The social history of Kerala has begun to attract the attention of the scholars only recently with the result that research works dealing with the social aspect of the region are few and far between. They generally deal with a single phenomenon, either a person or event or movement or institution contributing to social change Kerala had witnessed in the past century and a half. Hardly has an attempt been made to study the formative period of the present society of Travancore from 1858 onwards, viewing together the various sections of the Kerala community.

The scope of the present study, "Social Reforms and Social Changes in the Travancore State from 1858 to 1947", embraces the three communities Hindus, Christians and Muslims and various phases of their social development.

The traditional society of Travancore and the new factors at work are discussed in the Introduction. Chapter I deals with the social changes among the backward communities, mainly their demand for opening the educational institutions, conferring more civic rights, demand for more representation in the Government service, self-improvement and organisational work and fair representation in the political bodies of the state.

The second chapter deals with social changes among the socially privileged communities taking into account changes in the socio-economic and political status of communities like Nambudiris, Kshatriyas, Nairs, Christians, converted Christians
and Muslims.

Proclamations and legislation which affected various sections of the society is discussed in the third chapter.

The fourth chapter deals with the impact of the century of transition on the socially privileged, under-privileged, and women.

An assessment of the period under study is attempted in the conclusion.

As the scope of the subject has got the dimensions of an epic I have tried to confine myself to the changes that affected society without giving much emphasis to the origins of the various systems or going into the details of the customary observances, but only mentioned their effect on the society. Besides that, much-traversed and often-repeated and well-known stories have, except for an occasional mention, been avoided.

Strictly confining myself to the scope of the topic I have not studied events of social importance related to contiguous areas like Cochin and Malabar. Such references to these areas as will be found to have been dictated by the context.

As regards the division of various castes, they have been grouped together as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians, converted Christians and Muslims. Hence attention is concentrated on such groups, who fairly represent each section.
For instance, Ezhavas were considered untouchables and unapproachable but occupied a prominent position socially, economically and numerically. Thus, as regards social movements, when a particular disability of any type was done away with, it naturally benefited those below them also. For example, when a school or road was opened for Ezhavas, thenceforth it remained open also for those below them in social hierarchy. Secondly, as Ezhavas took leadership in social reform activities, more attention is given to them.

In certain movements like Devaswom separation and abstention which were fought together by communities like Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims detailed mention has been made of those who suffered much or who took the leading role. While discussing the participation of other communities in those movements the chronological sequence of the events have been maintained, since the most conspicuous changes and impact occurred among the backward and depressed classes, more attention has been paid to them in Chapter I.

The term 'socially privileged' has been used for those communities who could enter Hindu places of worship, Christians and Muslims. 'socially under-privileged' is used for those who, in view of their low caste, were once considered to carry pollution. Till recently tribal people remained far away from the main stream of social life and so they are not included in the scope of the study.
Instead of treating the reign of the Maharajas and Dewans separately, the Government is taken in its oneness and continuity, except for mentioning their names or period wherever felt unavoidable. Proceedings of the political bodies of the State have been taken as a cross-section of the public opinion then prevailing in the state.

Criterion used for assessing the social changes among various sections is changes in the interpersonal relationship in the society.

To the best of my ability I have tried to maintain objectivity by neither tilting to any 'ism' nor hiding any facts relevant to the discussion.

Finally, I have departed from the convention of giving footnotes on each page, immediately below the text, for two reasons. First, trying to keep the text as well as the notes and references together on each page would have made for lack of balance: almost every page would have contained fewer lines of text than those concerned with notes; and, in many a case, an unfinished citation would have had to claim space on the following page. Secondly, I was advised to keep in mind the requirements of modern publishers who insist on having a typescript in which notes and references are given in a consolidated form at the end of each Chapter.