

From Words to Action: Unraveling the Dynamics of C.V. Kunjuraman's Contribution to Social Protest and Change in Modern Kerala

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Abstract

This paper examines the influential role of C.V. Kunjuraman in transforming Kerala's socio-political landscape during a time of pervasive caste-based discrimination and social injustice. Utilizing Edward Bulwer-Lytton's adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword," it explores how Kunjuraman employed his literary talents and oratory skills to challenge oppressive systems. Born into poverty in 1871, he became a prolific writer, lawyer, and advocate for social equality, playing pivotal roles in movements such as the Civic Rights Movement and the Temple Entry Movement.

Inspired by Sree Narayana Guru, Kunjuraman founded the Kerala Kaumudi newspaper, which served as a vital platform for voicing the concerns of marginalized communities and mobilizing public support. This study highlights how his efforts contributed to a shift from rigid caste hierarchies to a more egalitarian society, demonstrating the power of writing and public discourse in effecting social change in Kerala.

Introduction

In the annals of social change, the power of the written word has often been celebrated as a formidable force, eloquently captured in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's assertion that "The pen is mightier than the sword." This sentiment resonates profoundly in the life and work of C.V. Kunjuraman, a pivotal figure in the socio-political landscape of modern Kerala. Born in 1871 into a humble family in Mayyanad, Kunjuraman emerged as a multifaceted personality—a writer, lawyer, and orator—who dedicated six decades to championing the rights of the marginalized and challenging the entrenched social injustices of his time. His diverse talents and unwavering commitment to social equity positioned him as a beacon of hope for those oppressed by the rigid caste system and myriad superstitions that plagued Kerala society.

Kunjuraman's formative years were marked by a deep thirst for knowledge, despite limited formal education. His educational journey, which began at the L.M.S missionary school and continued at the Government High School in Kollam, culminated in a self-driven exploration of the classics, including the Mahabharata and Ramayana. This intellectual curiosity ignited a passion for social reform that would define his life's work. Inspired by the progressive ideals of Sree Narayana Guru and the poetic genius of Kumaran Asan, Kunjuraman understood that true liberation required not only political reform but also a radical transformation of societal attitudes and practices.

The socio-political context of Kerala at the time was fraught with severe inequalities and institutionalized oppression. The majority of the population, particularly the lower castes, faced relentless social exploitation and discrimination, subjected to the harsh realities of rigid caste rules and

superstitions that dictated their existence. Public spaces, educational institutions, and even places of worship were largely inaccessible to them, effectively rendering many individuals invisible within their own society. Kunjuraman recognized these injustices and committed himself to a crusade against the social evils that perpetuated such inequities. He became a vocal critic of superstition, using humor and wit to dismantle the unfounded beliefs that ensnared the minds of many.

Throughout his life, Kunjuraman wielded his pen as a powerful weapon in this struggle. He started a school for low-caste Hindus in Vellamanal, Mayyanad, where he also served as headmaster, demonstrating a profound belief in the transformative power of education. His foray into journalism began with his contributions to *Sujanandini*, paving the way for his establishment of the influential *Kerala Kaumudi* in 1911. This publication, initially a weekly newspaper, evolved into a platform for sharp and vibrant criticism, inspiring countless individuals from marginalized communities to rise against their oppression. Kunjuraman's editorial acumen and powerful language galvanized a movement for social justice, creating a conducive environment for political and social action.

Kunjuraman's contributions were not limited to journalism; he played a crucial role in several pivotal movements in Kerala's history. His involvement in the Civic Rights Movement marked a significant chapter in the struggle for social equality. This grassroots initiative sought to secure rightful access to government services and public spaces for the Ezhavas, Christians, and Muslims—communities historically marginalized by caste discrimination. Kunjuraman's advocacy extended to demanding representation for these groups in governmental structures, culminating in his submission of a memorial to the Simon Commission in 1928. His efforts laid the groundwork for subsequent movements, such as the Abstention Movement and the Temple Entry Movement, both of which sought to dismantle the barriers imposed by the caste system.

The Abstention Movement, particularly significant in the 1930s, arose in response to perceived inadequacies in legislative representation for marginalized communities. Kunjuraman's leadership during this tumultuous period underscored his unwavering commitment to justice and equality. He articulated the grievances of the oppressed, advocating for meaningful reforms that would empower them politically, socially, and economically. His speeches in the *Sree Mulam Prajasabha* were instrumental in voicing the demands for an end to untouchability and access to public spaces, including temples.

Moreover, Kunjuraman's endeavors were enriched by his collaboration with other prominent leaders of the time, such as Dr. Palpu and Ayyankali, all of whom were influenced by the enlightened teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. Together, they championed a material approach to social reform, infused with spiritual principles that sought to uplift the Ezhava community and foster unity among its members. Through these collective efforts, Kunjuraman and his contemporaries effectively transformed the narrative around caste and community, shifting from a discourse of oppression to one of empowerment and solidarity.

Epistemological Review

The exploration of C.V. Kunjuraman's contributions to social protest and change in modern Kerala requires a nuanced understanding of the intricate socio-political fabric of the region. This fabric has been woven through centuries of historical events, cultural shifts, and social movements. The literature surrounding this topic is extensive and offers multiple perspectives on religion, caste, and social dynamics, providing a rich backdrop against which Kunjuraman's activism can be better understood.

A foundational text in this discourse is Ahuja's *Society in India: Concepts, Theories and Changing Trends* (1999), which lays out essential sociological theories relevant to social movements. Ahuja's exploration of social stratification and change provides a theoretical framework for analyzing Kunjuraman's role within the broader context of Kerala's evolving society. Similarly, Aiyar's various works, including *A Short History of Kerala* (1966) and *A History of Travancore* (1938), document the socio-political evolution of the region, elucidating the historical circumstances that shaped Kunjuraman's activism. Aiyar's narratives highlight the interplay between regional identity and social reform, setting the stage for understanding Kunjuraman's contributions.

The examination of caste as a central theme in Kerala's social structure is critically addressed in texts like Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970) and Ghurye's *Caste and Race in India* (1969). These foundational works articulate how caste systems have historically influenced political and social movements in India, providing context for Kunjuraman's challenges against entrenched social hierarchies. This examination is essential for understanding how caste dynamics informed Kunjuraman's strategies for social change and the push for greater equality in Kerala.

In addition to caste, the role of religious movements in shaping societal norms is explored in Forrester's *Caste and Christianity* (1980) and Farquhar's *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1967). These texts delve into how Kunjuraman's Christian background influenced his activism and the broader context of social reform in Kerala. They highlight the intersection of faith and social justice, underscoring how religious ideologies can either reinforce or challenge existing social structures.

Balakrishnan's *Narayana Guru: An Anthological Compilation* (1969) and Mannathu Padmanabhan and the *Revival of Nairs in Kerala* (1982) explore the contributions of prominent social reformers in Kerala, positioning Kunjuraman within a tradition of social reform and resistance. By examining the works and philosophies of these figures, one can better appreciate the lineage of thought and action leading up to Kunjuraman's initiatives, which were often in dialog with other reformist movements.

The impact of conversion and its social implications are critically examined in Antony Raj's *Social Impact of Conversion* (2001) and Ayyappan's *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village* (1965). These works provide insights into the complex relationship between religious conversion and social equality in Kerala. They illustrate how Kunjuraman's advocacy for social justice intersected with issues of faith, identity, and community belonging, revealing the multifaceted nature of his activism.

Moreover, the political history of Kerala, as chronicled by Menon in *A Concise Political History of Modern Kerala* (1987), offers essential context for Kunjuraman's activism during pivotal moments of change. Menon's analysis of the political landscape of Kerala from 1885 to 1957 sets the stage for understanding the legislative and social reforms that Kunjuraman supported. This historical perspective enables a deeper appreciation of the challenges and opportunities that Kunjuraman faced as he navigated the political environment of his time.

Chander's *The Legislative Process in Kerala* (1981) provides further insights into the institutional responses to social protests, highlighting how legislative frameworks both influenced and were influenced by social movements. This analysis is crucial for understanding how Kunjuraman's efforts were situated within the larger political discourse and how they contributed to shaping policy and public opinion in Kerala.

The literature also discusses the role of communalism in shaping identities and social dynamics in Kerala. Works such as Basu's *Communalism, Ethnicity and State Politics* (2000) and Chandra's *Communalism in Modern India* (1984) examine how communal identities have historically influenced

social movements and political actions in the region. These discussions are vital for contextualizing Kunjuraman's work, as they reveal the complex interplay between religious identities and political activism.

In sum, the extensive body of literature surrounding C.V. Kunjuraman's contributions to social protest and change in modern Kerala not only contextualizes his activism but also frames it within the wider historical and social narratives of the region. Through examining these texts, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in Kerala's socio-political landscape during Kunjuraman's era.

Methodology Followed in the Study

This study employs a qualitative historical methodology to analyze the profound impact of C.V. Kunjuraman on social change in Kerala during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The methodology is primarily grounded in an examination of primary and secondary sources, including Kunjuraman's writings, contemporaneous newspaper articles, historical texts, and relevant socio-political analyses.

1. Historical Contextualization

The study begins by situating Kunjuraman within the socio-political landscape of Kerala, characterized by rigid caste structures and systemic social injustices. Historical accounts highlight the institutionalization of caste oppression, drawing parallels to the experiences of marginalized communities elsewhere, such as the aborigines of America. This contextualization is crucial for understanding the urgency and necessity of Kunjuraman's interventions.

2. Literature Review

The methodology incorporates a comprehensive literature review of existing scholarship on caste dynamics in Kerala, social reform movements, and the writings of contemporary figures like Kumaran Asan and Sree Narayana Guru. This review provides a theoretical framework that informs the analysis of Kunjuraman's contributions and the broader implications for social reform.

3. Analysis of Primary Sources

A significant aspect of the methodology involves a close reading of Kunjuraman's journalistic and literary outputs, particularly from his role as the editor of Kerala Kaumudi and other publications. This analysis elucidates how he utilized the written word as a tool for social critique and mobilization. The study also examines his speeches and memorials, particularly during pivotal movements like the Civic Rights Movement and the Abstention Movement, to illustrate his rhetorical strategies and advocacy for the rights of lower castes.

4. Case Studies of Social Movements

The research identifies and details specific case studies of significant movements in which Kunjuraman played a pivotal role. This includes the Civic Rights Movement, which sought representation and access to public amenities for marginalized communities, and the Temple Entry Movement, which challenged the exclusionary practices of caste-based discrimination. Each case study is analyzed for its socio-political impact and Kunjuraman's strategic involvement.

5. Biographical Analysis:

The study contextualizes Kunjuraman's life, tracing his early education, career trajectory, and socio-political activism. His evolution from a teacher and lawyer to a reformist journalist is analyzed to establish the motivations and impact of his work.

6. Thematic Focus:

Themes such as caste oppression, social reform, and the interplay of spirituality and material progress are explored. The research investigates how Kunjuraman utilized the principles of Sree Narayana Guru to inspire marginalized communities while fostering a secular approach to societal transformation.

The Power of the Pen: C.V. Kunjuraman's Crusade for Social Justice in Kerala

When Edward Bulwer-Lytton used the remark 'The pen is mightier than the sword' in his play *Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy*¹ written in the year 1839 or George Whetstone who expressed the same idea in *Heptameron of Civil Discourses*, they might have foresaw the possibility of the use of pen for social change like the one accomplished by C.V. Kunjuraman, a multifaceted personality who dominated the socio - political and literary - journalistic fields in modern Kerala for six decades. He was a versatile genius- a writer of vast range and depth, lawyer and an orator of repute. He was a social revolutionary who followed the path lighted by Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan. He relentlessly strove for the freedom of worship, social equality and advancement of the depressed classes of Kerala using his pen and platform. He started a crusade against the social evils and infused a spirit of rebellion in the body politic of these sections of people. He questioned superstitions of every sort in the most hilarious manner.

The period in which C.V. Kunjuraman lived in Kerala was noted for social abuses and inequalities where large majority of the people were subjected to social exploitation, humiliation and slavery by the application of rigid caste rules and popularisation of superstitions and prejudices.² No other parts in British India where the pollution laws so strictly observed than in Kerala. The low castes were not permitted to enter into the public places like post office, courts, village office etc. They were not only denied entry into the temples but also were disallowed to walk on the roads leading to the temples. In Kerala by the middle of the 19th century social oppression became institutionalised that its enforcement was so embedded in the everyday working of social life that it was not easily identified as oppression.

Kumaran Asan the great poet of Kerala, once stated that "the cruelty and ruthlessness shown to the lower castes of Kerala, by the higher castes were comparable to the cruelty shown to the aborigines of America by the settlers from Spain." He also stated, "It would have been no wonder if the people of the lower castes decide to leave their villages and go to the forests and live like animals reversing the process described in Darwin's theory of evolution."³ The traditional caste structure in Kerala was designed in such a manner that it resulted in the drastic reduction of political equality to the lower castes, which also transmitted reduction of equality in other spheres such as economic, educational, social and cultural.⁴

In the given environment the organisations which represented the lower castes started their protest with the aim of achieving social change, which involved a transformation in social, political and economic organisation. This transformation was from the change- resistant -sacred outlook to the change- ready secular outlook. In Kerala social changes took place through contradictions. The shift of change was from structural relations to human relations or from caste hierarchical structure to inter personal relations. For achieving this, social conflict was necessary. It was in this context that persons like C.V. Kunjuraman carried the mantle of protest against the established tyranny.

C.V. Kunjuraman was born in a poor family as the son of Velayudhan and Kunhichali at Mayyanad near Kollam in 1871. He had his elementary education at the L.M.S missionary school, Mayyanad and Government High School, Kollam. He studied only up to fourth forum which is equivalent to the present

eighth standard. But his passion for knowledge induced him to learn the classics like Mahabharata and Ramayana and in due course became an enlightened scholar enabling him to fight against the superstitions of every sort.⁵ He started a school for the low caste Hindus at Vellamanal, Mayyanad, Kollam and became its head master. At his stint as school head master, he appeared for criminal test equivalent to law degree and came out successfully. Though he started his career as a teacher he later opted to be an advocate and joined Paravoor magistrate court as a criminal lawyer. He used his pen as the weapon to fight against the dirty customs existed in the society. He opened his journalistic career and got acquainted in the literary circles through his writings in *Sujanandini* published from Paravur owned by Paravur Kesavan Asan.⁶

Subsequently he served as its sub editor. He was behind publishing the daily *Kerala Kaumudi* initially from Mayyanad and then from Thiruvananthapuram in 1911. It was started as a weekly newspaper and he was the proprietor-editor, printer and publisher. Its sharp and vibrant criticism and powerful language inspired the aggrieved communities of Kerala and created a favourable condition for political and social action. He also worked as editor of publications like *Malayalarajyam*, *Navajeevan*, *Kathamalika*, *Yukthivadi*, *Navasakthi*, *Bhashaposhini* and *Vivekodayam*. In addition to his credit as a prolific writer, C.V. Kunjuraman also functioned as a member of the Sree Mulam Prajasabha.⁷

Like Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Asan, Ayyakkutti, T.K.Madhavan, C. Krishnan and Sahodaran Ayyappan, he also worked under the spiritual halo of Sree Narayana Guru. In fact all of them adopted a material approach enriched by the spiritual principles of guru for the transformation of a major community of Kerala from the position of polluting community to the status of a powerful community in Kerala. All these leaders very effectively utilised Sree Narayana Guru as a principal instrument in the upliftment of Ezhava community. Guru was an indispensable link between the educated Ezhavas and the Ezhava masses. His name was thus a valuable instrument for promoting Ezhava unity.⁸

C.V. Kunjuraman: Advocate for Social Justice in Travancore

C.V. Kunjuraman played a pivotal role in all the social and political movements started in Travancore from 1900 till his death in 1949. His support became crucial in the Civic Rights Movement, Abstention Movement, Temple Entry Movement and the Struggle for Responsible Government- all of them were the stepping stones for the progressive transformation of Kerala society. The Civic Rights Movement was the first popular political movement started in Travancore by the aggrieved communities of the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims for getting due share in the government service including the revenue department and for access to all public amenities and Hindu temples. Traditionally the revenue department was considered inaccessible to the non-Hindus and non caste - Hindus, for Devaswoms had been attached to that department.⁹

Christians and Muslims were debarred from the appointment in the Revenue department on religious grounds while the Ezhavas and other low castes on caste grounds. When the movement progressed C.V. Kunjuraman submitted a memorial to the Simon Commission for communal representation of the aggrieved communities in 1928. He demanded for the Ezhavas either representation by separate electorates or reservation of an adequate number of seats in the general electorates.¹⁰ He effectively used the pages of his newspaper *Kerala Kaumudi*, membership in the popular assemblies and his position as the General Secretary of S.N.D.P Yogam for the cause of the aggrieved communities. Along with Ayyankali C.V. Kunjuraman also demanded the necessity of putting an end to untouchability and

removing restrictions over the avarnas in the state while delivering his speech in the Sree Mulam Prajasabha in 1921.¹¹ The demand for temple entry, the right to walk through the temple roads and the abolition of untouchability were some of the major demands raised by C.V.Kunjuraman using the pen and platform.

The Abstention Movement: Kunjuraman's Fight for Representation

The Princely state of Travancore in the 1930's witnessed a turbulent political agitation initiated by the aggrieved communities like the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims for the purpose of adequate representation in the legislative bodies and public service, which produced consequences of far reaching magnitude. This agitation was in a sense, a continuation of the Civic Rights Struggle of the 1920's and the movement started by the aggrieved communities came to be called in Travancore history as Abstention Movement or Nivarthana Prakshohanam. This movement was started against the legislative reform proclaimed on 28 October 1932 as Regulation II by His Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal Maharaja.¹² It was alleged that the new constitutional reform was the brainchild of C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, the Legal and Constitutional Advisor of the Maharaja.

The main feature of the reform was the constitution of a bicameral legislature- the Sree Mulam Assembly and Sree Chitra State Council.¹³ The Assembly, the lower house which was the main legislative body consisted of 72 members of whom 62 were non- officials and 10 officials. Out of the 62 non-officials, 43 were elected by the general constituencies and 5 by special constituencies representing landlords, planters, commerce and industry. Fourteen seats were reserved for the nomination of members from the communities who were considered unable to secure adequate representation by general election. The council consisted of 37 members of whom 27 non-officials and 10 officials. Sixteen non-officials were elected from the general constituencies and 6 from special constituencies. To ensure the representation of the minorities provision was made for the nomination of 5 persons. In the lower house the franchise qualification was open to both sexes who paid a land tax of Rs. 5/- or more or income tax or municipal tax of Re.1/- or more per annum, graduates and retired military officials residing in the state. Higher qualification was stipulated to the council i.e., a land tax of Rs.25/- or more.¹⁴

The aggrieved communities of Travancore viewed the new reform as a measure to perpetuate tyranny. Among the leaders who raised the mantle of protest against the new regulation, C.V. Kunjuraman was in the forefront. An organisation known as Ezhava Political League held a meeting on 31 July 1932 at Kollam under the Presidentship of C.V. Kunjuraman. In this meeting Kunjuraman made a long and thought- provoking speech and with the support of statistical data he alleged that natural justice was denied to a fair number of communities in Travancore. He questioned the legitimacy of the word Sri Mulam Popular Assembly to the constitutional body of Travancore. He argued, "It consisted of 100 members of whom 77 elected and 23 nominated. The qualification of the voters was remittance of 50 rupees land tax. To such an assembly the most suitable name will be feudal Assembly. But it will not give me surprise because in our country we are naming blackish babies as white baby (*velumban*)."¹⁵ He severely criticised the nomination system adopted by the government for accommodating the unrepresentative communities and alleged that there were many instances of forgeries which occurred during the process of nomination.¹⁶ He demanded universal adult franchise and communal representation. To protest against the new reform a new political organisation known as All Travancore Joint Political Conference or Samyuktha Rashtriya Samiti was formed. A memorial was submitted to the

Diwan by a deputation consisted of C.V. Kunjuraman, N.V. Joseph, E.V. Varghese, Valsalam Rose, Thariath Kunji Thomman, P. S. Mohammad, K. I. Kocheepan Mappilai, K.C. Eapen, K. M. Kesavan, and P. K. Kunju demanding communal representation. ¹⁷

In the election held in 1933, the representatives of the aggrieved communities did not contested and boycotted from the election. Through his tactics of *divide et empera* Diwan C. P. Ramaswamy succeeded in influencing C.V. Kunjuraman and a few other leaders by offering seats in the Sree Mulam Popular Assembly. For a short interregnum C.V. Kunjuraman stood aloof from the Abstention movement. But later he realised the real nature of C.P. when his son-in-law C. Kesavan was arrested and imprisoned following the Kozhenchery speech. As a protest against this incident C.V. Kunjuraman resigned his membership from the Sree Mulam Assembly in 1935.¹⁸ Once again he began actively involved in the social protest movement. When the government appointed the franchise commission for settling the issues of the aggrieved people, S.N.D.P. Yogam Board meeting held under the presidentship of C.V. Kunjuraman on 25 August 1935 expressed extreme satisfaction over the new developments. As per the new franchise reform elections were conducted in April 1937. The election results vindicated the stand of the Abstentionists. All the candidates sponsored by the Joint Political Congress came out victorious.

Kunjuraman and the Temple Entry Proclamation of Travancore

The situation created by C.V. Kunjuraman for the Temple Entry Proclamation of Travancore on 12 November 1936 which saved Hinduism from its impending danger of destruction and put a stop to the conversion propaganda of the Christians in Travancore.¹⁹ A closer analysis of the events preceding the Temple Entry Proclamation reveals many hard realities, which prompted the Maharaja to issue the proclamation. It was the net result of the conversion threat of Ezhavas, the realisation of the Dewan and the Maharaja about the ever declining numerical strength of Hindus, after effects of the victory of the alliance of three major religious communities - Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims through the Nivarthana Agitation, the divide and rule policy of Dewan C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, popularity of Gandhian Programme of anti-untouchability and the growth of rationalist movement. In Travancore, Raman Thampi, a High Court Judge, firstly raised the demand for temple entry. When he first raised the issue he was an Advocate practising in Kollam.

While delivering the presidential address in the Sree Narayana Guru Jayanthi meeting held at Kollam in 1918, Raman Thampi argued that, it was not necessary for the Ezhavas to construct new temples and should start a movement for entry in public temples.²⁰ After this exhortation, S.N.D.P leaders began to think earnestly over the issue of temple entry demand. It was C.V. Kunjuraman who firstly wrote an article demanding temple entry for the low caste people of Kerala and handed it over to K.P. Kayyalakkal who owned the *Desabhimani* newspaper and its editor T. K. Madhavan. In the beginning they were little reluctant to publish it, thinking over its consequences, but later decided to seek legal opinion. N. Kumaran, an advocate who was also an SNDP Yogam leader gave his green signal for its publication. This was published as an editorial in *Deshabhimani*.²¹

The editorial pointed out that except a few conservative Nambudiri Brahmins, all other communities would be positive over the demand. C.V. Kunjuraman addressed various public meetings in which he argued that the Ezhava community and the SNDP Yogam took up the issue after much discussion.²² He asked the avarna Hindus to dissociate with the savarna Hindu temples until their temple entry rights

were accepted. He wrote in *Kerala Kaumudi* that his exhortation produced positive effects and as a consequence the economic position of Ezhava temples increased where as it adversely affected the caste Hindu temples.²³ C.V. Kunjuraman also demanded temple entry in the Sree Mulam Popular Assembly in 1920. The same demand was reiterated by persons like T.K. Madhavan, Kunju Panikkar and Chavarkottu Marthandan Vaidyan.²⁴ The leader of S.N.D.P Yogam T. K. Madhavan succeeded in convincing Gandhiji the need for temple entry in Kerala and the Congress activities created a necessary climate conducive for the Temple Entry Proclamation.

The conversion threat of the Ezhava community posed by the S.N.D.P Yogam leaders especially C.V. Kunjuraman was a major factor that compelled Diwan C.P to advice the Maharaja for the Temple Entry Proclamation. Ever since the emergence of S.N.D.P.Yogam that guaranteed caste solidarity to different sub -divisions of the Ezhavas, the elites of this community devised various measures and adopted various tactics for the social and political advancement of the members that the community represented. They have unequivocally declared that political freedom even if attained from the British rule would be meaningless unless it was backed by social and economic freedom. Kumaran Asan raised the same principle in his work *Oru Thiyyakkuttiyude Vicharam* in which he raised his question “For what this swaraj when men struggled with caste prejudices.” For majority of people including Kumaran Asan what was important was their primary freedom - freedom to walk through the public roads, freedom to get admission in the sirkar schools, freedom of access to Government services and above all a recognition that they were also citizens.²⁵

Several low caste people of Travancore including Ezhavas converted themselves into other religions especially Christianity since they found it the easiest way to escape from caste tyranny. In Kerala since the beginning of the 19th century the protestant missionaries succeeded in gaining a good many converts, especially among the lowest ranking castes. But on the issue of religious conversion the opinions of Ezhava leaders radically differed and these differences of opinions they expressed through their publications. From the very beginning itself the official publication *Vivekodayam* adopted a moderate stand on many issues including conversion. On the other hand publication like *Mitavadi* of C. Krishnan, *Sahodaran* of K. Ayyappan and *Kerala Kaumudi* of C.V. Kunjuraman adopted extreme radical stands.

Mitavadi C. Krishnan and *Sahodaran* Ayyappan strongly favoured the conversion of Ezhavas to Buddhism. They presented Buddhism as an anti-thesis to discriminatory Hinduism. They made a lot of homework to reproduce the heritage of the Ezhavas to Buddhist religion and asserted that it was because of the Ezhavas’ alleged commitment to Buddhist teachings; their social status was pushed down to the lower rung of caste hierarchy by the Brahmin law givers. There were instances of conversion to Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism.

Christianity was suggested as an alternative choice for the Ezhavas to convert. The strongest upholder of this idea was C.V. Kunjuraman. Generally the Ezhavas and other low castes had a positive approach towards Christianity because they had benefited considerably by the schools run by the missionaries. They also reiterated the service rendered by the missionaries for abolishing many social abuses from the society. *Mitavadi* published an editorial in 1920 in which it claimed that majority of the existing Christians hailed from the Ezhava community.²⁶ They thought that under the prevailing Travancore conditions, where Christian population numbered almost one third and was burgeoning, mass conversion of Ezhavas to Christianity could indeed have been a threat perceived to both the government and higher

castes. C.V. Kunjuraman was impatient to wait more and contacted with Rev. Moor, the Kottayam Bishop who was also a British Personnel, to sort out the methods for Ezhava conversion.²⁷ On 17 March, 1936, C.V. Kunjuraman participated in the Maramon Convention and declared that Ezhavas were going to embrace Christianity. He proclaimed that if any Ezhava leader was going to convert Christianity, he would be the first person. He wrote a pamphlet entitled *Izhavarude Matha Parivarthanam* (Conversion move of Ezhavas).²⁸

In this pamphlet C.V.Kunjuraman asserted that Christianity was the best choice for the Ezhavas to convert. Hinduism had given to the Ezhava only miseries. He argued, “conversion move was only a normal phenomena and innumerable conversions occurred in our world. Among 35 crores of people in India 8 crore Muslims, 63 lakhs Christians, 83 lakhs Sikhs, 1 crore 28 lakhs Buddhists and 13 lakhs Jains, all were converted from Hinduism.” He pointed out that Christianity was the number one religion in the world and even went to the extent of arguing the two famous messages of Sree Narayana Guru, i.e., ‘One Caste, One Religion and One God to Man’ and ‘whatever be one’s religion, that is enough, if man is good’ are the justifications for conversion to Christianity. In Christianity there is only one caste, one religion and one God. So also Christianity is working for making man good whereas Hinduism is trying to degrade humanity including Ezhavas to the category of Chandalas.²⁹

To make the matter more serious, various S.N.D.P. Yogam branches passed resolutions in favour of the conversion of Ezhavas and sent it to the Head Office. When the S.N.D.P. committee held at Kollam in March 1936, this issue came up for discussion and to study the problem a fifteen-member committee was constituted. A voting was conducted in the meeting to ascertain the pulse of the members on the question of conversion of Ezhavas to Christianity. Among the 30 members, 26 voted in favour of embracing Christianity. Two persons stood in favour of Islam. K. P. Kayyalackal and P. R. Narayanan adopted a neutral policy.³⁰

A referendum was conducted by the S.N.D.P to ascertain the opinion of Ezhavas of Travancore on the conversion issue. Some Ezhava leaders requested the authorities of Kottayam Anglican Church to give them permission to witness the mode of worship in the church. They were given permission and they participated in the prayer also.

The Christian missionaries and the church authorities followed favouritism towards the Ezhava community realising that the situation was very ripe for them. Many Christian propagators rushed to Travancore with huge money to influence the Ezhavas. The C.M.S. opened a special department named “Mission to Ezhavas.”³¹ C.V. Kunjuraman wrote that it was the high time for Ezhavas to accomplish the conversion. Christian publications had given wide publicity to his arguments. A huge meeting was held at Changanacherry under the leadership of Sahodaran Ayyappan for deciding the conversion issue. But the brain behind this meeting was C.V. Kunjuraman. Bishops invited Kunjuraman to their aramanas and made discussions with him. Dewan C. P. Ramaswamy realized the impending danger of the move. Thus if the Temple Entry Proclamation was a move against conversion threat, the Proclamation was not a part of national integration, but was a Hindu integration against Christianity.

C.V. Kunjuraman's Role in Travancore's Quest for Responsible Government

In the struggle for responsible government started in Travancore, C.V. Kunjuraman played a conspicuous role. The decision to form the Travancore State Congress was taken in the meeting held at Rashtriya hotel, Thiruvananthapuram under his presidentship in 1937. He effectively used his pen and

platform for attacking the policies of C. P. Ramaswamy. When his stirring criticism reached beyond limitations, C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer turned against C.V. Kunjuraman and his publications, *Kerala Kaumudi daily* and *Kaumudi weekly*. On 17 March 1938 both these publications were banned. But the ban was later lifted as part of his divide and rule policy. Even though C.V. Kunjuraman could breathe the thin air of democracy and peoples' power with the attainment of independence of the country, he could not survive to witness the formation of the state of Kerala and the emergence of the democratic government. He passed away in 1949 at the age of 78 after a fruitful innings spanning nearly six decades in social and political arena and serving twice as the General Secretary of S.N.D.P in 1928 and 1931. But his voices and wordings were instrumental in the transformation of Kerala society and polity.

Conclusion

C.V. Kunjuraman stands out as a transformative figure in Kerala's struggle for social justice, demonstrating how the written word and oratory can catalyze significant social change. His life, spanning from 1871 to 1949, was marked by a relentless commitment to fighting against the oppressive social structures that characterized his time. In a society where caste-based discrimination was institutionalized, Kunjuraman emerged as a powerful advocate for the rights of the marginalized, utilizing his diverse talents as a writer, lawyer, and journalist to challenge the status quo.

Kunjuraman's early life was fraught with challenges, growing up in a poor family in Mayyanad. Despite limited formal education, he cultivated a passion for knowledge that propelled him into the literary and social circles of Kerala. His self-education in classical texts enabled him to critique the superstitions and social injustices that plagued his community. His establishment of a school for low-caste Hindus was a significant step toward educational empowerment, reflecting his belief in the transformative power of education as a tool for social upliftment.

His journalistic career began with his contributions to various publications, most notably the *Kerala Kaumudi*, which he founded and edited. This newspaper became a vital platform for voicing the grievances and aspirations of the oppressed communities. Kunjuraman's incisive writing style and sharp critiques of social injustices inspired a wave of activism among the lower castes, fostering a collective consciousness that demanded equality and justice. His ability to articulate the struggles of the marginalized resonated deeply within a society rife with discrimination, galvanizing support for critical movements like the Civic Rights Movement, the Abstention Movement, and the Temple Entry Movement.

The Civic Rights Movement was particularly significant, as it marked the first concerted effort by marginalized communities—comprising Ezhavas, Christians, and Muslims—to secure their rights to public access and employment in government services. Kunjuraman's strategic submission of memorials to governmental bodies, such as the Simon Commission, emphasized the necessity for communal representation and highlighted the systemic barriers faced by these communities. His advocacy was not just theoretical; it was rooted in a deep understanding of the socio-political landscape of Travancore, which was marked by exclusionary practices and caste-based discrimination.

In the 1930s, Kunjuraman played a crucial role in the Abstention Movement, which protested against legislative reforms perceived as inadequate for ensuring representation for marginalized groups. His activism during this period underscored his commitment to political engagement as a means of achieving social justice. By demanding reforms that included adequate representation and the abolition of

untouchability, he positioned himself as a leading voice for the oppressed, drawing attention to the need for structural change in the political system.

Kunjuraman's efforts were not in isolation; he was part of a larger movement inspired by the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru, who advocated for social equality and unity among the oppressed. Kunjuraman, alongside contemporaries like Kumaran Asan and Ayyankali, worked to elevate the Ezhava community from a position of subjugation to one of empowerment. Together, they sought to dismantle the hierarchical caste system and promote a secular outlook that embraced human dignity and equality.

Throughout his life, Kunjuraman exemplified the idea that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword. His writings and speeches were instrumental in fostering a spirit of rebellion against social injustices, challenging deeply entrenched beliefs and practices that perpetuated inequality. His legacy is a testament to the power of intellectual and journalistic activism in driving social change, reminding us that the fight for justice requires not only courage and conviction but also the ability to articulate the aspirations and struggles of those who have been silenced.

The Temple Entry Proclamation of Travancore on November 12, 1936, was a pivotal moment in the socio-religious landscape of Kerala, largely influenced by C.V. Kunjuraman's activism. Faced with the threat of mass conversions among the Ezhava community to Christianity, Kunjuraman and other leaders of the S.N.D.P. Yogam galvanized efforts for temple entry rights, advocating for social justice within Hinduism. This movement emerged in response to various factors, including declining Hindu demographics, the success of the Nivarthana Agitation, and the growing influence of Gandhian principles of anti-untouchability.

Kunjuraman's writings and public speeches highlighted the necessity of temple access for lower castes, arguing that conversion to Christianity was a viable escape from caste oppression. His bold stance resonated within the Ezhava community, leading to significant support for conversion, which alarmed the ruling authorities and prompted the Maharaja to issue the Proclamation as a countermeasure.

The Proclamation, therefore, can be seen as a strategic response not only to the internal demands for social reform but also as a protective measure against the perceived threat of Christian conversion. It marked a significant attempt at Hindu integration, aimed at preserving the community's identity and addressing the socio-political challenges posed by the growing influence of other religious groups in Travancore.

C.V. Kunjuraman played a pivotal role in the quest for responsible government in Travancore, marking his influence through both political activism and journalism. As president of the meeting that led to the formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1937, he effectively mobilized public opinion against the policies of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, using his publications, Kerala Kaumudi daily and Kaumudi weekly, as platforms for critique. His bold criticisms eventually led to the banning of these publications in 1938, highlighting the tensions between dissent and authority during this transformative period.

Despite the challenges he faced, including government censorship, Kunjuraman's efforts contributed significantly to the awakening of democratic ideals and the push for social reform in Travancore. His work laid the groundwork for the political changes that would ultimately follow independence, although he did not live to see the formation of the state of Kerala or the establishment of a democratic government. Kunjuraman's legacy endures, as his contributions were instrumental in shaping the socio-political landscape of Kerala, advocating for the rights and empowerment of marginalized communities. His life's work reflects a commitment to justice and equality, underscoring the importance of civic engagement in the broader narrative of India's struggle for independence and democracy.

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