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Politics of identity and history of community-based politics in Kerala

Sudhakaran K.M.

In the early twentieth century, Kerala society witnessed radical changes in the socio-economic and political realms. The advent of capitalism, colonial modernity, and various other ideologies and movements that emerged in different parts of the world created a diverse consciousness among the major sections of society. It was reflected in some of the reforms of the then rulers to improve the conditions of the subjugated sections of the society. The First World War and the post-War developments that unfolded in many parts of the world also generated diverse forms of consciousness within the national movement and the society at large. People who gained modern education from prominent communities with varying degrees of social consciousness exerted some influence on the way of thinking and formed new social alliances within the society. It was reflected in the formation of alliances between and among the major communities developed mainly against the existing special rights and positions enjoyed by the upper caste Hindus. These alliances then fought for their rightful share in government services, free access to the general public, and equal and equitable treatment by the authorities as enjoyed by the caste Hindus. Their modes of struggle were as peaceful and constitutional as submitting petitions and memoranda for more rights and privileges in society. The repercussions of the alliances helped the major political parties of the twentieth century, the subsequent formation of governments, and the strengthening of democratic alliances after Indian independence.

Coalition politics is an inevitable part of parliamentary politics. As society is divided into different castes and religious groups, sectarianism has gained a lot of importance in coalition politics. The caste/religious interests dominate within political parties and serve as the key to sectarianism. The decision to enter or leave the coalition is always taken within small internal circles based sometimes on communal balancing. The value and commitment to ideology in such agreements,