Abstract: The caste system segregated the Scheduled Castes from the rest of the society. The caste and untouchability based exclusion and discrimination can be categorized in the socio-economic, educational and political sphere. The 'depressed classes' did not enjoy in general any facilities for education and remained steeped in illiteracy. 'Education' received by the agrestic slave castes [Pulayas] were confined to their folklore and skills handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The Pre British period, Kerala had an indigenous system of education characterized by tradition, caste determination and religious ideas. Education became highly religion oriented and monopolized by the Brahmans. Under the colonial influence the government of Cochin took active interest in the education of depressed classes from the beginning of the 20th century. The Christian missionaries also devoted special attention to the spread of education in Cochin State. The formation of the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha in 1913, created a new awareness among the Pulayas. The leaders of the Pulayas realized that their petitions and the consequent moderate welfare measures by the government did not improve the condition of the lower castes. They believed that education was an important tool for the emancipation of the community and carried on intensive campaigns among the Pulayas to send their children to school.

Key words—Depressed Classes, Monopoly, Missionaries, Western Education and Cochin Pulaya Mahasabha.

I.INTRODUCTION

Social change means a change in social structure in the size of society; in the 19th century Kerala witnessed a cultural and ideological struggle against the backward elements of traditional, cultural and ideological hegemony of the Brahmanas, this struggle was due to structural changes in the society. Education is the first step towards empowerment and the most decisive factor in overall development of the individual. Education sets one free ignorance exploitation, class discrimination and poverty. It liberates the mind opening up new horizons, new hope opportunities and self-confidence further equipping them with the knowledge, skills, self-respect and attitudes acquired through education help one to lead a desired quality of life. It can be said that social mobility comes through education.

The 19th century is considered to be an important period in the history of India, the ideals of freedom, nationalism and liberalism that emerged in European countries. After many incidents of revolution and movements influenced the Indian nationalist’s also when they appeared on the Indian sphere which produced deep impact on the Cochin society and life. The liberal minded rulers of Cochin inspired by the noble ideals took concrete measures to promote education with the help of their Diwans. Structural transformation in society started during British rule, which led it on a new and different path of developments and some of the basic changes in social system of Indian society. No doubt the development of education and fostering of literacy among the Indian people was one of the most visible achievements of the missionaries. The missionaries who were enlightened by the scientific thought and Renaissance used education as a weapon against social differences and casteism and molded the history of Kerala.

The present study concentrates the Pre-Colonial period Kerala had an indigenous system of education characterized by tradition. Upliftment of depressed classes in the educational sphere are channelized in three ways; under the colonial influence the government of Cochin took active
interest in the education of depressed classes, the Christian missionaries’ devoted special attention to the spread of education in Cochin State and the formation of the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha in 1913, created a new awareness among the pulayas.

II. EDUCATION IN PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

The Pre British period, Kerala had an indigenous system of education characterized by tradition, caste determination and religious ideas. It was a highly conservative, hierarchical and caste ridden society. The educational institutions of the state were mainly Ezhuthupallis, Kalaries, and Vedic Sanskrit schools. The Brahmins had maintained several Matts under their control. Members of other castes were not admitted to these institutions. Education became highly religion oriented and the Brahmin had a monopoly over the institutions of learning in the state.

The Agrestic slaves [Pulayas] belonged to the lowest castes in the Hindu hierarchy. They were not only untouchables, but were unapproachables too. Disabilities of untouchability become severe as they were also physically and socially segregated from the rest of the Hindu society through the institution of caste. According to C. Achutha Menon, Pulayans, who form the great majority of the slaves, are all engaged in field labourer. In the pre-colonial period Pulayas did not have a life of their own. They never worked or earned a living for themselves. Their entire life was depended on their master’s. P.K Narayana Pillai examines that the Pulayans occupy a very low position in the social scale and his approach to persons of superior caste causes pollution. Their only occupation seems to be the cultivation of the fields of their masters by ploughing; sowing seeds and reaping the harvest. Most of the slaves of the soil belonged to the pulaya caste.

The untouchable Pulayas began to suffer from various kinds of disabilities -- social, economic, occupational, educational, religious, and political. Educationally the Pulaya children were not permitted to attend schools. Till 1865, all Government schools were meant for the Savarnas. So they were uneducated and untouchables caste in Cochin.

The condition of the slaves after the abolition of slavery-

The second half of the 19th century saw the legal abolition of agrestic slavery in Kerala, buying, selling and possession of slaves were prohibited by law. This alone as we have seen did not release the Pulayas either from their miserable existence or from the hold of their former masters. The formal abolition of slavery did effect some changes in the life of the Pulayas. Some of them went to work in the plantations; where their wages are higher, but many of them became coolies. Their emancipation from slavery has improvement in their material condition.

III. Changes in Education System [Colonial Period]

State activity in the field of education began in Cochin from the time of Col. Munro. At his instance a proclamation was issued in 1818 by the ruler of Cochin establishing 33 Malayalam schools. In 1835 the beginning of modern education and 6 vernacular schools were started at each Taluk in Cochin. The government began to start schools to impart elementary education in 1890 and it brought an end to the traditional village system of education. In 1892 these vernacular and English schools were amalgamated and placed under the control of a superintendent of education. Considerable progress was made in the field of education during the time of Dewan A.R Banerji [1907-1914] till 1908 the educational system of the state was under the control of the Education Department. The whole state was divided into various educational districts for this purpose. Later the name of the department was changed to the department of public instruction. Cochin government had enacted the Educational Code in 1911, which made grant-in-aid rules more simple and liberal. It also divided schools into Vernacular and Anglo-Vernacular.

Under the colonial influence, the government of Cochin took active interest in the education of depressed classes from the beginning of the 20th century; State activity in the field of education began in Cochin from the time of Col. Munro. Various ameliorative measures were undertaken by the government for the upliftment of depressed classes in the educational sphere. Special
scholarships and various financial concessions had its impact on the progress of the education of the depressed classes in the state, drawing numbers of their pupils to schools annually. Number of night schools and primary schools of the ordinary type were opened for the special benefit of these communities and these schools were helped in several ways out of the funds set apart for the uplift of these communities. Pulaya boys and girls were given admission into government and aided schools. Arrangements were made for supplying books, slates and two clothes per head to the Pulaya pupils free of cost, by the government. They were also provided with a mid-day meal on all school days, the allowance for which was fixed at 1 anna 3 paisa per pupil. The education code of 1911 opened special institutions called the ‘Night Schools’ in order to improve the conditions of night schools full time head masters were appointed free books, slates were provided to the students of night schools.

Table-1. Report on the Census of Cochin, literate strength of slave castes are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census of Cochin-Year</th>
<th>Slav Caste – Pulaya</th>
<th>Literate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>52477</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>51251</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>59840</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>69423</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-2. Report on the Administration of Cochin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report on the Administration of Cochin-Year</th>
<th>Pulaya-Literate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919-1920</td>
<td>2902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-1930</td>
<td>16828</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table we can surmise that pulaya’s could make remarkable progress in the field of education. Various measures enumerated the considerable increase in the number of children of the Pulaya’s attending schools. The concessions and scholarships given by the government of Cochin might be the prime reason for the spread of education among the depressed classes. A number of night schools were opened by the Government as well as by private agencies. In 1944, the government of Cochin launched a scheme of giving free mid-day meal to all children attending primary school. It is noted that the liberal encouragement for the expansion of education.

Government declared that all schools in the state have been open to all classes and also ordered that if there are any in places not accessible to all, it should be removed as far as possible to place not objectionable and that no school buildings should hereafter be constructed out of public fund in a locality which is not accessible to all classes of people. Free and half free scholarships were granted to deserving poor pupils of the backward class and special scholarships were sanctioned to some for university courses.

The government’s liberal policy of an ‘open door’ [education] for all, the department was not left unmolested, but had to face opposition of a wholly unjustifiable character. For example, in Pongamuk a Pulaya boy when proceeding to school was beaten by an Ezhava on the ground that he was polluted. A Nair entered the Vellangallur School and caused such a great disturbance that criminal proceedings had to be taken against him and this owing to admission of pulayas. The Nair s at Edavanakkad and Palluruty withdrew their children from school on account of the admission of pulayas. But taken all in all the admission of the lowest castes into all the schools of the state is beginning to be accepted even by the opposition as a settled fact.

IV. Role of Christian Missionaries in Education

The Christian missionaries devoted special attention to the spread of education in Cochin State. Their educational efforts attracted mainly the backward classes and the depressed communities. The western education introduced by the missionaries hastened social transformation in Kerala. Educational programmes uplifted the status of the Pulayas and it helped them to have new opportunities in the occupational and social field.

It was the protestant missionaries who took the initiative in this field. The chief missionaries were the London Mission Society in south Travancore. Church Mission Society in central Travancore and Cochin areas and the Basel German Evangelical Mission in the Malabar area. Cochin area was made by Rev.J.Dawson opened an English school at Mattancheri in 1818 and it received a grant in aid from Cochin government. In Thrisur an English school was opened in 1837 and Cochin an English high school was started at Ernakulum under government auspices in 1845. It was raised to status of a college in 1875 [The Maharajas College of Today]

The great contribution of missionaries: providing literacy to the illiterate masses of princely states of Cochin, women’s education, patriotism, and the upliftment of the depressed classes and sowing the
Christian missionaries played an important role in the social liberation of the lower castes. The missionaries strove to secure equal rights for them. The stigma of untouchability that rested upon them for generations had led them to a sub-human level of existence. They were systematically exploited and kept down for centuries by caste Hindus. For many who got converted to Christianity it represented liberation from the dehumanising conditions of their existence. They were also benefited by the educational felicities provided by missions, the converts from the underprivileged groups made striking progress in their social and cultural life.

Missionary leaders in Cochin State, Rev. Hokes Worth, Rev. George Mathan, Rev. Henry Harley, they were mobilized the community of depressed classes and gave them the awareness with which to recover their human rights. Slaves castes were not admitted into schools in till 1865. It was the practice of the land lords to in humanity treat these classes of the soil who labored from dawn to dusk. Whatever the land owners said and there could be no dissent. Land lords opposed to education of slave caste, due to the paddy fields would be declined or field went dry. They believed that it was the granaries of the land lords that the slaves had toiled to till for their generations and also education could cause the erosion of manual labour force. After the abolition of slavery the educational efforts of the government and the private agencies are primarily engages the attention of the educational expansion in depressed classes. The activities of the Christian missionaries have contributed substantially to the educational progress of the state, owing to the caste system and slavery; the missionaries were at first forced to established separate schools for the education of the depressed classes. They were taken to promote social and economic equality and justice and to provide equal educational opportunities to all irrespective of caste and class considerations. In course of time the missionaries threw open the doors of their schools to pupils of all castes and creeds it caused a great social revolution in Kerala. In 1891 census report noted that in Perumanur Kalathil Pulaya Schoool, situated in the Kanayamnur taluk, 17 students belonged to the Pulaya caste had studied. The missionary education had created a new social consciousness among the downtrodden sections of the society.

V.Education and Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha.

The formation of the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha in 1913, created a new awareness among the pulayas. The leaders of the Pulayas realized that their petitions and the consequent moderate welfare measures by the government did not improve the condition of the lower castes. They believed that education was an important tool for the emancipation of the community and carried on intensive campaigns among the Pulayas to send their children to school. Pandit Karuppan and K.P. Vallon raised the problems of the depressed classes in the Cochin legislature. Taking this aspect in to consideration the government had adopted a liberal policy in the matter of giving educational concessions to depressed students. They were exempted from payment of fee at all levels of education. Lump sum grants for the purchase of books, clothes and free meals were given. Night schools and social welfare centers were opened in the areas where depressed classes lived in large numbers. A separate department was started for the upliftment of the depressed classes. In 1931 the government appointed a full time protector V R M Chohan to look after the literacy programme meant for the depressed classes. As a result of these steps taken by the government, there was remarkable increase in the number of pupils from depressed classes attending the schools. K.P. Vallon’s efforts led to the establishment of a government hostel for dalits in Ernakulam and the government gave free food and accommodation to the students. Spread of education among the lowest strata of the society enabled a section of the pulayas to obtain government jobs.

VI. Nationalist Movement in Education

The national movement received a new impetus in 1918 under the leadership of Gandhi which became a mass movement instead of being confined to the educated classes. National system of education should promote the national consciousness in the youth and inculcate a deep love for the motherland and pride in the cultural heritage. To achieve this purpose it was felt that education should be imparted through the language of the people it also emphasized scientific education and scientific research. In order to help economic growth to eliminate poverty and to provide decent living for all the citizens of the country. The leaders realized the need for literacy among the masses. Gandhi himself started adult education, as he realized that the national movement could never succeed without the cooperation and the involvement of the
masses. There was an inadequate appreciation of the need for education among the lower castes and classes in the urban areas and practically the entire group in the rural areas.

Spreading of education in the regional state of Cochin, the nationalist politics had played a crucial role. We know that the leaders of our national movement had stressed the liberation value of education. They exhorted the people to get educated and it alone could bring them out of colonial control. Educational facilities are extended to all the people of Cochin. The lowest caste people are also entitled to avail themselves of these facilities. The depressed classes realized that only by compulsory education they could achieve progress. These people are completely free from the hold of the caste.

VII. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the contribution of the missionaries in developing education among the depressed classes in Cochin State. The responsibility of the state in imparting free primary education to all irrespective of caste, creed or race had already been officially accepted. It can be traced to a deep-rooted longing for equality in education. Cochin Pulaya Mahasabha intensified its effort to nurture the new vigor and confidence of the Pulaya community. These people to give up their orthodox practices, superstitions and unrefined dress habits. They were not allowed access to public venues and their meetings were held on unused or government land, later they get freedom to travel without restriction. Sabha achieved through a favorable change in the attitude of the privileged community and also awake the lower caste people and brought them back into the mainstream society.

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