

**TRAJECTORY OF A CASTE ASSOCIATION: SNDP IN
KERALA 1885-2005**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled 'Trajectory of a Caste Association: SNDP in Kerala 1885-2005' by Jessy K Philip is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER of PHILOSIPHY of this University. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this or other university and is her own work.

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Acronyms

SNDP	– Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
BJP	- Bharatiya Janatha Party
IUML	– Indian Union Muslim League
NSS	- Nair Service Society
INC	- Indian National Congress
KC	- Kerala Congress
RSP	- Republican Socialist Party
PSP	- Peoples Socialist Party
DSP	- Democratic socialist Party
DYFI	- Democratic Youth Federation of India
SFI	- Student Federation of India
KSU	- Kerala Students Union
CPM	- Communist Party Marxist
CPI	- Communist Party of India
KPCC	- Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee

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Chapter 1

Kerala is a highly organised society. There are two kinds of organisations in Kerala which decide its future - caste and class organisations. History of modern Kerala is beset with stories of confrontation between mass organisations of the Communist Party and different caste associations.

Both kind of organisations class and communal, try to break into the sphere of influence of the other. Thus Communist Party registered its first organisational success in Travancore when it weaned away a section of the Ezhavas who were, till then supporters of the Ezhava caste association, the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam) (Gough 1965). In post independence era casteist and communal associations used the identity of caste and religion to break the potential unity of the working class and the peasants (Namboodiripad 1979). They succeeded to a large measure in this task and this marked a turning point in the development of caste associations in Kerala.

Through class struggles, and organisations of the agriculture workers and the peasants', the Communist Party tried again and again, to break the power of caste associations, for political mobilizations. However because of the peculiar community demography and coalition politics, the communal head count became crucial to win power in the State. Most political parties including the Left Democratic Front accommodated demands for state patronage by communal associations. In this favourable political environment, caste associations successfully nurtured their constituencies with state concessions from both the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government and the United Democratic Front (UDF) governments. The influence of caste associations is generally more evident during the UDF term in government.

But in recent times the so called secular community politics has taken a communal bend. Caste associations like SNDP, the Viswakarma Association (association to represent the OBC artisan caste groups like blacksmith, gold smith, and the carpenter) are seen flirting with hindutva ideology (George Varghese 2003). The Communist Party recognise such a casteist turn in Kerala society. They acknowledge the infiltration of the left - youth, women's and even the trade union - movements by such consciousness

(Document adopted by the Kerala state committee of CPM Quoted in Marxist Oct - Dec 2003).

A cursory look at today's newspapers in Kerala shows that the issues which animate Kerala politics has changed from yesteryears class concerns. Newspapers are replete with news items like the demand for a caste survey for proper implementation of reservation by NSS and talks of a united Hindu front. Many newspapers carry items on the dangers of minority power of Muslims and Christians. Observing this communal trend in Kerala, I was impelled to ask the following questions.

Has caste associations become stronger in Kerala? What are the reasons behind their expansion? For e.g. it is reported that SNDP has expanded to the virgin soil of Communist Northern Kerala.

Political sociologists often use the concept of political mobilization to understand the nature of state and society. Scholars with different theoretical orientations undertook studies on caste mobilizations to gauge the changing nature of state and society in India. To understand the nature of Kerala state and society a study of its caste association is crucial. The study does not presume that caste associational politics exhaust caste politics. But in Kerala, caste politics is often synonym to caste associational politics.

The concern of the dissertation is to study caste association in its social, political and economic context. Since SNDP is one of the most prominent caste association in Kerala and has come to play an aggressive role in politics in recent times -managing to be a spoiler for both the UDF and the LDF – it is picked up to study the changing nature of Kerala state and society.

A lot of studies have already been generated on the topic of SNDP and its role in Kerala politics and society. My study only tries to extend the insights of these scholars.

1.1 Objectives of the study:

- To figure out the growth and development of caste associations in Kerala across regions and in different historical periods.
- To study SNDP as a caste association and to understand the nature of its role in different time periods and the reasons behind them.

- To explore the mechanisms by which caste associations like SNDP operates - here an attempt is made to understand, though superficially, social networking and ideology creation by the association which ensures them a community constituency.
- To analyse the changing role of SNDP in the recent times.
- To widen our understanding of changing nature of state and society in Kerala

1.2 Methodology

A historical analysis is preferred, but an effort to integrate an anthropological and micro view with a historical understanding is attempted. The limitation of a historical study is that, in its hurry to explain change they sometimes skip the process by which state and society interacts.

1.3 Research techniques

Already existing historical research on Kerala society, caste associations and SNDP is assessed.

Secondary resources like news paper and assembly records are also used. A few restrictive interviews with caste association leaders are used. Since no systemic interview schedule or sampling was done to assess whom to approach, this will be used only to illuminate our understanding.

Government reports on education, the Backward Commission Reports, statistical data on the Kerala economy, specifically the migration and education data is used to illuminate the economic context from which caste associations and their politics make their respective claims. A general discussion on the Kerala economy is also used with the same purpose in mind. The data with regard to the expansion of branches, new political tactics, is also made available from the Yogam branch in Kerala.

1.4 Scope of the study:

The expressed aim of the study is only to locate the specific caste association, the SNDP as it has evolved over time. But since SNDP is part of a wider system of political and social interaction a few things can be tangentially deduced from its action in society. Thus a limited understanding of the working of other caste associations and of the nature of changing state society relationship in Kerala is attempted.

1.5 Limitation of the study:

The study would have gained hugely from a systematic collection of primary data. Interviews of political and association leaders and select activists and members would have enriched the understanding on the dynamics of caste association that is not included in the study.

To understand the current position of SNDP, the post 1990's sufficient studies are not available. Most of the findings are inferred in the absence of a rigorous primary research. Finally even though the theoretical orientation stresses the importance of supplementing historical research with anthropological insights, it was found that sufficient material was not available for the period after the 1990's.

1.6 Organisation of the dissertation:

Chapter two examines the methodological question of how to study caste associations. Different scholars have studied caste association with different purpose in mind. But at the broader theoretical level most of them employ caste association as a tool to understand the changing nature of state and society in India in general or in particular states. I have grouped their understanding more or less as structural functionalist or Marxist. There are varying problems with each especially because every work has a specific objective in mind. To suit the purpose of this study, insights provided by all these studies is integrated into a schema with out losing a historical perspective.

Third chapter looks at the origin of the caste association SNDP, of the depressed Ezhava caste. I locate the origin of the SNDP in the socio- political and economic context of colonial expansion in Kerala.

Fourth chapter examines dynamics of this caste association after the Indian independence. The study is contextualised in the planned economy and coalition politics in Kerala of this period. The last section of the chapter will analyse the recent changes in the role and importance of SNDP in Kerala. This is examined in the backdrop of a changed economic and political scenario. This socio- political change is the rise of hindutva as a political force in India and globalisation as an economic constraint at the national level.

Chapter Five will explore the theoretical and substantive conclusions the study throws up.

Chapter 2

Caste associations: The theoretical debates

Scholars who worked on caste associations studied it with certain purposes in mind. Reviews of works by social scientists from different theoretical persuasions reveal that most of them studied caste associations to understand the nature of social change in India. Many attempted to develop theories to explain the dynamics of India's socio-political system. Studies on caste association have generated a lot of lively discussion on social change. The scholars who studied caste associations were primarily interested in explaining social change. But the similarity ends here for each of them perceived social change differently.

Let me pose certain questions that any study on caste association will be interested in answering. What is a caste association? How do they come into existence? What are the mechanisms by which they operate? What are the internal dynamics in a caste association? What role do they play in society and politics?

Those who studied caste association attempted to answer these questions. Answers differed according to the theoretical predilections of the authors. The next section will elaborate these theoretical attempts of these scholars to place caste associations in a process of social change.

This chapter is divided into the following sections. Section 2.1 will explore the cultural anthropological tradition in the study of caste associations. Sub section 2.1.1 will develop a critique of it. Section 2.2 assesses the studies on caste association done by political scientists like Rajani Kothari and Rudolph & Rudolph. A critique of their approach is provided along with the description of their respective studies. Section 2.3 develops a critique of structural functional analysis of caste associations. Section 2.4 looks at the evolution of caste associations in colonial and post colonial India 2.5 develops a methodological framework to study caste associations.

2.1 The cultural Anthropological scholarship on caste politics

There was a tradition of cultural anthropological analysis in the study of caste association. M N Srinivas' study on social change in India can be considered as a classic illustration of this approach.

Srinivas quotes both Miller's study of a northern village in Kerala and Rowe's study of Cauhans caste mobility movement. Since Miller explains the process of social change in a similar manner as Srinivas, I will first give his explanation of social change and then move back to that of Srinivas, for an account of the development and functions of caste associations

Miller describes the process by which disparate jatis came together to form caste blocks. He notes that in the traditional society there was a territorial segmentation of jatis (Miller 1954:419). Only the military Nairs and other upper caste had an internal organization which extended beyond their village. Even for the Nair's the common cultural practices and kinship ties ended at the territorial unit of the Nad (administrative unit above the village). Only the Brahmins had uniform body of customs through out Kerala. There was no internal caste solidarity across large boundaries. With the introduction of colonial rule the situation changed. The improved road networks made people aware of same caste fellows in other localities. The earlier hypergamous marriages of the Nairs contracted to unite the ruling classes of Nairs. The Namboodiri was found superfluous under the new political dispensation (Miller 1954:417). Marriage relations began to be contracted beyond the earlier territorial unit of the Nad. This enabled castes to establish internal bonds of solidarity over wide areas. Further, the political integration of Kerala led to the development of homogenized caste blocks. Soon a system developed in which these caste blocks faced each other as opposing classes.

From here, Srinivas takes the next step: as new economic opportunities and political institutions were created these caste blocks were mobilized to form caste associations (Srinivas 1966: 105). These associations fought for improving their position in local hierarchy through a process of Sanskritization. Since caste loyalties existed prior to the establishment of democratic institutions, these existing solidarities were automatically used for political mobilization. As caste solidarities predated democracy in India; caste subsumed politics in India (Srinivas 1966: 118-122).

As the administrative unit changed from the village to the district and the rulers from the Rajas to the British; new avenues for caste mobility was created. Census operation created another avenue for caste mobility which prompted the creation of caste Sabhas.

Is there any fundamental difference between caste mobility in traditional society and the colonial world? Srinivas opines that the political fluidity in traditional society enabled caste mobility. But while the earlier caste mobility claims were presented in front of the raja, in colonial times it was presented to the colonial masters. In traditional India there were legal and religious sanctions against imitating the ritual and style of the twice born castes. Claims for higher status became easier to achieve in colonial India because the British refused to ban Sanskritization (Srinivas 1966: 99). Thus we see a proliferation of caste Sabhas intend on improving their relative position in the caste hierarchy.

Thus caste associations were a tool for social mobility and they came into existence with the political and legal integration of India. Their function was to enhance the general standing of the caste group in the local hierarchy. With the establishment of modernization, Sanskritization as a tool for mobility was found to be less effective in improving the social standing of the caste group.

2.1.1 Critique of the cultural anthropological understanding of caste associations

Does this methodology help us in understanding caste associations? Is it answering my problems in understanding caste associations? My first problem was in understanding the origin of caste association. Caste associations according to Srinivas came into existence to facilitate the social mobility of caste groups. Social mobility according to him is achieved by a process of Sanskritization. There are many studies which show that caste association came into existence to advance the secular interests of the rising middle class in gaining education (Jeffrey 1977:353-357; Washerbrook 1988). This middle class may or may not be interested in sanskritizing its life style.

My third question was about the internal dynamics of caste association and the mechanisms by which it gathers support. Srinivas could not answer this question for he assumes the existence of caste solidarity as prerequisite for the formation of the association. So he did not question the actions of the association as anything that benefits only some members of the association. So cliques and factions inside the associations did not figure in his discussion on caste association.

We know, by now, that the sheer presence of social cleavages like caste or class does not ensure political mobilization in the form of caste association or party. Ethnic

identities are created by political actors in the process of political mobilization (Brass 1976:19-25). If there are common ties in the form of caste or religion it helps in the creation of ethnic identity (Brass 1976: 23). But common ties, on its own, can not create an ethnic identity. Caste identity of Ezhavas for example was created by the deliberate actions of the caste association of the Ezhavas, the SNDP.

I find the cultural anthropologist tradition in the study of caste association not useful in developing an understanding of what constitutes a caste association. The only insight I gained from these studies was that the colonial rule provided a network of solidarities, which the caste association later on mobilized for sectional interests.

These studies mislead and confuses when one attempts to understand caste association. First the assumption of pre- existing caste solidarities leads one to see caste association as representative of the whole caste group.

Second, Srinivas and others develop a cycle of evolution for the caste associations. This cycle of development is a- priori decided rather than ascertained by reference to a concrete historical situation and process (Carroll 1978).

Third since Srinivas tells us in advance that caste associations came up to fulfill the social mobility aspirations of a “caste block” we interpret all actions of the associations as Sanskritic. Many caste associations during colonial times undertook ostensibly Sanskritizing activities to express a decisively non - Sanskritizing impulse of protest and negation of the principle of hierarchy. Thus the Ezhava women in Travancore wore the breast cloth which was ritually allowed only for the upper caste not to Sanskritize their way of life, but to question the ideological basis of Brahmanic Hinduism (Mohan 1987:65). Caste association often wrote common histories (this is often considered as a Sanskritizing activity) to create a feeling of common ties among the caste members (Carroll 1978). Caste associations worked for the removal of sub- caste differences among the caste fellows again with a similar purpose in mind. Some authors consider this also as a Sanskritizing activity of caste associations.

Wrong conclusions, wrong methodology – some examples from specific studies

Let us explore the studies conducted using this methodology and the wrong conclusions that these studies came up with due to the methodological deficit of cultural anthropological scholarship.

Rowe's uses this methodology to study Kayastha Saba, the caste association of the Kayastha's in North India (Rowe 1968). Carroll picks out the works of Srinivas (Srinivas1962) and Rowe (Rowe 1968) for scathing criticism. Analyzing Rowe's study of Kayastha association, she points out that calling Kayastha association and its activities as Sanskritic was based on a perception of 18th century history with 19th century understanding (Carroll, 1978:).

Observing the census controversy of the 18th century these authors typecast the working of the caste association as Sanskritic in its ssaims and objectives. The evidence for this was the concern of the association with changing caste names and writing caste histories .This is seen as a typical case of Sanskritization by which a jati claims a higher status by referring to past glories and high caste ancestors. They underestimate the role, common histories play in identifying and defining a community.

Common history plays a major role in defining a community (Brass 1976: 19). Caste associations attempted to homogenize the community by marriage and custom reforms. Innovative caste histories helped in this "community" creation by invoking a common history and ancestry. Appeals to higher ritual status made through census operations can be interpreted as Sanskritic attempts at social mobility. But such measures also helped in creating a community out of heterogeneous endogamous jati- groups.

We should note that most of the caste histories are addressed to western authorities who were trying to define caste communities. Later on these groups were signaled out for dispersal of state patronage. In most parts of India caste associations mushroomed as a direct result of colonial machinations which forced the elites to fall back upon the categories created by the state for political mobilizations (Washerbrook 1988 ; Cohn 1996) for forcing secular concessions out of the colonial state like seats in educational institutions and legislature (Washerbrook 1988).

Rowe assumes that the association was representative of the whole Kayastha population. He also assumed that there was a developmental cycle in the working of a caste association. He explains the shift from a Sanskritic phase to a westernizing phase, by examining the contents of Kayastha conference, the journal of the association. Rowe argues that the 1920's represented a westernizing phase of the association. He pointed out that the Kayastha journal contained progressive articles of common national interest than

what was pertaining to the Kayastha community. The association had moved away from narrow sectarian interests to more secular concerns. Carroll points out that in the same period there were other journals published which would have revealed this different story. But this was not even attempted (Carroll, 1978: 74). Thus both Kayastha Saba and Kayastha conference were mistaken to be representative of Kayastha as a whole. The behavior of the association and the journal was extended to account for the whole caste group.

The census operations of this period are not placed in the economic and political context of colonialism. Thus Srinivas observed “These associations were generally aimed at Sanskritizing life and ritual and occasionally at reducing expenditures on weddings and funerals” (Srinivas 1962: 14). In fact the association’s concern with reducing marriage expenditure - for the most part - was to free resources for education (Carroll 1978). But such an assertion will require a look into why education became a primary tool for attaining social mobility in the 18th and 19th century. This again will necessitate a look at changing class relations in India in the colonial period and the rise of a middle class. Most of the association leaders were drawn from this middle classes.

If we emphasize the second aspect without denying that ritual status was a concern in the climb for mobility we could question usefulness of Sanskritization as tool to understand caste association. When we realize that “Sanskritization” was at best a secondary concern for caste association how can we explain the rationale for the existence of caste association as simply Sanskritic?

A historical understanding will help us in investigating what and who caste association represents. Carroll points out that once the motives and nature of the association is understood then the limits of the community can be explored instead of assumed (Carroll, 1978:83). Then caste association will not be seen as a monolithic entity representing a monolithic caste but rather a disparate collection of factions, uneasy coalition of individuals and patron client cliques. Carroll points out that, far from being a monolithic association Kayastha Mahasabha, was severely ridden with factionalism, each clique trying to advance their personal ambitions (Carroll, 1978:83).

Carroll does not deny that Sanskritization was a matter of concern for the association. What is problematic was to consider Sanskritization as the only aim of the

association. We should not assume, before hand that the *raison d'etre* of a caste association is Sanskritization. Caste association should be investigated from the socio-political and economic context from which it originates.

Hardgrave's study on Nadars of TamilNadu also suffers from similar inattention to the historical context in studying caste association (Hardgrave 1966). It was discovered by the author that an association which rallied caste members around it had started to develop fissures. So he jumped to the conclusion that it is a validation of the development hypothesis of caste association. This hypothesis says that as society modernizes, vertical mobilization by a caste association gives way to horizontal mobilization by a class party. This then is the phase when caste association's internal unity brakes on class lines (Hardgrave 1966). Here also, the socio – political context of the working of the association is left to the imagination of the reader.

Most of these studies because of the structural analysis they adopted took an ahistorical approach. Based on their understanding of a social change - of tradition adapting to modernity -they developed a developmental cycle for caste association. They failed to show how this change came out. They did not show how socio- economic changes lead to such a cycle of development, if such a cycle exists. Thus most of these studies could not explain the regional variation as well as variations across time in the birth and spread of caste associations.

As Carroll points out Srinivas' study of social change has become the referent point for more ahistorical studies from such diverse fields like political science to social anthropology (Carroll 1978).

2.2 Caste in politics: Rudolph & Rudolph, Rajani Kothari and Paul Brass

The political scientists who researched caste association took off from where Srinivas left off. They took Srinivas and others who studied caste association in the colonial period at face value and developed a development cycle for caste association by assuming the Sanskritic phase in the development of caste associations as universally given. They worked with a concept of the developmental cycle of caste associations which was arrived at, independent of historical context. None of these studies provided a historically valid explanation for the origin and existence of caste association

I find their studies an advance on Srinivas' work on caste association because they also considers caste solidarity as created by the intervention of political factors like state and state policies, political parties and communal associations. They do not assume that the association is representative of the caste and advance the interests of all caste members. Because of this feature they were able to describe the internal contradictions inside the association in the form of cliques and factions.

Similar to the cultural anthropological studies these studies also describe a process. From this a logical jump was executed to arrive at a prediction of stages in the development of caste association. Most of them were interested in explaining how caste association in particular and caste politics in general are functional for Indian political system. They view caste politics and caste associational politics as the vehicle through which India is secularized and democratized. They merit caste associations for smoothing out the process of modernization by acting as intervening mechanisms. Are these claims tenable? In the next section I will go through the major works of those political scientists who worked on the caste associations and will assess their relative utility in advancing my understanding of the caste associations. Let me start with the work of Rudolph and Rudolph, considered as a neat theoretical exposition on the nature of political mobilization in India

Rudolph thought that caste associations are the structures through which tradition adapt to modernity in India. As society advanced from traditional to modern there were changes in the nature of political mobilization. Political mobilization in India occurs through caste associations. Since political mobilization occurs through caste associations a change in the nature of political mobilization requires that change in the nature of caste associations. So a change from vertical to horizontal mobilization occurs by fissions in caste associations (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 24-27). This is an advanced form of political mobilization since people are mobilized on the basis of common interests represented by a coalition of caste association. Caste federation representing a coalition of caste association or caste groups, then denotes an advance to modern political forms like class parties.

Rudolph assumes that it is through caste associations that Indians are politically mobilized (Rudolph 1967). A layman taking a cursory interest in politics can notice that

there are almost 2,500 or more jati groups but a handful of caste associations (Homjee 1973:801). A person convinced by Rudolph's argument, then has to deduce that in those places where there is no caste association "modernity" is not being ushered. This is nothing but absurd. In fact what most jatis have are caste councils rather than caste associations and these may or may not play a role in politics (Homjee 1973:802). Myron Wiener also advances an en-block view of caste mobilizations (Weiner 1962:37). At different time periods and across regions, caste politics take different forms. It may take the form of a caste association functioning as a political pressure group (Kerala) or caste associations in alliance with each other forming a political party (Gujarat) or existing political parties using Caste networks for gathering political support. So, caste associational politics is not the only form of caste politics. Structural functionalists bypass this point. Their preoccupation is to prove that caste solidarities are functional in ushering in modern values across India.

Rajani Kothari extends this argument and portrays caste politics as a variant of class politics in India (Kothari 1965). He considers caste association as the first step to class parties. With the development of new economic opportunities made available to all irrespective of caste differences, class differentiation in a caste group increases. This will lead, in time to the development of class parties. Rajani Kothari considers caste federation an advance from purely sectional politics of caste association. Caste association democratizes, homogenizes and modernizes Indian society (Kothari 1965).

Caste associations need not always usher in modern values of homogenization, secularization and democratization in Indian politics. Homjee points out that Kshatriya Saba (which Rudolph studied) in Gujarat in fact wanted to desecularize what ever secular character that the Kshatriya's acquired in their daily rural life (Homjee 1973:802). As far as homogenization is concerned while association may attempt at homogenization it may produce the opposite effect. What happened in the case of Kshatriya sabha was that at the eve of 1961 elections there was split in the organization following the revolt by a lowly Kshatriya of the authority of the princely order (Homjee 1973:801- 802). What secularize and democratize is mostly daily life albeit caste movements and caste associations have a hand in the creation of this everyday consciousness and interaction (Homjee 1973:801-803).

At different time periods, caste associations perform different functions. While SNDP in the early phase articulated the need for democracy and negation of caste and obscurantist customs, when the middle class organizers demands were met they turned reactionary (Osella 2000:195; Tharakan 1986:25). These criticisms have been put forward to show the danger of overgeneralization and decontextualised analysis.

Such understandings also mistake the reactionary elements in caste association as progressive and then call it as *alternative modernity*. Even the associations of the depressed castes, which started with stringent attack on the caste system, turned reactionary and made compromise with both national bourgeoisie and imperialism scuttling their original plan of demolition of caste system. The best example is the self respect movement in Tamil Nadu. The successors of this movement, DMK and AIDMK, soon made peace with caste system and even stopped their propaganda work on the evils of the caste system. This is quite understandable since both the parties are well integrated into the national bourgeoisie and landlordism, which is the dominant class structure (Ranadive 1979; Lieten 1979:322- 334). The precise nature of the reactionary nature of these associations and caste based political mobilization can be seen when we realize that, to mobilize a horizontal class vertically, one has to appeal to particularistic identities be it of caste or religion (Brass 1976 Lieten 1979: 332). This is not to say that caste associations were never progressive. In fact, want it or not, associations, specifically, of the depressed castes have helped in the political awakening of the masses (Lieten 1979:321).

To assume that political behavior of Indians can only take caste forms is an ethnocentric view. Caste association has stopped being vehicles of “secularization and modernity” where a strong secular alternative has come up. Nadar association (NMS) in Tamil Nadu and Ezhava in Kerala (SNDP) were the best examples. Both has to keep away from politics and change themselves into social welfare organizations or suffer a split in the association (Hardgrave 1966:234). SNDP was not even able to join other associations like NSS and the church for the overthrow of the first communist ministry in Kerala because of the different political affiliation of the caste members (Lieten 1982, 1979). The churches in Kerala find it difficult to gloss over class divisions among the laity. There is a bitter division between the Syrians, who generally represent the landed

interests and the Latin Catholic Church, which represent the poor fisher man and the agricultural workers (Lieten 1982)

Hence caste associations need not be the only way to mobilize, nor are they progressive all the time. Neither are they just imitative attempts at social mobility alone nor are they protest movements or voluntary associations all the time. To understand what they are we need to look at the context.

We ask the question, how useful is secularization as a concept to understand change in Indian politics and society? He bases his study on an analysis of the early phase of the caste association as being Sanskritic. This, as was demonstrated in the earlier paragraph's is an assumption. While he does a commendable job of describing the functioning of a caste association it does not help us in predicting a trend. The primary concerns of the caste associations were secular goals and personal power, even in the early phase.

As caste loses its economic role more and more and turns political, use of caste for personal and rival class interest is natural. Such a change in fact occurs due to change in the nature of state and society in India (Cairo, 2001). An analysis which describes with out giving explanation also can not pretend to predict a trend. This is where Kothari's analysis becomes problematic; it is in its logical leap from description to prediction without explaining the reason for the described reality.

But he advanced my understanding of the dynamics of caste association, when he pointed out that mobilization on caste basis follows rather than precedes individual competition for power (Kothari 1965, 1970). Since caste leaders use caste sentiments for furthering personal and sectional political interests, the conflict of interest with in an association or a federation has to be kept under wraps by strong authoritarian structure and orientation. They will have a command structure similar to the internal organization of the Kshatriya federation (Kothari 1965, 1970). Thus he furthered our understanding of the internal dynamics of the caste associations.

Kothari faithfully records the clashes of factions in the federation with each faction trying to get the maximum leverage. He also documents the mercurial alliances of the federation with other caste blocks drawn from the Congress to the Swatantra party. What he fails to do is to put these alliances and factions in a wider context and hence

view this association and federation for what they really were. He fails to relate the different styles of political mobilization to class alliances and class antagonism that distinguishes Indian politics in different historical periods. A clear view of both kind of mobilization ,that is caste association and alliance across associations, will alter as to shift in state, society, nature and relations that occurred from the colonial to post – colonial period (Cairo 2001).

His study also suffers from over generalization. Citing Gujarat politics and the interpenetration of caste association and parties he generalizes it to map out a trend for the whole of India. Carroll warns us of the danger of overgeneralization .She asks, when one can not even generalize about a single caste association and describe their activity as either Sanskritic or westernizing how can one generalize for the whole of India ?(Carroll, 1978). In fact if such generalization is ever attempted, it has been with lot of caveats, for India is a multi- ethnic state, a federation of nation states following different trajectories of capitalist development. To complicate things nature of political mobilizations and elite alignments are different in different states (Desai 2002). There will some commonality in the working and evolution of caste associations across India. But this is because national politics and economic policies of the central government affect the pattern of politics and economic development in the state.

In the next paragraphs I will be reviewing the main points advanced by Brass. I consider his analysis far superior to all the other works I so far reviewed. Limitation of his study is no fault of his analysis. His primary focus in dealing with ethnic mobilization is to show how immediate political opportunities affect the nature and extend of the mobilization and the creation of the ethnic identity (Brass 1976:49-70). His aim is not to understand the origin of the caste association. So he helps in my analysis only to a limited extend. One of my aims is to study the origin of the caste association. In fact I have borrowed heavily from his analysis to explain the shifting fortunes of caste associations in politics.

2.3 Structural functional explanation of caste association: what do they explain?

What we find problematic in a structural functional approach is the absence of a historically relevant explanation. All the studies quoted above suffer from this malady. Most of the intellectual energy of the structural functionalist is spend on fitting social

reality into developmental cycles and models of social change like Sanskritization, westernization and secularization. Again the problem is an often quoted one. There are no historically relevant explanations for developmental cycles through which caste associations are supposed to progress linearly. The model hangs so well that after a point, process of change in the activities of the association and its effect on society can be mechanically deduced. Thus caste association in the early colonial period would not be allowed to be preoccupied with anything other than Sanskritization. Only thing that is left for the researcher to do is to collect evidence to support the development cycle and to explain away anomalies as paradoxes.

There are some commonalities in the working and evolution of caste associations across India. But this, as we pointed out before, is the result of common national politics and economic policies and their effect on the pattern of politics and economic development in a specific state. In order to understand the development of the caste associations in Kerala a rudimentary knowledge of the trends in the development of the caste association is found to be necessary. The section below attempts to locate Kerala politics in a wider setting of Indian politics and economics.

2.4 Caste politics and caste associational politics: colonial period

Let us develop a contextual understanding of what constitute caste and caste politics in the colonial period.

Caste as it is understood is more social, ie endogamy, pollution, and ritual. Its economic dimension is fading in the new India. Colonialism brought about changes. New ways of associating were introduced. Colonialism and the introduction of the cash economy served the hereditary economic dependence of the lower castes on the upper castes. Upper caste hegemony registered a decline, with the rise of new influential classes out of different caste groups. With the introduction of modern judiciary and legislature along with a marginal reduction of economic clout of the erstwhile upper classes the ground was prepared for a fight for hegemony between groups.

The political resolution of the class conflict now has to take new forms. What the dominant caste was faced with was the challenge of a rising new class (Miller 1952; Srinivas 1964). The new classes aspired to advance their economic and political standing by making use of new economic opportunities created by the British rule. The new

political masters unwittingly introduced new ideas and a political rhetoric (democracy, citizenship, centralized judiciary). The stage was set for a political resolution of the conflict between the old masters and the new emerging classes. How was this social conflict resolved? This enquiry will lead us to see the origin of caste association, in the emergence of new middle class, created out of all castes fighting for economic and political supremacy, using borrowed ideas of democracy and citizenship. Neither will we in our enquiry, lose sight of the political maneuvering of the new colonial political masters to whom the political mobilizations were addressed in the ultimate analysis (Cohn 1996). Caste associations have developed in the context of colonialism and India's struggle for freedom. Caste association becomes the natural actors in politics also with the active encouragement from an imperial power interested in breaking up the developing national unity. This is true, for both Travancore as it is for the rest of India.

As Brass observes in the first instance "Governmental policies and institutional mechanisms (for e.g. electoral systems, reservations, communal award) may be critical factors in influencing a group's capacity or desire to survive as a separate identity, its self definition and its ultimate goals" (Brass 1976 pno50).

How far these influenced the development of caste association and caste politics depend on each and every regional context. In the southern states, especially in Tamil Nadu, the colonial efforts of using reservation and communal electorates gave an impetus to the growth of anti-Brahmanism. Thus we see that caste associations transformed themselves into political pressure groups early in Kerala. While in the north primacy of communal politics led to the weak development of caste associations and their use as political pressure groups (Carroll 1975). The social movements which came up like Arya samaj were preoccupied with defining a Hindu identity and this political culture had an effect on the growth of independent caste movements. Within each regional context "ethnincization" of caste (Jaffrelot 2000) progressed depending on socio-economic condition. Caste association gained or lost power depending on how accommodating or aggressive were the dominant groups towards the claims of these sections (Manali Desai 2002; Brass 1976). The allies these sections find, strength and weakness of class associations (E.M.S 1979 Lieten 1979), and how state reacts to the demands of such group also affected their growth and evolution. In short the state apparatus, political

opportunities, and the strategies employed by these associations in their perception of these opportunities, and of course the social- economic context determined the fortunes of these associations.

2.4.1 Post independence caste politics

The real constraints on the development of capitalism continued in the post independent period also. State becomes a source of economic power. There is a direct linkage between political power and economic condition of different classes and groups. State, rather than captured by a class, then become an arena of struggle. The continued existence of the caste association has to be seen from this socio- economic context.

2.5 A methodology for the study of caste politics and caste associations:

The study aims to understand caste association in their social, economic and political context. We understand that the power of caste mobilization is dependent on the patronage networks that an association can command. Thus special effort will be made to understand the operation of these networks. Such an understanding is developed in the next section.

Jati is an endogamous group with its membership drawn from kin groups based in families and spread over a few neighborhood. The most effective unit of decision making is the extended kin group in one neighborhood or spread over a few neighborhoods. Their effectiveness lies in the fact that there is a flow of good will and goods between them leveling class distinctions if any (Osella 2000). Thus the notables or those who wield power and munificence have a substantial say. In the district or provincial politics these notables who are tied to other notables by political parties or caste associations can assure block voting on caste lines sometimes. In this way villagers are linked together and eventually to state and national agencies through hierarchical chains (Osella 2000). Smooth running of this patronage net works requires a high degree of personalization of this hierarchical relationship. The patron and client relationship are smothered in familial discourse on duty, love to disguise and mystify the relationship (Kondo 1990; Osella and Osella 1996). Here in lies the power of such net works.

But such a vote presupposes that neighborhood kinship groups are primary units of interactions and that their word will be followed to the letter. It may be followed or may not be. Where class associations have come to stay, the hold of the kin group can be

minimal as in the case of Kerala to some extent (E.M.S 1979, Lieten 1979 Gough 1965; Osella 2000). The influence of kin groups and notables in a caste will depend on patronage they provide to the kinfolk. Patronage can take the form of, employment, a recommendation for jobs and help in dealing with bureaucracy or even providing information on marriage alliances and job opportunities.

Thus as Fillipo Osella shows in her work in Kerala, as a family acquires material advancement giving off largesse is a first step to social mobility and then political mobility. Those who dispense with patronage and get interested in political power logically are not few. Hence there is always a competition for dispensing and receiving patronage, leading to factional fights among cliques in the same caste. Osella discuss how the celebration of national festival of Kerala, Onam becomes a privileged site for patronage competition between local notables (Fuller 2002). Thus we see that political leadership is more often bifurcated and caste turning less cohesive and weakening political behavior on the basis of caste. The influence of the caste associations and cliques and factions in a caste group is directly proportional to the patronage net work they run. As pointed out before, given structural unemployment and low development in India such networks can be sustained.

Here in this chapter a historical understanding is proposed to study caste associations. We don't assume before hand that caste is the given political behavior and that factional politics represented through caste associations, are the norm by which politics is conducted in India. Rather we are more interested in understanding the different nature of caste associations in different historical period, and the mechanisms by which they operate.

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Chapter Three

Origin of the SNDP – A contextual analysis: 1885 - 1947

One of the significant developments of colonial rule was the emergence of caste associations as important socio - economic groups. Social conflicts in the colonial times took many forms. Caste associations were one such expression of social conflict. To understand the origin of caste associations one has to grasp the dynamics of social - economic changes effected by colonial incursion in India. In Kerala caste associations developed first in Travancore. This chapter attempts to understand the social, political and economic changes in Travancore in the postcolonial period and the consequent increase in caste mobility movements.

The chapter is schematised as follows: Sections 3.1 discusses the socio - economic changes in Travancore from 1850- 1930. Section 3.2 presents the growth of plantation sector and its effects on agrarian relations in Travancore. Section 3.3 analyses the rise of new classes in Travancore and the decline of the old elite, the Nairs. Section 3.4 presents the expansion of education in Travancore from 1865 -1930. Education was a tool for mobility hence a site of social conflict. The socio- political struggles of the 19th century were a direct result of the conflict between the emergent class and the old elites. Section 3.5 presents a general framework of the socio- political struggles in Travancore. Section 3.6 analyses the ideology, organisation and the political struggles of SNDP. Section 3.7 looks at the socio- political struggles of 1890 – 1930 in which SNDP was an active participant. Section 3.8 is the concluding section. This section looks at the changes in socio- economic situation in Travancore following the great depression of 1930 and its effects on the further development of SNDP as a political pressure group.

3.1 Change in Travancore economy 1850 – 1930: A synoptic view

In the traditional society production was mainly for subsistence and land and labour were the major factors of production. Colonial rule introduced a third factor of production, capital and the rule was geared towards primitive capital accumulation. This was achieved by introducing changes in the nature of the economy. Their interest was in extracting as much as surplus as they could. Reinvestments of part of this surplus to increase productivity were kept at a minimum. In Travancore colonial exploitation was

through the plantation sector. As the demand for coconut products, pepper, rubber, tea and coffee increased in the world market plantation sector developed in Travancore (Nair 1991).

Expansion of plantation sector had drastic consequences on Travancore economy and society. Cropping pattern changed from paddy cultivation to perennial commercial crops (Nair 1991). With the introduction of commercial crops, paddy production became less profitable mainly because it required good irrigation facilities and the colonial state did not invest in such productive expenditure. Further, for developing capitalist farming they required a mobile labour force for which they found slavery to be an obstacle and abolished it. Since paddy cultivation is labour intensive, the increased use of family and wage labour instead of slave labour in paddy farms made paddy cultivation highly expensive. The price of paddy was less compared to commercial crops making paddy cultivation less profitable (Nair 1991).

The shift in cropping pattern changed Travancore from a food surplus economy to a food deficit economy. A market for the sale of commercial products developed and food had to be imported from outside. The commercialization of agriculture led to increased monetization of the economy. A merchant class developed around the plantation sector, who functioned as intermediaries between the actual producers and the export firms run by Europeans. Agro-processing industries like coir manufacturing and cashew processing also developed during this period.

Travancore agriculture thus developed two tendencies: a capitalist and a semi-feudal. What constitutes a capitalist or a semi-feudal mode of production? Where capitalist mode of production is established there will be wage labour as opposed to slave or unfree labour and there will be reinvestment of the surplus, for profit generation. The produce will be sold in the market and the price in the market decides what will be grown and where. The colonial mode of production had some features of both capitalist and feudal modes of production. Thus in Travancore there was simultaneous co-existence of an advanced plantation sector and backward subsistence agriculture. (Nair 1991). Plantation sector had large land holdings, used wage labour and reinvested capital. Production was geared for sale in the market. Backward agriculture on the other hand, was conducted in fragmented holdings, produced mainly paddy and tapioca meant for

subsistence using the most primitive technology. The incursion of capital in agriculture was limited. Colonial exploitation in Travancore operated chiefly through the plantation sector.

Production relations drastically changed with the introduction of plantation sector. Relation to land defined each castes position in a feudal economy. Those who controlled the land were the dominant classes and they ruled and administered territories. In Travancore land was inalienable (Miller 1952; Shea 1959). But with the expansion of plantation sector, markets for land and labour were created. Population also increased in a Malthusian fashion during this period. The combined effect of unproductive paddy cultivation, population pressure, and a change in inheritance rights which allowed the sale of land led to fragmentation and sub - division of land holdings (Nair 1991). Fragmentation and sub - division made traditional agriculture more unproductive. The moneyed merchant class made intrusion in to agriculture and started upsetting traditional patterns of ownership.

Pre - capitalist relations of exploitation were super - imposed on capitalist relations. There was exploitation through wage labour, non-contractual tenancy and bonded labour considered as hall mark of a feudal mode of surplus extraction. Studying the development of ethnic identities in Kerala, Kurien points out that in the first phase of colonialism existing social relations were harnessed for revenue generation and political control. In the process there was an increase in the exploitation of the lower strata and empowerment of the elites (Kurien 1994). In the second phase, compulsions of the market economy and a modern state necessitated an overthrow of the existing stratification system. Social conflict generated by changing social relations manifested in different ways in different parts of colonial India. There were peasant revolts, communal tensions, caste mobilizations and rise of political parties across colonial India. Kerala also experienced increased social conflict from 1860's to 1940's.

While Malabar went through a series of peasant uprisings caste movements were endemic in Travancore. What was behind such a difference in social response to development of new social relations in Malabar and Travancore? Nature of land relations was different in Travancore and Malabar. In Malabar colonial administration conferred property rights on the Janmi (Miller 1952; Shea 1959). To meet the increased burden of

taxation and to make super profits the Janmi often increased the rent at will. The number of intermediaries between the actual producer and the state increased. Peasants were often not even left with enough surpluses for subsistence. A series of peasant revolts by the pauperized Mappilla peasantry against the Hindu land lords and the state rocked colonial Kerala (Gough 1968- 69). While in Travancore, a different tenancy system was followed. Travancorean cultivator was relatively secure and less exploited than their counterparts in Malabar. The major conflict was between those who were the entrenched classes and those who had newly acquired land and wealth. This conflict was further exacerbated by the princely Savarna government's dictates whose caste rules and laws were an impediment for the emerging class. Class conflict between the propertied took the form of caste movements. Similar to an all India pattern, working class and the pauperized peasants were mobilized only in a later stage in both Travancore and Malabar (Namboodiripad; social scientist 1979)

3.1.1 Travancore on the brink of a change

From 1860 – 1930 social relations in Travancore changed drastically. Landed Nairs lost their land to Syrian Christians and Ezhavas, a new class of traders and merchants emerged, peasantry was impoverished with a number of them joining the ranks of agricultural labourers.

3.1 Land ownership by caste groups - 1875

Caste	Total no of males	Total no of cultivators	Cultivators as a %of total population	Total no of agricultural workers	Agricultural workers as a %of total population
Nair	218,030	98,330	45%	12,490	6%
Christians	233,860	54,700	23%	29,590	13%
Ezhava	188,400	26,890	14%	4,6400	21%
Shannars	48,220	6,370	13%	8,450	18%
Foreign	14,520	2,536	18%	—	—

Brahmins					
Malayali Brahmins	5,840	527	9%	—	—
Pulayas	94,790	2,280	2%	55,040	58%

Source : (Jeffery 1967)

The above table reveals that only 14% of the total Ezhava population was engaged in agriculture in 1857 either as cultivators or as agriculture labourers. Roughly around this period in order to increase the *Sarkar* revenue, *Sarkar* encouraged communities like Ezhavas and Syrian Christians to take up waste land and to extent their holding, and thus their land holding were extended as early as 1820 (Jeffrey 1967).

There is no community wise data for the same period on those who were engaged in trade in Travancore. But it has been reported that Ezhavas had taken to trade especially as intermediaries for European firms who dealt in coir and pepper (Jeffrey 1976). By 1875 Ezhavas had a higher percentage of stakes in trade than any other Hindu community. By the beginning of 1850's trade both internal (trade in pepper, tobacco, toddy, food grains and British made factory goods) and external (tea, coffee coir, and cashew) increased in Travancore. Ezhavas and Syrian Christians were traders before colonial conquest too. "But while in 1847, when trade was little used, land was difficult to transfer and the *Sarkar* was attempting to operate the most lucrative trade as monopolies, commercial pursuits did not bring in telling advantage but they imparted skills, which would help those who were first in the field like Syrian Christians and the Ezhavas" (Jeffrey 1976).

The period from 1850 to 1930 witnessed dynamic changes in the Travancore economy. These changes were brought in by the introduction of plantation sector, aggressive extension of land under cultivation, and growth of trade and industry chiefly around the plantation sector. Changes in agrarian relations led to the rise of a new class drawn form Syrian Christian and the Ezhava.

3.2 Growth of plantation sector in Travancore 1860 – 1930

Slavery was abolished in 1855 by the consistent efforts of the missionaries (Dick 1989). By 1860 the Travancore government responding to British pressure embarked on a

series of administrative reforms (construction of roads, extension of holdings, tenancy reforms, introduction of bureaucracy and expansion of education). These reforms encouraged the development of a cash economy and spread of education.

The single most important event which had drastic effects on the social relations in Kerala was the setting up of plantation sector.

The low rate of assessment, cheap labour and good transportation facilities attracted British capitalist to invest in plantation industry in Travancore. From 1860 the British resident at the behest of the plantation lobby took many policies conducive to the development of plantation sector in Travancore. Land suitable for coffee and tea cultivation was made available at cheap rates, its ownership rights could easily be obtained and land tax remained low. Labour control was facilitated by the criminal breach of Contract Act (1865) and the Coffee Stealing Prevention Act (1879) (Paul Balk 1992). The agreement between the government and the plantation sector exempted them from export duty. They only have to pay land tax. The import duty was almost non-existent for the plantation sector. There were areas in Travancore where there was a power vacuum, unlike the case of British Malabar which was efficiently ruled by the British. Many a time land was usurped both by the foreign capitalist and the Indian capitalist, and land was leased in or bought at favourable rates (Paul Balk 1992). The political environment in the state was conducive to the development of plantation sector in Travancore.

In 1860 Madhava Rao, organized a public works department with the cooperation and encouragement of the British resident for constructing roads and highways to promote trade and commerce (Mohan 1987). The period from 1856 - 66 saw the public works department employing 10,000 Ezhavas and other low caste coolies on daily wages in their developmental work (Robin Jeffrey 1976). Residents also showed an interest in developing a system of communication which would aid the exploitation of resources. This was intended to advance the interests of those British capitalists who had invested in plantations in Kerala (Griffiths 1967:157).

There were real obstacles for Indian investment in the plantation sector. At the first sight of any competition, the European planters used their influence with the British resident to drive them out (Tharakkan and Tharian 1985). The areas owned by Europeans

were large and with the shift to tea cultivation the situation worsened for Indian capitalist. A few Travancoreans entered into joint ventures with foreign capital.

3.2 Tea cultivation in Travancore and Madras

Period	Average acres Travancore	Average acres Madras	Average production (pounds) Travancore	Average production Madras
1885 – 89	3,352 #	5,558	342,718#	
1890- 94	7,186#	5,385	1,735,803#	
1895-99	15,682#	7,016	3,505,938#	
1900-04	24,931	7,263	6,107,429	

Source: Report on the production of tea in India, from trade journal, p 10

#Cochin State included --

We could very well see the quantum jump in the area as well as in the production of tea towards the fag end of the century. This had far-reaching implication for the economy of the state as this was the first capitalist venture in agriculture using strictly wage labour. For the first time peasants and agricultural labourers were uprooted from their self sufficient villages. Most of the labourers came from the densely populated areas of Travancore and from Madras (Griffins 1967). In 1904 about 18,000 permanent and temporary workers were involved in the plantation sector in Travancore (Paul Balk 1992). The wages increased during this period from one and half Ana and one meal for a days work to 4 Ana's and one meal. Skilled workmen could get even up to a rupee a day by the end of the century. The wages of the non – agricultural labourers in plantation industry rose by 168% and of that of artisans increased by 140 % (Mateer 1883).

The creation of a labour market consequent to the abolition of slavery had a drastic effect on traditional agriculture. It increased the cost of cultivation. In the face of unremunerative prices for paddy and other traditional food crops, high tax rates and wages, and absence of government spending on irrigation works, many peasants sold their land and joined the ranks of casual labourers. Cropping pattern in the state changed when agricultural production was exposed to the influence of the market. Increase in the area of cultivation during 1906- 1936 was 32.37%. Out of this, the area under paddy

increased only 2% while the area under garden crops increased 47% (Nair 1991). Coconut, cashew, banana, areca nut and pineapple were the most important cash crops of Travancore in the early phase. Later tea and coffee plantations also increased. A remarkable growth in the acreage of garden crops was also recorded. The tenancy reforms further eroded the acreage under food grains. Tenants increasingly turned to cash crops when law allowed them to grow what they wanted to. A lot of peasants were pauperised in the process. Gough reports that across south India there was an emerging pattern of increase in the proportion of middle peasants to agricultural labourers (Gough 1969) whereas traditional agriculture and those who are dependent on it suffered with introduction of plantation sector.

But a new class of cultivators emerged, those of the capitalist farmer. Those who took to capitalist farming were mostly drawn from the Syrian Christian community. A few Ezhavas had also extended their holdings.

Earlier the Nairs had held *Sarkar Pattom*, a tenure which excluded sale and mortgage of land. Most of the tax and rent was paid in kind so the Nairs had no experience with the cash economy which was developing in the state. Syrian Christians while having considerable interest in land were not wedded to it like the Nairs. The family system of the Nairs which was more geared towards keeping the land from alienation and fragmentation was not suitable for individual initiative which was required for converting waste land and extending land holding which was occurring at a fast rate in Travancore (Aiyappan 1965; Jeffrey 1976).

At the same time when *Sarkar Pattoms* were made saleable, large scale land transactions happened and the excuse that the Tharavad *Karanavar* gave for not investing in education of the nephews disappeared. The chief buyers of this were Ezhavas and the Syrian Christians. The author of the second state manual points out that the kind of land fragmentation that happened in Travancore could not be seen any where else in India. He found land sale to be highest during 1925; 30 years following the adoption of inheritance laws by the major land owning communities.

Land transactions in Travancore 1926 – 1940(in %)

Caste	1926		1930		1935		1940	
	Sellers	buyers	sellers	buyers	sellers	buyers	sellers	buyers
Namboodiri	04.5	02.7	04.3	0.27	03.4	03.2	03.0	02.4
Nair	38.6	29.2	41.6	36.1	44.4	36.2	47.2	27.7
Ezhava	10.2	12.7	13.3	15.8	14.7	17.2	14.2	13.1
Backward Hindu	01.9	01.6	01.6	01.9	01.5	----	02.0	02.0
Syrians	23.8	33.9	19.5	25.5	17.7	22.2	18.3	28.00
Muslims	00.2	04.7	04.3	04.2	04.1	03.8	4.4	5.2

Source: Quoted in S. Saradomani. The emergence of a slave caste- Pulayas of Kerala

3.3 Decline of Nair dominance and the rise of new classes 1850 - 1920

The land reforms introduced after 1865 conferred fixity of tenure and ensured permanent occupancy rights. In north Travancore in 1904 out of 261 big land lords who were paying 100 rupees or more as land tax, eight were Ezhavas (Vivekodayam Jan – Feb. 1909). The Ezhavas were generally tenants. The new law also benefited Ezhavas who were sub – tenants. Communities like Syrian Christians and Ezhavas took advantage of the new economic opportunities and increased their land holding.

The most important effect of legalization was that, unknowingly this led to the decline of Nair dominance (Robin Jeffrey 1976). Sub tenants could no longer be evicted, slave labour was not available, increased wages had to be paid to labourers as plantation and *Sarkar* employment drove up the wages, and capitalist rent came down. The matrilineal family structure was not suitable for capitalist farming which was slowly developing in the state. The cumbersome matrilineal extend family, with its many

disputes on ownership, made sure that ready cash was not available for investment in capitalist farming. This period thus witnessed a decline of Nair dominance with huge land sale and mortgages by them and a disintegration of their matrilineal joint - family. Their decline was recited by the costly litigation they entered into after the abolition of matrilineal joint family (Jeffrey 1976).

3.4 Expansion of education 1965 – 1930

There was a clear increase in demand as well as supply for schools following 1965. What gave a real impetus to the spread of education was the need for educated persons to run the modern administrative system that was developing in the state. Dewan

Madhava Rao introduced an administrative network based on merit and started modern government schools. What the provincial administration wanted, were people to man the lower end jobs; hence primary education was encouraged. Most of the demand for education was for vernacular primary education. In 1901 English schools numbered 112 or 3 % of the total number of schools, while the number of vernacular schools stood at 3, 560 constituting 96.7 % of the total schools (Tharakkan, 1984). Demand for education was more for increasing basic literary skills suitable for a commercialized economy.

There was a phenomenal expansion of education in Travancore during this period. In 1905 more than one fifth of the total expenditure of government was spend on education (Dick 1992). This was unlike the situation in 1865 when there were only 20 government school. In 1863 the situation was far worse. There were only 9 government schools and the total student strength was 1580 (Jeffrey 1967). There was not even one Ezhava in these government run schools. From the table below the steady increase in government expenditure on education from 1871 can be seen.

3.4 Government expenditure on education, Travancore 1871- 1905

Year	Amount in rupees ,1000s
1871 – 72	110
1884- 85	218
1894– 95	596
1904- 05	611

Source PRG Nair 1978, chapter 3,p 52 table 3.6

The Government followed a dual policy of encouraging private expenditure in addition to the government investment in education. During their financial constraints, the princely states encouraged private educational institutes by providing handsome subsidies. There was a drastic increase in the number of private schools during this period. Christian management schools receiving grants in aid increased from 241 to 712 between 1875 and 1895 (Mathew 1989). By 1892 64 % of students were educated in grants - in - aid schools. There was a further increase in the following years discernable from the table below.

3.5 Number of schools and students distributed according to type of management, Travancore 1901- 02

Management	Number of schools	% of schools	Number of students	% students in each category.
Government	429	11.6	45,834	24.8
Private aided	941	25	51,383	27.8
Private unaided	2,313	62.9	87,422	47.4
Total	3,683	100	1,84,639	100

Source: Quoted from Michel Tharakkan p no 1915

Education by now had developed into a good business investment. The private agencies had developed deep vested interests in their educational institutions as a means of influence, as well as, for the monetary benefit accruing from the grants in aid. The attempt at curbing their power in the form of education code from 1910 saw a decline in the number of private schools. But the government had to withdraw in the face of public out cry. Consequently 2000 private educational institutions reappeared in 1914(Mathew 1981; Nair 1981)

3.4.1 Education as a site of struggle

Education had become an important source of mobility for the middle class by now. There was fierce competition to get educated and find a *Sarkar* job or clerical and managerial work in the plantation sector.

Government education helped the upper castes more especially the Nairs, and hence they could hold on to their dominant position. They could easily get government jobs with the patronage of the *Savarna* government. The Maharaja appealed to the Nairs

to take up education so that they could fill up the new administrative posts created in the state. The advances, the Nairs made in education helped them in maintaining their hegemony when it was getting progressively threatened by an emergent group from the Syrian Christians and Ezhava middle class.

The struggles that the Ezhava association led in this century were mostly around entry into schools and jobs in government departments. The entry in to school was a moot point for the Ezhavas. The other communities like Syrian Christians, both the Catholics and the Protestants had started their own school networks, from as early as 1880. During 1882 – 1887 the number of schools under the Catholic Management increased from 10 to 1,000. (P.R.G Nair 1981).The only hopes for getting a decent education was in the schools run by the Christian missionaries or the government. At the same time while the Syrian Christians where busy setting up colleges and English medium schools, the Ezhavas being less wealthy than them, were engaged in removing their social disabilities which hindered their further advancement.

3.5 The rise of caste associations 1865 - 1920

We witness a rise of caste association in the period, 1865 – 1880. As we have seen the sweeping socio – economic changes had led to the creation of a small middle class within the Ezhava community. It had also led to a decline in the dominance of Nairs. The period significantly witnessed the emergence of the Syrian Christians as a dominant caste. Caste associations were primarily an expression of the conflict between these groups in their fight for supremacy.

Caste associations primarily concentrated on pressurising the government for education, government employment and political representation. Because of the insufficient development of capitalism in agriculture and development of industry, education and government jobs were an important source of mobility. The caste bias of an overt Savarna administration explained to a large extent the political struggles in the 19th century of Travancore. In the *Savarna* ruled Travancore, recruitment to Government Departments like revenue, *Devaswom* (temple management) and Army (Nair brigades) was solely on the basis of caste. Avarna castes were also debarred from entry in to schools. Caste association came up in this period to remove the social disabilities, the different communities suffered in their march to capitalism.

The political action was facilitated by census operations which for the first time developed monolith caste blocks thus distorting reality of disparate localized jatis (Djck 1992). This provided the rising middle class with a political weapon, the argument of talking for the benefit of a whole caste group, be it the Ezhavas or the Nairs. At the same time caste provided a ready made vehicle for political mobilization (Jeffrey 1980; Srinivas 1967). The British indirectly ruled areas and princely areas encouraged this kind of political mobilization by playing one group against another and nurturing these cliques (Washer brook, Paul Brass 1974).

Spread of education and literacy created a favourable environment for political mobilization. Education had an ideological effect too. Students who were living in a predominantly feudal set up were taught a liberal capitalist ideology through subjects like civics, money, entrepreneurship, political economy and English literature. The contradiction between an ideal liberal state and their feudal social reality was felt by many. Early members of the caste association were mostly drawn from this English educated class, with Victorian morals who found their family system and pollution codes uncivilized (Jeffrey 1976, 1977).

3.5.1 The Rise of Political Struggles in Travancore 1980 – 1930

The period from 1980 was characterized by intense political struggles for domination led by the new rising elite. They were mainly drawn from those sections of the community that got education and hence was infused with modern ideas. The first to start a political struggle were the Nairs. This was the period in which the Nair dominance was starting to decline. At the same time as the dominant Savarna caste, they were the first to take to modern education and get in to Government services (Robin Jeffrey, 1980). The small holding families of Nairs especially in the areas of Central and Northern Travancore were threatened by the rising might of the Syrian Christians. They found it more difficult to perform the ceremonies, which its status demanded, at the same time meet the rising cost of food and education (Jeffrey 1976). It is in this background where matrilineal family system was seen as a hindrance by a large section of Nairs that NSS, (Nair Service Society) caste association of the Nairs came in to existence. The NSS campaigned successfully for Marriage Reform Legislation. The Nair act was enacted in 1925 by which a member of the matrilineal family could take his share and leave. They

also campaigned for abolition of sub -caste differences (Jeffrey 1977). NSS activities registered an increase in competition for resources in post 1920 Travancore.

This section will discuss the political struggles till 1920. A demarcation was made, for after this period, Nair dominance registered further decline, the result of political struggles by different caste associations.

3.5.2 The Origins of the Malayali Memorial

This section will briefly discuss the origin of the Malayali memorial, first ever political action, with a modern rhetoric in Travancore. From 1817 to 1914 with three exceptions, the *Dewans* of Travancore were Non-Malayali Brahmins and they held between 25 to 30% of all *Sarkar* jobs worth Rupees 10 or more in Travancore. In the 1870's the Nairs did not object to it much, for the bureaucracy was expanding rapidly enough to absorb almost all the educated Nairs (Jeffrey 1976). But this began to change by 1880. The Nairs had to resort to political mobilization because of the competitive pluralistic political environment existing in Travancore. This required that sub caste differences among Nairs be swept aside (Jeffrey 1977). Since the Memorial was based on mass mobilization, the leaders had to choose a political symbol and ideology which would appeal to the masses as well as the Raja and the British to whom it is addressed. Thus the theme of the anti-Brahmanism was used as a political symbol to show that Nairs had to be favoured in appointments. The leadership of the Memorial was almost exclusively drawn from the western educated Nairs. The Memorial which was signed by 18,000 people were circulated through out Travancore and was presented to the Maharaja in 1891.

The Memorial divided the population of Travancore in to Malayali Hindus which constituted 60% of the population and Christians 13% of the population who together constituted the native population of Travancore. Then there were foreign Hindus who constituted 13% of the population but cornered 80% of the *Sarkar* jobs (Jeffrey 1977). Census data was brought in to prove this claim and the memorial asked for more representation for the native Travancoreans.

The immediate outcome of the memorial was that in the coming years the foreign Brahmin Dewan came to accommodate arrangements with the leaders of the Memorial (Jeffrey1977). The most important consequence of the Memorial was the political

message it gave to others who wanted to launch political agitations. The political advantage of organizing around ethnic block for advancing economic interests sunk into the minds of middle class segments in all castes. The political techniques of petition and mass mobilization were employed in the subsequent period by both the Syrian Christians and the Ezhava middle classes. Nairs paradoxically undermined the caste system on which their hegemony was sustained. The liberal ideology of a person, worth assessed by merit, and a liberal political ideology of democratic support of the masses, eroded the legitimacy of caste ideology based on the divine superiority of the upper caste and their political rule based on divine right.

3.6 The Origin of SNDP

At the turn of the century Ezhavas constituted 17% of the total population of Travancore. Out of the total 25 lakhs population in Travancore there were five lakh Ezhavas, and stood second. They were beyond the pale of Hindu society. Even though their position was better than the other lower castes, they could not enter temples and schools and could not walk on the public roads. Ezhavas were divided in to many sub-castes. This caste group contained such diverse occupational groups like *Ayurveda* Doctors, Weavers, Toddy tappers, Agricultural and Plantation Labourers, Property Owners, Tenants and Sub- Tenants.

According to 1901 census there were 175 Ezhavas who were literate in English and 10% of the total Ezhava population was literate in Malayalam (Jeffrey 1974). A section of middle class emerged from among the Eshavas by the turn of the century. While an educated section made its appearance they were not allowed to sit for the Common Entrance Exam, which was the eligibility criterion for *Sarkar* jobs. Their children were not admitted to the *Sarkar* schools citing pollution codes. For the Ezhava middle class to advance socially and economically an association was found to be necessary. SNDP Yogam was founded by Dr. Palpu who himself had failed to get in to the *Sarkar* School and later on a job in Travancore despite excellent qualifications and was forced to seek a job in the neighbouring Mysore, from where he organized the political activities of the Yogam.

Palpu was also a signatory of the Malayali Memorial. P.K. Balakrishnan describes the Malayali Memorial as a palace revolt by the Nairs for which the Ezhavas were only

co-opted (P.K Balakrishnan 1987) and the mention of Ezhava grievances was confined to one paragraph, where the memorial points out, the lack of even one Ezhava in Travancore State service while there were many in the British service. Balakrishnan points out that the Malayali memorial bemoaned the decline of Nair dominance in the political sphere of Travancore.

Thus in 1896 under the leadership of Palpu an Ezhava memorial was submitted with 13176 Ezhava signatures. This was the first attempt at organizing the Ezhavas. The memorial asked for access to education and public employment. The chief news paper Malayala Manorama reported it favourably. The paper pointed out that there are many tax payers among Ezhavas. Surely then they should be allowed to use government schools which were run with tax payers money (Dick 1992). Dewan, in his reply to the memorialists refused to let Ezhava children study with Nair kids. Dewan told the petitioners that there was enough number of Ezhava schools to cater to the educational needs of the community. Palpu gave another memorial to British administration in 1900, but with out much result.

It is the failure of the memorials which convinced Palpu to organize politically. At around this time, in 1888 Sree Narayana Guru was emerging as a cult figure of the Ezhavas. He consecrated an Ezhava Shiva temple in Arvipuram and directly challenged Brahmanical Hinduism. Common illiterate Ezhavas were attracted to him for the healing magical powers he was supposed to have possessed. Palpu teamed up with guru to uplift the community from the degrading social existence. A Yogam was established in Arvipuram by merging it with the Yogam which was managing the temple at Arvipuram.

3.6.1 Ideology of SNDP 1889 – 1920

To change the prevalent social relations in a groups favour, that group have two options. One is a direct contestation of the legitimacy of the existing ideology supporting the exploitative social relations or acceptance of the principal of hierarchy but contest the group's position in it. Studies on Indian caste movements generally tend to see the caste association in its early phase as a contestation of the group's position in hierarchy (a sanskritization tendency). Thus to climb up the social hierarchy in a hindu society, a caste group emulates the upper castes, assumes higher caste status, wear the sacred thread, attempt temple entry, change their unsanskritic religious practices and try

to be respectable in front of the hegemonic classes. According to these scholars caste movements were Sanskritic in their aims and methods. What was Sanskritic about caste movements? Was it the aim, or the methods they used to change things in a groups' favour?

To understand why caste association came up at all and what they accomplished for the group and for the society, I feel it is important not to mistake the methods the movement used with the aim of the movement. In the specific case of SNDP given the religious world in which the caste members lived, it was logical for the movement to take religious idioms. Hence sanskritization activities should be seen only as the methods the movement took to contest the oppressive social relations.

A caste movement can be Sanskritic in its aims. This happens when a movement is only interested in improving its position in society. When the movement is manned by a certain class who stand to gain from the system, direct confrontation with the system will be avoided. This group is only interested in reforming the system a little, in their favour. Movements can be Sanskritic also when the existing political economic and social system does not favour a confrontation. It can also be Sanskritic when the group fails to connect the existing oppression to the social system and hence fails to develop a coherent ideology. Why did I put so many riders to interpret a movement as Sanskritic or otherwise?

The same logic that historians gave to understand the localised, incoherent and religious nature of conflicts in feudal times holds for the study of caste movements. A movement and its ideology arise in certain socio-economic and political context. The ideology and activities of the movement cannot be studied sans this historical context. The bottom line is that caste movement will be Sanskritic or otherwise depending on the socio- political context in which it operates.

SNDP was both Sanskritic and non Sanskritic in its aims and methods at different historical times. In its beginning in 1880's it gave extreme importance to the symbolic aspects of social reality. The Savarna administration refused to consider even the entry of lower caste students into the government run schools on the plea that it will disturb the religious order. A direct attack on the ideology which justifies the existing social relations then was necessary (Lemercinier 1992). In a pre-dominantly pre –

capitalist society, the religious aspect was central, for relationship of pollution were bound with it. Thus the religious factor served as the locus of the production of an ideology of subversion. Moreover a religious leader would appeal to the illiterate masses. Here sanskritization activities were not an aim but a way of articulating dissent. Let us see the specific Sanskritic and non Sanskritic aspects of Narayana guru's ideology.

Guru's ideology was a subversion of both popular religion and Brahminical Hinduism and selective appropriation of both. This religious reform attacked not only the social religious base of Brahminical Hinduism, but also was vociferous in its attack on the non- Aryan elements in the Ezhava religious practices. Guru opposed all these practices as being primitive and as leading to social and moral degradation of the Ezhavas. For e.g. Guru pointed out that since Ezhavas were uncivilized and dirty they were kept as untouchables (Rao 1987). Hence he pointed out, that a reform from within was necessary. He understood the interconnection and interdependence between religious and social life and religious beliefs and social evils (Mohan 1987). Efforts were made to move away from paganism animal worship.

With socio- religious reform in mind he consecrated a temple with Shiva in it and introduced Ezhavas to Brahminical pantheon. After this, he consecrated images in another sixty four temples across Kerala. He emphasized temple as a mode of advancement, for he hoped this will stop evil spirit and snake worship at houses. In these new temples he offered the images, flowers and fruits instead of toddy and animal sacrifice which was the customary practice of the Ezhavas. How can we understand his attack on the folk, non-Aryan religion of Ezhavas? Why did he do it? Any social observer can see that the primitive practices like animal sacrifice made the Ezhavas disrespectable in front of the Savarna castes. Secondly the primitive beliefs kept them ignorant. By this time - with the spread of education - a liberal belief in the potential of education to free people had penetrated people's consciousness. Guru emphasized the importance of the temple for he said clean and healthy habits can be developed around them. Temple was intended as a place of community activity. He dispensed with puja in the temple and started libraries and gardens next to the temple. Even though he increasingly got disillusioned with temples he understood the need felt by the illiterate masses for the temple and spirituality.

His activities helped the Ezhavas to gain self respect and to gain respectability among some sections of the Savarna population.

Those social practices which were integral to the social domination of the upper caste like restriction on the worship of gods and goddesses of Brahmanic tradition, untouchability and inapproachability and several other social stipulations like ban on using umbrella, shoulder cloth, and public roads was challenged by the religious reform ideology (Jeffrey 1974). Guru realized the link between untouchability and hegemonic ideology of Brahmanism; hence his ideology of one caste and one god which is egalitarian in character was counter posed against the hierarchical Brahmanism. Because of this specific characteristic it is hard to categorize these reforms only as Sanskritization. His emphasis was not on Savarna temple entry, but on the creation of a new form of worship different from both popular culture and Brahmanic Hinduism (Mohan 1987).

The most important aspect of his ideology was his reinterpretation of Hinduism to suit a capitalistic ethic. Guru developed an ideology, based on the *advaita* philosophy of Sankaracharya, but he gave a radical reinterpretation to it. Thus he defined *advaita* as the unity of brotherhood. *Moksha* (salvation) could be achieved only by removing *avidya* (lack of education), due to which people of different caste were kept away from each other. His reformation of Hinduism was similar to protestant ideologies' reinterpretation of Christianity. The ideology of thrift, self help and industrious behaviour suited the new capitalist relations developing fast in Kerala. He objected to all practices not suited to a capitalistic ethic.

He opposed irrational and backward rites like *thalikettu kalayanam* (mock marriage), *thirandukuli*, (ceremonial bath for girls first menstruation), *pulikudi* (ritual at the seventh month of pregnancy) etc. These ceremonies generally pauperized families; hence Guru in order to develop the qualities of thrift exhorted their abolition. Guru exhorted Ezhavas to invest in industry and asked the rich Ezhavas to give employment to the poorer Ezhavas. Thus Guru tried to develop qualities of individual initiative and thrift among Ezhavas. These ideas apparently were more suitable for the emerging capitalist tendencies in Travancore. In the later years he asked for a complete stoppage of all temple construction and advised the Yogam to concentrate on education and agitation.

He gave the slogan of educate, agitate and organize for the Yogam. While elite found this ideology suited for their modern outlook and secular advance, Guru's spiritual qualities attracted the illiterate Ezhavas. Thus Guru became a symbol which unites the Ezhava caste, divided on sub-caste as well as class lines. Unlike the Nair association, who found it difficult to tide over sub-caste and class differences in the subsequent years, Yogam more or less put up a unified fight because of the charismatic personality of the Guru.

He used Yogam as a vehicle to spread his ideology. Lecture series by trained missionaries, who emphasised on religious reforms, modification of customs, and the need for education and industrial expansion in rural areas were conducted in many places. In consultation with Guru, Palpu and the poet Kumaran Asan started a temple Yogam with the intention of spiritually, morally and economically up-lifting the Ezhavas. Yogam gave increasing importance to abolition of sub-caste differences in the community. Yogam exhorted the caste-members to abolish all wasteful and superstitious customs of the Ezhavas. Altered personal laws or customs prepared the community for its rise in social rank (Heimsath 1978).

E.M.S Namboodiripad characterizes the Ezhava movement as the first democratic mass movement of the landless peasant masses in Kerala (E.M.S 1954). He points out that the Guru, for the first time in Kerala history build up a world view suited to the development of national unity cutting across caste and religious lines.

It will be quite erroneous to characterize SNDP in the nascent stage, only as representing the interests of the Ezhava middle class. But at the same, middle orientation was hard to refute too (M.S.A Rao 1987) Another Ezhava in the early 1860 tried to organize a similar socio-reform movement when the breast cloth controversy was at its height. But he could not take the movement off the ground due to the lack of a coherent middle class.

The first Yogam members were all land lords or government servants since the membership fee was high which a poor Ezhava could never afford. The voting right in the Yogam was also based on the level of membership fee paid by each. Thus the Yogam had different subsections within it like *sakhakal*, (comrades) who could attend meetings; *samajikar* (legislators) who had voting rights and *pradhannikal* (important members) who

got preferential treatment (Balakrishnan 1987). The issues that animated the Yogam in the early years of its establishment were also middle class pre- occupations like entry into public administration and *Sarkar School* (Jeffrey 1977). This was only a concern of few, for admission to schools and administrations was a real possibility only for a few wealthy Ezhavas.

At the same time Yogam gave importance to industry. It is also note worthy that the activities of the Yogam selectively appropriated that part of Guru's ideology which was suited to a more middle class interest. They were less radical than the Guru. Yogam which was named after Guru, which preached and practiced his doctrine of one caste, one god and one religion, remained exclusively an organization of the Ezhavas (Mohan 1987). While efforts to remove sub- caste divisions were seriously pursued by the Yogam (in fact because of the efforts of Yogam by 1931 census Ezhavas registered themselves as a single caste as against 22 subdivisions in 1891), Guru's plans of interdining and intermarriage with the lower caste was not advocated or practiced at all by the Yogam.

This shows that, mostly Yogam was interested in a caste solidarity which would help them in their political struggle. In the second annual meeting of the Yogam an industrial exhibition was held where the community proudly announced its riches (P.S. Velayudan 1978). This functioned as a means of creating a community oneness and pride in the achievements of the wealthy community members among the lower class Ezhavas. An idea of a joint -stock company of the Ezhavas was also mooted, but it did not take off. What gave more impetus to the working of the caste organization was the socio - economic changes it brought in from the period of the establishment of the Yogam in 1890 to 1925.

3.7 Socio- economic changes in Travancore 1890 – 1930

The major economic developments of this period were 1) an increase in liquor trade which benefited the today tapping community of Ezhavas. The government excise revenue went up from Rs 27 lakhs in 1910 to Rs 55 lakhs in 1920 (Jeffrey 1976). By 1900 the export value of the products of coconut palm, caring for which was the traditional occupation of the Ezhavas, exceeded Rs 80 lakhs a year. The labour for this industry was overwhelmingly Ezhava and a large number f Ezhavas were also becoming petty traders and factory owners (Jeffrey 1976). Weaving was another occupation lending

itself to small scale capitalism. In spite of the First World War, the market for coir products expanded. In 1914 exports of the manufactured coir and matting were valued at Rs 8.2 lakhs and they were worth Rs. 24.5 by 1921(Jeffrey 1976). This period was conducive to the development of an Ezhava middle class. While population increased by 10 % in this period people supported by liberal arts and professions increased by 56%and those supported by trade by 26 %(Jeffrey 1976).

3.6 Population supported by Trade and Professions in Travancore: 1911- 1921

Population supported by	1911	%of total population	1921	%of total population	% of increase
Professions and liberal arts	97,729	2.9	142,398	3.6	24
Trade	285,333	8.3	333,314	8.5	46

Source: Jeffrey, Robin 1976, Temple entry movement in Kerala

While there were three times as many Ezhava traders as a Nair trade even among the professions there was a significant number of Ezhavas.

3.7 Nairs and Ezhavas in trade and professions 1921

Occupation	Nairs	Ezhavas
Traders	15,449	42,438
Lawyers Doctors Teachers	10,568	2,326
Public administration	5,172	346
Artisan and other workers	13,966	77,456

Source :(Jeffrey, ibid)

As economic status improved among the Ezhavas educated among them registered an increase. Literacy among Ezhava males went up from 12 % in 1911 to 36 % in 1921. Over all literacy in this period also increased from 29% to 38 %. In 1917 10 % of the total Travancore population was in schools. The number of Ezhava English educated increased from 1,441 to 5,202 from 1911 to 1931. In the same period, for the Nairs those who were English educated more than doubled from 3, 0007 to 8,226. In the same period

.there was a greater increase of the Christians, for whom the increase was from 10,129 to 378,296.

Christians with their wealth turned first to rubber plantation and then to export of cashewnut. Their surplus was invested to start banks. Out of 50 banks operating in Travancore at that time 11 belonged to the Syrian Christians .There was also a large segment of land holders among them (Jeffrey, 1967).

Thus the stage was set for a struggle for dominance and resources among the Christians, Ezhavas and the Nairs. While the Christians had almost caught up with the Nairs, Ezhavas were slowly emerging as a contentious group. The political struggles waged by the associations revolved around greater access to education and administration and a role in the political process among these groups. The elite among these caste groups increasingly used the caste associations to further their advance.

This period also saw the emergence of a working class around the coir industry (Isaac 1985; 1990) Class differentiation was acute among the Ezhavas. This coupled with spread of political consciousness among the working class of the Ezhavas ensured that there would be contradictory pulls within the SNDP (Osella 2000). The period of the leadership of Palpu, and Kumaran Asan were associated with a middle class fight for education and opening of public employment. But with the leadership of Madhavan, who widened the mass base of the SNDP and launched the association structure for temple entry, the contradictory pull in the association became all too apparent. The Yogam was split among those who allied with the administration or the old guard and the moderates like Madhavan who believed in the power of political mobilization and alignment with caste Hindus and radicals who moved to socialist and communist parties.

3.7.1 Political struggles of SNDP, church and the NSS: The period of intense rivalry and alliance

With economic improvement in the position of the Ezhavas and Syrian Christians, class struggles broke out in the form of caste riots in this period. At the second annual of the Yogam there was an industrial exhibition and a procession to the Yogam Mandir. This was a show of community strength which was still followed as a means for enhancing the political clout of the Ezhavas, Nairs and the Syrian Christians in Kerala. The organizational strength of the SNDP threatened the Nairs. An impression was created

among a section of the Nairs and the Ezhavas that the Yogam would be there for the Ezhavas. At the same time, the Yogam with its activities of public propaganda was actively destroying the ideological basis of the caste system, which was crucial for the continuing hegemony of the Nairs. Nairs resented symbolic subversion of caste system by the Ezhavas whose women started wearing the breast cloth. Some Ezhava students were forcibly admitted in a school in Haripad.

Thus in 1904 there broke out a Nair – Ezhava riot (Velayudhan 1978). SNDP stepped in as the natural spokesperson of the Ezhavas and circulated the news in all news paper and asked the government for help. Pollution codes were violated (P.S. Velayudhan 1978). As said before the social relations of the people were intimately linked with the pollution codes of the Brahminic ideologies. So to effect an immediate change in social relations it was important to violate this pollution codes. Thus the fight was symbolic only for us and was real for the people who were engaged in it. SNDP emerged as the natural spokes person of the Ezhava community after the Nair- Ezhava riot of 1904.

In this period, political mobilization was over issues of access to education and representation in the legislature. In 1888, the first legislation of a princely state was introduced in Travancore. The body was merely of advisory nature, with no right to ask questions and pass resolutions. On the lines of the 1898 Indian Council act 1904 *Sree MulamPraja Sabha* was constituted, consisting of land lords and traders of the state. The Dewan had to present reports to this Sabha once a year. With the 1912 Minto – Morley reforms, in 1921 limited franchise was introduced and members could ask questions. But the members were elected on the basis of property and educational qualification (Dick 1992).

The government nominated one or two members from each community and Kumaran Asan represented the Ezhavas from the inception of the assembly till 1931. A nominated or an elected presence in the assembly was crucial for safe guarding the interests of the community members for it brought the community members in contact with the bureaucratic & administrative structure. This helped them in developing patronage net works (Dick 1992). It brought council members closer to centres of power and offered them a platform to approach the administration. Council membership was also a source of prestige for the community concerned. Thus Kumaran Asan was able to

provide many Ezhavas public employment through his association with the ruling *Dewan* and the *Sarkar*.

By the end of the 1930, with these political efforts all most all government schools were opened for the Ezhavas and a large number of Ezhavas found public employment in Travancore State Service itself. An analysis of Kumaran Asan's speech in the assembly shows the different stages by which the community over stepped its social disabilities. On 28th February 1916 he complained about castes fellows, lower to Ezhavas being admitted to *Sarkar* schools while Ezhavas were excluded (Ravinder 1972). He critiqued the caste ideology which ostensibly stood in the way of admitting the Ezhavas to government schools and hostels and from gainful employment in police force. He asked for fee concessions for the backward Ezhavas. In the fourth meeting of the assembly Govindan presented a memorial signed by 64 assembly representatives for the free admission of all Ezhava kids to government schools. By these efforts an education code was passed in 1908 (Ravinder 1972). The proclamation opened all schools to the children of the Ezhavas. Royal order requested those schools near temples to shift to neutral places.

He also asked for admission of Ezhavas to Sanskrit and Ayurvedic colleges. He requested the administration to put up such institutions in places accessible to Ezhavas. At the same time he also brought in front of the assembly the daily incidents of oppression that Ezhavas faced. Many a times he pointed out how Ezhavas where not allowed to go to school for the local population supported by the upper caste officers prevented their admission (Ravinder 1972). He besieged the government to shift the schools from near temples and public roads where the Ezhavas could not go due to the pollution rules. He pointed out that in many instances the schools were so constructed to stop the Ezhavas from accessing government education (Ravinder 1972). While there was not even one Ezhava in public employment in 1901, with his efforts, there were 120 appointments by 1913. He asked for more representation in police and excise.

The issue of public employment came to a head around this period. Many in the community who got educated found that they could not get public employment due to pollution codes. Thus Christians and Ezhavas were denied employment in Devaswom (temple management) and police. The Dewan pointed out that both the department

employees had to enter temples and houses of upper castes and that pollution codes does not permit the Dewan to give employment to non - hindus and Avarna hindu castes. Land revenue department was entrusted with job of temple management too. This meant that a large share of public employment was reserved for the Savarna castes. With the success of the Malayali Memorial Nairs dominated public employment and this was resented by other communities.

Since class consciousness had not crystallized and parties had not made their appearance the conflict of interests among the elites were resolved through the alliance of caste associations. Syrian Christians and the Ezhavas came together to form the civic league. The league pointed out that out of the 4000 jobs in the crucial revenue department 3800 were held by caste – Hindus (Jeffrey 1976). In 1922 political struggles of the league resulted in the bifurcation of revenue and Devaswom departments. Christians gained hugely from this for they were more educated than the Ezhavas and did not suffer from civil disabilities like untouchability and inapproachability.

This period, in addition to petitioning the government, Yogam worked to spread and expand the organization. In 1922, membership fee was reduced. An attempt to organize peasantry was done, but there was a lack of enthusiasm among the leadership to such attempts (E.M.S.Namboodiripad 1954). Association opened branches at the local and taluk level. But in 1926 this was not a great success.

Yogam did much to popularize guru's ideology through subsidiary associations. Lectures and conferences were conducted to spread the ideology (Ravinder 1972). Thus by the end of this period Ezhavas got "sanskritized", their marriage and religious practices were reformed. But the social reform was mostly confined to students, lawyers, doctors, government officers, petty traders and small peasants. This was due to limited mobility, education and above all existence of old feudal relations of a section of big peasants, traders and masses kept away from the movement (E.M.S.Namboodiripad 1954).

Madhavan, an ardent congress supporter made a real attempt to organise the Ezhava masses. He felt that, the obstacle for advancement of the community was the pollution code, hence Yogam under his secretarship decided to press for temple entry (Vivekodayam 15th July 1905, no 12 p 3). Pollution hindered the middle classes from

entering government jobs and the trades from the smooth operation of their business. The prohibition on the use of certain roads ensured that they could not extend their trade to places near the temple (Petition, under official papers, Travancore .file no 404of 1907 p 1).The Ezhava elite resented the humiliation meted to them due to pollution codes. They were taxpayers, and their money was also used for the upkeep of the temple, but they were not allowed to enter it. This enraged the English educated middle class.

Madhavan, the new secretary of the Yogam was inducted in to the ideology of INC and believed in the efficacy of political mobilization to effect change. He spread activists across the state for membership .At this time around, the INC was involved in activities for the upliftment of Harijians. At the same time the Ezhava elite was disillusioned with the alliance made with the Christians. Nairs were looking for a counter weight-against the emerging Christians.. Madhavan understood that without civic and social rights, political rights could not be advanced hence he looked for measures which would help them in social upliftment. The two means which were mooted were conversion and reformation of Hinduism. A section of SNDP favoured conversion, while Madhavan believed in staying within the Hindu fold by a Sanskritization technique (temple entry).

For a symbolic fight like temple entry, since having limited real consequences on social relations, there was a support from the progressive among the upper caste. What was striking was that for those measures like public employment, education which could effect drastic changes in the social relation no such support from the upper caste was forthcoming. At the All India level too, progressive sections among the upper caste cooperated with lower caste, for social reforms intended at the change in symbolic order, (Dick 1989; Heimsath 1978).

Thus Madhavan's strategy was a limited success as well as failure. Vaikom Satyagraha of the 1921 was a turning point for the association for it showed the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the movement to effect changes. Temple entry broke the religious basis of pollution code. This in itself was significant, for it removed certain civic disabilities confronting the Ezhavas. But a reworking of the social relations required methods like land reforms which would break the structural bias of the disabilities

suffered by the Ezhavas. This, given the middle class biases in the association was not advocated.

Within the Ezhava community there were voices of dissent. Sahodaran Aiyappan considered as a radical and a real follower of Guru questioned the efficacy of measures like temple entry in effecting changes in the social relations of poor Ezhavas. Some in the community advocated more radical methods to effect change and later on turned to the Communist and Socialist Parties. But the debates on temple entry and the political struggles for it radicalised the Ezhava peasantry and workers.

Around this time limited franchise was also granted on the basis of educational and property qualifications. Till 1931 there was not even one elected Ezhava member in the assembly. The number of Syrian Christians was also low, for while there was land transfer from Nairs to Ezhavas and Syrian Christians during this period, most of it was in the form of mortgage. Hence people from these communities were not registered as voters. Maximum number of English educated degree holders was Nairs, so they got over represented in the electoral sheets. Since Nairs were the officers in the *Sarkar*, mal practices were committed while making electoral sheets, excluding many Ezhava and Syrian Christian land holders. Syrian Christians and Ezhavas came together for demanding a responsible government by the eve of independence.

The joint political congress of the Ezhavas and the Christians asked for proportional representation according to population following the communal award and the introduction of bi-cameral legislature in 1933 in British India (Kusuman 1976). The Dewan rejected the demand saying that there were no political parties to meet the demand and felt that nomination was the best way to represent community interests. The agitation that followed changed its demand from proportional representation to adult franchise.

Any meaningful political participation requires the group to have civic rights. (Kusuman 1976) "Only from the ashes of civil disabilities could the phoenix of political rights rise" (Kusuman 1976).

When the government tried to break the unity of Ezhavas and the Christians by nominating members from their community and putting candidates for elections, their unity defeated the government by boycotting the elections. This proved that election based on property rights does not give representation to communities. The joint political

league achieved what it set out to do. Responsible government and communal representation were granted in 1940.

For the first time the Joint Civic League introduced the concept of equal rights for all in Travancore. The movement for responsible Government which asked for total franchise helped in radicalising the Ezhava masses. The leaders of the Civic League actively campaigned around Travancore for democratic Government where an Ezhava or Nair would get representation irrespective of his caste and property. With economic depression and shortage of food the population was receptive to such fiery speeches. When there was a strike of workers in a coir factory in 1933, the slogan given was 'destroy the Nair rule, destroy capitalism' (Jeffrey 1967; Manali Desai 2001). Note that most of the workers were literate and could read the news papers.

3.8 Social political changes by the eve of independence:

The economic system in Travancore reminisce semi-capitalist, semi-feudal economy. The external orientation of capitalism ensured that a full-fledged entrepreneurial class would not develop. There was a lack of growth of industry. Hence educated unemployment was becoming a problem. After the economic depression of the 1930s general unemployment also increased. Workers got radicalized and many class organizations came up during this period (Isaac 1985). Thus caste association's role as the champion of the whole community received a set back. The task of creating a community undertaken by the Yogam, which obfuscated the real class differences among communities received a set back with the development of class associations.

The period also witnessed the marked expansion of cultivable land. Between 1919 and 1930 the year preceding world wide depression 1, 04023 acres of wet land and 3, 37,936 acres of dry land were brought under cultivation. This included the conversion of 20,000 acres of dry land to wet land in south Travancore and reclamation of about 10,000 areas of backwater in Kuttanad in northern Travancore (Jeffery, 1967). The later proclaimed the emergence of new class of cultivators.

But this did not result in commercialization as we found in the enclosure movements in Britain. Indigenous capital formation was at low level and industrialization acted as a halting process. Agriculture production in Kerala was confined to cash crops whose export trade remained with the British, with periodical fluctuations in world

market heavily hitting the Kerala economy. But these resulted in class differentiation in caste communities to a large extent, but not enough to break the hierarchy based on caste (Saradomani 1980). Thus caste continued to be important and at the eve of the independence gave rise to class parties in Kerala. These associations firmly associated themselves with the Congress. The fights in Congress and the factionalism was the direct result of elite groups trying to manoeuvre to get maximum mileage out of the patronage net works provided by the caste association for their class interests.

Conclusion

What emerges from our study is contradictory to what Srinivas and Miller considered as the nature of caste and caste politics. As said before Srinivas considered caste associations as occurring naturally due to the development of caste solidarities. This according to him was made possible by the colonial policies of road networks and centralised administration. But we have seen, in our study of SNDP that caste solidarity was created by the active intervention of SNDP. They took measures to abolish the sub caste divisions between them and an Ezhava identity was created around the charismatic figure of the Guru. From here we ask the question why class solidarity was created. Then we notice the new social relations which came up due to colonial economic policies. Those factors that the above authors outlined undoubtedly helped in the horizontal integration of caste, but what predated the creation of caste communities as we know today, is its politicization. In this regard we agree with Brass who takes an instrumental approach to the creation of ethnic identities (Brass 1976).

Neither do I agree with Srinivas' conception of caste association's orientation as being Sanskritic. My study of SNDP, so far proves that it is for secular ends like entry into schools, and public employment that most of the sanskritization attempts were made. For e.g. wearing breast cloth, shoulder cloth, ornaments were done to break pollution codes on which social discrimination was based. Other activities like simplifying rituals, marriage ceremonies etc were done with an express concern of making available, a pool of surplus to invest in industrial enterprises and education (Isaac 1983).

This is not to deny that there was no concern with pure ritual emulation too in this association working. As Osella points out such activities invest in social prestige later to be converted to economic assets and political power (Osella 2000). For e.g. those wealthy

Ezhavas, organizers of the second industrial exhibition, wore the rich clothes of a Nair and lot of gold ornaments (Ravinder 1972).

Sanskritization does occur but the point is not to take the manifestation (wearing the sacred thread – supposedly a Sanskritization activity) without understanding why those social actors took recourse to such an action. The third point is that the mere appearance of social cleavages does not mean a political movement.

We need to understand the political opportunities existing in the society to appreciate the working of a political organization like caste association. The comparative weakness of the Nairs compared to other dominant castes in India at that time, the political rhetoric Malayali memorial used (Jeffrey 1977), the nature of a princely state (Dick 1992), were the political opportunities presented before the raising Ezhava elite. How they perceived and acted on these opportunities determined the subsequent scope for political intervention of these associations. The organizational and tactical activities of the organization in the civil society, and in politics shape the destiny of the association in the later phase. SNDP was so hugely successful in the initial stages because of the strategy of social reform that they advocated.

Chapter Four

The political interventions of the SNDP: 1945- 2005

The political interventions of SNDP in the post independence period in Kerala society and politics is analysed in this chapter. Till the advent of class politics, caste organisations and their alliances had its political influence in the Travancore-Cochin area. But during the post independence period it was generally felt that the influence and capacity for intervention of such organisations was decreasing. The period till 1980's was the heyday of class politics; but this state of affairs has changed in the recent times. Kerala is seeing a return to casteism.

This chapter documents the shifting political fortunes of caste associations in Kerala. The political intervention of the SNDP is studied in the context of class and caste politics in Kerala.

This chapter is divided into the following sections. Section 4.1 presents the period from 1947 to 1956 and explains state and society in Kerala in this period. The role of SNDP is analysed on the background of this socio- economic context. Section 4.2 analyses the period from 1956 – 1959. This period is a watershed in the development of class and caste politics in Kerala. Section 4.3 explains the period from 1960 to 1990. In this section, changes in social relations following agrarian reforms and its implications for caste associations in general and SNDP in particular are analysed. Section 4.4 extends the analysis to the period between 1990 and 2006.

4.1 1947 – 1959: caste politics versus class politics

Period from 1930 – 1947 was a turbulent period in Kerala's social history. The great depression had a drastic effect on the economy of Kerala, which was deficient in food and rich in cash crops (Nair 1991:60-65). In this context Malabar peasantry was engaged in a fierce struggle against rack renting and hoarding of grains (Menon 1992:2710). Coir industry workers were fighting for better wage rates and working conditions in Travancore (Issac 1985: PE- 12).

During the British regime and the princely regime certain sections of the Christians and Hindus experienced economic prosperity. The Princely State did not promote the development of industrial manufacturing sector in Kerala, but it adopted a model of unproductive large bureaucracies. Stagnant agriculture with a heavy plantation component and agro- processing industries with very few forward and backward linkages characterised Kerala economy (Isaac 1987; Nair 1972; Mathew A 1987; Lieten 1982). With the absence of avenues either in manufacturing sector or the moneyed class recognized the commercial opportunities in the educational field (Nair 1972: 121). Lack of industrial development also resulted in the unemployment of the educated. Taking advantage of this situation caste associations politically mobilized to achieve communal representation in education and state employment (Mathew, A 1987).

Travancore politics was based on vertical mobilization by caste and communal leaders. The very leadership of the KPCC (Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee) was shared by three communities - Christians, Ezhavas and Nairs (Mankekar 1965 Somarajan 1985). A policy of alliance with the administration had become the new device by which Nair, Christian, and Ezhava middle and upper class sought to reap as much as patronage as possible (Rajendran 1974). The earlier radicalism was abandoned by caste association leaders following state recognition of their demands like temple entry and communal representation and responsible government. Hence they turned themselves into active collaborators with the administration (Lieten 1982; Namboodiripad 1984).

Government in turn encouraged these organisations by providing state funds for running educational institutions, social welfare schemes and economic development projects (Lieten 1982). In this way dozens of churches, Mappilla organisations and Hindu caste organisations became powerful joint stock companies owning export crop plantations, banks, schools, mills, newspapers, hostels and other lucrative assets (Namboodiripad 1984; Lieten 1982). Caste associations gave strong political clout to the aspiring entrepreneurial and middle classes. In order to ensure a steady flow of funds and jobs to themselves caste and communal organisations turned Indian National Congress in to a vehicle of factional fights. Communalism became the surest way of doing politics for the ruling classes. INC became a coalition of ethnically oriented capitalist vested interests (Namboodiripad 1984; Lieten 1977).

The first ever ministry in Kerala was a careful balancing act of community strength under the chief ministership of Pattom Thanu Pillai. But within nine months this ministry was brought down by the act of a Christian and Ezhava pressure groups (John 1981). The ministry of T.K.Naryanan was formed with the active support of the Christian and Ezhava community leaders. The government was later brought down by a coalition of interest groups consisting of members from the Ezhava and Nair community (Thomas 1985). This is what is famously called as the Hindu Maha Mandalam of 1952; a grand coalition of NSS and SNDP. Leaders of SNDP and NSS whipped up a mass hysteria among the Hindu population, with the slogan of the Hindu Mandalam, the unity of all the Hindus of the state against the growing power of the Christians (Rajendran 1974). This government also could not complete its term. Congress brought the Ezhavas back into its fold by effecting an alliance between the Ezhava SNDP leaders in Congress (Keshavan) and those in the Maha Mandalam (Shankar) (Rajendran 1974).SNDP naturally played a key role in effecting this alliance. In this play of caste politics ten ministries were pulled down by caste and communal factionalism in INC within a short period of ten years (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972). The community leaders invariably representing middle and upper class interests influenced public policy in their favour.

By this time the education sector had developed into a corporate enterprise managed by different community associations. An idea to nationalize education was proposed but was hastily dropped at the combined political power of the caste association leaders (Nayar 1966; Mathew A 1987; Lieten 1977). They resisted successfully attempts made by Travancore Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy to interfere in the running of these managements in favour of teachers. The government provided grants – in – aid for the upkeep of the institutes and payment of salaries. But under these managements teachers were indiscriminately dismissed, transferred, and were generally at the mercy of these profit making managements. Salary provided by the government in most of the cases did not reach the hands of the teachers (Mathew A 1987:169). Teaching posts were mostly auctioned off and exorbitant fees were charged on the students. Economic depression of 1930's made things even worse. This profit motive of the management is an inevitable corollary to the economic structure in the state.

The caste and communal pressure groups worked within the congress to ensure that schools were sanctioned and developmental projects were allotted to community associations. The political power of the association helped the upper class leadership to influence public policy in their favour. The ratio of government schools to private schools was 2 is to 7 in 1957. Of the nearly 60000 private schools 2200 were run by the church (Lieten 1970). In 1932 while the NSS ran 9 schools, and SNDP 5, the number of Christian run schools, only under the Roman Catholic denomination was 342 (Mathew A 1987). These community schools were used to develop and expand patronage networks. Only community members were appointed as teachers and students were also generally drawn from that particular community. While the Christians gained from government spending on education Ezhavas and other SC communities were at a disadvantage.

In this period we discern two kinds of political mobilization. First is the class mobilization of 1930's and 1940's associated with the rise of communist party in Malabar. In Malabar class organizations effected a transformation of socio- political climate conducive to the growth of a class consciousness among the peasants and workers. Reading rooms were started across Malabar by the socialists in the congress who later started the communist party. In these reading rooms labourers mingled and participated which facilitated the creation of a community of equals (Menon 1992:2705). In northern Kerala the only section of the peasant worker combine that the communist party could not radicalize was the Mappilla peasantry (Kurien 1994:398).

4.1.1 SNDP 1949 -1956

In Travancore class consciousness did not develop to the extent it did in Malabar. Class consciousness in Travancore developed in the coir industry in the struggles for better wages. These struggles split the community vertically on class lines. Ezhava coir factory owners were active collaborators with the imperial government in suppressing the movement of the Ezhava working class (Isaac 1985:PE 15).

Ezhava working classes were radicalised in this period. Most of them were active supporters of communist party (CP). In 1952 Travancore elections, communist gained 25 out of 109 seats and in 1954, 23 out of 118 assembly seats (Rao 1979:83). According to an estimate of communal distribution of votes in the 1957 elections, only two lakh Ezhavas supported the congress while twelve lakh voted for the communists (Rao

1979:83). In lieu of this change, in 1946 the Yogam decided to keep away from politics. The Yogam secretary R Shankar cited the communal nature of association as an excuse to keep the Yogam away from active politics. But what actually spurred such a decision was his fear of a communist coup within the association, if the secretary had persisted in aligning the SNDP with the congress, leading to a possible rift in the association (Rao 1979:89).

In Malabar where the communists have established themselves, the position of SNDP was far worse. The Mayur branch, the only one of its kind in Malabar neither had any temple nor did it register any marriage nor act as a caste court (Rao 1979:85).

In contrast in Palakkara village in Cochin which Kathleen Gough studied in 1949, the SNDP had created a feeling of Ezhavaness among the Ezhava working class (Gough 1965). SNDP by its organisation had successfully penetrated the every day life of Ezhava masses. SNDP branches across Travancore managed Ezhava temples, set up new ones, conducted marriage ceremonies and interfered in the daily life of an Ezhava. The association brought the leadership and local big men in contact with fellow caste men smoothing the process of developing networks of trust and patronage. These relationships were later mobilized to influence public policy in favour of Ezhava middle and upper classes.

The Ezhava villagers adopted a non- confrontational attitude towards the Nairs. The Ezhavas tried to circumscribe the caste oppression by reducing the social contact with the Nair's to a minimum (Gough 1965:367). Membership of SNDP grew in leaps and bounds during this period. Emulating the earlier secretaries of SNDP, Madhavan and Keshavan, who had increased the membership Shankar actively, scouted the country side for members. When he took office there were 933 branches, 24 unions, 4 union halls, 214 Yogam halls, 5 UP schools, and 4,000 permanent members. By 1954 he managed to increase the assets and membership by 12224 branches, 662 Yogam halls, 13 union halls, 18 UP schools, and 12 high schools (Velayudhan P S 1978). He increased the number of temporary members from 2, 00000 to three lakhs.

Mass support helped the elite to claim government funds by citing community support. Associational leadership posts like secretaries, treasurer etc at the provincial level as well as the branch and union level were occupied by Ezhava notables like owners

of factories, estates and busses, and government officials. They helped the association by providing financial aid in starting temples, Ashrams, Mutts, Gurukuls, schools, hostels, educational trusts and hospitals (Rao 1979:113). Monetary contributions were widely published in the newspaper run by the Yogam. The middle class leadership used pressure tactics to get themselves and their clique members elected to the legislature and in getting state funds sanctioned for the association.

In 1952 the general body of the Yogam authorised Shankar to form a trust and appointed him as the secretary of the Board of Secretaries. Thus SN Trust came into existence with a capital of 12 lakhs (Velayudhan P S 1978). In 1948 the first college under the trust, the Kollam Sri Narayana College came into existence (Velayudhan Pillai 1989). The objectives of the trust were to administer the schools and hospitals under it and to propagate Swami's teachings (Rao 1979:90).

Temple management, including conducting festivals was a source of wealth and status. This was earlier considered as a prerogative of the Nairs as they had retained the right to temples as *Avakashom* (caste right). Now the Ezhava middle class also aspired to have a piece of the cake. The creation of Hindu Maha Mandal safeguarded the interests of the Ezhava temples in the Devaswom Board (Rao 1979:91).

Rao points out that as associations accumulate power and property and grow in size factional fights among elites is bound to occur (Rao 1979). When attempts by one faction to gain control over the association fails it can lead to setting up of rival associations. Factions may come up on ideological basis or on fight over assets of the associations. The growing gulf between the middle and upper class leadership and the poor Ezhavas increased during this period (Rajendran 1974). SNDP in post 1957 period was torn by such intra- class and interclass tensions.

Even though SNDP's political intervention and mass support was weakened in this period by the growing class consciousness of the Ezhava working class and by the activities of communist party, SNDP remained powerful.

4.1.2 The political power of caste associations

Why were caste associations so powerful in this period? In a situation of economic underdevelopment, intra class and inter class conflict is bound to intensify. A society with a semi feudal economic system and a political history of ethnic mobilization would naturally experience increased ethnic mobilization. In an agrarian semi- feudal economy lower classes are tied to the upper classes by relations of dependency. A change in land relations is necessary in breaking the hold of caste consciousness on the people.

Presence of mass organisations of the peasantry and agricultural labourers is crucial for effecting a change from community mobilizations to class mobilizations. The setting up of parallel networks of patronage on class lines will provide a measure of security to downtrodden sections. Class organisations also help in developing alternative networks of patronage and in increasing class consciousness as opposed to community consciousness. Community consciousness simulates a unity of opposing classes around a common ethnic identity.

Class struggles by the working class can severely affect the community leadership's ability to organise politically for the class interests of the elite. To break the hold of caste consciousness on the working classes, intensified class struggles are required. Class struggles can infiltrate into the every day life of the peasant and the worker where caste is the primary idiom in which class oppression is expressed and lived. This is exactly what was achieved to some extent by the communist party in Kerala. The period from 1956 – 1959, the term of the communist government is considered to be a water shed in the development of class consciousness in Kerala.

4.2 Class politics 1956 - 1959

The activities of the communist party and the policies of the communist government of 1956 in the civil society in Kerala drastically changed the course of development of caste associations in Kerala. First and foremost the policies of the communist government like land reforms, educational policies and reservation brought the upper section of all the caste communities on one platform. The workers and the peasants got an opportunity to get to know the caste association leaders for what they actually are; the representatives of a class. The educational bill attacked the interests of upper classes in the community, through curtailing the management. As explained earlier, an educational institution's political clout was partly determined by the institutions ability

to direct the flow of state patronage to community members, especially the middle class segment of the community. The period between 1957 and 1960 saw the ratio of private schools to government schools falling, as the government took over some management run schools in Malabar and expanded the number of government schools from 140 to 244. There was also a phenomenal increase in the number of primary schools from 1627 to 2651(Lieten 1982:36).

Patronage networks of these caste associations were sustained due to the close proximity of the upper caste leaders with the centres of power in the administration. The first thing that the communist ministry did when it assumed power is to try and neutralize the class nature of the bureaucracy (Lieten 1982). Communist government directed the police to be neutral in case of any kind of class strife. This policy ensured that the police will not, as is the usual practice, act in the interests of the propertied classes (Lieten 1977). In opposition to the bureaucracy, the party set up cells of the working class to supervise the work of fixing the ceiling, and to settle claims of tenancy.

What gave a real boost to the activities of caste associations was the nature of the economy, especially agrarian relations. Exploitative forms of labour like bonded labour; farm labour etc had tied the agricultural worker to the landlord class in a direct dependency relationship (Djurfeldt and Lindbergh 1975). The abolition of landlordism reduced the political leverage of this class. Land reforms succeeded in abolishing tenancy and landlordism by 1970(Herring 1980:A59). With such far reaching agrarian changes the political power of the communist sunk into the minds of landed propertied class and reduced their bargaining power vis a vis agricultural labourer and the tenants.

The communist ministry also initiated industrial expansion so that employment could be generated to soothe out the unemployment scenario created by overcrowding of the agricultural sector (Lieten 1982:64-67). The creation of cooperatives run by labourers in toddy and coir industry reduced their dependence on usury and merchant capital which till then was eating up the surplus generated in this sector (Isaac 1984). All the policies initiated by the government were intended to break the dependency relationship through which the rural masses and industrial proletariat were tied to upper class in a semi – feudal, semi- capitalist economy (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972).

Given the balance of power in the state, there were powerful reactions to the above said policies from the entrenched classes. While the educational policies of the government pleased the NSS and SNDP, it was the Christian management interests that were hit by the legislation. But NSS turned hostile when the government refused them an engineering college. More over the Agrarian Bill introduced by the communist ministry hit the Nair landed interests directly. So they found common cause with the Christians whose economic interests were affected by both the bills.

SNDP was caught in between, (given the class nature of the Ezhavas - a large section of them were agricultural labourers or tenants - the gulf between this class and the middle class was considerable) and could not stand up against the bill. The wealthy Ezhavas were too few and powerless to direct the consciousness of the members of the caste against the progressive measures of the ministry (Lieten 1977:17). Shankar, the prominent SNDP leader was elected Kerala Congress president, which was in the forefront of the school closure agitations or the final deliverance agitation. SNDP for the most part kept away. Leading members of the SNDP had to resign from the Kerala congress party pressed by their mass following (Lieten 1977:17). But certain sections of the middle class leadership including Shankar were active participants of the liberation struggle.

Communist party successfully weaned away a large section of the Ezhava working class from the influence of the vested interests of SNDP. The social reforms initiated by SNDP had prepared the ground for radicalizing the Ezhava working classes. The way in which communal identities developed under colonialism in the case of Christians and Muslims and the lack of any reform movement among them, made Christians and Muslims more accessible to appeals on the basis of caste and religion (International congress on Kerala Studies 1994:5). Church raising the bogey of 'religion in threat' successfully mobilized even those teachers' the Educational Bill was intended to help and the poor Christians were used as volunteer corps, trained in armed resistance

Ranadive made the analysis that while class consciousness was generated in the course of these short years the communal and casteist vested interests exercised a powerful hold over the masses. The communist party miscalculated the strength of the alliance of communal associations as an ideological force and overestimated the popular

support of the working classes cutting across caste and communal divide (Ranadive quoted in Lieten 1982:161). The triple alliance had been able to dig into the recesses of the old society among the backward masses and keep a big section of the downtrodden on hold (Ranadive quoted in Lieten 1982:161).

In the movement which followed, dubbed as the liberation struggle the upper strata of all the castes made appeals on the basis of religion and caste to throw out the communist ministry and halt the implementation of policies. The Education Bill envisaged to curtail the power of the management with regard to recruitment, transfer and dismissal; and take over by the government in case of malpractices by the management. This bill was referred to the Supreme Court on the plea of violation of minority rights. The movement ended with the overthrow of the communist government and the imposition of President's Rule.

But still the pro - working class orientation of the government had helped in breaking down the hold of caste ideology to a large extent. How did this happen? As long as backward castes are politically and economically dependent upon the dominant castes, their horizon remains within the ideological world of the caste i.e. their struggle remain limited to the struggle for Sanskritization.

Linderberg and Djurfeldt in their study of caste and class consciousness in a Tamil village observed that in the mind of the Harijan agricultural worker an element of the caste ideology is fused with a bourgeoisie ideology of progress by individual striving. Thus while impure status of the caste is attributed to the low local standing of the caste a belief in the idea of progress in the new age through caste emancipation dissolves the contradiction between continuing discrimination and misery of the rural proletariat and the idea of progress. "Prevalent poverty then seen as a result of incomplete caste emancipation, a type of teleology which he calls as the hall mark of 'development' ideology" (Djurfeldt and Lindbergh 1975: 252).

What the communist ministry achieved was to make clear the class nature of poverty and the need for a head on fight with the dominant classes for emancipation. Communists increased their vote share from 40.7% to 43% in 1960, even in the Christian dominated Kottayam district from, as the Christian poor turned to the communist party.

In some constituencies around 50% of Catholic Christian population voted for the communists (Alexander 1968).

Most of the scholars who studied Kerala politics were unanimous in the opinion that the Namboodiripad ministry was a watershed in social relations in Kerala (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967; Aiyappan 1965; Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972; Thomas 1985: 94). Wherever communist party was predominant caste barriers came down. Intimate contacts between Namboodiris and Ezhavas became a common feature in those areas where party activities were strong (Aiyappan 1965). Punitive actions were organised against those caste Hindus who misbehaved with the lower castes (Aiyappan 1965). Assessing strength of the communists in 1949 and 1964 Kathleen Gough comments that while in 1949 there was a lacklustre support for communists; in 1964 communists gained in strength. This was due to a polarisation of different classes in support of communist party and congress party respectively (Gough 1965:369).

Working population in general rallied behind the communist party. Rao pointed out the declining importance of SNDP among the Ezhavas (Rao 1979). Gough recorded the development of polarization around congress and the communists during this period. General perception among the villagers was that while CP is the party of the have-nots, congress is the party of the rich. The communist ministry, by creating a class polarisation in the state helped initiated the development of a class consciousness as opposed to caste consciousness.

Gough points out that while congress canvassed among the propertied class citing it as the guardian of private property in the state, and used personal relations, monetary favours etc. to influence the propertyless. Gough points out that CP also dispensed patronage (Gough 1965:372). Communist supporters usually become so because they believe in the party policies and the benefit it may bring to their class, whereas personal favours come to them as secondary rewards. Gough also documents how the difference in the social base of both parties was seen in the nature of patronage dispensed. The CP used its influence to undertake works like building a road in the Harriijan colony or constructing a tank for a washerwoman. When the Congress undertook philanthropic work it was aimed at the middle or upper sections, like starting a library in the Nayar colony (Gough 1965:372).

4.2.1 SNDP – 1956- 1959

In this period cohesiveness of Yogam as an association was reduced. Many times the leadership and the masses worked at cross purposes. As pointed out before, during the liberation struggle the leadership was active in bringing the government down. But Yogam could not take a united stand against the communist government.

Ezhava communists captured branch elections, and instead of starting temples, used the funds provided by SNDP to start libraries and recreational places for labourers from all castes. Shrines were turned in to places where intermarriage ceremonies were conducted and communist ideology disseminated. Most of the Ezhava capitalists with congress background, who provided funds to start the Yogam, withdrew in the face of communist activity (Gough 1965). Most of the local branches started functioning independent of the union at the taluk level and the Yogam at the state level. The theme of exploitation of poor Ezhavas by the leadership of the Yogam was raised repeatedly in Yogam meetings.

4.3 Caste and class consciousness 1960 – 1980

For easy analysis the period is further sub divided into two sections 3.3 and 3.3.1. Section 3.3 analysis socio- political situation from 1960 – 1980 and section 3.3.1 does the same analysis for the period 1980 – 1990. The activities of the SNDP is analysed for the whole period from 1960 to 1990. No need was felt to sub divide the period.

CP lost the 1960 elections against the combined power of the church, SNDP, NSS, and the congress the party, but it managed to increase the total vote share. This election brought to light the importance of caste vote in deciding the winner in many crucial constituencies. The demography and the peculiar nature of the geographical spread of communities ensured that caste and communal vote will be decisive. Christians constituted 21% and Muslims 18% of the total population. With Christians concentrated in Ernakulam and Kottayam districts, Muslims in Malappuram (Palghat, Cannanore and Kozhikode districts) Nair's in Trivandrum, and Ezhavas particularly strong in Palghat, small percentages marked victory or defeat (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972). Thus while in 1960 communist party increased its total vote share it could not win a majority of seats due to caste and communal vote (Hardgrave).

Consequently communist party made the political assessment that communal and casteist alliances should not be allowed to come on a common platform as happened in 1959. Hence alliance with one or other splinter group from the congress or the league was proposed as a political strategy to break this alliance. This as many scholars points out has led to a soft approach to communalism by the party.

The period from 1965 to 1972 was also a period of unsteady coalitions and a setback to secular and class politics (Thomas 1985 Hardgrave). Many a times, CPM allied with Muslim League (1965 and 1967) and Kerala Congress (splinter group from congress) thereby alienating the poor sections among them. League mostly represented the feudal as well as mercantile sections among the Muslims. Kerala congress represented the Christian interests in education and plantation sector (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972).

Agrarian reforms of the left had many consequences on the social relations in Kerala. Feudal rentier class was completely eliminated (Herring 1980). Land reforms also created a class of capitalist farmer and the earlier unity of the tenant and the agricultural worker was disrupted. Kerala became a land of small proprietors (Krishnaji 1979:516). This was due to many market and non market reasons like conferring tenancy rights to small tenants, hut men rights to agricultural labourers and partitioning of land among family members (Krishnaji 1979:516).

Agrarian reforms reduced the dependency of the rural masses on the propertied classes. Further, the successive left governments ensured that police force would not be used to suppress the movements of the working class (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972:202). Bureaucracy was forced to become more responsive to the needs of the lower class.

Secondly the struggle for better wages, fair prices, and unionisation increased the class awareness in Kerala. The land grabs movement of 1972 to unearth land over and above the ceiling unlawfully kept, while not being a great success in terms of land distribution to the landless, greatly increased class polarisation (Krishnaji 1979:519). Wage struggles in Kuttanad were acrimonious with rich capitalist and peasant cultivators (Pillai 1999:241) organising themselves to counter the might of the unions (Mencher

1980). Class organisations developed, providing parallel social security net works for the poor who till then were vertically aligned with their rich caste fellows or with upper caste land lords. To restrict the landlord from using patron client relations to break the unity of the working mass, union succeeded in imposing a code by which land lords had to recruit labourers from the list provided by them (Alexander 1980:A73). This helped in the development of contractual relationships and transformed the cooperative and diffused relation between the farmers and labourers, nurtured by norms of inter -caste relationship (Alexander 1980:A73).

But on the balance, class politics advanced in this period. But there were setbacks too; both the CPM and the Congress, the leading political parties in Kerala came to accommodate the jockeying for state patronage by communal associations.

3.3.1 Class politics: 1980 – 1990

Recovering from the low economic growth cycle of 70's Kerala's economy moved to better level of economic development by the 80's (Kaanam 2005; Gopikuttan 1990; Chakraborty 2005; Isaac 1995 Prakash 1978; Mathew and Nair 1978). This was largely due to migration and subsequent remittances which kept the economy aloft. Migration was made possible because of the social development Kerala achieved through land reforms and by an expanding educational sector and health facilities (International congress on Kerala studies 1994). The high rates of literacy helped Keralites in the initial days to get employment. High social development coupled with a stagnant productive sector was the root cause of migration.

Migration in the first phase was by semi- skilled labourers. Mostly Christians and Muslims benefited from migration and the Ezhavas stood third in total contribution in the state to remittance income. Ezhavas who migrated mostly were from Kollam district, the seat of SNDP. A cursory look at the socio- economic characteristics of migrants in this period show that while half of them were Muslims Ezhavas constituted almost 13% of the total migrants.

The period from 1974 to 1990 was characterised by new economic changes. Gulf boom started in this period. At the same time economic reforms were being slowly introduced in the economy. The rights of the labour unions were curtailed, for example the stipulated number to start a union was increased from 7 members in the earlier years to 100. Government expenditure on education and employment generation was slowly reduced, PSC (public service commission) list delays and freeze on employment in government sectors were all part of this reform programme (Mathew 1994). Educated unemployed became a real problem (Mathew 1994; Prakash 1990).

Agriculture in Kerala experienced low productivity and paddy fields were turned into house construction plots. The gulf boom of the 80's increased general prices of food and essential commodities as general economic conditions improved. The first items for which expenditure increased were food, health and housing (Nair G 1998).

There was rigorous class struggle by the different mass organisations of CPM on all these fronts during the tenure of the UDF headed by Karunakaran and Antony respectively (1983 -1987). DYFI led many agitations against growing educated unemployment, prices rises, and freeze on government appointments. Labour militancy was at high levels in both construction and agriculture. During the reign of the next government an attempt was made to increase agricultural productivity through collective farming. The total literacy programme launched with the help of DYFI and SFI volunteers made Kerala a complete literate state by 1990. Mass movements and class consciousness were thriving.

But national political developments affected the political landscape of Kerala. The rise of identity politics and upsurge of backward castes at the national scene gave ideas to many back ward caste associations to mobilize on caste basis. Another important event which had an effect on Kerala politics was the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi. RSS gained respectability during this period and subsequently expanded to Kerala (Joseph 1999). Some CPM supporters switched their political allegiance to RSS (Joseph 1999). But the class associations were vibrant enough to frustrate such attempts and put up a spirited opposition to their further expansion. A series of political murders

committed by supporters of RSS and CPM marred Kerala during this period (Joseph 1999).

3.3.2 The role of caste association: 1960 – 1990

The period from 1974 to 1980 saw the consolidation of the left and the right coalitions in the form of LDF and UDF. Coalition politics had a direct effect on the bargaining power of all caste associations. Coalition politics ensured that, no matter who forms the government, caste associations will always have a say in the government. The defining character of the working of the caste association at this time was the equal distance policy maintained by some caste association, like NSS, with both fronts. Caste associations generally indulge in intense bargaining just before the elections to wring maximum advantage for the association. SNDP mostly remained in the social sphere and worked as a political lobby aimed at enlarging the SN trust. Parallel to this class awareness a period of consolidation of caste association was at evidence.

Namboodiripad ministry encouraged teachers and students' strike, but the political presence of vested interests representing the managements reduced the efficacy of mass action (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972:205). Similarly the Achutha Menon ministry attempted to introduce a fee equalisation law in all the management run educational institutions. This was also a failure (Mathur, Mohan Lal Sharma and Basu Deo Sharma 1972:205). Even the organisation of the teachers and students could not effectively check the power of the managements.

This period in Kerala politics was marked by intense politicking for sanctioning of schools and colleges by different communities. Considering the fact that this period witnessed a growing demand in gulf for semi- skilled labourers, no attempt was made to vocationalise education and steer it away from non productive sectors to productive sectors (Singh 1991). The number of arts and science college increased from 28 in 1956 – 57 to 172 to in 1984 – 85 and in a 10 year period of 1967- 1981 the number of job seekers increased from 1.9 lakhs to 19.03 lakhs. General education always exceeded its plan outlay while technical education was only 80% of the total outlay (Mathew A1987).

Thus the development needs of the state were ignored under pressure from the political power of the communal casteist associations in a coalition political regime.

Other caste associations like SNDP and NSS also actively entered into the educational field, a reaction to the virtual monopoly of teachers post and educational facilities by the Christians. A look at the statistics shows that 62% schools were under private management in 1983 with the state shouldering all the cost of education (Mathew A 1987; Tilak 2001). Minority Christian run institutions recruited mainly Christian teachers and enrolled Christian students. So in order to ensure educational facilities and employment opportunities for their own respective communities, SNDP and NSS entered the educational field (Mathew A 1987; Tilak 2001). No party attempted a direct attack on this kind of communal jockeying by different community association. The success of the liberation struggle was a warning for all parties to tread cautiously while dealing with educational interests of the communities represented by caste associations.

Educational enterprises served two purposes for caste association: first it augmented the wealth of the association. The practice of auctioning posts continued unchecked in these educational institutions. Second, by restricting the admission and appointments to caste fellows, associations ensured a steady flow of patronage to fellow men at government cost. This again impelled the association's leadership to use their political clout and money power to get schools and colleges sanctioned (Mathew A 1987). These educational institutions were able to maintain better standards than government schools, for money generated from the sale of posts was also used for better upkeep. This led to declining enrolment in government schools (Mathew A 1987; Tilak 2001). Notwithstanding this, more and more schools were sanctioned reducing quality and rational system of education. In this period there has been an unreasonable expansion of higher education of liberal arts contributing the problem of educated unemployment (Mathew A 1987 Mathew 1994; 1997 George, Zachariah and Ajith Kumar 2002).

As has been pointed out by many scholars' politics in Kerala took two forms; class mobilization and ethnic mobilization for educational benefits and other kick backs (Somarajan 1988).

This section looked at how, changes in social relations and struggles of the class organisations eroded the support base of caste associations. At the same time because of

the underdevelopment of the economy and the dynamics of coalition politics community associations remained relevant in Kerala society and politics. As rightly pointed out by many scholars, pressure group politics in Kerala was a secular jockeying for political and economic power than communal politics (Mathew 1985). Isaac points out that the political power of communal pressure groups was the result of the nature of political superstructure than of social relations (Isaac in international conference on Kerala studies 1994).

But caste politics in Kerala was not as virulent as was in other parts of India. The consciousness of exploitation both by the exploiters and the exploited was more in Kerala than in other parts of India. This ensured that ethnic mobilization on vertical lines to the extent it occurred in other parts of India was not possible in Kerala (Mathew A 1987:178). The next section will look at how, in this mixed contradictory political situation of the hegemony of class politics and coalition compulsions, SNDP as a caste association survived and thrived.

3.3.3 SNDP – 1960 – 1990

What was the role of SNDP during this period? Did it strengthen its position or was it weakened? The new middle class which came into existence with the Gulf Boom increased the political clout of the SNDP. SNDP's power increased during this period with the expansion in the activities of the SN trust. By 1970 it had established a wide network of educational institutions at all levels: 18 middle schools, 12 high schools, 3 post graduate colleges, 4 degree colleges, 4 junior colleges, one teachers training college and one polytechnic (Rao 1979:90). There were about 800 teachers employed by the trust of which 75% was Ezhavas (Rao 1979:90). Besides educational institutions they also ran hostels giving a number of scholarships for Ezhava students to pursue higher education. Yogam and the trust gained a lot from the political patronage of Shankar. After his retirement from active politics, with the rise of the LDF and the UDF coalitions SN trust was able to expand further.

This period witnessed inter class and intra class rivalries in the association. Communist SNDP members, many a times, tried to gain control over the Yogam. Even

during Shankar's time his nominees were many a times defeated by communist candidates in Ezhava dominated constituencies. The faction fights in SNDP took such ideological turns that Shankar was alleged to have shifted the assets of Yogam to SN trust under his control because he feared a communist take over of Yogam funds(Rao 1979:89). He also tried to curtail the power of the local branches, alleged to be under communist control. But efforts of the communist to gain control over the Yogam was always unsuccessful. SN trust remained in the hands of the rich Ezhavas. Only those who provided a certain amount of money for the trust could become a trustee and the executive of the trust was elected from this group of trustees. All those who supported SN Trust and the Yogam were invariably congress supporters and were rich Ezhavas. The poor Ezhavas in this period identified themselves with the CPM (Rao 1979).

Factional fights for the control over the assets of the Yogam were endemic during this period. In 1971 there was another ideological fight between Shankar and Sukumaran, the owner of the Kerala Kaumadi who had socialist leanings (Rao 1979:95). Shankar had made the Yogam a preserve of the congress, a vote bank. Sukumaran objected and opposed Shankar's policy of using the Yogam to support the congress. Shankar followed a policy of spurge of communists from the Yogam. There was also serious allegation of misappropriation of Yogam funds.

Following this period, over the controversy on reservation SNDP started taking more radical stand and is perceived to be more close to LDF. In the era of coalition politics SN trust was able to expand. A brief attempt was made to start a political party (Socialist Republican party) by the SNDP to take mileage out of a coalition regime where small parties are vital for government formation (Osella &Osella 2000:197).

In the period between 1970 and 1990 in most of the energy and time of the Yogam was spend on getting a foothold on Devaswom Boards and to look for means to expand and protect the reservation constitutionally provided for backward communities. Expansion of SN trust was another preoccupation of the Yogam. The branch expansion and other political activities of the Yogam during this period has not been analysed in detail for lack of sufficient information.

3.4 Social economic changes 1990 – 2005

There was a marked shift in economic structure of Kerala starting with 1990's, with the implementation of policies of liberalisation and privatisation both at the centre and the state. Gulf migration took on a new dimension. World demand shifted from semi-skilled to skilled and professional workers. There was a phenomenal increase in migration of the skilled labour and professional white collar workers like doctors, engineers, nurses, managers and computer professionals. Migration took such a dimension that there is at least one person in each middle class household who is abroad. The number of households depending on migration increased.

The importance of long term investment in education for social mobility took new meanings and significance. At the same time the 1991 Congress government vigorously followed a policy of reduction in social spending on education and health. This clearly threatened the so called Kerala model of high social development amidst low economic development. Many schools were closed down and sanctions were given to start unaided private schools(international conference on Kerala studies:12) . This period also witnessed the expansion of self financing institutes.

Another effect of liberalisation was felt in the agrarian sector. The new economic policy of opening up of the market and lifting of qualitative restrictions on imports reduced the price of commercial crops of Kerala like *copra* and rubber. Casualisation of labour force occurred at a fast rate (Osella & Osella & Osella 2000). Many marginal and middle peasants were badly hit by the fall in the prices of cash crops. Rubber and coconut are perennial crops. Those who invested in these crops when international prices were high were left high and dry when the market crashed for these crops. They could not cut the trees and grow something else the next year as it takes 10- 15 for the perennial crops to yield production. Most of them had invested in cash crops by taking loans from blade (blade is the local term for finance companies which charge cut throat interest rates). Many farmers committed suicide following mounting debts. This led to rising income inequalities.

Job cuts in government public sector and bureaucracy also affected the lower middle classes. Government jobs were most sought after for the simple reason that it is more secure than jobs in the private sector especially since job security was substantially

reduced in the private sector after the reform period. Small scale industries like coir and traditional jewellery making were severely affected (George Varghese 2003).

As migration picked up, it created a new middle class, globally aligned to a bigger world by labour movements across boundaries. As pointed out by Osella the effect of migration, during the first phase was on necessary consumption like food and housing, the next phase of remittances were used for long term investment in education and health (Osella & Osella & Osella 2000). About 24% of the cash remittance is used to finance education (Zachariah & Rajan 2004:57)

At the same time migrant households tried to turn their economic wealth into social honour and prestige by conspicuous consumption of consumer products (Osella & Osella & Osella 2000:147- 153). Marriage alliances were one form of accumulation of symbolic capital which helped middle class households in their long term mobility aspirations. Dowry, the mechanism by which family buys social prestige (Osella & Osella & Osella 2000: 97 -100) registered steep rise in amount paid in this period. The consumer market and its scope were further expanded with the entry of loan melas (Zachariah & Rajan 2004:53). Credit – deposit ratio increased in Kerala with increase in remittance income. Instead of investing in productive activities most of it was used to finance conspicuous consumption (Zachariah & Rajan 2004:73).

Kerala's socio - economic landscape changed dramatically in the period between 1990- 2000. Unlike the first period of migration, this period saw the tertiary sector share in GDP increasing. Sub- sectors which benefited from the gulf boom were unaided schools, transport, hotels, banking operations, telecommunications(Pushpagadhan 2003: 7- 12) This did not stimulate linkage effect of expanding industrial growth inside the state. Most of the consumer durables and other goods that the middle class used were acquired through trade with other states or through international trade (Pushpagadhan 2003). Kerala remained a consumer society and a money order economy. Educational demand in times of reduced public expenditure on education led to investment by private agencies in education (Namboodiri 2004). Through education the route to social mobility became more expensive and a privilege of those with money (Kumar 1997 Tilak 2001). We can see that the socio- economic changes in this period also led to intensified social conflict. This conflict took two forms: the conflict between the middle class and the fight

for survival by those who are left out in the race for social mobility. Education has always been the safest route to social mobility in Kerala. But the new economic reforms accentuated the potential of education to provide better jobs. The new rules of the game introduced by the reform were more in the favour of the upper and upper middle class. An engineering degree or a medical degree was an essential prerequisite for gainful employment abroad. The conflict of the elites revolved around access to education.

Gainful employment inside the state was difficult to obtain with retrenchment and downsizing of government work force. Educational and employment possibilities in the state were dictated by one's political connections. Thus it became imperative for the middle class - when possibilities for aggrandizement are expanding - to capture a slice of state power. Middle classes' access to education and employment in Kerala was historically determined by community bargaining power. Thus Christian churches were able to advance the interests of the middle class of the community by effective political lobbying which ensured that scarce economic resources were made available for them(Mathew A 1987). Community colleges and other institutions provided the middle class Christians a larger share of state funds to further their group mobility. In times of rising aspirations engineered by gulf migration and dreams of unimaginable riches, the reality of shrinking government expenditure on education and employment generation was sure to bring in social conflict. The whole debate on self financing education has to be located in the context of social conflicts between classes.

This period witnessed intra -class struggles between the new rich, they are those who migrated and have with better information on new possible areas of investment in education. They organized behind the ethnic blocks of different managements and tried to corner the maximum advantage for themselves. An upper middle class Christian tried to prosper at the cost of a Nair middle class who are late comers in migration race but were trying to catch up. Ezhavas, though one of the early migrants of semi- skilled labourers found themselves at a disadvantage with shift in international market in favour of skilled and professional labour. Historically one step behind the Nairs and Christians in social standing, Ezhava middle class too entered the struggle to ensure a share in the migration pie. Ezhava middle class channelized their remittance money into investment in education and those households with nobody in the family abroad, mortgaged or sold

their savings to obtain visas, or to give their children english education and later on in their life a professional college education(Osella &Osella 2000).

It is indisputable that a prosperous middle class has emerged among Ezhavas. Ezhavas remained a caste community where class polarisation was more than in any other communities. The upper class among the Ezhavas were always engaged in a struggle for supremacy with the Christians and the Nairs. This section was engaged in a fight for hegemony with similarly placed Nairs and Christians. They found caste as a barrier to social mobility. The dominant castes often used to denigrate and belittle the rise of this class by citing caste stereotypes. They were called as upstarts, vain and show offs (Osella& Osella & Osella 2000: 40). Their early occupation of toddy tapping was often pointed out and ridiculed (Osella& Osella & Osella 2000: 60). Social mobility for this group required side stepping this lack of cultural capital. Cultural capital and its accumulation is also a long term strategy for rise in social hierarchy. It is this group which with lavish displays of consumer goods and lavish life style and prestigious marriage alliance with large dowry tried to impress on the entrenched classes that they too have arrived as socially dominant and important beings(Osella& Osella & Osella 2000).

Caste associational activities got a boost during this period. Class organizations were seen more ineffectual in this period, unable to reverse the trend on reduction in government spending or the curtailment of labour rights and provide security and shelter to the toiling masses. Trade union movement suffered reverses in its gains. The working class was more and more thrown to the mercy of the market. Caste associations taking advantage of the general weakening of working class movement internationally and nationally tried to extend their patronage networks and once again reclaim a chance for vertical mobilization that has been usurped from them by strong left movements in the state.

Migration and economic reforms changed the shape of Kerala society. The rise of a new middle class in Kerala was associated with the increasing trends towards consumerism, commercialization of education and growing religiosity (Zachariah & Rajan 2004:53). Religion is perceived as a tool for social mobility. Lavish spending on community functions, announced to the world the rising hegemony of a caste group

(Osella & Osella & Osella 2000; Zachariah & Rajan 2004). There is also what is called as the rise of charismatic movements across Kerala. Spirituality became good business. The number of religious functions and festivals increased in number and intensity (Marxist Oct - Dec 2003). Old customs and obscure and superstitious practices were on a come back in Kerala.

Globalisation provided a favourable climate for ethnic and communal mobilizations. The rise of Hindutva further aided this process. As mobility aspirations skyrocketed, competition for scarce resources engineered social conflict. The communities that benefited most from the new boom were Christians and Muslims and a small percentage of Ezhava middle class (Zachariah & Rajan 2004:51-53). The social conflict between the middle classes is often expressed in community idioms. Social conflict spill over from family jealousies and community envy in to the political sphere. A vocabulary of community conflict was often borrowed from the ideology of communalism on the rise at the national scene.

Political changes at the national sphere also had its effect on Kerala society. Post Babri Masjid; there was an expansion of Islamic outfits in Kerala. RSS for a long time was trying to get a foothold in Kerala. When the left government came to power in 1996, caste and community interests waged fierce battle against the ruling party. SNDP and CPM were on logger heads on many issues. Meanwhile RSS was trying to woo the majority Hindu community, the Ezhavas (Kalakaumadi 31 Dec 2002). Similar to the tactics that BJP followed in other states no stone was left unturned to woo backward Hindu communities. More over SNDP could provide a ready made organisational vehicle for the spread of hindutva. Ezhava leadership and middle classes were wooed with offers of equal footing in a Hindu society. There was a phenomenal expansion of shakas during this period especially in central Travancore. Many Ezhavas were attracted by the Sanskritic ideal of studying Vedas and learning *Kallaripayattu* considered as the martial art of the Nair's (Osella & Osella & Osella 2000: 217). One has to understand the way Ezhava identity has evolved through historical times to grasp attraction of all encompassing Hindu identity for the Ezhava middle class. The ambivalent relationship that Ezhavas had developed with Hinduism dates back to the period of the establishment of SNDP. It was also reflected in the debates on conversion that ranged around 1930's.

The structural position of the Ezhava in the Hindu hierarchy, not fully accepted as equals by the Nair's nor considered as so polluting as the Pulaya's, shaped the Sanskritization aspirations of the middle class Ezhavas. It is this social context that should be kept as a background to understand the attempts at Hindu unity represented by Nair - Ezhava alliance that is currently in vogue in Kerala.

3.4.1 Political developments from 1991- 2006

What is most remarkable about this period is the rise of hindutva as a political power at the centre. This had remarkable effects on Kerala politics. SNDP is very crucial organisation for hindutva forces in its quest for expansion in Kerala as Ezhavas were the majority Hindu caste in the state.

During the left rule from 1991 – 1996 SNDP came into conflict with the ruling party and its student wing SFI. An altercation between the management and the students led to a violent confrontation. Allegation were made by SNDP leadership that Sree Narayana Guru's statue was defaced by SFI and CPM supporters (Malayala Manorama August 10, 1995). This was projected as reflecting the anti- guru, anti- Ezhava sentiment of the ruling party. Thus attention was deflated from student issues which otherwise would have divided the community along class lines. Osella points out the pressing need felt by the Yogam leadership for "community" creation as the gulf between the rich and poor widened within the Ezhava community (Osella & Osella & Osella 2000: 162).

Similar events of community construction were happening in other management colleges too. In a Christian run college in Kottayam, altercation between SFI and the management over the issue of students' right to strike led to one such affirmation of community sentiments. Following heated arguments and violence by students as well as outsiders Church bells were rung which historically signified danger to the holy church. On hearing the church bells Christian traders and workers from the nearby market rushed in to protect the community interest and pride (Malayala Manorama July19, 1993). It is cases filed by these managements which ultimately led to the banning of students politics from Kerala campuses.

CPM also successfully foiled an attempt to saffronise Shivagiri Mutt by the leadership of the Yogam with the active collusion of VHP. Leadership of the Yogam is alleged to be the major liquor barons of the area. The majority in the new committee administering the Mutt opined that in Shivagiri the deities of other Hindu Gods should also be installed in concordance with the philosophy of Narayana Guru. The belief of the Ezhavas that guru is an incarnation of Shiva was played up. The intervention of RSS and VHP to saffronise Shivagiri was foiled by the minority section within the Yogam. This faction argued that the Guru's philosophy went far beyond the confines of traditional Hinduism and insisted that Shivagiri should be maintained as an Ezhava institution. This faction resigned from the committee leaving the committee with out the necessary quorum to operate (Osella & Osella 2000:166). With the active support of progressive forces across the state this section within the Yogam organised strikes and dharanas. Ultimately shivagiri was maintained as an Ezhava institute.

SN trust and the secretary of the Yogam also alleged that Kerala Education Minister did not give the trust its due share in allocation of schools when pre - degree was delinked from college. Political pundits believed that all caste and communal organizations came together to defeat the LDF in the 2001 elections (Marxist Oct - Dec 2003).

In the government of 2001 – 2005 factional fights within the Congress impelled the Chief Minister to look to other sources for support. Caste and communal organisations came in handy. As more and more self- financing institutes were set up there were competitions between the managements representing different communities to make hay while the sun shines. Chief Minister besieged by faction fights on the one side and community politicking on the other side moved closer to BJP. While other Congress ministers were decrying saffronisation of education, Chief Minister Antony made a public statement that he sees no problem with such a move. Minorities were called as trouble makers, because they use state funds to improve their economic standing in Kerala. Their political muscle and money power was decried. The favourable political climate provided to RSS was promptly used by them. Political debates revolved around dangers of conversion, falling population of Hindus, and minority appeasement by successive

governments in Kerala (Organiser, September 19, 2004). As communal riots like Marad occurred it further vitiated the atmosphere (Malayala Manorama 26 May 2003).

The social conflict over control over resources was also manifested in quarrels in Devaswom Boards. The Devaswom Board manages important temples like Sabirimala Aiyappan temple which reek in a lot of money running to crores of rupees. Traditionally the Nairs controlled the Devaswom Board claiming temple management as their customary right. SNDP have through ages challenged this view. But when Ezhava – Nair unity was mooted with Hindu Aikya Vedi of the RSS brokering the deal, it was suggested that the way out of this conflict is the hand over of temple management by government to SNDP and NSS. The almost perfect unanimity of opinion of SNDP, NSS, and Akhila Hindhu Vedi on the need for Hindu temple management by the Hindus showed that they were working in tandem. RSS tried many a times to smooth out the inherent conflict of interest between the Ezhava and Nair elite. The decision of the Supreme Court to implement reservation for Avarna Hindus for employment in Devaswom Board was lauded by RSS.

Publication of Narendran commission which recommended filling of unfilled quota of OBC by special recruitment if need be, in government jobs exposed the internal divisions within the SNDP. The secretary of the Yogam asked for some revisions before implementing the report and the president asked for implementation of the report in Toto (frontline Aug 14- 27 2004).

Kerala history shows that unity of elites does not hold for a long time in the state. NSS did not take lightly to the Supreme Court directive to implement 33% reservation for Avarna Hindus in TDW nor the recommendation of the Narendran commission (Malayala Manorama June 30 2006) As of now the proposed unity of Hindus represented by the political alignment of SNDP and NSS is discarded.

3.4.2 Internal dynamics in SNDP: 1991- 2006.

It is alleged that the current leadership of the Yogam is in the hands of liquor barons. In 1995 a series of stories on sale of appointments in SN trust were brought to light. The Swami who is alleged to have facilitated such sales disappeared. A faction

fight is currently going on between Yogam Secretary Vellappaly Nateshan and the President Vidhya Sagar (Malayala Manorama April 22&June25 2005). The latter is opposed to a tie up with BJP and has alleged mismanagement of funds by the secretary Malayala Manorama December 15 2005). But in the recent elections to the State unit of Yogam, Sagar's rival panel was defeated

SNDP is reported to have supported the left coalition in the recently concluded assembly elections. BJP Kerala unit allege that LDF put up an Ezhava Chief Ministerial candidate to sway SNDP and the Ezhava population.

Organisationally the Yogam has attempted to spread to erstwhile communist citadel in Malabar. There are claims and counterclaims that SNDP has failed in such an endeavour. Yogam has started self help groups among women. According to Yogam secretary it is very important to mould the Ezhava women for ideal housewife hood. SHG has been started with such an aim. The meetings of the SHG start with devotional songs and recitals from Vedas. Yogam is attempting to increase its reach. Communist regards the activities of the Yogam with alarm. In the Current political situation SNDP remains an important player.

Chapter 5

Conclusion:

The aim of this dissertation was to study the role of caste association in Kerala society and politics. The study revealed that caste associations originated in Kerala as a result of the creation of new classes in the colonial times. The new economic opportunities created by colonialism led to the rise of a middle class. The social conflict for economic resources led to the emergence of caste association.

To understand the development of caste association in Kerala one has to understand the operation of the colonial system. Thus while in the first phase of colonialism the existing social arrangements were used for revenue generation and political control, in the second phase colonial exploitation required a partial overthrow of the existing stratification system. Abolition of slavery, development of administrative networks and recruitment in these based on merit rather than caste undermined the material base of caste system. Middle classes began to be recruited to the new developing sectors from all castes.

The old classes tried to undermine the rise of this middle class, from backward and depressed castes, by citing pollution codes. Thus it became imperative for this new class to fight against the ideological world of Brahmanic Hinduism. In Travancore, the situation was worse for the rising middle class from Avarna castes. This is because the Savarna princely government was particular about imposing pollution codes. The interest of the middle classes drawn from the Avarna castes came into conflict with Savarna princely regime. These castes wanted to get employment in the administration and entry into schools. Thus caste associations came up to fight for this group. They fought against the ideology of Brahmanic Hinduism and helped the lower classes in the caste group, since pollution codes affected them also. Caste association mainly fought for such middle class interests like entry into schools and communal representation in government employment. Thus we see that it was the colonial incursion which triggered the growth of caste association in Kerala.

Political factors also facilitated the growth of caste association. Thus in Travancore caste associations were the first political agents. This is because, the main contradiction and social conflict, arose because of the nature of the state. The princely regime necessitated the setting up of caste association. In Malabar, which is a British ruled area, caste associations hardly existed because British rulers did not discriminate on the basis of caste in matters of public employment. SNDP was successful in Travancore because of political factors like easy availability of allies and competitive, pluralistic, political atmosphere.

In the post independence period also the rationale for the existence of caste association continued. In fact scope for intervention of caste association in politics was increased, as state became a chief employer and dispenser of patronage in the form of grants-in-aid to schools. In Kerala, because of the underdevelopment of agriculture and industry; a legacy of British rule, moneyed class generally invested in education. Caste association in this period jockeyed for state largesse in the form of educational grants. Educational institutes also provided the association a platform to develop patronage network at the government cost. Caste associations allied with each other, brought governments down in their endeavor to get maximum advantage out of their political power.

The development of communist party was a set back for caste associations because the party eroded the mass base of these association among the lower classes. When the communist government captured power, the policies of the government tried to erode further the power of caste associations. Class polarization and class consciousness that Kerala experienced following this period reduced the power of caste associations. But coalition politics in the state ensued that caste association can continue to nurture their constituencies with state fund. But the presence of mass organizations of the workers and the peasants ensured that caste consciousness will be held in check.

In recent decades with the weakening of left forces, internationally and nationally, a new political situation has developed in Kerala. The new economic policies widened the income inequalities and created a new middle class. Education, as a tool for mobility, took new meaning with international changes in the demand for skilled and educated labor forces. At the same time reduction in government expenditure increased

the competition for resources. Since access to education in Kerala was historically determined by community strength in bargaining, the competition between elites took a new communal color in Kerala. Thus economic advances are attributed to community strength. Social conflict is taking a communal turn in Kerala. This is further aided by the rise of communal politics in the form of hindutva at the national stage. Caste associations are increasing their strength in Kerala.

The study revealed the power of caste association to politically intervene. This depends on a host of factors ranging from economic condition to political factors. The power to mobilize is also dependent on the association's capability in creating a community feeling. Thus we saw that community processions, festivals etc bind the caste fellows together in relationships of love and comradeships. Community creation is always challenged because the class distinctions within the associations make the creation of a community of "equals" difficult to achieve.

The study answered how caste associations evolved in Kerala it also helped in answering some theoretical questions. On the basis of the study I understood that caste associations are not a monolith entity representing the whole caste group. There are caste divisions within the associations and caste solidarity is not a pre-given but actively created. Caste associations were not primarily interested in sanskritization activities though it can be one of its aims. I understand that a historical approach is more appropriate to study caste associations.

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