



# Plurality in Practice: Challenges and Prospects

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## Abstract

Human beings are distinct from one another in each and every aspect of socio-cultural life. The virtue, colourfulness and beauty of human life is embedded in its diverse socio-cultural features and living circumstances. Languages, ethnic affiliations, beliefs and practices. Natural resources, climatic conditions, etc., contribute a lot in the development of multiple cultures across the world. In fact, plurality is the essence of human species. Nowadays, people belonging to varying affiliations of the nature mentioned above are sharing common resources and are in close contact with each other in their day to day life. Accordingly, a number of social adjustments and mobilizations are evolved to cope up with the changing socio-cultural, political and economic scenario of the society at large. This paper is an attempt to appraise the genesis, growth, nature and impact of group mobilizations as well as the 'working of plurality' in a multicultural society such as Kerala, the southern most State of the Indian union.

**Keywords:** Multi-cultural society, plurality, caste, social division

## 1. Introduction

Culture<sup>1</sup> plays an important role in almost all aspects of human life, especially in social and political developments, as well as in the

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development of individual identity. Traditionally, the minority cultures of the less represented and marginalized groups were excluded or ignored from the mainstream cultural discourses. However, with the popularity of multiculturalism, adequate representation has been given to the minority cultures as well. It is also pertinent to mention that a multi-cultural society, consisting of people from different linguistic, ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds has to be especially careful to ensure cordial relationships between those cultural groups embedded in their own socio-economic and historical backgrounds. However, in many urban and some rural areas of India, various groups limit their socio-cultural relationships within the circle of one's own community/religion. This is mainly because of the increased awareness of people about their socio-religious identities. Awareness about the socio-religious identities constitutes social maps in one's mind by demarcating the social territory into sacred, friendly, neutral, hostile, etc (Saberwal, 1991). Following is an account to appraise the genesis, growth, nature, and impact of group mobilizations as well as the 'working of plurality' in a multi-cultural society such as Kerala<sup>2</sup>, the southernmost state of the Indian union.

## **2. Caste: A Potent Force of Social Division and Associations in Kerala**

The Kerala society presents a multi-cultural amalgam, developed extensively by absorbing the Aryan elements from the North, and Arabian and European elements from the West. Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities represent the broad divisions in Kerala society with several smaller groupings among them, each having a distinct way of life. Religion constitutes the chief component of group identity throughout the history of Kerala (Lemerciniev, 1994). Hindu religion is the earliest religious form in the state. An elaborate caste system is the unique feature of the Hindu social system, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hindu community of the state experienced the most elaborate system of caste found in India (Nossiter, 1982). Caste is a unique system of stratification in which the members of the society are categorised into different levels from inferior to a superior position in the

society based on their birth, and one cannot change his/her caste in his/her lifetime.

Out of the four basic Varnas<sup>3</sup>, Kshatriyas are rarely found in Kerala (Iyer, 1961), even though this status is usually claimed by the Nair community of the state owing to their emergence as rulers of most of the erstwhile states. Nairs are generally considered as occupants of an upper stratum of the Sudra Varna, but they never wear the sacred thread, unlike the Kshatriyas in other places of the country. The Vaisya Varna was absent in the region from the beginning. However, the Muslims and Syrian Christians filled this gap to some extent by engaging in trading and business activities. Nambudiris occupied the top-most position in the caste hierarchy, followed by Embrantiris and the Tamil Brahmins (1961). The major high caste group below the Brahmins are the Nayars, officially spelled as Nairs. The term Nair is a generic term comprising three main subdivisions, viz. the Nayars proper or high caste Nayars, non-military Nayars, and low caste Nayars. There are different *jatis* that fill in each of these layers<sup>4</sup>. The high caste Nayars together with the Brahmins had formed the traditional land-owning class of the state. Kammalas/Viswakarmas, which consists of five endogamous groups viz., Tattans or goldsmiths, Perinkollans or blacksmiths, Musaris or braziers, Asaris or carpenters, and Chembottis or coppersmiths. Ezhavas/Thiyyas and Mukkuvnas/Arayans, a caste of fisherman, are the other prominent caste groups in Kerala. Pulayan/Cheruman, and Vettuvan are the caste groups engaged in 'unclean' occupations and are the major bottom level castes, who live at the periphery of the social hierarchy in the caste system of Kerala (Thurston, 1975).

Each caste in turn is divided into sub-castes. For instance, there are five important sub-castes in the Kammala caste, and 14 among Nairs. Usually, sub-castes within a caste never enjoyed equal status and were arranged into a number of grades according to their status. For instance, Vilakkithala and Veluthedathu Nairs, who were the barbers and washermen communities, respectively, of the high caste Nairs were at the bottom of the hierarchy (1975). Hence, an author commented that there existed a 'mini caste system' in each caste while at the same time the members of other castes did not experience the sub-castes within each caste (Balakrishnan,

1982). They consider, for example, all sub-castes in the Nayar community as Nayars. The author concludes that nobody in the Kerala caste system was aware of the actual structure of the society of which he/she is a part. The social interaction of the members of a caste was limited within itself or within its own sub-castes. Lower castes have fewer sub-divisions than the higher ones since they do not have others to carry out services for them.

In traditional society, social interaction between members of different castes was strictly regulated through rules of purity and pollution. Those in 'unclean' occupations were considered as polluted, and they were not allowed to use public amenities like roads, schools, temples, public wells, etc. In fact, caste is 'the most complex and ubiquitous of India's social institutions, the structural basis of Hindu society and the classic expression of institutionalized inequality', which 'has also traditionally been the principal category of social ordering and control' (Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Even after centuries of practice<sup>5</sup> and the legal abolition of several caste-based practices including untouchability as well as the reservation system introduced by the post independent Indian government the lower castes continue to remain in lower strata. Historically, they were not allowed to challenge or climb the hierarchy and improve their status within the system. This rigidity had led to discomfort among them, resulting in the emergence of one or the other sort of widespread agitations since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Organized and widespread agitations with the participation of common people were rare occurrences earlier. Scholars are in general agreement that this was due to the ignorance of the lower caste groups about the kind of exploitation and injustice that they had been subjected to. An instance of such an agitation during the early modern period can be seen in the Ezhome region in Kannur district near Payyannur. This was an outbreak due to the denial of the local 'Harijans'<sup>6</sup> to give the customary offerings of 3 *cer*<sup>7</sup> paddy from 75 families to the shrine as they were denied permission to attend the festival. The agitation on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October 1933<sup>8</sup> was a clear instance of mobilizations on caste lines by the unorganized people in the lower strata of the society during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The

members of the Pulaya community formed an association called 'Uthara Kerala Adhidravida Sabha' (UKAS) at Pappinisseri in North Malabar in the year 1929 to resist the persecution by the Nairs, Thiyyas, and Mappilas.

The colonial system largely privileged the members of higher castes who were given opportunities to take advantage of modern education and to enter into government jobs since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the members of lower castes were often denied any such opportunities owing to the restrictions that existed on their movements in the public domain. At that juncture, people began to organize along with caste/community identities against the ill-treatment of those in power and authority since the social relationships of that time were largely confined within the caste/community. Consequently, many caste organizations were formed. Some of these organizations that started in the first decades/half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have lasting impacts on the communitarian and secular landscapes of Kerala in addition to their lasting influence on the local politics. For instance, in 1903 the influential members of the Ezhava<sup>9</sup> community formed the first caste association in the state, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (hereon SNDP) to promote religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Ezhava community (Nossiter, 1982). SNDP formed its own political organisation 'Socialist Revolutionary Party' (SRP) in 1972. Although, SRP could not survive for long and had a natural death in the mid-eighties. SNDP continued to remain a strong political influence in the region. Grounded on a large demographic base of the local Ezhava community SNDP, in 2016, again formed another political party, viz., Bharath Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS). Part of a larger national coalition called National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP), BDJS contested in the State Assembly and Parliament elections in 2016, and 2019, respectively. All these reveal that caste identity is a primary socio-cultural identity in the state, and it has the potential to influence many arenas in society, including politics. The observation of Ahuja, (2004) regarding present day changes in caste functioning as 'Caste and politics have come to affect each other' is true in the case of Kerala society as well.

A similar instance emerges from Nair Service Society (NSS), the communitarian association formed for the reform of Nairs. A group of fourteen young Nairs under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabha Pillai (1878-1970) formed NSS in the year 1914 to liberate the community from the superstitions and taboos, to struggle for educational progress and welfare of the community, and to 'defend and advance Nair interests in the political arena' (Nossiter, 1982). NSS also formed a political party of its own called 'National Democratic Party' in the year 1973. However, it merged with the Congress party by accepting a handful of nominations to the community in the Nair-dominant constituencies in 1977 (Balakrishnan, P. K., 1982). At present, both NSS and SNDP have more than a thousand village-level units and several schools, colleges, medical colleges, hostels, and hospitals. With such infrastructure, a wider base, and better status in the caste hierarchy, the NSS and SNDP act as pressure groups politically and otherwise within the region.

'Sadhu Jena Paripalana Sangam' (SJPS) was established at Venganoor, Thiruvananthapuram, in the year 1907 at the initiative of Ayyankali<sup>10</sup> to fight for the cause of the bottom-level communities. Within a short span of time the organisation had spread in the entire Travancore region and formed a number of *Shogas* to co-ordinate its function. 'Sadhu Jena Paripalini', a monthly journal was started from Changanassery in 1913 to strengthen the activities of the association. A '*Samudaya Kodathi*' (Community Court) was also created to settle disputes among the members of the community (Abhimannyu, 1990). SJPS has not entered into overt political activities rather focused on improving the educational scenario of the backward communities in the region.

In the contemporary times, almost all castes and communities have their own associations, for instance, Vaniya Samudaya Sangam (VSS), Mannan Vannan Samudaya Sangam (MVSS), Mavilan Cultural Movement, etc. Forming such collectives allows them to act as political pressure groups and thereby to appropriate maximum socio-economic benefits for the members of their respective communities. Thus, caste organisations are found to be

effective in mobilising and projecting caste interests for political and other material gains.

Thus, it is pertinent to mention here that the people in the state had experienced the divisions, cleavages, inequalities, exploitations, and subjugations in the society in the form of superior and inferior castes. Caste has a direct influence upon the political and cultural landscapes of the region even though caste-based varied restrictions have dwindled to a great extent. Caste-based political mobilization has the effect of isolating the members of a particular caste group from other castes and communities. It has proved to be beneficial for members of the caste as it often results in challenging the local caste hierarchies and have effectively placed them directly in negotiation with the state and its agencies. However, such exclusive forms of organization also create, albeit reproduces the communal cleavages and result in the 'othering' of ('we' and 'they') other castes and their members.

### **3. Background of Political Formations in Kerala**

The political situation prevailed in the state prior to the formation of united Kerala in 1956 and was more or less identical in the erstwhile states of Cochin and Travancore; however, it was quite distinct in Malabar region, which was an integral part of the Madras presidency. One of the pioneering political developments in the erstwhile Travancore state was the Malayali Memorial of 1891 submitted to the Maharaja for greater representation of *Malayalees* in government services, which was until then dominated by Tamil Brahmins from outside the State. Travancore was the first princely state that established a Legislative Council in the year 1888 to make laws and regulations (Grover and Arora, 1998; Nossiter, 1982). Further struggles in the state during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were centered on the objective of responsible government, which had gained momentum with the arrival of Chetpat Pattabhirama Ramaswami Aiyar (popularly known as 'C. P.') as Dewan of the state. Nairs, Christians (mainly Syrian Christians), and the Ezhavas were the pressure groups in the struggle against the Dewan.

The Christian, Muslim, and Ezhava communities under the banner of Joint Political Congress (JPC) staged Abstention Movement or *Nivarthanam* agitation against the Nair majority in the then existing Legislative Council, demanding communal electorate during the 1930s (Pillai, 1998; Nossiter, 1982). JPC gained victory in the April 1937 elections, but the alliance collapsed in the following year. After this, Nairs, Christians, and Ezhavas came together under Travancore State Congress (TSC) with the minimum objective of the resignation of the Dewan (Nossiter, 1982). Shortly before Independence, SNDP Yogam under Sankar, and NSS under Mannath Pamanabhan formed a short-lived Hindu Mandalam, directed against Christian economic and political influences.

In Malabar, a district Congress Committee came into existence in the year 1908. During the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most leaders of Congress party came from the Nair community, especially from the *kanomdar* families (Nossiter, 1982). Nossiter further observed that during the pre-independence era, 'leaders of the backward classes argued that the Congress movement was really an instrument for the perpetuation of caste-Hindu domination. Where there was low-caste support, it was some times as much an expression of a feudal obligation to local magnates as of political belief' (1982).

The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed in the year 1934 within the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC), by those who later became the leaders of the Communist party, viz. P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S Namboodiripad, and A.K. Gopalan. They were instrumental in the formation of the Kerala unit of CSP, which soon became a dominant force within the Kerala Congress organization and passed a series of left-wing resolutions. The Kerala Congress formed under the leadership of K.M George after a split in the Indian National Congress (INC) in the year 1964. The party was later split into two in 1974: the Christian section stood by K.M Mani, and the Nair group supported Balakrishna Pillai. This reveals that caste and religious affiliations are influential in shaping political maneuvers in the state whenever there is a chance to express such sentiments.

The consolidation of Hindu identity for political gains was not explicit in the state until the 1980s. The formation of a Hindu



identity at certain instances occurred only after the disappearance of caste-based disabilities including, 'untouchability' and 'unapproachability'. The emergence of the Hindu Front with Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP), R.S.S, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad as prominent actors in the state politics became apparent in the elections since 1984 (Pillai, 1998).

### **3.1 Communist Movements in Kerala**

Communist League, established in 1931 at Thiruvananthapuram, was the first pro-Marxist organisation in the state. A state unit of the Communist Party of India (CPI) was secretly established in the year 1939 at a village near Thalassery in the present Kannur district. The factors that contributed to the emergence of communism in the state, has been variously cited by different scholars as 'Selig Harrison's emphasis on caste; Kathleen Gough's on agrarian relations and class divisions; Zagoria's on the interaction of landlessness and literacy; and, most recently Jeffrey's on the breakdown of a social system in which matrilineal joint families were of crucial importance' (Nossiter, 1982). Within a short period, the party became a dominant force and won the assembly elections of 1957<sup>11</sup>. Caste had played a major role in the emergence of the communist movement in the state as the lower caste population of the state constituted the labour class/ lower class in the society, especially during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, the Thiyya caste identity is instrumental for the growth of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Nadapuram, a rural area in Kozhikode district of the state that witnessed occasional clashes between the workers of CPI(M) and Indian Union Muslim League (hereon IUML) since 1970s (Pradeep, 2010).

### **3.2 Islam in Kerala and Political Mobilizations**

The Mappilas of Malabar are considered as 'the descendants of the first Indian Muslims' (Koya, 1983). On ideological basis, the Muslims in Kerala broadly came under three sects, viz. Sunni, Mujahid, and Jamaat-I-Islami. Samastha and Samasthana are the two widespread Sunni sect in Kerala. The Moplah (Mappila) Muslims of Kerala are divided into caste-like groups, viz. the Thangals<sup>12</sup>, the Arabs<sup>13</sup>, Pusalars<sup>14</sup> and Ossans<sup>15</sup>, (Srinivas, 1981), each occupying a position from the top downwards, respectively.

‘Muslim Aikya Sanghom’ (organisation for Muslim unity) formed in 1922 at Cranganore (Kodungalloor) was a pioneer organisation for coordinated efforts to struggle for the cause of the Muslim community as a whole and to defend the Islamic faith and principles against vilification and distortion supposed to have been caused by the Christian Missionaries of those times.

Political consciousness among the Muslim community came with the formation of the Young Muslim Association (1920), Muslim Majlis (1930), and Muslim Club (about 1933) at Thalassery in the present Kannur district and the establishment of the daily newspaper Chandrika<sup>16</sup>, the newspaper of the state unit of IUML. Many newspapers and magazines were also started in Malayalam as well as in ‘Arabi-Malayalam’, in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century by the members of the community. Some of those newspapers and magazines are still active in the field of public domain.

In Kerala, political mobilization among the Muslim community is more focused and is backed with ‘it’s own’ political parties that stand for the interests of the community (Sikand, 2007). The year 1937 marked the beginning of a unit of the All India Muslim League (AIML)<sup>17</sup> in North Malabar, even though its activities could be discerned even prior to that. Muslim politics in the state had experienced stagnation for a couple of years immediately after the partition of the country in 1947 as part of an all India phenomenon. IUML, as a separate political entity came into being on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1948, and it emerged as a major political force, especially among the Muslims in North Kerala nowadays. Thus, among the Muslims, where caste-like social divisions are absent, religion plays a significant role in providing political consolidation in the form of a separate political party that stand for the cause of the community among other things. Religion or caste in Kerala forms a frame of reference within which the group understands its past, interprets its present, and visualizes its future.

### **3.3 Denominations, Divisions and Politics amongst the Christians in Kerala**

Syrian Christians<sup>18</sup> of Kerala are the earliest Christian community in India (Tharamangalam, 1996), and are of two categories, viz, Knanaya Christians or ‘Southerners’ or ‘Southists’ and

‘Northerners’ or ‘Northists’. The former claims direct descent from the Syrian merchants who settled in Kerala in the 4<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of Thomas of Cana, and the latter ones claim to have descended from Namboothiri ancestry. The Knanaya Christians claim superior status over the ‘Northists’. Both the groups enforce strict endogamy. The Syrian Christians are comparatively much more prosperous group among the Christian community.

Latin Catholics constitute the second largest group within the community; in the local hierarchy, they are treated as lower to the Syrians. They are generally considered as the descendants of the low caste converts of the coastal region and are socially and economically backward. In Kerala, the conversion movements in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were focused on *Dalits* (predominantly Pulaya and Paraya castes), by taking advantage of ‘a mood of unprecedented restlessness among the depressed (castes)’ (Tharamangalam 1996: 269). This in turn, gave rise to a new Christian group (or caste cluster), the *Puthukrishtianikal* (New Christians or Neo-Christians) distinct from the Syrian Christians and the Latin Catholics. They occupy the lowest position among the Christian communities in Kerala.

The sectarian or the denominational divisions among the Christians in Kerala cut across the above-mentioned divisions. Generally, the Syrian Christians today belong either to the Catholic Church or to a variety of Protestant churches and three orthodox churches. The Latin Catholics are members of the Catholic Church. The Neo-Christians belong to a variety of sects including Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. Majority of the workers and supporters of Kerala Congress (Mani)<sup>19</sup>, especially in Kottayam region, are from the Christian community. Thus, like other religious and caste groups, Christians also have their own political preferences and affiliations.

### **3.4 Communal Outbursts in Kerala**

Hindu-Muslim community feelings in Kerala society developed into some kind of hatred between the two communities on specific issues in the past. For instance, the Moplah Rising of 1921 in erstwhile south Malabar area created fissures between the Hindus and Muslims of the area. The rebellion was ‘an end point and a turning point in the life of Muslim community. It was the last

Mappila outbreak and at the same time, it was also the first stage in a new development' (Miller 1976: 124). Congress party initially supported the movement, but later the party dissociated itself from the agitation as it became violent. After the rebellion, 'Congress in Malabar was divided into Hindu and Muslim Congresses, centered on two newspapers *Mathrubhumi* (Motherland) and *al-Ameen* (one who is honest)', Nossiter (1982). The formation of Malappuram district in 1969 also created an all India controversy and created a strain in the Hindu-Muslim relationship in the state (1976).

The state also witnessed violent communal outbursts in the recent past. One such incident was a conflict between Hindu and Muslim fishermen communities with the backing of their fundamentalist organisations at Marad, a coastal village in Beypoor near Kozhikode town. Five lives were lost in the riots of January 2002, and nine in 2003. It is reported that a day after the violence of 2002, three relief camps were opened in the village, which truly symbolised the riot. Local Araya Samajam opened a relief camp exclusively for the Hindu victims, while the Muslims set up one for themselves under the local mosque. The CPI (M) opened one for the 'secular' victims, constituting largely the party cadres belonging to both communities (Pradeep, 2010).

The clashes between the activists of Theera Sangh and RSS-BJP at Thykkal, near Cherthala, Alappuzha district over a dispute concerning loading and unloading of fish baskets, took away three lives in the year 2002<sup>20</sup>. Violent outbursts that led to communal divisions among people had also been reported at Vizhinjam and Poonthura in Thiruvananthapuram district during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The violent conflicts that happened at Nadapuram in Kozhikode district in 2001 that took away three lives also turned communal (2010).

However, in spite of occasional conflicts between people belonging to various communities and groups at specific parts of the state due to the inequalities prevalent in the socio-cultural system, a common Malayali culture was founded on the social and cultural diversity which helped unite the state as a whole. In a multi-cultural society like Kerala, people of different religious groups and communities

live in close proximity. They interact with each other in their day to day life and develop social relations among them. However, each group maintains its distinctiveness in its day-to-day life, even if they are in close interaction with each 'other'. The state keeps on going with relative social stability mainly because of the economic gains in terms of equitable goals, which itself has been the outcome of socio-economic and political mobilizations and agitations and proactive socio-economic legislations and their relatively effective implementations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Diversity is an essential component of human species. Variations in geographical surroundings, climatic conditions, livelihood, human adaptations, etc., lead to peculiar social formations and belief systems. The prevalence of multiple treatises, religious and otherwise, in a society, has a decisive role in the formation and functioning of various social institutions, social groups, social relationships, etc. Manifestations of plurality through the existence of diverse socio-cultural formations are a celebration of human species. But in the present scenario in many parts of the country community identity and sentiments are being used for economic and political gains owing to one or the other reasons and it in-turn create tensions between the different communities and groups. All these adversely affect the plurality and peaceful co-existence of varying human socio-cultural forms. Thus, a peaceful co-existence between distinct human socio-cultural types is a pre-requisite for the nonappearance of human exploitation and suppression at the cost of the multiplicity of cultural forms.

The 'peaceful co-existence' should be based on 'vibrant peace' rather than a 'silent one' as 'silent peace' is more 'a law and order situation' and there is every likelihood for its disturbance. Vibrant peace is a situation that is more stable, where strong relationships are established among diverse caste groups and communities, and where a rational dialogue is also possible between contesting viewpoints without the intention of causing harm and fear. Thus, a vibrant peace is a pre-requisite for the persistence, development, and progress of a plural society.

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<sup>1</sup> Culture is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1871: 1).

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- <sup>2</sup> The State is located on the south-western coast of India, between latitudes; 8° 18' and 12° 48' North, and longitudes; 74° 52' and 77° 24' East
- <sup>3</sup> Brahmin (Priest), Kshatriya (Warrior), Vaisya (Businessmen), and Sudra (Service Men) are the four Varnas.
- <sup>4</sup> In South Malabar, for instance, the highest class among the Nayars is Kiriyaam or Kiriyaattil Nayars. Most of the old Naduvazhis and Deshavazhis<sup>4</sup>, and most of the *stanis*<sup>4</sup> and other titled persons belonged to this class. Andurans or Kusavans<sup>4</sup>, Ottatu Nayars<sup>4</sup>, Pallichans or Parappur Nayars<sup>4</sup>, Chembukottis or Chembottis<sup>4</sup>, Vattekandan or Chakkingal Nayars<sup>4</sup> or Vanians<sup>4</sup>, Ashtikkurichchi<sup>4</sup> Nayars or Chittigans, Ambalavasis, Kulangara Nayars, and Edacheri Nayars are the major groups amongst the Non-military Nayars. Vellutedans or Vannattans<sup>4</sup>, Vilakkataravans/ Vilakkatalayans<sup>4</sup>, Kaduppattans or Ezhuthachan<sup>4</sup>, and Chaliyans or Teruvans (weavers) are the important ones among the low caste Nayars, who said to pollute other Nayars by touch.
- <sup>5</sup> Caste is an age-old institution and scholars are not sure about the exact period of its origin.
- <sup>6</sup> A generic term for untouchables.
- <sup>7</sup> A form of measurement in earlier days.
- <sup>8</sup> For more see Mathrubhumi Daily (Mal.), 4th & 5th November, 1933
- <sup>9</sup> Ezhava community occupy the middle order of caste hierarchy. At present the community is one among the Other Backward Classes (OBC) of the State for reservation purposes.
- <sup>10</sup> Ayyankali is a reformist leader from the Pulaya community.
- <sup>11</sup> The first held after the formation of a united Kerala
- <sup>12</sup> Claim descent from the Prophet's daughter, Fatima
- <sup>13</sup> Descendents of immigrants from Arabia
- <sup>14</sup> Recent converts from the Fisherman caste
- <sup>15</sup> Barbers
- <sup>16</sup> Started on 26th March 1932 from Thalassery, Kannur district.
- <sup>17</sup> AIML was formed in the year 1906 in Dhaka, Bengal in British India, and it played a major role in the formation of Pakistan.
- <sup>18</sup> Also known as Syrians, the Christians of St.Thomas or simply the Thomas Christians
- <sup>19</sup> The party is successful in electing a number of nominations in successive State Assembly
- <sup>20</sup> See The New Indian Express, dated: 16th March, 2002.