CONCLUSION

In July 1937 George Joseph was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly from the Ramnad – Tirunelveli constituency. Before that George had to face defeats in two elections. One took place in the year 1929 in Madurai Muncipal elections and another one took place in 1937 in Tanjore where he stood as a Congress candidate against a Justice party candidate, A.T. Pannirselvam. George Joseph failed in both elections¹ and it made George Joseph so disappointed. This time in the Madras Presidency, the Congress Party got a tremendous victory. Congress ministry was getting ready to form under Rajagopalachari. George Joseph was invited by Rajagopalachari to become a member of his cabinet. But George Joseph was not ready to accept this offer. He considered it as undemocratic and he felt that he would be getting into the cabinet through the back door. That he felt as unfair².

The election towards the Central Legislative Assembly in 1937 was a great victory for George Joseph. On 26th August 1937, George Joseph was elected to the Governing body of the Indian Research Fund Association. George Joseph’s maiden speech in the legislature was noticeable, in which he proposed certain reforms and changes in existing laws and bills. In his speech George Joseph spoke on the Insurance Bill.³
The Insurance management in India was based on the legislation of 1912. In 1937, another Insurance Bill was passed which included various reforms and it was mainly intended to protect the interests of the policyholders. In his speech, George Joseph made comments on this new Bill and advised certain amendments. He put forward his own ideas and opinions regarding this Bill. 4

He spoke thus, “we are moving more and more towards a totalitarian concept where the state assumes more responsibility and feels that it must do more for the people than according to the old doctrine of Victorian liberalism. Unfortunately for us today the ordinary citizen is regarded as thoroughly helpless. He is regarded almost as a tame rabbit. It is the policy holder’s interests that are being supported and maintained by the Government whether that reflection on the capacity of the ordinary citizen to take care of himself is right or not, that is a different question. 5 I myself have got considerable doubts about it. Now if you look at the general scheme of the Bill you will see that there are a series of provisions for protecting the policy holders – the deposit question, the minimum of working capital and the way the money in the hands of the insurers should be invested and how accounts should be kept and so on. All these things are conceived on the basis of this assumption that the policy holder must be protected by these and similar measures and these measures are absolutely necessary for his protection.” 6
The second assumption of this is that …it is possible for us to make ourselves in India self-contained in the matter of insurance and therefore as far as possible keep the non-Indian insurer out of the picture… The policy holder has got to be protected and the Indian insurer must be permitted to develop his business in this country just as the European insurers develop their business in their own country and they should have an opportunity of developing their own insurance business without an undue and unfair competition from other forms of insurance business which have been built up earlier than theirs.

George Joseph continued his speech on this Bill thus, “suppose this insurance business is made a monopoly of the state – whether Central or Provincial – then I am perfectly certain it would not be possible for any European to say that a European is being discriminated against an Indian. In course of time partly as a result of the sheer growth of insurance companies in this country, things will come to this pass so that the state will have to take up the whole responsibility of insurance both in life and general accident and motor cars and all the rest… This may be one way of getting rid of this discrimination against which the Government of India Act provides, to which the Honourable Law Member drew our attention this morning”.

George Joseph put forward an amendment on the salary of the superintendent of insurance. He said “the Superintendent’s
salary should in no case exceed Rupees 500 per month." But this amendment was not acceptable to others and majority voted against it. After attending George Joseph’s speech, one member remarked it as “yours is not a maiden speech. It can more aptly be called a widower’s speech.”

Another intervention from George Joseph had taken place in that session was regarding the provision of Muslim Personal law. As per the Government of India Act of 1935, various religious communities in India got a chance to modify their family right of succession and inheritance. The Muslims and the Hindus took it as a great opportunity to bring out certain reforms in their personal laws. The Muslim leaders intended to introduce, a new Law of Succession based on the ‘Shariat Law’ in which women would get more access to the family property. This bill got wide support from the Muslim leaders. The non Muslim leaders were not interested to interfere in this matter as it was an issue within the Muslim community. But George Joseph was different.

He expressed his view on the personal laws of succession for different communities. He wanted to introduce a Uniform Civil Code for all communities in India. George Joseph expressed his view thus “Though historically there was justification for the maintenance of this kind of personal law, now I submit that the time has long gone past and I can only regard it as a misfortune that in the year 1937 there should be any section of the community which really wants to
maintain a personal law one for Muslims, one for Hindus and another for the rest.”

George Joseph demanded a new code of law of succession. He explained the major consequences of this Bill by putting the example of the ‘Mappilas’ of British Malabar. They were following the ‘Marumakathayam’ laws of inheritance in which women had the right to have the property. Under this system the management of the property would be in the hands of women. The implementation of the Shariat-law would never can raise the position of Muslim women in that particular region from their present position. That won’t be better than their previous condition.

George Joseph put a conclusion to his opinion by saying that though he was favoured of a territorial law of succession and also he believed that ‘the position of women in the “Marumakathayam” sections at the Mappila community would not be made better”, he would not oppose the Bill because all Muslims in the assembly showed their full support for this Bill.

For this issue George Joseph did not get any support from his own party members. Most of them were not intended to interfere in this issue. In their opinion, giving any suggestion to this newly introduced Bill for the Muslims was unnecessary. Thus George Joseph was denied support in his own party. Some Muslim members in the assembly became irritated by George Joseph’s
They strongly threw criticisms on George Joseph. Muhammed Ali Jinnah criticized his view as utopian. George Joseph's courageous attitude and his own perspectives made him to express his views frankly. For every issue George Joseph had a unique opinion which might not be acceptable to others.

On 17th September a resolution was moved by T. Satyamurthi (veteran leader) that “The Government of India Act of 1935 in no way represent the will of the nation… It should be replaced by a constitution prepared by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise.”

George Joseph had full support for this resolution. He put an argument that “the whole scheme of constitutional reforms is to make sure that India gets Dominion status and with it the right of succession.” He continued “A Constituent Assembly containing representatives who were elected or authorized, if possible on an adult franchise but certainly on some popular franchise would be the answer.”

Another intervention of George Joseph had taken place in the Simla Session related to the Indian Mines Bill. The British Government had introduced certain amendments to this Bill without consulting the assembly. Regarding this bill also George Joseph made a speech in the assembly. His speech was on constitutional law and especially on the question of the separation of powers.
“It has always been recognized as a principle in all constitutions arising out of British experience to divide the functions of the state: the executive to administer, the legislature to legislate and the courts to judge. But as a result of modern complexities and difficulties that face all governments in legislation, in the execution and in the judiciary, it has become necessary for the legislature as an inevitable necessity, to delegate part of its legislative functions to the executive Government of the day. That should be regarded as an anomaly, it should be regarded with suspicion, it should be regarded with jealousy and it should be controlled with the greatest amount of care, because primarily it is the duty of the legislature to legislate and not the executive. But merely because of the sheer helplessness of modern legislature on account of the vast quantities of the proposals that come before the legislature, in spite of its anxiety to do all the legislature work all by itself, it is compelled by the necessity to delegate. But surely, it should be recognized that it is a delegated authority, it should only in very exceptional cases that the delegation should take place.” George Joseph made a plea in that session that the House should vote in favour of that amendment when introduced in the assembly.¹⁵

George Joseph’s presence was notable in the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. He raised questions on various subjects. Though he was physically unfit, that did not prevent him from asking questions. For that purpose he sought the assistance of one of his
colleagues from Tamilnadu. Entering into the legislative assembly was another important event in George Joseph’s life. George Joseph’s presence in the sessions of the legislature had made great impression on others.¹⁶ Pothan Joseph, famous journalist brother of George Joseph was told by the financial member of the Treasury Bench, Mr. James Grigg that he was impressed by two men from the opposing side because of their resources of strength and precision of speech. One was George Joseph and the another one was Govind Vallabhb Pant. (later Home Minister of India).

George Joseph could catch the attention of all members in the assembly through his courageous speech. He could express his views on various ideas without a slight fear in his mind. He welcomed criticisms from all sides. Throughout the Simla Session George Joseph was suffering from bad health. But that could not resist him from actively participating in the functions of the assembly. ¹⁷

After returning from Simla, George Joseph’s health condition had deteriorated. His life style in Simla was not favourable for his health. Most of the times he skipped meals and turned towards snacks. That badly affected his health. He got a high blood pressure and became more sick.¹⁸ He reached Madurai and was admitted to the American Mission Hospital in Madurai. The doctor informed him that his condition was severe. Doctors lost their hope in the recovery of George Joseph. George Joseph was well aware of his health but that could not affect his mental health. He never feared death.¹⁹
George Joseph took his last breath on 5th March 1938 at the age of 50. His funeral had taken place at St. Mary’s Church, Madurai and it was conducted by Reverend Fr. Mar Ivanios, Archbishop of Trivandrum and a close friend of George Joseph. Death of George Joseph put many into tears.

His funeral procession was attended by thousands. Here ended the life of a great man. George Joseph’s death was a great shock to his friends and other fighters for freedom social and political. The members of the Legislative Assembly paid tributes to him on his death on 7th March 1938.

It is clear that George Joseph’s role in Indian politics during the early decades of the 19th century was not at all unimportant. He has proved his ability as a good orator, a perfect Gandhian, a dedicated freedom fighter, a social activist, as a brave journalist, a temperance worker and a well trained Barrister. George Joseph’s strong criticisms against the British Government led him towards the prison. That never weakened him. He confirmed his writings with strong criticisms than before. On every issue George Joseph kept his own ideologies and view points. He had never deviated from his ideologies. This mentality of George Joseph caused for differences in opinion with some friends and colleagues including the father of the nation.
George Joseph could not surrender his ideas before anyone. He never longed for any position or better benefits of life. Though he had left everything for becoming a follower of Gandhi, George Joseph had disagreement with him on various issues. But that disagreement never reduced his love and respect for Gandhi. It continued throughout his life.\textsuperscript{20}

Western education provided a golden opportunity to George Joseph to mould a fine personality. During his student days in Britain he never missed a chance for better reading. He became familiar to numerous western authors. It was mainly due to western education George Joseph could come in the forefront of the national movement like other western educated national leaders.\textsuperscript{21}

George Joseph’s role as a Home Ruler was very important. He became a member of the delegation sent to England to promote the cause of Home Rule. George Joseph spent most of his years in Madurai. Madurai was his second home. At Madurai George Joseph dedicated his life for the uplift of the tribal people. There he proved as a dedicated social activist. With George Joseph’s interference the tribal sections in Madurai called the kallars could acquire some benefits in the society.

George Joseph’s philanthropic attitude made him always so close to the downtrodden sections in the society. That attitude of George Joseph led him towards the forefront of the Vaikom
Satyagraha. He took over the leadership of the Satyagraha at a time when the front rank leaders of the movement like T.K. Madhavan and K.P. Kesava Menon were put into the prison. Under George Joseph’s leadership the satyagraha got a new turn. He could organize this movement in a perfect manner. He worked hard to get the lower castes the permission to walk through the approaching temple roads.

George Joseph’s interference in the Vaikom Satyagraha made some vagueness in Gandhi. He advised George Joseph to keep away from this movement as it was fought to solve the problems related to untouchability within the Hindu community. Gandhi’s letter to George Joseph contained the sentence that “you should let the Hindus do the work, it is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and by your pen.” This advice of Gandhi was not favourable to George Joseph.

He had never thought of his religious identity till then and Gandhi’s opinion worried George Joseph. A dedicated nationalist like George Joseph could not accept such advises. George Joseph was the first Christian leader, who came to the forefront of the Indian nationalist movement, and religion was not a matter to him but in later years he got converted towards Catholicism and became more religious.
George Joseph proved his ability as an able barrister and a sincere statesman in the problem of Thangassery. The Travancore authority’s attempt to annex Thangassery was opposed by the people of this region and some leaders like K.C. Mammen Mappilai and M.M.Varkey, sought the help of George Joseph. With the interference of George Joseph they could easily solve this problem. George Joseph in person went to Delhi and met the Viceroy. His courage and dedication was enough to create a great impression on the Viceroy. George Joseph could present the problem of the people of Thangassery in an interesting and feasible way. George Joseph’s influence could easily solve the problem of Thangassery.25

George Joseph joined the Justice Party for a short period of time. But he could not stay in that party for a long time. His attachment with Congress turned him again towards the Congress party in 1935. In 1937, George Joseph was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly. George Joseph’s bad health allowed him to participate only in one session of the Assembly at Simla. Though he was physically unfit throughout the session he could acquire the attention of all other members present in the Assembly. He raised questions on various issues and gave his own directions and advises to certain issues26.

Some of his views and opinions were not acceptable to others and they made criticisms against George Joseph. But George Joseph’s courageous attitude never allowed him to deviate from his
own ideas. The Simla Session was an important event in the political life of George Joseph. George Joseph took his last breath on 5th March 1938 at the age of fifty27.

George Joseph still remains as a forgotten figure in the history of freedom movement. His role and dedication in India’s freedom movement has not been recognized by the historians. Early death of George Joseph wiped him out from the main stream of modern history particularly of freedom struggle.

Great as a crusader for social reforms of the downtrodden, George Joseph was greater as a nationalist freedom fighter and his greatest efforts were for humanitarian activities and he taught the A to Z of humanism to all the people whom he met. His is a true Indian fighter for freedom in a Gandhian way and his passion for India was unique and unparalleled. This made him persona grata to all his contemporaries.

Endnotes:

1. Diary of George Joseph for 1938.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. NMML, Cover Files on George Joseph.
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8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. NAI, Secret papers Vol.IV, Passim.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. ERTV, Vaikkom Satyagraha Files Vol III & IV. Also see Mahadeva Desai, Epic of Travancore, or Sadhu M.P.Nair, Eye Witness Accounts of Vaikkom Satyagraha (Mal), Passim.
23. Robin Jeffrey, Decline of Nayar Dominance (1806-1906) Passim, Also see George Joseph Papers in NMML, Bundle II.
24. Ibid.
25. TNA, Secret Sundry Papers (Thangassery), Vol I, Part II.
26. Sir.C.Sankaran Nair, Gandhi and Anarchy, pp.46-59. Also see M.P.Sreekumaran Nair, Values in Conflict, Passim.
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