INTRODUCTION

The present study, ‘Political agitations and the Teachers Movement – The case of Malabar 1920-1956’ is an attempt to analyse the struggles and agitations of the aided elementary teachers of Malabar against private managers and the government. It traces the role played by a particular professional group, the village teachers in the socio economic transformation of Malabar. This movement which grew as a part of the anti-imperialist movement forms an important chapter in the history of modern Kerala.

Our country has a brilliant tradition of national liberation struggle and trade union movement. The region of Kerala also has played a prominent role in these agitations. Outstanding studies have been made at the national level to analyse the various aspects of these movements. But no serious attempt has been made to prepare an objective account of the various streams of the anti-imperialist movement in Kerala. This may be due to the reluctance on the part of the historians to collect evidences from the grass root level or to the relative backwardness of modern historical scholarship in Kerala. The rich sources available in the village libraries in different parts of this region and the materials in the personal collections of the early activists remain unexplored even today. Hence by utilizing all these evidences a comprehensive study of the different streams of the national liberation struggle in Kerala becomes very necessary.

There had been attempts to study the role played by different religious groups, caste associations and classes in our national movement. However no serious attempt has been made to analyse the various aspects of the teachers movement in Malabar. The condition of the aided elementary teachers of Malabar was miserable. They were a section cruelly oppressed and exploited by the private managers as well as the government. The social renaissance and national movement had awakened the teachers. Thus the teachers movement in Malabar grew as a part of the national movement. Early unions were formed during the Civil
Disobedience Movement. But the ideological split in the national movement hastened the efforts of unionisation. They demanded regular payment of salary and security of employment. To get their grievances redressed they adopted various forms of agitations. The management and the government tried to suppress the movement. Soon their movement became a major stream of the anti-imperialist movement. Government forbade teachers politics. But the political pressure compelled the government to change its attitude towards the teachers. The teachers gained the support of all sections of the society and different political parties. They demanded the abolition of the private management system. The teachers also participated in the peasant and workers movements. They opened libraries and reading rooms and acted as the disseminators of ideas in Malabar. They played the most crucial role to integrate all these movements with the anti-imperialist movement in Malabar. They played an important role in the spread of socialist ideas among the people. Thus they prepared the ground favourable for the formation of the communist party in Kerala.

The teachers stood for the issues of the common people during the war period and thus their movement was integrated with popular agitation. The teachers continued their agitation against the managers and the government even after independence. They obtained certain benefits and improved their service conditions. The progressive role played by the teachers in Malabar prompted the first communist government to abolish all the disparity between the government and private school teachers.

### Objectives of the study

1. The major objective of the study is to highlight the significance of teachers movement in Malabar. It was one of the most active and organised teachers movement in south India.

2. To trace the rise and growth of primary education and the condition of elementary teachers in Malabar during the early decades of the 20th century.
3. To show the process of unionisation among teachers and their methods of propaganda
4. To reveal the methods of agitation adopted by the teachers in their fight against the management and the government.
5. To point out the link between the teachers movement and the national movement in Malabar
6. To give some insight to the contemporary social movements and agitation

Significance of the study:

No serious attempts have been made to study about the elementary teachers of Malabar, their struggles against the managements and government, their involvement in the national movement and above all their role in the socio-political transformation of Malabar. Hence an objective analysis of some aspects of this movement is a desideratum.

The elementary teachers of Malabar actively played the role of leaders, organisers and disseminators of ideas in society. Thus they could emerge as a class of rural intelligentsia in Malabar. Many teachers were attracted to the ideology of nationalism. So their movement grew as a part of the national movement. Though the teachers movement was very active in Malabar, it was not so in Travancore and Cochin. When SITU and Board teachers of Malabar remained relatively passive, the elementary teachers of Malabar came to the forefront of agitations. When all other mass organisation in Malabar faced serious opposition, the elementary teachers obtained the support of different political parties and all sections of society. Many teachers got attracted to left politics and took part in the peasant and trade union movement. They could integrate all these movements with the anti imperialist movement. The facts that prompted them to involve in the national movement and to fight against landlordism and British imperialism are also significant. They opened libraries and reading rooms. The propagated the ideology of socialism and paved the way for the formation of communist party. They were totally committed to
society and took up the issues of the common people along with their own demands. An attempt is made to analyse all these aspects in this study.

**Sources of study:**

Even though no serious attempt has been made on this topic few references can be cited. *Adhyapaka Prasthanam Utharakeralathil*, (Trivandrum 1978), written by Vallathol Kumara Menon gives a brief account of the teachers movement in Malabar. *Keralathile Adhyapaka Prasthanam* (Trivandrum 1982) edited by P.R. Nambiar is another study on this topic. These works do contain a lot of data related to the teachers movement. But their writings are only their personal experience and not based on official records and documents. The recent book *Keralathile Adhyapaka Prasthanam Oru Charithram*, (Trivandrum 2006) by C.Bhaskaran and G.D. Nair is a work chiefly based on the books mentioned earlier. We can also cite various articles by different participants which have got its own limitations. Dr. K.K.N.Kurup's articles and the PhD thesis of Dr. Gopalan Kutty do contain sections of the teachers movement and their involvement in the struggle of other sections of the society. But they do not focus their attention on the problems under discussion.

A large number of records and documents related to the teachers movement in Malabar are made use of, for this study. Several records available in the Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai were consulted during the early stage of this study. But of recently most of them have been transferred to the State Archives, Trivandrum. The reference of the teachers agitation in Malabar in the Fortnightly reports were also used for this study. Certain records available in the National Archives and NMML New Delhi, State Archives Trivandrum and Regional Archives Calicut, have also been consulted.

Besides the one mentioned above, the rich data available in the contemporary news papers like *Mathrubhumi* and *Desabhimani* have also been used for the study. In addition, the autobiographical writings and
journals and periodicals like *Adhyapakan, Prabhatam, Gurukulam, Mathrubhumi Weekly* were also made use of for this study. The extensive field survey conducted as a part of this study helped to collect several rare books, pamphlets and valuable copies of early periodicals including *Adhyapakan*, the journal of the teachers union. The present investigator could hand over all these materials to the NMML New Delhi. Above all oral evidences from the leaders of teachers movement like T.C. Narayanan Nambiar, CC. Nair and K.P. Padmanabhan are also used to analyse various aspects of the movement. This study is actually an earnest effort to reconstruct the history of the teachers movement in Malabar.

**Approach and Methodology**

The present study is both descriptive and analytical. In this work an attempt is made to give a narrative account of the process of the growth and development of the teachers movement in Malabar. At the same time the work tries to analyse how the movement became a part of the anti-imperialist movement in Malabar.

The opening chapter contains a brief account of the tradition of education that existed in Kerala particularly in Malabar. The introduction of grand-in-aid system, the proliferation of aided schools, structure of the existing system of education, schools under different agencies, the salary and qualifications of the teachers and above all the policy of exploitation adopted by the managers and the miserable plight of the teachers are also described in this chapter.

The second chapter deals with the efforts on the part of the teachers their organisational matters, their conferences, the formation of the M.A.T.U, and their demands like monthly salary, security of employment, salary parity with local board teachers and representation in the D.E.C. The teachers opposition to the exploitation of the managers and the corruption of the department, their demand for the abolition of the private management system, teachers response to contemporary political developments, their move towards the left stream are also detailed here.

The third chapter examines the disputes between the teachers and
the managers and the resistance organised by the teachers and common people in different parts of Malabar. The Ottapalam conference, the rise of teachers movement as a major stream of the anti-imperialist movement, the boycott of Gurujana Samajam meetings, the policy of oppression adopted by the government and the intervention of the KPCC and the Malabar committee are also discussed here.

The fourth chapter is an attempt to trace the teachers movement during the war period. The teachers agitation for War Allowance, their attempt to affiliate the union with the Guild, their efforts to face food crisis, famine and epidemics, their attempt to integrate their movement with popular agitations, the strike propaganda of the teachers and the final withdrawal of their decision in the wake of Indian independence are analysed in this chapter.

The fifth chapter deals with the teachers movement in Malabar during the post independence period till the formation of the Kerala state in 1956. The political polarisation of the period and its impact on the teachers, the move against the communist teachers, the teachers demand for the abolition of the private management system and introduction of free and compulsory education, their opposition to the Rajaji scheme, Parulakar report and the report of the Chettiar commission, the union attempt to formulate a policy of education, the measures adopted by the government to ameliorate the grievances of the teachers, the agitations for the D.A after state formation and the implementation of a common salary scale to the teachers by the first communist government are discussed in this chapter.

The summary of the study, conclusion and some observations forms the last chapter. It reveals the feature of the teachers movement in Malabar. The teachers of Malabar played the role of leaders and organisers of the people and thus emerged as a category of rural intelligentsia. The teachers movement in Malabar grew apart of the national movement. The teachers movement was more active in Malabar than in Travancore and Cochin. Here the movement grew as part of the national movement. The teachers obtained the support of different political
party and all sections of society. They were not confined to the limited struggles of the SITU and the board school teachers. They got attracted to left politics, took part in the peasant and the trade union movement and integrated these streams with the anti-imperialist movement in Malabar. They opened libraries and reading rooms, propagated the ideology of socialism and paved the formation of the communist party. They always took up the issues of the common people and integrated their movement with popular agitations. It was their progressive role in society that prompted the communist government to adopt certain remarkable steps to improve the condition of the teachers.