CHAPTER-V
WOMEN PARADIGMS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL EXCELLENCE

The history of Travancore is illuminated by the biographies of many important women personalities who imprinted their footmarks on political, intellectual and social arenas. As history is the biography of great women also, this chapter examines the biographies of history makers among women in Travancore between 1900 and 1947.

5.1 The Maharani of Travancore

Travancore possessed the fortune of being ruled by the enlightened Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai who initiated many progressive reforms.

5.1.1 Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai (1924-31)

The Regency of Senior Maharani was a constructive period and also a period of social reforms. Her Highness was enthroned during the period of Vaikom Satyagraha and just after her coronation, released all satyagrahis from jail. During the Vaikom Satyagraha period, Gandhiji made a personal interview with the Maharani and had all praise for her simplicity and nobility\(^1\). Gandhiji described her as an ideal of Indian womanhood\(^2\).

The marriage and inheritance laws of the Nairs and Ezhavas were reformed. During the regency of Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai, the ‘Nair Act of 1925’ was passed which deprived the nephews of all claims to the properties of their uncles. It made provision for the partition of Nair Tharawads and it cut at the very root of Marumakkathayam system\(^3\). The ‘Nair Act’ was a forerunner of similar enactments like the ‘Ezhava Act of 1925’ and the ‘Nanjanad Act of 1926’. These reforms conferred on the women equality of inheritance to property. Matriarchy was replaced by Patriarchy. She formed Village

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2. [http://inorite.wordpress.com](http://inorite.wordpress.com)
Panchayats in 1925 for developing self-government in rural areas\(^4\). A number of highways were opened in different parts of the state especially in High Ranges\(^5\).

During her reign, education was given top priority. The following table shows the number of girls’ institutions which flourished during her reign:

**5.1.2 The Number of Girls’ Institutions Which Flourished During the Reign of Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai\(^6\).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (M.E.)</th>
<th>No of Girls’ Institutions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1100</td>
<td>441</td>
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<tr>
<td>1101</td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1102</td>
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<td>1104</td>
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<td>1105</td>
<td>525</td>
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<tr>
<td>1106</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Women’s College Trivandrum was raised to the first grade, thus giving women an opportunity to be on par with men in educational qualifications\(^7\). The Maharani was a zealous promoter of women’s welfare also. Mary Punnen Lukose was appointed Durbar Physician in 1924 and she was given a seat in the Legislative Council\(^8\). In 1926, the Maharani ordered that the singing of obscene and indecent songs at the annual *utsavam* of Cherthalai *Bhagavathi* temple should be strictly prohibited\(^9\). Orders were issued to the police to take necessary steps to enforce the command and prevent any such disturbance of public peace. In 1930, Her Highness sanctioned a complete

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5. Ibid.
6. *Travancore Administrative Reports, 1100-1111 M.E.*
7. *Government College for Women Calendar for the Year 1979-80.*
9. Ibid., pp.133-134.
cessation of *Devadasi* system\(^\text{10}\). Apart from abolishing customs that undermined the position of women in society, she took positive steps to promote women’s welfare. She encouraged the ‘Girl Guide Movement’ with Mrs. Thackwell as its organizer for developing citizenship, character formation, interests in arts and crafts, promoting physical development and inculcating service mentality among girls\(^\text{11}\). A class for training midwives was opened in the District hospital at Alleppey\(^\text{12}\). Salaries of teachers were enhanced and grants and aids extended to private schools\(^\text{13}\). She died at Bangalore in 1985.

**5.2 Women Leaders of Travancore State Congress**

A large number of Travancore women, especially those from respectable families, plunged into the political agitation during the period of freedom struggle.

**5.2.1 Akkamma Cherian (1909-1982)**

Akkamma Cherian was hailed as ‘the Jhansi Rani’ and ‘Joan of Arc’ of Kerala\(^\text{14}\). She was born in a wealthy Catholic Syrian family at Kanjirappally in 1909 as the daughter of Karippapparambil Thomman Cherian and Annamma. Her early life was confined within the house, church, school and nunnery. Though she often heard the words ‘‘you are a girl’’ used to subdue her friends, the five boys and three girls in her family were brought up as equals. Akkamma Cherian was lucky to be born of parents having progressive attitude and she was proud of the influence of her educated grand mother\(^\text{15}\). Her family subscribed ‘Deepika’ daily and the family house in the small town of Kanjirappally was a meeting place on Sundays, for neighbours who gathered to read newspapers and discuss events, particularly the First World War and the small girls were allowed to hear these discussions\(^\text{16}\). Her father considered his daughters as assets, not liabilities. She had her education from Government Girls Primary School, Kanjirappally, Government English Middle School, Kanjirappally, St.Joseph’s

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) www.samyukta.info/archives
High School, Changanassery and St.Teresa’s College, Ernakulam. After obtaining B.A. degree, she became the Headmistress of St.Mary’s English Middle School, Kanjirappally.

After her college education, she reached Trivandrum in 1934 for Teacher’s Training Course. At that time the ruler was Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma and Diwan was Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. The power was vested in the hands of upper class Hindu bureaucracy. Nepotism and corruption existed everywhere. It was the life in Trivandrum that shaped the political philosophy of Akkamma Cherian17. She, along with her sister Rosamma Cherian and her brothers, participated in a number of political meetings, held in Trivandrum at that time. She was very much interested in the speeches of K.Balakrishnan, editor of ‘Kaumudi’.

She also participated in the annual meeting of A.I.W.C. in 193518. She keenly watched and began to participate in the activities of the Congress. In Central Travancore, the strength of the State Congress lay among Syrian Christians and Akkamma Cherian was a person of some influence around Kanjirappally. She also disliked Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar and resented the administrative system that favoured caste Hindus.

Akkamma Cherian and her friends were actively participating in Civil Disobedience Movement and the fame of the women of Kanjirappally spread among Congress circles. Any person who possessed love and respect towards the motherland could not remain inactive after seeing the tyrannical rule of the government. Akkamma Cherian also became aware of the role, women should play in liberating the motherland. That is why she plunged into the battlefield of freedom struggle leaving behind her, the calm life of a teacher’s life.

When V.V. Varkey, who was incharge of ‘State Congress Strike Committee’ at Kanjirappally, visited State Congress leaders of Ernakulam Camp, who were insearch of a woman, courageous enough to become twelfth ‘dictator’ and to lead a jatha to Maharaja’s Palace, asked him about Akkamma Cherian. Soon V.V.Varkey sent a telegraph to her house and her family gave

17. R.Parvathi Devi, op.cit., p.60.
18. Ibid., pp.60-61.
consent. Akkamma Cherian thus became the twelfth dictator of Travancore State Congress. She resigned her Headmistress post and went to Madurai by train accompanied by her brother K.C.Varkey, sister Rosamma Cherian and V.V.Varkey.

Akkamma Cherian carried with her a memorandum, to be presented to the Maharaja. Akkamma Cherian and party were welcomed at Madurai, Thenkasi and Kollam railway stations. On 23 October 1938, Akkamma Cherian reached Trivandrum railway station accompanied by State Congress and Labour Union volunteers. She entered into an open car and made an enthralling speech emphasizing democratic rule. Large number of volunteers from the nook and corner of Travancore marched to Trivandrum wearing khadi clothes and khadi caps and holding placards and tricolour flags.

Jails were filled with volunteers. Akkamma Cherian moved towards the palace in an open car, followed by fifty thousand Congress volunteers. People viewed the jatha from roadsides, tree tops and balconies of buildings and showered flowers, garlands and bouquets upon her. The jatha reached the palace gate at six O’clock in the evening and Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar used various tactics to disperse the jatha. A bull rushed towards the crowd and trampled the volunteers but they caught it and took it away. The volunteers sat on the ground and the people supplied refreshments. Then an army lorry came with great speed but the volunteers didn’t disperse. The soldiers who came out of the lorry kicked the volunteers with their boots and stabbed them with their bayonets. Akkamma Cherian wanted to see the Maharaja but the request was denied. When Colonel Watkis threatened to shoot the mob, Akkamma Cherian asked him to shoot her first.

Colonel Watkis returned and Akkamma Cherian’s courageous answer avoided bloodshed there19. The jatha returned to Thampanoor. A notorious goonda, ‘C.I.D. Subramanyam Pillai’ stood infront of Akkamma Cherian’s car and started beating the bonnet of the car with a cane. He also beat many volunteers. The volunteers endured all these blows silently and finally he returned.

19. Ibid., p.15.
The jatha dispersed after a meeting in the railway station maidan. The political prisoners were released in the evening. On the next day another meeting was held at railway station maidan and Akkamma Cherian returned her post of ‘Congress President’ to Pattom Thanu Pillai.

This historic jatha marked the political baptism of Akkamma Cherian. Thereafter she never rested till the attainment of independence. After the historic jatha, Akkamma Cherian was given heroic welcomes at Pala, Moovattupuzha, Arakkunnam, Pulinkunnu, Edathua, Kanjirappally and all over Travancore. Mrs. E. John Kuruvilla, Mrs. Pandalam K.P. Raman Pillai and Akkamma Cherian were given a great welcome at Kottayam.

In October 1938, the Working Committee of Travancore State Congress directed Akkamma Cherian to organize female volunteer corps called ‘Desasevika Sangham’. She travelled through rural areas from North Paravur to Kanyakumari, enrolled women between sixteen and seventy year’s old and put fifty women in each taluk under a captain. The members should take State Congress membership and should be ready for sacrifice and service. She taught them State Congress songs, urged them to wear khadi saris in saffron colour with green border and blouses in white colour. She also taught them physical exercises. They conducted ‘March Past’ and had their own ‘March Past’ songs.

Akkamma Cherian’s messages to ‘Desasevikas’ appeared regularly in newspapers like ‘Mathrubhoomi’, ‘Deepika’, ‘Malabar Mail’, ‘Powraprabha’, ‘Navabharathi’, ‘Malayali’ etc. The ‘Kanjirappally camp’ of ‘Desa Sevika Sangh’ won great publicity. Marching songs, drill, flag hoisting, tactics to face lathi charge etc. were taught here.

Akkamma Cherian was imprisoned for participating in the first annual conference of Travancore State Congress at Vattiyoorkkavu. In Vattiyoorkkavu jail, Akkamma Cherian, Rosamma Cherian and Annie Mascrene made a vegetable garden but the authorities destroyed it. They used to sing National Anthem in the jail at five O’clock in the evening. But as per the instruction of jail authorities, an inmate called Kunjilakshmi began to abuse those using foul

language. They gave a statement in court against this. Pattom Thanu Pillai forwarded a letter against this and Gandhiji interfered by writing in the Harijan and thus the problem was solved

From 1940 to 1942, Akkamma Cherian indulged in the constructive programme by collecting food materials and clothes and by sending them to famine stricken places. She also installed Charka centres and weaving centres at Ponkunnam, Podimattam etc. In 1942, Akkamma Cherian and Dr.Saundaram Ramachandran travelled all over South Travancore i.e., Neyyattinkara, Thakkala, Nagercoil etc.to organize women in Civil Disobedience Movement and they were arrested. Dr.Saundaram was exiled from Travancore and Akkamma Cherian was jailed. Later she was transferred to Trivandrum Central Jail where Annie Mascrene and other leaders were put in. In 1943, she was released. Due to her bad health, she went to Kodaikkanal for rest and happened to be in touch with Maria Montessori there. In 1946, Congress party worked against ‘Independent Travancore’ plan of Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar. Akkamma Cherian was also jailed for nine months and was released in April, 1947.

In Travancore, first Universal Suffrage was held in February 1948. She was elected unopposed, one of the three women elected to the 120 member assembly. She served as a member of Travancore Legislative Assembly and Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly. In November 1952 at the age of forty three, she married V.V.Varkey, a long time State Congress activist from Kanjirapally. In 1953, she contested independently in Meenachil Parliamentary election but failed. In 1967, Akkamma Cherian returned to politics to contest for Congress in Kanjirappally assembly seat. She managed only fourteen percent of vote.In 1967, V.V.Varkey and Akkamma Cherian got Thamrapatram from India government. They are the only couple in India, getting Thamrapatram for fighting for India’s freedom. In the mid 1970’s the family moved to Trivandrum to supervise the engineering studies of her son. Akkamma Cherian died there in 1982. The Kerala government honoured Akkamma Cherian by installing her statue infront of the present day ‘Raj Bhavan’.

24. Ibid., p.120.
5.2.2 Annie Mascrene (1902-1963)

Annie Mascrene, the first woman minister in Travancore state, was born in Trivandrum on 6 June 1901. She was the sixth child of Mariam and Gabriel Mascrene. The parents showed great interest in the education of their children despite of all the financial crises in the family. Annie was very bright in her studies. She got double promotion twice while she was studying in Holy Angels Convent School, Trivandrum. As a passionate reader, Annie drew maximum pleasure from reading. She had great rhetorical skills even in her school days. After completing Matriculation she joined the Maharajas College of Arts to do B.A. Honours. Later on she was appointed as Lecturer in Sanghamitra College, Sri Lanka. With the salary she got from the college, she studied law in the Law College, Trivandrum. She took B. L. Degree and set up legal practice at Trivandrum. She was one of the founder leaders of Travancore State Congress, the first woman to join Travancore State Congress and member of its first Working Committee. She did propaganda work outside Travancore to nullify the false propaganda carried on by certain agencies to malign the State Congress. Annie Mascrene suffered the vengeance of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. On 5 April 1938, stones were thrown at her residence and on 29 April, her house was robbed. A constable hit her with his bicycle while she was walking through the road and the police authorities kept silent.

She undertook a propaganda tour in Central Travancore along with Pattom Thanu Pillai in November 1938. She was arrested at midnight at Chengannoor on 13 November 1938 and tried for ‘sedition’ in two prosecutions based on her speeches, one delivered at Sarkara Maidan and the other at Kattakkada. She was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for eighteen months and fined thousand rupees in each case and the sentences were to be served one after the other. She was confined in Central Prison, Trivandrum. On release, she continued to participate in the agitation for responsible government with added enthusiasm. In 1941, she visited Gandhiji and her stay at ‘Sevagram’, Wardha, enabled her to learn more about Gandhian principles. She did the work of scavenging and also became a good spinner and weaver. She came into touch

25. Akkamma Cherian, 1114nte Katha, (Mal.), op.cit., p.34.
with national leaders like Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel. She took a leading part in the Quit India Movement in Travancore.

On 30 August 1942, she was arrested when attempted to address a meeting at Trivandrum, violating prohibitory order and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for two years and was fined five hundred rupees. In 1944 she was elected Secretary of Travancore State Congress. On 26 March 1945 she was again arrested and detained for two months. In 1946 she undertook an all India tour and addressed meetings at Poona, Bombay, Allahabad, Calcutta, Lucknow and other centres. She met the British Parliamentary Delegation in April 1946 and explained to them, the real political situation in Travancore.

During the Punnapra Vayalar uprising, she received first hand information about the happenings and found out that machine gun was used against rioters in Vayalar. The terrified people who were chased into teashops and houses were killed and dead bodies were locked up in nearby buildings by the military. While the official figure released by the Travancore government puts the death toll of Punnapra Vayalar as 190, the estimate made by Annie Mascrene after her own enquiries was seven thousand.

Returning to Travancore, she was served with prohibitory order, not to make speeches in meetings for two months from 15 September 1946. She attended the meeting of United Kerala Committee at Calicut in October 1946. In 1948, she was elected unopposed to Travancore Legislative Assembly in the first general election based on Universal Adult Suffrage. She was also elected as a member of Constituent Assembly of India. She was one of the members of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and her role in framing a new Constitution for the country was remarkable.

Following the merging of Travancore and Cochin into one state of the Union by the name of ‘the United State of Travancore and Cochin’, election was conducted and she was elected to

30. Ibid.
the Travancore Cochin Legislative Assembly with a thumping majority from Trivandrum during the period from 1949 to 1952\textsuperscript{31}.

Annie Mascrène became Minister of Public Health and Power on 5 July 1949 in the Ministry headed by T.K. Narayana Pillai. Her sincerity and dedication prompted her to criticize the corrupt practices of some of her colleagues in the newly formed ministry and she resigned from the council of ministers on 3 January 1950\textsuperscript{32}. Though she could not prove the corruption charges filed against her colleagues, her attempt to control corruption among the ministers was acclaimed by the politically conscious people. She was disappointed of the new political turmoil in the state of Kerala in the early 1950’s. Suppressing her grief, she resigned from the Congress Party in 1950\textsuperscript{33}.

In the first General Election of 1952 she had contested as an independent candidate and elected to the ‘Lok Sabha’ from Trivandrum. Among the candidates who had contested from Kerala to the Parliament, she secured the highest margin of votes over her opponents. In 1957 she had again contested to the ‘Lok Sabha’ from Trivandrum Parliament seat. Since the political wave in the United Kerala was so much in favour of the Communist Party, their candidate, Ishwara Aiyar, was able to defeat Annie Mascrène. When she found that her own people did not want her services any more, she withdrew from the political life and dedicated the rest of her life for social service. On 19 July 1963 she passed away and was buried in the Pattor Cemetery at Trivandrum.

5.2.3 Lakshmi N. Menon (1897-1994)

Lakshmi N. Menon was a teacher, lawyer, politician, activist, social reformer, educationist and central minister. She was one of the founder members of All India Women’s Conference. She was born in Trivandrum in 1899. Her father Ramavarma Thampan was a distinguished educationist and her mother Madhavikkutty Amma was a member of an old and respectable family in Central Travancore. Her early name was M.Lakshmikkutty Amma. Due to her pro-Congress attitude, the British authorities enquired about her to Diwan

\textsuperscript{31} Hundred Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala, (1888-1988), Centenary Souvenir, Government Press, Trivandrum, 1990, p.1028.
\textsuperscript{32} Joseph Sebastian Thekkedam, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
M.E. Watts and the *Diwan* gave a good reply. She had her education in Trivandrum, Madras, Lucknow and London. She took M.A. and L.L.B. Degrees and Teacher’s Diploma respectively. In 1930, she married Prof. V.K. Nandan Menon of the well known Karuppathu family of Cochin State. Lakshmi N. Menon served as a teacher in Queen Mary’s College, Madras, Gokhale Memorial School, Calcutta, and Isabella Thobourn College, Lucknow. She practiced as an advocate from 1933 to 1935. She was a founder member of the ‘All India Women’s Conference’ and for sometime was its Secretary and President. She played a prominent role in establishing the ‘All India Women’s Conference’ and purchased the land for A.I.W.C. at Delhi after mortgaging her own ornaments and property. She edited its magazine ‘Roshni’. Lakshmi N. Menon was an ardent nationalist also. She had close contacts with leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and Margaret Cousins. In 1952, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha. She was ‘Deputy Minister of External Affairs’ in Jawaharlal Nehru’s cabinet. A number of times she was delegate from India to the United Nations General Assembly. She was the first woman delegate from India in U.N. From 1949 to 1950, Lakshmi N. Menon was the chief of the U.N. Section on the status of women and children. She served as Parliamentary Secretary from 1952 to 1957, Deputy Minister from 1957 to 1962 and minister of the state from 1962 to 1967. In 1960, when China attacked India, Jawaharlal Nehru deputed her as India’s roaming ambassador to various nations to clarify India’s stand. She became President of ‘Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust’. She believed in Gandhian thoughts, wore only *khadi* clothes, was a staunch apostle of prohibition, often visited Vinobaji’s *asram* and devoted herself to the campaign for awakening of women’s potential energy. She was the founder member of the ‘Federation of University Women’ and served as its

35. [www.aiwcharidwar.org/intro.html](http://www.aiwcharidwar.org/intro.html)
37. [pages.rediff.com/lakshmi-n-menon](http://pages.rediff.com/lakshmi-n-menon)
President. She has written a book called ‘The Position of women’ and a number of articles. She was awarded ‘Padmabhooshan’ in 1957\textsuperscript{41}.

5.2.4 Dr. Saundaram Ramachandran (1905-1984)

Dr. Saundaram Ramachandran was born as the daughter of T.V. Sundaram Iyengar, who laid the foundations of an industrial empire of transport business. Her mother T.V.S.Lakshmi took part in the constructive work initiated by Gandhiji for the well being of women and children. Saundaram was married at a young age. But when her husband passed away, she took up studies once more, passed Matriculation and did her Medical degree at Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi. During her college days in Delhi, she became a friend of Sushila Nayar and through her, met Gandhiji. She was immediately drawn to the freedom struggle, but she did not give up her studies. She passed out as a doctor when she was thirty two years old.

Saundaram joined along with Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and the two started ‘Avvai Home’ for children and ‘Avvai Health Services’ for the villages. She took diploma in Gynaecology and Obsterics at Madras.

She then threw herself wholeheartedly into the freedom struggle and met G. Ramachandran who was active in the Harijan movement. They fell in love and decided to get married. Gandhiji gave them his blessings and they got married in November 1940. Dr. Soundaram and Ramachandran participated in the Quit India Movement and Ramachandran was arrested. Soundaram went about doing propaganda for the Movement. Saundaram Ramachandran and Akkamma Cherian travelled all over South Travancore such as Neyyattinkara, Thakkala, Nagarcoil etc. and organized women to participate in the Quit India Movement. The Travancore government asked Saundaram to leave the state for her propaganda work against recruiting soldiers to the war service. The Travancore State authorities took her to the border of Tamilnadu and served her with an externment order from the State.

Gandhiji made her the representative in South India of the ‘Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust’ and entrusted her with setting up an institution

in a rural area that would improve the lot of the poorest of the poor and she set up ‘Kasturba Gram’ at Erode. So was born the idea of ‘Gandhigram’, in 1956, where villagers were taught skills and provided support to revive village industries and the economy of the rural community. Dr. Soundaram threw herself wholeheartedly into this project that focused on health care, education, economic development and social welfare in the rural communities in the surrounding area. She spent all her wealth in developing the ‘Gandhigram Institute at Madurai’, which stands today as a monument of her vision, hardwork and administrative ability. She also took part in Vinoba Bhave’s ‘Bhoodan Movement’ in Madurai.

She was elected as an M.L.A. in 1952 and 1957, then an M.P. in 1962. With her move again to Delhi, she was appointed the Union Deputy Minister for Education. It was during her tenure as Deputy Minister that she set up a few rural institutes for women and introduced compulsory and free primary education throughout India. She also helped to start the National Service Scheme or N.S.S., which still has a strong rural service element to it. She was awarded ‘Padmabhooshan’ also. In 1976, the ‘Gandhigram Rural Institute’ was deemed to be a University and is now one of the country’s leading institutions in rural studies.

### 5.3 Other Important Women of Travancore State Congress

Apart from these stalwarts, many other women also actively took part in the State Congress struggles.

Elizabeth Kuruvilla, the daughter of ‘Rajyasabhabhoosan’ Mysore Chandy was the fifth ‘dictator’ of Travancore State Congress. In 1938, she made a train journey from Thrissur to Trivandrum. She was arrested on 28 September 1938. She was the first woman arrested in the State Congress strike. She was the first nominated woman member in Travancore Legislative Council.

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Council from 1928 to 1931. She was also an active worker of ‘Young Women Christian Association’. She expired on 20 January 1944.

Meenakshi Amma or Mrs. Pandalam K.P.Raman Pillai was the eighth ‘dictator’ of Travancore State Congress, during the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1938. She travelled all around Travancore and wanted enquiry on the death of Sivaraja Pandyan, the leader of a popular jatha from Madurai to Trivandrum. She was arrested on 14 October 1938.

Mariam Eapen was the elder daughter of Elanjikkal John Vakil, wife of K.V.Eapen, Kandathil and daughter-in law of Kandathil Varghese Mappilai, the founder of Balikamatom Girls’ High School, Thiruvalla. Mariam Eapen worked her best for the growth and development of Balikamatom Girls’ High School. She gave all support to Travancore State Congress and helped the ‘Great Jatha’ of 1938. When her brother E. John Philipose was in Punalur police lockup, she courageously earned permission from the government to transfer some books to him. She also acquired parole for him to attend his brother’s funeral.

Mrs. George Joseph, Chengannoor, actively participated in Vaikom Satyagraha, along with her husband, George Joseph. She gave first aid to the volunteers who were fainted during the Satyagraha.

Elykkutty Thomas, wife of R.V.Thomas, Palai, was another ardent supporter and worker of Travancore State Congress. She gave all support to the activities of her husband R.V.Thomas, when he participated in the struggle for responsible government. She was interested in Gandhian constructive programme. After independence, she became leader of Moovattupuzha D.C.C. Women’s wing and in 1956, became member of Pala Municipal Council.

Elykkutty Thomas and other women volunteers worked among the refugees in

50. Ibid., p.82.
51. *Confidential Files, No.4271/44 dated 14-12-1944, Bundle No.132*, Directorate of State Archives, Trivandrum.
Amaravathi. She worked as the Chairperson of Kottayam Rescue Shelter and Abala Mandir for fifteen years. She served as a member of Jail Committee, Hospital Committee, State Orphanage Board and After Care Home for Adolescent Boys\(^\text{54}\). She also worked for women liberation as the founder of a social centre at Palai where stitching, mat weaving, book binding etc. were taught. In 1954, Indira Gandhi visited her social centre during her visit to Kerala.

Mrs. K. Vasanthi, wife of C. Kesavan and Mrs. T. M. Varghese gave their wholehearted support to Nivarthana Agitation and the struggle for Responsible government\(^\text{55}\).

Ponnamma Varghese, a student of Catholicate High School, Pathanamthitta, took part in a procession in Pathanamthitta and addressed a meeting in connection with the agitation for responsible government, organized by Travancore State Congress, in 1938. She also participated in the prohibited State Congress annual conference at Vattiyoorkavu, Trivandrum in 1938 and was therefore dismissed from the school. Subsequently she joined the nursing school and took up her career as a nurse\(^\text{56}\).

Saramma Mathew, wife of Kanjirathummoottil K. A. Mathew, Thiruvalla, did relief work for families of the dead and the wounded in the military firing that took place during Civil Disobedience Movement in 1938. She presided over several Congress meetings in Thiruvalla during Civil Disobedience Movement\(^\text{57}\).

Mary Alexander, a native of Pulinkunnu, worked as the Headmistress of St. Alosyus School, North Parur and St. Joseph’s School, Alleppey. She was nominated to the twenty eighth session of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly in 1932. She expired on 9 September 1977\(^\text{58}\).

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57. Ibid., p.557.
58. Hundred Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala 1888-1988, Centenary Souvenir, op. cit.
Hepzibah Gnanasikhamoney from Nagercoil was a teacher and had attended ‘All India Women’s Conference’ at Karachi in 1934. She was a member of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly from 1933 to 1937\(^59\).

T.N. Kalyanikutty Amma was a native of Thalavady, Alleppey district. During Vaikom Satyagraha, she aided the movement by sending *pidiyari* collected from house to house to the *satyagraha* camp\(^60\). She supported T.K. Madhavan in his crusade against untouchability. She established a security shelter for the sake of orphans and a weaving centre to promote weaving on *Charka*.

She published ‘Vanitha Ratnam’ from Ochira which was proscribed by Travancore government for supporting the movement for responsible government. Then she started ‘Vanitha Mitram’ which also encouraged the struggle for responsible government\(^61\). She was also associated with Travancore State Congress for responsible government and worked along with G.P.Pillai and others in organizing State Congress activity in Karunagappally taluk. She became a member of Alleppey District Congress Committee for a term. She also served as a member of Kayamkulam Municipal Council for seven years.

Vadakkecharuvil P.K. Kalayani was presumably one of the few active female *satyagrahis* during the Vaikom Satyagraha. She is probably Kalayani, mentioned in the report sent by the Inspector of Police, Vaikom, to the District Superintendent of Police, Kottayam, on 24.10.1099 M.E i.e., mid June 1924\(^62\).

Bhavani Parameswaran of Venganoor Kunjan Vilakathu house was a member of District Congress Committee. She organised *Harijan* women in Congress Party. In 1937, when Gandhiji visited Venganoor, she served as an organizer of the meeting\(^63\).

Devaki Gopidas of Kallikkattu Parambil House, Kottayam, earned B.A. from Trivandrum Maharajas College and B.L. from Calcutta University. In

\(^{59}\)  *Ibid.*

\(^{60}\)  K.Karunakaran Nair, *op.cit.*, p.190.

\(^{61}\)  Anilkumar A.V., *op.cit.*, p.52.


1942, she served as an assistant in ‘Financial Advisor Office’ of India Government, and in 1946, started practice as a lawyer in Kottayam District Court. In 1948 she was elected as a Congress candidate to Legislative Assembly. Devaki Gopidas died in a plane crash in 1973 while going to Delhi to participate in the meeting of ‘Minority Languages Commission’.

Devaki Krishnan was the wife of M.K. Krishnan, S.N.D.P. Secretary of Cherthala taluk. At first she was a Communist supporter and had close connections with A.K.Gopalan, P.T.Punnoose and K.R.Gowri Amma. But after Vayalar revolt, she left Communist party and became active in Congress party. Her son Vayalar Ravi, M.P. is an active Congress worker.

Chellamma was the daughter of Paripra Kumara Pillai of Kankolil house, Alleppey. She became the wife of K.K. Kunju Pillai, an ardent nationalist. She also supported the Nationalist Movement, gave up ornaments and used khadi clothes. She gave shelter to freedom fighters in her house and gave medical aid to satyagrahis who were brutally tortured by the police. Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar tortured Chellamma through civil and criminal cases.

Bhagavathi Amma from Kollam was an active worker of ‘khadi’ and ‘Sarvodaya’ movement and Narayani K. Krishnakunju from Idukki was also an active worker of khadi and prohibition movements. T. Narayani Amma a native of Trivandrum was a nominated member of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly for fifteen years from 1933 to 1947. Thressiamma Korah from Bharananganam was also a member of Sree Chitra State Council for two times from 1937 to 1947.

Saraswathi Gandhi, born at Narayanathu house, Thycud, Trivandrum, was the daughter of Advocate N.K.Krishna Pillai and Padmavathi Thankachy. She was the niece of veteran Gandhian G.Ramachandran and wife of Gandhiji’s grandson Kanthilal Gandhi. She participated in the freedom movement while in

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68. Ibid.
Louis Ouwerkerk was born of Dutch parents in London. She took degree in Economics from Cambridge University and in 1929, became a teacher in Maharaja’s Women’s College, Trivandrum and in 1936, became the Acting Principal. In 1937, she became the Professor of the newly established University of Travancore. She lived in Trivandrum when the state passed through a turbulent period. She had intimate relationship with State Congress leaders and was an eye-witness of the ‘Great Jatha’ of 1938. Due to her relationship with State Congress leaders, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar turned against her and her service was ended in the year 1939.

5.4 Women Leaders of Communist Party

The pages of Communist party history is crowded with a large number of selfless, revolting women activists such as K.R. Gowri Amma, Rosamma Punnoose, Koothattukulam Mary, Suseela Gopalan, K.Devayani, Thankamma Krishna Pillai, P.K.Medini and others.

5.4.1 K.R. Gowri Amma (1919-)

K.R. Gowri Amma is the first woman minister of Kerala. She was member of Travancore Legislative Assembly in 1952 and 1954 and the Revenue Minister in 1957 ministry. An Ezhava by caste, K.R. Gowri Amma came from a wealthy family which owned 120 acres around Cherthalai. She was born in 1919 as the daughter of Kalathil Parampil Raman and Parvathi. Her father had great admiration to Gowri Amma, the first Ezhava woman who passed B.A. from Cochin and this prompted him to give the name ‘Gowri’ to his child. Kalathilparampil house was a venue for recruiting volunteers for liquor prohibition movement, temple entry movement, anti caste movement, Vaikom

70. www.hindu.com/2008/12/15
During her childhood, several organizations like ‘Chandika Paripalini Yogam’, ‘Karappuram Ezhava Samajam’, etc. sprang up in Cherthala. Several women’s organisations or ‘Stree Samajams’ also sprang up for helping the agitations conducted by men. Women donated rice, coconuts etc. and a part of their personal savings to help the reform and political movements. Her house was a meeting ground of several reform movements.

Manakkodathu Kesavan Vaidyar used to explain Asan’s poems like ‘Nalini’ and ‘Duravastha’ to peasants during evenings at her house. Eventhough her father didn’t know Lenin very well, Lenin’s photo adored the wall of the house along with the photos of leaders like Gandhiji and T.K.Madhavan. Her father started a school up to third standard near his house as per the advice of Sree Narayana Guru to ‘enlighten through education’. Her father also took initiative in organizing ‘Kathakali Sanghams’ and temple construction because these two were banned to depressed classes. Gowri Amma was also influenced by the poems of Kumaran Asan and Ezhava women social reformers like Muthukulam Parvathi Amma and Mannanthara Parvathi Amma. Gowri Amma’s mother was well trained in Kathakali, at a time when such art forms like Kathakali were prohibited to Ezhavas and other low castes. She was also the President of ‘Mahila Samajam’ of the local S.N.D.P. branch. She also sent pidiyari collection to Vaikom Satyagraha volunteers. Gowri Amma got her education from Government High School, Cherthala, Maharajas College, Ernakulam and St. Theresa’s College, Ernakulam. She became the first Ezhava woman to graduate in Law. She visited several ladies’ hostels and colleges and attracted women students to Students’ Union.

K.R. Gowri Amma was influenced by her brother K.Sukumaran who was the president of ‘Coir Factory Workers’ Union’, ‘Karshaka Thozhilali Union’, ‘Beedi’ Workers’ Union’, ‘Oil Workers’ Union’, ‘Carpenters’ Union’ etc. During the Quit India Movement of 1942 she was the women leader of Law College. When Aruna Asaf Ali came to Trivandrum, K.R.Gowri Amma went to

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73. www.frontlineonnet.com
hear her class held at ‘khadar store’ at Pulimood. Gowri Amma was the only woman participated in it. She got a warning from Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. Her brother Sukumaran participated in Punnapra Vayalar revolt. Her house gave asylum to communist leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, N.C. Sekhar, Sankara Narayananam Thampi and others.

It was P. Krishna Pillai who admitted Gowri Amma to Communist Party. Punnapra Vayalar episode and police atrocities after that prompted Gowri Amma to join Communist Party. She fought against the ‘Independent Travancore’ idea of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, as a member of Communist Party. In 1947 she became a member of the Communist Party. She swiftly plunged into organization work during the days of Punnapra Vayalar, guided by the stalwarts of Communist movement such as P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan, M.N Govindan Nair, T.V. Thomas and R. Sugathan.

When Communist party was banned after ‘Calcutta Thesis’ she was imprisoned along with Subhadramma Thankachy, V.C. Mary, Koothattukulam Mary, Radhamma Thankachy and others and was set free in 1950. She again worked in Communist Party, was jailed, contested elections from jail and got victory in 1952. K.R. Gowri Amma was the only woman in Travancore-Cochin Legislative assembly. K.R. Gowri Amma was elected to the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly in 1952 and 1954. In 1957 she was elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly. In 1957 after the Communists won office, K.R.Gowri Amma married T.V.Thomas, Labour Minister in the same government. But after the party split in 1964, K.R.Gowri Amma joined the newly formed Communist party of India [Marxist]. T.V.Thomas retained with the Communist Party of India. Finally their marriage relations strained. She has been continuously elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1960, ’67, ’70, ’82, ’87, ’91, and 2001, except in 1977. In 1957, ’67, ’80 ’87 and 2001 Governments, she served as Minister. Her ability to win elections was remarkable. Defeated in 1948, she won the seat of Aroor in Trvancore-Cochin Assembly in 1952. In the 1957 Communist government, she was the Revenue Minister who piloted the Kerala

75. Interview with K.R.Gowri Amma on 20-10-2011.
76. samyukta.info/site/book/export/html/135
Agrarian Relations Act through the legislature. As a woman legislator, K.R. Gowri Amma’s greatest contribution is the Land Reforms of 1957 and 1967. The bill sought to confer fixity of tenure on all tenants. It allowed landlords to resume possession of land from tenants only for three specific grounds for the extension of any place of religious worship, for the construction of buildings for residential purpose and for self cultivation. She got awards of S. Sankara Narayanan Thampi and V. Gangadharan Trust for noble legislator.

K.R.Gowri Amma adorned the posts of President of ‘Kerala Karshaka Sangham’ and the ‘Kerala Mahila Federation’. She has always been a ‘phenomenon’ commanding loyalty of the masses. She was once known as ‘iron lady of Marxist party’.

5.4.2 Rosamma Cherian (Rosamma Punnoose) (1917- )

She was born in 1914 as the daughter of Thomman Cherian and Annamma, of Karippappampil house, Kanjirappally. She was the younger sister of Akkamma Cherian. She took B.A. B.L. Degrees. She joined Travancore State Congress in 1938 and took part in the agitation for responsible government. She organized ‘Desasevikas’, the women’s wing of Congress volunteer corps.

She participated in defiance of prohibitory order, in the Vattiyoorkkavu conference of the State Congress and was sentenced to one year imprisonment. She was nominated as the fourth president of the State Congress during the second Civil Disobedience Movement and was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment.

5.4.3 Koothattukulam Mary (1921- )

Kothattukulam Mary was the daughter of Kochuparambil Pathrose Mathew and Koothattukulam Chollambel Elizuba. She was the niece of Chollambel Pillai or C.J.Joseph who died after brutal torture by

Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar’s police. While a student, she refused to give donation for celebrating Diwan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar’s Shashtiabdyapoorthy and left the classroom shouting ‘Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai’ and ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai’. She organized a march to Koothattukulam police station against Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar and was suspended from the school. In 1938, as per the urge of Gandhiji, Mary boycotted classroom and gave leadership to the struggle for freedom in her native place.

She founded ‘Mahila Sadanam’ in Koothattukulam in the model of Wardha Ashram and gave leadership to khadi production and Hindi propaganda. She joined the Communist party struggles and was brutally tortured by the police. When Communist Party was banned after the ‘Calcutta Thesis’, she lived in disguise as an absconder. When she was caught by the police, she was very brutally tortured and tormented. She married another Communist activist, C.S.George. It was Koothattukulam Mary who attracted many women of Koothattukulam area such as V.C.Mary, Allikkutty, Mariamma, A.O.Eliyamma, K.C.Saramma and others to the Communist movement. She worked as a school teacher in Perinthalmanna and several other places after independence. She is now ninety one years old and is leading a retired life.

5.4.4 Suseela Gopalan (1929-2001)

Suseela Gopalan was a leading figure of the left movement in India and a household name in her home state of Kerala. Suseela Gopalan’s life reflects the struggle for progressive change in gender, class and caste. Her uncle C.K. Karunakarappanicker encouraged her for social and party work. From school life itself, Suseela spoke in the meetings of coir workers. Her first political activity was leading a demonstration at Kayamkulam against monarchy while she was a student at Kayamkulam High school. She was transferred to ‘Sanathana Dharma Vidyalayam’, Alleppey, where she organized secret

82. Jose Karimpana, op.cit.
83. Interview with Koothattukulam Mary on 16-3-2013.
meetings of girl students. Then she was transferred to Thrissur St. Mary’s Convent. Nothing, of course, could keep Suseela away from politics, and in Thrissur too she found ways of keeping herself up to date with political developments, keeping in touch with A.K. Gopalan, the famous Communist leader. She married A.K. Gopalan while studying for B.A. On 10 September 1952, A.K. Gopalan and Suseela were married at the ‘Alleppey Coir Worker’s Union’ office. There were no marriage ceremonies, just the exchange of a garland of red flowers made by the Alleppey workers. She served as All India Vice President of ‘Centre of Indian Trade Unions’ or C.I.T.U., President of ‘All India Democratic Women’s Association’ and member of ‘Lok Sabha’ for two times. In 1996 he became Minister of Industry in Kerala.

5.4.5 K. Devayani

K. Devayani, one of the famous women activists of Communist party in Kerala, was born at Paravoor near Punnapra, Alleppey. She studied up to ninth standard at B.E.M. High school, Punnapra. Her classmates included V.S. Achyuthanandan and V.K. Sukumaran. After studying ninth standard, she stopped her education. She became a worker of ‘Atma Vidya Sangham’ started by Vagbhatananda. She recited a prayer song in the first ‘Atma Vidya Sangham Mahila Sammelan’ held at Punnapra in 1935. Muthukulam Parvathi Amma and Gomati Dev were the main speakers of that meeting. Later K. Devayani became the women’s wing secretary of ‘Atma Vidya Sangham’ and became an excellent speaker.85 She usually recited the poems of Kumaran Asan in the meetings of Atmavidya Sangham.

When, ‘Ambalapuzha Taluk Kayarupiri Thozhilali Union’ for women was organized in 1936, under the Presidency of Simon Asan, K. Devayani became its Secretary.86 She was only fifteen years old at that time. It may be considered as the first Trade Union exclusively for women.87 After participating in a Communist camp at Kozhikode, K. Devayani and her friends, K. Meenakshi,

Dakshayani and Bhavani, started a cadre camp at Alleppey. They hired a lodge near Alleppey town and led a commune life there. Coir workers, after their work during day time, reached the camp and participated in the study classes led by A.V.Kunjambu. K. Devayani’s political Guru was P. Krishna Pillai. Along with Thankamma Krishnapillai, She worked for organizing ‘Mahila Sanghams’ against casteism and Jenni system and imperialism. She served as the Secretary of ‘Ambalappuzha Taluk Mahila Sangham’. She was the leader of agrarian strike by women at Kalarkode fields.

Due to Kalarkode strike, wage was increased to six ‘annas’ and a leisure time of thirty minutes were approved at noon. K.Devayani and her husband A.V.Kunjambu lived at Kozhikode, in a commune, together with E.M.S Namboothirippad, Arya Antarjanam, I.C.P. Namboothiri, Mrs. I.C.P. Namboothiri, Arya Pallom, Priyadatha, P. Krishna Pillai and Thankamma Krishna Pillai. Later A.V.Kunjambu and K.Devayani lived in Karivelloor, the native place of Kunjambu. There K.Devayani organized struggles against Neeleswaram Kovilakam and worked among the peasants. She led a life of isolation, poverty and police assaults while A.V.Kunjambu was in jail.

Once she had to take assylum in a graveyard to save her from police assault. Her infant daughter Radhamol who died after sufferings and poverty during the Karivelloor struggle can be called ‘the first martyr in Kerala’s agrarian strikes’. Radhamol was also a martyr of long lasting struggles experienced by a Communist mother. Devayani returned to Alleppey and organized women in Punnapra Vayalar revolt. After four years she returned to Karivelloor. She died in 1991. Her autobiography, ‘Chorayum Kanneerum NananjaVazhikal’ presents her struggles during the formative days of Communist party in Kerala.

5.4.6 Thankamma Krishna Pillai

Thankamma Krishna Pillai was the wife of Sakhavu Krishna Pillai. She came to connection with Krishna Pillai while he was in jail. With the help of a jail guard, Krishna Pillai sought the help of Thankamma, a school girl at that time, to get some Hindi books to read. Thankamma gave a Hindi book ‘Chandragupta’ but was feared when she understood that the book was for a political prisoner in Edalakkudi jail. The relationship grew and Krishna Pillai taught her about Lenin, Stalin and other political matters through letters. He also sent ‘Prabhatham’ and other Communist literature and political messages to Thankamma.

The relationship blossomed further when Thankamma began translating Krishna Pillai’s secret messages from Hindi into Malayalam and delivering it clandestinely to Communist Party members, risking the wrath of the Diwan’s secret police. She started Hindi tuition to some students to earn money to buy books and pencils to Krishna Pillai and to pay the jail guard. He was making a ‘contact person’ in Thankamma. They got married in 1942. She profoundly helped Krishna Pillai in his party work. Thankamma made her first political speech in an anti-Japanese meeting at Parassinikkadavu. She also served as proof reader in ‘Desabhimani’, Kozhikode. She worked in Alleppey during Punnapra Vayalar agitation. She also worked for K.R.Gowri Amma in the Travancore election of 1948. While Krishna Pillai was known as Sakhavu, Thankamma was known as Chechi in Communist circles.

5.4.7 P.K. Medini (1933 - )

Puthenpurayil Medini or P.K. Medini was ‘the singing sensation of Communist party’ at a time. She was the daughter of Kankali and Pappy and the sister of Communist activists P.K.Bawa and Sarangapani. They were the tenants of ‘Mangalathu’ family. Eventhough a member of the barber caste among the Ezhavas i.e., the ‘Ezhavathi’ caste, her progressive minded father used shirts

95. www.frontlineonnet.com
97. Ibid., p.117.
with gold buttons and used to read newspapers. He was a regular reader of ‘Kaumudi’ newspaper and it was his reading habit that made him progressive minded. He gave progressive names such as Medini, Padmanabhan, Bawa, Chakrapani, Bhargavi, Vasumathi, Dayanandan, Jelam and Sarangapani to his children. Medini was proficient in singing ‘Ammanamkalippattukal’, ‘Oonjalppattukal’ and ‘Thiruvathirappattukal’. She also used to sing State Congress songs, wear khadi clothes, in State Congress meetings.

At that time Jenmi System existed with all its cruelties. The lower caste people had no right to dress properly or to walk freely through public roads. They had their own separate roads called ‘Parayan Vazhi’ and ‘Pulayan Vazhi’. Their dead were not properly buried, but were sunk deep in the river. They had no right to vote and had no way to express their grievances. They had to do compulsory labour to their landlords without any remuneration. In her childhood days, Medini also drew water for the coconut groves of the landlord. She had to leave her school at fifth standard for not giving fifteen chakram as fees.

There was widespread discontent among the labourers against Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. The labourers considered Communist party as their sole relief and path to liberation. Their lives intertwined with party work. For them party work and strikes were their humble attempts to survive. Medini also came under the influence of Communist party even from her childhood. She experienced the pain of poverty, hunger, inequality and social injustice from a very young age and was easily attracted to the Communist movement. She acted as a messenger of P.Krishna Pillai when he led an absconder’s life near her house.

P Krishna Pillai gave her a book written by E.M.S.Namboothirippad by name, ‘Onnekal Kodi Malayalikal’, which was banned at that time. She came into contact with Communist activists like Kalikkutty Assatty who taught Communism to working class women through Thiruvathira songs. Her brothers were also active workers of the Communist Party. Medini became a

98. Interview with P.K.Medini on 15-1-2013.
revolutionary singer. She sung the revolutionary songs written by S.K.Das and Ramankutty Asan. Her songs became a common item before the speeches of leaders like P.T.Punnoose, T.V.Thomas and R.Sugathan.

Medini grew through ‘Thozhilali Samskarika Kendram’. After Punnapra Vayalar, its name was changed to ‘Janadhipathya Kalanilayam’. Her songs against Diwan’s misrule in the style of Thiruvathira songs were very popular. She had been a regular presence in the election campaigns of the Communist party. Through her songs Communist ideology penetrated into the hearts of the working class. They were infact ideas about equality and class struggle in song form. Those were the ideas that spread by the progressive literature of the time. Her songs like ‘Red Salute’ deeply attracted the masses. She also acted in the dramas of Kedamangalam Sadanandan, P.J.Antony and N.N.Pillai and the most enthralling among them were ‘Sandesam’ ‘Ningalenne Communinstakki’ and ‘Inquilabinte Makkal’. She actively supported Punnapra Vayalar through her songs and was only twelve years old at that time. Her house was destroyed by the army and she, along with her brother lived secretly for sometime. She participated in the jathas along with her brother. P.T. Punnoose called her ‘Padappattukari’ meaning ‘singer of the wars’. She was imprisoned at the age of seventeen for singing revolutionary songs at Thirunakkara maidan, Kottayam. Meena, wife of her brother Sarangapani, was a dancer and ‘the programmes of Meena and Medini’ attracted people to Communist meetings.

Her husband Sankunni died at an early age when she was twenty seven years and she worked in ‘Kerala Spinning Mill’ for bringing up her children. P.K.Medini gave her own significant contribution to the growth of Communist party through her revolutionary songs. She defended the miseries of an age through her songs. Her personal sorrows added fuel to her songs. Her songs kindled the spirit of revolution. There were times when ‘the mike and Medini’s song’ drew crowds in party’s election conventions. She was honoured by

100. P. Geetha, op.cit., p.317.
102. Mathrubhoomi weekly, September 4-10, 2011.
103. Ibid., pp.203-204.
many awards such as ‘P.S. Somasekaran Award’. She also acted in a cinema ‘Vasanthathinte Theekkanalukal’ about the rise and growth of Communist party as its theme. She is now eighty years and is popularly known as ‘Sakhavu Medini Chechi’ among multitudes of party workers.

5.5 Women from the Palaces

Women from the palaces also were attracted towards political work. Four women of Kodungalloor Chirackal Kovilakom took part in Paliyam Satyagraha, viz., Kunjikkutty, Rema, Indira and Kochikkavu. They started a manuscript magazine called ‘Sridevi’ which included stories, articles, poetry, drama, politics etc. All of them were attracted towards Communism. Kunjikkutty Thampuratty, who was an active member of ‘Mahila Sangham’, also actively participated in Paliyam Satyagraha. Kodungalloor Rema Thampuratty was the daughter of Kodungalloor Kunjilakshmi Thampuratty and Kinarolirathu Krishnan Namboothiri. She studied Sanskrit, music, stitching and drawing and was active in ‘Kshatriya Samajam’ and ‘Mahila Samajam’. She later participated in Paliyam Satyagaraha.

Panampilly described Kodungallor Kovilakom as ‘Moscow’. As per their wishes, A.K. Gopalan visited the Kovilakom once and they welcomed him giving golden sickle and hammer. During the Paliyam struggle, Indira Thampuratti and Rema Thampuratti escaped from their home at night and went to Paliyam to participate in the Satyagraha. They gave a statement to newspapers about their participation in the Satyagraha. They were arrested and were deserted in far off places. The government suppressed the struggle with an iron hand. Paliyam road finally opened in 1948.

Subhadramma Thankachi and Radhamma Thankachi of Ennackattu ‘Tharayil’ palace, Chengannoor, also deserve mention. They were the daughters of Rama Varma Raja, a Gandhian who was active in Harijan uplift

106. Ibid., p.290.
108. Ibid.
movement. They were attracted towards Communist party through their elder brother Sankara Narayanan Thampi. Subhadramma Thankachi had her education in Women’s College, University College and Law College, Trivandrum. She joined ‘All India Student’s Federation’ (A.I.S.F.) and was the only woman student who went to welcome Aruna Asaf Ali, when she came to Trivandrum. Radhamma Thankachi organized coir workers and was active in ‘Mahila Sanghams’. She married another Communist leader C.Unnimraja. Radhamma organized an industrial self-help group called ‘Poshak’. Both of them were active in student’s movements, women’s movements and Trade Union movements. They suffered jail life along with K.R. Gowri Amma and Koothattukulam Mary in 1948. Ammini Amma, the wife of Thoppil Bhasi, was the daughter of Ennackattu Rama Varma Raja and Pallana Pandavathu Chellamma Kettinam.

Saradamma, who belongs to Ennackattu Padinjattethil house, was the daughter of Sankuppillai and Janaki Amma. She was attracted to Communist party through leaders like Sankara Narayanan Thampi, Puthuppally Raghavan and Kottathala Surendran who led a secret life in her house. She spread Communist ideology among Harijan women in the guise of teaching them Thiruvathira dance. She also organized cashew workers and peasants in the area. When the police, with the help of Jenmis, attacked Harijan houses, Subhadramma, Radhamma and Saradamma led a women’s jatha of about five hundred people towards the court premises and their men were set free.

Ambika, Ambalika, Manorama and Gayatri of Pandalam Palace also served as ‘Mahila Sangham’ workers.

5.6 Other Communist Activists

Anjilipparampil Krishnan Anasooya spread Communist ideas through songs and dances even when she was a very young girl. She served as a helper

112. Ibid., p.244.
115. Ibid., p.263.
of Communist leaders working underground and as a messenger who transported secret leaflets. She was the first revolutionary singer of ‘Thozhilali Samskarika Kendra’. The Communist Party helped her to study classical dance under Kunju Warrier and Ramankutty Asan and to stay in ‘Mahila Seva Sadan’, Kottayam. She became an unavoidable presence in the existing twenty four trade unions of the time. She worked along with Gomati Amma, Meenakshi, Lakshmikutty Amma and K. Devayani. She acted in the dramas of P.Kesava Dev and Abhaya Dev and suffered jail life during Punnapra Vayalar uprising.

K. Meenakshi popularly called Meenakshi Assatty started party work, after selecting her as the Acting General Secretary of ‘Travancore Coir Factory Workers’ Union’ when she was fifteen years old. Her first public activity was struggle against withdrawal of Onam allowance in coir factory. She used to sing revolutionary songs in coir factory workers’ meetings. She used to speak boldly to factory owners about labourer’s problems and travelled all over Kuttanad in country boats to teach revolutionary songs to women and children. She politicized the women of Alleppey through her Thiruvathira songs. She helped Punnapra rioters and suffered jail life three times. Her marriage with a party worker V.K.Bhaskaran was in the Party office. She also worked in ‘Thiru Kochi Mahila Sangham’, ‘Kerala Mahila Sangham’ and ‘All India Janadhipatya Mahila Association’.

Kalikkutty Assatty also bravely confronted the police with sticks and chilly powder during Punnapra Vayalar Struggle.

K.K.Kamalakshi, wife of martyr K.C.Velayudhan was also an activist among coir factory workers and peasant women. She was a volunteer of Vayalar camp who cooked food in the camp and organized demonstrations.
Devaki Krishnan Mukkomparampil, wife of M.K.Krishnan and mother of Vayalar Ravi M.P., was another Communist worker who organized women labourers in the coir factories. She later joined the Congress party\(^{125}\).

Gomati Dev, the first wife of P. Kesava Dev, was a pro-Communist and an active worker of ‘Atmavidya Sangham’. She was a good speaker and used to speak in ‘Ezhava Stree Samajams’\(^{126}\). She also acted in many dramas. She wrote many political essays and short stories in ‘Navajeevan’, ‘Kaumudi’ and ‘Kerala Kaumudi’ magazines\(^{127}\).

Devaki Panicker, daughter of Sardar K.M.Panicker, sacrificed her luxurious life to become the wife of the Communist leader, M.N.Govindan Nair. She studied in Shanti Niketan and Oxford and lived in China for sometime with her father. While she was in Delhi, she used to write articles in ‘Blitz’ about China. She came to Kerala to become a Communist worker and made speeches in hundreds of stages. She was moved by the party activities of M.N.Govindan Nair and married him\(^{128}\). After her marriage with M.N. Govindan Nair, she used white saris, discarded ornaments and led a simple life.

Beatrice was a participant of Punnapra Vayalar agitation and suffered three times imprisonment. She also served as President of ‘Mahila Association’ at district level.

Kudiancherry Elseena was a sufferer of Punnapra Vayalar struggles. Her husband participated in the revolts and was arrested. She and her children sought asylum in camps and led a miserable life\(^{129}\).

Gowri Gopinath and her husband used to sing songs in Communist meetings. While she was a student, she had participated in the State Congress jatha of 1938\(^{130}\).

\(^{125}\). Ibid.
\(^{129}\). Alosious D.Fernandez (ed.), op.cit., p.98.
\(^{130}\). P. Geetha, op.cit., p.97.
Bhaimy Sadasivan was a Communist party worker and Secretary of ‘Mahila Sangham’. She attended secret meetings and worked along with K.Meenaaksi and K.Devayani.

5.7 Travancore women who served as members of Legislative Assemblies

Mrs. P. Moses, member of ‘Sree Moolam Praja Sabha’, Tressiamma Korah, member of the second and third session of ‘Sree Chitra State Council’ from 1937 to 1947, Devaki Kainikkara, member of ‘Travancore Legislative Assembly’, Bharati Udayabhanu, the first woman to be selected to ‘Rajya Sabha’ from Kerala, O.T. Sarada Krishnan, member of Kerala and Madras University Senates and member of ‘Kerala Legislative Assembly’ in 1960 and Maheswari Amma, wife of N. Sreekantan Nair were some noteworthy politicians of the time.

5.8 Travancore Women with Academic Excellence

Travancore women who possessed a high educational career included Dr. Mary Punnen Lukose, Anna Mani, Anna Chandy, Sara Chacko, Thottakkattu Madhavi Amma, Muthukulam Parvathi Amma, B. Kalyani Amma and B. Bhageerathy Amma.

5.8.1 Dr. Mary Punnen Lukose (1886 - 1976)

Dr. Mary Punnen Lukose was the first woman doctor of India and the first Surgeon General to be appointed in any Indian State, when women doctors were still a rarity in Europe and America. She was also the first woman graduate of Travancore University and was presented a gold medal by the public. While she was studying for B.A. at Maharajas College, Trivandrum, she was the first woman to attend the classes and, for three weeks, the only female student in the college.

She spent seven years in London and Dublin studying medicine. In 1915, she became the first Kerala woman to graduate in medicine. In 1917, she married Barrister K.K. Lukose. She took charge of a newly opened Women’s and Children’s hospital. In 1924, she was appointed as the Durbar Physician, the

first woman in India to head a major department\textsuperscript{133}. She got telegrams of congratulations from friends throughout the world. She became Senior Surgeon and Surgeon General and was conferred ‘Vaidyasastra Kusala’ in 1935\textsuperscript{134}. She was the first woman who became a department head in the British Empire itself.

She had done much work as a nominated member of Travancore Legislative Council and was the first woman member of any legislature in India. She worked for the development of Trivandrum Y.W.C.A. along with Neena Bentnall, an Australian woman\textsuperscript{135}.

5.8.2 Modayil Anna Mani (1918-2001)

Modayil Anna Mani was the distinguished Indian meteorologist and former Deputy General of Indian Meteorological Department. She made noteworthy contributions in the field of meteorological instrumentation and pioneered research in the areas of solar radiation, ozone and wind energy measurements.

She was a research scholar in Bangalore Indian Institute of Science under the world famous scientist C.V.Raman. She became the Head of the Department of Instruments in Climate Observation. She also served as a consultant in World Climate Observation Centre at Geneva\textsuperscript{136}.

5.8.3 Anna Chandy (1905-1996)

Anna Chandy was the first woman advocate of Travancore and the spokeswoman of first wave Feminism in Kerala\textsuperscript{137}. She was born in 1905 to Malayali Syrian Christian parents in erstwhile Travancore state. She was the first Malayali woman who got Degree in Law and became the first woman advocate in Travancore\textsuperscript{138}. She was also the first woman High Court Judge in the British Empire\textsuperscript{139}. When Anna Chandy became the first woman advocate of Travancore, she was presented a gold medal by the public of Alleppey in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid., p.94.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Hundred Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala 1888-1988, Centenary Souvenir, op.cit.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} G.Kumara Pillai, op.cit., p.33.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} K.Saradamoney, Evar Vazhikattikal, (Mal.), Sign Books, Trivandrum, 2010, p.25.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} J.Devika, Kalpanayude Mattoli, (Mal.), op.cit., p.135.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Anna Chandy, Atmakatha, (Mal.), Carmel books, Thrissur, 1973, p.57.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} G.Kumara Pillai, op.cit., p.35.
\end{itemize}
In 1931, she presided over the educational conference of All Kerala Nair Conference of N.S.S. at Chavara. Anna Chandy made a speech on “Independence of women” in annual conference of Vidyaposhini Sabha, a critical response to another speech made by Sadasyathilakan T.K. Velupillai against giving government employment to women. The debate between Anna Chandy and T.K. Velupillai continued for sometime in the ‘Samadarshi’. She also served as the Chief Editor of ‘Sreemathi’ magazine.

In 1932-34, she became Member of ‘Sree Moolam Praja Sabha’. Her husband, P.C. Chandy, an Inspector General of Police, helped and supported her all the way. Anna Chandy made a resolution in A.I.W.C. meeting held in Trivandrum in 1935 asking the government to establish birth control clinics throughout India. She also asked to supply necessary information to those seeking contraceptive advice through municipalities and other institutions. Considerable indignation was expressed over a Christian woman bringing forward such a resolution. Anna Chandy participated in a drama called ‘Vyazhavattathinu Sesham’ in 1938 organized by ‘Sree Chithira Thirunal Granthasala’, in Maharaja’s palace and as a reward, the Maharani appointed her as the Munsiff. She became the first woman Munsiff in 1957 and the first woman judge in India in 1959. In 1967, she became the Law Commission member.

5.8.4 Sara Chacko (1905-1954)

Sara Chacko was born on 13 February 1905 as the daughter of M.A. Chacko of Mazhuvancheril Parampathu family at Ayyampally near Alwaye and Mary of Eralil family at Paravoor. Her father was the Diwan of the King of Cochin. Sara had her primary education at Syrian Girl’s Primary School and

141. J. Devika, Her Self: Gender and Early writings of Malayalee Women (1898-1938), Stree, Kolkata, 2005, p.127.
142. Anna Chandy, op.cit., p.106.
143. Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p.196.
144. J. Devika, Her Self: Gender and Early writings of Malayalee Women (1898-1938), op.cit., p.128.
Government Jubilee Girl’s High School, Trissur. After the school education, she joined Queen Mary’s Women’s College in Madras. She passed B.A. in 1925. In 1928, she joined for M.A. in History and Economics at Queen Mary's College in Madras. Miss. Sara Chacko was a teacher of Christava Mahilalayam School, Alwaye and later joined as the Lecturer of Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow.

Though Sara Chacko was belonging to an Orthodox Christian family, she was forced to attend the Methodist service to volunteer her leadership in the monthly Christian Congregation and in Christian Student's movements. In the Conference of Christian Student's movement held in Java, she represented India. Sara Chacko made a very epoch making speech in the Java conference where students from many Asian countries participated. Further, Sara Chacko continued her higher education in America in 1937 and took M.A. in Education from Chicago University and studied Law and Colonialism from Michigan University with scholarship. In 1938, she returned back to Lucknow, became Vice Principal and later Principal of Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow.

In 1947 she became the Vice-President of World Y.W.C.A. In 1951 she became President of The World Council of Churches (W.C.C.). Sara Chacko was the first Indian honoured to be the President and first woman President of the biggest ecumenical forum, The Word Council of Churches. Sara Chacko expired with a heart attack while playing Basket Ball at the age of forty nine. The short life of Sara Chacko was eventful with very valuable contributions to the Indian Society and Churches of the world. At the time of her early death, she had grown up to be a renowned educationalist and ecumenist.

5.8.5 Thottakkattu Madhavi Amma

Thottakkattu Madhavi Amma was the wife of prominent Nair reformer, Mannathu Padmanabhan. She was a scholar who gained proficiency in Malayalam, Sanskrit, English and other European languages and was known as a poet and critic. Her major works are ‘Hema Panjaram’, ‘Saradamani’ and ‘Tatvachinta’. She was active in the Ernakulam Women’s Association and was

146. www.lightoflife.com
nominated an unofficial member to the Cochin Legislative Council in 1925 and became the first woman legislative member in India\textsuperscript{148}. She was the President of the Women’s Conference held as part of the Nair Conference at Karuvatta in 1929.

**5.8.6 B. Kalyani Amma**

B. Kalyani Amma was one among the first Matriculates, the first women Degree holders and women teachers in Trivandrum area\textsuperscript{149}. She was the classmate of K.Chinnamma in ‘Zenana Mission School’, Trivandrum. She suffered many hardships as the wife of Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, a freelance journalist. The couples resembled Marx and his wife Jenny in many ways and Kalyani Amma can be called ‘the Jenny of Kerala’\textsuperscript{150}. Together they published a women’s magazine, ‘Sarada’. She was a woman of uncommon courage. When Ramakrishna Pillai was exiled, she accompanied her husband leaving her ancestral house and suffered a lot of painful experiences including poverty, diseases and mental agony together\textsuperscript{151}. Her uncommon courage was a result of her modern education\textsuperscript{152}. She served as Headmistress of Kannur Government Girls High School and Superintendent of Mangalapuram High School and Training school. Her autobiography was ‘Vyazhavatta Smaranakal’.

**5.8.7 B. Bhageerathy Amma**

B. Bhageerathy Amma was one of the most vocal advocates of an active, informed and disciplined domestic role for women in early twentieth century Kerala. She was well known as the editor of the ‘Mahila’, one of the long lived women’s magazines of the period. She was known to be a powerful public speaker and was one of the women considered for membership in the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha in 1927. Her major work ‘Stree’ published in 1925, described in detail, her vision of active domesticity as opposed to the traditional passive wifely devotion and was dedicated, to the womenfolk of Kerala. ‘Vijnana Prakasam’ was her important work.


\textsuperscript{149} G.Kumara Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.32.

\textsuperscript{150} Anilkumar A.V, \textit{Indulekhayude Anujathimar} (Mal.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.45.


5.9 Other Important Women of Excellence

More and more women continued to emerge successful in University examinations and were reported in dailies. Dr. Lakshmi Anaippil, Kollam was the first batch student of Velloor Medical College and later served at Kollam Victoria Government Hospital\(^{153}\).

L.Omana Kunjamma of Thikkurissi family, Trivandrum, was the first woman Magistrate in Kerala and India and served as Trivandrum District Collector\(^ {154}\). She was an orator and poetess and won many prizes for drama from the Maharaja\(^ {155}\).

Prof. Vijaya Raghavan of Thoppil house, Trivandrum, passed B.A. Music from Queen Mary’s College, Madras and became Professor in Music, in Annamalai University. She got education in music and painting at ‘Shanti Niketan’. She became Music Professor at Womens College, Trivandrum. She got D.Litt. in ‘Ragas and Thalas of Kerala’ \(^ {156}\).

Mrs. I.C. Chacko or Nidheerikkal Mariam was born in a distinguished Syrian Christian family in Alleppey as the daughter of a well-known lawyer Nidheerikkal Cyriac. She was educated in Trivandrum passing the Fine Arts examination from the Maharaja’s College for Women. However, unlike two of her younger sisters Teresa Nidheery and Anna Nidheery, who both had careers in education, she did not pursue her studies. At seventeen she was married off to I.C. Chacko, who was to be known as a brilliant scholar and intellectual in Travancore. She was the first woman who got college education among Kerala Catholics\(^ {157}\). She was known to be an outspoken and uncompromising champion of women’s rights. In a speech made at women’s meeting of All Kerala Catholic Conference at Pala, she said daughters must be granted equal share as that of sons, from their parents’ wealth. The absence of landed property among Syrian Christian women of Travancore is a handicap in their attainment of voting rights

\(^ {153}\) G.Kamalamma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.410.
\(^ {154}\) Pattom G.Ramachandran Nair, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 290.
\(^ {155}\) \textit{Vanithamitram} magazine, April 1947.
\(^ {156}\) G.Kamalamma, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 690-692.
to the Legislative Council and ‘Sree Moolam Praja Sabha’\textsuperscript{158}. She received threatening letters after this speech.

Her sister Miss. Anna Nidheery was the first Indian Principal of Government Women’s College, Trivandrum\textsuperscript{159}.

K. Bhanumati Amma, wife of Kumaran Asan was the daughter of Dr. Palpu’s father’s brother Thachakudy Kumaran. She married Kumaran Asan in 1917 and had two sons Sudhakaran and Prabhakaran and lived in a house at Thonnackal. When Asan died in 1924 in boat accident, she became a widow at the age of twenty three. She tactfully led ‘Union Tile works’ at Alwaye, ‘Sarada Book Depot’ at Trivandrum and in 1934, published Asan’s whole works in three volumes\textsuperscript{160}. The publication was dedicated to Maharani Setu Parvathi Bai. Later she married Sri. C.O. Kesavan who published a detailed biography of Kumaran Asan.

C. Kunjukuttyiamma belonged to Kalleli Thumarapparampil family, near Pathanamthitta. From very early age itself, she learned about medicines from her parents and uncles who were physicians\textsuperscript{161}. At a time when women were not encouraged to study, she was able to join Ayurveda College, Trivandrum. It was due to her unyielding desire, she was able to become an Ayurveda physician. She passed ‘Visha Vaidya Visarada’ examination from Ayurveda College, Trivandrum, in 1937.

In 1945, at the age of nineteen, she became an ‘A’ class medical practitioner approved by the government and started ‘Mahilamani Vaidya Sala’ at Konni. She was also a specialist for eye diseases. She also served as President of Kasturba Vanitha Sanajam, Konni, which gave training for poor women in weaving, stitching, embroidery, soap making, candle making etc.\textsuperscript{162}. Her biography is included in the ‘Directory of Indian Women Today’, published in

\textsuperscript{158} J. Devika (ed.), \textit{Her Self: Gender and Early writings of Malayalee Women (1898-1938)}, \textit{op.cit.}, p101.
\textsuperscript{159} Kurias Kumbalakkuzhy, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.87-88.
\textsuperscript{160} G.Kamalamma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.451.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Vanitha} magazine, 15-29 February, 1996.
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Ibid.}
1976. In this book, she is described as a specialist in cobra bite and Ayurvedic treatment.\textsuperscript{163}

V.Ikkavamma, Mayyanad was the first midwife of Ezhava community.\textsuperscript{164} She passed midwifery exam in first place from Kollam Victoria Hospital. She got many prizes in literary competitions held under the auspices of S.N.D.P. She was the secretary of Mayyanad Vanitha Samajam of S.N.D.P. Her important work was ‘Matrudharmam’ and she also published a magazine ‘Stree Ratnam’.

T.C.Kalyani Amma was the wife of ‘Sahityakusalan’ T.K. Krishna Menon. She was a pioneer of children’s literature in Malayalam. She organized ‘Balika Sadanams’ and ‘Stree Samajams’.

K. Gomathi Amma was the daughter of ‘Swadeshabhimani’ Ramakrishna Pillai and wife of Barrister A.K. Pillai. She was a social worker and writer. She served as the President of ‘Hindi Prachara Sabha’\textsuperscript{165}.

V.K.Kartyayani Amma was the wife of poet Bodheswaran. She was the Sanskrit Professor in University College, Trivandrum. Her daughter is the renowned poetess Sugathakumari. Kartyayani Amma was one among the early women Professors of Travancore.

K. Parvathi Amma Haripad was a teacher who engaged in spreading the ideas of Sree Narayana Guru. She participated in anti caste struggles and struggles for temple entry. She collected money and gave it to the needs of Vaikom Satyagraha. She wrote many articles in leading magazines. She worked for the founding of ‘Sree Sarada Vilasini Stree Samajam’, Karthikappally.\textsuperscript{166}

B. N. Meenakshi was a native of Muttathara, Trivandrum. She was the first woman who took B.A. among Ezhavas and became a teacher in Women’s Training School, Trivandrum. She was the first warden of ‘S.N.V. Sadanam’.\textsuperscript{167}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[165] Pattom G.Ramachandran Nair, \textit{op.cit.}, p.289.
\item[166] G.Kamalamma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.400.
\item[167] \textit{Ibid.}, p.417.
\end{footnotes}
Gowri Sankunni learnt Sanskrit and Malayalam and after High School education, she joined St. Theresas College, Eranakulam. Then she studied at Malabar Christian College and Madras Presidency College. She was the first South Indian woman who passed M.A in English. She was respected by Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam by awarding a gold medal. She served as a teacher in Women’s College, Trivandrum and also was an active worker of freedom movement.

After her marriage with the prominent labour union leader of Travancore T. Sankunni B.A. B.L., she went to Madras and became a Professor in Queen Mary’s College, Madras. She participated in many meetings along with Annie Besant. She started a Women’s College at Gundur and became its Principal. Her best student was Lakshmi N. Menon. Gowri Sankunni co-operated with Christian missionaries and established many orphanages and disabled children’s schools. She was also a worker of Red Cross Society and Women’s Vigilance Association.

Konniyoor K. Meenakshi Amma was the daughter of P.S. Veluppillai and Kutti Amma. After Matriculation from Chengannur High School, she took B.A. and M.A. from His Highness the Maharajas College, Trivandrum. She had a long and distinguished teaching career in Trivandrum from 1925 to 1956. She became Professor of University College, Trivandrum and retired in 1956. She was inspired by Gandhiji during his visit to Travancore in 1925.

She became a well known social worker in Travancore, after her retirement from services in 1956. She returned to her native village at Konniyoor and became very active as a grass root development activist and played a very important role in bringing electricity to her village, in bringing modern health care and family planning services to the region, in connecting the village to other areas by building a bridge across the Achenkovil River and so on. She was honoured by her students and the local people in 1975 with a library built in the village named after her. She wrote extensively in magazines and was

a respected public speaker. Her publications include “Neenda Nizhal” “Pushpakam” and “Atmabali” and many other translations from English\textsuperscript{170}.

At the ‘All-Kerala Nair conference’ of Nair Service Society at Chavara in April 1931, she presided over its educational conference in which a large number of women such as Anandavalli Amma, G.R. Thankamma, Swayam Prakash Yogini Amma and others spoke on women education. They called upon the N.S.S. to set up orphanage and Mahila Mandirams for helpless women, to establish modern girls’ schools and hostels, to employ Nair graduate women in N.S.S. Schools, to abolish untouchability, use Swadeshi clothes etc.

Achamma Mathai was the younger daughter of Elanjikkal John Vakil and wife of Dr.John Mathai, Finance Minister in Nehru’s ministry. She was graduated from Calcutta University. She later became all India President of Y.W.C.A and President of Central Social Welfare Board. She was awarded ‘Padmasree’ in 1955.

M.Haleema Beevi, a native of Adoor, was another brave woman who came to the forefront of social and political work. She was born in 1918 at Adoor as the daughter of Peer Muhammad and Maiteen Beevi. She and her sisters went to school, quite against the normal practice for Muslim girls and she studied upto the seventh class. Married at the age of sixteen, she was encouraged in public activities by her husband K.M.Muhammad Maulavi, who was a disciple of prominent Muslim reformer of the time, Vakkom Abdul Khadir Maulavi. At the age of eighteen, she spoke in the ‘Thiruvithamkoor Muslim Women’s Meeting’ about the importance of women education, in 1938\textsuperscript{171}.

She ran a magazine for women ‘The Muslim Vanitha’ in the late 1930s and in 1940s she started another publication, ‘Bharatha Chandrika’\textsuperscript{172}. In 1970, she started a magazine, ‘Adhunika Vanitha’. In 1930s she ran a press at Thiruvalla. She learnt composing, printing and binding to print leaflets and other materials for the protesters. She was a member of the Municipal Board of Thiruvalla, and the first Muslim woman to become a Municipal Councillor. She

\textsuperscript{171} Anilkumar A.V., \textit{Indulekhayude Anujathimar} (Mal.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{172} J.Devika, \textit{Kalpanayude Mattoli}, (Mal.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.13.
was also the President of Thiruvalla Muslim Women’s Association and an active member of Muslim ‘majlis’\textsuperscript{173}.

Maiteen Beevi was the first to pass ‘Rashtrabhasha Visarad’ examination among Muslim women in Travancore. She presided over Muslim Women’s Conference of Thiruvithamkoor, in 1938 and spoke on the topic ‘Muslim Women and Modern Life’, which was a strong plea for Muslim women’s education\textsuperscript{174}.

Justice Fathima Beevi was born on 30 April 1927 at Pathanamthitta, as the daughter of Meera Sahib and Khadeeja Bibi. She did her schooling in Catholicate High School, Pathanamthitta and B.Sc. Degree from University College, Trivandrum. She obtained her B.L. from Government Law College, Trivandrum. She was promoted as the Subordinate Judge in 1968 and as the Chief Judicial Magistrate in 1972 and as District and Sessions Judge in 1974. She was further appointed as the Judicial Member of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal in January, 1980. She was then elevated to the High Court as a Judge on 4 August 1983. She became permanent Judge of the High Court on 14 May 1984. She retired as the Judge of the High Court on 29 April 1989 but was further elevated to the Supreme Court as a Judge on 6 October 1989 where she retired on 29 April 1992. Her appointment to the Supreme Court over several senior judges was seen as a political decision by Rajiv Gandhi following the controversy over the ‘Muslim Women's Protection of Rights’ on ‘Divorce Act’. On her retirement from the court she served as a member of the ‘National Human Rights Commission’ and later as Governor of Tamil Nadu from 1997 to 2001. As the Governor of the state she had also served as the Chancellor of Madras University. She had also served as the Chairman of ‘Kerala Commission for Backward Classes’ and member of ‘National Human Rights Commission’ in 1993. She received Honourary D. Litt and ‘Mahila Shiromani Award’ in 1990. She was also awarded ‘Bharat Jyoti Award’\textsuperscript{175}. She was the first woman judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court of India and the first Muslim woman to

\textsuperscript{173} A. Krishnakumari, \textit{Samara Pathangalile Pen Peruma}, (Mal.), \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{174} J.Devika, \textit{Her Self: Gender and Early writings of Malayalee Women (1898-1938)}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.173.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{www.keralawomen.govt.in}
be appointed to any higher judiciary. She is the first woman judge of a Supreme Court of a nation in India and Asia\textsuperscript{176}.

The leading newspapers of the time carried news of brilliant women of the time. The ‘Malayala Manorama’, carried reports of the success of Thengummoottil Thresy Joseph in the B. Sc examination in the first class from the University of London, Matilda John’s success in the F.R.C.S. examination at Edinburgh University, a Muslim woman Havva Beevi, joining the intermediate class at Women’s College, Thiruvananthapuram, the success in B.A. exam of Ikkuvamma Tampuran, the first woman to gain this Degree in the Kochi royal family and the attainment of M.Phil, Ph.D degrees by E. Janaki from an American University.

The first women achievers of various communities also received public attention. For instance, the ‘Malayala Manorama’ carried reports of the return of C.Kunjilakshmi after obtaining an L.M.P. Degree from Madras, thus becoming the first lady doctor of the Ezhava community, the return of Paru Amma, a Tiyya woman from the U.S.A. after earning Medical Degree, the success of K.C. Annamma in the Mathematics Degree exam of the Madras University, she being the first woman to do so, the success of C. Meenakshi Amma, in the preliminary part of the Barristership Examination and the success of Kamalamma, the first Nair woman to have secured the M.B.B.S. degree from Presidency Medical College, Madras. It wrote an editorial on Anna Chandy congratulating her on her success in the B.L. Degree exam, being the first ‘Malayali’ woman to attain this degree\textsuperscript{177}.

Various communities congratulated their young women who were successful in examinations, by organizing public meetings. Mary Punnen Lukose was presented with a gold medal by an association of Syrian Christians at a public meeting in 1906 when she passed the F.A.Examinations\textsuperscript{178}. She received another medal at a public meeting when she was graduated in 1909. The ‘Vilakkithala Nair’ community awarded a medal to K.P. Janaki Amma, the

\textsuperscript{176} en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fathima_Beevi
\textsuperscript{177} J.Devika, Engendering Individuals, The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam, op.cit., pp.180.
\textsuperscript{178} Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 93.
first woman of that community to gain the L.M.P. Degree. Local organizations also organized congratulatory functions for women scholars. The ‘Sanmargaposhini Sabha’ of Vaikom awarded a gold medal to the first woman graduate from Vaikom taluk, N.Gowri Amma. A felicitatory function was organized at Kothamangalam to award a gold medal to Pulikkal Mary, the first woman graduate in the Muvattupuzha taluk.\(^{179}\)

In 1926, when V.K. Kartyayani Amma was appointed Sanskrit tutor at Women’s College, Trivandrum, a public meeting was held at the Aranmula Girls’ School in her honour. The appointment of K. Easwari Amma as English lecturer at Lady Wellington College, Madras was reported. Gowri Sankunni was presented with a gold medal by the ‘Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam’ in 1917 on her success in the B.A. Degree examination, and a public meeting was held in her honour when she secured the M.A. Degree in 1919. Many ‘Malayali’ women had entered the liberal professions and public office outside Keralam, especially in the Madras Presidency. K. Thankamma Jacob, who was born in Chengannoor, was a member of the Coimbatore Municipality and a member of the Senate of the Madras University in the 1930s. During the same period, C. Parvathi Amma became a member of the Ramnad District Board and First Class Honorary Magistrate at Madurai. Dr. Parukutty Raman, M.R.C.P., had established practice in Madras.\(^{180}\) All these women were products of modern education and proved their excellence in diverse fields. Dr. Habsa Marakkar was the first Muslim woman from this state to earn an M.B.B.S. degree. In 1929, four women graduates were appointed in Travancore i.e., G.R.Thankamma to the Secretariat, P.Chellamma in the Revenue Department and V.Ammukkutty Amma and Hepzibah in the High Court.\(^{181}\) Many women served as librarians and secretaries of libraries, stree samajams etc. Thoppil Sankari Amma was the President of ‘Sree Chithira Thirunal Tatwaparaksin Stree Samajam’, Keerikkad, P.S.Pennamma was the President of ‘Sarada Vilasini Stree Samajam’, Kottayam.

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\(^{179}\) J.Devika, *Engendering Individuals, The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam*, op.cit.

\(^{180}\) Ibid., p.181.

\(^{181}\) J.Devika, *Her Self: Gender and Early writings of Malayalee Women (1898-1938)*, op.cit., p.128.
and G.Bhavani Devi was the Secretary of ‘Karthika Thirunal Vayanasala’, Kottayam.\(^{182}\)

### 5.10 Women Social Workers

A large number of women in Travancore came forward for social work from various castes and communities.

#### 5.10.1 Rani Setu Parvathi Bai

Rani Setu Parvathi Bai was the mother of Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma. She belonged to Utsavamatom Palace, Mavelikkara and was the granddaughter of famous painter Raja Ravi Varma. She was adopted to Travancore Royal family and later became the mother of the Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma. When Gandhiji visited Travancore palace, he had all praise for her simplicity. She wore simple white dress, avoided diamonds and gems and her household articles were also simple.\(^{183}\)

Rani Setu Parvathi Bai was very progressive minded and was the main inspiration behind the Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma to issue Temple Entry Proclamation.\(^{184}\) A great meeting of women was held at Trivandrum for appreciating Rani Setu Parvathi Bai for influencing the Maharaja for Temple Entry.\(^{185}\) She was honoured by giving Doctorate by Andhra University and Kasi University also honoured her.\(^{186}\) She presided over the A.I.W.C. conference held at Trivandrum in 1937\(^{187}\). She also gave Presidential address in the seventh Biennial Conference of National Congress in August 1941. She was also the motivating force behind the establishment of ‘Chitrodaya’ dance school, Poojappura and ‘Swati Thirunal Music Academy’, Thycaud. She was the embodiment of old Kerala’s influential womanhood.\(^{188}\)

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5.10.2 K. Gowrikutty Amma

K. Gowrikutty Amma was the founder of ‘Sarada Giri’ near Varkala. She was the daughter of Thurayil Krishna Panicker. She had her education in Government High School, Kayamkulam, Government Women’s College, Trivandrum, Maharaja’s College, Trivandrum and became an officer in Accountant General Office, Trivandrum. She resigned her government job and worked as the Secretary of S.N.V.Sadanam, Trivandrum189. She organized a production centre, a bakery, boarding home, orphanage for women and children, old age home for women and English medium primary school at ‘Sarada Giri’. She served until her last and donated all her wealth to ‘Sarada Giri’190. She served as the General Secretary of ‘Kollam Haindava Stree Mahasammelan’ in 1936 for appreciating Maharani Setu Parvathi Bai for influencing the Maharaja for Temple Entry191. She got ‘Veluthampi Dalawa Award’ for social work192.

5.10.3 ‘Sadana Matha’ T.V. Narayani Amma

‘Sadana Matha’ T.V. Narayani Amma was the daughter of Varanappalli Govinda Panicker and the wife of Manakkodathu Kesavan Asan. Sree Narayana Guru presented her a ‘sovereign’ and asked her to start a hostel for avarna girls at Trivandrum.

T.V. Narayani Amma and her husband Manakkodathu Kesavan Asan founded Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam or S.N.V. Sadanam in 1924 near Government Women’s College, Trivandrum as per the wishes of Sree Narayana Guru. On 24 July 1924, Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam was started near Bakery junction Trivandrum.

The early inmates of S.N.V. Sadanam included K.R. Gowri Amma, ex-minister of Kerala, K.O. Ayisha Bai, Deputy Speaker, Kerala Legislative Assembly and Fathima Beevi, the first woman Supreme Court Judge. Another hostel was started in 1943. It started the first baby crèche in South India. In 1949 Kollam S.N.V. Sadanam was started. T.V. Narayani Amma was popularly known as ‘Sadana Matha’. In 1937 when elections were held in Travancore,

192. Ibid., p.1.
T.V. Narayani Amma got victory from Mavelikara constituency and became ‘Sree Moolam Praja Sabha’ member. She also served as *Stree Samajam* president and Judge of Panchayat Court\(^\text{193}\).

### 5.10.4 Thapaswini Amma

Thapaswini Amma was the founder of S.N.V. Sadanam, Ernakulam. She was born in Cherai, as the daughter of a local physician. She was the first Ezhava woman to pass Matriculation from Cochin State\(^\text{194}\). She was interested in social work and founded an ‘Abala Mandir’ for destitute women and also founded S.N.V. Sadanam for girl students.

### 5.10.5 Parvathi Ayyappan

Parvathi Ayyappan was born at Erinjelil house, Thrissur. Her father Judge Ayyakkutty was a Buddhist. After graduation from Madras, she got government job. Later she served as a teacher in a school. She also served as the Superintendent of S.N.V. Sadanam. During the Second World War, as a member of Red Cross Society, she served as Junior Commander in military nursing section.

She married Sahodaran Ayyappan who translated Sree Buddha’s ‘Dharma Padam’ along with Judge Ayyakkutti. Ayyappan and Parvathi together worked behind ‘Sahodaran’ newspaper and anticaste ‘Sahodara Sangham’. Parvathi Ayyappan was one of the first women graduates from among the Harijans. She organized ‘Sree Narayana Sevika Samajam’ in Thottumukham, Alwaye, and started Nursery, ‘Bala Samajam’, ‘Vanitha Samajam’, Production unit, library etc. there\(^\text{195}\).

### 5.10.6 ‘Adhyatmabharathi’ K. Chinnamma

K. Chinnamma was the founder of ‘Sree Moolam Shashtiabdyapoorthy Smaraka Hindu Mahila Mandiram’, a home for destitute children and women at Poojappura, Trivandrum\(^\text{196}\). She was born in Attingal, was a student of ‘Zenana

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\(^{194}\) K.R. Gowri Amma, *op.cit.*, p.139.
\(^{196}\) G. Kumara Pillai, *op.cit.*, p.31.
Mission School’ and got training under Augusta Blandford\textsuperscript{197}. She was the classmate of B.Kalyani Amma, in this school. She passed B.A. and F.A. and became Assistant Inspectress of Schools at Kottayam. She was the wife of Kumara Pillai, brother of C.V. Raman Pillai. In 1911, K.Chinnamma was invited to attend a “Nair Maha Sammelanam” i.e., Nair Congress at Perunnai. Chinnamma asked the male audience to give women creative role in social welfare activities\textsuperscript{198}.

Chinnamma was enrolled as the first woman member of the Nair Samajam. Chinnamma attended the next assembly with a group of women. Subsequently, women’s sessions began to be organized at the annual assembly of Nair Samajam. She had spent her life for the welfare of the society, for the uplift of women and for shelter to poor. She rendered selfless sacrifices for the freedom of women and for their educational progress. ‘Mahila Mandiram’ runs home for destitute girls, hostel for working women, primary and secondary schools, rural units, vocational training units etc\textsuperscript{199}.

5.10.7 Mother Eliswa Vakayil

Mother Eliswa Vakayil was the first nun in Kerala who took the initiative to start the first religious congregation for women in Kerala. Mother Eliswa was born on 15 October 1831 in an ancient dignified Christian family at Ochanthuruth. Eliswa grew up as a devout child. At the age of sixteen she was married to Vareed Vakayil who belonged to Koonammavu, in Varappuzha and they had a girl child, Anna.

But after a year and a half, Vareed Vakayil fell ill suddenly and died. Eliswa, her daughter Anna and her sister Thresia were influenced by the God-centered life style. All three of them were eagerly longing to embrace a life of prayer and solitude, in a convent\textsuperscript{200}.

Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro rendered wholehearted support to construct a Convent. On 12 February 1866, the first

\textsuperscript{197} J.Devika, Engendering Individuals, The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam, op.cit., p.211.

\textsuperscript{198} J.Devika, Kalpanayude Mattoli, (Mal.), op.cit., p.57.

\textsuperscript{199} mahilamandiram.org/siteprotect.net

\textsuperscript{200} ctccongregation.org/history.asp
three members were officially received into the ‘Discalced Carmelite Order’ by Bishop Bernardine Baccinelli.

The foundation of the ‘Congregation of Teresian Carmelites’ (C.T.C.) took place on 13 February 1866. Thus with the help of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopad Beccaro O.C.D., the first Catholic nunnery in India was established at Koonammavu near Paravoor in 1866 under the name ‘The Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced’. It is the first indigenous Christian nunnery in Kerala and in India\(^{201}\). She is the one who instituted the first school, boarding house and orphanage for girls. The main aim of the C.T.C. was the education of girls. The sisters trained young girls in catechism, prayers, devotion and handicrafts. A boarding house for young women for residential study was attached to the convent.

5.10.8 Swayamprakash Yogini Amma

Swayamprakash Yogini Amma worked with K.Chinnamma to form Mahila Mandiram. She was a disciple of Thaikkadu Ayya\(^{202}\). She also established ‘Swayam Prakash Asram’ at Kulathoor, Trivandrum in 1916. She was a speaker in the educational conference of All Kerala Nair Conference of N.S.S. at Chavara where she spoke about the need of women education\(^{203}\).

5.10.9 Mundakappadam Leyamma Cherian

Mundakappadam Leyamma Cherian was the co-founder of the destitute home or ‘Agathimandiram’ of Mundakappadam at Kottayam\(^{204}\).

Leyamma Cherian was born on 25 October, 1911, in Puthuparampil house of Mundakappadam, as the daughter of Cherian and Kuttiyamma. She had three elder brothers. Her pet name was Pennamma. Her parents used to take their children to attend Gospel meetings conducted in and around Kottayam and Puthupally. Leyamma was a student of the Church Missionary Society Primary School in Machukadu. In those days, Biblical stories were taught in mission

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201. www.satnadiocese.org
202. www.saivaneri.org
204. mandiram.org/history.asp
schools by teachers. The moral lessons and stories she learned from them influenced her a great deal and was the foundation of her future.

Right from childhood, Leyamma had great concern for the poor and the sick. When she was seven years old, her mother died at the age of 32. After a few years, her father too passed away. Her elder brother took care of her thereafter. In May 1932, at the age of 21, she joined the Vanitha Mandiram in Tiruvalla for a two year training course. At the Vanitha Mandiram, women were given training in Mission work, home science and home management, kitchen gardening, etc. in addition to Biblical studies. An Australian missionary, Miss Kellaway, was the Principal of this institution for twenty years.

During her stay in Vanitha Mandiram, Leyamma could visit and stay at various mission fields of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association in Palghat, North Travancore, Central Travancore and the sea coast. Through the mission trips, she got firsthand information in gospel work and it helped her get a broader outlook of other religions. The training in Vanitha Mandiram was very fruitful. It created a sound vision of service in her. No one knew that God was preparing her for a greater mission in her own village, to work among the poor.

Leyamma’s brother, P.C. George, and his friends were greatly concerned about the poor, sick and destitute people living in the streets of Kottayam. They prayed for a solution and finally the idea of setting up a ‘destitute home’ came to their minds. George was willing to provide any sort of help to set up a ‘destitute home’ in his compound. On hearing the plans, Leyamma willingly agreed to become the ‘Sevika’ or caretaker of the ‘destitute home’. She was aware of the difficult situations she might have to face in the ‘destitute home’. Like her brother George, she was also aware of the need of the society.

In 1934, the youths of Mundakapadam, constructed a shed in Leyamma’s property for the ‘Agathimandiram’. The first inmate was a very old sick man, brought from the streets of Kottayam. His name was Ayyappan. He was very weak and unable to speak and Leyamma took care of him like a brother and in due course, he became well.

205. Ibid., p.74.
Thus Mundakappadam Leyamma became the co-founder of Mundakappadam orphanage, Manganam, Kottayam, along with her brother P.C. George. The orphanage was formally inaugurated on 1 October 1938. A woman was sent to Nagercoil Salvation Army Hospital for nursing training and a dispensary was started in the orphanage in 1943. The inauguration of the dispensary was made by Dr. Mary Punnen Lukose. Leyamma was helped by many like-minded women. The inmates included those with malaria, cancer and other diseases, the lame, the dumb, the blind, orphans, beggars, widows, widowers and the destitute.

These inmates were to be fed, bathed, their wounds and their clothes were to be washed, and it was all done happily by Leyamma for years without complaint and without another to relive her. Priests and Bishops from various denominations and political leaders like K.P.S. Menon and Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar visited the orphanage and appreciated the work going on. Leyamma died of cholera in 1943.

5.10.10 Mannanthara Parvathi Amma

Mannanthara Parvathi Amma was a native of Cherthala. She was a Sanskrit scholar and an active worker of S.N.D.P. She also assisted sister Thapaswini in establishing S.N.V. Sadanam hostel at Ernakulam. Mannanthara Parvathi Amma along with K.R. Narayani Amma, Devaki Krishnan and many others formed ‘Young Women Hindu Association’ (Y.W.H.A.) at Cherthala in 1942 in the model of Y.W.C.A. They started a hospital at Cherthala and she served as the Assistant Superintendent of this hospital. Y.W.H.A. also gave training to women in weaving, defibering, nursing and midwifery. Mannanthara Parvathi Amma was also known as a literary figure. She wrote a poem about the working of Y.W.H.A.hospital and presented it to Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar when he came to the inauguration of the hospital.

5.10.11 Mannathu Parvathi Amma

Mannathu Parvathi Amma, mother of Mannathu Padmanabhan, was another progressive woman who gave full support to Nair reformist activities. When Mannathu Padmanabhan brought a Pulaya called Azhakan to his house as a part of his policy of interdining, Parvathi Amma gave him food and cleaned his plates. It was an unparalleled act by a Nair woman of that age of caste rigidity. Nair Service Society was formed in front of the Nilavilakku, lighted by Mannathu Parvathi Amma, in the verandah of her house. Mannathu Parvathi Amma lighted a Nilavilakku in the courtyard of her house and placed some flowers in front of it. Mannathu Padmanabhan and some other prominent Nairs, who were invited by him, took an oath in front of it, to work for the benefit of Nair community and it was the beginning of Nair Service Society.

5.10.12 Sister Alphonsa Muttathupadathu (1910-1946)

Sister Alphonsa was born as the fourth child of Cherian Ouseph and Mary Muttathupadathu, in Kudamalloor, near Kottayam, on 19 August 1910. She was baptized on 26 August 1910. She was widely known as ‘Alphonsamma’. She dedicated her life to God and service to mankind. She joined the Franciscan Clarist Congregation and lived at the ‘Poor Clares Convent’, Bharananganam. Her prayers and work brought great spiritual solace to people around her. She was the first woman in India, raised to sainthood.

5.10.13 Kandamma Varghese

Kandamma Varghese was the Organizing Secretary of ‘Mar Thoma Suvisesha Sevika Sangham’ for over twenty years, travelling far and wide, organizing branches in the parishes, doing evangelistic work among Christians and non-Christians, and building up the work in parishes. Kandamma Varghese was born on 30 June 1876, as a member of the Kalleli family, Mavelikkara. Kandamma did her education in the C.M.S. School. Many of her teachers were dedicated missionaries, and inspired her to go for Gospel work. She was an exemplary student and used to conduct prayer meetings with classmates in schools.

After her school education, at the age of twenty, she got married to Varghese Vadhyar of Cheruthuruthiyil family of Thumpamon. Varghese Vadhyar was a devoted and God fearing man. Their family was a model family. They attended Church regularly and participated in all activities of the parish. They were very generous in providing financial help and assistance to the needy members of the parish. They were known for their hospitality in entertaining Gospel Workers in their house. But this blessed family life lasted only for ten years. Varghese Vadhyar passed away in 1906, leaving behind Kandamma Varghese and their three little children, Sosamma, Achamma and Koshykunju.

In the early years of the twentieth century women evangelists were not common and there were no societies or association to sponsor them in their work. She started her work in her neighborhood and home parish. She visited houses in her parish and spent time with house wives in prayer and self examination of their spiritual lives. It was a strange thing in those days, for a woman to speak in a church during the service. But Kandamma Varghese was a regular preacher in churches, at road junctions and market places. People had great respect and reverence for her and priests and people whole heartedly supported her in her work. She even distributed tracts during her house visits and meetings.

Two Missionary women, Mrs. Nicholson and Miss Maccabin came to Kunnamkulam near Trissur for missionary work and this inspired Kandamma Varghese. She was not ashamed of the Gospel. She believed that she had an obligation to all people, to the educated and the illiterates, to the Christians and the non Christians.

During the 1920s, it was not at all a common thing for a young woman to speak in a market place. But Kandamma Varghese took it as a challenge. She used to preach standing at road junctions in Pathanamthitta Town without shame. Everyone was amazed to see the young, Syrian Christian woman wearing a pure white Chatta and Kachamuri, sharing the divine Gospel. She was a living witness to her listeners. She even knelt down in street corners and roads, and prayed for her listeners. Kandamma Varghese had a great desire to preach the Gospel to the King of Travancore, Maharaja Sree Moolam Thirunal.

211. www.kuwaitmarthoma.com
During one of the King’s royal visits to Pandalam, Kandamma Varghese stood in a place away from the crowd to get a clear view of the King. When the King’s car passed by, she shouted out “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and family”. The King heard and acknowledged her message. ‘Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sangham’ was officially established on 14 February 1919, in the Maramon Convention by Abraham Mar Thoma Suffragaon Metropolitan. The first committee consisting of twelve members was formed for the administration of the new association.

Kandamma Varghese, who was well known woman evangelist by that time, was the first ‘Travelling Secretary’ of the Sevika Sangham. Since there were no proper roads she had to travel by foot and bullock cart to visit parishes. In her first year, she established fifty branches of the Sevika Sangham. She even encouraged young women to become evangelists. Polachirakkal Puthiyaveettil Mariamma and Maramon Anjilivelil Rahelamma were the first Secretaries while Kandamma Varghese was the ‘Travelling Secretary’. Pallikkal T. M. Annamama, Konny Mariamma and Kollamala Aleyamma were also very active members.

Kandamma Varghese was one of the main persons behind the establishment of the ‘Vanitha Mandiram’ at Tiruvalla in 1925. During the early years many women were trained for missionary work and sent to various places outside Kerala. Sister Chechamma of Mathilunkal, Kuttapuzha, Thiruvalla, Miss. K.J. Aleyamma, Miss. P.O.Sosamma, Miss. Mariamma John, Miss. P.G. Aleyamma of Sihora Ashram and Mrs. Mariamma Joseph were students of the Mandiram. Kandamma Varghese worked with Miss Kellaway in the running of the ‘Vanitha Mandiram’. The main mottos of the Institution are Prayer, Worship, Study, Witnessing, and Discipline.

After the death of the Travancore Maharaja Sree Moolam Thirunal, Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai became the ruler. Kandamma Varghese desired to visit her as well. An interview with the Maharani was arranged, through her sister’s son M. O. Oommen, who was a Forest Conservator in Trivandrum. On the appointed day, Kandamma Varghese went to the Trivandrum Palace and had a long talk with the Maharani. Kandamma Varghese answered Maharani’s
enquiries regarding the work of the ‘Sevika Sangham’, the ‘Vanitha Mandiram’ and the orphanages. Kandamma Varghese shared the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Then she presented the Maharani a gold gilded Bible and requested her to read it. The Maharani gratefully accepted it and was highly impressed.

The early years of the ‘Sevika Sangham’ were not financially sound. Many of the Church members were agriculturalists and the women were mainly house wives. So it was a very difficult task to get funds for the smooth running of the Sangham. At that time, there weren’t any foreign parishes supporting the work of the Sangham, and fund raising was part of the duty of all the office bearers.

Kandamma Varghese used to collect money for the ‘Sevika Sangham’ wherever she went and even collected money from sister churches. Proper receipts were given for all collections and the money was remitted to the ‘Sevika Sangham’ office in time. She was very faithful in all money matters. Her appeals for money were never for herself. That is why she was never met with a refusal. People knew her work and responded accordingly. ‘Sowjanya Dana Piruvu’ or a collection of free will donations in cash or kind from the women of the church in aid of the ‘Swadeshi Mission’ was introduced by Kandamma Varghese. She gave importance to personal evangelism.²¹²

She conducted special meetings for women and girls, visited Christian homes and non Christian homes and personally interacted with people. After serving many years as a Travelling Secretary, she became the General Secretary and she continued for twelve years in that post. It was through her hard work that the Church received the land property for the construction of the Salem Orphanage, the ‘Vanitha Mandiram’ and the ‘Sevika Sangham’ Office. She placed a firm foundation for the smooth running of various departments of the ‘Sevika Sangham’.

While Kandamma Varghese was the Travelling Secretary, ‘the Sevika Sangham’ started a hospital in Cheriyazhikkal near Thrikunnapuzha in 1921. Another dispensary was working in a nearby place called Puthuppally. For many

²¹². Ibid.
years this work continued till the formation of the Medical Board by the Mar Thoma Church.

When she died on 9 November, 1964, at the age of 88, she left behind a glowing legacy of her work in Kerala. Her greatest attribute was her ability to inspire others for Mission Work. In her memory, the ‘Sevika Sangham’ collected ‘Kandamma Memorial Endowment for Higher Education of Christian Workers’ of fifteen thousand rupees and the interest collected from this fund is still being used for the theological education of the women.

5.10.14 Rev. Mother Hanna

Rev. Mother Hanna was the main architect of ‘Martha Mariam Samajam’, the women’s organization of Malankara Orthodox Church. Her early name was K.M.Annamma. She was born in Plamthottathil Kandathil family at Kattode, Thiruvalla and was married to Vattasseril Philipose. After her husband’s death, she returned to her family with her child. She attended classes in Bible studies at ‘Vanitha Mandiram’ of Marthoma Church at Kattode under Mrs. Kellaway.213

Influenced by the training in ‘Vanitha Mandiram’, she started a women’s organization in her own parish, ‘Sleeba’ Church, Kaviyoor in 1930, in the model of ‘Mother’s Union’ in England. She was ably helped by her relative, an enthusiastic priest called Fr. N. G. Kuriakose. Founding of schools, convents, widow homes, hospitals etc. and social work among women were its aims.214 She visited the houses of members, made speeches and organized classes among women. She and her co-workers raised funds through pidiyari and coconut collected from houses. She later became the General Secretary of ‘Martha Mariam Samajam’ and the Mother Superior of Othera convent.

5.10.15 Sr. Susanna, Sr. Hanna, Sr. Deena

After getting special training in St. Margaret convent, Sri Lanka, Sr. Susanna, Sr. Hanna and Sr. Deena became the co-founders of Bethany convent, Perunad, Ranni, in 1940, for education and charity among women.

214. Ibid., p. 114.
5.10.16 Mother Elisuba, Sr.Mary, Sr.Mariam, Sr.Susan

Mother Elisuba, Sr.Mary, Sr.Mariam and Sr.Susan were the co-founders of Bethlehem convent, Kizhakkambalam, Alwaye, in 1937. Among them, Sr.Mary secured first rank in Matriculation in Travancore state and while studying in Diocesan College, Calcutta, she joined the convent215. These nuns dedicated their lives for service among women.

5.10.17 Mother Susanna and Mother Elizuba

Mother Susanna who passed B.A.Honours from Madras University and Mother Elizuba who was a school teacher were the co-founders of Mount Tabor convent, Pathanapuram in 1920s216. They propagated education and rendered services among their fellow people.

5.10.18 Rachel Joseph

Rachel Joseph belonged to Theverthundiyil house, Maramon. She was the co-founder of Bethel Asram, Thiruvalla, along with the C.M.S. missionary Miss. Edith Jane Neeve. Both of them, while serving as teachers of Baker School, Kottayam, felt God’s call, left educational work and went out to serve women and this was the beginning of Bethel Asram, Thiruvalla217. Here they started home for motherless babies, crèche, dispensary, convert’s home, industrial school etc.

5.10.19 ‘Parivrajika’ A.K.Rajamma

‘Parivrajika’ A.K.Rajamma was a ‘Sarvodaya’ worker and follower of Vinoba Bhave. She was born in 1925 as the daughter of C.R.Ayyappan Vaidyar. She was a member of Students Congress and reached ‘Sevagram’ in 1948. In 1956, she founded ‘Vinoba Niketan’ at Trivandrum for women upliftment.

5.10.20 Miss.Sosamma Mathew

Miss.Sosamma Mathew was born in 1901 in Koickal house, Konni. She had her schooling in Baker Memorial School, Kottayam and Nicholson Girl’s

215. Ibid., p.81.
216. Jacob Kurien, ibid, p.72.
High School, Thiruvalla. She passed Intermediate from Women’s College, Trivandrum and B.A. from Madras Christian College. In 1924, she became District Secretary of Y.W.C.A. Later she became Secretary of Trivandrum Y.W.C.A. as per the wishes of Neena Brentnall. Between 1944 and 1951, she founded more than forty branches of Y.W.C.A. from Nagercoil to Kozhikode. She became National Secretary of Y.W.C.A. of India, Burma and Ceylon\(^{218}\). She travelled many countries like China, Japan, U.K., U.S.A. and Geneva. After retirement she organized ‘Mahila Samajam’ and worked among rural women.

### 5.11 Travancore Women in Literary Field

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a large number of women in Travancore emerged as major figures in the upper class, male dominated world of Malayalam literature. In the climate of patriotic upheavals, female powers of expression received a new momentum and women wrote sincerely, excitedly and prolifically\(^{219}\).

#### 5.11.1 Muthukulam Parvathi Amma

Muthukulam Parvathi Amma was the daughter of Thattakkattusseril Rama Panicker and Velumbi Amma. She passed Malayalam ‘Vidwan’ examination and Hindi ‘Visarad’ examination. She also had knowledge in Sanskrit, Tamil and Bengali. She came to be known as ‘Lady Vidwan Muthukulam Parvathi Amma’. She was an ardent follower of Sree Narayana Guru. She was interested in Gandhian life style and wore white *khadi* clothes until her death. She was a literary figure and began to write poems from the age of twelve.

Many of her poems were included in the text books of Travancore. She was a poetess, short story writer, dramatist, translator, biographer and essayist. Her important works include poems like ‘Meera’, ‘Oru Vilapam’, ‘Udayaprabha’, ‘Karmabhalam’, ‘Sree Chithira Maharaja Vijayam’ etc. and dramas like ‘Bhuvana Deepika’, ‘Ahalya’, ‘Dharmabali’ ‘Pookkari’, ‘Sree Buddha Charitham’ etc. She wrote a political drama ‘Save India’ and translated


Tagore’s ‘Gitanjali’ and ‘Srimad Bhagavat Gita’. She was a poetess greatly influenced by the poems of Kumaran Asan. A new sense of freedom and moral indignation entered her writing, to be recreated into a virile outcry against slavery and male dominance.

5.11.2 Sister Mary Beninja

Sister Mary Beninja was born in Thottam family of Elanji. She became a nun of Carmelite order. Her poems include ‘Lokame Yatra’, ‘Vanchi Nade’ etc. Her collection of poems, ‘Kavitharamam’ was a best seller of one lakh copies at that time. One of the poems in this collection, ‘Lokame Yatra’, which means ‘Farewell World’, narrates her decision to abandon the material world in favour of the cloister and it remains a classic among romantic poems.

In her poem ‘Vanchinadu’, she describes Regent Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai as ‘mother to her subjects’ and praises that the Rani gave meaning to the name ‘Dharma Rajya’ of Travancore. Although her poetry does not indicate a direct concern with social issues, because of her retreat from worldly life, the roots of her introspectiveness, idealistic stance and metaphysical vision should be traced to the generally enthused female thought at the time.

5.11.3 Mary John Koothattukulam

Mary John Koothattukulam, sister of famous playwright C.J.Thomas, wrote many poems like ‘Tharangini’, ‘Poojapushpam’, ‘Prabhatapushpam’, ‘Anthi Nakshatram’ etc. She was one of the earliest women to be employed in Travancore Anchal.

5.11.4 Palkkulangara K.SaraswathiAmma

One of the pioneer voices for women liberation was heard from the well-known writer Palkkulangara K.Saraswathi Amma. She was the first feminist

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225. Jancy James, *op.cit*.
novelist in Malayalam and prophetess of women’s liberty\textsuperscript{227}. She was also the first woman writer in Malayalam who wrote purely feminist short stories\textsuperscript{228}. Her works include ‘Ponnum Kudam’, ‘Kanatha Mathil’, ‘Devadoothi’, ‘Kalamandiram’, ‘Penbuddhi’, ‘Vivaha Sammanam’ etc. She gave a challenging title to the collection of her stories called ‘Purushanmar Illatha Lokam’. She always responded strongly against male domination in society, and presented stories of feminine identity\textsuperscript{229}. Her novels helped to change the attitude of her community towards women and contributed towards the growth of Feminism in Malayalam literature\textsuperscript{230}. She lived single and isolated and her works were admired only after her death. She was the angry bitter spinster who condemned any gesture of injustice to women\textsuperscript{231}.

5.11.5 Lalithambika Antarjanam

Lalithambika Antarjanam was born at Kottarakkara. She was one of the earliest to break the shackles among the Namboothiris. Because of her revolt, she had to part from her family, but her reformist husband shared her zeal. She convened the first meeting of antarjanams in her house before she came out to public platform to campaign. Her efforts were supported by ‘Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha’. Lalithambika Antarjanam wrote in spite of the oppressive environment of an orthodox Brahmin community.

Her famous works include ‘Agnisakshi’, ‘Moodupadathil’, ‘Thakarna Thalamura’, ‘Pavithra Mothiram’, ‘Yathravasanam’, ‘Vidhibalam’, ‘Prathidhwani’, ‘Prathikara Devatha’, ‘Kuttasammatham’ etc. She wrote a drama called ‘Punarjanmam’ which was renamed ‘Savitrikkutty’ on the theme of widow remarriage. It was staged on the annual meeting of ‘Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha’ at Harippad in Dhanu 1110 M.E.\textsuperscript{232}. She re-

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{227} A. P. P. Namboothiri, \textit{op. cit.}, p.39.
\textsuperscript{228} N. Jayakrishnan, (ed.), \textit{Pennezhuthu}, (Mal.), State Institute of Languages, Trivandrum, 2011, p.147.
\textsuperscript{229} M. M. Basheer, \textit{Malayala Cherukatha Sahitya Charithram} (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 2002, p.259.
\textsuperscript{230} C. P. Leela, \textit{op. cit.}, p.198.
\textsuperscript{231} Jancy James, \textit{op. cit.}, p.105.
\end{footnotesize}
created the story of Kuriedathu Thathri in her short story ‘Prathikara Devatha’. She wrote with the aim of social and caste reform.

Her ‘Agnisakshi’ pictures the story of ‘Thethi Antarjanam’ or ‘Devi Bahan’ who became attracted to Namboothiri reform movement and National Movement. Lalithambika Antarjanam showed interest towards Progressive Literary Movement also. She became a political activist and a social reformer, participating in Congress party and later in the Communist party. Lalithambika Antarjanam wielded her pen as a vehicle of protest.

The feminist phase of Malayalam literature became established with her writings. Through more than a hundred short stories, one novel and a criticism, she carried out her mission as a courageous spokeswoman of maltreated womenhood233.

5.11.6 Rajalakshmi (1930-1965)

Rajalakshmi illustrated the persistence of the suffocating domestic atmosphere, a woman has to encounter inspite of the matriarchal heritage of Kerala and its history of women’s participation in education and politics234. Her most famous work is ‘Ucha Veyilum Ilam Nilavum’. She found it impossible to continue her writing career and took her own life.

5.12 Stree Samajams of Travancore

By the early twentieth century, Stree Samajams began to appear all over Kerala in association with reformist organizations, schools etc. ‘Kottayam Streejana Sevika Sangham’ was formed in 1925. Chattampi Swamikal gave a lecture on ‘The Place of Man and Woman in the Universe’ at a Stree Samajam in Ernakulam235. Gandhiji also addressed ‘Hindu Vanitha Sangham’ at Trivandrum in 1927236.

Some Stree Samajams had their own magazines such as ‘the Mahila Mandiram’ magazine published by Hindu Mahila Mandiram of Poojappura,

Trivandrum. ‘Mayyanad Stree Samajam’ was active in Cherthala area. ‘Ezhava Stree Samajams’ were organized all over Kerala and speakers like Gomati Dev used to speak on various subjects\(^{237}\). Churches also started \emph{Stree Samajams} among their parish women. ‘Martha Mariam Samajam’ was formed among the Syrian Orthodox women in 1920s\(^{238}\). A \emph{Stree Samajam} was formed in Kaippattoor Syrian Church in 1925 itself\(^{239}\).

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\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{238}\) malankaraorthodoxchurch.in
\item \(^{239}\) Malayala Manorama, 25 September, 1926.
\end{itemize}