

Title:

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF 'MODERN' POLITICS IN
TRAVANCORE: FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO 1938

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Abstract

The subject is the development of politics, within a context of social change, in the Indian princely state of Travancore. The thesis is divided into two parts: Part One focuses upon social change, and Part Two on politics.

Since, in considering the emergence of 'modern' forms of political expression we are concerned with the twin themes of political socialisation and mobilisation, Part One explores the social background. Beginning with the latter half of the nineteenth century it deals with the development of communal identity. Chapters Two and Three give a survey of the castes and communities in the state and their situation at the turn of the century. They cover social and religious reform movements and the emergence of communal associations. Chapter Four is devoted to religious reform in the 1918-38 period. Chapter Five turns to the economy of Travancore: it considers the rise of capitalism and the consequences of change for nascent class conflict.

Having examined political development prior to 1918 in Chapter One, Part Two concentrates on politics in the eventful 1918-38 period. Chapter Six deals with the formation of the early political associations and the campaigns for civic equality and legislative reform in 1918-22. Chapter Seven covers the communal politics of the 1920s. Chapter Eight examines the Abstention movement of 1933-35 that sought an end to the political and administrative dominance of caste-Hindus. The final chapter looks at the background to the formation, in 1938, of the multi-communal Travancore State Congress on a platform of responsible government.

The conclusion reviews the transformation of politics in a period of social and institutional change - the development and expression of a new sense of communal identity, nationalism, and an emergent class consciousness. It then goes on to consider the significance of all three in post-1938 Kerala.

<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
List of Abbreviations	5
Map of Travancore	6
I. Introduction: i. The Historiography of Modern Travancore	7
ii. Travancore and Its Politics Before 1918	9
 <u>Part I: Social Change from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1938</u>	
II. Castes: Social Reform and Identity	27
III. Communities: Social Reform and Identity	63
IV. Caste Organisations, Religious Reform and Hindu Revivalism	90
V. The Development of Capitalism and the Rise of Trade Unions	109
 <u>Part II: Politics 1918 to 1938</u>	
VI. 1918-1922: The Emergence of 'Modern' Politics	128
VII. 1922-32: Communalism and Nationalism	167
VIII. 1933-1935: The Abstention Movement	216
IX. 1935-1938: The Joint Political Congress and the Formation of the State Congress	262
Conclusion: The Politics of Community, Class and Nation	295
 <u>Tables:</u>	
1. Population of Travancore in 1931	302
2. Land in Travancore	303
3. Ownership of Wet Land	304
4. Ownership of Dry Land	305
5. Percentage Distribution of Classes of Owners of Wet Land	306
6. Percentage Distribution of Classes of Owners of Dry Land	307
7. The Electoral Strength of the Principal Communities in 1931	308
Biographical Notes	309
Bibliography	316

Errata

Page

- 5 Add 'SMPAP - Sri Mulam Popular Assembly Proceedings'.
- 22 Add to n.1 'V.Rangaswami, The Story of Integration. A New Interpretation in the Context of the Democratic Movements in the Princely States of Mysore, Travancore and Cochin 1900-1947, New Delhi 1981'.
- 22 Add to n.3 'C.J.Baker, The Politics of South India 1920-1937, Cambridge 1976'.
- 122 Add to n.2 (after Sree Padomvaka) 'Sree Pandaravaka and Kundukrishivaka'.
- 163 Add n.107a - 'Freedom Fighters, pp.258-59'.
- 294 Add to n.145 'Perumal, op.cit., pp.46-49'.

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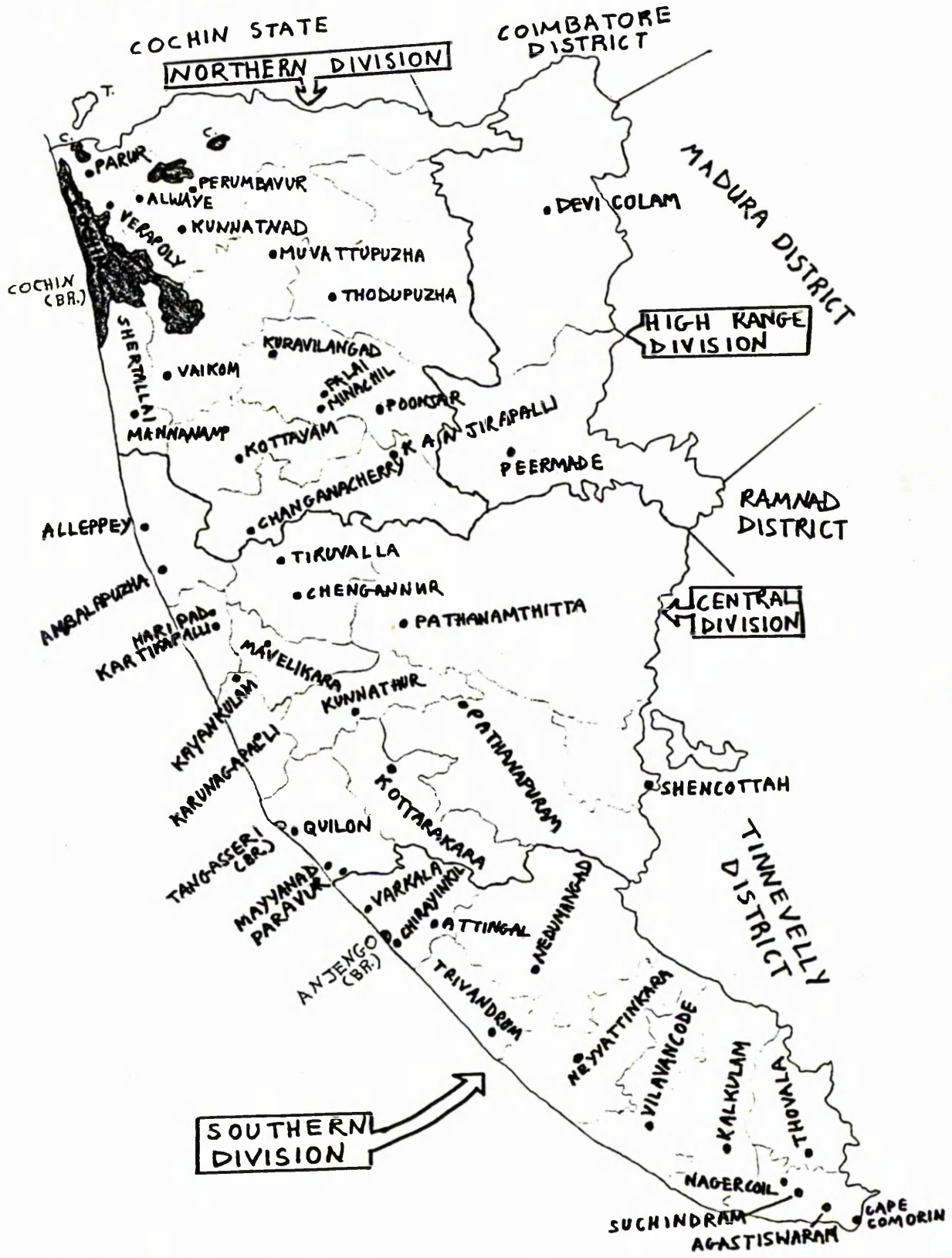
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Select List of Abbreviations

CI	Census of India
CT	Census of Travancore
Ch.J.	Chief Justice
CMSP	Church Missionary Society Proceedings
CS	Confidential Section files*
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
CRR	Crown Representative Records
FR	Fortnightly Report
Genl.	General files*
Genl.(Pol)	General (Political) files*
IMC/CBMS	International Missionary Council/Conference of British Missionary Societies
INC	Indian National Congress
Judicial	Judicial files*
KPCC	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
Leg.	Legislative Section files*
LMS	London Missionary Society
MLA	Member of the Legislative (or Sri Mulam) Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative (or Sri Chithra) Council
MNNR	Madras Native Newspapers Report
MSD	Madras States Directory
MSMD	Madras States and Mysore Directory
RRSC	Regional Records Survey Committee
RPT	Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore
Pol.	Political files*
SMAP	Sri Mulam Assembly Proceedings
SCSCP	Sri Chithra State Council Proceedings
TAD	Travancore Almanac and Directory
TAR	Travancore Administrative Report
TLA	Travancore Labour Association
TLCP	Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings
TLJ	Travancore Law Journal
TLR	Travancore Law Report
TSCC	Travancore State Catholic Congress
WSB	Weekly Secret Bulletin
YMNA	Young Men's Nair Association

* Travancore Government files, Kerala Secretariat. For details see Bibliography.

MAP OF TRAVANCORE



Adapted from CI (1931), XXVIII, I, pp.1, 338.

Chapter I:

Introduction

i. The Historiography of Modern Travancore

The Indian states, that accounted for a third of the area and a quarter of the population of the sub-continent before 1947, have only recently begun to attract the attention of historians. The studies by Barbara Ramusack, Ian Copland and Stephen Ashton have concentrated on the relationship between the princes and the British, while Vanaja Rangaswami's examination of Mysore, Travancore and Cochin considers developments within the states specifically in relation to the nationalist movement.¹

The internal politics of the states thus remain to be fully explored, and it is unsurprising that those seeking to fill the gap should have begun with two of the most populous and politicised states - Mysore and Travancore. The works by Bjørn Hettne and James Manor on twentieth-century Mysore, and that of Robin Jeffrey on Travancore in the second half of the nineteenth century, should be mentioned in this regard.² Their studies appeared at a time when South Indian historiography in general benefited from the surge of interest in regional history aroused by the influence of the so-called Cambridge school, represented in the South by D.A.Washbrook and C.J.Baker. David Arnold has also covered the development of politics in the Madras Presidency between 1870 and 1940.³ My study of Travancore is aimed at complementing their work, and that of Jeffrey and Manor, as well as contributing towards the understanding of the background to modern Kerala politics.

Social and religious change in Kerala in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been comparatively well covered. Apart from the work done by Jeffrey⁴, the Catholic sociologists, Francois Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier⁵, have attempted to relate socio-religious movements to the development of capitalism; M.S.A.Rao⁶ has looked at the Ezhava uplift movement; and T.K.Ravindran⁷ has made a study of the 1924 Vaikom Satyagraha. Most recently, Susan Bayly⁸ has considered the origin of community in Kerala, while J.W.Gladstone⁹ has focused upon the conversion of low-caste Hindus to Christianity in the period from 1850 to 1936.

However, no substantial research has hitherto been undertaken on the politics of early twentieth-century Travancore.^{9a} Several Malayali historians, such as M.K.Koshy, K.K.Kusuman and T.K.Vijaya Mohan, have produced a collection of largely uncritical narrative accounts,

principally notable for their lengthy extracts from primary sources.¹⁰ Jeffrey's The Decline of Nayar Dominance ends in 1908, while his article on the Travancore State Congress deals only with the decade after 1938.¹¹ The intervening period was one in which Travancorean politics crystallised under the impact of both far-reaching social and economic changes within the state and the rise of nationalism in British India. My thesis examines developments in this period in two parts: Chapters Two to Five are devoted to social change from the end of the nineteenth century, while the next four chapters consider the evolution of politics in the 1918-38 period.

The central theme of the study is the role played by caste and community, and later by nationalism and class, in political socialisation. Therefore, we begin with the various movements for social and religious reform that emerged between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s. By inducing an awareness of a distinct communal identity, the movements ensured that, initially, people were drawn into the new political system, with its modes of operation and structure modelled on the West, as members of a particular caste or community. However, as the sphere of politics expanded to embrace groups outside the wealthy and educated communal elites, class consciousness and nationalism also became significant factors in political mobilisation. As a result, by 1938, community, class, and nation were all important catchwords for Travancore's politicians.

ii. Travancore and Its Politics Before 1918

Located in the extreme south-west of the Indian subcontinent, the princely state of Travancore was bordered in the north by Cochin State, to the east by Madras Presidency, and to the west and south by the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. With an area of over 7,600 square miles and a population, in 1921, of just over four million,¹² it ranked seventeenth among the 562 princely states in terms of area, and third (behind Hyderabad and Mysore) in population.

Isolated from Madras Presidency by the Western Ghats, Travancore was distinguished by its rich tropical vegetation. About a third of its area was covered by dense jungle, and another third by low jungle. By the 1910s tea and cardamom plantations were beginning to be a common sight on most of the higher elevations, with other cash crops, such as pepper, rubber and ginger, flourishing in the lesser uplands. There were reserve forests of valuable timber in both regions. Paddy cultivation was found in terraced stretches along valleys, and was also extensive in the irrigated areas of Nanjinad and Edanad in the south, and in the backwater reclamations of Kuttanad in the north - the two 'rice-bowls' of Travancore. The coastal belt was covered with dense coconut plantations, and intersected by lagoons, backwaters, and rivers flowing west into the Arabian Sea.

The state was peculiar even amidst the diversity of the Indian subcontinent. One of the strongest bastions of Hindu orthodoxy and the caste system in southern India, it included the largest, oldest and socially best-positioned, concentration of Christians in India - the Syrian Christians. Furthermore, while exhibiting an extraordinarily rapid rate of progress in aspects of modernisation such as literacy, it, nevertheless, maintained an outmoded form of social organisation - the matrilineal joint-family of the caste-Hindu Nairs - right until the 1920s.

The half century from the Malayala Memorial of 1891 to the campaign for the establishment of responsible government in Travancore in 1938, was a period of social, economic and political development which gave the state the reputation of being among the most progressive of the Indian principalities. A few statistics drawn from the decennial Census and annual Administrative Reports will serve as a guide to the pace of change. In demographic terms, the population more than doubled - from two and a half to over six million - between 1891 and 1941, with the proportion of Hindus declining from 73 to 60 per cent; the corresponding Christian percentage rising from 21 to 32.¹³

One of the most thickly populated areas of India, second only to neighbouring Cochin, Travancore had a density of 525 persons per square mile in 1921. Within twenty years this average had increased to nearly eight hundred. Only a tenth of the population was enumerated as living in towns in 1921. Apart from Trivandrum, the state capital, only three towns - Nagercoil, Quilon and Alleppey - boasted a population in excess of 25,000.¹⁴

One of the most striking features of the state was the high percentage of literate people. This was the result of the efforts of the Christian missionary institutions since the early nineteenth century, and the vigorous policy of educational expansion pursued by Travancorean governments from the 1860s. In 1891, one in ten Travancoreans was literate; by 1921 this had risen to one in four, and in 1941 the figure was almost one in every two.¹⁵ This represented a tenfold increase in the number of literates, from 280,000 to 2.8 million, and meant that literacy in Travancore was four times the Indian average, and on a par with a southern European state of comparable size - such as Portugal.

In the light of this fact it is unsurprising that the press in the state grew rapidly, and was easily the most active in any Indian principality. In 1893-4 the vernacular press list in the Travancore Administrative Report, included only seven newspapers with a combined circulation of 4,150.¹⁶ By 1903-4 circulation had quadrupled, and in the next two decades it more than quintupled, so that by 1921 it was over 82,000.¹⁷ The Administrative Report for 1923-24 gave a total of 43 newspapers and 73 periodicals, but following the 1926 Newspaper Regulation, the multiplication of publications was checked and, by 1939-40, the aggregate of papers was down to 88.¹⁸ One in 50 Travancoreans was a newspaper reader in 1921 - a proportion that remained constant over the next two decades.¹⁹

Travancore in 1921 was a predominantly agrarian society, with over half the population engaged in farming, as compared to only a tenth in trade, and a fifth in industry.²⁰ The vast majority of the latter were involved in cottage industries, and there were few factories of any size. Most of the industry was related to processing the produce of the plantation agriculture sector, especially tea (in the highland ranges of Devicolam) and coconut (concentrated round the port of Alleppey).

The expansion of plantation agriculture in the early twentieth century contributed to a phenomenal increase in commercial activity

in the state. The number of registered joint stock companies rose from ten, in 1892-3, to 132 in 1916-17. It reached a peak of 943 in 1932-33 when Travancore accounted for a fifth of all the banks in India.²¹ Though the number of companies had dropped sharply - to 407 - by 1940, Travancore still had more than twice the number registered in the much larger state of Mysore.²²

Some of the main features of socio-economic change in modern Travancore can, thus, be summarised as follows: a rapid rate of population growth, with a significant shift in communal strengths; a high literacy rate that was the result of impressive educational expansion; the rise of a sizeable newspaper-reading public; and the growth of commerce, particularly in the sectors of banking and plantation agriculture. Some other prominent features in the transformation of Travancore should also be noted. These include the final breakup of the matrilineal Nair joint-family (the 'taravad'), and the related high incidence of land transfer in the 1920s and 1930s, which benefited Syrian Christians in particular. There was also the upward economic and social mobility of members of the backward Ezhava caste, and the new assertiveness of the Ezhavas and the ex-slave castes of Pulayas and Parayas. This helped to bring about the reform of traditional Hinduism, culminating in the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936.

The state of Travancore came into being in the mid-eighteenth century. It resulted from the extension northward of the domain of Raja Marthanda Varma of Venad (1729-58), from what was to become the state capital of Trivandrum. Venad had been a feudatory of the second Chera empire (c.800-1102 AD) based at Mahodayapuram, north of modern Cochin. Contemporaneous with the Tamil Chola and Pandya Kingdoms further east, the Cheras developed a small empire covering much of present day Kerala.²³ The empire had strong commercial ties with West Asia, and between the fourth and ninth centuries, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, settlements were established along the Malabar coast.

The Chera empire's disintegration, in the course of the eleventh century, was the result of the constant campaigns launched against it by its powerful Chola neighbour. By the early twelfth century the Chera ruling house, the Kulasekharas, had shifted their seat to the port of Quilon, following the Cholas' destruction of Mahodayapuram. The Chera ruler, Rama Varma Kulasekhara (1090-1102), is considered the founder of the Venad royal family.²⁴

In the wake of the collapse of the Chera empire, there emerged four small coastal kingdoms - Kolattunad, Kozhikode, Cochin and Venad - and

a large number of semi-independent principalities in the hinterland. The situation that prevailed in Kerala prior to the eighteenth century has been described as bearing a strong resemblance to the feudalism of eleventh century Western Europe.²⁵ The smallest political unit was the 'desam', presided over by the 'desavazhi', the hereditary caste-Hindu (Nair) headman. He owed allegiance to the 'naduvazhi', the Nair head of a number of desams, which constituted a 'nad', or territory. A chief who had at least a hundred Nair followers was considered a naduvazhi, and owed allegiance to the raja, being expected to supply him with fighting forces in time of need.²⁶

In Venad, a settlement in 1050 AD had granted the administration of the Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple in Trivandrum to an 'Ettarayogam' (council of eight and a half votes) of eight hereditary Malayala Brahmans and the reigning raja. These 'Yogakkar' (councillors) divided the extensive lands owned by the temple into eight districts, over which they appointed eight Nairs to be in charge of revenue collection. The eight, known as the 'Ettuveetil Pillamar' (the Lords of the Eight Houses), were said to have gradually usurped all authority and reduced the raja to a figure head.²⁷ When Raja Marthanda Varma succeeded to the throne in 1729, he was faced by a rebellion, supported by the Yogakkar and the Ettuveetil Pillamar, which he ruthlessly crushed. They were banished, or put to death, and their property was confiscated. In 1749 Marthanda Varma dedicated his dominions in perpetuity to the god Sri Padmanabha, and took the title of Sri Padmanabha Dasa (the Servant of the Lord Padmanabha), for himself and his successors.²⁸

Apart from the assertion of royal authority, the internal policies of Marthanda Varma had the long-term effect of serving to undermine the preeminence of the Malayala Brahman 'janmis' (landlords) and the Nair naduvazhis and desavazhis. It also marked the beginning of the ascendancy of foreign, non-Malayala Brahmans in administration that was the main grievance behind the Malayala Memorial of 1891.²⁹ Other significant changes introduced by Marthanda Varma were the creation of a standing army, and an elementary bureaucracy, which was aimed at making the revenue administration of the state more efficient.

The transformation of Venad into Travancore occurred in stages and involved the subjection of numerous local rajas and chieftains. By Marthanda Varma's death in 1758, the borders of Travancore were much as they were to remain for the next 190 years.³⁰ His successor, Rama Varma (1758-98), withstood the attacks of Tippu Sultan with the aid of the troops of the British East India Company, with whom

Marthanda Varma had always maintained good relations. In 1795 a treaty of perpetual alliance was concluded between the Company and the Raja.³¹

The immediate impact of British hegemony was a further undermining of the power and influence of the Nairs, who constituted the most numerous caste-Hindu group. Having seen their predominance in administration decline under Marthanda Varma, the Nair office-holding class had experienced a revival of fortunes during Rama Varma's reign when two of their number - Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai and Raja Kesava Das - served as chief minister. However, following an abortive revolt by the Nair Dalava (Dewan), Velu Tampi, in 1808-9, the British Resident, Colonel John Munro, officiated as Dewan from 1811-14, and deprived the mostly Nair 'Kariakkars' (local officials) of their magisterial and judicial functions, so that they became merely tax collectors. He also abolished the independent 'Sankethams' of the Hindu temples with their considerable powers and privileges. In 1811 the responsibility for the management of the temples was assumed by the Sirkar.³² Another cause for grievance for the caste-Hindus was Munro's attempt to reduce their monopoly of the Sirkar service by recruiting Syrian Christians and appointing Christian judges to the reformed judiciary. This policy of encouraging the indigenous Christians was not continued by Munro's non-Malayala Brahman successors.³³

The 1820s and 1830s saw Travancore acquiring some features of a modern state, such as the introduction of a codified system of law and the establishment of new law courts along British lines. The first census was undertaken in 1836. From the 1810s British missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS) were to the fore in encouraging the spread of Western-style education. However, it was the second half of the nineteenth century that saw the most significant changes occurring. In 1855 a Royal Proclamation abolishing slavery was promulgated after years of campaigning spearheaded by the missionaries, and in 1858 a new Dewan, T. Madhava Rao, was appointed; he soon gained a reputation as a moderniser.

In his fourteen years in office, Madhava Rao, with the support of the reigning Maharaja, Ayilliam Tirunal (1860-80), carried out a wholesale reorganisation and expansion of state education. He also sought to reform the agrarian system, organised a Public Works department, and encouraged the growth of a cash economy. Madhava Rao's period was further characterised by the steady bureaucratising of the

rapidly expanding state administration.³⁴

A significant political innovation was introduced under one of Madhava Rao's successors, T.Rama Rao. In 1888 Travancore became the first Indian state to establish a Legislative Council. Modelled on the British Indian Councils Act of 1861, the Council Regulation originally provided for six official, and two non-official members. However, in 1898 the Regulation was amended to allow for a maximum of fifteen members, of whom at least two-fifths had to be non-officials.³⁵ Initially, the membership was wholly caste-Hindu, and it was mainly pressure from the British Resident, H.B.Grigg, that persuaded the administration to nominate a Christian, Vellala Catholic lawyer A.M.Muthunayagom Pillai, to the Council in 1894.³⁶ It was not until 1896 that a Syrian Christian, K.K.Kuruville, a retired engineer in the state Public Works Department, was given a seat.³⁷ Appointment to the Council was largely a matter of prestige for the individual and community concerned, since its powers were strictly limited, and members could not even raise questions or propose motions.

These administrative, social and economic changes engendered a rising political consciousness which began to express itself in the 1880s through the formation of short-lived associations, such as the mainly Nair Malayali Sabha and the Syrian Christian Jathiakya Sangham. It was also seen in the emergence of the first popular Malayalam newspapers - the Malayali (1886), the Nazrani Deepika (1887) and the Malayala Manorama (1889).

The Malayala Memorial of 1891 is considered a landmark in the history of modern Travancore. It was the culmination of the first phase in the inter-communal struggles that were to dominate the politics of the state for the next half century. Initiated by a group of young Western-educated Nairs, many of whom were active in the Malayali Sabha, the Memorial, which was submitted to the Maharaja, Sri Mulam Tirunal, in January 1891, had as its principal theme the preponderance of foreign non-Malayala Brahmans, and the corresponding under-representation of native Malayalis, in the higher administration of the state. While mentioning the claims of the Syrian Christians and the most numerous non-caste-Hindu community, the Ezhavas, the Memorial emphasised the demands of the Malayali Sudras (i.e. the Nairs). It declared that

'As the Malayali Sudras are the most loyal portion of Your Highness' subjects, as they are in point of intelligence, general culture and attainments not behind any other class in the country, as they were from the earliest times till within the last few years the ruling race in the land, and as it is they that mainly contribute to the material resources of the

state, more than one-fourth of which is derived from land revenue - their claims on Your Highness' Government are far stronger than those of any other class in the country.'³⁸

The organisers of the Memorial seem to have sought support from outside the Nair community, especially from Syrian Christians, as a means of impressing the government. In this they had some success - two of the six public meetings in support of the Memorialists, held during the first half of 1891, were presided over by Syrian ecclesiastics.³⁹ In addition, the Memorialist delegation of six that met Dewan T.Rama Rao in July 1891, included Cyriac Nidhiry, a Syrian Catholic landlord and a brother of Emmanuel Nidhiry, the Vicar General of Kottayam. In the light of later divergences in the political stance of Syrian and non-Syrian Christians, it might also be noted that a counter-Memorial movement gained the support of prominent Tamil LMS converts in South Travancore. For instance, P.C. Joseph, the editor of the Travancore Times of Nagercoil, was a member of the counter-Memorialist delegation that also met the Dewan.⁴⁰

The Memorialists' public campaign subsided following the July 1891 audience with the Dewan, at which the counter-Memorialists decried any distinction being made between Malayalis and non-Malayalis in appointments to the public service, and rejected the classification of people as natives and foreigners.⁴¹ This stance was largely accepted by the government, and no specific assurances for the redress of their grievances was held out to the Malayala Memorialists, though the Maharaja did state that he would be 'happy to advance their interests in every legitimate way'.⁴² Thus the first modern political movement in Travancore ended with apparently nothing to show for its efforts, apart from a few well-attended public meetings, an audience with the Dewan, and favourable comment in the Madras press.

Nonetheless, the 1891 Memorial was a watershed in the political development of Travancore. It came just three years after the inauguration of the Legislative Council, and at a time when the scope of politics in the state was being widened by the newly-formed associations and the nascent Malayalam press. Hitherto politics had been confined to palace intrigue, with the occasional intervention by a British Resident, or missionaries campaigning for social reforms. The Memorial was the first purely indigenous expression of public opinion to which the government had had to respond. It established a pattern whereby political campaigns were launched to bring about

social and administrative reforms in the interests of particular communities - the dominant feature of Travancore politics until the 1930s. In this sense the Malayala Memorial was the precursor of the movement for equal civic rights in 1918-22, and the Abstention Movement of 1933-35.

The years following 1891 saw the prominent Memorialist leaders being won over by the government through the skilful use of patronage by Rama Rao's successor as Dewan, S.Shungarasobyer. These tactics, while successful in ensuring that the public campaign against foreign Brahmans was not resumed, also contributed to a split among the Nair leaders that was to have long-term consequences. Two of the chief organisers of the Memorial accepted government posts within the decade. C.V.Raman Pillai, the Secretary of the Malayali Sabha and editor of its organ, the Malayali, became manager of the High Court in 1897. K.P.Sankara Menon, a Madras High Court vakil and the official spokesman for the Memorialists, was appointed a district judge in 1898. Another notable appointment was that of P.Thanu Pillai as Chief Secretary in 1895.⁴³ While not associated with the Malayala Memorial, Thanu Pillai had taken an active interest in the Malayali Sabha and had founded its precursor, the Malayali Social Union, in the 1870s. The only Nair leader steadfastly to spurn an accommodation with the government was C.Krishna Pillai, an Inspector of Government Schools, who had founded the Malayali Sabha in 1884 and fought, unsuccessfully, to maintain it in the 1890s. Within the Nair community Krishna Pillai led a group favouring radical social reform which was opposed by conservative Nairs who looked to Raman Pillai for leadership.

The official policy of conciliating the Nair elite impelled non-Nairs to organise independently to press for the redress of their grievances. In 1895 and 1896 Dr P.Palpu, one of the few educated men from the Ezhava caste, and a signatory to the Malayala Memorial, submitted petitions on the disabilities suffered by his community, to Dewan Shungarasobyer and the Maharaja. He failed to get a favourable response.⁴⁴

The Syrian Christians of Travancore had particular cause to be discontented with Dewan Shungarasobyer's administration from 1892-98. The clergy saw a serious obstacle to conversion in the 1885 High Court ruling by which a Christian convert from one of the marumakkathayam (matrilineal) castes lost his, or her, rights of inheritance and maintenance. In 1893 a memorial on the subject was submitted to the Maharaja on behalf of the CMS, the LMS, and the Syrian Jacobite and

Marthomite churches.⁴⁵ This elicited no response, and two years later the Dewan even rejected a suggestion from the British Resident, H.B. Grigg, that Nair converts be granted maintenance rights by law.⁴⁶

In 1894 a new Education Code was introduced that stated that pupils in the private schools receiving grants-in-aid, the majority of which were church schools, could only receive religious instruction with parental consent.⁴⁷ In the same year, further controversy was aroused by an amendment to the Penal Code that proposed a criminal penalty for building a place of worship without official permission.⁴⁸

With such legislation, the absence of a Syrian Christian member on the Legislative Council was especially keenly felt. Finally, there was the longstanding grievance of the underrepresentation of Christians in the public service, one of the reasons for which was the caste-Hindu monopoly of the higher posts in the Revenue Department, the largest department of state. This had been an important concern for Christian supporters of the Malayala Memorial, such as Emmanuel Nidhiry, who had suggested in a Memorialist meeting, in Kottayam in 1891, that the duties of devaswom (temple) supervision be removed from the purview of Revenue officials, as this would leave the way clear for non-caste-Hindus, and non-Hindus, to enter the higher ranks of the Revenue Department.⁴⁹

Thus, it was in the context of considerable dissatisfaction among both the Christian clergy and the educated classes that the Travancore and Cochin Christian Association was formed in April 1898. Its first President, T.C. Poonen, was a retired Cochin judge and a prominent Anglican Syrian from Kottayam, who had the distinction of being the first Malayali to be educated in England. In 1899 the new body presented a memorial to Dewan K. Krishnaswami Rao praying for the separation of devaswom duties from executive officers, the introduction of competitive examinations for the higher administrative posts, and a greater balance to be maintained in the composition of the administration.

The government was not receptive towards the suggestions and when the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, visited Travancore in November 1900, the Association petitioned him, but Curzon declined to interfere.⁵⁰

The Christian Association included Jacobite, Marthomite and Anglican Syrians, but the Syrian Catholic Nidhiry was barred by the Papal Delegate to the East Indies, Mgr. L.M. Zaleski, from becoming the Association's permanent President. Mgr. Zaleski also refused permission for any Catholics to join the body.⁵¹ This fact, taken in conjunction with the lack of participation in its activities by the non-Syrian

Protestant Christians, meant that the Association could only claim to represent the wealthy and educated sections of Christian denominations that together formed less than two-fifths of all the Christians in the state.

Politics in the 1900s were dominated by the intrigues and scandals surrounding the Maharaja's court. The central figure in palace affairs was T.Sankaran Tampi, the Palace Manager and the ex-husband of the Maharaja's wife. Sankaran Tampi was close to C.V.Raman Pillai and others of the conservative 'official' Nair faction, but his influence was undermined by the removal of Dewan Krishnaswami Rao in 1904, and his replacement, at the insistence of the Madras Government, by V.P.Madhava Rao from the Mysore Service. On this occasion Sri Mulam Tirunal would have preferred to appoint V.Nagam Aiya, the most senior Travancorean official; he had had to bow to British pressure.⁵²

Madhava Rao's appointment was resented by the Palace clique, and he was the object of attacks from Raman Pillai and others. The new Dewan's actions were not calculated to conciliate his critics. First he appointed more non-Malayala Brahmans to the Legislative Council, thus giving them a majority. This prompted a protest delegation to the Dewan led by Malloor K.Govinda Pillai, a protege of C.V.Raman Pillai. Madhava Rao defended his appointments and suggested that the deputationists should turn to organised political activity.⁵³ He followed this up, in October 1904, by inaugurating a new non-official chamber of representatives, the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly.⁵⁴

The new body, formed along the lines of the Representative Assembly established in Mysore in 1881, was intended to elicit public opinion. Meeting annually for a session which usually lasted about a week, its main function was to act as a forum for non-officials to make representations before the government. Purely consultative in character, it had no legislative powers.

The first Assembly was wholly nominated, but from 1905 most members were elected, albeit on a severely restricted franchise.⁵⁵ Initially, 90 of the 100 members were elected, but following successive revisions of the Assembly Rules between 1910 and 1914, the figure dropped to 77;- 43 from the 33 taluks in the state, nineteen deputed by Town Committees, seven by commercial interests, and four each by the planters' associations and 'janmis' (large landlords). Under the Rule changes the number of members nominated by the government rose from ten to 23.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, until the 1919 reform of the Legislative Council, the Assembly remained the principal directly-elected political institution in the

state. Its importance was highlighted in October 1906 when Dewan S. Gopalachari failed to convene the third session of the Assembly. There were strong protests and a public meeting in Trivandrum warned the Dewan against attempting to abolish the chamber.⁵⁷

During his brief tenure as Dewan, Madhava Rao was regarded with hostility by the 'official' Nair faction. Their disaffection was increased by the encouragement he gave to the newly-formed Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam that championed Ezhava demands for greater educational and employment opportunities. In 1905 the Dewan's policy of opening state schools to non-caste-Hindus provoked widespread clashes between Nairs and Ezhavas in central Travancore. Even a High Court ruling against his arch-foe, palace manager Sankaran Tampi, in a bribery case in February 1906, failed to make the Dewan's position easier, and in March Madhava Rao returned to Mysore.⁵⁸

In 1907 P.Rajagopalachari, a Madras civil servant and former Dewan of Cochin, replaced Gopalachari, Madhava Rao's unpopular successor. The early years of Rajagopalachari's administration were marked by continuing controversy over corruption in court circles. Unlike Madhava Rao, Rajagopalachari, whose second wife was a Trivandrum Nair, maintained close ties with Sankaran Tampi and the influential clique of Nair officials led by C.V.Raman Pillai.⁵⁹

The activities of Tampi and his associates were attacked, often in virulent terms, by a young Nair journalist, 'Swadesabhimani' K. Ramakrishna Pillai, one of the younger associates of the reformer C.Krishna Pillai. Many of the articles published in Ramakrishna Pillai's Trivandrum paper, Swadesabhimani (National Pride), were actually written by K.Narayana Kurukkal, like Krishna Pillai a schools' inspector who was in his fifties.⁶⁰ Kurukkal was forced to resign his government post because of his criticism of the administration. A sympathiser of the Indian National Congress, he wrote the first political novels in Malayalam, which were based on alleged misrule by the Maharaja and his ministers, and the licentiousness of the Travancore court.⁶¹

In 1910 Ramakrishna Pillai was elected to the Popular Assembly but was promptly disqualified from becoming a member.⁶² The Swadesabhimani's increasingly strident attacks on the administration then forced the Dewan to contemplate the introduction of a stiffer Press Regulation. However, such a measure was not favoured by either the Maharaja or the Paramount Power.⁶³ Therefore, in September 1910 Ramakrishna Pillai was arrested and deported from Travancore, and the Swadesabhimani suppressed.⁶⁴ While the affair gained considerable publicity outside

Travancore, within the state there were few protests and most local newspapers backed the administration's action.⁶⁵

A consummate politician, Rajagopalachari was able, while maintaining close ties with the conservative Nair officials, also to win over some prominent reformist Nairs⁶⁶ and encourage the aspirations of the Christians and the non-caste-Hindus of the state. The Dewan actively promoted the development of a communal consciousness that had already been stirred by the growing debate over social reform within the advanced communities, and social uplift among the more backward groups. Rajagopalachari's first action in office was to appoint a committee to examine the possible reform of the matrilineal joint family, a question that preoccupied Nair leaders until the early 1920s. In 1911 a similar committee was appointed to examine the controversial question of succession among Christians. In addition, the Dewan patronised some non-caste-Hindu leaders, such as the Ezhava poet Kumaran Asan, and the Pulaya Ayyan Kali, both of whom were nominated to the Popular Assembly.⁶⁷ The Swadesabhimani saw Rajagopalachari's policy as one of divide and rule, and accused the administration of encouraging racial strife by emphasising distinctions of caste and community.⁶⁸

In a speech just before his departure from the state in 1914, Dewan Rajagopalachari highlighted the crucial issues around which the politics of Travancore were to evolve in the next two decades. He said:

...If you, men of more advanced classes or castes, obstruct, either wilfully or through ignorance, the nascent life of these rising communities, what would be the result? You would certainly not be able to stop them; the communities now called backward would one day come to the front, whether you like it or not; but instead of coming to the front with a feeling of gratefulness, that they have been helped through their trial, they would take their place with a feeling of bitterness against those who had striven - and that unsuccessfully - to prevent them from coming to the front...⁶⁹

Apparently referring to demands for greater powers for the Popular Assembly made by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, the most prominent of C. Krishna Pillai's followers, he added that it was only by their considerate treatment of the backward classes that the more advanced sections could justify their claims.

The words of the outgoing Dewan proved to be prophetic; the politics of communalism dominated the affairs of Travancore for the remaining years of the state's existence. The typical politicians and the most influential organisations of the interwar period reflected the interests and aspirations of the wealthy and educated

politicised elites of the major communities. Communal controversy provided the staple diet for most of the state's newspaper-reading public, and formed the main subject for discussion in the legislature. In government and politics Syrian Christian and Ezhava leaders strongly challenged the hitherto dominant Nairs, while Palace intrigue and personal rivalry were the main subsidiary features.

Notes

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- ² B.Hettne, The Political Economy of Indirect Rule: Mysore 1881-1947, London 1978; J.Manor, Political Change in an Indian State. Mysore 1917-1955, New Delhi 1977; R.Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance. Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908, New York 1976.
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- ⁶ M.S.A.Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India, Madras 1979.
- ⁷ T.K.Ravindran, Vaikkam Satyagraha and Gandhi, Trichur 1975.
- ⁸ S.Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: Religion, State and Society in Kerala, 1750-1850', in Modern Asian Studies, 18 (1984), 2, pp.177-213.
- ⁹ J.W.Gladstone, Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala. A Study of Christian Mass Movements in Relation to Neo-Hindu Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850-1936, Trivandrum 1984.
- ^{9a} P.M.Mammen, Communalism vs. Communism. A Study of the Socio-Religious Communities and Political Parties in Kerala, 1892-1970, Calcutta 1981. A general study covering Kerala politics in this period, Mammen devotes only limited attention to Travancore and makes no use of unpublished sources.
- ¹⁰ M.J.Koshy, Constitutionalism in Travancore and Cochin, Trivandrum 1972, and Last Days of Monarchy in Kerala, Trivandrum 1973; K.K.Kusuman, The Abstention Movement, Trivandrum 1976; T.K.Vijaya Mohan, Genesis of Students' Unrest in Kerala, Trivandrum 1980. Pages 96-271 of Koshy's Last Days are appendices reproduced from the Travancore State Congress, Travancore Today: Her Struggle for Freedom, Cochin 1938.

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- 12 CI (1921), XXV, I, pp.2-3.
- 13 CT (1891), pp.215 and 319; CI (1941), XXV, I, pp.10-11, 125.
- 14 CI (1921), XXV, I, p.8.
- 15 CT (1891), p.470; CI (1921), XXV, I, p.80, CI (1941), XXV, I,p.155.
- 16 The papers were either weeklies or monthlies. TAR (1893-94), p.157.
- 17 In addition to weeklies and monthlies, this also included a daily and tri-weeklies, bi-weeklies and fortnightlies. CI (1921), XXV, I,p.81.
- 18 CI (1941), XXV, I, pp.165-66.
- 19 However, the number of daily papers increased from one in 1919 to eleven in by 1939-40. TAR (1939-40), p.200.
- 20 CI (1921), XXV, I, pp.132-34.
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- 25 K.Gough, 'Literacy in Kerala' in J.Goody (ed), Literacy in Traditional Societies, Cambridge 1968, p.133.
- 26 History of Kerala, p.77.
- 27 Trivandrum Gazetteer, pp.165-69.
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- 29 Ibid., p.200. It was Ramayyan Dalava, Marthanda Varma's Tamil chief minister, who first introduced large numbers of Tamil Brahmans into the Travancore service.
- 30 V.Nagam Aiya, Travancore State Manual, Vol.I, Trivandrum 1906, pp.333-68.
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The Decline of Nayar Dominance, pp.6-7. Over 300 Syrians lost their posts in the civil administration after Munro's departure in 1819. S.B.Kaufmann, 'Popular Christianity, Caste and Hindu Society in South India, 1800-1915; A Study of Travancore and Tirunelveli', Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge 1980, p.339.

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R.R.Nair, Constitutional Experiments in Kerala, Trivandrum 1964, pp.3-4 and 6-7. Until 1904 the Council had only eight members, this was then increased to ten and by 1913 there was a membership of fifteen, including seven non-officials.

36

Resident's foreward to TAR (1891-92), p.2, and (1893-94), p.7; note by J.F.Price, Madras Gov., TAR (1893-94), p.31; and TAR (1894-95), p.19.

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TAR (1895-96), p.23.

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The Travancore Memorials, (Madras Times, 8 July 1891), pp.4-5.

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Madras Mail, 8 June 1891, p.3; C.R.Mitra, Sree Narayana Guru and Social Revolution, Shertallai 1979, p.34.

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Travancore Memorials, p.1.

41

Ibid., pp.14-16.

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Ibid., p.6.

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The Decline of Nayar Dominance, pp.177-79, 344

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Rao, op.cit., pp.32-35.

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1893 Christian Memorial, Appendix 'D' to CMS Mission Conference to Lord Wenlock (Governor of Madras), undated. Travancore and Cochin Mission, G2, I, 5/0, 187/1895.

46

The Decline of Nayar Dominance, pp.193-94.

47

Ibid., pp.195-96.

48

The original Bill proposed a maximum penalty of one or two years imprisonment. However, after a memorial submitted by Protestant missionaries, this was reduced to a fine of Rs.500 in the Regulation passed in 1898. RPT, II, pp.772-77.

49

Madras Mail, 8 June 1891, p.3.

50

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A.M.Nidhiry, Father Nidhiry, 1842-1904: A History of His Times, Kottayam 1971, p.271.

52

The Decline of Nayar Dominance, pp.216-22.

53

Ibid., p.233.

54

TAR (1904-05), p.1.

55

Initially, the basic qualification was payment of annual land tax of Rs.50 or a net annual income of Rs.3,000. Graduates of recognised universities could also vote. After 1910 the income requirement was reduced to Rs.2,000 and only graduates of ten years standing were allowed to vote. In 1920 the electorate for the Assembly numbered 4,790. TAR (1906-07), p.iii, and (1909-10), p.ii; Note by Dewan T.Raghaviah, 4 November 1920, Genl.(Pol.), 28/1920.

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R.R.Nair, The Political Ideas of Swadesabhimani (1878-1916), Trivandrum 1975, pp.14-15.

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65

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66

Ibid., Part IV, pp.84-86. An example is P.K.Govinda Pillai, the editor of the weekly, Subhashini. In 1910 he was nominated to represent the interests of low caste Pulayyas in the Popular Assembly. Gladstone, op.cit., p.275.

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T.K.Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala: A Study of His Assembly Speeches, Trivandrum 1972, pp.LXXVII and LXXXI.

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PART ONE

SOCIAL CHANGE FROM THE
LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO 1938

Chapter II

Castes: Social Reform and Identity

Travancore society in the early twentieth century was experiencing far reaching changes. Within all the major communities there were movements for social reform and uplift that were transforming intra- and inter-caste relations. The movements, spearheaded by the new caste and communal associations, drew their strength from the perceived need both to adapt to, and to change, existing social conditions. Organisations such as the Travancore and Cochin Christian Association, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalna Yogam of the Ezhavas, and the Nair samajams were the principal focus of public activity outside the official forums of the Legislative Council and Popular Assembly.

As in British India, the preoccupations that governed the conduct of administration encouraged the development of communal consciousness. For instance, the decennial census reports, published from 1875, stressed the division of society along the lines of caste and community. The pursuit of social reform as a communal, rather than a general, concern further accentuated the differences between one social group and another.

The preeminence of communalism in social affairs was mirrored in the politics of Travancore. Most newspapers were communal organs and members of the Assembly and Council regarded themselves primarily as representatives of their respective communities. Thus a survey of the various communities - their history, customs and situation at the turn of the century, is indispensable in arriving at an understanding of the political dynamics of the state.

The numerous castes and communities can be brought under five main headings: the caste-Hindus, the outcaste-Hindus, the Syrian Christians, the non-Syrian Christians and the Muslims. The relative proportions of the five groups, and the castes and sects included within each are given in Table 1.

In an often-quoted denunciation of the strength of caste discrimination in Travancore, the Hindu reformer Swami Vivekananda, who visited south India in 1892, declared that 'these Malabaris are all lunatics and their houses so many lunatic asylums'.¹ The extent of practices such as 'theendal' (distance-pollution) and other forms of segregation and discrimination against outcastes were without parallel in other parts of the south. Caste rules were still rigorously observed in the early years of this century. The British Assistant Resident in 1917-19 noted that the reigning Maharaja, Sri Mulam Tirunal, was a very orthodox

Hindu who only received European visitors at daybreak before undertaking purificatory ablutions.²

An idea of the complex hierarchical nature of traditional Hindu society on the Malabar coast is conveyed by the Cochin Census Report of 1901.³ It lists eight broad categories of castes in descending order of precedence: the Brahmans, followed by the royal Kshatriya castes; the temple service castes; the Sudras, divided into a number of Nair sub-castes; the Kammalas or artisan castes; the Ezhavas and the fishing castes; the former slave castes of Kuruvas, Parayas and Pulayas; and, last of all, the Ulladan and Nayadi castes of scavengers.

People belonging to the latter four outcaste categories were considered to pollute the caste-Hindus above them. Therefore, the Kammalas had to observe a distance of 24 feet from the castes above, while the Ezhavas had to remain 36 feet away. Distance pollution was even observed among the outcastes themselves. The lowly Pulaya had not only to remain 96 feet away from a Brahman and 64 feet away from a Nair, but had also to stay at a distance of 30 feet from Ezhavas and 40 feet from Kammalas.⁴ Pulayas in the 1900's were still excluded from Syrian Christian and Ezhava, as well as caste-Hindu homes. Even the Kuravas, themselves ex-slaves, considered a Pulayas touch polluting.⁵

Unapproachability based on caste status and the consequent exclusion of a large proportion of the state's inhabitants from many public places was unique to Travancore. However, it was a practice that, in the early part of the twentieth century, was fast declining under the pressure of expanding communications, industry and education, and the growth of towns, all of which undercut the maintenance of caste segregation. In 1934 the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee reported that 'within the last fifty years the idea of unapproachability has been gradually losing its hold on the Hindu community'.⁶ By comparison, in 1834 a British traveller had recorded that 'if a Nair accidentally meets a Pooleh [Pulaya], on the high way, he cuts him down with as little ceremony as he should a noxious animal'.⁷ Although a century later such brutal instances of discrimination had disappeared, the acutely depressed social position and self-perception of the ex-slave castes only changed very gradually. Commenting on the Pulayas in 1939, L.A. Krishna Iyer, Travancore's leading anthropologist, said 'their slave mentality is bred in the very marrow of their bones'.⁸

The disabilities suffered by the majority of Hindus was the principal factor behind the rapid spread of Christianity in Travancore in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the half century between 1891 and 1941 the proportion of Christians in the state rose by nearly 12 per

cent until they included almost a third of the population.⁹ By 1931 almost half of all Nadars, Pulayas and Parayas were Christian and some smaller low-caste groups, such as the Arasar and Mukkuvan fishermen, had converted en masse.¹⁰

Whilst the main concern of movements among the non-caste-Hindus was removing social disabilities, caste-Hindus in the state were preoccupied with bringing about reforms in social customs that would help them maintain their privileged position in society. As has already been noted, the principal caste-Hindu groups in Travancore were the Malayala and non-Malayala Brahmans, the Nairs and the Vellalas. Of these the Nairs alone accounted for over three-quarters of all caste-Hindus and, with the Syrian Christians and the newly assertive Ezhavas, were one of the three principal protagonists in the inter-communal struggles that dominated politics in the 1920s and 1930s. None of the other caste-Hindu groups were politically significant, though the non-Malayala Brahmans were prominent in the State Service, the Malayala Brahmans in religious affairs, and the Tamil-speaking Vellalas in trade.

In the course of the rest of this chapter I shall consider each of the major Hindu castes, beginning with the Brahmans and Nairs and then turning to the Ezhavas and the other non-caste-Hindus. Particular attention will be paid to the role played by reform movements and caste associations in the development of a modern caste identity.

Malayala Brahmans (pop. in 1931 - 13,931). The Nambudiri Brahmans were found throughout Kerala but were most thickly concentrated in parts of southern Malabar, Cochin, and northern Travancore. They generally avoided the towns and, even in the early years of this century, largely confined themselves to their estates and their religious functions. Nagam Aiya, in the Travancore State Manual, describes them as 'simple, innocent, unobtrusive and unassuming'¹¹ and relates the local tradition that they were the descendants of a colony of 64 villagers brought to Kerala from all over India by Sri Parasurama, an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu.¹² Parasurama is said to have reclaimed the land from the sea and given it as a free gift to the Brahman settlers. This was the justification for the absolute right of land proprietorship enjoyed by the Brahman janmis¹³, of whom there were nearly 13,000 according to a British survey of Travancore taken in the early nineteenth century.¹⁴

In pre-eighteenth century Kerala, the Nambudiris led a privileged, autonomous existence with those from the higher classes belonging to 'sankethams'. These were temple corporations made up of groups of Nambudiri households (illoms). Within a sanketham, committees of Brahmans

managed the local temple, undertook Vedic study, governed their caste fellows and administered servants drawn from the lower castes.

The Nambudiris were subject to their own legal institutions and were allowed peaceful transit across boundaries in times of war. This helped them to play an important political role as diplomats and advisers to the matrilineal royalty and nobility with whom they intermarried.¹⁵

Intermarriage with Kshatriyas and Nairs was the consequence of a custom by which only the eldest son in a Nambudiri household could marry from within the caste, while younger sons had to take non-Brahman consorts in an arrangement known as 'sambhandam'. As a result, the larger Nambudiri estates were never subjected to partition. Thus even the poorer Nambudiris were generally able to maintain a relatively comfortable life-style,¹⁶ supplementing their income by means of their common priestly duties such as officiating at temple ceremonies and festivals, professional magic, and astronomy and astrology. A few degraded their ritual status by becoming physicians and priests to Nair households.¹⁷

The traditional position of the Nambudiris was undermined in the course of the eighteenth century as Marthanda Varma strengthened the authority of the Raja and introduced large numbers of non-Malayala Brahmans into Travancore as administrators. The decline of the Nairs as a martial nobility and the establishment of British supremacy in Kerala also contributed to loss of the Brahmans' political importance. In addition, Colonel Munro's abolition of the sankethams and the assumption of responsibility for temple management by the Sirkar in 1811 reduced the Nambudiris religious authority. Reacting to these developments, the Nambudiris retreated into isolation, spurning even English education as this would have made them ritually impure, and thus further endangered their religious position. Unlike the Nairs and Brahmans in some other parts of India, their landed wealth meant that they could afford not to adapt.

In the early twentieth century, however, the Nambudiris had to face further challenges. The agitation among Nairs against the practice of sambhandam gained in strength. At the same time, Sri Narayana Guru's founding of Ezhava temples with non-Brahmans to officiate ended their religious monopoly. On the land a prolonged period of conflict between janmis and their tenants over agrarian legislation resulted in Regulations in 1896 and 1932 that granted tenants full rights of ownership and transfer, and meant that the janmis were entitled only to receive certain dues called 'janmikkaram'.¹⁸

However, it was pressure for social reform that was the most important factor in the formation of the Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha in 1906.

Progressive Nambudiris demanding change were influenced by their close contact with Nairs. Joan Mencher argues that Nair males, with their access to English education and slow acquisition of rights over their own children, became a reference group for Nambudiri younger sons.

The campaign for taravad partition among the Nairs, and the comparatively advanced position of Nair women, also had an impact on the thinking of the 'junior Nambudiris' - as the younger sons were known.¹⁹

The Nambudiris responsible for establishing the Yogakshema Sabha belonged to a progressive party that had been ostracised from the community by the decision of a 'smartavicharam' (caste court of enquiry into allegations of unchastity). According to P.R.G.Mathur the case, which arose in a village in the Trichur district of Cochin in 1905, was fabricated by orthodox Nambudiri caste elders with the approval of the rajas of Cochin and Travancore.²⁰ Among the chief promoters of the Sabha was V.N.Jatadevan Namboodiripad, an elected member of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. The younger activists included C.N.Thuppan Namboodiri, the first Travancore Nambudiri to take to English education and one of very few in the whole of Kerala.²¹

The acceptance of English education was an early object of the Sabha and a resolution advocating this was passed by its annual meeting in 1916. Four years later the Sabha called for younger sons to be allowed to marry within the caste.²² These views were propagated through the Sabha weekly, the Yogakshemam, edited for a time by Jatadevan Namboodiripad. More radical Nambudiri reformers in the 1920s and 1930s used the journal Unni Nambudiri as a platform to press for further changes. One of their principal aims was the improvement of the social and legal status of Nambudiri women. Strictly segregated within the homes, many were condemned to a life as spinsters due to the caste's marriage customs. To redress this the radical reformers campaigned for the abolition of purdah and in favour of permitting widows to remarry. These reforms were supported by the Yogakshema Sabha at annual meetings in 1930 and 1934 respectively.²³ The radicals also favoured the division of family property among the individual members, and some even supported the right of non-caste-Hindus to enter temples.²⁴

The Travancore Malayala Brahman Regulation that came into force in February 1931, was guided in its passage through the Legislative Council by Thuppan Namboodiri. The measure failed to satisfy the radicals, for while it entitled any member of an illom to a separate allotment of illom properties for his or her maintenance given 'just and sufficient cause', the Regulation did not provide for the partition of illoms, and continued to recognise polygamy.²⁵ Despite this, the campaign conducted by Nambudiri

radicals, such as the future Malabar communist leader, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, did have an effect. As had earlier been the case with the Nairs and taravad reform, literature and drama played a significant role in popularising the reformers' cause.²⁶ By the late 1930s purdah was dying out and the Nambudiris were 'slowly but unmistakably entering into public life'.²⁷

The experience of the Nambudiris illustrates the close link between social change in one community and another. Having suffered a decline in their political position, in company with the Nairs, they were greatly influenced in moving towards social reform by the Nair example. The changes that were transforming traditional society in the early twentieth century would not leave untouched even a community that could afford an attitude of splendid isolation. Politically, while the Nambudiri reformers in Travancore were only of incidental importance, Nambudiri radicalism further north made a significant contribution to the nascent communist movement in Kerala.

Non-Malayala Brahmans (pop. 54,141). The majority of the foreign Brahmans were Tamil Smartas but there were also sizeable communities of Maratha Desasthas and Gowda Saraswath Brahmans from the Konkan region. Though forming little more than one per cent of the total population, they exercised an influence in administration and education vastly disproportionate to their numbers. Since the days of Marthanda Varma they had dominated the superior branches of the state service, and in 1918 accounted for over a third of the 300-odd officers in the service drawing a salary of Rs150 and above.²⁸ These included the Chief Secretary and all four Assistant Secretaries, the Head Sirkar Vakil and three of the other four Law Officers, three of the four divisional Dewan Peishkars, a third of the senior staff in the Education Department and two-thirds of the teachers at Maharaja's College, the premier educational institution in the state.²⁹ The dewanship itself was virtually a Brahman preserve and M.Krishnan Nair, who held office from 1914 - 1920, was only the second non-Brahman Dewan in over a century.

The non-Malayala Brahmans were easily the best educated section of Travancore society with their rate of literacy (53 per cent in 1921) more than double the state average.³⁰ This fact, taken in conjunction with the royal preference traditionally accorded them and the advantage of high ritual status in such a caste-ridden society, goes a long way towards accounting for their over-representation in government. In addition, not being natives of the state was also a positive factor because it meant that they were relatively removed from the competition

and tensions between the three major communal groups in Travancore.

However, there was considerable anti-Brahman feeling in the 1880s and 1890s, especially among Nairs who resented their administrative dominance. Social privileges enjoyed by the former, such as the sambhandam marriage system and the free meals provided for poorer Brahmans in state-maintained uttupuras, were further causes for resentment. The non-Malayala Brahmans contributed to their own unpopularity by forming social associations, such as the exclusive Brahman Shanmadi Vilas Sabha in 1882 and the predominantly Brahman Fort Reading Club in 1885.³¹ The Malayala Memorial agitation was the consequence of this unpopularity and while Dewan Shungarasobyer was successful in assuaging the resentment of most of the Nair leaders of the agitation, anti-Brahman feeling did not die away completely with the 1890s. The dewanships of V.P. Madhava Rao (1904-6) and P. Rajagopalachari (1907-14) with their concern for the uplift of non-caste-Hindus gave rise to a mild resurgence, and in the mid-1920s T. Raghaviah faced a virulent campaign to remove him from office. Despite this, anti-Brahman sentiment was not a significant force in Travancorean politics in the interwar period, unlike the situation in neighbouring Mysore State and Madras Province.

Nairs (pop. 868,411). The main caste-Hindu community in Travancore, they occupied a position next in rank to the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas and the higher classes of Ambalavasis (temple servants). While according to the caste system, Nairs belonged to the Sudra group, the fourth and last of the Hindu varnas, they were, in fact, the martial class in traditional Kerala society. Found in strength throughout Travancore, except in the Tamil-speaking taluks of the extreme south and Shencottah on the Madras border, and the predominantly Catholic northern taluk of Minachil, the chief Nair centres were Trivandrum and Neyyattinkara in the south, Quilon, Mavelikara and Tiruvalla in the Central Division, and Changanacherry in the north.³²

Perhaps best known for their unique marriage and inheritance customs, the Nair community was preoccupied in the early twentieth century with the question of social reform. There was a widespread feeling that the community was in decline and that social customs were, in large part, to blame.

The Nairs followed the matrilineal 'marumakkathayam' system, a custom they shared with the caste-Hindu Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis, sections of the non-caste-Hindu Ezhavas, Pulayas and Parayas and some very small groups of Muslims and Christian converts. The origins of the system are obscure, but modern Kerala historians like A. Sreedhara Menon

hold that it was unknown until the tenth or thirteenth century A.D. Elamkulan Kunjan Pillai argues that marumakkathayam was the product of social and economic factors created by the Chola-Chera war in the eleventh century A.D.. These include the political, religious and economic ascendancy of the Nambudiri Brahman janmis and the compulsory military service that meant that Nair males had little time to spare for domesticity.³³

Under the system, property was inherited through the female line and there was no monogamous marriage bond. A Nair woman could enter into relationships with Brahman, Nair or any other Hindu men of a higher caste. This sambhandam was usually solemnised by the presentation of a cloth. It did not involve setting up a separate household, and the woman remained in her taravad (joint family house), where the offspring of the union were raised. The man was not legally responsible for the maintenance of the woman and children, who often had little to do with their father, especially if he was a Brahman and thus socially barred from even taking meals in a Nair house. Although there was no obligation to observe marital fidelity, promiscuity was becoming uncommon, and even a fierce critic of the marumakkathayam system such as the missionary, Rev. Samuel Mateer, acknowledged, in 1890, that '...the union of man and wife is becoming more permanent and more nearly approaching the bond of real marriage, many couples living together all their life affectionately and faithfully'.³⁴

The Nair taravad consisted of all the descendants of a common ancestress, all of whom were entitled to maintenance. Though property belonged, in law, to female members, the eldest male - called the karanavar - managed it. He could not alienate any property without first obtaining the unanimous agreement of the taravad, and in the event of mismanagement he could be removed from his position by legal proceedings.³⁵

An appreciation of the power exercised by the karanavar can be gained from this account, given by the Indian diplomat and administrator, Sardar K.M.Panikkar, of his grand-uncle, Eravi Kesava Panikkar, the karanavar of the Chalayil taravad in Ambalapazha taluk, central Travancore.

It is difficult for people today to imagine the dread which grand-uncle inspired in the rest of the family. Nephews who were suspected of insubordination ran the risk of losing food and habitation. Once he refused maintenance funds to the older branch of the family for a time as punishment for some breach of his instructions. The story ran that one junior guilty of drunken and dissolute behaviour was locked up in the coconut store for one week and fed only once a day.³⁶

One of the problems encountered under the marumakkathayam system was suspicion of the karanavar showing partiality to his own branch of the taravad (his direct sisters and their children). Robin Jeffrey has detailed the growth of dissensions in taravads by the 1890s.³⁷ Samuel Mateer commented in 1890 that 'incessant disputes, heart-burnings and litigations spring up; many families are sinking into ruin, and the Nayars are on the whole, diminishing in wealth and position'.³⁸ He also noted the shame of educated Nairs at the absence of real marriage in their community. Apart from being a social embarrassment, critics felt that the maintenance of marumakkathayam discouraged individual initiative in the community at a time when Syrian Christians and even Ezhavas were making rapid progress in expanding fields such as commercial agriculture, trade, industry and the professions.

The example of the Syrian Christians was an important factor in the thinking of the Nair leaders who demanded taravad partition and the end of the marumakkathayam system. Influenced by contemporary ideas of the relationship between family organisation and economic progress,³⁹ they saw the Christians patrilineal nuclear-family system as directly promoting their material success. K.Kelappan, a Malabar Nair who was the founder-President of the Nair Service Society and later became Kerala's most prominent Gandhian, said in retrospect:

A community which possessed vast area of land and immense wealth; a community which had royal power to rule; a community which had rights to receive everything without resorting to manual labour; a community which withered due to lost consciousness of the community - there is nothing surprising in such a community falling prey to other communities which had consciousness of unity, dexterity of hand, cleverness and power to work.⁴⁰

Progress towards marriage reform and taravad partition was slow. In 1896 P.Thanu Pillai introduced a bill in the Legislative Council that sought to grant legal recognition to all sambhandam marriages. Studied by a select committee, it was never taken up owing to Brahman and Kshatriya intrigue. However, in 1899 the Wills Regulation gave marumakkathayis the right to bequeath up to half their self-acquired property to their wife and children.⁴¹

The taravad partition controversy played an important part in the divisions within the Nair community. In 1903 C.Krishna Pillai, founder of the old Malayali Sabha, formed the Travancore Nair Samaj which supported reform. Some of his former associates in the Sabha, including the novelist C.V.Raman Pillai, organised the rival Keraliya Samajam. These two bodies merged to form the Keraliya Nair Samajam at the time of the 1905 Nair-Ezhava riots in Quilon but, nevertheless, disagreement

persisted between Krishna Pillai's reformist followers and Raman Pillai's conservative supporters with their official links.⁴²

In 1907 the second annual conference of the Keraliya Nair Samaj in Trivandrum passed resolutions favouring cautious moves towards a patri-lineal family and the recognition of sambandham as legal marriage. Shortly afterwards, Dewan P. Rajagopalachari appointed a five-man committee to investigate proposed reforms of the taravad system. The 1908 Marumakkathayam Committee Report recommended several radical reforms, notably the recognition of sambandham; the outlawing of polyandry and polygamy; the maintenance of careful records of taravad assets by a karanavar; the grant of a half-share in his self-acquired property to the wife and children of a man who died intestate; and the right of any taravad branch (thavazhi) descended from the same woman to demand formal partition of the real property.

The conservatives, led by Raman Pillai, were successful in opposing the partition clause which was omitted in the Nair Regulation of 1912. The Regulation incorporated the other recommendations of the Committee and made the sambandham husband the legal guardian of his wife and children, with responsibility for their maintenance. A thavazhi (branch) partition bill introduced in 1916 was again rejected by the Legislative Council in the following year.⁴³

The conflict between supporters of Raman Pillai and Krishna Pillai partly reflected generational, regional and class divisions within the community. The corrupt palace politics that Raman Pillai's Trivandrum clique of officials engaged in, held little appeal for the majority of Nairs, and many of the younger men who favoured social reform tended to gravitate towards Krishna Pillai's party. With his independent outlook and quick temper, Krishna Pillai was never comfortable with the Nair officials of Trivandrum, and his long stints as Schools Inspector in central and northern Travancore enabled him to develop alternative links with Nair leaders from the mofussil. For instance, the President of his Travancore Nair Samaj was Quilon landowner Kavalan Neelacunda Pillai one of the few Nairs in an emerging class of capitalist agriculturists.⁴⁴

There had always been a division between southern Nairs, who regarded themselves as the aristocrats of the state, and those further north. Many of the former belonged to large landowning taravads related to the reigning Kulasekhara dynasty. They had formed the backbone of Marthanda Varma's and Rama Varma's armies in the eighteenth century and, being centred around Trivandrum, had easiest access to the palace and administration as well as to educational facilities.

With no competitors on the land comparable to the Syrian Christians in central and northern Travancore, the southern Nairs looked upon the non-Malayala Brahmans as their principal rivals for government jobs and education, and they had organized the Malayala Memorial agitation.⁴⁵ With regard to the reform of the marumakkathayam system, they feared that their large taravad holdings would be threatened by individual partition. In contrast, the generally less prosperous Nairs in the north had little to lose by reform. They felt that it would encourage individual initiative in the community and help them face the challenge presented by the enterprise of the Syrian Christians.

Closely associated with the campaign to reform the marumakkathayam system was a movement to encourage the spread of education. O.Chandu Menon's classic novel, Indulekha, which was published in 1889 and had a great impact on the debate that was raging on taravad reform, made a powerful plea for the adoption of Western education and the education of women.⁴⁶ Menon was a Malabar Nair and in Travancore the educational movement was sponsored by C.Krishna Pillai,⁴⁷ himself for long the Inspector of Schools in northern Travancore. The latter's influence was partly responsible for the large numbers of teachers and educationalists who were in the forefront of those pressing for taravad reform.

The taluk of Changanacherry emerged as the centre for the activities of Nair reformers in northern Travancore. Kainikkara Govinda Pillai, one of the prominent Nairs of the locality, was a strong proponent of female education and began the first girls school in Perunna, a village near Changanacherry. In 1902 Kainikkara started a magazine, the Nayar, and an Anglo-Malayalam weekly, the Subhashini (Good News). The magazine was edited by a school master (K.Kannan Nair) and concentrated on social affairs; it ceased publication in 1904. The Subhashini was more successful and became the first durable Nair newspaper, surviving until 1926. After Kainikkara's death in 1911 the paper's editor, P.K.Govinda Pillai, a former Munsiff's Court Vakil, became its proprietor too.⁴⁸

Among those who took an interest in these early activities was Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, the founder of the Nair Service Society which became the principal organisation of the Nairs in Kerala. Mannathu belonged to a poor taravad in Kainikkara's village of Perunna. The son of a Nambudiri Brahman who had left his mother shortly after Mannathu was born, he had a difficult early life and left school to find work while he was in the fourth class.

In 1894 C.Krishna Pillai appointed him as a teacher in a local vernacular school; this was the beginning of a long and eventful association.⁴⁹ Mannathu was elected the first secretary of the Perunna Karayogam formed in 1912 at the initiative of members of the Kainikkara family. When a Karayogam Mandiram was built its inauguration was presided over by Krishna Pillai. The mandiram (Karayogam offices) was only the second to be built by Nairs in Travancore - the first having been constructed at Ayiroor in the central taluk of Tiruvalla under the influence of the Keraliya Nair Samajam.⁵⁰

The circumstances that led up to the formation of the Nair Service Society in 1914 arose out of the incipient communal conflict between the Nairs and Christians of Changanacherry. In 1913 meetings were held in the town to mark the birthday of the Maharaja (tirunal) as was customary. In his autobiography Mannathu recalls that Christian priests were elected to chair the first two meetings, and when at the third the popular Syrian Catholic Vicar General of Changanacherry, Mgr. C.Kandancary, was proposed, the Nairs unsuccessfully put forward the name of Kainikkara Kumara Pillai.

Mannathu then walked out of the meeting declaring that what had happened was a dishonour to the Hindus. It was later decided that the Nairs would celebrate the 'tirunal' separately from that year on.

Also in the aftermath of the clash, a meeting of Nairs in October 1913 presided over by Kumara Pillai resolved to organise a Taluk Nair Samajam. Mannathu became the secretary of its executive committee and the Samajam helped ensure that a Nair was elected from the taluk to the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly in 1914.⁵¹

On 31 October 1914, fourteen young Nairs met at Mannathu's taravad house in Perunna and pledged to devote the rest of their lives to the service of their community. Thus the Nair Samudya Bhruthya Jana Sangham (Society of the Servants of the Nair Community) came into being with K.Kelappan Nair as President and Mannathu as Secretary, a position which he was to hold for nearly half a century. Kelappan Nair was a 26 year-old teacher from Malabar then engaged at the Catholic St Berchman's school in Changanacherry.

The Bhruthya Sangham had some influential supporters. They included Krishna Pillai, P.K.Govinda Pillai of the Subhashini, and Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai.⁵² The last was the most prominent of Krishna Pillai's younger followers, a member of the Legislative Council and a successful High Court lawyer. Changanacherry, the son of a Nair

Head Accountant in government service, had been helped with his education by Krishna Pillai after being orphaned at 14.⁵³

In July 1915 the Bhruthya Sangham changed its name to the Nair Service Society and in August Mannathu resigned his job as a pleader to become a full-time organiser. Five months later Kelappan Nair was replaced as President by Changanacherry, and with the split in the Nair Samajam, the new body rapidly gained in influence.⁵⁴

The end of the united Samajam had been a long time coming. The two factions had never succeeded in arriving at a consensus with regard to taravad partition. Rivalry grew with the increase in the influence, in official quarters, of C.V.Raman Pillai, following the elevation to the dewanship, in 1914, of M.Krishnan Nair.^{54a} The latter was a Malabar lawyer who had first visited Travancore in 1908 to preside over the third session of the Nair Samajam.⁵⁵ Raman Pillai was instrumental in his appointment as Chief Justice of the High Court two years later. In November 1915 the rival factions clashed at the annual general meeting of the Samajam in Trichur⁵⁶ in neighbouring Cochin. Subsequently, the Krishna Pillai faction formed their own Samastha Kerala Nair Mahasamajam (All Kerala Federation of Nair Associations) at a convention held under the auspices of Mannathu's NSS at Perunna in May 1916.^{56a} C.Krishna Pillai was elected President and Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, Secretary.^{56b}

The end of the decade found Nair leaders still principally concerned with the taravad partition issue and attempts to draw the rival Samajams together. The Syrian Christian-led agitation for equal civic rights, and the legislative reforms of 1919 and 1921 encouraged progress towards a closing of ranks within the community. In April 1925 the amendment of the Nair Regulation permitted the partition of taravad property among its individual members.⁵⁷ This finally resolved almost four decades of controversy that had instilled a new sense of communal feeling among Nairs.

Political awareness had become more widespread and the unquestioned dominance of the Trivandrum elite in public affairs was a thing of the past. Nairs had also become used to organising along communal lines and acting on behalf of the community. While this helped break down old internal divisions such as those of subcastes, new ones were emerging to take their place. As we have seen, class played a part in the conflict of interest between northern and southern Nairs and while the Nair Service Society rapidly became the

premier communal organisation in the state, Nairs south of Quilon still tended to stay aloof. By the 1930's class consciousness was developed enough to impel some poorer Nairs towards the nascent socialist and communist movement. However, that lay in the future; in the early twentieth century most Nairs thought of themselves as Nairs first and foremost. Competition in politics, jobs and education were all coloured by this view.

Other Caste Hindus. These included the Vellalas (pop. 69,627) as well as a few thousand Ambalavasis (temple-servants) and royal Kshatriyas. The Vellalas were Tamil-speaking Sudra agriculturalists concentrated in the fertile rice-growing tracts of the Nanjanad south of Trivandrum. Some Vellala traders were also found in commercial centres such as Alleppey. The Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis intermarried with the Nairs, and political activists from these communities generally aligned themselves with the Nairs in communal conflicts. The Vellalas, who had adopted many of the customs of the Nairs, were regarded as occupying the place of the Nair agriculturists in the south. However, in the 1920's and 1930's they showed more interest in the nationalist and non-Brahman politics of neighbouring Madras than in the communal struggles of Travancore.

For much of the first quarter of the century the Vellalas, in common with other communities, had been preoccupied with the question of legislation to regulate succession, marriage, and the partition of family property. At the 1908 Sri Mulam Popular Assembly a representative of the Nanjanad Vellala Association prayed for the right of taravad partition to be granted. At the Assembly session two years later M. Subrahmanya Pillai submitted a petition signed by 1600 people requesting legislation. Originally, followers of the makkathayam system, like their Vellala brethren in Madras, the Nanjanad Vellalas had changed to marumakkathayam - due to their isolation and the influence of their Malayala Sudra counterparts, the Nairs. Progress in adopting reform legislation was slow; it was only in June 1926 - after two official committees had reported and two draft bills had been considered - that Subrahmanya Pillai succeeded in getting a Regulation providing for division of taravad property on individual demand onto the statute book.^{57a}

Ezhavas (pop. 869,863). Hindus outside the caste system accounted for nearly two-thirds of all the Hindus in the state. Of these the Ezhavas were the largest and most progressive group. As numerous and widely distributed as the Nairs, their traditional occupation had been toddy-tapping but by the early twentieth century only a small minority of the community was still engaged in this profession. It has been claimed that the Ezhavas were originally migrants from Sri Lanka and were responsible for introducing the coconut palm into Kerala.⁵⁸ In any case, it is accepted that ethnically they are Dravidians like the caste-Hindu Nairs and Vellalas.⁵⁹

The Ezhavas were not a homogenous group and even went by different names in various parts of Kerala. Known as Ezhavas in most of Travancore, they were also called Chōgans in the Quilon area, and as Tiyas in Malabar. The caste followed no uniform system of inheritance. While those north of Quilon generally followed the pure matrilineal marumakkathayam system like the Nairs, the minority misradayi section in the south used a mixed law of succession. Among them half a man's property went to his children and half to his sister's sons. Samuel Mateer wrote in 1883 that apart from the toddy-tappers, Ezhavas could be found engaged as agriculturists, weavers, boatmen, petty traders, teachers, priests and ayurvedic physicians.⁶⁰

On the land they were mainly landless labourers or sub-tenants who were leased out land on a three year tenure known as verumpattom by the, mostly Nair, Kanom pattom holders.⁶¹ The Tiyas of northern Malabar were comparatively affluent, benefiting from service under Dutch, French and English merchants. There had been considerable intermarriage between the Europeans and Tiya women, and some of the offspring became prosperous merchants, cash-crop farmers, soldiers and members of the professions.⁶² In Travancore too, there were a few Ezhava families that could boast not inconsiderable wealth and claimed aristocratic status. One such was the house of Alamuttu Channar, the wealthiest Ezhava landlord in Travancore. T.K.Madhavan, the leading Ezhava politician in the 1920's, belonged to this family.

M.S.A.Rao argues that until the end of the nineteenth century a distinct Ezhava identity, expressed in widespread collective action and social consciousness, did not exist.⁶³ Crucial in forging such an identity was the socio-religious movement that began in the 1890's under the inspiration of Sri Narayana Guru, an Ezhava sanyasi. There had been Ezhava reformers before Sri Narayana, both in Travancore and British Malabar.⁶⁴ However, their efforts were isolated and left the

mass of Ezhavas untouched.

Several factors were responsible for this. It was only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that Travancorean Ezhavas became educated in any significant numbers. According to the 1875 census only some 6,000 Ezhavas (out of a total of 383,000) were literate.⁶⁵ By 1891 this figure had registered a dramatic increase to 25,000.⁶⁶ Given the important role played by English-educated Nairs in campaigning for social and political reforms, it is significant that in 1891 there were even 30 Ezhavas literate in English. Along with the growth in literacy, the rapid expansion of modern communications and the press - especially after the turn of the century - also helped to foster the development of an Ezhava identity that cut across barriers of locality and sub-caste.

The initial attempts to organise the Ezhavas and make representations on their behalf came from P.Velayudhan and P.Palpu, two brothers from Trivandrum who were the first Ezhava graduates and who both signed the anti-Brahman Malayala Memorial of 1891. Velayudhan had graduated from Trivandrum's Maharaja's college in 1882 and joined the Madras Civil Service after having been denied a post in his home state. Palpu, who passed out from Madras Medical College in 1889, was also refused a job in the Travancore Service and in 1891 became a Health Officer in Mysore.⁶⁷ Their experience of rejection had left the brothers embittered. When he saw the Memorialist agitation subside as its Nair leaders were accommodated by Dewan Shungarasoobyer, Palpu launched a campaign of his own for Ezhava rights. In May 1895 he submitted a petition to the Dewan complaining of Ezhavas being barred from many educational institutions and the sirkar service. This, and a mass memorial to the Maharaja in September 1896, organised by Palpu and signed by over 13,000 Ezhavas, brought no positive response. Palpu also waged his campaign through the Madras press and even submitted a memorandum to Lord Curzon when he visited Mysore.⁶⁸ However, all these efforts were apparently fruitless.

In 1896 Palpu made an attempt to organise an Ezhava Mahajana Sabha but it proved stillborn as its appeal was limited to the very small minority of educated Ezhavas. Religion held the key to a wider appeal. A few years previously, Palpu had become acquainted with Sri Narayana Guru through an elder brother, P.Parameswaran, who had become manager of the properties belonging to the Guru's Aruvipuram temple.⁶⁹ Though still only in his early forties, Sri Narayana had already acquired a reputation as a holy man. In 1887 he had founded the Shiva temple at

Aruvipuram, near Neyyattinkara in southern Travancore. A remark he made to an angry Brahman at the time illustrates the importance building their own temples had in liberating the Ezhavas from their low religious status. Sri Narayana told the Brahman: 'I have consecrated not the Shiva of Brahmans but of the Ezhavas'.⁷⁰ Hitherto, Ezhavas had had few temples of their own, and in most of them the deities worshiped were evil spirits to whom animal sacrifices were made. Sri Narayana sought to raise both the object and style of worship in a manner that could be described as Sanskritisation.

In 1894 Sri Narayana had arranged that Palpu would sponsor the education (outside Travancore) of a young follower of his, N. Kumaran Asan. Five years later, when the Aruvipuram ashram was reorganised as the Aruvipuram Kshetra Yogam (Temple Association), Asan became its secretary and treasurer.⁷¹ Palpu then encouraged Sri Narayana to expand the Yogam into the spearhead for a new socio-religious movement for the uplift of their caste.

In December 1902, ten shareholders, paying Rs. 100 each for life membership, met at Aruvipuram to form the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalna Yogam (SNDP Yogam). Though Palpu was not among the ten, it was his brother Parameswaran, who submitted the application for the registration of the Yogam. This was approved in March 1903 and two months later the Yogam was formally established with Sri Narayana as Life President and Kumaran Asan as General Secretary.

The Yogam's 'main object' was stated to be 'to promote and to encourage religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Ezhavas'.⁷² At its second meeting in Trivandrum in 1904, presided over by Mattachery Govindan (the first Travancorean Ezhava law graduate), Palpu declared that education was essential if they were to be able to fight for rights of citizenship. A year later, in January 1905, he organised a highly successful Ezhava industrial exhibition in conjunction with the Yogam's annual conference in Quilon.⁷³

In the aftermath of the exhibition, Nair-Ezhava clashes broke out at a village temple festival in the northern part of Quilon Division. They continued for two months and spread through the area. Among the flash-points was Haripad, a small town where, shortly before, a school had been opened to the Ezhavas. There angry Nairs beat Ezhava schoolboys and looted Ezhava homes. In March 1905 the offices of an Ezhava weekly, the Suguna Nandini, in Paravur, south of Quilon, were burnt down. Following this incident Dewan V.P. Madhava Rao toured the area to help calm the situation; a public meeting of reconciliation

between the two communities was held at the Malayali Hall in Quilon. The meeting was chaired by the reformist Nair landowner, Kavalam Neelacunda Pillai, and among the participants was Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai, then a 28-year old Quilon High Court lawyer. Subsequently the trouble died down, though Nair hostility to what they saw as the new arrogance of the Ezhavas persisted.⁷⁴

The Ezhavas achieved considerable success in gaining the right of admission to educational institutions. Though Madhava Rao had opened many schools to them, the question continued to be raised frequently by Ezhava members of the new Popular Assembly. In 1908 M. Govindan presented a memorial signed by 64 of the 95 Assembly members, many of them Nairs and Christians, on the subject of the free admission of Ezhavas into all public schools.⁷⁵ Yogam General Secretary Kumaran Asan was also prominent in challenging the government on the issue after he was nominated to the Assembly in 1911. In 1915 Asan succeeded in getting the Ayurvedic College opened to the Ezhavas. Two years later they were also allowed into the Sanskrit College. However, as late as 1919 only 180 of 352 girls schools were open to the community, though Ezhavas were admitted to all but a few of the boys schools.⁷⁶ According to the 1921 census a fifth of all Ezhavas were literate: exactly half the proportion among Nairs.⁷⁷

With regard to entry into the public service, progress was slower, though Kumaran Asan acknowledged at the 1913 Assembly session that the number of Ezhavas in the service had risen to 120 from none at the 1901 census. In 1913-14, 50 Ezhavas were appointed but, as Asan pointed out in the Assembly session of February 1914, the situation still compared very unfavourably with that prevailing in British India.⁷⁸ There men such as Palpu's brother, Velayudhan, had risen to high positions. Velayudhan had eventually become Assistant Commissioner of Revenue Settlement in Madras and was created a Rao Bahadur in 1906. In Travancore it was only after several unsuccessful attempts to enter the service that M. Govindan became the first Ezhava District Munsiff in 1908; he then had to wait ten years before he was joined by another. In 1918 there were still no Ezhava tahsildars, judges, police inspectors, college lecturers or executive engineers, and out of over three hundred government officers drawing a salary of Rs. 150 and above, Govindan was the only Ezhava.⁷⁹

In terms of political representation the community's position was hardly any better. It was rare to have even one Ezhava returned to the Assembly by election: they had to be content with being

represented by a few nominated members. There were no Ezhavas at all on the Legislative Council until 1920.

Apart from their campaign to gain entry into educational institutions and the public service, the early Yogam leaders also propagated social reforms within the community. Sri Narayana Guru took the lead in this. He encouraged wealthy and prestigious Ezhava families to set an example in abandoning wasteful customs, such as 'talikettu kalyanam' - a form of union between a prepubescent girl and a 'ritual' husband⁸⁰ that was imitated from the Nairs - and 'pulikudi' pregnancy rites. He also advocated monogamy, favoured English education and the education of women, and urged Ezhavas to give up their traditional caste occupation of toddy-tapping.⁸¹

Among the other leading Ezhava reformers in the early twentieth century were Kumaran Asan, Paravur Kesevan Asan, C.V.Kunjuraman and T.K.Madhavan. Kumaran Asan, one of the greatest modern Malayalam poets, used his compositions to attack the injustice of the caste system.⁸² Kesevan Asan, an ayurvedic physician, founded the first Ezhava newspaper - Sugyna Nandini (The Good Motherland) in Paravur, near Quilon, in 1891. With a circulation of a few hundred, it helped propagate Sri Narayana's teachings until its press was destroyed in the Nair-Ezhava clashes of 1905.⁸³ In 1904 the SNDP Yogam founded the Vivekodayam (The Light of Intelligence), a monthly that concentrated on social issues and started with a circulation of over a thousand. It was edited first by Kumaran Asan and then by C.V.Kunjuraman. The latter was a young journalist from Mayyanad, south of Quilon, who founded the Kerala Kaumudi in 1911 - still the premier Ezhava newspaper in Kerala. Kunjuraman brought about a cultural revival among the Ezhavas of his home area by organising primary education and musical dramas.⁸⁴ T.K.Madhavan helped found Desabhimani (Pride of Country), a Quilon Ezhava weekly, in 1915.

The SNDP Yogam had its origins in the aspirations of the very small minority of educated Ezhavas. However, by the late 1910s it was well established as the acknowledged voice of the caste. This was due, in great measure, to the appeal that Sri Narayana Guru enjoyed among Ezhavas in general, and the outstanding ability of the other early Yogam leaders, such as Palpu and Kumaran Asan.

Initially the Yogam's strength was concentrated in central and southern Travancore. Of the ten founding shareholders, four were from Neyyattinkara and two each from Trivandrum, Kottarakara and Mavelikara.⁸⁵ The two centres of Yogam activity were Trivandrum and Quilon.

Its headquarters was located in Trivandrum from 1904-1916, when it moved to Sivagiri in Varkala, south of Quilon. This was Sri Narayana's religious headquarters and remained that of the Yogam until his death in 1928. Then it shifted to Quilon.⁸⁶ Of the early Yogam leaders, Sri Narayana and Palpu were both from the Trivandrum area and Kumaran Asan made his home there. Three of the four Ezhava newspapers were published in, or near, Quilon; the Vivekodayam which began in Trivandrum also moved there later. Though a Yogam branch - the A.C.J.P. Sabha - was established in Kottayam in 1905,⁸⁷ the Yogam was never as strong there as it was further south. One reason for this was that there were few wealthy upper-class Ezhava families capable of giving leadership in the Northern Division. In this respect the Yogam contrasts strikingly with the Nair Service Society which drew its support mainly from the poorer Nairs of the north. The young educated Ezhava professionals preferred to concentrate their campaigning closer to the state capital where they were more likely to gain the ear, and the patronage, of the government.

The Yogam's supporters belonged almost exclusively to the wealthier class of Ezhavas. The subscription for life membership was Rs.100, payable in, at least, ten equal annual instalments.⁸⁸ Even though Kumaran Asan did much to expand the membership, in 1909 there were still only 900 members. They had to pay a membership levy of Rs.25 - a sum which remained well out of the reach of the mass of the community. In 1909 the Yogam had 25 branches in Travancore, as well as 8 in Cochin and Malabar. It also maintained 17 temples.⁸⁹ By 1922 the Yogam's membership had risen to 2,425, but the membership list of its controlling Board of Directors in 1920 read like a who's who of the emerging Ezhava middle class. The 22 directors included a palace physician, the two Ezhava District Munsiffs, the only Ezhava doctor in the Travancore Medical Service, a sub-inspector of police, a Munsiff Court vakil, a Quilon industrialist, a newspaper proprietor, a Cochin judge and a Calicut High Court vakil.⁹⁰

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were close kinship ties between most of the early Ezhava leaders. The most obvious case was the family of P.Palpu. Two of his elder brothers were Yogam activists - P.Parameswaran who submitted the Yogam's application for registration in 1903, and P.Madhavan Vydian, Vice President of the body in the 1910's. In 1918 a cousin of Palpu, belonging to an aristocratic Channar family, married Kumaran Asan, himself the son of a poor trader.⁹¹ M.Govindan, the first Ezhava law graduate and District Munsiff, married

the daughter of Palpu's distinguished elder brother, Rao Bahadur P.Velayudhan.⁹² Another family that was prominent in the affairs of the Yogam was that of Alamattu Channar who had sent a telegram of support to the 1904 Trivandrum Yogam session.⁹³ T.K.Madhavan was a scion of this family and the finance for his Desabhimani newspaper was provided by Kayyalakkal Padmanabhan Channar, a director of the Yogam. Madhavan's mother belonged to another of the leading Ezhava families in the Mavelikara-Kayankulam area - the Komalezhathus'. The latter provided the first Ezhava elected Assembly member and several Yogam directors.⁹⁴

The network of family relationships was a reflection of the elitist character of the SNDP Yogam in its early years. However, this elitism did not prevent the movement exercising an appeal among Ezhavas far wider than its narrow membership. The nascent Ezhava press and the public activities of the Yogam - notably its annual conferences - helped to spread its influence. At the same time, the official recognition it received (for instance, in nominations to the Popular Assembly) lent credibility to its claim to be the representative caste organisation. The success of the Yogam leaders in gaining for Ezhavas greater access to educational institutions and the public service, further bolstered its reputation. However, it was the role played by the Yogam's founder, Sri Narayana Guru, that was most important in terms of creating an Ezhava sense of identity which subsequently expressed itself in politics. The social and religious reforms he championed, popularised the cause of Ezhava uplift and, through transforming the individual Ezhava's self-perception, helped to induce an assertive caste consciousness.

Nadars (pop. (Hindu) 233,982). One of the arguments used by Dr Palpu in his 1895 petition to Dewan Shungarasobyer was that existing government policies meant that Ezhavas seeking education and jobs in the Sirkar's service had no option but to change their religion.⁹⁵ The threat of conversion, whether implicit or explicit, was long used by the Ezhava leaders as a means of extracting concessions from both the government and the caste-Hindus. Indeed, at the height of the Abstention movement in the 1930's, a mass conversion of the caste to Christianity was considered a definite possibility by some local churchmen. In fact, the Christian missionaries had a signal lack of success among the Ezhavas, especially when compared with the vast number of conversions made from the Nadars in southern Travancore and the neighbouring Tinnevely district of Madras.

The Tamil-speaking Nadars (or Shanars) in the extreme south of Travancore were originally toddy-tappers and occupied a position within the caste system akin to that of the Ezhavas.

As with the latter, their ritual status was intermediate between the outcaste untouchables and the caste-Hindu sudras. Robert Caldwell, the Anglican Bishop of Tinnevely from 1877-1891, suggested that the Nadars and the Ezhavas shared a common origin - but this remains uncertain.⁹⁶

Unlike the Ezhavas, large numbers of Nadars were converted to Christianity in several mass movements beginning in the 1840's. By 1931 168,000 - or two-fifths of the Nadars in Travancore - were Christians.⁹⁷

There were several reasons for the difference between the Nadars and the Ezhavas in their attitude towards conversion. As the Nadars had been the first non-caste-Hindus to convert in large numbers they were able virtually to take over churches. The Ezhavas could not do this: south of Trivandrum they had been preempted by the Nadars, and in northern and central Travancore they found the facilities and positions of influence within the churches jealously monopolised by Syrian Christians. The matrilineal system followed by the Ezhavas also acted as an obstacle to conversion. Protestant missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) were firmly opposed to the loose marriage tie provided by marumakkathayam and marumakkathayi converts could generally only retain property they had acquired personally. These factors, coupled with the success of Sri Narayana Guru and the SNDP Yogam in establishing a movement to uplift Ezhavas from within the framework of Hinduism, helps explain why the vast majority chose not to convert.

Most Nadar Christians belonged to either the LMS or the Roman Catholic Church. Socially they remained close to the Nadar Hindus and intermarriage was not uncommon. In fact the Nadar Christians preserved a strong sense of caste identity and discriminated against later Paraya converts - who often found themselves excluded from, or subordinate in, Nadar-dominated churches.⁹⁸ Due to their comparative backwardness in wealth, education and social position, the Nadar Hindus tended to look to the Christians, and to their fellow Nadars across the border in Madras, for leadership in public affairs. Five years after the Nadar Mahajana Sabha had been formed in Madras, the Keraliya Nadar Samajam was formed at Neyyattinkara in 1915. Its secretary was said to be a 'well-to-do' young man, and by 1920 it had 700 members.⁹⁹ However, unlike the Sabha, the Samajam was

shortlived and never attained a position of influence in the community. Later Nadar sanghams did not develop beyond local associations, and members of the community played no significant part in the political ferment of the 1930's.

The Depressed Castes. The Ezhavas, Nadars and Kammalas (artisan castes) accounted for over two-thirds of all the non-caste-Hindus in Travancore. The three major castes of ex-slaves - Pulayas, Parayas, and Kuravas - formed a further fifth. The rest of the depressed castes included such diverse groups as the Arayas (fishermen), Vannans(washermen), and Maravans (bandits).

The Pulayas (pop. (Hindu) 208,132) were the most numerous of the former slave castes and were found throughout Travancore, except in the extreme south. The Parayas (pop. (Hindu) 70,684), in contrast were largely concentrated in the Tamil south, though Malayalam speakers were also to be found in the central taluks. The third of the ex-slave castes - the Kuruvas (pop. (Hindu) 87,071) were widely distributed in an area between Tiruvalla, in central Travancore, and Nedumangad, just north-east of Trivandrum.¹⁰⁰ The vast majority of the ex-slaves - 92 percent of Pulayas in the 1911 census - were field labourers.¹⁰¹

Although slavery had been abolished in Travancore in 1855 the social position of the former slaves, more than six decades later, was virtually still that of agrestic serfs. V.R.Pillai and P.G.K.Panikar, in a study of land reclamation in Kuttanad in northern Travancore, give us a picture of what life was like for the Pulaya attached labourer in the early twentieth century. He and his entire family were dependent on the landlord for their livelihood, and lived on his estate. While the man worked with the plough and spade, the women and children tended to weeding, transplanting and harvesting. Allowed to do little personal cultivation of their own, they had to make gifts of these meagre crops to the landlord during festivals like Onam. The landlord, for his part, was traditionally supposed to provide for their clothing, and paid the labourer's wages in kind.¹⁰² The latter had little protection against eviction, and his womenfolk were often exploited for immoral purposes by Syrian Christian and Nair landlords. Joseph Tharamangalam asserts that these conditions only began to change in Kuttanad in the 1930's under the impact of capitalist farming and the emergence of labour unions.¹⁰³

Given their depressed social and economic position, the ex-slaves were naturally attracted by Christianity. Not only did it offer them an elevated religious status outside the caste system, it also meant

access to facilities hitherto denied to them. European missionaries could petition and influence the government on their behalf and the outcastes were able to benefit from mission institutions such as schools and hospitals. Early efforts at converting the Pulayas had been made by one of the first CMS missionaries in Travancore, Thomas Norton, in the 1820s, and by the mid-nineteenth century, despite caste-Hindu and Syrian Christian opposition, the CMS had begun active evangelisation among the outcastes of central Travancore.¹⁰⁴ The first slave converts were baptised in 1854 and by the turn of the century Edward Hodges, Bishop of Travancore and Cochin from 1890 to 1904, estimated that of nearly 42,000 adherents of the CMS over 25,000 were of Pulaya and Paraya origin.¹⁰⁵ Though the LMS in southern Travancore had concentrated their early efforts on the Nadar caste, considerable conversions appear to have also been made from among the Parayas, particularly from the late nineteenth century. Apart from the Roman Catholics, well established since the sixteenth century, other groups that were active among outcastes include the Salvation Army who had begun work among the Parayas of the south in the early 1890s; the Mar Thoma Syrians who organised an Evangelistic Association in 1889; and the Jacobite Syrians whose missionary order, Servants of the Cross, was founded in 1924.

Several mass movements of outcastes into the churches occurred between the 1890s and 1930s. This was the main factor in the Christian proportion of Travancore's population rising from 21 per cent in 1891 to 32 per cent four decades later. By 1931 more than two-fifths of all Pulayas, over half the Parayas and a tenth of the Kuravas had converted. Some castes such as the Mukkavan, Arasar and Bharathar fishermen of the coast converted en masse to Catholicism.¹⁰⁶ The motivation behind such conversion is well brought out in a report from an LMS missionary writing in 1892:

Early in the year a great commotion took place in many of the Pariah villages of Nagercoil District, and a willingness and readiness and a strong desire among the people to yield themselves to Christian teaching. The object which the people have primarily in view is social reform or elevation in social rank and the bettering of their material condition. Change of religion is contemplated not so much from a sense of spiritual need as from a growing conviction that it is only in connection with Christianity that the desired social reform can be effected.¹⁰⁷

In contrast to the missionaries' solicitude for the outcastes, the official attitude was one of indifference for much of the nineteenth century. Dewan T. Rama Rao, who had been educated at the LMS Seminary at Nagercoil and served as Dewan from 1887 - 1892, was the first to show any concern for their improvement. In 1891 a CMS missionary working in

Mavelikara, in central Travancore, reported that Pulayas had been allowed entry into the public market for the first time at the instance of the Dewan.¹⁰⁸ An LMS report after Rama Rao's retirement remarked on how he had 'greatly encouraged the opening of schools among the poorest and most backward classes, and was ready to aid with government grants.'¹⁰⁹ However, these policies were not continued by his immediate successors: not until the dewanship of P.Rajagopalachari (1907-14) did the government again interest itself in the uplift of the outcastes.

The work of the Christian missions had an impact on the attitude of caste-Hindus. From the 1890s, the latter began to support efforts to improve the position of the ex-slave castes. For instance, in 1897 an LMS missionary in Trivandrum wrote of a school for Pulayas being started and maintained by a son of a late Dewan and some of his friends.¹¹⁰ As the CMS Annual Report for 1913-14 pointed out, at least part of the motivation for the activity of the caste-Hindus was to prevent the accession of the outcastes to Christianity. The Report spoke of Hindu schools being erected in close proximity to mission schools, special meetings being held for Pulayas on Sundays; and government grants of land to outcastes in which Pulaya Christians found it difficult to obtain a share.¹¹¹

Until the turn of the century the depressed castes remained wholly dependent on outside forces - such as the government, Christian missionaries, or Hindu reformers - for improvements in their condition. The 1900s saw the emergence of the first Pulaya leader - Ayyan Kali. Born in 1863 in Venganur, a village of Neyyattinkara taluk south of Trivandrum, little is known of his early life, but he appears to have had no formal education and was barely literate. At about the age of 30 he was inspired by Sri Narayana Guru to dedicate himself to the service of his community.¹¹² The Guru's Avuvipuram temple was only a few miles from the young Pulaya's native village.

Ayyan Kali campaigned first for the right of Pulayas to walk along public roads in his village. This provoked clashes with local Nairs but was eventually successful.¹¹³ Dewan Rajagopalachari then enabled him to establish himself as a leader of the Pulaya caste. He encouraged Ayyan Kali's activities and promised the Pulayas land grants and entry into government schools,¹¹⁴

In the late 1900s Ayyan Kali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalna Sangham (Association for the Welfare of the Poor) to improve the conditions of Pulayas in Neyyattinkara.¹¹⁵ By 1920 the Sangham had a membership of 600. A small membership subscription funded the purchase of a plot of land

and the construction of a building. Later Ayyan Kali started a weaving factory and school in Venganur and opened a Malayalam primary school. He also began a shortlived Malayalam monthly with the help of a Nair teacher and other sympathetic caste-Hindus from Changanacherry, the centre of Nair reformist activity.¹¹⁶

In 1912 Ayyam Kali became the first man from the ex-slave castes to be nominated to the Popular Assembly. This was highlighted in the grateful address presented to Dewan Rajagopalachari upon his retirement, by the Sadhu Jana Sangham:

It was only since you, who are magnanimous and equally sympathetic to all, became Dewan, that we obtained certain liberties and privileges...It is solely as a result of the policy of your administration that we, who had not walked fearlessly even on public roads, have been granted the boon of membership in the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly and have been permitted the liberty of making our representations equally with men of higher ranks. Neither we nor anybody else ever deemed (sic) that we could get this boon in this century,¹¹⁷

The departure of Rajagopalachari in May 1914, and his replacement by the Chief Justice, M.Krishnan Nair, the first Nair Dewan since 1880, was followed by a confrontation between Pulayas and Nairs in the Neyyattinkara area. As with the Nair-Ezhava clashes of 1905, a dispute over access to an educational institution provided the spark. An LMS missionary noted at the time how the late Dewan's policy of favouring the entrance of all classes of the community into government schools had been deeply resented by the Nairs. Thus it was unsurprising that at the appointment of a new Dewan 'the smouldering fires of jealousy and opposition broke out'.¹¹⁸ Towards the end of 1914, Ayyan Kali sought to get a Pulaya girl admitted to a village school. Both he and the girl were beaten by Nairs, who then proceeded to raid Pulaya huts and drive their occupants into the jungle. The school itself was set alight, and property belonging to several Christian missions also came under attack. Ayyan Kali then organised a strike by outcaste labourers in several villages. Only after mediation by the Nagercoil Deputy Superintendant of Police, a Vellala, R.Vaidyalingom Pillai, did the local Nairs agree to permit outcaste children to attend schools.¹¹⁹

A few months after the Neyyattinkara disturbances, the 'Kallumala' (or bead necklace) agitation took place in the Quilon area. In the south Ayyan Kali had already persuaded Pulaya women to discard the bead necklaces which had been a badge of their slave past. They had also begun to wear upper garments that covered their breasts. A Central Travancore Pulaya Samajam had been organised in the early 1910s¹²⁰ and a local Pulaya leader urged women there to follow the example of their sisters in the

south. This provoked the anger of local Nairs who sought to disrupt a Pulaya social reform meeting. A serious riot followed in which two houses belonging to caste-Hindus were set on fire. In revenge Nairs destroyed several hundred Pulaya huts, including many belonging to Christian converts of the LMS. Eventually, after the arrival of Ayyan Kali, a truce was reached between the Pulayas and Nairs. At a mass meeting attended by both Ayyan Kali and the Nair reformer Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, hundreds of Pulaya women publicly threw away their necklaces.¹²¹

The unrest among Pulayas gave rise to a mass movement towards Christianity in several villages south of Quilon that were among the worse affected. The Quilon Mission of the LMS made over 3,000 converts in 1915-16, which was as many as it had made in all the previous eighty years. The conversion movement brought a strong reaction from Hindu Pulaya leaders. Apprehensive of losing their followers to the churches, men like Ayyan Kali cooperated with the Nair landlords in attempting to counteract the influence of Christianity. They even organised religious meetings for Pulayas on Sundays in an effort to dissuade them from going to church.¹²²

Ayyan Kali was seen by the missionaries as 'a firebrand and very hostile to Christianity'.¹²³ Paradoxically, many Pulaya Christians showed active sympathy with his campaigns, and it was the impact of Christianity that had made them possible. A CMS missionary wrote of the outcastes in 1915:

...the seeking of them by Christianity, and now the courting of them by Hinduism because such numbers of them have been 'found' by Christianity has increased their sense of importance. The Travancore Government has adopted various measures for 'raising' them... The outcastes have had the new and delightful experience of being encouraged to petition Government about their grievances and even of having their petitions listened to; and, naturally that has wrought a change in their whole outlook. The coming into being of their 'sanghams', to push their cause, to demand their rights, is, I imagine, the most significant thing both from the point of view of the state and missions, of the last four years in Travancore...¹²⁴

The growth of an assertive self-consciousness also gave rise, in the 1910s, to a remarkable neo-Christian socio-religious movement among the Paraya and Pulaya converts of central Travancore. While doctrine allowed no place for caste distinctions to be preserved in churches, in practise outcaste converts had to accept being discriminated against by Syrian Christians and converts from higher castes, such as the Ezhavas, Nadars, and Vellalas. This was a problem that persisted despite all the efforts of the missionaries. To take just one instance from Ayyan Kali's

native village of Venganur; in 1915 higher caste converts sought to exclude Pulayas from a new LMS church.¹²⁵ The problem was at its most acute in congregations further north where Syrian Christians had for long held the dominant position. There a movement called the Pratyaksha Raksha Daivasabha (God's Church of Visible Salvation) came into being.

The new church was started by Poykayil Yohannan, a Paraya from Eraviperur in Tiruvalla taluk. Born in 1877, he was converted to Christianity, with his family, by Mar Thoma Syrians, while still a child. Dissatisfied with their teaching and with the inequitable treatment of outcaste converts, he left them in 1899 and became associated with the Plymouth Brethren sect. He began to preach independently from about 1909.¹²⁶ Charles Hope Gill, the Anglican Bishop of Travancore and Cochin (1905-24), described Yohannan as a man of fine presence who possessed remarkable gifts of leadership.¹²⁷ A government report on him in 1915 also credited him with being 'intelligent and very enterprising'.¹²⁸ Yohannan took advantage of dissatisfaction among Pulaya and Paraya converts belonging to the CMS and the Mar Thoma Church. The converts particularly resented being segregated in worship and charged fees beyond their means for ceremonies. The Paraya preacher proclaimed himself to be the divinely-appointed Mediator for the salvation of the outcastes and called on them to 'unite under him for mutual protection and help, and to work out their own salvation and uplift, without being beholden to any others, whether Hindus or Europeans or Syrian Christians'.¹²⁹

In spite of persecution from Syrian Christian landlords and attacks from the churches, Yohannan's movement grew rapidly and by 1915 was estimated to have some 10,000 followers in the taluks of Tiruvalla and Changanacherry. They were mostly Pulaya and Paraya converts from the established churches, but included a few Syrian Christians.¹³⁰ Partly due to Yohannan's increasing financial demands on his followers, the movement's influence waned after about 1918.¹³¹ Nevertheless, its leader achieved recognition by government, twice being nominated to the Popular Assembly (in 1921 and 1931). He continued as the head of his church until his death in 1938.¹³²

Efforts at uplift were not limited to the larger depressed castes like the Pulayas and Parayas. For instance, K.P.Karuppan, a Sanskrit teacher and poet, belonged to the small fishing caste of Arayas. In 1910 he founded the Vala Samudya Parishkarim Sabha which sought to promote the advancement of the fishing castes and reform their social customs. Karuppan had been influenced by Sri Narayana Guru and propagated his teachings. His brother, Swami Ananda Yogi, also a follower of the

Guru, produced a drama, Balakalesam, that stigmatized the practise of untouchability.¹³³ The work was performed in 1912 at the Maharaja's College in Ernakulam to mark the Shashtiabdapurthi (60th birthday) of the reigning Cochin Maharaja. A Pulaya leader, Krishnathi Asan, organised a demonstration on the occasion and successfully demanded the lifting of the ban on the entry of outcastes into the state capital.¹³⁴

While men like Karuppan and Ayyan Kali derived their inspiration from Sri Narayana Guru, there was little sympathy for the depressed castes among Ezhavas in general. One exception was 'Sahodaran' k. Aiyappan, a young Ezhava lawyer and journalist from Cochin. In 1917 Aiyappan founded a brotherhood called the Sahodara Sangham Pratish-tanam. It had as its objective the eradication of Ezhava discrimination towards lower castes. In the same year Aiyappan organised a 'misra bhojanam' (inter-dining) of 21 Ezhava families with Arayas and Pulayas. For this he was strongly attacked by more orthodox Ezhava leaders but in spite of their opposition the Sangham made considerable headway in changing attitudes, particularly in Cochin where its activities were centred.¹³⁵

The formation of caste uplift associations; the early struggles for emancipation led by Ayyan Kali; and the Poykayil Yohannan movement were all indicative of the beginnings of a change of attitude among depressed castes. Whereas in the nineteenth century they had relied almost exclusively on the western missionaries to bring about any improvement in their situation, they were now, for the first time, starting to act for themselves. In this they were encouraged by the government which, in the 1920s and 1930s, actively engaged in working for the uplift of the outcastes. Hindu reform associations such as the Nair Service Society, the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samajam, and later, the Harijan Seva Sangham and the Kerala Hindu Mission, also sought to assist them. However, though the sources of help available to them became more diversified, the extent of their social and economic deprivation and educational backwardness meant that progress was extremely slow. The absence of an emerging educated elite, or small propertied class, such as existed in the Ezhava caste, was of crucial importance. It was the reason why, in the inter-war period, the depressed castes were unable to take advantage of the communal competition for public service jobs or to benefit from the expansion of commercial activity in the state. Politically they could not play any significant role: there were very few who had the vote and the nominated outcaste members of the legislature understandably almost always supported the government. Thus, it was only after the formation of agricultural

labour unions and the emergence of the communist movement in the late 1930s and early 1940s, that the depressed castes were drawn into the political life of Travancore.

The political importance of the movements for social reform among the various castes lay in the crucial role they played in the creation of a caste identity that extended to the borders of the state and beyond. Organisations such as the Nair samajams and the SNDP Yogam forged links that cut across boundaries of locality and subcaste. Aided by the spread of modern education and communications, they were also helped by the recognition they were accorded in new political institutions like the Popular Assembly. While only a small minority elite of castemen were actually involved in their activities, the associations prepared the way for the use of caste as the main tool in mobilising support for popular campaigns and electoral and legislative politics. The consequence was a growing polarisation between castes that was reflected in social and political conflicts from the 1900s onwards. Increasingly, men identified themselves primarily as Nairs or Ezhavas¹³⁶, rather than by locality and subcaste, though such subsidiary vestigial loyalties remained strong enough to play a part in divisions in the SNDP Yogam in the early 1920s.

Notes

- 1 Swami Vivekananda, 'The future of India', Collected Works, Vol.3, Calcutta 1960, pp.294-95.
- 2 Tottenham Papers (memoirs of Sir Richard Tottenham), Bk.1, pp.39-40.
- 3 CI (1901), XX, pp.181-82.
- 4 Ibid., p.50; Rev S.Mateer, Native Life in Travancore, London 1883,p.334.
- 5 L.A.Krishna Iyer, The Travancore Tribes and Castes, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1937, p.191.
- 6 Quoted in M.Desai, The Epic of Travancore, Ahmedabad 1937, p.6.
- 7 J.Forbes, Oriental Memoirs, Vol.I, London 1834, p.254.
- 8 Iyer, op.cit., p.191.
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Chapter III

Communities: Social Reform and Identity

The non-Hindus in Travancore fall into three categories: the Syrian Christians, the non-Syrian Christians, and the Muslims. Of these the Syrians are the most important. Apart from being more numerous than the Nairs or the Ezhavas, they were also the Nairs' principal competitors for wealth and political influence. Anthropologists and historians, other than church historians, and with the notable recent exception of Susan Bayly,¹ have usually focused their attention on the Hindus of Kerala. However, the changes affecting the Syrian Christian community in the nineteenth century, and the early years of the twentieth century, were just as significant for the subsequent political development of Travancore. It is for this reason that, in this chapter, I shall concentrate on the Syrians. The politically less important non-Syrian Christians and Muslims will not be treated in similar depth.

The modern history of the Syrian Christians can be viewed in terms of three distinct phases. The political activism of the post-1918 period followed upon periods in which the emphasis was on, first, ecclesiastical, and then social, reform. For much of the nineteenth century the clergy provided political leadership, and the dominant issues were religious reform and ecclesiastical independence. However, as we shall see in chapter five, the development of commerce and cash-crop agriculture from the end of the century, contributed to the growing prosperity of the wealthier landed Syrian families. They readily took advantage of modern education, and by the 1890s an educated professional elite was beginning to replace the clergy in taking the lead in public affairs. Such a trend was encouraged by the resolution of the two major ecclesiastical controversies with the foundation of a separate Mar Thoma Church in 1889 and the appointment of Syrian Catholic bishops in 1896. Several Syrian Christian associations were formed; they debated and campaigned over a wide spectrum of issues. At first these were social, as was the case among the Hindu caste associations, but political questions later came to the fore, culminating in the launch of the civic rights agitation in 1918.

In 1931 there were 948,514 Syrian Christians in Travancore. They were concentrated in the Northern and Central districts, though sizeable additional numbers could be found in the neighbouring state of Cochin. A predominantly agricultural community, they were also important in trade. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries the

Syrians had been divided into three principal denominations - the Syrian Catholics, the Jacobites and the Marthomites. The Catholics (pop.449,173) were the most numerous, forming a quarter of the inhabitants in the Northern Division of the state where they were mainly concentrated. The Jacobites (pop.337,872) were found in strength in both the northern and central areas of the state, while the Marthomites (pop.142,486) were concentrated in the area to the south and east of their headquarters of Tiruvalla in central Travancore. In addition to these main divisions, a small body of Anglican Syrians (c. 18,000)² were found in early CMS mission centres such as Kottayam, and Tiruvalla and Mavelikara further south.

The Syrian Christians represented the oldest surviving Christian community east of Persia. Their own tradition traces the origin of the community back to St Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, who, it is claimed, landed near Cochin in about 52 AD.³ While this remains an historical enigma, there is evidence that Christians were established on the Malabar coast as early as the sixth century. In about 535 AD a Syrian merchant of Alexandria, Cosmas Indicopleustes, wrote of a flourishing church in Male (Malabar) with a bishop at Kalliana (possibly Quilon).⁴ Strong trading links existed between West Asia and Malabar in this period and there were probably several migrations of persecuted Christians between the fourth and ninth centuries.⁵

Little is known of the early history of the Syrian Christians, so-called because of their use of the Syriac liturgy. The Syrian church is thought to have had strong links with the Nestorian church in Persia and its bishops were ordained by the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon.⁶ Socially, the Syrians appear to have occupied a position of some privilege, particularly in trade. They were regarded as being on par with the Nairs, and used hereditary titles, granted as a mark of royal favour, such as 'Tharagan' (derived from the Malayalam word for tariff) and 'Mappillai' (the equivalent of the Nair 'Pillai').⁷ According to legend there even existed a Christian royal dynasty. Sreedhara Menon asserts that, like the Nairs, the Christians possessed a martial tradition and maintained their own 'Kalaris' (gymnasia).⁸

Prior to the nineteenth century the Syrian Christians do not appear to have attempted to make converts to their faith and, in fact, shared many of the social customs of the caste-Hindus. They were endogamous and did not inter-marry with the low-caste Latin Catholic and Protestant converts - originating from the period after the sixteenth century. Even among the Syrians there were two endogamous groups: the 'Southists'

who claimed descent from the early West Asian immigrants, and the more numerous 'Northists', who claimed to be descendants of high-caste converts made by St Thomas. Indeed, some of the leading 'Northists' families prided themselves on their Brahman descent. These included the Pakalomattom family, which provided the first eight bishops of the Jacobite Syrian church between 1653 and 1816.⁹ The extent of the Syrian adoption of Hindu traits has led scholars like Leslie Brown to argue that the community virtually functioned as a caste in its relations with the rest of society.¹⁰ A recent study has even considered the Brahman claim of 'Northist' families as part of a form of Sanskritisation¹¹, though it is doubtful how much relevance the term has outside the framework of Hinduism.

The long isolation of the Syrian Christians from the wider Christian world came to an end following the arrival, in Calicut in 1498, of the Portuguese, Vasco da Gama. A Portuguese settlement was founded in Cochin in 1503, and successive Syrian bishops came into conflict with the Roman Catholic Church in the course of the sixteenth century. Ultimately, in 1599, at the Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur) the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Aleixo de Menezes, with the support of the Cochin Raja and the Portuguese, secured the accession of the Syrian church to the authority of Rome.¹² However, the efforts at imposing the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church gave rise to considerable discontent, and led to the 'Coonen Kuriseu Sathyam' (oath of the Coonen Cross) in 1653. At Mattanchery, near Cochin, the Syrians proclaimed their independence of Rome and chose their own bishop, who was later formally consecrated on the authority of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. Through the efforts of a party of Carmelite missionaries, a majority of the Syrian congregation was later reunited with Rome, thus causing the Catholic-Jacobite split in the community.¹³

The advent of British supremacy in India had a major impact on the Syrians. The encouragement and protection they received from the colonial power strengthened them vis a vis the caste-Hindus. This new sense of security, coupled with their improving economic position, gave rise to an assertion of communal identity that first showed itself in religious life, with movements that sought to affirm the distinct Syrian Christian heritage. Between the 1830s and the 1900s the Jacobite Syrian Church suffered two serious splits, both of which produced groups claiming independence from any foreign religious authority. In the same period the Syrian Catholics came close to a schism with Rome before being granted a

separate hierarchy governed by indigenous bishops.

In 1806 Claudius Buchanan, first Vice Provost of Calcutta's Fort William College and a chaplain of the East India Company, arrived in Travancore to enquire into the condition of the Syrian Christians. The visit marked the beginning of British interest in developing links with the Jacobite Syrians. According to Buchanan, the Jacobite Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius I, responded favourably to the suggestion of a union with the Church of England.¹⁴ In 1810, a year after the suppression of the revolt by the strongly anti-Christian Nair Dewan, Velu Tampi¹⁵, Colonel John Munro became the Resident in Travancore and Cochin. A fervent evangelical, he saw 'the diffusion of genuine Christianity in India as a measure equally important to the interests of humanity and to the stability of our [British] power.'¹⁶ To this end Munro took an active interest in the affairs of the Jacobite Syrian church. Between 1816 and 1819, in response to a request from the Resident, the Church Missionary Society despatched four missionaries to Travancore on a mission to aid the Syrian church. The mission had far-reaching consequences for the development of the educational and religious life of the Syrians.

In 1815 a seminary was established in Kottayam by a Jacobite archdeacon who was friendly with Munro, Pulikot Ittoop Ramban (Metropolitan 1815-16 as Mar Dionysius II). Built on land granted by the reigning Travancore Rani, with the interest from an endowment to the Syrian church made by the Resident¹⁷, the Seminary developed, under the supervision of the missionaries, into the CMS College. The foremost educational institution in northern Travancore, the College produced Syrian clergy, often of reformist inclinations, and also Christian professionals, including many lawyers, doctors, journalists and administrators.

The CMS-Jacobite association continued after Munro's departure in 1819, though his successors were not as active in encouraging the Christians, and involving themselves in the internal affairs of the Syrian church. The disquiet of conservatives in the church at attempts by missionaries to introduce ecclesiastical reforms led to growing strains in relations with the CMS. In 1836 a Jacobite church synod rejected Anglican proposals for reform, and cooperation was discontinued. Some of the reformist Jacobites then joined the CMS to become the first Anglican Syrians. A second group remained within the church and in 1842 succeeded in getting Mathew Mar Athanasius consecrated Metropolitan by the Jacobite Patriarch.¹⁸ Though Athanasius gained

recognition from the Travancore government in 1852¹⁹ this was withdrawn in 1876 after a long campaign by the anti-reformers, led by Joseph Mar Dionysius V. The latter had been consecrated Metropolitan by the Patriarch in 1864, and in 1875-6 a visit to Travancore by Patriarch Mar Ignatius Peter III enabled Dionysius to gain the allegiance of many of Mar Athanasius's erstwhile followers. A ten-year legal battle over the property of the church ended in 1889 with the final victory of Mar Dionysius. The losing reformist party then organised itself into an independent Mar Thoma Church.²⁰

Twenty years after the formation of the Mar Thoma Church the Jacobites suffered yet another split.²¹ In 1876, at a synod presided over by Patriarch Peter III, a Jacobite church association - the Malankara Syrian Christian Association - had been inaugurated. In 1908 the ailing Mar Dionysius V convened a meeting of the Association to elect a successor. The Association then sent two rambans (archdeacons) for consecration as Metropolitans by the Jacobite Patriarch, Mar Abdulla II. The two were consecrated Mar Dionysius and Mar Kurilos. Following the death of Dionysius V in 1909 the Patriarch appointed the former to succeed him, at the request of the Malankara Association.

However, Abdulla II desired to assert his authority over the Malabar Church. Arriving in Travancore, he called a meeting of the church Association and demanded acknowledgement of his temporal authority. This was unacceptable to Mar Dionysius VI and the majority who, in September 1910, passed resolutions embodying their viewpoint. Nevertheless, the Patriarch was able to gain the backing of a significant minority, including Mar Kurilos. In August 1910 Abdulla created a separate diocese with its own bishop for 'Southist' Jacobites, thus attracting their support.

In 1911 the Patriarch excommunicated Mar Dionysius and appointed Mar Kurilos as Malankara Metropolitan, an action that was not accepted by the Malankara Association. Subsequently, Mar Abdul Messiah, Mar Abdulla's predecessor as Patriarch of the Jacobite Church, was invited to Travancore by the Dionysius party. In 1912 Abdul Messiah consecrated a bishop of this faction as the first Catholicos (local Patriarch) of the Malabar church. The Catholicos, while recognising the spiritual supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch, did not come under his jurisdiction. The late Mar Dionysius V had requested the creation of such an office in 1892, and again in 1906. The attainment of his objective resulted in a second split among the Jacobites, and the emergence of a church that was virtually independent, with the Catholicos's

successors being consecrated by local bishops.

Litigation over church property and official recognition began in 1913 and has continued, with occasional gaps, ever since. The conflict between the two parties divided the Jacobites along regional and even familial lines.²² The minority - about a third - who backed the Patriarch was strong in Cochin and in the northernmost taluks of Travancore, while the pro-Catholics' majority was predominant further south, in the area between Kottayam and Quilon. This area was the most literate in the state and was also where the adherents of the Mar Thoma Church, the product of the earlier Jacobite split, were concentrated. The original focus of CMS activity, the Kottayam-Quilon belt, thus became the stronghold of two independent Syrian churches.

Among the prominent Jacobite families in central Travancore backing the Catholics were the Elanjikkals and the Kandathils of Niranam, a village in Tiruvalla taluk. Elanjikkal Jacob John, a High Court lawyer and member of the Managing Committee of the Malankara Association²³, was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1904 and remained the leading Syrian politician for the next thirty years. The Kandathils' owned the state's foremost newspaper, the Malayala Manorama, and the wife of its editor, K.C.Mammen Mappillai, belonged to the family of the third Catholics, Mar Baselios Geevarghese II (Catholics 1929 - 1964).²⁴ The prominent followers of the Patriarch included the Palampadoms of Kottayam and the 'Southist' Thamarapallils of Chengannur, in central Travancore. Palampadom T.Thomas was a pioneer tea and rubber planter and, like Thamarapallil Kochu Thomman²⁵, who owned several rubber and coconut estates, served as a member of the Legislative Council in the 1920s. These family alignments showed themselves in politics as well. In the 1930s, while most leading Jacobites of the Catholics party, including E.J.John and K.C.Mammen Mappillai, supported the Joint Political Congress and the Travancore State Congress, those belonging to the Patriarch's section, like Palampadom Thomas and Thamarapallil Kochu Thomman, were pro-government.²⁶

While Protestant influence was bringing about a reformation among the Jacobite Syrians, the late nineteenth century also saw major changes in the ecclesiastical organisation of Syrian Catholics. After the split of 1653, the latter came under the authority of two, often bitterly competing, Latin hierarchies - the Diocese of Cochin, part of the Portuguese Padroado (Patronage), and the Vicariate of Malabar at Verapoly, belonging to Propaganda Fide (the Catholic Church's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith). The Syrian Catholics were

never happy with this Latin domination, and in the second half of the nineteenth century their resentment found expression in the demand for bishops of the Syrian rite. Twice, in 1861-62 and 1874-77, the issue threatened to cause a serious schism, with opposition to Rome coalescing around bishops sent out by the Chaldean Patriarch of Mosul in response to appeals from Malabar.²⁷ On the second occasion Emmanuel Nidhiry, the Vicar of Kuravilangad, near Kottayam, played an important role in winning back many schismatics who had joined the Chaldean bishop, Mar Elias Mellus.

Nidhiry was a leader of the movement within the Catholic Church for the separation of the Syrians from the Vicariate of Malabar, ruled by European Carmelites. He belonged to a wealthy and influential landowning family of Kuravilangad. Educated locally, at the first Catholic English-medium school in Travancore, he later joined the CMS Seminary where he studied under the reformist Jacobite Metropolitan, Mathew Mar Athanasius.²⁸ He first engaged in efforts to gain greater independence for the Syrians as a young deacon and secretary to the Padroado Governador (Administrator) of Cranganore and Cochin. In 1872 Nidhiry and Parayil Avira Varki Tharagan, the richest landlord in Travancore²⁹, supported a petition by Syrian deacons to the Archbishop of Goa, requesting a separate bishop. However, their representations were unsuccessful and in 1873 Nidhiry left the Padroado camp to join the Carmelite monastery of Mannanam.³⁰

The Syrian Carmelite Congregation at Mannanam had been formed in 1831 as the first indigenous community of Catholic clergy.³¹ In the 1870s it became the centre of the movement for Syrian Catholic separation, with Father Louis Pazheparambil and Nidhiry in the forefront. In July 1875 an anonymous memorial was submitted to Pope Pius IX requesting separation and a bishop, who could be a European Carmelite, with a native Syrian co-adjutor. This was followed by numerous signed petitions from lay Syrian Catholics and provoked the Italian Archbishop of Verapoly to expel seven monks of the Carmelite Congregation, including Pazheparambil.³²

In 1876 Mgr. Leo Meurin, the Archbishop of Bombay, arrived in Travancore with the twin mission of looking into the Syrian demand, and dealing with the Mellusian schism. Nidhiry acted as his interpreter and, with others, such as Pazheparambil and Parayil Tharagan, assisted Meurin in turning back the threat of schism. On the separation question the Archbishop cancelled the order expelling the Carmelite monks and submitted a report favouring the Syrian cause. However, following

complaints from the Verapoly missionaries, Rome dispatched a second Visitor Apostolic to Malabar. In 1877, after the latter had reported, the Syrians within the Vicariate of Malabar were put in the exclusive charge of a co-adjutor to the Bishop of Verapoly.³³

The grudging concession made towards them failed to satisfy the leaders of the Syrian agitation. They were granted further favours in an attempt to placate them. For instance, Nidhiry was appointed vicar of two important churches, in addition to his own parish of Kuravilangad.³⁴ In spite of this, he continued to campaign for Syrian autonomy. In 1882 he joined Mar Dionysius V in initiating the Jathyaikya Sangham (Association for Communal Unity).³⁵ The Catholic priest and the Jacobite Metropolitan were close friends, and Nidhiry assisted Mar Dionysius in his legal battles with the reformist party. The new Sangham's Declaration of Objectives likened the Catholic-Jacobite division to an amputated body and saw social progress, particularly in education, being achieved through unity. It was planned to found a joint Syrian college at Kottayam, as an alternative to the CMS College, and also to start high schools, libraries, shops, and even a bank. The fund raising for this was undertaken mainly by Nidhiry. At the time the Vicar of Alleppey, he persuaded an Irish American coir factory owner of the town, James Darragh, to donate Rs.20,000 to the Sangham. In 1886 Darragh also sold the 22-acre Woodland Estate in Kottayam to the Sangham at a reduced price. A year later, in April 1887, a Malayalam newspaper, the Nazrani Deepika (Nazarene Journal), began publication from Mannanam under the auspices of the Sangham. Nidhiry was the editor, and the paper's first editorial was a call for Christian unity. In the event, circumstances proved to be against this, and by the end of 1888, amidst bitterness and acrimony, the Jathyaikya Sangham ceased to function.

The reasons for the Sangham's failure were to be found in developments within the Jacobite and Catholic churches. Nidhiry had seen the re-entry of the Jacobites into the Catholic communion as the eventual aim. He later claimed that Mar Dionysius had agreed to allow some Jacobite priests to receive Catholic instruction, so that they could go on to prepare for re-unification.³⁶ It seems likely that the Jacobite Metropolitan saw the Sangham schemes as a way of securing his church's future in case the legal contest over church property, with the reformist party ended adversely. However, the Alleppey Zilla court judgement in 1884 found in favour of Mar Dionysius, a decision that was upheld in the Travancore High Court in the following year, and by the Royal Court of Final Appeal in 1889. Consequently, any pressing need

for Dionysius to move towards unity with the Catholics was removed, especially since Nidhiry's European superiors were not prepared to countenance any joint venture short of total Jacobite submission to Roman authority.

While engaged in the Jathyaikya Sangham scheme, Syrian Catholic leaders continued their efforts to achieve Syrian autonomy within the Catholic Church. In 1885, Nidhiry and Parayil Tharagan invited the first Apostolic Delegate to the East Indies to Mannanam, where he was presented with a petition addressed to the Head of Propaganda Fide, calling for a native Syrian bishop. Signed by Nidhiry and 78 others, it stated:

The want of a Bishop of our own nation and rite is the cause of our great deterioration in ecclesiastical and social affairs as compared to our Jacobite brethren who, having Bishops of their own nation and rite and having been encouraged by them, not only pass the University Examinations but also hold high and responsible offices in the Government. So, the Catholics, being a contrast to their Jacobite brethren, are under-valued by the Hindus as a set of ignorant men; this is a hindrance to the conversion of the Hindus.³⁷

The petition also expressed the view that only a native bishop would be able to attract the Jacobites towards unity.

In 1886 a new Concordat was reached between the Papacy and Portugal, establishing a Catholic hierarchy in India and re-allocating sees between the Padroado and Propaganda Fide. In May 1887, as part of the general reorganisation, the Syrians were finally separated from the Archdiocese of Verapoly, and grouped in the two new vicariates of Trichur and Kottayam. However, there were still no native Syrian bishops.

While an Anglo-Indian military chaplain was appointed to Trichur, a French Jesuit, Mgr. Charles Lavigne, became Vicar Apostolic of Kottayam.

The leaders of the movement for Syrian separation, Nidhiry and Pazheparambil, were included in the new Kottayam Diocesan Council, and the latter became the new Bishop's secretary.³⁸

Mgr. Lavigne did not see Syrian unity as of paramount importance and, according to Nidhiry, pressed him and Mar Dionysius to transfer the Woodland Estate to the Vicariate, with the intention of establishing a Jesuit college on the proposed site of the joint Syrian college.

This, Nidhiry and the Jacobite Metropolitan, refused to do, and in June 1888, Nidhiry was ordered to vacate the estate by Mgr. Lavigne.³⁹

Subsequently, Mar Dionysius bought out Nidhiry's share. In August 1888, Jacobite-Catholic relations were further strained by the Metropolitan's consecration of a dissident Goan priest as Archbishop of the Independent Catholic Church - a new Ceylon-based Latin branch of the Jacobite

Church.⁴⁰ A bitter Mgr. Lavigne then brought all contacts with the Jacobites to an end.

In September 1889 Nidhiry was appointed the first Vicar General of the Kottayam Diocese. The appointment was greeted by demonstrations of popular enthusiasm, which Mgr. Lavigne looked upon with disfavour.⁴¹ Strained relations with the Bishop forced Nidhiry to resign his position in 1892, and when the Syrian Catholics succeeded in getting native bishops in 1896, he was not one of the three new Syrian Vicars Apostolic (for Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanacherry). However, Pazheparambil, who had served Mgr. Lavigne loyally, became Bishop of Ernakulam while a 'Southist' Syrian was installed at Changanacherry, the only vicariate with its headquarters in Travancore. The latter appointment was deeply resented by the 'Northist' majority in northern Travancore and, until his death in 1904, Nidhiry played an active part in efforts to get a 'Northist' bishop for Changanacherry.⁴² The demand was eventually conceded in 1911 when a separate vicariate of Kottayam was created for the 'Southists', following the example set by the Jacobite Patriarch Abdulla II.

The turn of the century was a time of revival in the fortunes of the Syrian community. While the impact of British influence had caused division in the Jacobite church, it had also led to a reassertion of a distinct Syrian identity, and an improvement in opportunities for members of the community. An important instance of the latter was the leading role played by Syrians in the expansion of commerce. They were also to be found in increasing numbers in the public service. In 1903, C.M. Agur noted that many Syrians held high posts in government service, particularly in British India and Cochin, where they were appointed more readily than in Travancore. Educated at the CMS College, Maharaja's College in Trivandrum, and the Madras Christian College, they went on to become judges, deputy commissioners and deputy collectors, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and journalists.⁴³

The first Syrian members of the Travancore Legislative Council, the Jacobite K.K. Kuruvila, and his Anglican successor, T.C. Poonen, were both products of CMS College; as was the latter's nephew, Dr E. Poonen, who was in charge of the Trivandrum General Hospital in the 1900s, and later became an M.L.C. as well.⁴⁴

It was in modern education that the relationship between British missionary activity and progress was most obvious. The Anglican Syrians and the Marthomites represented the best educated sections of the Syrian community. In 1905 the CMS conducted over 270 educational institutions

with 11,523 pupils.⁴⁵ The Marthomites maintained two high schools and 87 Malayalam schools.⁴⁶ In comparison, the Jacobites, who accounted for roughly two-thirds of the non-Catholic Syrian population, lagged some way behind. In 1903 they had 97 Malayalam schools, in addition to two high schools, and four English-medium middle schools.⁴⁷

The Mar Dionysius (MD) Seminary High School was established at the Woodland Estate in Kottayam in 1893.⁴⁸ The premier Jacobite educational institution, it was founded to further English education among the Jacobites.

Just as the Anglican Syrians and Marthomites, with their close ties with the CMS, were the most advantaged groups in terms of education, so the Catholics, who had no links with the British, were correspondingly disadvantaged. Their church hierarchy discouraged them for a long time from attending Protestant educational institutions. As late as 1906 priests were still being instructed to ensure that Catholic children were educated in Catholic schools, with any exceptions requiring the sanction of the local bishop.⁴⁹

Until the 1880s there were very few Western-style Catholic schools. However, this changed rapidly following the creation of the Syrian vicariates in 1887. In 1891, Mgr. Lavigne established the first Catholic English high school, St Berchman's in Changanacherry. By 1903 Changanacherry diocese had more than 400 parish schools with over 14,000 pupils.⁵⁰ In the 1890s the Latin Catholics also started high schools in Quilon and Trivandrum. St Joseph's College, the first Catholic college in South India, was established at Trichinopoly in 1883.⁵¹ Over the years it produced many Travancorean graduates. The Catholic convents were in the forefront of female education, and the Convent of the Holy Angels was the first private womens' institution to be given the status of a second grade college. Among those who passed out from it was Mary Poonen, the daughter of Dr E. Poonen, who became the first Malayali woman to graduate (in 1909) and to study in Britain.⁵²

Prominent lay Catholics, notably Nidhiry's friend, Parayil Avira Varki Tharagan, also engaged in efforts to further English education. Themselves handicapped in giving leadership to the community because of their lack of a modern education, Parayil Tharagan and his brother, started their own English schools.⁵³ The Parayil s provide an illustrative contrast with the wealthiest Jacobite Syrian family, the Kulangaras of Parur, one of whom graduated in arts and law, and served as a district munsiff in the 1890s.⁵⁴ Despite the increased Catholic educational activity, in 1905-6 the Catholics (both Syrians and Latins)

constituting over half Travancore's Christian population, still accounted for only 35 per cent of the Christians in educational institutions.⁵⁵ There were very few Catholic graduates and none holding responsible posts in the government service.

Overall, the Christians (Syrian and non-Syrian) were the most literate religious group. In 1901 their literacy rate (15.8 per cent) easily surpassed that of the Hindus (11.7 per cent). The superiority was even more pronounced when it came to literacy in English and female education. Nearly half of the 15,000 Travancoreans literate in English were Christian, and literacy among Christian women (5.2 per cent) was twice as high as among the Hindus (2.5 per cent).⁵⁶

The Christians advanced position in education was reflected in Travancore's nascent press. In 1893-4 six of the seven newspapers in the state were owned by Christians, and even a quarter of a century later, in 1918, 28 of the 55 papers were Christian-owned.⁵⁷ The first journal printed in Kerala, Jnana-nikshepam (Treasury of Knowledge), was started by a CMS missionary in Kottayam in 1848, to propagate religious reform.⁵⁸ In 1860 the English-language Western Star was founded in Cochin, to be followed by its Malayalam edition four years later.⁵⁹ Owned by C.Kurien, a wealthy Jacobite supporter of Mar Dionysius V⁶⁰, the paper moved to Trivandrum in 1893. Kurien's Kunnumpurath family held the abkari (liquor) contract for most of northern Travancore.⁶¹ His nephew, and successor as proprietor of the Star, C.J.Kurien, was one of the principal backers of the Patriarch's party in the 1911 Jacobite split. Another prominent Jacobite, Kandathil I.Varghese Mappillai, started the Malayala Manorama in 1889. The leading Malayalam journalist until his death in 1904, Mappillai sat on the board of the Mar Dionysius High School⁶² and was the moving spirit behind the Bhasha Poshini Sabha, a literary society that flourished in the 1890s and 1900s.⁶³ His nephew, K.C.Mammen Mappillai, was Headmaster of the M.D. High School from 1896 - 1906, after which he became an editor of the Manorama.⁶⁴ This paper, printed at the Jacobite Church's Woodland Estate in Kottayam, was, for forty years, the most popular in Travancore.. While the Manorama acted as a voice of the Jacobites, the Nazrani Deepika performed the same function for the Syrian Catholics.

In reviewing the history of the Syrian Christians in the nineteenth century, we can recognise how the wealthier sections of the community took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the establishment of British power. The most visible result of this was the emergence of

churches with greater independence. The focus of communal identity, these new, or reformed, churches responded to changing aspirations by, most notably, encouraging the spread of modern education. The missionary institutions of higher education also contributed to the growth of a class of Western-educated Syrian Christian professionals who were henceforth to take the leading role in social and political movements. It is to the early activities of these men that we now turn our attention.

The formation of the Travancore and Cochin Christian Association was treated briefly in Chapter One. Its first president, T.C.Poonen, died in 1901⁶⁵ and was succeeded by the Jacobite Trivandrum High Court vakil and leader of the bar, E.J.John. The Association's Committee in the 1900s included three other influential Jacobites - K.C.Mammen Mappillai and K.M.Mathulla Mappillai, another editor of the Kandathil family newspaper, the Malayala Manorama, and C.J.Kurien. Three Anglican Syrians were also members - T.C.Poonen's brother, T.C.Cherian, Superintendent of Registration in Cochin, John Chandy, the Superintendent of Kottayam's CMS Press, and N.E.Varghese, a Kottayam vakil. The only Marthomite on the committee was C.P.Thomas, Headmaster of the Mar Thoma Seminary in Kottayam.⁶⁶

Between 1910 and 1915, four Christian conferences were held under the auspices of the Association. The first, at Kottayam in May 1910, was presided over by E.J.John and attended by 600 Jacobites, Marthomites, Anglicans, London Missionary Society Christians, and Latin and Syrian Catholics.⁶⁷ (An initial objection to Catholic participation by their ecclesiastical heads, appears to have been relaxed, although there was still no Catholic who took a prominent part in the Association's activities.) Later conferences were held in 1911 (presided over by Dr E.Poonen), 1913 (in Tiruvalla), and in 1915 (at Kottayam, with the Anglican Bishop, Charles Gill, presiding).⁶⁸ At all of them social questions were prominent, the foremost being the need for a law to regulate succession and inheritance of property among Christians. Other subjects discussed included the condition of women, and the ending of the practices of child marriage, and the giving of considerable dowries, both of which were more prevalent among the Syrian Christians than among non-Brahman Hindus.

As was the case among the Nairs, Syrian Christians were preoccupied in the early years of the century by arguments for and against social reform. The most significant of these concerned succession and inheritance. From the 1860s onwards, the absence of a settled law

was remarked upon by Judges of the Travancore High Court, who had to adjudicate in numerous cases of litigation. In 1894 the Resident, H.B.Grigg, wrote to the Madras Government of the great need for such a law to remove the cause of endless quarrels leading to civil suits, and often crimes.⁶⁹ Agur also says that the Syrian Christians were very litigious⁷⁰ and a correspondent in the Madras Mail in December 1891, noted that the greater part of the litigation was 'accounted for solely by the absence of a definite law (of succession) of their own'.⁷¹

These words echo descriptions of the problems suffered by Nair marumakkathayis and, in the 1890s, Christian writers emulated Nairs like O.Chandu Menon in using literature to attack partiular social customs.⁷² In his 1894 report, the Resident remarked that:

unfortunately the leaders of the Christian community are ecclesiatics who do not recognise the evils of the present position - partly because of the absence of interest in matters of non-religious character though of vital interest to their people, and partly because the present absence of law increases their ecclesiastical power, and in regard to certain priests and bishops, because the introduction of law would involve loss of income.

The preeminence of the clergy in the life of the community declined with the emergence of a secular Christian leadership, which included activists in the Christian Association and Christian members of the Legislative Council and Popular Assembly.

At successive sessions of the Popular Assembly, beginning in 1905, representations were made by Christian members, such as Parayil Kunju Avira Tharagan, of the wealthy Parayil family of Shertallai, C.P.Thomas, K.M.Mathulla Mappillai, and Iype Thoma Kathanar, senior Vicar-General of the Mar Thoma Church. A Jacobite wakil from Alleppey read a paper on the subject at the first Christian conference in 1910.⁷³ During the seventh session of the Popular Assembly in 1911, Dewan Rajagopalachari announced his intention of appointing a Christian Committee to study the question.⁷⁴ The Committee that was appointed included P.Cherian, an Anglican Syrian District Judge, who was its President, Iype Thoma Kathanar and K.C.Mammen Mappillai, representing the Marthomites and the Jacobites respectively, and D.Francis, Secretary of the South Travancore Catholic Association. The other three members were a Tamil LMS paistor, a Syrian Catholic District Munsiff, and a Latin Catholic.⁷⁵

A group of Anglican and Marthomite Syrians from central Travancore supported the introduction of a succession law identical to the Indian Succession Act of 1865, that accorded greater rights for women than was

the custom among the Syrians. The leading reformers were all products of the CMS College or the Madras Christian College, and a number of them held high positions in the Madras and Travancore services. Among the members of a Reform League, headed by Rao Bahadur G.T. Varghese, the Deputy Collector of Calicut, were P.J.Varghese, a Trivandrum judge, and P.Chерian.⁷⁶ Other supporters of reform included E.J.John, the only prominent Jacobite reformer. All four were involved in a controversial case decided by the Travancore High Court in 1907. It concerned T.G.Varghese's sister and her husband and sister-in-law, and arose out of rival claims to the property of the sister-in-law's deceased husband. In 1903, P.J.Varghese, then District Munsiff of Krishnapuram in central Travancore, had followed the 1865 Act in dividing the property equally between the widow and mother of the deceased, while disallowing the male heirs, sons of the dead man's paternal great-uncle. The decision was upheld by the High Court where E.J.John, acting for G.T.Varghese's relations, used the testimony of Cherian in support of applying the British India Act to Travancore.⁷⁷ Cases involving the reformers were also heard by the District Court of South Malabar in 1906, and the Cochin Chief Court in 1907-8.⁷⁸

The Bill proposed by the Succession Committee in 1912 showed the influence of the reformers. While not as liberal as the 1865 Act in the rights it accorded to women, it entitled daughters who had not been given a dowry to a share equal to a third that of a son's.⁷⁹ It also gave a widow a share equal to that of a son, subject to a maximum of one quarter of the estate. Iype Thoma Kathanar strongly opposed these provisions, claiming that the Majority Report showed a desire to realise the reform ideals advocated by the Committee President, P.Chерian, in an essay published in 1894. Of the six other committee members, Mammen Mappillai also dissented from the Report.⁸⁰

The fiercest opposition came from the naturally conservative hierarchy of the Syrian churches, who had a vested interest in the maintenance of the traditional dowry system. Iype Thoma noted that a woman with independent property rights could avoid the tithe given to the church on her marriage by opting for a civil ceremony, or one solemnised in a non-Syrian church.⁸¹ The heads of all the Syrian churches wrote to the Dewan during the course of 1913, supporting Thoma's dissenting minute.⁸²

His stand was also widely supported in the community. In September 1913 a public meeting was held in Kottayam to protest against the draft Bill.⁸³ The meeting was chaired by K.K.Kuruvila, the ex-MLC,

who asserted that the vast majority of Syrians, headed by the propertied classes, clung to the existing customs as necessary to preserve the community's individuality, the continuity of wealthy families, and the dignity of the community among its Hindu rivals. (Iype Thoma's minute had pointed out the danger of sub-division of property, and the effect this would have on voting rights in the elections to the Popular Assembly.)⁸⁴ Wealthy Christian families, were well represented at the Kottayam meeting. Among the members of the leading Jacobite Kandathil family who were present were K.C.Mammen Mappillai and Mathulla Mappillai. Also present was C.J.Kurien of the Western Star. The Catholic participants included two men who later achieved prominence in public life - John Nidhiry, a Kottayam High Court lawyer and nephew of Emmanuel Nidhiry, and T.J.Mathew, the son of a Poonjar landlord. The meeting chose a deputation of four to submit a petition to the government.⁸⁵

As a result of the strength of public opinion, the draft Bill was amended by a Select Committee of the Legislative Council, that included the three Christian Council members.⁸⁶ Under the Succession Legislation, which became law in December 1916, the share of a daughter, in lieu of dowry, was reduced from a third to a quarter that of a son's, and even this was made subject to a maximum of Rs.5,000. Moreover, though the widow's right to claim a share equal to that of a son was retained, over immovable property this was made terminable upon her remarriage or death.⁸⁷

Thus the activities of the Christian Association in the early 1910s were overshadowed by the debate about succession. At the April 1915 Kottayam Christian Conference, a major reorganisation of the body took place. It was renamed the Travancore and Cochin Christian Conference, and E.J.John was replaced as President by Dr E.Poonen. There were three new joint secretaries, and the old committee was replaced by a 27-member Managing Committee elected by taluk associations.⁸⁸ Following Dr. Poonen's death in March 1916, E.J.John became President again.⁸⁹ In 1918 the Civic Rights League was formed and, to a large extent, supplanted the Christian Conference, although the latter continued to exist until about 1929.

The Christian Association was not the only communal Christian body in Travancore to function in the early years of the twentieth century. In the early 1900s a Trivandrum Syrian Club was formed along the lines of the National Club, begun in 1899 by Nair officials belonging to C.V.Raman Pillai's faction. Dr Poonen, and then E.J.John,

served as its presidents. P.Cherian and O.M.Cherian, a lecturer in the Trivandrum Teachers' College, were also on the Club's committee.⁹⁰ John Nidhiry, then working as a clerk in the Huzur Secretariat while studying for his law degree^{90a}, was the only Catholic member.

Barred from taking an active part in the Christian Association, the Syrian Catholics sought to form alternatives. In May 1905, at a public meeting at Mannanam, the centre of the campaign for Syrian Catholic separation in the 1870s and 1880s, the Travancore and Cochin Roman-Catholic Association was established under the patronage of Mar Louis Pazheparambil, Bishop of Ernakulam. The object of the Association was said to be to promote the community's social and material welfare and to guard its political rights. Its President was Nidhiry's old associate, Parayil Varki Tharagan, and its headquarters were at the Parayil's home village of Ezhupunna in Shertallai taluk. A body with a membership of less than 400, the Association stopped functioning in 1918 when the Malabar Catholic Congress was founded.⁹¹

This Congress grew out of the Malabar Syrian Catholic Social Gathering, of which Cyriac Nidhiry, Emmanuel Nidhiry's younger brother, was the founder-President. In the 1870s he had become the first Syrian Catholic in Travancore to pass the Matriculation examinations. He later graduated and became a leading lawyer and Alleppey landlord. One of the 1891 Malayala Memorial deputation, he was a member of the Popular Assembly in the 1900s.⁹² John Nidhiry was also an early member of the Catholic Social Gathering, as was Joseph Thaliath, one of the first London-educated Syrian Catholic barristers, who presided over the Gathering's 1914 session. Other leaders of the Catholic Congress, in its early days, included T.J.Mathew, a Kottayam High Court lawyer, and N.V.Joseph, a lawyer from Alwaye.

Other groups - Latin and Protestant Christians, and Muslims - followed the Syrian Christians in asserting their independent social and political identity.

The non-Syrian Christians (pop.654,584) of Travancore can be divided into two groups. They are the Latin Catholics, most of whom were converted after the sixteenth century mission of Saint Francis Xavier⁹⁴, and the Protestants, who were nineteenth century converts. Until the 1890s the Syrian Jacobite and Marthomite churches made no organised effort to win converts. This was largely due to the fact that the vast majority of converts came from the low castes, and were regarded as socially inferior to the Syrians. Thus, the latter feared

that evangelisation would not only antagonise their caste-Hindu neighbours, but would also jeopardise their own social status.⁹⁵

Latin Catholics (pop.360,217) were found in significant numbers throughout the state. They were concentrated along the coast and in the Southern Division where, by 1941, they represented over a tenth of the inhabitants.⁹⁶ The majority were fishermen and landless labourers, though there were a few landowners of substance in the northern taluk of Shertallai. In the south some Nadar Catholics were prosperous traders and industrialists. Though all the Latins came under the religious authority of either the Archdiocese of Verapoly or the Padroado Diocese of Cochin, they did not form a homogenous social group. In northern Travancore and Cochin there were at least two distinct sub-groupings of importance: the 'Anjuttikar' (Five Hundred) and the 'Ezhunuttikar' (Seven Hundred).

The 'Anjuttikar' were descended from converts from the Mukkuvan caste of fishermen, and were mostly found in Shertallai. The origins of the 'Ezhunuttikar', concentrated in the taluk of Parur, are more obscure.⁹⁷ In any case, both groups sought to maintain their own identity. Agur, in 1903, noted that priests belonging to one group were generally unacceptable to the other.⁹⁸ Inter-marriage was also uncommon. However, both sections claimed affinity to the wealthier, and socially superior, Syrian Catholics, often describing themselves as 'Latin Nazranis'.⁹⁹ At the turn of the century the 'Anjuttikar' submitted a memorial to the British Resident, in which they presented themselves as descendants of the original St Thomas Christians.¹⁰⁰ The 'Ezhunuttikar' made similar claims.¹⁰¹ The desire to identify with the Syrians extended to changing social customs. In 1912 the Christian Committee on succession found that the law of inheritance followed by the northern Latins was gradually gravitating towards that of the Syrians.¹⁰²

In the 1920s and 1930s the Latin Catholic elite followed the example of their Syrian counterparts in pursuing first, ecclesiastical and then, political, reform. In 1920, at a meeting of a new Catholic Association of Verapoly Archdiocese, held in Ernakulam in Cochin, L.M.Pylee, a young college lecturer, suggested that the administration of the Archdiocese could be entrusted to the indigenous clergy. The missionary-dominated church hierarchy reacted unfavourably to this and withdrew their patronage from the association, causing it to go out of existence.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, local Latins persisted in their efforts to win a greater measure of ecclesiastical self-government.

In 1920, following approaches made by Pylee and several others, to the Archbishop of Verapoly, Joseph Attipetty¹⁰⁴, a 26 year-old ordinand from Cochin, became the first native Latin to be sent to Rome for his theological training. Two years later Pylee organised a memorial to the Holy See signed by a number of Latin priests and prominent laymen. The memorial argued the case for appointing an indigenous prelate, claiming equality with the Syrian Catholics and drawing attention to the growth of nationalism.¹⁰⁵ The memorialists' demand was eventually conceded in June 1933 when Attipetty, who had been ordained only seven years earlier, was consecrated Archbishop of Verapoly.¹⁰⁶ 1933 also marked the beginning of Latin political activism; a new Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha became one of the constituent organisations of the Joint Political Conference, spearheading the campaign for communal representation in the legislature and in the public service.

As in the north, the Latins of southern Travancore were not homogenous. Apart from a small minority of Vellalas¹⁰⁷, the southern Latins were drawn from the non-caste-Hindu Nadars, Pulayas and Parayas. The Nadars formed the dominant element in many churches, and when, in 1908, a South Travancore Catholic Association was formed, D.Francis, a Nadar tile manufacturer and government contractor, became its first secretary.¹⁰⁸

Not as numerous as the Latins were the Protestants (pop.295,744). They included adherents of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Salvation Army and several smaller denominations.

The LMS was the first to arrive in Travancore, beginning its work in 1806. By 1931 its successor, the South India United Church, had 138,958 adherents - all but a small minority in the Southern Division. During the nineteenth century the LMS was compelled by the poverty and low social status of its converts, to develop its social and educational work to a much greater extent than the other denominations.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the Scott Christian College in Nagercoil, established as a mission seminary in 1819, became the leading private institution of higher education in southern Travancore, while the Neyyoor mission hospital was the largest in the state.¹¹⁰

As in neighbouring Tinnevely, the Nadars, who accounted for most of LMS's early converts, derived the maximum benefit from the facilities provided by the mission. Consequently, when the Salvation Army initiated its efforts in Nagercoil in 1890, it was soon able to attract

large numbers of Parayas and Pulayas, many of whom were unhappy with the Nadar dominance in the existing Catholic and LMS churches.¹¹¹

By 1931 the Salvationists claimed 58,991 followers, most of them in the south. Further north, the CMS, with c.67,000 non-Syrian adherents, was the leading Protestant denomination. Overall a majority of Protestants in Travancore were found in the south, and in 1931 the Latins and Protestants together accounted for between 23 -38 per cent of the population in the five taluks south of Trivandrum.¹¹²

Islam is generally believed to have been brought to Kerala in the ninth century by Arab seafarers and traders.¹¹³ Unlike in Malabar, where they represented a fifth of the population, in Travancore the Muslims (pop.353,274) represented a small minority. Spread throughout the state, they were found in largest numbers in the towns, particularly the ports of Quilon and Alleppey.¹¹⁴ In contrast to the Mappillas of Malabar, the vast majority of whom were fishermen, sailors, coolies and poor tenant cultivators¹¹⁵, the Travancorean Muslims tended to be more prosperous. Generally accorded a 'respectable' status, they were prominent in trade, though there were also significant numbers of Muslim tenant cultivators and labourers.¹¹⁶

Despite their relative prosperity, the Muslims were slow to take advantage of modern education. Consequently, they lagged behind other communities in literacy.¹¹⁷ The encouragement of education was, therefore, the main concern of Muslim social reformers in the early twentieth century. Foremost among them was Vakkom M.Abdul Khader Moulavi, a Koranic scholar from Quilon who, in 1905, started the first Muslim newspaper in the state, a monthly called the Muslim.¹¹⁸ Introduced to reformist ideas current in the wider Islamic world through the Egyptian journal al-Manar¹¹⁹, the organ of the Salafiyya movement led by Rashid Rida, Moulavi was strongly influenced by its synthesis of Islamic purity, rationalism and Muslim solidarity. He translated portions of the Koran into Malayalam and promoted the spread of modern education.¹²⁰

The earliest Muslim association in Travancore was the Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha, formed in Alleppey in 1915.¹²¹ Its secretary, and later president, was P.S.Mahomed, the first Travancorean Muslim lawyer.¹²² The Sabha founded the first English-medium Muslim high school and did substantial other educational work. However, its activities were largely limited to Alleppey, and only in the early 1920s, in the wake of the Khilafat movement, did Muslim associations, seeking to operate more widely, emerge. Vakkom Moulavi played a

leading role in the formation of both the shortlived Travancore Muslim Mahajana Sabha (Muslim All Peoples Conference), founded in 1920, and the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham (United Muslim Society), started in 1923.¹²³

.. There are clear parallels between the experience of Travancore's Hindu castes and those of the Christian and Muslim communities. Among all the groups, movements for religious and social reform preceded the expression of a distinct communal identity in the new politics of newspapers, associations, representative institutions and elections. This is not to say that the consciousness of being a Syrian or Latin Catholic - or a Nair or Ezhava - was itself an innovation. Rather, the efforts by communal elites to replace outmoded values and customs by a set of aspirations in greater conformity with changing political and economic circumstances, deepened the individual's attachment to a particular social category, thus transforming it into a potent political force. Chapter Four considers the way in which this fact influenced religious change in the 1920s and 1930s.

Notes

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- 2 Anglican Syrians were not enumerated in censuses. However, the 1931 Census returned 18,983 Syrians not belonging to the major denominations. Most of these were Anglicans. CI (1931), XXVIII, 1, p.388.
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- 5 Ibid., pp.71-75.
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- 10 Ibid., p.173.
- 11 J.Arakkal, M.V.Cyriac and A.Koothottil, 'Alienation or Liberation', Jeevadhara, 37 (1977), Alleppey.
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- 13 Ibid., pp.100-07.
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- 15 One of Tampi's arch-foes was Thachil Mathu Tharagan, a Syrian Catholic merchant from Shertallai in northern Travancore, who gained control of the salt, tobacco, timber and other monopolies in the state at the end of the eighteenth century. Tharagan was one of a ruling triumvirate of royal favourites whom Tampi ousted in 1799. Brown, op.cit., pp. 121 and 124; V.Nagam Aiya, Travancore State Manual, Vol.I, Trivandrum 1906, pp.418-19 and 428-29; Bayly, op.cit., p.188; and A.S.Menon, Kerala District Gazetteer. Alleppey, Trivandrum 1975, pp.86-87.
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Chapter IV

Caste Organisations, Religious Reform and Hindu Revivalism

Between 1918 and 1938, the Hindus of Travancore witnessed a progressive democratisation of their religious life. The two most important caste associations - the Ezhava SNDP Yogam and the Nair Service Society - both acquired a mass membership. At the same time a campaign against untouchability resulted in the 1936 Proclamation opening temples to all Hindus. The Proclamation was a demonstration of the growing solicitude for the non-caste-Hindus shown by both the government and the caste-Hindu leaders. The new depressed class sanghams particularly benefited from their concern. These developments meant that by 1938 Travancore could no longer be described as a stronghold of conservative Hinduism - Vivekananda's 'lunatic asylum' of 1892.

The transformation of the caste associations of the 1910s into the mass organisations of the 1930s was one of the most significant features of change. It was tangible proof of the success of the social reformers in exploiting caste identity. The NSS provided the most remarkable instance. Aided by a few wealthy and influential backers, it rapidly expanded the scope and spread of its activities.

The Society replaced the rival pro- and anti- reform Nair samajams of C.Krishna Pillai and C.V.Raman Pillai. Krishna Pillai died in 1916 and was succeeded as President of the Nair Mahasamajam first by another retired Schools Inspector, and then by the Quilon lawyer Changanacherry K.Parameswaran Pillai, the President of the NSS. Though Raman Pillai served as a director of the Nair Samajam until his death in 1922, in the late 1910s the Samajam's affairs were largely conducted by younger men. Its secretaries were the Trivandrum lawyers P.K.Kesava Pillai and A.Narayana Pillai.¹

The geographical division that marked attitudes toward taravad partition, remarked upon in Chapter II, was reflected in the composition of the managing bodies of the two samajams. Most of the members of the Samajam Directorate were southerners while at least two-thirds of the Mahasamajam Committee was drawn from northern and central Travancore and Cochin. The Mahasamajam possessed wider public support. By 1922, 137 local Nair samajams were affiliated to it. In contrast, the Samajam could only claim 135 individual members, and nine of its fifteen-strong Directorate were serving or retired government officials. Many also belonged to the Trivandrum National Club, founded by Nair officials in 1899.² The Mahasamajam Committee had a more varied membership, including

lawyers, educationalists and landlords. It was also more active, organising annual conventions attended by some 200 representatives of the constituent samajams.

The onset of the Christian-led civic rights agitation in 1918 contributed towards a rapprochement³ between the rival Nair factions. In 1919 both samajams simultaneously held conferences in Trivandrum which appointed committees to consider an amalgamation. Dewan Bahadur A.Govinda Pillai, the last president of the united pre-1915 Nair Samajam⁴, was commissioned to work out the terms. Shortly afterwards, C.V.Raman Pillai and P.K.Kesava Pillai joined the Mahasamajam Committee.⁵ Then, in November 1920, the reformers attended a meeting of the conservative Samajam that overwhelmingly passed a resolution backing taravad partition.⁶ Spurred on by the general Nair disenchantment with the administration of Dewan Raghaviah, the two samajams resolved to unite at a joint meeting held early in 1923. The merger eventually produced the Travancore Nair Mahasabha. An umbrella association lacking any organisation of its own, the Mahasabha soon became moribund and this allowed the NSS to emerge as the foremost caste organisation.

In its early years the Society concentrated on education. There were several reasons for this. Many of its founders, among them the first President, K.Kelappan Nair, and the General Secretary, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, were, or had been, teachers. Moreover, Mannathu's mentor, C.Krishna Pillai, had always stressed the importance of promoting education. A third factor was the example already set by the Christian churches in establishing schools and colleges - in the 1910s the foremost educational institution in Changanacherry, the NSS headquarters, was St.Berchman's, a Catholic high school where Kelappan Nair taught for a year.

Eight months after its foundation, the Society was given a grant of Rs.5,000 for educational work by the karanavar of the Panangot taravad, a wealthy Changanacherry family. A month later, in July 1915, it received its first gift of land - 87 acres donated by the karanavars of the Kunnappally and Nadamel taravads, two branches of another wealthy north Travancorean family. The Kottayam Schools Inspector, an associate of C.Krishna Pillai, played an important part in inspiring these grants.⁷ In 1916 a school was founded on the donated land and this was followed, over the next eight years, by the establishment of three more in other centres in northern and central Travancore; all four developed into high schools.⁸

Although the emphasis was on education, the NSS soon became active

in other areas too. In 1919 it brought out a monthly, Service. Published in Changanacherry, it was initially edited by the school-master who had conducted the magazine Nayar in the early 1900s. After the Service moved to Trivandrum in 1921, he was replaced by an editorial board including M.N.Nair, an ex-teacher, and a Neyyattinkara wakil. Jointly, or separately, these two edited Service for the next twelve years. The paper focused on communal concerns and by the late 1920s had a circulation of about 3,000.⁹

M.N.Nair, a junior associate of Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai¹⁰, also played a leading part in building up the NSS organisation. In 1924 he was appointed to head a new department to oversee organisational affairs.¹¹ From its inception, one of the Society's main aims had been to revive the Karayogam, the traditional local caste body. After July 1925, when the Society was registered under the Companies Regulation, the numerous Karayogams that had already been formed were asked to join it, and paid agents were assigned to reorganise them along the lines of cooperative societies. Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai undertook tours to collect funds and assist Nair in coordinating these activities. Each Karayogam sent two representatives to a Taluk Union that was affiliated to the Society.¹² The NSS acted as a central agency and the Karayogams, while enjoying a degree of autonomy, effectively became its local branches. Consequently, by the late 1920s the Society wielded an influence disproportionate to its small membership.

The leaders of the NSS long sought to limit entry, fearing that the lifting of restrictions would undermine the organisation and make it difficult to direct. As late as 1933 the entry fee, for both individuals and unions, was Rs.100 - the total membership was just 628.¹³ However, with the strengthening of its organisation, and possibly as part of its effort to counter the Christian-led Abstention movement of 1933-35, restrictions on membership were lifted and there was a phenomenal increase as all those involved in the Karayogams joined. By 1936 there were 371,075 members, a figure that represented over a third of the total Nair population.¹⁴

The SNDP Yogam was the other caste association that developed into a mass organisation. Its membership in 1922 was 2,425 (out of an Ezhava population of nearly 700,000).¹⁵ However, by 1928 the position had changed dramatically and there were 50,684 members.¹⁶ The man principally responsible for this transformation was T.K.Madhavan, the editor of the Desabhimani, who achieved prominence as the initiator of the Vaikom satyagraha of 1924. Madhavan was appointed to the newly created post of

Organising Secretary of the Yogam in 1926. He then proposed a plan that paralleled what the NSS leadership, his close associates in the Vaikom satyagraha, were undertaking. The plan, approved by the Yogam's Board of Directors, entailed the establishment of branches at the village level that would be affiliated to taluk unions. Each constituent branch elected representatives to a union committee and the unions, in turn, elected the Yogam Council (the erstwhile Directorate). In 1928 there were 254 branches belonging to ten unions; by 1936 the number of both branches and total membership had doubled - to 530 and over 100,000.¹⁷

The expansion in the membership was not achieved without some acrimony. As had earlier occurred in the Keraliya Nair Samajam, regional rivalry brought about the alienation of a section of the leadership. The increasing influence of the Quilon Ezhavas, like Madhavan, was resented by Trivandrum Ezhavas who had been in the forefront of the Yogam in its early years. Prominent among the latter was the family of Dr Palpu. By 1920 the General Secretary and a third of the Yogam Board members were from Quilon¹⁸ and following the death, in 1924, of the poet Kumaran Asan, related by marriage to the Palpus¹⁹, the Quilon Ezhavas strengthened their hold. In the discussion in the Legislative Council of a Bill to regulate succession among Ezhavas, Yogam General Secretary N.Kumaran, a close associate of Madhavan²⁰, opposed any concessions to the misradayi Ezhava minority in the south, some of whom wanted to retain aspects of matriliney. Palpu's brother, P.Parameswaran, the president of a misradayi association²¹, was the only member to oppose the Bill on its final reading in February 1925.²² Palpu might have been embittered by the Yogam leadership's dismissal of the claim by his son, Sri Nataraja Guru, to be considered the natural spiritual successor to Narayana Guru.²³

Madhavan differed from Palpu on the question of how to achieve an improvement in the social position of Ezhavas. While Palpu had relied on appeals to the government and the Paramount Power, Madhavan initially supported the civic rights agitation. However, when it became clear that the movement's Christian leaders were concerned more about entry into the public service than removing the disabilities suffered by non-caste-Hindus, he turned away from the Christian alliance and decided that Ezhava interests would be best served by winning the cooperation of Nair reformers and the pro-Congress caste-Hindu youth.²⁴ This strategy was helped by Madhavan's sympathy for Gandhian methods. As early as December 1917 he had advocated satyagraha as the best way of challenging restrictions on non-caste-Hindus approaching Hindu temples.²⁵

Though the Desabhimani subsequently criticised the Rowlatt Satyagraha²⁶,

Madhavan's support for the British appears to have ended when he abandoned his alliance with the Christians.

In 1921 he interviewed Gandhi at Tinnevely and discussed launching a campaign against untouchability and alcohol.²⁷ The movement for prohibition had the blessing of Narayana Guru, who saw the Ezhavas traditional occupation of toddy-tapping as demeaning.²⁸ However, since many Ezhavas relied on the liquor trade for their livelihood, whether as toddy-tappers or liquor contractors, the campaign was not a success.²⁹ Although there was a five per cent drop in excise revenue between 1922 and 1924³⁰, the unpopularity of prohibition was one of the factors that persuaded Madhavan to focus his attention on untouchability.

Their exclusion from even the vicinity of temples was a grievance that was deeply felt by the professional and landowning Ezhavas who dominated the SNDP Yogam. In Malabar, in 1917, a ban on using roads near temples was flouted by C.Krishnan, an Ezhava editor and the legal advisor to the Yogam. At the same time, in an editorial in Krishnan's Mitavadi, the Travancorean C.V.Kunjuraman advocated temple entry³¹, a call that he repeated in the Popular Assembly in 1922.³²

Ezhava leaders were not agreed on how to overcome religious discrimination.³³ Among those favouring conversion to another faith, Kunjuraman supported Christianity, while Krishnan backed Buddhism. Madhavan opposed them both, proposing cooperation with caste-Hindus who wanted reform. His strategy received implicit approval from Narayana Guru who, at a multi-faith conference held in Alwaye in February 1924, proclaimed that all religions were essentially good and only became bad through being corrupted. The way was thus clear for Madhavan to join forces with sympathetic caste-Hindus like Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai. During the 1922 Popular Assembly, Mannathu had submitted a petition supporting Ezhava aspirations.³⁴ He, and other leading Nair reformers, felt that only a consolidated Hindu community could withstand the political, economic and demographic advance of the Christians.

Madhavan was conscious that to succeed, any campaign against untouchability had to attract the widest possible backing. In December 1923 he attended the annual Congress session at Kakinada to canvass support. He was assisted by K.M.Panikkar, the editor of the new Congress daily, the Hindustan Times.³⁵ Panikkar belonged to a prominent north Travancorean Nair taravad. He and Madhavan were successful in their efforts, and in January 1924, the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee chose ex-NSS president K.Kelappan Nair to convene an Anti-untouchability Committee. Advised by Madhavan and Panikkar, the Committee resolved

upon a satyagraha to gain non-caste-Hindus the right to use roads near the Shiva temple at Vaikom.³⁶ They forbore from demanding temple entry so as not to alienate caste-Hindu opinion by appearing extreme.

The satyagraha, begun on 30 March, lasted eighteen months and gained national attention. It was strongly opposed by local Nambudiri Brahman janmis. T.K. Ravindran lists 25 satyagrahis who were convicted of offences in the first four months.³⁷ Mostly Congressmen, in addition to Madhavan and six other non-caste-Hindus, they included fifteen caste-Hindus and three Christians. R. Jeffrey notes that Madhavan was the only Ezhava among the Travancoreans convicted.³⁸ These statistics indicate that much of the tangible support for the satyagraha was provided by Congressmen from all over Kerala, NSS activists, and a few Ezhavas who, like Madhavan, belonged to wealthy landed families in central Travancore. The mass of poor non-caste-Hindus were not aroused to the extent of risking the wrath of the government, or of their employers and landlords.

For the politics of the state the most important feature of the satyagraha was the alliance that was forged between Ezhava and Nair communal activists. In May 1924, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai presided over a joint Nair-Ezhava conference at Vaikom attended by about 15,000 people.³⁹ Subsequently, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, assisted by Madhavan and the Nair Congressman A.K. Pillai, organised a 500-strong caste-Hindu jatha (march) from Vaikom to Trivandrum, at the end of which he submitted a memorandum to the Maharani Regent.⁴⁰ Nair opinion was not wholly in favour of the satyagraha. Many conservative south Travancoreans stayed away from the Vaikom conference and one, the Trivandrum MLC T.K. Velu Pillai, criticised it in the press.⁴¹ Nevertheless, when a Legislative Council resolution recommending the lifting of restrictions on the entry to roads situated near temples, was put to the vote in February 1925, Velu Pillai, and ten of the eleven other elected Nair members, supported it. This demonstrated the increasing willingness of Nair leaders to pay at least lip service to the cause of religious reform at a time when they found themselves constantly at odds with the Syrian Christians. The resolution, which was backed by most of the Christian non-officials, was defeated by one vote: Palpu's brother, P. Parameswaran, sided with the government.⁴²

Interest in the Vaikom satyagraha declined following a visit by Gandhi in March 1925 during which he negotiated a compromise with the government.⁴³ In November, the Anti-untouchability Committee formally ended the satyagraha after a bypass, open to all sections of the public, had been completed.⁴⁴ Subsequent satyagrahas organised by Travancorean

Congressmen at Suchindram in the far south (in 1926)⁴⁵ and in Thiruvarpur near Kottayam (in 1927)⁴⁶, ended on a similarly subdued note. Even so, despite the lack of significant progress, the SNDP Yogam leadership persisted with the policy of cooperating with caste-Hindu reformers until the death of T.K.Madhavan in 1930.

Many of the Yogam leaders were educated professionals whose position as representatives of their caste furthered their own careers. By 1928 the first three Travancorean Ezhava law graduates, all of whom had served on the Yogam's Directorate, were in government service. N.Kumaran and M.Govindan had been appointed the first Ezhava district judges and C.O.Madhavan was a First Class Magistrate.⁴⁷ However, at the end of the 1920s several factors brought about the emergence of a radical element among Ezhavas that ultimately led to the mass of the community supporting the Communist Party in post-independence Kerala. These factors were: the rise of Ezhava-dominated labour unions; the agitational direct action tactics pioneered by the Vaikom satyagrahis; the expansion of the Yogam membership; and the radical ideas espoused by a minority of Yogam leaders.

Foremost among the Ezhava radicals was K.Aiyappan,⁴⁸ the editor of the Cochin monthly, Sahodaran (Brother). In the mid-1920s he favoured the conversion of Ezhavas to Buddhism and criticised Madhavan's satyagraha method as ineffective.⁴⁹ Aiyappan subsequently edited a rationalist journal, Yuktivadi, first published in 1928 and, in the early 1930s, he was among those who initiated a secular, rationalist movement - the Swatantra Samudaya Prasthanam (Free Society Movement). This had as its objective the elimination of caste and religion.⁵⁰ Its leaders included E.K.Madhavan, a Yogam activist from Vaikom in his early 30s. In 1934 Madhavan published a booklet, Swatantra Samudayam (Independent Community), which exhorted Ezhavas to abandon all religions and eulogised the Soviet Union.⁵¹ These views reflected the radicalism current among the swelling ranks of young, literate Ezhavas⁵², especially those who were trade unionists or unemployed.

The focus of radical sentiment was the northern coastal taluk of Shertallai. Situated between Vaikom and Alleppey, the area was one in which a few Nair and Syrian Catholic families monopolised the land.⁵³ The mass of Ezhava inhabitants were either impoverished agricultural labourers or worked in the coir industry. In 1922 coir factory workers in Alleppey formed Travancore's first labour union.⁵⁴ Both their activities, and the propaganda of the Vaikom satyagrahis, had a radicalising effect. The Karapuram Ezhava Yuvajana Seva Sangham (Karapuram

Ezhava Youth Service Society), established in 1921, was more militant than Ezhava societies elsewhere.⁵⁵

The Sangham's founders were K.C.Kuttan and N.R.Krishnan,⁵⁶ a 28 year-old lawyer and one of the few Ezhava landowners in the taluk. Krishnan was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1928. Two years later, when there were disturbances in Shertallai in connection with a temperance campaign, he cooperated with the police in their efforts to restore order. Kuttan, however, remained a radical, and under his leadership the Sangham had a membership of about 1000.⁵⁷ In 1933 it was reorganised into an All Travancore Ezhava Youth League with Kuttan as Secretary and C.Kesevan (a Quilon lawyer and the son-in-law of C.V. Kunjuraman) as President.⁵⁸

By this time the political climate had changed completely. In January 1933 the SNDP Yogam leadership joined Christian and Muslim politicians in launching the Abstention movement for communal representation. It was in these circumstances that at the first meeting of the Youth League a resolution urged the Yogam to declare that Ezhavas were not Hindus. In January 1934 the leaders of the League denounced a visit to Travancore by Gandhi undertaken as part of his national Harijan tour. They claimed that his anti-untouchability campaign was aimed at securing a Hindu monopoly of political power.⁵⁹ In reply, Gandhi said he was not opposed to other religions but was 'anti-humbug'.⁶⁰

The Mahatma's mention of other religions was an oblique reference to the revival of debate among Ezhavas regarding the possibility of mass conversion to another faith. The strength of anti-Hindu feeling on the part of some young Ezhavas was only one of the factors behind the renewal of the controversy. Ezhava politicians knew that they could use the suggestion of mass conversion to strengthen their position in the tripartite alliance with the Christians and the Muslims. More important, it was also a threat that the pro-Hindu administration and caste-Hindu leaders could ill afford to ignore, since if it was carried out, there would no longer be a Hindu majority in Travancore.

Though political factors played a role, the immediate cause of the Ezhava disillusionment with Hinduism was religious. In 1932 the satyagraha at Guruvayur, in Malabar, led by K.Kelappan Nair, focused on the question of opening temples to non-caste-Hindus. Several Travancoreans, including Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, participated in the satyagraha, and in Travancore the NSS and the SNDP Yogam cooperated in arranging a tour by a delegation of satyagrahis.⁶¹ Responding to widespread public sympathy, in November 1932 the Travancore government appointed a

committee to study the issue. Headed by a Brahman ex-Dewan, V.S. Subramonia Aiyar, its eight other members included four more Brahmans, two Nairs (Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and T.K. Velu Pillai), an Ezhava (M. Govindan) and a Pulaya.⁶² The Committee found that while most Nairs and Vellalas favoured temple entry, almost nine-tenths of Brahmans surveyed were opposed.⁶³ Therefore, its April 1934 Report suggested only a limited right of temple entry and an end to official recognition of unapproachability with regard to all facilities maintained out of public funds.⁶⁴ Changanacherry and Govindan dissented from the majority in calling for unrestricted temple entry.⁶⁵

The Temple Entry Report fueled anti-Hindu sentiment among Ezhavas. K.C. Kuttan, E.K. Madhavan and K.R. Narayanan, a 28 year-old Yogam activist from Vaikom, were prominent in campaigning for withdrawal from Hinduism.⁶⁶ In July 1934 the Yogam Council passed a resolution favouring conversion.⁶⁷ Nine months later, at a 'Swatantra Samudaya Durbar' organised by the Youth League in Shertallai, Narayanan and Yogam General Secretary C. Kesevan went further and called for the destruction of Hinduism.⁶⁸ By this time Ezhava leaders were intensely debating the merits of alternative religions - Christianity, Islam, even Buddhism and Sikhism.

Christianity was the option mentioned most often. Its main proponents were two senior Yogam leaders in their sixties - C.V. Kunjuraman⁶⁹, who had received his early education at a London Mission Society school⁷⁰, and T.K. Kittan, a Kottayam merchant. The Christian missions and leading Syrian Christians⁷¹ from all denominations welcomed and encouraged the interest shown by the Ezhavas. In March 1936 Kunjuraman attended the annual convention of the Mar Thoma Church and, along with other Ezhavas, also attended an Anglican service in Kottayam.⁷² According to the Political Agent, the Anglican Church was particularly favoured because it represented the religion of the King-Emperor.⁷³ A report by the Anglican Bishop of Dornakal, states that 80 per cent of Yogam branches passed resolutions backing Christianity.⁷⁴ In September 1936 the Bishop assisted in baptising 100 Ezhavas near Kottayam.⁷⁵

There were Yogam leaders who favoured faiths other than Christianity. K.C. Kuttan went to Amritsar and became a Sikh,⁷⁶ while C. Krishnan promoted Buddhism.⁷⁷ However, the main competition to Christianity came from Islam. Leaders of the Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha sponsored an Isa-ath Committee to proselytise among non-caste-Hindus in the Alleppey area.⁷⁸ From the beginning of 1936 intensified activity by the Committee exacerbated tensions between Muslims, on the one hand, and Christians

and Ezhavas on the other.⁷⁹ This culminated in one of the worst instances of communal rioting to occur in Travancore. On 18 May clashes involving several hundred people left four Christians and one Muslim dead, and a further twenty people injured.⁸⁰ After a review by the High Court, 29 persons, including a ward secretary of the Mohamadiya Sabha, were convicted of offences arising from the riot.⁸¹

Throughout 1936 the Ezhava conversion movement was under surveillance by the Criminal Investigation Department.⁸² On 22 July the Brahman Police Commissioner issued a notice censuring the movement.⁸³

Subsequently, prohibitory orders were served on several Muslim and Christian preachers.⁸⁴ However, no restrictions were placed upon Hindus campaigning for temple entry and seeking to dissuade the Ezhavas from converting.

In January 1936 the Kerala branch of Gandhi's Harijan Sevak Sangh, headed by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, proposed an organised agitation for temple entry. Four months later the Sangh held an All Kerala Temple Entry Conference in Trivandrum. The Conference appealed to the government to open all temples to non-caste-Hindus.⁸⁵ A Sangh deputation including M.Govindan, the principal Ezhava opponent of conversion, and five nationalist Nair politicians⁸⁶, then travelled through the state. Prominent Sangh activists from other parts of India also toured Travancore. One of them, Rameshwari Nehru, in a speech in central Travancore, attacked the efforts made by missionaries of other religions to win the allegiance of the Ezhavas.⁸⁷

It was not just Congressmen who demanded temple entry. Prominent caste-Hindus concerned by the success of the Abstention movement and faced with the possibility of mass conversion by Ezhavas also did so. At a Hindu meeting held in conjunction with the Kerala Nair Conference at Konni in April, V.S.Subramonia Aiyar abandoned the position he had taken as President of the Temple Entry Committee. He appealed to the administration to open all temples to non-caste-Hindus. In his Presidential address to the Nair Conference, another conservative, Malloor K.Govinda Pillai, indicated the motivation for such a change of heart when he attacked the 'unnatural' Ezhava alliance with Christians and Muslims.⁸⁸

The campaign for temple entry culminated on 3 November with the submission of a memorial to the new Dewan, Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar. Signed by 50,522 caste-Hindus, it was organised by the All Kerala Temple Entry Conference. Nine days later, on his birthday, the Maharaja issued a Proclamation permitting all Hindus to worship in state-controlled

temples.⁸⁹

As they yielded to pressure from Ezhavas for the removal of social and religious inequalities, the government and caste-Hindu leaders also sought to demonstrate their good will towards the depressed classes. With regard to these groups, the primary motive was not only to prevent, but also to reverse the tide of conversions to Christianity. Initiated by Dewan Rajagopalachari in the 1910s, this policy became pronounced in the early 1930s as an intensely pro-Hindu administration actively encouraged caste-Hindus to espouse the cause of the uplift of the depressed classes.

Rajagopalachari's patronage of the Pulaya, Ayyan Kali, set an example that was followed by his successors. Between 1918 and 1932, on average eight representatives of the depressed classes were nominated to the annual Popular Assembly. In addition, from 1922 the Legislative Council usually included a nominee from one of the same groups. Such recognition contributed to the emergence of numerous depressed class sanghams. The growth of these sanghams was encouraged by other actions taken by the government. Though, unlike the SNDP Yogam and the NSS, they had few resources of their own, whether in terms of finance, educated leadership, or an active membership, appeals made by their Assembly representatives were granted a sympathetic hearing.⁹⁰ For instance, in 1921 rules were passed for the assignment of cultivable waste land to untouchables at concessional rates. Four years later the Registrar of Cooperative Societies was designated Protector of the Backward Classes.⁹¹

Ayyan Kali's Sadhu Jana Paripalna Sangham had become moribund by the 1920s.⁹² However, in the words of one CMS missionary, new associations 'sprung up like mushrooms'.⁹³ The most notable was the Cheramar Mahajana Sangham. Founded in 1920 by a Christian Pulaya, N. John Joseph,⁹⁴ it included both converts and Hindu Pulayas and was supported by Christian missionaries.⁹⁵ One of the principal demands of the Sangham was for the abandonment of the old 'Pulaya' caste name and the adoption instead of the term 'Cheramar'. Joseph justified this change by claiming that the Pulayas had once ruled over 'Cheranad' (Kerala).⁹⁶

The Cheramar Sangham was not only concerned with elevating the historical status of Pulayas. Among other demands, pressed by Joseph in the Popular Assembly, were land grants and free education⁹⁷ for the depressed classes, Cheramar representation in the Legislative Council, and separate treatment for Christian converts in public service recruitment. The Sangham emulated the NSS and the SNDP Yogam in its

organisation. By 1931 it had formed 120 cooperative societies and over 700 Karayogams.⁹⁸ However, a dearth of resources meant that it could not undertake popular campaigns for social and religious reform, and instead relied almost entirely on the good will of the administration, the missionaries and sympathetic caste-Hindus.

Like the government, in the course of the 1920s Hindu reformers also responded to the gradual awakening amongst the depressed classes. In 1922 R.C.Das, a nationalist Ezhava, founded the Arya Samajam in the state. By 1931 the Trivandrum-based Samajam claimed 2,734 members, mostly non-caste-Hindus.⁹⁹ Other more prominent figures also espoused the cause of Harijan uplift. In 1929 a Kerala Adima Mahajana Sabha was established in southern Travancore. Among those who joined Ayyan Kali and a Hindu Paraya Assemblyman on the managing committee were the Brahman District Magistrate, the Nair Director of Agriculture, two Nair MLCs and the Ezhavas C.V.Kunjuraman and N.Kumaran.¹⁰⁰ Though the new body proved stillborn, it set the pattern for the Kerala Hindu Mission, an organisation formed with official backing in 1933, at the height of the Abstention movement.

The Mission, of which the General Secretary was R.C.Das, sought to counter the work done by Christian missionaries amongst the depressed classes;¹⁰¹ it organised religious instruction, published Hindu literature, awarded scholarships, trained Hindu priests and employed travelling preachers. Closely following the approach used successfully by Christian missions in the past, it also established some free schools, reading rooms and dispensaries.¹⁰² The Mission's efforts at weaning away depressed-class Christians intensified following the Temple Entry Proclamation. By 1938 it operated in a 118 centres throughout the state.

The Hindu Mission's activities brought complaints from Christian clergy. In early 1937 a Catholic priest and the Territorial Commander of the Salvation Army both mentioned the Mission in making allegations about the harassment of depressed-class Christians by Nair landowners in central Travancore.¹⁰³ These charges were dismissed by the Police Commissioner and the Quilon District Magistrate¹⁰⁴, but, it seems probable that their reports were influenced by a disinclination to criticise an organisation that enjoyed the patronage of the palace. The latter's interest was apparent from the handling of matters relating to the Mission. In 1936 the British Agent had brought to the attention of the government two virulent anti-Christian pamphlets by Amsi Narayana Pillai, a Nair Congressman and the Inspector of the Mission.¹⁰⁵ The Dewan gave an assurance of stern action.¹⁰⁶ However, Pillai was not

prosecuted. Furthermore, in a letter in April 1937 the Mission President, V.S. Subramonia Aiyar, mentioned submitting notes to the Maharaja's mother, the Junior Maharani, on the re-conversion of erstwhile Hindus.¹⁰⁷ Two months later the government overruled an objection from the Devaswom Commissioner to provide money for the Mission to print 50,000 conversion certificates.¹⁰⁸

It can thus be concluded that the Hindu Mission represented part of a deliberately anti-Christian policy pursued by the administration in the 1930s. The reasons behind this policy will subsequently be discussed in the context of the government's overall political strategy.

In any event, it was certainly effective in halting the advance of Christianity. In 1931-41 the increase in the Christian population was restricted to 22.4 per cent, as compared with 36.8 per cent in 1921-31 and around 30 per cent in each of the preceding three decades.¹⁰⁹

According to the 1941 census, Christian denominations with a high proportion of converts, notably the South India United Church and the Salvation Army, actually recorded a fall in numbers.¹¹⁰

The democratisation of Hindu religious life in the 1920s and 1930s appears to have been essentially a defensive reaction, on the part of the caste-Hindus, to the challenge posed by the political, religious and economic advances made by Travancore's Christians. Revivalism and reform were dominant themes of the NSS, while the activities of bodies like the Hindu Mission echoed those of the shuddhi (purification) movement that had emerged in northern India in the early 1920s. Among the non-caste-Hindu Ezhavas, religious questions such as temple entry, initially attracted the active interest of only a small elite of landowners and professionals. However, the movements for radical religious change later aroused the political consciousness of many poorer Ezhavas, who had been drawn into the Yogam in the period of expansion after 1926. A high proportion of the latter subsequently supported the Communist Party. Chapter 5 looks at the rise of trade unionism, the primary factor in the radicalisation of working-class Ezhavas.

- 1 R.Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance. Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, New York 1976, pp.338 and 344; List of Societies, Dewan to Resident, 31 July 1920, Pol., 46/1920; List of Societies, 30 June 1922, Pol., 131/1922.
- 2 Jeffrey, op.cit., p.241. P.K.Kesava Pillai, A.Narayana Pillai and Malloor K.Govinda Pillai served as secretaries of the Club in the late 1910s. TAD (1919), p.89 and (1923) p.125; The Asylum Press Almanack and Directory of Madras and Southern India, CXVIII, p.1476.
- 3 S.Ramanath Aiyar, Progressive Travancore, Trivandrum 1923, pp.41-42.
- 4 C.Hayavadana Rao (ed), The Indian Biographical Dictionary 1915, Madras, p.166.
- 5 List of Societies, 31 July 1920, loc.cit.
- 6 Jeffrey, op.cit., p.256. The new Young Men's Nair Association, formed by southern youths backing taravad partition and patronised by some of their elders, played an important part in bringing the samajams together. The members of the Association were well placed to act as intermediaries. For instance, the YMNA's President, ex-Excise Commissioner N.Raman Pillai, a southerner and the son of the last Travancorean Nair to serve as Dewan, was also the son-in-law of the arch-reformer C.Krishna Pillai. Aiyar, op.cit., pp.41-42; K.R.Elankath, Dewan Nanoo Pillay. Biography with His Select Writings and Letters, Neyyoor-West (n.d.), pp.89-90.
- 7 V.Balakrishnan and R.Leela Devi, Mannathu Padmanabhan and the Revival of Nair in Kerala, New Delhi 1982, pp.38 and 40-42.
- 8 Ibid., pp.46-51.
- 9 Ibid., p.53; Regional Records Survey Committee, The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1972, p.481; TAD (1923), pp.165-66, and (1927).
- 10 O.M.Thomas, Under the Knife. Studies of Some Kerala Notables, Allahabad 1970, pp.58-59.
- 11 Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.54-55.
- 12 RRSC, op.cit., p.480.
- 13 Ibid., p.480; Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.55-56.
- 14 This figure is quoted by the RRSC and might seem incredible. However, a government list in 1936 stated that the NSS included 26 per cent of the Nair population. The only explanation is that whole families, rather than just the adult members, were enumerated. RRSC, op.cit., p.480; List of Societies, Dewan to Agent, 10 July 1936, CS,1092/1936.
- 15 List of Societies, 30 June 1922, loc.cit.; CI (1921),XXV, II,p.30.
- 16 M.S.A.Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India, Madras 1979, p.68.
- 17 List of Societies, 10 July 1936, loc.cit.
- 18 List of Societies, 31 July 1920, loc.cit.

- 19 Jeffrey, op.cit., p.335.
- 20 Rao, op.cit., p.68.
- 21 SMPAP,XX, pp.211-12.
- 22 TLCP, VI, pp.1062-88.
- 23 Rao, op.cit., pp.98-99.
- 24 Thomas, op.cit., p.52; R.Jeffrey, 'Travancore:Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1860-1940. The Temple Entry Movement' in Jeffrey (ed), People, Princes and Paramount Power. Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States, Delhi 1978, p.149.
- 25 Rao, op.cit., p.59.
- 26 MNNR (1919), pp.694-95.
- 27 Thomas, op.cit., pp.49-50.
- 28 Rao, op.cit., p.38.
- 29 Ibid., p.67.
- 30 From Rs.4,471,705 to Rs.4,246,817. TAR (1921-22), p.3 and (1923-24), p.3.
- 31 Rao, op.cit., pp.56 and 59.
- 32 SMPAP, XVIII,p.168.
- 33 Rao, op.cit., pp.59-61.
- 34 SMPAP, XVIII, p.168.
- 35 K.M.Panikkar, An Autobiography, Madras 1977, pp.37 and 352-53.
- 36 Jeffrey, 'The Temple-Entry Movement', pp.151-53.
- 37 T.K.Ravindran, Vaikkam Satyagraha and Gandhi, Trichur 1975, pp.322-26.
- 38 Jeffrey, 'The Temple-Entry Movement', p.153.
- 39 Hindu, 20 June 1924, Vaikom Satyagraha Correspondence, Vol.III.
- 40 Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.61-63; Jeffrey,'The Temple-Entry Movement', p.153.
- 41 Hindu, 20 June 1924, loc.cit.
- 42 TLCP, VII, pp.812-13.
- 43 Ravindran, pp.202-03.
- 44 Ibid., p.206.
- 45 M.Desai, The Epic of Travancore, Ahmedabad 1937, pp.22-23. In August 1927 the Legislative Council approved a grant for the construction of

- a bypass. TLCP, XI, p.322.
- 46 Again Gandhi negotiated with the authorities while restraining the satyagrahis. Desai, op.cit., pp.22-24 and 100-01.
- 47 TAD (1928), pp.50-51 and 54-55.
- 48 RRSC, Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala, Trivandrum 1975, pp.42-43.
- 49 Thomas, op.cit., pp53-54.
- 50 Rao, op.cit., p.81.
- 51 'The Temple-Entry Movement', p.160
- 52 Between 1921 and 1931 the number of literate Ezhavas increased by 38 per cent (from 134,034 to 185, 047); the overall increase in the same period was 26 per cent.CI (1921), XXV, I,p.80, and II, p.30; CI (1931), I, pp.282 and 287.
- 53 K.C.George, Immortal Punnappa - Vayalar, New Delhi 1975, pp.14-16.
- 54 K.C.Govindan, 'Labour Associationade Charithram' in Thiruvithamcore Kayar Factory Worker's Union Kanaka Jubilee Souvenir, Alleppey 1972, p.179.
- 55 C.R.Mitra, Sree Narayana Guru and Social Revolution, Shertallai 1979, pp.137-39.
- 56 MSD (1931), p.71.
- 57 List of Societies, 10 July 1936, loc.cit.
- 58 Rao, op.cit., p.74.
- 59 WSB, I, I (30 Dec. 1933)
- 60 Desai, op.cit., pp.109-18.
- 61 A.K.Gopalan, In the Cause of the People, Bombay 1973, pp.29,32, and 45-46.
- 62 Travancore Temple Entry Enquiry Committee Report, Trivandrum 1935, pp.2-3.
- 63 Ibid., pp.77-78.
- 64 Ibid., pp.99-103.
- 65 Ibid., pp.335-413.
- 66 WSB, I, 2 (6 Jan. 1934).
- 67 Rao, op.cit., p.75.
- 68 Police Report, CS, 1023/1935; Madras States, FR: April 1935, CRR,R/1/29/1291.

69

C.V.Kunjuraman, Ezhavarude Mathaparivarthana Samrambham, (The Ezhavas Face the Choice of Conversion) Kottayam 1936.

70

W.Matthew to G.E.Phillips (LMS London), 8 April 1936, LMS correspondence, Box 34 (1934-36-11).

71

Including K.Chandy, a retired Anglican member of the Mysore Executive Council, the Catholics N.V.Joseph and M.M.Varkey, the Marthomite T.M.Varghese, and the Jacobite K.C.Mammen Mappillai. WSB, III, Para.49 (29 Feb.1936).

72

Ibid., Para.54 (7 March 1936).

73

Agent's Note, 2 May 1936, CRR, R/2/223-Dis.130/1936.

74

Bishop of Dornakal's report on the Travancore Ezhava situation, p.1, IMC/CBMS, Box 406.

75

Report by W.Matthew (LMS Quilon), 5 Sept. 1936, LMS Correspondence, Box 34 (1934-36-11).

76

WSB, III, Paras. 119-20 (23 May 1936).

77

Rao, op.cit., p75; C.Krishnan, Tiyarude Abhivridhi Margangal (Ways of Uplifting the Ezhava Community), Calicut 1934.

78

TLR, LIII, pp.237-42.

79

The 1935 municipal elections in Alleppey reflected these tensions. In the contest for the Municipal Council presidency, P.S.Mahomed, the ex-president of the Mohamadiya Sabha and a defector from the Abstentionist camp, defeated a Christian challenger. Another Muslim ousted M.S.Anirudhan, an Ezhava councillor and SNDP Yogam director. Ibid., pp.341-42; MSMD (1937), p.393.

80

Madras States, FR 2 May 1936, CRR, R/I/29/1418.

81

TLR, LIII, pp.279-314 and 372-73.

82

Rev.H.C.Lefever to G.E.Phillips, 3 March 1936, LMS Correspondence, Box 33 (1934-36-1); W.Matthew to Phillips, 5 Sept. 1936, loc.cit.

83

Notice, 22 July 1936, IMC/CBMS, Box 406.

84

P.O.Phillip to Rev. William Paton (Sec.,IMC), 21 Aug. 1936. Quoted in Dornakal's report, loc.cit.

85

Desai, op.cit., pp.33-35.

86

G.Ramachandran, K.P.Nilakanta Pillai, K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai, V.Achutha Menon and K.A.Damodara Menon. Ibid., p.35.

87

Ibid., pp.37-39.

88

K.K.Kusuman, The Abstention Movement, Trivandrum 1976, pp.62-63.

89

Desai, op.cit., pp.39-40.

90

SMPAP, XIV, pp.21-22, XX, pp.146-47 and 210-11.

- 91
CI (1931), XXVIII, I, pp.433-35; SMPAP, XXI, p.3. Government help for untouchables was stepped-up during the 1930s. In 1933 a British-educated Ezhava graduate was appointed the first full-time Protector of the Backward Communities. Subsequently, several model colonies were established for the benefit of poor Harijan families. TAR (1932-33), pp.149-50, and (1936-37), pp.154-55.
- 92
K.Saradamoni, Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala, New Delhi 1980, p.152.
- 93
CMSP, Annual Report 1924-25, pp.189-90.
- 94
MSD (1933), p.92.
- 95
CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.439.
- 96
SMPAP, XIX, pp.176-77. Paraya members made a similar request for their caste name to be changed to 'Sambavar'.
- 97
SMPAP, XVIII, p.173, and XX, pp.207-10.
- 98
CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.439.
- 99
Ibid, p.336; List of Societies, Dewan to Agent, 23 July 1930, CS, 746/1930.
- 100
Samadarsi, 1 April 1930, Judicial 903/1931.
- 101
An initial annual grant of Rs.10,000 was later increased to Rs.15,000. List of grants, Enclosure XIII, Dewan to Agent, 30 March 1935, CRR, R/2/213-Dis.108/1935; Devaswom Commissioner's Note, 16 April 1937, CS, 1586/1937.
- 102
LMS Annual Report (Quilon) 1934, p.3; CMSP, Annual Report 1938-39, p.252; Rev.R.Sinclair to Rev.N.Goodall (Foreign Sec., LMS), 13 Sept. 1938, LMS Correspondence, Box 36 (1937-40-11).
- 103
Deposition made by Rev.Jacob Kodasanad, Jan. 1937, CS, 1384/1937; Memorandum to the Dewan submitted by F.A.Mackenzie, 27 Feb.1937, CS, 1476/1937.
- 104
Police Com. to Ch. Sec., 8 and 11 March 1937, CS, 1476 and 1383/1937; District Magistrate to Ch. Sec., 31 March 1937, CS, 1385/1937.
- 105
Agent to Dewan, 29 May and 24 Oct. 1936, CS, 1325/1936.
- 106
Dewan to Agent, 25 Oct. 1936, CS, 1325/1936.
- 107
Aiyar to Dewan, 13 April 1937, CS, 1586/1937.
- 108
Devaswom Com. to Ch. Sec., 11 June 1937, and Ch.Sec. to V.S.Subramonia Aiyar, 17 June 1937, CS, 1586/1937.
- 109
CI (1941), XXV, I, p.125; (1931), XXVIII, I, p.342; (1921), XXV, I, pp.34-35; (1911), XXIII, p.227; (1901), XXVI, I, pp.88-91.
- 110
CI (1941), XXV, I, p.139.

Chapter V.

The Development of Capitalism and the Rise of Trade Unions.

The major innovation of the 1918-38 period was the rise to political prominence of the Syrian Christians. However, there were also signs of activity that went beyond communal elites, preparing the way for a dominant feature of politics from the 1940s onwards - the mobilisation of the lower social classes. In this chapter I shall consider the two main economic changes that affected political development - the advances made by Syrians in land ownership and commerce, and the emergence of trade unions. The first influenced the communalism that characterised politics in the interwar years, while the second introduced a class element, a factor that was of increasing importance from the late 1930s.

1. The system of land tenure prevailing in Travancore at the turn of the century was complex. One of the main objects of the land revenue settlement, carried out between 1883 and 1911, was to simplify it. The Settlement Report brought the 312 types of tenure relating to cultivated land under nine main headings.¹ These can be further reduced to four: Sirkar (i.e. state) land; freehold land, belonging to the mainly Malayala Brahman janmis; inam and quasi-inam land; and Crown land. The Sirkar accounted for about 80 per cent of the land, the janmis for thirteen per cent, the inamdars for five per cent, and the Crown for two per cent.² The Report excluded the four Edavagais (freehold estates) belonging to former rajas.

Three-quarters of the Sirkar land came under a tenure known as 'Pandaravaka pattom'. Until the 1865 Sirkar Pattom Proclamation, the holders of such land had no ownership or occupancy transfer rights in the Western sense. The Proclamation, the most significant of Dewan T. Madhava Rao's agrarian reforms, granted pattom holders full property rights.³ Two years later the tenure of tenants of janmi landlords was recognised as perpetual leasehold.⁴ These, and subsequent measures,⁵ ensured that Travancore became an area of many thousands of mainly small-holders and secure tenants, a contrast to the position in Malabar where janmis formed the dominant element and owner-cultivators represented a small minority of those deriving their livelihood from the land.⁶ The difference is important in explaining the relative strength of communism in Malabar; in Travancore communism succeeded in attracting a mass rural following only in Kuttanad with its untypical concentration

of large landlords.

Most of those affected by the 1860s legislation were Nairs or Syrian Christians. According to a survey undertaken in the 1810s, Nairs represented the largest body of farmers with the Christians claiming a good, gradually increasing, share of the land; less than a twelfth of Ezhavas were returned as landholders.⁷ Robin Jeffrey argues that the agrarian reforms had an adverse impact on the Nair taravads and benefited the Christians, who showed greater aptitude for commerce and whose family arrangements permitted more effective management of land.⁸ Though, in theory, taravad property could only be alienated with the consent of all family members, the 1908 Marumakkathayam Committee Report revealed that many families had mortgaged or leased out land.⁹

The 1925 Nair Regulation, intended to facilitate the abandonment of the outmoded matrilineal joint family, initially caused a spurt in land transactions. Many Nairs sold or mortgaged their shares of the newly partitioned land, either because they were not interested to become farmers or because the plots were uneconomic. Between 1920-25 and 1925-30 the value of land transfers increased by 21.8 per cent (from Rs.61.9 million to Rs.75.4 million). On average, per annum, in the second quinquennium the Nairs alienated land worth Rs.19.9 million and acquired land worth only Rs.10.1 million. The Christians were the principal beneficiaries - their annual average of sales and mortgages claimed exceeded those executed by Rs.8.4 million.¹⁰

Tables 2-6, based on a sample survey, indicate the pattern of landownership prevailing in Travancore in 1931. About half the earners in the state owned land (Table 2) and a fifth possessed wet (i.e. paddy) land, regarded as particularly valuable. Most of the landowners were smallholders - nine-tenths possessed less than five acres. Indeed, smallholders predominated among landowners of all communities, claiming a bare majority even among Malayala Brahmans (Tables 5 and 6). The leading landowning communities were the Nairs and the Syrian Christians who, between them, accounted for about three-fifths of the land. While the former were more numerous amongst most classes of landowners, the latter, along with Malayala Brahman-janmis, were more prevalent among those with larger holdings. Tables 3 and 4 show that all the other communities, with the exception of the Muslims, were disadvantaged. The Ezhavas, the most numerous Hindu caste, claimed only seven per cent of wet land and twelve per cent of dry land.

In a primarily agrarian society possession of land has an important bearing on wealth. This was reflected in income levels. According to the

1931 Census, among non-Brahmans, Syrian Christian earners claimed the highest annual average - Rs.275. They were followed by the Muslims (Rs.210), Nairs (Rs.147), non-Syrian Christians (Rs.110), Ezhavas (Rs.109) and depressed caste Hindus (Rs.57).¹¹ Taken together with Tables 5 and 6 these statistics demonstrate that Syrian landowners tended to be more prosperous than their Nair counterparts.

There were several reasons for the greater prosperity of the Syrians. As we have seen, their position as the second most numerous group of landowners enabled them to take advantage of the slow breakdown of the Nair taravad system. Moreover, in the early twentieth century they took the lead in land reclamation and the expansion of plantation agriculture and banking. Their geographical situation also contributed to the prosperity of some Syrians. The most fertile rubber, coconut and pepper planting land in Travancore was found in the northern areas of Minachil, Thodupuzha and Kanjirapalli, inhabited mainly by Syrian Catholics. Catholics also owned a large part of the most productive paddy land in Kuttanad and, further north, formed the bulk of the 'well-to-do' classes in the taluks of Vaikom and Shertallai. Similarly, the majority of Jacobites and Marthomites in central Travancore also inhabited fertile tracts.¹²

The Syrians benefited from land reclamation which required large capital investment, and consequently, necessitated the development of capitalist farming. Much of the activity was concentrated in Kuttanad, an area of over 300 square miles that included parts of the taluks of Ambalapuzha, Changanacherry, Kottayam and Vaikom.¹³ Large scale reclamation from the Vembanad lake was pioneered in the 1880s by two Nair landowners - Eravi Kesava Panikkar, of the Chalayil taravad, and Kavalam Neelacunda Pillai, later an associate of the reformer C.Krishna Pillai. The two were followed by wealthy Syrians.¹⁴ Technological developments, as well as government loans and tax exemptions, caused a great expansion in the scale of operations between the 1920s and the 1940s. By 1945 20,000 acres had been reclaimed.¹⁵ A survey estimated that Syrian Catholics were responsible for three-fifths of the total reclamation¹⁶ and one Poonjar landlord, Thomas Murikkan, alone claimed 2,340 acres.

Because reclamation was only economic in fairly large units, cultivation in the reclaimed areas was predominantly undertaken as commercial farming.¹⁷ In contrast to the norm of smallholders engaged in subsistence agriculture, the average size of holdings in Kuttanad exceeded 150 acres.¹⁸ The scale and seasonal character of operations meant that the workers retained by landlords under the traditional

attached labour systems had to be supplemented by a large inflow of migrant casual labourers from adjoining areas.¹⁹ This had a profound impact on agrarian relations in Kuttanad for it created a large mass of unattached Ezhava and Pulaya landless labourers dependent on the fortunes of a few large Syrian Christian and Nair landowners.

The Kuttanad reclamations contributed to a banking boom in the 1920s and 1930s, in which, again, the Syrian Christians were prominent. Banking in Travancore in the latter half of the nineteenth century was mainly in the hands of Tamil Brahman Hundi merchants who acted as money lenders and deposit bankers.²⁰ However, among Syrians joint funds, known as chitties, were common. As late as 1932-33 there were 8,418 chitties with a total capital of Rs.26.5 million.²¹

Despite the chitties, until the 1890s agriculture in the state was largely financed either by Hundi merchants or by other Tamil Brahmans who conducted 'grain banks'. The latter made their calculations in terms of paddy, but both they and the Hundi merchants charged very high rates of interest. This induced wealthy Syrians to enter the field.²² Prominent among them were members of the Jacobite Kandathil family who owned the Malayala Manorama and had a century-old tradition of running chitties. In 1893 they founded the Travancore Bank with profits made from trading cash crops. The first organised commercial bank in Kerala, it was liquidated in 1900. However, in the same year, the Kandathils started two more banks and, in 1912, when the Travancore National Bank was founded, they were its principal promoters.²³

The real growth in banking came in the decade that followed the end of the First World War. Between 1919 and 1933 the number of registered banking institutions rose from just eight to 274.²⁴ Most were village concerns receiving deposits from small savers and giving credit to farmers and traders.²⁵ The major factors in encouraging the formation of banks were a great expansion in commerce, especially in cash crops, and the lack of any effective regulatory system.

The Syrian Christians were the principal beneficiaries of the banking boom. In 1930 a survey by the Banking Enquiry Committee found that of the 235 joint-stock banks, 129 were located in four taluks.²⁶ in central and northern Travancore in which Syrians constituted the principal element in the population; the Marthomite centre of Tiruvalla alone had 70 banks. By contrast, no southern taluk boasted more than ten. P.C. Joseph, in 1938, estimated that Syrians owned four-fifths of the banks in the state.²⁷ These included three of the five largest²⁸ - the Travancore National Bank, the Quilon Bank, founded by a Marthomite

(C.P. Matthen) in 1919²⁹, and the Palai Central Bank, established in 1927 by the Kayalackakoms, a family of Catholic merchants and landowners.³⁰

The banks contributed significantly to the prosperity of the Syrian community. Syrian entrepreneurs engaged in land reclamation in Kuttanad and plantation agriculture in the eastern hill regions, were major recipients of loans.³¹ Indeed, many, like the Kandathils, and the Kayalackakoms, were heavily involved in banking. Bank loans also helped Christian landowners to benefit from the increase in land transactions. This was because the Christian law of inheritance made their land more acceptable as security.³²

The economic boom was fueled by a steep increase in the value of exports of cash crops. Between 1920-21 and 1927-28 annual revenue from exports rose by 78.3 per cent to Rs.118.4 million; almost three times the average for the years immediately preceding the First World War.³³ The cause was an increase in the volume and price of export commodities, both of which fell drastically as the depression set in. By 1931-32 export revenue was down to Rs.75.1 million and the recovery remained sluggish until the increase in demand for cash crops during the Second World War.³⁴

Travancore's principal exports were tea, rubber, cashew-nuts, coconut products, pepper and cardamom.³⁵ While the last three were traditional crops, large-scale plantation of tea and rubber began only in the 1890s and 1900s.³⁶ Pioneered by European planters, the Travancoreans who later entered the field were predominantly Syrian Christians. In the case of rubber, P.C. Joseph says that many young Syrians in central Travancore employed as managers and clerks in European enterprises, subsequently began their own plantations.³⁷ In 1931 the Economic Depression Enquiry Committee estimated that about 17,000 of the 61,986 acres under rubber cultivation were owned by Travancoreans, as were about 4,000 of the 74,618 acres under tea cultivation.³⁸ The number of locally registered plantation companies rose from ten in 1915 to 47 in 1928.³⁹

Though many Syrian rubber planters, in particular, operated on a small scale, owning holdings of less than 100 acres⁴⁰, there were notable exceptions. Among them were Puliampallil John John and K.C. Mammen Mappillai, both of whom served in the legislature during the 1920s. John's background and career illustrates the rapid rise to prosperity enjoyed by certain families. His father, P. John Kurien, a Marthomite from Aymanam, a village near Kottayam, began life as an impoverished youth, but was educated by CMS missionaries. Joining the Madras provin-

cial service, Kurien eventually became Sheristdar of the Tellicherry sub-court.⁴¹ Just before his death, in 1893, he founded the Alleppey firm of P. John and Sons. Subsequently, P. J. John gave up his college studies to run the family business. In 1897 he opened the first mechanised coconut oil mill in Travancore before turning his attention to planting. After starting with tea, in the 1910s he organised the Malankara Rubber and Produce Co., the most successful locally-owned rubber concern.⁴² By 1919, in addition to their shares in the Malankara Co., the Puliampallil family owned two oil mills, a 600-acre tea estate, 500 acres of cardamom estate, and 700 acres of coconut trees.⁴³

One of John's two partners in the Malankara Co. was K. C. Mammen Mappillai of the Kandathil family. In the years immediately after World War One, Mappillai popularised rubber planting through the Malayala Manorama, thus encouraging sales of shares in the Company. Though he later resigned as the Company's Secretary, following differences with John, he subsequently initiated another joint plantation project, and defended planting interests in the Legislative Council,⁴⁴ where he represented commerce and industry for six years. In November 1925 he joined other Syrian Christian MLCs, several of whom were planters, in unsuccessfully opposing a bill to levy income tax on the owners of rubber and tea estates in the Edavagais.⁴⁵

The Malankara Co. was the third major commercial venture embarked upon by Mappillai in less than a decade. After starting the C. P. Co., a grocery that grew into one of the leading mercantile firms in Alleppey, he had been one of the chief promoters of the Travancore National Bank, becoming Chairman of its Board of Directors.⁴⁶ The Bank, which began with working capital of Rs. 33,000⁴⁷, grew rapidly. By 1937, when it completed its quarter century, it was third among the 42 scheduled banks in India in total volume of trade.⁴⁸ Following a merger with a major competitor - the Quilon Bank - in September 1937, its assets amounted to Rs. 42 million, a figure well in excess of the annual revenue of the state.⁴⁹ The Quilon Bank's success had been largely based on financing the trade in cashew-nuts, a new cottage industry developed during the 1920s.⁵⁰

P. J. John and Mappillai were both non-Catholic Syrians and, generally, Syrian Catholics were not prominent as planters. This partly reflects the greater interest shown by Catholic entrepreneurs in land reclamation and the older cash crops. For instance, the Parayils of Shertallai, the richest Catholic family, were known as the 'coconut kings' of Alleppey.⁵¹ Another factor was the head start enjoyed by

non-Catholic Syrians in tea and rubber cultivation. There were several reasons for this. Better-educated and concentrated in central taluks, they formed the majority of the administrative staff recruited by the first European planters. In addition, the non-Catholic Syrians dominated banking. P.C. Joseph estimated that, excluding the 24 major banks, of the 240 others, they owned 148 to the Catholics' 50.⁵²

The success of Christian entrepreneurs served to highlight the disparity that existed between economic power and representation in political forums and the administration. This formed the background to the Syrian-led agitations for equal civic rights and communal representation in 1918-21 and 1933-35. Among Nairs, their relative decline contributed to a heightened awareness of social and political identity, one reflection of which was the rapid growth of the Nair Service Society. Thus developments such as taravad partition, the banking boom, and the spread of commercial agriculture, had a profound impact on the communalisation of politics in the 1920s and 1930s.

2. We turn now to the labour movement. Manufacturing industry was one branch of economic activity in which Syrian Christians were of minor importance. In 1938 they owned only two tile factories and a few of the smaller coconut oil mills.⁵³ However, the emergence of trade unionism had significant repercussions for the Syrian elite. It was the main factor in the rapid growth of the Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s. The rise of such a class-based party undermined the strategy of using alliances of communal elites to attain political objectives; Syrian politicians had been the most successful in operating such tactics in the 1918-38 period. In economic terms too large Syrian landowners were adversely affected by the unionisation of agricultural workers.⁵⁴

Travancore's main organised industries involved the processing of the major export crops - tea, coconut, and rubber. Three-quarters of the 145,291 industrial workers returned in the 1941 Census were employed in these industries.⁵⁵ Apart from a number of coir factories belonging to merchants from western India, European firms owned many of the larger coir factories, as well as most of the tea factories.

Since tea and rubber factories tended to be located in the rural plantation areas in the interior of the state, the only towns with an industrial labour force of any significance were the ports of Alleppey and Quilon. After James Darragh, the Irish American benefactor of the Syrian Jathiaikya Sangham, built the first coir factory in Alleppey in 1859, the town soon became the centre of the coir industry.

As the industry expanded, an increasing number of labourers, mainly Ezhavas and Latin Catholics, were recruited from the rural areas of Shertallai and Ambalapuzha taluks.⁵⁶

The centre of organised industry, Alleppey was also the birthplace of the organised labour movement. On 31 March 1922, at a meeting attended by four labour contractors and a number of workers, a union was formed. Subsequently named the Travancore Labour Association, its principal organiser was Vadappuram P.K.Bava, an Ezhava labour contractor whose motives appear to have been primarily philanthropic. A member of the local branch of the SNDP Yogam, he had received advice from educated Ezhava leaders, like C.V.Kunjuraman and K.Aiyappan, and was encouraged to form a union by a Syrian Christian factory manager who had gained a knowledge of developments abroad. Before going ahead with his plans, Bava obtained the permission of the Muslim proprietor of the Empire Coir Works, the newly-established factory in which he was employed as a yard superintendent.⁵⁷

In its early years the TLA was a far from militant body. Its activities included starting a dispensary, initiating a fund to pay compensation to the families of workers who died in accidents, and participating in temperance work. In 1924 it established a reading room and library for members.⁵⁸ Originally, there were three classes of members and only the first - those paying an annual subscription of one and a half rupees - were accorded full membership rights including the right to vote.⁵⁹ The three-tier system was one of the reasons for the TLAs initially slow growth. Others were the strong opposition shown by many coir factory owners, despite the union's moderate character, and the suspicions aroused among workers by the union leaders' failure to maintain proper accounts.

Unable to overcome the opposition, and accused of corruption⁶⁰, P.K.Bava was replaced as the union's General Secretary at its first annual conference in April 1924.^{60a} Shortly afterwards an organisation, formed by young labourers discontented with the TLA, merged with the union.⁶¹ In April K.C.Govindan, a 24 year-old Ezhava, had become the union's Assistant General Secretary and, in the wake of the merger, the TLA expanded rapidly. A weekly newspaper, Thozhilali (Worker), was launched, and by 1930 the union had a membership of 1,100.⁶²

From its inception, the TLA maintained strong ties with the SNDP Yogam. The April 1924 conference, presided over by K.M.Krishnan, a Yogam Director, despatched a group of volunteers to participate in the

Vaikom satyagraha.⁶³ Two years later a labour conference, held in connection with the annual Yogam meeting in Quilon, called for legislation protecting coir workers against retrenchment.⁶⁴

The TLA needed the assistance of educated men who could negotiate directly with the European factory managers. One Yogam activist who was prominent in this regard was V.K.Velayudhan, a young Ezhava lawyer. In April 1928, when the union intervened to settle a three-day strike by workers protesting against retrenchment measures taken by the firm of William Goodacre and Sons Ltd., Velayudhan negotiated successfully on the union's behalf. He subsequently co-edited the Thozhilali with the Muslim lawyer P.S.Mahomed, and, between 1930 and 1934, served successively as the TLA's Honorary Secretary, Vice President and President.⁶⁵

Velayudhan's predecessor as President was Mahomed. During his period in office, from 1927 to 1933, the latter strove to present the TLA as a 'responsible' body. In correspondence with the government in 1932, both he and the union's General Secretary, emphasised how it had discouraged strikes and dissuaded members from participating in picketing that occurred in Alleppey during the Congress civil disobedience movement.⁶⁶ Apart from the 1928 strike, the union had also helped to settle amicably a dispute at Darragh, Smail and Co. in May 1930.⁶⁷ Such interventions increased its influence, both among the employees and the employers.

While men like Mahomed and Velayudhan favoured compromises with the factory management, some of the working class union leaders were more radical. Foremost among these were K.C.Govindan, described in a 1935 police report⁶⁸ as an extremist agitator with communist views, and P.Kesava Dev, a Nair from Parur who had been introduced to Marxism by the Nair Congressman A.K.Pillai.⁶⁹ The two were probably behind a three-month strike against wage reductions in 1931. The strike, the first to be actually initiated by the TLA, resulted in a detachment of armed reserve police being sent to Alleppey.⁷⁰

The main factor in the trend towards militancy was the impact of the economic depression. While not as badly affected as clerical workers, agricultural labourers and plantation workers⁷¹, industrial labourers also faced wage cuts and lay offs. At the same time the labour movement was given added impetus by the activities of the radical Ezhavas campaigning against Hinduism.

The new militancy of the TLA was reflected in changes in the union leadership. In 1933 P.S.Mahomed was ousted as President and

Kesava Dev became General Secretary. Forced to flee to Cochin after organising a brief strike at the Empire Coir Works and Darragh, Smail and Co., Dev was succeeded, in February 1934, by Nair Congressman Pandavathu Sankara Pillai. Eight months later Pillai was replaced by K.C.Govindan.⁷²

By 1934 the authorities were becoming seriously concerned by the union's activities. A police report on a meeting in May, attended by some 2,000 people, noted that 'the principles of communism are taking root in the minds of the labourers'.⁷³ The TLA's growing importance was also reflected by the interest being shown in it by leading politicians. The May meeting was presided over by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and in December, another Nair MLA, Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, chaired an All Travancore Labour Conference in Alleppey.⁷⁴ In May 1935 P.K.Kunju, a radical Muslim politician who was the Joint Secretary of the anti-government Joint Political Congress, became the union's President.⁷⁵

In order to curb the union's influence, the authorities sought to exploit communal divisions among the labourers, a strategy that was also being used against the Joint Political Congress. The government's efforts were directed at isolating the Ezhavas. In July 1934 a short-lived Muslim Labour Association was formed. Three months later, the attention of Catholic bishops was drawn to the anti-religious propaganda conducted by Ezhava radicals. They then instructed clergy to dissuade Catholics from participating in the labour movement.⁷⁶ In another move, in August 1935, the government overruled objections from TLA leaders and nominated P.S.Mahomed to represent labour interests in the legislature. Subsequently, a new Alleppey Labour Association was formed with Mahomed as its President.⁷⁷ The breakaway union, backed by M.L.Janardanan Pillai⁷⁸, a prominent Vellala coir manufacturer, failed to win substantial support among workers.

Mahomed had been nominated to the Sri Mulam Assembly in connection with the introduction of labour legislation, a course the government had been forced into by pressure from the TLA. The December 1934 Labour Conference had called for the enactment of a factory law and in April 1935 the union resolved to conduct a procession to Trivandrum to petition the Maharaja regarding their grievances. The planned procession was widely publicised and numerous public meetings were organised to enlist mass support. At the end of May, after a banning order was passed by the Quilon District Magistrate, K.C.Govindan and two other leaders of the 50-strong procession were arrested.⁷⁹

This provoked demonstrations and strikes in Alleppey.⁸⁰ The protests even reached Trivandrum where, on 3 June, a public meeting, chaired by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, demanded the enactment of a comprehensive labour law. Shortly afterwards the union leaders were released on bail and a deputation of Changanacherry, Govindan and P.K.Kunju was allowed to submit a memorandum to Dewan Muhammad Habibullah.⁸¹

In an attempt to deal with the increasing labour unrest, between July 1935 and November 1936 the government introduced four labour bills. These covered the working hours and conditions in factories; the regulation of trade unions; procedures to be observed in industrial disputes; and the payment of compensation in case of industrial accidents.⁸² The bills, modelled on legislation that had already been enacted in British India, did not satisfy the TLA. In July and December 1937 it submitted memorandums to Habibullah's successor, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, complaining about the successive wage cuts that had been imposed by coir factory owners. The union claimed that since 1925 monthly wages had been more than halved.⁸³

Reports by the Alleppey Magistrate and Tahsildar of Ambalapuzha Taluk confirmed that wages had fallen. An important reason for the reductions was the increase in the number of small coir factories operating in the coastal belt between Alleppey and Shertallai. These establishments took advantage of the cheap labour available due to the high rate of unemployment among agricultural workers in Kuttanad. Many of the large Alleppey manufacturers opened rural branches or contracted out to small factories.⁸⁴

During the interwar period the trend away from labour-intensive methods of cultivation and towards the capital-intensive technology of oil engines and electricity, eroded employment opportunities in Kuttanad. Agricultural workers were also seriously affected by a slump in the price of paddy caused by the economic depression of the early 1930s. Land was often kept fallow and there were drastic cuts in wages.⁸⁵ An important consequence of the drift to the factories was an extension of the influence of the TLA. By 1939 the situation in Kuttanad was ripe for the emergence of peasant trade unionism; a Travancore Karshaka Thozhilali Sanghadana (Agricultural Labourers Union) was formed under the direction of coir union activists.⁸⁶

In Alleppey the wages issue came to a head at the beginning of 1938. A meeting of the TLA, on 7 March, resolved to organise a general strike in the Alleppey area.⁸⁷ The threat of a strike was

calculated to put pressure on the government at a time when it already faced a political challenge from the newly formed Travancore State Congress. The threat was temporarily lifted after the District Magistrate of Quilon was delegated to enquire into the labour problems at Alleppey. This followed considerable unrest - the arrest of five union leaders; a lightning strike by workers; and the death of a labourer, allegedly as a result of a police lathi charge on demonstrators.⁸⁸

The events of March were only a prelude to the general strike of October 1938. The strike was called in support, not only of economic demands, such as a guaranteed minimum wage and the formal recognition of the union by factory owners, but also of the movement for responsible government.⁸⁹ Several of the union leaders were members of the state Congress and the TLA President - P.K.Kunju - was a member of the party's Working Committee.

The politicisation of the union was one of the principal features of its transformation from a quiescent philanthropic body into a militant working-class organisation. In its early years the union had shown little interest in politics. However, by 1930 there were signs that this was changing, K.C.Govindan, on behalf of the TLA, welcomed a band of Travancorean Congressmen on their way to participate in the salt satyagraha.⁹⁰ Five years later the union celebrated May Day for the first time and sent a representative, R.Sugathan, to the first All-Kerala Trades Union Congress.⁹¹

Sugathan's career⁹² provides us with an insight into the making of a working-class union leader. The son of an Ezhava agricultural labourer, he started work in an Alleppey coir factory. However, having passed the Malayalam Middle School examination, in 1921, at the age of 20, he became a teacher in an SNDP Yogam primary school. During fourteen years as a teacher he came under the influence of Ezhava reform movements and converted to Buddhism before becoming an atheist. Patronised by V.K.Velayudhan, in 1930 Sugathan started teaching at a TLA-sponsored night school for labourers, and was elected secretary of a mutual help society formed by the union. Succeeding Govindan, he served as General Secretary from 1936 to 1938. A member of the State Congress, he joined the Communist Party during the Second World War.

After 1935 the TLA maintained links with the labour movement in Malabar, dominated by pro-communist Congress Socialists. P.Krishna Pillai, the Travancorean Nair Secretary of the Kerala branch of the CSP, was the principal contact and visited Alleppey on several occasions.⁹³

Prior to the 1938 general strike, Pillai and other labour organisers from Malabar were active in the Alleppey area. They conducted political education classes and started a CSP group that subsequently formed the core of the first Communist Party unit in Travancore.⁹⁴

The radicalisation of the TLA contributed to its rapid expansion in the late 1930s. Between mid-1936 and February 1939 the membership more than doubled, from 3,000 to nearly 7,500; a quarter of the coir workers in the state.⁹⁵ An estimated 40,000 coir workers and boatmen were involved in the 1938 general strike.⁹⁶

While the TLA was the most important union in Travancore, it was not the only one. In 1928 a Quilon Labour Association was established.⁹⁷ With a membership, in 1936, of 1,000⁹⁸, it was considerably smaller than the TLA. K.G.Sankar, its President (until 1934)⁹⁹ was a Nair Congressman whose brother owned one of the leading publishing concerns in Kerala. Though police reports referred to a communist tendency, the union's principal object appears to have been to put pressure on the management of European-owned coir factories and cotton mills.¹⁰⁰ The leadership, including nationalist Nair lawyers and prominent members of the SNDP Yogam, such as K.P.Kayyakkal and C.Kesevan, reflected this non-revolutionary stance. Indeed, at a meeting organised by the union, in September 1934, G.Ramachandran, a Gandhian Congressman, attacked the 'communistic policy' that had been adopted by the TLA.¹⁰¹ Like the early TLA leaders, whenever strikes occurred, the leaders of the Quilon union sought a compromise settlement.¹⁰²

The emergence of trade unions, first among factory workers, and then among agricultural labourers, was of primary political importance. It mobilised previously inactive sections of society; the consequences of this were starting to become evident by the late 1930s. Subsequently, the mass of poor Ezhavas abandoned the politics of the reformist middle-class SNDP Yogam leadership for that of the Communist Party. They were joined by many Latin Catholics, Pulayas and Parayas, as well as by some poor, or ideologically motivated, Nairs and Syrians. By the mid-1940s open class conflict was as much a part of Travancore's political landscape as communal rivalry.

Notes

1

M.A.Oommen, Land Reforms and Socio-economic Change in Kerala. An Introductory Study, Madras/Bangalore 1972, p.22; T.C.Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala, 1850-1960, Calcutta 1971, pp.96-97.

2

Sirkar tenure includes Pandaravaka and Sirkar Devaswomvaka; the janmi tenure includes Brahmaswomvaka, Doranma Devaswomvaka and Madampimarvaka; inam tenure includes Karamozhivu; and Crown tenure includes Sree Padomvaka. Ibid., pp.86-87; Oommen, op.cit., pp.18-25.

3

RPT, I, pp.5-10.

4

Ibid., II, pp.333-34.

5

The most important of these were the Janmi and Kudiyan Regulations of 1896 and 1932, the Viruthi Proclamations of 1886 and 1893, the Estates Rent Recovery Regulation of 1893, and the Edavagai Regulation of 1934. Ibid., I, pp.50-58 and 767-77, II, pp.329-439, VII, pp.589-612 and 618-32.

6

Oommen, op. cit., pp.28-29, 34-37 and 55.

7

B.S.Ward and P.E.Conner, Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States, Vol.I, Trivandrum 1863, pp.54 and 62.

8

R.Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance. Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908, New York 1976, pp.88-90.

9

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10

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PART TWO
POLITICS 1918-1938

Chapter VI

1918 - 1922: The Emergence of 'Modern' Politics.

'The government of of the state was carried on in the good old Oriental fashion. There was no sedition and no Parliament. Politics were merely the conflicting efforts of certain castes to secure as many of the governmental positions as possible.'

So wrote a European visitor to Travancore in 1916. While the picture he drew remained essentially valid in 1922, the intervening six years saw significant changes in the way in which political activity was expressed. Several shortlived political associations were formed and by 1921 the Indian National Congress was also operating in the state. At the same time, successive legislative reforms produced a Council with a narrow elected majority.

Several factors, both internal and external, contributed to the upsurge of political activity. The most important was the emergence of a Western-educated elite that took the lead in public affairs. The census returns for English literates provide a reliable estimate of the total strength of this group. According to the 1921 census almost 54,000 Travancoreans were literate in English. More than two-thirds of these were Christians or Nairs while the majority of the rest were Ezhavas and non-Malayala Brahmans.² A class breakdown of the English literates is unavailable, but it can safely be assumed that most were from the wealthier sections of society. The 1928 Unemployment Enquiry Committee Report quotes statistics that show that 91 per cent of the pupils in English-medium schools and colleges belonged to the families of 'well-to-do' agriculturists, merchants, lawyers, government servants, teachers and other professionals.³ These were the same groups that accounted for the greater part of the newspaper-reading public, and the rapid growth of a vigorous press in the first decades of the century was an important factor in encouraging political awareness. Increased spatial mobility also contributed to the development of a wider politics beyond the orbit of the local village or small town. Cross-border travel to British India and Cochin, as well as travel within Travancore, became easier and quicker after 1900. In 1904 the Tinnevely-Quilon railway was completed and this was extended to Trivandrum in 1918. Another line linking northern Travancore and Cochin to Malabar was opened in 1902.⁴ The first motor vehicle in the state was registered in 1911 and by 1921 there were 152 - including 51 public buses.⁵

Improved communications, as well as the fact that Travancore was a small, densely populated state with no large urban centres, helped in maintaining the close ties that bound political activists in places like Trivandrum, Quilon and Kottayam with the rural areas. The lawyers, editors and entrepreneurs who took the lead in politics generally belonged to prosperous landowning families. Consequently, there was no discontinuity between the politics of the small towns and the concerns of the countryside - where nine in every ten Travancoreans lived.

External influences played a role in the growth of political activity in the state and in determining the direction it took. The ferment in British India attracted wide interest, and many educated Travancoreans - especially among the youth - were sympathetic to the Home Rule movement, and later, to Gandhian non-cooperation. The postwar constitutional reforms introduced by the British served as a yardstick for measuring political progress. The speeches of Travancorean politicians; and editorials in the local press, often made use of the democratic rhetoric of the Great War and its aftermath. However, press opinion on British Indian issues was divided along communal lines. Christian and Ezhava newspapers generally supported the British administration, fearing that success for the nationalists would mean the uncurbed dominance of the caste-Hindus. The Nair press took a different view, favouring the Home Rule Leagues and the 'extremist' party in the Congress.

As we have seen, in the late nineteenth century, and the early years of the twentieth century, the issues that preoccupied the leaders of Travancorean society were social and not political. However, by 1918 the impracticability of pursuing social changes without engaging in organised political activity was apparent to men such as the leading High Court lawyers E.J. John and Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai. John recognised that whatever the economic and educational advances made by the Western-educated Syrian Christian elite, only political agitation could end their exclusion from many posts in the higher branches of the state's administration. Similarly, Nair reformers like Changanacherry saw campaigning for more democratic politics, and especially an enlarged Legislative Council, as essential if they were to succeed in overcoming the opposition of the small but influential Trivandrum clique of conservative Nairs who had blocked legislation on taravad partition for more than a decade. A number of parallels can be made between John and Changanacherry: both were in their forties

and stood at the top of the legal profession in the state; both had served in the Legislative Council; both were prominent proponents of the cause of social reform within their respective communities; and, finally, though they led communal organisations (John the Christian Conference, and Changanacherry the Nair Service Society), both favoured communal concord. These shared characteristics were reflected in the strictly constitutional nature of the political agitations led by the two men.

The issues which dominated political debate in 1918, and for the next two decades, were state employment and legislative reform. The Dewan, M.Krishnan Nair, was considered weak in comparison to his skilful predecessor - P.Rajagopalachari. Consequently, the corrupt Nair palace manager, T.Sankaran Tampi, exercised even greater influence when it came to making appointments to the state service.⁶

This may have contributed to the concern expressed on the issue of fair employment in the public service at the fourteenth session of the Popular Assembly in February 1918. The activities of Tampi, and the favoured position enjoyed by C.V.Raman Pillai's clique of conservative Nair officials, probably also played a part in prompting demands for reform of both the Legislative Council and the Assembly itself.

The exclusion of non-caste-Hindus and non-Hindus from the important Land Revenue Department was a grievance that had been raised by Christian and Ezhava members ever since the first Assembly session in 1904.

On that occasion, Dewan V.P.Madhava Rao had given Raja Marthanda Varma's dedication of the state to the Hindu deity Sri Padmanabha as the reason for the exclusion of Christians - the same reply as he had made to an address presented by the Christian Association earlier in the year.⁷

A special problem was seen in the responsibility of the senior revenue officers for the supervision of Devaswoms (temple properties), and as early as 1891, in recognition of this obstacle to appointments, the Malayala Memorial had included the suggestion from Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiry that the responsibilities be separated.⁸ When this idea was repeated at the 1907 Assembly session, Madhava Rao's successor, S.Gopalachari, replied that it was 'neither desirable...nor feasible'.⁹

Nonetheless, the demand was reiterated in 1910, 1916 and 1917.

The real obstacle to reform, however, was the lack of effective popular articulation of the demands. Thus Dewan Rajagopalachari, known for his sympathy for the Hindu depressed castes, advised the Vice President of the Christian Association, T.C.Chcrian, that he could do nothing for the communities excluded from the Revenue Department unless

they began a constitutional agitation.¹⁰ By 1918 this condition was on the point of being met.

During the annual Assembly session, when the matter was raised yet again, a Christian member, P. Jacob Kurien, declared that Travancore had no serious politics to discuss except the public service.¹¹ He was well-placed to advance a discussion, as editor of Keraliyabhimani (Pride of Kerala), a weekly published in Mavelikara in central Travancore. As the first step towards a constitutional agitation, Christian members submitted a memorial to the Dewan protesting against the exclusion of Christians from the Revenue and Military departments. They noted how even in neighbouring Cochin, where conditions were similar to those prevailing in Travancore, the Revenue Department was open to all classes. Newspapers were in the fore of this nascent movement: the memorial was published in the Jacobite Malayala Manorama and also backed by the main Catholic organ, the Nazrani Deepika.¹²

The need for a concerted agitation was equally clear when it came to the issue of legislative reform. In 1914, just before his departure from Travancore, Dewan Rajagopalachari admitted that the Legislative Council was not adequately representative of the different communities.¹³ In 1907 he had granted the Popular Assembly the right to return four non-official members to the Council - one for each of the main revenue divisions in the state. However, all of those subsequently elected - except one - were Nairs; in 1914 Nairs occupied four of the seven non-official Council seats, and there was only one nominated Christian non-official. The Ezhavas were wholly unrepresented.

The numerous reforms of the Council and Assembly suggested in the course of the 1918 session demonstrated that there was little consensus among members on the subject.¹⁴ The right to discuss the budget was one of the few points on which most were agreed. On other aspects of reform a communal division was apparent - with Christian members demanding that the principle of communal representation should be conceded.

Nevertheless, among the Nair members there were efforts at achieving agreement and cooperation. Some of them signed a memorial on the expansion of the Council which was presented to the Dewan by T.K. Velu Pillai¹⁵, a Trivandrum lawyer who was a non-official MLC. In addition, in March 1918, a preliminary meeting was held to discuss the formation of a political association - the Mahajana Sabha (All People's Conference).¹⁶ The demands for reform were supported in the press and one paper, the Pauran (Citizen) of Kayankulam in central Travancore, even called for a form of government that would be

responsible to the people.¹⁷ The paper was edited by G.Raman Menon, an independent-minded Nair Assembly member with secular nationalist inclinations.

Outside influences played an important part in extending the agitation. While the politicians of Travancore were debating the public service and constitutional reform, the Home Rule movement in Madras was at its height. Congress activity began to take root in the state at this time and, as elsewhere, its early successes in gaining support were among students. In September 1917 there was trouble between police and students at a public meeting at Trivandrum. The meeting, presided over by the Dewan, was on the occasion of the Shashtiabdapurthi (60th birthday) of the Maharaja. Another confrontation between police and students took place in the same year on the College Day of the Maharaja's College.¹⁸ Several young Nairs, later to become Congressmen, were prominent on both occasions. They included A.K.Pillai, a law student belonging to a wealthy taravad in Quilon District, C.Kuttan Nair of Neyyattinkara, and Kochikal P.Balakrishnan Tampi from Mavelikara.

In April-May 1918 the Samastha Kerala Nair Mahasamajam, of which Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai was the Secretary, met at Ayirur in Cochin. The meeting, chaired by Dewan Bahadur A.Govinda Pillai, a retired Travancore High Court judge, was addressed by two Congressmen - Paliath Cheria Kunjunni Achan, a scion of the leading Nair landowning family in Cochin that had for long provided chief ministers to the Maharaja, and K.Ramakrishna Das, a lawyer who had given up his practise to join Congress.¹⁹ Over the next two years Paliath Achan and Das propagated nationalist ideas, addressing several meetings in Travancore and Cochin. Achan also published the Bhaje Keralam, an Ernakulam weekly newspaper²⁰, which was eventually proscribed in 1921 for its criticism of the administration of Cochin Dewan T.Vijayaraghavachari.

The most important sign of the advent of 'modern' politics in Travancore, however, was the formation, in June 1918, of two political associations - the Mahajana Sabha and the Paura Sabha. The first was established on an avowedly non-sectarian basis, while the second aimed at the advance of politically underprivileged groups. Both were 'modern' perhaps chiefly in harnessing the instruments of popular agitation to a demand for - or protection of - employment and political influence. A clear analogy can be made with the beginnings of 'modern' political activity in British India, expressed through caste sabhas and the INC.

The inaugural conference of the Mahajana Sabha, from 9-11 June, was held at the Victoria Jubilee Town Hall in Trivandrum under the presidency of A.Govinda Pillai.²¹ The Sabha had had its origin in the demands for constitutional reform made at the Popular Assembly session. It was dominated by caste-Hindus and though its declared object was to promote the welfare of the people in general, without distinction of caste or creed, a split emerged at the conference between the Nairs, led by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, and the few Christian participants led by E.J.John.²² The Nair majority was unwilling to accommodate the Christian demands that the association should first campaign for the attainment of equitable civic rights for members of all communities.

Changanacherry was President of the Sabha, and three of its other four officers - as well as 37 of 45 members of the Managing Council - were caste-Hindus.²³ Apart from their dominance, what was also apparent from the composition of the Council was the preponderance enjoyed by south Travancoreans; most of the exceptions were men like Changanacherry and John who lived and worked in Trivandrum. The Sabha's leading members were mainly lawyers and journalists, and the Council included both prominent Nair reformers - like the Trivandrum barrister, K.R.Padmanabha Pillai, and P.K.Govinda Pillai, editor of the Subhashini - and leaders of the conservative faction, notably the Trivandrum High Court lawyers P.K.Kesava Pillai, Malloor K.Govinda Pillai and A.Narayana Pillai. There were also a few people to support the non-sectarian concept of the association - though too few to adequately reflect their communities' representation in the liberal professions. The non-caste-Hindu and non-Hindu majority in the state were represented by just eight members: the Pulaya leader Ayyan Kali; an Ezhava physician from Trivandrum; three Christians - E.J.John, and the Latin Catholics D.Francis, the Secretary of the South Travancorean Catholic Association, and L.A.Netto, a Trivandrum vakil; and three Muslims - including a Sabha Secretary, S.Adam Sait, a prominent Trivandrum merchant.

The second association to be formed in June 1918 was clearly designed to supplement the first, with which it shared some members. The Nair versus Christian split that had emerged at the Mahajana Sabha conference was followed by moves towards the organisation of a campaign by the underprivileged communities to wrest concessions from the government. On 19 June, Jacob Kurien's Keraliyabhimani called for an agitation to be started for the employment of Christians, Ezhavas and

Muslims in the Revenue Department.²⁴ At the end of the month a meeting under the auspices of a newly constituted Paura Sabha (Citizens Conference) was held at the London Mission Society Hall in Trivandrum.²⁵ By contrast with the Mahajana Sabha, this association was dominated by Syrian Christians. E.J. John, the principal organiser, was the Sabha's President, and two of its four secretaries - M.V. Ittycheria and Pathrose Mathai - were also Syrian Christian High Court lawyers. Even here, however, there were some who advocated a united front. One of the two Hindu secretaries was G. Raman Menon, the editor of Pauran; he was among the few Nairs who acknowledged the importance of removing civic inequalities before seeking major political reforms.

Both the new associations were strongly supported in the press, though Nair papers concentrated on the Mahajana Sabha's demand for political reforms, and their Christian counterparts on the Paura Sabha's call for equal civic rights. On 17 July the Keraliyabhimani published an open letter to the Dewan advocating the claims of the non-caste majority in the state for equal treatment with the rest of the population.²⁶ In the same month the Sreevazhumcode, a caste-Hindu monthly of Quilon, called for the establishment of an Executive Council to assist the Dewan, and for reform of both the Legislative Council and the Assembly.²⁷ Both papers urged the administration to follow the example set by British India in these respects.

In general then, the emergence of the sabhas represented the beginnings of new and more extensive political activity in Travancore. An English article in the leading Nair organ in the state, the Malayali of Quilon, focused on their import. It concluded:

Meanwhile the storm gathers. The political consciousness of the people, who had been for long treated with cold disdain or studied insult, is being slowly, but none the less surely, called into being... There are clear and unmistakable signs of the change of temper... and it is the duty of every government to take heed of its course and import and by yielding to their just demands, direct their actions to the country's commonweal.²⁸

Whether or not these observations were objectively true, the fact that they were being made was in itself a sign of the expectations that had been aroused among the intelligentsia.

In October 1918, the Mahajana Sabha criticised, and offered suggestions on, the Native States portions of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report on Indian Constitutional reform. Dewan Krishnan Nair reacted by expressing 'surprise and regret' at their pronouncement on relations with the Paramount Power.²⁹ However, at the same time, and for its

own reasons, the administration was already considering the amendment of the Legislative Council Regulation. Additional Head Sirkar Vakil V. Subba Aiyar was despatched to consult the Advocate General of Madras Seshadri Srinivasa Iyengar, as to how the proposed measure should be passed.³⁰ Iyengar's opinion was that the Council Regulations of 1888 and 1898 did not affect the Ruler's absolute prerogative to legislate. Even so, he added that by having passed the 1898 Regulation through the existing Council, the Maharaja had established a convention that should be respected.³¹

The issue of the Maharaja's prerogative was a controversial one. On a number of occasions the Travancore High Court had questioned the validity of Regulations that had been passed independently of the legislature. One of the main purposes of the 1918 Bill, therefore, was to eliminate any confusion by explicitly stating the Maharaja's absolute powers to legislate.³² In July 1919 the Bill was approved by the Government of India after lengthy consideration and with the proviso that it should be passed without reference to the Legislative Council. Wary of any suggestion that the Ruler of an Indian State could, through creating a convention, divest himself of his ultimate legislative authority, the Government also proposed that members of the existing Council should be made to present an address making clear that they claimed no greater rights for their body than those accorded in the new Regulation.³³ These directions were followed when the Regulation was finally passed in September 1919.

Returning to the Sabhas, a major aspect of the 'new' approach towards political activity in this period was a willingness to organise support in the mofussil. Both associations, having been formed by activists in Trivandrum, mainly functioned in the capital. For the Paura Sabha this was a definite drawback. Syrian Christians stood to gain most from the demand for equal civic rights and any successful agitation would, therefore, have to focus on northern and central Travancore where the community was concentrated. Consequently, a further new body - the Civic Rights League - was formed at a meeting in Kottayam on 7 November 1918.³⁴ The meeting was chaired by John Chandy, the 64 year-old retired Superintendent of the CMS Press, who was a member of the Managing Committee of the Christian Conference.

To win credibility for its campaign, the League had to demonstrate that it was a broadly-based movement that extended beyond a few Syrian Christian professionals in the main towns. With this aim public meetings, in which prominent Syrian Christians from all denominations

took an active part, were held in more than thirty centres in the state between November 1918 and February 1919.³⁵ Unlike the situation in the 1900's, when the Catholics had stood aloof from the Christian Association, some of the chief backers of the League were leaders of the new Malabar Catholic Congress - men such as T.J.Mathew, John Nidhiry and N.V.Joseph. The Syrian clergy also rendered valuable support, and among the several priests who chaired meetings was Konat Kora Mathan Malpan, a leader of the Patriarch's party in the Jacobite Church.^{35a}

Though Syrian Christians predominated, some Ezhavas, Muslims, Vellalas, Latin Catholics, and even Pulayas participated in the meetings. For instance, one in Alleppey was addressed by a Vellala merchant, M.L.Janardanan Pillai, and K.A.Pitcha Bava Sahib, a Muslim merchant and member of the Popular Assembly.³⁶ However, the Syrian leadership of the League was not wholly successful in drawing other groups into the movement. Thus, while it had a few notable Ezhava supporters like T.K.Madhavan, the editor of Desabhimani, the League appears to have been unable to win the cooperation of the SNDP Yogam.

A feature of the League's activity was the extent to which it was organised and controlled by a Central Committee³⁷, based in Kottayam and chaired by John Chandy. The Committee circulated lists of resolutions that were adopted by many of the local civic rights meetings, which nominated representatives to attend a general meeting in Kottayam in April 1919. It also published a pamphlet entitled Caste and Citizenship in Travancore which focused on the exclusion of all but caste-Hindus from the Revenue Department. With a view to gaining publicity outside the state, copies were sent to British Indian newspapers and several - including the Hindu, the Madras Times and Justice, wrote editorials in sympathy with the League's aims. Within Travancore the movement was supported by most Christian newspapers.³⁸

The activities of the Civic Rights League and the Mahajana Sabha, despite being scrupulously law-abiding and peaceful, caused the government some concern. In December 1918, as a safeguard against any trouble, two amendments to the Penal Code were introduced. These made the promotion of communal hatred and the incitement of public disorder, or unrest among military personnel, punishable by up to two years imprisonment.³⁹ The amendments were passed by the Legislative Council despite opposition from the non-official members⁴⁰ who included Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, the Mahajana Sabha's President.

The February 1919 Popular Assembly session was dominated by the civic rights issue. Christian and Ezhava members organised themselves into a group demanding the separation of Devaswoms from the Revenue Department. They were led by K.M.Mammen Mappillai, a schools manager representing the Tiruvalla Town Committee. He belonged to the influential Jacobite Kandathil family that owned the Malayala Manorama.⁴¹

The Kandathil s, who originated from the same village as E.J.John, played a leading role in the Civic Rights League, and K.C.Mammen Mappillai, the editor of the Manorama, was one of its stalwarts.

The gap in interests that existed between the Syrian Christian supporters of the civic rights movement and their fellow-travellers was reflected in the representations made by Assembly members.

While the Syrians spoke almost exclusively on the demand for Devaswom separation, Ezhavas like T.K.Madhavan also raised social and religious disabilities such as untouchability and the exclusion of non-caste-Hindus from temples. For the latter, such discrimination was of as much concern as the removal of restrictions on employment, from which, in any case, the well-educated Syrians were better placed to benefit. Dewan Krishnan Nair replied to all the representations by promising his 'anxious consideration'.⁴²

South Travancorean Nairs, who had for long competed with non-Malayala Brahmans for government appointments, were particularly hostile to the demand for Devaswom separation. They feared that increased Christian competition for jobs would endanger their interests. It was this anxiety that was behind a request by T.K.Velu Pillai, representing Trivandrum taluk in the Assembly. He wanted sectarian agitation for communal representation to be stamped out.⁴³ T.Kumara Pillai, a prominent Nair landlord of Kalkulam taluk, south of Trivandrum, also gave an ominous warning that if the expression of communal demands in the Assembly continued to be tolerated it could land the state 'in a dangerous turmoil of caste and racial troubles'.⁴⁴

On 5 April 1919 the general meeting of the Civic Rights League was held at the Tirunakkara maidan in Kottayam. The speech of welcome was given by John Chandy who proclaimed the unity of the Christian, Ezhava, Muslim and depressed caste communities and affirmed the constitutional nature of their agitation for 'equality of citizenship'. However, Chandy made clear the strength of feeling behind the agitation, declaring: "Let us not rest until we get what we want. For 20 years or more the authorities have been either 'noting down' or 'considering anxiously' our representations. Now they should be requested that

'action' should take the place of 'consideration'" ⁴⁵

Like Chandy, who had described it as a 'monstrous system', E.J. John, in his presidential address, also strongly attacked untouchability. However, despite such rhetorical gestures towards the non-caste-Hindus, John summed up the real cause of the agitation when he said: 'The Christian is now deliberately excluded from the superior ranks of the Revenue service; and as the Heads of several non-technical departments are generally chosen from the higher grades of the Revenue Department, those departments are also therefore practically closed to him. The subordinate staff of these departments is constituted as in the circumstances might be expected.' He went on to note that it was encouraging that, though few responsible caste-Hindus had come out in support, none had avowed open opposition to the civic rights campaign. ⁴⁶ Even the southern Nairs had only attacked it by implication.

At the end of his speech John thanked the Christian prelates who had expressed their sympathy with the movement, acknowledging that it was impossible to overestimate the value of this. The ecclesiastical heads of the Catholic and Mar Thoma churches and the Senior Missionary of the London Missionary Society had all sent messages of support to the League. ⁴⁷ Though the Anglican Bishop and the heads of the rival parties in the Jacobite Church had not done so, the Jacobites' attitude was probably determined by a desire not to upset the government just as their six year-old legal battle over church property was about to be decided by the Trivandrum District Court. ⁴⁸

A month after the Kottayam meeting the second session of the Malabar Catholic Congress, held at Ernakulam, passed a resolution urging the Travancore government to grant equal civic rights. ⁴⁹ The Congress also demanded the introduction of political reforms in Travancore and Cochin and called for the proportional representation of the various communities in representative institutions and the public service. The last two demands reflected the fact that the Catholics, though the most numerous Christian group, were also the worst represented in the government service and the Legislative Council. In the Council there had never been a Catholic non-official member; apart from the rather exceptional case of the Vellala Catholic A.M. Muthunayogam Pillai in 1894-96.

There were few representations on Council reform in the 1919 Popular Assembly. Nevertheless, pressure for reform continued.

In March the first, and as it turned out, only, annual general meeting of the Mahajana Sabha was held at the Sri Krishna Vilasom Hall in Trivandrum, with Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai presiding.⁵⁰ As lawyers were in the forefront of political activity, Council reform was also a major issue at the sixth session of the Travancore Vakils Conference, held at Mavelikara in April.⁵¹ The conference, chaired by E.J. John, President of the state Bar Association, passed a resolution expressing the hope that the contemplated measure would provide for a non-official majority; adequate representation of the people by direct election; the right to interpellate the government and discuss the budget; and to move resolutions on questions of general administration.

By August 1919 Nair newspapers were expressing impatience with the delay in introducing reform.⁵² They were also pessimistic on the prospects for the Legislative Council being granted powers and privileges similar to its counterparts in British India. These misgivings proved to be wholly justified when the Council Regulation was promulgated on 6 September.⁵³ Under it the strength of the Council, which continued to be presided over by the Dewan, was increased to 25, but the official majority was retained. Four of the eleven non-official members were to be directly elected by voters in the four Revenue Divisions of the state, and four more by special constituencies of the janmis, European planters, merchants and factory owners, and the non-official members of the nineteen Town Committees. The remaining three non-officials were to be nominated by the government. The franchise qualifications for electors in the Divisions were the payment of annual land tax of Rs.25, or a net annual income of at least Rs.2000. This gave the vote to almost 13,000 people as compared to an electorate of less than 5,000 for the Popular Assembly. The Council Regulation granted members limited rights of budget discussion and interpellation, though they still could not move resolutions or ask supplementary questions.

The measure fell short of even the relatively moderate suggestions of the Vakils Conference. There was strong press criticism of the manner in which it had been enacted with some Nair papers, such as the Samadarsi (The Egalitarian) of Trivandrum, questioning its legality. The actual conditions were unfavourably compared to the changes being introduced in British India, where the Montagu-Chelmsford Report had proposed 'dyarchy' and a substantial elected majority in the provincial legislatures. Even the generally pro-government Malayala Manorama failed to welcome the Regulation.⁵⁴

The Council reform was particularly disappointing for Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai. Apart from political preferences, he and other Nair social reformers who favoured taravad partition, saw the reconstituted Council, with its official majority, as unlikely to pass such a measure. For the same reason, some conservative south Travancorean Nair members of the Mahajana Sabha, notably Malloor K.Govinda Pillai, P.K.Kesava Pillai and T.K.Velu Pillai, welcomed the Council reform. They organised a public meeting on 2 November at the Sri Krishna Vilasom Hall in Trivandrum.⁵⁵

An attempt was made to disrupt it by a band of Nair students - including C.Kuttan Nair and E.V.Krishna Pillai.⁵⁶

Several protest meetings took place before the new Council met in February 1920. A gathering in Changanacherry passed a resolution that urged the government to revise the Regulation and grant the Council a non-official majority.⁵⁷ In Trivandrum opponents of the new Council met at the office of the Bharatha Kesari, a Nair newspaper, but a procession planned for the next day (20 February) - to coincide with the first sitting of the Council - was banned by the District Magistrate.⁵⁸

In inaugurating the reformed Council, which was still small enough to meet in the Dewan's Public Offices, Krishnan Nair claimed that the 1919 Regulation had 'gone ahead of popular opinion'. However, this was rejected by several of the elected members.⁵⁹ Three of the four representing the Divisions of the state - Nair High Court lawyers C.Raman Tampi (Quilon) and G.Parameswaran Pillai (Trivandrum) and the Catholic John Nidhiry (Kottayam and Devikulam) - described the reforms as 'inadequate'. Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai, a Trivandrum lawyer and member of the Managing Council of the Mahajana Sabha, who represented the Town Committees, expressed 'deep disappointment'.⁶⁰ Apart from Nidhiry, the first ever Syrian Catholic non-official member was Puliampallil John John, the wealthy Marthomite planter and industrialist, who represented the commercial classes. The three nominated non-officials included, for the first time, an Ezhava (N.KumaranAsan) and a Muslim (S.Adam Sait).

As the government faced growing criticism on the Council reform issue, the question of opening the Revenue Department to members of all communities remained unresolved. In pursuance of the promise to consider the demands made by the civic rights group in the 1919 Popular Assembly, the government appointed an officer to report on Devaswom separation. The memorandum that he submitted in June 1919

recommended the creation of a Devaswom Department to administer all temple properties.⁶¹ However, a second memorandum by the Chief Secretary, R.Mahadeva Aiyar, in January 1920, was more cautious, holding that the essentially Hindu character of Travancore's constitution had to be safeguarded.⁶² One way of doing this that he suggested was by reducing the number of posts in the Revenue Department reserved for caste-Hindus. Such a token measure would probably have been unacceptable to the civic rights campaigners.

After the Kottayam general meeting of April 1919 the Civic Rights League had concentrated its efforts on collecting signatures to a draft memorial to be submitted to the Dewan. The memorial⁶³, along with six volumes of signatures, was presented on 28 February 1920, midway through the annual Popular Assembly session. It protested against the exclusion of all but caste-Hindus from the Revenue Department and noted how the government had adopted a similar policy of exclusion with regard to more recent establishments - such as the Caste-Hindu Hostel attached to the Maharaja's College in Trivandrum.⁶⁴ The memorial then went on to refer to the 'growing ill-feeling' between different sections in the state. In conclusion, it quoted Queen Victoria's 1858 proclamation in demanding that: all ranks in every government department be opened to all subjects of the Maharaja; the benefits of all public institutions be extended without discrimination; and the removal of the 'stigma of untouchability', as far as this was within the government's power.

The civic rights deputation that met the Dewan was led by E.J. John and fifteen of the other deputationists were also Syrian Christians.⁶⁵ In addition to three priests, they included some of the wealthiest men in the state. Among the latter were K.C.Mammen Mappillai and Palampadom T.Thomas, prominent lay leaders of the rival parties within the Jacobite Church, and two Catholic landlords from Shertallai - Parayil Kunju Avira Tharagan and A.C.M.Anthraper. Other notable Syrian members of the deputation included John Chandy, John Nidhiry and P.Jacob Kurien. The four non-Syrian deputationists were the Ezhavas T.K.Madhavan and K.Kunju Panickar, both nominated members of the Popular Assembly, J.Walsalam Rose, a Tamil Protestant lawyer from Trivandrum, and M.Kunju Khadir Pillai, a Muslim merchant and Assemblyman from northern Travancore.

Although the Syrian predominance is apparent, an attempt was made to substantiate the memorialists' claim to represent the 'Christian, Ezhava, Mahomedan and other communities in the state'. This was evident not only in the wording of the memorial, but also in the conduct of the audience with the Dewan: the memorial was read by T.K.Madhavan and then presented by Khadir Pillai. In this respect there was a clear parallel between the Syrians in 1920 and the Nair Malayala Memorialists of 1891. The latter had also sought the support of other communities in order to strengthen their attack on the ascendancy enjoyed by Brahmans.

Dewan Krishnan Nair's reply to the civic rights memorial was cautious. He told the deputation that while the government hostels and satrams (resthouses) would be thrown open to all classes 'as far as possible', with regard to untouchability the government was helpless, the deciding factors being 'time, education and social improvement'.⁶⁶ On Devaswom separation - he said only that it was being considered. The Malayala Manorama expressed disappointment at this response and, at the end of the Popular Assembly session on 4 March, K.M.Mammen Mappillai, the leader of the civic rights group, reiterated their request for free admission into all branches of the public service.⁶⁷

A month later the Dewan appointed a committee to study the question of Devaswom separation.⁶⁸ Its membership gave the civic rights campaigners some encouragement. One of the three official nominees was Executive Engineer John Kurien, the elder brother of the Marthomite MLC P.John John. The two non-officials, both from Kottayam, were John Nidhiry and P.K.Narayana Pillai, a Nair lawyer who, though linked by marriage to the Trivandrum clique of Nair officials⁶⁹, was also a close friend of Nidhiry.⁷⁰ Kottayam, the centre of the civic rights movement, was made the committee's headquarters.

On the eve of the close of the 1920 Popular Assembly session a Paura Sabha meeting was held in the LMS Hall, Trivandrum.⁷¹ Presided over by E.J.John, it was attended by about one hundred people, mostly vakils and students. Among the Mahajana Sabha members present were Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai, and K.R. Padmanabha Pillai. Those south Travancorean Nairs who had supported the 1919 Council Regulation stayed away from the meeting and the only Paura Sabha leaders in attendance were M.V.Ittycheria, P.Jacob Kurien and T.K.Madhavan. During the meeting Changanacherry voiced his strong support for Devaswom separation and the right of

every Hindu to enter temples. However, John did not reciprocate with unequivocal backing for the anti-Council Regulation agitation led by Changanacherry. His opinion was that the people of Travancore had not attained the political consciousness necessary for self-government. Apparently referring to the absence of many prominent southern Nairs John declared that the very fact that the leaders of society were not present demonstrated their satisfaction with the existing Council.

The opponents of the Council Regulation were not altogether unsuccessful in their attempts to gain the support of Christian leaders. A memorial submitted in March 1920 was signed by 44 members of the Popular Assembly - including K.M.Mammen Mappillai and D.C.Joseph⁷², the Nadar Protestant editor of the Travancore Times, the leading Christian newspaper in southern Travancore. In April, John Nidhiry raised a question in the Legislative Council referring to the strong public opinion for the establishment of an Executive Council.⁷³

Nevertheless, in the main, Christians regarded demands for greater powers for a Nair-dominated legislature with suspicion.

This was what was behind E.J.John's stance, and was also evident at the third session of the Malabar Catholic Congress held in Alwaye in May 1920.⁷⁴ The Congress passed a resolution which, while requesting reform that would confer more substantial powers to the Popular Assembly, linked this with the drastic lowering of the franchise qualification from payment of land revenue of Rs.50 to Rs.5. Such a measure would have increased the electorate more than tenfold, particularly benefiting Christian tenants of caste-Hindu landlords. In the 1920 Popular Assembly 30 of the 43 directly elected members were caste-Hindus, as compared to only ten Christians and one Ezhava⁷⁵ - proportions that remained largely unchanged until the Assembly's dissolution in 1932.

In July 1920 Dewan Krishnan Nair left Travancore to successfully stand in elections for the new Madras Legislative Council. He was replaced by Thodla Raghaviah, formerly a District Collector in Madras.

As Revenue Officer of the Madras City Corporation from 1908-11, Raghaviah, a Brahman, had won a reputation for fighting corruption and had, therefore, been unpopular with the city's commercial magnates.⁷⁶

His style of administration was described by a Travancorean observer as strong but not sympathetic,⁷⁷ and his appointment was, therefore, bound to exacerbate the tensions in the state. Nair press reaction was generally hostile, and the cliquish south Travancorean Nairs who had close links with the previous administration, were particularly

unhappy. Two leading Nair officials - the Chief Justice of the High Court and Excise Commissioner N.Raman Pillai - both retired shortly before Raghaviah's arrival.⁷⁸ An important result of the conservative Nair faction's disenchantment with the new administration was to give added impetus to moves to bring about a rapprochement between rival Nair Samajams. This development strengthened the agitation against the Council Regulation, though none of the Regulation's prominent erstwhile supporters actively engaged in the campaign for its amendment or repeal.

Three months after the appointment of Dewan Raghaviah, Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras, visited Travancore. A remark made by the Governor brought a strong reaction from the Nair press. In a speech at a state banquet in Trivandrum attended by the Maharaja, Lord Willingdon said:

'Your Highness, there is one other matter which since the beginning of my tour impressed itself much on my mind - that in your state and in the State of Cochin there are a very large number of your citizens who are of the same religious denomination as I and my wife belong to. They are, I believe among the most loyal and devoted subjects of your state. They are treated by your Government with the utmost sympathy and consideration, and I am perfectly sure that you will always give them the same opportunity as you give all other denominations to show their loyalty and good service to your Highness and your Government.'

These comments, with their implicit reference to the Civic Rights League's demand for the opening of the Revenue Department, provoked controversy in the local press.⁸⁰ The Malayala Manorama saw it as a 'veiled criticism of the policy of the Travancore Government' and an endorsement by the Paramount Power of the demands made by the civic rights campaigners. The Catholic Nazrani Deepika also expressed satisfaction. The Nair Malayali, in contrast, criticised 'such unauthorised and mischievous interference of His Majesty's officials with the internal affairs of Indian states.' The Kerala Chandrika (Kerala Moon), a new Quilon weekly, vehemently denounced the civic rights leaders for having caused indignity to the Maharaja. (The Chandrika was published by a Muslim landlord with Khilafatist sympathies - M.K.Abdul Rahman Kutty.) Even the Pauran, edited by G.Raman Menon, a Nair sympathetic to the civic rights movement, felt it was highly regrettable that the Governor had not referred to the disabilities of other classes in the state. As to how Lord Willingdon's remarks effected government policy on Devaswom separation it is difficult to say. It is possible that it helped Dewan Raghaviah to overcome the opposition of the Trivandrum Nair clique of officials

and hangers-on, who were close to the Palace and had exercised considerable influence during the last administration.

The Willingdon visit coincided with the first anniversary of the Council Regulation having come into force. The Pauran, which held the Madras Government, as well as the Travancore Durbar, responsible for the Regulation, advocated a popular boycott of the visit.⁸¹ There was a division of opinion among opponents of the Regulation. A public meeting at the LMS Hall in Trivandrum on 18 October 1920 was chaired by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and attended by some other Mahajana Sabha members, notably Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai, and Trivandrum lawyers V. Achutha Menon and Pattom A. Thanu Pillai.⁸² A body of 50 Maharaja's College students led by C. Kuttan Nair were also present. None of the prominent civic rights leaders attended and the only Christians of note to do so were the Trivandrum lawyers M. V. Ittycheria and Walsalam Rose and K. C. Eapen, Secretary of the Travancore National Bank and a younger brother of Manorama editor, K. C. Mammen Mappillai.

At the meeting Changanacherry declared that those opposed to the Council Regulation were prepared to go to the extent of non-cooperation with the government. It was decided unanimously that a memorial should be submitted to the Maharaja, but two proposals to submit one to Lord Willingdon were both defeated. The Christian participants - Ittycheria, Eapen and Rose - were the main proponents of the latter course of action, while the pro-nationalist Pattom and Achutha Menon were among its chief opponents. The meeting finally resolved to send a deputation to the Dewan; Changanacherry and Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai were given the responsibility of organising it.

The issue of Council reform was raised again at the November 1920 Council session by John Nidhiry, who also referred to demands for the reform of the Popular Assembly and the establishment of an Executive Council.⁸³ The government's reply was that the existing Regulation had to be given a fair trial before it was taken up for revision. They also rejected the proposal for an Executive Council, but said that the revision of Assembly rules would be dealt with after the next session. However, by the time the deputation on Council reform met with the Dewan on 21 February 1921, the administration's attitude had undergone a marked change. Raghaviah now announced that after further careful consideration it was felt that 'the rapid growth of political consciousness justifies a further move forward being made...'⁸⁴ He added that the deputationists' requests for a

non-official majority, and for the grant to Council members of the privileges of asking supplementary questions and moving resolutions were receiving consideration. However, the Dewan upheld the absolute rights of the Sovereign and made no concession to the dissatisfaction with the way in which the Council Regulation had been promulgated.

The reasons that lay behind the shift in the government's position can only be speculated upon, but it is likely that it was at least partly prompted by the threat of the agitators to adopt non-cooperation at a time when the movement was sweeping British India. Another factor might have been the anticipated effect upon popular opinion of the new reformed Legislative Council functioning across the border in Madras. Finally, there was the fact that in December 1920 the Raja of Cochin had proclaimed his intention to establish a Legislative Council with a large elected majority.⁸⁵ Earlier, the Raja had made a positive response to a memorandum presented by a body that described itself as the Cochin Mahajana Sabha.⁸⁶ The Brahman Dewan of Cochin, T. Vijayaraghavachari, had previously served as Raghaviah's successor as Revenue Officer in Madras⁸⁷ and might well have had a hand in influencing his former colleague

Certainly there were close parallels between the administrations of Raghaviah and Vijayaraghavachari. While conceding the legislative reforms, both Dewans alienated Nair opinion by their firm opposition to Congress activity, and the consideration they showed to the Christians and depressed castes. Vijayaraghavachari was the first Dewan of Cochin to formulate a policy for the amelioration of the untouchables. His appointment of a Jacobite priest as Special Officer with responsibility for their uplift aroused particular controversy.⁸⁸ In March 1921 Raghaviah introduced rules for the assignment of cultivable waste land to untouchables on concessional terms.⁸⁹ Though this measure was uncontroversial, the same was not true of moves towards Devaswom separation.

In February 1921 the Devaswom Committee submitted its report. Acknowledging 'the legitimate aspirations of the Christian and other communities' excluded from the higher grades of the Revenue Department; it favoured the establishment of a separate Devaswom Department.⁹⁰ This brought a furious reaction from Nair members of the Popular Assembly. When the Assembly met at the end of the month, they submitted a memorial demanding the just representation of their caste in the public service.⁹¹ Other appeals were made on behalf of Latin Catholics, Muslims, Malayala Brahmans, Tamil Chaliyas and Ezhavas.⁹² Far from resolving the issue, Devaswom separation appeared only to have increased the

pressure of irreconcilable communal demands on the government.

Meanwhile, an outbreak of rioting in Cochin heightened communal tensions in Travancore. Street fighting between Christians and Hindus followed the arrival of the Madras Congressman C.Rajagopalachari to address a meeting in the town of Trichur.⁹³ Hindus blamed the clashes on provocation by the Superintendent of Police, M.A.Chacko, and the District Magistrate, C.V.Antony, both Syrian Christians. Eventually, British Indian troops were called in⁹⁴ and the Christian officers were transferred.⁹⁵

The riot and its aftermath evoked strong reactions in the Travancorean press.⁹⁶ The Malayali demanded the dismissal and prosecution of Chacko and Antony, as well as the removal of Vijayaraghavachari. The latter was described by the Samadarsi as the Christians' Dewan and the enemy of Nairs. In a series of articles, for which it was warned by the government, the Khilafatist Kerala Chandrika called for a boycott of Christians.⁹⁷ By contrast, the Christian Malayala Manorama and Nazrani Deepika blamed the trouble on the non-cooperation movement in British India.

Throughout 1921 the issue of Devaswom separation, the Trichur riot, and the Mappilla rebellion in Malabar⁹⁸, fueled the attacks in Nair and Muslim newspapers on the Christians, the British and the administration. Criticism was also directed at Dewan Raghaviah's decision, made after a request from Lord Willingdon, committing Travancore to participation in a scheme for the expansion of Cochin harbour.⁹⁹

The scheme was seen as harmful to the future of Travancore's own ports. Some newspapers even encouraged Travancoreans to take up non-cooperation. They included the Malayali, the Kerala Chandrika, and the Muslim, a new Alleppey weekly started by the reformist lawyer, P.S.Mahomed.¹⁰⁰

The growth of political agitation in British India had already made a significant impact on students in the state. Ever since the first demonstrations by nationalist students in Trivandrum in 1917, there had been a climate of incipient unrest in educational institutions. In 1919-20 there were minor strikes and protests on non-political issues at a number of schools and colleges in the capital - including the Sri Mula Vilasom (SMV) School and Maharaja's College. Outside Trivandrum sporadic instances of indiscipline also occurred at several high schools in central Travancore.¹⁰¹ The participation of Trivandrum students in the public campaign against the Council Regulation was the first important indication of political disaffection. This was followed, in late 1920, by the refusal of students, in

schools as far apart as Alleppey in the north and Attingal in the south, to accept peace medals awarded by the government.¹⁰²

A Students' Club was formed in Trivandrum with T.K.Narayana Pillai,¹⁰³ a 21 year-old Nair Congressman from northern Travancore, as president. In February 1921 Dewan Raghaviah castigated the Club's managing committee in rejecting a request that they should be given free use of the VJT Hall for holding a variety entertainment. The Club reacted by passing a protest resolution¹⁰⁴ and, in an article in the Malayali¹⁰⁵, Narayana Pillai attacked the Dewan as an autocrat. Subsequently, on 22 February, the Club organised a meeting in sympathy with the non-cooperation movement in Malabar.¹⁰⁶ It was addressed by K.G.Sankar, a Maharaja's College student who belonged to a prominent Quilon Nair taravad.

Several Travancorean Nairs attended the first conference of the Kerala Pradesh Congress at Ottapalam in south Malabar in April 1921.¹⁰⁷ They included Sankar, Congress propagandist K.Ramakrishna Das, G.Raman Menon of the Pauran, and A.K.Pillai, who had discontinued his studies at Oxford in response to Gandhi's non-cooperation call.^{107a} M.Mathunni, a 25 year-old Syrian Christian from central Travancore, joined them as did K.Kesavan Potty, a Malayala Brahman student of Maharaja's College.¹⁰⁸ On their return, A.K.Pillai, the secretary of the new Travancore District Congress Committee, travelled about the state with Sankar and Das setting up local Congress branches¹⁰⁹, most of which only had an ephemeral existence. The strongest branch, with 600 members was at Quilon.¹¹⁰ Its managing committee, included Sankar and M.R.Madhava Warriar, the Ambalavasi editor of the Malayali who worked on the staff of the Message, a Bombay English daily published under the patronage of Bal Gangadhara Tilak.¹¹¹ The first Congress newspaper in Travancore, the Swarat, was founded in Quilon by A.K.Pillai and Sankar. There was only one Congress branch in which Christians were well represented. This was at Palai in the northern taluk of Minachil, where there were four Christians on the managing committee. The four included Kayalackakom Joseph Thomas, an influential local figure.¹¹² Scion of a Syrian Catholic family with a long commercial tradition, Thomas managed the family's merchant firm and was also a planter, owning extensive lands.

The Nair predominance in the Congress did not pass unnoticed by the authorities. Dewan Raghaviah feared that Congress activity would accentuate sectarian differences. Writing to the new European Commissioner of Police, W.H.Pitt, in April 1921, he stated that the activity had

to be prevented from spreading in central and northern Travancore ¹¹³ the Syrian Christian heartland. In Trivandrum itself, a non-cooperation meeting was held in June. ¹¹⁴ Among those attending were K.G.Sankar, K.Kesavan Potty, C.Kuttan Nair and his younger brother, C.Krishnan Nair, and two students who went on to become state legislators in the 1930's - K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai and P.I.Simon.

Kesavan Potty and Krishnan Nair were both in the forefront of the first organised students' strike in the state. The strike, in August-September 1921, had the public or tacit support of most Nair politicians. Particularly noticeable was the sympathy shown by south Travancorean supporters of the previous administration - men such as the ex-MLCs P.K.Kesava Pillai and T.K.Velu Pillai. However, Christian leaders strongly opposed the strike, viewing it as arising out of Nair resentment at the government's plans for Devaswom separation. The result was that the controversy assumed a communal character.

The immediate cause for the outbreak of the strike was the enhancement of school fees. An Education Expenditure Committee appointed in August 1919 had recommended the imposition of a cess to meet the increasing demands of educational institutions. In April 1921 a conference of the headmasters of higher grade English schools, and a larger Special Educational Conference convened by the government, both proposed a substantial increase in fees as the only alternative. The latter course of action was adopted by the government and on 8 July fees in vernacular schools were increased by 50 per cent and in English schools by between 16 and 50 per cent. ¹¹⁵

The increases came into effect on 17 August and a week later a leaflet calling for a protest strike was circulated at the SMV School in Trivandrum. ¹¹⁶ Apart from attacking the fee increases, it inveighed against other policies instituted by Dewan Raghaviah, specifically noting the reform of the Revenue Department. In criticising British rule, the leaflet made a reference to Mahatma Gandhi. It also called upon students to emulate Nair heroes like Raja Kesava Das, Velu Tampi Dalava and 'Swadesabhimani' Ramakrishna Pillai.

On 25 August the strike began at the SMV School. It quickly spread to other schools and colleges in the capital as students either joined the strikers or were sent home by the authorities. Nearly two thousand students attended a meeting at the Police Parade Ground. Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai was invited to preside over the gathering; he accepted with the aim of exercising a moderate influence. ¹¹⁷ He suggested that the students should submit a memorial to the government and said it was

unfair to attempt to negate constituted authority. However, K.R.Elankath, a twenty year-old Nair teacher at the SMV School, advised the students to continue the strike until the fees were reduced.¹¹⁸ Several students including C.Krishnan Nair, a VI-former at the SMV School, also addressed the crowd. One speaker called for the adoption of measures with the object of expelling the existing government.¹¹⁹ Despite such inflammatory speeches there was little violence and the police avoided a confrontation.

On 27-28 August schools in Quilon went on strike.¹²⁰ Over the next few days the strike spread to other centres in the state - with the receipt of telegraphic information from Trivandrum, or as a result of incitement by students travelling from the capital.¹²¹ By early September many schools in the mofussil were effected. The largely Christian-run private high schools suffered least disruption, though the CMS College in Kottayam had to be closed after being invaded by a crowd of about a 1000 schoolboys.¹²²

Several of the instigators and leaders of the strike in Trivandrum belonged to some of the leading Nair families in south Travancore. This lends credence to the Christian charges that the strike had an ulterior motive since the south Travancorean Nairs were the group most opposed to Devaswom separation. The teacher K.R.Elankath was a grand-nephew of the last Travancorean Nair Dewan, N.Nanu Pillai. Elankath was also one of the organisers and first secretaries of a body known as the Young Men's Nair Association.¹²³ The President of the Association was retired Excise Commissioner N.Raman Pillai¹²⁴, the eldest son of Nanu Pillai, while its Treasurer was K.Narayana Menon, a retired District Magistrate whose son was a leading student agitator at Maharaja's College. Both Raman Pillai and Menon had been part of the clique of Nair officials close to the Palace who had exercised considerable influence until Dewan Raghaviah's arrival.¹²⁵ The circumstantial evidence for their involvement in the strike is thus persuasive, if not definitive.

In any case, there was considerable sympathy for the students among the caste-Hindus of Trivandrum. On 26 August several leading citizens met at the house of P.K.Kesava Pillai to decide on concerted action to get the fees enhancement modified and end the strike.¹²⁶

Among those present were Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and V.Achutha Menon. At a second informal meeting at which a large number of students were gathered, several resolutions to be put before a public meeting were drafted.¹²⁷ These included a call upon the government to cancel the fees increase and a request that no action should be taken

against the strikers. A citizens' committee was constituted of the banker K.C.Eapen and seven lawyers. The latter included three Nairs, among them Kesava Pillai and MLC G.Parameswaran Pillai; two non-Malayala Brahmans (V.S.Subramonia Aiyer and E.Subramonia Aiyar), another caste-Hindu and a south Travancorean Christian. On 28 August the committee met with the Chief Secretary and Acting Dewan, R.Krishna Pillai, who accepted their suggestion that all educational institutions in the capital should be closed for a week during which members of the committee could attempt to conciliate the students.¹²⁸ On the same day students at the Maharaja's College declared sympathy for the strike.¹²⁹

The fact was that the strike had taken the government unawares, with Dewan Raghaviah away in Madras and Police Commissioner Pitt on tour.¹³⁰ The Dewan returned on 31 August and was met by the citizens' committee, strengthened by the addition of Changanacherry.¹³¹ Raghaviah promised to consider their suggestion that the government should not insist on an apology from the students, but instead be satisfied with the draft resolution requesting that no action be taken against the strikers. He also agreed to consider any representation on fees made by the forthcoming Trivandrum public meeting and indicated that a short postponement might be made of the date for the payment of the enhanced fees.

Public meetings in support of the students were held in various parts of the state; the majority in Nair-dominated areas in central and southern Travancore.¹³² Many of the Nairs, and the few non-Malayala Brahmans, who took a leading part in the meetings were lawyers or other educated professionals with Congress sympathies. For instance, among those prominent in Quilon was the editor of the Malayali, while a gathering in Neyyattinkara was chaired by N.K.Padmanabha Pillai,¹³³ a local vakil and the elder brother of the radical journalist the late 'Swadesabhimani' K.Ramakrishna Pillai. Some notable Muslims, whose feelings had been aroused by the Mappilla outbreak¹³⁴, joined in the demonstrations. The latter included the Alleppey lawyer P.S.Mahomed.

By contrast, Christian leaders supported the administration¹³⁵, seeing the students' strike as a Nair stratagem to thwart Devaswom separation. On 1 September public meetings were held in the Syrian Christian centres of Kottayam and Tiruvalla. Attended by most notable Christians in the locality, both meetings passed resolutions condemning the strike.¹³⁶ The civic rights leaders, John Nidhiry and Palampadam Thomas were prominent at the Kottayam meeting and the heads of the Christian churches also assured the Dewan of their support.¹³⁷

On 2 September the public meeting organised by the citizens' committee was held in Trivandrum with V.S.Subramonia Aiyar presiding.¹³⁸ Resolutions were passed asking for the cancellation of the fees increase, the deferment of the payment of fees and no action to be taken against the students. However, a motion advising the parents and guardians of pupils to see that they returned to school was persistently obstructed by those students present.¹³⁹ This caused a breakdown in the tentative understanding reached between the Dewan and the citizens' committee. A government press communique on the same day warned the students against any breach of discipline and defiance of authority.¹⁴⁰ All schools were closed until 19 September with holidays for the Onam festival being extended.

The government communique doubted whether the continuing unrest was due to the fees enhancement, suspecting that the students were 'being deliberately misled and used by mischief-makers for their own purposes'. Several officials adduced that political reasons were behind the strike. The Director of Public Instruction noted that though it was almost six weeks before the fees enhancement orders came into effect no complaints appeared to have been made in that period.¹⁴¹ According to him, fees at the enhanced rate were paid without protest in several schools. The Nair Acting District Superintendent of Police saw the agitation as the result of the non-cooperation movement,¹⁴² while Police Commissioner Pitt asserted that the boys were being supported in many places by their elders partly so as 'to hamper the administration of the state as a set-off (sic) to measures such as the separation of the Revenue from the Devaswom Department..¹⁴³

Both the Trivandrum Police Superintendent and his superior were probably accurate in their assessment. The likely latent role played by Nair opponents of Devaswom separation and the Young Men's Nair Association has already been considered. However, the strike could not have taken place without the non-cooperation movement. It was the latter that was crucial in mobilising student support for the agitation. The efforts made by A.K.Pillai, K.G.Sankar and others, to popularise the movement were an important feature of the background to the strike. Inflammatory articles in several local newspapers in late August and early September also contributed to the growing disaffection among students by encouraging anti-British sentiment and advocating non-cooperation. The Swarat, the Malayali and the Pauran (all edited by Congressmen) and the Khilafatist Kerala Chandrika were notable in this respect.¹⁴⁴ Several students with Congress sympathies played prominent parts in the strike. Among them were K.Kesavan Potty of Maharaja's College, and C.Kuttan Nair and K.A.Damodara

Menon, both sixth-formers at the SMV School.¹⁴⁵ K.R.Elankath, the YMNA activist, was also a nationalist.¹⁴⁶

The situation became more tense following the failure of the citizens' committee's efforts to bring about a settlement. On 4 September an attempt by a procession of students to present their grievances before the Maharaja's Palace was prevented, and on the same day, the District Magistrate of Trivandrum prohibited students from holding meetings.¹⁴⁷

Two days later, the citizens' committee responded to the government press communique by publishing a statement of their activities.¹⁴⁸

Though the committee hoped that parents and guardians would advise pupils to return to school, a Quilon Nair weekly, the Veerakeralan, simultaneously published an appeal to the students to stand firm and united.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, communal tensions continued to rise. At public meetings held by Hindus in Kottayam and Tiruvalla the attitude of local Christians towards the strike was criticised.¹⁵⁰ The Kottayam meeting passed a resolution specifically condemning the Malayala Manorama for seeking to 'foment ill-feeling between the different sections of His Highness subjects'. The Trivandrum newspaper, the Subhashini, echoed the charge in an article violently attacking the Christians.¹⁵¹

Public meetings in support of the government's position were held at various centres in northern and central Travancore. Christian priests were prominent at many of these as were notable civic rights campaigners like P.Jacob Kurien and M.K.Khadir Pillai.¹⁵²

On 10 September a students' deputation led by T.N.Kunjuraman Nair, the son of retired District Magistrate K.Narayana Menon, and including C.Krishnan Nair, met with Dewan Raghaviah.¹⁵³ A week later the government issued an order postponing the levy of fees at the enhanced rate to the next school year. It also demanded that the prominent student agitators should tender an unconditional apology and a promise of future good behaviour. The shift in the government's stance was prompted by the opinion of two of their senior law officers who held that the fees increase was invalid under the 1910 Educational Code, having been imposed three months into the academic year.¹⁵⁴

The government's retreat was hailed as a triumph by the Trivandrum students. On 19 September, the day educational institutions reopened, they demonstrated their defiance of a refusal by the District Magistrate to allow them to conduct a procession. Subsequently, Kunjuraman Nair of Maharaja's College, and four pupils of the SMV School were suspended. Both institutions were then closed. As a result, on 21 September, there were serious clashes between demonstrating students and the police

and military. Again pupils of the SMV School took the lead and the Police Commissioner, W.H.Pitt, was stoned as he dispersed a picket.

Worse trouble occurred at Maharaja's College where, at the request of the Principal, an Englishman, the police forcibly dispersed several hundred students who had gathered in the College compound.¹⁵⁵ At least 22 people, the majority of them students, were injured¹⁵⁶ and 27 students arrested.¹⁵⁷

On 22 September K.Kesavan Potty and three Nairs, including Kunjuraman Nair, were dismissed from Maharaja's College. Another student of the College, K.R.Elankath, left after being reprimanded and losing his job as temporary teacher in the SMV School.¹⁵⁸ After the expulsions unrest continued for a few more days with attempts at picketing schools and boycotting classes. There were also scattered outbreaks in mofussil centres. However, by 1 October educational institutions in Trivandrum had resumed normal working.

The events of 21 September aroused widespread controversy.

The government was strongly criticised in all but the Christian newspapers.¹⁵⁹ A public meeting in Trivandrum on 23 September was presided over by the Nair High Court lawyer A.Narayana Pillai, a municipal councillor and member of the 1921 Popular Assembly.¹⁶⁰

It requested that the government appoint a committee of enquiry of elected non-officials.¹⁶¹ On 24 September a non-official manifesto¹⁶², was published contradicting the official account given in a press communique. The manifesto charged the police and cavalry with using excessive violence in clearing the college compound. It was signed by Narayana Pillai and four other Nairs. Although the only Christian signatory was a nationalist Munsiff's Court vakil, the manifesto condemned attempts to give the situation a communal colouring. Ironically, on the previous day 26 notable Christian citizens of Trivandrum had signed a petition to the Dewan which remarked on the great forbearance shown by the government and commended Police Commissioner Pitt.¹⁶³

The signatories included the President and Secretary of the Paura Sabha - E.J.John and Pathrose Mathai - as well as the two Christian members of the citizens' committee that had unsuccessfully attempted to conciliate the students.

There were other demonstrations of the Christian community's backing for the Dewan. A letter of support was sent by Titus Mar Thoma II, the Marthomite Metropolitan,¹⁶⁴ and a telegram from D.Francis, the Secretary of the South Travancore Catholic Association, expressed the hope that 'these unworthy agitations may not in the slightest degree stand in the way of carrying out the noble and necessary measures of equitable

reforms the government has in view.¹⁶⁵ At a meeting in Nagercoil, chaired by a Nadar lawyer, Paul V. Daniel, South Travancorean Protestants adopted a similar resolution.¹⁶⁶ A meeting under the auspices of the Civic Rights League was held in Kottayam presided over by the Marthomite MLC P. John John. It condemned the students' behaviour, denounced non-cooperation propoganda and reminded the government of the urgent need to expedite measures calculated to remove civic disabilities.¹⁶⁷

In the midst of the controversy over the handling of the students' strike, on 2 October, the Maharaja passed a Legislative Council Regulation¹⁶⁸ to replace the unpopular 1919 Regulation. The new measure conceded most of the major demands made by the Council reform deputation that had met the Dewan in February. Members were granted the right of voting on the budget, moving resolutions and asking supplementary questions. The strength of the Council was doubled to 50 and the body was given an elected majority: 22 of the 35 non-officials were elected by general constituencies, one from Trivandrum and five others by special constituencies of planters, janmis, political pensioners and Edavagais (local rajas), and commercial interests. The franchise was also liberalised. In the taluks all those paying a land revenue assessment of at least Rs.5 were given the vote, while in the municipalities the qualification was payment of land or building tax of Rs.3 or more (Rs.1 in Trivandrum). Graduates and all those liable to professional or income-tax were also enfranchised. For the first time women were granted the vote on terms of equality with men. These changes meant a seven-fold increase in the electorate to over 96,000¹⁶⁹, a figure that represented less than one in twenty adult Travancoreans. This was a proportion close to that of the newspaper-reading public.

The Khilafatist Kerala Chandrika asserted that the Regulation left the Dewan an 'unfettered despot'.¹⁷⁰ The latter could submit any Bill rejected by the Council for the Maharaja's approval on the basis that it was essential for the safety, tranquillity or interests of the state. Similarly, he could rule out of order any measure proposed by the Council. The Dewan was also allowed to submit emergency legislation and authorise expenditure without reference to the legislature.

Reaction to the reform was mixed. A meeting was held on 10 October at Kottarakara in central Travancore under the auspices of the Travancore Mahasabha (All-Travancore Conference), a predominantly caste-Hindu body that had recently been constituted at Quilon.¹⁷¹ It expressed the opinion that the reform did not confer any rights on the people and called upon the administration to introduce responsible government in

the immediate future. However, at the last meeting of the old Council on 9 November, John Nidhiry described the measures as 'very substantial and quite adequate'.¹⁷²

The Kottarakara meeting was presided over by S.Krishna Aiyar, a non-Malayala Brahman High Court lawyer who had played an active part in inciting students to strike.¹⁷³ The meeting passed resolutions condemning the authorities' handling of the strike and backing the demand for a public committee of enquiry. It added that the allegation that the strike had been instigated by opponents of Devaswom separation was 'absolutely unfounded' and authorised the Mahasabha's working committee to convene a conference of the leaders of the different communities to promote harmonious relations.¹⁷⁴ The call for an enquiry, and for the government to forbear from taking disciplinary action against the strikers, gained considerable support. Five municipal councillors, four from Trivandrum and one from Quilon, resigned over the government's negative attitude, and a memorial with more than 2,000 signatures was submitted to the Maharaja on 8 November.¹⁷⁵ The issue was also raised, at the last meeting of the old Council, by G.Parameswaran Pillai.¹⁷⁶

In the wake of the students' strike, the authorities sought to clamp down on both the press and the activities of the Travancorean non-cooperators. In November the Nair editor of the Veerakeralan was arrested in connection with an article published in June that allegedly incited disaffection.¹⁷⁷ In the same month four Congress workers, including Congress Secretary A.K.Pillai, were arrested for picketing shops in Quilon.¹⁷⁸ Their picket was in response to a call from the All India Congress Committee for a nation-wide hartal to mark the arrival of the Prince of Wales in India. The four Congressmen were bound over to keep the peace for a period of one year.¹⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the government was unyielding in its refusal to appoint a committee of enquiry to look into the students' strike. This was criticised at the special conference organised by the Travancore Mahasabha on 27-28 December 1921.¹⁸⁰ The conference, held in Trivandrum and attended by some four hundred people, failed in its declared purpose of bringing together the leaders of the different communities. None of the leaders of the Civic Rights League were present and notable Nair absentees included Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai. Nevertheless, there was an attempt to make the gathering appear representative with Trivandrum vakils and students being joined by some representatives from the mofussil. Notable among the latter was Mannathu

Padmanabha Pillai, the General Secretary of the reformist Nair Service Society. The Reception Committee for the conference was chaired by a Vellala editor, and the proposal that a Nair (T.K.Velu Pillai) should preside over the conference was made by Paura Sabha secretary M.V.Ittycheria, the only Christian participant of note. In a speech Velu Pillai called for future Dewans to be appointed only from among Travancoreans and for them to be made responsible to the people. He also favoured the formation of an Executive Council to assist the Dewan. The Secretary of the Mahasabha, A.R.Damodaran Nambiar, went even further: Nambiar, the Ambalavasi editor of the Quilon paper Sreevazhumcode, demanded elected ministers.

The February 1922 Popular Assembly session was also dominated by calls for more responsible government and the continuing controversy over the students' strike. As many as eighteen members, including fourteen Nairs, spoke in favour of the creation of an Executive Council responsible to the legislature.¹⁸¹ Among the speakers were Paura Sabha secretary G.Raman Menon and a young Quilon lawyer, K.P.Raman Pillai, both of whom used the students' strike in support of their argument. The Dewan's reply to the representations was that the government had to watch the working of the reformed Council before taking any further decisions.

On the subject of the students' strike, T.K.Velu Pillai advised the government to abandon the enhanced fees scheme and withdraw the criminal prosecutions and disciplinary measures taken against students.¹⁸² A group of half a dozen members, led by K.P.Raman Pillai, drafted a memorial making the same suggestions.¹⁸³ It was signed by 52 of the 100 Assemblymen - including all the Nairs and a few other Hindus, notably the Ezhava editor C.V.Kunjuraman, M.L.Janardanan Pillai, an erstwhile Vellala supporter of the civic rights movement, and K.M.Sivathanu Pillai, a Vellala lawyer from Nagercoil, who was the President of the town's local Congress Committee.

However, the Dewan was solidly supported by Christian members, none of whom signed the memorial. The Christians had been gratified by Raghaviah's announcement, in his opening address to the Assembly, that a separate Devaswom Department was to be created.¹⁸⁴, thus formally conceding the principal demand made by the Civic Rights League. The Devaswom Proclamation was issued on 12 April 1922 and came into force four months later.¹⁸⁵ But even before the opening of the Revenue Department, the Raghaviah administration's appointments and salaries policy appears to have improved the position of Christians in the public service. Between 1918 and 1922 the number of those drawing a

salary of Rs.150 and above per annum had doubled to about a hundred. Consequently, Christians now formed 24 per cent of those in the higher wage bracket - an increase of seven per cent over 1918 (Nairs' claimed 30 per cent and the non-Malayala Brahmans' 33 per cent).¹⁸⁶

The intense activity of the 1918-22 period brought to the fore a number of features that were to characterise Travancorean politics over the next decade. First, there was the formation of transient associations dominated by lawyers and other professionals in the main towns. These bodies, apart from the Paura Sabha, were largely composed of Nairs and were shunned by the Christians. Political activity was, thus, mainly channeled along communal lines, a fact that was highlighted by the issues raised in the press and in forums like the Popular Assembly, most notably that of representation in the public service. One result was to draw together leaders of the various subdivisions within the major communities. This trend was illustrated by the degree of cooperation which existed between Christians of different denominations during the civic rights campaign, as well as by the moves towards reconciling pro-travancore reform, and conservative, Nairs. By 1921 the Syrian Christians' junior allies in the Civic Rights League, the Ezhavas, realised that the League's leadership did not share their particular concerns, foremost among them being temple entry. Consequently, T.K.Madhavan and his associates turned towards cooperation with the Nair reformers, an entente that was maintained through the decade. Lastly, the unrest among students in 1918-22 gave rise to a new generation of political activists.¹⁸⁷

However, the main factor in their politicisation - the popularity of the National Congress, evident during the non-cooperation movement, remained, understandably, peripheral to the politics of a princely state like Travancore.

Notes

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- 97 Kerala Chandrika, 11, 18 and 25 April 1921, CS, 569/1921.
- 98 MNNR (1921), pp.1045-47.
- 99 Ibid., pp.933-34, 1020 and 1085, and (1920), pp.1391 and 1419-20; Samadarsi, 27 August 1921, CS, 643/1921.
- 100 MNNR (1921), pp.173, 258, 363 and 532; Kerala Chandrika, 13 June 1921 CS, App. to 899/1921; Malayali, 29 June, 23 July and 10 August 1921, CS, 643/1921.

- 101 T.K.Vijaya Mohan, Genesis of Students' Unrest in Kerala, Trivandrum 1980, pp.18-22.
- 102 One of the schools in Alleppey was run by the Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha of which P.S.Mahomed was the Secretary. Ibid., pp.20-21.
- 103 Freedom Fighters, pp.407-08.
- 104 Students' Club to Dewan, 20 February 1921, CS, 542/1921.
- 105 Malayali, 16 February 1921, CS, 542/1921.
- 106 Freedom Movement, p.93
- 107 Ibid., p.90. A students' conference held in conjunction with the main conference was presided over by the Syrian Christian Congressman George Joseph. C.K.Kareem, Kerala District Gazetteer Palghat, Ernakulam 1976, pp.134-35.
- 108 Freedom Fighters, pp.220-21.
- 109 Ibid., pp.491-92 and 550.
- 110 List of Societies, 30 June 1922, Pol., 131/1922.
- 111 Freedom Fighters, pp.336-37.
- 112 MSD (1930), p.85.
- 113 Dewan to Police Com., 22 April 1921. Quoted in Freedom Movement, p.93.
- 114 Important Papers, pp.170-72.
- 115 Mohan, op.cit., pp.28-29.
- 116 Ibid., p.33 and App.II, pp.109-12.
- 117 Changanacherry to Ch. Sec., 26 August 1921, Important Papers, p.6.
- 118 Mohan, op.cit., p.87.
- 119 Police Report, Important Papers, pp.4-5.
- 120 Ibid., pp.12-13.
- 121 Mohan, op.cit., pp.44-46.
- 122 CMSP, Annual Report 1922-23, p.159.
- 123 MSMD (1937), p.394.
- 124 S.Ramanath Aiyar, Progressive Travancore, Trivandrum 1923, pp.41-42. Raman Pillai had become Travancore's first notable student dissident when, in 1882, he was expelled from the state for criticising the administration of his father's Brahman successor. R.Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance. Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908, New York 1976, pp.159-60, 166.

125

Menon, then a Sessions Judge, was suspended after the High Court overturned his conviction of those accused in connection with a riot in Trivandrum in June 1908. The riot had been sparked off by police corruption and Menon's links with Sankaran Tampi and the C.V.Raman Pillai clique ensured that he was appointed a District Magistrate in 1910. T.K.Velu Pillai, Travancore State Manual, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1940, pp.106-07; LMS Annual Report (Nagercoil) 1908-09, p.3; TAR (1911-12), II, App.I, p.i, (1908-09), II, App.I, p.ii, and (1907-08), I, p.10.

126

Mohan, op.cit., p.41.

127

Statement of the citizens' committee, 6 September 1921, Ibid., App.V pp.118-23.

128

Important Papers, pp.11-12.

129

Mohan, op.cit., p.43.

130

Ibid., pp.34-40.

131

Ibid., pp.47-48 and App.V.

132

Freedom Movement, p.108; Important Papers, pp.16-17 and 20-23.

133

Freedom Fighters, pp.430-31.

134

They included the Muslim MLC, S.Adam Sait, who wrote to the Central Khilafat Committee in Bombay asking guidance regarding the aid needed from Muslims in the Native States. The letter was intercepted by the Bombay CID. Sait to Committee, 23 August 1921, CS,566/1921.

135

The managers of Christian aided institutions had been well represented at the Special Educational Conference that had recommended the fee increases. K.M.Mammen Mappillai subsequently strongly defended the stance taken by the non-official participants at the conference. SMPAP, XVIII, p.150.

136

Rev. Kuriakose Kor Episcopa to Dewan, 2 September 1921, and Enclosure Bp. Alexander Chulaparambil (Catholic Bp. of Kottayam) to Dewan, 2 September 1921, Important Papers, pp.27 and 29.

137

Bp. Chulaparambil to Dewan, 2 September 1921, Mar Ivanios (Jacobite Bp., Kottayam) to Dewan, 3 September 1921, Ibid. pp.28 and 31.

138

Acting District Superintendent to Police Com., 2 September 1921, Ibid., p.33.

139

Mohan, op.cit., App.V.

140

Ibid., p.48.

141

Director of Pub. Instruction, 30 January 1922. Quoted in Ibid., pp.31 - 32.

142

Acting District Superintendent, 25 August 1921. Quoted in Freedom Movement, p.105

143

Police Com. to Ch. Sec., 3 September 1921. Quoted in Mohan, op.cit.,

p.47.

144

MNNR (1921), pp.1045-47, 1119 and 1143; Swarat, 8 September 1921, and Pauran, 3 September 1921, CS, 643/1921.

145

Darbar Physician to Dewan, 22 September 1921, and District Magistrate to Ch.Sec., 6 October 1921, Important Papers, pp.87-90 and 143.

146

As secretary of the Onam Day celebrations committee at Maharaja's College, Elankath allowed a friend to sing songs in praise of Mahatma Gandhi. Oral History Transcript no.84, 25 October 1970 (NMML).

147

Mohan, op.cit., pp.51-52 and App.VI, pp.124-25.

148

Ibid., App.V.

149

MNNR (1921), p.1143.

150

S.Krishna Aiyar to Dewan, 5 September 1921, and G.K.Udaya Varma to Dewan, 6 September 1921, Important Papers, pp.36-38.

151

'Is everything to be thrown on the Nair's head?', Subhashini, 8 September 1921, CS, 569/1921.

152

Important Papers, pp.49-55.

153

Ibid., pp.48-49.

154

This point had been raised at the Kottayam meeting of 5 September. Mohan, op.cit., pp.54-55; and App.X (Head Sirkar Vakil to Ch.Sec., 13 September 1921), pp.134-36.

155

Ibid., pp.59-69.

156

Darbar Physician to Dewan, 22 September 1921, loc.cit.

157

Mohan, op.cit., p.70.

158

Ibid., pp.69 and 87-88.

159

'The Military Invasion of the Royal College', Swarat, 22 September 1921, Ibid., App.XI, pp.136-38; MNNR (1921), p.1198.

160

SMPAP, XVIII, App.B, pp.x-xvii.

161

Freedom Movement, p.112.

162

Mohan, op.cit., App.XIII, pp.140-46.

163

Petition to Dewan, 23 September 1921, Important Papers, pp.96-97.

164

Mar Thoma II to Dewan, 28 September 1921, Ibid., p.122.

165

Francis to Dewan, 30 September 1921, Ibid., p.131.

166

Daniel to Dewan, 30 September 1921, Ibid., p.133.

167

John to Dewan, 3 October 1921, Ibid., pp.135-36.

- 168 RPT, V, pp.59-184.
- 169 TAR (1921-22), p.40.
- 170 Kerala Chandrika, 17 October 1921, CS, 642/1921.
- 171 Malayali, 27 August 1921, CS, 643/1921.
- 172 TLCP, 9 November 1921, pp.20-21.
- 173 Dir. of Pub. Instruction to Ch. Sec., 24 September 1921, Important Papers, p.105.
- 174 Krishna Aiyar to Dewan, 12 October 1921, Ibid.
- 175 Mohan, op.cit., pp.78-79; Freedom Movement, p.112.
- 176 TLCP, 9 November 1921, pp.3-4.
- 177 Dewan to Palace Sarvadhikariakar, 11 November 1921, CS, 569/1921.
- 178 MNNR (1921), p.1422.
- 179 A.K.Pillai appealed to the High Court which, in July 1923, annulled the Quilon Magistrate's order. TLR, XXXVIII, pp.237-40, and XXXIX, pp.158-62.
- 180 Mohan, op.cit., App.XVI, pp.151-55.
- 181 SMPAP, XVIII, pp.16, 98-99, and 187-95.
- 182 Ibid., pp.145-46. The government did not relent and 23 students were tried by the Trivandrum Magistrates' Court. Four were acquitted and the rest sentenced to a fine, in default of which they were to serve a month and a half in prison. The accused were defended by Velu Pillai and three nationalist Nairs - A.K.Pillai, V.Achutha Menon, and K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai. Important Papers, pp.237-57.
- 183 Raman Pillai to Dewan, 19 February 1922, and Memorial, 28 February 1922, Important Papers, pp.234-36
- 184 SMPAP, XVIII, pp.13-14.
- 185 RPT, V, pp.326-27.
- 186 These figures are estimates calculated from the List of Officers given in TAD (1919), pp.778-85, and (1923), pp.501-10.
- 187 Among the more notable were A.K.Pillai, K.G.Sankar, C.Kuttan Nair, Kochikal P. Balakrishnan Tampi, E.V.Krishna Pillai, T.K.Narayana Pillai, K.Kesevan Potty and P.I.Simon.

Chapter VII

1922-32: Communalism and Nationalism

Developments in British India, the students' strike and other agitations, encouraged public interest in politics. In the first elections for the reformed Legislative Council in May 1922, only six of the 28 constituencies were uncontested. The poll was 64.4 per cent - high by Indian standards.¹ Voting followed communal lines. For example, in the central constituency of Tiruvalla E.J. John relied on his popularity among Christians and on the considerable local influence of his landowning family, while his successful opponent, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai had the support of the Nair Service Society (of which he was the President) and its local organisation, mobilised by its General Secretary, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai. Tiruvalla's narrow caste-Hindu voting majority asserted itself², with a 77 per cent turn out, including many conservative women voting for the first time.

A similar pattern was seen elsewhere in central and southern Travancore. Among those returned were notable Nairs such as Kalkulam landlord T. Kumara Pillai and the lawyers P. K. Narayana Pillai, K. P. Raman Pillai, G. Parameswaran Pillai and T. K. Velu Pillai. In the north of the state, however, six of the eight constituencies elected Syrian Christians. Several of them had close ties with the Syrian churches, and the clergy played an influential role in the elections. For instance, John Nidhiry was a leading figure in the Malabar Catholic Congress, and his opponent, K. I. Joseph, a political maverick who was one of the few Christians sympathetic to the Indian National Congress, filed a petition alleging interference by priests.³ C. J. Kurien, the only Jacobite elected, was returned by the Jacobite centre of Kottayam, and was a lay trustee of the Jacobite Church. Outside northern Travancore, a Christian won only in Agastiswaram, in the extreme south, where the Protestant lawyer, Paul Daniel, defeated a Vellala opponent. The constituency was one with a large number of Protestant voters.

Overall, Nairs captured twelve of the 23 general seats; the Christians seven. The remaining four went to caste-Hindus: a non-Malayala Brahman (the Travancore Mahasabha activist S. Krishna Aiyar), an Ambalavasi (M. R. Madhava Warriar of the Malayali), and two Vellalas. The only Ezhava standing lost⁴, and Trivandrum merchant S. Adam Sait was the only Muslim to be elected. He represented a commerce constituency. However, the Muslim civic rights campaigner, M. K. Khadir Pillai, was among those nominated to the Council by the government -

as was N.Kumaran, the General Secretary of the SNDP Yogam.

The tendency for political preferences to be determined by communal allegiances was not limited to Council elections. It also applied to local politics. The composition of the nineteen municipal councils in the state closely reflected the electoral strength of the particular communities.⁵ In 1922 Nairs formed a majority of the elected councillors in Mavelikara in central Travancore, and in six southern councils - including Trivandrum. Of the five of these with elected presidents, four - Padmanabhapuram, Neyyattinkara, Haripad and Kuzhithura - chose Nairs, and the remaining one - Mavelikara - a Kshatriya. Similarly, of the three town councils with a Christian majority, two - Tiruvalla and Kottayam - had Christian presidents, while the third - Alwaye - was headed by a Muslim (Khadir Pillai). In the remaining nine councils, there were Nair presidents in the four with a Nair plurality - Quilon, Kayankulam, Vaikom and Parur; a Christian president in Changanacherry, where the number of Nair and Christian councillors was equal; and Tamil caste-Hindu presidents in Nagercoil and Shencottah with their largely Tamil-speaking populations.⁶ Many of the non-official MLCs had been active in municipal politics before they entered the legislature. For instance, G.Parameswaran Pillai was a Trivandrum councillor, and four other MLCs, including C.J.Kurien and Khadir Pillai, presided over municipal councils.

Considered from an occupational standpoint, the elections for the reformed legislature confirmed the prominent role played by lawyers in the politics of the state. Twelve of the 23 members returned by the general constituencies were practising vakils, and about a third of the rural seats were represented by High Court lawyers practising in Trivandrum and the divisional towns of Quilon and Kottayam. As elsewhere in India, members of the legal profession found themselves well-suited to represent local interests within the new political structures borrowed from the West. Apart from the Council members who were lawyers, there were others whose occupation also enabled them to play a mediatory role. They included two newspaper proprietors, an editor, a Catholic priest and a celebrated homeopathic doctor. The remaining elected non-officials were wealthy landlords.

The proportion of educated professionals was significantly higher among the Nair members; while nine of the twelve held degree qualifications - seven of them in law - only two of the six Syrian Christians did so. This was a trend that persisted through the 1920s.

Over two-thirds of the Nairs elected between 1922 and 1931 had degrees,

as compared to just over half the Christians. While Nair members were more often lawyers, doctors or educationalists, many of their Christian counterparts were landowners.⁷

The contrast can partly be explained by the fact that Nairs were, on the whole, better educated than Syrian Catholics, the largest of the Christian denominations, and the one to which the majority of Christian legislators belonged. Furthermore, the degree and type of political activism in the respective communities also contributed to the difference in educational backgrounds. Nairs were found in greater numbers in Trivandrum and the other towns where organised political activity was concentrated. With their history of political pre-eminence, they took the lead in forming associations, holding public meetings and engaging in press campaigns. These activities tended to bring educated professionals to the fore. After the success of the civic rights agitation, Christians, influenced by the consideration shown by successive administrations in the 1920s, were politically more quiescent. However, this changed with the Abstention movement in the early 1930s, when the burden of leadership in the community once again shifted to those more adept at agitational politics. Consequently, by 1937 there was no marked disparity in the high proportion of graduates among both Nair and Christian legislators.⁸ Thus the legislature reflected the changing composition of Travancore's political elite.

The debates in the Council's first session, in July-August 1922, clearly showed the principal motivating factors in the behaviour of members. The first important subject to be discussed was the Kallar hydro-electric scheme.⁹ This involved granting a forty year lease to a British company to allow it to proceed with a plan that meant the diversion of water from Kallar, a tributary of the River Periyar in northern Travancore, to the Madura District of Madras Province. Nair members were unanimous in their opposition to the scheme, which was attacked as being detrimental to the interests of the state. Voting on a resolution proposed by G. Parameswaran Pillai - for an independent committee of experts to study the scheme - showed that communal considerations dictated support or opposition for Dewan Raghaviah's administration. While the elected caste-Hindus voted en bloc for the resolution, seven of the nine Christians joined the official members in voting against. Consequently it was defeated by seven votes

The attitude of the Christian MLCs was often to prove crucial

for both Raghaviah and his successor, Watts. In addition to the official bloc of fifteen members and the votes of seven nominated members, the Dewan needed the support of at least four elected non-officials to muster a bare majority in the 50-seat Council. These votes were usually provided by the Christians. The only instance of Christian and Nair non-officials joining forces to defeat the administration, was in a vote for the abolition of income-tax inspectors¹⁰: the introduction of income-tax in 1921 was a measure that was highly unpopular among the wealthier Travancoreans, irrespective of community.

During the 1922 Council session, communal differences were brought into the open by a motion introduced by K.C.Mammen Mappillai.¹¹ The motion initiated a debate on the representation of the various communities in the public service. The introduction of communal claims was vigorously denounced by Nair and Brahman members, one of whom (S.Krishna Aiyar) accused Mappillai of throwing 'the apple of discord into the Council'. Christian members such as John Nidhiry disagreed, claiming that the motion only sought to draw attention to the principle of due representation of all communities.

It was inevitable that the question of communal representation in the public service should frequently be debated in the Legislative Council and the Popular Assembly, since members of both bodies saw their primary function as that of representing their communities. At the Popular Assembly session in 1923, the Ezhava social reformer Kumaran Asan demanded separate seats and electorates for his community.¹² A similar request was made on behalf of Muslims by the Alleppey merchant and supporter of the civic rights movement, K.A.Pitcha Bava Sahib.¹³ While Nair politicians strongly opposed such appeals, they were not averse to making communally-motivated representations. For instance, at the Assembly session a Nair member criticised an existing Christian missionary institution while pressing for a government-sponsored English-medium girls' high school in Quilon.¹⁴ Again, in November 1923, all the non-official caste-Hindu Council members supported a resolution to prohibit cow-slaughter.¹⁵ It was defeated by a single vote.

As we have seen, Nairs were, from the outset, hostile to Dewan Raghaviah, taking advantage of every possible opportunity to embarrass an administration they regarded as anti-Nair. In June 1923 the non-official members resigned from a committee, to which they had been elected by the Legislative Council, to revise the rules for the Popular Assembly; they argued that the government had disregarded their

criticisms in drafting the new rules.¹⁶ While the changes proposed by the Dewan increased the number of elected members from 77 to 85, and the Assembly's term from one to three years¹⁷, they did not meet any of the more significant demands made by the non-official committee members. In a memorandum that borrowed features from both the Montagu-Chelmsford Report and the Representative Assembly Act that had just been introduced in Mysore, the non-officials had proposed that the government's annual legislative programme should be placed before the Assembly and freely discussed and voted on.¹⁸ Furthermore, they wanted the Assembly to be allowed to discuss the budget, and for any resolution passed by both the Assembly and the Council to be made binding on the government.

On 21 July 1923 a meeting to protest against the new draft rules was held at the LMS Hall in Trivandrum, with P.K.Kesava Pillai, the ex-MLC, in the chair.¹⁹ The Nair press strongly supported the stand taken by the opponents of the new Assembly rules. An editorial in the Samadarsi called on the people to throw out the rules and demand the establishment of responsible government. Writing in the same paper, Kuruvila Mathew²⁰, a young Christian Congressman, charged that the Dewan was a 'Black Resident'.²¹ The Malayali of Quilon suggested that the Paramount Power had interfered in the rules controversy.

In November G.Parameswaran Pillai repeated proposals made in the non-official Assembly rules memorandum in an amendment to a resolution proposed in the Legislative Council.²² The ensuing debate revealed the continuing lack of consensus, even among caste-Hindu members, on the details of any reform of the Popular Assembly. Nevertheless, the public criticism persuaded the government to drop its own proposed changes to the rules.

Following this success, the Nair campaign against the Raghaviah administration did not relent. At the March 1924 Popular Assembly session the Dewan had to reply to charges of showing favour towards members of his own Brahman caste.²³ Raghaviah was also addressed during the session on making the Assembly an effective second chamber. Two nationalists of advanced views, who often found themselves odd-men-out in their own communities - G.Raman Menon and Kayalackakom Joseph Thomas - even ventured to call for a system of cabinet government.²⁴

Later in the month the government had to face a more formidable challenge from Indian nationalism. On 30 March the Vaikom satyagraha was inaugurated, marking the start of a twenty month struggle that attracted all-India attention through the involvement of Gandhi and

the Indian National Congress. The satyagraha further alienated the administration from non-Brahman Hindu opinion, with the Dewan put in the unenviable position of a foreign Brahman opposing demands for progressive religious reform. Already on the defensive against attacks by the south Travancorean Nair establishment, Raghaviah now incurred the active hostility of the pro-reform Nair Service Society. He also became unpopular with the NSS's Ezhava allies led by T.K. Madhavan.

Another event that discredited the administration was the Van Ross Case. This involved the Excise Commissioner, A.J. Van Ross, a Eurasian whom Raghaviah had confirmed as the successor to the southern Nair, N. Raman Pillai. In July 1924 a Trivandrum Malayala Brahman was sentenced to three months imprisonment for offering a bribe to Van Ross.²⁵ The case caused quite a furore with the government engaging the former MLC, Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai, as special prosecutor. His courtroom adversary was Malloor Govinda Pillai, who, along with G. Parameswaran Pillai, had assumed the leadership of the southern Travancorean Nair opposition to the Dewan following P.K. Kesava Pillai's death.

The Jenmabhoomi (Native-born), a Trivandrum weekly, made virulent attacks on Van Ross. In an editorial after the July judgement, it described him as illiterate and a 'human worm', and even impugned the chastity of his wife.²⁶ Though the government was challenged on the issue in the Legislative Council, no case for defamation was brought against the paper. Its editor, K.G. Nair, a wealthy young Nair Congressman from Shertallai, was, however, imprisoned in connection with the Vaikom satyagraha.²⁷

At this critical juncture in the affairs of the state, Sri Mulam Tirunal, the 66 year-old Maharaja who had reigned since 1885, died on 7 August 1924.²⁸ He was succeeded by his great-grandnephew, Bala Rama Varma. As the new Maharaja was just twelve, his aunt, Setu Lakshmi Bai, the Senior Rani, became Maharani Regent, The situation was ideal for palace intrigue, an art at which the southern Travancorean Nair aristocracy had, in the past, proved adept. However, on this occasion they found themselves stymied by circumstances.

The Maharani Regent's Kshatriya consort, the Valia Koil Tampuran, was unpopular with Nairs, and Dewan Raghaviah successfully sought his favour. The Dewan feared that the British Agent, C.W.E. Cotton, was unwilling to recommend the extension of his term. Cotton, therefore, suspected the Valia Koil Tampuran of being behind a series of articles in the Hindustan Times of Delhi, that alleged that he was interfering

in the affairs of the state and recommended the extension of Raghaviah's term.²⁹ In his account of the background of the affair, the paper's Nair editor, K.M.Panikkar, claimed that prominent Nairs, such as Trivandrum lawyer A.Narayana Pillai, wrote to him saying that Cotton was a friend of the Nairs, and attacks on him could only harm the community.³⁰ He adds that Nair officials friendly to Cotton, influenced his uncle to suggest to Panikkar that he should abandon journalism and return home to manage the affairs of his taravad. Cotton eventually got the Maharani Regent to reprimand Panikkar and, in an attempt to limit his interference, the Vail Koil Tampuran was put in charge of his wife's household estates at Attingal.³¹

Meanwhile, the Nair opposition to Raghaviah continued its campaign to oust him. In September 1924 the Legislative Council passed a motion critical of the Brahman predominance in the Education Department.³² Six months later, 80 of the 100 members of the Popular Assembly walked out over the government's refusal to review a reduction in their travelling allowances.³³ On both occasions the Nairs were able to gain Ezhava and Christian support as the feeling grew that Raghaviah's days as Dewan were numbered. In the forefront of the Nair press campaign against him was the People, a Trivandrum weekly edited by G.Parameswaran Pillai. In a series of editorials in December 1924 the paper praised Cotton, condemned the articles in the Hindustan Times, and demanded Raghaviah's immediate departure.³⁴

Speculation about who would succeed Raghaviah was rife from late 1924. In March 1925 it was ended with the appointment of Maurice Watts,³⁵ an Anglo-Indian Catholic whose family had been settled in Travancore for four generations. Watts' father had served as the state's Chief Secretary until his death in 1895, and his sister, Miss D.H.Watts, was the Principal of the Maharaja's College for Women in Trivandrum. As the Maharani Regent's old tutor, Miss Watts was thought to have been instrumental in the appointment of her brother.³⁶ Watts had not lived in Travancore for more than thirty years, and since retiring from the Finance Department of the Government of India in 1920, had become a barrister in England.

The appointment of the first non-Hindu Dewan since Colonel Munro in 1811, was, at first, widely ill-received. Nairs had hoped that R.Krishna Pillai, the Chief Secretary, would be chosen, while Christian opinion had favoured either K.Chandy, the Revenue Commissioner of Mysore, or K.Matthan, the Chief Secretary of Mysore, both Anglican Syrians.³⁷ All the Hindu papers, with the sole exception of the Service,

the organ of the Nair Service Society, followed the lead of the People in denouncing the appointment. G.Parameswaran Pillai and another editor belonging to the southern Nair anti-Raghaviah clique, even sent a telegram to the Viceroy appealing that the rumoured appointment be averted.³⁸ NSS President Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai was one of the few caste-Hindus to back Watts' appointment.³⁹

When it became clear that only a Nair Dewan would meet with the general approval of Nairs, Christian opinion swung strongly behind Watts.⁴⁰ Initially, the only Christian papers to welcome his appointment had been C.J.Kurien's Western Star and the Standard of A.Hoogewerf, a nominated MLC who, like Watts, was a Eurasian Catholic. Then other papers, such as the Trivandrum English weekly, the Malabar Advocate, joined in, concentrating on the fact that the Hindu monopoly on the Dewanship had been broken.⁴¹

The Nairs had an important ally in their campaign against the Maharani Regent's choice - Setu Parvathi Bai, her younger cousin and the mother of the young Maharaja. The two Maharanis were very different in character. Lakshmi Bai was gentle, cultured, of a retiring disposition and held in high esteem by the general public.⁴² Parvathi Bai, in contrast, had a reputation for moral laxity and was described by one British Agent as 'arrogant, uncharitable, egotistical, bad-tempered, insular and vindictive'.⁴³ The latter harboured strong hostility towards the Vail Koil Tampuran whom she saw as a threat to her son.⁴⁴ In mid-March 1925 she wrote to Cotton protesting against the planned appointment of Watts as a 'violent departure' from long established usage.⁴⁵ Instead she proposed a Council of Regency of the Maharani Regent, herself and one experienced officer, preferably a non-Travancorean. This was not accepted by the Agent and in April a memorandum making the same points was submitted to the Viceroy on behalf of the Junior Maharani by the Raja of Kollengode, a prominent Malabar landlord and former member of the Madras Executive Council, who was the son-in-law of a Nair ex-Chief Justice of Travancore.⁴⁶ Another of the Junior Maharani's advisors was Sir P.Rajagopalachari, now a member of the Council of India. Though it was over a decade since he had left Travancore, the former Dewan maintained close ties with the Trivandrum Nairs. In May the Government of India overrode the arguments of the Junior Maharani and her supporters and approved the selection of Watts. At the same time, religious objections made to a non-Hindu Dewan were circumvented by the appointment of R.Krishna Pillai, the Nair candidate for Dewan, as Devaswom Commissioner with direct access

to the Maharani Regent.⁴⁷

The first three years of the Regency administration were marked by a degree of communal acrimony in public affairs that was unsurpassed until the height of the Abstention movement in the mid-1930s.

Nair and Christian leaders seemed to exist in mutually exclusive spheres. For the first time in a century, Christians held some of the highest positions in the administration; this apparent preference shown to their archrivals was resented by the elite Nair office-holding and professional class. The success of Christian entrepreneurs, at a time when the Travancorean economy was expanding faster than at any point in the previous 50 years, also contributed to a sense of unease on the part of Nairs, still preponderantly an agricultural caste.

This was particularly the case since the increasing prosperity of Christians coincided with the partition and subdivision of Nair family property following the 1925 Nair Regulation.

A series of appointments made in the initial eighteen months of the Regency administration gave the impression of a Christian takeover. Nairs felt that the Valia Koil Tampuran was responsible, but this is impossible to ascertain. What can be said is that the appointments made were unusual. In September 1924 Mrs Mary Poonen Lukose, the Anglican Syrian head of Trivandrum's Women's and Children's Hospital, was appointed Acting Darbar Physician and head of the Medical Service. At 34 she was considerably junior, both in age and experience, to a Nair officer, Dr K.Raman Tampi.⁴⁸ Tampi belonged to the southern Nair family that had produced the famous eighteenth century Dewan, Raja Kesava Das. He was also the Secretary of the National Club⁴⁹, the social centre for the Nair elite of Trivandrum. In the Legislative Council a fellow member of the Club, Dr M.N.Pillai, described the choice of Mrs Lukose as 'an insult offered to the manhood of the state'.⁵⁰

The appointment of Mrs Lukose was followed seven months later by that of C.K.Mathan, a Marthomite Sessions Judge, as the first native Christian Dewan Peishkar (chief divisional revenue officer) in Travancore.⁵¹ Then came the appointments of E.J.John as Principal of the Law College, and of another Christian as Director of Registration. The most furious controversy was provoked by the promotion, in November 1925, of K.George, the Anglican Syrian Financial Secretary, and the brother of K.Matthan of the Mysore service, to the powerful post of Chief Secretary. Nairs questioned why he should have superseded Madichal R.Krishna Pillai, the new Dewan Peishkar of Kottayam, and Dr N.Kunjan Pillai, the Director of Agriculture, both George's seniors

in terms of length of service.

The administration's appointments policy did not benefit members of the various Christian denominations equally. The less numerous, but better educated non-Catholic Syrians, who already held many senior positions were best placed to take advantage of official favour. Moreover, the new Christian heads of department were not free of sectarian bias. For instance, Cotton wrote that Chief Secretary George represented 'communalism in its extreme form, being anxious to confine patronage to Christians of his own particular denomination only'.⁵²

Sectarian differences were also apparent in the Legislative Council and Popular Assembly. In 1925 Catholic members of both bodies presented a memorial to the Maharani Regent requesting that they be treated as a separate community in determining appointments policy.⁵³ The government agreed that various Christian denominations should be classified separately in the newly instituted quarterly returns of appointments made by departmental heads.⁵⁴ In February 1925 Thariathu Kunjithomman, a Syrian Catholic who had been a member of the 1920 civic rights deputation, introduced a resolution in the Council recommending that qualified candidates from communities underrepresented in a particular department be given preference in appointments to that department. Re-introduced in the second Council, the resolution was forced to a vote by Congressman A.K.Pillai, one of the strongest Nair critics of the principle of communal representation.⁵⁵ In the division, in April 1927, it was easily defeated, with most of the caste-Hindu members joining the official bloc in opposing it. Significantly, while all the Catholics voted for the measure, the five non-Catholic Christians stayed neutral. Again, at the Popular Assembly sessions from 1927-29, while Catholic members were prominent in raising the subject of communal representation, the Jacobite banker K.C.Eapen was notable for consistently decrying the emphasis on community.⁵⁶ The divergence in attitude demonstrated the division on the issue between Catholics and non-Catholics.

The storm over the increasing Christian influence caused the first serious press prosecution to be undertaken in Travancore, and also led to the promulgation of a controversial Newspaper Regulation. Early in January 1926 K.G.Nair, the editor of the Jenmabhoomi, was arrested. This followed the paper's publication of a series of scurrilous attacks on the Valia Koil Tampuran and the Christian community. An article in September 1925 likened Christians to worms and, referring to their commercial enterprise, added: 'if you trust them they

will kill you with Banks and chitties. If you incur their displeasure they will send you to jail with the counterfeit notes.'⁵⁷

In November a leader on the appointments of K.George and Mrs Lukose accused the Valia Koil Tampuran of taking bribes and commented: 'Rumour goes that, for all offices the Valia Koil Tampuran wants only Syrian Christian ladies....and gentlemen!'⁵⁸ Referring to Mrs Lukose's appointment to a new Administrative Board to run the Medical Service, it asked: 'Why is it that Mrs Lukose is held so close? Who is holding her so firmly?' The government contemplated prosecuting the Jenmabhoomi for this article, but eventually decided to do so over an issue published a week later. In it Christian priests were charged with promiscuous immorality and Hindus were called upon to put down what was described as 'this hellish and fearful Christian commotion...'⁵⁹

In February K.G.Nair was convicted of an offense under the provisions of the 1918 amendment to the Penal Code relating to the promotion of communal hatred. He was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment and a Rs.250 fine.⁶⁰ Though the Jenmabhoomi was not one of the leading Nair papers, there was considerable sympathy for the views it expressed, certainly among Trivandrum Nairs. This was shown by the fact that two prominent political activists - A.Narayana Pillai and Pattom Thanu Pillai - represented Nair in an appeal in the High Court. Narayana Pillai argued that the offending newspaper article was only a bona fide statement of Nair grievances.

At the same time as the prosecution of Nair, the government, in an attempt to appear more even-handed, also brought a case against a Syrian Catholic journalist, M.M.Varkey. Varkey was the editor of the Keraladasan (Servant of Kerala), another Trivandrum weekly, which in November 1925 had published articles welcoming the appointment of K.George, and advocating preferment of Catholics in the public service.⁶¹ In doing so the paper had violently attacked the Nairs. The government withdrew the case against Varkey in July 1926 after he had tendered an apology and made a plea for consideration in open court.⁶²

The controversy in the press was only one aspect of the embittered relations between Nairs and Christians. Towards the end of 1925 a special conference of the Civic Rights League was held in Kottayam. During the conference a Kottayam lawyer, O.M.Thomas, made a vehement speech attacking the Nair monopoly of the military.⁶³

However, several leading figures in the Civic Rights League, most notably K.C.Mammen Mappillai, shunned the meeting and it was criticised

as unrepresentative by Mappillai's Malayala Manorama. According to Thomas, the apparent division in Christian opinion was caused purely by Mappillai's unhappiness at not being able to stage-manage proceedings. In any case, this was the last meeting of the League which had been moribund ever since the attainment of Devaswom separation.

On the Nair side, the Christian ascendancy caused a closing of ranks. The man who played a leading role in bringing this about was Malloor K. Govinda Pillai.⁶⁴ He became President of the Travancore Nair Mahasabha, formed out of the merger of the rival conservative and reformist Nair samajams. The new body organised Nair conferences in various parts of the state. Malloor was also Vice President of a Keraliya Hindu Sabha that was formed in reaction to the growing communal conflict.⁶⁵

The strength of Nair feeling about the administration's appointments policy was shown during the 1926 Popular Assembly session. For the first time, Nair members took the lead in complaining about unfair treatment.⁶⁶ They alleged that a 'process of Christianisation' was taking place. One member even suggested a talukwar segregation of communities as the only solution. Responding to the attacks, Dewan Watts denied sacrificing Nairs on 'some altar of base prejudice', and described their representations as an exercise in self-pity. Christian members also rejected the Nairs' assertions and some did little to hide their satisfaction at the reversal of roles.⁶⁷

In April 1926 there was a renewed attempt to get the Government of India to appoint a Council of Regency, as had been demanded by the Junior Maharani. Signatures were canvassed for a memorial, the organisers of which were mainly southern Nairs.⁶⁸ They included A. Narayana Pillai and two MLCs - Dr M.N. Pillai and K.P. Nilakanta Pillai. Nilakanta Pillai⁶⁹, the youngest member of the second Council, was a lawyer belonging to an influential Nair taravad. He achieved prominence as one of the leaders of the agitation for the repeal of the Newspaper Regulation promulgated on 22 May 1926.

The press in Travancore had, hitherto, been operating under few restrictions. The 1903⁷⁰ and 1917 press laws⁷¹ were non-controversial regulatory measures. Now the Jenmabhoomi's attacks on the Valia Koil Tampuran moved the administration towards preparing a new Newspaper Regulation. In December 1925 Dewan Watts wrote to Cotton about the need for such a measure.⁷² Five months later the Regulation was passed by the Maharani Regent without reference to the Legislative Council.

Under the provisions of the new law⁷³, based on the Indian Press

Act of 1910, all newspapers in the state had to have a licence for which a fee of up to Rs.500 could be charged. The government could, without warning, cancel the licence and declare the fee forfeit on a variety of grounds. These were: exciting disaffection, or bringing into hatred, or contempt, the Ruler, Ruling Family and Government of Travancore, or the King-Emperor and Government of India; promoting communal hatred; and habitually disseminating false information. Under the Regulation only the Dewan could authorise prosecutions, and appeals against the cancellation of a licence could be referred to the High Court.

The Regulation was obviously aimed at gagging the more intemperate Nair papers, and Nair leaders regarded it as inspired by the Valia Koil Tampuran and his palace clique. The latter had replaced the favourites of the late Maharaja, most notably the notorious Sankaran Tampi. Many of the Koil Tampuran's associates belonged to a small society known as the Setalmond Children's Guild. The Guild, named after the Setalmond Palace in Trivandrum, was highly influential during the Regency period, particularly among government officials. It published its own monthly newspaper, the Microcosm, which claimed to represent the Koil Tampurans (Travancore's Kshatriyas) and had a limited circulation among Guild members and their friends.⁷⁴ Significantly, Microcosm was the only Hindu newspaper to support the Newspaper Regulation.⁷⁵

The enactment of the Regulation sparked off the most serious agitation in Travancore since the 1921 students strike. On 29 May a protest meeting of about a 1000 people was held at the Thampanoor Hall in Trivandrum.⁷⁶ The meeting was chaired by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, and among those who played a prominent part in the proceedings were several other Nair MLCs. A resolution was passed calling for the immediate repeal of the press law. It was also resolved that the Legislative Council should delay sanctioning the budget until the grievance was redressed, and that Council members would resign if they failed in their attempt. A committee was appointed to implement the resolutions and carry out propaganda. Headed by P.K.Narayana Pillai, it included A.K.Pillai, Pattom Thanu Pillai, V.Achutha Menon and A.Balakrishna Pillai, the editor of the Samadarsi. A.K.Pillai and others of the young nationalist party also had a resolution passed calling for an agitation for responsible government.

As with the students' strike and the campaign against the 1919 Council Regulation, Christians stood aloof from the protest.

The circumstances in which the Newspaper Regulation was passed probably made this inevitable, but at the Thampanoor meeting the Nair politicians certainly did little to play down the communal aspect. Malloor K. Govinda Pillai hinted that the Regulation had been passed with a view to crushing the Nair community. Even the moderate Changanacherry answered attacks on the Nair predominance in agitations by saying that they were peculiarly fitted for such activities by their political traditions and training, education and influence. He felt that they had to take a lead on behalf of the other communities who were only beginning to be imbued with the political spirit. It was this seemingly patronising attitude that had caused E.J. John to split the Mahajana Sabha eight years earlier.

Nevertheless, despite the general lack of sympathy among Christians, the agitation against the Regulation gathered strength. Meetings were held in many of the larger centres of the state in early June, and 24 Hindu newspapers were represented at a conference of journalists in Trivandrum.⁷⁷ On 23 June a second public meeting was held in the capital, this time under the presidency of M.V. Ittycheria. Again the meeting called for the immediate repeal of the press law and the introduction of responsible government.⁷⁸

Under the May Regulation existing newspapers had been given a month to obtain new licences. Of the 113 papers that applied most were only asked to pay nominal fees of Rs.5 or Rs.25.⁷⁹ Significantly, five of the six papers that were asked to pay the maximum fee of Rs.500 were caste-Hindu organs. They included the Subhashini, the Samadarsi and the People. The only Christian paper from which the maximum fee was exacted was the pro-nationalist Paura Prabha (Light of the Citizen) of Kottayam. Fees of Rs.150 were demanded from seven papers including the Malayali and the Keraladasan (renamed Dasan). Two Quilon weeklies opposed to the administration - the Sreevazhumcode and the Veerakeralan had to close after being asked to pay the maximum fee. Several others, like A.K. Pillai's Swarat, also decided to cease publication. The Subhashini, however, paid the fee and was renamed Navasakti (New Strength), while the People continued publishing only by moving to the British enclave of Tangasseri, with A. Narayana Pillai as its new editor.⁸⁰ K.G. Nair's Jenmabhoomi had already become defunct with its editor's imprisonment. Thus the Regulation's desired effect was achieved, with the administration's most intemperate critics either silenced or forced to tone down their attacks.

The absence of Watts, on leave in England, meant that the Devaswom

Commissioner, R.Krishna Pillai, became Acting Dewan. Just as during the 1921 students' strike, he had a calming influence on the situation.⁸¹ When the Navasakti published a leading article severely criticising Watts, both the Chief Secretary, K.George, and the Brahman Head Sirkar Vakil, V.S.Subramonia Aiyar, wanted the paper's licence to be cancelled without warning.⁸² However, Krishna Pillai demurred at using the new Regulation to punish what was only a personal attack on the Dewan.⁸³ As a result P.K.Govinda Pillai, the publisher of the Navasakti, was let off with a warning.⁸⁴

Opposition to the Regulation in the Legislative Council was led by K.P.Nilakanta Pillai who, on 13 August 1926, introduced a motion recommending its repeal. This followed a boycott of Council proceedings by Nair members protesting against the Dewan's initial refusal to allow a debate on the issue.⁸⁵ In the division on the motion the twelve Nairs were joined only by a solitary Christian and the Vellala Congressman M.Sivathanu Pillai. Consequently, they were outvoted by the official bloc of fifteen supported by nine Christians and six members who were either nominated or represented special interests.⁸⁶ None of the Nair MLCs adhered to the Thampanoor resolution that had called on them to resign if they failed in their attempt to get the press law repealed.

Immediately after the Council session, a two-day political conference attended by over a thousand people took place in Trivandrum. It was presided over by the Kalkulam MLC T.Kumara Pillai who, in an obvious reference to the Christian press, regretted that some people in the state were 'standing aloof from their sorrows and proclaiming vociferously that the Newspaper Regulation is a blessing'. He also strongly supported the proposal to form an All-Travancore Political Association to campaign for the establishment of responsible government. Such an association had already been mooted in a new Trivandrum Congress weekly, the Mahatma.⁸⁷ It was now embodied in a resolution passed by the conference.

However, another resolution authorising the Standing Committee of the Conference to memorialise the British authorities to give 'proper advice' to the Maharani Regent caused considerable controversy. It was unsuccessfully contested in the Conference's Subjects Committee and was moved in open conference by E.V.Krishna Pillai⁸⁸, a moderate Nair who was the editor of the Malayali. He was supported by M.V.Ittycheria, the Christian Chairman of the Reception Committee, and Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, the General Secretary of the NSS. The opposition to petitioning the British came from the young men of

the Congress camp led by A.K.Pillai. A compromise proposed by P.K.Narayana Pillai, the President of the Newspaper Regulation Repeal Committee, proved unacceptable and the resolution was defeated. In protest Ittycheria resigned from the various conference committees.⁸⁸ The only notable Christian to consistently seek to cooperate with Nairs in political activities, he had suffered a similar defeat in 1920 when the proposal to memorialise Lord Willingdon on the Council reform issue had been successfully opposed by nationalist Nairs.

The August conference was effectively the end of the agitation over the Newspaper Regulation. The new Political Association that it brought into being was dominated by A.Narayana Pillai and had its headquarters in the office of another Trivandrum lawyer, V.Achutha Menon.⁸⁹ Functioning in a desultory fashion until 1929, the Association had less than a hundred members and limited influence. In this respect it resembled its predecessors - the Mahajana Sabha and the Travancore Mahasabha. As long as politics was conducted mainly on the basis of communal loyalties, ostensibly secular organisations modelled on the National Congress could have no future. Unlike in British India, in a princely state there was no obvious external power to unite against and this was of especial importance in Travancore with its heterogenous population.

After the communal factor, what usually counted most in the rarefied atmosphere of intrigue in which politics was carried out was not ideology or principle, but personal ambition. This was demonstrated in the readiness of politicians to accept posts offered by the same administrations that they had so lately criticised.⁹⁰ For instance, Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai, who along with Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai had led the campaign for Council reform, became the Sirkar's special prosecutor in the Van Ross case following his defeat in the 1922 elections. Himself the editor of a Trivandrum English daily, in 1926, as Law Member, he defended the Newspaper Regulation in the Council. Kayalam's more senior compatriot, Changanacherry, had also sought the post of Law Member⁹¹, and eventually vacated his Council seat in June 1927 to become a High Court judge. G.Parameswaran Pillai, the leader of the opposition to the appointment of Dewan Watts, gave up his seat in July 1927 in order to accept Watts' offer of a sessions judgeship. Two years later, P.K.Narayana Pillai joined Changanacherry on the High Court bench.

In the latter half of 1926 Christian officials supporting the Regency administration, perhaps unsettled by the strength of the

agitation against the press law, were active in countering the opposition from Nairs. In September, Rao Sahib O.M.Chериан, the Inspector of Vernacular Schools, organised a memorial extolling the administration.⁹² Three months later, the Christian Dewan Peishkar of Quilon, C.K.Mathan, carried out inquiries in central Travancore regarding the authenticity of some of the signatures to the Nair memorial of April 1926 demanding a Council of Regency. His investigations in Chengannur and Pathnamthitta brought charges of coercion and terrorism from the local Nair MLC.⁹³ A petition on the matter was submitted to the Political Agent by several prominent southern Nairs, including A.Narayana Pillai.⁹⁴ However, after consulting the Dewan, Cotton refused to forward a subsequent memorial addressed to the Viceroy and presented by V.Achutha Menon.⁹⁵ Both representations were thought to have been engineered by Narayana Pillai.⁹⁶

During his first eighteen months as Dewan, Watts had faced constant opposition from the Nair politicians and press. However, in early 1927 this began to change. Rumours that he was to be replaced by K.Chandy, the Anglican Syrian Member of the Mysore Executive Council, were largely responsible. The Dewan was not getting on well with Chief Secretary George.⁹⁷ George, along with Mrs Mary Lukose of the Medical Service, and O.M.Chериан, formed a Syrian Christian triumvirate that wielded considerable influence.⁹⁸ Under these circumstances the Malayali of Quilon urged the retention of Watts, while more extreme Nair organs predicted communal riots and revolution if a Syrian Christian became Dewan.⁹⁹

The change in the Nair attitude towards Watts was shown near the end of the Brooke Bond controversy. The Dewan, while on leave in England in the summer of 1926, had suggested a scheme whereby smallholders in Travancore would benefit from the advantages of large-scale tea production. The scheme involved assigning a large tract of high land in central Travancore to the Brooke Bond Company for it to exploit in cooperation with the smallholders. In November 1926 the scheme was granted the tentative approval of the state's Economic Development Board, with the only opposition coming from Dr K.Madhavan Pillai, a Nair MLC who felt that Travancorean land should not be registered in the name of foreigners.¹⁰⁰ K.P.Nilakanta Pillai then raised the matter in the Legislative Council only to have the Dewan dismiss Madhavan Pillai's objection by asserting that British subjects were not foreigners.

At the February 1927 Popular Assembly session Nair members

representing the taluks of Pathnamthitta and Tiruvalla, both of which contained a number of wealthy Travancorean planters, criticised the scheme. An address presented by Assembly members advocated the cause of the local planters who had only entered the field in the last fifteen years and had experienced extreme difficulty in getting suitable land in the face of competition from powerful foreign companies. In late April, Nilakanta Pillai and three Nair MLCs from central Travancore again rigorously questioned the government on the issue.¹⁰¹ However, only days later, when Watts gave the impression of contemplating resignation, a deputation, including Nilakanta Pillai, Dr M.N. Pillai and A. Narayana Pillai, met the Dewan to assure him of their support in getting the Brooke Bond scheme through the Council.¹⁰²

Even more curious than the Nairs' volte-face was the attitude of the Syrian Christian politicians. Most of the local planters belonged to their community, but, apparently because of the Regency administration's close identification with the Christian ascendancy in official circles, Christian MLCs and Assemblymen were silent on the issue. This was true even of those with considerable planting interests, such as K.C. Mammen Mappillai. However, most of the other local planters were active in opposing the scheme. Memorials were presented by tax-payers in central Travancore, and in April 1927 an All-Travancore Conference held at Chengannur forwarded a resolution of protest to the government.¹⁰³ The wealthy Marthomite planter, P. John John, took the lead in organising an Indian Planters Association, the main plank of which was to agitate against the scheme.¹⁰⁴ The Association convened a conference in Kottayam at the end of May. In early June Brooke Bond withdrew from the scheme, giving the strength of local opposition as its main reason.¹⁰⁵

The latter half of 1927 saw a steady diminution of communal tensions and political controversy. The last two sessions of the second Council were far less acrimonious than those of 1926, and when the 1928 Popular Assembly met, the Dewan could express satisfaction at the tranquillity that prevailed in the state.¹⁰⁶ The fears of the Nair office-holding and professional class about Christian dominance in the administration had been assuaged by appointments such as that of Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and G. Parameswaran Pillai as judges, and of Madichal R. Krishna Pillai as Acting Land Revenue Commissioner.¹⁰⁷ The firm line taken by the Dewan towards the Valia Koil Tampuran's meddling in government had also reassured Nairs. Thus, through the skilful use of official patronage, Watts had removed the threat posed

by a combination of frustrated personal ambitions and long-standing communal jealousies.

The restraint imposed on the local press by the Newspaper Regulation also helped curb communal passions. Apart from acting as a break on the encouragement of inter-communal hostility, the Regulation reversed the uncontrolled proliferation of newspapers. In the seven years prior to 1926 the number of newspapers had almost tripled from 55 to 146; in 1926-7 the figure fell to 120.¹⁰⁸

The Council elections in May 1928 reflected the relaxation of communal tension ; a contrast to the situation in 1922 and 1925 when polling had taken place at a time when relations between Nairs and Christians were at a particularly low ebb. The 1928 elections were also unusual in a number of other respects. It was the first occasion when a majority (thirteen) of the 23 directly elected members were not graduates. In all, the number of non-official members who used Malayalam or Tamil in debates rose from just six to fifteen (out of 35). The number of sitting members returned was low - five as compared to nine in 1925 and 1931. Of those who had played a prominent part in the previous Council only K.P.Nilakanta Pillai and Thariathu Kunjithomman were returned. Many of the new members were wealthy landlords or entrepreneurs, and it was this group that figured largely in Travancore's first legislative party.

The People's Party that came into being during the first session of the third Council¹⁰⁹ marked a departure from the politics of communal conflict that had characterised the two previous Councils. A coalition of members from different communities, it was essentially a cross-communal party based on wealth. The leaders were the Nair K.G.Parameswaran Pillai and the Catholic Thariathu Kunjithomman. Parameswaran Pillai¹¹⁰, its whip, was a prominent Quilon Nair who had begun his career as a successful government contractor and now owned one of the leading publishing firms in the state. To coincide with his entry into politics, he had launched a newspaper, the Malayala Rajyam (Malayali Nation), with his younger brother, Congressman K.G.Sankar, as the editor.¹¹¹ In contrast, Kunjithomman¹¹², the People's Party's deputy leader, was a wealthy landlord and planter with long experience in politics. After representing his native taluk of Muvattupuzha in the Popular Assembly for twelve years until 1922, he had since sat in the Council. Another prominent member of the party was A.S.Damodaran Asan¹¹³, a Quilon Nair lawyer who was also a substantial landowner. Both Asan and Parameswaran Pillai were active in the Nair Service

Society; Asan was its president from 1929-31.

The formation of the People's Party, unlike that of previous political associations floated in Travancore, was apparently not prompted by any particular event or common purpose. The relaxation of communal tensions facilitated its emergence, but as far as more tangible factors are concerned, it is only possible to speculate. For instance, it is likely that the Valia Koil Tampuran's Setalmondian clique encouraged the party in order to embarrass Dewan Watts. The fact that L.R.Raja Raja Varma Koil Tampuran¹¹⁴, a wealthy Kshatriya businessman from Changanacherry, was a member lends support to this possibility since the Koil Tampurans were prominent in the Setalmondian circle. Furthermore, the leading Nair members of the new party were from central Travancore and did not belong to the southern service families who had been particularly hostile to the Maharani Regent's consort. However, any links with the palace must have been indirect since another member of the party was D.C.Joseph¹¹⁵ of the Travancore Times, a staunch supporter of Watts.

Though the new party was very loosely organised, and not infrequently one or two members voted against the majority, its existence had a definite impact on the Council's functioning. In debates and votes the non-official members were no longer divided along communal lines. The new bi-communalism showed itself in the first session in August 1928. For the first time since 1924 the government suffered two defeats when motions were passed recommending the abolition of Dewan Peishkarships and of the Administrative Board running the Medical Service.¹¹⁶ Christian and Nair members united in criticising these offices as wasteful and unnecessary. Four of the seven elected Christian members also joined their Nair colleagues in voting for a resolution recommending the repeal of the press law.¹¹⁷ It was only defeated by the votes of the nominated and special interest members who supported the official bloc.

Over the next two years even Thariathu Kunjithomman, hitherto the leading advocate of communal representation in the public service, forbore from pressing the controversial issue. It was a Nair member from Kottayam who, in August 1929, introduced a motion favouring appointments being made with due regard to a community's strength.¹¹⁸ He was supported by both Christian and Muslim members, as well as by other Nairs such as Damodaran Asan. However, by the end of 1930, with communal tensions once again on the rise, the truce on the issue had virtually broken down. In December A.C.Kuriakose¹¹⁹, a Catholic

teacher from Minachil and a former secretary of the Malabar Catholic Congress, proposed a resolution recommending the advertisement in the press of vacancies in the public service and preferential treatment for under-represented communities.¹²⁰ Though almost unanimously supported by Christian members, the resolution was defeated by a large margin; Nair members either voted against or abstained.

On economic questions on which there was a greater identity of interest, the People's Party was able to achieve a better consensus. In December 1928 a resolution introduced by Thariathu Kunjithomman opposing the sale of more than five acres of land to any foreigner was supported by most of the elected members.¹²¹ The support of nominated and special interest members was again crucial in enabling the government to defeat it. Significantly, an amendment proposing that legislation should also be enacted to prohibit the sale of land registered by Travancoreans to foreigners was voted down by a huge margin. As the proposer (a Vellala merchant) commented, this was because it was not in the interests of Kunjithomman and his supporters who wanted to profit from prospecting in land.

The operation of common class interests could also be seen in the Council's consideration of a bill aimed at realising adequate compensation for tenants who planted trees on rented land.¹²² Its sponsor was N.R.Krishnan, a nominated Ezhava member from Shertallai. As a lawyer and social worker, Krishnan¹²³ had first hand experience of the problems encountered by the impoverished Shertallai tenants, most of whom were Ezhavas. In the discussion of the bill he faced strong opposition from members of the People's Party, one of whom complained that it failed to mention the rights of the landlord. The bill's main supporters were P.S.Mahomed, the Alleppey lawyer who was now President of the Travancore Labour Association, and K.P.Nilakanta Pillai, always notable for his espousal of radical causes. It was eventually defeated by twelve votes, with the official bloc abstaining.

Outside the Council there was a revival of agitational politics in 1929, after two years of relative calm. The resurgence of Congress activity in British India, with the boycott of the Simon Commission and the demand for the immediate grant of Dominion status made at the Calcutta Congress, contributed to this development.

Actively encouraged by some British Indian politicians who felt that effective Indian self-government required constitutional advance in the princely states, Congressmen from the states founded the All-India

States' People's Conference at a meeting in Bombay in December 1927.¹²⁴ In 1928 the leading Travancorean Congressman, A.K.Pillai, travelled to England as an official representative of the AISPC.¹²⁵ On 14 February 1929 the first South Indian States' People's Conference was held in Trivandrum under the auspices of the Travancore Political Association.¹²⁶ Presided over by Sir M.Visvesvarayya, a former Dewan of Mysore, it was chaired by P.K.Narayana Pillai. The Conference resolved to fight for the establishment of responsible government and followed the Bombay meeting in agreeing to future federation with British India. Nair lawyers, many of whom had been active in the 1921 students' strike and the opposition to the press law, dominated the Conference. Like the old Political Association, the dominant figure in the eleven-man Working Committee that was formed to direct future activity, was A.Narayana Pillai.¹²⁷

It was as political activity was again picking up that the Dewan was replaced. After his first troubled eighteen months in office, Watts had gained the grudging acceptance of a wide spectrum of Travancorean opinion. However, his uneasy relations with the Valia Koil Tampuran and the Setalmondian clique had deteriorated when, in the course of 1927-28, a group of non-Malayala Brahman officials replaced the earlier Syrian Christian triumvirate of Palace favourites. In August 1928 Watts threatened to resign over the appointment of a new Director of Public Instruction.¹²⁸ The Maharani Regent wanted to appoint K.V.Rangaswami Aiyangar, the Brahman Principal of the Arts College. Apart from quarreling with Watts' sister, Aiyangar had also attracted the anger of the Syrian Christian community by making insulting remarks about the Jacobite Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius.¹²⁹ Despite this Watts' objection was ignored and Aiyangar became Director. The Dewan withdrew his resignation, although his sister did retire as Principal of the Womens' College.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, though Watts had backed down, the Maharani Regent resolved not to extend his term when it expired in June 1929. In January she suggested V.S.Subramonia Aiyar, now a High Court judge, as his successor.¹³¹ This was approved by the Government of India and Aiyar's appointment was announced in April. The new Dewan was the first native-born Brahman to occupy the office for thirty years. Prior to the appointment there had been appeals in the press and requests from some members of the legislature for the extension of Watts' term.¹³²

Criticism of the change at the top came from diverse quarters.

D.C.Joseph's Travancore Times described it as 'heartrending news', and

an insult to the Christian community in particular.¹³³ Two Nair papers, the Samadarsi and the Service, also joined in disapproving the choice.¹³⁴

Over the next two years several factors contributed to a resurgence in communal tensions. Nair dislike of the ascendancy of Brahman officials fueled a 'mini' anti-Brahman movement. This development was encouraged by the self-respect movement, spearheaded, in neighbouring Madras, by E.V.Ramaswami Naicker. In south Travancore a British-educated medical practitioner and Congress activist, Dr M.E. Naidu, formed a local Self-Respect League that drew most of its support from Ezhavas.¹³⁵

Relations between the Christians and the caste-Hindus were also worsening again. The economic depression meant that there was greater competition for jobs within the rapidly expanding class of educated Travancoreans. Even before the depression, in April 1928, an official committee that studied the problem of educated unemployment had drawn attention to its 'inevitable political repercussions' (i.e. the disaffection that it gave rise to).¹³⁶

Civil disobedience in British India and increased Congress activity in the state also played a part in the Hindu-Christian tension, just as it had in 1921. A CMS missionary at the Union College in Alwaye, which was attended by large numbers of caste-Hindus as well as Syrian Christians, reported considerable difficulty caused by 'the intense political feeling between Hindus and Christians'.¹³⁷ In Nagercoil, another missionary explained the extreme apprehension with which Protestants regarded nationalist demands: 'I think they do remember the slavery from which they rose, and they do want to wait until their position...is much more secure than at present'.¹³⁸

The new Peoples' Conference was active in organising public meetings. In November 1929 a meeting held in Quilon, presided over by the People's Party MLC A.S.Damodaran Asan, made a demand for responsible government.¹³⁹ A resolution was also passed for the Regency administration not to be extended beyond the young Maharaja's eighteenth birthday in November 1930. The meeting resolved to submit a memorial to the Viceroy incorporating both resolutions. The size of the gathering was disappointing for the organisers. In a town with a population of about 30,000 they were able to attract only about 150 people - mostly local Nair vakils and a few landlords. This was an indication of the low level of political activity in the state outside Trivandrum. As at the February meeting, those attending included several men with Congress connections, notably K.G.Sankar of the

Malayala Rajyam. Among the others present was the Ezhava lawyer C.Kesavan.

The participation of Kesavan in the Quilon meeting showed that the Nair-Ezhava entente that had existed since the Vaikom Satyagraha five years earlier, was still in existence. Its main support was drawn from Nairs and Ezhavas of central Travancore. Prominent among the Ezhavas were T.K.Madhavan, the Gandhian Organising Secretary of the SNDP Yogam and Kesavan's political mentor, and Kesavan's father-in-law, C.V.Kunjuraman, the Yogam's President. Among the Nairs it was the activists of the NSS who strongly backed cooperation with the Ezhavas. Notable were Damodaran Asan and K.G.Parameswaran Pillai, the People's Party leader who, in 1930, appointed Kunjuraman co-editor of his Malayala Rajyam newspaper.¹⁴⁰

At a public meeting organised by a new Reform League of Nairs and Ezhavas, in Shertallai in January 1930¹⁴¹, the NSS General Secretary, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, claimed that the Pattar (i.e. non-Malayala) Brahmans alone opposed the right of entry into temples of all Hindus, irrespective of caste.¹⁴² Mannathu favoured a satyagraha for temple entry, to be led by T.K.Madhavan, and said that the Pattar-supported government was a formidable barrier to progress. He added that it was better to die than to be the spectators of the enjoyment of key offices, like that of Dewan and Devaswom Commissioner, by a privileged minority. A few days later, at a conference of the self-respect movement held at Nagercoil, the Nair leader even suggested M.Govindan, a retired Ezhava District Judge and Yogam activist, for the Devaswom Commissionership, the only high office in the state reserved for caste-Hindus.¹⁴³ The post had fallen vacant following the death of the Brahman occupant.

The cry of Brahman domination was one calculated to gain wide support among Nairs. In the January session of the Legislative Council an adjournment motion was proposed by a southern Nair. It raised the issue of the Dewan's favouritism towards his own caste men.¹⁴⁴ Subramonia Aiyar, disputing this, disallowed the motion.

The Nair press maintained its initial hostility to the administration. In February a new Trivandrum English weekly, the Popular Herald, asserted that the Dewan's appointment policy was 'guided entirely by the likes and dislikes of Koil Tampuran'.¹⁴⁵ In June both the Prabodhakan (Announcer), another new Trivandrum weekly, and the NSS organ, Service, criticised official handling of the Suchindram satyagraha against the ban on non-caste-Hindus entering roads near

the temple.¹⁴⁶ The article in the Prabodhakan that attacked the local magistrate was the subject of a successful action brought by the government for contempt of court.¹⁴⁷ The paper's editor, A.Balakrishna Pillai, and the author of the article, A.Narayana Pillai, were fined by the High Court. Later articles in the paper continued to attack the administration, and in September 1930 the Prabodhakan became the first paper to have its licence cancelled under the 1926 Newspaper Regulation.¹⁴⁸

Disenchantment with the administration extended to Nair politicians who had earlier been won over by Watts with judicial appointments. For instance, High Court Judge Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai was asked to explain speeches that he had made while presiding over Nair conferences at Cochin and Chirayinkil in September.¹⁴⁹ He was said to have referred to non-Malayala Brahmans as 'wily Pattars'. In December the Dewan prohibited Changanacherry from taking part in any public meetings without official sanction.¹⁵⁰

In their desire to see the Regency administration terminated, the Nair political activists were in accord with the Junior Maharani. She had consistently demanded a Council of Regency and, in December 1929, had submitted a memorandum to the Government of India, arguing that her son should be vested with ruling powers when he reached the age of eighteen in November 1930.¹⁵¹ This had been preceded, in September 1929, by a memorial signed by A.Narayana Pillai that made the same request.¹⁵² Both were disregarded by the Government of India which extended the Regency until August 1932. Their decision was probably prompted partly by fears about the unsettling effect that a transfer of authority might have at a time when Congress activity had already caused a rise in the political temperature. In October 1930 the Working Committee of the People's Conference submitted another memorial to the Viceroy protesting about the extension.¹⁵³ Like its precursors in 1926 and 1929, it was dismissed by the Agent as the work of a small group of Nairs led by A.Narayana Pillai.

One of the factors that influenced the Government of India's extension of the Regency was the character of the Maharaja's mother, Setu Parvathi Bai. Early in 1929 the Agent, Lt-Col C.G.Crosthwaite, had sent back reports highly critical of her and her family.¹⁵⁴ He particularly mentioned the scandal caused by the Junior Maharani's association with Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar, the former Law Member in Madras.

At 50, Aiyar's public career was at a turning point. From one of

the leading Smarta Brahman families of Tanjore, he was the son of a Madras Small Cause Court Judge and, while still in his twenties, had inherited a lucrative law practice from his father-in-law. A prominent figure in the Mylapore clique that dominated the Madras Corporation in the 1910s, he entered nationalist politics in 1916 as the General Secretary of Mrs Besant's Home Rule League. Within a year he was also General Secretary of the National Congress, but the 'extremist' take-over of the organisation abruptly ended his career as a nationalist. He then embarked on a new career as an official. In 1920 Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras, appointed him Advocate-General. Three years later Willingdon picked him to be the Law Member of his Executive Council. In this capacity he soon became the chief adviser to Willingdon's successor, Lord Goschen. However, after the formation of a ministry supported by his foes in the non-Brahman Justice Party, in March 1928, he resigned from the Executive Council.¹⁵⁵

It was at this juncture that Aiyar began to take more of an interest in Travancore. He had already been introduced to the state, and the Junior Maharani, by the former Dewan, the late Sir P. Rajagopalachari, a friend and associate in Madras politics.¹⁵⁶ In 1925 the Raja of Kollengode was reported to have shown him the first memorandum submitted to the Viceroy on behalf of the Junior Maharani.¹⁵⁷ However, this was not Aiyar's first connection with Travancorean affairs. In the early 1910s he had defended P. Karunakara Menon, the editor of the Indian Patriot of Madras and apologist for the Rajagopalachari administration, when a defamation suit was brought against Menon by the late 'Swadesabhimani' K. Ramakrishna Pillai.¹⁵⁸ A few years later he also gave the legal opinion on the Devaswom Proclamation.¹⁵⁹ In September 1926 several pro-nationalist Christian newspapers in Travancore were cautioned for publishing articles containing insinuations against Aiyar, that had first appeared in the Congress paper Swarat.¹⁶⁰ Shortly before he gave up his seat on the Madras Executive Council there were fresh rumours that he was anxious to come to the state as its Administrator.¹⁶¹ He was the Junior Maharani's favourite for the job, and prepared her December 1929 memorandum to the Viceroy.

Though the Government of India had initially decided to delay the Maharaja's investiture by almost two years, the date was brought forward to November 1931. It is likely that the review was prompted by the arrival of Lord Willingdon as Viceroy. Willingdon had always held Aiyar's abilities in high regard¹⁶² and the latter was now appointed Acting Law Member on the Governor-General's Executive Council.

Before assuming his powers the young Maharaja had had to undergo fifteen months of administrative training under an ICS officer in Bangalore.¹⁶³ However, it was apparent that this had not reduced the influence of his strong-willed mother. Just before the investiture Dewan Subramonia Aiyar was sent on leave.¹⁶⁴ This was followed by the Maharaja's announcement, at his investiture on 6 November, of the appointment of Ramaswami Aiyar as Legal and Constitutional Adviser to the government.^{164a}

The appointment was unpopular. Critics said that it represented an unnecessary encroachment on the functions normally performed by the Dewan. They also saw Aiyar's salary of Rs. 72,000 - double that of the Dewan - as exorbitant.¹⁶⁵ On 14 November a protest meeting was held in Trivandrum, presided over by the Congressman A.K.Pillai.¹⁶⁶ Its principal organiser was G.Sankaran Nair, a lawyer belonging to a Trivandrum Nair family.¹⁶⁷ Nair had served as the headmaster of an NSS school¹⁶⁸ before moving to Malabar. He was in the forefront of a campaign that resulted in the 1930 Malabar Tenancy Act. One of the other leaders of the movement for tenants' rights¹⁶⁹ was Sir M.Krishnan Nair, the former Dewan and Ramaswami Aiyar's successor as Law Member in Madras. Aiyar had strongly advocated the cause of the mainly Brahman janmis who bitterly opposed the 1930 Act.

Nairs were in the forefront of the opposition to the appointment of the Legal Adviser. Among those who addressed the Trivandrum meeting were Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai and Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, a lawyer and MLC from Quilon. Their criticisms were subsequently taken up by the Nair press, notably the Kesari (Lion).¹⁷⁰ started by A.Balakrishna Pillai as a successor to the Prabodhakan.

There were a number of reasons for the Nairs' unhappiness. Probably the most important was the fact that once again a foreign Brahman was cast in the role of the power behind the throne. For more than a decade Nairs had felt themselves excluded from the position of preeminence in the state which they had previously enjoyed. Both the Trivandrum Nair elite and leading Nairs from central Travancore, belonging to the NSS, had eagerly anticipated the end of the Regency as beginning a new era of power and influence for them. In this context, the arrival of Aiyar, with his previous record of hostility towards the non-Brahman movement in Madras, aroused serious misgivings. An additional reason for their disquiet was Aiyar's close association with the British, particularly Lord Willingdon, whose role in bringing about Devaswom separation was still remembered.

While Nair opinion was decidedly unfavourable, the initial Christian attitude towards Aiyar was ambivalent. However, the end of the Regency was viewed with apprehension by Christian officials and politicians.¹⁷¹ Their close identification with the previous regime, and especially with the Valia Koil Tampuran, made them anxious that they would become targets for the Junior Maharani's displeasure. It was this fear, as well as the pressure on jobs resulting from the depression, that was behind the renewed urgency and stridency of Christian demands for communal representation in the public service. At the first session of the fourth Legislative Council in August 1931, the Kottayam lawyer O.M.Thomas strongly attacked the attitude of Nair members towards communal representation. He repeated a statement reportedly made by Maulana Mahomed Ali - 'if we cannot have justice by counting heads, well we must have it by cutting them'.¹⁷²

The acrimonious tone of legislative debates foreshadowed an intensification of the communal rivalry that had been the predominant feature of Travancorean politics throughout the 1920s. Following the end of the civic rights movement the conflict had been confined to the Malayalam press, speeches in the Council and Popular Assembly, and jockeying for position within the administration. This reflected the fact that all the activity was focused in the towns, particularly Trivandrum and Quilon, and was limited to a few hundred lawyers, government officers, teachers, businessmen and landowners. For most of them politics was intimately connected to office-seeking and, consequently, palace cliques and intrigues played a significant role. However, by the early 1930s there were indications of wider political involvement. As had been the case a decade earlier, developments in British India were an important factor in this; the second half of the chapter considers the impact of nationalism on Travancore.

Congress in the 1920s

Many of the younger generation of Nair politicians who came to the fore during the 1920s were men who entered politics as nationalists at the height of the non-cooperation movement. For instance, K.P.Nilakanta Pillai joined the National Congress in 1920 and lost his first job - as the headmaster of an English middle school - for leading a demonstration to mark the 1923 Nagpur Flag Satyagraha.¹⁷³ Several of his compatriots on the Working Committee of the People's Conference had also participated in the non-cooperation movement. They included C.Kuttan Nair, T.K.Narayana Pillai and V.Achutha Menon. Kuttan Nair¹⁷⁴ went on to serve as Secretary of the local Congress Committee in Trivandrum in 1923-24. However, apart from him, none of those mentioned owed their primary allegiance to the Congress and, in their case, as for the majority of Travancorean politicians who claimed to be nationalists, it only represented a peripheral cause that was exploited for its populist appeal among caste-Hindus. For this reason, an understanding of the nature and extent of Congress activity in the state can best be gained by treating it as separate from our study of mainstream politics, both in this chapter and in Chapter Eight.

There were probably less than a hundred committed Congress activists in Travancore. The most prominent was A.K.Pillai, who resigned as the Secretary of the Travancore District Congress Committee in 1923 over the issue of Council entry.¹⁷⁵ He was part of the minority in the DCC who supported the Swarajist line favouring participation in the reformed legislatures. After the compromise reached between the Swarajists and the 'no-changers' at the special Delhi Congress, Pillai was one of several nationalists elected to the second Legislative Council in May 1925.¹⁷⁶ Helped by the popularity won for the Congress by the Vaikom Satyagraha, others elected included K.P.Nilakanta Pillai, the Vellala vakil M.Sivathanu Pillai, G.Raman Menon, editor of the Pauran, Kattiyattu Sivarama Panikkar^{176a}, a wealthy landowner and NSS educationalist from Shertallai, and K.I.Joseph, John Nidhiry's defeated opponent in Minachil in 1922.

One of the last coordinated political ventures undertaken by local Congressmen in the aftermath of non-cooperation was the despatch of a band of volunteers to take part in the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha.¹⁷⁷ The group was organised by K.Kumar¹⁷⁸, a Nair from Pathnamthitta in central Travancore. A Gandhian Congressman, he served successively as Organising Secretary, General Secretary, and President of the DCC. Among those who accompanied him were two younger men - Ponnara G.

Sridhar, a 24 year-old Nair lawyer from Nedumangad, near Trivandrum, and N.P.Kurukkal, a nineteen year-old Ambalavasi who also belonged to the Trivandrum branch of Congress.

Between the final abandonment of non-cooperation in 1922 and the start of the civil disobedience movement in 1930, Travancorean Congressmen followed the Gandhian line in concentrating on social questions, such as the removal of untouchability and the promotion of temperance. Gandhi, in an address to Law College students in Trivandrum, during his visit to the state in March 1925, called on them to adopt a life of self-sacrifice exemplified by the spinning of Khadi.¹⁷⁹ Following the end of the Vaikom Satyagraha in November 1925, similar satyagrahas, but on a smaller scale, were conducted at the sites of two other important Hindu temples - Suchindram¹⁸⁰ and Thiruvvarappu.¹⁸¹ A handful of Congressmen, including the Ezhava T.K.Madhavan and C.Kuttan Nair, at Thiruvvarappu, and M.Sivathanu Pillai and Dr M.E.Naidu, at Suchindram, were in the fore of these campaigns.

Though individual Congressmen, like A.K.Pillai, played an prominent role in the protests against the Newspaper Regulation, there was no concerted effort at encouraging overtly political agitation. The local Congress committees that had been formed in 1921 soon became moribund following the suspension of non-cooperation in British India. In 1926 Pillai's Swarat, Travancore's first Congress newspaper, closed down after the promulgation of the press law. The Swarat had a circulation of about 1,200¹⁸², well in excess of two other Congress papers - a monthly, Swadesabhimani, and a weekly, Mahatma, both of which continued publishing until 1928. The extent to which Congress activity relied on a few individuals can be deduced from the fact that all three papers were started and edited by A.K.Pillai and K.Narayana Kurukkal, the former associate of Pillai's father-in-law, the late 'Swadesabhimani' K.Ramakrishna Pillai.

Throughout the 1920s mainstream Christian opinion in Travancore remained unfavourable to the Congress as a caste-Hindu dominated organisation. A.K.Pillai's strong opposition, in the Legislative Council, to the principle of communal representation did nothing to ease Christian distrust. Neither did Gandhi's approval of objections to a Christian - the Madura Congressman George Joseph - leading the Vaikom Satyagraha.¹⁸³ The Mahatma's promotion of temperance and his claim that Christians were the heaviest drinkers in Travancore¹⁸⁴, further alienated the community.

There were a few idealistic exceptions to the general Christian

attitude. Most notable was the Palai merchant Kayalackakom Joseph Thomas, a strong supporter of the temperance movement in the northern taluk of Minachil.¹⁸⁵ Among his associates were the lawyer and MLC K.I. Joseph, and David Mahapillai¹⁸⁶, a law student from Palai who was also active in the temperance movement.¹⁸⁷ In 1926 Joseph and Mahapillai started a short-lived Trivandrum weekly called Desabandhu (Patriot).

Palai, and Chengannur in central Travancore, were the two towns in which Christians were prominent in Congress activity. Chengannur was the home town of George Joseph¹⁸⁸, and his influence probably played an important part in attracting several Syrian Christian youths of the locality to the non-cooperation movement. Among these were M. Mathunni¹⁸⁹, later the secretary of the local Congress branch, and Kuruvila Mathew¹⁹⁰, a Jacobite from the neighbouring town of Tiruvalla. Both Mathunni and Mathew were imprisoned, along with George Joseph, in the Vaikom Satyagraha.¹⁹¹ After his release, Mathunni started a pro-Congress weekly, the Bhaje Bharatham, and in 1928 stood for election to the Legislative Council from the Pathanamthitta constituency. He was defeated by a wealthy Jacobite planter, Thamarapallil Kochu Thomman, after an election campaign in which, according to a police report, Mathunni lost about Rs.13,000.¹⁹²

In the late 1920s Congress propaganda was mainly disseminated in Travancore under the guise of promoting temperance and the use of khaddar. Consequently, with the upsurge of nationalism in British India in 1929-30, there was a corresponding intensification of the temperance movement in the state. In August 1929 the first of the main temperance associations - the Sanmarga Pradayani Sabha - was formed at Paravur, near Quilon. Over the next ten months, ten more associations connected with the movement came into being - seven in central Travancore and three in the northern taluk of Shertallai.¹⁹³ In June 1930 a Swadeshi and Prohibition Society was formed in Quilon, with the aim of becoming the chief directing temperance association. Its Working Committee¹⁹⁴ included several prominent Quilon Nairs, among them K.G. Sankar of the Malayala Rajyam. Two Ezhavas were also members - C.V. Kunjuraman, the joint editor of the Malayala Rajyam, and his son-in-law, C. Kesavan.

North of Quilon, propaganda work was undertaken by members of the Chengannur Congress Sabha. They included Mathunni, C.K. Sankara Pillai¹⁹⁵, a Nair vakil who was the joint editor of the Bhaje Bharatham, and Kannara Gopala Panickar, an Ezhava vakil who was the Sabha's Secretary. A new Congress League in Kayankulam also engaged in the

prohibition campaign. One of its main organisers was P.K.Kunju¹⁹⁶, a Muslim who had joined Congress during the Khilafat movement.

The membership of the various temperance associations ranged from less than twenty to several hundred. The three largest were all located in the Quilon area and claimed a combined membership of over a thousand. Mainly attracting the growing numbers of unemployed, their activities contributed to a 32 per cent fall in the abkari revenue of the state in 1930-31.¹⁹⁷

The temperance movement was strongest in the northern taluk of Shertallai. There the economic depression had meant serious hardship for the thousands of Ezhava and Pulaya landless agricultural labourers and coir workers.¹⁹⁸ The Vaikom Satyagraha and the activities of both the Travancore Labour Association at Alleppey, and the militant Karapuram Ezhava Yuvajana Seva Sangham, had already introduced Shertallai's non-caste-Hindus to radical notions of equality and opposition to authority. This, as well as the general discontent caused by the depression, was exploited by Congress agitators.

In late 1929 a Kerala Reform League¹⁹⁹ was started in Shertallai to campaign against the caste system and for the right of temple entry for all Hindus. Its organisers included K.C.Kuttan, the leader of the Ezhava Yuvajana Sangham, and K.G.Gopalakrishnan, the Nair secretary of the local Cooperative Bank. In April 1930 the League passed a resolution supporting the civil disobedience movement. Over the next eight months, 'extremist' political and social societies mushroomed in the area, and in a lengthy report to the Legislative Council in December 1930, Police Commissioner L.A.Bishop identified several of these.²⁰⁰ He claimed that no more than a dozen agitators were actually behind all the activity, and alleged that temperance had been adopted as a respectable cloak for anti-British and anti-government propaganda.

The movement against toddy-tapping and the drink trade was far more aggressive in Shertallai than elsewhere in the state, and the local temperance association was not accepted for affiliation to the main central association at Quilon. A large number of meetings were held in the taluk and among the speakers at these were A.B.Salem, a radical Jewish member of the Cochin Legislative Assembly, K.R.Narayanan, a young Ezhava from Vaikom, and Kattiyattu Sivarama Panikkar, the ex-MLC for the area and headmaster of the local NSS school. The serving Shertallai MLC, like Panikkar, a Nair, also encouraged the agitation. However, it was opposed by Syrian Catholic liquor contractors, and by the year's end more than 30 court cases had been

filed in connection with the movement. A.B.Salem was issued with an order prohibiting him from making public speeches. In early October K.G.Gopalakrishnan and another Nair temperance worker were convicted on charges of breaking a similar order. Two meetings held to congratulate them on their conviction were disrupted, and the convenor of one, K.C.Kuttan, was assaulted by a group of Christians. After this all further meetings and processions were banned and a contingent of armed reserve police was despatched to the area.²⁰¹

As had been the case during non-cooperation, the section of Travancorean society on which the unrest in British India made the strongest impression was the youth. In Trivandrum many students attended public meetings organised by the People's Conference. On 2 October 1929 at one such meeting, at Victoria Jubilee Town Hall, presided over by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, it was resolved to form a Youth League.²⁰² The meeting was attended by 800 people, who listened to anti-British speeches and raised nationalist slogans. The new League had a hardcore of about twenty members, prominent among whom were the Nagpur Flag Satyagrahis Ponnara Sridhar and N.P.Kurukkal. In January 1930, three months after the formation of the League, students at the Maharaja's College Hostel marked Indian Independence Day by running up the Congress tricolour.²⁰³ A Nair lawyer, who had helped defend those charged in connection with the 1921 students' strike, K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai, also hoisted the national flag at a demonstration in Trivandrum attended by some 500 people, again mainly students.²⁰⁴

With the start of civil disobedience in British India in March 1930, the Trivandrum Congress Committee was revived.²⁰⁵ The leading figures behind this were V.Achutha Menon, a member of the Working Committee of the People's Conference, Ponnara Sridhar, and N.P.Kurukkal. Kurukkal became the Committee's Secretary. Though it only had about 50 members, the new body organised 24 volunteers on a march that left Trivandrum on 2 May to join the Salt Satyagraha at Payyannur in Malabar. The marchers²⁰⁶, led by Sridhar, included Kurukkal, K.Kumar, Kattiyattu Sivarama Panikkar and N.C.Sekhar, a Nair youth from Neyyattinkara.

For some of the younger Congressmen the most important consequence of their participation in the Salt Satyagraha was their introduction to Marxism. Before 1930, although a few Travancoreans, notably the late 'Swadesabhimani' K.Ramakrishna Pillai and his son-in-law, A.K.Pillai, had imbibed Marxist ideas, there was no systematic attempt

to propagandise on behalf of socialism. In 1912 'Swadesabhimani' wrote a Malayalam biography of Karl Marx and on Lenin's death in 1924, A.K.Pillai published a lengthy obituary in the monthly Swadesabhimani.²⁰⁷ However, these were isolated instances, and it was only in prison in Malabar during the Salt Satyagraha, that a handful of Travancoreans adopted a definitely socialist outlook.

The most notable in this group were N.P.Kurukkal, N.C.Sekhar and P.Krishna Pillai. Kurukkal, like Ponnara Sridhar²⁰⁸, went on from Payyannur to participate in the satyagraha campaigns at Wadala and Dharasana in Bombay. After returning to Travancore, he joined Sekhar in picketing foreign cloth shops in Cannanore in June 1930. As a result they were both imprisoned in Cannanore Central Jail²⁰⁹ where one of their fellow inmates was P.Krishna Pillai, a 24 year-old Nair from northern Travancore, who had resigned his job as a Hindi teacher to take part in the Payyannur Satyagraha.²¹⁰

During the civil disobedience movement, Cannanore Jail was a centre for Marxist political education. A.K.Gopalan, a young Malabar Congressman, who was imprisoned there in 1932, recalled how political detainees engaged in daily debate and held group studies on socialism and the Russian revolution.²¹¹ Among those who the Travancorean Congressmen came into close contact with were several Bengalis charged with terrorist offenses, north Indians such as Kamalnath Tiwari, one of Bhagat Singh's co-workers in the revolutionary Hindustan Socialist Republican Party, and compatriots of A.K.Gopalan, like K.P.R.Gopalan and Moyarath Sankaran.²¹²

Robin Jeffrey has argued that it was a generation of deracine caste-Hindus from matrilineal joint-families that produced the leaders of the Communist Party in Kerala.²¹³ However, the evidence he gives for this is scanty, and T.J.Nossiter has drawn attention to the need for a more comprehensive study.²¹⁴ As this would involve examining the backgrounds of the Malabar and Cochin Communists, as well as the few from Travancore, such a task is beyond the scope of this thesis. What a comparison of the background of the three early Travancorean Communists - Kurukkal, Sekhar and Krishna Pillai - does reveal is their common lack of a significant stake in the existing social system, whether measured in terms of educational qualifications, wealth or position. It is reasonable to infer that this made them more disposed to embrace revolutionary politics

All three were school dropouts - Pillai had discontinued his studies in the fourth standard, while Sekhar and Kurukkal left

without passing their finals.²¹⁵ Not possessing any recognised qualifications, they were unable to get steady jobs. They were also financially insecure. Sekhar and Pillai both came from impoverished Nair taravads, and Kurukkal²¹⁶ belonged to the small Ambalavasi (temple-servant) caste, the ritual position and functions of which had been seriously effected by the rise of the Hindu reform movements. A contrast that tends to support the link between the lack of economic or educational advantages and a revolutionary outlook, is provided by Ponnara Sridhar, the other Payyannur Satyagrahi from Travancore who became involved in radical politics. Sridhar, the son of a south Travancorean Nair village officer, was a law graduate and, unlike the others, who all joined the Communist Party in the late 1930s, remained a Congressman until after independence, when he joined the Socialist Party.²¹⁷

The Salt Satyagraha evoked considerable sympathy in the Travancorean press. Both K.G.Sankar's Malayala Rajyam²¹⁸, which had overtaken the Malayala Manorama to become the state's largest circulating newspaper, and the Christian Pratidinam (Daily News) of Kottayam, published poems commemorating the non-violent assault on the Dharasana salt depot. The Pratidinam was warned, and apologised for printing the verses. Another Kottayam Christian paper, the Paura Prabha, also had to apologise for publishing anti-British articles.²¹⁹ That Christian papers, albeit excluding the two main organs of the community - the Manorama and the Nazrani Deepika, were now found voicing support for the Congress cause indicates that the minority of Christian Congressmen were having some success in their efforts to bring about a change in their co-religionists' traditionally anti-nationalist attitude.

The most prominent Christian Congressman, M.Mathunni, along with the co-editor of his Bhaje Bharatham, C.K.Sankara Pillai, had to face prosecution for an article published in June 1930. The piece, entitled 'Gunda Bharanam' (Outlaw Rule) attacked British repression and denounced the introduction of the lathi into Travancore. It concluded by saying - 'It is now time to enquire what place of refuge there is, for the safety of the people of this country, if the 'black' administrators of this place are inclined to destroy the land for fear of the 'whites'.' After the Bharatham's editors refused to tender a full apology for the article, the government first considered cancelling the paper's licence, but then, in November 1930, decided to prosecute the editors.²²⁰ This was resolved upon after A.Balakrishna Pillai had countered the cancellation of the licence of his Prabodhakan in

September by immediately starting the Kesari.

The Bharatham case, heard in the Trivandrum Sessions Court, attracted considerable attention. Malloor K.Govinda Pillai was employed for the prosecution at a fee of Rs.2,000²²¹ and the lawyers for the defence were George Joseph and K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai.²²² In March 1931, after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, a memorial was presented by members of the Popular Assembly asking that the prosecution be withdrawn.²²³ However, later in the month, Mathunni and Sankara Pillai were convicted of sedition and sentenced to two months in prison and a fine of Rs.250.

At the end of 1930, the local supporters of Congress held an All Travancore Political Conference in Trivandrum which was attended by about three hundred people.²²⁴ Portraits of Congress leaders and others, including the condemned Punjabi revolutionary Bhagat Singh, were displayed at the meeting. It was chaired by Pattom Thanu Pillai, an MLC and member of the Working Committee of the People's Conference. Probably influenced by the proximity of the Council elections, the participants sought to capitalise on the popularity of the National Congress by forming a Travancore State Congress, the declared aims of which included the attainment of full responsible government with universal suffrage. It also proclaimed support for the promotion of communal harmony and the eradication of untouchability.

The caution of the mainly Nair participants in the Trivandrum Conference was seen in their commitment to using only legitimate and peaceful means to achieve their ends. There were clear indications of differences between the majority and the few dedicated Congressmen present. A.Narayana Pillai proposed a resolution favouring a federal constitution for India, along the lines suggested at the first Round Table Conference in London. Seconded by the Quilon advocate E.V.Krishna Pillai, this was strongly opposed by the Chengannur Congressman C.K.Sankara Pillai. He declared that Congress stood for complete independence and he could not accept any decision of the Round Table Conference.²²⁵

In the first half of 1931 there was considerable political activity. The State Congress, with its headquarters in Quilon, established branches in Trivandrum and other centres. In the capital the continuing strength of nationalist feeling among students was demonstrated on 6 February by a successful hartal to mark the death of Motilal Nehru. A month later, after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the released Travancorean Salt Satyagrahis were accorded a hero's welcome on their return,

with meetings organised in Nagercoil, Edalakudi and Trivandrum.²²⁶

The radical Youth Leaguers were particularly active. On 26 March a demonstration was held in Trivandrum to protest against the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his two associates. Organised by N.P.Kurukkal and N.C.Sekhar, it was presided over by A.Balakrishna Pillai.

About 300 people, mainly students heard Kurukkal attack Gandhian passive resistance and call for open battle with the British.²²⁷

In March and April a pamphlet was published by Kurukkal, entitled The Communist Party, and circulated in Trivandrum. The pamphlet, in which Kurukkal was designated Organising Secretary of the Indian Communist Party (Kerala Provincial Organisation) contained a Malayalam translation of part of the statement made by the defendants in the 1929 Meerut Conspiracy trial. It was proscribed by the authorities. Kurukkal, along with Sekhar and Ponnara Sridhar, was also active in recruiting high school and college students into the Youth League.²²⁸ In May 1931 a member of the League convened a reception committee to welcome Jawaharlal Nehru when he paid a brief visit to the state. The Congress leader was greeted by large crowds in Trivandrum.²²⁹

Outside the capital, one of the main centres of Congress activity in 1931 was the northern port of Alleppey. There K.Kumar ran a campaign to boycott British cloth, which was initiated in February, and resulted in his imprisonment.²³⁰ The campaign was assisted by several young Muslims, including H.B.Abdul Khadar Rowther, the younger brother of a leading merchant and MLC, H.B.Mahomed Rowther.

Abdul Khadar acted as Jawaharlal Nehru's host when he passed through Alleppey. Another Muslim involved in the picketing of shops selling British cloth was T.A.Abdulla, like P.K.Kunju of Kayankulam, one of a number of young Muslims who had joined Congress at the height of the Khilafat agitation.²³¹ However, the boycott campaign provoked the hostility of some Muslim traders, who were probably behind leaflets that referred to the recent Hindu-Muslim riots in Kanpur in warning Muslims and Christians to have nothing to do with Congress.²³²

In the extreme south of Travancore supporters of the self-respect movement, started by Dr M.E.Naidu, played a leading role in Congress activity. In May 1931 a petty Ezhava merchant who was a 'self-respecter' was selected as President of the local Congress Youth League.²³³ The efforts of Congress workers made a considerable impact on the area. In January 1932 a missionary stationed at Nagercoil, remarked on the 'very evident' growth in nationalist feeling over

the previous year.²³⁴ He particularly mentioned the youth, noting that a 'very large proportion' of Hindu students at the Scott Christian College had taken to wearing khaddar, and most of the students had boycotted classes on hearing of Gandhi's arrest. The local Nair agent of the Khaddar organisation was G.Ramachandran, the 27 year-old son of a former Excise Commissioner of Travancore. Ramachandran was one of the few dedicated Gandhians in the state, having once been a resident of the Mahatma's ashram at Sabarmati.²³⁵

The Legislative Council elections of May 1931 took place in the midst of all the Congress activity. Several members of the State Congress and People's Conference, notably Pattom Thanu Pillai, A.S.Damodaran Asan, E.V.Krishna Pillai, and Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, were returned, as were a number of prominent temperance workers. The latter included Puthupalli S.Krishna Pillai²³⁶, a Quilon Nair lawyer, and K.C.Chandy²³⁷, a 28 year-old Catholic lawyer from Palai. In Shertallai the counting of votes was halted after the Congressman K.G.Gopalakrishnan was disqualified from standing as a candidate.²³⁸ As in the case of M.Mathunni, who had been declared ineligible before the poll²⁴⁰, the justification given was his court conviction.

Though the degree of their political leaders' commitment to the nationalist cause can be questioned, there is no gainsaying the widespread sympathy for Congress that existed among educated (or semi-educated) Nair youth. This was shown again in the picketing of foreign cloth shops in Trivandrum in late 1931.²⁴⁰ The picketing was organised by K.A.Damodara Menon, now a Law College student. He was assisted by the Payyannur satyagrahis P.Krishna Pillai and Ponnara Sridhar. Also among the pickets was C.Narayana Pillai, another law student and a journalist on the staff of A.Balakrishna Pillai's Kesari. Balakrishna Pillai was a friend of both Menon and P.Krishna Pillai²⁴¹, and his paper faced constant police harassment.

The upsurge in Congress activity witnessed in 1930-31 subsided after the Travancore government prohibited all processions and public meetings in the state, following the promulgation of the Emergency Powers Ordinance in British India on 4 January 1932. Though the arrest of Gandhi had been marked by a complete hartal in Quilon, the headquarters of the State Congress, the official clamp-down proved very effective. Some of the chief Congress activists, like K.Kumar, N.C.Sekhar and Amsi Narayana Pillai²⁴² were banned from making speeches, and sentenced to a month's rigorous imprisonment if they disobeyed.²⁴³ By late May the Agent was able to report that

Congress activity had virtually disappeared.²⁴⁴ The State Congress, which had recruited about 300 members²⁴⁵, followed its precursor - the District Congress - in lapsing into a moribund state.

While the activities of Travancorean Congressmen remained outside the political mainstream, both they and the nationalist movement in British India had a significant influence on the development of politics in the state. Together with the main caste associations - the SNDP Yogam and the NSS - nationalism and the local nationalists were important in encouraging the spread of political awareness beyond a wealthy and English -educated elite. For instance, the temperance movement, particularly in Shertallai, saw Congressmen, NSS activists and radical Ezhavas joining forces in a campaign that attracted considerable support and aroused the serious concern of the authorities. They did this by using a more agitational style and by exploiting a variety of popular grievances - social, religious and economic - in a manner that recalls the latter stages of the non-cooperation movement in parts of British India.²⁴⁶ However, given the strength of communal feeling in Travancore, and the developments that followed the end of the Regency, it is not surprising that the subsequent extension of politics in the early 1930s took the form of a communal, rather than a nationalist or class-based, movement - the Joint Political Congress.

Notes

1

TAR (1921-22), p.40. This compares with a poll of 36.3 per cent in the Madras Council elections in 1923. The Asylum Press Almanack and Directory of Madras and Southern India, CXXIII, IV, p.xxxv.

2

V.Balakrishnan and R.Leela Devi, Mannathu Padmanabhan and the Revival of Nairs in Kerala, New Delhi 1982, pp.53-54.

3

Report of the Election Commissioners, Leg., 83/1923.

4

SMPAP, XXIII, p.36.

5

TAD (1923), pp.84-92.

6

The four remaining councils were headed by officials or government nominees.

7

Membership lists, TLCP, I, VII, XIII and XIX.

8

Membership lists, SM AP, X, and SCSCP, X.

9

TLCP, I, pp.38-39 and 120-21.

10

Ibid., pp.329-41.

11

Ibid., pp.406-11.

12

SMPAP, XIX, p.184.

13

Ibid., p.188.

14

Ibid., p.156.

15

TLCP, IV, pp.189 ff.

16

Regional Records Survey Committee, The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1972, p.319.

17

SMPAP, XVIII, p.13.

18

TLCP, IV, p.357.

19

Note from Acting Ch. J. on participation of M.K.Govinda Pillai in protest meeting, 30 June 1926, CS, 665/1926.

20

RRSC, Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala, Trivandrum 1975, pp.346-47.

21

Freedom Movement, pp.319-20.

22

TLCP, IV, p.357.

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SMPAP, XX, pp.133-36.

24

Ibid., pp.156-57 and 219-20.

25

TLJ, XIV, pp.564-76.

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- 27 T.K.Ravindran, The Vaikkam Satyagraha and Gandhi, Trivandrum 1975, pp.322-26.
- 28 TAR (1923-24), p.1.
- 29 Madras States, FR 1 November 1924 and 2 December 1924, CRR,R/1/1/1583.
- 30 K.M.Panikkar, An Autobiography, Madras 1977, pp.50-51.
- 31 Madras States, FR 1 Dec. 1924, loc.cit.
- 32 TLCP, V, p.728.
- 33 SMPAP, XXI, pp.29-34.
- 34 People, 15 and 22 Dec. 1924, CRR, R/1/1/1531.
- 35 The Malabar Advocate, 28 March 1925, CRR, R/2/147-Dis.24/1924; Who Was Who, Vol. III, London 1947, p.1425.
- 36 People, 30 March 1925, CRR, R/2/147-Dis.24/1924.
- 37 Agent's Report, 7 April 1925, CRR, R/1/1/1531; MSD (1930), p.53 and MSMD (1937), p.351.
- 38 Telegram, 24 March 1925, CRR, R/2/147-Dis.24/1924.
- 39 O.M.Thomas, Under the Knife: Studies of some Kerala Notables, Allahabad 1970, p.17.
- 40 Agent's Report, 7 April 1925, loc.cit.
- 41 The Malabar Advocate, 28 March 1925, loc.cit.
- 42 Thomas, op.cit., pp.64-65; Tottenham Papers (memoirs of Sir Richard Tottenham), Bk.I, p.39.
- 43 C.P.Skrine to Pol.Sec., Oct. 1938, CRR, R/1/29/1849.
- 44 Madras States, FR 1 Nov. 1924, loc.cit.
- 45 Jr. Maharani to Agent, 18 March 1925, CRR, R/2/155-Dis.30/1925.
- 46 The Indian Year Book 1931, Bombay, p.989.
- 47 Agent to Jr. Maharani, 6 May 1925, CRR, R/2/155-Dis.30/1925.
- 48 The Who's Who in Madras 1934, Cochin, p.110.
- 49 TAD (1923), p.125.
- 50 TLCP, VII, p.106.
- 51 TAR (1924-25), pp.iii-ix.
- 52 Madras States, FR 1 Jan.1927, CRR, R/1/1/1584.

- 53 TLCP, VI, p.1017.
- 54 Travancore Public Service Recruitment Committee Report, Trivandrum 1934, pp.22-24.
- 55 TLCP, VI, p.1009, and X, pp.850-51.
- 56 SMPAP, XXIII, pp.249-51, XXIV, pp.168-69, and XXV, p.276.
- 57 Quoted in TLR, XLIII, pp.79-98.
- 58 Jenmabhoomi, 21 November 1925, CS, 654/1925.
- 59 TLR, XLIII, pp.79-98.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Keraladasan, 21 November 1925, CS, 668/1926.
- 62 Ch.Sec. to V.Subba Aiyar, 28 July 1926, CS, 668/1296.
- 63 Thomas, op.cit., pp.73-75 and 79.
- 64 MSMD (1936), p.340.
- 65 SMPAP, XXII, p.181.
- 66 Ibid., pp.176-91.
- 67 Ibid., pp.188-89 and 193-94.
- 68 Madras States, FR 2 April 1926, CRR, R/1/1/1584.
- 69 MSD (1933), p.106s.
- 70 RPT, II, p.1229.
- 71 Ibid., IV, p.391.
- 72 Dewan to Agent, 2 Dec. 1925. Quoted in Freedom Movement, pp.499-500.
- 73 RPT, VI, pp.1167-70.
- 74 Published from c.1922 to 1933, the paper had a circulation of 635 in 1926-27. TAD (1923), pp.157-60, and (1928)
- 75 TLCP, IX, p.480.
- 76 Police Report, 30 May 1926, CS, 664/1926.
- 77 Madras States, FR 1 June 1926, CRR, R/1/1/1584.
- 78 Madras States, FR 2 June 1926, CRR, R/1/1/1584.
- 79 TLCP, IX, App.V.
- 80 Madras States, FR 2 June 1926, loc.cit., and 1 Jan.1927, CRR,R/1/1/16444
- 81 Madras States, FR 2 July 1926, CRR, R/1/1/1584

- 82 Aiyar to George, 6 July 1926 CS, 666/1926.
- 83 Pillai to Aiyar, 15 July 1926, CS, 666/1926.
- 84 Aiyar to George, 17 Nov. 1926, CS 666/1926.
- 85 TLCP, IX, pp.53-60.
- 86 Ibid., p.570.
- 87 Mahatma, 22 July 1926, CS, 652/1926.
- 88 Reports in the Hindu, 18 August 1926, and the Madras Mail, 19 August 1926, Cs, 693/1926.
- 89 List of Societies, Dewan to Agent, 23 July 1930, CS, 746/1930;
Freedom Fighters, pp.403-04.
- 90 List of elected MLCs who accepted government posts between 1922-29,
TLCP, XV, App.XII.
- 91 Thomas, op.cit., p.58.
- 92 Madras States, FR 2 Jan.1927, CRR, R/1/1/1644.
- 93 Kalloor Narayana Pillai to Dewan, 17 Dec.1926, CS, 670/1927.
- 94 Petition, 11 Dec.1926, CS, 670/1927.
- 95 Agent to Dewan, 14 Jan. 1927, CS, 670/1927.
- 96 Madras States, FR 1 Jan.1927, loc.cit.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Madras States, FR 2 Jan.1927, loc.cit.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Proceedings of the Board, 13 Nov.1926, CRR, R/2/163-Dis.27/1927.
- 101 Extracts from TLCP, 24 Nov.1926 and 26 April 1927, and SMPAP, XXIII,
CRR, R/2/163-Dis.27/1927.
- 102 Madras States, FR 1 May 1927, CRR, R/1/1/1644.
- 103 TLCP, XI, p.148.
- 104 Thomas, op.cit., pp.151-52.
- 105 Brooke Bond to Dewan, 9 June 1927, CRR, R/2/163-Dis.27/1927.
- 106 SMPAP, XXIV, pp.138-39.
- 107 TAR (1926-27), p.21.
- 108 TAD (1919), pp.112-17; TAR (1925-26), p.170, and (1926-27), p.185.
- 109 Madras States, FR 1 Aug.1928, CRR, R/1/29/375.

- 110 Asylum Press Directory, CXXXIV,p.1473.
- 111 Freedom Fighters, p.550
- 112 MSD (1930), pp.68-69. Kunjithomman, like K.G.Parameswaran Pillai, Raja Raja Varma Koil Tampuran and several other prominent members of the People's Party, used Malayalam in debate.
- 113 MSD (1933), p.75.
- 114 MSMD (1937), p.370.
- 115 MSD (1930), p.62.
- 116 TLCP, XIII, pp.242-55 and 700-16.
- 117 Ibid., p.923.
- 118 TLCP, XV, pp.286-312.
- 119 MSD (1930), p.69
- 120 TLCP,XVIII, pp.133-68 and 243-95.
- 121 TLCP, XIV, pp.183-248.
- 122 TLCP, XV, pp.1088-1152.
- 123 MSD (1931), p.71.
- 124 B.N.Ramusack, The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire: Dissolution of a Patron-Client System 1914-39, Columbus 1978,p.162.
- 125 S.P.Sen (ed), Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.III, Calcutta 1974, p.359.
- 126 List of Societies, loc.cit.
- 127 One Nair paper called him 'the Hercules of the States People's Committee'. Popular Herald, 8 Feb.1929, CS, 724/1930. The other Committee members included K.P.Nilakanta Pillai, Pattom Thanu Pillai, Dr M.N.Pillai, V.Achutha Menon, T.K.Narayana Pillai, A.Balakrishna Pillai and C.Kuttan Nair.
- 128 Agent to Pol.Sec., 15 Aug.1928, CRR, R/1/29/389.
- 129 TLCP, XIII, pp.131-32.
- 130 Agent to Pol.Sec., 24 Aug1928, CRR, R/1/29/389; TAR (1928-29),p.202.
- 131 Maharani to Agent, 27 Jan.1929, CRR, R/2/179-Dis.75/1929.
- 132 Freedom Movement, p.324.
- 133 Travancore Times, 30 April 1929, CS, 852/1929.
- 134 Note initialled by Ch.Sec., 18 June 1929, CS, 790/1929.

- 135 List of Societies, loc.cit.
- 136 Report of the Unemployment Enquiry Committee, Trivandrum 1928, pp.47-48.
- 137 CMSP, Annual Report 1929-30, p.313.
- 138 Mrs G.H.Marsden, 20 Oct.1930, LMS Correspondence, Box 30 (1928-30).
- 139 Police Report, 19 Thulam 1105 ME. (3 Nov.1929), CS, 717/1929.
- 140 A.S.Menon, Kerala District Gazetteer. Quilon, Trivandrum 1964, p.149.
- 141 List of Societies, loc.cit.
- 142 Desabhimani, 12 Makaram 1105 ME. (Jan.1930), CS, 834/1930.
- 143 Popular Herald, 8 Feb.1930, loc.cit.
- 144 TLCP, XVI, p.13.
- 145 Popular Herald, 8 Feb.1930, loc.cit.
- 146 Service, 29 July 1930. Quoted in K.K.Kusuman, 'The Anti-Brahmin Movement in Travancore', Journal of Kerala Studies, IV, 3 (1977).
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- 148 TLR, XLVII, pp.336-69.
- 149 Pillai to Dewan, 15 Oct. and 9 Dec. 1930, CS, 791/1930-32.
- 150 Dewan to Pillai, 18 Dec.1930, CS, 791/1930-32.
- 151 Memorandum, CRR, R/2/178-Dis.74/1929.
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- 153 Memorial, 11 Oct.1930, loc.cit.
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- 155 D.A.Washbrook, The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870-1920, Cambridge 1976, pp.202, 220, 236 and 239; C.J.Baker, The Politics of South India 1920-1937, Cambridge 1976 pp.36-38, 43 and 76-77.
- 156 Washbrook, op.cit., pp.255-56.
- 157 Agent to Sir H.Haig, 24 April 1925, CRR, R/2/155-Dis.30/1925.
- 158 Aiyar to Menon, 13 July and 16 Sept.1916, CS, 466/1916.
- 159 Aiyar, 20 Nov.1921, CRR, R/2/142-Dis.11/1922.
- 160 District Magistrate (Trivandrum) to Ch.Sec., 10 Jan.1927, and Ch.Sec. to District Magistrate, 23 Dec 1926, CS, 684/1927.

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D.Arnold, The Congress in Tamilnad. Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919 to 1937, New Delhi 1977, pp.57, 100.
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M.J.Koshy, K.C.Mammen Mappillai: The Man and His Vision, Trivandrum 1976, p.259; Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.94-95.
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Freedom Movement, p.115.
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Membership List, TLCP, VII.
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MSD (1934), p.121.
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R.Jeffrey, 'A Sanctified Label -"Congress" in Travancore Politics, 1938-48' in D.A.Low (ed), Congress and the Raj Facets of the Indian Struggles 1917-47, London 1977, p.446.
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Freedom Fighters, pp.271-72.
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TLJ, XV, pp.xiv-xv.
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Panikkar, op.cit., pp.45-46.
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Young India, 26 March 1925. Reproduced in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, XXVI, Ahmedabad 1967, p.407.

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Freedom Fighters, p.102.
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District Magistrate to Ch.Sec., 10 Jan.1927, loc.cit.
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Joseph, the son of a Travancore PWD engineer, was a London-educated barrister who set up practice in Madura in 1909. Prominent in Mrs Besant's Home Rule League, he later became a non-cooperator and successively edited Motilal Nehru's Independent (1920-21) and Gandhi's Young India (1922-24). Before opposition to Council entry caused him to resign in 1925, he served on the All India Congress Committee and the party's Working Committee. Sen, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.247-49; Who's Who in Madras, p.39.
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Police Report, 3 July 1931, Judicial, 2417/1931.
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Ibid.; Freedom Movement, p.196.
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Police Report, 3 July 1931, loc.cit.
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Freedom Fighters, pp.308-09.
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Ibid.; Police Report on N.C.Sekhar, 4 April 1936, CS, 1074/1936; K.K.Kusuman, The Extremist Movement in Kerala, Trivandrum 1977 pp.18-19.
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R.Jeffrey, 'Matriliney, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-40', Journal of Asian Studies, XXXVIII, I (1978), 87. In the 1940s A.K.Pillai was active in the Radical Democratic Party founded by M.N.Roy, the first Indian Communist of international standing. Sen, op.cit., Vol.III, p.359.

- 208 Ibid., Vol.IV, pp.261-62.
- 209 Police Report, 4 April 1936, loc.cit.; The Extremist Movement, pp.18-19.
- 210 T.V.Krishnan, 'Sakhavu' Krishna Pillai - Kerala's First Communist, New Delhi 1971, pp.11-19.
- 211 A.K.Gopalan, In the Cause of the People, Bombay 1973, p.34.
- 212 When P.Krishna Pillai was imprisoned again in 1932 his fellow inmates included the Malabar Congressmen E.M.S.Namboodiripad, A.K.Gopalan, K.P.R.Gopalan, and Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair. All five, along with Moyarath Sankaran, became Congress Socialists and in 1939 founder-members of the Communist Party of Kerala. Krishna Pillai, Namboodiripad and N.C.Sekhar joined the Communist Party of India in 1937. Ibid., pp.34-35; Krishnan, op.cit., p.21; and Jeffrey, 'Matriliny, Marxism and the C.P.', p.92.
- 213 Ibid.
- 214 T.J.Nossiter, Communism in Kerala. A Study in Political Adaptation, London 1982, pp.86-87.
- 215 Krishnan, op.cit., pp.1-7; The Extremist Movement, pp.18-19; Police Report, 4 April 1936, loc.cit.
- 216 Jeffrey, 'Congress in Travancore', p.467n.
- 217 Sen, op.cit., Vol.IV, pp.261-62, and III, pp.89-90. Another apparent instance of social background influencing political orientation is provided by K.A.Damodara Menon, one of P.Krishna Pillai's fellow inmates in the Cannanore Central Jail in 1932. Menon, the Secretary of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, belonged to a wealthy north Travancorean Nair taravad and had been prominent in the 1921 students strike. A graduate, he stayed a Congressman until elected to the first Lok Sabha on a Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party ticket. He returned to the Congress fold in 1957.
- 218 Malayala Rajyam, 19 July 1930, CS, 871/1930.
- 219 V.C.John to Ch.Sec., 24 Oct.1930, CS, 725/1930; Z.M.Paret to Ch.Sec., 22 Sept.1930, CS, 725/1930.
- 220 CS, 727/1930.
- 221 Acting Dewan to Private Sec. to Maharani Regent, 24 Nov. 1930, CS, 2417/1931.
- 222 TLJ, XXI, pp.691-721.
- 223 SMPAP, XXVII, pp.349-52.
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- 226 Madras States, FR 2 March 1931, CRR, R/1/29/690.

- 227 Ibid.; The Extremist Movement, pp.20-22; Krishnan, op.cit., p.29.
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- 229 Freedom Fighters, p.453; Jeffrey, 'Congress in Travancore', p.447.
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Freedom Movement, pp.197 and 231.
- 231 Freedom Fighters, p.3.
- 232 Madras States, FR 1 May 1931, CRR, R/1/29/690.
- 233 District Magistrate (Trivandrum) to Ch.Sec., 16 May 1931, CS,895/1931.
- 234 LMS Annual Report (Nagercoil) 1931.
- 235 LMS Annual Report (Nagercoil) 1930, p.3; Sen, op.cit., Vol.III, pp.459-61.
- 236 MSD (1933), pp.106p-q.
- 237 MSD (1931), p.96f.
- 238 Ch.Sec. to Returning Officers, 26 and 28 May 1931, CS, 732b/1931.
- 239 CS, 733/1931.
- 240 Freedom Movement, p.231.
- 241 Krishna Pillai, from 1933 a trade union organiser in Malabar, stayed with Balakrishna Pillai on his frequent visits to Trivandrum. The two had been introduced by Menon. Krishnan, op.cit., pp.25-26.
- 242 Pillai had participated in the Vaikom and Suchindram satyagrahas and in the picketing of foreign cloth shops in Alleppey. Freedom Fighters, p.404.
- 243 District Magistrate (Trivandrum) to Ch.Sec., 6 Jan.1932, and District Magistrate (Quilon) to Ch.Sec., 5 Jan 1932, CS, 912/1932. Madras States, FR 2 April 1932, CRR, R/1/29/849.
- 244 Madras States, FR 2 May 1932, CRR, R/1/29/849.
- 245 List of Societies, Dewan to Agent, 10 July 1936, CS, 1092/1936.
- 246 J.M.Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922, Cambridge 1972, p.345.

Chapter VIII

1933-35: The Abstention Movement

On 28 October 1932 the Maharaja promulgated the Travancore Legislative Reforms Regulation. The reforms maintained the electoral dominance of the Nair community. Within three months of the Royal Proclamation the leaders of the Christian, Ezhava and Muslim majority in the state resolved to boycott the new legislature. The Abstention movement thus ushered in a decade of turbulence in which Travancorean politics was transformed.

The Abstentionists' campaigning was better organised and more sustained than the agitations of the 1920s. Indeed, the Joint Political Congress, which spearheaded the opposition to the reforms, could lay claim to being the first political party to emerge in the state. It was responsible for mobilising far greater numbers than any of its numerous, more shortlived, precursors. In 1935 the JPC had the distinction of becoming the first significant political organisation to have one of its prominent leaders imprisoned. Two years later, having realised most of its initial aims, the party achieved another first by successfully contesting an election campaign.

The previous two chapters examined the development of communal politics between 1918 and 1932. The formation of a political party along communal lines could be seen as the logical consequence of such a process. However, it was the convergence of a particular set of circumstances that determined the emergence and success of the JPC. In this chapter the background to the Abstention movement will be explored by focusing on political trends within the Abstentionist communities, and considering the grievances that lay behind their discontent. The course of the movement itself will then be treated.

The communalism manifested during the 1920s resulted in the formation of numerous, overtly political, communal societies. These occurred particularly among groups that saw themselves as being disadvantaged. The first of the new bodies was a Catholic Political Committee formed at Panavalli, with T.M.Varghese Mappillai, the editor of the daily Nazrani Deepika, as its convenor, and John Nidhiry, the former MLC, as President.¹ The committee was succeeded by a Catholic Political League whose main objective was the proportional representation of Catholics in the public service.²

The initiators of the League were mostly educated men belonging to wealthy Syrian Catholic landed families. Many of them were prominent in the Malabar Catholic Congress (now the All Kerala Catholic Congress).³

The League appears to have functioned primarily as a discussion group, and was probably behind a Congress memorial entitled 'The Catholic Grievances', which Thariathu Kunjithomman submitted to the Maharaja immediately after his investiture.⁴

In 1932 a Travancore State Catholic Congress (TSCC) was formed in anticipation of the expected legislative reforms. Its President was N.V. Joseph, an Alwaye lawyer who had been active in the Civic Rights League. A.C. Kuriakose, a one-time secretary of the Malabar Catholic Congress, became Secretary of the new organisation and, in an effort to draw in the Latin Catholics, E.P. Varghese, an Alleppey lawyer, was chosen to be Vice President.

Varghese had played a leading role in setting up the new Travancore Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha; he was Vice President of the Central Managing Committee based at Quilon. Like its earlier Syrian Catholic counterparts, this association was dominated by a small, wealthy and educated elite within the Latin community. The President, Wilfred de Netto, was an Anglo-Indian district judge, while Varghese belonged to one of the few prominent Latin landowning families of Shertallai Taluk.⁵

As among the Syrian Christians and the Ezhavas, there was a definite correlation between the progress of the Latins' independent religious identity and the growing political assertiveness of the communal elite. This is demonstrated by the fact that it was in 1932, after a long campaign⁶, that a native Latin priest was designated as the successor to the retiring Spanish Archbishop of Verapoly.

The Latin Catholics of northern Travancore were not the only previously quiescent community to show a new political awareness in the early 1930s. In October 1930 the first conference was held of a South Travancore Indian Christian Association, which had been formed to represent the Protestant Christians.⁷ The Association, while claiming to represent all sections of the community, including the low-caste Paraya and Pulaya converts, was dominated by the wealthier and better educated class of Nadar businessmen and lawyers. Its President was D.C. Joseph, the proprietor of the Travancore Times.⁸

Organised political activity along communal lines was not confined to Travancore's Christians. During the 1928 Council elections Muslims were aroused by a contest between P.K. Kunju⁹, a young Congressman from Kayankulam, and G.P. Nilakanta Pillai, a Nair lawyer. The contest, in the Karunagapalli constituency in central Travancore, resulted in a defeat for Kunju, who was supported by his own community and the Ezhavas. However, the election campaign led to the formation of a Travancore

Muslim Mahasabha, constituted at a conference in Quilon, with the declared aim of working for the social and political advancement of Muslims.¹⁰ Though shortlived, the Sabha represented the first Muslim association in Travancore formed with political, as well as social, objectives.

In 1930 a more lasting organisation - The All Travancore Muslim Service League - was founded at a conference in Kayankulam.¹¹ The conference resolved that the League should encourage, and seek to advance, the political, social and religious development of the community. Though P.K.Kunju, known as a radical because of his Congress and temperance work, was one of the promoters of the League and was elected its General Secretary, the body was also backed by wealthy merchants. The 1930 conference was presided over by a merchant who had been nominated to the Popular Assembly and the League's first President was H.B.Mohammed Rowther¹², a leading Alleppey trader and the first elected Muslim MLC.

One of the principal reasons for the emergence of politically active communal associations among the non-Hindus was resentment at the dominance of caste-Hindus in the public service. Apart from the value attached to the service for reasons of prestige and patronage, it was also the major source of employment for educated Travancoreans. In 1928 the Unemployment Enquiry Committee estimated that three-fifths of all those with educational qualifications, who obtained jobs within the state, worked for the government.¹³ The problem of imbalance in the composition of the service was not solved by Devaswom separation. Appeals on the subject continued to be voiced in the Popular Assembly and the Legislative Council, with Catholic, Muslim and Ezhava members prominent in urging the adoption of a system of communal quotas.^{13a}

Official policy favoured the maintenance of the status quo. After 1915 circulars were periodically issued to departmental heads stating that special consideration should be shown to qualified applicants from the underrepresented communities,¹⁴ but these appear to have made little impression on recruitment policy. For instance, in the three years following the opening of the Revenue Department, 235 (or 85 per cent) of the 277 appointments made in the Department went to caste-Hindus.¹⁵ One in six caste-Hindu applicants was accepted, but only one in eleven Christians, and one in twenty Muslims.

In 1925, in response to pressure in the Legislative Council, provision was made for regular quarterly returns of appointments made by the heads of the various departments.¹⁶ In a Council debate in

August 1930, Pattom Thanu Pillai suggested the establishment of a committee to resolve the whole issue¹⁷; an idea supported by other Nair members, but not by members of the disadvantaged communities. This suggests that it was viewed as a strategem devised to protect Nair interests, while appearing to consider the grievances of the other communities. Nevertheless, in his address to the Popular Assembly on 2 March 1931¹⁸, Dewan Subramonia Aiyar announced the establishment of a committee which was eventually appointed in December.

From the outset the Committee was set an impossible task. It was asked to report on the 'principles to be observed in the matter of recruitment to the public services, keeping in view...the complaints of certain communities that they are not fairly represented...and...the need for maintaining efficiency and for avoiding injustice and unfairness to the other communities.'¹⁹

The twelve-member Committee soon encountered difficulties. Following the death of the Chairman, his successor and three other members resigned. The Committee then found itself equally divided between those who emphasised communal representation and those who considered efficiency the guiding principle. The former usually included the five non-official members belonging to the disadvantaged communities²⁰, and one official, Excise Commissioner C.O.Madhavan, the only Ezhava head of department. Ranged against them were Dr N.Kunjan Pillai, the Nair Land Revenue Commissioner, and three other officials as well as three non-officials, including Pattom Thanu Pillai, and the Brahman Committee Chairman.²¹

The disadvantaged communities had never entertained high hopes of the Committee and its proceedings only confirmed their misgivings. In October 1932 the Catholic newspaper Dasan, alleging that the representatives of disadvantaged groups were being cunningly manipulated by the Chairman, commented that it was very doubtful if their efforts would be beneficial.²² In a further sign of the general lack of confidence, the annual conference of the South Travancore Indian Christian Association, held in Trivandrum on 28 October, submitted a memorial to the Dewan. It emphasised the distinction between the Protestant Christians and the Syrian Christians and asked that they should be treated as a separate community in determining policy.²³

The doubts about the Committee's efficacy proved well founded. Its Report, submitted in September 1933, was remarkable for its inconclusive character. Two-fifths of it was taken up by notes dissenting from the conclusions reached. This detracted from the main recommenda-

ations, which were that recruitment to the inferior service should be based on the population of the respective communities concerned, while nine-tenths of the posts in the superior service should be filled under a complicated scheme of communal rotation determined by weighted proportional representation.²⁴

An appendix to the Report gave a communal statement of public service employees showing the caste-Hindu dominance.²⁵ They accounted for 17,786, or 75.1 per cent of the 26,693 employees; over three times their proportion of the general population. Nairs alone claimed over half the jobs in the public service, while the non-Malayala Brahmans, constituting merely one per cent of the population, held eleven per cent of the posts, including more than one-third of those carrying a salary of over Rs.100 per mensem. In two of the largest and most important departments - Land Revenue and Police - the dominance was particularly pronounced with caste-Hindus accounting for 88 and 84 per cent respectively.

The non-caste-Hindus were left in the worst position; constituting almost two-fifths of the population, they claimed one in twenty government posts. The Ezhavas, as numerous as the Nairs, held only 875 jobs, as compared to the latter's 12,892. The situation was worse in the higher branches with only eighteen Ezhavas among the 781 officers receiving a salary of over Rs.100. Muslims (seven per cent of the population) fared little better - accounting for two per cent of the jobs.

Among the Christians the position was somewhat different. The community as a whole was underrepresented with only 16.6 per cent of jobs as compared to 31.5 per cent of the population. However, this inequity did not effect all the denominations; the highly literate Marthomites were, like the Nairs and Brahmans, an overrepresented group. The Jacobite Syrians were represented roughly proportionately. Christians, in general, were progressively better represented in the higher grades of the service. When it came to posts carrying a salary of over Rs.100, they were ahead of the Nairs and not far behind the Brahmans, holding 241 posts, as compared to 178 and 282 respectively. It was the poor representation of Catholics (both Syrian and Latin) and of Anglican and Protestant converts that was responsible for the overall Christian shortfall. While accounting for nearly sixteen per cent of the population, the Catholics held less than four per cent of the jobs.

There were historical and social reasons that partly explained the imbalance. Probably most important was the fact that Brahmans and Nairs had a long tradition of government service, the result of both royal

patronage and the advantages offered by high ritual status in a Hindu state. Groups such as the Muslims and Ezhavas had no such tradition, and the Muslims, in particular, still lagged far behind the other communities in education.²⁶ The Ezhavas, too, had become literate in large numbers only since the 1880s, and even in 1931 the proportion of those literate in English was only a third that of the Nairs.²⁷ As for as the depressed castes, they were only just beginning to emerge from a past of wretched servitude, and literacy was still limited to less than one in thirty.

Among Christians, the Catholics' late start in Western-style education had an important bearing on their underrepresentation. The economic position of the Syrian Catholic agriculturists was another contributory factor. Compared to the bulk of non-Catholic Syrians, they were on average more prosperous, being concentrated in some of the most fertile areas of northern Travancore. This made them, on the whole, less enterprising in pursuing modern education and government jobs. Paradoxically, in the case of the Christian converts, it was the poverty and low social status of the vast majority, that was primarily responsible for their underrepresentation.

Taking these social factors into account, it is still evident that the entrenched position of the caste-Hindus was what maintained their dominance. On his arrival in February 1932, Subramonia Aiyar's successor as Dewan, Thomas Austin, commented on the bias towards members of their own community shown even by judges of the High Court in recommendations for the appointment of a district judge.²⁸ The Public Service Committee Report's findings confirm the strength of communalism. For instance, Christians were proportionately best represented in the only three government departments to have had Syrian Christian heads ever since the beginning of the Regency - the Medical, Sanitary and Industries departments.²⁹

Their poor representation in the public service was a grievance that was deeply felt among the younger educated Catholics, Ezhavas, and Muslims at a time when there was increasingly stiff competition for jobs resulting from the steep rise in educated unemployment during the 1920s. However, the main cause of the Abstention movement was the demand for communal representation in the legislature. In this respect the 1933-35 agitation differed from the civic rights campaign a decade earlier. Then the question of legislative reform had been practically ignored and the Civic Rights League had concentrated its attention on gaining the right of unrestricted entry into the public service. Though the 1919

Malabar Catholic Congress session requested that the principle of communal representation should be admitted in any future reform, the demand was not taken up by the League.

In the late 1920s it was usually the Ezhava and Muslim members of the Popular Assembly who regularly demanded reserved seats and separate electorates for their respective communities.³⁰ There was reason for their dissatisfaction with the existing system: between 1922 and 1931 no Ezhava and only one Muslim, was returned by any of the 23 general Council constituencies. As eminent a figure as the Ezhava poet Kumaran Asan was defeated by a Nair in a byelection for the Quilon seat in 1924.³¹ In the same year Dewan Raghaviah promised an Ezhava deputation that their claims would be considered if no Ezhava was returned in the 1925 elections. In August 1927, an SNDP Yogam deputation, led by the Yogam General Secretary, C.V.Kunjuraman, submitted a memorial to the Maharani Regent calling for, either the reservation of seats, or the creation of separate electorates. However, these options were rejected, and the government continued to favour the practice of nominating representative Ezhavas.³²

Of the 76 men who were returned by the general constituencies in the four Council elections held between 1922 and 1931, 51 were caste-Hindus (including 39 Nairs), 23 Christians (fourteen Syrian Catholics, seven Jacobites and two Protestants), one Muslim and one Nadar.³³ The basis for the success of the Nair candidates lay in the restricted franchise. In 1931 the electorate was constituted as shown in Table 7.

The Nairs electoral strength was maximised by their even distribution in much of the state. The main franchise qualification, based on payment of land revenue, also favoured them. Already forming the most numerous group of landowners, taravad partition had the effect of bringing about a disproportionate increase in Nair voters³⁴, while the growing number of Christian mortgagees were denied the vote. A last, incalculable, factor that may have worked to the Nairs advantage, was their preponderance among the Proverthicars in the Land Revenue Department who had the responsibility for preparing the voters' lists: in 1932, 390 out of a total of 404 were caste-Hindus.³⁵

Through the 1920s the advent of electoral politics on a significant scale, and the advocacy of communal interests in the Council, the Popular Assembly and the press, had served to highlight the inequalities in Travancore's public service and representative institutions. However, it was the actions of the new administration following the end of the Regency that brought these longstanding grievances to a head.

The manner in which the enquiry into the public service was conducted, and the appointment of only Nair non-officials to an Educational Reforms Committee set up late in 1932, encouraged Christian and Ezhava doubts about the administration's will to institute genuine reforms.³⁶

The 1932 legislative reforms deepened their mistrust.

Demands for a reform of the SMPA had been current since the 1910s and, following the introduction of an elected Council, public interest in the Assembly had steadily declined.³⁷ Therefore, the new Maharaja's promise of reform in November 1931³⁸ was welcomed. However, it gave rise to renewed communal appeals for special consideration. The Ezhava members submitted a memorial at the last session of the old Assembly in March 1932, requesting either special electorates, or reserved seats, if adult franchise was not conceded.³⁹ The ten Muslim members also called for separate electorates.⁴⁰

A press communique in June 1932, announcing that the government intended to reconstitute the Legislative Council and the Popular Assembly, led to Christian, Ezhava and Muslim claims to special consideration.⁴¹ The August Communal Award in British India provided a further stimulus. The first reaction came from the SNDP Yogam. Since the death of the Gandhian Congressman T.K.Madhavan in 1930, the Yogam leadership had been drifting away from their policy of cooperating with progressive caste-Hindus, which had yielded little apart from the opening to non-caste-Hindus of roads close to a number of temples. On 29 June a Yogam meeting at Quilon demanded adult franchise or, at least, the vote for all taxpayers. It also pressed for the reservation of a fifth of the seats in the new legislature.⁴²

The chairman of the reception committee for the Quilon meeting was C.Kesevan, a 41 year-old lawyer. Kesevan had entered public life as a junior associate of T.K.Madhavan and had been a prominent supporter of the Nair-Ezhava entente, taking part in meetings of Nair-led bodies such as the Peoples' Conference. Now, however, he was among a group of lawyers who formed an Ezhava Political League based in Quilon. The new League met on 31 July under the presidency of C.V.Kunjuraman, Kesevan's father-in-law, and the President of the SNDP Yogam. The League demanded the reservation of seats and called for a round table conference to be held before the shape of the new constitution was decided.⁴³

Also in July, the Muslim Service League submitted a memorial to the Maharaja claiming preferential treatment on the basis of the community's pre-eminence in commerce.⁴⁴ On 21 August a meeting of the Lejñathul Mohamadiya Sabha of Alleppey passed a resolution urging the

creation of separate Muslim electorates.⁴⁵ Two weeks later a memorial was submitted from the Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha.⁴⁶

E.P.Varghese, the Vice President of the Sabha, was one of the five deputationists from the State Catholic Congress, who presented a memorial to the Maharaja on 15 October. It requested the government to either publish its scheme of reform or convene a round table conference of communal representatives.⁴⁷ Like the Latin Sabha, the Congress favoured adult franchise and the reservation of seats based on population, with Christians subdivided according to denomination. However, the Congress memorial differed from the Latin Sabha's in opining that conditions were not suitable for a responsible Executive Council, instead suggesting a nominated Council with at least one Catholic member.

The reforms which all these memorials sought to influence were drawn up by Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar and G.Parameswaran Pillai, the Trivandrum District Judge who was appointed Temporary Political Secretary. In spite of recommending the appointment as Dewan of a British ICS officer from Madras, Thomas Austin, Aiyar continued to exercise the real power in the state in concert with the Junior Maharani. The choice of Parameswaran Pillai to assist him in his task of drafting the reforms, was not reassuring to those who sought an end to Nair political dominance. Having orchestrated the campaign seven years earlier to get a Nair appointed Dewan, Pillai was not likely to draft reforms that reduced his community's overrepresentation in the legislature. So it proved. The Reforms Regulation conceded nothing. Furthermore, the measure, again passed without reference to the existing Council, involved no prior consultation of public opinion along the lines suggested by the SNDP Yogam and the Catholic Congress.

The Regulation⁴⁸ provided for an upper and lower house - the Sri Chitra State Council and the Sri Mulam Assembly. Both houses could initiate and pass legislation and had to approve all bills. The Assembly exercised greater control over finance. No real new powers were granted to the legislature and the few privileges conceded were hedged around by restrictions. For instance, while the non-official members could elect the Assembly's Deputy President, the government could veto their choice. Similarly, the Dewan's sanction was required to consider any measures relating to the Military or Devaswom departments, previously excluded from legislative discussion. Indeed, most significant, in constitutional terms, was the Dewan's retention of his very considerable powers.

The new Assembly had 72 members, including 60 non-officials, of

whom 43 were elected by general constituencies, five by special constituencies of the jannmis, commercial interests and planters, and twelve nominated by the government. The upper house had 37 members with 27 non-officials, sixteen elected by general constituencies, six by special interests, and five by government nominees.⁴⁹ This more than doubled the size of the legislature, but the proportion of those returned from the general constituencies was not liberalised in the same measure; it increased by eight per cent (to 54 per cent). Nor was the franchise greatly liberalised. For the Assembly it remained the same as for the old Council, except that all those assessed to a land or building tax of one rupee in a municipality were given the vote. This contributed to an increase of just nine per cent in the general electorate (from 144,103 in 1931 to 156,798 in 1933).⁵⁰ As compared to the franchise for the old SMPA, the land tax for the upper house was halved to Rs.25, and those paying a municipal tax of five rupees were given the vote. This produced a five-fold increase in the electorate - to 31,157. On 29 October 1932, an official communique on the electoral system was published.

It declared that the formation of communal electorates was 'altogether unsuited' to Travancore, saying that 'they tend to create and multiply communal cleavages in the country...'⁵¹ The reservation of seats in joint electorates was dismissed as impracticable and nomination was seen as the best safeguard against the inadequate representation of any group. Ezhavas and Muslims were assured of four and two Assembly seats respectively. Finally, on the question of granting adult suffrage, the communique stated:

The divisions in Travancore are at the present moment based upon communal or sectional interests, and, unless popular parties formed on political lines come into existence, the introduction of adult suffrage is likely to endanger the larger interests of the State.⁵²

The government's attitude was therefore, that although it acknowledged the predominance of communalism in politics, it was unwilling to encourage it by giving it institutional recognition. For those favouring communal representation, the effect was to consign their political aspirations to indefinite limbo, while allowing Nair politicians continued electoral success. This was pointed out by the recently retired Syrian Catholic Director of Industries, I.C.Chacko, a leader of the State Catholic Congress.⁵³ He asserted 'it seems from the communique, that its architects have thought of wiping out communal antipathies of (sic) Travancore by subjecting all other communities to the predominance of a particular community'.⁵⁴

The organisations that had had their claims dismissed reacted swiftly.⁵⁵ The Working Committee of the Ezhava Political League met at Quilon on 5 November. This was followed by a meeting of the Executive Committee of the State Catholic Congress in Kottayam, and protests from both the Muslim Service League and the Latin Mahajana Sabha.

On 10 November some prominent Christian residents of Trivandrum met under the chairmanship of E.J. John, acknowledged as their elder statesman by all sections of the Syrian Christian community. The meeting appointed two sub-committees to report on the representational and constitutional aspects of the reforms.

Three High Court lawyers were appointed to the committees. They were A.J. John⁵⁶, a former Syrian Catholic MLC, K.T. Thomas, a Marthomite, and S.I. Sathyanesan, a Nadar Protestant. A serving Syrian Catholic MLC joined John and Thomas on the committee on representation which submitted its report on 21 November.⁵⁷ They favoured the communal reservation of seats, in multi-member constituencies, on a population basis, and criticised the franchise qualifications and the proposed delimitation of constituencies as favouring the Nairs. The report recommended the constitution of a working committee with representatives from the various Christian denominations.

Following the sub-committee's report, the Christians in Trivandrum, joined by a few leaders from the mofussil, held an All Travancore Christian Political Conference on 24 November.⁵⁸ The participants included K.C. Mammen Mappillai of the Malayala Manorama, and several prominent retired officials. The Conference appointed a deputation to wait upon the Dewan.

The main organiser of the campaign against the reforms was E.J. John who chaired the Conference. Now in his sixties, the esteem in which he was held was such that, even after being forced to give up his public activities following a stroke in December 1932,⁵⁹ he remained the President of the new Joint Political Conference. John advised the leaders of the Abstention movement on tactics and had an important influence in ensuring the movement's strict adherence to the law.

On 27 November an Ezhava conference in Alleppey⁶⁰, held under the auspices of the SNDP Yogam, urged that in the absence of adult franchise, fourteen seats should be reserved in the legislature for Ezhavas. A committee was elected to confer with the leaders of other communities on taking common action.

Within the next three weeks memorials were submitted to the government by the Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha and the South Travancore

Indian Christian Association. The Muslim Service League also resolved to send a deputation to the Dewan. All these bodies responded favourably to the Ezhava initiative for taking joint political action. On 17 December delegates from nine organisations⁶¹ opposed to the reforms met in the LMS Hall, Trivandrum, to form an All Travancore Joint Political Conference.

Two days after the formation of the JPC, the deputation from the Christian Conference presented a memorial to Dewan Austin. E.J. John, acting as their spokesman, justified the demand for reservation by saying that it would 'have the beneficent result of gradually obliterating communal discord; for, when each (community) is satisfied that it has its due and nothing more, the *raison detre* (sic) of the communal struggle vanishes...'.⁶² In a reference to the Communal Award in British India, John noted that 'in spite of the cant and shibboleth of nationalism, reservation will find a place'. While this aside was calculated to appeal to Austin, it also reflected the lack of enthusiasm for Indian nationalism among many Christian leaders, especially of John's generation.

On 9 January 1933, a deputation representing the JPC submitted yet another memorial to the Dewan. It stated that, with the exception of a section of the Muslims (a reference to the *Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha*), the constituent organisations were not demanding communal electorates but reserved seats in joint multi-member constituencies.⁶³ In the absence of the stricken John, the JPC spokesman was N.V. Joseph, the President of the State Catholic Congress. In a strongly-worded speech, he claimed that the reforms had created a 'virtual Nayar oligarchy'.⁶⁴

Hitherto the administration had ignored the mounting tide of protest released by the announcement of the reforms. However, on 14 January, Chief Secretary K. George wrote to Joseph inquiring whether he would be willing to attend a small conference to consider the regrouping of constituencies. The JPC memorial had specifically rejected such an option as a way of ironing out inequalities in representation. In his reply Joseph, therefore, refused to accept the proposal.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the leaders of the JPC were being encouraged to take a more aggressive stand. On 5 January the weekly organ of the Christian Service League, the Kerala Sevakan (Servant of Kerala), published an article that concluded with the words '... the Christian Political Committee should realise that it is not prayer and resolutions that are important on occasions such as these, but that vigorous action is required'.⁶⁶ Such sentiments reflected widespread feeling within the JPC. On 25 January, at a second meeting at the LMS Hall, the Conference

passed a resolution backing total abstention from the new legislature until the government provided for communal representation on a population basis.⁶⁷

Until then Nair politicians had been uncharacteristically restrained in their response to the reforms, which fell far short of meeting the demands of responsible government that had been made in previous years by organisations such as the People's Conference and the Travancore State Congress. None of the main Nair newspapers came out against the reforms and, in marked contrast to 1919, there was no effort to launch a campaign for more substantial changes. Instead, most Nair politicians appeared relieved that their electoral advantage remained unaffected, and were prepared to support the government in opposing communal representation. Their earlier hostility towards Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar was apparently subordinated to this desire to retain their legislative dominance.

In late January, a conference of prominent Nairs, including most of the retired Nair officials in the state, was held in the Saivaprakasa Hall, Trivandrum, as a counter to the JPC meeting. It was presided over by Dr K.Madhavan Pillai, the longest serving Nair MLC. The conference condemned the Abstention resolution as calculated to isolate the Nairs. On 20 February, Madhavan Pillai, along with Pattom Thanu Pillai and Congressman Amsi Narayana Pillai, went on a deputation to Dewan Austin opposing the regrouping of constituencies.⁶⁸

Their concern had been aroused by government efforts to conciliate the Abstentionists. An official press statement on 27 January spoke of arranging electoral areas in a manner that would ensure equal representation of Nairs and Christians in the State Council. It also expressed confidence that at least sixteen Christians and two or three Ezhavas could be elected to the new Assembly.⁶⁹

The government's reply to the JPC memorial on 28 January sought to highlight conflicts of interest within the Abstentionist communities. It claimed that representations had been received from low-caste Christian converts asserting that they had nothing in common with their more prosperous co-religionists, and asking that their interests should be safeguarded. The 'misradayi' minority among Ezhavas were also said to have made similar representations, and sections of the Latin Catholics to have advocated either facultative or nominated representation. The government called for the reforms to be given a fair trial, holding out the possibility of changes 'if it then be found that any important section of the public has been deprived of the opportunity of making

its needs and opinions felt in the Legislature'. Concluding, the reply regretted the 'attitude of non-cooperation' adopted by the Abstentionist leaders.⁷⁰

The JPC rejected the government's reply. It dismissed the reference to depressed caste Christians numbering over 'six and a half lakhs' as imaginary, saying that Christianity recognised no such distinctions. The Latin and misradayi representations were described as 'illusory claims' advanced by individuals seeking nomination to the legislature. The JPC noted that even if the official projection of the election results was accepted, Nairs would still be left holding 25 of the 43 general Assembly seats. They also rejected the term 'non-cooperation' as an attempt to misrepresent their position by equating them to the non-cooperators in British India.⁷¹

At this juncture, Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar made the first of his controversial interventions aimed at undermining the JPC. He held talks with two senior leaders of the SNDP Yogam - C.V.Kunjuraman and M.Govindan, the Ezhava representative on the Public Service Committee.⁷²

Aiyar won them over by assuring them that the Ezhavas would get seven Assembly, and two Council, seats, they themselves being among those nominated. On 19 February, at a meeting of the Yogam Board of Directors in Alleppey, Kunjuraman and Govindan expressed doubts about the success of the Abstention movement. However, the Board affirmed its support for the movement, with C.Kesevan among those strongly opposing any change of attitude.⁷³ The decision was confirmed by an overwhelming majority of 1491 to 9 at an extraordinary general meeting of the Yogam at Changanacherry on 14 March.⁷⁴

In his attempt to bring about divisions in the Abstentionist ranks, Ramaswami Aiyar made frequent use of the Trivandrum branch of the Associated Press of India news agency.⁷⁵ On 21 February, API reported a meeting between the Constitutional Advisor and certain Christians and Ezhavas, quoting him as saying that he saw no distinction between abstention and non-cooperation, and was glad to see prominent representatives of both communities disassociating themselves from the movement.⁷⁶ The Working Committee of the Christian Conference issued a statement on 24 February denying that any notable Christian had met Aiyar since the Abstention resolution. It also advised constituent organisations to obey orders prohibiting meetings so as to maintain the distinction between Abstention and non-cooperation.⁷⁷

On the same day, a large public meeting was held in Tiruvalla to show mass support for the JPC. The meeting demanded that the government's

patronage of the API should be withheld and recorded its opinion that Ramaswami Aiyar's 'retention in Government service is not conducive to the best interests of the state'.⁷⁸ The Tiruvalla meeting was followed by gatherings of over 5,000 at Kottayam (chaired by N.V. Joseph) and nearly 10,000 at Kozhencherry (chaired by A.C. Kuriakose).⁷⁹

The API report coincided with a violent attack on Christians in the Nair newspaper, Samadarsi. The article compared the 'Christian' agitation in Travancore to the recent Muslim protests against the Hindu maharajas of Alwar and Kashmir, charging that it was 'directed towards the abolition of the Hindu dynasty in the State'. After insinuating that the Junior Maharani's old foe - the Valia Koil Tampuran - was behind the Abstentionists, it concluded by declaring 'let them (the Christians) not dream that so long as a single Nayar is left in this State, they could drive out the noble shining star of.... Travancore and instal in the place any Pope or any of their "Fathers"'.⁸⁰ The Samadarsi article was followed by a report in the Malayala Rajyam that an unnamed Christian had secretly visited the Valia Koil Tampuran. The report was repeated in the Dakshina Bharathi (South India), a south Travancorean Nair paper, which charged Christians such as Chief Secretary K. George of being in league with Christian Abstentionists and editors.⁸¹

The Christian press reacted to the Nair attacks. An article in the Catholic bi-weekly Kottayam Patrika (Kottayam Diary) of 25 February strongly defended the Abstention movement, saying that it was aimed at protecting the communities involved from Nair oppression, and was not directed against the Maharaja.⁸² The Kerala Kesari (Lion of Kerala), also published from Kottayam, denounced the selfishness of the Nairs and proclaimed the Christians' loyalty to the royal family.⁸³ On 1 March, in an attempt to end the communal exchanges, the government issued a letter to three Nair and three Christian newspapers⁸⁴ warning against the tendency to indulge in communal attacks.

Also on 1 March, the government initiated another attempt to find a solution that would satisfy the Abstentionist communities. By-passing the JPC, Dewan Austin convened an informal conference with eleven Christian, Ezhava, Muslim and Nair members of the last Legislative Council. The eleven were supplied with detailed statistics relating to the communal make-up of the electorate. When the conference met again on 9 March, the Christian members presented a scheme aimed at eliminating the caste-Hindu dominance. The scheme was rejected by the government whose only concession was to increase the number of nominated Assembly seats from twelve to fourteen.⁸⁵

Throughout March public meetings were held by the Abstentionists at centres in northern and central Travancore. N.V. Joseph and A.C. Kuriakose, both members of the JPC's Executive Committee, were prominent in addressing these gatherings. The meetings passed resolutions supporting the Abstention movement, calling for the removal of Ramaswami Aiyar, and affirming loyalty to the Maharaja.

The strength of elite support for the movement within the various communities involved can be gauged from the attendance at some of these meetings. One, on 10 March, was held in Changanacherry, a Catholic centre. It attracted about 800 people, including many from the nearby towns of Alleppey and Kottayam.⁸⁶ Though largely made up of Christians, there were some 80 Ezhavas and Muslims present. Among the latter were M.S. Anirudhan⁸⁷, an Ezhava vakil and SNDP Yogam Director from Alleppey, V.K. Velayudhan, another young Alleppey lawyer and labour activist, and T.K. Kittan, a veteran Yogam leader from Kottayam. One notable Alleppey Muslim who attended was H.B. Mohammed Rowther, the ex-President of the Muslim Service League and a member of the JPC Committee. The Christian participants included K.K. Thomas⁸⁸, onetime secretary of the Civic Rights League and President of the Kottayam Municipality. Thomas's brother, K.K. Lukose, was Assistant Head Sirkar Vakil, and his sister-in-law, Dr Mary Poonen Lukose, was the acting head of the Medical Department. That a man with such strong official connections should identify himself with the Abstention movement demonstrated the strength of feeling among the elite of the Christian community.

A typical member of that elite was the leader of the Abstentionists in Changanacherry - P.J. Sebastian.⁸⁹ A 35 year-old lawyer, he belonged to a notable Syrian Catholic family that had once held the title of Tharagan. The son of a merchant, Sebastian was the director of two local banks, as well as being a former president of the municipal council. His efforts at gaining the solid backing of local Catholics was aided by the active sympathy shown by Mar James Kalachery, the Bishop of Changanacherry.⁹⁰

Support for Abstention was just as strong among the Jacobites. A public meeting at Perumbavur, in the northern taluk of Kunnatnad, was held in the premises of the local Jacobite Church.⁹¹ Presided over by M.A. Chacko, the retired Cochin Police Superintendent who had been accused of instigating the 1921 Trichur riot, the other participants included three local landlords - two Jacobites and a Catholic - who had successively represented the taluk in the Legislative Council since 1925.⁹² Among the principal visiting speakers at the meeting were two

Ezhavas - the Cochin editor K.Aiyappan, and K.R.Narayanan, an SNDP Yogam Director who had come to prominence in the temperance movement in Shertallai.

Outside the Syrian Christian areas of northern and central Travancore, the JPC was relatively weak. The Protestant Christians of the south were divided. Though the South Travancore Christian Association was a constituent organisation of the JPC, an LMS missionary wrote that many Protestants feared association with the Syrians could 'bring down Palace displeasure'.⁹³ Some, like D.C.Joseph, the Association's former President, openly supported the administration.⁹⁴ while others, who had initially opposed the legislative reforms, notably the lawyer S.I.Sathyanesan, were won over by official appointments.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, a few south Travancoreans were active in the Abstention movement. For instance, a public meeting held in Kalkulam Taluk in late March, was chaired by A.Nesamony, a Protestant lawyer from Nagercoil.⁹⁶ Other notable participants included retired Tahsildar T.A.Thomas, a member of the Public Service Committee who was the Secretary of the Travancore Church Council of the South India United Church, and X.G.Lopez, a Neyyattinkara Latin Catholic who had served as a nominated MLC.

By the end of March all hopes for a settlement between the JPC and the government had faded. In a final initiative, three senior JPC leaders - K.C.Mammen Mappillai, T.J.Mathew, a former Catholic MLC, and P.S.Mahomed, the President of the Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha - met Dewan Austin.⁹⁷ At the meeting a draft of an official press communique was read. It stated that the government's intention was that 'if any injustice results from the elections, a new legislature will be constituted giving to all communities representation in the legislature in proportion to their population as far as possible'.⁹⁸

When the three negotiators, along with eight members of the JPC's Executive Committee, met Austin again, the following day (25 March), they noted a change in attitude. He now declared that the government had said its final word on the matter and was not prepared to issue any fresh press release. On the morning of the 25th, the Dewan had discussed the draft communique with Ramaswami Aiyar. The inference drawn from this was that it was the latter's intervention that had induced the Dewan to abandon his earlier conciliatory line. Following the breakdown of negotiations the JPC Committee resolved to present a mass memorial to the Viceroy, publish a memorandum of their grievances, and carry on the Abstention movement.

The administration's reaction was uncompromising. In an interview

Ramaswami Aiyar claimed that Ezhava and Muslim leaders were generally satisfied with the representation conceded to their communities in the new legislature.⁹⁹ Urging the Christians to learn from developments in British India that reforms could not be achieved at a stroke, he regretted attempts by a few Abstentionists to approach members of the British Parliament and the Indian Legislative Assembly with their grievances. The Constitutional Advisor's remarks were followed, on 2 April, by a press note which stated that the government viewed 'with utmost displeasure the continuance of agitation in this form'.¹⁰⁰ The note was issued on the day that the Maharaja, accompanied by his mother and Ramaswami Aiyar, left the state at the beginning of a four-month European tour.

On 30 March the Nair Commissioner of Police, B.Narayana Pillai, had written to the Dewan recommending the banning of an Abstentionist meeting in North Parur¹⁰¹, on the grounds that it might lead to a clash with local Nairs given the provocative nature of previous meetings. Ever since January, Narayana Pillai, who had been appointed Police Commissioner in October 1932¹⁰², had been impatiently demanding the prosecution of certain speakers as well as of the most strident Christian newspapers. In an indication of the communal differences within the administration, these requests had been persistently blocked by Chief Secretary George.¹⁰³ However, with the administration's adoption of a hard line, the Commissioner's advice was heeded and on 1 April all public meetings were prohibited in Kottayam District.

The prohibition order in Kottayam was followed by the imposition of similar bans in the districts of Quilon and Trivandrum. The issue of pamphlets and placards was also prohibited. All the restrictions were enforced until a fortnight after polling had taken place in the June elections for the new legislature.¹⁰⁴ In accordance with its policy of maintaining the distinction between Abstention and non-cooperation, the JPC scrupulously observed the ban on meetings. However, some of the younger and more radical Abstentionists continued to be active in canvassing support. The latter included C.Kesevan, the Christian Congressman M.Mathunni, and P.K.Kunju of the Muslim Service League.¹⁰⁵

The administration also acted against one of the newspapers that had been most vehement in supporting the movement. On 5 April the Catholic Dasan, edited by M.M.Varkey, had its licence cancelled. It was charged with exciting disaffection by publishing a leading article entitled 'The Knight Errant', a satirical piece on Ramaswami Aiyar.¹⁰⁶ In another instance of pressure on a pro-Abstentionist newspaper, on 23 March a warning was issued to the Malayala Manorama¹⁰⁷,

the leading Christian organ in the state.

Meanwhile, the JPC and its constituent organisations, carried on their public activities in neighbouring Cochin. On 20 April the JPC Executive Committee met in Ernakulam and published a statement that accused the government of 'endeavouring to perpetuate by exercise of force the Nayar oligarchy'.¹⁰⁸ Between 12-14 May the annual sessions of the Christian Service League and the Kerala Catholic Congress, as well as a meeting of Ezhavas, were all held in Ernakulam. Attended by several thousands, they passed resolutions reiterating support for Abstention and calling on the government to ensure that there was no official interference with the June elections. On 13 May an All Kerala Muslim Conference in Calicut, presided over by Sir Muhammad Habibullah, a former member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, passed a resolution requesting the government 'to call off the scheme of repression launched by them'.¹⁰⁹

The government took considerable pains to ensure that the elections were a success. On 1 May a letter was circulated to Police Commissioner Narayana Pillai, Land Revenue Commissioner Kunjan Pillai, and the District Magistrates of Quilon and Kottayam. It stated that it was 'important before and during the elections to have strong and reliable officers' in six taluks¹¹⁰ where Christians constituted a majority, or close to a majority, of the population. The object was to see that the official forecast of the election results, given in a communique on 14 March, would prove justified. This necessitated the return to the Assembly of sixteen Christians, two Ezhavas and a Muslim. To ensure such a result candidates had to be found from the Abstentionist communities; caste-Hindus had to be dissuaded from opposing them; and Christian, Ezhava and Muslim electors had to be persuaded either to vote for anti-Abstentionists or, at least, to abstain from voting.

The Police Commissioner was given the responsibility of directing the government's election efforts and spent several weeks in northern and central Travancore.¹¹¹ He had mixed results. Only fourteen Christians, three Ezhavas, and a Muslim could be persuaded to stand as Assembly candidates. None of the Christians were men of note, apart from N.E.Varghese¹¹², a retired Anglican Syrian wakil who had served as joint secretary of the Christian Association from 1908-14. The Ezhavas included two SNDP Yogam directors - K.M.Krishnan and K.Sankaran. Sankaran¹¹³, a High Court wakil, belonged to the wealthy landowning Komalezhathu family, and was related to the leader of the Ezhava anti-Abstentionists, Komalezhathu Sankaran¹¹⁴, a Chengannur wakil and former Yogam director. Another anti-Abstentionist, K.P.Kayyalakkal, the

proprietor of the late T.K.Madhavan's, now defunct, Desabhimani newspaper, was also related to the same family.¹¹⁵ The sole Muslim candidate was a former clerk in the Registration Department.

In the second of its aims - dissuading caste-Hindus from opposing the anti-Abstentionists - the administration was aided by the cooperation of many Nair leaders. For instance, G.Raman Menon, the maverick former MLC, publicly stated that he withdrew from standing against K.Sankaran only due to pressure exerted by other Nairs. However, four Nairs did not yield, and stood against Christian candidates in Changanacherry and Kottayam.¹¹⁶ They included M.N.Nair and Kainikkara M.Padmanabha Pillai, both prominent members of the Nair Service Society, who disregarded directions from the Society to withdraw.

In influencing voters the government used the tactics of both repression and persuasion. A Nair was appointed head of the Criminal Investigation Department, which was reorganised with a special branch opened to deal with political matters.¹¹⁷ A manifesto calling upon Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims to participate in the elections was published over the signatures of 35 Christians, most of whom either held semi-official municipal or judicial posts, or benefited from the government's patronage in other ways.¹¹⁸

Despite these efforts, the election result was a blow to the government. Only just over a quarter of the general electorate voted and in three-fifths of the constituencies candidates were returned unopposed.¹¹⁹ They included all the ten Christians (two in the State Council) to be elected, as well as two of the three Ezhavas and both Muslims (one in the Council) who stood. The eight Christian candidates who faced opposition were all defeated. They included K.K.Thomas, who had been induced to abandon the Abstentionist cause but lost in the Kottayam Council constituency to a Nair.¹²⁰ Two Assembly constituencies with Christian majorities - Kottayam I and Changanacherry I - returned M.N.Nair and Kainikkara M.Padmanabha Pillai. Overall, Nairs won 35 of the 59 general seats in the two houses,¹²¹ almost the same proportion as they had claimed in the old Council.

While the government may have been disappointed, most Nair leaders indicated their satisfaction at the outcome. At the inaugural meeting of the legislature on 31 July, Dr K.Madhavan Pillai and Changanacherry K.Parameswaran Pillai both welcomed the reforms as marking a great constitutional advance.¹²² The new legislature also had the overwhelming backing of the Nair press, with A.Balakrishna Pillai's Kesari, the only paper to be critical.¹²³

The Nair dominance of the legislature was reflected in the election of the Assembly's Deputy President. The successful candidate was T.K.Velu Pillai, and his three opponents were also Nairs - Changanacherry and P.K.Narayana Pillai, both retired from the High Court bench, and Pattom Thanu Pillai.¹²⁴ The three were all prominent in the two main party groupings to emerge in the Assembly.¹²⁵ Changanacherry led the mainly Nair Nationalist Party, whose other members included Pattom, while Narayana Pillai was the leader of an ostensibly multi-communal Liberal Party. A third party, also dominated by caste-Hindus, was the Independent Party. However, rather than signifying the introduction of a multi-party system into the Travancorean legislature, these divisions were of scant political importance since there was no serious inter-party conflict. The groupings were merely an attempt by legislators to emulate their counterparts in British India.

While Nair leaders jockeyed for position, the anti-Abstentionist youths observed fasts to protest against individuals who had accepted nomination.¹²⁶ The latter included erstwhile JPC supporters who had been won over by the administration - K.K.Thomas, C.V.Kunjuraman, M.Govindan and N.Abdur Rahiman - as well as Komalezhathu Sankaran, the leader of the Ezhava anti-Abstentionists. Christian legislators were most affected by the pressure from within their community.¹²⁷ One Anglican Syrian Assembly member failed to take his seat¹²⁸ and, in the State Council, K.K.Thomas urged the Dewan 'to come to a generous understanding'¹²⁹ of the position of the underrepresented communities.

The JPC resumed its activity within Travancore following the end of the ban on public meetings. Meetings held at several centres called for the dissolution of the legislature. One of the first, at Palai in Minachil Taluk, requested the appointment of a European Police Commissioner and demanded an inquiry into official interference in the elections.¹³⁰

The government countered the renewal of Abstentionist activity. In September the teaching licence of A.C.Kuriakose, on the staff of the St Thomas High School, Palai, was cancelled. Notices were also served on two teachers in aided schools who supported Abstention, and the managers of two Catholic high schools, including St Thomas's, were called upon to explain why their institutions should not be penalised since some staff members had been engaging in agitation. Apart from these actions, pro-Abstentionists' meetings and newspaper articles were again frequently prohibited.¹³¹

The government's tougher attitude was reflected in an administrative

reshuffle in September, in which Chief Secretary George exchanged posts with the Land Revenue Commissioner, Dr Kunjan Pillai. George's transfer was widely seen as a mark of official displeasure towards the Christian community.¹³² Since it followed the return of the royal party from Europe, it is likely that it indicated dissatisfaction with his conduct in their absence. Having frequently shielded Christian newspapers from government action, in July 1933 he had been behind a warning to the pro-government Malayala Rajyam threatening the cancellation of its licence. This followed the paper's publication of an article attacking the authorities in British India. In appeal to the Dewan, the Rajyam's editor, K.G.Sankar, had accused George of close links to the Malayala Manorama and of wanting to destroy his paper.¹³³

Meanwhile, Nair leaders responded strongly to the renewal of Abstentionist activity. The first All Travancore Joint Nair Conference to be held since 1925 met in Trivandrum in late September. The conference was dominated by attacks on the Abstention movement, which was characterised as anti-Nair.¹³⁴ The chairman, retired District Magistrate K.Narayana Menon emphasised the privileged position in the state that Nairs were entitled to. Even a moderate like E.V.Krishna Pillai, an MLA and former editor of the Malayali, appealed to the government to put down, what he termed, the Abstentionists' subversive activities. At a Nair Youths' Conference, Malloor K.Govinda Pillai, the former President of the Nair Maha Sabha, exhorted the youth to organise to fight agitators who were trying to destroy their community. Despite the opposition of the Secretary of the radical Youth League, N.Sivasankaran Nair, Malloor succeeded in getting the conference overwhelmingly to approve the formation of a committee¹³⁵ to supervise the establishment of separate Nair youth leagues.

The conference had several notable features. It was large - attended by about a thousand people. It was distinctly communal in character - apart from the speeches already mentioned, leaders of communal organisations, like the Nair Service Society, took a prominent part in proceedings. It was representative of Nair opinion - the only notable absentee was Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai. And, finally, it had official backing - those attending included the Law Member (Kayalam Parameswaran Pillai), a Nair High Court judge, and numerous retired officers, among them three former District Magistrates, and an ex-High Court judge (P.K.Narayana Pillai).

The conference organisers clearly saw the Syrian Christians as their main adversaries. In an effort to isolate the Syrians, attempts

were made to woo the non-caste-Hindus. Hindu and Depressed Classes conferences were held in conjunction with the Nair conference. Those attending included the nominated MLAs C.V.Kunjuraman and N.John Joseph, General Secretary of the Cheramar Mahajana Sangham, the largest depressed classes organisation. R.C.Das, the Ezhava Secretary of the local Arya Samajam branch, moved a resolution favouring the re-conversion of Hindus who had embraced other religions.

Like the Nair leaders, the administration was aware of the danger of the caste-Hindus being isolated, and joined in showing solicitude for the non-caste-Hindus. In the six months after the Trivandrum conference, three separate organisations were formed, with official encouragement, for the uplift of the depressed classes.

Congressmen started a branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangh in October¹³⁶ and this was followed by the formation of two bodies enjoying official patronage.¹³⁷ The larger of the two - the Kerala Hindu Mission - was given a grant of Rs.10,000.¹³⁸ Though ostensibly social reform organisations, the activities of the new bodies, especially their proselytising among depressed class Christians, caused them to be regarded as anti-Christian. One Catholic bishop felt that the administration's policy was a reaction to the rapid growth of Christianity revealed by the 1931 census.¹³⁹

Meetings called to protest at the Nair Conference were banned¹⁴⁰, while anti-Abstentionist activity continued. Tracts were circulated aimed at persuading Muslims and Ezhavas that the Abstention movement was merely the product of Christian manoeuvres. This was followed by anti-Abstention meetings.¹⁴¹ The SNDP Yogam leadership did its best to counter the influence of the Ezhava anti-Abstentionists. In December the Yogam's new General Secretary, C.Kesevan, cancelled the affiliation of an Alleppey branch which had invited C.V.Kunjuraman and K.P.Kayyalakkal to its anniversary meeting.¹⁴²

In reaction to the government's attitude, the JPC decided to establish a permanent Joint Political Congress. The objectives of the new organisation went beyond the terms of the Abstention resolution. Its aims were said to be 'representation in the Legislature, Public Service, and in the Army for all considerable communities in the state in proportion to their population, the securing of adult franchise and the establishment of responsible Government'.¹⁴³ The JPC Executive Committee resolved to press their demands through successive memorials to the Dewan, the Maharaja and the Paramount Power.

The administration was also prepared to change its tactics.

On the eve of a visit by the Viceroy in December, it sought to conciliate Abstentionist opinion so as to avoid any possible embarrassment.

In October some caste-Hindu legislators, with official encouragement, took the lead in forming the Liberal Party League. Its purpose was to act as an intermediary between the government and the Abstentionists. Though a League conference at Kottayam supported the legislative reforms, it also passed a resolution requesting proper representation in the public service for underrepresented communities.¹⁴⁴ P.K.Narayana Pillai was elected leader of the new party, with a Christian Assemblyman as his deputy. The League claimed the support of 27 legislators, but many of these, including N.Abdur Rahiman¹⁴⁵, were nominated members. In any case, it failed to win the trust of the Abstentionists.¹⁴⁶

Along with the indirect overtures made via the Liberals, the administration also used direct, unofficial, contacts to dissuade the JPC leaders from submitting a memorial to the Viceroy. On 22 October Ramaswami Aiyar contacted E.J.Philipose, a Trivandrum lawyer and the son of E.J.John. He subsequently met C.P.Matthen, a Marthomite banker, who was on close terms with many Abstentionist leaders. According to Matthen and Philipose¹⁴⁷, they met the Constitutional Advisor again, on 8 November, when he made several proposals. He said that changes could be made that would assure the Christians of getting at least as many Assembly seats as the Nairs, and increase the number of Ezhavas and Muslims elected to ten. Ramaswami Aiyar suggested that the JPC should submit a memorial to the Maharaja, while, at the same time, giving a private assurance that Abstention had ceased and that they had no intention to go beyond the Maharaja. These terms were conveyed to the JPC's Committee which, on 12 November, authorised Matthen and Philipose to continue the negotiations.

In public Dewan Austin refused to receive a JPC deputation until the party unequivocally renounced Abstention. Therefore, while on 9 November, the JPC's General Secretary, N.V.Joseph, forwarded a memorial demanding the dissolution of the legislature¹⁴⁸, later, in a private meeting with Austin, E.J.Philipose handed over a confidential letter containing the assurances requested by Ramaswami Aiyar. At the same time, the discredited Nair Police Commissioner was replaced by a Brahman officer on secondment from the Indian Police.¹⁴⁹

The administration's efforts at defusing tensions ensured that the Viceroy's visit passed off without a repetition of the controversy that had marked Lord Willingdon's previous visit in 1920. The Abstentionists received no encouragement from Willingdon, who refused their request for

an interview.¹⁵⁰ Instead, in a speech praising the 1932 reforms, he described their movement as 'ill-advised'.¹⁵¹

In the aftermath of the Viceroy's visit there was a lull in Abstentionist activity. Apart from disappointment, the inaction was also due partly to divisions within the JPC. K.C.Mammen Mappillai, one of the party's chief backers, temporarily withdrew from the movement for fear of measures being taken against him.¹⁵² This followed a notice, in November 1933, threatening his Malayala Manorama with prosecution for publishing material critical of the transfer of K.George.¹⁵³

In response, Mammen Mappillai made a written apology which angered some of the more radical JPC activists. One, P.K.Kunju, unsuccessfully sought a meeting to pass a resolution of no-confidence.¹⁵⁴

In January 1934, two members of the JPC Committee - N.V.Joseph and K.T.Thomas - started a new Kottayam weekly, the Swatantra Kahalam (Independent Bugle), to do propaganda for the Abstentionist cause following the Manorama's adoption of a more moderate stance.¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the government had not granted the concessions that Ramaswami Aiyar had promised in November. On 5 February, a memorial, in the form of a book, entitled Travancore: The Present Political Problem, and signed by the members of the JPC Executive Committee, was submitted to the Maharaja. It repeated the demand for the reconstitution of the legislature.¹⁵⁶ However, the Maharaja's reply made no reference to any redress of the Abstentionists' grievances, and the intermediaries - Philipose and Matthen - met Aiyar to express their astonishment. They were told that an official communique along the lines of his November proposals would be issued very soon. When this failed to materialise they again met the Constitutional Advisor, who told them to await the arrival of Sir Muhammad Habibullah, appointed to succeed Thomas Austin as Dewan.

In February Austin left to take up a post in Madras. His successor was, in some respects, an unexpected choice. The 64 year-old Habibullah¹⁵⁷ was approaching the end of a distinguished public career, the high point of which had been five years on the Viceroy's Council. In May 1933 he had presided over the Muslim Conference in Calicut, which had expressed support for the JPC. Thus he was suspect in Nair eyes and readily acceptable to the Abstentionists. It seems, therefore, that his appointment was another aspect of the attempts to defuse the agitation. However, the fact that Ramaswami Aiyar had known Habibullah in Madras, and served with him on the Indian delegation to the 1929 League of Nations Assembly, was probably also important.

On 2 May the new Dewan was approached by a deputation of ten members of the JPC's Committee who submitted a memorial giving a history of their secret negotiations with Ramaswami Aiyar. They alleged that there had been a breach of understanding on the government's part.¹⁵⁸ This caused a furore. In a statement on 17 May, Aiyar denied any negotiations having taken place, or having promised concessions if the JPC forbore from approaching the Paramount Power. E.J. John, E.J. Philipose and C.P. Matthen replied by publishing their own statements which confirmed the JPC's account. On 30 May, Chief Secretary Kunjun Pillai, was questioned on the subject by Nair members of the Assembly. In reply he denied that the government had made any promises regarding the redress of grievances, adding that it could not accept any responsibility for what Aiyar said or did in his private capacity.¹⁵⁹

However, the Constitutional Advisor's position was also challenged in the press. The Kesari said that the negotiations with the Abstentionists left the government with a moral responsibility. It declared that Aiyar should not exercise power without responsibility, and should either be appointed Dewan or asked to leave.¹⁶⁰

Such comments reflected the revival of the misgivings felt by some Nair politicians regarding Aiyar's manner of functioning. This development was encouraged by the emergence of T.M. Varghese, who had led the deputation that met Habibullah, as the JPC's principal spokesman. Varghese¹⁶¹, a leading Marthomite lawyer from Quilon, had only belatedly come to the fore of the Abstention movement. In his first political speech, a presidential address to a JPC meeting in Tiruvalla on 30 January 1934, he favoured cooperation with Nair leaders in order to reduce communal rivalry.¹⁶² This gesture towards Nair moderates, like Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and E.V. Krishna Pillai, evoked a positive response. On 11 June, Changanacherry released a statement which, while criticising the Abstentionists, said that the movement could not be considered unconstitutional. He also suggested a non-official committee to ascertain public opinion, and frame compromise proposals on political reform.¹⁶³

A newspaper article by C.N. Madhavan Pillai, a prominent Nair lawyer, in February 1935, was even more conciliatory towards the Abstentionists. Madhavan Pillai saw the role played by Ramaswami Aiyar, in the affairs of the state, as the most important political problem facing Travancore. He strongly criticised the 1932 reforms and asserted that the only Nairs to benefit from the administration's policies were certain officials, such as Dr Kunjan Pillai, and G. Parameswaran

Pillai, belonging to leading south Travancorean Nair service families. The article, therefore, advised Abstentionist leaders to take a less narrowly communal attitude and represent the interests of 'poor' Travancoreans, irrespective of community.

Here, presumably, was an opportunity for the Abstentionists to counter the administration's divide and rule tactics. However, there was little support for the change in emphasis that was needed, probably because JPC leaders were uncertain of the response - both from the majority of Nairs, and within their own communities. Consequently, their draft memorial to the Viceroy¹⁶⁴ only mentioned the demand for communal representation, and left out the other stated objectives of the JPC - adult franchise and responsible government.

The hostility towards Aiyar was particularly evident among Travancoreans with pronounced nationalist sympathies. Madhavan Pillai's article, 'Memorial to the Viceroy', was published simultaneously in the Malayali and the Kerala Sevakan.¹⁶⁵ Both papers had recently acquired nationalist editors - M.R. Madhava Warriar, returning to the Malayali after a twelve-year absence, and Zacharia Olassa, an associate of the Christian Congressman M. Mathunni.

While some Nair leaders were reviewing their support for the administration, the Abstention movement was comparatively quiescent for much of 1934-35. This was due mainly to the JPC's lack of success in bringing about the dissolution of the legislature, but also partly the result of the appointment of the new Dewan. Habibullah's arrival had caused most notable Muslims, apart from the radical P.K. Kunju, to back out of the movement.¹⁶⁶ The Dewan had also been able to persuade some Christian leaders of his goodwill. Indeed, two Catholics - Thariathu Kunjithomman and E.P. Varghese - abandoned Abstention and accepted nomination to the State Council.¹⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the administration continued to be regarded with suspicion by most Christian leaders. A series of controversies that concerned the Christian community contributed to a feeling that they were under attack.¹⁶⁸ The patronage granted to Hindu revivalist organisations aroused serious anxiety among the clergy, while popular sentiment was inflamed by incidents such as a Nair's desecration of an image of the Virgin Mary at Palai, a Catholic centre, in August 1934.¹⁶⁹

The punitive measures taken against Christian newspapers that attacked the Nair community and the government, reinforced the Christian intelligentsia's hostility to the administration. In October 1934, the Kerala Sevakan and Swatantra Kahalam were threatened with closure

for an article published in the wake of the Palai incident.¹⁷⁰

A month later, the licence of the Yuva Bharathi, the successor to M.M.Varkey's Dasan, was cancelled.¹⁷¹

Moreover, it was not only Christian politicians and journalists who found themselves constantly at loggerheads with the post-Regency administration. Relations between church and state were also passing through their most difficult phase since the 1890s. As had been the case then, two of the subjects at dispute were education and places of worship. In November 1932, the government had issued an order prohibiting the use of grant-in-aid schools as prayer houses without the permission of the Education Department. The order was of particular concern to the churches since many of these were Christian institutions. Though the operation of the order was indefinitely delayed following an appeal from E.A.L.Moore¹⁷², the Anglican Bishop of Travancore and Cochin, the pressure on Christian education was maintained.

In addition, the Christian denominations were experiencing unusual difficulty in getting permission to erect new churches under the terms of a Proclamation made in 1898. This was partly due to the fact that in March 1930 a notification had been issued extending the operation of the Proclamation to cemeteries as well. In May 1935 a joint session of the Kerala Christian Service League and the Kerala Catholic Congress, at Kozhencherry, demanded the withdrawal of all restrictions on the erection of churches and the opening of burial grounds. The resolution was justified by the conference's president, the Madras Congressman George Joseph, in the light of 'the fearful state of nervousness and orthodoxy into which the administrators of law in the State have got'.¹⁷³

The most controversial of the issues that bedevilled church-state relations was the classification of converts from the depressed castes for the purpose of determining recruitment to the public service. The question was first raised in February 1933, and after consultation with Bishop Moore and the LMS, the government resolved to consider the converts as a separate sub-division of the Christians.¹⁷⁴ This was strongly supported by the leaders of Pulaya and Paraya associations. In May 1934 a memorial, asking that depressed-class Christians should be classified separately, was submitted to the Dewan. Signed by representatives of the Cheramar Mahajana Sangham, and two smaller depressed-class sanghams, it argued that they were discriminated against, both socially and religiously, by other Christians.¹⁷⁵

In July 1934 the government issued a circular grouping Christian converts from the depressed castes with Hindu depressed castes.

There was a storm of protest. From the population figures given, the circular appeared to include all non-Syrian Christians in the depressed class category. This brought a strong reaction from the Latin Catholics, many of whom saw the new classification as degrading their social status. Over the next six months they held 37 public meetings, some of which were attended by several thousands.¹⁷⁶ The leaders of the Latin Mahajana Sabha played an active role, with E.P.Varghese attempting to raise the matter in the State Council.¹⁷⁷

In November, at the annual session of the State Catholic Congress, P.J.Sebastian attacked Dewan Habibullah for cutting the Christian community in two.¹⁷⁸ The Anglican Church Council and the South Travancore Christian Association, also recorded their protests.¹⁷⁹ However, the representatives of the associations of the depressed-caste Christians held a meeting in Trivandrum on 23 September, at which resolutions were passed opposing the stance taken by 'savarna Christians'.¹⁸⁰

The 'Depressed Classes' classification was only one of the long list of grievances in a memorial submitted to the British Agent in March 1935, by Mar Ivanios, the Catholic Archbishop of Trivandrum. He charged that the administration was pursuing a policy of repression towards existing Christians and preventing conversions.¹⁸¹

The controversy was not limited to the state. The new classification was one of the grievances raised by George Joseph in an interview with the Political Secretary of the Government of India, Sir Bertrand Glancy, on 28 March.¹⁸² The Travancorean Christians also enlisted the support of two British Conservative Members of Parliament strongly opposed to the Government of India Bill - Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent, a leading Catholic peer, and the Duchess of Atholl, a Scottish member of the Commons.¹⁸³ They both demanded that representations be made to the Travancorean authorities.¹⁸⁴ Though this was not done, the very fact that the matter had been raised, brought a protest from the Dewan, who also sent a long memorandum to the British Agent refuting Mar Ivanios's allegation. The Agent, Lt-Col.W.A.M.Garstin, a devout Anglican, was not inclined to accept the protestations of the administration's impartiality.¹⁸⁵ Consequently, the Public Service Commission G.O. issued on 25 June sub-divided Christians simply on denominational lines.¹⁸⁶

Another notable victory for Christian opinion came in a debate over the future of Tangasseri, a British enclave north of Quilon. With a mainly Catholic population of less than 2,000, it had been held successively by the Portuguese, Dutch and British, since the sixteenth century.

A proposal was made to transfer the area to Travancore, a move favoured by the Travancore administration, which feared that the enclave could become a refuge for political dissidents. However, the inhabitants of Tangasseri were opposed to the idea and, at a public meeting in June 1934, a committee was appointed to convey their feelings to the Government of India.¹⁸⁷

A memorial was submitted to the Viceroy and the matter was then raised in the British Parliament. In a debate in the House of Commons on 10 December, the government faced questions from, among others, the Duchess of Atholl. In reply, the House was assured that there would be no attempt to go against the wishes of Tangasseri's inhabitants.¹⁸⁸ Two days later, Ramaswami Aiyar issued a statement in which he mentioned Travancore's large Christian population as evidence of the state's religious tolerance, and a factor in favour of the cession of Tangasseri.¹⁸⁹

Aiyar's argument recoiled on him. Within Travancore, the Christian press¹⁹⁰ and the JPC criticised the proposed transfer, while the citizens of Tangasseri forwarded another memorial to the Viceroy detailing the alleged mistreatment of Christians in Travancore. The memorial also accused the Travancorean authorities of using intimidatory and corrupt tactics in canvassing support for a counter memorial.¹⁹¹ In March 1935, George Joseph mentioned the matter in his interview with the Political Secretary, and further Parliamentary representations were made by the Duchess of Atholl.¹⁹² The proposal for the transfer of Tangasseri was subsequently shelved.

The success of the Christian approaches to the Paramount Power caused the JPC to favour acting upon the decision that had been taken in 1933, to submit a memorial to the Viceroy. When the party's Working Committee met on 12 May 1935, they had to decide on their future programme in the knowledge that a year after their memorial to the Dewan, Habibullah had yet to deliver any substantial concessions. The Committee, therefore, resolved to go ahead with the memorial to the Viceroy.¹⁹³

The annual conference of the JPC was held in Kozhencherry on 13 May. In his presidential address, C. Kesevan, who had been elected the party's Vice President in February¹⁹⁴, strongly attacked the Nairs and the administration. In a reference to the debate among Ezhavas on the advisability of an en masse conversion, he also spoke of a widening gulf between Ezhavas and Hinduism. Kesevan vehemently supported the plan to memorialise the Viceroy, and described Ramaswami Aiyar as that 'jandhu' (beast).¹⁹⁵

On 27 May, the Head Sirkar Vakil reported that Kesevan, along with several other speakers at the Kozhencherry conference, could be prosecuted for exciting disaffection and promoting class hatred.¹⁹⁶ In the first demonstration of its kind in Travancore, the JPC Vice President was garlanded and cheered by a crowd of about a thousand, on his arrest in Alleppey on 7 June.¹⁹⁷ In the aftermath of the arrest there was a protest demonstration in Changanacherry, which resulted in the detention of P.J. Sebastian, and a threat to withdraw official recognition from the Catholic St Berchman's High School.¹⁹⁸ Demonstrations also took place in Quilon and several other centres.¹⁹⁹

The government determined to make an example of Kesevan. After the Quilon Sessions Judge passed a sentence of a year's imprisonment and a fine of Rs.500, the administration filed a revision petition in the High Court against the inadequacy of the sentence. In what became a cause celebre, Malloor K. Govinda Pillai, engaged as the Special Public Prosecutor, faced a trio of Christian lawyers who defended Kesevan - T.M. Varghese, George Joseph and K.T. Thomas. In December the High Court rejected Kesevan's appeal and extended his term of imprisonment to two years.²⁰⁰

The controversy provoked by the arrest of Kesevan probably aided Habibullah in overcoming any opposition there was within the administration to his attempts to redress the grievances of the Abstentionists. The most significant obstacle to his authority was Ramaswami Aiyar. Soon after taking up his post, Habibullah, like his predecessor, had complained bitterly to the British Agent, Lt-Col. D.M. Field, about Aiyar's interference in the administration. Though Field advised Delhi of the desirability of the latter's departure from the state²⁰¹, the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, felt that the Government of India should await concrete developements.

In spite of the restraints imposed on him, Habibullah was able to make significant progress in responding to the main demands of the JPC. In October 1934, a European High Court Judge, Dr. G.D. Nokes, was appointed to study the question of reforming the system of recruitment to the public service. He submitted a report in March 1935, and in June the government issued an order based on his recommendations.²⁰² This divided the service into three divisions: in the higher division efficiency was to be the primary criterion, with only a small proportion of posts reserved for communities that would otherwise be unrepresented; in the intermediate division, three-fifths of the appointments were to be made with regard only to efficiency, while a system of communal

preference was devised for the remainder; finally, recruitment to the lower division was to be mainly on a communal representation basis.

The order recognised the Muslims, eight Hindu caste groupings, and six Christian denominations as separate communities. Of these, ten, including the Syrian and Latin Catholics, the Ezhavas and Muslims, were considered inadequately represented and, therefore, to be given preference.²⁰³ Dr Nokes was appointed the state's first Public Service Commissioner in July, and the new Recruitment Rules came into force on 16 September 1936.²⁰⁴ In a separate move, that redressed another grievance cited by the JPC, in April 1935, the scope of recruitment to the military was extended from Nairs to men from other communities as well.²⁰⁵

All that remained of the JPC's demand for communal representation was the part relating to the legislature. The Dewan was anxious to have the Government of India's backing for his scheme of electoral reform in order to be able to counter possible opposition from the Junior Maharani and Ramaswami Aiyar. This support was conveyed by the Agent, and a communique detailing Habibullah's scheme was issued on 17 August 1935.²⁰⁶ Eighteen of the sixty general seats in the legislature were reserved for poorly represented communities, with the Ezhavas getting ten, and the Muslims and Latin Catholics four each. In addition, E. Subramonia Aiyar, the Brahman Principal of the Law College, was appointed Commissioner for the Franchise and Delimitation of Constituencies, with responsibility for reporting on electoral reform.²⁰⁷

The Abstentionists reacted favourably to the communique and the Public Service Commission G.O.. In a statement on 21 August the JPC withdrew its programme of agitation, including the planned memorial to the Viceroy, and promised full cooperation with the government. While noting that the communique gave no definite assurance to the Syrian and south Travancorean Christians, it expressed confidence in the Franchise Commissioner.²⁰⁸ Subramonia Aiyar²⁰⁹ was a Director of K.C. Mammen Mappillai's Travancore National Bank, and had for long served with E. J. John in the Law College.

Nair opinion regarding the reforms was mixed. Several Nair legislators strongly criticised the Public Service Commission G.O. .²¹⁰ Even before the August communique, Pattom Thanu Pillai also expressed apprehension about the consequences of legislative reform for the caste-Hindus. However, moderate Nair leaders, including Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, were prepared to reserve their judgement. Others who were close to the palace, like K.G. Parameswaran Pillai, the publisher of

the Malayala Rajyam, were generally unwilling to criticise the administration. The Rajyam's favourable comment on the August communique²¹¹ indicated that the palace, in spite of the Dewan's apprehensions, regarded the limited concessions that had been made as unavoidable.

Congress in 1933-35

In contrast to 1930-31, there was little Congress activity in Travancore during the Abstention movement. This was partly due to the fact that, for the first time, Nair politicians were in the position of having to defend the established political order. The effective repression of Congress in British India also contributed to the hiatus, since the intensity of Congress activity in the state usually corresponded to phases in the nationalist movement.

From early 1932 until the end of 1933, Congress was virtually dormant in Travancore. Then, in January 1934, the visit by Gandhi brought a rush to arrange receptions to welcome the Mahatma. Apart from local Congressmen, those involved included Nair legislators, newspaper editors, lawyers and leading members of the Nair Service Society, as well as prominent Ezhava anti-Abstentionists. However, Christians kept their distance; the only ones to be associated were David V. George, a Youth League activist and correspondent with the Malayala Manorama, and K.C. Mathew, a brother of K.C. Mammen Mappillai and the co-editor of the Manorama.²¹² Even the veteran Congressman M. Mathunni stayed aloof from the preparations for the visit, which was generally viewed as encouraging Hindu revivalism. Among Ezhavas, the more radical Abstentionists opposed the visit. They felt that Gandhi's sympathy for the depressed classes arose out of a desire to strengthen the Hindu community politically.

Among those who took an active interest in the Mahatma's visit was M. Sivasankaran Nair, the Secretary of the radical Youth League. Virtually moribund following the clampdown on Congress activity in early 1932, the League was re-established in March 1933. An official report in mid-1936 estimated that it had about a hundred members, said to be mostly 'extremists' in their social and political outlook.²¹³ In fact, there was a distinct division within the League. Men like Sivasankaran Nair, Trivandrum lawyer V. Achutha Menon, the League's Vice President, Ponnara Sridhar and the Gandhian G. Ramachandran belonged to notable southern Nair families and were part of the educated Nair political elite. Their 'extremism' was of the intellectual Fabian socialist variety espoused by Jawaharlal Nehru.²¹⁴ In contrast the real 'extremists' - such as N. P. Kurukkal and N. C. Sekhar - did not belong to the elite and, being, by inclination, communists rather than socialists, harboured a deep

distrust of the National Congress.

The secular League was the only organisation in the state to attempt actively to combat the growth in communal animosity. In a presidential address, to its annual session in Trivandrum in November 1933, K.Kelappan, the veteran Gandhian Congressman from Malabar, regretted that even students were allowing themselves to be divided by the Abstention movement.²¹⁵ The League engaged in anti-communal propaganda to reverse this trend, organising meetings like one, in July 1935, at which Dr T.S.S.Rajan, a leading Madras Congressman, lectured against communalism and in support of nationalism.²¹⁶ 'Extremists' in the League went further. N.P.Kurukkal, who had sought a boycott of Gandhi's visit, published articles advocating atheism.²¹⁷ These appeared in the Pauran, a shortlived Trivandrum weekly, the editor of which had renounced both Hinduism and Christianity.²¹⁸

Apart from campaigning against communalism, the Youth League also sought to widen its appeal. In October 1934 a branch was started by a few Christian youths at a meeting, near Chengannur, chaired by Zacharia Olassa²¹⁹, the editor of the Kerala Sevakan. In addition, though the League leadership remained predominantly Nair, David George was appointed a joint secretary.²²⁰

Following the victory of the Congress Socialists in elections to the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, there was an attempt to reactivate the nationalist movement in Travancore. In July 1934, three representatives of the new KPCC toured the state on a drive to recruit members.²²¹ The three were A.K.Gopalan, the KPCC's Joint Secretary, the expatriate Travancorean, P.Krishna Pillai, the Secretary of the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party, and K.Kumar, who, though a Gandhian, was also associated with the Socialists.²²² The response to their efforts was poor. On 26 July at a public meeting in Trivandrum, chaired by KPCC member Changanacherry Perameswaran Pillai, N.P.Kurukkal expressed dissatisfaction with the Congress programme.²²³ In a meeting in Trivandrum, with Gopalan and Krishna Pillai, his sentiments were echoed by other 'extremist' Youth Leaguers, most notably, N.C.Sekhar, who, at this time, was contributing newspaper articles attacking capitalism. The 'extremists' felt that the Congress was a capitalist organisation, and that it was useless to join it.²²⁴ Of course not all Youth Leaguers took up such a dogmatic stance. Ponnara Sridhar participated in the meeting in Calicut, at which the Kerala CSP was formed, and even Kurukkal was among those who attended.²²⁵

Although the Congress organising party had had little success,

they, nevertheless, managed to arouse the government's concern about the spread of communist ideas. A communique on 10 August noted the advocacy, at certain meetings, under the name of Congress, of the abolition of private property, and other proposals associated with communist organisations. It stated that the government could not 'permit the holding of meetings and the conducting of propoganda within the State in furtherance of the objects of the Communist organisations in British India or to enrol members for the Indian National Congress'.²²⁶ When the need for the ban, at a time when Civil Disobedience had ended in British India, was challenged in the State Council, the Chief Secretary replied that it did not apply to Congress activities like temperance, the uplift of Harijans, or Khaddar propoganda, but only to 'the activities of a certain section of the Congress which has a leaning towards communistic and socialistic ideas'.²²⁷

Towards the end of August, a meeting of the revived Travancore District Congress Committee was held at the Chengannur office of the Bhaje Bharatham, recently restarted by M.Mathunni. Those present included Mathunni, K.Kumar, Ponnara Sridhar, Pandavathu Sankara Pillai (the General Secretary of the Travancore Labour Association and a KPCC member), and the Ezhava wakil, Kannara Gopala Panickar.²²⁸ Two weeks later a public meeting, chaired by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, was held in Trivandrum, to protest against the government communique. Among those attending were Mathunni, Kumara, Sridhar, the Nair MLC, K.R.Elankath, and K.C.Thomas, the Secretary of the Christian Service League and an associate of Mathunni.²²⁹

Many Nair leaders, who had previously shown sympathy for Congress, were wary of incurring official displeasure, and stayed away from the Trivandrum meeting. In an editorial the Dakshina Bharathi attacked them for their acquiescent mentality. The paper also criticised Christian speakers who had charged Ramaswami Aiyar with responsibility for the ban on the INC, while implying that the Dewan had been misled by his advisors. The Nair Service Society organ, Service, joined in criticising Mathunni and the other Christians for using the occasion to vent their communal spite.²³⁰

The Trivandrum meeting had appointed a standing committee to carry on with the protest, and on 19 September a meeting was organised by K.Kumar in Pathanamthitta in central Travancore.²³¹ Another demonstration in the capital in December 1934, marked the end of the brief revival in Congress activity.²³² Three pro-Congress newspapers - the Bhaje Bharatham, Kesari, and Mahatma (revived by Amsi Narayana Pillai in

1933) - later closed following the promulgation, in June 1935, of an amendment which strengthened the Newspapers Regulation.²³³

The Abstention movement was significant in several respects. It marked the first time that there had been an open confrontation between the government and a state-wide political organisation. Though more aggressive and broadly based than the Civic Rights League, the JPC was not a mass movement in terms of its leadership or objectives. Nevertheless, through popularising the politics of communalism, it was able to mobilise the support of tens of thousands of Christians and Ezhavas, as it demonstrated in the successful boycott of the 1933 elections. Faced with this challenge to the political dominance they had hitherto enjoyed, Nair activists responded by being more stridently communal in their own rhetoric. Combating the JPC was one of the principal preoccupations of the NSS in this period²³⁴ and a cross-section of Nair leaders attempted, with the encouragement of the administration, to divide the Abstentionist coalition by emphasising Hindu solidarity. Even veteran Congressmen were affected by the rampant communalism; while M.Mathunni was an active Abstentionist, Amsi Narayana Pillai was the Inspector of the Kerala Hindu Mission.

In a speech in the State Council in August 1935 a Nair member, M.N.Parameswaran Pillai, gave a broadly accurate, if hyperbolic, description of the developing situation in the state:

'In the midst of this fight between warring communities for the distribution of offices, we are also slowly being confronted with the beginnings of a working class (sic) revolt. Far in the distant socio-political horizon, in that historic and commercial town of Alleppey, the working class (sic) has now begun to appear as an active, independent factor.... There is no doubt that our country has reached a critical stage in its political evolution...However much the Government may try, in their anxiety, to conserve their power, to put down the people by repressive measures.....the situation is not going to improve unless the causes of soreness... are completely removed...'²³⁵

The solution Pillai offered was the establishment of a government responsible to the legislature. Chapter Nine considers how this became the rallying point for a new cross-communal opposition to the administration.²³⁶

Notes

1

MSD (1930), p.75, and (1931), p.96a.

2

MSD (1930), pp.68-69.

3

Nidhiry, the League's President, was Vice Patron of the Congress, and Thariathu Kunjithomman, the Vice President, was on the Congress Committee. Joint Political Congress, Travancore: The Present Political Problem, Calicut 1934, pp.23 and 54.

4

Ibid., p.23; Memorial, CS, 1126/1931.

5

MSD (1933), p.102, and (1937), p.388.

6

L.M.Pylee, The St. Thomas Christians and the Archdiocese of Verapoly, Ernakulam 1977, pp.382-91.

7

Speech by Lily Joseph (Joint Sec., South Travancore Indian Christian Ladies' Conference), LMS Correspondence, Box 30 (1928-30).

8

MSD (1930), p.62.

9

Regional Records Survey Committee, Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala, Trivandrum 1975, pp.308-09.

10

P.Sukumara Panikkar, 'The Muslim League in Kerala', PhD. Thesis, Kerala 1976, pp.77-78.

11

Jamal, Kunjju Sahib, Cochin 1975, p.37.

12

MSD (1930), p.71. The brother of Congressman H.B.Abdul Khadar Rowther.

13

Report of the Unemployment Enquiry Committee, Trivandrum 1928, pp.8-10.

13a

See for instance SMPAP, XXIV, pp. 140-41 and 158-68; and TLCP, IX pp.334-63.

14

Travancore Public Service Recruitment Committee Report, Trivandrum 1934 pp.22-24.

15

TLCP, VIII, pp.1008-09.

16

Recruitment Report, pp.22-24.

17

TLCP, XVII, pp.316-21.

18

SMPAP, XXVII, p.16.

19

Recruitment Report, p.1.

20

Thariathu Kunjithomman, T.A.Thomas, M.Govindan, P.S.Mahomed, and K.Narayanaperumal Nadar. Ibid., pp.2-3.

21

V.Subba Aiyar, the former Additional Head Sirkar Vakil.

22

Dasan, 15 Oct.1932. Quoted in K.K.Kusuman, The Abstention Movement, Trivandrum 1976, pp.29-30.

- 23
Memorial, 21 Nov. 1932, LMS Reports, Box 11.
- 24
Recruitment Report, pp.88-101.
- 25
Ibid., App.IV, pp.114-20.
- 26
In 1931 their literacy rate of fourteen per cent was half the state average. CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.393.
- 27
Ibid., p.299.
- 28
Dewan to Ch. J., 18 Feb.1932, CS, 892/1932.
- 29
Medical Dept. - 47.6 per cent, Sanitary Dept. - 35.3 per cent, and Industries Dept. - 27 per cent. Recruitment Report, pp.114-20.
- 30
See for instance, SMPAP, XIX, pp.184-86 and 216-17.
- 31
T.K.Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala: A Study of His Assembly Speeches, Trivandrum 1972, p.49; Membership list, TLCP,VI.
- 32
Memorial, 10 Aug.1927, and Ch.Sec. to Kunjuraman, 6 Dec.1927, Judicial, 1751/1927. Kunjuraman served as a nominated MLC in 1927-28.
- 33
Membership lists, TLCP, I, VII, XIII and XIX.
- 34
Between 1921-31, while the population increased by 27.2 per cent, the electorate did so by 51.1 per cent. Nairs accounted for much of the disproportionate expansion, forming 64.8 per cent of new voters in 1928-31. CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.20; TAR (1927-28), pp.80-81, and (1930-31), pp.86-87.
- 35
Recruitment Report, p.45.
- 36
Dasan, 1 Makaram 1108 ME (Jan.1933), CS, 750/1933.
- 37
Only 33.9 per cent of the electorate for the Assembly voted in 1932 compared to a 54.5 per cent turnout in the 1931 Council poll. SMPAP, XXVIII, p.2; TAR (1930-31), pp.86-87.
- 38
SMPAP, XXVIII, p.2.
- 39
JPC, op.cit., App.1.1A.,p.1.
- 40
Ibid., p.13.
- 41
Ibid., p.29.
- 42
M.S.A.Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India, Madras 1979, p.71.
- 43
JPC, op.cit., App.1.1B, pp.1-2.
- 44
Ibid., pp.169-72.
- 45
Ibid., App.1.2, p.2.
- 46
Ibid., App.1.3A, pp.2-12.

- 47 Ibid., App.1.3B, pp.12-20.
- 48 RPT, VII, pp.125-52.
- 49 TAR (1932-33), pp.16-17.
- 50 Ibid., p.93; TAR (1930-31), pp.86-87.
- 51 RPT, VII, p.132.
- 52 Ibid., p.136.
- 53 Chacko was married to a cousin of John Nidhiry. A.M.Nidhiry, Fr. Nidhiry, 1842-1904: A History of His Times, Kuravilangad 1971, pp.14-16.
- 54 Dasan, 26 Nov.1932. Quoted in Kusuman, op.cit., p.28.
- 55 JPC, op.cit., pp.33-34.
- 56 S.P.Sen (ed), Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.II, Calcutta 1973, pp.246-47.
- 57 JPC, op.cit., App.VII, pp.86-87.
- 58 Ibid., pp.33-34.
- 59 TLJ, XXVII, p.156.
- 60 JPC, op.cit., pp.33-34.
- 61 The Christian Political Conference, the State Catholic Congress, the Latin Mahajana Sabha, the South Travancore Christian Association, the Kerala Christian Service League (the successor to the Travancore and Cochin Christian Conference), the SNDP Yogam, the Muslim Service League, the Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha and the Hidayathul Islamia Sabha. Ibid., p.35.
- 62 Ibid., App.X, p.114.
- 63 Ibid., App.XI, pp.114-19.
- 64 Ibid., App.XI, p.120.
- 65 Ibid., App.XII, pp.132-33.
- 66 Kerala Sevakan, 5 Jan.1933, CS, 809/1933. The paper's editor was P.Jacob Kurien, the erstwhile civic rights campaigner.
- 67 JPC, op.cit., pp.36-37.
- 68 Ibid., App.XVII, p.162; Madras States, FR 2 Jan.1933, CRR, R/1/29/963; Kerala Kesari, 21 Feb. 1933, CS, 750/1933.
- 69 JPC, op.cit., App.XIII, pp.133-35.
- 70 Ibid., App.XIV, pp.136-41.
- 71 Ibid., App.XVI, pp.150-61.

72

Kusuman, op.cit., p.36.

73

Rao, op.cit., p.72; JPC, op.cit., App.XVIII, pp.163-64.

74

Ibid., App.XXX, pp.240-41.

75

Aiyar was conscious of the importance of propaganda. The new administration appointed a full-time Publicity Officer in 1931. In October 1932 API opened its branch. Since local newspapers were unwilling to subscribe to the agency, the government itself did so - according to the State Congress at an expenditure of Rs.24,000. API was not the only agency to receive official patronage, Reuter too got a secret contribution, and in 1937 United Press of India proposed opening a branch that would provide favourable coverage in return for a monthly grant of Rs.1,000. TAR(1936-37), p.244; pseudonymous Memorial to the Sec. of State for India, 1 May 1934, CRR, R/2/203-Dis.75/1934; TSC Memorandum to the Maharaja, 30 May 1938, IMC/CBMS, Box 442; Asst.Ed., UPI to Dewan, 23 April 1937, CS, 1585/1937; Dewan to Private Sec. to the Maharaja, 26 Oct.1938, CS, 150/1938.

76

JPC, op.cit., App.XVII, p.162.

77

Ibid., App.XVIII, pp.163-64.

78

Ibid., App.XIX, pp.164-65.

79

Ibid., p.55.

80

Samadarsi, 21 Feb.1933, Ibid., App.XXVIII, p.203.

81

Dakshina Bharathi, 25 Feb.1933, CS, 750/1933.

82

Kottayam Patrika, 25 Feb.1933, CS, 750/1933.

83

Kerala Kesari, 12 Kumbham 1108 ME (Feb.1933), CS, 750/1933.

84

Malayali, Samadarsi, Dakshina Bharathi, Kottayam Patrika, Kerala Kesari and Dasan. CS, 750/1933; JPC, op.cit., App.XXX, pp.240-41.

85

Ibid., App.XX, pp.165-68.

86

Police Report, CS, 755/1933.

87

MSMD (1937), p.393.

88

MSD (1931), p.95.

89

MSD (1930), p.83.

90

The Bishop was said to give a regular subsidy to N.V.Joseph. WSB, II, Para.201 (17 Aug.1935).

91

Asst. Dewan Peishkar to District Magistrate (Kottayam), 30 March 1933, Kusuman, op.cit., App.9, pp.145-47.

92

Membership lists, TLCP, VII, XIII and XIX.

93

LMS Annual Report (Nagercoil) 1935, p.4.

- 94 Joseph's Travancore Times attacked the Abstention movement as disloyal and showing a spirit of short-sighted opposition. WSB,I,25 (16 June 1934).
- 95 Sathyanesan was appointed Second and Additional Sessions Judge, Quilon. The Asylum Press Almanack and Directory for Madras and Southern India, Vol.CXXXII,p.1413.
- 96 Tahsildar to District Magistrate (Trivandrum), 9 Meenom 1108 ME (March 1933), CS, 808/1933.
- 97 JPC, op.cit., pp.50-51.
- 98 Ibid., App.XXIV, p.187.
- 99 Ibid., App.XXV, pp.189-90. Though the majority of Ezhava and Muslim leaders remained in the Abstentionist camp, the administration had won over Kunjuraman, Govindan and N.Abdur Rahiman, Travancore's only Muslim High Court lawyer, and a member of the JPC Committee. Rahiman, along with the two Ezhavas and another Trivandrum Muslim - S.Adam Sait - accepted nomination for the new legislature. MSD (1934), p.69.
- 100 JPC, op.cit., App.XXVI, p.191.
- 101 Police Com. to Dewan, 30 March 1933, Kusuman, op.cit., App.8,pp.141-44.
- 102 TAR (1932-33), p.98.
- 103 Pillai to George, 12 Jan. and 26 Feb.1933, and George to Pillai, 3 March 1933, CS, 809/1933; Pillai to George, 11 March 1933, and George to Pillai, 15 March 1933, CS, 759/1933; Pillai to George, 25 March and 4 April 1933, CS, 755/1933.
- 104 JPC, op.cit., pp.55-56.
- 105 District Magistrate (Quilon) to Ch.Sec., 10 April and 22 May 1933, Kusuman, op.cit., Apps. 13 and 15, pp.151 and 153.
- 106 JPC, op.cit., App.XXVIII, p.203.
- 107 Ibid., App.XXX, p.234.
- 108 Ibid., App.XXVII, p.195.
- 109 Ibid., pp.56-57.
- 110 Ch.Sec., 1 May 1933, CS, 909/1933.
- 111 JPC, op.cit., p.59.
- 112 MSD (1934), p.126b.
- 113 MSD (1937), p.396a.
- 114 MSD (1934), p.119.
- 115 The Komalezhathus appear to have followed Madhavan's lead in seeking to develop close ties with the Nairs. In 1937, K.Sankaran married the

niece of a Nair High Court vakil from a well-known taravad.

116

JPC, op.cit., App.XXX, p.236.

117

Ibid., p.60; in 1933-34 the special branch reported on 200 Travancoreans and about 100 Asiatic foreigners. TAR (1933-34), p.101.

118

JPC, op.cit., p.60.

119

TAR (1932-33), pp.93-94.

120

JPC, op.cit., App.XXX; pp.240-41.

121

Membership lists, SMAP , I and SCSCP, I.

122

SMAP , I, pp.6-7.

123

JPC, op.cit., App.XXX, pp.242-44.

124

SMAP , I, p.67.

125

SMAP , II, pp.978-84; IV, p.73; VI, p.141.

126

JPC, op.cit., p.62.

127

One spoke of being 'oppressed and thwarted in many ways'. Petition to the Maharaja from C.M.Joseph, 20 Jan.1936, CS, 1153/1936.

128

JPC, op.cit., App.XXX, pp.242-43.

129

SCSCP, I, p.102.

130

JPC, op.cit., App.XXIX, pp.216-18.

131

Ibid., pp.63-65.

132

Ibid., p.65.

133

Sankar to Dewan, 11 July 1933, CS, 986/1933.

134

JPC, op.cit., App.XXX, pp.242-44; CID Report, CS, 851/1933.

135

The committee included Malloor and K.R.Elankath, a leading figure in the students' strike and now a newly elected MLC.

136

WSB, I, Paras.126ff. In January 1934 the government welcomed a visit by Gandhi to Travancore, undertaken as part of his all-India Harijan tour. M.Desai, The Epic of Travancore, Ahmedabad 1937, pp.23 and 32.

137

WSB, I, Paras.133 (28 April 1934) and 86ff.; The directorate of the Hindu Mission included P.K.Narayana Pillai, ex-Dewan V.S.Subramonia Aiyar, a former Nair Acting Police Commissioner and a retired Brahman District Magistrate. At least five directors, including Pillai and R.C.Das, had attended the Nair Conference. Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Mission, Enclosure XII, Dewan to Agent, 30 March 1935, CRR, R/2/213-Dis.108/1935; the Devaswom League also included many retired officials. Memorandum from C.P. Bhanu, 6 Feb.1935, IMC/CBMS, Box 406.

138

List of grants, Enclosure XIII, Dewan to Agent, 30 March 1935,

loc.cit.

- 139 Mar Ivanios to Agent, 8 March 1935, CRR, R/2/213-Dis.108/1935; between 1921 and 1931 the Christian percentage of the population increased from 29.3 to 31.5. There were at least 100,000 conversions. CI (1931), XXVIII, I, pp.340-42.
- 140 JPC, op.cit., App.XXX, pp.242-44.
- 141 Kusuman, op.cit., pp.48-49.
- 142 WSB, I, 2 (6 Jan.1934).
- 143 JPC, op.cit., p.67.
- 144 Kusuman, op.cit., pp.49-50.
- 145 MSMD (1937), p.319.
- 146 Kusuman, op.cit., pp.50-51.
- 147 RRSC, The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1972, p.360ff.; C.P.Matthen, I Have Borne Much, Madras 1951, pp.27-32.
- 148 JPC, op.cit., pp.67-68.
- 149 TAR (1933-34), p.101.
- 150 Freedom Movement, pp.361-62.
- 151 T.K.Velu Pillai, Travancore State Manual, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1939-40, p.751.
- 152 WSB, I, 2 (6 Jan.1934).
- 153 M.J.Koshy, K.C.Mammen Mappillai: The Man and His Vision, Trivandrum 1976, App.V.2, pp.613-18.
- 154 WSB, I, I (30 Dec.1933).
- 155 WSB, I, 4 (20 Jan.1934).
- 156 JPC, op.cit., p.7.
- 157 N.K.Jain (ed), Muslims in India. A Biographical Dictionary, Vol.I, New Delhi 1979, pp.184-85.
- 158 WSB, I, 19 (5 May 1934).
- 159 SMAP, II, pp.217-19.
- 160 Kesari, 12 Aug.1934, CS, 941/1934.
- 161 Sen, op.cit., Vol.IV, 1974, pp.385-86.
- 162 Kusuman, op.cit., pp.57-58.
- 163 WSB, I, 24 (9 June 1934).

- 164 JPC Statement, 15 July 1935, CRR, R/2/212-Dis.107/1935.
- 165 Kerala Sevakan and Malayali, 21 Feb.1935, CS, 1040/1935.
- 166 WSB, I, Para.100 (24 March 1934).
- 167 Membership list, SCSCP, III; MSMD (1937), p.388.
- 168 Kottayam Patrika, 10 and 13 April 1935, CRR, R/2/222.
- 169 Madras States, FR 2 Aug.1934, CRR, R/1/29/1136.
- 170 Ch.Sec. to Swatantra Kahalam and to Kerala Sevakan, 2 Oct.1934, CS, 1045/1934.
- 171 TLR, LI, pp.376-77.
- 172 Bp. to Ch.Sec., 24 July 1936, CRR, R/2/219.
- 173 Memorial Submitted by the Christians of Travancore to H.H. the Maharaja...1946, Madras, Apps.G and H, pp.vii-x.
- 174 Ch.Sec. to Ch. Missionary, and to Bp., 31 May 1933, Bp. to Ch.Sec., 17 June 1933, and T.A.Thomas to Ch.Sec., 16 Sept.1933, Genl.1598/1933.
- 175 Enclosure III, Dewan to Agent, 8 March 1935, loc.cit.
- 176 Ivanios to Agent, 8 March 1935, loc.cit.
- 177 SCSCP, IV, pp.28-29.
- 178 Police Report, 18 Nov.1934, CS, 1003/1934.
- 179 Ivanios to Agent, 8 March 1935, loc.cit.
- 180 The term was used to include both Syrian and Nadar Christians. Enclosure IV, Dewan to Agent, 30 March 1935, loc.cit.
- 181 Mar Ivanios's new Syro-Malankara rite was one of the most aggressive of the Christian denominations in proselytising. The rite had been established after Ivanios, a Jacobite bishop of the Catholicos party, joined the Catholic Church in 1930. LMS Annual Report (Quilon) 1934, p.3; M.Gibbons, Mar Ivanios 1882-1953, Archbishop of Trivandrum, Dublin 1962, pp.59-60.
- 182 Note by Pol.Sec., 23 March 1935, CRR, R/2/213-Dis.108/1935.
- 183 Who Was Who, Vol.IV, London 1952, p.389, and Vol.V, 1961, pp.43-44.
- 184 Commons' Parliamentary Debates, 300, col.4-5; Lords' Parliamentary Debates, 96, col.45-51.
- 185 Agent's Report, 16 April 1935, CRR, R/2/213-Dis.108/1935.
- 186 TAR (1934-35), pp.265-66.
- 187 Memorial to the Viceroy, 15 Jan.1935, CRR, R/2/213-Dis.108/1935.
- 188 Commons' Parliamentary Debates, 296, col.4 and 168-78.

- 189
Koshy, op.cit., pp.193-95.
- 190
Bhaje Bharatham, 22 Dec.1934, and Kerala Sevakan, 20 Dec.1934, CS, 1043/1935.
- 191
Memorial, 15 Jan.1935, loc.cit.
- 192
Commons' Parliamentary Debates, 297, col.774; 298, col.2; 300, col.773-74.
- 193
JPC Statement, 15 July 1935, loc.cit.
- 194
WSB, II, Para.32 (9 Feb.1935).
- 195
Kusuman, op.cit., App.21, pp.168-79.
- 196
Ibid., App.23, pp.182-84.
- 197
Police Report, 8 June 1935, Ibid., App.27, p.190.
- 198
Taluk Magistrate to District Magistrate (Kottayam), 24 Edavom 1110 (June 1935), CS, 1031/1935; Agent to Pol.Sec., 15 July 1935, CRR, R/2/212-Dis.107/1935; Kottayam Patrika, 21 Aug.1935, CS,1046/1935.
- 199
Ch.Sec. to District Magistrate (Quilon), 15 June 1935, CS, 1031/1935.
- 200
TLR, LII, pp.1-69.
- 201
Agent to Pol.Sec., 2 Jan.1935, CRR, R/1/29/1361.
- 202
Ch.Sec. to Land Revenue Com., 22 Jan.1935, Genl., 82/1935; TAR (1934-35), pp.265-66.
- 203
Velu Pillai, op.cit., Vol.IV, pp.290-91.
- 204
In the first three years the Rules operated three-quarters of the appointments made in the lower division, and half those made in the intermediate division, went to members of underrepresented communities. TAR (1937-38), p.249, (1938-39), pp.236-37, and (1939-40), p.207.
- 205
Freedom Movement, pp.366-68.
- 206
Agent to Pol.Sec., 26 July 1935, and Agent to Dewan, 8 Aug.1935, CRR, R/2/212-Dis.107/1935.
- 207
TAR (1935-36), pp.100-01.
- 208
JPC Statement, 21 Aug.1935, CRR, R/2/212-Dis.107/1935.
- 209
MSD (1934), p.123.
- 210
SMAP, VI, pp.304-54; SCSCP, VI, pp.123ff.
- 211
Note by Agent, 2 Sept.1935, CRR, R/2/212-Dis.107/1935.
- 212
WSB, I, 1-4 (30 Dec. 1933 to 20 Jan.1934).
- 213
List of Societies and Sabhas, Dewan to Agent, 10 July 1936, CS, 1092/1936.

- 214 See Menon's The Socio-Economic Reconstruction of Travancore, Trivandrum 1937.
- 215 Kusuman, op.cit., pp.47-48.
- 216 WSB, II, Para.159 (8 July 1935).
- 217 Note by Acting Head Sirkar Vakil, 29 April 1935, CS, 1047/1935.
- 218 WSB, I, 24 (19 May 1934).
- 219 Ibid., Para.288 (20 Oct.1934).
- 220 Ibid., Para.306 (10 Nov.1934).
- 221 Ibid., Para.207 (21 July 1934).
- 222 Ibid., Para.263 (22 Sept.1934).
- 223 Ibid., Para.213 (8 July 1934); K.K.Kusuman, The Extremist Movement in Kerala, Trivandrum 1976, p.24.
- 224 T.V.Krishnan, 'Sakhavu' Krishna Pillai - Kerala's First Communist, New Delhi 1971, p.29; A.K.Gopalan, In the Cause of the People, Bombay 1973, p.60.
- 225 Krishnan, op.cit., p.43.
- 226 Communique, CS, 1096/1936.
- 227 SCSCP, III, p.426.
- 228 WSB, I, Para.245 (1 Sept.1934).
- 229 Ibid., Para.257 (15 Sept.1934); District Magistrate (Quilon) to Ch.Sec., 10 April 1933, Kusuman, Abstention Movement, App.13, p.151.
- 230 Dakshina Bharathi, 15 Sept.1934, and Service, 23 Sept.1934, CS,949/1934.
- 231 WSB, I, Para.263 (23 Sept.1934).
- 232 The Extremist Movement, p.24.
- 233 RPT, VII, pp.9-11.
- 234 List of Societies, loc.cit.
- 235 SCSCP, VI, p.113.
- 236 Pillai, himself a Trivandrum lawyer, became a member of the Travancore State Congress Working Committee and was imprisoned in 1938. Travancore State Congress, Travancore Today: Her Struggle for Freedom, Cochin 1938, p.xviii; Ch.Sec. to High Court Registrar, 15 Dec.1938, CS, 313/1938.

Chapter IX

1935-38: The Joint Political Congress and the Formation of the State Congress.

The two and a half years between the end of the Abstention movement and the establishment of the Travancore State Congress (TSC) in February 1938 was a period of intense activity culminating in a dramatic transformation of the political scene in the state. The communalism that had hitherto characterised politics seemed suddenly to give way to a new spirit of nationalism akin to that prevailing in British India. The reality that lay behind the facade was more complex. In this chapter we shall explore the background to the formation of an anti-government coalition by erstwhile Abstentionists and discontented Nair politicians.

Perhaps the most important single factor in creating the conditions for the emergence of the TSC was Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar. Though pressure from the Government of India forced him to give up his appointment as Constitutional Advisor to the Maharaja in August 1935, this did not end his interference in the administration. The Political Agent, Lt.-Col. W.A.M.Garstin, saw a direct connection between the former Advisor's frequent visits to Trivandrum and efforts to undermine the position of Dewan Habibullah.¹ In September a controversy arose over an interview given by the Dewan to G.Sankaran Nair, who, in 1931, had attempted to initiate an agitation against Aiyar's appointment. Two leading Nair newspapers - the Malayala Rajyam and a new Trivandrum daily, the Bharatha Patrika (Indian Diary) - made allegations about the Dewan's conduct, while the Maharaja himself reprimanded Habibullah and told Garstin of his suspicion that Nair was in league with the Valia Koil Tampuran in plotting against the existing regime.²

The Muslim Dewan's concessions to the Abstentionists on electoral reform and public service recruitment had already made him unpopular with the Nair elite. The latest controversy followed a bitter disagreement with K.G.Parameswaran Pillai, the highly influential President of the Quilon municipality. Parameswaran Pillai, the publisher of the Malayala Rajyam, also financed the Bharatha Patrika. He had clashed with Habibullah after an incident in Quilon in September 1934: a police party had opened fire after stones were thrown at a Hindu procession that played music in front of a mosque.³ The incident occurred during the Sri Krishna Jayanti celebrations and was the subject of acrimonious exchanges between Nair and Muslim newspapers.⁴ In an attempt to forestall trouble during

the 1935 celebrations the Dewan supported a suggestion that only soft music should be played by the Hindus as they passed the mosque. However, Pillai, whose family had traditionally conducted the procession, opposed this and, though the celebrations were ultimately abandoned, the fact that Pillai's stance was supported by the Maharaja seriously embarrassed the Dewan. Soon afterwards Pillai became even more hostile to Habibullah when a notice was issued threatening the Rajyam with the cancellation of its licence following the paper's criticism of government policy.

Since the Rajyam was generally regarded as a palace paper, it is probable that its attacks on Habibullah had the approval of the Junior Maharani and Ramaswami Aiyar. Despite this, late in September the Dewan was compelled by the Maharaja to issue a note affirming his cordial relations with the ex-Constitutional Advisor.⁵ Following this humiliation Habibullah only remained to see the electoral reforms, that he had initiated in August 1935, carried through to completion. As soon as the order instituting the reforms was made in August 1936, the Dewan resigned.⁶

The G.O. of 20 August was framed on the basis of the report presented by the Franchise Commissioner, E. Subramonia Aiyar. Apart from redrawing constituency boundaries and providing for multi-member constituencies, with reserved seats, the order also liberalised the franchise for the Assembly. The land revenue qualification was lowered from five rupees to one rupee, and in the municipalities all tax payers were given the vote. In a special concession to Latin Catholics, many of whom were fishermen, all certified holders of fixed engines for fishing were enfranchised.⁷ The changes more than tripled the electorate to over half a million, about a sixth of the adult population, and a proportion similar to that in the British Indian provinces following the 1935 Government of India Act.⁸

The Government of India took a particular interest in the appointment of a successor to Habibullah. Garstin's own opinion was that an experienced British ICS officer would be most suitable.⁹ However, the Maharaja resolved to offer the post to Ramaswami Aiyar. Although the reaction of the Political Department was unfavourable, no definite action was taken after the Maharaja had refused the Agent's suggestion of prior consultation with Delhi. Consequently, the appointment of Aiyar as Dewan was semi-officially announced on 10 September.¹⁰

The departure of Habibullah was greeted with satisfaction by Nair politicians, and with regret by the leaders of the JPC. The latter were

prominent at a farewell function for the outgoing Dewan. The function was boycotted by most notable Nair non-officials and a statement issued by a trio of south Travancorean Nair leaders, including Pattom Thanu Pillai and A.Narayana Pillai, criticised it as a partisan affair.¹¹

The reasons behind the contrasting attitudes of Nair and Christian leaders were obvious. The influence of Aiyar at the palace, even after his resignation as Constitutional Advisor, meant that he was regarded as partly responsible for the continuing controversies involving the Christian community and the government. In November 1935 the licence of the Kottayam Patrika, a Catholic newspaper that had been outspoken in its support for the Abstention movement, was cancelled after it had published an article defending religious conversions. The cancellation was upheld by the government, and later by the High Court, in the face of a campaign by other Christian papers and an appeal in the British Parliament by the Duchess of Atholl.¹² The Duchess's intervention led to Garstin raising the matter with the Dewan and the Agent subsequently commented that the cancellation bore 'the hue of invidiousness'.¹³

The most serious confrontation between the government and the Christian community arose over an amendment to the Educational Code in June 1936 which prohibited the use of schools as prayer houses. If they failed to comply with the order within three years, those already in use as such faced losing their grants-in-aid and the withdrawal of recognition by the Educational Department.¹⁴ The action renewed a controversy that had first arisen in 1933, provoking a strong reaction from the churches.

An LMS missionary saw the palace as primarily responsible for a policy of discriminating against Christians and reported that Habibullah had left because he disagreed with aspects of that policy.¹⁵ Between July and September 1936 the ecclesiastical heads of virtually every notable Christian denomination made representations to the government about the schools order.¹⁶ The only exceptions were the leaders of the rival parties in the Jacobite Church who were wary of attracting official displeasure at a time when they were once more on the verge of litigation.¹⁷

The churches had an invaluable ally in the Political Agent who was on close terms with the senior Protestant missionaries.¹⁸ Garstin accepted their fears of discrimination as valid and reported to the Political Department that religious liberty in the state appeared to be in jeopardy.¹⁹ He also spoke to Ramaswami Aiyar on the day he took up his duties as Dewan, advising him to resolve the schools

question in consultation with the Anglican Bishop, the Chief Missionary of the LMS, and the Suffragan Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church. Six weeks later, on 23 November, a fresh government order was issued stating that the earlier notification would not be applied to existing schools.

The retirement of Garstin in November 1936 and his replacement by C.P. Skrine must have come as a relief to the new Dewan. In his 21 months in Travancore, Garstin had repeatedly obstructed the wishes of the palace and his support had possibly been crucial in enabling Dewan Habibullah to push through the 1935 reforms. In contrast, Skrine, in his two years in the state, staunchly supported Aiyar against the attacks of his opponents.²⁰ He also defended the administration against allegations of anti-Christian bias²¹ and did not seek to protect the interest of the churches.

While Aiyar's position was made easier by the cordial relationship he achieved with the Political Agent, the Dewan's previous record did not seem to augur well for the maintenance of the relative calm that had prevailed in the state since the end of the Abstention movement. Nevertheless, he enjoyed a period of unprecedented popularity during his first few months in office, largely owing to the aftermath of the Temple Entry Proclamation of November 1936. The Proclamation ended a furious debate over whether the Ezhava caste should convert en masse to another religion. The question attracted considerable attention with not just Ezhavas but also Christian, Muslim and Nair leaders taking a keen interest in propagandising for or against conversion.

On the political front, the electoral reforms announced in August 1936 had been greeted by the JPC and attacked by Nair politicians and newspapers. The Malayala Rajyam and the Bharatha Patrika stated their protest in emphatic terms and prominent Nairs such as A. Narayana Pillai, K.P. Nilakanta Pillai, A.S. Damodaran Asan, Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, and Malloor K. Govinda Pillai also issued statements criticising the new electoral system.²² A Nair Vigilance Committee was formed, and on 3 October issued a statement describing the reforms as against the interests of the state and especially that of the Nairs.²³

Nevertheless, an attempt was made to bring about an electoral agreement between politicians belonging to the various communities. Following the August G.O. the four main constituent organisations of the JPC - the SNDP Yogam, the State Catholic Congress, the Christian Service League and the Muslim Service League - had all set up parliamentary boards to select candidates for the April 1937 elections.

They had also elected a joint board to exercise general supervision.²⁴ It was at this juncture that an Amity Conference attended by notable leaders from the four major communal groupings in the state, was held at E.J. John's house in Trivandrum.

The meeting, on 11 October, was arranged at the initiative of the International Fellowship, a cultural society in Trivandrum with a membership that included both Christians and Nairs. The president of the conference, a Christian belonging to the Fellowship, proposed that all the communities should cooperate to ensure that in the elections for the 29 non-reserved general Assembly seats thirteen Nairs and twelve Syrian Christians would be returned. These figures reflected unofficial projections of the likely result of the poll. Most of the Nair leaders present were agreeable to the proposal with the proviso that the general opinion of their community had to be ascertained before it could be accepted. An exception was Pattom Thanu Pillai, who had argued that no discussions on a Nair-Christian compromise were possible without first considering the defects in the reformed electoral system, and who refused to join the others present in signing a statement of the proceedings.²⁵ Though isolated at the Trivandrum meeting, Pattom was able to get the support of the majority at a subsequent Nair conference held to discuss the issue. The conference, which took place in Quilon on 1 November, rejected the compromise formula, describing it as an artificial attempt to create amity with people who might not be sincere.²⁶

The disagreement at the Quilon meeting was influenced by the traditional regional rivalry between northerners and southerners as well as by personal animosity. Nair leaders from central and northern Travancore, notably including Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, A.S. Damodaran Asan, K.G. Parameswaran Pillai and Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai of the NSS, were inclined to accept a compromise. Among those most prominent in arguing for acceptance were Puthupalli S. Krishna Pillai and Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, two Quilon MLA's who were close to K.G. Parameswaran Pillai and jointly edited his daily, the Bharatha Patrika. The opposing party included many south Travancorean Nairs who did not have to face electoral challenges from Syrian Christians and could, therefore, afford to take an uncompromising line. Pattom, whose relations with the coterie of Quilon Nairs around K.G. Parameswaran Pillai had never been good, and K.R. Elankath, a fellow south Travancorean legislator, were both in the vanguard of the group favouring rejection. They succeeded in persuading the conference

that the Nairs should seek to capture as many seats as possible under existing conditions. However, a proposal to emulate the JPC and organise a parliamentary board under the auspices of the NSS was thrown out.

The personal conflicts between some of the most influential Nair leaders played an important part in the failure of the Quilon conference to reach a consensus. Apart from Pattom's intense dislike for the Quilon Nairs, there was also the split between Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and NSS General Secretary Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai. The latter felt Changanacherry had sought to further his own interests as President of the NSS from 1916-1927.²⁷ The two men also differed in their attitude towards the Abstention movement with Mannathu more hostile than Changanacherry. Their mutual antipathy found public expression at a meeting held to mark the 22nd anniversary of the Changanacherry Taluk Nair Samajam in October 1935 when Mannathu condemned a presidential address by Changanacherry. In the speech, Changanacherry had declared that communal organisations had out-lived their usefulness and lost the ideals and aspirations with which they had been established. He had even ventured to suggest the abolition of such bodies in the interests of communal amity and had specifically criticised the Nair hostility to other communities.²⁸

Despite their mutual antipathies and differences regarding the election, most of the Nair leaders were united in their opposition to the electoral reforms. On 7 November 1936 a six-man deputation from the Nair Vigilance Committee met the Dewan. The deputation, which included three Trivandrum Nairs - among them Pattom and Malloor K. Govinda Pillai - and three Quilon Nairs - Puthupalli, Kottoor, and Damodaran Asan - presented a memorandum outlining the Committee's position. They proposed that the number of elected seats should be increased by reducing the nominated representation in the legislature. Aiyar rejected this suggestion and asked the Nairs to cooperate in working out the existing scheme. Aware of the furore that would be provoked by any attempt to interfere with the concessions already granted to the underrepresented communities, he was only prepared to say that the government would have to watch the operation of the scheme before considering possible changes.²⁹

In the interests of a peaceful election, the administration appears to have given tacit encouragement to the efforts to achieve an agreement on the distribution of seats among the communities. Meeting a deputation from the Working Committee of the JPC on 28 October, Ramaswami Aiyar indicated as much when he referred in passing to the

Amity Conference initiative. The nine-man deputation, led by T.M. Varghese submitted a memorandum listing twenty grievances. It cited numerous instances of official discrimination against the communities represented by the JPC. Among the more notable ones were the amendment to the Educational Code, the surveillance activities of the Criminal Investigation Department, and the prohibitory orders served on Christian, Ezhava and Muslim religious speakers (no restriction had been placed on the activities of the Hindu Mission). The specific demands made by the JPC included the retention of the electoral reforms, measures to ensure a fair election, the repeal of the Newspaper Regulation, the grant of the right of temple entry to all Hindus, and the release of the imprisoned C. Kesevan.³⁰ Kesevan's plight had been highlighted at the annual conferences of the JPC's constituent organisations held in Changanacherry in May.³¹ A 'Kesevan Memorial' signed by 50,000 people had been submitted to Dewan Habibullah in September.³²

In replying to the memorandum, Aiyar rejected most of the main points made by the JPC, laying particular emphasis on the government's religious tolerance and its impartiality as far as the various communities were concerned. While giving the JPC the assurances they sought regarding the electoral reforms and the forthcoming poll, he dismissed their demands relating to the press and Kesevan. Despite Aiyar's firm stand, the meeting appears to have taken place in a cordial atmosphere and Varghese indicated the willingness of the JPC to cooperate with the government.³³

Both the JPC and the government had a vested interest in not disturbing the political atmosphere in the run up to the elections. The JPC anticipated victory while the Dewan was conscious that any serious outbreak of communal unrest would jeopardise his own position, especially given the reluctance shown by the Government of India in accepting his appointment. The departure of Lord Willingdon in April 1936 also meant that Ramaśwami Aiyar could no longer count on Viceregal regard to safeguard him in possible clashes with the Political Department.

Unlike the Nairs, the JPC had considerable success in ensuring that the communities it represented remained a united bloc in the elections. To avoid damaging competition between Syrian Catholics and non-Catholic Syrians for the general seats, the executive committees of the parliamentary boards of the Catholic Congress and the Christian Service League held a joint meeting in Changanacherry in December.

They agreed that the two sections should share the seats equally.³⁴ In February the SNDP Yogam chose candidates for the ten reserved seats for the Ezhavas. The authority exercised by the Yogam among the Ezhava voters is seen from the fact that nine of the ten candidates it selected were returned unopposed.³⁵

There was not the same unanimity in the case of the Latin and Muslim seats, half of which were contested. The Muslim Service League was challenged by a United Muslim Association formed by P.S.Mahomed, the former president of the Lejnathul Mahomadiya Association and a nominated MLC who had deserted the Abstention movement after initially giving it his support.³⁶ Mahomed opposed H.B.Mahomed Rowther, the ex-president of the League, for the Ambalapuzha-Shertallai seat while P.K.Kunju, the League's General Secretary and Joint Secretary of the JPC, had to face a Muslim lawyer in the Quilon-Kottarakara constituency.³⁷

Apart from the advantage gained from contesting the elections as a cohesive unit, the JPC's poll prospects were strengthened by the drift back to it of several influential figures who had been induced by the government to abandon the Abstention movement. Following the end of Abstention there was nothing to prevent these men from returning to the fold. They were readily welcomed by the party leadership: C.V.Kunjuraman was invited to preside over the May 1936 JPC Conference,³⁸ E.P.Varghese, by now the President of the Latin Mahajana Sabha, was re-inducted into the party's Working Committee, and Varghese, Thariathu Kunjithomman and N.Abdur Rahiman were all adopted as JPC candidates. But, though this broadened the party's appeal in the short-term, it was also a factor in its eventual breakup, since the inclusion of individuals with a record of opportunism detracted from the JPC's cohesion in the post-election phase.

The JPC's success in presenting a united front of Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims aroused a strong reaction from the Nair leaders, most notably Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai. In an article in the Malayala Rajyam, Mannathu condemned the efforts of the JPC and the SNDP Yogam to defeat Nair candidates. He alleged that Christian politicians desired to convert Travancore into a Christian country and were seeking to destroy the power of the Hindus by creating splits among them. In conclusion, Mannathu called on Nairs not to stand in opposition to each other.³⁹ However, his call was not heeded in several marginal constituencies where Nair candidates divided the anti-JPC vote.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, once again finding themselves partially isolated, other Nair leaders did join Mannathu in appealing for Hindu unity.

In April 1937, at a Hindu conference held under the auspices of the Kerala Nair Conference, a resolution was passed recommending the merger of all existing Hindu communal organisations into an All Travancore Hindu Mahasabha.⁴¹ This reflected the Nair concern that in constituencies where there was no reserved seat, or where the Ezhava candidates were returned unopposed (as all but one were), Ezhava voters would support the Christian JPC candidates in the contest for the general seats.

Under the revised franchise, Ezhava voters held the key to the election in several marginal constituencies, particularly in central Travancore where electoral competition between Nairs and Christians had always been at its most intense. One of the bitterest contests involved the JPC leader and the President of the Christian Service League, T.M.Varghese. Varghese stood in Pathanamthitta where he faced the veteran Congressman K.Kumar. A native of the area, Kumar was backed by the NSS and a cross-section of Nair leaders, among them Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and Puthupalli Krishna Pillai.⁴²

Though the constituency had been unsuccessfully fought by the Christian Congressman Mathunni in the 1928 elections, the outcome of the poll in 1937 was wholly determined by communal considerations. While Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai made a special appeal to the Ezhavas in exhorting the Pathanamthitta electorate to vote for Kumar⁴³, SNDP Yogam activists sought to ensure solid Ezhava backing for Varghese. The two candidates and their supporters traded charges of communal bias on the part of local Nair and Christian officials.⁴⁴ After numerous representations the local Tahsildar - a Christian - was ordered to leave until the elections were over. The step, taken on the recommendation of the Brahman Police Commissioner, came despite a report from the Quilon District Magistrate - an Anglican Syrian - defending the Tahsildar's conduct.⁴⁵

Voting took place at the end of April and the results produced the expected triumph for the JPC. Twelve of the seventeen general Assembly constituencies were contested and there were unopposed returns in only six of the 29 unreserved seats.⁴⁶ Of the other 23, the JPC claimed thirteen, having topped the poll in seven constituencies, including Pathanamthitta where T.M.Varghese gained a majority of 1,900 over Kumar in a record 88 per cent turnout. Nine Nairs and a Vellala were also elected to join the three Nairs and three other Hindus - a Vellala, a Yadava and a Nadar - who had been returned unopposed. Of the fourteen reserved Assembly seats, JPC candidates were elected unopposed to the eight allotted to the Ezhavas as well as to one of the Muslim and one

of the Latin seats. In three of the four remaining reserved seats, P.K. Kunju and H.B.Mahomed Rowther overwhelmed the challenge presented by the anti-JPC United Muslim Association, while E.P.Varghese was elected from Ambalapuzha-Shertallai.

The importance of Ezhava, Muslim and Latin votes to the JPC's success in winning marginal seats is evident from the fact that in one of the two constituencies where there was a contest for the reserved seat, Ambalapuzha-Shertallai, the party's candidate for the general seat lost to a Nair. The point is further borne out by a comparison between the JPC's performance in the Assembly poll, in which Ezhavas, Muslims and Latins represented almost a quarter of those eligible to vote, and the elections to the Council, in which the same groups accounted for less than one-eighth of the electorate.⁴⁷ The party won thirteen (i.e. 56 per cent) of the 23 general Assembly seats contested, while claiming only three (i.e. 33 percent) of the nine general Council seats contested. It won only one unreserved seat in the constituencies south of Quilon in which caste-Hindus retained their electoral preponderance. Overall, the JPC claimed 26 of the 48 elected Assembly seats and eight of the 22 Council seats. Nair representation had been almost halved from 35 to eighteen.

Though not unexpected, the election results provoked strong reactions from some Nairs. In the Karunagapalli-Kartikapalli constituency north of Quilon, there was even an outbreak of communal violence. The local Ezhava electors had voted solidly for M.G.Mathew, an Anglican Syrian member of the JPC's Working Committee, who defeated two Nair opponents to win the second general seat in the constituency. Several Nair landlords subsequently forcibly reclaimed land they had leased to Ezhavas. When the latter protested eighteen were imprisoned with the connivance of the local Police Inspector - a Nair. However, the Ezhavas were later released and the Inspector suspended following an investigation.⁴⁸

Of more long-term significance was the debate among Nair leaders as to the best way of recouping their political influence. Moderates favoured coming to an agreement with the JPC. E.V.Krishna Pillai contributed an article to the Malayala Manorama advising Nairs to join the JPC.⁴⁹ In a second contribution to the paper, he attacked the NSS leader Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai and others who opposed such a course of action, saying that their stance would both weaken the position of the Nairs and heighten communal tension.

The Manorama carried other articles echoing these views. In one C.N. Madhavan Pillai condemned Manthathu's leadership as largely responsible for the strained relations between the Nairs and other communities. He also criticised Nairs for wanting to play the role of government supporters.⁵⁰ The veteran Congressman A.K.Pillai added his voice to the calls for communal amity. In an article in the Ezhava newspaper, Kerala Kaumudi, the onetime fierce opponent of communal representation now justified the JPC's successful agitation on economic grounds, arguing that in the past lucrative appointments had been practically reserved for certain communities.⁵¹

An agitation for the establishment of responsible government was widely mooted as the basis on which the communities could cooperate politically. The Malayali, commenting favourably on Krishna Pillai's advice to the Nairs, stated that such an agitation should follow an agreement between the communities on representation in the public service and legislature. In late June, in an article in the Malayala Rajyam, even A.Narayana Pillai deplored the growth of communalism and suggested the formation of a non-communal party to campaign for responsible government.⁵²

There was no consensus on the responsible government issue within the JPC. In mid-June the Madras Congressman George Joseph, who had taken an active interest in the Abstention movement, made a speech favouring immediate responsible government, with the leader of the JPC legislature party being invited to form a ministry.⁵³ He was only repeating what he had already stated in an article in the Manorama in June 1936 entitled 'Responsibility before Federation'. In it he had referred to 'the socialistic and communistic storm sweeping over every species of autocracy in Indian India!'⁵⁴, adding that the JPC could save the ancient order in the state - as far as it could be saved - by bringing about responsible government.

Within Travancore, at a meeting in Kuravilangad held to congratulate successful candidates, P.J.Sebastian, a member of the party's Executive Committee and the Secretary of the State Catholic Congress, supported an agitation for the establishment of responsible government, coupling it with a demand that representation in the public service and the legislature should be based strictly on a community's population.⁵⁵ Sebastian joined T.M.Varghese and the party's General Secretary, N.V. Joseph, in calling on Nairs to cooperate with the JPC. However, Varghese, the de facto party leader, was more cautious regarding responsible government. In a speech on 15 June, he said it was not the intention of

the JPC immediately to begin an agitation on the issue. In his view, minority communities in the state were still labouring under disabilities and their interests had to be safeguarded first before the grant of responsible government. This stance was supported by the Manorama which, in an editorial on 16 June, described any agitation for the establishment of a responsible system in the immediate future as a kind of madness. The paper saw the communalism that characterised public life as incompatible with the concept.⁵⁶

The majority of Christian and Nair politicians concurred with the Manorama's assessment. Among the Nairs, those favouring cooperation with the JPC were outnumbered, and Malloor Govinda Pillai voiced mainstream opinion when, in an article in the Malayala Rajyam, he appealed to the Nairs to form a powerful minority party in the legislature and seek to mobilise their community under the banner of the NSS.⁵⁷

A rapprochement between the JPC and the Nairs advocating cooperation was thus prevented by the lack of agreement within the party on the demand for responsible government. The Nairs regarded this as the basis for any common action, but JPC leaders were reluctant to shelve the communal demands that had hitherto formed the principal plank in their programme. Besides, they were not prepared to risk alienating the government since they were aware that their prospects of reaping the fruits of electoral success depended on official tolerance. Espousing the cause of responsible government was certain to antagonise the Dewan and the palace.

In the event, T.M.Varghese was rewarded for his moderation. When the new Assembly met on 22 June, Varghese was the JPC's candidate in the contest for the Deputy Presidency of the house. He faced four caste-Hindu opponents and eventually defeated Puthupalli Krishna Pillai on the fourth ballot by 32 votes to 27 - with the ten official members maintaining their neutrality throughout.⁵⁸ Among those eliminated in the inconclusive earlier rounds was Pattom Thanu Pillai, who was proposed by two fellow South Travancorean Nair members, but failed to mount a serious challenge, in what was his second bid for the post.

Following the election of Varghese as Deputy President, the JPC legislators met to form a new Samyuktha Party. The party offices were shared between leading members from the various communities. The Syrian Catholic N.V. Joseph became the party's leader in the Assembly with the Ezhava V.K.Velayudhan⁵⁹ as his deputy, the Muslim P.K.Kunju as chief whip, and the Jacobite E.J.Philipose as party secretary. In the upper house the Ezhava M.S.Anirudhan was chosen to lead the party

with the Muslim N. Abdur Rahiman as his deputy.⁶⁰

A month after the formation of the Samyuktha Party, and on the eve of the budget session of the legislature, two more parties were formed. The first was the United Nationalist Party (UNP) which claimed the allegiance of 21 Assembly members, including eight Nairs and nine government nominees.⁶¹ The Nair newspaper, the Samadarsi, implied that it had been formed at the instance of the government.⁶² Its composition and political posture lent credence to this suggestion. Its president, Tamil Brahman S. Krishna Aiyar, was a nominated member. A man in his sixties and one of the wealthiest planters and landowners in Travancore,⁶³ he was a retired High Court lawyer and ex-MLC who had long been associated with the Quilon Nairs politically, having played an active role in the Travancore Mahasabha of the early 1920's. While acceptable to Nair opinion, his age, caste and position meant that he could also be wholly trusted by the government. Another indication of official inspiration was the policy enunciated by the UNP's first meeting in Trivandrum on 21 July. The party resolved to support the government on matters of vital importance. Rules were framed so as to leave the nominated members free to back the administration on issues on which the elected members might feel constrained to vote in opposition.

Moreover, in early August, the Progressive Party, with a policy broadly similar to that of the UNP, was formed by thirteen of the eighteen non-JPC members of the Council. Led by Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, its other officers included a south Travancorean Latin Catholic as deputy leader and K.R. Elankath as party secretary.⁶⁴ The UNP's deputy leader was Kottoor's close associate, Puthupalli Krishna Pillai. The prominence of the two in the newly formed parties demonstrated the important role played in their formation by the clique of Quilon Nairs that revolved around the pro-government publisher K.G. Parameswaran Pillai. The predominance of the Quilon clique explains why Pattom Thanu Pillai stayed aloof.

Pattom was among those consulted by A. Narayana Pillai in his efforts to form a new non-communal party. Narayana Pillai prepared a draft scheme which was discussed at a meeting in Trivandrum on 16 July attended by Pattom and three other politicians with pronounced Congress sympathies - K.A. Damodara Menon, M.R. Madhava Warriar of the Malayali, and Vaikom N. Ramakrishna Pillai, a Trivandrum lawyer representing a north Travancorean constituency in the Assembly. They agreed that the objects of the new party should be to establish responsible government and promote communal amity. Ramakrishna Pillai was deputed to secure the support of

the JPC - but had little success.⁶⁵ In August Narayana Pillai communicated with the executive committees of the Youth League and a new Young Kerala Society in order to canvass their support.⁶⁶ However, when he approached Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai and V. Achutha Menon, with a view to enlisting local Congressmen, he was told that his scheme would be put to them only if he became a member of the National Congress.⁶⁷

Though intelligence reports in July 1937 mention that a few Nairs, notably Damodara Menon and Narayana Pillai's younger brother, A. Sankara Pillai, were attempting to organise a political association known as the Travancore State Congress, these reports also indicated that their efforts were making little headway.⁶⁸ The essential problem was that Narayana Pillai was unable to win the confidence of those whose support he was seeking. Many veteran Congressmen had doubts about his commitment to their cause. His background as one of the leading Nair communal politicians in the 1920's was also a handicap when it came to persuading JPC leaders to support the proposed new party. In any case, as has been pointed out, the latter were preoccupied with deriving maximum benefit from their party's plurality in the legislature.

The Dewan took full advantage of the JPC's concern not to alienate the administration. He needed the Samyuktha members' support to facilitate legislative approval for two controversial schemes - one to establish a Travancore University and the other, to set up a State Transport Department. In this he was aided by the personal ambitions of the JPC leaders. For instance, in August 1937 the Latin Mahajana Sabha, whose president, E.P. Varghese, was a Samyuktha MLA, wrote to the Dewan welcoming his idea to redress the poor representation of the Latins in the judiciary by giving them some appointments. In her letter, the Sabha's General Secretary, Annie Mascarene, noted that presidents of the NSS were often taken into the higher grades of the public service while the equally efficient office bearers of other communal associations were not.⁶⁹ In this connection, it should be noted that three of the five officers of the Sabha, including both Mascarene and Varghese, were practising lawyers.

The first of the Dewan's schemes to come before the legislature was for the constitution of a Travancore University. Hitherto colleges in the state had been affiliated to Madras University. Though the creation of an independent institution had been recommended by an official committee as early as 1919, it was Ramaswami Aiyar who determined to bring the idea to fruition. The plans for the new university were not submitted to the Assembly for detailed consideration, a point that

was raised by the Samyuktha leader, N.V. Joseph, when he moved that the budget allotment for the scheme should be rejected. In a debate on the motion on 29 July, Pattom Thanu Pillai joined Samyuktha members in criticising the manner in which the scheme had been introduced. However, the government received solid support from the UNP, and Joseph withdrew his motion after Aiyar gave a bland assurance to the house that the scheme would be undertaken 'only with the universal consent of the people'.⁷⁰

In the upper house the Samyuktha Party failed to put up even a token resistance to the scheme and the only criticism came from Kochikal P. Balakrishnan Tampi⁷¹, a Nair lawyer from Alleppey, who had been a frequent critic of the administration. He strongly favoured the introduction of responsible government and had first gained note as a student agitator in the late 1910's. Tampi was a lone voice and most of the Council members, including the deputy leader of the Samyuktha Party, N. Abdur Rahiman, supported the scheme.⁷²

The Samyuktha members' failure to challenge the government on the university issue was particularly surprising in the light of the misgivings about the government's plans expressed by Christian educationalists in private.⁷³ Under the scheme, Christian colleges in the state were to become part of the new university. In August 1937 a memorandum from A.M. Varki, the Principal of one of them - the Union Christian College in Alwaye - was submitted to Viscount Halifax, a member of the British Cabinet and a former Viceroy of India.⁷⁴ It is unlikely that the Christian JPC leaders were unaware of the opinion held by Varki, a close friend of the Manorama editor, K.C. Mammen Mappillai.⁷⁵ In any event, though his memorandum condemned the scheme as unwise, no action appears to have been taken by the Government of India and the University Act was promulgated on 1 November.⁷⁶

A transport scheme provided the second major issue on which the Samyuktha Party failed to oppose the administration. The government proposed to set up a Department to assume direct control of public transport along certain routes. The scheme was to operate initially only in Trivandrum District, but after a trial period could later be extended to other parts of the state. Predictably, it provoked a strong reaction from bus owners throughout Travancore. While seven of the eleven principal bus companies were owned by Syrian Christians⁷⁷, three of the four main services operating in the south belonged to caste-Hindus. The latter, who faced the most immediate threat, spearheaded the agitation against the scheme. Among the politicians most actively

involved were four Hindu legislators from south Travancore - K.Narayanaperumal Nadar, T.C.Kesava Pillai, K.R.Elankath and K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai.⁷⁸ At a protest meeting in Nagercoil on 11 July, both Kesava Pillai and A.Sankara Pillai (A.Narayana Pillai's brother) declared that Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar should be dismissed if the scheme was implemented. A week later Kunjukrishna Pillai, a member of a deputation that had unsuccessfully petitioned the Dewan, presided over another meeting in Trivandrum.⁷⁹

One Samyuktha MLA, M.G.Mathew, was already active in the agitation, and three south Travancorean bus owners, one of whom was a Eurasian, interviewed Samyuktha leaders in an effort to get the party to move a resolution in the Assembly demanding the scheme's withdrawal. Nonetheless, party opinion proved to be divided at a meeting of legislators in Trivandrum on 24 July. While T.M.Varghese and the Ezhavas, led by V.K.Velayudhan, supported the scheme, N.V.Joseph and P.K.Kunju were among those opposing it. Varghese favoured backing the government on the university scheme as well and ultimately it was decided that individual members should be permitted a free vote on both issues.⁸⁰

During the budget debate in the Assembly, K.Narayanaperumal Nadar moved a motion to omit the financial allotment made for the Transport Department. Speaking for the Samyuktha Party, K.T.Thomas contented himself with mentioning the need for the bus owners to be adequately compensated and for their employees not to be made redundant. In the subsequent division Nadar's motion was defeated by 38 votes to six, with 26 members, including 25 belonging to the Samyuktha Party, staying neutral.⁸¹ The six votes for were cast by Nadar, M.K.Mackar Pillai, a Muslim Samyuktha Party member, and four Nairs. The four were Pattom Thanu Pillai, G.P.Nilakanta Pillai and two members of the UNP who later resigned from the party over the issue - K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai and N.Narayana Kurup.⁸²

The end of the Assembly's budget session found the Samyuktha Party totally out-manoeuvred by Ramaswami Aiyar. Nowhere was this more evident than over communal representation. The party had successfully fought the elections on the issue but was isolated on it within the Assembly. In the four votes taken, it was easily defeated by a combination of the UNP and the official bloc.⁸³ Even the nominated members representing the depressed castes and backward class Christians generally opposed communal representation. Their attitude was summed up by N.John Joseph of the Cheramar Sangham, who saw its application to Christians as just a clever device, on the part of the forward sections of the community, to deprive low-caste converts of the jobs they deserved.⁸⁴

The stance taken by the government was crucial in ensuring the isolation of the Samyuktha Party. The party's effective neutrality during the discussion of the university and transport schemes was not reciprocated by the administration in the debates on communal representation. Instead, on 31 July, Chief Secretary N.Kunjan Pillai provoked a Samyuktha walk out when he responded strongly to allegations of nepotism.⁸⁵ In spite of this, three days later a majority of Samyuktha members still voted with the official bloc to overwhelmingly defeat a motion brought by Pattom Thanu Pillai censuring the government's industrial policy.⁸⁶

The Samyuktha Party's ineffectual performance probably contributed to the defection of two of its members during the budget session. The two were M.K.Mackar Pillai, a wealthy Muslim merchant, and D.Francis, the veteran Nadar Catholic leader from Nagercoil. Neither man had played an active role in the Abstention movement and both owed their original adoption as JPC candidates to their status as community leaders.⁸⁷

The legislative setbacks it had suffered set in motion a train of events that eventually resulted in the breakup of the Samyuktha Party. Some party leaders, most notably T.M.Varghese, sought to refurbish the JPC's public image by capitalising on the release from prison, on 25 September, of C.Kesevan. The Ezhava leader was freed, a few days prior to the end of his sentence, under an amnesty granted on the occasion of the birthday of the Maharaja's eldest sister.⁸⁸

Public receptions celebrating Kesevan's release were held at several centres in the state in October and November 1937.⁸⁹ The most elaborate took place in Alleppey on 3 October.⁹⁰ It was attended by an estimated 100,000 people; the biggest public demonstration seen in Travancore. Kesevan was led into the town by a procession of marching volunteers headed by caparisoned elephants and accompanied by numerous musicians. He was also presented with purses collected in a subscription campaign launched by K.C.Mammen Mappillai, the principal organiser of the reception. In a speech Mappillai described Kesevan as 'the uncrowned King of Kerala'.⁹¹ The organisers of the Kesevan receptions were subsequently warned against taking portraits of the Maharaja in procession with those of the released JPC leader. In addition, all official advertising was withdrawn from the Malayala Manorama⁹² and Mappillai was warned regarding the reports of the Alleppey reception that had been published in his paper.⁹³

Both the administration and pro-government Nair papers, such as the Malayala Rajyam and Bharatha Patrika, reacted hostilely to the Kesevan

receptions.⁹⁴ On 19 November an address presented to Kesevan by the militant Shertallai-based Ezhava Youth League was proscribed.⁹⁵

This was followed, at the end of the month, by a ban on all public meetings and demonstrations in Quilon District.⁹⁶

In another development a Nair UNP member of the Assembly moved a motion of no-confidence against T.M.Varghese, the Assembly's Deputy President. He argued that in welcoming Kesevan to Alleppey on behalf of the people of the state, Varghese had abused his legislative position. Though several Samyuktha members spoke defending Varghese, only one Nair did so. Even such a persistent critic of the administration as Pattom Thanu Pillai was among those who joined the official bloc and the UNP in voting for the motion. After the Dewan had spoken critically of Varghese's conduct, the house passed the motion by 42 votes to 24 with two abstentions.⁹⁷

The ousting of the Deputy President was followed by a split in the JPC. Relations between Varghese and N.V.Joseph, the leader of the Samyuktha Party in the Assembly, had always been uneasy. The latter resented having been supplanted as the JPC's main spokesman back in 1934. In the aftermath of the Kesevan receptions he found himself at odds with Varghese, Mammen Mappillai and the Ezhava MLAs. Having successfully opposed the legislative party's neutral posture in the votes on the university and transport schemes, he also expressed misgivings about the celebrations attending Kesevan's release, feeling that it was unwise to revive communal antagonisms by reminding people of Kesevan's controversial Kozhencherry speech.⁹⁸ Joseph saw the consequences of the Kesevan receptions - the ban on demonstrations and the no-confidence motion in the Assembly - as having vindicated his position. He, therefore, proposed his own candidacy for the Deputy Presidency, ostensibly to test assertions by the government and Nair legislators, that the motion against Varghese had not been aimed at the Samyuktha Party itself. However, this strategy was rejected by a majority of Samyuktha MLAs and, consequently, the party boycotted the election of a new Deputy President. S.Chattanatha Karayalar, a wealthy Yadava businessman from Shencottah, who had the backing of the administration⁹⁹, was elected unopposed after Pattom Thanu Pillai, nominated for the third time in five years, was persuaded to stand down.

Following the boycott decision Joseph announced his resignation, both from the Samyuktha Party and as General Secretary of the JPC. In a published statement he was particularly critical of Varghese and the Ezhava MLAs. Varghese exacerbated the divisions in the party by

choosing K.T.Thomas, a fellow Marthomite, to succeed Joseph as JPC General Secretary.¹⁰⁰ The choice of Thomas, as well as some further skilful use of its influence by the administration¹⁰¹, brought about further resignations from the Samyuktha Party in mid-December 1937 and early January 1938. In the Assembly, four of the six remaining Catholic members, including E.P.Varghese and Thariathu Kunjithomman, left the party. In the upper house N.Abdur Rahiman, the party's deputy leader, also resigned.¹⁰² P.I.Simon, a Jacobite MLC, had left the party earlier. Overall, the defections meant that in six months the Samyuktha strength in the legislature had fallen from 34 to 25.

Though six of the nine Samyuktha legislators to abandon the party were Catholics, the split in the JPC was not simply along communal lines. It was also influenced by personal rivalries and differences regarding political strategy. Following the setbacks suffered during the budget sessions, several previously moderate JPC leaders, including T.M.Varghese and his close ally, K.C.Mammen Mappillai, lost faith in the policy of conciliating the administration and were receptive to suggestions for the launch of an agitation for responsible government. This course had been favoured for some time by several of the younger and more radical JPC leaders, notably P.J.Sebastian, V.K.Velayudhan and P.K.Kunju. With the coming together of the radicals and some of the leading moderates, the remaining JPC leadership began to make approaches towards the Indian National Congress and anti-government Nair politicians.

Since the official ban imposed in 1934, there had been little Congress activity in the state. In December 1935 the Golden Jubilee of the National Congress was marked by a few public meetings, the largest being one in Trivandrum presided over by Pattom Thanu Pillai.¹⁰³ At the beginning of 1936 several Congress activists and sympathisers formed the Young Kerala Society to combat the growth of communalism.¹⁰⁴ Its organisers were mostly Nairs and the Society's committee included Trivandrum lawyer K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai (the President), the Gandhian G.Ramachandran, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, K.A.Damodara Menon and C.Narayana Pillai. One of the only two Christian committee members was David George, the Youth League Joint Secretary. While the Society advocated the eradication of casteism and an egalitarian ethic,¹⁰⁵ it was not as radical a body as the Youth League, and the most left-wing Youth Leaguers, such as N.C.Sekhar and N.P.Kurukkal stayed aloof from it.

The most important distinction between the Society and the League was the former's strong links with Congress. The Society's first annual conference, held in Trivandrum in August 1937¹⁰⁶, was presided over by

K.Santhanam, the editor of the Indian Express and a Congress MLA from Madras. The conference elected a new committee of which the President was G.Ramachandran, a serving member of the All-India Congress Committee. Among the new committee members was the veteran Congressman Kuruvila Mathew, now the Secretary of the Student Christian Movement.¹⁰⁷

Mathew represented a growing body of educated Christian youth sympathetic to Indian nationalism and to Gandhian, and even socialist, ideals. Beginning in the 1920's with a few inspired by the example of George Joseph, this group had expanded rapidly as the generation that had been aware of the mass Congress campaigns of the 1920s and early 1930s grew up. Within Travancore those notable in encouraging the spread of Gandhian ideas among Christians included K.K.Kuruvilla, the Principal of the Mar Thoma Seminary and High School in Kottayam, and a Samyuktha MLC, and Sadhu K.I.Mathai, a saffron-robed ascetic who ran a Christian Institute in Alwaye and later founded an ashram in Kottayam.¹⁰⁸

By the late 1930s both the Student Christian Movement and the Mar Thoma Youth League¹⁰⁹ had become centres of anti-government and pro-nationalist sentiment. Such a development played a part in encouraging Syrian Christian politicians, especially Marthomites like T.M.Varghese and K.T. Thomas, to abandon their community's traditional distrust of Congress and move towards cooperation with pro-Congress Nairs who shared their hostility towards the government.

However, in 1937 the National Congress's own attitude towards the Travancore administration was ambivalent. Gandhi had been favourably impressed by the Temple Entry Proclamation, while Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar was careful to cultivate good relations with the new Congress ministry in Madras, many of whose members were old associates of his.¹¹⁰ In August two Congresswomen from Madras took a leading part in the All Kerala Hindu Women's Conference in Quilon attended by the Junior Maharani.

Local Congressmen were not slow to take advantage of this apparent shift in the official attitude towards Congress. At a meeting in Trivandrum on 12 September a Travancore Congress Provisional Committee was formed to revive the Congress movement in the state.¹¹¹ Headed by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, it also included G.Ramachandran, Ponnara Sridhar, and Vaikom N.Ramakrishna Pillai. The new Committee arranged a visit to the state in November by Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Balwantraji Mehta, the President and General Secretary of the All India States' Peoples' Conference.

It was at this juncture that JPC leaders approached the National

Congress. C.Kesevan's father-in-law, C.V.Kunjuraman, made enquiries regarding the association of the Samyuktha Party with Congress.¹¹² Dr Sitaramayya gave a discouraging response, telling Samyuktha Party members that as long as they had as their main programme communal representation in the public service, they could not properly join Congress. At a public meeting at Quilon he also denounced separate electorates and both he and Mehta, while calling on Travancoreans to demand responsible government, laid stress on the wearing of khaddar as a primary test of loyalty to Congress ideals.¹¹³ On 27 November Sitaramayya presided over a Travancore Political Conference in Trivandrum the deliberations of which were dominated by the responsible government issue.¹¹⁴

The Samyuktha leaders finally determined to adopt the cause of responsible government after the failure of a last-bid to prevent the defection from the party of those Catholic MLAs whose main concern was communal representation. On 4 January 1938 a deputation, including T.M.Varghese and Thariathu Kunjithomman, submitted a memorandum on public service recruitment to the Dewan.¹¹⁵ It carried the principle of communal representation to an extreme by demanding that the popular strength of the various communities should be strictly reflected in the appointment of heads of departments, as well as within each department and within all the three grades of the service. It even suggested the employment of non-Hindus in the Devaswom Department. Unsurprisingly, the demands were dismissed as impracticable and the memorandum did not dissuade Kunjithomman, the leading proponent of communal representation and two other Catholic MLAs from leaving the Samyuktha Party.

Not all Catholic legislators joined in the exodus; the four who remained loyal to the party included P.J.Sebastian, the Secretary of the State Catholic Congress, and K.M.Korah, another wealthy lawyer from Changanacherry. On 16 January Sebastian convened a meeting of the Congress committee that removed N.V.Joseph from the presidency of the organisations and demanded the resignation of the Catholic MLAs who had defected.¹¹⁶

Over the next four weeks both pro- and anti-Samyuktha factions canvassed for support, particularly from the Catholic bishops.¹¹⁷ The final rupture in the Congress occurred in February when the rival groups both held meetings.¹¹⁸ At one in Muvattupuzha, Joseph was confirmed as the Congress President with Kunjithomman as Vice Patron. Aided by his links with the Bishop of Changanacherry and the concern of the Catholic hierarchy not to alienate the administration, Joseph was able to get the bishops to act as the official patrons of his faction. The other faction, meeting near Alleppey, retained Sebastian as Secretary and elected

T.J.Mathew, one of the early leaders of the Malabar Catholic Congress and a former Changanacherry MLC, as the new President. They also endorsed the cause of responsible government.

Apart from the breakup of the JPC, several other events played a role in the emergence of a cross-communal coalition favouring the immediate introduction of responsible government. On 4 January, a new constitution was introduced in neighbouring Cochin state.¹¹⁹ It provided for a system of dyarchy with the minister in charge of the 'transferred' subjects being made responsible to the legislature (that is removable by a majority vote of the elected members). Travancorean advocates of responsible government were thus able to point to an example that their own administration should follow. This was particularly important owing to the ill-concealed rivalry between Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar and Sir R.K.Shanmugam Chetty, the non-Brahman Dewan of Cochin and an old political foe.¹²⁰

Within Travancore too, circumstances favoured the creation of a new party on a platform of responsible government. Since taking office the Dewan had alienated a number of notable Nair politicians, particularly from the south. Foremost among them were Pattom Thanu Pillai, A.Narayana Pillai and M.R.Madhava Warriar.¹²¹ Jealous of the influence enjoyed by the clique of Quilon Nairs close to the palace, and embittered by the failure of his repeated attempts at gaining the Deputy Presidency of the Assembly, Pattom had emerged as a leading legislative critic of the administration. Narayana Pillai, like Pattom - from Trivandrum, also resented the political ascendancy of the Quilon Nairs and had been active in opposing the government's transport scheme. Warriar, the editor of the Malayali, found himself in open conflict with the administration after attacking the official encouragement of sycophancy. In late 1937 the Malayali was twice warned by the government.¹²²

On 19 January 1938 Warriar and the Jacobite Syrian editor of the Trivandrum English paper, the Malabar Advocate, were the victims of separate assaults by unidentified miscreants in the streets of the capital. While in themselves not serious, the incidents provided opponents of the administration with a grievance they could exploit to attack the government. In an appeal to the Maharaja published on 24 January, the Malayali commented scathingly on what it called hooliganism, terrorism and insecurity. The paper expressed serious doubts about the conduct of government officers.¹²³ On the following day both Pattom Thanu Pillai and T.M.Varghese proposed motions for the Assembly to discuss the reported assaults on the editors. These were ruled out of order by the Dewan.¹²⁴

The administration was becoming seriously concerned by the developing entente between its Samyuktha and Nair opponents. On 28 January A.Narayana Pillai was issued with a notice threatening prosecution in connection with an article by him that had been published in the Malayala Rajyam.¹²⁵ Entitled 'The Problem of Representation in the Public Service and Nairs', it claimed that the Nairs were in reality underrepresented in all but the lower grades of the service and that their selfless defence of the principle of efficiency as the main criterion in making appointments had gone unrewarded. In an echo of earlier outcries raised by south Travancorean Nairs against the appointment of foreign Brahmans, Narayana Pillai also criticised the unrestricted appointment of Brahmans in the name of efficiency. He concluded by asking Nairs to consider abandoning their previous stance in the interests of unity with the other communities and the consequent strengthening of popular rights and influence.¹²⁶

While warning its Nair opponents, the administration also sought to answer the demands for responsible government. On 1 February it allowed a motion by T.M.Varghese for a debate on the issue in the Assembly. In a statement the Dewan criticised the dyarchical system of government as leading nowhere and said that observance of treaty obligations to the Paramount Power was 'inconsistent with any grant of real Responsible Government...'¹²⁷ Varghese attempted to meet the Dewan's objections by arguing that the impossibility of granting a government full responsibility should not be allowed to preclude giving the people a government 'with half or three fourths responsibility'.¹²⁸ He said that the essential demand was for the substitution of the Dewan by a Prime Minister and Ministers who were the people's representatives. In his contribution to the debate, Pattom Thanu Pillai requested the grant of responsible government within the limitations placed by treaty obligations. He also made a call for Travancore to be ruled by sons of the soil.

Apart from Pattom, Nair members who had previously demanded responsible government now withheld their support from Varghese's motion. Opposing the Samyuktha stance, Puthupalli Krishna Pillai, the deputy leader of the UNP, noted how, since June 1937, Varghese seemed to have changed his opinion on the issue. In Puthupalli's own opinion responsible government was incompatible with the communal representation that existed in the legislature. K.G.Kunjukrishna Pillai, notable for his consistent support for the INC, based his opposition to the motion on the grounds that it was 'anaemic' and 'an eye-wash'.¹²⁹

However, a fortnight after the Assembly debate, a meeting in A.Narayana Pillai's Trivandrum office, chaired by M.R.Madhava Warriar, resolved upon launching a new political party to agitate for responsible government.¹³⁰ A seven-man committee was appointed to draft a constitution. In addition to Narayana Pillai, Warriar and Pattom, it also included K.T.Thomas and C.V.Kunjuraman from the JPC. Another committee was chosen to do publicity work. Among its seven members were C.Kesevan of the JPC and three pro-Congress Nair lawyers - V.Achutha Menon, C.Narayana Pillai and P.N.Krishna Pillai, a labour activist.

What was striking about the 16 February meeting was the attempt to create as broad a coalition as possible. It was not just the Samyuktha Party members and prominent Nair critics of the government who attended. A nominated Muslim MLC and James Fletcher, the Latin Catholic deputy leader of the pro-government Progressive Party, were both included in the constitution committee.¹³¹ The publicity committee numbered among its members S.K.George, the Christian Secretary of the nationalist Young Kerala Society, and Annie Mascarene. Miss Mascarene, one of only three female lawyers practising in the state, was the General Secretary of the Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha - whose president (E.P.Varghese) had resigned from the JPC. Even men who later became fierce critics of the State Congress, most notably Puthupalli Krishna Pillai and his close associate, Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai¹³², were present at this initial exploratory meeting. Of course it is not inconceivable that they were there as agents of the government.

Over the next few days several developments served to encourage the organisers of the new party. On 20 February the 51st session of the Indian National Congress, meeting in Haripura, passed a resolution that committed the Congress to lend 'moral support and sympathy' to movements for responsible governments in the States.¹³³ The resolution directed Congress Committees in the States not to 'engage in parliamentary activity nor launch on direct action in the name and under the auspices of the Congress'. Thus individual Congressmen were left with no option in 'the struggle for freedom' other than initiating or joining organisations independent of the national body. In Travancore this meant that the Provisional Congress Committee that had been formed in September 1937 lost its *raison d'etre*.

The Haripura resolution was followed by a statement in the House of Commons by Earl Winterton, the Under Secretary of State for India, that seemed to contradict the objections to responsible government raised by Ramaswami Aiyar. Winterton, replying to a question from a Conservative

member, said on 21 February that it was 'not the policy of the Paramount Power in ordinary circumstances to intervene in the internal administration of full-powered states', and gave an assurance 'that the Paramount Power would certainly not obstruct proposals for constitutional advance initiated by the Ruler'.¹³⁴

On the same day as the statement in the Commons, the Travancore government sanctioned the arrest and prosecution of A.Narayana Pillai.¹³⁵ He was charged with sedition and promoting communal hatred through his Malayala Rajyam article and a subsequent piece in the Malayali. The case provided a cause celebre for the newly allied Nair and Samyuktha politicians, with the ex-MLA E.V.Krishna Pillai and T.M. Varghese representing Narayana Pillai in the Trivandrum District Court.¹³⁶

If the arrest of one of the chief organisers of the responsible government party was intended to discourage his colleagues it certainly failed in its purpose. On 24 February, at a second meeting in Narayana Pillai's office, this time presided over by C.V.Kunjuraman, the draft constitution of the newly formed Travancore State Congress was adopted.¹³⁷ The Executive Committee of the TSC was then chosen on the next day, at a meeting chaired by Pattom and held in the Trivandrum house of E.J.Philipose, the erstwhile Samyuktha Party secretary in the Assembly.¹³⁸ The eleven-member committee included several Samyuktha legislators, among them T.M.Varghese, K.T.Thomas, Philipose, and P.K.Kunju. C.Kesevan was also a member and the Nairs given places included, Pattom, appointed the President, and K.P.Nilakanta Pillai, along with Thomas one of the two joint secretaries.¹³⁹

Both Pattom and Nilakanta Pillai had represented south Travancorean constituencies in the legislature for over a decade. A significant section of the southern Nair intelligentsia had become particularly disenchanted with the Dewan, and they provided much of the initial caste-Hindu backing for the new party.¹⁴⁰ By contrast the Nair Service Society and most of the prominent Nair leaders in central and northern Travancore eventually came out in support of the administration. The reasons for such a regional division among Nair politicians lay in the old rivalry between northerners and southerners. This had been made worse by the close links that existed between the palace and the clique of Quilon Nairs around K.G.Parameswaran Pillai. Men such as Pattom and Nilakanta Pillai felt that they were being denied the prominence in public life that, as southern Nairs, they had traditionally enjoyed and come to expect.

The Travancorean supporters of the Indian National Congress were divided in their response to the Haripura resolution. On 5 March, a week after the TSC had demanded 'the speedy establishment of Responsible Government',¹⁴¹ the Provisional Congress Committee met in Trivandrum and decided by 28 votes to four, to suspend its activities and instruct its members to join the new party.¹⁴² Though the Committee President, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, and a majority of Congress activists did so,¹⁴³ a few were unable to overcome the antipathy they felt towards the TSC leadership. For instance, K.Kumar voted against joining the party and subsequently justified his stance by publicly attacking its organisers as communalists.¹⁴⁴ However, the attitude of the anti-TSC Congressmen was not based purely on ideology; it was also influenced by personal factors. Kumar had been embittered by his electoral defeat at the hands of T.M.Varghese, while the others who denounced the TSC as a sham included K.G.Sankar, the brother of K.G.Parameswaran Pillai, and M.Sivathanu Pillai, a prominent member of the pro-government UNP.¹⁴⁵

The establishment of the TSC marked the beginning of a new phase in Travancore's political development - one in which the politics of nationalism overlaid the politics of caste and community. Sharing a common hostility towards Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar's regime, the leaders of the party were brought together by circumstances both within and without the state. Within Travancore the successive setbacks suffered by the Samyuktha Party and the growing disaffection among southern Nair politicians prepared the way for an anti-government coalition under the banner of 'Congress', a label that, by 1938, possessed a powerful appeal even among Christians. Moves towards such a coalition were given impetus by external developments - the formation of Congress ministries in Madras and other British Indian provinces, the new constitution in Cochin and the Haripura resolution. The party that was thus called into being represented an uneasy symbiosis between nationalism and communalism.

Notes

- 1
Agent to Pol.Sec., 2 Nov. 1935, CRR,R/1/29/1369.
- 2
Agent to Pol.Sec., 26 Sept. 1935, CRR, R/1/29/1369.
- 3
Proceedings of the Government of Travancore, Sept. 1934 to Feb. 1936, Judicial, 809/1936.
- 4
Muslim Mithram, 17 Sept. and 29 Oct. 1934, Dakshina Bharathi, 22 Sept. 1934, and Navasakti, 11 Oct. 1934 , CS, 949/1934.
- 5
Enclosure, Agent to Pol.Sec., 2 Nov. 1935, loc.cit.
- 6
Agent's Note, CRR, 1/29/1485.
- 7
TAR (1935-36), pp.100-01.
- 8
P.Spear, A History of India, Vol.2, London 1973, p.208.
- 9
Agent to Pol.Sec., 26 Nov. 1935, CRR, R/1/29/1369.
- 10
Agent's Note, loc.cit.
- 11
WSB, III, Para.245 (30 Sept.1936).
- 12
Commons' Parliamentary Debates, 308, col.1436.
- 13
Agent to Pol.Sec., 16 June 1936, CRR, R/2/222.
- 14
Notification R.Dis. No.858 of 36/Edn., 13 June 1936, CRR, R/2/219.
- 15
G.H.Marsden (Principal, Scott Christian College) to G.E.Phillips (LMS, London), 12 Oct.1936, IMC/CBMS, Box 406.
- 16
Proceedings of the Government of Travancore (copy), Enclosure, Marsden to Rev. Norman Goodall (Foreign Sec., LMS), 24 Nov. 1936, LMS Correspondence, Box 33 (1934-36-1).
- 17
Following the death of the leader of the Catholicos party, Mar Dionysius VI, in 1934, an attempt had been made by Abstentionist politicians to bring the two sides together. However, this failed and in March 1938 the Patriarch's party filed a suit in the Kottayam District Court. WSB, I, 12 (17 March 1934); D.Daniel, The Orthodox Church of India, New Delhi 1972, p.123; F.E.Keay, A History of the Syrian Church in India, Delhi 1960, pp.103-07.
- 18
Marsden to Phillips, loc.cit.; Bp.Moore to Sir Cusack Walton (CMS,London), 13 Oct.1936, IMC/CBMS, Box 406; Rev. R.Sinclair to Rev.Goodall, 3 Dec. 1936, LMS Correspondence, Box 34 (1934-36-11).
- 19
Agent's Note, 15 Sept. 1936, CRR,R/2/219.
- 20
Agent to Pol.Sec., 11 Oct. 1938, CRR, R/1/29/1849.
- 21
Agent to Jt.Sec., Pol.Dept., 24 June 1938, CRR, R/1/29/1696.
- 22
WSB, III, Paras. 214 and 218 (29 Aug. 1936).

- 23 Ibid., Para 247 (3 Oct. 1936).
- 24 Ibid., Paras. 254 (12 Oct 1936) and 267 (24 Oct. 1936).
- 25 Ibid., Para.254.
- 26 Ibid., Para.273 (2 Nov. 1936).
- 27 V.Balakrishnan and R.Leela Devi, Mannathu Padmanabhan and the Revival of Nairs in Kerala, New Delhi 1982, pp.92-93.
- 28 WSB, II, Para.247 (12 Oct. 1935).
- 29 Speeches of Sachivottama Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore, Vol.I, Trivandrum 1942-45, pp.104-10; Regional Records Survey Committee The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol.II, Trivandrum 1972, p.372.
- 30 Memorandum, CRR, R/2/220-Dis.91/36.
- 31 WSB, III, Para.108 (9 May 1936).
- 32 K.K.Kusuman, The Abstention Movement, Trivandrum 1976, p.72; RRSC, op.cit., p.373.
- 33 Notes of deputation's meeting with Dewan, 31 Oct. 1936, CRR, R/2/220-Dis.91/36.
- 34 WSB, III, Para.317 (15 Dec.1936).
- 35 34th Annual Report of the SNDP Yogam, Alleppey 1937, pp.10-11.
- 36 Mahomed to Dewan, 29 Karkadagam 1112 ME. (Aug.1937). Quoted in D.J.Das, Working Class Politics in Kerala. A Study of Coir Workers, Trivandrum 1983, p.135.
- 37 WSB, IV, Paras.60 (28 Feb. 1937) and 73 (20 March 1937).
- 38 Ibid., III, Para.108 (9 May 1936).
- 39 Ibid., IV, Para.82 (27 March 1937).
- 40 For instance, in the Karunagapalli-Kartikapalli constituency, three Nairs, including ex-MLCs G.P.Nilakanta Pillai and G.Raman Menon, joined a JPC candidate in contesting the two general seats. District Magistrate (Quilon) to Ch.Sec., 16 Edavom 1110 ME. (June 1937), Judicial, 1447/1937.
- 41 Madras States, FR 2 April 1937, CRR, R/1/29/1538.
- 42 WSB, IV, Paras.108 (24 April 1937) and 111 (1 May 1937).
- 43 Ibid., Para.88 (3 April 1937).
- 44 Kumar to Dewan, 2 April 1937, K.G.Gopala Pillai to Dewan, 8 April 1937, Ch.Sec. to District Magistrate (Quilon), 9 April 1937, T.M.Varghese to Dewan, 13 April 1937, and P.S.Veloo Pillai to Dewan, 16 April 1937, CS, 1475/1937.

- 45 District Magistrate to Ch.Sec., 13 April 1937, Ch.Sec. to District Magistrate, 19 April 1937, Police Com. to Ch. Sec., 18 April 1937, CS, 1475/1937.
- 46 TAD (1938), pp.294-97.
- 47 TAR (1936-37), pp.98-99.
- 48 District Magistrate (Quilon) to Ch.Sec., 16 Edavom 1112 ME. (June 1937), Police Com. to Ch.Sec., 7 June 1937, Judicial, 1447/1937.
- 49 WSB, IV, Para.120 (8 May 1937).
- 50 Ibid., Para.132 (22 May 1937).
- 51 Ibid., Para.180 (10 July 1937).
- 52 Ibid., Para.166 (22 June 1937).
- 53 Dewan to Agent, 17 June 1937, CRR, R/2/226-Dis.159/37.
- 54 Head Sirkar Vakil to Ch.Sec., 30 June 1936, CS, 1098/1936.
- 55 WSB, IV, Para.149 (12 June 1937).
- 56 Enclosure, Dewan to Agent, 17 June 1937, loc.cit.
- 57 WSB, IV, Para.146 (5 June 1937).
- 58 SMAP, X, pp.46-47.
- 59 Following Kesevan's imprisonment, Velayudhan had become Acting General Secretary of the SNDP Yogam and JPC Vice President.
- 60 WSB, IV, Para.162 (26 June 1937).
- 61 Ibid., Para 189 (23 July 1937).
- 62 Ibid., Para.193 (24 July 1937).
- 63 N.Perumal, The Truth About Travancore, Madras 1939, pp.69-71.
- 64 WSB, IV, Para.201 (9 Aug. 1937).
- 65 Ibid., Para.183 (17 July 1937).
- 66 Ibid., Para.207 (11 Aug. 1937). The society had been formed in Jan.1936.
- 67 Ibid., Para.232 (10 Sept.1937)
- 68 Ibid., Paras.191 (24 July 1937) and 196 (31 July 1937).
- 69 Mascarene to Dewan, 20 Aug.1937, CS, 1604/1937.
- 70 SMAP,X, pp.453-79.
- 71 MSD (1934), p.73; RRSC, Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala, Trivandrum 1975, p.56.

- 72 SCSCP, X, pp.259-71.
- 73 LMS Annual Report (Nagercoil) 1937, p.2.
- 74 Halifax to Dr.William Paton (Sec., International Missionary Committee) 11 Sept.1937, IMC/CBMS, Box 442.
- 75 O.M.Thomas, Under the Knife: Studies of Some Kerala Notables, Allahabad 1970, pp.73-75; Mappillai's brother, K.C.Chacko, was a founder of the UCC and lectured there until 1943. C.E.Abraham, 'Three Leaders of the Syrian Church in India', International Review of Missions, 37 (1948).
- 76 RPT, X, p.1.
- 77 P.C.Joseph, The Economic and Social Environment of the Church in North Travancore and Cochin, Kottayam 1938,p.74.
- 78 WSB, IV, Para.181 (11 July 1937).
- 79 Ibid., Para.212 (16 Aug.1937).
- 80 Ibid., Para.189 (24 July 1937).
- 81 SMAP, X, pp.633-40.
- 82 WSB, IV, Para.220 (29 Aug.1937).
- 83 SMAP, X, pp.372-73, 413-16, 550-51 and 905-22.
- 84 Ibid., p.648.
- 85 Ibid., pp.672-82.
- 86 Ibid., p.691.
- 87 MSD (1934), pp.94-95, and (1930), pp.57-58.
- 88 Madras States, FR 2 Sept.1937, CRR, R/1/29/1538.
- 89 Freedom Movement, p.373.
- 90 Madras States, FR 1 Oct.1937, CRR, R/1/29/1538.
- 91 M.J.Koshy, K.C.Mammen Mappillai: The Man and His Vision, Trivandrum 1976, p.619.
- 92 Ch.Sec. to Ch.Conciliation Officer, 17 Oct.1937, CS, 1757/1937.
- 93 Dewan to Agent, 10 Oct.1937, CRR, R/2/226-Dis.159/37.
- 94 Malayala Rajyam, 31 Oct.1937, and Bharatha Patrika, 30 Oct.1937, CS, 1757/1937.
- 95 Government Press Note, 19 Nov.1937, CS, 1643/1937.
- 96 Madras States, FR 1 Dec.1937, CRR,R/1/29/1538.
- 97 SMAP, XI, pp.210-83.

98

Statement by N.V.Joseph, Malayala Manorama, 8 and 16 Dec.1937, CRR, R/2/226-Dis.159/37.

99

An independent Tamil non-Brahman, Karayalar, was an uncontroversial choice. A Director of the new Travancore National and Quilon Bank, the chairman of which was K.C.Mammen Mappillai, he was generally well-regarded by Christian leaders. Dewan to Agent, 7 Dec.1937, CRR, R/2/226-Dis.159/37.

100

E.M.Kovoor, T.M.Varghese, Kottayam 1965, pp.149-50.

101

Resident's Note, 14 June 1938, CRR,R/2/236-Dis.24/38. Several of the Samyuktha defectors were rewarded with official appointments: N.Abdur Rahiman became Conciliation Officer, Alleppey; another - Joseph Vithayathil - became a lecturer in the Law College; and P.I.Simon and E.P.Varghese became Government Pleaders.

102

WSB, V, Para.8 (7 Jan.1938).

103

Ibid., II, Para.315 (28 Dec.1935).

104

List of Societies and Sabhas, Dewan to Agent, 10 July 1936, CS, 1092/1936.

105

WSB, III, Paras.147 and 149 (20 June 1936).

106

Madras States, FR 2 Aug.1937, CRR, R/1/29/1538.

107

Travancore State Congress, Travancore Today: Her Struggle for Freedom, Cochin 1938, p.53.

108

C.P.Mathew and M.M.Thomas, The Indian Churches of St.Thomas, Delhi 1967, pp.147-49.

109

S.A.Oren, 'Religious Groups as Political Organisations: A Comparative Analysis of Three Indian States', PhD. Thesis, Columbia 1968,p.199.

110

The Dewan gave a party for the new Congress ministers at his Madras residence. Madras States, FR 2 Aug. 1937, CRR, R/1/29/1538.

111

Madras States, FR 1 Sept.1937, CRR, R/1/29/1538.

112

Bharatha Kesari, 4 Dec.1937, CRR, R/2/226-Dis.159/37.

113

Police Report, 26 Nov.1937, CS, 1656/1937.

114

TSC, op.cit., pp.48-49.

115

Freedom Movement, p.374; Public Service Com.'s notes on Memorandum, 3 Jan.1938, CS, 301/1938.

116

WSB, V, Para.18 (16 Jan.1938).

117

Ibid., Para.20 (22 Jan.1938).

118

Ibid., Para.51 (21 Feb.1938).

119

V.Rangaswami, The Story of Integration. A New Interpretation in the Context of the Democratic Movements in the Princely States of Mysore,

Travancore and Cochin 1900-47, New Delhi 1981, p.305n.

120

K.C.Mammen Mappillai even suggested that Chetty should replace Aiyar as Dewan. In an appeal to the Archbishop of Canterbury to use his influence against Aiyar, Mappillai gave Chetty as a character reference. Mappillai to Archbishop, 26 Aug.1938, IMC/CBMS, Box 442.

121

An Ambalavasi.

122

Ch.Sec. to K.G.Warrier, 8 Oct. and 16 Nov.1937, CS, 1634 and 1642/1937.

123

TSC, op.cit., pp.188-90.

124

SMAP, XI, pp.519-21.

125

TSC, op.cit., p.97.

126

Ibid., pp.92-93.

127

SMAP, XI, p.803.

128

Ibid., p.805.

129

Ibid., pp.818-34.

130

WSB, V, Para.45 (17 Feb.1938).

131

Both later withdrew from the venture.

132

Puthupalli was appointed Legal Remembrancer in May 1938 and Kottoor became a leading promoter of the pro-government Travancore National Congress formed in July 1938. TSC, op.cit., p.vi; WSB, V, Para.164 (14 July 1938).

133

A.M.Zaidi and S.G.Zaidi (ed), The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress, Vol.XI: 1936 -1938.Combatting an Unwanted Constitution, New Delhi 1980, p.434.

134

Commons' Parliamentary Debates, 332, col.4; Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, had described Aiyar's objections as 'absurd' and 'silly', Zetland to Linlithgow, 20 Feb.1938. Quoted in Rangaswami, op.cit., p.153.

135

TSC, op.cit., pp.99-100.

136

Ibid., pp.102-04; TLJ, XXVIII, p.514.

137

C.Narayana Pillai, Thiruvithamcore Swatantriya Samara Charitram, Trivandrum 1972, p.82; Porunna K.N.Nair, Keralathile Congress Prasthanam, Trichur 1967, pp.222-25.

138

WSB, V, Para.51 (26 Feb.1938).

139

The identity of the four remaining committee members is uncertain since soon after a number of members were co-opted and at least two (including V.Achutha Menon) resigned. By May 1938 the committee's strength had doubled to 22 - nine Nairs, seven Christians, four Ezhavas, a Muslim and an Ambalavasi. Apart from those already mentioned they included N.K.Padmanabha Pillai, K.N.Kunjukrishna Pillai, M.N.Parameswaran Pillai, A.Narayana Pillai, R.Vasudevan Pillai,

Kumbalath P.Sanku Pillai, Parur T.K.Narayana Pillai, Kannara Gopala Panickar, P.J.Sebastian, K.M.Korah, A.J.John, Annie Mascarene, V.K.Velayudhan, K.Kesavan, and M.R.Madhava Warriar.
TSC, op.cit., p.xviii; Pattom Thanu Pillai Papers, File no.1 (1938-39)

140

Seven of the nine Nair members of the Working Committee, as it was constituted in May 1938, were southerners. The two exceptions - Sanku Pillai and T.K.Narayana Pillai - had both been supporters of the National Congress since the days of non-cooperation. Freedom Fighters, pp.407-08 and 555-56.

141

TSC, op.cit., pp.42-45.

142

WSB, V, Para.57 (5 March 1938); Rangaswami, op.cit., p.160.

143

Among the veteran nationalists who supported the TSC were A.K.Pillai, C.Kuttan Nair, K.A.Damodara Menon, Amsi Narayana Pillai, G.Ramachandran, K.Kesavan Potty, Kannara Gopala Panickar, Kuruville A. Mathew, David Mahapillai, and T.A.Abdulla. The leftists Ponnara Sridhar, N.P.Kurukkal, N.C.Sekhar and P.Krishna Pillai were also active in the party. Freedom Fighters, pp.3, 102, 140, 220-21, 258-59, 312, 346-47 and 404; S.P.Sen (ed), Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.III, Calcutta 1974, pp.89-90 and 459-61, and IV, pp.261-62; Acting Ch.Sec. to Supt., Central Prison, 23 Oct.1938, CS, 323/1938; T.V.Krishnan, 'Sakhavu' Krishna Pillai - Kerala's First Communist, New Delhi 1971, pp.43-49.

144

Malayala Rajyam, 18 June 1938. Quoted in WSB, V, Para.147.

145

SMAP, XII, p.260.

Conclusion

The Politics of Community, Class and Nation.

The story of Travancore in the early twentieth-century is one of social and political change. Movements for social and religious reform gave rise to an awareness of communal identity that prepared the way for the emergence of statewide politics. Wealthy and educated Travancoreans were mobilised along the lines of caste and community, forming associations, publishing newspapers, and competing for government jobs.

By the 1920s there were signs that political consciousness had spread beyond the established communal elites. Radical reformers were introducing poor Ezhavas to novel ideas of secular rationalism and egalitarianism. These, in turn, encouraged the growth of a class consciousness, expressed in the nascent trade union movement. Meanwhile, Indian nationalism was making a strong impact, especially on impressionable students, some of whom became Congressmen. Congress activity also influenced the style of politics, giving it a more agitational character.

Nevertheless, communalism, rather than nationalism or class conflict, still determined the course of politics in the 1930s. The JPC broke new ground by conducting a sustained confrontation with the government and mobilising support on an unprecedented scale. However, once it had achieved its primary objectives of providing for communal representation in the public service and the legislature, the party lost its *raison d'etre*. The JPC's successor, the State Congress, was a product of circumstance, but the movement for responsible government that it spearheaded ushered in an era of mass involvement in politics characterised by the interaction of communal, class and national loyalties.

There was a dramatic shift in the nature of political activity in the months following the formation of the TSC. At the end of May 1938 the TSC submitted a memorial to the Maharaja calling for the dismissal of Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar; the creation of a cabinet of ministers responsible to the legislature; and universal adult franchise.¹ Then, in July and August, the radical Youth League seized the initiative. With strong support among students, it took the lead in organising mass demonstrations in Trivandrum of up to 20,000 people.² Anticipating the launch of a civil disobedience campaign, on 25 August the government promulgated a Criminal Law Amendment Regulation³ under

which both the TSC and the League were banned.

Despite the arrest of most TSC leaders, and some League activists,⁴ over the next two months Travancore was gripped by a widespread agitation.⁵ Almost 2,000 extra troops and police had to be mobilised to deal with the trouble, and on several occasions the security forces opened fire on crowds, killing seventeen people.⁶ Various local grievances⁷, as well as the support for the TSC expressed by Gandhi and demonstrated by Congressmen from outside the state⁸, fueled the unrest. The agitation only subsided in late October, following an amnesty for political prisoners convicted under the August Regulation.⁹

Despite the defection of some leading figures, such as V.K. Velayudhan, the majority of the politicians who threw in their lot with the TSC remained with the party until its ultimate triumph in the February 1948 elections. The poll took place six months after the forced resignation of Ramaswami Aiyar and the accession of Travancore to the Indian Union.¹⁰ For a decade veteran communal leaders like Pattom Thanu Pillai, T.M.Varghese and C.Kesevan had maintained their loyalty to Congress. They followed the national leadership in supporting the Quit India movement in 1942 and avoided the communal controversies provoked by issues such as a change in the voting system, in 1939¹¹, and the 1945 educational reforms.¹² However, once it had gained power, the latent divisions within the State Congress soon came to the surface. Pattom's autocratic style as Chief Minister alienated many in the party. In October 1948 he was defeated in a confidence vote and, along with a number of other Nairs, joined the newly-formed Socialist Party.¹³ The split contributed to the Congress' loss of its majority in the first elections to the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly in 1952.¹⁴

In his attacks on the TSC, Ramaswami Aiyar had sought to portray the organisation as a 'Christian Congress'.¹⁵ This theme was revived in the late 1940s by Nairs and Ezhavas who resented the influence wielded by Christians within the party. There was even a shortlived attempt by the leaders of the NSS and the SNDP Yogam to form a Hindu front - Hindu Mahamandalam.¹⁶ The fact was that once the State Congress had attained its objectives, it was impossible to sustain the 'nationalist' coalition. The conditions that had given rise to the wave of popular sentiment exploited by the party in 1938 and, again, in 1947-48, had disappeared. Communalism thus enjoyed a resurgence, the main difference from the 1920s and 1930s being that it now operated, not just through communal organisations but, within, and

through, secular political parties.

By the 1950s the politics of community and nation faced a powerful challenge from the appeal of class. The leftists within the TSC had been the first to abandon the 'nationalist' coalition.

Trade unionists were disillusioned by the party leadership's failure to lend tangible support to the Alleppey general strike of October 1938¹⁷, while the Youth League opposed the TSC Working Committee's decision, taken on Gandhi's advice, to withdraw a memorandum that contained serious personal charges against the Dewan.¹⁸ The memorandum was withdrawn in December 1938, and in March 1939 the Working Committee also resolved not to resume civil disobedience as had been planned previously. Subsequently, Youth League activists joined labour organisers, like the Congress Socialist P. Krishna Pillai, in forming a Radical Conference.¹⁹ This was later absorbed into the Communist Party, formally established in Kerala in 1939-40.²⁰

During the war years, when they were allowed to operate freely, the Communists had built up a strong organisation among the coir workers, agricultural labourers, toddy-tappers, boatmen and fishermen of the Alleppey-Shertallai belt.²¹ Their supporters were mostly Ezhavas, other outcaste-Hindus and Latin Catholics. The growth of Communist influence among Ezhavas even led to concern about the possibility that Communists might attempt to gain control of the SNDP Yogam; in 1946 the Yogam General Secretary, R. Sankar, a prominent State Congressman, had the general body pass a resolution that the organisation should stay aloof from party politics.²² In October of the same year, the Communist Party declared a general strike in opposition to the Dewan's plans to introduce a new 'American model' constitution. The consequence was the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising which was brutally suppressed with the loss of several hundred lives.²³

After independence, the Communists benefited from the fissiparous tendencies of the Congress and the creation, in 1956, of a Kerala state including the Malabar districts in which they were well-established. The 1957 elections gave them a majority of four in the Legislative Assembly.²⁴ However, the abiding strength of communalism was demonstrated two years later when the dismissal of the Communist ministry was brought about by a 'Vimochana Samaram' (liberation struggle), spearheaded by Mannathu Padmanabhan²⁵ of the NSS and backed by the Catholic Church.²⁶

Since 1959 neither Congress nor the Communists have succeeded in gaining power without the support of at least one of the two

communally-based parties - the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress.²⁷ The League's strength is concentrated in the Malabar region, where the majority of Kerala's Muslims live; while the Syrian Christian-dominated Kerala Congress was formed in 1964 by dissident Christian and Nair Congressmen opposed to a faction led by the Ezhava R.Sankar, the then Congress Chief Minister.²⁸ The new party enjoyed the backing of Mannathu Padmanabhan until he rejoined the INC before the 1967 elections.²⁹ In the 1970s two smaller communal parties emerged - the (Nair) National Democratic Party and the (Ezhava) Socialist Republican Party.³⁰

The subject of this thesis has been the development of modern politics in Travancore. By 1938 communalism, class feeling and nationalism were all part of the political culture of the state. It is interesting from the perspective of Indian politics more generally, to notice that the three elements are consecutive only in the sense that they emerge at different times, not in the sense of one progressively displacing another. Today they continue to co-exist and are the principal determinants of politics in Kerala. We have seen how the communal awareness, that initially lent substance to the form of modern politics, remains an important factor. The strength of two communist parties, one or both of which were in government from 1967 to 1981³¹ is evidence of the continuing appeal exerted by the class-based politics introduced to Travancore in the interwar period. Finally, the concept of an 'Indian' national identity, though more amorphous than that of either class or community, still manages to tap a well of popular sentiment, especially in times of crisis. Congress has tended to be the main beneficiary of such sentiment, as was demonstrated most recently in the 1985 Lok Sabha poll.³²

Notes

1

Travancore State Congress, Travancore Today; Her Struggle for Freedom, Cochin 1938, pp.1-3.

2

R.Jeffrey, "A Sanctified Label - 'Congress' in Travancore Politics, 1938-48" in D.A.Low (ed), Congress and the Raj. Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917-47, London 1977, pp.451-52.

3

RPT, X, pp.123-35.

4

T.V.Krishnan, 'Sakhavu' Krishna Pillai - Kerala's First Communist, New Delhi 1971, pp.42-43; Jeffrey, op.cit., p.452.

5

Ibid., pp.452-54.

6

TAR (1938-39), pp.13, 97-98.

7

One of these was the collapse of the Travancore National and Quilon Bank which left many small depositors impoverished. An officially-encouraged run on the bank led to its closure in June 1938. Ramaswami Aiyar regarded the bank's Chairman, K.C.Mammen Mappillai, and its Managing Director, C.P.Matthen, as key figures behind the TSC. Mappillai's memorandum on the closure of the bank, IMC/CMBS, Box 442; Dewan to Resident, 31 Oct.1938, CRR, R/1/29/1777; C.P.Matthen, I Have Borne Much, Madras 1951, pp.60-62, 132-33.

8

Jeffrey, op.cit., p.452. The KPCC formed a Travancore Struggle Aid Committee and helped organise jathas (marches) into the state from British India. Leftists outside Congress, like S.V.Ghate, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India, were also involved. Krishnan, op.cit., pp.45-46; A.K.Gopalan, In the Cause of the People, Bombay 1973, pp.101-04; Resident to Dewan, 6 Dec.1938, CS, 206/1938.

9

Dewan to the Palace, 24 Oct.1938, CS, 323/1938.

10

Jeffrey, op.cit., pp.462-63. Congress won 97 of the 120 seats in the new legislature.

11

Under the change all the electors in a constituency were given an additional vote for each reserved seat in that constituency. The amendment, supported by the NSS, was opposed by the SNDP Yogam which saw it as intended to undermine its electoral influence. Nair members of the TSC Working Committee, including Pattom and G.Ramachandran, were inclined to welcome the change and favoured taking a neutral stand. This led to the Yogam abandoning its support for the TSC, and the defection of V.V.Velayudhan. RPT, XI, p.1388; U.Muraleedharan, 'SNDP Yogam and Kerala Politics', PhD Thesis, Kerala 1979, pp.186-88, 190.

12

This included the nationalisation of private primary education, a plan strongly attacked by the Catholic Church. Jeffrey, op.cit., p.458.

13

Ibid., p.463; N.N.Gidwani, 'Political Pathology in Kerala' in I.Narain (ed), State Politics in India, Meerut 1967, p.140. Apart from Pattom, the other Nair members of the new group included K.P.Nilakanta Pillai and the leftist Ponnara Sridhar. Regional Records Survey Committee, Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala, Trivandrum

1975, p.415; S.P.Sen (ed), Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.IV, Calcutta 1974, p.262.

14

Congress representation in the new legislature was reduced to 44 in a house of 109. The state of Travancore-Cochin had come into being on 1 July 1949. V.M.Fic, Kerala; Yenan of India. Rise of Communist Power: 1937-69, Bombay 1970, pp.34, 37.

15

Jeffrey, op.cit., p.453.

16

V.Balakrishnan, An Epoch in Kerala History (Biography), Kottayam 1977, pp.54-55. In the early 1940s the leaders of the Yogam, the NSS and a new Pulaya Mahasabha had sought to popularise a united 'Hindu Sangha-dhanam' (Hindu Community). Muraleedharan, op.cit., pp.194-95.

17

Krishnan, op.cit., p.60.

18

Ibid., pp.47-48. The memorandum had been submitted, along with the May memorial, to the Maharaja. Copy, IMC/CBMS, Box 442.

19

Krishnan, op.cit., pp.48-49.

20

Ibid., pp.68-72.

21

K.C.George, Immortal Punnapra-Vayalar, New Delhi 1975, pp.11-13,16-17, 19; R.Jeffrey, "India's Working Class Revolt: Punnapra-Vayalar and the Communist 'Conspiracy' of 1946", Indian Economic and Social History Review, XVIII, 2 (April-June 1981), 105-06.

22

M.S.A.Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India, Madras 1979, p.89.

23

"India's Working Class Revolt", pp.116-18.

24

T.J.Nossiter, Communism in Kerala. A Study in Political Adaptation, London 1982, pp.122-23.

25

Formerly Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai.

26

R.L.Hardgrave, 'The Communist Parties of Kerala: An Electoral Profile' in J.O.Field (ed), Electoral Politics in the Indian States. Party Systems and Cleavages, Delhi 1975, p.177.

27

The Congress - Praja Socialist Party ministry formed in 1960 had Muslim League support, though the League did not actually participate because of Congress opposition. Fic, op.cit., pp.127-28, 133.

28

Ibid., pp.141-3; Hardgrave, op.cit., p.179.

29

Nossiter, op.cit., pp.206-07.

30

Ibid., pp.29, 273n, 36. The parties were established at the instance of the NSS and the SNDP Yogam respectively. Nossiter sees their formation as an attempt to halt a decline in the political influence wielded by the caste organisations. However, communalism remains significant in state politics. This has been demonstrated by developments such as the recent rise of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS); the Hindu-Muslim riots in Trivandrum in December 1982; and the communal calculations behind a reshuffle of the United Democratic Front ministry in September 1983.

See Economic and Political Weekly, XVII, 21 (22 May 1982), 842-43, XVIII, 7 (12 Feb.1983), 209-11, and 38 (17 Sept.1983), 1590.

31

Nossiter, op.cit., App.2, p.380. A Muslim League - National Democratic Party - Praja Socialist Party coalition held office from October to December 1979.

32:

In the wake of Mrs Gandhi's assassination, the Congress (Indira) registered the best-ever Congress performance in Kerala elections. It won all the thirteen seats it contested and the Congress-led United Democratic Front claimed seventeen of the twenty seats overall. Keesing's Contemporary Archives. Record of World Events, XXXI (1985), London, p.33465.

Table 1: Population of Travancore in 1931

<u>Community</u>	<u>Percentage of total population</u>
Caste-Hindu	22.3
Nair	17
Vellala	1.4
Non-Malayala Brahman	1.1
Malayala Brahman	0.3
Other	2.5
Outcaste-Hindu	38.4
Ezhava	17.1
Nadar	4.6
Kammala	4.1
Pulaya	4.1
Kurava	1.7
Paraya	1.4
Other	5.4
Total Hindu	61.5
Syrian Christian	18.9
Syrian Catholic	8.8
Jacobite	6.6
Marthomite	2.8
Anglican	0.6
Non-Syrian Christian	12.6
Latin Catholic	7.1
South Indian United Church	2.7
Anglican	1.1
Salvation Army	1.1
Other	0.6
Total Christian	31.5
Muslim	6.9

Source: Percentages calculated from figures quoted in CI (1931) XXVIII, I, pp. 338-42, and II, pp. 154-63.

Table 2: Land in Travancore

Total Earners	1,354,383 (26.6 per cent of total population)
Earners with wet land	275,126 (20.3 p.c. of total earners)
Earners with dry land	621,324 (45.9 p.c. of total earners)
Area of wet land	597,700 acres (27.2 p.c. of total land)
Area of dry land	1,599,000 acres (72.8 p.c. of total land)
Extent and value of average holding of wet land	2.17 acres (Rs.1,867)
Extent and value of average holding of dry land	2.57 acres (Rs.1,443)

Source: CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.471. Since the owners of wet land almost always possessed some dry land, the aggregate of landowners cannot have been much higher than the number of earners with wet land.

Table 3: Ownership of Wet Land

	Per cent of <u>total sample</u>	Per cent of <u>total owners</u>	Average holding (in acres)	Per cent of <u>total land</u>
Nair	17.8	43.8	1.72	38.6
Brahman	0.5	1.1	15.60	8.8
Other Hindu	17.7	11.4	1.85	10.8
Ezhava	18.7	11.9	1.11	6.8
Depressed Hindu	11.1	1.6	1.03	0.8
Syrian Christian	15.0	18.9	2.69	26.1
Non-Syrian Christian	13.4	5.6	1.07	3.1
Muslim	5.8	5.7	1.72	5.0
Total Sample	100.0	100.0	1.95	100.0

Source: CI (1931), XXVIII, I, P.472. The percentages in Tables 3-6 are calculated from a sample survey of 55,803 income earners. The sample was broadly representative of the population (see Table 1). However, since it excluded the towns where most non-Malayala Brahmans lived, the Brahman percentage can be taken as referring only to Malayala Brahmans. The 'Other Hindu' grouping appears to include the non-caste-Hindu Nadars and Kammalas as well as the caste-Hindu Vellalals and Kshatriyas.

Table 4: Ownership of Dry Land

	<u>Per cent of total sample</u>	<u>Per cent of total owners</u>	<u>Average holding (in acres)</u>	<u>Per cent of total land</u>
Nair	17.8	27.1	2.95	30.4
Brahman	0.5	0.6	12.89	2.9
Other Hindu	17.7	16.3	1.42	8.8
Ezhava	18.7	16.5	1.95	12.2
Depressed Hindu	11.1	4.5	1.43	2.4
Syrian Christian	15.0	19.7	3.90	29.2
Non-Syrian Christian	13.4	9.2	2.28	8.0
Muslim	5.8	6.1	2.69	6.1
Total Sample	100.0	100.0	2.63	100.0

Source: CI (1931), XXVIII, p.475

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Classes of Owners of Wet Land

	1				2				3				4				Total Sample
	Below 1 acre				1-5 acres				5-10 acres				Over 10 acres				
Nair	43.4	(62.0)	45.5	(32.3)	40.7	(3.4)	37.3	(2.3)	100.0							(100.0)	
Brahman	0.2	(12.8)	1.4	(39.2)	4.2	(14.4)	13.7	(33.6)	100.0							(100.0)	
Other Hindu	13.7	(74.7)	7.6	(20.5)	8.4	(2.7)	9.2	(2.1)	100.0							(100.0)	
Ezhava	13.6	(71.7)	9.8	(25.7)	6.0	(1.9)	3.3	(0.7)	100.0							(100.0)	
Depressed Hindu	2.0	(77.4)	1.1	(21.0)	0.5	(1.1)	0.3	(0.5)	100.0							(100.0)	
Syrian Christian	15.0	(49.6)	24.5	(40.2)	30.9	(6.1)	29.4	(4.1)	100.0							(100.0)	
Non-Syrian Christian	6.5	(73.3)	4.2	(23.6)	3.7	(2.5)	1.3	(0.6)	100.0							(100.0)	
Muslim	5.6	(61.6)	5.9	(32.2)	5.6	(3.6)	5.5	(2.6)	100.0							(100.0)	
Total Sample	100.0	(62.6)	100.0	(31.1)	100.0	(3.7)	100.0	(2.6)	100.0							100.0	

Source: CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.472. In each column the first figure represents the percentage of the total landowners in that class, while the figure in parentheses refers to the total sample (i.e. the Nairs constituting 43.4 per cent of the landowners in Class 1 represent 62 per cent of all Nair landowners). The share of total land is the percentage owned by each class of landowner.

Table 6: Percentage Distribution of Classes of Owners of Dry Land

	<u>Below 1 acre</u>	<u>1-5 acres</u>	<u>5-10 acres</u>	<u>Over 10 acres</u>	<u>Total Sample</u>
Nair	25.1 (40.8)	28.3 (47.5)	30.3 (7.4)	30.6 (4.3)	(100.0)
Brahman	0.3 (23.2)	0.6 (41.8)	1.3 (13.6)	3.4 (21.4)	(100.0)
Other Hindu	19.8 (53.4)	14.5 (40.5)	9.9 (4.0)	8.8 (2.1)	(100.0)
Ezhava	18.8 (50.3)	15.5 (42.7)	11.9 (4.8)	9.3 (2.2)	(100.0)
Depressed Hindu	5.4 (53.0)	4.4 (44.0)	1.6 (2.4)	0.7 (0.6)	(100.0)
Syrian Christian	14.1 (31.6)	22.5 (51.1)	31.3 (10.5)	34.9 (6.8)	(100.0)
Other, Christian	10.2 (48.8)	8.5 (42.0)	8.5 (6.1)	7.4 (3.1)	(100.0)
Muslim	6.3 (46.1)	6.0 (45.1)	5.2 (5.7)	4.9 (3.1)	(100.0)
Total Sample	100.0 (44.2)	100.0 (45.4)	100.0 (6.6)	100.0 (3.8)	(100.0)
Share of total land	7.2	38.8	16.5	37.5	100.0

Source: CI (1931), XXVIII, I, p.475.

Table 7: The Electoral Strength of the Principal Communities in 1931

	<u>Per cent of population</u>	<u>Per cent of electorate</u>	<u>No. of seats</u>
Nair	17.0	36.4	14
Ezhava	17.1	8.4	0
Christian	31.5	28.1	5
Muslim	6.9	5.7	0
Others	27.5	21.4	4
Total	100.0	100.0	23

Sources: TAR (1930-31), pp.86-87; Membership list, TLCP, XIX.
The four 'others' included two Vellalas, a caste-Hindu Yadava,
and a Nadar.

Biographical Notes

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BALAKRISHNA PILLAI, A. (1889-1960). Nair. Ed. Samadarsi 1923-26; Prabodhakan 1930; Kesari 1930-35. Patronised progressive school of Malayalam writers.

DAMODARA MENON, K.A. (1906-). Nair. Belonged to wealthy Alwaye taravad. Educated: SMV High School; Maharaja's College; Law College, Trivandrum. Student activist. School teacher, Burma 1927-30. Sec. KPCC, 1931. Imprisoned, Cannanore Central Jail 1932. Law practise, Trivandrum 1935-37. Ed. Mathrubhumi, Calicut 1937-48. INC Industries Minister, Kerala 1960-64.

DAMODARAN ASAN, A.S. (1896-). Nair. Landlord. Law practise, Quilon 1923. MLC 1928-32; MLA 1933-37. Pres. NSS 1929-31. Conciliation Officer, Quilon 1937-41. Retd. as Member, Revenue Board, Travancore-Cochin. Associated with K.G. Parameswaran Pillai, q.v.

DIONYSIUS VI, Vattasseril Mar (1858-1934). Jacobite Metropolitan, 1909-34. Leader of Catholicos section.

ELANKATH, K.R. (1901-). Nair. Grand-nephew of N. Nanu Pillai (Dewan, 1877-80). Educated: Maharaja's College; Union Christian College, Alwaye. Sec. YMNA. Student activist. School headmaster. Supported Vaikom Satyagraha. MLA 1933-37; MLC 1937-38. Joined TSC 1938. Minister, Travancore Gov. 1948.

EAPEN, K.C. (-1939). Jacobite. Younger brother of K.C. Mammen Mappillai, q.v. Sec. Travancore National Bank, 1912; Managing Director, 1926. Member JPC Executive Cttee. 1933. Deputy Chairman, Travancore National and Quilon Bank, 1937. Imprisoned following Bank's collapse, 1939.

FRANCIS, D. (1883-). Nadar Catholic. Nagercoil tile manufacturer and contractor. Sec. South Travancore Catholic Assoc. 1908. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918. MLC 1928-31; MLA 1937-44.

GEORGE, K. (1883-). Anglican Syrian. Belonged to a prominent family: his brother, K. Matthan, was a Member Mysore Executive Council in the 1920s. Educated: CMS College, Kottayam; Madras Christian College. Joined Travancore service 1910. Ch. Sec. 1925-33. Retd. as Land Revenue Com. 1938.

GOVINDA PILLAI, Malloor, K. (1878-). Nair. Law practise, Trivandrum c.1904. Patronised by C.V. Raman Pillai, q.v. A communal activist from the the 1900s. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918. Principal, Trivandrum Law College, 1931-33.

GOVINDA PILLAI, P.K. Nair. A reformer. Ed., then proprietor, Subhashini 1902-26; Navasakti 1926. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918.

GOVINDAN, M. (1874-1958). Ezhava. First Ezhava law graduate. Married niece of Dr Palpu, q.v. First Ezhava District Munsiff 1908; District Judge 1928. MLC 1931-47. Pres. SNDP Yogam 1937-38, 1939-54; Trivandrum Harijan Seva Sangham.

JOHN, E.J. (c.1870-1942). Jacobite. Belonged to wealthy Elanjikkal family. Educated: Madras Christian College. Law practise, Trivandrum, 1894. Pres. Christian Assoc. (later Conference) 1904-14, 1916-29; Civic Rights League 1918; JPC 1933. MLC 1904-07. Principal, Trivandrum Law College 1925-31. Retd. after a stroke 1932.

JOHN, A.J. (1893-1957). Syrian Catholic. Lawyer at Alleppey, then Trivandrum. Supported Civic Rights League. MLC 1925-28. Member JPC Executive Cttee. 1935. MLA 1937-39. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938-48. INC Ch. Minister, Travancore-Cochin 1952-54.

JOSEPH, George (1887-1938). Marthomite (converted to Catholicism 1931). Educated: CMS College, Univ. of Edinburgh; Middle Temple. Law practise Madurai 1909. Sec. Travancore Christian Assoc. 1915-18. Active in Home Rule League, INC 1917-25. Backed JPC. INC member, Indian legislative Assembly 1937.

JOSEPH, N.V. Syrian Catholic. Always lawyer. Active in the Malabar Catholic Congress; Civic Rights League. MLC 1925-28. Pres. TSCC 1932. Gen. Sec. JPC 1933-34, 1937. MLA 1937.

KELAPPAN NAIR, K. (1890-1971). Malabar Nair. Began career as a school teacher 1914. Pres. NSS 1914-16. Left Gov. Law College, Bombay, to become a non-cooperator. Led Vaikom Satyagraha; Salt Satyagraha, Malabar; Guruvayur Satyagraha. A Gandhian. Abandoned INC for Acharya Kripalini's Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party 1951.

KESAVA PILLAI, P.K. (1878-1923). Nair. Law practise, Trivandrum, 1905. MLC c.1911-14. Sec. Keraliya Nair Samajam, late 1910s. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918.

KESAVAN, C. (1891-1969). Ezhava. Son of a weaver; nephew and son-in-law of C.V.Kunjuraman, q.v. Law practise, Quilon 1926. Gen. Sec. SNDP Yogam 1933-35. Member JPC Executive Cttee. 1933-35. Imprisoned for sedition 1935-37. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938. INC Ch. Minister, Travancore-Cochin 1951-52.

KRISHNA PILLAI, C. (1852-1916). Nair. Gov. schools inspector c.1882-1907. Founder of the Malayali Sabha 1884; Travancore Nair Samaj 1903; and Samastha Kerala Nair Mahasamajam 1916. Sec. United Keraliya Nair Samajam. The leading Nair reformer.

KRISHNA PILLAI, P. (1906-48). Nair. Son of a village peon. Worked in a coir factory, tea stall and bicycle shop before going to Allahabad to study Hindi, 1927. Returned to Kerala, participated in civil disobedience in Malabar and imprisoned twice, 1930-32. Sec. Kerala CSP 1934. Labour organiser. Joined Communist Party 1937. Died of snake bite while working underground as Sec. Kerala CP.

KRISHNA PILLAI, Puthupalli S. (1895-). Nair. Law practise, Quilon c.1916. Temperance activist 1929-31. MLC 1931-32; MLA 1933-38. Pres. NSS 1938. Legal Remembrancer 1938-43. Retd. as Ch. Justice 1949. Associated with K.G.Parameswaran Pillai, q.v. and Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, q.v.

KRISHNA PILLAI, E.V. (1895-1938). Nair. Son-in-law of C.V.Raman Pillai q.v. Quilon lawyer. Ed. Malayali mid-1920s. MLC 1931-32; MLA 1933-37. A leading dramatist and humorist.

KRISHNAN NAIR, Sir M. (1870-1938). Malabar Nair. Law practise, Calicut 1894. Ch. Justice, Travancore 1910-14; Dewan 1914-20. MLC, Madras 1903-10, 1920-29. Law Member, Madras Executive Council 1930-34.

KUMAR, K. (1894-). Nair. Left Presidency College, Madras, in response to non-cooperation. Leading Travancorean Congressman in the 1920s and 1930s. A Gandhian.

KUMARAN, N. (1882-1964). Ezhava. Law practise, Quilon 1919. Gen. Sec. SNDP Yogam 1919-27. MLC 1922-28. District Judge 1928-36; High Court Judge 1936-38.

KUMARAN ASAN, N. (1873-1924). Ezhava. Son of a poor trader. A follower of Narayana Guru, q.v. Education sponsored by Dr Palpu, q.v. Gen. Sec. SNDP Yogam 1903-19. MLC 1920-21. One of the greatest modern Malayalam poets.

KUNJAN PILLAI, Dr N. (1881-). Nair. Dir. of Agriculture 1908-31; Ch.Sec. 1933-38. Pres.NSS 1939.

KUNJITHOMMAN, Thariathu (1881-). Syrian Catholic. Muvattupuzha land-lord. Member SMPA 1910-22. Civic rights deputationist 1920. MLC 1922-32, 1934; MLA 1937-44. Active in Kerala Catholic Congress; TSCC.

KUNJU, P.K. (1906-79). Muslim. Joined Congress as a student. Gen.Sec. Muslim Service League 1930. Member JPC Executive Cttee 1934-37. Pres. TLA 1935-38. MLA 1937-39. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938-40 (resigned from the party). Joined Praja Socialist Party 1953. Finance Minister, United Front Gov., Kerala 1967-69.

KUNJUKRISHNA PILLAI, K.G. (1892-1977). Nair. Law practise, Trivandrum 1921. A prominent nationalist in the 1920s and 1930s. MLA 1937-43. Opposed the TSC. Advocate-Gen. 1944-48.

KUNJUKRISHNA PILLAI, Kottoor (1900-). Nair. Son-in-law of Madichal R.Krishna Pillai, twice Land Revenue Com. Law practise, Quilon c.1926. MLC 1931-32, 1937-44; MLA 1933-37. Associated with K.G.Parameswaran Pillai, q.v. and Puthupalli Krishna Pillai, q.v..

KUNJURAMAN, C.V. (1871-1949). Ezhava. Ed. Kerala Kaumudi 1911-30, 1936. Gen.Sec. SNDP Yogam 1927-28; Pres. 1928-33. MLC 1927-28. Joint-Ed. Malayala Rajyam 1930-34. MLA 1933-37.

KURIAKOSE, A.C. (1888-). Syrian Catholic. School-teacher from 1908. Sec. Malabar Catholic Congress; TSCC 1932. MLC 1928-31. Member JPC Executive Cttee. 1933-34.

KURUKKAL, N.P. (1904-46). Ambalavasi. Educated: SMV School, Trivandrum. Came under Congress influence while studying telegraphy at Trichinopoly. Participated in Nagpur Flag Satyagraha; Salt Satyagraha. Imprisoned, Cannanore Central Jail 1930-31. Active in the Youth League. Joined the Communist Party. Murdered, allegedly by government agents.

KUTTAN NAIR, C. (c.1900-62). Nair. From Neyyattinkara. Brother of C.Krishnan Nair (b.1902), Gandhian Congressman and Gen.Sec. Delhi PCC 1937. Trivandrum student activist. Sec. Trivandrum Congress Cttee. 1923. Participated in Vaikom, Thiruvappu and Guruvayur satyagrahas. Manager, Service 1930. Joined TSC 1938.

MADHAVA WARRIER, M.R.(1893-). Ambalavasi. Educated: Maharaja's College, Bombay University. Worked on Message, Bombay English daily patronised by B.G.Tilak. Law practise, Trivandrum. Ed. Malayali 1919-22, 1935; Samadarsi 1927. MLC 1922-25. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938.

MADHAVAN, T.K. (1886-1930). Ezhava. Related to the wealthy landowning Komalezhatu and Kayyalakkal families of central Travancore. Discontinued education in matriculation class due to ill-health. Ed. Desabhimani 1917-30. Civic rights deputationist 1920. Initiated Vaikom Satyagraha. Organising Sec. SNDP Yogam 1926-30.

MAHOMED P.S. (1889-). Muslim. Law practise, Alleppey 1917. Sec. Lejnathul Mohamadiya Sabha. Pres. TLA 1927-33. MLC 1928-32; MLA 1935, 1939-47. Pres. Alleppey municipality 1932-38.

MAMMEN MAPPILLAI, K.C. (1873-1953). Jacobite. Belonged to wealthy Kandathil family. Educated: CMS College, Kottayam; Maharaja's College; Madras Christian College. Ed., Malayala Manorama 1906-38. Chairman, Board of Dirs., Travancore National Bank 1912-38.

MLC 1922-28. Imprisoned following the collapse of his Bank 1939-41.

MATHEW, Kuruville A. (1900-). Jacobite. Became a Congressman during non-cooperation. Imprisoned in connection with Vaikom Satyagraha. Pres. Student Christian Movement, late 1930s. Joined TSC.

MATHEW, T.J. (1886-). Syrian Catholic. Poonjar landlord. Law practise, Kottayam c.1916. Sec. Malabar Catholic Congress 1918-24. Promoter, Civic Rights League. MLC 1925-28. Member JPC Executive Cttee. 1933-34.

MATHUNNI, M. (1896-1937). Syrian Christian. Expelled from Calcutta college for nationalist activities. A leading Travancorean Congressman in the 1920s and 1930s. Ed. Bhaje Bharatham 1925-35. Convicted of sedition 1931. An active Abstentionist.

NAIR, M.N. (-1935). Nair. Began career as a teacher. Patronised by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, q.v.. Co-Ed. Service 1922-27; Ed. 1933-35. In charge of organisational dept. NSS 1924. MLA 1933-35.

NARAYANA GURU, Sri (c.1855-1928). Ezhava. Spiritual leader of his caste. Pres. SNDP Yogam 1903-28.

NARAYANA PILLAI, A. (1888-1972). Nair. Trivandrum lawyer. Sec. Keraliya Nair Samajam, late 1910s. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918. Dominant figure in the Travancore Political Association, and South Indian States' Peoples' Conference in the 1920s. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938.

NARAYANA PILLAI, Amsi (1896-). Nair. Congress activist. Ed. Mahatma 1933. Inspector, Kerala Hindu Mission 1933. Joined TSC 1938.

NARAYANA PILLAI, P.K. (1878-1938). Nair. Son-in-law of ex-District Magistrate K.Narayana Menon. Tutor, Maharaja's College 1901-08. Law practise, Kottayam; Trivandrum. MLC 1922-28. High Court Judge 1929-33. MLA 1933-37. Noted litterateur.

NARAYANA PILLAI, Parur T.K. (1899-1969). Nair. Joined Congress 1920. Student activist, Maharaja's College. Law practise, Trivandrum 1925. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938. Ch. Minister, Travancore 1948; Travancore-Cochin 1949-51.

NARAYANAN, K.R. (1906-). Ezhava. From Vaikom. Temperance worker, Shertallai 1930. SNDP Yogam Dir., early 1930s. Active Abstentionist. MLA 1937-47. Yogam Gen. Sec. 1958.

NIDHIRY, Father Emmanuel (1842-1904). Syrian Catholic. Belonged to a wealthy landowning family. Educated: CMS College, Kottayam. Campaigned for indigenous bishops and English education. Founder, Nazrani Deepika 1887. Vicar-Gen., Kottayam 1889-92.

NIDHIRY, John (1872-1934). Syrian Catholic. Nephew of Father Nidhiry, q.v. Law practise, Kottayam 1909. Active in Malabar Catholic Congress. Civic rights deputationist 1920. MLC 1920-25. Backed Abstention movement.

NILAKANTA PILLAI, K.P. (1898-). Nair. Belonged to an influential Chirayinkil taravad. Law practise, Trivandrum 1924. MLC 1925-31, 1933-37. Active nationalist. Joint Sec. TSC Working Cttee 1938. Joined Socialist Party 1948. Speaker, Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly 1952-54.

PADMANABHA PILLAI, Mannathu (1878-1969). Nair. Belonged to a poor Changanacherry taravad. Appointed a schoolmaster by C.Krishna Pillai, q.v., 1894. Law practise, Changanacherry 1905-15. Gen. Sec. NSS 1914-45; Pres. 1945. Joined TSC 1947. Led 'liberation struggle' against

Communist gov. of Kerala 1959.

PALPU, Dr P. (1863-1950). Ezhava. Son of High Court tout. Educated: Maharaja's College; Madras Medical College. In Mysore and British Indian service from 1891. Leading campaigner for Ezhava rights in the 1890s and 1900s. Dir. SNDP Yogam until the 1920s.

PANICKAR, Kannara Gopala. Ezhava. Chengannur lawyer. A Congressman. Participated in Vaikom and Guruvayur satyagrahas; Abstention movement. MLA 1937-39. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938-42.

PANIKKAR, K.M. (1895-1963). Nair. Belonged to the weathy Chalayil taravad of Ambalapuzha Taluk. Educated: Madras Christian College; Christ Church, Oxford; Middle Temple. Ed. Hindustan Times 1923. Indian Ambassador to China in the 1950s.

PARAMESWARAN PILLAI, G. (1890-). Nair. Law practise, Trivandrum c.1913. MLC 1920-27. District Judge 1927-31; Pol. Sec. 1931-34; High Court Judge 1935; Ch. Sec. 1941-45. Retd. 1947.

PARAMESWARAN PILLAI, K.G. (1883-1949). Nair. Belonged to a prominent taravad; brother of K.G.Sankar, q.v. Quilon publisher. MLC 1928-31. Founded Malayala Rajyam 1928. Pres. Quilon municipality 1931. The leading figure in an influential clique of Quilon Nairs. MLA 1944-47.

PARAMESWARAN PILLAI, Kayalam (1888-). Nair. Trivandrum lawyer. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918. MLC 1920-21. Law Member, Travancore Gov. 1925-37.

PARAMESWARAN PILLAI, Changanacherry K. (1877-1940). Nair. An orphan, aided by C.Krishna Pillai, q.v. Lawyer at Quilon 1903-18, and Trivandrum after 1918. MLC 1913-19, 1922-27. Pres. NSS 1916-27; Mahajana Sabha 1918. Patronised the Congress and labour movements in Travancore. A Buddhist by conviction, campaigned for the reform of Hinduism. High Court Judge 1927-33. MLA 1933-37.

PHILIPOSE, E.J. (1903-55). Jacobite. Son of E.J.John, q.v. Educated: Maharaja's College; Law College, Trivandrum; in England. Trivandrum lawyer. Active Abstentionist. MLA 1937-39. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938-48. INC Minister, Travancore-Cochin 1949-51.

PILLAI, A.K. (1893-1949). Nair. The son-in-law of K.Ramakrishna Pillai, q.v. Educated: Maharaja's College; Oxford; Bar-at-Law, London 1930. Sec. Travancore DCC in the early 1920s. Ed. Swarat 1921-26. MLC 1925-28. Law practise, Burma 1932-36. Pres. TSC, Madras branch, 1938. Represented M.N.Roy's Radical Democratic Party in England, 1943-46.

POONEN LUKOSE, Dr Mrs Mary (c.1890-). Anglican Syrian. Daughter of Dr E.Poonen. Married son of K.K.Kuruville, first Syrian MLC. First Malayali woman graduate; study in Britain 1909-16. Member, Administrative Board, Medical Services, 1925-32. Retd. as Surgeon-Gen. 1942.

RAJAGOPALACHARI, Sir P. (1862-1927). Vaishnavite Brahman. Joined Madras service 1886. Dewan, Cochin, 1896-1902; Travancore, 1907-14. Member Madras Legislative Council 1920-23. Member Council of India 1924-26.

RAMACHANDRAN, G. (1904-). Nair. Son of an ex-Excise Com. Educated: Tagore's Santiniketan. Resident of Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram 1925. Sec. Harijan Sevak Sangh's Kerala branch 1933. Supported TSC 1938.

RAMAKRISHNA PILLAI, K. (1877-1916). Nair. Ed. Swadesabhimani 1906-10. Expelled from Travancore 1910.

RAMAN PILLAI, C.V. (1858-1922). Nair. Began career as a High Court

clerk. Sec. Malayali Sabha. Led a clique of conservative Nair officials in the 1900s and 1910s. Retd. as Supt., Gov. Press. Replaced C. Krishna Pillai, q.v. as Sec. Keraliya Nair Samajam 1915. Wrote three historical novels.

RAMASWAMI AIYAR, Sir C.P. (1879-1966). Smarta Brahman. Joined Madras Bar 1903. Gen. Sec. Home Rule League 1916-17; INC 1917-18. MLC Madras 1919-20. Law Member, Madras Executive Council, 1923-28. Member, Viceroy's Council, 1931-32. Legal and Constitutional Advisor Gov. of Travancore, 1931-35; Dewan 1936-47.

SANKAR, K.G. (1898-1953). Nair. Brother of K.G. Parameswaran Pillai, q.v. Educated: Maharaja's College. Congress activist from 1920. Leader of temperance movement in central Travancore 1929-31. Pres. Labour Assoc., Quilon 1928-34. Ed. Malayala Rajyam 1928. Semi-paralysed after 1933.

SEBASTIAN, P.J. (1898-). Syrian Catholic. Son of a merchant. Law practise, Kottayam 1924. Pres., Changanacherry municipality, 1928-31. Member JPC Executive Cttee. 1935-37; Acting Gen. Sec. 1936. Sec. TSCC. MLA 1937-39. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938-43.

SEKHAR, N.C. (1906-). Nair. Educated: Neyyattinkara English School. Participated in civil disobedience in Malabar; imprisoned 1930-31. Labour organiser, Calicut 1935. Joined Communist Party 1937. Closely associated with N.P. Kurukkal, q.v., and P.G. Sridhar, q.v. Joined CPI(M) in 1964. MP Rajya Sabha 1955-60.

SIVATHANU PILLAI, M. (1891-1961). Vellala. Nagercoil lawyer. Pres. Nagercoil Congress Cttee. 1920. Active in Swaraj Party. Participated in Vaikom, Suchindram satyagrahas. MLC 1925-28; MLA 1933-44.

SRIDHAR, G. Ponnara (1899-1966). Nair. Educated: Maharaja's High School; Hindu College, Tinnevely; Law College, Trivandrum. A Congressman. Participated in Nagpur Flag Satyagraha; Vaikom Satyagraha; Salt Satyagraha. Active in the Youth League. Law practise, Nedumangad. Supported the TSC. Joined Socialist Party 1949.

SUBRAMONIA AIYAR, V.S. (1879-). Tamil Brahman. Law practise, Trivandrum 1904. Head Sirkar Wakil 1926; High Court Judge 1927-29; Dewan 1929-31. Pres. Kerala Hindu Mission 1933.

THANU PILLAI, Pattom A. (1885-1970). Nair. Law practise, Trivandrum 1915. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918. MLC 1928-32; MLA 1933-39. Pres. TSC 1938-48. Ch. Min., Travancore 1948; Travancore-Cochin 1954-55; Kerala 1960-62. Left INC to join Socialist Party 1948; PSP 1952.

THOMAS, Kayalackakom Joseph (1891-). Syrian Catholic. Landowner and planter. Gen. Manager, Messrs. Kayalackakom & Co., Gen. Merchants. Promoter, Palai Central Bank. Active in Malabar Catholic Congress. Strong supporter of Congress and temperance movement in the 1920s.

THOMAS, K.T. (-1979). Marthomite. Law practise, Trivandrum c.1924. Sec. JPC Executive Cttee 1933-35; Gen. Sec. 1935, 1937. MLA 1937-38. Joint Sec. TSC Working Cttee. 1938.

VARGHESE, T.M. (1885-1961). Marthomite. Belonged to a prosperous landowning family. Law practise, Quilon 1915. Chief JPC spokesman and Member TSC Executive Cttee. 1934-37. Pres. Christian Service League. MLA 1937-39; Deputy Pres. SMA 1937. Member TSC Working Cttee 1938-47. INC Home Minister, Travancore-Cochin 1952-54.

VARGHESE, E.P. (1898-). Latin Catholic. Son of a Shertallai landowner. Lawyer at Alleppey 1925-33, and Trivandrum after 1933. Vice Pres. TSCC 1932. Member JPC Executive Cttee 1934, 1936-37. MLC 1934; MLA 1937-44. Gov. Pleader 1940-41.

VARKEY, M.M. (1898-). Syrian Catholic. Began journalistic career with the Nazrani Deepika 1922. Ed. Keraladasan 1924-26; Dasan 1926-33; Yuva Bharati 1933-34. Publicist for the JPC and TSC.

VELAYUDHAN, V.K. (1904-82). Ezhava. Alleppey lawyer. Hon. Sec. TLA 1930; Vice Pres. 1932; Pres. 1933-34. Gen. Sec. SNDP Yogam 1935-44. Vice Pres. JPC 1935-37. MLA 1937-39. Member TSC Working Cttee. 1938-39. Retd. as Chairman of Kerala Public Service Commission 1961.

VELU PILLAI, T.K. (1882-). Nair. Son of an ex-Supt. of Salt Revenue. Law practise, Trivandrum, 1912. MLC 1915-18, 1922-25. Member Mahajana Sabha Council 1918. Deputy Pres. SMA 1933-37. Revised State Manual 1938-40.

WATTS, Maurice Emygdius (1878-1933). Catholic Anglo-Indian. Son of a former Ch. Sec. Educated: Maharaja's High School, Trivandrum; Presidency College, Madras; Middle Temple. Joined British service 1901; retd. as Controller of Accounts, GOI, 1920. Dewan 1925-29.

Bibliography1. Unpublished SourcesIndia Office Records, London.

Crown Representative Records. Political Department 1924-39 (R/1).
 Crown Representative Records. Madras States Agency 1897-1938 (R/2).
 Reports on Native Newspapers, Madras 1918-21 (L/R/5).

Congregational Council for World Mission Archives, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London.

London Missionary Society Reports: Boxes 4-12 (1888-1940).
 London Missionary Society Correspondence: Boxes 13-36 (1890-1940).

International Missionary Council/Conference of British Missionary Societies Archive, SOAS, London.

Boxes 406, 409, 442 and 447 (on microfilm).

Church Missionary Society Archives, London.

Travancore and Cochin Mission: Correspondence and Papers 1891-1932 (G.2 I.5).

Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge.

Tottenham Papers. Memoirs of Sir Richard Tottenham, Assistant Resident, Travancore and Cochin, 1917-19 (on microfiche).

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Pattom A. Thanu Pillai Papers 1938-41 (File Nos. 1-5).

Oral History Transcript Accession No. 84 - K.R.Elankath.

Note: In October 1983, when I visited the Library, it had recently acquired the private papers of Dr. P.Palpu. Unfortunately, as they were in the process of being indexed, I was only able to discuss the contents with the research assistant responsible for them.

Travancore Government Records, Kerala Government Secretariat Trivandrum.

Confidential Section files 1916-39.

General and General (Political) files 1918, 1920, 1923, 1928, and 1930-39 (1919, 1921-22, 1924-27 and 1929 unlisted).

Judicial files 1918-1919, 1926-29, and 1931-38 (1920-25 and 1930 unlisted).

Legislative Section files 1914-38.

Political files 1918-24 (1925-38 unlisted).

Vaikom Satyagraha Correspondence (in bundles).

Note: I confined myself to material relating to the 1918-38 period. Understandably, files that have not yet been listed in the descriptive handlists are hard to obtain. Much of the political material of importance is found in the Confidential Section, while most of the so-called Political files actually deal only with routine administration.

Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

Weekly Secret Bulletins, Vols. I-V (1934-38).

Important Papers connected with the Students' Strike, August-September 1921 (bound volume).

2. Published Sources - Official

India Office Library and Records, London.

Administrative Reports, 1891-92 to 1939-40.

Census Reports, 1875 to 1941.

Report on the Administration of Cochin for 1096 ME, Ernakulam 1921.

The Report of the Devaswom Separation Committee, Trivandrum 1921

(enclosed in R/2/142-Dis.11/1922).

Travancore Economic Depression Enquiry Committee Report, Trivandrum 1931.

SOAS, London.

The Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore (from 1938 Acts and...),
Vols.I-XI, Trivandrum 1927-40.

Travancore Law Reports, Vols. I-LIV, Trivandrum 1896-1941.

University of London Library.

Commons' Parliamentary Debates, Vols.296-98, 300, 308 and 332.

Lords' Parliamentary Debates, Vol.96.

Church Missionary Society, London.

Church Missionary Society Proceedings. The Annual Report, 1891 to 1940-41.

The British Library, London.

Report of the Unemployment Enquiry Committee, Trivandrum 1928.

Kerala Legislative Library, Trivandrum.

Sri Mulam Popular Assembly : Proceedings, Vols.XIV-XXVIII (1918-32).

Travancore Legislative Council: Proceedings, 1920-21.

Report of the Marumakkathayam Committee (Malayalam version), Trivandrum 1908.

Travancore Temple Entry Enquiry Committee Report, Trivandrum 1935.

Kerala University Library, Trivandrum.

Travancore Legislative Council: Proceedings, Vols.I-XXII (1922-32).

Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly: Proceedings, Vols.I-XII (1933-38).

Travancore Sri Chithra State Council: Proceedings, Vols.I-XII (1933-38).

S.G.Barker, Report of the Industrial Survey of Travancore, Trivandrum 1919.

The Travancore Banking Enquiry Committee Report, Trivandrum 1930.

Travancore Public Service Recruitment Committee Report, Trivandrum 1934.

Travancore Almanac and Directory (from 1938 Travancore Directory),
1877-1946. The series is incomplete.

Mrs George Alexander, Kozhencherry.

Report of the Christian Committee, Trivandrum 1912.

Public Library, Trivandrum.

Report of the Co-operative Enquiry Committee, Trivandrum 1934.

Report of the Board of Conciliation of Trade Disputes in the Mats and
Matting Industry, Trivandrum 1939.

3. Newspapers.

Newspaper Library, London.

Madras Mail, 1891-92.

Travancorean Newspapers.

The Kerala Kaumudi, the Malayala Manorama, and the Nazrani Deepika still function. However, hardly any complete copies of the other newspapers are available and I have made use of cuttings, extracts and

translations found in the Secretariat files, the Crown Representative Records and the Madras Native Newspapers Reports. The place, and where possible, the dates of publication, are cited.

Bharatha Kesari (Lion of India), Trivandrum, 1910s.
Bhaje Bharatham, Tiruvalla, and then Chengannur, 1925-35.
Bharatha Patrika (Indian Diary), Trivandrum, est.1934.
Dakshina Bharathi (South India), Eraniel, est. mid-1920s.
Desabandhu (Patriot), Trivandrum, c.1926-27.
Desabhimani (Pride of the Nation), Quilon, 1915-30.
Jenmabhoomi (The Native-born), Trivandrum, c.1923-26.
Kerala Chandrika (Kerala Moon), Quilon, 1920s.
Keraladasan (Servant of Kerala), Trivandrum, 1924-33 (from 1926 the Dasan).
Kerala Kaumudi, Mayyanad, and then Quilon, est. 1911.
Kerala Kesari (Lion of Kerala), Kottayam, 1930s.
Kerala Sevakan (Servant of Kerala), Trivandrum, and then Tiruvalla and Chengannur, c.1930-35.
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The Malabar Advocate, Trivandrum, est.1917.
Malayala Manorama, Kottayam, est.1889.
Malayala Rajyam (Malayali Nation), Quilon, est.1928.
Malayali, Trivandrum, 1880s.
Malayali, Quilon, 1903-04.
Malayali, Quilon, est.1914.
Microcosm, Trivandrum, c.1922-33.
Muslim, Vakkom, 1905-06.
Muslim, Alleppey, c.1921-30.
Muslim Mithram (Muslim Friend), Thuckalai, est. c.1927.
Navasakti (New Strength), Trivandrum, est.1926.
Nayar, Changanacherry, 1900s.
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Paura Prabha (Light of the Citizen), Kottayam, c.1924-32.
Pauran, Trivandrum, 1933-35, (see below)
The People, Trivandrum, and then Tangasseri, 1920s.
Popular Herald, Trivandrum, est.1929.
Prabodhakan (Announcer), Trivandrum, est.1929.
Pratidinam (Daily News), Kottayam, c.1923-31.
Samadarsi(Egalitarian), Trivandrum, est. c.1918.
Service, Changanacherry and Trivandrum, est.1919.
Sreevazhumcode, Quilon, c.1915-26.
Subhashini (Good News), Changanacherry, and then Trivandrum, 1902-26.
Suguna Nandini (Good Motherland), Paravur, 1891-1905.
Swadesabhimani (Pride of Nation), Vakkom, and then Trivandrum, 1906-10.
Swarat, Quilon, and then Trivandrum, 1921-26.
Swatantra Kahalam (Independent Bugle), Kottayam, 1933-34.
Thozhilali (Worker), Alleppey, est.1925.
Travancore Times, Nagercoil, est.1876.
Veerakeralan (Brave Keralite), Quilon, c.1921-26.
Vivekodayam(Light of Intelligence), Trivandrum, and then Quilon,est.1904.
Western Star, Cochin, and then Trivandrum, est.1860.
Yuva Bharathi (Young India), Trivandrum, 1933-34.

Also:

Pauran, (Citizen), Quilon and Kayankulam, c.1918-31

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