

Literacy in Cochin, 1890-1949

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "Literacy in Cochin, 1890-1949" submitted by Senu Kurien George, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University, is an original work and has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

India is one of the countries with a low literacy rate. Most of the Third World countries come under this category. The illiteracy rates are highest in the least developed countries and amongst the poorest and under-privileged people. Efforts to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy have been going on in different parts of the world and the 1990s has been declared by the UN as the International Literacy Decade.

In India the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was introduced in 1978. The idea was to impart functional literacy to 100 million illiterate adults within five years and to achieve this objective partly through a centre based programme and partly through a mass volunteer based approach. However, with mass orientation lacking, the NAEP remained primarily a government funded and government controlled programme. Another programme, National Literacy Mission was launched in 1988 with the target of improving the rate of literacy. Various state governments are desperately trying to eradicate illiteracy also.

Both at the Centre and in the states, there is unambiguous political will and commitment to literacy. Yet the movement to increase the literacy has not achieved its desired goal. One hindering factor is the population

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explosion. The gains in the field of education as reflected in the increase in the number of literates is nullified by an alarming rate of growth of population. This seems to be a vicious circle. Literacy is supposed to be a factor that helps the family welfare schemes. Illiteracy might have been a cause for the alarming increase of population which in turn neutralizes the efforts to increase the rate of literacy. There could be some other factors also that stood in the way of the efforts to spread literacy.

In this respect, the experience of a society which had been keeping ahead of its neighbours in literacy status, could be of interest to the educationists and administrators engaged in spreading literacy.

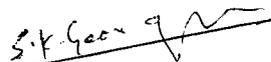
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I had been collecting materials at the National Archives of India, Nehru Memorial Library, Regional Archives, Ernakulam, CDS Library, Trivandrum, State Central Library, Trivandrum, Kerala University Library, Trivandrum, Economics Department Library, Kariavattom, Sree Krishna Vilasom Library, Malayinkil and the Legislative Assembly Library, Trivandrum. I wish to express my thanks to the Librarians and the staff of these Libraries for the permission granted me to use the respective libraries and the help rendered to me that made the collection of materials easy.

I am thankful to Shri T.M.Varghese for the neat and prompt typing of the dissertation.

Whatever faults remain in the dissertation, I am solely responsible for them.



(SENU KURIEN GEORGE)

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The amount of information to which we have access is one index of our intelligence. The unit of information is something called a bit. It is an answer - either yes or no - to an unambiguous question. To specify whether a lamp is on or off requires a single bit of information.¹

When our genes could not store all the information necessary for survival, we slowly invented brains. But then the time came, perhaps ten thousand years ago, when we needed to know more than could conveniently be contained in brains. So we learned to stockpile the enormous quantities of information outside our bodies. The technique of writing was invented and the information was retrieved in written form on clay, leaves, rocks or paper.²

The importance of writing lies in its creating a new medium of communication between men. It objectifies speech, provides language with a material correlative, a set of visible signs. In this material form speech can be transmitted over space and preserved over time; what people say and think can be rescued from the transitoriness of oral communication.³

1. Carl Sagan, Cosmos (New York, 1980), p.297.

2. Ibid., p.307.

3. Jack Goody, ed., Literacy in Traditional Societies (Cambridge, 1968), p.1.

Can literacy alone change a particular society's way of life? Works of Jack Goody, Marshall McLuhan and of the classicists like Eric Havelock would lead us to believe that writing has altered the way men think, that it has given birth to history, scepticism, and science, that it has changed the political structure of the West. Writing is said to have opened for examination the inner life of man, and to have been a necessary cause of democracy and the industrial revolution.⁴

But by itself writing is an inert force. It provokes change only within the living organism of human community, and the change it does stimulate makes sense only when studied in conjunction with the consciousness of language prevalent in the culture where it is employed.⁵ Writing did not make the Greek mind sceptical, logical, historical or democratic, as Goody claims. Instead it furnished an opportunity for these dispositions to flourish.⁶

So the notion that there is some connection between development and literacy is perfectly valid only if literacy is properly defined. Here we cannot define it simply as the possession of mechanical skills in reading

4. Robert Pattison, On Literacy (New York, 1982), p.40; See also Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "Consequences of Literacy," in Jack Goody, ed., op.cit., pp.19-68.

5. Robert Pattison, op.cit., p.40.

6. Ibid., p.45.

and writing. We may well adopt the definition given by Robert Pattison that literacy is mechanical ability with technologies of language coupled with consciousness of language as a force in human affairs.⁷

To make this point clearer Pattison points out the concept of 'prisoner phenomenon'. It has been noticed that many prisoners, by some sort of external and internal inducement, were awakened to literacy, and the mystical power of the word transformed their lives. This is explained as prisoner phenomenon. The cases of Malcolm X, John Bunyan and St. Augustine are classic examples of this phenomenon. The curiosity engendered by the oral contacts with his relatives led Malcolm to undertake the arduous road to literacy and finally to the creation of his own movement. Once his passion had been aroused, literacy provided the means of developing and organizing it, but literacy did not - does not ever by itself - awaken the passion of the mind. In the fourth century Augustine changed the course of his life and thus of Western history when he took up a Bible in his mother's garden and discovered Christ. What led to this momentous confrontation with the Christian text was not literacy, but the voice of a child Augustine heard that urged him to "take up the

7. Ibid., p.vii.

book and read". Literacy can only alter our lives where some still smaller voice urges us on to seek change.⁸

In this sense literacy is a potent form of consciousness. Once possessed it makes us productive. It remakes our lives.⁹

Accordingly, a person who can read and write may still lack the sensitivity towards what is the essential quality of the literate man in the broadest sense of literate. O'Neil also makes such a distinction between what he calls proper literates and improper literates. A proper literate can bring his knowledge and experience to bear on what passes before him. And, on the other hand, an improper literate will be able to read and write and can merely follow words across a page, getting generally what is superficially there. Both Pattison and O'Neil went to the extent of remarking that a person need not be able to read and write to be (properly) literate.¹⁰

Literacy is always connected with power.¹¹ Once a system of writing is invented, people have to be initiated into its conventions: and historically these people have been a select few. They have nearly always held political

8. Ibid., p.136.

9. Ibid., p.x.

10. Ibid., pp.26, 32; Wayne O'Neil, "Properly Literate," in Martin Hoyles, ed., The Politics of Literacy (London, 1977), p.74.

11. Robert Pattison, op.cit., p.viii; Martin Hoyles, "The History and Politics of Literacy," in Martin Hoyles, ed., op.cit., pp.18-19.

power or they have been used by those with power. In Tahiti the nobles were responsible for the calendar, in New Zealand, the priests, and in China the literati formed a formidable group of administrators. Those without skills of literacy often looked upon them as having magical powers.¹²

There is no fixed rule that will tell us what cultural effects follow any set of attitudes or technologies. An innovation in literacy, like writing, will always be coloured by the existing attitudes toward language and the economic structure of the culture where it is introduced. The innovation then will begin to alter the attitudes and the economy, and these alterations will in turn produce new innovations, and so on, reciprocally, each step in the process being particular to its time and place in history. In other words, literacy changes in time and from place to place.¹³

The literate man is alive to the problems of language. Simply to be awake to questions about the relation between language and life, however, is only a foundation, and on this foundation each society erects its own structure of literacy, compounded of theory (ideology) and technology. Theories that respond to the questions

12. Martin Hoyles, op.cit., pp.18-19.

13. Robert Pattison, op.cit., p.83.

of language give the structure its form. The available technology give it its substance. We view the finished product as a unity and do not trouble ourselves to distinguish the components of literacy, but theory and technology are nonetheless distinguishable in the result. The theory (ideology or consciousness) and technology always have a reciprocal relation, and no two societies will have an identical relation between these two forces and no two societies will have the same literacy.¹⁴

Cochin was a Native State, a scenic land on the west coast of India, bounded by the river Bharatha on the north, Travancore on the south, the Arabian sea on the west and Travancore and the British district of Coimbatore on the east.¹⁵ But there were territories belonging to Travancore and the British within these boundaries, and Cochin's Chittur taluk lay outside the boundaries, entirely encircled by British territory.¹⁶ The state lay between 9° 48' and 10° 50' N latitude and 76° 5' and 76° 56' E longitude¹⁷ and had an area of 1361½ square miles.¹⁸

14. Ibid., pp.29, viii.

15. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Cochi Rajya Charithram (Malayalam) (Calicut, 1989), p.1.

16. Ibid.; Census of India, Cochin, 1911, p.5.

17. Census of India, Cochin, 1911, p.5.

18. Ibid.; Administration Report of Cochin, 1084 ME (1908-1909 AD), no page number.

In the following pages we will discuss the literacy in Cochin from 1890 to 1949. Cochin was, as notified in the Census Report of 1891, having the highest rate of literacy among the native states and British provinces in India. After independence the State was merged with Travancore in 1949; and the United States of Travancore and Cochin and the Malabar District of Madras Province were united in 1956 to form the new Kerala state, the only state in India which went in for total literacy.

The second chapter describes the castes and classes in Cochin and examines the course of social change that was transforming the society and the system of land tenure that determined the class character in the State. The third chapter analyses the traditional education system and the process of their transforming to the modern pattern over the period that we study. The next chapter, the fourth, offers an explanation for the comparatively higher rate of literacy in Cochin. The fifth chapter critically examines the development of literacy among different sections of people including the unprivileged. The final chapter concludes the discussion.

This study is mainly based on the Census Reports, Administration Reports and certain Committee Reports looking into the condition of education - all the three

dealing with the state of Cochin - and some secondary sources. The bibliography at the end of the dissertation gives the list of source materials used for writing this dissertation.

Chapter II

CASTES AND CLASSES IN COCHIN

The caste system reigned supreme over the Hindu community in Cochin.

The Nambuthiries were the dominating section of the society in Cochin. They were native Brahmins. They were not split into sects, Vaishnavite or Saivite. They had no agraharams, nor did they live segregated. Some were employed in the performance of religious offices but the greatest part indulged in indolent repose.¹ Nambuthiries in Cochin belonged to the Trichur Yogam.² Nambidi, Moosath and Elayath were inferior castes of Nambuthiri.³ The Nambuthiries were the sole owners of land in Kerala till the eighteenth century. The rule of Marthandavarma in Travancore (1729-58) and the Mysore domination (1766-92) in Malabar made changes in the land ownership pattern.⁴ In Cochin also there were attempts by the State to subdue the chiefs through seizure of their land and strengthen the state power, but not to the extent as in Travancore.⁵

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1. Census of Cochin, 1875, pp.34-35.
 2. C.Achuta Menon, Cochin State Manual (Ernakulam,1911), p.197
 3. Census of Cochin, 1875, p.35.
 4. P.K.Balakrishnan, Jathivyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum (Malayalam) (Kottayam, 1987), p.270.
 5. T.C.Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences; Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960 (Calcutta, 1970),p.32.

There were some Brahmins in Cochin who originally belonged to other regions. For example, there were Embranthiries (from Tulunad or South Canara), Putters or Tamil Brahmins from Tinnevelly, Tanjore and Coimbatore,⁶ Konkani Brahmins and Telugu speaking Gauda Brahmins. Nambuthiri considered Embranthiri almost on an equal footing. They were often employed to officiate as priests in minor temples and as cooks in Nambuthiri and Kshatriya houses. The putters lived in Samoogha Madams which serve as a point of union and were scattered throughout the country. Many of them were employed in Sirkar service and were also seen generally performing some of the minor duties of religion. Nearly half of them were merchants trading in cloth and grain. Konkani Brahmins were Vaishnavites. The Nambuthiri and other Brahmins did not treat them as Brahmins and the Konkani returned the compliment by refraining from dining with other Brahmins and by refusing them admission into their temples. They were mostly traders, shopkeepers and landholders.⁷

The Kshatriyas were known as Tamburan, Tamban or Tirumalpad. This subdivision was not by caste but by position. The royal families of Cochin and Kodungalloor belonged to Kshatriya caste.⁸ Ananthakrishna Iyer,

6. Census of Cochin, 1875, p.35.

7. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.207.

8. Ibid., p.199.

Thurston and Fuller argue that the Malayali Kshatriyas were originally Nairs. The Malabar Marriage Commission subscribed to this view. William Logan and K.P.Padmanabha Menon are also of the opinion that the Malayali Kshatriyas had evolved from the Nairs as a result of their alliance with the Nambuthiries.⁹

There were scarcely any Vaisyas in the State.¹⁰

The Ambalavasi held rank at the head of the Sudras. Though many of them were engaged in agricultural pursuits they were generally dedicated to the service of temples. They were of various denominations - Nambidi, Adikal, Chakkiyar, Nambiyar, Pushpakan, Pishardai, Variyar, Putuval and Marar.¹¹

The Nairs may be considered as having constituted the soul of the population. They were a martial people and formed mainly the state militia.¹² They avoided commercial and other petty vocations. To take up such menial jobs was considered as derogatory to their caste status. They were not interested in cultivating the land they enjoyed as kanom. Instead they subleased the land to others. The share of agricultural products they

9. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.271-3 ff.

10. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit.

11. Ibid., pp.199-200.

12. Ibid., p.201.

received as intermediary tenants was the chief income of many a Nair taravads.¹³ They, with the Nambuthiries and Ambalavasis formed the most dominant section of the people of Cochin.¹⁴

As K.N.Panikkar has rightly pointed out the traditional pattern of family organisation, the system of marriage and the law of inheritance of Nairs were closely linked with the nature of land relations and the overriding influence of the values and ideology of the Nambuthiries.¹⁵ The rules of social conduct and caste relations ensured a superior privileged position for the Nambuthiries, as well as the subjection and acquiescence of the lower orders to the value system and it helped to perpetuate privileges. The Nambuthiries ranked highest in the caste hierarchy and ritual status, were considered as repositories of vedic knowledge and scholars of Sanskrit and their authority was supreme in all religious matters. At the initial stage they might have had some technical expertise, like the knowledge of calendar and ability to forecast weather cycles. They were the "holiest of human beings, representatives of God on earth" and their person

13. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., p.130.

14. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.201.

15. K.N.Panikkar, "Land Control, Ideology and Reform: A Study of the Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala," in S.C.Malik,ed., Determinants of Social Status in India (IIAS, 1986), pp.65-68.

and property were sacred. They also wielded considerable political influence. Above the normal process of law, they were subject only to the authority of the head of their own community.¹⁶

The lower castes on the other hand were supposed to serve the Brahmins by protecting and maintaining their property. Their salvation lay in submitting themselves to the will and pleasure of the Nambuthiri. Literature, religious discourses and temple arts like Chakyarkoottu were inbuilt with the virtues of serving Brahmins. The subservience of the lower castes was manifest in all the areas of social interaction. A Nair could not touch a Nambuthiri, Tiyya had to keep at least thirty two feet away from him, and a Cheruman sixty four feet. The style of conversation was also an indication of this superior-inferior status. The violation of these rules led to ex-communication in the form of the denial of village services like those of the barber and the washerman and the facilities of village temples and wells.¹⁷

The influence of the Nambuthiri value system and of their material position is best reflected in the marriage system and law of inheritance. The Nambuthiries followed patriliney and primogeniture; only the eldest son

16. Ibid., p.65.

17. Ibid.

was allowed to marry within the caste. This device served two purposes: (i) it preserved the family property intact; (ii) it also preserved the status of the Nambuthiries by limiting their population.¹⁸ The younger sons established relations with matrilineal Nair women. These were not considered as marriages by Nambuthiries though the Nairs viewed them as such. These relationships, called sambandhams, were temporary or semi-permanent arrangement and could be terminated without notice by either party. The Nair matriliney and Nambuthiri primogeniture denied to the offsprings of these alliances any share in their father's property. This was reinforced by the popular belief that accepting brahmaswom (brahmin property) was a great sin. Thus the sambandham system met the sexual needs of the Nambuthiri without any obligation on his part.¹⁹

The Nairs lived in taravads (matrilineal joint families) which consisted of "a woman, her children, her daughters' and grand daughters' children, her brothers, descendants through her sisters and her relations through her dead female ancestors". The members were co-parceners of all family property whether inherited or acquired by

18. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.362-3.

19. K.N.Panikkar, op.cit., pp.65-66.

the efforts of individual members. The karanavan, senior-most male member of the family was the trustee of family property. He did not have the right to alienation. He possessed enough powers to act as patriarch, subjecting the other members to his power and authority. The junior members had practically no say in the management of the property. The rule of impartibility held the various tavalis (lineages) together within the taravad. Members were totally dependent on their taravad for the economic needs.²⁰

There were some Tamil sudras, Tarakans, in Chittur taluk. They followed patriliney.²¹

Four intermediate castes were there between the Nair and the polluting castes. Veluttedan, Velakkattalavan, Chaliyan and Kadupattan. Their touch would pollute Nairs and higher castes and were not allowed to enter even the precincts of Brahmanical temples. Veluttedans were the washerman and Velukkattalavans, the barbers of all castes above them. Chaliyas were hereditary weavers and weaved coarse clothes generally worn by poor classes. Kadupattans were also called Ezhuthacchan (literally, teachers of writing) as they were largely employed as village school masters.²²

20. Ibid., pp.66-67.

21. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.202.

22. Ibid., pp.202-3.

All the castes below them were the so-called untouchables. They polluted the higher castes not only by physical contact but by approach as well. The members of the low caste were not permitted to approach the members of upper castes beyond a prescribed distance. Thurston has recorded a case of a Nayar killing a Cheruma even as late as in 1904 for coming within the polluting distance. The untouchables were not supposed to dress neatly and they were not allowed to cover their breasts. They were also not to keep milch cows, and were prohibited from using oil mills, metal vessels and umbrellas, from wearing shoes and any but coarse cloth and ornaments. They had to use self derogatory language and should stand before a caste Hindu in awe and reverence assuming a humble posture. The use of public highways was forbidden to these outcastes and were not allowed to approach even the periphery of brahmanical temples. They could not erect idols of Gods worshipped by higher castes. Their deities included Bhadrakali, Chamundi, Kuttichattan, etc., a sort of outcaste Gods. These deities were worshipped with the offerings of toddy and the blood of fowls and animals.²³

23. P.Chandramohan, Social and Political Protest in Travancore: A Study of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (1900-1938) (M.Phil Dissertation) (JNU, 1981), pp.14-18 ff.

Kammalans were among the first of the polluting castes. They were divided into a number of endogamous subcastes - Marasari (carpenter), Kallasari (mason), Musari (brazier), Karuvan (blacksmith), Tattan (goldsmith) and Tolkollan (leather worker). The first five groups were socially on a par with one another. They interdined but did not intermarry. The kurups who formed a subcaste among them were their priests as well as their barbers.²⁴

Though in social status Ezhavas were considered untouchables economically and educationally they were not so poor as the other polluting castes.²⁵ They were numerically the strongest caste in Cochin.²⁶ The tapping of toddy and distilling of arrack and the sale of these articles were considered the hereditary occupation of the Ezhavas,²⁷ and these were done only by the Ezhavas. However, it was only an occupation of a minority who were the poorest section among them.²⁸ Majority of the Ezhavas were subtenants and landless labourers and engaged in agriculture.²⁹ The comparatively better economic condition

24. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.203.

25. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., p.65.

26. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.203.

27. Ibid.

28. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., p.66; Ayappan, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village: A Study in Culture Change (Bombay, 1966), p.117.

29. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., p.67.

of the Ezhavas naturally gave them more educational facilities. A number of Ezhava families were traditionally ayurvedic physicians and astrologers. There were also a number of Sanskrit scholars among them.³⁰ The headmen of Ezhavas were known as tandans. Vattis or Kavutiyans, the priests and barbers of Ezhavas formed a distinct subcaste inferior in status to them. They follow marumakkathayam in Cochin-Kanayanur taluk and makkathayam in the rest of the state.³¹

Valan, Arayan, Mukkuvan and Marakkan were fishermen and boatmen castes. Amukkuvan, a subcaste of Arayan was the priest of Valan as well as Arayan.³²

There were some other polluting castes who were more or less equal in status to Ezhava and Kammalan - Kaniyan and Kanisan were professional astrologers; Panans were exorcists and necromancers; Vilkurup engaged in making bows and arrows and palm-leaf umbrellas; Mannan and Velan were washerman to polluting castes, and their services were required by castewomen for purification (after delivery and monthly periods); Pulluvans were singers in serpent groves; and Pattilans were barbers serving most of the polluting castes.³³

30. Ibid.

31. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.204.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

The Kadan and Malayan were the most typical of the hill tribes of Cochin. The Kadans were confined to the Nelliampathi and Parambikulam from where other hilltribes were excluded. The Malayan is found in most other forests. Ulladan and Nayadi lived on the outskirts of the jungles.³⁴

The slave castes formed about a tenth of the population of the State. Kanakkans were good boatmen as well as agricultural labourers and were comparatively better off than the other slave castes. Cheruman or Pulayan formed the great majority of the slaves and were engaged in field labour - ploughing, sowing, cropwatching and reaping - and were paid in kind. They lived in hovels situated on the banks of fields or nestle on the tree to watch the crop. Tandapulayans were found only in the south-western part of the state. They caused atmospheric pollution even to the Pulayan. Kutan and Vetturan were also agricultural labourers. Parayans were the lowest among the slave castes. Valluvans were the priests of the slave castes.³⁵

About fifteen per cent of the Hindu population of the state belonged to castes which were foreign to Kerala. They retained most of the habits, customs and usages of

34. Ibid., pp.205-6.

35. Ibid., pp.204-5.

the original stock. All of them followed makkathayam, and differed from indigenous castes in language, dress, mode of wearing the tuft etc.³⁶

We have seen about Tamil Brahmin, Konkani Brahmin, Tulu Brahmin and Telugu Brahmin and Tamil Sudra in paragraphs above.

Chetans or Devanga Chettis and Kaikolans were weaving castes found in Chittur taluk and in the eastern portion of Talappilli Taluk. Chetans were immigrants from Mysore and spoke Canarese. Kaikolans were from Coimbatore and Tamil was their mother tongue.³⁷

Vellalas were immigrants from Coimbatore and Salem, and were found in Chittur taluk. Their occupation were agriculture and trade.³⁸

Vaniyans were Konkani vaisya, and Kudumi Chetti, Konkani Sudra. Some good gold and silver workers were there among Vaniyans, but most of them were petty traders. Kudumi served as domestic servant of Konkani Brahmins. Panditan was Vaniyan's priest.³⁹

Chakkans were oil pressers from Tamil country.⁴⁰

36. Ibid., p.206.

37. Ibid., p.207.

38. Ibid., pp.207-8.

39. Ibid., p.208.

40. Ibid.



Panditattan and Kallan were workers in gold and granite respectively. Pandaran, employed in making pappadam (gram-wafers), Ambattan and Vannan, the barbers and washermen, Chakkiliyan, the leather worker, Kusavan, maker of pottery and tiles, Odda Naikan, the tank diggers and earth workers, were all said to have been first got down for the construction of the Travancore Lines. Kakkalans or Kuravans were a gypsy tribe.⁴¹

It is interesting to see that most of the castes in the mid position of the caste hierarchy followed marumakkathayam. While Nambuthiri, Elayath and Moosath at the top and Kammalan, fishermen castes, Kaniyan, Kanisan, Panan, Vilkuruppu, Mannam, Velan, Pulluvan, Pattilan, serf castes and the hill tribes at the bottom of the hierarchy followed makkathayam, all the other castes, with the exception of Kadupattan, some Chaliyans, and Ezhavas in all the taluks other than Cochin-Kanayanur, positioned between the above mentioned two layers followed marumakkathayam.⁴²

The status of the Muslims and Christians in social gradation was below the Nairs and above the Ezhavas. They polluted castes above them only by physical contact.⁴³

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., pp.196-208 ff.

43. A. Ayappan, op.cit., p.79.



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A class that had been enjoying the land ownership in absolute term for more than a millenium should, as a rule, have been leading a plentiful, luxuriant and secure life. But Nambuthiries as a class, on the eve of the twentieth century were seen as poor and helpless.⁴⁴ A majority of Nambuthiries were virtually living from hand to mouth. Their womenfolk were cloistered in illoms (Nambuthiri houses). Most of them were denied the joys of family life as only the eldest son was allowed to marry within the caste. When the younger sons went out to the lower caste women for conjugal relations, most of the Nambuthiri women remained as spinsters through their life. Their fate was to be confined to their illoms without the right to see even close male relatives like brothers. Those women married to the eldest sons in families were not in a better position either. In many cases she found herself as one among the wives of her husband. And if a girl happened to be a widow at an early age - this was common - she was not only not allowed to remarry but had to live a miserable life secluded in the innerparts of the apartment for ladies in the illom, as she was considered as an inauspicious object in the family.⁴⁵

44. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.262-3; K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Cochi Rajya Charitram (Malayalam) (Calicut, 1989), p.764.

45. V.T.Bhattathiripad, Veetiyude Jeevitha Smaranakal (Malayalam) (Kottayam, 1983), pp.15, 16.

How did the Nambuthiries turn into such a wretched financial condition? The social environment, economy and the concept of land (wealth) ownership and a luxuriant life had been changing over the time. But the Nambuthiries failed to recognize these changes and instead, turned their backs to them. Their rights in land was the same as they enjoyed before also. But when the rest of the society was marching forward with new concepts of society and economy the Nambuthiries refused to move along with and as a result they found themselves backward, poor and in helpless condition. It should be remembered that they still enjoyed their honoured status in the society.⁴⁶

The Nairs were not well off economically either in the long past or at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The main reasons were the systems of joint family and inheritance prevailed among them. The general concept was that a Nair family inherited enough property to sustain its members. Addition to this inheritance was very rare as there was no incentive to individual earning. The property even if earned individually could not be enjoyed by the person who earned it. So the karanavar (the elder member acting as trustee) and the ananthiravans (other male members of the family) were not enthusiastic to earn.

46. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., p.205.

47. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.782; P.K.Balakrishnan op.cit., pp.122-34.

Instead they idled their time. Their caste pride did not allow them to take up any other job than their traditional vocations of warfare and agriculture. The taravad did not take up responsibility to educate the anantaravans beyond the traditional instruction.⁴⁸ Just as the Nambuthiri family system led them to the degeneration of the community the joint family system of Nairs, the symbiotic allies of Nambuthiries, paved the way for their disintegration.⁴⁹ The emergence of money economy and the socio-economic changes during the British rule considerably undermined the cohesion and utility of Nair taravads.⁵⁰

Marshal's theory that the love of one's family inspires one to acquire wealth⁵¹ is relevant regarding the Nair family system. Even if a Nair was keen on helping his wife and children he was unable to do so under the then existing system. Man's instinct always tends to live with his family. And when a system does not allow for it the breaking of that system is an inevitable consequence. And the disintegration of Nair joint families was on the cards towards the end of the last century.

48. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.782.

49. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.381-2.

50. K.N.Panikkar, op.cit., p.72.

51. As quoted by K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.784.

Padmanabha Menon states that all the wealth and capital of Nairs were land only.⁵² The main income of Nair families was their share of crops as the intermediary holders of land. There were no other means of income.⁵³ From the earlier times the chief avocations of Nairs were warfare and agriculture.⁵⁴ But from warfare they did not receive any other remuneration.⁵⁵ Even the payment received by them during war was just sufficient for their food and other necessities while on the march or on service in towns.⁵⁶ So the sustaining avocation was agriculture.⁵⁷ But they did not cultivate the land they held. They leased the land to sub-tenants and these sub-tenants cultivated the land with the help of agricultural slave castes like Pulayas and received a portion of the produce as their share.⁵⁸

It is at this point that we can understand better how the Nairs happened to be vulnerable to the Nambuthiries. Elsewhere we have seen the strong ideological influence of

52. Ibid., p.785.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.; P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., p.131.

56. K.N.Panikkar, op.cit., p.67.

57. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.785.

58. Ibid., p.4; P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.385, 130.

the Nambuthiries, and the Nairs' perception of the privileges of the Nambuthiries arising out of their social dominance as a matter of prestige and privilege for themselves. Where ideology failed the Nambuthiries had their material positions to fall back upon. The Nairs were holding land belonging to Nambuthiries who had absolute proprietary rights. They could assign lands to the families of women whose favours they sought, or in the case of refusal, cancel the existing assignment.⁵⁹

The colonial domination of Cochin by the British meant much to the Nairs. They lost their position as the members of the State militia. In nineteenth century there was no need for such a militia all the other States around Cochin also having been under the final authority of the British. Thus one of the traditional avocations of Nairs ceased to be of any importance to them and they had to resort to agriculture⁶⁰ be it for sustenance or status.

And the agrarian scene was also witnessing change. The earlier stipulation of particular job for particular caste has diluted and many other people started taking up agriculture. As population increased and the people were devoid of having any inspiration or capital to bring

59. K.N.Panikkar, op.cit., pp.67-68.

60. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.786.

barren land under cultivation, the arable land got divided into small fragments. This gradually resulted in increased impoverishment. On the one hand the agricultural land became short compared to the increasing population. On the other, more land was required for habitation purposes of this increasing population.⁶¹

Padmanabha Menon certifies that the condition of the castes ranging from Ezhavas to Pulayas was improving.⁶² Many of the hindrances that were blocking their progress had been removed. They became free when oozhiyam (slavery) was abolished. The rule that they were not allowed to hold land was also weakened.

When did changes begin in the social sphere? We are unable to pinpoint any time when the changes began. Padmanabha Menon states that there was not much difference between the customs that prevailed during the days of Visscher, i.e., late eighteenth century and those at the beginning of the present century.⁶³ His argument is that the customs and manners of the people in the east does not change as rapidly as in the west. But he remarks that changes were visible during the British domination.⁶⁴ Indeed, changes were taking place in

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., p.790.

63. Ibid., p.640.

64. Ibid., pp.640, 763.

society. Sankariah in 1875 reports that some very momentous changes were brewing in regard to the caste and religious systems of the Hindus.⁶⁵ We should take these changes as a segment in the ongoing process of progress of human beings towards a more humane and egalitarian society.

The caste hierarchy in the southern part of India was, generally speaking, not conforming to chaturvarnyam. The caste system prevailed in Kerala was distinctly different from that in Karnataka or Tamil Nadu. All other castes than Brahmins were polluting by touch or on approach.⁶⁶ In Madras a Brahmin could travel in a tonga led by a Paraya. That Paraya could go up to the doorway of the temple without any question of pollution. But in Kerala a Paraya had to keep 64-72 feet away from the temple doorway.⁶⁷ In other words the caste system was more oppressive in the Malayalam speaking areas than in the other regions of the country. The more the suppression the more would be the tendency to get rid of it. And when the protest against caste oppression began to be expressed in organized form in Kerala it happened to be the first of its kind in the country.

65. A.Sankariah's letter to Diwan in Census Report, 1875, no page number.

66. P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit., p.332.

67. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.794.

The first expression of social awakening among the Nairs was a struggle against the existing value system as reflected in the taravad organization and marriage arrangement. During the second half of the nineteenth century these two institutions were increasingly coming under critical evaluation. By then, the educated section of Nairs had begun to perceive the connection between land control and their symbiotic life with the Nambuthiri land lords and their family organization and marriage customs. Therefore, their reform efforts were directed towards all these aspects namely the taravad organization, marriage customs and tenurial relations.⁶⁸ The movement for the reformation of social customs, practices and institutions of Nairs was the outcome of the collapse of the economic basis of the taravad organization. It was also due to the new ideological and cultural perspectives acquired by the educated middle class.⁶⁹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century marked changes were visible among the Ezhavas. The contact with Christian missionaries helped to awaken the social consciousness of the Ezhavas with regard to their rights. This social awakening was accelerated by the changing economic condition and spread of education. As a result

68. K.N.Panikkar, op.cit., p.72.

69. Ibid., p.75.

of the job opportunities in public works, trade, commerce etc. and the increase of wages the living standard of the Ezhavas increased. This opportunity helped the Christians and the Ezhavas because of their enthusiasm and experience in commercial and menial occupations. Nairs and other upper caste Hindus did not show much interest in industry, trade and commerce. In the second half of the nineteenth century an unprecedented demand developed for coconut products abroad especially in America and Europe. Though the Ezhavas were not the actual owners of the coconut trees, they certainly got a good share of the increased profit as the main exploiters of the coconut products. With an expanding market for coir Ezhava men and women found full employment. The price of toddy and arrack doubled between 1860-81. This also helped the Ezhavas to increase their income. Their lifestyle and perspective of life began to change with their improved financial position.⁷⁰

Thoughtful Ezhavas began to look for the defects of their society and for ways and means of removing them. A new group of people began fighting against the obstacles which were in the way of their development. They became conscious of their basic human rights and began to rise in defence of these rights.⁷¹

70. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., pp.65-77.

71. Ibid., p.80.

It was at this time that Palpu met Sree Narayana Guru and they together propounded the idea of an organization to bring together the various groups of Ezhavas, which had been clamouring for their rights and were scattered throughout the Malayalam speaking area.⁷² Sree Narayana Guru's teachings were designed to develop a self respect for the Ezhavas and other low castes so as to enable them to stand independent and competent and shed their age old inferiority complex.⁷³

The greatest of the Narayana Guru's disciples in Cochin was K.Ayyappan. He organized an intercaste dining at Cherai in 1917. This was a step unimaginable to a majority of people. A Pulaya boy served to those who were prepared to participate in the interdining and it evoked mixed response even within the Ezhava community itself. C.Krishnan supported it but Kumaran Asan was against such a move eventhough he changed his opinion later. The Vijnana Vardhini Sabha, a cultural society of the Ezhavas of Cherai, of which Ayyappan and other participants of interdining were members, was against the interdining and expelled Ayyappan and others from the society.⁷⁴ Resultantly the Karayogams of Ezhavas in

72. P.K.Balakrishnan, Narayana Guru (An Anthology) (Kottayam, 1969), pp.109-11 ff.

73. Ibid., p.124.

74. K.A.Subramaniam, Sahodaran Ayyappan (Malayalam) (Cochin, 1973), pp.174 ff.

Cochin split into two - the progressives who supported Ayyappan and the conservatives. In course of time the progressives were able to dominate the public opinion and finally the Vijnana Vardhini Sabha, after ten years of expulsion revoked the decision to expel, in 1927.⁷⁵ Implied in this expulsion and readmission is the trend of the change in the attitude of the people over the time.

A section of the Nambuthiries felt the need for a change in their life style and they formed an organization called Nambuthiri Yogakshema Sabha. In the initial period the reformers were concerned with changes among the menfolk only. They wanted to bring out changes within the legal framework.⁷⁶ Gradually there emerged Yuvajana Sangham, a group of younger generation within the Yogakshema Sabha and they desired to revolutionize the changes.⁷⁷ Similar reform movements in other castes at large and Narayana Guru in particular inspired them. They also drew inspiration from progressive movements in other parts of the country like those under the leadership of E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker and Jawaharlal Nehru.⁷⁸ The reformers aimed at spreading English education among

75. Ibid., p.29.

76. V.T.Bhattathiripad, op.cit., p.77; E.M.S.Nambuthiripad Athmakatha (Malayalam) (Trivandrum, 1970), pp.46-47.

77. V.T.Bhattathiripad, op.cit., p.102.

78. E.M.S.Nambuthiripad, op.cit., p.173.

the Nambuthiries, and changes in the systems of family and marriage etc.⁷⁹ By and by the life style of the Nambuthiries began to change. All the sons of a family began to marry within the caste. The girls could hope for a married life and that too with a young spouse, unlike in early days.⁸⁰ The marriage of all sons within the caste led to the partitioning of the family property. The Nambuthiri joint families started breaking into nucleated families.⁸¹ Men removed tuft and sacred thread and women wore upper clothes and ornaments made of gold.⁸² Women started coming into public life.⁸³ The Nambuthiries were conforming to a new pattern of life.

The royal families (Kshatriyas), the girls of which could have only been married to Nambuthiries also showed signs of change. The number of those who stood for marriage only within the Kshatriya caste increased.⁸⁴

While the formal structure of the caste remained more or less the same as in the past, two of its important aspects, the political and economic, had undergone changes during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The upper

79. Ibid., p.88.

80. Ibid., p.219.

81. Ibid., p.238.

82. Ibid., pp.232-6 ff.

83. Ibid., p.237.

84. Ibid., pp.224-5.

castes in traditional Kerala constituted the administrative and political wing of the society directly attached to the ruler. Through the institution of landlord members of this administrative group controlled most of the economic activities. As trustees of the temple which was also the biggest landlord, the leading Nair lineages had control not only over the economy of the village but also of the collective cultural activities of the village which centred around the temple. They collected the rent due from the tenants in the form of a multiplicity of feudal payments in cash and kind on various occasions of their domestic ceremonies and public celebrations in the temple. The cash and other offerings made by the villagers ultimately went to the upper caste lineages. The village rulers and their retainers of the upper cluster had vast powers and authority over the rest of the villagers.⁸⁵

In the later period we see that on account of their inability to manage their affairs according to the dictates of prudence the traditional aristocrats of the village collapsed economically and lacked the means to maintain their status. At the same time some of the under-privileged families took advantage of the opportunities of the times and became defacto leaders of the village. This, organizationally, was an important change indeed.⁸⁶

85. A.Ayyappan, op.cit., p.80.

86. Ibid., p.82.

Land Tenures that Determined Class Structure

The pattern of land ownership and interest in Cochin during the first half of the nineteenth century were more akin to that of Malabar than that of Travancore. The only difference was that a considerable part of the land belonged to the state and, to that extent, it acted as a deterrent to the powers enjoyed by the private janmies viz-a-viz the cultivators.⁸⁷

As in Malabar and Travancore, considerable section of the agricultural labourers in Cochin consisted of dependent labourers belonging to the lowest castes, and they continued to be attached to their masters even after the abolition of slavery in 1854.⁸⁸

An edict was issued by the Raja in 1863 to prevent the eviction of kanom tenants before the completion of a term of twelve years. In the absence of any machinery for implementation of this edict, however, had very little effect. On the janmom lands the landlord tenant relations that existed were similar to those in Malabar.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding the impediments the tenure condition existing in Cochin seem to have been more conducive

87. T.C.Varghese, op.cit., p.32.

88. Ibid., p.50.

89. Ibid., p.69.

for expansion of cultivation than in Malabar. The state ownership of forty per cent of the occupied lands namely the Sirkar land was different in nature from private ownership of janmom lands. In particular, the ownership of the whole of the unassigned wastelands by the state was likely to have facilitated an increase of cultivation on Sirkar lands. It is a fact that on these lands cultivation expanded to such an extent as even to include reclamation of backwater swamps near the coast line. They were called kol lands and was similar to the backwater swamps of Travancore.⁹⁰

However, the opening up of plantation in Cochin did not make headway to the same extent as in Travancore mainly due to the lack of transport facilities though by the latter half of the last century European planters had begun to show some interest in developing the Nelliampathi forests.⁹¹

The cadastral survey preceding the land revenue settlement began with the Royal Regulation of 1899 and the settlement was completed in 1909 under the close supervision of settlement officers from the Madras Presidency. The settlement followed more or less the scheme adopted

90. Ibid., pp.70-71.

91. Ibid., p.71.

for Malabar. Nevertheless a few important changes had to be made so as to fit in with her peculiar tenure pattern.⁹²

On the whole, the revenue settlement simplified considerably the multiplicities of tenure that existed prior to the settlement. Replacing the numerous tenures four well defined categories emerged. One of the most important decisions taken along with the settlement was that to confer proprietary rights in the soil on the pandaravaka verumpattom and kanom tenants which right the Travancore cultivators obtained as early as 1865. Due to this radical reform the nature of the pandaravaka verumpattom and pandaravaka kanapattom changed from those of tenancy to those of ownership.⁹³

At the beginning of the present century two important steps were taken to improve the condition of tenants, one relating to the sirkar tenants and the other with respect to devaswom tenants. We have seen that the pandaravaka tenants who had about forty two per cent of the total land were given ownership rights. In 1909 by a Devaswom Proclamation, all tenants of incorporated devaswom land (covering five per cent of the total occupied area at that time) were also given fixity of tenure, though under obligation to pay a higher rate of

92. Ibid., p.91.

93. Ibid., p.94.

land revenue than on sirkar land. But the landlord-tenant relationships on janmom land were left uncontrolled, with the sole exception of the edict in 1863, which was more in the nature of a general instruction. However, in the course of the first half of the twentieth century the state accomplished more than what was achieved by the other two political units in regard to tenancy reform. The important legislations during this period were the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1914, the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1938, the Cochin Verumpattomdars Act of 1943 and the Devaswom Verumpattom Settlement Proclamation of 1943. The significant feature of the 1914 Act was the provision regarding the award of compensation for improvements made by tenants. It also secured fixity of tenure for kanom tenants. With the 1938 Tenancy Act more categories of tenancy were brought within the definition of kanom. It also brought the kanom documents of a longer period than that prescribed in the 1914 Act within kanom already enjoying fixity of tenure.

The Cochin Verumpattomdars Act of 1943 granted permanent occupancy rights to all verumpattom tenants irrespective of the nature of their tenancy or the duration of their occupation of the land, either for cultivation or for bonafide residence. Devaswom Verumpattomdars Proclamation, 1943 conferred absolute occupancy rights on all tenants and fixed fair rents. The kanom

tenants of devaswom land benefited much more through the Proclamation, on account of the newly provided low-rent rates and abolition of the practice of renewals.⁹⁴

Emergence of a New Class

Kerala society witnessed the emergence of a new middle class from the second half of the nineteenth century. Various factors like the land reforms, growth of cash economy due to the development of plantation industries, public works department and small scale industries and the introduction of English education paved the way for the emergence of the new class in Travancore.⁹⁵ This class was drawn from almost every religion and caste.⁹⁶ Panikkar opines that the middle class had its social origins in the rent-receiving-rent-paying class of intermediary kanakkar.⁹⁷ There were merchants, government servants, lawyers, doctors, among the new middle class. They all had a common perception of life - a new cultural and ideological perspective - which was almost similar to those of the social reform movements.⁹⁸ As in Malabar and Travancore, it was this class that had initiated the reform movements in Cochin.

94. Ibid., pp.134-5.

95. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., pp.38, 300.

96. Ibid., p.300.

97. K.N.Panikkar, op.cit., p.70.

98. E.M.S.Nambuthiripad, op.cit., p.91;
K.N. Panikkar, op.cit., p.70.

Chapter III

EDUCATION: SYSTEM AND DEVELOPMENT

Traditional System of Education

In traditional society, i.e., before the widespread use of printing most knowledge and culture were handed down from previous generations passed on by parents, teachers and older members of the community. People learned largely by direct personal contact, and traditional culture was organized so that it could be carried directly from person to person. There were two main types of traditional culture - the popular folk culture and the intellectual classical culture. The folk culture was passed on without much self-conscious system of instruction, but was picked up instead by habitual association in small communities. The classical culture was carefully trained and educated and was passed on by teachers who instructed their pupils in the classic exercises and the classic works on which systems of culture and knowledge were based.¹

In Cochin - and in Kerala - the traditional instruction was fragmented on caste line. There were separate teachers for each of the caste groups. The government did not have any responsibility in the instruction of the subjects except that the Rajas financially

1. Ananda E.Wood, Knowledge Before Printing and After: The Indian Tradition in Changing Kerala (Delhi, 1985), pp.1-2 ff.

supported the brahmaswom or sabha madhoms, established for the vedic instruction of Namputhiries. People took up the responsibility for education of their children. Under the direction of the karayogams of Nairs, there were asans (teachers) and ezhuthupallies (schools) in virtually each and every village.²

Children were initiated to letters on a religiously auspicious day, at the age of five or seven. On that day, after Saraswatipuja (worship of Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom), the teacher would write the alphabet on the child's tongue with a gold ring or other gold object. Then the child would write the alphabet on spread out rice. In the beginning teacher would hold his hand and make him write.³

The initiated children should get up in the early morning and be present at the place of instruction. Usually the schools were conducted in verandhas of buildings, public places, tree shades or in the houses of teachers themselves.⁴ After invoking the gods, particularly Ganapati and Saraswati, and teachers, children would be asked to write and recite the lessons they

2. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Cochi Rajya Charitram (Malayalam) (Calicut, 1989), p.659.

3. Ibid.; Kathleen Gough, "Literacy in Kerala," in Jack Goody, ed., Literacy in Traditional Societies (Cambridge: 1968), p.141.

4. P.K.Michael Tharakan, "Socio Economic Factors in Educational Development: Case of Nineteenth Century Travancore," in Economic and Political Weekly, vol.45, no.10, 1984, p.1915.

learned the previous day. Only after successfully doing so would they be taught new lessons. The class would last till five in the evening with two breaks of one hour each at nine in the morning and two in the afternoon; for Nambuthiries, the first break was around eleven in the morning as they took the morning meal only after doing many rituals that took up a long time. Before leaving the school in the evening they had to recite their oral lessons. The elders saw to it that the children recited their prayers in the evening and learned their lessons before going to bed.⁵

The sequence of instruction was somewhat like this: children would be taught alphabet, both reading and writing on sand. Having learnt to write on sand one progressed to reading on palm leaf. The verses one was to read were indented on palm leaf with a pointed stylus and given to one by the teacher. Reading on palm leaf was a step forward in that one progressed from separate and combined letters to reading continuous verses which had to be recited and learnt by heart. The course of instruction included the learning of ashtakams (poems consisting of eight stanzas, mostly in praise of deities), vakyam (lessons in verse mainly astrological

5. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., pp.659-60; Excerpts of the autobiography of Kanippayur Sankaran Nambuthiripad, translated and quoted by Ananda E.Wood, op.cit., pp.36-40 ff.

and astrologically related for calendar reckoning etc.), ativakyam and nakshatravakyam (verses for telling the time of day by the length of one's shadow and of night by recognizing the position of stars, respectively), amarakosam (the standard verse dictionary in Sanskrit) etc. and arithmetic. Girls would be taught poems which depict didactic verses about moral and conduct.⁶ This kind of education lasted for one or two years.

It should be noted that every step in the instruction right from the writing of alphabet on the child's tongue, was preceded by invocation of gods, particularly Ganapati and Saraswati.⁷ This manner of teaching and all these lessons constituted the traditional form of elementary education for Namputhiries as well as other castes down to Nairs.⁸

The teachers were accorded great respect and had great authority over their students. If a student made some mistake which the teacher did not like, he would be soundly punished. They could also expel the unruly children from the class.⁹

6. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.659; Excerpts of the autobiography of K.V.Mussate translated and quoted by Ananda E.Wood, op.cit., p.59.

7. Kanippayur's autobiography as translated and quoted by Ananda E.Wood, op.cit., pp.36-39 ff.

8. Ibid., p.39.

9. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.661.

Ordinary children in the country side were rather poor. If someone was appointed to instruct the children of a rich family it was common practice to send children from neighbouring houses there. Eventhough a teacher would not get much financial benefit from this he considered it his duty to instruct as many children as possible. Therefore, only if he could not do otherwise would a teacher send a boy back without accepting him. On the day of initiation into letters and on festival days like Onam and Vishu children would make their teacher some kind of gift according to their means. It was customary to make children themselves offer the gift. They were paid in cash also but mostly in kind.¹⁰

Once the elementary education was over those Sudras who had interest in further studies learned literature. Others would go to kalaris to learn the martial arts.¹¹

After the sacred threat ceremony Namputhiri boys were taught to recite the family inherited Veda by heart. This was learned without the aid of any written material.¹² The practice of vedic instruction was terrible. When the dawn worship and the fire worship called chamata was over

10. Ibid., p.661; Kanippayur's autobiography in Anand E. Wood, op.cit., p.44; Census of Cochin, 1891, p.92.

11. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.660.

12. Ibid., p.308; Kanippayur's autobiography, in Ananda E. Wood, op.cit., p.45.

one had to do 100 to 150 suryanamaskarams (a set of exercises), and straight away sit down to recite till lunch time. There were rituals before lunch and then immediately after lunch one started reciting again and it went on till the evening rituals of sunset, then again after evening worship till dinner, and sometimes even after dinner. In the course of all this, except for necessities like going to lavotary, there was not even a respite.¹³ During the period called brahmacharyam the boys lived simply and ascetically, and often in their guru's home.¹⁴

After the ceremony of samavartanam, by which the brahmacharyam was ended, one would serve at the family temple and then at the village temple. During this time one should learn more on the family inherited veda. Only if one is well versed in vedas could he be allowed to participate in public competition. Then he can learn Sastras and higher vedic studies at sabha madhoms¹⁵ or traditional centres of learning like Kotungallur Kovilakam.¹⁶ Trichur Brahmaswom madhom provided free food and residence for boys from an association of Nambuthiri families of four villages - Alattiyur, Panniyur, Sukapuram and Trichur.

13. Ibid., pp.45-46.

14. Kathleen Gough, op.cit., p.145.

15. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.309.

16. For details see Ananda E.Wood, op.cit., pp.90-104.

Other Namputhiries who visited there were also fed and lodged free, and it was famous not merely in Cochin but throughout Kerala.¹⁷

At the madhom students would go on to recite formal analytical exercises on text, breaking up into words (called padam) and remembering the words in different ways (called jata and ratha). Every student's goal was to pass the examination held annually at Katavallur, where students from Tirunavaya Brahmaswom madhom would also compete. There were internal examinations held at Trichur madhom to test whether students were fit to be sent for the public examination at Katavallur.¹⁸

Before the English schools displaced the village schools of old, the Kaniyan men and women taught the three R's to the children of the villagers of all castes from the Ezhavas downwards. Boys used to be taught fencing, archery etc. and girls were taught dances and songs which were the most important feminine accomplishments.¹⁹

School does not appear to have been common in Christian and Muslim community, in the traditional period. The literate among these communities must have been those

17. Kanippayur's autobiography, in Ananda E.Wood, op.cit., p.49.

18. Ibid., p.50.

19. A.Ayappan, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village: A Study in Culture Change (Bombay, 1965), p.26.

engaged in trade and commerce. The primary schools attached to every church which has been referred to in the Census Report of 1891 seem to have been started in the beginning of the nineteenth century with the inducement of Reverend Claudius Buchanan of the Church Mission Society, at a time when the Malabar Syrian Church and the CMS were working in cooperation.²⁰ Before it, the education among Christians seems to have been limited to theology and that too among those who chose to become priests.

As for Muslims the system of education prevailed in the traditional period was Madrasa and Dars education. The only education they received there was a parrot like recitation of the Quran which being in Arabic none of them understood.²¹

Without modern media to provide easy reference to extensively recorded information system of knowledge had to be carried much more in people's heads; and the simplest way to do this was to remember things through rhythmic verses or aphorisms that could be called to mind and thought about or quoted for discussion.²²

20. K.V.Eapen, Church Missionary Society and Education in Kerala (Kottayam, 1985), p.56.

21. Mohammed Koya, Mappilas of Malabar (Calicut, 1983).

22. Ananda E.Wood, op.cit., p.9.

The necessity to personally carry and pass on culture with limited communication media, had a profound effect on traditional societies. Ananda Wood points out the four attitudes of traditional society towards knowledge and explains the formative factors behind these attitudes.²³

In traditional society the reproduction and transmission of form had to be much more of a personal matter than it is at present, and people had to spend much more attention and effort personally ensuring that the details of form were correctly maintained. This meant that relatively few forms could be kept available and those forms that were available had to be maintained and used more intensively than we are accustomed to today. Hence traditional culture was organized to be 'formal and intensive' and developed an attitude of laborious formality, making the reproduction of form and formal details a major time-consuming activity around which people organized much of their lives and culture.

The second traditional attitude was repetition and concentration. Since the forms that could be handed on by tradition were relatively few they had to be used correspondingly more often, and people learned to concentrate on the same few forms over and over again, learning gradually more through successive repetitions. Traditional

23. Ibid., pp.2-6 ff.

behaviour and attitudes were regulated by forms of custom and ceremony that to be observed over and over again; a traditional person's life was organized by the repetition of daily routine, with special periods of time set aside for concentrated study and worship; and there was special disciplines of mental concentration, in particular ritual and yoga, in which the ability to focus the mind was systematically trained through the repetition of prescribed forms.

The third traditional attitude was obedience and faith. Since the same few forms were so often repeated, they had to concentrate as much knowledge and culture as possible; and hence traditional form were not intended to be understood at once, but to achieve results only after they had been obediently performed and faithfully repeated many times under the guidance of an experienced teacher. This process required a special spirit of obedience and faith: particularly in classical culture with its special systems of rigorous training, but also in folk culture where accepted forms had to be correctly followed. The traditional social order emphasized self-restraint and authority.

The final traditional attitude to knowledge was 'respect and reverence'. Since traditional forms and traditional elders and teachers had to be followed and

and obeyed with such faithful effort and attention, they had to be highly respected, as representatives of concentrated experience and knowledge of tradition. Since traditional society lacked the technological capacity to provide opportunity for more than a very few people, it was authoritarian, hierarchical, cultivating an attitude of respect for established forms and for elevated persons, as embodiments of status and value. Respect was cultivated, practically by disciplined obedience, symbolically by ceremonial and ritual deference, and personally by ideals of devotion towards elders and superiors who provided direction and support. Religious worship and spiritual devotion were the ultimate expressions of traditional respect, in that religion expressed respect for a spiritual principle of ultimate value represented by the form of a god. Religion was very important in traditional society and in fact it coloured all of traditional life, because the spiritual values of religion were conceived to underlie everything in existence, and hence some kind of ritual worship and a sense of spiritual reverence were involved in almost all traditional activity.

Transition from Indigenous to Modern Type Schools

The educational scene in Cochin was undergoing a change in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth

century. It witnessed transition from indigenous schools to schools on modern lines.

There were a few schools on modern pattern in the state in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Sirkar and the Protestant and Western missionaries, the two agencies that ushered in modern education in Cochin, started establishing schools from 1818 onwards.

Thomas Dawson, the first Church Mission Society (CMS) missionary to be stationed in Cochin in 1817 opened two schools, one in Mattancherry for Jews and the other in Crangannur. The Reverend Thomas Dawson was the first who opened an English school and introduced the study of English language in Cochin. But the schools did not thrive long.²⁴

In 1818 through a Proclamation issued by the then Raja, vernacular schools were established in several of the prowerthies.²⁵ Obviously the influence of Colonel Munro, who was the Resident and Diwan of Travancore and Cochin and a strong advocate of the betterment of people through education, was behind the issuing of the Proclamation.²⁶ As these schools were not an improvement upon the

24. K.V.Eapen, op.cit., pp.67-68.

25. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.799.

26. Ibid., p.799.

indigenous schools they were abolished in 1833 only to be reopened as Taluk schools in 1835.²⁷

In 1820 Jones, a CMS missionary revived the school at Mattancherry. He established, a Malayalam school, at the Fort in which Catholic, Muslim and Hindu children attended.²⁸ Samuel Ridsdale who came to Cochin in 1826 established six boys' schools and four girls' schools. Most of them, except the seminaries were in the nature of elementary schools.²⁹

Two English schools were opened by Sirkar, one at Thrippoonithura for the education of the members of the ruling family and the other at Ernakulam, in 1845.³⁰

Henry Harley, the missionary in Trichur had in 1850, nine primary schools in places like Trichur, Kolapadi, Moolicherry, Kunnamkulam etc. About five schools were in Trichur itself. Though Trichur was an orthodox Hindu centre, the CMS schools attracted Protestant, Catholic and Jewish children as well as high caste Hindu pupils. Some of these schools were anglo-vernacular and the others were vernacular institutions. As a result of the admirable work done in the field of education by the

27. Ibid., p.800.

28. K.V.Eapen, op.cit., p.68.

29. Ibid.

30. Census of Cochin, 1901, p.101.

successors of Harley, the number of schools increased in Trichur mission. A few schools for girls were also opened. By 1878 there were seven schools in the Trichur region itself (Kunnamkulam became a separate mission centre by the time - five boys schools and two girls schools with seven teachers (male teachers only) and 157 pupils (101 boys and 56 girls).³¹

The activities of J.G.Beuttler who came to Kunnamkulam in 1854 and Reverend F.Bower, who succeeded him, increased the facilities for primary education in the northern part of Cochin. In 1878 there were seven schools with nine teachers (all male) and 172 pupils (143 boys and 29 girls) in the Kunnamkulam mission. About five villages were brought within the educational activities of the CMS at that time. Some schools were anglo-vernacular while others were vernacular.³²

Sirkar English schools were opened in all the important centres of the state by 1873.³³ There were district schools in Trichur, Chittur, Wadakancherry, Irinjalakuda, and Mattancherry, in 1874.³⁴ There was a

31. K.V.Eapen, op.cit., p.73.

32. Ibid., p.74.

33. Census of Cochin, 1901, p.101.

34. Administration Report of Cochin, 1049 M.E. (AD 1873-74), Appendix XI, no page number.

municipal school at Fort Cochin.³⁵ In 1876 the Sirkar English schools were subjected to inspection. A.F.Sealey, the first Principal of the Ernakulam College was made Director of Education with powers to inspect the schools in the state.³⁶

The first Sirkar school for the education of caste girls was opened at Trichur in 1887 in honour of the Jubilee of the British Queen Empress.³⁷ The Catholic missionaries, especially of Carmelite and Cannosian orders, were actively engaged in the educational work by this time.

Thus we see that there were schools on modern pattern before 1890. But they were far outnumbered by indigenous schools (see Table 3.1). The activities of Sirkar and missionary schools were limited. For one thing, most of them imparted education in English. Second, a large number of people could not comprehend the new schools. It was the system of indigenous schools that they knew well and that suited them well.³⁸ The

35. Administration Report of Cochin, 1046 M.E.(AD 1872-73) pp.16-18 ff.

36. A Blue Book Containing Important Orders and Official Papers Connected with the Progress of Education in Cochin State (Cochin, 1908), pp.5-6.

37. Census of Cochin, 1901, p.101.

38. Census of Cochin, 1891, p.93.

new schools levied a system of fees that was beyond the capacity of the common people.³⁹

The credit for the comparatively advanced rate of literacy in Cochin, as furnished by the Census Report of 1891, must go to the indigenous schools. There was at least one, in many cases two or three, indigenous school in every village.⁴⁰ In those days well-to-do taravads (joint families) had their own family tutor. Children of the poorer families in the neighbourhood also were sent to him for instruction. The teacher was paid once or twice a year either in kind or in cash, in most cases on Onam and Vishu as presents. In some other cases the teacher received pupils in his own house and was paid in kind according to their means. This sort of indigenous schools carried the rudiments of knowledge to the doors of a large number of people.⁴¹

The Sirkar's entering the mass education scenario initiated a change in the educational sector. A new system of grant-in-aid was introduced in 1889.⁴² A separate department for the spread of vernacular education was opened in 1890.⁴³ Sirkar gave emphasis to, and

39. Ibid., p.92.

40. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.659.

41. Census of Cochin, 1891, p.92.

42. Census of Cochin, 1901, p.101.

43. Ibid., p.102.

established more, vernacular primary schools.⁴⁴ Private managements were encouraged to open more schools under the grant-in-aid scheme. The private schools had to conform to certain regulation to win the aid. A good number of schools conformed to the Sirkar pattern and in those schools modern type of education was imparted. Private schools were brought under the grant-in-aid scheme,⁴⁵ for one reason, it was difficult to run schools without grant and for another, parents preferred modern education which was essentially of higher 'value'. Indigenous schools were, therefore, compelled to be brought under the scheme and they gradually disappeared from the scene in the third decade of the present century. Table 3.1 demonstrates the disappearance of indigenous schools.

Table 3.1
Showing the Number of Primary Schools 1900-46

Year	Number of Primary Schools				Total no. of pupils
	Total	Sirkar	Aided	Unaided and indigenous	
1900	954	57	103	795	28844
1910	1046	93	250	703	50337
1920	1005	157	272	576	77280
1930	1001	167	545	289	140138
1940	624	174	450	0	147850
1946	674	184	490	0	177207

Source: Administration Reports of Cochin.

44. A Blue Book Containing Important Orders..., op.cit., pp.5-6 ff.

45. Ibid.

This table shows that the number of Sirkar and aided schools were increasing **over** the decades while the indigenous schools decreased in number and finally disappeared in the 1930s. The number of children taught in schools does not show any decrease in number and it suggests that the modern kind of education was more and more resorted to.

Thus we see, during the period under study, the indigenous schools which had been catering for the needs of a large section of the society from earlier times and which enabled Cochin to achieve the highest rate of literacy among the British Provinces and Indian states, according to the 1891 Census, finally made its way out of the scene and were replaced by a new kind of schools greatly influenced by Western educational practices.

One very important aspect of the disappearance of indigenous schools should be noted here. These indigenous schools were either gradually replaced by schools on modern lines or transformed into modern pattern through stipulations of the grant-in-aid code. Hence there was not any lacuna on the supply side of mass education unlike in most of the British Presidencies where mass education and indigenous village schools which imparted elementary education were neglected by the educational policy of the Company's government.

Chapter IV

LITERACY IN COCHIN: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There are only a few books that deal with education in Cochin. They are C.Achuta Menon, Cochin State Manual (1911); K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Cochi Rajya Charitram (Malayalam) (1914); and T.K.Krishna Menon, ed., The Progress of Cochin (1934). These books give us a fairly good idea about education in general. As they were meant for giving a general idea about education as part of the history of the state, they did not deal with any specific stage of education, least of all literacy, in detail. Another drawback of these books is their descriptive narrativeness. Nonetheless, these books are useful for a study of the educational development and the general history of the state.

The advanced rate of literacy in Kerala has drawn the attention of many scholars to the study of the development of education there. Various hypotheses have been put forward by scholars like Kathleen Gough,¹ M.G.S.Narayanan,²

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1. Kathleen Gough, "Literacy in Kerala," in Jack Good, ed., Literacy in Traditional Societies (Cambridge, 1968).
 2. M.G.S.Narayanan, Educational Traditions in Kerala: Persuasions from the Past, paper presented in a workshop on Education in Kerala at NIEPA, New Delhi, in 1987.

P.R.Gopinathan Nair,³ Michael Tharakan,⁴ and Robin Jeffrey.⁵ A study of these hypotheses is essential to understand the development of education in Kerala and to formulate our own idea on such a development.

It is a widely held view that the government policy with regard to education and the missionary endeavour to educate the people caused the advancement in the field of education in Kerala. But we see in the case of Cochin that even before the government entering the field of mass education the state had achieved the highest rate of literacy among Indian states and British provinces. As far as the missionary activities are concerned it was qualitative rather than quantitative. The number of whom the missionaries educated were not many compared to the total population of the state. The importance of missionaries was in attempting social change and in pioneering the education of women and the low castes,

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3. P.R.Gopinathan Nair, "Education and Socio-Economic Change in Kerala, 1793-1947," in Social Scientist, vol.4, no.8, March 1976; P.R.Gopinathan Nair, "Universalization of Primary Education in Kerala," in P.R. Panthamukhi, ed., Studies in Educational Reform in India, vol.2 (Educational Reforms at Different Levels) (Bombay, 1987).
 4. P.K.Michael Tharakan, "Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Development: Case of Nineteenth Century Travancore," in Economic and Political Weekly, vol.19, nos.45 and 46, 10 November and 17 November 1984.
 5. Robin Jeffrey, "Governments and Culture: How Women Made Kerala Literate," in Pacific Affairs, vol.60, no.3, 1987.

which was neglected by government and traditional institutions and in setting a model of educating these sections of society for the government to follow later.

It is not that these agencies were not instrumental in the educational development of the state. In fact they played a major role in such a development. What is meant here is that they were not the only factors responsible for the development but there were some other factors at work in the process.

Tradition has been pointed out by scholars as the basis for the rather advanced literacy among the people of Kerala. Kathleen Gough suggests that more than half the men and at least a quarter of women may have been proficient in Malayalam in the early eighteenth century.⁶ As Michael Tharakan points out this figure is an over estimation.⁷ In traditional Kerala the Nambuthiries who formed only one per cent of the population were earmarked as literary specialists. The clerks, writers and astrologers engaged by the Rajas and chieftains were mostly from the Nair caste and the Nair strength was at the most around nineteen per cent of the total population. To consider the entire population as literate would be exaggeration. The Nair caste consisted of different layers and not all of them were administrators or writers.

6. Kathleen Gough, op.cit., p.151.

7. P.K.Michael Tharakan, op.cit., pp.1915-16.

The other Nairs were illiterate. Even after considerable growth in schools in Travancore and Cochin - or as A.Sreedhara Menon put it, after an 'alarming increase of literacy', with which Kathleen Gough agrees⁸ - as late as 1891 Nairs showed only 37.58 per cent literacy for males in Travancore. It is true that this matrilineal caste allowed their women comparatively more freedom. As far as the ability to read is concerned not more than a small segment of Nair women can be expected as having acquired the skill which seems to be reflected in the 1891 census figure of 5.72 per cent female literacy in Travancore. Hence the existence of a high level of literacy among Nairs in early eighteenth century is doubtful.

The condition of Christians and Muslims in spite of having some trading groups among them, who must have had literacy, was close to that of Nairs than that of Brahmins. Most of the ordinary Christians and Muslims must have remained illiterate. The case of Ezhavas, except those who practised ayurveda and astrology was even worse. As far as the agrestic slave castes of Pulayas and Cherumars in eighteenth century are concerned there is no reason to believe that there was any significant spread of literacy among them.

8. Kathleen Gough, op.cit., p.155.

On the other hand, Kathleen Gough, concerning the literacy rate figure in the Census Report, is of the opinion that they are too low:

... for literates were defined as those who had passed the fourth standard in a government recognized elementary school. Since most older people had never attended modern schools, and since most village girls and many boys left after the third standard, actual ability to read and write was much greater than the official literacy rate.... After 1931, the Census Collectors were instructed to record actual rather than 'fourth standard' literacy. In 1941, partly as a result of this change, the recorded male literacy rate in Cochin rose to 79.3 per cent in the age group 15-20, and the female rate to 58.6 per cent.

It is difficult to agree with this. First, the figures for male and female literates of 15-20 age group in 1941 are 67.37 and 49.33 per cent respectively and not 79.3 and 58.6 per cent respectively as Kathleen Gough had calculated. Secondly, increase in the rate of literacy does not seem to be the result of a different standard of enumeration (though this might have caused a slight increase, only a slight increase, in the figure) but due to the natural development over the time period. This is particularly so when the increase in the number of literates is noticed among the lower age groups. If it was a case of discounting, the number of literates in the upper age groups would have marked a substantial increase as a result of addition of those who might have been uncounted before. The increase noted among the

9. Ibid., p.155.

upper age group tends to be the addition from the lower age group literates in the preceding census. Thus we must take the increase in the number of literates as part of a natural course of development of education during the period.

So we cannot put the rate of literacy in Kerala in the early eighteenth century to 'more than fifty per cent for the males and twenty-five per cent for women'. However, it must be admitted that the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were a period of growth of literacy in Kerala.¹⁰

Most of the scholars emphasise the importance of Malayalam as the medium of instruction. It is easier to acquire literacy in one's mother tongue than in another language. There are differences of opinion about the emergence of Malayalam as a distinct language. The hypothesis put forward by Kathleen Gough¹¹ seems to be a plausible one. She explains that Malayalam originated from ancient Tamil. Ancient Tamil had been written with the vattezhuttu script. Modification of vattezhuttu were used for records of the palaces of Kerala throughout the medieval period and in Travancore until 1860. A distinct form of vattezhuttu, called kolezhuthu, evolved in the royal courts during the traditional period.

10. P.K.Michael Tharakan, op.cit., p.1916.

11. Kathleen Gough, op.cit., pp.134-5.

From about the ninth century, Brahmins in South India used a script called grandha, derived from the north Indian Devanagiri to write Sanskrit. The Nambuthiri Brahmins in Kerala used it extensively in their Sanskrit literary compositions. As more and more Sanskrit words were incorporated into the vernacular of Kerala, high caste non-Brahmins added grandha characters to their vattezhuttu script to represent sounds, especially aspirates, found in Sanskrit but not in Tamil. Tunjath Ezhuthachan and his contemporaries produced the Malayalam script derived largely from grandha but with a number of vattezhuttu characters. It became the medium of literary Malayalam for high caste Hindus and gradually spread to the lower levels.

In the nineteenth century Protestant missionaries came to Kerala and in their activities for conversion education became an important plank. In the course they produced works of grammar, dictionaries and moral books which supplied the basic tools for education through the Malayalam language.¹²

M.G.S. Narayanan believes that it was the development of Malayalam as a distinct and popular language and its modernization by the Protestant missionaries that did the preparatory work in spreading modern education in Kerala.¹³

12. M.G.S.Narayanan, op.cit., pp.5-6.

13. Ibid., p.6.

Robin Jeffrey gives us an example to point out the importance of culture that had a great role in the educational development in Kerala. After leaving the Diwanship of Travancore in 1870s Madhava Rao served as Dewan in Baroda. There he tried to implement the educational policies which he could successfully effect in Travancore. He started a vernacular education department, quadrupled spending on education and had a hundred and eighty vernacular schools under government control at the time of his retirement. Thereafter, literacy in Baroda always exceeded the all India average. But female literacy in 1901 was only 0.8 per cent, while in Kerala it ranged from 3 per cent in Malabar to 4.5 per cent in Cochin. By 1941, total literacy in Baroda was 23 per cent, only slightly more than half that of Travancore and Cochin. Jeffrey's argument is that Baroda lacked Kerala's particular cultural attributes - especially Kerala's attitude to women.¹⁴

P.R.G. Nair points out that the existence of an economy of small peasant proprietors and tenants with substantial economic independence and sustained interest in the land acted as a dynamic force of socio-economic change including educational growth.¹⁵

14. Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p.461.

15. P.R.Gopinathan Nair, op.cit., p.29.

He has also brought to light the fact that the rapid growth of literacy in Travancore and Cochin began only after the complete removal in late 1920s, of the caste restrictions on admissions to primary schools. Since then the states have reached a stage of near-universal literacy, at least among the younger age groups of the population.¹⁶

Michael Tharakan shows how a combination of the increased prosperity of the Syrian Christian community and the changes in their church organization, created the pre-conditions for speedy and spectacular achievements in the field of education.¹⁷ To encourage conversion of waste lands in Travancore into agricultural land, a government regulation was issued in 1818 and it guaranteed enjoyment of such lands tax free for first ten years and light taxation afterwards. This opened up the possibility of Syrian Christians and Ezhavas acquiring Sirkar land on lease for cultivation which was almost impossible earlier due to caste barriers. Through the Pandaravaka Pattom Proclamation in 1865 full ownership rights were conferred on the tenant cultivators of Sirkar lands. Through a Royal Proclamation in 1867 and the subsequent Janmi-Kudiyan Regulation of Travancore higher tenants on private Jammom lands were given full security of tenure.

16. Ibid., pp.37, 40.

17. P.K.Michael Tharakan, op.cit., pp.1959-60.

The Syrian Christians who formed a considerable section of Sirkar tenants could exploit the opportunities for developing commercial cultivation. They were advantageous of their patriarchal family organization and earlier trade traditions. By the second half of the nineteenth century it was the Christians who dominated in the cultivation of commercial crops. They also engaged in banking and public works contacts. The community made enormous economic progress.

The Syrian Christian church had undergone tremendous changes in its organization. The earlier locally sustained parishes were brought under a centralized hierarchy. This hierarchical organization could mobilize the increased resources of the community more extensively and could channel it more effectively into building schools and other public institutions.¹⁸

Along with the changes in the organizational structure there emerged a monastic order of Carmelites, recruited on an all-Kerala basis which provided an effective instrument for building up educational institutions in Travancore and Cochin.¹⁹

Michael Tharakan puts forth two important factors in the development of literacy in Travancore. They are

18. Ibid., p.1960.

19. Ibid.

the commercialization of economy and growth of plantations,²⁰ and the settlement pattern in the State.²¹ British investment in plantations started around 1850. Along with the growth of plantation agriculture within the state the tenurial reforms created the necessary pre-conditions for increasing commercialization of agriculture - both cash crop cultivation and cultivation of food grains the surplus of which were sold in the market. The job opportunities in plantation and commercial sectors increased on the one hand. On the other hand there was increasing demand for at least basic education that could equip people to handle accounts, mortgages, contracts, agreements etc. He states that the commercialization of the Travancorean economy and the resultant all round interest in acquiring basic literary skills have worked as a powerful force behind the increase in demand in the second half of the nineteenth century.²²

Again, the peculiar settlement pattern in Travancore facilitated wider access to education with a relatively low geographical spread of educational institutions.

In Travancore, for that matter in whole Kerala, villages melt invisibly into one another and it is

20. Ibid., p.1963.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

difficult to find where one village ends and the next begins. In other parts of the country, for example Tamil Nadu, villages are compact and houses are in continuous lines with the walls of adjacent houses juxtaposed or even common. Why this difference? A. Aiyappan explains this on the basis of the ecology and history of the region. The low rainfall of the Tamil country necessitated co-operative effort to conserve water in irrigation reservoirs. Every villager was concerned about the building and maintenance of the tanks and the canals taking the water to the fields. On the other hand, the heavy rain fall on Kerala coast partly obviated the need for irrigation. The rugged terrain makes irrigation more difficult. The Malayali villager found it perhaps more convenient to be as near his farm as possible and felt less worried about the security than the Tamil villager. Tamil villages were more exposed to enemy attacks than Kerala villages. The environment and history thus favoured the general dispersal of houses in Kerala.²³

But all these studies are conspicuous in one way. They have not taken care of the peculiar characters and background of Cochin. In a study not entirely devoted to the state of Cochin, it is quite understandable. Hence a

23. A. Aiyappan, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village: A Study in Culture Change (Bombay, 1965), pp. 35-36; see also, George Woodcock, Kerala, A Portrait of Malabar Coast (London, 1967), p. 16.

study of the development of education in Cochin is necessitated.

Tradition, though not in such an exaggerated rate as pointed out by Kathleen Gough, and the importance of culture, especially society's attitude towards women in Kerala hold good for explaining the development of literacy in Cochin also. It would be easy to build up a structure if a foundation or basis exists. The comparatively advanced literacy in the traditional period provided the basis for the enormous development made in the field of literacy in the later period. The leaning to literacy was a manifest character of Malayalam culture. The great respect in which the women, especially of the matriarchal castes, were held was another trait of the Kerala culture. As pointed out in a previous paragraph, the resultant comparatively higher rate of literacy among women in turn resulted in the increase of literacy rate in the succeeding generations.

Another factor that favoured the wide spread education in Cochin was the medium of instruction. The large number of indigenous schools located in every village - and in some villages more than one - which were catering to the educational needs of large number of pupils, imparted education in vernacular language.²⁴ This

24. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Cochi Rajya Charitram (Malayalam) (Calicut, 1989), p.659.

made it easy for them to acquire literacy.

It would be interesting to study the state of affairs in Cochin towards the end of the nineteenth century when Cochin was recognized as having the highest rate of literacy among the Indian states and British Provinces. We shall examine the condition of small peasants, agrarian economy etc. that are claimed by scholars as influential and prodding factors in the educational development of Kerala or Travancore.

The small peasant proprietors that P.R.G.Nair mentions to as a catalyst in social change did not exist in Cochin till the beginning of the present century. Such a class of peasants came into existence when the land revenue settlement began with the Royal Regulation of 1899 was completed in 1909. With this settlement proprietary rights in the soil were conferred on the 'pandaravaka verumpattom' and 'kanom' (Sirkar) tenants.²⁵

Before the settlement of 1899-1909 the land was owned by Sirkar and janmies. Forty per cent of the tenants were on Sirkar land and the rest dependents of janmies. The holders of Sirkar kanom enjoyed privileges but they constituted only a small fraction of Sirkar tenants. The bulk of Sirkar tenants were pandarapattom

25. T.C.Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960 (Calcutta, 1970), p.95.

cultivators who, apart from the disabilities connected with their tenure had to bear the major portion of the land revenue assessment. Despite the high rate of land assessment and non-conferment of ownership rights the position of the Sirkar tenants was better than the fate of their counterparts on the Janmom (private) lands. This was so because the Sirkar tenants enjoyed more or less fixity of tenure and the revenue paid by them was governed by rules and regulations made on the basis of periodical surveys for fixing the amount of assessment as well as for deciding the commutation rates.²⁶

This fact is corroborated by the author of Cochin State Manual (published in 1914). He says that the condition of the agricultural classes had considerably improved during the last fifty or sixty years. On a rough calculation the cost of living had increased only by 150 per cent during this period while the price of chief agricultural products, paddy and coconut, had risen by 200 and 300 per cent respectively. They live on better houses, and have generally a greater command of the necessities of life, though a margin between bare sustenance and want is still a narrow one. The class that had prospered most was that of substantial tenants who held lands on kanom and verumpattom under the Sirkar or private Janmies. In justice, however, to the petty

26. Ibid., pp.4-5.

farmers of nilams, it must be admitted that they are often rack rented by their land lords - janmies as well as non-cultivating tenants and that many of them are in the grip of the money lenders.²⁷

A good number of literate children in all possibility belonged to the rather prosperous Sirkar-tenant families.

The commercialization of agriculture and the plantation industry does not seem to have made much headway in Cochin in the nineteenth century. C.Achuta Menon gives a description of commercial crops cultivated in Cochin by the turn of the present century.²⁸ The cultivation of pepper was neglected. Cardamom was not regularly cultivated as in Travancore. Betel is largely grown in all the taluks. Ginger, turmeric and chillies are not cultivated much extensively.²⁹

European capitalists tried to develop coffee plantations on the banks of Alwaye and Chalakudi rivers, but they were abandoned in a few years. In the 1860s another series of attempts was made on coffee cultivation. The labour employed in these plantations were foreign.

27. C.Achuta Menon, Cochin State Manual (Ernakulam, 1911), pp.245-7.

28. Ibid., pp.234-44 ff.

29. Ibid., p.242.

But after two or three decades these plantations began to decline by the large increase in the output of Brazilian coffee. Subsequently they were replanted with tea.³⁰ This obviously shows the unsatisfactory profitability of these coffee plantations. The tea industry also did not make any progress.

From the beginning of the twentieth century rubber plants were cultivated in the Palapilli forests and Vellanikara in Trichur.³¹

The most extensive and the most valuable paramba industry was the cultivation of coconut palm. The price of coconut had increased in the latter half of the nineteenth century and its cultivation has become very profitable.³²

The next most important paramba industry was the cultivation of arecca palm.³³

The survey shows that commercial cultivation was not advanced in the nineteenth century. It is from the turn of the twentieth century that the cultivation of commercial crops started to be done on a scale we may call extensive. So Michael Tharakan's argument that

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p.243.

32. Ibid., p.238.

33. Ibid., p.240.

commercialization of agricultural economy in Travancore was a major factor that raised the demand for education there, cannot be applied to Cochin, at least till the beginning of the present century.

So how shall we explain the comparatively advanced literacy rate in Cochin. Here we will have to take into account the unique features of the state.

Cochin is endowed with a natural port. The port was the best of its kind on the west coast and was one of the chief ports in India. The state has also other ports at Malippuram and Njarackal. These ports were navigated during monsoons also. This was possible because of the protection afforded by the mudbanks, a peculiar feature of these ports. The seabed along the mudbanks were paved of mud and could be anchored safely at during the tempestuous monsoon seasons. Along with this facility the availability of spices in the area attracted foreign merchants to Cochin.³⁴

Throughout the world coastal trading areas tend to have higher rate of literacy.³⁵ In the organization of long distance trade literacy assists the calculation of the profit and loss.³⁶ Literacy was just as important

34. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.2.

35. Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p.450.

36. Jack Goody, ed., Literacy in Traditional Societies (Cambridge, 1968), p.2.

commercially for merchants and ship pilots in the middle ages as being the preserve of the Church and legal profession. The high rate of literacy in Venice came about because it was needed for navigation.³⁷

Cultural exchange seems to have been important in the development of writing. This occurred through trade and conquest.³⁸ Ports, which enable contact with other peoples will naturally influence the life style of people around it. Foreign merchants, who may very well have been the advanced section among their societies and who had got blunted their sharp ideas and attitudes through their interaction with different peoples must have carried away the people of Cochin around the port. The openness, hospitality and receptivity shown by the people in Cochin, Calicut and Alleppey, discernable even to the present, must go largely to the ports existed in these places and the contact they were able to make with other peoples through these ports.

Another peculiar feature of Cochin is that a comparatively higher proportion of people were engaged in commerce and industry.³⁹ Agriculture was the predominant

37. Martin Hoyles, "The History and politics of Literacy," in Martin Hoyles, ed., The Politics of Literacy (London, 1977), p.17.

38. Ibid., p.17.

39. C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p.265.

occupation of the people of Cochin as in the other part of India. However, it maintained only 51 per cent of the people in Cochin while the proportion of people supported by agriculture in the neighbouring Travancore and Malabar district was 60 and 62 per cent respectively. The majority of the rest of the people in Cochin was engaged in industry and commerce. This comparative preponderance of industrial and commercial people in Cochin was due to certain natural advantages possessed by the state, which had diverted a large proportion of people than elsewhere in South India from agriculture to industrial occupation. It should be pointed out that soil in the state was not infertile nor unsuitable to agriculture.⁴⁰ The higher proportion of people engaged in commerce and industry should be seen in connection with the existence of the port, one of the natural advantages of the state.

Another natural advantage was the existence of large extent of backwaters and canals and of valuable forest tracts and the facilities for the cultivation of coconut palm. The backwaters and canals, as also the Arabian sea teem with fish and provide occupation to a large number of fishermen, fish curers and dealers, and boat and bargemen. Similarly the forests that

40. Ibid., p.265.

corner the eastern half of the state provide employment to number of wood cutters, sawyers, carpenters and collectors of forest produce. The industries connected with the raw products of coconut tree - toddy drawing, jaggery making, arrack distilling, oil pressing, coir-making etc. were important and extensive. The state, particularly the area along the coast is conducive to the plantation of coconut trees. The industries connected with coconut products afford a means of subsistence to over a tenth of the population of the state.⁴¹

There was a larger community in Cochin engaged in industry and commerce which demand the knowledge of letters - reading and writing - for accounting and transacting purposes, than in other parts of the country. The give and take between the merchants and the natives, especially those engaged in commerce and industry, and the dissemination of cultural ideas between the two created a larger number of literates in Cochin.

When we say literates among the commercialists and industrialists, it should not be taken to mean that all of them were educated. Only a limited number of accountants - either the industrialists or the persons they employed, for accounting purposes - were literate. Otherwise the number of literates in the state would have

41. Ibid., p.266.

gone higher. The percentage of literate persons in Cochin in 1891 was 13.8.⁴²

The influence of the port could extend to a larger proportion of the people of the state. This was mainly due to the territorial limitation of the small state. Cochin was a small state possessing 1361.5 square miles of area.⁴³

Thus the better condition of higher tenants on the Sirkar land the natural advantages enjoyed by Cochin such as the port, the environment etc. the larger number of people engaged in commerce and industry and the resultant spread of literacy due to the inherent give and take nature of ports and commerce, and the small territoriality of the state explain the highest rate of literacy achieved by Cochin among the Indian states in 1891.

An important fact should be noted here. The majority of the literates in Cochin belonged to the land-owning or higher tenant classes.⁴⁴ Literacy spread among Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Ambalavasis, Nairs, native Christians and a few Ezhavas, the landowning class apart from some professional castes till late nineteenth century. The

42. Census of Cochin, 1891, p.87.

43. Census of Cochin, 1911, p.5.

44. See Table 5.5. See also P.R.Gopinathan Nair, op.cit., p.37.

caste structure was so strong and rigid to the extent of controlling all the aspects of human life. Land distribution and education were part of the all-pervasiveness of the caste gradation. The literacy among the professional castes like Kaniyans etc. is also explained by the function assigned to them through caste.

With the dissemination of Western liberal ideas and thoughts, and the activities of the missionaries a gradual awakening for reform was experienced among some sections of the society. In some instances it had to be coerced or prompted to reform as in the case of upper clothe rebellion or the slavery abolition. But in many cases people themselves were at large receptive to the ideas of reform.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, with the land revenue settlement of 1899-1905 property rights in the soil were conferred on the pandaravaka verumpattom and kanom tenants.⁴⁵ In 1901 by a Devaswom Proclamation all tenants of incorporated devaswom land were also given fixity of tenure. Some more Acts were passed aiming at tenancy reform. The important legislations were the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1914, the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1938, the Cochin Verumpattomdari Act of 1943 and Devaswam Verumpattom Settlement Proclamation of 1943. The 1914 Act

45. T.C.Varghese, op.cit., p.94, see also p.134.

provided for the award of compensation for improvements made by tenants. It also secured fixity of tenure for the kanon tenants. With the 1938 Tenancy Act the definition of kanom was broadened so as to include a few more categories of tenancy; the kanom documents of a longer period than that prescribed in the 1914 Act were also brought within kanoms already enjoying fixity of tenure. The Cochin Verumpattomdar's Act 1943 granted permanent occupancy rights to all Verumpattom tenants irrespective of the nature of their tenancy or the duration of their occupation of the land. The Devasom Verumpattomdari Proclamation not only conferred absolute occupancy rights on all tenants but also fixed fair rents. The effect of all these proclamations and legislations was that a new class of small peasant proprietors came into existence. They ensured fixity of tenure for the tenants also.⁴⁶ This class acted as a base for social change including the development of education.

When we think of reform movements we cannot think of what happened in Cochin in isolation. It was part of the process that was taking place in the Kerala society which in turn was part of all India movements. The first of the reform movements in its organized form began around the beginning of the present century.

46. Ibid., pp.134-5.

The SNDP Yogam started functioning in 1903.⁴⁷ But the kingpin of the movement, Sri Narayana Guru started his reformation some fifteen years before with the consecration of the 'Ezhava Siva' idol at Aruvikkara and the concomitant establishment of a religious group, the Vavoottu yogam. The yogam can be considered as a logical extension of this Vavoottu Yogam with its activities and areas of influence widened.⁴⁸ Sri Narayana Guru travelled all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala and caused a flutter in Kerala society through his deeds and teachings.

The disturbance in one layer of the firm caste structure was enough to make ripples in the other layers, which were also ripe for change. Organized reform moves started in other castes also: Nair Service Society (NSS) among Nairs;⁴⁹ Yogakshema Sabha of Nambuthiries;⁵⁰ Sadhujana Paripalana Yogam and Samastha Kochi Pulaya Mahasabha in Pulaya Community;⁵¹ and various movements

47. P.K.Balakrishnan, Narayana Guru (An Anthology) (Kottayam, 1969), p.108.

48. Ibid.

49. See Mannath Padmanabhan, Ente Jeevita Smaranakal (Autobiography - Malayalam) (Trivandrum, 1964).

50. See V.T.Bhattathiripad, Veetiyude Jeevitha Smaranakal (Kottayam, 1983); see also E.M.S.Namboodiripad, Auto-biography (Trivandrum, 1970).

51. Kerala Charithram (Malayalam) compiled by Kerala History Association Cochin, vol.1 (Ernakulam, 1973), p.1276. See also P.Chandra Mohan, "Growth of Social Reform Movement in Kerala," no pagination (article in a forthcoming volume).

among the Arayas and Valans.⁵²

Apart from having an all Kerala character and perspective,⁵³ these caste associations, however caste exclusive they might have become in later period, cooperated with one another and very often worked together for reforms.⁵⁴

These reform movements disturbed the traditional structure of the society that was restricting the privileges and benefits to a few groups. Through persuasion these movements successfully brought forth regulations by government that was to change drastically the structure of the society. As a result people's attitude towards social customs and practices changed. The Kerala society underwent dramatic changes, politically, socially, economically, psychologically and in bureaucracy. We should see the development of education in Cochin as part of this social process.

52. T.M.Chummar, Kavithilakan K.P.Karuppan (Malayalam) (Kottayam, 1974), pp.124-8 ff.

53. The activities of these movements had spread all over Kerala. Where an organisation was limited within one political unit it tried to be in contact with its counterparts in the other states or the district.

54. Narayana Guru was concerned about the well being of the lower castes like Pulayas. The Pulaya leader Ayyankali used to consult the Guru on matters concerning the community. Mannath Padmanabhan and other NSS leaders used to attend the meetings of other caste associations. In Cochin also we see caste Hindus behind the inception of Samastha Kochi Pulaya Maha Sabha. K.P.karuppan was also encouraging the Pulayas and other lower castes besides his social work among the Valans and Arayans. The joining hands together of different caste associations towards one single aim, that of mitigating the caste evils was itself a marked deviation from the past.

One of the most important social change from the viewpoint of educational development was the breaking up of joint families and the formation of nuclear families. The joint families were noted for the absence of any responsibility on its part to educate the children beyond the traditional system of instruction. But the atmosphere in a nuclear family was different and the education of the children was given importance. This was one of the main reasons for the spread of education.

I would like tentatively to divide the society into two - those who were losing in the process and those who gained. The social changes influenced these groups in different ways towards the same end, that of seeking education. The upper castes who had been enjoying the privileges found the ground under their feet eroding. They discerned education as a means to keep their status in some way or the other. E.M.S.Namboothiripad speaks of the agony of the Nambuthiries in Malabar district when a process in succession to a similar one in Cochin took place. It was the time when the Tenancy Bill was about to be passed. The Nambuthiries were perplexed. They felt that they did not have enough knowledgeable persons among them who would argue their case. They understood the need for pursuing modern education.⁵⁵ The

55. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, op.cit., pp.58-67 ff.

same process happened among the upper castes in Cochin also. It is also interesting to note that in Cochin the demand was after the modern type of education and the existing old indigenous schools were gradually conformed to the modern pattern. So whoever seeking education could be guaranteed of receiving modern education - the better kind of education - through these modern schools.

It was these higher castes who had a tradition of education behind them. And this acted as a strong basis for the later day expansion of education among these castes. Towards the end of the period under study it was these castes who returned the highest rates of literacy and most of them reached a stage of almost near universal literacy.

Now let us examine how the lower castes were faring in the process. After the professional caste, it was the Ezhavas who registered the highest growth rate in literacy among the lower castes. It was quite natural for a community who had emerged to a good position economically.⁵⁶ And the Ezhavas had, however narrow it might have been, trait of education in their tradition. Quite naturally a good progress was made among them.

56. See C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., pp.244, 266. See also, P.Chandramohan, op.cit., no page number.

Almost all the social reformers insisted on the need of education in the upliftment of the lower castes.⁵⁷ As mentioned in a previous paragraph now the upper castes were turning to education as their main plank for status quo, the concept of a middle class began to be shifted from the land owned to the educated. So the aspiring lower castemen could join the middle class by educating themselves. The Ezhavas who were enjoying good economic position took to education in an attempt to join the new middle class. The lesser castes disabled in many ways, could not make it up to the mark done by the Ezhavas.

Another important nature of the social reform movements was their advocacy of thrift⁵⁸ in family spending. Earlier a large sum had to be spent by families on the occasion of ceremonies like talikettu kalyanam, tirandukuli, pulikudi etc. This was true for both the Nairs and Ezhavas.⁵⁹ Many Nair families on the verge of collapse were impoverished on account of the spending on these ceremonies. Ezhava families were also observing these customs. Once it came to be looked upon as

57. Almost all the reformers, Narayana Guru, Mannath Padmanabhan, Vaikom Maulavi, K.P.Kuruppan etc. exhorted people to get educated.

58. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., no page number.

59. F.Fawcet, Nayars of Malabar (Delhi, 1990), pp.229-53ff. See also P.K.Balakrishnan, op.cit.

unnecessary the extravagant spending could be diverted to other good purposes, notably education of the children which all the reformers were insisting on.

The availability of employment opportunities outside caste structure was a supporting factor in the liquidation of the traditional social structure. The creation of public works department in Travancore and Cochin gave employment to a large number of low caste people as coolies.⁶⁰ The construction of railway lines and the modern port also offered similar opportunities to still larger number of Cochinites. This had the effect of the low caste people's moving outside the traditional structure.

The joint stock companies can be considered as a scale to measure the income of traders and commercialists.⁶¹ With the construction of the railway line there was an increase in the commercial activities in Cochin. Correspondingly there was a big rise in the number of banking and other joint stock companies from the 1920s. The expansion of commercial and other non-agricultural activities in Cochin can be seen from the fact that the number of joint stock companies at work in the state

60. P.Chandramohan, op.cit., no page number; T.C.Varghese, op.cit., p.126.

61. E.M.S.Namboodiripad, Kerala: Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi (Malayalam) (Calicut, 1948), p.214.

increased from 21 in 1918-19 to 332 in 1948-49. It would be interesting to note that these banking institutions originated in the predominantly commercial, coastal areas of Cochin rather than in the agrarian oriented hinterland.⁶²

The increased well being of the people of Cochin might have changed their perspective of life and could have enabled them to send their children to schools.

It should be noted that the psychological importance of literacy will pull the masses towards acquiring the literacy skills. An illiterate among literates will naturally feel his deficiency and will try, at large, to overcome the inferiority through acquiring the ability to read and write. According to Robert Pattison the psychological importance of literacy goes a long way toward explaining the swift expansion of reading and writing skills in the general population of the west.⁶³ In Cochin also this sort of psychological pressure must have pushed the literacy rate to a higher level in the first half of the present century.

On the whole, there was great demand for education. The supply side also rose to the demands and numerous schools, both under Sirkar and private managements, came

62. T.C.Varghese, op.cit., p.115.

63. Robert Pattison, On Literacy (New York, 1982), p.131.

up and provided necessary facilities for instruction. The government adopted a policy of encouraging education by all means. The government seemed to be anxious to maintain its all-India record in the field of literacy and at one stage thought seriously of making education compulsory for all categories of children.⁶⁴ But, owing to various factors mentioned in the previous pages, the demand for education was so great that the society made rapid progress in the field of education and some communities reached near universal literacy without resorting to any compulsion by the government.

Thus the economic improvement of a large section of people, the social reform movements and social changes including the transformation of joint families into nuclear one, the psychological pressure put on the masses by the spreading literacy and the progressive government policies including the land distribution and encouragement of education were the factors that were responsible for the growth and the high rate of literacy prevailed in Cochin in the twentieth century.

64. Report of the Committee for the Revision of the Cochin Education Code, 1921, p.43.

Chapter V

GROWTH OF LITERACY, 1890-1949

Cochin was ahead of other Indian states and British Provinces in the matter of literacy by the turn of the present century. 13.8 per cent of the population was literate in 1891. This included 23.8 per cent of male population and 3.8 per cent of females.¹ The achievement of Cochin is all the more convincing when compared to the progress of literacy in the other parts of the country.

Table 5.1

Percentage of Literacy in Various British Provinces
and Indian States

Province/ State	1901	1911	1921	1931
Cochin	18.1	20.4	24.6	36.1
Travancore	16.1	19.7	30.2	31.6
Baroda	10.4	12.7	17.5	22.1
Delhi	-	-	12.3	16.2
Ajmer Merwara	7.6	9.0	11.9	13.0
Bengal	7.3	10.1	11.7	11.8
Bihar and Orissa		5.5	6.1	5.8
Madras	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.2
Mysore	-	7.9	9.4	11.7
Hyderabad	3.7	3.6	3.7	5.3

Source: Census Report of India, 1931.

Note: Total population is calculated as of those above ten years old.

Table 5.2 shows the tremendous progress Cochin has made in the field of literacy.

1. Census of Cochin, 1891, p.87.

Table 5.2
Statistics of Literacy in Cochin, 1891-1941

Year	Population			Literates			% of Literacy		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1891	722906	361904	361002	130484	110380	20216	13.8	23.8	3.8
1901	812025	405200	406825	108979	90709	18270	13.42	22.39	4.49
1911	916110	457342	460768	139083	111146	27937	15.18	24.3	6.6
1921	979080	482959	496121	181410	132090	49320	18.52	27.35	9.94
1931	1205016	589813	615203	339814	225669	113984	28.2	38.3	18.5
1941	1224826	597377	627449	502407	310498	191909	41.02	51.98	30.59

Source: Census Reports of Cochin, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941.

Local Distribution of Literacy Talukwise

Cochin had seven taluks in 1901. They were Cochin, Kanayanur, Cranganur, Mukundapuram, Trichur, Talapilli and Chittur.² Cochin and Kanayanur taluks were merged in 1907.³ It is interesting to examine the level of literacy prevailed in these taluks.

Cochin-Kanayamur was having the highest literacy rate among the seven taluks of the state. The port and the great commercial centre of the state, Mattancherry, was located in the taluk.⁴ Besides, it contained the capital of the state,⁵ and therefore, a large number of educated people were attracted to it. Trichur was one of the most important towns, with early historic associations and cultural activities and was the headquarters of some of the chief administrative departments of the state.⁶ Ernakulam and Trichur were the two educational centres of the state with their first grade colleges and numerous high schools, and facilities for modern education were available in Cochin-Kanayanur and Trichur long before other taluks came to possess them.

2. Census of Cochin, 1901, p.103.

3. Census of Cochin, 1911, p.5.

4. Census of Cochin, 1891, pp.41-42.

5. Census of Cochin, 1901, p.95.

6. Ibid.

Table 5.3
Percentage of Literacy in Taluks

Taluks	1901			1931			1941		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Cochin	15.29	25.14	4.83	33.8	45.0	22.3	48.32	60.10	36.19
Kanayanur	17.39	28.44	5.7						
Cranganur	12.46	21.13	3.64	25.5	36.0	15.1	38.03	50.54	26.15
Mukundapuram	9.95	17.21	2.8	25.3	34.8	16.4	37.56	48.02	27.88
Trichur	16.11	25.85	6.62	33.0	43.6	23.1	46.96	58.02	36.63
Talapilli	12.29	20.67	4.3	24.1	33.0	16.1	34.99	44.62	26.43
Chittur	9.93	17.47	2.77	15.0	22.7	7.7	22.19	31.50	13.29

Sources: Census Reports of Cochin, 1901, 1931 and 1941.

Note: Cochin and Kanyanur taluks were merged in 1907.

There are some other reasons for the low proportion of literacy in Cranganur, Mukundapuram, Talapilli and Chittur. In Cranganur the proportion of Muslims who are backward in literacy is far higher than in other places and there are but very few Christians to restore the balance of the literate population. Mukundapuram, Talapilli and Chittur have an essentially agricultural population and these taluks have a high percentage of such Hindu communities as are very much backward in literacy, if not entirely illiterate.⁷ Chittur and Mukundapuram taluks contain the largest forest area⁸ and have a larger tribal population than the rest. Chittur, in particular, lying almost wholly detached from the literate west coast, has a population of highly mixed character in which backward and illiterate communities predominate, and even the very small proportion of Christians in this taluk is mostly illiterate. Naturally, Chittur has the lowest figures of literacy.⁹

Distribution of Literacy Religionwise/Castewise

The Jews had always ranked high in literacy.¹⁰ This is the case everywhere in the world.¹¹ But their

7. Census of Cochin, 1931, p.191.

8. Ibid., 1901, p.95.

9. Ibid., 1931, p.191.

10. Ibid., p.196.

11. The Jew males have to be literate to study Mosaic laws. So the male literacy rate among Jews would always be high.

number is too low in proportion to the total population in Cochin to be counted here.

It is the Christians who returned the highest proportion of literates in the Census Reports, both in male and female literacy. The schools attached to the parishes the influence of the Indian clergy and the educational activities of Christian missions were undoubtedly the factors behind this advancement. According to the Census Report, 1931 the Indian Christians formed 27.6 per cent of the state's population and 39 per cent of the literate population were from this community.¹²

Among the Indian Christians themselves, the Protestants and Syrians had a slight advantage over the Roman Catholics and Romo-Syrians. The numerical strength of the Roman Catholics and Romo-Syrians and their having large number of converts among them from the depressed and illiterate Hindu communities accounted for this difference.¹³ The converts among the Protestants formed only a small section and many of them were made literates through the efforts of the Protestant missionaries. The percentage of literates among different Christian churches in 1931 are shown in Table 5.4.

12. Census of Cochin, 1931, p.191.

13. Ibid.

Table 5.4
Percentage of Literates in Different Christian Churches in 1931

	Popula- tion	% of literates (1931)		
		Total	Male	Female
Indian Christians	333,041	40	48	32
Roman Catholics	108,013	39	47	31
Roman Syrians	183,418			
Syrians (Jacobites, Marthoma, Chaldean, etc.)	36,165	47	56	39
Protestants	5,445	45	48	43

Source: Census Report, 1931.

Taken religionwise Hindus come only after the Christians in the order of literacy rate possessed by them. But it should be remembered that more than half of the Hindu population is made up of communities that are stamped illiterate and backward on account of their social conditions. If considered individually the caste Hindus have higher rate of literacy than the Indian Christians have.

According to statistics in Census Reports of 1931 and 1941 illiteracy among males is practically unknown in communities like the Tamil and Malayalai Brahmins, the Ambalavasis and the Malayali Kshatriyas. The Nairs occupy a high rank and the proportion of literates among their males is particularly high. They form 11.8 per

cent of the states population but 19 per cent of the total number of literates in the State are Nairs.¹⁴

Among the non-caste Hindus the Kaniyans -astrologers by profession - are one of the most literate castes in the state. 66 per cent of them and 81 per cent of their males being literate in 1931.¹⁵ The Ezhavas, the second largest community in the state, who were educationally backward had made rapid and creditable progress over the first few decades of the present century and in 1941, 44 per cent of them were literate with 50 per cent male literacy and 21 per cent female literacy.¹⁶

The Ezhuttassan, Ambattan, Arayans, Kanakkan, Kudumi Chetti, Valan, Velan, Velukkattalavan and Veluttedan also showed considerable progress during the period.¹⁷

Not much progress was made by the depressed classes and hill tribes like the Pulayan, Vettuvan, Parayan, Ullatan, Nayady, etc.¹⁸

The Muslims have always occupied the last place in literacy scale among the followers of different religions in the state.¹⁹

Figures showing the progress made by each of these castes has been provided in Table 5.5.

14. Ibid., p.193.

15. Ibid., p.194.

16. Calculated from the table in Census of Cochin, 1941, p.107.

17. See Table 5.5 in the text.

18. Ibid.

19. Census of Cochin, 1931, p.195.

Table 5.5

The Distribution of Literacy Castewise

Caste, Tribe or Race	Percentage of Literate Persons					Percentage of Male Literates					Percentage of Female Literates				
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
1. Brahmin	37.61	39.1	42.2	61.25	72.64	62.51	62.1	59.8	80.96	86.81	9.54	13.3	21.1	40.85	58.37
a) Malayali	47.02	42.1	46.5	67.69	74.49	69.5	63.3	62.9	85.11	88.51	22.7	20.3	27.3	49.42	59.52
b) Konkani	24.11	29.0	23.9	44.99	53.05	44.34	50.2	36.9	72.28	73.36	1.65	4.4	8.4	17.54	32.87
c) Tamil	39.65	42.5	48.9	68.6	81.77	68.87	68.4	71.2	86.88	94.44	8.04	15.0	24.6	50.34	69.88
d) Others	40.06	35.4	35.3	45.25	66.64	55.89	49.8	45.3	58.62	74.95	6.37	7.7	14.0	23.36	53.36
2. Kshatriya	35.06	44.25	45.6	57.25	69.56	49.84	60.15	57.45	69.21	76.7	16.54	27.15	33.3	44.58	60.61
a) Malayali	46.63	60.9	57.9	79.72	85.09	61.48	72.4	65.8	83.63	91.64	31.91	49.2	50.7	76.66	78.85
b) Others	23.49	27.6	33.3	34.78	54.02	38.2	47.9	46.1	54.79	61.75	1.16	5.1	15.9	12.5	42.36
3. Ambalavasi	42.76	40.1	48.2	72.8	77.61	60.75	55.0	63.6	86.1	88.74	25.25	25.0	32.7	60.19	67.09
4. Native Christian	17.28	21.2	26.2	50.84	59.77	27.04	31.2	35.1	61.19	67.99	7.15	11.1	17.2	40.72	51.67
5. Nair	26.64	27.1	31.0	55.74	63.25	42.51	41.3	42.9	72.24	75.65	11.85	13.7	20.0	42.03	52.99
6. Ezhuthassan	-	10.5	12.6	28.89	40.14	-	19.6	21.9	46.17	58.36	-	1.7	3.9	12.74	22.69
7. Ezhavan	6.61	8.2	10.6	26.2	43.94	12.64	15.4	18.6	42.9	50.35	0.69	1.2	3.3	11.09	20.52
8. Kammalan	10.21	10.7	12.9	29.64	38.71	20.17	20.8	23.8	51.1	57.46	0.61	0.9	2.5	9.51	21.54
9. Kaniyan	-	37.2	37.1	65.56	63.05	-	55.1	53.1	80.78	79.29	-	19.3	23.7	50.41	47.9

Table 5.5 (Contd...)

Caste, Tribe or Race	Percentage of Literate Persons					Percentage of Male Literates					Percentage of Female Literates				
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
10. Kudumichetti	2.27	4.5	8.5	14.59	24.31	4.11	8.4	16.9	26.04	39.93	0.13	0.2	0.6	2.43	8.17
11. Pulayan	0.39	0.5	0.9	5.31	9.8	0.8	0.9	1.6	9.13	15.96	0.01	-	0.03	1.72	3.9
12. Parayan	-	0.2	0.7	3.07	5.84	-	0.4	1.2	5.37	9.62	-	-	0.3	0.77	2.22
13. Arayan	-	10.7	12.2	28.33	37.06	-	18.9	20.2	42.8	51.24	-	1.5	2.6	11.75	21.99
14. Valan	6.38	10.6	11.7	30.72	39.64	11.7	19.2	20.8	46.06	50.48	0.55	1.4	4.2	14.44	28.49
15. Malayan	-	0.04	1.1	0.66	1.88	-	0.08	2.0	1.19	1.51	-	-	-	0.08	2.22
16. Kadan	-	-	0.7	5.42	11.11	-	-	0.7	8.11	10.24	-	-	0.8	2.17	12.15
17. Musalman	6.24	7.05	9.85	18.27	25.21	11.78	13.15	17.75	30.73	38.81	0.5	0.5	0.95	5.21	11.24

Source : Census Reports, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941.

LITERACY AMONG WOMEN.

Cochin had been dominating the female literacy scene in India with an exception in 1921 when Travancore was reported as having the highest rate of female literacy. Table 5.6 gives us an idea about the state of female literacy in different states.

Table 5.6Percentage of Literacy Among Women in Different Provinces and States in India

Province/State	1891	1901	1911
Cochin	3.8	4.5	6.6
Travancore		3.1	5.0
Baroda	0.5	0.8	2.0
Bombay	1.0	0.9	1.4
Ajmer Merwara	0.8	0.8	1.3
Bengal	0.4	0.5	1.1
Madras	1.0	0.9	1.3
Mysore	0.7	0.64	1.3
Central Provinces	0.2	0.2	0.3
Hyderabad	0.3	0.3	0.4

Source: Census Reports of India, General.

The table also speaks out the growth of literacy among women. Compared to other states Cochin had an enviable growth rate in this regard.

Table 5.7
Percentage of Female Literacy in Different
Taluks of Cochin

Taluks	1901	1931	1941
Cochin	4.83	22.3	36.19
Kanayanur	5.7		
Cranganur	3.64	15.1	26.15
Mukundapuram	2.8	16.4	27.88
Trichur	6.62	23.1	36.63
Talapilli	4.3	16.1	26.43
Chittur	2.7	7.7	13.29
Cochin State	4.4	18.5	30.59

Sources: Census Reports of Cochin, 1901, 1931 and 1941.

Note: Cochin and Kanayanur taluks were merged in 1907 and formed the new Cochin-Kanayanur taluk.²⁰

Kanayanur taluk which stood first among the taluks in the state in the relative strength of literate males,²¹ was placed second, Trichur dominating it, in the case of female literacy. In both these taluks the female literacy was above the state average while the other taluks were below state average. It is interesting to note that the first Sirkar school exclusively for the girls was established in Trichur.

20. Census of Cochin, 1911, p.5.

21. See page 92 ante.

Model of Girls Education

The traditional education in Cochin, or in Kerala, was not exclusive to boys. In Nambuthiri system girls were taught till they reached the age of puberty.²² By this time they are just able to read a Malayalam book. In the indigenous schools boys and girls were taught together.²³ Thus there was not any question of exclusive institutions to impart primary education in the traditional societies of Kerala. Then where did they get the model of women's education from?

It was the Protestant missionaries who for the first time established girls' schools in Kerala.²⁴ The first girls' school in Cochin was opened by the Ridsdales who reached Cochin in 1826. The school was within the mission compound. Pupils included Dutch, Portuguese, French and Indian ones. Girls of all castes and creeds were admitted in Mrs.Ridsdale's school. Mrs.Ridsdale is considered the pioneer of female education on modern lines in Cochin.²⁵

In 1841 this school was shifted to Trichur. Sixteen girls were attending the school in 1854.²⁶

22. Census of Cochin, 1891, pp.89-90.

23. K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Cochi Rajya Charithram (Malayalam) (Calicut, 1989), p.660.

24. K.V.Eapen, Church Missionary Society and Education in Kerala (Kottayam, 1985), p.660.

25. Ibid., p.152.

26. Ibid., p.153.

Mrs. J.H. Bishop, wife of the CMS missionary of Trichur (1880-1913) conducted a boarding school for girls in the mission compound. Most of the children were girls from high caste Hindu families. There were two other CMS girls schools in Trichur, one for Syrio-Chaldeans and the other for caste hindus. It is also reported that there were three schools for girls at Kunnankulam.²⁷

Another mission, the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society which had as its aim propagation of the Gospel among the women of India and China by means of schools, Zenana visitation, medical mission etc. worked in cooperation with the CMS. The lady missionaries of the Zenana Mission established girls' schools in Trichur (1881) and Ernakulam (1902).²⁸

The Catholic missionaries of various orders were also active in the field of female education. For example, the Canossians established a school for native girls in Fort Cochin in 1889.²⁹ Similar endeavours were carried on by some other orders also, notably the Carmelites.

27. Ibid., p.154.

28. Ibid., pp.154 ff.

29. Sr.Lucy Jacob, "School Pinnitta Nooru Varshangal... Oru Charithra Samgraham," (Malayalam) in St.Mary's Lower Primary School, Fort Cochin Hundredth Anniversary Commerative Volume (Fort Cochin, 1989), pp.17 ff.

The girls schools established by the missionaries in Cochin, Trichur, Kunnamkulam and their suburbs might have induced the desire of the parents to educate their daughters. For one thing, the girls instructed by the missionaries were seen as better persons, better wives and better mothers. The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record described the aim of a girls' school as to educate girls who may be trained as teachers, to bring up Christian girls in such a way that they may become useful wives and mothers and that they may have a great spiritual influence on the community.³⁰ But we see that not only the girls of Christian faith, either Syrian or converted, but girls hailing from caste Hindu families were also taught in the mission schools.³¹ The Hindu girls were sent to the mission schools inspite of the fact that elements of Christian faith were also imparted in these schools. This shows a strong desire and demand for the education of girls.

Government Policy Encouraging Girls Education

The Sirkar came up to the demands of girls education and encouraged girls education by all possible means. Sirkar started establishing schools for girls with the

30. "The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record" quoted in K.V.Eapen, op.cit., pp.143-4.

31. Ibid., p.153.

establishment of Victoria Jubilee School in 1889.³² In the subsequent decades more and more schools came up either managed by Sirkar or under private managements. In 1903 girls of all Castes were allowed admission into the lower secondary departments of the school at Trichur,³³ and in 1911 the restriction as regards admission to the primary department was removed.³⁴

In 1910 the curricula of girls' school was revised and hygiene, music, drawing, needlework, dress making and domestic economy were prescribed.³⁵

The Education Code drawn in 1911 was revised in 1921. Accordingly several special scholarships for girls were instituted.³⁶

In 1922 girls were allowed free admission in primary schools for boys.³⁷

Women's Share in the Literacy of the State

In Kerala, society gave the womenfolk greater respect than elsewhere in traditional societies. The society's attitude to women had great say in the educational development in Cochin as well as in Kerala on the

32. Ibid., p.162.

33. Administration Report of Cochin, 1121 ME (1945-46), pp.60-61.

34. Ibid., p.61.

35. Administration Report of Cochin, 1085 ME (1909-10), p.40.

36. Ibid., p.61.

37. Administration Report of Cochin, 1047 (1921-22), p.14.

whole. The women enjoyed more freedom than their counterparts in most other parts of the country did. In addition to permitting and sending the girls to attend school it helped the growth of literacy in another way. The education of a woman meant the education of her children, both sons and daughters; on the other hand the education of a man most probably inspire the education of his sons only. In Cochin as well in the whole Kerala, girls - especially of the upper crust - were given education in one form or other, and this helped progressively increase the number of educated persons in the state.

LITERACY AMONG THE LOW CASTES AND THE MUSLIMS

Instruction in traditional Kerala was imparted within the framework of caste. As such it rarely went down the intermediary castes. Even where it did, the exigencies of caste provided the explanation for this. The statistics of literacy among different castes at the turn of the present century will show us how these castes fared on the literacy scale. (Table 5.8)

Educationally Muslims were not above the low castes. They were also at par with the low castes in the case of literacy figures (see Table 5.9).

Table 5.8Percentage of Literacy Among Low Castes in 1901

Caste	Percentage of Literates in 1901		
	Total	Male	Female
Ezhavan	6.61	12.64	0.69
Kammalan	10.21	20.21	0.61
Kudumi Chetti	2.27	4.11	0.13
Pulayan	0.39	0.8	0.01
Valan	6.38	11.7	0.55
Arayan	-	-	-
Kaniyan*	-	-	-
Parayan*	-	-	-
Mallayan*	-	-	-
Kadan*	-	-	-

*Data for these castes are not available.

Source: Census Report of Cochin, 1901.

Table 5.9Percentage of Literacy Among the Muslims

	Percentage of Literacy in 1901		
	Total	Male	Female
Muslims	6.24	11.78	0.5

Source: Census Report of Cochin, 1901.

The fluidization of caste system was the most important factor that enabled the lower castes to reach education. What forces were at work in liquidating the caste system? The Protestant missionaries played a major role in this direction. The peculiar social customs prevailed in the land were unintelligible to the western missionaries. And it was a time when the missionaries could influence the native governments through the British administrators. They raised voice against the social inequalities and the evils of caste system. They used education as a powerful instrument for social change and tried to raise the social status and prestige of the low castes. The rigid caste rules and regulations among the Hindus were loosened to a great extent by the educational activities of the missionaries. They actively engaged in the struggle against untouchability and for the rights of the low castes to use public roads, wells, schools etc. The Slavery Abolition Proclamation issued by the Travancore and Cochin rulers and the Royal Proclamation issued in Travancore in 1859 granting women the rights to cover the upper part of their body were largely the result of the exertions on the rulers by the missionaries.³⁸

38. K.V.Eapen, op.cit., pp.229-31 ff.

It is true that the activities of the missionaries in pursuit of social progress was a major factor in the subsequent social development that took place in the region. However, one notices that missionary activities and the consequent Royal Proclamations in the absence of some other crucial factors would not have been that much effective as it was.

To cite an example we may take the plight of agricultural labourers who were set free through the abolition of slavery. They continued to be as wretched as they had been before, till alternative employment opportunities were available for them. A.V. Jose who has studied about agriculture labour in Kerala states:

The subordinate stratum of society, who were the landless labourers, were kept totally outside the purview of the reforms. The socio-economic development of the nineteenth century, however, resulted in the decline of agrestic slavery as an organized institution in Kerala. In reality slavery changed more in form than in content, as it evolved into the attached labour system; the informal bondage continued and the slave castes remained tied to land. The tenants-turned-owner cultivators carried on cultivation with the same dependent labourers. Available evidence indicates that the attached labour system survived till the fifties of the present century³⁹ in the major rice growing tracts of Kerala.

The activities of the missionaries aroused a lot of interest among the low castes and it acted as a basis

39. A.V. Jose, Agricultural Labour in Kerala (unpublished Ph.D thesis) (University of Kerala, Centre for Development Studies, 1980), p.208.

for the subsequent social and political developments that greatly determined the liquidation of caste system.

The first organized effort for social equality in Kerala was made with the establishment of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam.⁴⁰ The Yogam was established in 1903. It was a time when the Ezhavas all over Kerala enlightened through the pamphlets and exhortations of P.Palpu, G.P.Pillai and T.M.Nair, started organizing into small groups. The establishment of the Yogam was an attempt to give an organized form to these scattered and independent groups.⁴¹

It was not without reason that the first of the series of reform movements in Kerala occurred among the Ezhavas. Being in a position just below the Nairs and the first among the low castes, it was the Ezhavas who suffered most and wanted to find a way out of the oppression. This was all the more deeply felt by the elite among the Ezhavas, who were educated and financially in a good position but were subject to various discriminations just because of having born in a low caste. Their dissatisfaction found expression in sporadic incidences

40. P.K.Balakrishnan, Narayana Guru (An Anthology) (Kottayam, 1969), p.106.

41. Ibid.

from the middle of the last century. The Shannar revolt was a better organized of such incidences.⁴²

Moreover, the increase in the price of coconut products in the late nineteenth century⁴³ was beneficial to the Ezhavas, a number of whom were engaged in industries dealing with coconut products, and lifted them to a financially better condition. Achuta Menon testifies in the Cochin State Manual that the majority of workers engaged in industries connected with coconut products were Ezhavas.⁴⁴ The now financially well to do Ezhava community resented the caste restriction they had been putting on for a long time. They readily responded to the teachings of Narayana Guru. The Ezhavas were filled with a sense of their own worth which transformed them from the passive underlings who made so slight a mark on the history of the Malabar coast up to the nineteenth century into a community conscious of the power which their numbers might one day give them.⁴⁵

42. Ibid., pp.112-13 ff. See also Mannath Padmanabhan, Ente Jeevitha Smaranakal (Malayalam) (Trivandrum, 1964), p.105; and George Woodcock, Kerala, A Portrait of Malabar Coast (London, 1967), p.227.

43. C.Achuta Menon, Cochin State Manual (Ernakulam, 1911), p.238.

44. Ibid., p.268.

45. George Woodcock, op.cit., p.229.

A number of social reform groups were formed among the Valans and Arayans, the fisherfolks, through the efforts of K.P.Karuppan, a leader from among these communities. The first of such organizations was formed at Anappuzha in Kodungalloor and was known as Kalyanadayini Sabha. In 1910 the second one, Valasamudayaparishkarani Sabha was formed at Thevara.⁴⁶ He also initiated the formation of Prabodha Chandrodayam Sabha at North Paravur, Jnanodayam Sabha at Edakochi, Araya Vamsodharini Mahasabha of Engandiyoor and Sanmargapradeepa Sabha at Kumbalam.⁴⁷

Karuppan was a talented poet. He used poetry as a medium for social reform. He wrote poems emphasising the advaita philosophy which meant that there was no distinction between the high caste and the low caste people. These poems were learned by heart and recited by people belonging to Valan, Paraya and Pulaya castes, just as the caste people recited Harinamakirthanams.⁴⁸

He had good rapport with the Sirkar and sought redressal of the grievances and miseries of the unprivileged castes. An example can be cited. Some time around 1909 an exhibition of agricultural produces was held in Ernakulam. Karuppan informed the Diwan, Joseph

46. T.M.Chummar, Kavitilakan K.P.Karuppan (Malayalam) (Kottayam, 1974), p.124.

47. Ibid., p.126.

48. Ibid., pp.63-64 ff.

Bhore that those who laboured to produce the exhibits were not allowed to enter the exhibition area and see the fruits of their labour. The Diwan gave permission to the low caste people to enter the area of exhibition. Along with it they were allowed safe entrance in and passage through the market and town of Ernakulam.⁴⁹

The progressive leaders like T.K.Krishna Menon, K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Appan Tamburan and Karuppan were sympathetic to the plight of the low caste people. They encouraged the Pulayas to organize a reform association of their own. With their support Krishnathi, a Pulaya leader organized the Samastha Kochi Pulaya Mahasabha. Its first meeting was held under the presidentship of T.K.Krishna Menon in May 1913. The second meeting was held at Njarackal in 1914. Appan Tamburan presided in the meeting.⁵⁰

These social reform movements helped the development of education of the low castes in two ways. In the first place, it liquidated the rigid caste system which was a barrier for the low castes in their way to learning.

These social reform movements helped the development of education of the low castes in two ways. In the

49. Ibid., pp.133-4.

50. Kerala History Association, Kerala Charithram (Malayalam), vol.I (Ernakulam, 1973), p.1276.

first place, it liquidated the rigid caste system which was a barrier for the low castes in their way to learning.

Secondly, it inculcated an urge to be educated in the minds of people whatever caste they might belonged to. This can be explained. Most of the social reformers insisted education as a means to development. Narayana Guru asked the people to get educated. He wanted all the Ezhavas, both male and female, to get education at least till the primary level. He directed that schools and readingrooms should be established wherever it was necessary. Mannath Padmanabhan remembers that even the progressives of the generation prior to him were conscious of the importance of education in the development of a society. He gives us the example of Kainikkara Govinda Pillai. Govinda Pillai believed that women should be advanced for social development and this advancement could be gained only through the education of girls. So the first school started in Perunnai was a girls' school managed by him. In the twentieth century the SNDP Yogam and the Nair Service Society (NSS) established a number of schools all over Kerala. The other caste associations also propounded the importance of education but lacked resources to establish schools. They petitioned the Sirkar to establish more schools and the Sirkar responded favourably.

Modern secular education was slowly accepted by the Muslims. The study of Malayalam, especially by females, was opposed on the ground that it was an Aryan language. Madrassa and Dars education was the system of education that was predominant in Muslim community at the beginning of the present century. The only education they received there was a parrot like recitation of the Koran, which being in Arabic, none of them understood. As a result the Muslims were rendered backward in the field of education.⁵¹

Vaikkom Muhammed Abdul Qadar Moulavi started a reform movement called Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham and it played the major role in the socio-religious resurgence among the Muslims in Kerala. The activities of the Aikya Sangham created a general awakening among the Muslim masses in all spheres of their life, especially in the field of modern education.⁵²

The Sirkar rose to the occasion to meet the demands for education on the part of the people, especially those belonging to the lower rungs of the social ladder. A number of schools were established for the backward classes. In 1908-09 primary education for girls and the backward classes throughout the state was made free. A few examples of special schools for

51. S.M.Mohammed Koya, Mappilas of Malabar (Calicut, 1983), pp.77-78.

52. Ibid., pp.80-81.

backward classes can be cited: special schools for Muhammadans at Azhikode and Kochangadi, for Valans at Anapuzha, for Kanakkans at Nedumpuzha, for Ezhavas at Thekkumbhagam and for Kaikolans of Ambattupalayam. There were similar schools in other parts of the state. Besides these schools, several other Sirkar primary schools had practically become schools for the backward classes.⁵³ Later these special schools were abolished and free admission was given in all the schools irrespective of the caste of the pupil.

Another innovation in the educational field was night schools for the benefit of workers who could not avail themselves for study at daytime. The Administration Report of Cochin, in 1910 testified that the night schools had become so very popular that several private night schools had sprung up.⁵⁴

To encourage Muslim students Koran and Arabic teachers were appointed in schools situated in Muhammadan centres.⁵⁵

The Education Code revised in 1921 provided that children of the depressed classes should be exempted from payment of all fees and that those belonging to Muslim,

53. Administration Report of Cochin, 1084 ME (1908-9 A.D.) p.41.

54. Ibid., 1085 ME (1909-10 A.D.), p.41.

55. Ibid., 1095 ME (1919-20 A.D.), p.45.

Ezhava and other backward classes should be allowed half fee concessions in English schools. Several scholarships were instituted for the pupils belonging to the Muslim and other backward and depressed communities. These provisions were systematically followed.⁵⁶ In the forest tracts children of the hill tribes were fed daily so as to attract them to schools.⁵⁷

The rapid growth of literacy in Travancore and Cochin began only after the complete removal, in the late 1920s, of the caste restrictions on admissions to primary schools.⁵⁸ Table 5.10 shows the progress made in the field of literacy by the backward communities in Cochin.

The existence of newspapers and journals is a sure index of the reading habit of the people. Table 5.11 gives the statistics of the number and circulation of newspapers in Cochin between 1901 and 1931.

The Census Report 1931 comments that to see the rickshawalla who waits for hire in the street,

56. Ibid., 1121 ME (1945-46 A.D.), p.61.

57. Ibid., p.67.

58. P.R.Gopinathan Nair, "Education and Socio-Economic Changes in Kerala, 1793-1947," in Social Scientist (New Delhi), vol.4, no.8, March 1976, p.37.

Table 5.10

Progress of Literacy Among the Backward Sections of the
Society in Cochin in the First Half of the
Twentieth Century

Caste	Percentage of Total Literates					Percentage of Male Literates					Percentage of Female Literates				
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Ezhavan	6.61	8.2	10.6	26.2	43.94	12.64	15.4	18.6	42.9	50.35	0.69	1.2	3.3	11.09	20.52
Kammalan	10.21	10.7	12.9	29.64	38.71	20.17	20.8	23.8	51.1	57.46	0.61	0.9	2.5	9.51	21.54
Kudumichetti	2.27	4.5	8.5	14.59	24.31	4.11	8.4	16.9	26.04	39.93	0.13	0.2	0.6	2.43	8.17
Pulayan	0.39	0.5	0.9	5.31	9.8	0.8	0.9	1.6	9.13	15.96	0.01	-	0.03	1.72	3.9
Valan	6.38	10.6	11.7	30.72	39.64	11.7	19.2	20.8	46.06	50.48	0.55	1.4	4.2	14.44	28.49
Arayan	-	10.7	12.2	28.33	37.06	-	18.9	20.2	42.8	51.24	-	1.5	2.6	11.75	21.99
Kaniyan	-	37.2	37.1	65.56	63.05	-	55.1	53.1	80.78	79.29	-	19.3	23.7	50.41	47.9
Parayan	-	0.2	0.7	3.07	5.84	-	0.4	1.2	5.37	9.62	-	-	0.3	0.77	2.22
Kadan	-	-	0.7	5.42	11.11	-	-	0.7	8.11	10.24	-	-	0.8	2.17	12.15
Malayan	-	0.04	1.1	0.66	1.88	-	0.08	2.0	1.19	1.51	-	-	-	0.08	2.22
Muslim	6.24	7.05	9.85	18.27	25.21	11.78	13.15	17.75	30.73	38.81	0.5	0.5	0.95	5.21	11.24

Source: Census Report of Cochin, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941.

Table 5.11The Number and Circulation of Newspapers in Cochin
Between 1901 and 1931

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Number of periodicals	-	13	23	45
Circulation of periodicals	-	9,075	14,475	29,400

Source: Census of Cochin, 1931.

purchasing a copy of the day's newspaper, hawked about in the street and selling like hotcakes at 3 paise a copy, and reading it was not an uncommon sight.⁵⁹

59. Census of Cochin, 1931, p.202.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

People of Cochin witnessed an all out transformation in almost all walks of life since the middle of the nineteenth century. The all-pervading caste system began to lose its grip over the people. The caste regulations and ideologies that determined relations between different sections of society changed. Social reform movements sprang up from the degenerated condition of almost every section of the society. The land tenure pattern changed as a result of the survey settlement in the beginning of the present century and the subsequent regulations. The agrarian scene underwent changes. British domination of the state acted as a catalyst and boosted the pace of social change. A new middle class emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and its strength increased in later years.

The field of education was also transforming. The old village schools were replaced in the process by the modern type of schools and eventually they made their way out of the education scene in the state.

The natural and cultural background of Cochin lay as the foundation of the spectacular growth of literacy the state was able to achieve in the twentieth century. The natural port at Cochin, the safe haven even during the tempestuous monsoons and the rich spices

of the Malabar coast attracted long distance merchants from foreign lands. These merchants must have been literates by the very nature of their vocation. Cochin had a larger proportion of people engaged in avocations other than agriculture unlike in the neighbouring political units and most of these people were engaged in industry and commerce. The geographical features of the state, the back-waters and forest tracts, influenced the people in turning to these callings. The give and take between the foreign merchants and the native commercialists, the cultural exchange between the two, facilitated the notion of literacy to spread among a rather good number of people. It is assumed that the literates were formed from the Brahmins and the comparatively prosperous kanom and pandaravaka verumpattom tenants.

The great respect and freedom accorded to women in the society, especially those belonged to matriarchal castes was conducive to the education of women. Mother's influence, generally speaking, is greater than that of the father in the early days of the children and educated mothers could be a great motivating factor for the child's eagerness to learn. Thus, the ethos and natural endowments of the state provided the solid foundation for the later day development of education in the state.



In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some newly emerged forces and factors contributed to a spectacular growth of literacy in Cochin. After the revenue settlement of 1905-09 the Sirkar tenants were given proprietary rights on the land and through some land regulations the other tenants were given more freedom and rights on the land. The right of compensation was recognized. The increased demand and prices of agricultural produces like paddy and coconut raised the living standard of the people who were engaged in its cultivation or processing. The new railway line substantially increased the commercial activities in the state. The nuclear families disintegrated from the old joint families enabled the parents to attend to their children's education. The social reform movements that had its origin in the social degeneration exhorted the people to take to education as a way out, a means for progress. As a result of all these, there was great demand for education on the part of the people. There were already village schools, sirkar schools and schools attached to parish churches of Christians. Social reform associations started establishing schools. Communities and villages not in a position to run one on their own, requested the sirkar to establish it for them. And the sirkar rose gracefully to the occasion not only by establishing schools but also encouraging by every possible means,

the weaker sections of the society to take to education. The work of the sirkar in this regard was by large on the lines of what the missionaries had been engaged from the first half of the last century. The result was the tremendous increase in the number of those who can read and write so much so that some communities attained a near total literacy status towards the end of our period of study.

What does the increased number of literates mean to the society? The literacy, in the sense of consciousness of language, does not remain the same in a society at different periods as much as it does not remain the same for different societies. The consciousness of language of the people in Cochin had changed. The language of conversation had been determined by the castes, age and seniority. People were conscious of this usage. This consciousness changed. People no longer use the particular terms to describe them and their belongings as they used to do in the past. It is very difficult to distinguish the degree of influence exerted by social reform and literacy in bringing about this change of consciousness in society unless their inter-relationship is studied in detail. The limitation of time prescribed by the University for the preparation of this dissertation makes it impossible, for the time being, to extend the scope of it to such a vast canvas. Such a

study, however, will enable us to understand the intricacies and nuances of the culture of Malayalam better. A study of that kind will throw light on the ethos of the political maturity - including the development of the representative political (legislative) assembly in Travancore as well as Cochin, and the influence of left political ideology - of the people in Kerala.

GLOSSARY

- Agraharam : Tamil Brahmin Village
- Amarakosam : The standard verse dictionary in Sanskrit
- Anantaravan : Male members, other than the senior most member acting as trustee, of the joint families of Kerala
- Asan : Teacher in traditional system of education
- Ashtakam : Poems consisting of eight stanzas, mostly in praise of deities.
- Ativakyam : Verses for telling the time of day by the length of one's shadow.
- Bhadrakali, Chamundi and Kuttichattan : Lesser Gods worshipped by low caste people
- Brahmacharyam : Period in the life of a man in which he pursues education and during which he is supposed to be a celibate.
- Brahmaswom : Brahmin property.
- Brahmaswom madhom : Same as Sabha madhom
- Chakyarkoottu : Traditional art form in which the participants had to be from particular castes.
- Chaturvarnyam : Fourfold caste system
- Devaswom : Literally means belonging to the deity; in usage 'pertaining to Hindu temple'.
- Ezhuthupalli : Traditional village schools.
Harinamakirthanam : Hymns in praise of God sang at evening pujas by caste Hindus
- Illom : Nambuthiri houses
- Janmi : Superior caste land owner in Kerala who claimed to have enjoyed allodium in the soil and got the claim partially recognized by the British.

- Janmom : the allodial property right claimed by the janmi and partially recognized by the British Government in India.
- Jata and Ratha : Different ways of remembering words in a text.
- Kalari : Traditional school for martial arts
- Kanakkar : The holder of kanom tenure
- Kanapattom : See Kanom
- Kanom : A customary tenure interpreted by British courts as possessing the characteristics of both lease and mortgage.
- Karanavar : Male head of the matrilineal joint family of Kerala.
- Karayogam : Exclusive village caste associations
- Kol : Shallow parts of backwater in Cochin where rice cultivation is practised.
- Kovilakam : Houses of royal family
- Makkathayam : Patrilineal system
- Marumakkathayam : The matrilineal system of inheritance practised in Kerala by certain castes.
- Nakshatravakyam : Verses for telling the time of night by recognizing the position of stars.
- Nilam : Rice cultivating tract
- Oozhiyam : Slavery tied to the land
- Padam : Formal analytical exercises on texts, breaking them into words
- Pandaravaka : Belonging to the state
- Pandaravaka kanom (Pandaravaka kanapattom) : Favourable tenure of Government sort lands which have the characteristics of kanom.

Pandaravaka pattom (Pandarapattom or Pandaravaka verum- pattom)	: Non-favourable tenure of Government sort lands on which full rate of land-revenue is charged.
Pappadom	: Gram-wafers
Pattom	: Rent or tenancy
Pulikudi	: See Talikettukalyanam
Ratha	: See Jata
Sabhamadhom	: Endowed (brahmin) college
Samavartanam	: Ceremony by which brahmacharyam was ended.
Sambandhom	: Particular form of marriage which had been prevalent in Kerala among various castes and in which the male partner did not have any responsibility over the offsprings from the marriage.
Samoogha madhom or Samooha madhom	: Tamil Brahmin houses
Saraswatipuja	: Worship of Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom.
Sirkar	: The native state government
SNDP Yogam	: Association established to propa- gate and practise the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru.
Suryanamaskaram	: A set of exercises
Talikettukalyanam, Tirandukuli and Pulikudi	: Extravagant ceremonies in certain castes
Taravad	: Joint families of Kerala
Tavali	: Branches of matrilineal joint family of Kerala
Tirandukuli	: See Talikettukalyanam
Vakyam	: Lessons in verse mainly astrologi- cal and astrologically related for calendar reckoning etc.

Vavoottu Yogam	: An informal association established by Sree Narayana Guru at Aruvikkara
Verumpattom	: Tenancy at will
Verumpattomdar	: Tenants leasing-in land on tenancy-at-will.
Yogam	: Association

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