban areas, caste-based practices may matter less, and economic success or professional skills may play a bigger role in social mobility. These external factors, like the growth of a middle class, have reshaped social mobility in ways that Sanskritization cannot fully explain. Sanskritization provides valuable insights into social change and mobility in the caste system, it has limitations. Its focus on cultural adoption, lack of attention to economic factors, and reinforcement of caste hierarchies mean that it doesn't fully explain social mobility in India. Additionally, its relevance in modern contexts and to non-Hindu communities remains debated. Therefore, while the theory has contributed to understanding caste dynamics, it is not a complete explanation of social mobility. For the details of the complexity of caste and varna (For details see , M. Klass, *Caste: The emergence of the South Asian social system*,1993, New Delhi, p. 89; M.N.Srinivas, *Religion and society among the Coorges of South India*, Bombay, 1952 ; M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1966 ; B.R Ambedkar, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: writings and speeches Volume 1*, Education Department Government of Maharashtra,1989, p.15).

9 M.N. Srinivas, *Ibid.,* p. 51.

10 *Ibid.,* p. 125.

The colonial capitalist system penetrated political, economic, cultural, and educational spheres. While this facilitated the appropriation of resources and supported colonial dominance, it also helped generate a pro-British modern society that favored colonial rule. English education played a dual role: it perpetuated British rule and enabled resource exploitation while simultaneously promoting liberalism and equality. In Kerala, various communities—including Brahmins, Nairs, Thiyyas, Muslims, and converted Christians—benefited from English education, regardless of caste or religion. Among these groups, the Nair and Thiyya communities of Malabar showed particular interest in English education, as it provided access to government and private sector jobs.

Educational Practices and Cultural Transmission in the Thiyya Community of Malabar

Before the introduction of English education, two traditional systems of education existed in Malabar: the Gurukula system, run by upper-caste communities like the Brahmins, and the Madrassa system, primarily for the Muslim community. It was customary for men from the Namboothiri and Nair communities to study in the *gurukulams*. The Thiyyas, meanwhile, had their own educational institutions, known as *Ezhuthupallis* and *Kudippallikoodams*. The teachers in these schools, called *Asans*, conducted classes in the *kolaya* (veranda) of their homes, which led to these schools being referred to as *kolaya* or veranda schools.

The Namboothiris ran *Illom*-centered *gurukulams* to educate their male children, while the Nairs attended temple-centered schools.[11] Traditional education in these institutions primarily focused on teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. The teaching and learning process varied based on the type of school and the knowledge of the *gurus* (teachers). The curriculum typically included subjects such as the Vedas, arithmetic, *kavyam* (poetry), *amaresam* (grammar), *alankara* (rhetoric), *tharkam*

[11] William Logan, *Malabar Manual-Vol. I* (Reprint), Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 109.

(logic), *jyothisha* (astrology), *vaidhyam* (medicine), and martial arts. However, there was no standardized curriculum.[12] Special centers for martial arts training, known as *kalaries*, were also a part of this educational system.[13]

These institutions primarily admitted boys, as educating girls was rare due to social prejudices and superstitions. As Suresh Chandra Ghosh pointed out, the majority of Indians at the time were reluctant to provide education to girls because of these societal barriers.[14]

Before the establishment of modern schools, women and members of lower castes, particularly the untouchable communities, had limited access to education. While some lower castes, such as the Thiyyas, had their own educational institutions, many economically disadvantaged individuals within these communities were unable to receive education. Revathiamma's biography, *Sahasrapoornima* provides insights into the traditional educational system of the Thiyyas in Malabar. Revathiamma notes that, during her time, there were few schools in the Thalassery area, including Brennen College, one mission high school, and a convent-run girls' school. There were also numerous *Ezhuthupalli* (informal schools) spread across Malabar. These institutions typically provided basic education in Malayalam to children between the ages of three and five. Wealthier families employed private teachers, known as *Gurunathan*, to educate their children. After completing this basic education, children would move on to primary schools. However, while boys often continued their education, girls were typically required to stop once they reached puberty, as ending education before marriage was considered a dignified practice.[15]

In the nineteenth century, there were several prominent scholars among the Thiyya community who were instructors at traditional schools and *kalaries* (martial

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12 K.N. Ganesh, *Culture and Modernity - Historical Explorations*, Calicut University, 2004, p. 164.

13 George Jacob, *Religious Life of the Ilavas of Kerala: Change and Continuity*, Delhi,1995, p. 96.

14 Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Modern India, 1737-1998*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 7.

15 C.K. Revathiamma, *Sahasrapoornima*, Thalassery, 1977, p. 8.

arts schools).[16] Notable figures included Uracheri Gurunathanmar, Punathur Raman Gurukkal, Madayi Mannan Gurukkal, Paithal Gurukkal, and Kakkuzhi Kunhappu Gurukkal. Some Thiyyas also had a deep understanding of Sanskrit literature and Ayurvedic medicine. Nedumbrath Koman Vaidhyar, a renowned Ayurvedic physician from Thalassery, had sons who were esteemed Sanskrit scholars, Kunhikannan, Kunhichandan, Kunhikorart, and Othenan, known collectively as Uracheri Gurunathanmar.[17] They played a significant role in advancing Sanskrit education in Malabar and contributed to the development of Dr. Herman Gundert's Malayalam-English dictionary.

Kakkuzhi Kunhappu Gurukkal, a distinguished *pandit* from the Thiyya community,[18] was the teacher of the well-known scholar Murkoth Kumaran. Kunhappu Gurukkal's father, Kadaladi Kannan Vaidhyan, was also an accomplished Ayurvedic physician and a Sanskrit scholar who wrote *Harishchandracharitam*. Kunhappu Gurukkal ran his own *Ezhuthupalli* and taught several students, including upper-caste individuals. He also served as a Malayalam teacher in the Mission School. Another esteemed Thiyya scholar was Karayai Krishnan Gurukkal, whose works included *Lakshmanaparinayam*, *Rukmini Swayamvaram*, *Manipravalam*, and *Ramayana Manipravalam*, all of which are considered important contributions to Malayalam literature.

M.K. Gurukkal was a renowned Sanskrit scholar who established a Sanskrit school called *Vidyala Chindamani* to promote Sanskrit education.[19] A linguist and scholar, he worked for many years at Brennen College. His prominent disciples included Agamananda Swami and Vagbhadananda. He was also the editor of the newspaper *Gajakesari* and the author of *Kalavidhyavivaram*. Another notable Sanskrit *pandit* from the Thiyya community was Madayi Manna Gurukkal, who

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16 *Ibid.,* p.9.

17 B. Parvathy, *Thalasseriyude Navodhana Charitram* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 2017, p. 45.

18 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine*,* Vol. V, No.1, August, 1915. (n.p).

19 Vidwan Koyithatta, *Thalasseriyude Samskarika Parambaryam* (Mal.), Kannur,1988, p. 21.

authored works such as *Nalacharitham*, *Parvathi Parinayam*, and *Pathivradhadharmam*. The autobiography *Smaranakal Mathram* by C.H. Kunhappa mentions several traditional Thiyya *pandits*, including Bapputty Gurukkal, who taught at a primary school in Peralassery.[20]

Evolution of Modern Education in Malabar

It is significant that, among the lower castes, the Thiyyas were the only community with a robust tradition of education, particularly in Sanskrit.

Thomas Babington Macaulay was instrumental in recommending the introduction of English education in India, primarily to create a class of people who would support British rule and serve as intermediaries between the rulers and the ruled. English education became a tool for controlling the subjugated middle class. However, it also opened new avenues of knowledge, including Western science, literature, values, and practices. Modern education introduced principles of liberalism, equality, and humanitarianism.[21] As A.R. Desai observed, English education was a progressive initiative of British rule that fostered a democratic and rationalist outlook.[22] The intelligentsia produced in this colonial context greatly influenced Indian society.[23]

Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras Presidency, played a key role in the introduction of modern education in the region, including the district of Malabar. He instructed district collectors to prepare reports on education, detailing the number of schools, caste-wise student data, textbooks, fees, and class schedules.[24] The Malabar

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20 C.H. Kunhappa, *Smaranakal Mathram* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2000, p. 38.

21 Sankaran Thayat, *Bharatheeyia Navothanathinte Rooparekha* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2000, p. 22.

22 AR Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1987, pp. 157-163.

23 *Ibid.,* p. 161.

24 S-148, File corresponding on Modern Education in Malabar, Madras Government Records. Paper relating to public instruction, RAK, Calicut, 1855, p.1.

District Collector tasked the Board of Revenue with this responsibility, which was undertaken by Herman Gundert and Samuel Hebich.[25]

According to Munro's report, there were 759 schools, though these were traditional learning centers rather than modern schools. [26]The development of modern education under colonial rule occurred in three stages: the first from 1817 to 1854, the second from 1854 to 1882, and the third from 1882 to 1947. The first stage was marked by the Macaulay Minutes of 1835, which laid the foundation for English education in India. Prior to this, there was little governmental involvement in education, with indigenous learning systems prevailing. Macaulay argued against funding indigenous education, stating that English education was more valuable than learning Sanskrit or Arabic. He famously proposed creating a class of English-educated Indians who would act as intermediaries between the British rulers and the Indian populace.[27]

Macaulay opposed educating the masses and was not focused on converting natives to Christianity,[28] as he believed it would hinder British political and economic ambitions. During the first stage of modern education, the British government decided to promote European literature and science through English-medium instruction. They also established committees for indigenous education and started normal and provincial schools.[29]

In the second stage, key developments included the establishment of provincial and zillah schools as models, the opening of normal schools, the founding of the University of Madras, the introduction of a grant-in-aid system, and the opening

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25 S-4935, File corresponding on Proceeding of the Collector to the Board of Revenue RAK, Calicut, 3 July 1823. (n.p).

26 C.K. Usha, *English Education, Intelligentsia and Social Change in Colonial Malabar*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kannur University, 2017, p. 44.

27 Elmer H. Cutts, 'The Background of Macaulay's Minute', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 1953, pp. 824-838.

28 *Ibid.*

29 C.K. Usha *op. cit.,* p. 45.

of civil service positions to English educated Indians.[30] Vernacular languages were also introduced as mediums of instruction, and the education of the masses was recognized as a governmental duty. The third stage saw the decentralization of education, with local self-governments empowered to establish and manage schools. District and Taluk Boards, as well as initiatives by educated natives, played important roles during this period.

While the colonial government had its own educational programs, Christian missionaries, particularly the Basel Evangelical Mission (BEM) in Malabar, pursued a separate stream of educational initiatives. These programs aimed at conversion through education, charity work, and industrial training. Protestant missions, such as BEM in Malabar, the Church Mission Society (CMS) in Travancore, and the London Missionary Society (LMS) in southern Travancore and Kanyakumari, introduced mass education in Kerala.[31] BEM established the first English school in Kallayi in 1848, which later moved to Kozhikode and became the Malabar Christian College in 1909.

In Thalassery, BEM took over a CMS missionary school in 1839, now known as BEM Parsi School. Herman Gundert, a key figure in educational and missionary work, started two schools for the poor in Kadirur and Anjarakandy.[32] Although the primary goal of missionary education was religious conversion, their efforts had a significant impact on society by promoting free and secular education for all, regardless of caste, religion, or gender. The removal of caste discrimination became a greater focus for missionaries than conversion itself.

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30 *Ibid*., p. 47.

31 P.K. Gopala Krishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapruram, 2000, pp. 506-507.

32 Moorkoth Ramunny, 'German Influence on the Literature, Society, Culture and Education in Malabar' in K S. Mathew (ed.), *Maritime Malabar and the Europeans 1500-1962,* Thalassery, 2003, p. 464.

By 1931, there were 4,126 elementary schools in Malabar, with a student population of 342,000, the highest in the Madras Presidency. Missionaries promoted education for girls, with the Government Girls' Secondary School in Kannur having the largest number of pupils, followed by Sacred Heart Girls' School in Thalassery and the Basel Mission School in Kozhikode.[33] Training schools for teachers were also established, with eleven such schools operating in Malabar, including two each in Kozhikode, Thalassery, Kannur, and Palakkad, and one each in Malappuram and Vadakara. The Basel Evangelical Mission also maintained an aided school at Nettur.[34] Roman Catholic nuns established several schools in Kozhikode and Kannur, including St. Joseph's School in Kozhikode, the only high school for European boys in the district, which admitted students from all communities.

Impact of English Education on the Thiyya Community.

In 1844, the British government declared a preference for English-educated candidates for government jobs, opening up new opportunities for the Thiyyas of Malabar, who had been marginalized by upper caste authorities.[35] The Thiyyas, a community numbering about seven lakhs, saw education as a key to social mobility, with over 11 percent of them becoming educated. Historically loyal to the government, they embraced education and various public service roles, becoming an essential part of Malabar society. [36]

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital provides a useful framework for understanding the modernization of the Thiyya community in Kerala. Cultural capital, in its three forms – embodied, objectified, and institutionalized – plays a central role in shaping the social and economic mobility of marginalized groups. The Thiyya community, once relegated to the lower social strata, has experienced significant

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33 K.N. Krishnaswami Ayyar, *Madras District Gazeteers*: *Statistical Appendix for Malabar District,* Vol. II*,* Madras,1933, p. 39.

34 C. A. Innes, *Madras District Gazetteers: Malabar and Anjengo*, Vol. I, Madras, 1908, p. 284.

35 *Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council Third Session*, Vol. XlV, No.1-5, 1925. (n.p).

36 *Ibid*.

transformation through the accumulation of cultural capital, particularly in education. The rise in educational attainment has allowed members of the Thiyya community to break free from traditional caste-based occupations, entering more prestigious fields like medicine, engineering, and administration. Education has also translated into institutionalized cultural capital, with many Thiyya individuals gaining access to higher learning and acquiring professional qualifications that enhance their social mobility and integration into Kerala's middle and upper-middle class. This shift has been accompanied by political empowerment, with the Thiyyas playing a crucial role in Kerala's Leftist political movements and development policies, further strengthening their social capital. For example, the activities of A.K. Gopalan.

While modernization has altered the community's social and economic structure, traditional cultural practices like *Theyyam* performances and rituals continue to play an important role in preserving the community's identity. These practices are not only cultural markers but have also been objectified in ways that contribute to both the community's social cohesion and its economic opportunities, particularly in the tourism sector. The Thiyya community's economic capital has also grown significantly, with increased participation in business ventures and professional work, reflecting the broader urbanization and modernization of Kerala. Through their engagement with education, politics, and cultural traditions, the Thiyya community has been able to reconfigure traditional class structures, leveraging cultural capital to redefine their position in Kerala's modern democratic society. This process exemplifies the complex interplay between traditional cultural values and modern forms of capital, illustrating how marginalized communities like the Thiyyas have adapted to and thrived in the modern world.

For the Thiyyas, education served as a crucial channel for social transformation. English education, in particular, fostered a sense of freedom among the lower castes in Malabar, while the upper castes, especially the Namboothiris, initially resisted English as they considered it an inferior *mlecha* language. The most oppressed groups, such as the Pulayas and Parayas, had no access to education and

were unaware of political, economic, and social developments, remaining in a state akin to slavery.[37] In contrast, the Thiyya community showed great interest in learning English and acquiring modern knowledge, partly because, being a lower caste, they faced fewer social barriers than other lower castes. Their willingness to engage with Europeans and adapt to new opportunities further facilitated their progress.[38]

From the early stages of British colonization, the Thiyyas worked as domestic servants, gardeners, watchmen, and contractors, developing friendly relations with the English. This exposure helped them embrace modern education. Interactions between Thiyya women and European men also led to the development of a mixed race and culture in Malabar. As Robin Jeffrey noted, Thiyyas in North Malabar, even those not part of the "White Thiyya families," established smoother relations with European rulers than Hindus in other parts of Kerala.[39] The British allowed Thiyyas to access education and employment, while in Travancore, the Ezhavas faced severe restrictions and were even barred from entering schools and public places.

In South Malabar, however, the situation was different. Many Thiyyas worked as toddy tappers and political clients of other castes.[40] Despite most being tenants or subtenants, some Thiyyas owned large tracts of land. [41]It was primarily the wealthier Thiyyas who reaped the benefits of English education and secured government jobs as magistrates, deputy collectors, and lawyers. These educated and affluent Thiyyas also contributed to the educational advancement of their community. The novel *Sahasrapoornima* vividly portrays the impact of colonial influence on Malabar society, particularly on the Thiyyas of North Malabar. Thiyya social reformer

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37 S. Ramachandran Nair, *Social and Cultural History of Colonial Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 4

38 Moorkoth Kunhappa, *Moorkoth Kumaran* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1975, p. 36.

39 Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well- Being: How Kerala became a model,* New York, 1992, p. 49.

40 C.J. Baker and David Wash Brooke, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 180.

41 M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 25.

Revathiamma highlighted how her family, like many others, prospered through English education and trade relations with the British.[42] This education and mercantile involvement helped elevate them to the colonial middle class.

A 1915 article in *Mithavadi* celebrated the achievements of the Thiyyas, quoting Bombay High Court judge Justice Narayan Chandavarkar, who advised social reformers to follow the example of the Thiyyas of North Malabar. "Their social and economic advancement, largely due to English education, enabled them to achieve significant social mobility."[43] The same edition of *Mithavadi* also published a letter from Chamier, the superintendent of the central jail in Kannur, emphasizing that the British education system had made the Thiyyas eligible for government services, significantly improving their social standing.[44]

The Lord Pentland Report, a key document in reconstructing the history of the Thiyyas, provides important administrative details. It recorded that the overall literacy rate of the Thiyya community was 17.5 percent, with English literacy at only 0.9 percent among males.[45] According to the 1921 census, the total Thiyya population was 330,080, with 69,394 literate individuals, of whom 4,850 were literate in English. This report underscores the pivotal role of English education in the Thiyyas' social ascent and their growing influence in colonial Malabar.[46]

Despite the significant changes taking place in the education sector, some modern institutions like Zamorin's College in Kozhikode, which were managed by

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42 Karayi Bappu and Karayikuti were successful businessmen with strong connections to European traders. Karayi Bappu, the father of Revathiamma, and Karayikuti, her maternal uncle, played key roles in establishing and maintaining these relationships. Karayi Bappu, in particular, was known for his direct trade dealings with Europeans and operated his own factory in Thalassery (For details see, C.K. Revathiamma, *op.cit.,* p. 11).

43 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. I, No. 4, March, 1917, p. 6.

44 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. II, No.5, April, 1913, pp. 40-41.

45 Eighteenth Tour Report of Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, Vol. I, October 14th to 25th 1917, p. 5.

46 J.T. Martin, Census of India 1921, Vol. I, Part II – Imperial Tables, Culcutta,1923, p. 34.

indigenous authorities, still refused admission to Thiyya students.[47] Another notable incident occurred when Dr. Krishnan was appointed as a doctor in Palakkad's Agraharam. The Municipal Council of Palakkad, dominated by upper-caste members, opposed his appointment, insisting that Dr. Krishnan should not hold the position. However, the British government rejected their arguments, stating, "We consider only the merits of the person, and their caste or other factors do not influence our decisions."[48]

The Basel Missionaries played a pivotal role in advancing education for the lower caste communities. Before the emergence of the social reform movement in Kerala, they acted as early social reformers, and their efforts can be seen as a precursor to the broader reform movement in the region. The following table shows the major Basel Mission stations in Malabar.[49]

Major BEM station in Malabar

Sl.No.	Stations	Founding year	Missionaries	Indian agents	Number of out stations
1	Kannur	1841	11	35	4
2	Thalassery	1839	8	67	3
3	Chombala	1849	3	51	6
4	Kozhikode	1842	23	133	5
5	Kodakkal	1857	7	57	7
6	Palakkad	1858	8	47	6
7	Vaniyamkulam	1886	2	27	4
8	Manjeri	1908	2	3	2

The Basel Missionaries were strongly committed to eradicating social evils such as slavery, untouchability, and oppressive customs. They worked diligently to provide educational opportunities to all people, regardless of caste or creed. Although

47 Eighteenth Tour Report of Lord Pentland, *op. cit*., p. 75.

48 B. Seluraj, *Kozhikodinte Paithrukam* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2011, p. 62.

49 Basel German Evangelical Mission Reports (Appendix 3), Managalore, 1912. (n.p).

their primary objective was proselytization, they did not use coercive methods. Instead, they initiated projects like providing elementary education, especially to the lower castes. They also focused on improving the status of women. Their efforts helped dismantle superstitions, fostered changes in attitudes, and instilled self-confidence and a sense of identity among the people.[50]

The Thiyya and Billava castes were prominent among the Basel Mission converts.[51] With the support of the missionaries, the Thiyyas of Malabar led a social revolution, gaining a sense of independence and freeing themselves from caste-based restrictions.[52] This social mobility was made possible by the constant support and contributions of the Basel Missionaries, which significantly improved the social status of the Thiyya community. The following table shows the caste background of the Basel Mission in the Malabar region in the nineteenth century.[53]

Caste Background of Basel Mission

Caste	Number	Percentage
Nair	22	4.9
Chetti	13	2.9
Thiyya	206	45.5
Carpenter	11	2.4
Goldsmith	8	1.8
Vettuvan	1	-
Cheruman	128	28.4
Vannan	33	7.3
Kaniyan	15	3.3
Unspecified	16	3.5
Total	453	100.00

50 P.J. Cheriyan, *Perspectives of Kerala History The second millennium* (ed.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 461.

51 Jaiprakash Raghaviah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara, 1834-1914*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 59.

52 *Ibid.,* p. 59.

53 Rudolf Fischer, *the Basel Mission Industries, 1850-1913*, Quoted in Jaiprakash Raghaviah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara, 1834-1914, op.cit*., p. 22.

By the first half of the twentieth century, a significant number of Thiyyas had converted to Christianity. During the colonial period, a substantial portion of the converts to Christianity came from the Thiyya community. Among the total converts, 45.5% were from the Thiyya caste, followed by 24% from the Cheruma caste, while Nairs accounted for only 4.6% and Chettis for 2.9%.[54] However, the educational services provided by the mission were widely accepted by local communities, particularly the Nairs, Thiyyas, and Muslims. These groups, especially the Nairs and Thiyyas, recognized the value of modern education offered by the mission schools as a means for economic and social advancement.[55] English and modern education became essential qualifications for employment during the colonial period, and it also helped to some extent in dispelling superstitions and fostering a sense of self-respect and equality among the people of Malabar.[56]

The Basel Mission played a pioneering role in modernizing Malabar society. Those who converted to Christianity gained freedom from caste restrictions and were able to access public spaces and educational institutions. This newfound freedom attracted more low caste individuals to Christianity. For many years, Malabar and the Nilgiri region were considered among the most fertile grounds for missionary work in India.[57] Missionary reports indicate that the social status of the Thiyya community was elevated through the influence of their efforts. If the missionaries had not opened schools and admitted students from all castes, the social and material progress of the Thiyya community would have been significantly delayed.[58]

In 1852, the Madras government appointed Dr. Hermann Gundert as the first school inspector for Malabar and South Canara. Gundert's primary goal was to

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54 Jayaprakash Raghaviah, *op.cit*., p. 22.

55 *Report of the German Evangelical Mission 1857*, Mangalore, 1858, p. 73.

56 P.J. Cherian, *op. cit.,* p. 461.

57 The Report of the Basel German Evangelical Mission 1906, Mangalore, 1907, p. 76.

58 The Report of the German Evangelical mission in the southern Maharashtra, Canara and Malabar Provinces, Madras, 1842, p. 6.

establish a solid foundation for literacy in Malabar.[59] He taught subjects such as science, history, geography, Malayalam, English, and the Bible. Meanwhile, his wife, Julie Gundert, managed two female schools in Thalassery. One was a day school attended by 20 girls, mostly of Portuguese descent, where they were taught English and Malayalam, arithmetic, history, geography, the Gospel, and needlework. The other was a boarding school with 16 girls, all dedicated to the mission, where they were educated in reading, writing, math, and various skills such as lace-making.[60]

In the nineteenth century, the Basel Evangelical Missionary Preparatory (BEMP) School in Thalassery was an important educational institution. Dr. Hermann Gundert served as a teacher there, and another notable figure was Muller, the head of the mission. In 1871, the school was elevated to high school status, and Panagadan Raman, from the Thiyya community, was appointed as its headmaster, serving for an extended period.[61] This appointment marked a significant milestone in the educational advancement of the Thiyya community under colonial rule. The school authorities also encouraged extracurricular activities, further supporting holistic development.

An overview of missionary work in the nineteenth century reveals the growth of modern schools across Malabar. Mission schools were established in Kasaragod, Taliparamba, Melparamba, Ottappalam, Vaniyamkulam, Vadakara, Koyilandy, Koothuparamba, Kannur, Payyanur, Palakkad, Vadakancheri, Kozhikode, and Thalassery. By 1900, around 48 Basel Mission schools were operating in different parts of Malabar. Many of these schools continue to serve as important educational centers to this day.[62]

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59 K.K.N. Kurup, 'Adhunikathayude Pratheekam: Dr. Herman Gundert' in *Malayala Manorama newspaper, Kannur Edition, Inauguration Supplement*, Kannur, 17 December, 1994. (n.p).

60 The Report of The German Mission in The Southern Maratha, Canara and Malabar Provinces 1839, Madras, 1841, p. 7.

61 Thalassery Arivukal (Mal.), Sanjayan Samskarika Samiti Souvenir, Thalassery, 1999, p. 136.

62 *Ibid*.

Another significant development in modern education was the initiative of Edward Brennen, Master Attendant at the Thalassery port. Brennen donated Rs. 12,000 to establish a free school for all individuals, regardless of religion, caste, or creed. The school was opened in Thalassery in 1862 and, after several changes, was taken over by the Basel Mission in 1866 and renamed BEM Brennen School. The mission relinquished control in 1871, and from 1872 it became known as Brennen District School. In 1891, the school was affiliated with the University of Madras as a second-grade college. The government took over the institution in June 1919, and in 1925, a secondary training school for teachers was merged with the college. In 1947, Brennen College was upgraded to a first-grade college, producing many renowned scholars from various communities in North Kerala. The college played a vital role in the higher education of the Thiyya community, with notable alumni such as Murkoth Kumaran.

The Malabar Christian College in Kozhikode was another major educational contribution of the Basel Mission. It evolved from a primary school established by the mission in Kallayi in 1848 and later moved to Kozhikode to attract more students. The school was upgraded to a middle school in 1872 and a high school in 1879, eventually becoming a second-grade college in 1907. However, with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Basel missionaries were forced to leave India, and local Christians took over the college. In 1919, Madras Christian College assumed responsibility for the institution, which was then renamed Malabar Christian College.

The Basel Mission also prioritized female education by establishing boarding schools and day schools for girls. The first girls' school under the Basel Mission was opened in 1839 at Nettur, near Thalassery.[63] In 1840, Julie Gundert, wife of Dr. Hermann Gundert, opened an English and Malayalam day school for girls in Thalassery. In 1852, a girls' school was started in Kozhikode, and another in Vadakara

[63] Jaiprakash Raghavaiah, *Faith and Industrial Reformation: Basel mission in Malabar and South Canara*, New Delhi, 2018, p. 97.

in 1886. In the Kasaragod region, the mission opened nine schools for girls, where they were taught reading, writing, and skills such as sewing and knitting. Through these initiatives, many girls, especially from the Thiyya community, received an education, defying the rigid social customs of the time. The Thiyyas became a prominent group in embracing the educational opportunities offered by both the mission and the colonial government.

Under British colonial rule, qualifications and abilities were prioritized for appointments to administrative positions. Many Thiyyas who attained English education were employed in well-paid professions such as advocates, doctors, journalists, teachers, and clerks.[64] They were among the first in Malabar to secure jobs in the British government. Churayi Kanaran, a member of the Thiyya community, became the first deputy collector in Malabar. Uppot Kannan, Poovadan Raman, and Potheri Kunhambu were pioneers in the legal field, becoming some of the earliest Thiyya advocates. The Thiyyas were also the first Malayalis to pass the Bachelor of Law (B.L.) examination. E.K. Krishnan was the first Thiyya to earn a B.L. degree and was later honored with the title of Diwan Bahadur.

The contributions of these English-educated Thiyyas played a key role in shaping the intellectual landscape of the community and fostering its social and economic advancement.

P. Palpu, T.K. Madhavan, Kumaran Asan, and others played significant roles in advancing the Ezhava or Thiya community in Travancore, Kerala. Similarly, in Malabar, several individuals also made great sacrifices for the upliftment of the Thiyya community. These unsung heroes fought tirelessly against caste-based discrimination and social inequalities, striving to bring about reform and create better opportunities for the Thiyyas. Their efforts, much like those in Travancore, were

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64 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. II, No. I, September, 1915. (n.p).

crucial in raising awareness, promoting education, and securing equal rights for the community in Malabar.

P. PALPU

P. Palpu, a prominent leader of the Ezhava community, was born on November 2, 1863. He enrolled at His Highness (H.H.) The Maharaja's College in Trivandrum. During his time at the college, Palpu applied for admission to the Medical College in Trivandrum and passed the entrance examination. However, due to his community background, he was denied admission.[65] Undeterred, Palpu pursued his medical education at Madras Medical College, where he eventually became a doctor.

When he sought employment in Kerala, the Travancore Public Service Commission denied him an appointment, citing caste discrimination. Deeply disheartened by the Travancore Government's decision, Palpu returned to Madras and in 1890, joined the government service there. At the time, many highly qualified individuals from the Ezhava community faced similar discrimination in admissions and employment in Travancore due to their caste.

Palpu, seeking justice, garnered the support of Barrister G.P. Pillai and another leader, Shankara Menon. Together, they drafted a petition known as the "Ezhava Memorial" and the "Malayali Memorial," which they presented to the Travancore government on January 11, 1891. Despite the widespread publicity these petitions received in Travancore newspapers, the government did not respond.[66]

Determined to advance the cause, Palpu met with the Dewan of Travancore, who assured him that steps would be taken to support the backward classes. Yet, no concrete actions followed. In response, Palpu sent Barrister G.P. Pillai to England to present the grievances of the Ezhava community before the British Parliament. On July 17, 1897, the issue was raised in Parliament by Herbert Roberts. However, the

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65 M.K. Sanu, *Dr. P.Palpu: Dharma Bodhathil Jeevicha Karmayogi* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2007, p. 14.

66 *Ibid.*

British government ultimately decided not to interfere in Travancore's internal caste system.

After this setback, Palpu submitted a petition to Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, titled "The Treatment of Thiyyas in Travancore." During Lord Curzon's visit to Travancore in 1900, he advised the Travancore government to adopt a more conciliatory policy toward the Ezhavas.[67] Despite these efforts, Palpu's attempts at reform seemed fruitless.

In his search for a solution, Palpu met with Swami Vivekananda, expressing his desire to become one of the swami's disciples. Vivekananda, however, directed him to another great spiritual leader in Kerala, Narayana Guru, who lived in Aruvipuram.[68] Following Vivekananda's advice, Palpu sought guidance from Narayana Guru, marking a new chapter in his efforts for social reform.

T.K. MADHAVAN

The Ezhava community experienced a significant revival under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan, a dedicated disciple of Sree Narayana Guru. Born on September 2, 1885, in Mavelikkara, Madhavan showed an early desire to work for the betterment of society. He was deeply moved by the plight of the lower caste communities and committed himself to improving their conditions. Forming a close relationship with Sree Narayana Guru, Madhavan played a key role in establishing the Ezhava Associations in Karthikapally and Mavelikkara in 1902.[69]

Madhavan was greatly influenced by the teachings of Francis Bacon, Swami Vivekananda, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He became an active participant in the fight against untouchability and was instrumental in organizing the Temple Entry

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67 Velayudhan Panikkassery, *Dr. Palpu* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1970, p. 222.

68 C.R. Mitra, *Sree Narayana Guru and Social Revolution: A Complete Biography*, Chertalai, 1979, p. 59.

69 M.K. Sanu, *Narayana Guru Swami* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1976, pp. 398-399.

Movement, notably participating in the Vaikom Satyagraha.[70] As a gifted orator, he played a pivotal role in a public meeting in Kottayam in 1918, which focused on civil equality.[71] He also submitted a joint petition on behalf of the Ezhavas, Muslims, and Christians, urging the government to provide equal rights for the lower castes.

Due to his efforts, the Revenue and Temple departments were separated, and the government began appointing lower caste individuals to the Revenue Department.

In 1915, Madhavan founded the journal *Deshabhimani*, through which he promoted progressive ideas and advocated for Ezhava representation in the Sree Mulam Assembly of Travancore. His activism extended to the right of the Ezhavas to use public roads, and in 1918, his influence led to his appointment to the Sree Mulam Assembly. In 1921, Madhavan met Mahatma Gandhi in Tirunelveli, which greatly enhanced the status of the Ezhava community. At the time, Ezhavas were primarily engaged in weaving and toddy tapping. Madhavan encouraged the community to abandon toddy tapping and focus on weaving, aligning with Gandhi's call for the production of Swadeshi cloth.

Through his forward-thinking initiatives, Madhavan facilitated improvements in the Ezhava community's standard of living, notably by promoting the production of Swadeshi textiles. In 1924, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee, during a meeting in Ernakulam, formed a committee for the abolition of untouchability, with Madhavan playing an active role. He called on the Ezhavas to join the Congress in this fight for equality. The committee held a public meeting in Kollam, advocating for equal rights for the Ezhava community and other lower castes.[72]

Madhavan’s persistent efforts culminated in the historic Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 by the Travancore government, which granted the Ezhavas and

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70 G. Krishnan Nadar, *Historiography and History of Kerala*, Kottayam, 2001, p. 282.

71 C.N. Somarajan, S. Sivadasan, *Civic Rights Movement in Travancore*, Kollam, 1995, p. 65.

72 A.K. Pillai, *Congressum Keralavum* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1983, p. 99.

other lower castes equal rights to enter temples. This marked a significant victory for the social reform movement in Kerala.

KUMARAN ASAN

Kumaran Asan was a revolutionary poet of Kerala, using poetry as a tool to raise awareness within the Ezhava community. Through his literary works, he sparked a social awakening in the region.[73] Asan emerged during the Indian Renaissance, a period marked by the rise of nationalist movements and community reform initiatives. This era also saw the spread of modern education and printing technology, the codification of grammar, the translation of classical texts, the development of prose, and the publication of literary journals. These changes contributed to the formation of a public sphere that challenged various forms of power and the hierarchies of caste and class.

Asan's poetry reflected his unwavering commitment to the ideal of freedom at every level, embodying the authentic voice of India's marginalized and oppressed communities. His work fused ethics and aesthetics, making his poetry a reflection of society's struggles, particularly those of the downtrodden. [74]His role as a poet became synonymous with the voice of the oppressed, expressing their aspirations for justice and equality.

In 1905, Asan was nominated to the second session of the Sree Mulam Popular Assembly, becoming the first Ezhava representative in this assembly. This was a historic moment for the Ezhava community. In the assembly, Asan raised concerns about the injustices faced by the Ezhavas and demanded education, employment, and representation for them. He advocated for the provision of education and scholarships for students from all backward castes, with particular emphasis on the Ezhavas. Asan

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73 T.K. Ravindran, *Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972, p. 9.

74 *Proceedings of the Travancore Sree Mulam Popular Assembly,* Vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1934, p. 73.

also expressed his desire to establish Sanskrit and Ayurvedic colleges for the Ezhavas, underscoring his commitment to the community's welfare.

Asan's efforts in the assembly drew significant attention from the Ezhava community in Travancore. Through his speeches and literary works, he carried forward the momentum of the social reform movement initiated by Dr. Palpu. His contributions were widely recognized, and in 1922, the University of Madras honored him with the title "Mahakavi", meaning "Great Poet."[75]

Beyond his contributions in the assembly, Asan's literary achievements earned him great reverence in Kerala's cultural landscape. His poetry deeply impacted the people of Kerala, and it is said that no poet has stirred the hearts of Keralites as much as Asan. In January 1922, the Prince of Wales visited Madras and honored Asan with a gold bracelet and silk shawl in recognition of his literary contributions.

Asan's poems, such as *Nalini, Leela*, and *Thoughts of a Thiyya Boy*, are considered monumental in the realm of Malayalam literature, portraying the depth of human conscience and psychology. Asan later dedicated his life to the welfare of the Ezhava community through the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDPY), where he served for nearly sixteen years. He also launched the Ezhava gazette, *Vivekodayam*, to promote the ideals of Narayana Guru and spread awareness about the activities of SNDP.

Potheri Kunhambu

He was the first radical intellectual to initiate charity, philanthropy, and social mobilization through his writings. He received his early education from his father at Onakkan's *Ezhuthupalli* and later pursued English studies in Kannur. However, due to financial difficulties, he had to leave his education after completing his matriculation and join government service as a postmaster. Despite these challenges,

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[75] M. J. Koshy, *Last Days of Monarchy in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1973, p. 267.

he later studied law and became a *vakil* (lawyer). In addition to being an advocate, he also demonstrated skills in banking, publishing, and journalism, making him a distinguished colonial lawyer and social reformer.

Kunhambu's eldest son from his first marriage, Kunhikannan, managed the Malabar Bank and was a devout follower of Sree Narayana Guru. His daughter, Dr. Paruamma, pursued higher education in the USA and became the first female gynecologist in Malabar, while her husband, Dr. Millet, was a European. His second daughter, Janaki, was also well-educated.[76] From his third marriage, Kunhambu had a son, Potheri Madhavan, who became a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly.[77] Another son, Uthaman, was an agricultural scientist, and his youngest son, Krishnan, became a school teacher.

Potheri Kunhambu was a prolific writer, known for significant works such as *Saraswathivijayam, Thiyyar, Ramakrishna Sambadham, Ramayana Sarasodhana, Mythri, and Bhagavad Geethopadesham*.[78] An avid reader, he critically assessed a wide range of topics and published scholarly essays in newspapers to raise awareness of the pressing social issues of his time.

His monograph, *Thiyyar*, showcased his dedication to the welfare of his community, the Thiyyas. In this work, Kunhambu provided a detailed plan for the community's upliftment,[79] pointing out that only five percent of Thiyyas were educated or economically stable, while the majority remained in poverty.[80] He argued that the Western system of education was the key to social advancement for the community. His novel, *Saraswathivijayam,* emphasized how English education

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76 *Gurudevan,* Magazine, Volume.32, No.4, March, 2005. (n.p).

77 Dilip. M. Menon, 'Caste and Colonial Modernity Reading Saraswathivijayam', *Studies in History*, Vol. 13, Issue.2, 1997, New Delhi, p. 299.

78 *Yoganatham,* Magazine, Vol. X, No.6, July, 1976. (n.p).

79 Uloor S Prameswara Aiyer, *Kerala Sahithya Charithram* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1975, p. 302.

80 *Gurudevan*, Magazine, Volume. 44, No. 7, March, 2009. (n.p).

helped the lower castes escape the oppression of the caste system. In the preface of this novel, Kunhambu famously wrote, "Education is the greatest wealth to attain progress."

Kunhambu strongly advocated for embracing colonial modernity as a means to break free from traditional caste bondage.[81] He encouraged the masses to recognize this social reality and fight for a caste-free society. [82]Through his efforts, he successfully persuaded many lower-caste members, including the Cherumas, of the importance of modern education, and he even established schools to further this cause.

P.C. Govindan

He was a prominent Thiyya from Malabar, known as the first Malayali to pursue higher education in England. He also became the first political agent from the Thiyya community in Malabar.[83] Another notable Thiyya, C. Krishnan, served as a judge in the Madras High Court. Educated Thiyyas of the colonial period elevated their social status by holding influential positions, such as serving as directors of banks in colonial towns.[84] O. Krishnan, B.A., B.L., was the director of Malabar Bank in Kannur, while P. Shankunny, another distinguished Thiyya, served as the principal of Victoria College.

Pangadan Raman was the first Thiyya to become the headmaster of a high school, and K. Raman from the same community went on to become the first Malayali Postmaster General. Educational institutions like Brennan College, Malabar Christian College, and Basel Mission Schools produced many Thiyya scholars. The affluent Thiyyas of the time took full advantage of modern educational opportunities, leading to a significant number of Thiyya students achieving matriculation in Malabar.[85]

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81 Dilip. M. Menon, *op.cit.,* p.300.

82 M. Sahadevan, From *Brahmanism to Liberalism,* Palakkad.2008, p. 163.

83 C. Kesavan, *Jeevitha Samaram* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2021, pp. 267-268.

84 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. I, No.5, Auguste, 1915. (n.p).

85 K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*: *Studies in Social and Agrarian Relations,* Delhi, 1988, pp. 84-85.

Among them, Palleri Kannankutty stood out as the first Thiyya student to secure the top rank in the matriculation examination.

Mithavadi C. Krishnan

He was a renowned intellectual and educationalist who strongly believed in the transformative power of education for the upliftment of the marginalized classes. He was convinced that the social backwardness of the Thiyya community could be eradicated through education. To put this vision into practice, he established the Balaprobodhini Sanskrit Patasala in Kozhikode, which later evolved into a prominent center of learning.[86]

Krishnan also focused on the educational and social development of the oppressed classes by founding the SNDP Club in Kozhikode. This club was inaugurated by Rao Bahadur G.T. Varghese, the District Collector, on October 18, 1912.[87] It provided its members with access to newspapers, journals, indoor games, musical entertainment, and accommodation for visitors. Krishnan personally supported impoverished boys by offering them lodging at Lakshmivilasam and mentoring them. His efforts made significant contributions to the education and empowerment of the underprivileged.

Murkoth Kumaran

He was an esteemed intellectual, social reformer, and journalist from the Thiyya community in Malabar. After completing his FA course from Madras University, he became the first Thiyya, and likely the only one, to be appointed as the headmaster of St. Joseph's Anglo-Indian Boys School in Kozhikode. He began his career as a teacher at the same school in 1907, and his dedication and abilities were quickly recognized, leading to his promotion to headmaster. At a time when European

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86 K. Sabukuttan, *C. Krishnan and Social Change in Kerala*, Kottayam, 2002, p. 29.

87 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. I, No. 4, February, 1915, p. 22.

schools rarely appointed Indian teachers, Kumaran's exceptional command of English earned him the rare opportunity to teach in a European school.[88]

Kumaran was a strong advocate for women's education, particularly at a time when girls were typically not allowed to pursue studies beyond elementary school. From 1902 to 1906, he worked at St. Joseph's Convent School in Kozhikode, during which he organized a meeting to raise awareness about the importance of educating girls. This meeting inspired many parents to send their daughters for higher education. Under his guidance, three women from lower castes achieved significant academic success and attained prominent positions in society.[89]

From 1913 to 1923, Kumaran served as the headmaster of the BEM School in Nettur. He retired from teaching in 1930, after his tenure at St. Joseph's Boys School in Thalassery. Following his retirement, he dedicated 18 years to public service, working as a Municipal Councilor in Thalassery and serving as a taluk member of Kottayam. His contributions to education and social reform left a lasting impact on his community.

Muliyil Krishnan

He was a prominent English-educated figure from the Thiyya community of North Malabar, born in 1848 into the renowned Muliyil Tharavad, a family known for its expertise in *vishavaidhyachikilsa* (treatment of poisons, especially snake bites). Several members of the family were well-educated, and Muliyil Tharavad had its own schools. His father, Pokkan Gurukkal, was a teacher, and the family maintained their own *Ezhuthupallis*. Krishnan was the fifth son of Pokkan Gurukkal and Meenakshi. His brother Paithal was also a teacher, and his sister Chirutha was married to Oyitti Raman, a tahsildar. Another brother, Muliyil Raman, completed his English education and entered the revenue service, later working as a translator in the Huzur Kacheri.

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88 Murkoth Kunhappa, *Murkoth Kumaran* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1975, p. 67.

89 *Ibid.,* p. 67.

The Muliyil family was recognized as one of the most educated Thiyya families in North Malabar.

In 1868, Muliyil Krishnan passed the civil service examination. After completing his matriculation, he began his career as a headmaster at a mission school in Thalassery.[90] He later passed the FA examination and joined Madras Presidency College as a Malayalam teacher in 1878. In 1894, Krishnan completed his BL degree and worked as a Malayalam translator in the Madras government service. He was proficient in English, Malayalam, and Sanskrit. K.P. Kesava Menon, the founder of the Mathrubhumi newspaper, was one of Krishnan's students. Krishnan's notable works include *Chandra Hasacharithram*, *Ramacharitam*, *Nalakadha*, *Savithricharitram*, and *Shabthakosham*. He co-authored *Balavyakaranam* with Seshagri Prabhu, a textbook used in the Madras Educational Department until 1940.

Krishnan held several esteemed positions in academia, serving as the Chairman of the Board of Studies at the University of Madras and as a member of the Dravidian Board of Studies. He also chaired the government textbook committee.[91] In 1901, he was appointed a fellow of Madras University, and four years later, he became an honorary fellow. In 1913, the Madras government awarded him the position of Honorary Presidency Magistrate. Notably, Krishnan was the first Malayali to construct a two-storey house in Madras, where Narayana Guru once stayed during a visit.[92] He also served as a director of the SNDP yogam.

Muliyil Krishnan passed away in 1923, leaving behind a legacy of educational and social contributions, particularly his efforts to provide education and shelter for poor students.

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90 K. M. Nair, *Muliyil Krishnan* (Mal.), Calicut, 1932, p. 24.

91 *Ibid.,* pp. 23-24.

92 Murkoth Kumaran, *Narayanaguruswamikalude Jeevacharitam* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1997, p. 225.

Muliyil Ramotti Gurukkal,

He was a respected teacher from the Muliyil Tharavad, and the uncle of Muliyil Krishnan. Renowned for his knowledge of Sanskrit and Malayalam, he maintained close ties with the Basel missionaries, to whom he taught the Malayalam language. In 1854, Ramotti Gurukkal converted to Christianity and adopted the name Abraham Muliyil. His son, Joseph Muliyil, went on to write the novel *Sukumari*, which was closely associated with Herman Gundert. The novel's theme revolved around the experiences of Basel missionaries and the impact of English education in Malabar.

The missionaries played a significant role in promoting social transformation among the lower castes, particularly the Thiyyas and Pulayas of Malabar. English education emerged as a key factor in determining social power and status for these marginalized communities.[93]

Churayi Kanaran

He was a distinguished figure from the Thiyya community in Malabar. His father served as a jailor. Following his father's retirement, Kanaran joined the colonial government service at the age of twenty-seven, where he remained until 1832.[94] During his service, he diligently studied Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu.

In addition to his role as a government employee, Kanaran was a committed social reformer who worked tirelessly to uplift his community and assist others in securing government positions. Notably, his support played a crucial role in helping Uppot Kannan, the second Thiyya deputy collector, attain his position.

Kanaran's linguistic prowess caught the attention of Assistant Judge Greenway, who appointed him as a *Gumastah* in his court in 1832.[95] Kanaran later

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93 Joseph Muliyil, *Sukumari* (Mal.) Calicut, 2013, p. 17.

94 *Deepam*, Magazine, Vol. I, No.7, January, 1930, p. 20.

95 *Ibid.*

advanced to the role of first-class deputy collector. His exemplary service was recognized by the British government, which granted him a pension equivalent to his last month's salary.[96]

Kottiyath Ramunni

He was a prominent English-educated intellectual from Kannur. After passing his matriculation examination, he joined the colonial civil service as a clerk in the Munsif court. At the age of twenty, he became a second-grade *vakkil* and was promoted to first-grade *vakkil* within four years. Ramunni was also one of the first councilors of the Thalassery Municipality, serving from 1891 to 1893.[97]

The subsequent generations of the Kottiyath family placed a strong emphasis on education, viewing it as a key to a prosperous future. Ramunni's son, Kottiyath Krishnan, was a distinguished high court advocate, and other family members continued to hold significant positions within the British bureaucracy.

Uppot Kannan

Born in 1825 in Uppot Tharavad, Kannan received his primary and Sanskrit education under the guidance of Poovadan Ambu Gurunathan. In 1850, with the assistance of Churayi Kanaran, he secured a position as a copywriter in the Kozhikode court, earning a salary of ten rupees.[98] Over time, Kannan was promoted through various roles, including police amin, revenue munshi, head police munshi, salt inspector, and sirasthar.[99] He emerged as a prominent intellectual within the Thiyya community.

In 1870, Kannan achieved the significant milestone of being appointed as a deputy collector, becoming the second person from his community to reach such a

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96 *Mathurbhumi Newspaper*, supplement, *Kazhcha*, 26 March, 2019, (n.p).

97 *Mithavadi*, Magazine, Vol. 1. No.1, January,1921. (n.p).

98 M.K. Sanu, *op.cit.,* p. 375.

99 *Yoganatham,* Magazine, Vol. XI, No.6, July, 1988. (n.p).

high rank in the colonial administration. He was well-versed in Malayalam and made substantial contributions to literature and Ayurveda. Notably, he translated several Sanskrit texts into Malayalam, including the *Ashtangahridayam*.[100] The first part was published as *Sarasangraham* in 1863, and the second part, titled *Bhaskaram*, was released in 1874.

Kannan's notable work in Ayurveda included the creation of a reference book for practitioners, named *Yagamritham,* aimed at making Ayurvedic knowledge accessible to a broader audience.[101] He also maintained a medicinal plantation near his home, which attracted several foreign visitors seeking his expertise. Additionally, he prepared a Malayalam reference for the Indian Penal Code, which was used as a reference text in various British government departments. [102]

His contributions to both traditional Ayurveda and British colonial administration reflect the dual aspects of his life: one rooted in traditional practices and the other aligned with colonial governance.

Onden Sankaran

He was a distinguished English-educated Thiyya intellectual from North Malabar. During a period when the British predominantly appointed Englishmen to judicial and administrative positions, he rose to become a munsiff magistrate. His home, named "Silver Oaks," reflected his deep influence from English culture and society. The house featured a spacious porch where Onden Sankaran, known locally as Munsif, would meet with the public and address their grievances.[103]

Onden Sankaran’s family also achieved notable success. His eldest son, O.K. Gopalakrishnan, worked as an official in an English tea plantation in Wayanad. His

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100 *Kalakaumudi,* Weekly, Vol.1, No. 1, 17 Auguste, 1975. (n.p).

101 This is a highly useful work that explained how to cure several illnesses (For details see, C. Kesavan, *op.cit.,* p. 267).

102 *Mithavadi*, Magazine, Vol. II, No.5, October, 1921. (n.p).

103 *Mithavadi,* Magazine*,* Vol. IV, No. 3, June, 1916. (n.p).

second son, O.K. Narayanan, served as an officer in the Royal Air Force. The third son, O.K. Karunakaran, held the position of ADC (Aide-de-Camp) to the Governor of Madras and the Rajah of Bhavangar. The fourth son, O.K. Ramunni, was an officer in the British Army, and O.K. Kesavan, a highly educated medical practitioner, earned a high degree in Medicine. The youngest daughter, also well-educated, married early. The family's connections with the English and their education played a significant role in their economic prosperity and elevated social status.

Sankunni of Cheddiyath Tharavad

In North Malabar lived Sankunni, a notable Thiyya intellectual. His father, Puthanpurayil Kunhiraman, served as a clerk in a European company. Sankunni completed his education at BEMP School, Thalassery, and Madras Christian College. During his time at BEMP School, his uncle, Chediyath Kunhiraman, was the principal.

Sankunni began his official career as a clerk at the Kozhikode Hajur Office. He later worked as a headmaster at Illikunnu School before transferring to Malabar Christian College. He achieved a significant milestone by becoming the first Indian principal at Victoria College, Palakkad, a distinguished position for someone from a lower caste within the education sector.

Principal Sankunni also made notable contributions to literature by translating Kumaran Asan's *Chintavishtayaya Sita* and Sree Narayana Guru's *Daivadasakam* into English.[104]

Women's Education in Malabar

The Basel Mission and convent schools played a pivotal role in advancing the education of women from lower caste communities, particularly the Thiyyas of Malabar. The Basel Evangelical Mission's first girls' school was established by Julie

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104 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. IV, No.7, Auguste, 1916. (n.p)

Gundert in 1839 in Thalassery. Subsequently, similar schools were set up in various locations, including Kannur, Chombala, Palakkad, Kozhikode, Manjeri, Kodakkal, and Vaniyamkulam.

These schools provided education in subjects such as English, History, Geography, Knitting, Sewing, and Embroidery, alongside religious instruction. Joseph Mooliyil's novel *Sukumari* offers a detailed account of the educational system in the missionary school at Chirakkal, Kannur.[105] To attract girls, the missionaries appointed female teachers and created a welcoming environment for students.[106]

Thiyya women, who faced no caste restrictions on attending school, were among those who benefited significantly from these educational opportunities. Many Thiyya women received their education at Basel Evangelical Mission (BEM) schools, and several emerged as prominent figures in public life during the colonial period. Notable examples include Ayyathan Janaki and Murkoth Madhavy, who earned medical degrees in the nineteenth century. Dr. Paaru, daughter of Potheri Kunhambu, was the first female doctor in Malabar.

E.K. Janaki

She was a distinguished Thiyya woman born in 1897 at Edavalath Thiyya Tharavad in Thalassery. The daughter of Rao Bahadur E.K. Krishnan, she received her early education at Sacred Heart School in Thalassery. She later pursued a bachelor's degree in Botany from Presidency College, Madras, and completed her honors degree at Women's Christian College, Madras, in 1925.

Following her graduation, E.K. Janaki began her career as a teacher at Madras Women's Christian College. In 1928, she furthered her studies at the University of Michigan, where she earned a doctorate in 1931. Her significant contributions to

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105 Joseph Mooliyil, *op.cit.,* p.57.

106 P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 2019, p. 21.

botanical research led to her appointment as the Director of the Botanical Survey of India.[107]

In recognition of her exceptional work, she was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government in 1977. E.K. Janaki's achievements exemplify how English education during the colonial period enabled Thiyya women to attain prominent positions in public service and significantly contributed to the modernization of the Thiyya community.

Karayi Damayanthi

Born in 1865 in the Karayi family of Thalassery, Damayanthi was a pioneering figure in advancing women's education and social reform. In the 1920s, she founded a *Mahila Samajam* (Ladies' Club) aimed at empowering women through various educational and practical initiatives. The club offered training in skills such as cutting and tailoring, and organized lectures by doctors on child-rearing.[108]

Damayanthi also established a library and arranged for books to be distributed to women in their homes, further promoting literacy and education.[109] An ardent advocate for women's education, she used her platform in the *Mithavadi* to advocate for government action to establish schools for women's education in Malabar. Her efforts were instrumental in advancing the cause of women's education and social reform in the region.[110]

C.K. Revathiamma

Revathiamma, the author of the celebrated work *Sahasrapoornima*, was a prominent women's activist in Malabar. Like her contemporary, Karayi Damayanthi,

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107 Premanand Champad, *E. K Janaki Ammal* (Mal.), Kannur, 2018, p. 28.

108 V.Vasansthi, *Women in Public Life in Malabar (1900-1957)*, Kozhikode, 2013, p. 166.

109 Damyanthi's father Karayi Bappu was a wealthy merchant in Thalassery. He had trade relations with the English company and had direct trade with *Bilathi* (London) in the nineteenth century. (For details see, C.K. Revathiamma, *op.cit.,* p. 3).

110 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. II, No.5, Auguste, 1914. (n.p).

Revathiamma was dedicated to the educational and social advancement of Thiyya women in the Thalassery and Mahe regions. She founded a *Mahila Samajam* (Ladies' Club) in Mahe, which aimed to support and uplift women in the community.

To fund the activities of the club, Revathiamma organized a fundraising event featuring a play performed by girls. Despite facing strong opposition from orthodox Thiyyas who believed that public performances by girls would harm their prospects of marriage, and even resistance from her husband,[111] a police officer under the French administration in Mahe, she persevered. With the support of Murkoth Kumaran, who wrote an appropriate play for the event, Revathiamma successfully conducted the program.

In addition to her activism, Revathiamma wrote a novel, *Randu Sahodarimar*, which, despite initial disapproval from her husband, eventually contributed financially to the family and garnered support for her efforts.[112] Her most significant work, *Sahasrapoornima,* provides a detailed portrayal of the social, economic, and cultural life of the Thiyyas in North Malabar. This seminal work highlights the challenges faced by Thiyya women and underscores Revathiamma's contributions to their empowerment and progress.

Ayyathan Janaki

She was born into a prominent Ayyathan Thiyya family in Thalassery in 1881. She received her early education from missionary schools in Thalassery and Kozhikode before pursuing medical studies at Madras Medical College. There, she earned a Licentiate in Medical Practice (LMP) degree. She began her career in the government medical department in 1907, serving initially in Chengalpattu before joining the Leprosy Hospital in Kozhikode, where she worked for several years.

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111 *Ibid.*

112 *Ibid.*

In addition to her medical career, Ayyathan Janaki, alongside her brother Ayyathan Gopalan, was actively involved in social service efforts aimed at the advancement of the Thiyya community. She played a significant role in the *Sugunavardhini* Movement, which was dedicated to the empowerment of women. These English-educated women became role models for Thiyya women, inspiring them to pursue higher education and secure employment in government and other sectors. The missionary schools run by the Basel Evangelical Mission (BEM) in various towns across Malabar, along with convent schools such as Sacred Heart School in Thalassery and St. Joseph's Anglo-Indian School in Kozhikode, were instrumental in promoting girls' education.

The following table shows some English-educated and job-seeking Thiyyas in nineteenth century Malabar.[113]

Prominent English educated thiyyas in Malabar during 19th century.

Name	Qualification	Profession	Remarks
Uppot Kannan	Completed matriculation, entered the service as a clerk then cleared several departmental tests	First class deputy collector	He was the second deputy collector from Thiyya community
Murkoth Kumaran	FA, BA, teacher education	Teacher	Editor of *Mithavadi*, correspondent of English newspaper *Madras Mail*, editor of Malayalam newspapers *Deepam*, *keraa sanchari*, *Saraswathi, Vidhyalayam* etc.., examiner of Madras University, literary man, social reformer, Municipal Councillor of Thalassery, Taluk Member of Kottayam, Malabar District Educational Council Member

[113] *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. V, No.1,1913, Vol. I, No. 4, 1915, Vol. IV, No.1, 1916, Vol. IV. No.7, 1916, Vol. IV, No.6, 1917, Vol. I, No. 3,1918, Vol. II, No.6, 1919, Vol. I, No.5,1912; K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1970, p.51; Moorkoth Kunhappa, *Moorkoth Kumaran* (Mal.) Kottayam, 1975, p. 32.

Name	Qualification	Profession	Remarks
Churayi kanaran	Completed Matriculation, entered the service as a jailor then cleared several departmental tests	First class deputy collector and Magistrate	He was the first deputy collector from Thiyya community
Rao Bahadur K. Chantan	Completed Matriculation, entered the service as a clerk then cleared several departmental tests	First class deputy collector	He was the Third deputy collector from Thiyya community
C .Krishnan (Popularly called Mithavadi Krishnan)	BA, BL, Lawyer		Editor of *Mithavadi and Kerala Sanchari.* Published articles in several journals social reformer, founder of Calicut Bank, SNDP Club, chairman of the prohibition of Malabar Liquor Board, and member in district board, Malabar Educational Council, Calicut Municipal Council, Member of Madras Legislative assembly
Kottiyath Ramunni	Law Education	First Grade Lawyer	First Thiyya Councillor of Thalassery Municipality, Pathfinder of Jagannatha Temple and Gyanodaya Yogam
Poovadan Ambu	Matriculation, Teacher Education	Teacher	He was the teacher of Uppot Kannan
Koroth Ramunni C.P.	Law Education	First Grade Lawyer and special Magistrate	
Onden Shanakran unsif	Law Education	Munsif	
Gopalan Munsif	Matriculation, entered the service as an assistant at district court	Munsif	True follower of Sree Narayana Guru and he tried to uplift the lower communities of Malabar
Kottayi Kumaran	Matriculation	Head Accountant of Police	Follower of Mithavadi C. Krishnan and Buddhism

Name	Qualification	Profession	Remarks
		Superintendent Department	
Palleri Kannan Kutty	Matriculation Teacher Education	Teacher	He was the first person to pass the Matriculation Examination in Madras state
Dr. O. Govindan	Medical Education	LMP of Royal British Army	
Poovadan Raman	Law Education	Lawyer	Editor of the paper *West Coast Spectator,* First Thiyya man to follow western style of dress and hair cutting
Oyitti Krishnan	Law Education	Lawyer	Four times elected as Chairman of Calicut Municipality
Oyitti Raman	Matriculation	Tahsildar	
P.C Govindan,	Matriculation from London	Government Employee	Though passed MDCM of Edinburgh University could not complete the medical course due to financial crisis. Worked Resident Superintendent at Aden
Rao Bahadur E.K Krishnan	B. A	Sub Judge	
Rao Bahadur E.K. Govindan	B. A	Acting Assistant of Governor General	
Churayi Kunhappa	Law Education	Lawyer	Translator, Vishavaidhyan, Magician. His home became *Pandithasadhass*
Potheri Madhavan MLA, Madras			
Murkoth Ramunni	B.A	Pilot of Royal Air Force	Head of National Defence Academy, Administrator of Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura
Muliyil Krishnan	F.A, B.L, He cleared Civil service in 1868	Teacher Madras Presidency College	*Chandrahasacharitham, Rama Charitham*, *Nalakadha* Translated in to English, Chairman of Board of Studies in Madras University, Member of Dravidian Board

Name	Qualification	Profession	Remarks
			of Studies, Member of School Book and Literary Society and Chairman of Government Text Book Committee
Muliyil Ramotti	Matriculation	Teacher	
Muliyil Achuthan	Matriculation	Clerk in Revenue Department	
Muliyil Narayanan	M.A	Government Employee	
Tatha Kanaran	B.A, Teacher Education	Teacher	Translated several English works to Malayalam
Kottiyath Krishnan	Law Education	*Vakil*	
Potheri Kunhambu	Law Education	*Vakil*	*Saraswathi Vijayam*, *Thiyyar, Ramakrishna Sambadham* etc.., social reformer, founder of Edward Printing Press
Dr. E.K. Janaki Amma	Doctorate	Scientist	First Women Scientist from Thiyya Community
Dr. Ayyathan Janaki.	Medical Education	Physician	
Murkoth Madhavi	Medical Education	Physician	
Krishnan.	B.A, B. L	*Vakil*	Director of Malabar Bank
Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan	Medical Education	Physician	Head, Mental Hospital, Kozhikode
Potheri Madhavan			MLA, Madras
Potheri Uthaman	MSC/MS	Agricultural Scientist	
Potheri Krishnan	Matriculation and Teacher education	Teacher	
Diwan Bahadur Dr. Krishnan	Medical Education	Physician	
Panagadan Raman	Matriculation Teacher Education	Teacher	Head Master of BEM school Thalassery. Later he became *Vakkil*

Name	Qualification	Profession	Remarks
Dr. M.D. Raghavan	Doctorate	Scientist	Director of Indian Institute of Astronomy
Dr. Venu Bappu	Doctorate	Astronomer	Director of Indian Institute of Astronomy
Manayath Damodaran	Doctorate	Biochemist	Worked in University of Madras
Dr. Paaru	Medical Education	Physician	First Lady Gynaecologist
Principal Sankunni,	Teacher Education	Teacher	Principal, Victoria College Palakkad He translated Asan's *Chintavishtayaya Sita* and Sree Narayana Guru's *Daivadasakam* in to English
Puthanpurayil Kun hiraman	Matriculation	Clerk	
Chediyath Kunhira man	Teacher Education	Teacher	Principal BEMP school, Thalassery

Under colonial rule, the main objective of English education was to solidify British control and economic dominance. Despite this, English education inadvertently created a significant opportunity for lower-caste individuals, particularly the Thiyyas of Malabar. Through access to education, they were able to transcend traditional caste restrictions, secure new employment prospects, and improve their social standing. This access to education, though initially designed to serve colonial interests, became a transformative force for social mobility and empowerment within the Thiyya community.

Chapter 3

Role of Print and Mithavadi among Thiyya Community in Malabar

Colonial modernity introduced a new worldview that fundamentally transformed the indigenous way of life, resulting in an ontological shift. Evangelicalism, education, the printing press, the economy, administration, and laws became tools through which socio-cultural reconstruction was implemented. These mechanisms demonstrate how people were trained to understand their identities through the lens of colonial representations, shaping their self-perception to align with colonial constructs.

Prior to colonial rule, the social structure was based on an agrarian economy characterized by garden land cultivation, crafts production, trade, and shifting agriculture, with wetland cultivation as the dominant mode of production. The control of resources, including both labor and its products, defined a hierarchy of tenurial relations. This system interlinked domestic segments of hereditary occupations (*Jathis*) within a historically contingent framework of wealth and power.

During the colonial period, the commodification of land and labor significantly altered the socio-economic organization of society, impacting social institutions and values. The rise of a market economy disrupted traditional family structures, inheritance laws, and social relations within various communities.[1]

Various sites and forms of submission existed within the totalizing framework of colonial modernity. Although the subjectivities developed in these different arenas – evangelicalism, colonial administration, education, and reform – appeared distinct,

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[1] Rajan Gurukkal, 'Development Experience of Colonial Keralam' in M.A. Oommen (ed.), *Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 118.

they were fundamentally aligned with the broader objectives of colonial modernity. The ethical imperatives of evangelism, the administrative essence, educational aims, and reformist agendas all reflected underlying power relations rooted in colonial rule. Upon closer inspection, these structures of contemporary Western civilization converged on the same totalizing forces that defined colonial power dynamics.[2]

The role of printing and publications in shaping human culture and modernizing society was profound. Prior to the invention of the printing press, knowledge was largely monopolized by the elite classes. However, the arrival of printing liberated knowledge from this small group, making it accessible to the general populace. Through the spread of printed works, ordinary people became familiar with the thoughts and ideas of figures such as Homer, Socrates, Plato, and the Indian classics like the *Bhasakalidhasyan*. This access to knowledge helped broaden perspectives, dispel superstitions, and set society on a path of progress.

The origins of writing are difficult to trace, but it is believed that early humans depicted objects as they appeared. While writing systems eventually developed, it took a long time for the printing process to emerge. It was only after the invention of paper that Europeans realized the potential for printing. The Chinese, pioneers in papermaking, also introduced the use of paper money. By the fifteenth century, paper production had become widespread, ushering in significant changes in information and communication.

Johannes Gutenberg, a German inventor, revolutionized modern printing by creating movable type, quick-drying ink, and a wooden printing press. His innovations made the modern printing technique a reality, spreading quickly throughout German towns. Eventually, printing houses were established in Italy, France, Austria, Turkey, and other nations.[3]

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2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.,* p.119.

The invention of the printing press and the widespread use of paper were pivotal in sparking Europe's cultural renaissance. Printing became a major catalyst for the cultural development and advancement of modern societies. At this time, two key innovations shaped the world: gunpowder and paper. While gunpowder redrew borders through violence, printing brought people together by facilitating cultural progress. Globally, printing initiated cultural renaissances, and in India, it played a significant role in societal reform and modernization.[4]

The printing press in India, a Western import, is one of the most beneficial legacies of colonial rule. While its initial purpose was to propagate Christianity, this does not diminish the revolutionary impact of introducing modern printing technology to the subcontinent. The modern printing press in India originated in Goa, with the Spanish coadjutor Brother John de Bustamante recognized as the first printer. The first material printed by him on Indian soil was *Concluseos*, or *Thesis of Philosophy*[5]. An important milestone in Indian printing history was the printing of St. Francis Xavier's *Doctrine Christo* in 1557, which marked the beginning of a new era in the dissemination of knowledge. The third known book printed by Bustamante was *Tractado* (1560), written by Fr. Goncalo Rodrigues.[6]

Despite their significant efforts, the Jesuits' printing activities in Goa, which utilized imported Latin types, did not directly benefit the local population, as Latin was unintelligible to the native people. The missionaries' primary goal was conversion, and printing in Latin did not further their efforts to convert the Hindu population. Therefore, vernacular presses were needed for their mission.

The arrival of Western colonialism, the development of printing technology, and the standardization of literature sparked an intellectual awakening in India. In Bengal, the first vernacular press was established by Baptist missionaries in

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4 Babu Cheriyan, *Benjamin Baily* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2009, p. 87.

5 Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, Delhi, 2003, p. 59.

6 Philip. G. Altbach, *Publishing in India: An Analysis,* England, 1975, p. 18.

Serampore in 1800 for evangelization purposes. The emergence of print culture was shaped by the educated elite, but its accessibility and affordability allowed for a wide circulation of printed books, extending beyond the dominant power groups. In the nineteenth century, print media in Bengal significantly shaped ideas and identities, with both the British rulers and the local intelligentsia using Bengali as a medium for communication. For the British, mastering Bengali was necessary for administrative convenience, while for the native intellectuals, it became a vehicle for cultural identity and expression. The rapid growth of the literate population and the printing industry created a vibrant intellectual environment, with increasing numbers of readers and writers contributing to ongoing debates.[7]

A similar process occurred in Kerala. Before the advent of printing technology, journalism did not exist in the region. The introduction of printing, the rise in educational institutions, and a growing public interest in current affairs led to the birth of vernacular journalism.[8] The first printing press in Kerala was established by Rev. Benjamin Bailey at the C.M.S. Press in Kottayam in 1811, with the help of British Resident Colonel Monroe. Rev. Bailey is rightly considered the father of modern Malayalam printing technology. To support the effort, carpenters and blacksmiths were trained to mold modern Malayalam alphabets. However, it was in Bombay in 1811 that the first Malayalam printing took place, with the Holy Bible being the first book printed in the language.[9]

Vaipicotta was another important site for early printing in Kerala, where a press with vernacular types was established at the Holy Cross Church in Chennamangalam. Two notable early works printed here were *Doctrina Christao* and *Rudiments of the Catholic Faith*.[10] At the Third Council of Goa in 1585, the Vaipicotta

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7 Anindita Ghosh, 'Revisiting the Bengal Renaissance Literary Bengali and Low-Life Print in Colonial Calcutta', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 42, October, 2002, pp. 432-444.

8 Puduppally Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2008, p. 13.

9 P. J. Thomas, *Malayala Sahithyavum Christhyanikalum* (Mal.), Kottayam,1983, pp. 84-85.

10 *Ibid*., pp. 58-59.

fathers were tasked with translating religious texts into Chaldaic and Malayalam, marking significant early efforts in vernacular printing in India. The Ambalakkad Seminary, established in 1695, was another landmark in the history of Tamil and Malayalam printing. Fr. Johann Ernst Haxteden, also known as Arnos Padre, produced the *Puthenpana*, a widely-read Malayalam lyrical composition on the life of Christ, at this press. The seminary's destruction by Tipu Sultan in 1790 was a setback to vernacular printing, but the seminaries at Verapoly and Aluva continued the work of developing Malayalam literature.[11]

ROLE OF BASEL MISSION IN MALABAR

The introduction of printing in Malabar can largely be attributed to the efforts of the Basel missionaries, particularly in Mangalore. The Basel German Evangelical Mission, rooted in Wurtemburg Pietism, was founded in 1815. While Protestant missions like the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Church Mission Society (CMS) concentrated their efforts in southern and central Kerala, the Basel Mission chose to focus on the Malabar region. Their activities began with the establishment of mission stations in Kallayi (Kozhikode), Nettur (Thalassery), and Kannur, gradually expanding their evangelical work across the whole of Malabar.

Under the leadership of Hermann Gundert, the Basel Mission expanded significantly in Thalassery. As their activities grew, the need for printing became increasingly important. Initially, Gundert and his colleagues would travel to Mangalore to fulfill their printing needs, but the inconvenience of this arrangement led them to establish a press in Thalassery. Consequently, a lithographic press was founded on October 23, 1845, at Illikunnu, the headquarters of the Basel Mission in Thalassery. This became the first printing press in North Kerala.[12] From this press,

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[11] D. Ferroli, *Jesuits in Malabar-Vol. II*, Bangalore, 1939, pp. 74-98.

[12] M.V. Thomas, *Madhyamangalum Malayala Sahithyavum* (Mal.) Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 27.

Hermann Gundert published two notable newspapers: *Rajyasamacharam* in June 1847 and *Paschimodayam* in October 1847.[13]

The missionaries in Kerala had two primary objectives. First, their missionary goal was to save as many souls as possible. Realizing that high-caste individuals were resistant to conversion, they shifted their focus to marginalized groups, who were more receptive to their message. The second aspect of their work involved the interests of the converts, which were rarely material in nature. Caste mobility provides a more accurate explanation, as it mainly affected middle-order castes rather than Brahmins or untouchables. This constant struggle for upward mobility has fueled various reformist movements throughout Indian history.

Although initially anti-caste, these movements gradually took on an anti-Brahmin character. However, in some cases, Brahmins with a progressive mindset sought to turn these movements into reformist initiatives. Importantly, many of these movements also encompassed untouchables, primarily as protests against their marginalization and subjugation.[14]

In the early years, the progress of the Basel Mission's activities in Malabar was slow. This is evident from the Mission report of 1850, which states, "The preaching of the Gospel has hitherto had little effect upon the natives around us. The Brahmins and the Nairs keep at a distance from the missionary. The Thiyyas are more accessible but are altogether preoccupied with worldly concerns. The Mussalmans hate the Gospel and express their hatred whenever possible.[15] This statement highlights the missionaries' initial focus on the influential communities of Malabar. The Basel Mission reports are filled with criticism of the caste system that dominated Malabar society at the time.

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13 Sally Jacob, *A Study on Early Malayalam Periodicals, Especially Njananikshepam and Vidyasangraham*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, M.G University, Kottayam, 2011, pp.10-18.

14 T.K. Oomen (ed.), *Social Movements: Issues of Identity-Vol. I,* New Delhi, 2010, p. 49.

15 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore, 1850, p. 18.

For the missionaries, it was essential to critique the caste system, as their ideology was rooted in an egalitarian philosophy inspired by Christianity. This social philosophy, which embraced all of humanity from the Nayadis and Parayas at the bottom to the Brahmins at the top, motivated the missionaries to challenge and dismantle the caste barriers in Malabar. Over time, the *Padirimadom* became a symbol of the Mission's anti-caste stance.

The missionaries were keenly aware of the caste system's oppressive influence in Malabar society. Their first report noted that "the lowest caste of Hindus are oppressed by a degree of spiritual indolence and brutalizing superstition.[16] They were also frustrated by the fact that even the Pulayas and other untouchable classes were reluctant to approach the missionaries.[17] Against this backdrop, the Basel Mission initiated its efforts to convert people to Christianity. According to Mission reports, while there was a desire among some to become Christians, they were afraid of losing their caste status. It was noted, "Those who wish to become Christians are not tolerated in their houses by their relatives." In many cases, family members actively discouraged and pressured individuals who were considering conversion.[18]

Mission reports describe numerous instances where individuals expressed a willingness to convert but were dissuaded by their families. Those who did go through with baptism often faced ostracization from both their families and society. Converts described the experience of losing one's caste as "horrible and unbearable." [19]Isolated from their social and familial networks, many converts felt compelled to leave their local environment, adopting migratory lifestyles. The Mission noted that conversion to Christianity often resulted in the loss of "home, relations, caste, friends," leading to feelings of loneliness, especially when it became difficult for converts to earn a

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16 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore, 1841, p. 6.

17 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore 1845, p. 44.

18 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1842, p. 6.

19 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1843, p. 54.

livelihood.[20] The reports also mention that "for those who forsake their ancestral caste and customs, we have neither houses nor gardens," highlighting the material and social hardships faced by converts.[21]

Conversion often fractured families. Converted families were typically ostracized by their caste relatives, while individual converts faced even greater isolation. Christian husbands were frequently abandoned by their wives and children, and unmarried converts were deserted by their parents and other kin. Many converts were willing to lose their property and social status, but they struggled to overcome their emotional ties to their relatives. The strong bonds of family, reinforced by the caste hierarchy, often prevented individuals from embracing Christianity. In many cases, people postponed baptism until after the death of a parent or spouse. Some baptized Christians even reverted to their former castes due to their love for their families. Nonetheless, many individuals chose to join the Christian community, even if it meant leaving behind their grieving wives, children, or parents.[22]

The missionaries faced significant challenges as they confronted the dire economic conditions of converted Christians, many of whom came from low-caste backgrounds and experienced further deprivation after embracing Christianity. Many converts were not only homeless but also without basic sustenance. The missionaries made several attempts to persuade landlords to allow the converts to stay on their lands, but these efforts were unsuccessful.[23]

In response, the Mission sought to provide training in various trades such as carpentry and blacksmithing.[24] They also planned to establish a paper manufactory for this purpose. The poorest Christians were employed within the Mission as

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20 *Op.cit.,1845*, p. 80.

21 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1884, p. 60.

22 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1897, p. 49.

23 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1898, p. 49.

24 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1847, p. 46.

household servants, while those with promise were trained to become school teachers or catechists. As the number of Christians grew, the Mission experimented with agriculture, settling lower-caste converts from Anjarakandy in Chovva, where land was allocated for the cultivation of coconuts and other crops.[25] The Mission also conducted agricultural experiments in the Kodakkal region of Malappuram district.[26] Additionally, many Christians found employment in the Mission's tile factories and weaving establishments.

Recognizing the high cost of provisions and the risk of converts falling into debt, the Mission established a savings and lending bank, along with a cooperative society, to help them become financially independent.[27] These material improvements were crucial for maintaining the small Christian community, as many converts relied on the Mission for their daily needs.[28] Mission reports confirm that the majority of the converts came from Malabar's lower castes, with most belonging to the Thiyya caste, followed by Pulayas, Vettuvars, and other marginalized communities.[29] While a few Nairs also converted, their numbers were minimal.[30] The Anjarakandy congregation, for example, primarily consisted of the slave castes like Pulayas and Vettuvars.[31] The Mission initially had hopes of converting the Nayadis, but many of them eventually turned to Islam.[32]

The Basel Missionaries initially believed they could convert large numbers of Thiyyas to Christianity. However, their hopes were dashed when the Thiyya elite sought to elevate their status by adopting Brahminical forms of worship. The construction of large temples and the adoption of Sanskrit rituals by the Thiyyas

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25 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1880, p. 48.

26 *Op. cit.,* 1897, p. 49.

27 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1893, p. 52.

28 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1894, p. 57

29 *Op.cit.,*1850*,* p.18.

30 *Op.cit.,*1893*,* p. 51.

31 *Op.cit.,*1843, p. 58

32 *Op.cit.,*1845*,* p.39.

disappointed the missionaries, and the movement that once gave them great hope shifted toward embracing Sanskritic Hinduism.[33] This change in the Thiyyas' attitude led the missionaries to focus their efforts on the more marginalized Pulaya community, with significant success in converting many Pulayas in the Chirakkal region. In the Padikkal region of Payangady, the Basel Mission opened a school for Adidravidas and converted many to Christianity, with many joining the faith to escape the oppression they faced from higher castes like the Nairs, as well as from avarnas like the Thiyyas and the Mappila Muslims.[34]

The Basel Mission also made efforts to uplift converts through education and cultural development, in addition to addressing their material, moral, and religious needs. They established primary schools, which were open to children from all castes and communities, along with day schools, female schools, and boarding schools.[35] However, Mission reports indicate that many higher-caste individuals were reluctant to send their children to these schools.[36] Despite this, the Mission made determined efforts to provide education to children from marginalized communities such as the Pulayas, Parayas, and Nayadis.[37] Teachers often visited Cheruma homes to collect pupils each day. However, their efforts to educate the oppressed classes achieved only limited success due to resistance from higher castes and the difficult conditions faced by the underprivileged.[38]

Despite these challenges, the Thiyya community benefited significantly from the educational initiatives of the Basel Mission. The Mission's 1907 report acknowledges that "if about 60 years ago the missionaries of Malabar had not opened schools and admitted students of every caste, the number of educated Thiyyas would

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33 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1907, p. 76.

34 *Mathrubhumi*, Weekly, 17 March and 28 June , 1928. (n.p).

35 Murkoth Kunhappa, 'Heritage of Basel Mission in Malabar' in K. J. John (ed.), *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, L.M. Pylee Felicitation Volume, Cochin, 1981, p. 243.

36 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report, op.cit.,* 1851, p. 32.

37 *Op.cit.,* 1850, p. 52.

38 *Basel German Evangelical Mission Report*, Mangalore ,1886, p. 38.

be small."[39] The Missionaries' genuine and selfless interest in the social and material progress of the Thiyya community is evident. The educational institutions established by the Basel Mission enabled the polluting castes, particularly the Thiyyas of coastal Malabar, to embrace modern ideas of equality and social justice. Those who received a Western education from these institutions became leaders of social change in Malabar, challenging obsolete customs and practices and advocating for a more just society.[40]

PRESS AND PUBLIC SPHERE.

The press, under the control of missionaries, became a powerful tool to shape public opinion, promoting reform and progress within the framework of colonial ideology. It played a crucial role in influencing people's perceptions, encouraging them to adopt Western habits in areas such as food, rationality, clothing, games, furniture, and housing.[41] The increasing demand for Western goods and services, fueled by these changing notions of progress, warrants detailed study. Equally significant is how the missionary-managed press facilitated both the expansion of colonial markets and the dissemination of Western values, ultimately leading to the establishment of "colonial modernity".[42] Journalism became the medium through which colonialism planted its social influence, and by the late 19th century, Kerala began to experience the effects.

This period also marked the rise of knowledge production in Kerala. As with any historical development, whether in technology, culture, or politics, growth follows social rules. The newspaper, one of the "Western plants" rooted in Indian soil, unexpectedly grew in ways that colonial authorities had not intended. By the end of the nineteenth century, Keralites, once "slaves to circumstances" under feudalism and

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39 *Op.cit.,*1845, p. 44.

40 Murkoth Kunhappa *op. cit.,* p. 238.

41 C.I. Issac, 'The Press as a Site of Colonial Discourse-A Case Study of the Experience of Keralam', *Journal of South Indian History*, Vol. I, Issue I, 2003, p. 39.

42 *Ibid*., p. 42.

colonialism, became the masters of their fate. Newspapers transformed into tools for protesting against authority, initiating social reform movements, and later, leading the struggle for independence and the common man's rights.

Missionaries and their printing presses became, much like the British colonialists, unconscious instruments in the history of Kerala's media and societal growth.[43] The establishment of printing presses made knowledge more accessible to the public. As literacy and print culture expanded, the habits of reading, public speaking, and debate flourished. A world of print emerged where ideas were expressed, debated, and eventually accepted by readers. The discourse fostered in this space gained importance due to its potential to bring about social change, prompting more people to propagate their ideas through the press.[44]

One of the most important developments of this period was the emergence of the "public sphere". This concept took root in various establishments by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through schools, colleges, publications, literary societies, religious associations, political groups, markets, factories, tea and coffee stalls, boarding houses, clubs, parks, and other public spaces. These settings became arenas for cultural discourse and political debates, creating a space for discussions, criticisms, and dialogues.[45]

However, the public sphere in Kerala had unique characteristics, distinct from the European experience of the early nineteenth century. The definitions of "public" and "public sphere" have been topics of scholarly debate since the resurgence of Jürgen Habermas' theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His original concept of the bourgeois public sphere, centered on rational discourse, common concerns, and

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43 Shibu Muhammed, 'A Critical Enquiry into Popular Journalism in Kerala with Reference to Malayalam Newspapers and its History' in P.K. Poker (ed.), *Calicut University Research Journal*, Calicut, July. 2003, p.113.

44 K. M. George, *Western Influence on Malayalam Language and Literature*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 42-51.

45 Robin Jeffrey, *Media and Modernity*, New Delhi, 2010, p. 279.

impartial judgment, has since evolved into a broader view of the public sphere as a space for free expression available to any social group. The discourse around the public sphere has taken two main directions: one emphasizing rational autonomy, where individuals from different backgrounds engage as abstract individuals in rational debates, and the other focusing on the public sphere as a platform for free expression by diverse social groups, often overlooking the emphasis on rational modernity.[46]

Benedict Anderson's work on the centrality of print in the formation of nationalism brought renewed attention to the role of the press in shaping public discourse in colonial Kerala.[47] While Anderson emphasized the role of newspapers and novels in forming national identity, Habermas's view of the newspaper's role in developing the public sphere aligns with Kerala's experience. In the nineteenth century, print culture enabled the discussion of social and political issues, mobilizing people around these issues. The scarcity of printed materials gave them authority, leading to fears among colonial authorities, who responded by shutting down three Malayalam newspapers in 1910, 1938, and 1948.[48]

The participation of different communities in the public sphere in Kerala was deeply intertwined with caste and religion. The social history of Kerala provides ample evidence of the close relationship between caste and religion in shaping public discourse.[49] Caste movements, often tied to religious beliefs and cultural practices, played a significant role in this space. Lower caste social protests frequently took on religious forms, such as the construction of new religious identities or the reinterpretation of Hindu traditions. The interactions between caste and religion also influenced the political participation of religious communities like Christians and

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46 *Ibid*., pp. 240-244.

47 Abdul Razzak P.P, *Colonialism and Community Formation in Malabar: A Study of Muslims of Malabar,* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Calicut, 2007, p. 67.

48 Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit*., p. 280.

49 Salah Punathil, 'Kerala Muslims and Shifting Notions of Religion in the Public Sphere', *South Asia Research Journal,* Vol. 36, Issue 4, New Delhi, 2013, p. 4.

Muslims in Kerala's public sphere.[50] Colonial modernity, along with factors like administrative policies, legal reforms, print culture, and the rise of reformist leaders, helped consolidate community identities and shape political communities, often in similar ways while also influencing each other.[51]

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the public sphere in Kerala was focused on public interest, with issues being debated in those terms. However, this did not yet signal the emergence of a fully developed civil society.[52] The nineteenth-century middle class redefined tradition, incorporating colonial symbols such as English education, religion, moral values, customs, and clothing styles. For example, Malayalam novels like *Indulekha, Parangodiparinayam*, and *Saraswathivijayam* have been interpreted as indirect conversations about how the modern self might be shaped. In U.K. Kumaran's novel *Takshan Kunnu Swaroopam*, people in the small village of Takshan Kunnu gathered to read newspapers and discuss the Second World War and Gandhi's independence movement, illustrating the role of print in shaping public opinion.[53]

The public sphere that developed in Kerala cannot be seen as the result of conscious efforts by modern-educated elites. Rather, it presupposed the transformation of social ties and the creation of new institutional arrangements that reshaped the context of social communication. This space became one where new forces contended for hegemony in the late nineteenth century. Often, challenges to the old order were framed in terms of an image of society where gender differences replaced birth and inherited status as the fundamental principles of social order.[54]

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50 *Ibid*., p. 5.

51 *Ibid.*

52 J. Devika, *En-gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Twentieth Century Keralam*, Hyderabad, 2007, p. 6.

53 U.K Kumaran, *Thakshankunnu Swaroopam* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2014. p. 48.

54 J. Devika, *Imagining women's social space in modern Keralam*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007, p. 9.

Basel Evangelical Mission and Upward Mobility

The work of the Basel Mission in Malabar had a significant impact, particularly on lower communities, by providing education, employment in industries and plantations, foreign migration opportunities, and access to medicine. This contributed to the rise of a middle class, especially within the Thiyya community.[55] Members of this new middle class actively engaged in journalistic and literary activities, using their newspapers and magazines as vehicles for social reform and community development. Several leaders from the Thiyya community owned their own presses, which they used as tools to fight against unjust customs and social issues. Many individuals from this community, having received a Western education, later worked to improve the conditions of their own people, furthering the mission's impact.

The Basel Mission played a key role in promoting the social mobility of the Thiyya community in nineteenth-century Malabar by challenging caste hierarchies and offering economic opportunities. Rooted in Christian beliefs of human equality, the mission opposed the caste system, viewing it as unjust. While Thiyya converts faced social stigma, the mission focused on creating economic opportunities, believing financial success would lead to greater social respect and upward mobility, despite ongoing challenges in overcoming caste-based restrictions.

One of the key methods used by the missionaries was the establishment of commercial and industrial enterprises. These businesses not only offered economic opportunities for converts but also helped bridge the gap between caste divisions by bringing together individuals from different caste backgrounds to work in factories. This inclusive working environment fostered a sense of equality and diminished caste-based prejudices. Additionally, the Basel Mission encouraged inter-caste marriages

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55 Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*, London, 2000, p. 21.

among converts, further promoting social integration and challenging the caste system.

The Basel Mission also sought to rehabilitate its converts by training them in traditional crafts such as weaving and carpentry. They established an industrial school in 1846 in Mangalore to provide the necessary skills for these trades. However, the social environment in Malabar, which resisted the entry of new artisans from lower castes into traditional professions, limited the success of these initiatives.

Another significant initiative was the mission's involvement in the production of sugar from toddy. Many of the converts employed in this venture were Thiyyas, who traditionally worked as coconut tree tenders and toddy tappers. The missionaries' moral objections to toddy drinking may have influenced this project, as it provided an alternative livelihood for the Thiyyas while addressing the social stigma attached to their traditional occupation.

The Basel Mission's success in breaking down caste barriers can be attributed to two major factors: the relatively small number of upper-caste converts in Malabar and the impersonal nature of industrial labour. In the mission's factories, converts from various caste backgrounds worked together, performed the same tasks, and received equal wages, which helped create a more egalitarian social structure. The mission's strong stance against caste distinctions and its encouragement of inter-caste marriages further contributed to the idea of a casteless society.

The social impact of the Basel Mission's efforts was profound. By creating a model of a caste-free community where people from different caste backgrounds could live and work together, the mission demonstrated that it was possible to break free from the rigid caste system. This example likely inspired other lower-caste communities to challenge caste restrictions, ultimately contributing to the broader movement against caste discrimination in Malabar.

The Thiyya community, in particular, benefited from the opportunities provided by the Basel Mission. They were able to move away from their traditional caste-based occupations and pursue new avenues for employment and social mobility. This was especially significant for the Thiyyas, who had been traditionally confined to low-status occupations such as toddy tapping and coconut tree tending. The mission's efforts allowed them to enter industrial labour and other fields, thereby improving their social standing.

Moreover, the Basel Mission's initiatives were not limited to its converts. By 1913, approximately one-fourth of the employees in Basel Mission factories were non-converts, illustrating that the mission's industrial ventures provided a means of escape from the caste system for people from all backgrounds. The Basel Mission played a crucial role in promoting the upward mobility of the Thiyyas community in Malabar. By providing economic opportunities, establishing vocational training programs, and creating an inclusive social environment, the mission allowed the Thiyyas to transcend the limitations imposed by their caste background. Through these efforts, the Basel Mission laid the groundwork for social mobility and contributed significantly to the weakening of the caste system in the region.[56]

Benedict Anderson's theory of *Imagined Communities* (1983) highlights the role of print media in forming modern national identities. He argues that in pre-modern societies, communities were small and localized, but the advent of print media allowed individuals to imagine themselves as part of a larger, cohesive nation. This shift enabled the creation of an "imagined community," where people identified with a nation despite being geographically dispersed. [57]This argument is more or less true in the case of the Thiyya community in Malabar, Anderson's theory illustrates how print media helped modernize the community and connect it to national movements.

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[56] Jaiprakash Raghaviah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara (1834-1914) A study of its social and economic impact*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 43; Dilip. M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and communism in South India*, Cambridge university press, 1994, p. 39.

[57] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983, p. 198

Traditionally marginalized within caste-based structures, the Thiyyas used print media to assert their rights, challenge caste discrimination, and engage in social reform. Newspapers, pamphlets, and books allowed the Thiyyas to see themselves as part of a larger society.

Anderson's concept of "print capitalism" explains how mass-produced print media spread national ideas, standardized languages, and reinforced national identity. For the Thiyya community, this enabled greater access to education, increased literacy, and participation in political and social movements, particularly those focused on caste reform and social justice. Print media thus played a key role in the Thiyya community's integration into the larger national discourse.

Similarly, Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* explores the transformative impact of the printing press on knowledge, literacy, and intellectual cultures. She argues that print catalysed major historical developments like the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Scientific Revolution by facilitating the mass distribution of ideas, which led to the fragmentation of authority and the rise of new intellectual and social communities.[58]

In the context of the Thiyya community in Kerala, Eisenstein's theory explains how print media played a crucial role in their modernization, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The introduction of newspapers, books, and pamphlets expanded access to ideas about social justice, education, and politics, increasing literacy and fostering new social engagements. Leaders like Sree Narayana Guru used print to promote equality and challenge the caste system, empowering the Thiyya community to assert their rights.

In addition to this, the development of print in Malayalam helped to preserve and share Thiyya culture and history, fostering a collective identity and enabling the

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[58] Elizabeth. L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe, United States of America,* 1983, p. 46.

community to engage with modern ideas. Thus, like the Reformation and Enlightenment in Europe, the printing press empowered the Thiyyas, providing them with a platform for participation in Kerala's evolving political, social, and economic spheres, contributing to their transformation into a modern, inclusive community.

Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* also explores how media, particularly print, shape human consciousness and social structures. He famously stated, "the medium is the message," arguing that the medium itself influences society more than the content it conveys. McLuhan's theory suggests that media shape how we think, interact, and perceive the world.[59]

In the context of the Thiyya community in Kerala, McLuhan's ideas help to explain the community's transformation through the rise of print media. Before print, the Thiyyas relied on oral traditions, which reinforced local, community-based ways of life. The advent of print in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shifted the Thiyyas from an oral to a print-based society, broadening their access to ideas and fostering individualism. Print allowed for the dissemination of reformist ideas, enabling the Thiyyas to engage with social and political movements for equality and justice.

However, this shift also led to the fragmentation of traditional communal bonds, as print promoted individualism and weakened face-to-face, local interactions. Nonetheless, print media empowered the Thiyya community to challenge caste hierarchies, reshape their identities, and engage with the broader processes of modernization and social change in Kerala. Through print, the Thiyyas accessed new ideas, marking their entry into the modern world.

When we look at Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, we can see in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he emphasizes the role of print

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[59] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man (ed.) W. Terrence Gordon, University of California,* 2003, p. 187.

media in fostering rational-critical debate and forming modern democratic societies. Habermas argues that the rise of print media, such as newspapers and books, created a space for public discussion, independent of state or religious authorities, and was central to the development of democratic life.[60]

In the context of the Thiyya community in Kerala, Habermas's theory helps explain how print media contributed to their modernization. Before print, the Thiyyas, like other marginalized groups, had limited access to public discourse. With the rise of print in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Thiyyas gained a platform to discuss caste discrimination, advocate for social justice, and participate in broader social reforms. Through print media, they challenged oppressive caste structures and contributed to the development of modern democratic values in Kerala.

Print media thus helped create a more inclusive public sphere, allowing the Thiyya community to engage with societal issues, shape public opinion, and play an active role in the process of modernization and nation-building.

Supplementary to the above arguments Christopher A. Reed's *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* explores how print capitalism in China shaped social, cultural, and political transformations.[61] Although focused on China, Reed's insights can be applied to colonial India, particularly the Thiyya community in Kerala. In both contexts, the rise of print media played a crucial role in spreading ideas for social reform, political movements, and identity formation, especially for marginalized groups like the Thiyyas, who faced caste discrimination.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, print media in Kerala helped disseminate reformist ideas from leaders like Sree Narayana Guru, enabling the Thiyyas to challenge caste-based oppression and advocate for social justice. Just

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60 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Thomas Burger (Tran.), Cambridge, 1993, pp. 51-57.

61 Christopher. A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937,* University of Hawaii Press, 2004, pp. 1-25.

as print in China contributed to the formation of modern Chinese identity, print in India helped the Thiyya community redefine their social and political identity. Reed's work offers valuable insights into how print capitalism influenced social movements and community building, providing a useful framework for understanding the impact of print on the Thiyya community.

Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet Age, edited by Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb focuses on the historical development of journalism in Britain and the U.S., exploring the role of print media in shaping public discourse, political movements, and social change. [62]The book examines the political economy of journalism, showing how media systems were influenced by political forces and economic imperatives Similarly, in colonial Kerala, print media played a crucial role in transforming marginalized communities like the Thiyyas. The rise of print in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries spread ideas of social equality, education, and caste reform, empowering the Thiyya community. Reformers like Sree Narayana Guru and Vagbhadananda used newspapers and pamphlets to challenge caste discrimination and advocate for lower-caste rights.

The political economy of journalism in Kerala, shaped by colonialism and reformers efforts, mirrors the dynamics in Britain and America, where the press influenced political movements. Print media increased literacy, education, and social change, helping the Thiyyas become active participants in social reform. It provided a platform for the Thiyyas to challenge caste-based hierarchies, articulate their struggles, and demand inclusion in society. Print media united people from different regions and castes, fostering a shared public sphere and collective identity. The rise

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[62] Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (ed.), *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet Age*, Oxford university press, 2015, pp. 40-47.

of literacy helped the Thiyyas and other lower-caste groups demand equality, contributing to Kerala's broader social transformation.

MITHAVADI IN MALABAR

The *Mithavadi* newspaper played a crucial role in the upliftment and advocacy for the rights of the Thiyya community in Malabar. It can be seen as a significant contribution from the educated class in Malabar, who had benefited from Western education. Mithavadi was first printed in 1906 at the Vidhyalayam Printing Press, with a page size of 12 and an annual subscription of 3 rupees and 12 annas. It featured various types of news and articles and was owned by the Thiyya community in Malabar.

The newspaper played a pivotal role in the social reform of the Thiyyas, a historically marginalized group. Notably, *Mithavadi* was the first publication to print Kumaran Asan's iconic work, *Veenapoovu*, a major milestone in Malayalam literature. Murkoth Kumaran, who founded the paper, was also an editor of *Keralasanchari* and *Saraswati* magazines. He named the newspaper *Mithavadi* after being inspired by a classification of Indian leaders made by Gopal Krishna Gokhale at the 1905 Congress meeting in Banaras, where leaders were categorized as moderates and extremists. [63]

Initially published monthly, *Mithavadi* became a powerful platform for social reform, particularly under the leadership of C. Krishnan, a well-known social reformer. It became a key tool in the fight against caste discrimination, especially targeting the injustices faced by the Thiyya community. Caste discrimination was so severe in Kerala that Swami Vivekananda once described it as a "lunatic asylum." The Thiyyas of North Kerala and the Ezhavas of South and Central Kerala made up the largest lower caste communities in the state, though they were still considered untouchable and were ranked below the Nairs in the caste hierarchy.

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[63] P.A. Sayed Muhammed, *Kerala Muslim Charithram* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1969, pp. 1246-1247.

However, the Thiyyas in Malabar were seen as more advanced in terms of education and social progress than the Ezhavas. Mithavadi helped raise awareness about contemporary social issues faced by the Thiyyas and encouraged them to fight against societal evils and barriers to education and social advancement. The newspaper also emphasized the achievements of modern science, reporting on developments like the spread of railroads, mail systems, and steam mills, encouraging a positive outlook towards such progress.

Notably, writers like Vengayil Kunjiraman Nayanar contributed significantly to *Mithavadi,* and the paper worked diligently to promote a culture of reading among the newly educated masses. Through its content, *Mithavadi* became a champion of progressive ideas, rational thought, and the social empowerment of marginalized communities.

Mithavadi was often referred to as the "Bible of the Thiyya community" due to its significant impact on the social and cultural life of the Thiyyas. It was in *Mithavadi* that the influential and grand articles written by Murkoth Kumaran about Kerala Varma and A.R. Raja Raja Varma were first published. The newspaper also featured writings by prominent figures like C.V. Kunhiraman, Manjeri Rama Iyer, Ramavarma Thampan, and Mooliyil Kesavan, enriching its pages. Additionally, *Mithavadi* was the first to publish an authoritative biography of Oyyarath Chandu Menon, the celebrated author of *Indulekha.*

The newspaper gave prominence to independent thought, rationalism, and naturopathy, reflecting its progressive nature. Sahodaran Ayyappan’s enlightening weekly notes were a regular feature in its pages. For a brief period, *Mithavadi* even operated as a daily, during which it produced three special supplements of exceptional quality. The publication often printed research-oriented articles such as *Malabarile Chila Mahaanmaarude Aadyakaalam* (The Early Life of Some Great Men in

Malabar). It also offered unwavering support to the tenants' agitation in Malabar, while using its columns to propagate Buddhist ideology.[64]

Mithavadi was the first newspaper to effectively address social issues, waging a relentless battle against caste discrimination and untouchability. It emerged as a powerful advocate for social change and a protector of the marginalized classes at a time when Mathrubhumi was still in its infancy. Although *Mithavadi* is now closely associated with Adv. C. Krishnan, it was, in fact, the brainchild of Murkoth Kumaran.

The naming of the newspaper as *Mithavadi* was dramatic in itself. Murkoth Kumaran chose the name after being inspired by a speech given by Gopal Krishna Gokhale at the 1905 Bharatha Mahajanasabha in Kasi, where Gokhale divided Congress leaders into two groups: *Mithavadi* (moderates) and *Amithavadi* (extremists). Murkoth Kumaran, drawn to the moderate faction, decided to start a newspaper under the name *Mithavadi.*

The weekly edition of *Mithavadi* was first published in 1907 from the Vidyavilasam Press in Thalassery, under the proprietorship of T. Sivasankaran, a businessman. The personal touch of Murkoth Kumaran was evident in every aspect of the newspaper. He even handwrote the design for the paper's masthead and supervised its production. [65]

The newspaper was well received from the outset. *Malayala Manorama* praised the excellence of the paper and the caliber of its editor, stating, “We received with happiness the first issue of the weekly newspaper *Mithavadi*, published from Thalassery under the editorship of Murkoth Kumaran, who is acknowledged throughout Kerala as a distinguished prose writer in Malayalam and a good friend of *Malayala Manorama*. Mr. Kumaran is qualified enough to be appointed as a headmaster of a high school or an Assistant Professor in a college. But, bidding

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64 *Ibid*.

65 P.A. Syed Muhammad, *op.cit*., p. 794.

farewell to such a career, he has chosen the profession of journalism and is now running this paper. Based on the first issue, there is no doubt that this paper deserves a top place in Malayalam journalism. It contains many interesting items, written in pure and original Malayalam, catering to various categories of readers."[66]

Similarly, Mahakavi Kumaran Asan, after receiving the first two issues of *Mithavadi,* wrote in *Vivekodayam* magazine: "We are very happy and satisfied to see *Mithavadi,* distinguished in both appearance and content. It is adorned with a variety of news items and articles, which we are eager to read. The arrangement of the articles is also commendable. There is no doubt that Mithavadi deserves a prominent place among the newspapers of Kerala".[67]

By the time Mithavadi began in 1907, its editor, Murkoth Kumaran, had already established himself as an experienced journalist, having contributed frequently to various newspapers in both Malabar and Travancore and having studied many English and Malayalam publications. He contributed a unique form and style to *Mithavadi.* In *Mithavadi*, along with news reports, the reasons behind the events and their consequences were highlighted. During that period, the advancements in science were remarkable, and as a result, the various achievements of modern science frequently became prominent headlines. Each week, a general summary of the latest developments in modern science was published in *Mithavadi* in a tabular format.

As new technologies such as the railway, postal services, telegraph, steam engines, and tile factories were introduced in the country, *Mithavadi* provided interesting explanations of the principles behind how these systems and engines functioned.[68] At a time when Malayalis were becoming familiar with the modern lifestyle, it was essential to raise awareness on many topics, and *Mithavadi* played a significant role in this by acquainting readers with the latest news. Literate individuals

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66 *Malayala Manorama*, Weekly, 6 November, 1907. (n.p)

67 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. I, No.2, November, 1907, p. 24.

68 *Ibid*.

had just begun to read newspapers regularly to keep up with current events, so it was important to include subjects that would pique readers' interest and inspire new avenues of thought.

Kumaran masterfully blended these topics, offering them in measured portions and with a simple, often humorous style. He also had to familiarize people with the new system of administration introduced by the British in Malabar. Initially, the people found it difficult to comprehend or respond to this new system. For example, they referred to the police as "puyyemakkar" or "puthiya niyamakkar," meaning "new law-givers," and addressed magistrates as "Magistrate Thampuran" because they saw government officials as successors to the old lords, or thampurans. These officials also often acted in a despotic manner, reinforcing this perception.

During this period, municipalities, taluk boards, and district boards began to acquire administrative powers. Consequently, people's representatives gained the ability to act above such officials and, to some extent, even overrule them. This was a completely new experience for the populace. Through the pages of *Mithavadi,* Murkoth Kumaran not only introduced these new institutions to the public but also provided a platform for public scrutiny by evaluating and criticizing the actions of the officials involved in these institutions.[69]

Mithavadi regularly included content related to local municipal administration, discussions about school operations, court case details, and short articles that helped familiarize readers with the new lifestyle. There was also a rich array of intellectual content, covering a wide range of topics. It was a period when new literary movements were emerging, and Mithavadi responded positively to these changes. The magazine published Kumaran Asan's poetic masterpiece, *Veena Poovu* (The Fallen Flower), marking the first time Asan’s work was featured. This alone has secured *Mithavadi* place in history.

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[69] Murkoth Kunhappa, *Murkoth Kumaran* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1975, pp. 157-158.

Uchampally, a friend of Murkoth Kumaran and a regular reader of *Mithavad*i, used to say that if the various issues of *Mithavadi* were bound together, it could serve as a small encyclopedia.[70]

The renowned Malayalam writer and journalist, Sanjayan, once remarked, “I am certain that the Malayalam language will always remember Murkoth Kumaran as a shining star among the writers who liberated Malayalam prose from its earlier form, which resembled legal documents formless and meandering, following the style of Sanskrit champu (a mixture of prose and poetry), lacking vitality and vigor. Kumaran’s style was incredibly flexible, adapting to become pleasant, simple, sweet, intense, elegant, or witty, depending on the context. Even topics as tough as iron, when treated by Kumaran, would quickly become resilient and blend seamlessly with his style. No other prose writer in Malayalam has matched Kumaran’s ability to evoke emotions in the human heart with the magical power of words."[71]

During that era, newspapers often published debates on various issues, and *Mithavadi*, under Murkoth Kumaran's editorship, frequently featured such discussions. One memorable debate was between M.K. Gurukkal (who later became known as Vagbhadananda) and Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panikkar on the topic of the "Virtuous Man and Virtuous Woman." *Mithavadi* appealed to a wide audience due to its engaging style and diverse content. Kumaran developed his distinctive style during his time at *Mithavadi*, although he served as editor for only a year and a half.[72]

A difference of opinion eventually arose between Kumaran and Sivasankaran, which led to Kumaran's resignation. This disagreement stemmed from the publication of a satirical article in *Mithavadi* written by K. Sukumaran, Kumaran’s close friend and classmate. Both shared a fondness for wit and humor. In Sukumaran's article,

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70 G. Priyadarshan, *Malayala pathrapravarthanam Prarambaswaroopam* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1982, p. 61.

71 M.R Nair, *Sanjayan-Vol.II*, Kozhikode, 1986, pp. 528-29.

72 P.A. Syed Muhammad, *op. cit*., p. 765.

there was a humorous reference to Sivasankaran's pickle business, with a couplet that read, "Shiva, Shiva, Shivashankarante pachakkurumulakaaliha theerthorachaar" (Shiva, Shiva, Shivasankaran's pickle made of green pepper). Sivasankaran took offense to this satirical verse, viewing it as a personal insult.[73]

Out of respect for Sivasankaran's hurt feelings, Murkoth Kumaran resigned from his position as editor. After Kumaran's departure, *Mithavadi* continued for a short period, using articles contributed by C. Krishnan from Kozhikode. However, in 1908, the publication of *Mithavadi* came to an end.[74]

Kumaran's resignation caused significant distress among language enthusiasts. Kumaran Asan expressed his sorrow in *Vivekodayam*, stating, "Murkoth Kumaran's resignation from the helm of *Mithavadi* at the height of its glory truly grieves us."[75] It was Asan's deep admiration for Murkoth Kumaran that led him to publish his debut poem, *Veena Poovu*, in *Mithavadi.* Even Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran, who had been the target of Kumaran's sharp criticism, mourned his departure from the magazine. As an editor, Kumaran consistently promoted government policies that benefited the people while harshly criticizing officials who strayed from virtuous conduct. He worked tirelessly to introduce reforms within the community and delighted readers with his witty articles and stories.[76]

Upon learning of his resignation, *Malayala Manorama* remarked, "Murkoth Kumaran has managed *Mithavadi* with exceptional competence and insight from its very beginning. Malayalees with a discerning sense of right and wrong will undoubtedly grieve over his exit from *Mithavadi.* We are certain that the magazine's success thus far is due to Kumaran's hard work and diligence. He wrote in a unique and attractive style, offering balanced critiques of government policies, unflinchingly

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73 G. Priyadarshanan, *op. cit*., p. 62.

74 P.A. Syed Muhammad, *op. cit*. p.787.

75 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. V, No. I, February, 1908, p. 26.

76 Murkoth Kunhappa, *op. cit*., p. 165.

criticizing those who deviated from righteousness, promoting community reforms, and entertaining readers with simple, humorous, and witty pieces."[77]

Mithavadi was notably supportive of the British government. The magazine believed that the progress of the Thiyya community was largely due to the British government's efforts, especially in education and development, and they refrained from participating in anti-government activities. One such example is an article written by Murkoth Kumaran, noting that the Thiyyas did not attend a district meeting in Thalassery, which focused on 'National Education'. *Mithavadi* published articles that supported the British and their initiatives.[78]

Untouchability was one of the critical issues faced by the Thiya community. With the support of the British government, *Mithavadi* called upon the Thiya community to resist untouchability through Gandhiji's concept of passive resistance. The idea emerged that the Thiyya community should address untouchability through community meetings and education. During the Thiyya conference held in Kozhikode in October 1918, it was decided to launch a full-scale struggle against untouchability and *theendal* (unapproachability). The meeting resolved not to practice theendal towards the castes below them and to resist the attempts by higher castes to enforce it. To implement these decisions, the community established a Passive Resistance League.[79]

The Thiyyas of Kozhikode also formed an association to demand the abolition of *theendal*, even "if necessary, by coercion."[80] This led to several unfortunate incidents. In one such case, Chapannayar, a resident of Vatanapally, was beaten by two Thiya children after he addressed them disrespectfully. The case was brought before the Chavakkad Magistrate Court, where the children were fined 12 rupees,

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77 *Malayala Manorama*, Weekly, 7 April, 1909. (n.p).

78 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. II, No.9, September, 1917. (n.p)

79 *Mitavadi,* Magazine, Vol. IV, No.7, November, 1918. (n.p).

80 *Ibid.*

though this decision was later appealed. Despite such incidents, the community remained committed to reform through passive resistance.

C. Krishnan, through *Mithavadi,* encouraged members of the Thiyya community to donate to the Passive Resistance League, assuring them that the collected funds would be deposited in Calicut Bank, and the names of donors would be published in *Mithavadi*. He urged those who had love for the community to support this cause.[81]

Much of the progress within the Thiyya community was due to the efforts of Christian missionaries, although the community eventually grew opposed to the missionaries' proselytizing activities. The *Mithavadi* newspaper was used to voice this opposition. A significant number of people from the Thiyya community converted to Christianity, which provided them with various social and educational advantages. However, there were those in the community who were dissatisfied with this trend. One article in *Mithavadi* remarked, "About half of the Christians in Travancore and Cochin are former members of the Thiyya community and their descendants. There is a very close relationship between the Thiyya community and many Christians in Kerala. During the time of the Portuguese and the Dutch, some Thiyyas converted to Christianity. Later, missionaries like the London Mission, German Mission, and Basel Mission came to Kerala and focused their efforts on converting the Thiyya community. Harassment from ruling dynasties also played a role in driving these conversions. These activities have significantly reduced the Thiyya community's numbers."[82]

As a result, there were individuals within the community who opposed the process of conversion. The Thiyya Mahasabha held in Manjeri in 1932, under the leadership of C. Krishnan, was a pivotal event in the community's reform movement. In his speech as chairperson, C. Krishnan stated, "Thiyyas have never needed a change

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81 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. I, No. 4, Auguste,1919. (n.p).

82 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. V, No.1, July, 1920, p. 37.

of religion, only community reform. Thiyyas believe that religion is a personal matter, and it is not appropriate to organize around it. Thiyyas have faced many negative experiences due to Hinduism. Instead of converting to another religion, the solution is for people to follow the religion of their personal choice. Thiyyas believe that if the individual is good, the community will be good. Personal freedom in matters of religion is essential."

C. Krishnan expressed concern that the Thiyya community had become too secure under British rule and feared that if the British left, a government dominated by caste Hindus would take over. However, he also believed that such a government would be temporary. While he held the British government in high regard, he advised the community to support the next government, as there would be no benefit in backing a government that was on its way out. "We must act with intelligence in this matter," he said. "Only by aligning with those who are dominant and powerful can we secure benefits for the betterment of our society. The Thiyya community must make informed decisions based on the realities of the situation."

Krishnan emphasized that social reform could only be achieved through the efforts of people who were willing to sacrifice for the cause. Morality is the essential need of humanity, he said. "The Thiyya community needs individuals of good character and high ideals. If we are to proudly call ourselves Thiyyar, we must abandon Hinduism and ensure that everyone reads newspapers to stay informed."

In his closing remarks, C. Krishnan stated, "It is not possible for everyone to become Nairs or Thiyyas. We must not act irrationally but support the British, considering the immediate benefits we can gain, rather than focusing on future possibilities. We should oppose their enemies. The Thiyya community is an independent community, not tied to any specific religion, and caste differences must not be allowed to divide us."[83]

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[83] *Kesari,* Magazine, Vol. V, No.1, June,1932. (n.p).

The *Mithavadi* magazine played a pivotal role in the modernization of the Thiyya community in Malabar. It served as a platform for social reform, education, and the spread of progressive ideas. By addressing issues such as caste discrimination and the importance of education, *Mithavadi* enabled the Thiyyas to engage with modern concepts and actively participate in the evolving socio-political landscape of Kerala. The widespread influence of printing and such publications helped the community overcome traditional social barriers, significantly contributing to their modernization.

Chapter 4

The Role of SNDP in the Awakening of the Thiyya (Ezhava) Community in Kerala

The Ezhava community was historically marginalized and forced to remain in a state of backwardness due to their low social status. They were treated as untouchables and denied access to education. However, the arrival of Christian missionaries opened doors to education for the Ezhavas, enabling them to attend schools. By the late nineteenth century, educated members of the Ezhava community began to work towards uplifting their people and fighting the injustices they had long endured, particularly those related to caste discrimination and the notion of pollution.

Recognizing that their efforts would only succeed through collective action, the Ezhavas established several organizations and groups to unite their community. While many organizations were formed by leaders from various communities and religious backgrounds, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam became the sole organization representing the Ezhava community.[1] Today, the Ezhavas enjoy many societal privileges, largely thanks to the efforts and involvement of the SNDP Yogam.

The formation of the SNDP Yogam can be traced back to the late nineteenth century when educated leaders began to emerge and advocate for the rights of the community. One such leader was Dr. Palpu, who played a pivotal role in organizing the people of Travancore to oppose the injustices they faced. After submitting a petition to the Dewan, which proved ineffective, Dr. Palpu realized the need for a more organized and strategic movement. Inspired by Swami Vivekananda, he founded

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[1] Joseph Mathew, *Ideology, Protest and Social Mobility: Case Study of Mahars and Pulayas*, University of Michigan, 1986, p. 28.

the Ezhava Mahajana Sabha in 1896.[2] Swami Vivekananda had also encouraged Dr. Palpu to seek the guidance of Sree Narayana Guru, a revered ascetic from the Ezhava community.

With the support of Sree Narayana Guru and the poet Kumaran Asan, the organization was renamed the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903.[3] To formalize the organization, Sree Narayana Guru sought to register the SNDP Yogam as a joint-stock company.[4] The Dewan approved the registration, and the organization was officially licensed in March 1903.[5] Sree Narayana Guru became the permanent president of the SNDP yogam, with Kumaran Asan serving as its general secretary.

Dr. Palpu, known for his powerful oratory, played a key role in promoting the SNDP Yogam throughout Kerala. His speeches and efforts not only brought widespread attention to the organization but also facilitated the merger of various local Ezhava organizations with the SNDP Yogam, further strengthening the movement for the community's upliftment.

In its early stages, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam primarily represented the Ezhavas of Travancore. However, within just four years, its influence spread across Kerala, and it soon became the unified organization for the entire Ezhava community in the region.

Contributions to the Community

The SNDP played a pivotal role in elevating the Ezhava community. It helped raise the social status of the Ezhavas through revolutionary ideas championed by Sree Narayana Guru. As a visionary leader, Sree Narayana Guru recognized that societal change could not be achieved through individual efforts alone. He used the SNDP as

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2 M.K. Sanu, *Narayana Guru Swami* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2008, p. 60.

3 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. I, No.2, 1904, p. 19.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.,* p.21.

a platform to communicate and implement his progressive ideas. Under his leadership, the SNDP became the central organization representing the Ezhava community, leading their struggles for social, economic, educational, political, and religious equality.

From 1903 to 1919, the SNDP remained particularly active, marking a period of significant revolution and transformation. During this time, Sree Narayana Guru served as the organization's president, while the poet and reformer Kumaran Asan was its general secretary. Sree Narayana Guru focused on societal progress through reformative ideas, while Kumaran Asan worked to promote the community's status by engaging with the government, filing petitions, and seeking institutional support. Dr. Palpu stood alongside Asan, supporting these efforts.[6]

Other notable leaders who contributed to spreading the movement's momentum included Sahodaran Ayyappan, C.V. Kunjuraman, C. Krishnan, Murkoth Kumaran, and Paravoor Kesavan. These individuals were instrumental in expanding the revolutionary efforts initiated by Dr. Palpu and Sree Narayana Guru.[7]

At the time when Sree Narayana Guru took up the cause of uplifting the Ezhavas, the community was severely marginalized and exploited. They were denied basic rights and suffered from severe economic hardships. [8]The primary cause of their backwardness was ignorance, rooted in superstitions, illiteracy, and orthodoxy. Sree Narayana Guru, recognizing these obstacles, made it his mission to eliminate superstitions and lead the community towards progress and enlightenment.[9]

The SNDP focused on eliminating superfluous and detrimental customs within the Ezhava community while simultaneously emphasizing the critical importance of

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6 K.R. Narayanan, *Images and Insights*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 238.

7 J. Prabash, *Affirmative Action and Social Change: Social Mobility of Dalits*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 41.

8 K. Ravi Raman, *Development Democracy and the State: Critiquing the Kerala Model of Development* (ed.), New Delhi, 2012, p. 56.

9 *Mithavadi Magazine*, Vol. V, No.1, Auguste, 1913, p. 17.

education. As a result, the literacy rate among the Ezhavas gradually improved, leading to significant social progress and the erasure of their historical backwardness.[10]

Social Welfare Activities

Under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru, the SNDP made notable advancements in social welfare. Through the SNDP, Guru condemned the superstitions and orthodox practices that were prevalent among the Ezhavas. Despite their economic struggles, the community continued to spend large amounts on elaborate ceremonies and rituals, which were performed throughout life, from birth to death. Guru advised the Ezhavas to abandon these costly and unnecessary customs, which he saw as a waste of money. One such ceremony was the expensive *Thalikettu Kalyanam* ritual. Guru simplified the marriage process and introduced a new, more affordable system. This idea was accepted by the SNDP during its Sixth Annual General Meeting, and the organization worked to abolish such extravagant practices within the community.[11]

The SNDP's official journal, *Vivekodayam*, published information about the simplified marriage system, which Kumaran Asan helped promote. The SNDP also implemented a system for registering all marriages within the Ezhava community. To further this effort, the SNDP appointed influential speakers who traveled to rural areas once a month to educate the public on the unnecessary customs. These speakers also visited urban centers like Travancore to promote the aims and objectives of the SNDP.[12]

Sree Narayana Guru had a vision of uplifting not just the Ezhava community but all communities. The SNDP's focus on reforms naturally led to the establishment

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10 *Vivekodayam Magazine,* Vol. V, No.1, 1908, p. 24.

11 Raj Narain Arya*, Brahmin and Brahminism: A historical Survey*, Canada, 2001, p. 111.

12 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. II, No.1, 1914, pp. 36-38.

of a Women's Association, with conferences held annually after each SNDP meeting. These conferences encouraged Ezhava women to fight against the injustices they faced. Guru also believed that youth were the pillars of future society, leading to the formation of a youth association to inspire Ezhava youth.

The caste system was a major factor in the backwardness of the Ezhava community, and the SNDP strongly opposed the caste hierarchy that dominated Travancore. Sree Narayana Guru himself denounced caste barriers, emphasizing that the SNDP was not just for the Ezhavas, but for all people. Consequently, individuals from other castes also joined the SNDP. Guru's philosophy promoted the unity of humanity, encapsulated in his famous slogan, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for all."

Guru also founded several ashrams that accepted people regardless of caste or religion, including Brahmins. His vision was to educate the downtrodden and create a society free of caste divisions. The SNDP became well-known for its social and cultural contributions. On the religious front, Sree Narayana Guru had many spiritual disciples who spread his teachings. Leaders like Kumaran Asan, T.K. Madhavan, C. Krishnan, and C.V. Kunjuraman further strengthened the organization. C. Krishnan, as the editor of the journal *Mithavadi*, spread the SNDP's objectives and achievements, particularly in promoting human rights and social equality. Both spiritual leaders and SNDP officials worked together for the betterment of the Ezhava community.

Removal of Social Evils

From 1904 onwards, Sree Narayana Guru focused on eliminating social evils within the Ezhava community. Many harmful practices, including *Kettu Kalyanam* (child marriage), were prevalent. In this custom, girls as young as 12 were married off in extravagant ceremonies, leading to significant financial burdens for families. Both rich and poor Ezhavas celebrated this function lavishly, which often plunged families into poverty. Guru strongly criticized the extravagant expenses associated with *Kettu*

Kalyanam and advocated for its abolition, helping to lift the community out of unnecessary hardship.[13]

Similarly, other ceremonies such as *Thirattu Kalyanam* and *Pulikudi Kalyanam* were also common among the Ezhava community, and all of these rituals were costly and unnecessary. *Thirattu Kalyanam* was celebrated when a girl reached puberty, and *Pudavakoda* was a part of marriage ceremonies where the groom would present a new dress to the bride. *Pulikudi Kalyanam* was a ritual held when a woman became pregnant. Sree Narayana Guru put an end to these extravagant and unnecessary practices. He also worked to abolish the custom of Naga worship (snake worship) among the Ezhavas.[14]

The SNDP appointed strong orators to educate the public about these unnecessary ceremonies. These speakers were sent to rural areas once a month to spread the ideals of the SNDP, and to urban centers like Travancore to promote the organization's goals.[15] Sree Narayana Guru's vision was to uplift all communities, with a special focus on the Ezhavas.[16] This commitment to widespread reform also led to the formation of a women's association. A conference of the women's association was held after every annual SNDP meeting, where Ezhava women were encouraged to fight against the injustices they faced.[17]Sree Narayana Guru firmly believed that youth were the pillars of the future society, which led to the creation of a youth association to inspire and motivate young Ezhavas.

The caste system was one of the main reasons for the social and economic backwardness of the Ezhava community. Naturally, the SNDP opposed the caste system that prevailed in Kerala. Sree Narayana Guru himself raised his voice against

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13 V. Vilanilam, Antony Palackal, Sunny Luke (ed,), *Introduction to Kerala Studies: A Multi-Disciplinary Reference Book for Universities and Malayali* Diaspora-Vol I, U.S.A, 2012, p. 276.

14 *Vivekodhayam Magazine*, Vol.I, No.2, 1905, p. 2.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Vivekodhayam Magazine*, Vol 1, No.1, 1904, p. 28.

17 *Dharmadheeran, Magazine*, Vol. I, No.4, 1929, p. 123.

caste-based discrimination.[18] He emphasized that the SNDP was not solely for the Ezhavas but was open to everyone, leading individuals from other castes to join the organization. Guru advised the SNDP members not to differentiate people based on caste, and he propagated the principle of human unity through his famous slogan, "One Caste, One Religion, One God."[19]

Guru also founded several ashrams that welcomed people from all castes and religions, including Brahmins. He believed in educating the downtrodden and sought to create a society free of caste barriers.[20] The SNDP gained widespread recognition for its socio-cultural contributions. On the religious front, Sree Narayana Guru had many spiritual disciples who spread his teachings. The SNDP also had strong leaders like Kumaran Asan, T.K. Madhavan, C. Krishnan, and C.V. Kunjuraman, who worked tirelessly for the community. C. Krishnan, as the editor of the journal *Mithavadi*, promoted the SNDP's objectives and highlighted its achievements in protecting human rights and promoting social equality. Both the spiritual and organizational leaders of the SNDP worked hand in hand for the welfare of the Ezhava community.

Struggle for Representation

Initially, the Ezhava community was denied representation in the Legislative Assembly and the Council. The SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana) movement united the Ezhavas and fought for their inclusion. Kumaran Asan became the first Ezhava to be represented in the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly, marking a significant milestone for the community.[21] As the voice of the Ezhavas, the SNDP consistently demanded representation in the Assembly, pressing the government to recognize their rights. Eventually, their efforts succeeded, and the government

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18 M.K. Sanu, *Narayana Guru:A biography,* Bombay,1998, p. 117.

19 Vijayalayam Jayakumar, *Sree Narayana Guru: A Critical Study*, New Delhi, 2017, p. 73.

20 *Ibid.*

21 T.K. Ravindran, *Eight Furlongs of Freedom*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p. 38

conceded to their demands. SNDP leaders held numerous meetings, pledging to support the Ezhava community in all their struggles for liberation.[22]

Removal of Discriminatory Boards and the Right to Public Access

The Ezhava representatives raised various injustices in the Assembly, including their exclusion from education, government jobs, and most notably, their prohibition from using public roads near temples. Discriminatory signs called *Theendal Palakas* were installed on these roads to prevent low-caste individuals from accessing them.[23] Kumaran Asan persistently argued in the Legislative Assembly for the right of low castes to access public roads, bringing national attention to the issue. [24]He submitted numerous petitions demanding the removal of these restrictions.[25]

Another Ezhava leader, Kunju Panikkar, also pushed for the abolition of untouchability and unapproachability. Despite these efforts, the government's response remained indifferent. The SNDP organized multiple agitations, but they initially proved ineffective. It wasn't until other low-caste communities joined forces with the Ezhavas that the movement gained momentum. The Indian National Congress took notice and joined the fight, which led to the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-1925) under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan. Although this movement was considered unsuccessful at the time, it laid the groundwork for future efforts.

In 1927, widespread protests led by T.K. Madhavan culminated in the opening of all public roads to low-caste individuals. This marked a significant step in the fight against caste discrimination. The persistent advocacy in the Assembly by Ezhava leaders gradually resulted in the community gaining their long-denied rights. Dr.

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22 *Vivekodayam Magazine*, Vol. II, No.4, 1905, pp. 1-2.

23 *Vivekodayam Magazine*, Vol. II, No.11, 1913. (n.p).

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly*, Vol. l, 1935, p. 120.

Palpu, though working behind the scenes, played a key role in guiding these representatives as they fought for justice and equality.

The Ezhavas were historically denied government employment,[26] with only low-level positions offered to them, regardless of their qualifications.[27] Dr. Palpu was the first from the Ezhava community to highlight this injustice.[28] He submitted several petitions, including the Ezhava Memorial and Malayali Memorial (1891), to address the issue. Ezhava employees in the Revenue Department earned less than fifteen rupees, a sum that was later increased due to Dr. Palpu's efforts. Kumaran Asan also raised the issue in the Legislative Assembly, noting that only 80 Ezhavas were employed out of 13,181 government employees, largely due to caste-based discrimination. Adding to the injustice, while the Ezhavas were denied jobs, Ezhavas who converted to Christianity were employed without issue. This led to demands from Ezhava leaders for equal access to government jobs, particularly in departments where Ezhava converts were already employed.

Despite the theoretical opening of the Revenue Department to Ezhavas, they were still not appointed in practice. Similar exclusions occurred in other departments, though they were officially open to the Ezhavas.[29] Kumaran Asan advocated for equal representation in government employment, arguing that Ezhavas contributed to the state just like other castes. A memorandum was sent on this issue, and SNDP leaders such as T.K. Madhavan, C.V. Kunjuraman, and K. Ayyappan, under the leadership of Kumaran Asan, negotiated with the Dewan of Cochin. Eventually, the Dewan issued a circular granting employment rights to Ezhavas in all departments except the *Dewaswom* Department. The Dewan of Travancore followed suit, but many department heads refused to appoint Ezhavas, rendering these efforts ineffective. However, the SNDP persisted in advocating for employment rights, eventually

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26 K. Ravi Raman (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 106.

27 Mannathu Padmanabhan, *Reminiscences of My Life*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003, p. 8.

28 George Mathew, *Communal Road to a Secular Kerala*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 53.

29 *Sahodaran,* Magazine, Vol. II, No. I, 1920, p. 57.

leading to the introduction of job reservations for Ezhavas in 1935, based on their population share. Even after gaining employment, Ezhavas faced caste-based discrimination.[30] For instance, Ezhavas in the police department were restricted from entering certain areas due to caste prejudice. Over time, these restrictions eased, and the Ezhavas were able to work more freely. These significant advancements would not have been possible without the relentless efforts of the SNDP.

Economically, the Ezhavas were also disadvantaged.[31] To address this, the SNDP focused on improving the community's economic conditions by encouraging agricultural and industrial activities,[32] moving away from the traditional occupation of toddy tapping.[33] In line with Sree Narayana Guru's opposition to toddy tapping, the SNDP urged Ezhavas to embrace agriculture and industry. To promote this shift, the SNDP organized an industrial and agricultural exhibition in Kollam on January 7 and 8, 1905, following the organization's second annual general meeting.[34] Ezhavas from Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar participated, showcasing agricultural products such as paddy, tapioca, and pepper, as well as manufactured goods like textiles, coir, and sugar. The exhibition was a great success, raising the status of the Ezhavas, and was attended by the Maharajas of Travancore, Cochin, and Mysore.

In 1907, a second Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition was held in Kannur, following the SNDP's fourth annual meeting.[35] This event garnered attention across India and included awards, certificates, and cash prizes for deserving participants. The exhibitions encouraged Ezhavas to invest in trade and small-scale industries such as

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30 H. Kotani, *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed* (ed.), New Delhi, 1997, p. 143.

31 A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers*, Kottayam, 2011, p. 202.

32 Kappadath Parameswara Kannan, *Of Rural Proletarian Struggles: Mobilization And organization of Rural workers in South – West India*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 57.

33 Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio- Religious Reform Movements in British India-Vol. I*, England, 1989, p. 186.

34 George Mathew, *op.cit.,* p. 53.

35 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. V, No.1, p. 21

coir manufacturing and weaving.[36] A tile factory was even established in the name of Sree Narayana Guru in recognition of the SNDP's efforts. Through these initiatives, the Ezhava community gradually progressed economically, abandoning toddy tapping in favor of agricultural by-products and small-scale industries. The SNDP also promoted handicrafts, further contributing to the community's economic upliftment.[37]

To advance their business interests, the Ezhavas formed a union called the Malabar Economic Union. In addition, a trading company was established in Ernakulam by the Ezhavas of Cochin to further promote trade. As a result, commerce and industry flourished, with new industries emerging regularly. The SNDP also played a crucial role by offering financial assistance to support Ezhava businesses. During the seventh annual general meeting of the SNDP, a resolution was passed to provide a loan of one lakh rupees to Ezhavas to either start new businesses or improve existing ones. This financial support was also extended to cultivators to encourage agricultural activities. The initiative led to the creation of several chit fund companies, contributing significantly to the community's economic growth. Today, the economic prosperity of the Ezhavas can be largely attributed to the efforts of the SNDP.[38]

In official records, the Ezhavas were often referred to as either 'Ezhavas' or 'Thiyyas.'[39] Although these terms were used collectively to describe the community, there were several sub-castes within it, each with distinct customs and daily practices. Marriages between different sub-castes were prohibited, and despite being known by a common name, the differences between them created divisions. This lack of unity was one of the main reasons for the community's historical repression.

Recognizing the need for unity, organizations in Travancore, particularly the SNDP, took the initiative to unite the various sub-castes of the Ezhava community.

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36 *Ibid.*

37 M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making: A Study of Sahodaran Ayyappan*, Palakkad, 1993, p. 51.

38 *Vivekodayam Magazine*, Vol. II, No.4, 1905, p. 4.

39 *Ibid*., Vol. III, No.3, 1905, p. 3.

The SNDP deserves credit for this unification, which brought significant benefits to the community. Once united, the Ezhavas were able to collectively fight against oppression, setting aside their internal differences. Initially, when one sub-caste faced challenges, only a few others would offer support. However, after the unification, their struggles gained momentum as the entire community participated in large numbers, strengthening their cause.

When the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam) was first established, its focus was primarily on the Ezhavas of Travancore, working for their spiritual and economic empowerment.[40] Over time, however, the organization began to extend its efforts to include the Thiyyas of Malabar and the Chovans of Cochin, alongside the Ezhavas of Travancore. Eventually, the SNDP opened its doors to the entire community, regardless of sub-divisions.[41] Kumaran Asan, the general secretary of the SNDP, consistently emphasized the importance of unity within the community, making it a core objective of the organization. This message of oneness was highlighted at every annual general meeting and reinforced during meetings in the Malabar and Cochin regions.[42]

As a result, many leaders from Malabar and Cochin joined the SNDP, working together for communal unity. One such leader was Kottiathu Ramunny Vakil from North Malabar, who was invited to deliver the presidential address at the third annual general meeting of the SNDP held in Alleppey in 1906. During this meeting, he emphasized the need for the Ezhavas of Travancore, Thiyyas of Malabar, and Chovans of Cochin to collaborate for the progress of the entire community. To promote this idea, he also published an article in the journal *Mithavadi*. At the twentieth annual general meeting of the SNDP in 1923, a resolution was passed requesting the government to officially refer to the entire community as "Thiyyas" in

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40 *Ibid.*

41 Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 305.

42 *Vivekodayam Magazine*, Vol. III, No.5, 1907, p.3.

records.[43] This marked a significant milestone, as the various subdivisions of the community came together, united in purpose. This unity was achieved largely due to the persistent efforts of the SNDP.[44]

Uniting the Ezhavas of Cochin and Malabar was a significant achievement, but through the relentless work of leaders such as C. Krishnan, Rarichan Moopan, Kottiathu Ramunny from Malabar, and E.K. Ayyakutty from Cochin, the Ezhavas in these regions were brought together. This unification resulted in the Ezhavas becoming the single largest community in Kerala.

The Fight Against Untouchability

The Ezhavas were historically subjected to untouchability and considered unapproachable by the higher castes. They were denied basic rights such as walking on public roads, using public wells, attending schools, and accessing markets, all due to the rigid caste system. Although official proclamations were issued granting them the right to use public roads, these proclamations were often ignored. In response, the government issued a circular warning of severe punishments for those who violated these laws. Gradually, changes began to take effect as punishments were enforced, and discrimination began to lessen.

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and Anti-Conversion

The nineteenth century also saw the arrival of European missionaries in Kerala, significantly impacting the social and religious landscape. However, the SNDP focused on uplifting the Ezhava community and promoting unity, addressing social challenges such as untouchability without resorting to religious conversion.

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43 *Mithavadi*, Magazine, Vol. ll, No. 1,1914, p. 25.

44 Address speech of Murkothu Kumaran in the 10th Annual Meeting of the Velappad Ezhava Samajam in *Kerala Kaumudi*, Newspaper, 23 April 1930, N.N.P.R., Tamil Nadu State Archives. (n.p).

Through its efforts, the SNDP played a pivotal role in the progress and empowerment of the Ezhava community, striving for equality and dignity within society.

During this period, several schools were established, offering free education to all, regardless of caste or creed. For the first time, historically marginalized communities gained access to education and knowledge. Alongside education, the ideals of Christianity were spread, and many were drawn to these beliefs, leading to conversions. The Christian converts gained several rights that were denied to other lower castes. They were allowed to walk on public roads and were not subjected to untouchability. As a result, many people opted to convert to Christianity to enjoy these rights.

During the peak of these conversions, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam was established. Many Ezhavas embraced Christianity and Islam during this time. The leaders of the SNDP sought to curb the rate of conversion.[45] The organization stood as a barrier against the conversions and managed to prevent some Ezhavas in Travancore from converting. Before this, many Ezhava leaders believed that converting to other religions like Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism was the only way to escape caste-based restrictions and untouchability. However, Kumaran Asan, a prominent leader, strongly opposed this view.[46] He was supported by Sree Narayana Guru and the SNDP, who worked towards reforming Hinduism by eliminating its rigid orthodox practices. Although the SNDP's efforts slowed down the rate of conversion, they could not stop it entirely.

Regarding the Ezhava community's marital practices, monogamy was prevalent, but polygamy also existed. Divorce was permissible by mutual consent. The Ezhavas in Travancore followed a matrilineal system of inheritance, though in some areas, patrilineal or mixed inheritance systems were also practiced. These diverse systems often led to complications. Recognizing these issues, the SNDP

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45 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. IV, No.7, 1916, p. 44.

46 *Ibid.*

sought to improve the social welfare of the Ezhava community, focusing particularly on reforming the inheritance system. When the government implemented changes to the inheritance laws for the Nair community, Kumaran Asan urged the Ezhavas to send their suggestions regarding inheritance law reforms to the SNDP office.[47] In 1912, during the ninth annual general meeting of the Yogam, a special prayer was conducted for the appointment of a new commission to regulate marriage and inheritance laws for the Ezhava community.[48]

C.V. Kunjuraman, a prominent Ezhava leader, published an editorial in *Kerala Kaumudi* highlighting the benefits of the proposed regulation that the SNDP Yogam was advocated by. Due to the SNDP's persistent efforts, the government eventually appointed a commission to reform the laws governing inheritance and marriage. This commission meticulously reviewed the public's suggestions and submitted its report to the government on April 9, 1923. Based on the commission's recommendations, the Ezhava Regulation Act of 1925 was enacted.[49] The role of the SNDP in advocating for these social reforms was crucial, particularly in matters related to marital relationships and inheritance laws.

Advocacy Beyond the Ezhava Community

Although the SNDP primarily represented the Ezhava community, its efforts were not limited to them alone. The Yogam worked for the upliftment of all marginalized groups, including those considered to be even lower in the social hierarchy than the Ezhavas. Whenever the SNDP led struggles for rights, it did so on behalf of not just the Ezhavas, but also other low-caste communities.

Mannathu Padmanabhan, another notable social reformer, acknowledged that the SNDP's work benefited other oppressed communities, such as the Pulayas and

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47 *Vivekodayam*, Magazine, Vol. IX, No.8, 1913, p. 25.

48 *Ibid*., p. 35.

49 Vivekodhayam, Magazine, Vol.ll, No.2, 1926. (n.p).

Parayas, as well as the Ezhavas.[50] The rise of the Ezhava community under the SNDP's leadership inspired other low-caste groups to fight for their rights. Kumaran Asan, a prominent Ezhava leader, raised his voice in the legislative assembly not only for the Ezhavas but also for the Pulayas. It is widely believed that it was due to Kumaran Asan's influence that the government nominated Ayyankali, a leader from the Pulaya community, to the legislative assembly in 1912.[51] Additionally, the SNDP passed a resolution demanding that the government nominate a Pulaya representative to the assembly.

In its eighth annual general meeting in 1912, the SNDP further resolved that its leaders should actively support the Pulayas and assist them in their struggles. Through these efforts, the Yogam indirectly contributed to the progress of other downtrodden communities.

The Denial of Education to Ezhavas

The SNDP recognized the importance of education as a key tool for empowering the Ezhava community to resist injustice. The Yogam believed that education would enable the Ezhavas to discern right from wrong and to critically evaluate which customs and traditions should be preserved.[52] However, in reality, the Ezhavas were systematically denied access to education. They were barred from attending government schools, as education in Travancore during the nineteenth century was reserved for caste Hindus.

Caste discrimination was rampant during this time, reaching its peak as those in power suppressed lower-caste communities with no regard for ethical values. According to the Travancore Administrative Report of 1863, no one from the backward classes was admitted to government schools, even towards the end of the

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50 Mannathu Padmanabhan, *Entejeevitha Smaranakal, Part I* (Mal.), 1964, p. 112.

51 *Vivekodayam*, Vol. V, No.6, 1912, p. 164.

52 P. Chandramohan, *Development modernity in Kerala: Narayana Guru, SNDP Yogam and Social Reform,* Chennai, 2018, p. 38.

nineteenth century. Under the pressure from caste Hindus, the government refused to enroll students from marginalized communities, fearing they would have to sit alongside caste Hindus in the same classroom.

The famous Ezhava Memorial, submitted by Dr. Palpu, which called for equal educational opportunities, was also rejected by the government.[53] The Travancore government actively sought to keep the Ezhavas uneducated, placing numerous obstacles in their path whenever they attempted to gain access to education.[54]

In the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries emerged as saviors for the Ezhava community, who had long been denied education. The missionaries established schools that provided free education to all, including the Ezhavas. However, even in these missionary schools, there was a distinction between converts and non-converts.[55] Despite these differences, the educational opportunities provided by the missionaries played a crucial role in the early stages of Ezhava education.

Role of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in Educational Empowerment

The Ezhavas' pursuit of education only truly gained momentum with the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru. He was the driving force behind the community's educational progress, advocating for the importance of knowledge and education. Sree Narayana Guru often emphasized, "Knowledge is God," believing that people are repositories of knowledge and that education is the key to empowerment.[56] He laid the foundation for providing education to all, encouraging the Ezhava community to shed oppressive customs and take bold steps toward self-improvement.

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53 M.J. Koshy, *Genesis of Political Consciousness in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972, p. 36.

54 *The Madras Standard*, Newspaper, November 1896, p. 34.

55 P. Chandramohan, *op.cit*., p. 46.

56 *Kerala Kaumudi Newspaper*, 1 January, 1999, p. 5.

The SNDP wholeheartedly embraced this cause and began working toward the educational advancement of the community. One of its fundamental objectives, as articulated by Sree Narayana Guru, was "To liberate through education and strengthen through organization."[57] Guru firmly believed that education was the primary means to uplift the Ezhava community, and he urged the SNDP to spread awareness about the importance of education.

Guru instructed that all Ezhavas should receive at least a basic education and that no one should be left uneducated.[58] He encouraged his followers to disseminate the value of education, with many of his teachings centered on this theme. His vision was for the Ezhavas to achieve a better quality of life through education.

The SNDP aimed to ensure that all backward communities, not just the Ezhavas, received at least elementary education. It sought to inspire the poor to pursue education as a means to elevate themselves socially and economically. In addition, the SNDP promoted the education of Ezhava women, recognizing the importance of empowering women through knowledge. The Yogam also encouraged its leaders to establish libraries and schools to foster educational development within the community.[59]

In 1904, Sree Narayana Guru established a Sanskrit school at Sivagiri,[60] where he had built a temple and [61]installed a Shiva idol. Sivagiri became the center of Guru's educational and revolutionary activities. To oversee the spiritual and educational functions of the Sivagiri Mutt, Guru formed a committee known as Sivagiri Sahodaryam, with Swami Sivalinga serving as its secretary.[62] The committee

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57 Jerald J. Pereira, *Narayana Guru: A Social Educator*, Varkala, 1989, p.138.

58 Nataraja Guru, *The word of the Guru: The Life and Teachings of Guru Narayana*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 80.

59 P. Chandramohan, *op.cit*., p. 46.

60 S.N. Sadasivan, *A Social History of India*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 499.

61 *Kerala Kaumudi, Newspaper,* 31 December, 2011, p. 8.

62 *Ibid*.

consisted of *sanyasis* (renunciants) who resided at Sivagiri to manage and teach at the Sanskrit school. These *sanyasis* and Guru's disciples played a crucial role in promoting education among the backward communities.[63]

Guru's disciples traveled across the state, raising funds for the school's expansion. Those who donated Rs. 10 or more were included in the school committee.[64] Over time, the Sanskrit school became an institution providing education in Sanskrit to lower castes, a privilege previously denied to them. This remarkable achievement was made possible through the dedicated efforts of Sree Narayana Guru. Subsequently, more Sanskrit schools were established at Aruvipuram and Aluva.[65] In addition to Sanskrit, these schools also offered instruction in Malayalam and English, though Guru placed particular emphasis on Sanskrit, believing that Indian culture was deeply rooted in the language.

Sree Narayana Guru personally taught Sanskrit literature and scriptures to the students, and the Sanskrit schools became renowned for their teaching methods and the strong moral character they instilled in their pupils. Mundayil Govindan Asan was responsible for overseeing the overall operations of the schools.[66] Guru, like the other teachers, actively taught the students, and admission was open to all, regardless of caste or creed.

A board was formed to manage the schools, comprising eminent members such as V.R. Padmanabhan, Swami Sankaran Paradesi, and Kumaran Asan. Eventually, this board was brought under the control of the SNDP, whose leaders worked diligently to expand the institution. Students from all over the state enrolled in the school and stayed at the Sivagiri Gurukulam.[67]

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63 *Sahodaran Magazine*, Vol. II, No. I, 1920, p. 57.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Nataraja Guru, *Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru: In Two Parts*, Varkala, 1990, p. 53.

66 *Vivekodhayam*, Magazine, Vol. III, No.2, 1917, p. 34.

67 *Ibid*., p. 41.

However, by the late 1950s, the prominence of these Sanskrit schools began to fade, largely due to the establishment of government-run Malayalam and English medium schools, which offered education to all without discrimination. As previously mentioned, the Ezhavas were initially denied entry into government schools and had to rely on Christian missionary schools for their education. Later, Sree Narayana Guru founded separate schools to provide education to the Ezhavas and other marginalized communities.

Though the SNDP established schools to educate Ezhavas, it also took significant steps to secure admission for Ezhava students in government schools. The organization, through its representative Kumaran Asan, raised the issue of school entry rights in the legislative assembly. Asan highlighted the struggles of the Ezhava community and demanded equal opportunities for their education. In response, the government gradually began to yield to these demands, establishing separate schools for Ezhavas and other marginalized communities.[68]

However, the Ezhavas were not satisfied with the separate schools and sought equal educational opportunities, demanding the same access to education as caste Hindus. The government, citing opposition from caste Hindus, rejected their request.[69] In response, the SNDP decided to submit a memorial to the government, requesting equal education rights. SNDP representatives in the assembly sought signatures from members to support the memorial, and 64 members, including some from high-caste communities and even a few Nair leaders, signed the petition. The Nair representatives also passed a resolution advocating for the admission of Ezhavas into government schools, breaking caste barriers.

Despite this support, the government rejected the memorial, with the Dewan stating that the decision was due to concerns about "social pollution" and nothing else.

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68 T.K. Raveendran, *Sree Narayana Guru: Oru* Padanam (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2018, p. 67.

69 *Vivekodayam Magazine*, Vol. I, No.2, 1904, p. 41.

Nevertheless, the SNDP did not give up. After persistent efforts, the government finally relented and opened boys' schools for Ezhavas.[70]

The SNDP's Role in Women's Education

Following their significant victory in opening educational opportunities for Ezhava boys, the SNDP further emphasized ensuring educational opportunities for Ezhavas girls. The organization prioritized gender equality in education, recognizing that the education of women was essential for the community's overall progress. The importance of women's education was emphasized in all SNDP annual meetings, conferences, and through articles in its official journal, *Vivekodayam*. By promoting the education of both men and women, the SNDP sought to achieve comprehensive social and economic development for the Ezhava community.[71]

To draw the government's attention to the issue of women's education, representatives of the SNDP raised their concerns in the legislative assembly, demanding the establishment of government schools for Ezhava girls. Initially, the government remained silent and later rejected the demands, citing the traditional and orthodox customs of Travancore.[72] However, the SNDP representatives persisted, continuing to argue in the assembly. Under the leadership of Kumaran Asan, they met with the Dewan and requested the opening of schools for Ezhava girls. Eventually, Dewan Rajagopalachari issued orders to open schools for both boys and girls of all castes without discrimination.[73]

In an article published in *Vivekodayam*, Kumaran Asan highlighted that several barriers to Ezhava education were broken by government orders E-2044 (June 6, 1908) and E-1964 (May 8, 1908).[74] Despite these advancements, certain schools

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70 *Vivekodayam*, Magazine, Vol. V, No.1, 1922, pp. 4-5.

71 *Ibid*., p. 20.

72 *Ibid.,* p. 36.

73 *Vivekodayam, Magazine,* Vol. VII, No.5, 1911, p. 33.

74 *Vivekodayam, Magazine,* Vol. V, No.2, 1908, p. 5.

located near temples and palaces remained off-limits to the Ezhavas.[75] Nevertheless, due to the persistent efforts of the SNDP leaders, government schools were opened not only to Ezhavas but also to other backward communities, such as the Pulayas.[76] At the same time, there were favorable developments in Cochin, where the Dewan opened government schools for all children, regardless of gender or caste.[77]

As these government schools became accessible to all communities, student enrollment surged significantly. The number of Ezhava students grew considerably, and Pulaya student enrollment increased from 2,017 in 1914 to 10,918 in 1917.[78]

Enrollment of Ezhavas in Ayurvedic and Sanskrit Institutions.

Many Ezhavas were renowned for their expertise in Ayurvedic medicine, with significant contributions to the field. However, despite their rich legacy, they were denied admission to Ayurvedic institutions, as well as Sanskrit colleges. The proximity of these institutions to holy sites and royal palaces further exacerbated the exclusion of the downtrodden.

The SNDP leaders raised this issue in the assembly, with Kumaran Asan delivering a speech that highlighted the cultural heritage of Ayurveda and the significant contributions of Ezhava physicians.[79] He spoke of the Ezhavas' history as palace physicians and their service to high-caste individuals, recounting the honors and recognition they had received from the rulers of the land.[80] Through such efforts, the SNDP continued to challenge the barriers to education and professional advancement faced by the Ezhava community.

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75 *Vivekodayam, Magazine,* Vol. II, No.1, 1909, p. 5.

76 *Vivekodayam, Magazine,* Vol. X, No.3, 1913, p.11.

77 *Mithavadi Magazine*, Vol. IV, No.3, 1916, pp. 5-6.

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Vivekodayam Magazine,* Vol. IX, No.11, 1913, pp. 45-54.

80 *Ibid.*

The SNDP representatives repeatedly raised demands in the assembly, but the Dewan consistently denied them, citing concerns over social purity. Despite this, the SNDP persisted, and due to its tireless efforts, the Ayurveda College in Trivandrum was relocated in 1914 and subsequently opened to all communities without discrimination.[81] Additionally, C. Kesavan Asan founded a separate Ayurvedic school in Paravoor, where girls were given special consideration.[82]

Demand for Fee Concessions

After ensuring that schools and colleges were accessible to low-caste communities, the SNDP shifted its focus to improving the educational system. Since many from these communities were poor and unable to afford school fees, they faced significant financial barriers to education. Meanwhile, fee concessions were granted to high-caste students who were wealthier.[83] In response, the SNDP leaders demanded fee concessions for low-caste students, particularly the Ezhavas, and submitted a memorial to this effect. Dewan C. Rajagopalachari considered the memorial and approved fee concessions for Ezhava students.[84]

Discrimination against Ezhavas

Despite these advancements, Ezhava students still faced discrimination from Nair students, which often led to chaos and riots throughout the state. Both low- and high-caste communities clashed during this period.[85] Just as caste Hindus looked down upon Ezhavas, many Ezhavas, in turn, regarded castes lower than them, such as the Pulayas as inferior.[86] When Pulayas were admitted to schools, many Ezhavas

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81 File. No: E-199 – File corresponding on opening of Ayurvedha College of Thiruvananthapuram for all communities, Education Department, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvanathapuram, 16 October 1914. (n.p).

82 *Vivekodayam*, Magazine, Vol. II, No.4, 1906, p. 9

83 Robin Jeffery, *Politics, Women and well-Being*, London, 1992, p. 35

84 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine*,* Vol. II, No.3, pp. 31-32.

85 *Vivekodayam,* Magazine, Vol. II, No.3, 1914, p. 133.

86 *Ibid.*

opposed their inclusion. However, the SNDP leadership supported the enrollment of other low-caste groups and urged Ezhavas to abandon their arrogance and assist them in their progress.

Establishment of an Educational Fund

To provide financial support for the education of poor Ezhavas, the SNDP established the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam Education Fund.[87] A committee was also formed with representatives from Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar to support students in need. In addition, the SNDP offered scholarships for higher education and granted interest-free loans with easy repayment terms. As a result of these efforts, the number of Ezhava students grew significantly—from 23,895 in 1914 to 54,777 in 1921 and 57,328 in 1922.[88]

The work of the SNDP marked a significant turning point in the educational advancement of the Ezhava community, representing a monumental achievement in Travancore's history. Among its many accomplishments, the removal of caste-based discrimination in schools was the most important. These victories were followed by the School Entry Movement, which marked the beginning of a new era where Ezhavas gained their rights to temple entry, adult franchise, and political representation. Although caste discrimination in schools decreased after this period, it did not disappear entirely.

Spiritual Contributions of Sree Narayana Guru and the SNDP

Sree Narayana Guru, a revered ascetic, preached the ideals of human dignity and equality. For a long time, Ezhavas were not allowed to enter temples, but through his spiritual leadership and the work of the SNDP, the barriers that restricted the community's religious and social rights began to break down.[89]

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87 *Ibid*., *op. cit.,* p.115.

88 *Navajeevan,* Magazine, Vol. I, No.3, 1972, p. 88.

89 A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers*, Kottayam, 2011, p. 225.

The Ezhava community was historically barred from worshipping major deities like Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi, as these practices were considered the exclusive rights of the upper castes. Instead, the Ezhavas were only permitted to worship local deities such as *Kutichathan*, *Chamundi,* and *Gullikan*, often offering sacrifices of birds, animals, and even alcohol in their rituals. Sree Narayana Guru viewed these customs as uncivilized and sought to reform them. He believed in elevating the spiritual practices of the Ezhavas and guiding them toward more progressive religious values.

The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement, which followed Narayana Guru's teachings, worked to establish new temples and ashrams for those previously denied access to traditional Hindu temples. The movement actively prohibited animal sacrifice and the offering of alcohol to deities, focusing instead on promoting unity and brotherhood among the oppressed castes. It encouraged the Ezhavas to build their own temples and underscored the importance of temples in the spiritual and religious life of individuals. These temples also served as centers for education, housing schools and libraries, thereby broadening their impact on the community.[90]

One of SNDP's goals was to open these temples to people of all castes and creeds. However, the Ezhava community initially resisted the idea of allowing other people of lower castes into their temples. Narayana Guru criticized this exclusionary attitude and urged the Ezhavas to embrace unity with other marginalized groups. His persistent efforts led to a transformation in the mindset of the Ezhavas, fostering a sense of brotherhood among them and other marginalized castes.[91] Narayana Guru's teachings were pivotal in bringing about religious reform in Travancore, where his progressive outlook on religion promoted inclusivity and equality.[92]

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90 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. 1, No.1, 1913, p. 17.

91 *Mithavadi,* Magazine, Vol. IV, No.1, 1916, p. 21.

92 *Ibid.*

Although Narayana Guru witnessed many lower-caste Hindus converting to Christianity, Islam, and other religions during his time, he did not place blame on these religions.[93] Instead, he argued that harmful practices within Hinduism, such as caste discrimination, untouchability, and other social injustices, were driving people away. His solution was not conversion but reform within Hinduism itself. He strongly criticized the caste system and advocated for unity among all oppressed castes, urging them to fight against the injustices they faced.[94]

In March 1924, Narayana Guru organized an "All Religious Conference" at Aluva, with the aim of fostering unity among different religious communities. Representatives from various faiths attended the event, where Guru emphasized that all religions ultimately share the same goal. The conference promoted religious harmony and mutual respect, a theme central to Narayana Guru's philosophy.[95] He argued that nothing had been gained from caste conflicts and that the nation would benefit from embracing religious equality.

Sivagiri became the center of both spiritual and educational activities under Narayana Guru's guidance,[96] evolving into a pilgrimage site for the Ezhavas. In 1924, he proposed establishing a school dedicated to religious and spiritual education. By 1925, he had appointed Bodhananda as his successor[97] and entrusted the management of his properties to the Dharma Yogam, a trust he created.[98] His efforts to stop

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93 R.N. Yesudhas, The History of the *London Missionary Society in Travancore 1806-1908*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p. 23

94 V. Thomas Samuel, *One Caste, One Religion, One God: A Study of Sree Narayana Guru*, Delhi, 1977, p. 1.

95 K. Sreenivasan, *Kumaran Asan: Profile of A Poet's Vision*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984, p. 21.

96 M.K. Sanu, *op. cit*., pp. 82-83.

97 C.Meera, *Sree Narayana Dharma Sanghom Trust: It Socio-Spiritual Mission*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002, p. 189.

98 Vijayalam Jayakumar, *op.cit.,* p. 373.

conversions to Christianity even included reconverting many Ezhavas back to Hinduism, reinforcing his commitment to reform rather than conversion.[99]

Narayana Guru's fight for the rights of the Ezhavas left a lasting impact on Kerala's society, helping to dismantle traditional caste restrictions and promoting social progress. His teachings on equality and freedom were instrumental in elevating the status of the Ezhava community, and his advocacy sowed the seeds of freedom and equality among the oppressed castes. Through his efforts, Kerala took significant strides toward a more just and equitable society.[100]

In addition to establishing temples, Sree Narayana Guru advocated for the creation of industries and schools, recognizing that trade and education were crucial pillars of progress. He worked to abolish many harmful practices that were justified in the name of religion and appointed priests from his own community to serve in temples.[101] This marked an era of revolution, where caste barriers were dismantled, and the lower castes began to shed their inferiority complex, enabling them to live with dignity in society. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement fully supported Guru's efforts, implementing his ideas and making them practical for society.

Guru believed that the Ezhavas could be strengthened through the SNDP Yogam and liberated through education. The SNDP worked to remove the community's social, political, educational, and economic backwardness, helping to foster development in multiple spheres.

The Ezhavas, historically barred from temples due to caste-based restrictions, were forced to worship from a distance—sometimes standing as far as 30 feet away from the sanctum. Although their offerings were accepted by temple management,

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99 Swamy Geethananda, *Sivagiri Theerthadana Kanaka Jubilee Sammelnam*, Sivagiri, 1985, pp. 103-106.

100 C. Meera. *op. cit.,* p. 78.

101 *Ibid.*

they themselves were not permitted entry. Despite these humiliations, a deep faith persisted within the community that one day they, too, would be allowed to worship God without restrictions.

Sree Narayana Guru ignited this hidden faith through his teachings. He consecrated new temples and opened them to everyone, regardless of caste. His actions were revolutionary, particularly when he established the temple at Aruvipuram, located about 40 km south of Travancore. In 1888, Guru began the construction of this temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, with the intention of making the Ezhavas equal to the high castes.

Breaking with tradition, Guru installed the Shiva idol himself, disregarding the customs and rituals typically followed during temple consecration. He also appointed priests from his own community. This act met with strong opposition from caste Hindus, but Guru calmly responded by stating that he had installed an "Ezhava Shiva" rather than a "Brahmin Shiva." His statement became famous and was a turning point in the empowerment of the Ezhava community.

Through this act, Sree Narayana Guru allowed the Ezhavas, who had previously been restricted to worshipping local deities, to worship Lord Shiva at the Aruvipuram temple. Furthermore, he extended this opportunity to other marginalized communities, such as the Pulayas, allowing them to enter the temples he consecrated. Guru's work not only brought religious reform but also symbolized the larger struggle for equality and dignity for the oppressed.[102]

The Aruvipuram installation by Sree Narayana Guru was a pivotal event that shattered the caste-based barriers in worship and emphasized the fundamental right of every individual to worship any deity. Guru's non-violent struggle for the rights of the Ezhava community, along with the temple, Sanskrit school, and *gurukulam* he founded, gained significant attention across Kerala. Encouraged by the Ezhavas, Guru

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[102] A. Sreedhara Menon, A *Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam, 2006, p. 299.

went on to establish 62 temples throughout Travancore, challenging the traditional customs upheld by the upper castes. His movement extended beyond Kerala, with temples being established in neighboring states and even in Sri Lanka.

Among these temples, the most notable was the Sarada Mutt at Sivagiri, where Guru installed the idol of Sarada, the Goddess of Education. The octagonal structure, made of bricks, glass windows, and panels, became a center of attraction. In these temples, Guru abolished religious rituals and encouraged meditation, emphasizing mental calmness and peace. He believed temples should serve as both places of worship and centers for relaxation. Guru also advocated for the inclusion of gardens and libraries in temples, so devotees could experience tranquility and gain knowledge through religious and spiritual texts.[103]

The temples founded by Sree Narayana Guru were markedly different from traditional upper-caste temples, which propagated religious exclusivity. Guru's temples were open to all, fostering inclusivity, mental peace, and freedom from social worries. Though he installed idols in some temples, such as the Shiva idol in Thrissur, Guru clarified that the idols were symbolic, intended to help devotees focus on the divine rather than the material object itself. Over time, he began replacing idols with more abstract representations of divine knowledge. For instance, he installed a lamp (*Jyothi*) in some temples, symbolizing the light of knowledge.

In 1927, at the Kalavancode temple, Guru introduced the concept of *Kannadi Prathishta,* installing a mirror inscribed with the symbol 'Om' instead of a conventional idol. This act was intended to convey that God resides within each individual, reflecting his belief in self-realization and inner divinity.[104]

Guru's overarching aim in establishing these temples was to combat the caste system and superstition that dominated Hindu religious practices. He envisioned

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103 P. Parameswaran, *Narayana Guru, The Prophet of Renaissance*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 122.

104 G.V. Narayana Murthi, *Narayana Guru*, Bangalore, 1974, p. 28.

temples as places promoting purity, mental peace, and universal brotherhood, rather than centers of caste-based discrimination and superstition.

Sree Narayana Guru recognized that the Ezhava and other lower caste communities were systematically excluded from the temples of upper castes, depriving them of religious and spiritual spaces. He also understood that, just as upper caste communities had access to religious mutts (monasteries) and ashrams (hermitages), these lower castes needed similar institutions for their spiritual development. Thus, Guru took the initiative to establish religious institutions that mirrored those of Brahmanical Hinduism, creating a platform for worship and spiritual growth for the marginalized communities.

A pivotal aspect of Guru's social and religious reform movement was the construction of temples, starting with the historic Aruvipuram Prathishta, where he consecrated a deity in a newly constructed temple. This marked the beginning of a wave of temple constructions across Kerala, such as the Sri Kandeswara Temple in Calicut, Sri Jagannatha Temple in Thalassery, and the Sri Sundareswara Temple in Kannur. These temples became symbols of resistance against the oppressive Brahmanical order and caste-based exclusion. They also represented a step towards social mobility for the Ezhava and Thiyya communities, who sought to attain equal status with the upper castes. This movement can be seen as a form of Sanskritization, as these communities sought to integrate practices of the higher castes to improve their social standing.[105]

One significant event in this reform process was a conversation between Sree Narayana Guru and Varathur Kaniyil Kunhikkannan, an Allopathic pharmacist from Thalassery. Kunhikkannan visited Guru at Sivagiri to seek his assistance in constructing a temple in Thalassery. He told Guru, "Swami, you have constructed

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[105] Murkoth Kumaran, *Narayana Guruswamikalude Jeevacharitram* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1971, p. 165.

several temples in the southern regions and consecrated idols there. We too need a temple in Thalassery, and we request your support."

Guru, initially hesitant, responded, questioning whether there were enough learned people in the region who could manage such a temple. He asked, "Are there people with knowledge of Sanskrit, Vedanta, and the Brahma Samaj in Thalassery?" Kunhikkannan assured him that there were, but Guru was still reluctant, fearing that the upper castes would ridicule him for coming from a distant place to install an idol in a temple.

Kunhikkannan then explained the specific social challenges faced by the people in Malabar, including caste-based discrimination, superstitions, alcoholism, and animal sacrifice. He argued that if proper temples were built with appropriate religious practices, the marginalized communities could be safeguarded from the oppressive dominance of the upper castes.

Guru, surprised by Kunhikkannan's description, asked, "Are such evil practices still prevalent in a civilized country like Malabar, under British rule?" Kunhikkannan clarified that while the British government did not interfere in religious matters, it was up to the local communities to address their own social issues. This led Guru to reconsider and ultimately agree to visit Thalassery to help with the temple construction.[106]

This conversation reveals that Sree Narayana Guru believed British colonialism, alongside the spread of English education, could play a crucial role in eliminating social evils and superstitions. He regarded British rule as a civilizing influence, believing that it could help transform Malabar into a more progressive society, free from the entrenched social inequalities of the past.

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[106] *Sri Jaganatha Kshetra Shathabdi Smaranika*, Kannur, 2008, pp. 65-66; K.V.N. Gurukkal's *Varuthur Kaniyil Kunhikannan* (Mal.) (no page number, book damaged).

Sree Narayana Guru's reform movement involved not only the establishment of religious institutions for lower castes but also a deep challenge to the social norms of caste-based exclusion. Through the construction of temples, the appointment of priests from the marginalized communities, and the promotion of egalitarian practices, the movement sought to dismantle Brahmanical control over religious spaces and provide opportunities for social mobility.

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam also played a critical role in the Temple Entry Movement. Although Sree Narayana Guru's temples were open to all, many other temples continued to exclude lower castes. In 1918, T.K. Madhavan, an SNDP leader, passed a resolution at the organization's annual meeting, advocating for temple entry for all Hindus. While T.K. Madhavan had no formal ties with national parties at the time, he aimed to unite all Hindus under this cause.[107]

Madhavan's strategy involved forging alliances with leaders from other communities, such as Mannathu Padmanabhan of the Nair Service Society, though tensions between the Nair and Ezhava communities persisted.[108] Despite resistance from conservative factions within the upper castes, who wielded considerable influence and opposed temple entry rights, progressive sections of society supported the movement. They recognized temple entry rights as a way to prevent religious conversions and maintain unity within Hinduism.[109]

The conservative opposition, however, maintained control over temple management and vehemently resisted change. Their stance was well documented in newspapers and magazines of the period, providing a clear account of the struggle for temple entry rights.

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107 *Mithavadi*, Magazine, Vol. III, No.5, 1919, p. 53.

108 *Ibid*.

109 *Kerala Kaumudi*, Newspaper, 24 June, 1920. (n.p).

The demands for temple entry rights by the lower castes faced strong opposition and criticism from Brahmins and caste Hindus, which was frequently reflected in their publications. A Nair magazine, *Navya Keralam,* published articles denouncing these demands and blamed the government for taking control of the temples. The magazine argued that if the temples had remained under *Savarna* (upper caste) control, the lower castes (*Avarnas*) would not have dared to make such demands.[110]

Another caste Hindu newspaper, *Swarajya*, harshly condemned the *Avarnas'* demands in response to an article written by C.V. Kunjuraman in the *Kerala Kaumudi*. The paper used offensive language, stating that instead of granting temple entry rights, the lower castes should be physically assaulted.[111]

Brahmins enjoyed exclusive privileges that were denied even to the Nairs, such as the right to question and punish the ruler. Only Brahmins were permitted inside the temple's sanctum sanctorum, the innermost part of the temple. In one instance, a Nair who entered the sanctum was mistreated and beaten by a Brahmin priest and others present. He was subsequently arrested, and a criminal case was brought against him in the First Class Magistrate Court in Alleppey.[112]

During this period, many caste Hindus supported the prevailing caste system and vehemently opposed the demands of the lower castes. They viewed these demands as absurd and argued that they were entirely contrary to traditional customs.[113]

In 1885, a goldsmith faced charges after entering a Shiva temple in Tamil Nadu. The Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, Muthu Swamy Iyer, ruled against him, stating that the presence of lower-caste individuals would defile the sanctity of

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110 *Sahodaran Magazine*, *op. cit.,* p. 8.

111 *Service,* Magazine, Vol. I, No.9, 1917, p. 32.

112 File No.554- File corresponding on Pollution Issue, Public Department, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, 30 November 1920. (n.p).

113 *Kerala Kaumudi Newspaper*, 10 April 1924. (n.p).

the temple. Following this verdict, the Travancore Government adopted a similar stance, barring lower castes from entering temples. In 1918, supporting the Temple Entry Movement, a group of young Ezhavas attempted to enter a Subramaniya temple in Chirayinkeezhu taluk. When they were stopped, they forcefully entered, leading to their prosecution under the same precedent set by the Madras High Court.

The legal system further enforced these discriminatory practices through Section 295 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 294 of the Travancore Penal Code, which criminalized any defilement of places of worship. This legal barrier effectively prevented Ezhavas and other lower castes (*Avarnas*) from entering temples, sparking widespread attention across India. Dr. Annie Besant raised the issue at the thirty-second Bharath Maha Sabha meeting in Calcutta in 1917, and her plea garnered support for the cause. In 1918, the All India Anti-Untouchability Committee passed a resolution to support the *Avarnas* in their fight for temple entry.

In 1917, Ezhava lawyer C. Raman Thampi chaired a public meeting where he argued that Ezhavas did not need separate temples but deserved entry into existing temples. Inspired by his speech, T.K. Madhavan wrote an editorial in *Deshabhimani*, demanding temple entry for *Avarnas*.[114] It is widely believed, however, that Kunnathu Janardhana Menon first coined the term "temple entry" for Avarnas.[115]

When T.K. Madhavan advocated for temple entry, Kumaran Asan made a request in the Assembly to open roads and remove the *Theendal Palakas* (pollution boards) near temples. The differing approaches of these two Ezhava leaders created a temporary rift in the community. Madhavan criticized Asan for focusing on opening roads rather than temples in an article in *Deshabhimani*. Asan responded in *Prakshobha*, denying the accusations. Eventually, the two leaders reconciled and began working together for temple entry.

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114 *Deshabhimani Magazine, op. cit.,* pp. 46-48.

115 P.K. Balakrishnan, *Narayana Guru* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2000, p. 72.

After their demands were ignored by the Assembly, both Madhavan and Asan organized a protest meeting in Trivandrum, opposing Dewan Raghavaiah's rejection of their plea. Asan went further by demanding that *Avarnas* be allowed to serve as priests in the temples, enabling them to perform rituals. Madhavan, on the other hand, sought unity between the Nairs and Ezhavas for this cause but was troubled by the ongoing enmity and inequality between the two groups.

Madhavan joined the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) in 1914 and founded the journal *Deshabhimani,* which highlighted the achievements of the Ezhava community. His active participation in the agitations organized by the Yogam earned him the position of Organizational Secretary.[116] Under his leadership, the Yogam spearheaded the Civic Rights League Agitations, achieving their objectives. Madhavan's relentless efforts spread the temple entry movement throughout the state, inviting support from all quarters, though the government remained unresponsive.[117]

The SNDP leaders proposed alternative solutions, accusing Hinduism of perpetuating their social disabilities and advocating for religious conversion. Prominent leaders like T.K. Madhavan, Kumaran Asan, and Sree Narayana Guru opposed this idea, though Madhavan was pressured to present a resolution in favor of conversion at the seventeenth annual general meeting of the SNDP. Ultimately, he withdrew the resolution.

To galvanize the Ezhava community, Madhavan, Asan, and K. Ayyappan participated in a symbolic walk along the forbidden roads near the Vaikom temple. This act of defiance inspired the Ezhavas to demand temple entry, marking a significant step forward in the movement.[118] In 1920, the SNDP passed a resolution urging Ezhavas to adopt non-cooperation with the government until temples were

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116 *Mannathu Padmanabhan*, *op. cit*., p. 79.

117 *Sahodaran Magazine*, *op. cit.,* pp. 89-94.

118 Mannathu Padmanabhan, *Ente Jeevitha Smaranakal- part 1*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1964, p. 136.

opened to them. A committee was formed to oversee the implementation of non-cooperation, and a circular was distributed throughout Travancore, outlining ten principles. Ezhavas were also encouraged to avoid caste Hindu temples, opting instead to worship in their own.[119] This marked a turning point in their fight for equality, as they ceased offering donations or participating in temple rituals at caste Hindu temples.

The Ezhavas also boycotted festive ceremonies at caste Hindu temples, causing significant financial losses to these institutions. In 1921, during a meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, T.K. Madhavan requested Gandhi's support for the *Avarnas*' right to enter temples.[120] However, Madhavan faced challenges in organizing the Kerala Congress Party due to the aftermath of the Mappila Rebellion.

Madhavan submitted a memorial to the government, urging that temples be opened to all sections of society. This memorial was notably signed by both *Avarna* and *Savarna* representatives of the Assembly. During Dewan Raghavaiah's tenure, several caste Hindus wrote articles in printed literature supporting temple entry, and progressive upper-caste individuals began to advocate for the opening of temples to everyone. Additionally, the Nair Service Society, led by Mannathu Padmanabhan, laid the groundwork for temple entry through various meetings and conferences. Seizing this opportunity, T.K. Madhavan made another representation in the Assembly, but this, too, was rejected by Dewan Raghavaiah.

After this setback, Madhavan attended the 1923 Kakinada Session of the Indian National Congress, where leaders passed a resolution condemning untouchability and instructed the State Committee to address the issue.[121] Gradually, political parties in Travancore began agitating against the government in favor of

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119 *Ibid.*

120 *Navjeevan Magazine*, Vol. 1, No.5, 1922, p. 13.

121 Robin Jeffrey, 'Temple-Entry Movement in Travancore, 1860-1940', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, No. 8, March, 1976, p. 11.

temple entry. In January 1924, the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee formed an Anti-Untouchability Committee, with T.K. Madhavan as a member. Under the committee's leadership, campaigns and meetings were organized throughout Travancore.[122]

The temple entry movement gained widespread popularity across India, largely due to Gandhi's support. Many *Savarnas* also joined the movement, inspired by Gandhi's message. The Nair community representatives in the Assembly passed a resolution in favor of temple entry, further strengthening the cause.

The SNDP passed a resolution at its twentieth annual general meeting, stating that there was no evidence of untouchability being endorsed in any royal proclamation. Instead, it was seen as an orthodox custom and blind belief rooted in religion. The SNDP urged the government to abolish untouchability and open temples to all people. In response, the Indian National Congress decided to launch a strong agitation. On February 16, 1924, the Congress's Anti-Untouchability Committee met in Kollam and planned the agitation, which aimed to gain access to the roads around the Vaikom temple. This agitation became known as the famous Vaikom Satyagraha.

Vaikom, a town in Travancore revered by Hindus as "Dakshina Kasi," was home to a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Low-caste people, or *Avarnas,* were prohibited from entering the temple and were also denied access to the public roads around it. The Congress planned a procession on March 30, 1924, along these restricted roads and informed the government about their intentions. T.K. Madhavan recognized the importance of involving supportive s*avarnas* and sought the assistance of the Nair Service Society (NSS). The NSS issued a circular through their journal service, urging all Nairs to join the procession.[123] Madhavan also sought support from the Ezhavas and the SNDP, although some Yogam leaders opposed this move, fearing

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122 S. Ramachandran Nair, *Social and Cultural History of Colonial Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 18.

123 *Service,* Magazine, Vol. II, No.8, 1924, p. 97.

government retaliation if the procession was suppressed. Despite this opposition, the SNDP passed a resolution supporting the Vaikom Satyagraha.

Mahatma Gandhi, who provided both direct and indirect support, advised K.P. Kesava Menon to proceed with the agitation. Congress leaders encouraged Ezhavas and Pulayas to march on the prohibited roads. To prevent violence, the District Magistrate ordered police barricades to block the roads. On the day of the Satyagraha, both *avarnas* and s*avarnas* were sent in batches to the restricted roads, where they were arrested and sentenced to six months in prison. On the following day, more batches of Nairs and Ezhavas participated and faced the same punishment. Although the Nairs were later released after offering an apology, the movement continued.[124]

Some caste Hindu leaders, attempting to end the agitation, misinformed Gandhi that the roads were private Brahmin property. As a result, Gandhi temporarily called off the Satyagraha, but K.P. Kesava Menon later proved that the roads were public property. The agitation resumed on April 7, 1924, and lasted for 20 months.[125] Many leaders were arrested and sentenced to six months in prison, while the government dismissed the movement as a push for political gain.[126]

The Vaikom Satyagraha attracted widespread attention across India, with increasing numbers of volunteers, including women, joining the cause. The SNDP supported the volunteers by providing food through the *Sree Narayana Bhakshanasala*, and Sree Narayana Guru also offered financial assistance.[127] The movement received nationwide coverage, with Muslims and Christians also extending their support. In May 1924, a joint meeting between the SNDP and the Nair Service Society was held, during which a memorial was presented to the Dewan on May 16,

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124 File No.605, File corresponding on Vaikam Sathyagraha, Public Department, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram,1924. (n.p)

125 K.N. Panikkar, *Essays on the History and Society of Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2016, p. 214.

126 T.K. Ravindran, *Vaikom Satyagraha and Gandhi*, Kollam,1975, p. 63.

127 *Service,* Magazine, Vol. III, No.11,1924, pp. 57-58.

1924, signed by both Ezhavas and Nairs.[128] Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, a Congress leader from Tamil Nadu, also participated in the Satyagraha.

As the government struggled to suppress the movement, orthodox *savarnas* tried to counter the protest by launching their own Savarna Satyagraha, which was eventually withdrawn.[129] In August 1924, after the death of Maharaja Sree Moolam Thirunal, the Satyagraha was briefly halted for three days. Gandhi later advised Congress leaders to submit a memorial signed by *savarnas* to the Dewan and Maharaja in support of the movement.[130] Gandhi himself visited Vaikom and negotiated with the Queen, the Dewan, and the temple officials, urging them to open the roads to *avarnas*. The issue was also raised in the Assembly, where N. Kumaran of the SNDP moved a resolution to open temples to all sections of society.

As the Satyagraha dragged on, some Ezhavas converted to Christianity and Islam. Eventually, at Gandhi's request, the government agreed to hear the protesters' demands, and the barricades around Vaikom's roads were removed.[131] Though the Vaikom Satyagraha was called off, the Temple Entry Movement continued, as orthodox caste Hindus closed other temples to prevent *avarnas* from entering. After years of struggle, the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 finally allowed all sections of society to enter temples, a victory made possible by the Vaikom Satyagraha.

The SNDP played a pivotal role in the Satyagraha and was instrumental in the upliftment of the Ezhava community. Key figures such as Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Asan, T.K. Madhavan, K.P. Kesava Menon, and Sankar were crucial in its growth and achievements. However, in recent years, the influence of the SNDP has declined, with the organization losing its political relevance. Many Ezhavas have distanced themselves from caste-based organizations, aligning instead with leftist movements.

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128 *Ibid.*

129 *Yoganandam*, Magazine, Vol. IX, No.6, 1933, p. 13.

130 *Service,* Magazine, Vol IV, No.3, 1925, pp. 185-187.

131 *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XXVI* (ed.), The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1967, pp. 370-386.

They shifted their support from right-wing to left-wing politics, believing that the left was more likely to grant them their rights. Consequently, the once-prominent Ezhava organization has diminished in influence and standing.

In Malabar, The Congress party believed that temple entry was the key to achieving caste equality. In 1924, they established an anti-untouchability committee in Malabar and actively participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha. Following the Vaikom Satyagraha, Congress activities in Malabar became more vigorous. In a letter, a Nair Congressman described the Vaikom Satyagraha as the result of the efforts of Ezhava volunteers, with the "civilized" classes serving as their leaders.[132] In Malabar, this movement enabled the Nairs to enter many temples under the Namboothiris, which they had previously been barred from. However, the Thiyyas chose to remain independent of any religious affiliations. They distanced themselves from temple celebrations, even those that were part of their responsibilities, such as the *Kalaripadikkal* Festival in 1930.[133]

Peasant Movements and Leftist Ideas in Malabar

In the 1930s and 1940s, peasant movements in Malabar played a crucial role in shaping the region's political landscape, with Communist ideology gaining significant traction among the Thiyyas community. These movements, driven by class organizations representing peasants, workers, and marginalized groups, marked a turning point in modern India's political history, as the working class became actively involved in the nationalist struggle.

By the mid-1930s, left-wing politics, particularly Socialist and Communist ideologies, gained influence within the Indian National Congress. The Kerala Congress Socialist Party (KCSP), formed in 1934, emphasized class struggle and mobilized peasants and workers, advocating for their economic rights and promoting

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[132] Dilip M Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar 1900 -1948*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 48.

[133] *Mathrubhumi Newspaper*, 17 December, 1930. (n.p)

scientific socialism. The party's leadership replaced existing, often Congress-aligned, trade union leadership, pushing the movement towards more militant and class-conscious tactics. Communism found its most passionate following among impoverished agricultural workers in North Malabar, who were severely exploited by landlords. The KCSP spearheaded the formation of Kisan Sanghams, advocating for tenants' rights and leading successful struggles, such as resisting illegal taxes. The All Malabar Karshaka Sangham, formed in 1937, marked a significant milestone, with frequent confrontations between peasants, police, and landlords' thugs.

In the 1930s, efforts were made to foster a broader, secular identity that transcended traditional caste divisions, with a strong opposition to imperialism and the nationalist Congress. The idea was that by addressing economic inequalities, caste distinctions would be diminished. This vision aimed to replace a perceived transient Hindu identity with a unified, secular identity focused on workers and peasants.

Krishnapillai, a founding member of the Communist Party of Kerala, articulated this vision in 1934, urging people to transcend their caste identities—such as Thiyya, Nair, Pattar, Mappila, and Christian—and instead identify as agricultural or mill workers. He wrote, "I am an agricultural worker, I am a mill worker, and my success is the success of every worker belonging to my class." This ideology, promoting class unity over caste distinctions, resonated strongly with the Thiyya community, leading many members to join the Communist Party.[134]

The role of newspapers in shaping the political discourse of the time was also significant. Publications like *Mithavadi* played a key role in shaping the political discourse, supporting the cause of the oppressed, and critiquing the socio-economic structures. Though not explicitly Marxist, *Mithavadi* aligned with revolutionary change, drawing inspiration from the Russian Revolution and advocating for the land ownership rights of farmers.

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[134] *Mathrubhumi,* Newspaper, 21 December, 1934. (n.p).

These peasant movements and the rise of Communist ideology among the Thiyya community were instrumental in challenging colonial and feudal power structures, fostering class consciousness, and empowering previously marginalized groups to demand social and political change. This movement marked a significant shift in the political and social landscape of Kerala, as it mobilized marginalized groups like the Thiyyas, encouraging them to embrace a collective, class-based identity and fight against both imperial and feudal exploitation.

Unfortunately, over time the struggle of the marginalised associations including SNDP is drifting away from their basic aims and objectives. It is a fact that SNDP, S.N. Trust and many other similar caste organisations did not grow up into expectations as desired by Sree Narayana Guru and other reformers. Despite the fading of SNDP and other organisations in the long run, the legacy of Narayana Guru and his teachings and launched movements he initiated including Temple Entry continue to inspire efforts towards equality and justice in the social fabric of Kerala.

Conclusion

Before the British advent in Malabar, the region was defined by a deeply entrenched social hierarchy, shaped by a rigid caste system. The term "Malabar" itself has a partially foreign origin, with the Dravidian word "Mala," meaning hill or mountain, and the Persian term "bar," meaning country. Arab navigators, between the sixth and eleventh centuries, referred to the region as "Mala" or "coast," using variations like Malibar, Manibar, and Munibar. It is believed that later visitors, particularly those in search of pepper and spices, coined the full name "Malabar," which accurately reflected the region's hilly, mountainous landscape. Geographically, Malabar was bordered to the north by the South Canara district, to the south by the Cochin State, to the west by the Arabian Sea, and to the east by the Western Ghats. Spanning an area of 5,795 square miles, it was divided into nine taluks: Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani, and Palakkad.

Malabar society was structured along strict caste lines, with the Brahmins, Kshatriyas (or ruling chieftains), Ambalavasis (intermediary castes), and Nairs at the top, forming the political, military, and social elite. These groups held significant power, overseeing religious, political, and judicial matters. Among them, the Brahmins were the most powerful, largely due to their control over land. Traditional Brahmanical texts, such as the *Keralolpathy*, espoused the belief that all land in the region belonged to the Brahmins, granted to them by Lord Parasurama. These texts also discussed the settlement of Sudras, the establishment of customary laws known as *maryada*, and systems like *janmamaryada* and *janmam* governing land transactions involving *adiyar*. Another important work, *Kerala Jatinirnayam*, examined the formation of the caste system, land grants, and the dominance of Brahmins as landowners. While many of these accounts are considered legendary, there is

substantial evidence that Brahmins were indeed the predominant landowners in Malabar.

The Namboothiris, or Brahmins, classified the Nairs as Sudras. However, William Logan noted that the Nairs were traditionally regarded as Kshatriyas in Malabar society. The Nairs formed the region's traditional militia, enforcing caste rules, including administering capital punishment for violations. Over time, they became tenants under the Brahmins, often subletting their lands to the Ezhavas or employing the Pulayas as serfs. Despite their alliance with the Brahmins, the Nairs faced social disadvantages. The sambandham relationship between Brahmin men and Nair women, though common, did not offer the protections of a formal marriage, leaving Nair women and their children vulnerable. Most Nairs adhered to a matrilineal system of descent, where inheritance and familial ties passed through the mother's side.

Below the Nairs in the social hierarchy were the Thiyyas, who were ranked beneath the Nairs but still part of the caste system. While the Nairs were considered Sudras, the Thiyyas were classified as *avarna*, meaning they were outside the traditional varna system. The Thiyya community was economically and socially diverse. Most Thiyyas were either subtenants or landless laborers working for high-caste landlords, especially Brahmins and Nairs. However, some Thiyya families, like the Kallingal Madam in Calicut, were affluent landowners, second in prominence only to the Zamorins. This family was involved in international trade, including with China, and owned ships, earning them the title of *Moopan* from the Zamorin. Additionally, the royal family of Kadathanad appointed Thiyya individuals to significant positions within their courts.

At the lowest rungs of society were those who lacked land and struggled to make a living. This group included the Cherumas, Pulayas, Parayas, Nayadis, and others, who were among the most marginalized and impoverished classes. These

individuals faced the harshest conditions, were excluded from the benefits afforded to higher castes, and were largely relegated to menial labour and subjugation.

This hierarchical and caste-based structure of Malabar society remained largely unchanged until the British presence in the region, which brought about shifts in the political and social dynamics.

In the eighteenth century, the British arrived in India primarily as traders and gradually extended their influence, introducing a range of progressive ideas. Their presence left a significant impact on Indian society, with the British playing a key role in abolishing many inhumane social practices. They helped introduce modern concepts, including the principle of equality before the law, the right to a fair legal process, and the freedom to practice and propagate one's religion. Additionally, the British promoted humanitarian reforms, leading to the abolition of practices such as sati, human sacrifice, and slavery. This period marked the onset of what is often referred to as colonial modernity, which saw the rise of modern education, science, and values such as civic liberty, liberalism, and human rights. Western-style legal frameworks were also implemented, laying the groundwork for modern educational systems.

In Malabar, British control was formalized after the Treaty of Seringapatam in 1792, following the conclusion of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. With British dominance established, a series of administrative reforms were introduced to strengthen colonial power and maximize revenue. Policies governing agriculture, forestry, industry, transport, and communication were designed to exploit local resources for British benefit. The colonial administration also aimed to create a local elite that would support their rule. The introduction of English and modern education, initially promoted by missionaries and later by the British government, played a key role in shaping this supportive class.

Historically, the Thiyyas of Malabar were a marginalized community, facing widespread poverty and social exclusion. Although they held a somewhat elevated

status compared to other lower castes in the region, they were still considered polluting by the upper castes. This designation led to their exclusion from temple premises and restrictions on their use of public spaces. The Namboothiris, the highest-ranking caste in the region, along with other non-native Brahmins, enjoyed the greatest privileges. Below them were the intermediate castes, known as Ambalavasis, followed by the Nairs, whose various subgroups occupied the next significant level in the caste hierarchy.

The Thiyyas, or Ezhavas, occupied a position lower in the caste hierarchy, though they were regarded as somewhat superior to the "untouchable" castes. Despite this relative standing, they were still classified as polluting castes by the upper-caste Hindus, or savarnas.

Traditionally, Thiyyas were engaged in agricultural work, toddy tapping, serving landlords, producing coir, weaving, and running small businesses. However, during the colonial period, a few Thiyya individuals, including figures like Murkoth Kunhappa, Karayi Bappu, and Karayi Kutti, achieved success by establishing lucrative liquor businesses in Malabar. Additionally, the Kallingal Madathil family in Kozhikode expanded their commercial ventures and amassed wealth with the support of the British. While these individuals achieved considerable success, the vast majority of the Thiyya community continued to face widespread poverty.

In terms of education, the Thiyyas faced significant disadvantages due to their caste status. While a small number of families managed to acquire some basic Sanskrit education and ran *Ezhuthupallis* (traditional elementary schools), such opportunities were largely restricted to the higher echelons within the Thiyya community. As a result, widespread illiteracy, social marginalization, and economic hardship prevailed among the Thiyyas in Malabar, particularly in the pre-colonial era.

The Thiyyas, like other lower castes, were often categorized as polluting castes until they began to benefit from modern education, new employment opportunities, and social reform movements aimed at challenging upper-caste dominance. The

arrival of British colonial rule marked a significant turning point in the lives of the Thiyya people, particularly those living in coastal towns like Thalassery, Kannur, Kozhikode, and other key colonial urban centers.

Under the influence of Thomas Babington Macaulay, the British government introduced English education with the goal of creating a class of educated Indians who would serve as intermediaries between the British rulers and the local population. This new class, educated in English, became part of the lower tiers of the colonial bureaucracy and played a key role in administering British rule in India. Over time, these English-educated Indians formed a middle class that adopted European cultural values and lifestyles, which in turn shaped their social identity and position within the colonial system.

In the early stages of British colonial rule in India, the British government managed educational initiatives at the presidency level. However, over time, responsibility for education was transferred to local self-governing bodies, such as district boards and municipalities. While the colonial government's educational policies were unfolding, Christian missionaries, particularly the Basel Evangelical Mission (BEM) also played a significant role in shaping education in Malabar.

The BEM, through its schools established in various towns and rural areas, had a profound impact on the spread of modern education in the region. Key centres of missionary educational activity in the nineteenth century included towns like Kannur, Thalassery, Chombal, Kozhikode, Kodakal, Palakkad, and Vaniyamkulam. Unlike traditional educational institutions such as gurukulams and ezhuthupallis, which were often caste-restricted, the schools founded by missionaries and the colonial government offered open admission to all students, both boys and girls regardless of caste or religion.

For the Thiyya community in Malabar, who had long been oppressed and marginalized by the caste system, this new system of education represented a significant opportunity. The Thiyyas embraced Western-style education

enthusiastically, seeing it as a means to break free from their social constraints and improve their socio-economic standing.

In addition to establishing English-medium schools, missionaries in Malabar also set up vernacular schools that were more accessible to the poor and marginalized communities. Two key figures in the development of modern education in the region were Herman Gundert and Samuel Hebich, who are often credited with laying the foundations of modern education in Malabar. The vernacular mission schools they established in towns such as Thalassery, Nettur, Kadirur, Anjarakkandy, Mahe, and Koyilandy were particularly important. These schools primarily catered to students from the Thiyya community, offering them an opportunity for education that had previously been denied to them.

Additionally, the missionaries recognized the widespread gender discrimination against women and took the initiative to establish girls' schools. Traditional educational institutions were mostly exclusive to boys, and women had little access to formal education. In response, missionary nuns began opening girls' schools and training centers in urban areas. Over time, progressive social reformers and intellectuals supported this cause, contributing to the expansion of women's education.

While the primary goal of missionary work was often proselytization—converting people to Christianity—there was no forced religious conversion in Malabar. Conversions took place voluntarily, and the missionaries understood that true Christian faith could not be achieved without education. As a result, they prioritized education as a key element of their mission. Despite this emphasis on education, missionary efforts did not lead to significant religious conversions, as evidenced by baptism records from the time. Nevertheless, the missionaries saw education as a means of social service aimed at improving the lives of the downtrodden, including the Thiyyas.

For the Thiyya community, this educational opportunity was seen as a means of social and economic progress. As Murkoth Kumaran noted, the Thiyyas embraced the perspective of missionary education as a tool for their empowerment. The introduction of English education played a pivotal role in creating a new middle class, which included educated professionals such as government employees, journalists, teachers, lawyers, doctors, intellectuals, and businessmen from various castes. This emerging middle class transcended traditional caste and religious boundaries, representing a more secular social segment.

The middle class in colonial India was largely a product of British colonialism and its educational system. One of the key functions of this class was to support the continuation of colonial rule, often justifying the political, economic, and cultural projects of the British as essential for the advancement of Indian society. However, this middle class also made significant contributions to the modernization and democratization of India. It promoted a new social outlook based on individualism, rejecting traditional norms and hierarchies. This shift in perspective laid the ideological foundation for modernity and democracy in India.

The English educated Thiyyas embodied this new social outlook, placing emphasis on individual progress and personal identity. This shift marked a significant departure from the traditional collective identities based on caste and instead highlighted the importance of individual achievement and self-determination.

The Thiyya community played a significant role in the emergence of a middle class in colonial Malabar. They contributed greatly to the professional landscape, with members of the community working as civil servants in various capacities, ranging from peons and lower-grade clerks to deputy collectors, judges, *vakkils* (legal advisors), teachers, professors, journalists, doctors, nurses, businessmen, and writers. As such, the Thiyyas formed a crucial part of Malabar's middle class, helping to create a new social space that fostered diverse intellectual and cultural discourses, ultimately shaping the region's modernity.

Simultaneously, the Thiyyas also served as an important intellectual support for the colonial administration, as seen in the contributions of figures like Churiya Kanaran. This growing middle class represented a composite, intermediate social layer that embraced a wide range of professions while maintaining a common lifestyle and behavioural patterns that were distinct from traditional norms.

Accompanying this social and economic transformation, the Thiyya middle class, many of whom had close ties with the British, began adopting aspects of European lifestyles. In a colonized society, the middle class often emulated the food, clothing, and habits of the colonizers, viewing them as symbols of progress and status. For instance, drinking coffee or tea with biscuits or snacks became a widespread habit, reflecting the influence of British colonial culture, as it did across India. The dress style of English-educated Thiyyas, particularly those employed in government service, such as wearing shirts, jackets, and neckties, further illustrated the impact of colonial modernity on their lives. These everyday practices symbolized the larger influence of colonialism in shaping India's modern identity.

In India, modernity was largely shaped by British colonialism, influencing the country through education, technology, employment, and lifestyle. It introduced egalitarian and democratic ideals such as equality, liberty, individualism, and rationalism, which were contrary to the rigid caste system and other social injustices. Modernity in India, therefore, reflected the transformative experiences of colonization, which challenged longstanding social hierarchies and advocated for greater social equality.

One of the key outcomes of modern education and the influence of Western ideals was a growing critique of traditional customs, particularly the caste system. The discriminatory practices of caste, which most severely impacted the lives of lower castes and the untouchables, came under intense scrutiny. Educated individuals, especially from the lower castes, vehemently criticized the caste system and its injustices. They sought to restructure society in a way that would treat all individuals,

regardless of caste, gender, or religion, as equals. This led to the rise of the social reform movement in Kerala, which was spearheaded by Sree Narayana Guru in the Travancore region and later spread to Cochin and Malabar.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital provides a useful framework for understanding the modernization of the Thiyya community in Kerala. Cultural capital, in its three forms – embodied, objectified, and institutionalized – plays a central role in shaping the social and economic mobility of marginalized groups. The Thiyya community, once relegated to the lower social strata, has experienced significant transformation through the accumulation of cultural capital, particularly in education. The rise in educational attainment has allowed members of the Thiyya community to break free from traditional caste-based occupations, entering more prestigious fields like medicine, engineering, and administration. Education has also translated into institutionalized cultural capital, with many Thiyya individuals gaining access to higher learning and acquiring professional qualifications that enhance their social mobility and integration into Kerala's middle and upper-middle class.

English educated Thiyya leaders in Malabar were drawn to this reform movement, though some had differing views on its ideology and approach. The social reform movement in Kerala became a multi-faceted movement, incorporating a variety of reform strategies and ideologies. Sree Narayana Guru, a traditional intellectual and reformer, advanced three main strategies for social change: first, ideological resistance to the prevailing social order; second, social and religious resistance against caste-based discrimination; and third, organizational resistance, which included the formation of collective bodies to support social reform.

The Thiyya reformers in Malabar were particularly inspired by Guru's teachings and invited him to the region to guide their reform programs, including the construction of temples. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam), a key organization for social reform, also extended its activities into Malabar, with strong support from the Thiyya middle class. Throughout the colonial

period, the Yogam remained loyal to the British, recognizing the benefits it had gained under colonial rule.

Following the footsteps of Sree Narayana Guru, several Thiyya social reformers and intellectuals made significant contributions to the development of the Thiyya community in Malabar. Prominent leaders such as Rarichan Moopan, Kottieth Ramunni Vakkil, Murkoth Kumaran, Potheri Kunhambu, Mithavadi C. Krishnan, Aryabandhu, P.K. Bappu, Ayyathan Gopalan, Sadhu Sivaprasad, Kambil Anandan, Swami Guruprasad, Churiyayi Kanaran, Kottayi Kumaran, Vaghbadananda, Karayi Damayanthi, and C.K. Revathiamma were all influential figures in the social reform movement.

While these reformers shared a common goal of improving the social conditions of the Thiyya community, they differed in their perspectives and methods of achieving this change. For instance, figures like C. Krishnan, Ayyathan Gopalan, and Vaghbadananda did not fully align with the ideas and strategies proposed by Sree Narayana Guru. Vaghbadananda, for example, rejected the construction of temples and idol worship as tools for social transformation. Instead, he followed the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj and founded the *Atmavidya Sangham*, a distinct organization with a focus on spiritual reform.

C. Krishnan, a rationalist, opposed idol worship but recognized the importance of building temples or shrines. He argued that these places of worship could serve as centres for education and vocational training, which he saw as essential for the progress of the Thiyya community.

Another noteworthy development was the access that Thiyya women gained to English education, which helped them break through societal constraints and contribute to various fields, including education, research, literature, social work, and medicine. Women like Dr. Paru and Dr. Ayyathan Janaki, who were both respected physicians, played key roles in their communities. Dr. Janaki, in particular, was also deeply involved in social work, alongside Ayyathan Gopalan in Kozhikode.

Revathiamma, the author of *Sahasrapoornima*, was another notable figure who contributed as both a writer and a social worker, focusing especially on the empowerment of women.

The spread of English education, largely facilitated by missionary-run schools, allowed Thiyya women to enter new professions and redefine their roles in society. Though still limited in number, these women became part of the emerging middle class, challenging the traditional norms of caste and patriarchy. Their educational and professional progress marked a significant step toward the modernization of the Thiyya community.

Benedict Anderson's theory of print capitalism, as outlined in *Imagined Communities*, explains how print media played a pivotal role in shaping modern national identities by fostering shared "imagined communities." This process allowed people to see themselves as part of a larger collective, even without direct interaction. Through newspapers, books, and journals, common languages, stories, and ideologies were spread, helping to form national identities. This was central to the rise of nationalism and the transformation of social, political, and cultural landscapes globally.

Anderson's concept of print capitalism, which involves the convergence of print technology and the capitalist market to produce mass literature, can also be applied to understand the social and political changes within the Thiyya community of Kerala. While Anderson emphasized the role of newspapers and novels in forming national identity, Habermas's view of the newspaper's role in developing the public sphere aligns with Kerala's experience. In the nineteenth century, print culture enabled the discussion of social and political issues, mobilizing people around these issues. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, print media played a crucial role in reshaping the Thiyya community's social identity, fostering political mobilization, and enabling them to navigate the complex caste hierarchies of colonial Kerala. By

uniting people across distances and social divisions, print media helped the Thiyyas challenge their marginalized position and envision a more inclusive society.

The establishment of the printing press stands as one of the most transformative events in Malabar, particularly in the context of missionary activities. In 1845, the Lithic Press was set up in Illikunnu, near Thalassery, marking a pivotal moment in the region's history. This printing press became a powerful tool for social change, playing an instrumental role in the upliftment of the local community. It facilitated the widespread dissemination of knowledge, contributing significantly to the spread of education, the growth of literacy, and the development of a more informed and enlightened society in Malabar. Through its publications, the Lithic Press not only supported the educational efforts of the missionaries but also helped in shaping the cultural and intellectual landscape of the region. Magazines such as *Mithavadi* and *Vivekodayam* played a crucial role in driving social change and progress in Thiyya community. These publications consistently featured articles that focused on the need for reform, modernization, and the advancement of society. By addressing pressing social issues, promoting new ideas, and encouraging critical thinking, these magazines became powerful agents of change. Their widespread circulation ensured that their messages reached a broad audience, influencing public opinion and fostering a sense of social awareness. As a result, they significantly contributed to transformative shifts in the attitudes, values, and practices of the community, helping to lay the foundation for a more progressive and enlightened society.

The colonial period also saw the growth of libraries, literary associations, and clubs dedicated to the arts and sports, all of which contributed to the spread of modern ideas. One notable initiative was the mobile library, organized by Karayi Damayanthi, which aimed to encourage reading habits among women. This project, introduced in the early twentieth century, was a revolutionary step in expanding access to education for women.

M.N. Srinivas theory of Sanskritization is a significant concept in the study of social change in India, especially in the context of caste dynamics. Sanskritization refers to the process through which lower-caste groups, aiming to improve their social status and gain respectability, adopt the customs, rituals, and practices of higher-caste Hindu groups, particularly Brahmins. This often involves imitating the religious practices, language, dress, and social behavior of the upper castes, with the goal of achieving greater respectability and gaining access to the privileges enjoyed by higher castes.

In the context of Kerala, the Thiyya or Ezhava community, a large and historically marginalized group, serves as a key example of how Sanskritization played out at the local level. Traditionally considered a lower-caste group, the Ezhavas were engaged in occupations such as toddy tapping, agricultural labor, and various manual trades. In their efforts for social mobility, many Ezhavas embraced the process of Sanskritization, seeking to improve their social standing and challenge their marginalization within the rigid caste hierarchy of Kerala.

The Ezhava community's engagement with Sanskritization manifested in several ways. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ezhavas sought to adopt Brahminical practices, such as wearing the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*), performing rituals like *poojas* (prayers), and associating with Brahmin-controlled temples. By aligning themselves with these practices, the Ezhavas aimed to be recognized as part of the higher social strata of Hindu society. Another important aspect of Sanskritization was the rejection of traditional lower-caste occupations. The Ezhavas distanced themselves from occupations considered impure, like toddy tapping, and sought to adopt more "respectable" jobs in trade, administration, or agriculture in order to elevate their social status.

Moreover, Sanskritization provided the Ezhava community with an opportunity to challenge the rigid caste boundaries that confined them to a lower status. By adopting Sanskritic practices such as learning Sanskrit, studying the Vedas,

and associating with Brahmin teachers, many Ezhavas sought to gain access to higher social circles and influence. The reform movement within the Ezhava community, led by figures like Sree Narayana Guru, emphasized education, social equality, and religious reform, which were aligned with Hindu religious ideals but also aimed at eradicating caste discrimination.

Sree Narayana Guru, a central figure in the Ezhava community's quest for social mobility, played a pivotal role in the Sanskritization process. A social reformer and spiritual leader, Guru advocated for a more inclusive form of Hinduism and encouraged the Ezhavas to adopt practices that were aligned with higher-caste traditions, such as worshipping a single god, in contrast to the folk religious practices of many Ezhavas. His efforts in religious and social reformation helped elevate the Ezhavas' status within the broader Hindu social order. The installation of the idol at Aruvippuram, his educational and revolutionary activities at Sivagiri, his ability to teach Sanskrit literature, hitherto untouched by a low caste, his novel forms of worship, etc., brought about a silent revolution among the lower class in Kerala society. One of the key struggles of the Ezhava community during the period of Sanskritization was the Temple Entry Movement, which aimed to secure access to Hindu temples that were traditionally restricted to higher-caste individuals. This movement, often associated with the efforts of Sree Narayana Guru, symbolized the Ezhavas' desire for social equality and recognition within the religious and cultural practices of the upper castes. By gaining access to temples, the Ezhavas sought to overcome the social stigma attached to their caste and assert their dignity within the larger Hindu community.

Alongside religious and cultural reform, Ezhava leaders also pursued political representation and access to education. The formation of organizations like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1903 played a crucial role in mobilizing the community. These organizations not only focused on promoting the welfare of the Ezhavas but also encouraged them to adopt more "respectable" cultural practices and challenge their social marginalization.

Being a first Ezhava representative in the Srimulam Popular Assembly Asan raised concerns about the injustices faced by the Ezhavas and demanded education, employment, and representation for them. Beyond his contributions in the assembly, Asan's literary achievements earned him great reverence in Kerala's cultural landscape. Asan's poems, such as *Nalini, Leela*, and *Thoughts of a Thiyya Boy*, are considered monumental in the realm of Malayalam literature, portraying the depth of human conscience and psychology. Asan later dedicated his life to the welfare of the Ezhava community through the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDPY), where he served for nearly sixteen years. He also launched the Ezhava gazette, *Vivekodayam*, to promote the ideals of Narayana Guru and spread awareness about the activities of SNDP.

The Ezhava memorial submitted by Palpu for proper participation in government jobs and his representation to British parliament for earning their support in the same cause created a positive response among the Ezhavas. It is an undeniable fact that their activities provided a space for social mobility and equality.

Despite the opportunities for social mobility that Sanskritization provided, the process had its limitations. It often reinforced the caste hierarchy, as lower castes aspired to emulate the customs and practices of higher castes without addressing the deep-rooted structural inequalities within the caste system. Even after adopting Sanskritic practices, many Ezhavas remained at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and continued to face discrimination.

The application of Sanskritization theory to the Ezhava community highlights their efforts to gain social mobility and recognition by imitating higher-caste Hindu practices. While the process did offer some opportunities for upward mobility, it also exposed the persistent inequalities and challenges of caste-based discrimination in colonial Kerala. The complex relationship between the Ezhavas and Sanskritization reflects both their aspirations for equality and the limitations imposed by a deeply entrenched social order.

At the same time, C. Kesavan notes that in the 1930s, the Ezhava community in Kerala was divided into two factions based on differing ideologies and ideals. The Ezhava youth were unwilling to conform to the expectations and conveniences of others in order to gain benefits and opportunities. They questioned the spiritual vision of Sree Narayana Guru, which emphasized one caste, one religion, and one God. Instead, they reinterpreted this vision as advocating for castelessness, religionlessness, and non-specificity. They sought to free themselves from the influence of the Hindu religion and the dominance of the upper castes, aiming to create a new social order.

The SNDP Club, established by C. Krishnan in Kozhikode, became a significant platform for social and intellectual interactions among Thiyya scholars, social reformers, politicians, journalists, and professionals. It fostered a space for the exchange of ideas and furthered the cause of social reform and intellectual growth in the region.

These efforts reflect the Thiyya community's active engagement with the forces of modernization, education, and social reform in colonial Malabar, and their determination to break free from the limitations imposed by caste and gender norms.

The Malayalam novels *Saraswathivijayam*, *Sukumari*, and *Vasumathi* vividly capture the impact of English education, Western values, and ideas on the Thiyya community of Malabar. These works not only reflect the changing social dynamics brought about by colonialism but also serve as a form of social protest against caste-based hierarchies and discrimination. They highlight how colonial modernity penetrated the social fabric of the Thiyyas in Malabar, illustrating a shift in their cultural and social identity.

During colonial rule, Malabar witnessed significant transformations. The introduction of a new administrative system, the spread of English education, the establishment of modern infrastructure like transport and communication systems, the rise of capitalist industries, and the growth of plantations all contributed to the region’s economic and social reshaping. These developments also provided new

employment opportunities in government, business, and education sectors, directly influencing the lives of the Thiyya community. The result was the emergence of the Thiyyas as a middle class, shaped by the cultural and social constructs of colonial modernity.

Historiographies of this period often focus on the exploitative nature of colonialism, particularly the extraction of resources from the colony. While this aspect is undeniable, the impact on the Thiyya community was also regenerative in many ways. The expansion of the railway and road transport systems, for example, allowed many Thiyya students from across Malabar to pursue higher education in cities like Madras, and some even went to Europe and the USA for further studies. These developments, facilitated by colonial infrastructure, played a crucial role in the rise of an educated and socially mobile Thiyya class.

The Thiyya community, particularly under the guidance of its intellectuals and social reformers, began challenging caste barriers and moving towards modernity. The new middle class of Thiyyas displayed distinct educational and professional achievements, adopting new social practices and lifestyles that reflected the influence of modernity.

However, they did not entirely abandon their traditions. While some embraced a fully Westernized lifestyle, many Thiyyas created a hybrid identity, blending elements of both traditional and modern practices. This blend was visible in their attire, such as the combination of Western-style jackets, neckties, shoes, and the traditional *mundu* (dhoti), symbolizing the emergence of what could be termed as "Thiyya modernity" a fusion of Eastern and Western influences.

By the end of British rule, the Thiyya community in coastal towns and surrounding areas had become economically, intellectually, and culturally advanced. This marked the beginning of significant social change for a previously marginalized community, which gradually forged a new identity as a progressive force within Malabar. The Thiyyas resistance to upper-caste domination and their reluctance to

fully engage in the nationalist movement due to suspicions of upper-caste hegemony in politics played a role in their eventual prominence in the Communist movement in post-colonial India. The Thiyyas' growing political and social influence was a testament to their transformation into a strong, educated, and progressive community in the region.

Glossary

Agraharam	:	Brahmin quarter of a heterogeneous Village Or to any village inhabited by brahmins
Anandaravan	:	Nephew
Antitiriyan	:	He is the priest who lights the sacred lamp of the Kazhakam shrine
Ashrams	:	Hermitages
Avarna	:	Lower caste
Ayurveda/Nattuvaidya	:	Traditional Medicinal system
Caneeshmari	:	Census
Ezhathupalli	:	Traditional school of Thiyyas
Gramakshetra	:	Central body of Brahmin village
Gurunathanmar	:	Teachers
Jathi	:	Caste
Kalayakkaran	:	Brings auspicious toddy for rituals
Kanchipanam	:	Money for the food
Karanavar	:	Male head of the Family
Kavus	:	Sacred groves
Kazhakkams	:	A particular type of Administrative system
Kottila	:	Thirty two taras joined
Kuttayikkaran	:	together He is a representative of the kutta Avai or assembly
Madappura	:	Muthappan Shrine
Mahilasamajam	:	Ladies Club
Makkathayam	:	Patrilineal System
Marumakkathayam	:	Matrilineal System

Muthappan/Kuttichathan	:	Thiyya God
Mutts	:	Monasteries
Nalappadi	:	Executive head of the Tara
Namaskaramandapam	:	A mandapam in front of the central shine of a temple
Parikarmi	:	Ritual Assistant
Pudamuri	:	Cutting of the dhothi (Main function of the marriage which takes place at the noon)
Pulikudi	:	Celebration during the time of pregnancy
Purohita	:	Priest
Rakku	:	Alcoholic Product
Sahodharimar	:	Sisters
Samajam	:	An official group or organization
Sambandham	:	Informal mode of marriage
Samudayi	:	They are elders who help in taking important decision by the karanavar
Savarnas	:	Upper caste
Sevakan	:	Servant
Swaroopam	:	The region under the control of a chieftain was known as swaroopam
Taras	:	Consist of two or three villages
Thali kettukalyanam	:	The girl who completed the age of twelve was married as per this tradition
Thambrakkal	:	Traditional Lord
Tharawad	:	Ancestral Home
Theendal and thodil	:	untouchability and unapproachability
Tindal Jathi	:	Polluting Caste
Tirandukuli	:	A custom at the time of first menstruation of girl
Uralar	:	Rulers of the village
Vaidikars	:	Priests

Vakkil	:	Advovate
Vannathi Mattu	:	Washed or purified cloth to be worn after Menstruation
Varna	:	Vedic classification of the four ranked Occupational order
Velichappatan	:	He makes oracles as possessed by gods and goddesses
Vidyala	:	School
Vishavaidhya chikilsa	:	Treatment for poisons especially for snake bite
Thrikuttam	:	it is a body made of four kazakkams

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Interview

Dr.K.Sugathan , Author of the book *Bhudhanum Nanuguruvum* (mal) , Buddhamathavum Jathivyavasathyum(mal) 12.08.2019.

Samuel Aron, he was a converted Christian with the influence of Basel evangelical mission in Malabar.07.03,2020.

Vasu, pottammal library, he was the early communist party member from the Thiyya community.21.05.2019.

Vasumitran, T.V, Grand Daughter of Vidwan K.T Krishnan Gurukkal.6.11.2019.

Appendices

Appendix I

Choorayi Kanaran

Appendix II

C.K. Revathi Amma

Appendix III

Moorkoth Kumaran

Appendix IV

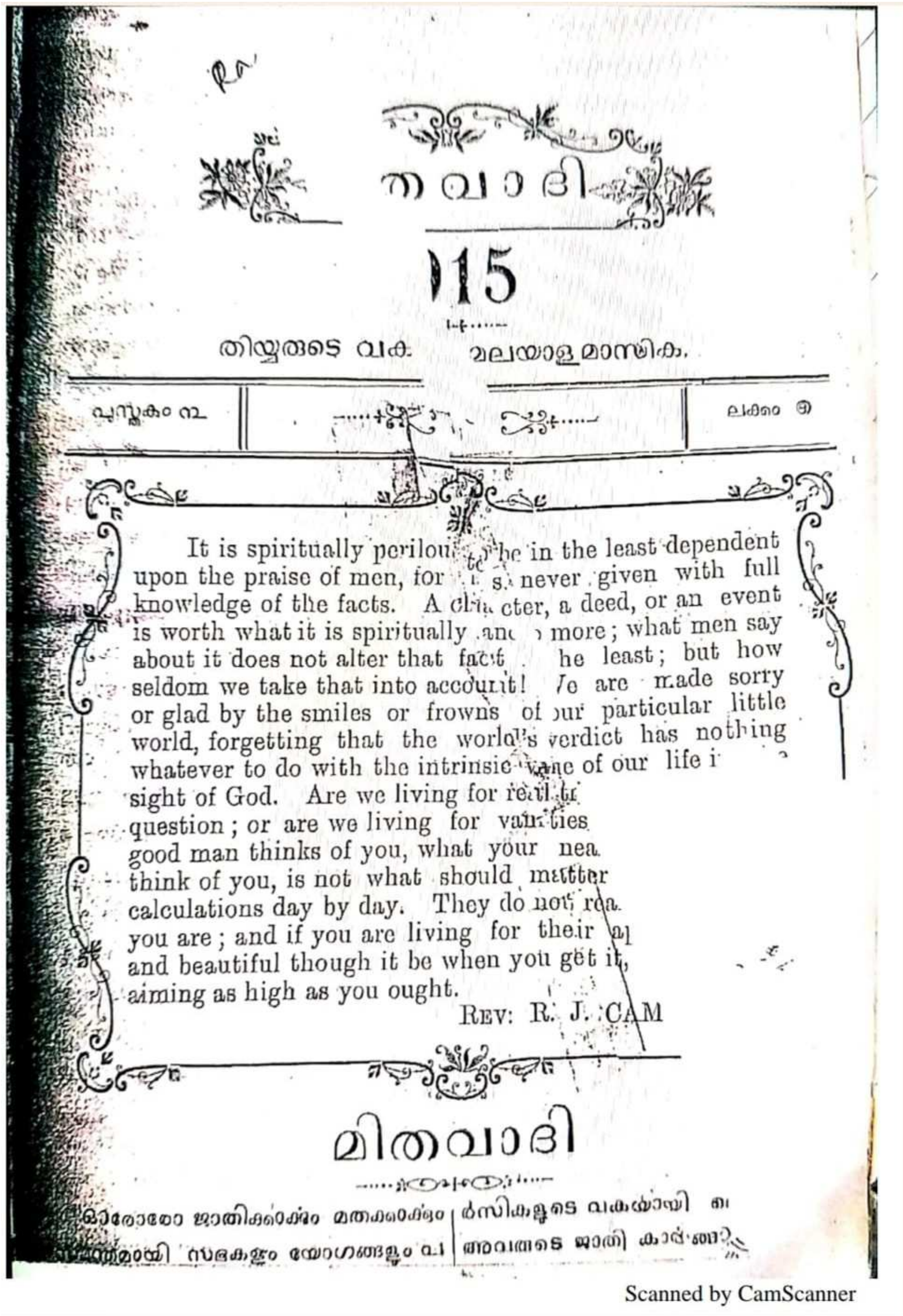
Ayyanthal Janaki

Appendix V

E.K. Janaki Ammal

Appendix VI

Choyi Butler



തവാദി

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തിയ്യരുടെ വക. മലയാള മാസിക.

പുസ്തകം ൨ ലക്കം ൯

It is spiritually perilou... be in the least dependent upon the praise of men, for ... s never given with full knowledge of the facts. A cha... cter, a deed, or an event is worth what it is spiritually and ... more; what men say about it does not alter that fact ... he least; but how seldom we take that into account! We are made sorry or glad by the smiles or frowns of our particular little world, forgetting that the world's verdict has nothing whatever to do with the intrinsic value of our life i... sight of God. Are we living for real tr... question; or are we living for vanities ... good man thinks of you, what your nea... think of you, is not what should matter ... calculations day by day. They do not rea... you are; and if you are living for their a... and beautiful though it be when you get it, ... aiming as high as you ought.

REV: R. J. CAM...

മിതവാദി

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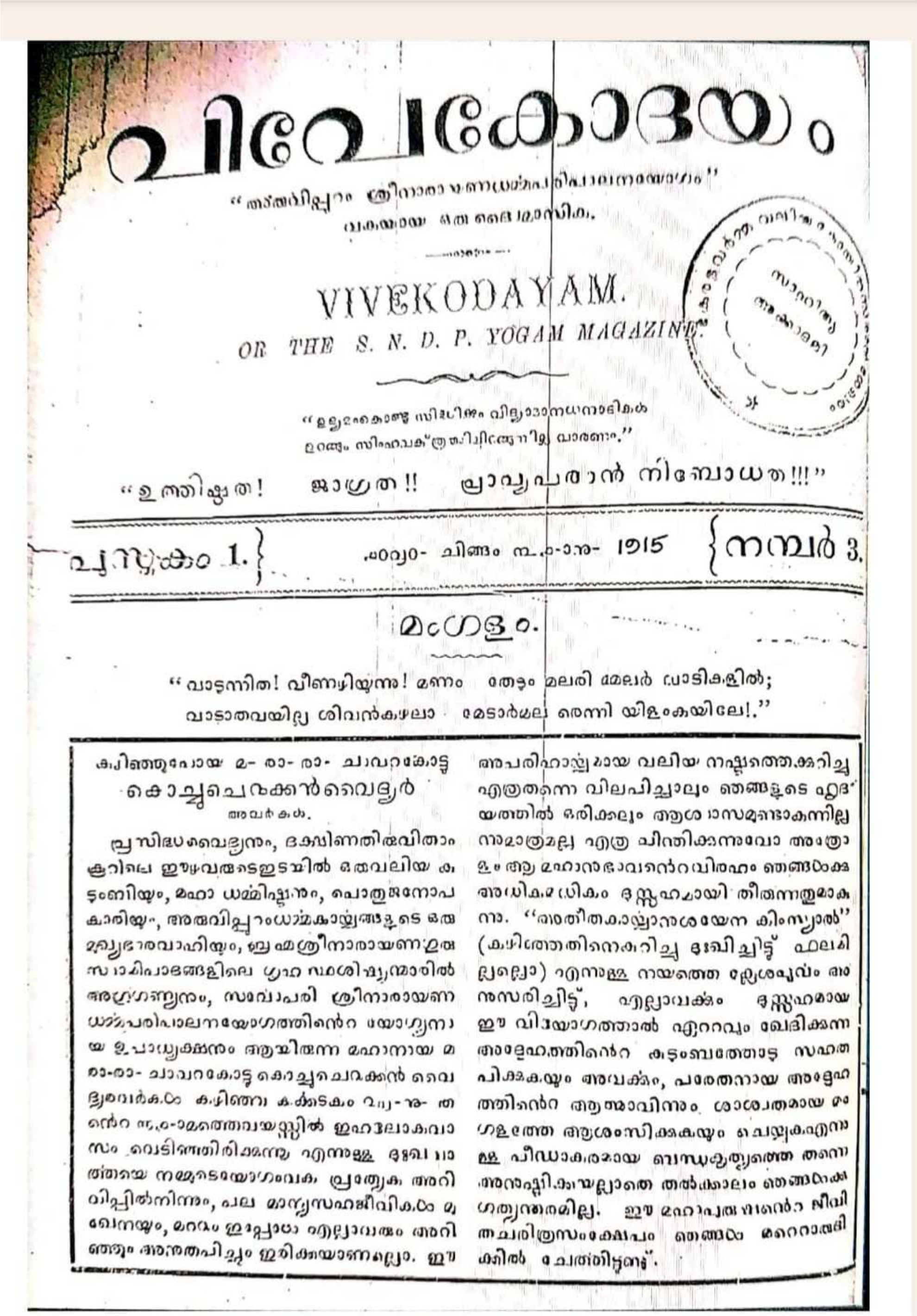

വിവേകോദയം

"അത്ഭുതപ്പെടാനില്ല ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മപരിപാലനയോഗം"
വകയായ ഒരു ദ്വൈമാസിക.

VIVEKODAYAM.
OR THE S. N. D. P. YOGAM MAGAZINE.

"ഉദ്യോഗം കൊണ്ടു സിദ്ധിക്കും വിദ്യാദാനധനാദികൾ
ഉറക്കം സിംഹമന്ത്രമിതിലിങ്ങനെ വാരണം."

"ഉത്തിഷ്ഠത! ജാഗ്രത!! പ്രാപ്യവരാൻ നിബോധത!!!"

പുസ്തകം 1. | ൧൦൯൦- ചിങ്ങം ൩൧-ാം- 1915 | നമ്പർ 3.

മംഗളം.

"വാടുന്നിത! വീണഴിയുന്നു! മന്നം തോറും മലരി മലർ വാടികളിൽ;
വാടാതവയില്ല ശിവൻകഴലാം മെടാർമല രെന്നി യിളംകയിലേ!."

കഴിഞ്ഞുപോയ മ- രാ- രാ- ചാവറക്കോട്ട
കൊച്ചുചെറുക്കൻവൈദ്യർ
അവർകൾ.

പ്രസിദ്ധവൈദ്യനും, ദക്ഷിണതിരുവിതാംകൂറിലെ ഈഴവരുടെഇടയിൽ ഒരുവലിയ കുടുംബിയും, മഹാ ധർമ്മിഷ്ഠനും, പൊതുജനോപകാരിയും, അരുവിപ്പുറംധർമ്മകാര്യങ്ങളുടെ ഒരു മുഖ്യഭാരവാഹിയും, ബ്രഹ്മശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുസ്വാമിപാദങ്ങളിലെ ഗൃഹസ്ഥശിഷ്യന്മാരിൽ അഗ്രഗണ്യനും, സർവ്വോപരി ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മപരിപാലനയോഗത്തിന്റെ യോഗ്യനായ ഉപാദ്ധ്യക്ഷനും ആയിരുന്ന മഹാനായ മ-രാ-രാ- ചാവറകോട്ട കൊച്ചുചെറുക്കൻ വൈദ്യരവർകൾ കഴിഞ്ഞ കർക്കടകം ൨൬-ാം- തന്റെ ൬൦-ാമത്തെവയസ്സിൽ ഇഹലോകവാസം വെടിഞ്ഞിരിക്കുന്നു എന്നുള്ള ദുഃഖവാർത്തയെ നമ്മുടെയോഗംവക പ്രത്യേക അറിവിപ്പിൽനിന്നും, പല മാന്യസഹജീവികൾ മുഖേനയും, മററും ഇപ്പോൾ എല്ലാവരും അറിഞ്ഞും അനുതപിച്ചും ഇരിക്കയാണല്ലോ. ഈ അപരിഹാര്യമായ വലിയ നഷ്ടത്തെക്കുറിച്ചു എത്രതന്നെ വിലപിച്ചാലും ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഹൃദയത്തിൽ ഒരിക്കലും ആശ്വാസമുണ്ടാകുന്നില്ലെന്നുമാത്രമല്ല എത്ര ചിന്തിക്കുന്നുവോ അത്രയും ആ മഹാനുഭാവന്റെ വിരഹം ഞങ്ങൾക്കു അധികമധികം ദുസ്സഹമായി തീരുന്നതുമാകുന്നു. "അതീതകാര്യാനുശയേന കിംസ്യാൽ" (കഴിഞ്ഞതിനെക്കുറിച്ചു ദുഃഖിച്ചിട്ടു ഫലമില്ലല്ലോ) എന്നുള്ള നയത്തെ ക്ലേശപൂർവ്വം അനുസരിച്ചിട്ട്, എല്ലാവർക്കും ദുസ്സഹമായ ഈ വിയോഗത്താൽ ഏററവും ഖേദിക്കുന്ന അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ കുടുംബത്തോടു സഹതപിക്കുകയും അവർക്കും, പരേതനായ അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ആത്മാവിനും ശാശ്വതമായ മംഗളത്തെ ആശംസിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുകഎന്നുള്ള പീഡാകരമായ ബന്ധുകൃത്യത്തെ തന്നെ അനുഷ്ഠിക്കയല്ലാതെ തൽക്കാലം ഞങ്ങൾക്കു ഗത്യന്തരമില്ല. ഈ മഹാപുരുഷന്റെ ജീവിതചരിത്രസംക്ഷേപം ഞങ്ങൾ മറെറാരേടത്തിൽ ചേർത്തിട്ടുണ്ട്.

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