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Multiple Roles and Socio-political Dynamics-The Intelligentsia of Colonial Tellicherry

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Tellicherry has been the commercial hub of colonial Malabar it was actually the economic headquarters too. It was known for the world class pepper hence attracted International commercial magnates to the town. The local as well as native traders either acted as intermediaries of trade or commercial agents of the East India company. The geography of the region was extremely conducive for the transaction of Inland and hinterland trade. The proximity to sea also ensured wide avenues of trade. The East India company's entry into the town marked the beginning of a new socio-cultural history of Malabar. The company was basically profit oriented and well utilised the prospects of trade and business. But the native merchants were already engaged in trade and commerce of the region. The company realised that it is better to have a collaboration with the native merchants to ensure a large share in the volume of business. They monopolised pepper trade and spice business of the region.

Tellicherry's economic supremacy forced the company servants to establish a permanent mechanism here. A colonized cultured society adaptive to the situation was an essential requirement. The administrators never interfered in the routine life; but had a hidden agenda to convert the town as their administrative headquarters. Demographically, Tellicherry people also had the habit of adopting different cultural tastes and even before the advent of the company, the town attracted merchants from different parts of India. This cultural compositeness and adaptiveness unknowingly constructed a new cultural identity in the region. As William Logan (Treaties and Engagements) has given, the native Muslim traders along with the Seths of North India, Pattani Muslims, Baniya merchants converted the town into an affluent city with internal and international transactions. The merchants like Subbaiya Seth Moosakeyi

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(Chovvakkaran Moosa) was financially stable enough to lendmoney to the East India Company when it was left in financial peril.

In his treaties and engagement Logan points out numerous examples for the mutual collaboration that the company and the merchants had. The native population also had frequent cultural intercourse with them, leading to the formation of a new culture in the colonial town. Dominantly, the population were Thiyyas followed by Muslims, progressive and liberal minded joined with the colonial bureaucrats and administrators to effect a wider social change. The administrators and bureaucrats were interested toutilize the intellectual caliber and human resources confronted with a hurdle of communication with the natives. The solution was to promote modern education in the region. The Basel missionaries already provided education a firm footing, hence the colonial authorities find it easy to propagate colonial education in the town. The success of the project went beyond their hopes and aspirations. During the 19th century Tellicherry has had an unprecedented growth in secular education. Gundert's statements on education as school inspector reflex into the native educational institutions prominently managed by the teachers belonging to Thiyya caste. A number of traditional Thiyya families are engaged as native medical practitioners. Hence, this intellectual inheritance directly passed into the hands of the missionaries and from there to the colonial Masters to provide a concrete foundation for the intellectual identity of the region.

The missionaries had a greater role in transforming the region into an educational hub. There were separate schools for boys and girls in the town. This began with foundation of the Basel Evangelical Mission school in the heart of Thalassery town. The business class and rich commercial magnates lavishly encouraged the educational growth of the town. The school was on the brink of closure in the 1850s following a financial crisis for the lack of funds to maintain, but it was K. Darashaw, a Parseemerchant, revived it by contributing a sum of 1500 rupees in 1859. These schools accommodated all aspirants irrespective of cast and creed and the training college for teachers in the heart of the town had a decisive role in producing teachers, a dynamic social class. The foundation of government Brennen College in 1862 was the finest manifestation of the intellectual tradition inherited by the region. The

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natives, without any coercion, accepted all the changes and stood beyond the expectations of the colonial rulers of the region.

The trade commerce business and educational growth all had a corresponding growth on the social structure of Tellicherry. The penetration of capitalism in every sector of life created congenial situation for the rise of a new consumer culture in the region. Tellicherry witnessed the accumulation and investment of capital, commercialization that changed the taste of the people. The urban material culture and the rise of an intellectual environment manifested in the emergence of the middle class. This class, the fine product of capitalism, proved to be a blessing as far as Tellicherry is concerned. The emergence of banking, business, government offices and administrative mechanism gave rise to different professional groups in the town. B. B Misra precisely elucidated the context in which the middle classes emerged. Tellicherry during the early decades of the 20th century witnessed the growth of Nedungadi Malabar Bank and cooperative mutual benefit societies which worked in consultative corporations. In the specific material milieu of Tellicherry, amiddle class, took its perfect form and collaborated with a social class in intelligentsia who molded the destiny of the town in the coming years. These classes articulated new ideas, values, nurtured new cultural tease, preserved and promoted a secular democratic culture and provided an identity to the town

The intelligentsia, the product of colonial education dominated different sectors of socio-political life in Tellicherry. They acted as social workers, municipal councilors, litterateurs, journalists, and bankers. They did not confine themselves to a particular field, their presence felt everywhere. This involvement has an ideological implication, they nurtured liberalism, humanitarianism and democratic values. A fraction of the intelligentsia served as legislative council members. Generally, the Muslim community in other parts of India were confined to their socio-religious framework. But in the colonial context, they promoted progressivism, learnt English language and accommodated to modern professions. The Tellicherry Municipal council was dominated by the enlightened Muslim public, and the British government honored them with laurels. They were engaged in charitable works, supported educational institutions, instituted endowments and scholarships and had an identity of their own.

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Moidoo Saheb and Uppi Saheb were the legislative council members. Mammu Keyi and Saavan Kutty Keyi were the chairmen of the municipal board. The Muslim intelligentsia had a great role in transforming the facets of the town.

The Thiyyas dominated the intellectual domain of colonial Tellicherry. Majority of the Thiyyas were traditional agricultural laborers and toddy tappers. However, there were a few of them who were landlords, businessmen, native medical practitioners, and teachers in traditional schools (kudipallikudams or kalaris). The Thiyyas had a tradition of hard work, quest for knowledge and a perpetual desire for material progress, which enabled them The Thiyyas of Malabar, a low caste in the caste hierarchy, had a unique place in the to elevate their socio-economic status. They acted as the disseminators of the knowledge system that they inherited from their ancestors. European colonial interventions in Malabar had a crucial role in the modernization of local society. Basel Mission was the pioneering agency in Malabar to carry out powerful social and educational mobilization among the lower caste people. The Thiyyas of Malabar were in the frontline to accept colonial education offered by the mission schools.

Though the Thiyyas were in general economically and socially a backward community, there were a number of landlords and businessmen among them. Therefore, from the economic point of view, the rich Thiyyas were capable enough to bear the expenses of colonial education. Their contacts with European officials as clerks and office assistants in civil and military establishments in colonial towns gave them a new identity. The Thiyya women worked as midwives and were able to easily accept the changed circumstances in the colonial towns. The rich and enlightened Thiyya families of Malabar like the Oorachery, Onden, Uppote, Karayi, Moorkoth, Kottieth, Cheruvari, Kallingal Madathil, Potheri and Oyitti through their divergent and collective activities could easily embark on a modernization process of their society.

Malayalam literature served as an important vehicle for radical social transformation. Weeklies like Vivekodayam and Sanadana Dharma provided a platform for discussing social issues (Narayanan, 1984: 43). Moorkoth Kumaran and Moorkoth Kunhappa, prominent writers of from the Thiyya community articulated their ideas of social reform through Mathrubhumi (Mathrubumi Weekly 1934 p.4) and

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Vivekodayam. C. Krishnan a well-known Thiyya advocate served in various capacities as journalist, banker and social reformer, had a leading role in the social activities.

Journalism was another platform for social reform discourses. In Tellichery, C.K. Damodaran and Kolarathu Raghavan established Vidyavilasam Press with such a political perspective (C.K. Ravathiamma 1977 p.198). Mitavadi newspaper published from Calicut exclusively for the Thiyyas was instrumental in articulating the intellectual needs of the community. It was distinguished by its indignant protest against the caste system and social taboos and stressed the need for modern education. It was founded by C. Krishnan, a renowned representative of middle class Thiyya intelligentsia, to utilize press as a channel for educating the masses. He realized the potential of capitalist institutions including banks for the general progress of a community. Mitavadi was an attempt to inform the members of his community and the public about the socio-economic issues of the time. Extracts from the works of eminent thinkers and writers were given in its first page along with the picture of Jaganath Temple of Tellichery (Mitavadi,1915). Publication of advertisement in the Mitavadi signaled the growth of consumer culture among the middle class. The press also inculcated a consciousness with regard to the need for social reforms among other communities and therefore, it could mediate the interests of all communities beyond the caste rules and notions of pollution (Mitavadi, 1915: 9).

There were a considerable number of Thiyyas working colonial offices in Tellicherry and Mahe, who belonged to the families of Moorkoth and Kottieth. C.K. Revathiamma, a prominent social worker of the community in Tellicherry describes how the educated families promoted practice of progressive thinking (C.K.Revathiamma, 1977). Many famous traditional Thiyya medical practitioners, in the colonial context, switched over to new realms of modern medicine to retain social prominent status. For example, the Uppottu family was traditionally 'Vaidyas' but its member shifted to government jobs as a means to retain the family status in the new situation.

As the Thiyyas were denied access to temples, the rich and progressive among them took initiative to construct temples for the community. Such temples acted rather as the centers of community service and public meeting, soon converting them to major centers of intellectual activities. Sree Jnanodaya Yogam of Tellicherry, (1906 July) an

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association of the wealthy, influential and progressive minded Thiyyas, took the initiative to construct the Jaganath Temple. It opened its doors to all castes except the conservatives of the caste and Cherumars. (Kurup, 1993: 437). The joint efforts of the educated Thiyyas including Murkoth Kumaran, P.Raman, Kottieth Choyi, Oyitti Krishnan and Chamakkali Kannan resulted in the construction of Sudareswara Temple at Cannanore (Mitavadi Weekly 1915: 30-31). The secular ethos and the reforming zeal of the Thiyyas helped the rise of new socio-cultural set up in the colonial towns of Malabar. The educated Thiyyas considered it a privilege to be placed in the deputations and committees formed by the colonial government for various purposes. For instance, a commission was formed to study the condition of the Ezhavas of Cochin with Kottieth Ramunni, C. Krishnan, K.S. Krishnan, M.K. Raman, all were the leading advocates, as its community members (Ibid).

Unlike the women of other communities, Thiyya women enjoyed freedom of mobility and employment. Educational activities of Basel Mission played an important role in the empowerment of Thiyya women. Stree Samajam came into being Malabar under the initiative of Karayi Damayanthi, a prominent lady of Thiyya caste in Tellichery. She conducted a mobile library for women (Manjula K.V, 2005: 76).

A large number of Thiyya women of Tellichery entered public life during the colonial period. C. K. Damayanthi inherited the characteristic qualities of her father, Karayi Bappu, who was a prominent trader of Tellicherry having close contacts with the British. She organized vocational training to girls and orientation classes of eminent doctors on health and hygiene for women. Her daughter, C.K. Revathiamma, was a lady with high accomplishments. Being educated at the convent school in Tellichery, she was able to develop a broad social outlook. Her familial background and intimacy with educated natives and the Europeans made her well known person in the town. She was associated with Red Cross Society, Social Services League, rehabilitation of the poor, women's associations, library movement etc. Besides, she served as the Director of Urban Bank and founded a school at Chaliatheru. She opened an Arogya Mandiram (health centre) near Jaganath temple of Tellichery. As recognition of her social service and commitments she was elected to Kannur District Board (Revathiyamma, 1977: 78). Along with Ravathiyamma, Maliyekkal Mariyumma, Amina

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Hashim, Mampally Leela and a host of other women intellectuals joined in the collective endeavor for the women uplift of the region.

The schools of the colonial towns of Tellichery, Cannanore and Calicut became the centers of intellectual growth. The female teachers served as the torch bearers of the intellectual changes in Malabar. V.P. Devaki, K. Janaki, P. Kalyani, C.V. Madavi, to name a few for instance, were the teachers associated with socio-political reforms. P. Nani teacher of Morazha set herself as a vibrant social reformer by breaking of caste rules through inter caste-marriage. Most of the female teachers were associated with Mahila Samajam founded for women (Vasanthi: 112-120). Female education was the hallmark of all women associations. Mitavadi published with extra significance, names of those female students who passed from the schools and colleges. E.K. Janaki, after her studies at the convent school in Tellicherry, graduated in Botany (Honors) and obtained master's degree. She was appointed as a teacher at Madras Women's Christian College. In 1928 she joined Michigan University for research and qualified Doctor of Sciences. On account of her valuable contributions in Botanical research, she was appointed as the Director of Botanical Survey of India. Thus, the English education produced a large number of women scholars and intelligentsia who contributed significantly to politics, society and education.

The rise of a Thiyya intelligentsia in colonial Malabar seems to be an end product of a combination of forces let loose by the colonial education and changed material environment created by colonial capitalism. Yet it was difficult for the people to defy inhuman caste and communal rules in order to unfetter them. Therefore, all progressive social reform movements in Malabar initiated by the intelligentsia confined within these limited boundaries. Nevertheless, the Thiyya intelligentsia opened the doors of their community for accepting the winds of social change and educational progress. They formed an important segment in the emerging middle class of Malabar.

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