

The World of The Middle Class in Colonial Malabar

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Abstract

The cities which grew into prominence in Malabar at the turn of the last century became avenues for a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The introduction and expansion of railways eroded physical and emotional barriers regarding travel and mobility as did the relaxation of caste restrictions. At the workplace and beyond, what can be termed proto-friendships emerged between the natives and the Whites. Under the influence of the latter and the culture they represented, the native attire would get westernised. But whether it was the cities, railways, dress or relations with the Whites, the attitude of the Middle Class was not always consistent. This paper seeks to explore this ambiguous world the Middle Class inhabited in Colonial Malabar.

Keywords: Malabar, Middle Class, Cities, Transport, Dress, Friendships

Introduction

By the turn of the twentieth century, in Malabar, new towns were emerging while the older ones expanded further. So did transport, especially railways, which was to have a huge impact on the lives of the people in the region. As caste restrictions lost their earlier potency and people became more mobile with the advancement in transport, barriers, both spatially as well as at the level of the individual, began to fade. A sense of modesty combined with a cosmopolitan life brought about changes in the attire of the people. Meanwhile, at the work place and beyond, relations with the White ruling class provided moments of antagonism as well as the odd instances of what can be termed proto-friendships. This paper explores this world the middle class inhabited.

The Cities:

By the late nineteenth century, Malabar had its share of towns, though, compared to the metros, they were small ones. In fact, as late as the 1930s, it was observed that, in Malabar, 'there are, to all intents and purposes, no real towns. Such few towns as there are being

merely collections of bazaars or trading stations; and even these towns consist very largely of isolated houses in more or less extensive grounds of their own' (Hesterlow, 1932: 179). Traditionally, Kerala did not have big cities. This is partly explained by the absence of a strong central political power structure and technological development. Urban forms did develop during the colonial period through a well developed transport network, but due to the absence of a central node which link all towns and contributes to a major share of urban population and urban economic activity, no big cities emerged. As a result, decentralized small towns became the feature of the Kerala landscape with little difference between urban and rural cultural pattern. The emerging social forms have been characterized as rurban or semi-urban (Sreekumar, 1988:65).

Of the small towns then that existed in Malabar, the significant ones were Tellicherry and Calicut. Tellicherry, now Thalassery, is twenty one kms south from the present district headquarters, Kannur [formerly, Canannore]. It was established in 1663 by the British for the pepper and cardamom trade and was their first settlement on the Malabar Coast, buttressed by a fort built in 1708. With the end of Mysore rule, and later the defeat and death of Pazhassi Raja, Tellicherry rose into prominence possessing, among other things, the earliest light house in the state, port facilities, and a bridge on to the sea. It soon became a British centre with courts and government offices. Under the circumstances, the town also acquired a cosmopolitan character with Arab, Gujarati, European, and Konkani traders selling their wares. C.H. Kunhappa, who studied in the B.E.M.P School started by the Basel Mission with the help of the Parsees, refers to a 'Satram' near it, where every year 'the Chinese used to come with birds, coloured paper fans, etc. and in their amusing way eat with their small sticks' (Kunhappa, 1981:75). Writing in the late nineteenth century, Dunsterville found Tellicherry to be a 'healthy and pretty town built upon a group of well-wooded hills running down to the sea and protected by a natural rocky breakwater with suburbs five square miles...trade consisting largely of the export of coffee, cardamoms and other spices.' (Dunsterville, 1898:57). But Calicut, the former capital of the Zamorins, later became the British headquarters in the district and the principal town with a population in 1891 of 66,000, and a density of 4,000 per square mile. In the intellectual history of Tellicherry in the colonial period, names of a few natives stand out, O.Chandu Menon, in particular, who with his novel, *Indulekha* inaugurated a new era in Malayalam literature. Chandu Menon used a Malayalam, shorn of its Sanskritic trappings, and which was used by the common people, a trend

that continued in the years to come through the works of people like Sanjayan who too hailed from Tellicherry. So did Moorkoth Kumaran, one of the earliest and most prominent short story writers in Malayalam.

Then, there were a couple of foreigners who too contributed to the cultural well-being of the town – Hermann Gundert and Edward Brennen. It was sometime in early 1839 that Gundert, a native of Stuttgart in Germany set sail on a ship heading to the south western coast of India. After several weeks at sea, he reached Tellicherry, and there, at his house given to him by the judge, T.L. Strange, on the slopes of a small hill overlooking the Arabian Sea, he spent the next twenty years with his French wife and children, engaging himself in missionary work. An indirect result of Gundert's work was the impetus he gave to the development of the Malayalam language. In 1847, he started the first Malayalam newspaper, *Rajyasamacharam*, and a few years later, prepared the first lexicon in the Malayalam language. An elder contemporary of Gundert was the Englishman Edward Brennen, who after being shipwrecked on the coast of Tellicherry, spent years as an official at the town's port, and on retirement, before sailing back to England, left behind a small fortune for the native population to build an school which survives to this day in his name.

Apart from the enormous cultural clout Tellicherry possessed during this time, the town also had substantial economic significance. Consequent to the development of Tellicherry as an important centre of English trade, a few native families, notably the Keyis, allying with the foreigners, made considerable wealth. Kozhikode would later on become the capital of the Malabar district, but all along, the cultural impact of the English rule would be most felt in Tellicherry reflected in the earliest cricket Association of the state, and the numerous bakeries which sprang up during the colonial period. Tellicherry had the most and best bakeries – Mambally bakery set up in 1880 being the earliest, and for long, at least until Independence, the most popular. It is said that an Englishman once, on a Christmas eve, came to Mambally Bappu and ordered a Christmas cake. He baked as per the recipe provided, and the bakery never had to look back. Long queues comprising of white women outside the bakery was a common occurrence in those days.

One city to which a lot of Malayalis from Malabar were closely tied during the colonial period was Madras. Ashis Nandy speaks of 'the beckoning magic of the new colonial metropolis' (Nandy,2007:vii). Until the middle of the twentieth century, Madras had remained the capital of a vast presidency comprising most of south India, and attracting multitudes of educated migrants from the distant parts of the region.

Malayalis were no exception to this trend. In 1921, there were an estimated 8,000 Keralites in the city. And, by 1931, the figures had crossed 18,000. A majority of the Malayali migrants were from Malabar which was part of the presidency. One important reason for this migration had been the economic stagnation Malabar experienced during the colonial period. An equally significant factor had been the demise of the *Marumakkathayyam* system, and the resultant partition of *tarawad* lands. As Susan Lewandowski observes, ‘as land changes hands, more people became candidates for the rural to urban migration’ (Lewandowski, 1970:95).

Some like Sanjayan and C. Krishnan, of *Mithavadi* fame, went to Madras for their higher education at institutions like Madras Christian College and Presidency College. Others like C. Sankaran Nair took up residence there while practicing law. Still others like Kesava Menon, the long-time editor of *Mathrubhumi* went there for medical assistance for his ailing wife, after giving up a career in public life in Calicut. Some got very attached to the city, and when the time came to leave it, felt bad. P. Narayanan Nair, who made his mark as a journalist and then as a freedom fighter, for instance, wrote ‘while leaving Madras, naturally I felt sad... There were some permanent lodges where law students, and government employees stayed. I was staying in one such lodge. I had been active in the functioning of Malayalee Club and the Kerala Samaj founded by Dr. C.R. Krishna Pillai and others’ (Nair, 1973:73-74). Madras offered a lot of avenues for a vibrant public life. For instance, Muliyl Krishnan used to go once a week to the Cosmopolitan club to have coffee, while he was at Madras teaching at the Presidency college (Nair, 1932:83).

Those who studied in Madras came back to Malabar, and joined the government service as teachers, pleaders, clerks, revenue officials. Those who stayed back maintained close ties with their home and family in Malabar. Apart from the annual visits during vacations, occasions like birth, death and marriage also brought them home. Sometimes, relatives from Malabar came and stayed with their successful kinsmen in Madras.

Madras, in spite of its many attractions to the educated middle classes, like other big cities, invariably had its vices which find a mention in one of Kesari’s short stories, ‘*Madirasi Pithalattam*’ where one of its characters get cheated by an acquaintance after being lured into consuming a spurious drink (Nayanar, 1956:178-184). In fact, in an interesting article, A.R. Venkatachalapathy examines how in the popular imagination Chennai was perceived as a city of fraudsters out to cheat the gullible (Venkatachalapathy, 2006:59-72). Other cities too seemed to share its vices. S.K. Pottekkatt recounts how a fraudster who

befriended him in Bombay cheated him off the little money he had while on his very first visit to the city in 1934 (Pottekkatt,2008:7-18).

The towns in Malabar too had their pitfalls. The *West Coast Spectator* of 11th March, 1916 reported that in Calicut ‘brothels are everywhere, while certain localities about town are infested with fallen women to such an extent that it is dangerous to pass through them after night fall’ (The *West Coast Spectator*, 1916). But, still, for many amongst the lower castes, as Dilip M. Menon points out, modernity represented in the city was a liberating force. ‘If the village is the space of caste and inequality and marked by the static continuance of hierarchy’, writes Menon, ‘the city is the transformative space in which new individuals can be forged as subjects unmarked by subjection....*Sukumari*, set entirely in the city of Canannore with its fort, army barracks, armoury and camp bazaar, celebrates commerce over the moribund spaces of agriculture...[and] clearly establishes the link between escape from slavery, travel and social mobility’ (Menon,2004:500-501).

Cities and towns looked a lot different then. It is hard to imagine living in the second decade of the twenty first century, what the nights would have been like a century earlier. Electricity, for instance, was introduced in Kozhikode only in the 1930s, and even after that, for many years, inside many homes and on the streets, lamps were lit with the aid of kerosene. There was also much less traffic than now. And, for another, public places were dirtier and smellier! Even as late as the 1970s, in the early mornings, in many parts of Malabar including towns, scavengers used to carry night soil from homes in their little trolleys before shifting it to lorries, creating in its wake, an awful stink which would last for quite a while long after the vehicles had left. Kaattumadam Narayanan mentions how this activity used to spoil his breakfast while staying at Lakshmi Vilas lodge in Tali not far from its famous temple during a visit to Calicut (Narayanan,2012:102). Drainage system, meanwhile, was primitive, and the mosquitoes played havoc with the health and lives of the people, a point repeatedly raised by Sanjayan in his writings (Sanjayan,2006). The authorities were not too keen on the upkeep of sanitation. As filth accumulated around the Tali temple pond, and people complained, the colonial administration made it clear that this was not a public domain as the Zamorin, ex-*raja* of Calicut, did not allow entry to the lower castes (Seluraj,2004:64). A.M.V. Hesterlow, writing at the close of the nineteenth century, observed that there was a problem with hygiene and personal sanitation in Malabar as rubbish and waste accumulated in compounds, soil and water were polluted by

feces, and cases of hookworm, dysentery and diarrhea were the highest in the Presidency (Hesterlow,1932:182). Health and sanitation, however, did improve over time. Mayer, writing a couple of decades later thought that the people of Malabar were cleaner than their counterparts on the eastern coast because of abundant water supply which allowed them to take a bath at least once a day (Mayer,1952:12). Digging a well in Kerala which can provide potable water, as Joan Mencher points out, is not the problem that it is in other parts of India (Mencher,1976:135-171).

Transport

Transport facilities improved during the colonial period. But, like everything else, the growth was painfully slow. Even well into the twentieth century, horse drawn and bullock carts were the mainstay on the roads of Malabar until they were replaced by hand drawn carts. Some bicycles, a few cars owned mostly by doctors, and a handful of buses constituted the other means of transport. That was all that was required in fact since people hardly travelled beyond their immediate towns and villages. P.K.S. Kutty, the cartoonist, remembers that during his childhood at Ottapalam,

... bus services were in their infancy. Small buses, which would carry about twenty people, used to run on twenty or twenty five mile routes. Carts drawn by bullocks or buffalos were the usual vehicle to go places. Some horse drawn carts too were there. Rickshaws, pulled by men, a common vehicle for locomotion, were used for short distances. A few chaps had their own cycles. The palanquin or the manchal, which four men carried from place to place, continued to be the carriers for affluent people. Ottapalam had a single taxi cab(Kutty,2009:10).

Carts, which remained the chief medium of transport until the end of the nineteenth century, caused much havoc on the narrow roads. The *Kerala Sanchari* of 30th January, 1889 invited the attention of local police 'to the annoyance caused to passengers in transit carts by the reckless and negligent way in which the carts are driven in Canannore, Tellicherry, etc.,' and went on to add that 'like in Presidency towns, no one should become a driver except when pronounced fit to do so by a competent authority' (*Kerala Sanchari*, 1889:15). By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, motor transport had become common on the streets of Malabar towns. A fledgling motor transport system was not without its pitfalls. According to The *West Coast Spectator* of 26th September, 1916,

The increasing popularity of motor traction in Malabar calls for the increased attention of the police and magisterial authorities. We are constantly receiving complaints of breakdowns and accidents which

not only cause serious inconvenience, but result in injured limbs, and though not yet, lives. One does not, surely, like to be stranded in a strange locality in the dead of night by old engines and rickety cars. Stricter supervision by the authorities will be appreciated (*The West Coast Spectator*, 1916:1692)

The development in transport was closely linked to the promotion of the commercial interests of the English. Canals like the Conolly canal built in 1871 helped reach commodities from the interior to the port towns on the western coast. In the 1930s, roads got concretized in Malabar. They connected the plantations on the high eastern land like Wynad with Tellicherry and Calicut. The Ponnani – Coimbatore road led to Tamil country. Then, there was a road at the heart of Malabar, from Palghat, through Calicut along the coast to Mangalore.

The railways came into existence here in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first tracks were laid between Madras and Bypore in 1861, which was extended to Calicut some years later in 1888. Over time, the railways got extended through Tellicherry, Canannore and finally upto Mangalore. More than other means of transport, railways best served British commercial interests. Goods from Malabar, including its timber could now reach Madras. The Nilambur railways was, similarly, meant to serve the interests of Nilambur teak plantation as well as the ones in Wynad, and those of the European coastal firms like Pierce Leslie & William Goodacre Co., Volkart Brothers, and Aspinwall & Co. who monopolized the export of plantation products as well as imports for the plantation sector (Balan, 2000:35-39).

Meant initially to serve the British military and commercial interests, the railways hardly took care of the needs of the passengers. In the early years of its existence, traveling, especially in the third class compartments, was not a pleasurable experience. As *The West Coast Spectator* of July 26, 1913 commented ‘third class traveling in India is certainly not a luxury...Third class compartments on most railways are rickety, ill-ventilated, ill-roofed and ill-lighted’ (*The West Coast Spectator*, 1913:1201). There were occasions during the rainy season when leaking carriages made it imperative for passengers to travel keeping their umbrellas open (*Kerala Sanchari*, 1900:105). The racial discrimination the natives had to undergo while traveling was another handicap. *The West Coast Spectator* of February 12, 1916 reported that,

While over-crowded compartments and cattle trucks are quite sufficient for the Indian passenger, Eurasians and Europeans, whether loafers or

the lowest dregs of society...have comfortable compartments, specially reserved, and woe unto the Indian passenger who dares even to peep into the sacred enclosure (*The West Coast Spectator*,1916).

After mentioning how absence of level-crossings resulted in cattle being killed by moving trains, the *West Coast Spectator* of April 15, 1916 concluded that in this country, railway companies act on the principle that India is made for the railways, and not the railways for India (*West Coast Spectator*,1916).

In spite of these limitations, the railways, like elsewhere in India, had a huge impact on Malabar society. It helped in bringing in goods, mail, as well as the latest fashion from among other places, the nearest metropolis, Madras. Its utility was widely acknowledged, and often led to strange demands. For instance, an article in the *Kerala Sanchari* of July 3rd 1901 expressed the 'need for a railway station near Tiruvangad temple, as ladies around that area find it inconvenient to travel to the main station'(Kerala Sanchari,1901). The railways seems to have rendered unintended help to undesirable elements. The *Kerala Patrika* of 17 February, 1917 draws attention to 'the facilities afforded by the present timing of the night trains to the thieves of distant places like Walluvanad and Palghat to go to Calicut, commit thefts there and return' and observes that 'a change in the timing of trains is highly desirable' (*Kerala Patrika*,1917). It is said that the railways contributed to the people, even farmers, becoming conscious of the newly introduced clock time. In the school where P. Kunhanandan Nair (who later became more famous as *Thikkodiyann*) was working, once, one of the Union leaders, P.R. Nambiar came. It so happened that the office clock was not functioning. When asked how the school maintained its office timings, the reply was that by depending on the train timing – classes start at 10.15 a.m when the local train passes towards north, and classes get dissolved in the evening when it moves south at 4.15 p.m! (Thikkodiyann,2008:127-28). The railway time would one day become the country's civil time as well, the Indian Standard Time, fixed five and a half hours ahead of the Greenwich Mean Time.

Railways soon became a part of the everyday lives of the people here. Different communities, in fact, tried to mould its growth according to their convenience. In the beginning, the Kozhikode railway station had an opening towards Valiyangadi where Muslim rice merchants had their stores. When upper caste Hindus complained it was inconvenient for their womenfolk to walk through this street, it was relocated. Not all groups had it their way, though. When the Thiyya community leaders requested the government to change the location of

the station as one of their temples lay on its path, the government put down its foot and rejected their demand outright (Seluraj,2015:287-88).

New occupations, improvement in transport facilities, and the influence of modern scientific ideas helped break down several taboos, including those involving travel. Earlier, a Nair woman from North Malabar would not travel south of Kozhappuzha river, nor marry someone belonging to the same caste from across the river. But as a colonial official observed at the beginning of the twentieth century:

to this rule there is what appears to be an exception, and this exception is now, having some effect, since of late years the world has come in touch with the Malayali who now-a-days goes to the university, studies medicine and law in the Presidency town or even in far off England... the old order changeth everywhere, and now-a-days Malayalis who are in the Government service and obliged to reside far away from Malabar, and a few who have taken up their abode in the Presidency town, have wrenched themselves free of the bonds of custom, and taken with them their wives who are of other clans than theirs” (Fawcett,1915:7).

Moyarath Sankaran gives an instance of the breaking of the Kozhappuzha taboo in his memoirs – ‘when Rairu Nambiar who practised a long time as an advocate in the Madras High court took his wife to Madras, the community was angered. But that patriot did not mind’(Sankaran,1965:22). Similarly, when KPS Menon, from Ottapalam, married someone from Kottayam and practiced law there, he nor his wife were ever forgiven for that. But by the next generation, these kinds of cross-regional marriages had become passé. Of Menon’s two daughters-in-law, one was from Travancore, while the other came from Malabar (Lewandowski,1970:111).

Sartorial Changes

Until the later part of the nineteenth century, due perhaps to the hot weather, clothing was sparse as far as the people of Kerala were concerned. Thus, in Malabar, as M.G.S. Narayanan comments, there was ‘no demand for tailors as the climate did not make a lot of stitching necessary’(Narayanan,1999:16-17). In his study of social changes in colonial Malabar, M.S.A. Rao says that, in the earlier times, clothes were distributed among the *Tarawads* only twice a year, during the two important festivals, Onam and Vishu. They included *konakam* (loin cloth) *mundu* (dhoti) and *Tortu* (towel) for men; *Tuni* (cloth used as underwear), *pudava* (double cloth worn like a dhoti), and *neriyathu* (upper

garment) for women (Rao, 1957:77). Traditionally, even with regard to the limited attire in use, there had been caste restrictions on how to wear them. According to Mayer, formerly all upper castes of both sexes wore a simple white cotton cloth round the waist and reaching to the ankle (*mundu*), and a folded cloth thrown over the shoulder or across the chest. Tiyysans and others were not supposed to wear his clothes below their knees... and were forbidden the shoulder cloth...if they violated these rules, they were beaten up and their houses burnt (Mayer,1952:197).

But, slowly, under the impact of colonial modernity, the region witnessed sartorial changes. In the wake of a recently acquired sexualized subjectivity, with its notions of modesty and nudity, partly helped by the gendered divisions deployed in schools and colleges run by the missionaries and the government, an anglicized middle class took to European style of dress as is indicated in the photos and fiction of the period. For many, western dress was regarded as symbols of Europeanisation and of the economic efficiency and power that were supposed to result therefrom.

Some influential sections in Malabar used more or less fully western dress except for the traditional headgear and the *mundu* in public. One example would be Murkoth Kumaran who, according to his biographer, used golden specs, English twilshirt, black tie, coat, walking stick, shoes and a headgear (Kunhappa,1975:125-26). Mayer describes the compromise the Malayali male made with regard to dress thus: ‘the *mundu* is retained and a western shirt worn over it...trousers are certainly not advantageous in the Malabar climate’ (Mayer,1952:110-111). There were some like Sanjayan, who, though he used to talk only in English to students while in class and the staffroom, did not like wearing English dress. But then, it was compulsory to wear suit, tie and boots to Malabar Christian College. So, as a kind of compromise, he used to come to college in a suit, but once inside the class room, used to take it off! (Pazhassi,2000:86). P.K.S. Kutty, in his memoirs, recounts how incongruous it looked when some of his teachers at Malabar Christian College in the 1930s amalgamated the western attire with the regional - *mundu* and jacket, and sandalwood paste/ash on the forehead along with ties! (Kutty,2009:46).

Sartorial changes among women were even more significant. Reform movements of the twentieth century had highlighted the low position occupied by women in society which was seen as the sign of a civilization in decline. Of the Nambuthiri women, who remained, like the rest of the women folk in the state, half-naked, it was observed that ‘until and unless their status is low and they remain undecorated, Nambuthiri community shall never attain glory...Let us make these

unfortunate women human beings by providing right education, decent clothes, and appropriate ornaments' (Manezhi,1927:714-16). Consequently, improving the position of women became a central part of the reformist agenda. This was to include, among other things, a change in their appearance as well. The ideal was represented by, among others, Ravi Varma, in whose paintings, the heroine is not only modestly covered in a sari but wears a blouse as well (Mitter,1994:206).

Exposure to the outside world, made possible through modern means of transport, opened the eyes of a traditional society to its own drawbacks. As Mayer observed 'there has crept in lately, chiefly amongst those who have traveled, a feeling of shame in respect of this custom of dress (or lack of it!)' (Mayer,1952:198). A dramatic change in traditional attire was the consequence. In the second decade of the twentieth century, it was observed that 'nowadays, all upper-caste women wear bodices, though bare-breasts are not considered immodest for Cherumas. Coloured saris are starting to displace the traditional white cloth...' (Mayer,1952:110-11). The movement calling for changes in attire had to face opposition from the conservatives. Opposition to the sartorial changes, sometimes, came from within the family. For instance, C. Kesavan, in his Autobiography, writes of how when his mother first wore a blouse, she was beaten up by her mother in law, after which she confined the wearing of blouse only in the presence of her husband in the bedroom (Kesavan,2010:72-73). In *Rithumati*, a drama written by M.P. Bhattathirippad, when the heroine, an English educated Brahmin girl wears a blouse for the first time, her old fashioned uncle/ guardian tears it off in anger (Bhattadiripad (Premji),1991:57).

In the southern parts of the state, the lower caste women had to face violent opposition from the upper castes before they gained the rights to cover their breasts. But, comparatively, in Malabar, under direct colonial rule, sartorial changes were smoother. In clothing themselves, the Thiyya women, for instance, in the north of the state did not have to struggle like their lower-caste counterparts in the south. This was partly due to the effect of direct colonial rule in Malabar, and the proximity some Thiyya families enjoyed with the colonizers through marriage and otherwise. This could also be explained by the fact that the Thiyyas, though considered socially inferior, enjoyed numerical superiority and economic independence in many of these areas. Logan refers to Thiyya women from Canannore to Calicut covering their breasts with a cloth thrown over the left shoulder and brought forward under the right arm and tucked in behind or in front (Logan,1989:134.) In the early twentieth century, as is revealed in novels

like *Vasumati* written by Murkoth Kumaran, Thiyya women under Parsi influence, became pioneers in the wearing of sari (Kumaran, 1935:1-2).

Anglo – Indian relations

In the backyard of St. John's Church, located between the Arabian Sea and a British-built fort in Tellicherry, lies the tomb of Edward Brennen, one of those Englishmen of the nineteenth century who, for the work he did for the land, remains much loved by the natives. His association with the town began on a stormy monsoon evening in the early 1850s, when following a ship wreck, he was washed ashore. For the next couple of decades, after that, he worked in different capacities at the port in the quaint little town. He had a lot of friends among the natives, and legend has it that in the evenings, after work, he would move around the town in his horse-drawn carriage, throwing, in the process, coins to the street children who would follow him (Balakrishnan,2002:27). After retirement, Brennen would go back to England, but before that, he would keep aside a big part of his savings for the establishment of a school for native children which functions to this day.

During the long period the English were in the country, they maintained close ties with certain families, especially those engaged in business. One fine example for this was the relationship they had with the Keyis of Tellicherry. The Keyis were a business family originally from Canannore, but in early nineteenth century, shifted their base to Tellicherry. Beginning with pepper trade, they soon delved into other businesses including timber. So rich did they become that sometimes the East India Company depended on them for loans. In return, the Keyis got unstinted support from the English authorities. So confident were the Keyis of this support that they would, with audacity, carry goods through the seas belonging to the Cochin raja without paying taxes. This confidence was not misplaced became clear on more than one occasion including when the English establishment took the side of the Keyis in their dispute with the English planter, Murdoch Brown (Kurup&Esmail,2009:42). By the end of the nineteenth century, the equation had changed somewhat. Once they became the unchallenged power in this region, and the Keyis refused to update themselves in their business activities, the English would have no time for them.

It was at Tellicherry the British first set up their base, but later, Kozhikode was to develop into their headquarters. There, the English mostly stayed in the periphery of the town, at a height, in East and West Hills, very near to their barracks. But they continued to maintain

friendships with the natives, one prominent example being Karunakara Menon. He started his career as a clerk in the English East India Company in 1801, but, before retiring in 1834, had gradually rose in the ranks. He played an important role in the English campaign against Pazhassi, so much so that one of the last requests made by the latter before succumbing to his injuries was that Menon should not approach him so as not to be polluted by someone who lived in close proximity with the English (Jayakumar,2009:34). Menon was quite popular with the English officers, and when Captain Walsh visited Malabar, he spent a few days with Menon at his home in Ramanatukara, in the outskirts of Kozhikode, indulging in, among other things, hunting. Menon continued to be respected by the English authorities even after retirement, and was entrusted with the responsibility of mediating with the raja of Coorg against whom the English went to war in the early nineteenth century.

There were other examples too of what could be described as proto-friendships between the two communities. At the death of Churyayi Kanaran, who went on to become the Deputy Collector of Ponnani, Sir William Robinson, spoke thus:

In this bereavement – so sore to you all – I too have lost the most esteemed and respected friend I have made in India- a friend of thirty years’ standing and known to and respected by friends – especially our mutual departed one Mr. Conolly long before that (*Deepam*,1930:3).

Chandu Menon, the novelist, enjoyed a good rapport with his English superiors which partly was responsible for his promotions, as well as the acquisition of the ‘Rai Bahadur’ title. He dedicated his second work *Sarada* to the Malabar acting District Collector, Dumergue, who had got his *Indulekha* translated into English, and thereby provided it a wider readership. Both he and E. K. Krishnan were very close to Herbert Wigram, district Judge in South Malabar from 1875 to 1882, and, on the latter’s departure from Calicut, arranged for the awarding of a gold ring each to whoever came first in Matriculation and F.A. at Kerala Vidyasala (later Zamorin’s College) in his memory (Kumaran,1996:36). But this did not mean that Chandu Menon groveled before the colonizers. One of his biographers cites an instance involving the hot-tempered Davids, the district Judge, while Chandu Menon was a sub-judge. A Marar (a drummer) had gone to court complaining that the temple authorities had paid him less than what ordinarily a drummer would get during a festival. In order to decide on his mettle, Chandu Menon asked him to bring along a drum and show his skills within the courtroom, which he duly did. Needless to say, those in the neighbouring rooms were acutely

disturbed by what was going on. An angry Davids, after a peon sent to restore order failed in his mission, finally came to the spot himself. By then, Chandu Menon had judged that the Marar should be paid at the rate of an expert drummer. Though initially angry, Davids was finally forced to concede that Chandu Menon had been right in the matter, and shook hands with him” (Balakrishnan,1957:32-34). Others were even more forthright. One collector after taking office, as was the custom, met the editors of the local newspapers. On being introduced to Murkoth Kumaran, the editor of *Kerala Sanchari*, which had been critical of British officers, he said ‘Mr. Kumaran, my predecessor did not think much of you and your paper’, to which Kumaran is said to have retorted “nor did I think much of your predecessor’ (Kunhappa,1981:152). Some like the free-spirited Sanjayan quit his government job as a clerk at Calicut Hajoer office within months of joining as he had got tired of saluting higher officials (Pazhassi,2000:48). In the biography of Madhavan Nair, there is a reference to how when he was a lawyer he once walked out of the court when the arrogant District Judge J.C. Stodartt scolded him for being late, and returned only after the latter apologized (Moosathu,1987:43-44). There must have been many other instances where Indians felt humiliated at the workplace – some responding in kind like Madhavan Nair did, others suffering in silence - for, as Sumit Sarkar says ‘the office was also the point where the respectable, but struggling, Indian directly faced his predominantly foreign bosses, a situation marked by blatant distinctions in pay scales, racism, and insults which compounded the sense of the servitude of new jobs’ (Sarkar,2015:324).

Conclusion

Malabar was forever changed by the impact of colonial modernity. The responses by the locals to the forces of change were, however, not uniform or consistent. While for some, the newly emergent cities opened up avenues of emancipation, others became life-long critics of the vices they gave rise to. Those initially resistant to the railways, once they realized its inevitability, tried to manipulate its growth to the advantage of their communities. The transformation of the native attire to a western style remained an unfinished project, and those caught in between the two, ended up becoming objects of ridicule. The new milieu threw up few instances of proto-friendships between the natives and the ruling classes even as racial tensions, for the most part, simmered underneath. The inconsistencies and contradictions of the Middle class were inevitable in the fractured nature of the modernity colonialism gave rise to in Malabar.

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