SOCIO - POLITICAL REFORM MOVEMENTS

The political condition in Kerala was divergent into three administrative divisions, but the social structure within the region was same. The traditional society of Kerala underwent tremendous change particularly in socio-economic dimensions during the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The society was dominated by the stagnant elements of medievalism and feudal institutions like caste–hierarchy and conventions. The progress of social change in Kerala society during the 19th century has been interpreted as the output of the interplay of several internal and external factors like colonialism, introduction of Western education, social conflicts developed in the society etc.¹

Entry of Christian Missionaries

From the beginning of the 19th century, many Christian missionaries started their activities in different parts of Kerala. Christian missionaries reached India particularly in Kerala region to propagate the Christian faith, very soon they realized the importance of a healthy society, for that they tried to create awareness among

the women of their ignoble position that they were facing for centuries back. Both evangelical and medical missionaries worked hard to change the pathetic position of the people, especially the women folk. They tried to educate and enlightened the masses. But some of Nair girls were admitted along with their boys in indigenous institutions called *ezhuthupallis* till the *thalikettukalyanam*\(^2\). This ceremony took place between three to ten years of a girl and thus formal higher education was denied to them. The upper caste Hindus were suspicious of the missionaries and their efforts to educate women. They feared that the schools were being used by them for evangelization. Missionaries encouraged women to come out of the age long seclusion for attainment of empowerment in different ways. One cannot ignore the role of Christian missionaries to empower women and establish a new social order in Kerala. The medical mission of the London Missionary Society went several steps ahead offering treatment to all the women of the region irrespective of their caste and religion for their hitherto untreated maladies. The lady Missionaries of the London Missionary Society rendered yeoman service to the needed. The Medical Mission workers educated the women folk to come out of their houses to seek medical treatment and advice from trained medical men of the missionaries. It relieved them from the traditional bondages and enabled them to know about

their equality in the society. The Missionaries gave training to the indigenous women, especially the widows above the age of forty, were trained in mid-wifery and reduced maternal mortality rate. A large number of nurses were trained in the institute, established for the purpose. The missionary started lace industry which provided food, shelter and education to orphan and destitute girls. It also improved their general living conditions through training and teaching. The lace industry and other cottage industries started by the missionaries provided employment to many people and prevented them from going back to their traditional occupations. It enables the women to develop a new outlook on life for the new-found employment made them self-supporting.

The Christian missionaries started schools in many parts of Kerala. Women were encouraged for education. Most of the communities hesitated to send their daughters to school. The missionaries opened separate girl’s schools and women’s colleges. The work of Christian missionaries and the growth of western education made social awareness among the people. The judiciary has undergone a complete change since the British become the de-facto rulers. Permanent civil and criminal courts were established throughout the country. The early movements like upper cloth

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movement allowed the common people to wear upper cloth and ornaments.

**The Upper Cloth Movement**

The Upper Cloth Movement was the struggle of the downtrodden people of South Travancore to secure their women folk the same right in regarding to dress as were enjoyed by the upper caste people of Hindus. The women of Nadar and other low caste were not allowed to cover their breast. The struggle also called as the Breast-cloth agitation or Upper cloth movement. The Christian missionaries supported the movement; in this respect the involvement of Rev. Charles Mead of the L.M.S is great indeed. The Upper cloth riots broke out at many places particularly in Neyyatinkara, Eraniel and its suburbs and continued until 1859. In Padmanabhapuram, several people were killed and there was a serious breach of law and order. During the Diwanship of Col. Manro, an order was issued permitting the low caste women who become converts to Christianity to cover their breast with jackets.

**Social Reformers**

Hinduism was in a state of deep pandemonium when some extraordinary reformers establish the very foundation of Hindu revivalism and the basement for the modern India. Swami

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Vivekananda, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Vinoba Bhave, Baba Amte, Eshwar Chandra Vidyasagar insist on the revival of Hinduism. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, E.V.Ramaswamy Naikar were the pioneers of social reform movement in South India. In the beginning of the 20th century, many caste and social organizations were formed. The formation of the caste organizations created awareness in their community. The social and spiritual leaders like Muttukutty Swamikal, Sri Narayana guru, Chattambi Swamikal, Aiyyankali, Sahodaran Aiyappan and many others made tremendous change in the society.

**Muttukutty Swamikal**

History cannot ignore the role of Muttukutty Swamikal in the upper cloth movement. He was one of the early social reformer in India, who fought for the minimum right of the people who were prohibited to cover their upper part of the body, the great humiliation to womanhood. Vaikunta Swamikal also known as Muttukutty Swamikal was born in a Nadar family in present Kanyakumari district. He was one of the pioneer social reformers in India. As a man of progressive social outlook, he founded Samatva Samajam in 1836 to fight against inequality. The work of Vaikunta Swami for the cause of social equality led to the famous upper cloth movement. His works in Tamil called *Akila tirattu* and *Arulnul* are noted for their historical, biographical and philosophical content. His effort uplifted
the low caste people particularly the Hindu Nadar community. The agitation of the affected people eventually led to the royal proclamation on 26th July, 1859, abolishing all restrictions in the wearing upper cloth. This social change of far reaching character was introduced partly by the administration and partly under the pressure of circumstances.

**Chattambi Swamikal**

Chattambi Swamikal was one of the early social reformers in Kerala. He was born in a Nair family in Thiruvananthapuram as a son of a Namboodiri Brahmin. He was brought up in a society where out-dated customs and practices dismantled the Nair families, more over Marumakkattayam and the monopolistic position of Namboodiri added more trouble to Nair family. He stood against all these injustice. As a social and religious reformer, his main achievement was that he could induce the social consciousness among the Nairs and made them capable of fighting against the social evils.

**Sri Narayana Guru**

Sri Narayana Guru, the greatest spiritual and social leader from Kerala, whose preaching and principals had great impact on Socio-cultural and political history of Kerala. Sri Narayana Guru was born in an Ezhava family in Thiruvananthapuram. He lived in an era,

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5 A.Sreedhara Menon, *op.cit*, p.313.
when people of backward communities including Ezhavas faced many social injustice in the caste based Kerala society. Narayana Guru built many temples in which common people were allowed. He advocated stopping wild and orthodox rituals, which made people superstitious.

**Aiyyankali**

Aiyyankali was born in a Pulaya community which had suffered a lot from social disabilities through the ages. He worked for the cause of eradication of untouchability in Kerala and to improve the pathetic position of the Pulayas. Due to his effort, the common people got the right to walk on the public roads in Travancore. In 1907, he founded the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogom* for the upliftment of the low caste people. Just as the women of the lower caste in South Travancore had to fight for their right to cover their breast, the women of central Travancore also had to fight of their right to wear ornaments made of gold and silver, until the Pulaya women were only allowed to wear ornaments made of stone\(^7\). Aiyyankali persuaded the Pulaya women to throw away the bead necklaces which were a sign of the slavery and to wear upper cloths to cover their breast. This was resented by the caste Hindus who believed that it was an attempt of the Pulayas to imitate their women. Situation become worsen when one of the Pulaya leaders

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\(^7\) M Nisar, Meena Kandasamy, *op.cit.*, pp.75-80.
Gopidas asked women to emulate the examples of their sisters in South Travancore. Getting inspiration the Pulaya women used new ornaments and jackets. This started a great confrontation suffering loss of life for both sides. Compromise was concluded, a public meeting was held in which the right of the Pulaya women to wear upper cloth and gold ornament in the place of bead necklace was recognized. This was a great victory to Aiyyankali and his crew⁸.

**Sahodaran Ayyappan**

Sahodaran Ayyappan, the social reformer who developed the secular ideas among the people, for that he started *Sahodara Sangam*- a social organisation. To mobilise women participation, a women’s *Sahodara Sangam* was organised on 1st September 1917. Many women including Chandrika, Pappikutty, Yogini, Lekshmi Amma, Meenakshi Amma, M Lakshmi Amma, M K Gouri Amma, and V K Kartyayani Amma were its pioneer members⁹.

**Social Organisations**

*Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogom* (SNDP) was one of the early organizations that registered in India. The eradication of the social taboos on Ezhava community was happened only because

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of the SNDP. It also united the Ezhava community and started many schools and colleges for the upliftment of the Ezhavas. Many educated Ezhava women like Tapaswini Amma, Mannanthara Parvathi Amma, and Karthyayani Amma’s services rendered by them are noteworthy. Tapaswini was the main inspiration behind the construction of the *Ablashramam* for helpless poor women and the Sri Narayana Sadanam hostels for girls. Apart from this she started many vocational schools for girls. The Nair Service Society (NSS) was started in 1914. The main motto of NSS was to stop *Marumakkattayam*, NSS also advocated their people to leave up the sub-caste system which had great roots in the Nair community. NSS stopped many luxuries and uncivilized practices like *Talikettukalyanam*, *Terandukalyanam*, *Pulakuli*, etc which affected the Nair women. NSS made revolutionary change in Kerala, particularly in Nair community. 

In 1930’s witnessed a great social progress particularly in Brahmin society, V.T Bhattatiripadu, and Premji organized dramas that uncovered the dreadful practices prevailed in Namboodiri families. They were followed by Arya Pallom and Lalithambika Andarjanam. The *Yoga Kshema Sabha*, a social organization made revolutionary change in the life of Namboodiri Brahmin. The reform

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movement by V.T Bhattatirippadu, E.M.S. Namboodirippadu, Arya Pallom, Parvathi Nenmelimangalam and Lalithambika Antarjanam made many reforms in Namboodiri families. They reconstructed the social structure of the Namboodiri families. The thought provoking writings of these leaders gave hope to tens and thousands of Namboodiri women. They used mass media for this purpose. Drama, novels, short stories were used as the media to propagate the liberation ideas. Their main aim was to free them from the clutches of social stigmas. The drama “Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangattekkku’ made awareness among the Brahmin community. Arya Pallom focused on Malabar region while Parvathi Nenmenimangalam and Lalithambika Andarjanam worked at Cochin and Travancore respectively. In 1930,’s Arya Pallom joined Communist front and took part in Agrarian revolutions. As a result, Namboodiri women were liberated from the social taboos and traditional customs.\footnote{S.N.Sadasivan, \textit{op.cit}, p.577.}

Apart from this, various legislations and the royal proclamations made drastic change in Kerala society. In Travancore, the First Nair Act of 1912 was enacted. According to this act, the Property was equally shared between sons and nephews of the karanavar. However, the family remained join family. This act did not solve the family problems of Nairs. The result was the Second Nair Act of 1925, which abolished Marumakkattayam in Nair community.
and made sons as the legal heirs. Another provision of this act abolished polygamy as illegal. In 1925 the Ezhava Act and in 1926 the Nanjil Nadu Vellala Act were passed, which abolished Marumakkattayam in these communities. In Cochin the Nair regulations was passed in 1921, which made regulations in Marumakkattayam and polygamy in Nair community. Later 1937-1938 Nair regulations completely abolished Marumakkattayam. In 1933 the Madras Marumakkattayam Act was passed by which Marumakkattayam was abolished in Hindu society. Similarly, the Mappila Marumakkattayam Act of 1939 abolished Marumakkattayam in Muslim community. The Malayali Brahmin Act, The Christian Succession Act also curtained Marumakkattayam. All the above acts made the wife and children of a husband or father the legal heir of his property.

Kumaran Asan, Dr Palpu, T.K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan, Mannathu Padmanabhan, K.P. Kesava Menon, A.K. Gopalan, E.M.S.Namboothiripad, Moothiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, Swami Vagbhatananda, Brahmananda Sivayogi, Mohammed Abdul Rahiman were the few social icons who stood for a healthy society and womanhood.

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Reforms in Muslim Society

The position of Muslim women was not fair, until the introduction of the Shariyat Act in 1937, legal and social codes observed by Muslim communities in different parts of the country were varied and diffused. Muslim parents hesitated to send them to school. Smt. Ayisha beevi, the first Muslim girl at Areacode school has vividly recalled her painful experience and sufferings of her family while attending the school. Stating the position of education of the Muslim girls, T K Velupillai point out in 1940, ‘although the special concessions granted, the proportion Muslim girls attending schools are still disappointing’. It was in this situation many reformers took in charge of the burden of making the Muslim community united. Sayyid Sannullah Makti Thangal, Sheik Hamadani Tangak, Vakkom Muhammed Abdul Khadir Moulavi (popularly known as Vakkom Moulavi), Chaliakathu Kunjahammad Haji, Kathib Mohammed Moulavi were the prominent reformers. Most of these social reformers also participated in the freedom movements like Quit India Movement and participated in anti-British movements like Khilafath movement. Vakkom Moulavi was the greatest reformer in Muslim community who gave prior importance.

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to the upliftment of women folk. He campaigned for the need of modern education, the education of women and the elimination of outdated customs among the Muslim community. He started Al-Islam and Deepika, dailies through which he propagated the ideas including the liberation of women. With the efforts of the reformers, government exempted Muslim girls from payment of fees. A woman reformer Assai Bai was the first lady who took interest in the education of the girls of the Muslims. She started the Zanana Madrasa for Muslim girls\textsuperscript{17}. Vakkom Moulavi was the founder of the newspaper Swadeshabimani, which was banned and confiscated by the Travancore government for its pro-freedom attitude.

Most of the Christian community enjoyed the privileges of the forward castes. They enjoyed educational right and they were appointed in government jobs as Nairs and Brahmins enjoyed. Women in the Christian community enjoyed all privileges. A Christian women conference was held on 24 April, 1930 at Chengannur presided over by Anna Chandy, the first women lawyer of Kerala and women judge of India. In the conference they discussed the dependency of women and the need to improve women’s economic position. The conference also passed resolution to stress the need for the Christian’s participation in the struggle for Swaraj\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{17} A.Sreedhara Menon, \textit{op.cit}, pp.192-193.

\textsuperscript{18} P.J. Cherian, \textit{Perspectives’ on Kerala history: Second Millennium}, Kerala gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.496.
Mrs Gracy Aron was an active participant of freedom movement from 1930. Mrs Aaron was the wife of Samuel Aaron of Pappinisseri, Kannur. She organised women Congress workers in Calicut and Kannur.

**Political Participation of Royal Women**

It is pitiful to see in our long recorded history, very rarely women raised as rulers of a country\(^1\). Yet women maintained the spark of human dignity that ignited from time to time. In India, Nur Jahan issues her edicts and even rode into battle on her elephant litter. Sultana Razia Begum, Durgavati, Lakshmi Bayi, Hazrat Mahal are the few who showed their talent as par with men in administration\(^2\). In Kerala history many women showed their talent in administration. Aswathi Thirunal Umayamma(Attingal), Rani Lakshmi Bayi, Gouri Parvathy Bayi, Sethu Lakshmi Bayi are some of the regents who showed their outstanding performances\(^3\).

**Gouri Lakshmi Bayi**

King Bala Rama Varma died on 7\(^{th}\) November 1810 leaving no male member in the family to succeed. The only members in the ruling family at present were four princesses Lakshmi Bayi, Parvathy

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\(^1\) Guida Myrl Jackson-Laufer, *Women rulers throughout the ages an illustrated guide*, p. Xxxv.

\(^2\) Ibid, p.xxi.

Bayi, Lakshmi Bayi’s daughter Rukmini Bayi and a young female child who died shortly afterwards. Finally Gouri Lakshmi Bayi assumed as the queen of the Travancore from (986-990 ME.). She was barely twenty years old and possessed little experience of the world, for in those days the members of royal family led more or less secluded life with in the walls of the palace. Meanwhile Col. Munro assumed the Diwanship in addition to the resident. With the help of Diwan, Gouri Lakshmi Bayi introduced a number of reforms that made for reaching changes in Travancore. She introduced some reforms in local government. She introduced ‘Pattayams’. Pattayams contained the extent, tenure, government demand etc, of each ryots holding and a land register was also compiled. The output of paddy and other produces was sought increased by taking away fields from the possession of indifferent and indolent owners and gave them to others who were ready to apply the requisite quantity of labour. Market regulations were strictly enforced. Provisions in common use were exempted from duty when sold in the markets. The sale of tobacco, arrack and other intoxicants was regulated in conformity with the rules framed. Ware houses were established in all centres of trade such as Padmanabhapuram, Trivandrum, Quilon and Mavelikara. The amelioration of the condition of slaves was another achievement of her administration. Zilla Courts were established at Padmanabhapuram, Trivandrum, Mavelikara, Vaikom and Alwaye for the trial of offenders and decision of civil disputes. A court of appeal
was established at the capital with five judges, one whom was the Dewan himself. Police force was strengthened. The Devaswams which look after the temple administration was also modified.

On the 16th April 1813 the Rani gave birth to a son. The infant prince Rama Varma (Swathi Thirunal) was proclaimed Maharaja on the 29th July. However, the Queen Mother continued to rule the state in the name of her son. Gouri Lakshmi Bayi continued her reforms in the country. In 1814 Col. Munro was relieved from his duties as diwan. He was succeeded by Diwan Padmanabhan. Rani was ready to accept Munro’s advice. But in certain situations she was enough to take decision on her own. Gouri Lakshmi Bayi died in 1814 A.D. The region of Rani Lakshmi Bayi though short was a bright period in the history of Travancore. She respected the traditions of the past, but was anxious to effect reforms.

**Gouri Parvathy Bayi**

After the death of Queen Rani Lakshmi Bayi, Rani V Gouri Parvathy Bayi was recognised as regent. She was only thirteen when she assumed the office. The reign of Rani Parvathy Bayi was remarkable as one of the best periods in the annals of the state. The beginning of the social reforms was carefully laid. Members of the communities low in the social scale were, for the first time, allowed to use ornaments of gold and silver. The poll-tax levied on castes such as Ezhavas, Vannars, Kavuthis, Chettis etc. was abolished. The
trend of legislation tended in the direction of doing away with invidious rules of social precedence and establishing civic equality so far as it was possible on those days. A prominent instance is afforded by the proclamation issued by the Rani permitting all persons to have tiled roofs for their houses. Noticing that, large sums were demanded as dowries by intending Namboodiri bride grooms. Large sums of money amounting Rs1000 to Rs 2000 are demanded as dowry and this practice leaded to alienation of Brahmanswam properties and the ruination of families. Women were constrained to remain unmarried fill their thirtieth or fortieth year of age and consequently many untoward things are seen to happen. The queen issued proclamation that “All virgins in the families of Namboodiries and Potties should be married between the ages of ten to fourteen. No person shall demand and none shall pay more than 700 fanams (Rs 100) as dowry. All the women above fourteen, remaining unmarried shall be married with in a period of two years from this date. Those who violate this law will be subjected to judicial process and punished in conformity with the Dharma Sastra”\textsuperscript{22}. The export duty on rice, paddy and other cereals was abolished to make cultivators to obtain maximum profit. The coinage was reformed to meet the requirements of increasing trade and offences against the currency were severely punished. The tolerant religious policy of Rani Parvathy Bayi elicited the appreciation of the world as well as the

\textsuperscript{22} T.K.Velu Pillai, \textit{op.cit}, Vol - II. p.534.
commendation of the British Government. Few European missionaries were permitted to make their permanent residence in the state. Lands were given for church sites, and timber for the erection of building. In Nagercoil a large number of bungalows were granted to them besides a sum of Rs5000. Rev. Mead, one of the missionaries was appointed as judge of the Zilla Court at Nagercoil. In 991ME, the Rani sanctioned the erection of a protestant church in Alapuzha and supplied timber free of cost. Permission was according to church mission society to commence its operation at Kottayam for improving the condition of Syrians, the oldest Christian subjects of the Travancore. It was during the reign of Rani Parvathy Bayi that the sovereignty of Travancore was extended over the territories of Edappally chief. Edappally was formerly an independent state ruled over by a Namboodiri Brahmin dynasty.

**Sethu Lakshmi Bayi**

The reign of Sri Mulam Thirunal ended in 1924, after his death on behalf of Sri Chitra Thirunal Bala Rama Varma his maternal Aunt Sethu Lakshmi Bayi ruled the country from 1924 to 1931. She introduced many reforms like village Panchayats Act by which local self – government was introduced in rural areas. A women’s college at Thiruvananthapuram was started and later upgraded. She also introduced many social reforms like abolishing Devadasi system, prohibiting animal sacrifice in temples etc. In 1931 the Sri Chitra
Thirunal Bala Rama Varma became major and took over the charge. Sri Chitra Thirunal was the last King of Travancore.

**Mass participation of women in politics**

From the beginning of the 20th century women in Kerala began to participate actively in politics. At the early stage of the freedom movement people of Kerala didn’t participate in nationalist movement actively. The great revolt of 1857 did not produce any ripple in Kerala. This was because Kerala was divided and ruled by three independent governments and each had different political situation with Malabar under British rule, Cochin and Travancore were the princely states. The Indian National Congress formed in December 1885 had no impact in Cochin and Travancore State.

**Temple Entry Agitation**

The most important of the social reform movements of Kerala was the agitation for removal of untouchability. The movement earned inspiration from the social reformers like Chattambi Swamikal, Sree Narayana guru and Kumaran Asan, social organisations like N.S.S and S.N.D.P. Yogam and the Indian National Congress Under the Leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The First major struggle of the movement was the famous Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-1925). Its aim was to get the approach roads to the Vaikom temple.

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opened for the low caste people of the Hindu community. Many leaders including Periyar E.V Ramaswamy Naicker, K.P.Keshava Menon, Mannath Padmanabhan, K.Kelappan etc. Guruvayur Satyagraha, Paliyam Satyagraha are some other similar agitations. The women of Kerala actively participated in these social movements almost equally with the men. Large numbers of women eagerly participate for the first time during the Vaikom Satyagraha. A meeting was arranged at Thiruvananthapuram under the presidency of N.Meenakshi in order to show solidarity and to insist the need to open the roads around Vaikom temple for the use of all class of people. Another women conference was held at Chengannur presided over by Balammal. Gandhiji had a major role in making a change in the orthodox society to change their attitude on women. He wanted to bring equal footing with men. It was the national movement that women got enough oppurtunity to come to the fore front.

Gandhiji welcome the women leadership in temple entry agitation. A women conference was held at Chengannur presided over by Balammal and a resolution was passed regarding Khadi wearing. There were about hundred women present at the meeting\textsuperscript{24}. In order to organize women participation in Vaikkom Satyagraha, a

women’s wing was formed. Kamalammal, Lekshmiammal, Nagamma, the wife of Ramasamy Naiker were the prominent members of the wing. They travelled throughout Kerala along with hundreds of women volunteers to propagate the purpose and ideas behind Vaikom Satyagraha. In 20 May 1924 ladies started Satyagraha in Vaikom. On August 4 women lead by Nagamma and Lekshmi Amma picketed the road. The police arrested and remanded them for eight days\textsuperscript{25}. Active parts in politics began to ask for greater role in the national movement.

Paliyam Satyagraha, another mile stone in the social movement which stood for the eradication of untouchability. It was a movement in 1947-1948 to allow the low caste people in temples and roads. Women leaders like Arya Pallom, Priyadatta Antharjanam from Palghat, Saraswathi Thamburatti and Omana Thamburatti from Kodungallur Kovilakom, N.K. Bhanumathi, Prabala, Leela, SatyaBhama, Ammini, Haridasi, Sujatha and many others actively participated in it. With the effort of Paliam Satyagraha and similar movements the roads and temples of Cochin were opened for all Hindus\textsuperscript{26}.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, pp. 88-90.

\textsuperscript{26} Kerala State gazetteer, vol – I, part-II, p.492.
Women in active politics

During the second quarter of the 20th century women all over India, while Gandhiji announced Salt Satyagraha, marched towards Dandi on 12th March 1930. In Kerala the Congress leader Kelappan followed by thousands including women marched towards Calicut and broke salt laws. Kerala took an active part in the struggle for freedom. In Kerala women were not merely participants but they took over leadership and made an active participation for the success of the civil disobedience movement and the organised Satyagraha.

A.V. Kuttymalu Amma, Mukkupuzha Kartyayani Amma, O.D. Saradha Krishnan strengthened Congress party and gave inspiration to the new Congress volunteers. P.C. Karthyani Amma, Chenau Vetil Lakshmi Amma, Puttilottu Payyadakkan Vetil Lakshmi Amma joined with low caste people and participated in many movements. In 1942, a conference was held in Kozhikode in order to form a women organization comprising Malabar, Travancore and Cochin territories. In 1943 Kerala Mahila Sangham was formed and their main agenda was to participate in India’s freedom movement. Thankamma Krishnapilla, Kamalakshi, Radhamma Tankachi were the prominent organizers of the Kerala Mahila Sangham. Women started to participate in all sort of agitations. In Malabar, womenfolk participated in agrarian agitations. While in Travancore, women workers in coir sector organized and participated largely. Parvathi
Aiyyappan, Devaki Warrier, C.Kunjukaavu Amma, Metilda Kallan, Mallapuzha Karthayani Amma, Gracy Aron, Margret Pavamony, Kamalam, Swarna Kumari, Sugunabhai, Koyepilli Devaki Amma, E Ammukutty Amma, T.C. Kochukutty Amma were the few who were arrested and jailed during the freedom movement. In 1936 a women workers union was started called Ambalapuzha Taluk Kayaru Piri Tozhilali Union - A trade union for the upliftment of the coir workers, it gained popularity in Alapuzha District27.

Karthayani Amma was a school teacher. She resigned her job and joined salt Satyagraha. The women who were determined to defy the law and get arrested, came out of the home and marched forward. These women precisionist were arrested, and were taken to the special sub-jail at Calicut. The arrest of the women leaders and their trial altercation large crowds. Karthyayani Amma, one among the arrested, was sentenced undergo imprisonment till the rising of court, on her to give securing for good behaviour28. Gandhiji started civil disobedience movement in 1931. Rosamma Punnoose, A.V.Ammukutti Amma, Eswari Amma, M.K.Janaki Amma, was the various patriotic women who participated in civil disobedience movement. In connection with Civil Disobedience movement, the

procession was led by the Karthyayani Amma, along with, E.Narayani Kutti Amma, T.Ammukutty Amma and Jeyalekshmi Sundarayan also courted arrested\textsuperscript{29}.

\textbf{Rosamma Punnoose}

Rosamma Punnoose was one of the prominent leaders in freedom movement in Kerala. She was born on 13\textsuperscript{th} May 1913 in family famous for patriots known as Karimpparampil. Her Marriage with P.T.Punnoose the prime great communists and organiser of Punnapara Vayalar struggle, gave way to her mental and political duration. Violating prohibition she attended Vattiyoorkavu meeting. On the basis of it Rosamma was sentenced for a year imprisonment and penalty of hundred rupees by the first class magistrate on 31\textsuperscript{st} July 1939. At the time of second state Congress law violating movement Rosamma was nominated as the fourth president. In 1939 she was sentenced for 6 months imprisonment and penalty of 500 rupees\textsuperscript{30}. After the formation of Kerala she was the candidate of Communist Party of India in Devikulam Constituency and elected to the First Kerala Legislative Assembly. Later she was elected to the Eighth Kerala Legislative Assembly from Alapuzha Constituency. Salt Satyagraha gave them rather a rare opportunity to come to the world


\textsuperscript{30} Mathurbhumi, Daily, Calicut, 18 March 1930.
outside from within the four walls of their confinement\textsuperscript{31}. The first batch of Satyagraha accompanied Gandhi in his march Dandi consisted of 75 men. On the way, several women greeted Gandhi and sought him advice, But Sarojini Naidu and Mithubeen Patel were the only two come close to him during this epic march\textsuperscript{32}.

In Kerala, Payyannur was chosen as the venue for the enactment of salt Satyagraha. Young men and large number of women, from all over Kerala enthusiastically came forwarded to enrol themselves as volunteers, P.C.Kochukutty Amma who was in the service of the Cochin education Department, through an article exhorted, women of Kerala received inspiration for participating in the freedom movement from Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs Annie Besant and other national leaders\textsuperscript{33}. The distinguishing feature of Payyannur march was the participation of many women including several belonging to the lower state of society\textsuperscript{34}.

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\textsuperscript{31} A.Sreedhara Menon, \textit{Kerala Charithram}(Malayalam) NBS,Kottayam,1967, p.441.
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Janaki Amma who hailed from maternal joint family was kezheveedu in Perunthani, the west fort area in Trivandrum.\textsuperscript{35} Janaki Amma participated in the salt Satyagraha in 1930. She was arrested and imprisoned for one year. Another important personality in Indian National Congress and Kerala Politics was A.V.Kuttamalu Amma, she belonged a famous family house called Anakara Vadaketh of Ponnani Taluk, South Malabar in 25\textsuperscript{th} April1905. She was drawn into the freedom movement in her youth. She conducted her school education at presidency school for girls in Madras. As it was the custom of those days not to educate matured girls, she also didn’t get higher education. In 1928, she was married to kozhipurath Madhava Menon who later became a member of Madras Ministry, a high leader of Congress in Malabar, Municipal Chairman of Kozhikode, an advocate and K.P.C.C President\textsuperscript{36}. Congress was encouraged by her picketing that she organized before the textile shops of Kozhikode which supplied foreign made clothes and it was she who accelerated the activities and enlivened the freedom movement. She was one of the prominent women leaders of the freedom struggle in Kerala during the 1930s, considering her enthusiasm, courage, capacity in organising and high spirit of leadership\textsuperscript{37}.

\textsuperscript{37} P.M.Nair, \textit{op.cit}, pp. 874 – 875.
For violating ever few, leading a great procession and addressing the mass she was sentenced for two years imprisonment. She was also sentenced by the sub-court of Kozhikode for one year imprisonment for participating in the Satyagraha held on 24th November 1940 at Chevayoor. During Quit India Movement, she was imprisoned for two years at Presidency jail. Then she was released in 1944, when her husband Kozhipurath Madhava Menon becomes a minister of Madras ministry. Even after this his relation to Malabar Congress and her interest in the persistence of Congress continued\textsuperscript{38}.

Quit India movement was another inspiration and chance for the people of India to unite and work together. During the freedom movement, Gandhiji visited Kerala several times to propagate national movement among the people. On one such visit to Kerala in 1934 one young lady, Kaumudi teacher voluntarily donated her ornaments to Gandhiji to show her solidarity\textsuperscript{39}. Hundreds and thousands of people stood behind Mahatma Gandhi. On 8th August 1942 all India Congress committee met together in Bombay and discussed on a resolution demanding all India above 16 years to fight for freedom in non-violent method. This resolution that is popular in the name Quit India Resolution. When Gandhiji was saying about this resolution, he gave the slogan “do or die” to the people. In

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p.873.

\textsuperscript{39} The Hindu, Kannur edition, Kerala, August 5,2009, p.5.
Kerala, thousands participated in quit India movement to show the solidarity. Quit Indian movement was actively participated by Akkamma Cheriyan, Annie Mascrene, Smt Elizabeth Kuruvila and Lakshmi.N.Menon popularly known as captain Lakshmi.

**Akkamma Cheriyan**

Akkamma Cheriyan was the forefront of the agitation for responsible government in Travancore. She was born on 14th February 1909 in Kanjirapally, Travancore State. She was born into a wealthy Catholic Syrian family, she took B.A degree and later became a teacher. She gave up her teaching career in order to join the struggle for liberty. She joined the Travancore State Congress which was formed in 1938, which started agitation for a responsible government in Travancore. In 1938 the Travancore State Congress was banned by the government. Most of the prominent leaders including president of the party Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai, After his arrest, Akkamma Cheriyan was nominated as the 12th president of Travancore State Congress. She led a mass rally from Thampanoor to Kowdiar palace of King Chitira Thirunal Balarama Varma to revoke the ban on Travancore State Congress. The agitating mob also demanded the dismissal of the Diwan. The British police Chief ordered his men to fire on the rally of over twenty

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thousand people. Akkamma Cherian boldly shouted ‘I am the leader, shoot me first before you kill others’. Her courageous words forced the police authorities to withdraw their orders. On hearing the news Mahatma Gandhi hailed her as ‘the Jhansi Rani of Travancore’. She was arrested and convicted for violating prohibitory orders. In November 1952, at the age of 43, she married V.V.Varkey a long time state Congress activist from Kanjirapalli, Akkamma died in 1982.

**Annie Mascarene**

Annie Mascarene, the charismatic leader is credited with many ‘first’, she was the first lady to be elected to Travancore assembly, the first lady ministry of Thiru-Kochi statement who signed in the preamble of constitution, the first lady elected to Indian parliament from South India, in these states she is generally in Indian history and particularly in Kerala politics an epoch making personality. Annie Mascarene was born in 6th June 1901 at Thiruvananthapuram. The activities of Annie Mascarene in rousing the political consciousness of the people by her speeches and writings were disapproved by the government and it was decided to process against her. The following extract from the interview note for November 7, 1938 throws light in the developing situation. I have to report to your highness that Annie Mascarene has been grossly

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abusing the freedom that has allowed to her and three days ago at Kattakadai and one or two places the delivered speeches accusing the government of many gross inequities including the burning of houses, injuries inflicted on pregnant women and permission given to the military to dishonour women. She has also, notwithstanding the ‘peace’ atmosphere definitely advocated the stoppage of taxes and payment of school fees and crippling the resources of the government. Annie Mascarene was arrested and brought to trial but the judgement of the court in respect of her application for bail called considerable embarrassment to the government. Sir C.P.’s note to maharaja on November 15, 1938 gives the details of what happened and the subsequent action taken by the government in Annie Mascarene’s case. “I am sending here with the judgement passes by Mr. K.C. Abraham in the matter of the bail application put in on behalf of miss Annie Mascarene. The judgement is not only perverse but is deliberately mischievous and the remarks there in are wholly irrelevant to the matter that the judge has to decide. He has pretended that he did not know that Miss. Annie Mascarene made any other speaks of this speech as a single attempt. As Annie considers it essential that the public should realize how far wide of their remark are the statements made in the judgement Annie authorized that Miss Mascarene even a clear case of sedition. This
will show that is continuously contumacious. On 19th July 1936 at the age of 64, she passed away while at the treatment in general hospital, Thiruvananthapuram. Annie Mascarene endowment committee decided to put up a complete status made of bell metal at Annie Mascarene square at Vazhuthacaude.

Elizabeth Kuruvila

Smt. Kuruvila is the daughter of Mysore Chandi, the rajyasabha Bhooshan, E. John kuruvila the eldest son of advocate Elinjikal E.J. John was her husband. All the ladies and men of Elanjikal family played integral parts in freedom struggle of India. Mrs. E. John Kuruvila from her permanent residing place Thrissur set out for Thiruvananthapuram 21st September by rail. A huge mass including ladies received her in each station and she addressed them everywhere. When she reached Thiruvananthapuram she gave a statement to the press. She demanded a clear public investigation on the death of a boy whose dead body was deposited on the Veli coast. It was said that police was responsible for the murder and police brutality and torture caused such a murder. She also gave to pass the press statement of A.J. John which he was not able to publish because of his unexpected arrest. Kuruvila was taken to Puthen Chantha lock up and Mrs. Kuruvila was to central jail up and Mrs. Kuruvila was on the 29th both of this were presented before the court.

43 P.M.Nair, op.cit, p.513.
and sentenced for imprisonment in central jail. She was the first lady in Travancore who received worst in connection with state Congress struggle.

Lakshmi N Menon

Lakshmi N Menon is one of the early prominent leaders from Kerala who select New Delhi for his political career. Born in 1897 in Thiruvananthapuram as the daughter of Rama Varma Thampan and Madhavikutty Amma. She was one of the founder members of All India Women’s Conference and served as its president and secretary. She was good orator who gripped the audience attention; she worked in Ministry of External Affairs as Parliamentary Secretary from 1952 to 1957. She becomes the Deputy Minister in the Jawaharlal Nehru’s cabinet from 1957 to 1962. She was the Chairperson of a number of United Nation’s commissions. Lakshmi Menon was behind the concept of mother’s day as she wanted to appreciate the works of mothers in all homes. After retirement from political service in 1967, she turned to social work and also to writing she becomes the chairman of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust. In recognition of her services, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1957.

Justice Janaki Amma, the first women Municipal Chairperson of Travancore – Cochin and also the justice of the high court, Captain Lakshmi Sehgal, the prominent freedom fighter and political activist, Justice Anna Chandy, the first women judge of India and

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44 Kaumadi, Weekly, 9 November 1953, p.4.
second in the world, Justice K.K. Usha, who represented India at the 18th International Convention of International Federation of women lawyers in 1975, she also actively involved social activities, were the other few prominent socio political works who worked for the upliftment of destitute women in Kerala. Many women were deserting their comforts and concessions, pomp and pleasure for the well being and freedom of motherland. In history of Kerala from 1930 to 1942, Women had a considerable and important place. No wonder that the close of the movement Gandhiji commented that the role that the women played in the freedom struggle should be written in letters of gold. In the subsequent movements, they were resolute in their steps and were prepared to undergo any hardship in the course of the attempt to attain freedom. All regions of India witnessed sweeping changes, both socially and culturally during the period from 1850 to 1910. The terms modernization, reformation, renaissance etc are used to denote these changes. But perhaps nowhere else in India changes have occurred that were as dramatic as in Kerala. In the same state in which in 1815 Government implemented the rule on dress code forcing women not to cover their breast, a women acquired a degree in medicine from London University using Government Scholarship in 1915. This shows the speed and strength of reform movements that happened in this region.\footnote{R Raman Nair, L Sulochana Devi, \textit{op.cit}, p.3.}
Towards Responsible Government

Travancore

A legislative council was introduced during Sri Mulam Thirunal Rama Varma. Provision was made for the representation of the non-official members in the council. The legislative council was inaugurated with Diwan as president with a maximum strength of eight members and the minimum of five. The powers of the council were wide, but no bill that was passed by the council would be law unless the king expresses his assert. The king retained the final legislative authority. In 1073 ME, the power of the Legislative council was curtained by imposing certain restrictions on its jurisdiction and take over some subjects from the legislative council.

In 1080 M.E another institution was installed, the Sri Mulam Assembly, both council and Assembly functioned effectively. The maximum strength of the council rose from 15 to 25 members. Provisions were made for direct elections. An electorate was made in which people with certain qualifications were included. Women of Travancore also enjoyed certain provisions in legislative assembly. The Travancore State manual describe like this, The women of Kerala have always been better circumstances than their sisters in other parts of India and the countries of the west. According to Marumakkattayam women formed the stokes of descent, their children and the children of their daughters succeeding to the
ownership of the properties belonging to the *Taravad*. The female education in Travancore has always received the admiring commendation of Indian statesmen. Many women had already proven their capacity for successful leadership in liberal professions as well as in humbler callings. Several had risen to high rank in the service of government. The maharaja generously resolved to initiate a policy of giving them a large share in politics as well\(^{46}\). Planters, merchants and jenmies had special representation in the assembly. The rights to discuss the budget and ask questions were also granted. Provisions were also made by nomination for the representation of certain interests, which had no chance at the polls. In 1097 M.E, a law was passed by which provisions were made for electing a large number of members on a wider franchise. The maximum strength of the council was raised from 25 to 50 of which 15 were nominated and the rest were elected. Women were declared entitled to sit in the house of legislature as members and to cast their vote. The number of voters was around 100000, which was only 2.5 percent of the total population. Later the power of the council was amplified and enlarged\(^{47}\). Thus Travancore – Cochin were the first Indian states to give voting rights to women in 1870\(^{48}\).

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The Sri Mulam popular assembly becomes a popular institution in Travancore. Notable statesmen served in it as members, but the assembly met only once a year. It had no deliberative function allowed by law or even by executive orders. There was in fact no discussion, no provision to ascertain the sense of the House. Some criticized Sri Mulam Assembly as a mere petitioning body.

In 1108ME (1932 A.D) king Bala Ramavarma Sri Chitra Thirunal issued a legislative reform act which made Sri Mulam popular assembly a statutory one and made changes in the legislative council. The Assembly was reorganized with seventy-two members of whom sixty-two were non-official and ten official members. Forty-three of the non-official members were elected from general territorial constituencies and five by special constituencies representing planters and jenmies as well as commercial interests. Fourteen non-official seats were nominated by the government to give representation to minorities and other inadequately represented sections. The diwan was the president of the assembly. The voters were limited by all persons who hold lands and pay certain tax, all graduates of Indian universities who were residing in Travancore enjoyed voting right. Women enjoyed equal right in the matter of voting and membership concerning both houses.\(^49\)

Cochin

Earlier there was no special legislative machinery in the state for making laws and regulations. Between 1893 and 1903, there was a law committee, consisting of a president and seven members. The law committee helped diwan to draft bills. The committee was abolished in the later year. Whenever the state finds it necessary to legislate on any subject, the diwan calls upon the government advocate and law experts to prepare and submit a draft bill. The proposed bill would be published in the government gazette for public opinion. Then it would be submitted to the government of Madras, on the receipt of their advice. After the assent of king, it becomes law\textsuperscript{50}.

Later the government of Cochin act was passed on June 17 1938. A scheme of diarchy on the pattern of the system, which prevailed in British India under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms, was introduced. According to it, Cochin legislative council was formed constituting 58 members of whom 38 were elected. The first popular ministry of Cochin assumed office on September 9, 1946\textsuperscript{51}.

The history of women representation in Travancore from 1888 to 1947 very clearly substantiates their limited representation. In

\textsuperscript{50} C.Achyuta Menon, \textit{The Cochin State Manual}, Thiruvananthapuram, 1911, p.465.

\textsuperscript{51} A Sreedhara Menon, \textit{op.cit}, pp. 296-300.
fact the Travancore state has been credited to have had its first Legislature in 1988. There were two women representatives in the Travancore Legislative Council and eight representatives Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. Women got better treatment in Cochin Legislative Council (1925 – 1948) were thirteen members were women. Two women members got placement in the Cochin Legislative Assembly (1948 – 1949). In 1922 – 1923 Dr.Mary Poonnen Lukose was nominated to the first Travancore Legislative Council. She was the first women member in any of the Legislature in India52. Numerous others were nominated in the subsequent periods in Travancore and Cochin states. Prominent among them were Elizabeth Kuruvilla, Anna Chandy, Mary Alexander, T.V.Narayani, Walsaiam Rose, Gnanasikhamoney, Hepzibah, I.Narayani Amma, Thressaimma Karoh, C.D Ponnamma, Annie Tliayyil, Meenakshi N Menon, Akkamma Cheriyan, Annie Mascarene, Kuttyyimalu Amma, Renganayaki Ammal, P. Thankamma, Thottakkat Madhavi Amma, Mrs. T.Pavithram, Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, Mrs Swans, G.M.D’suza, Meenakshikutty Amma, Joshua Anni, Thankamma W Menon, Miss Annie Joseph, K.Dakshayani Velayudhan and Mrs T.Francis. Most of the members were nominated by the Government. This shows the profound attitude of the Travancore and Cochin Rulers53.

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Up to twentieth century, the position of women was pathetic. Meanwhile the Christian missionaries started its work in the various parts of Kerala. The western education and rationalist ideas made intellectual development to rethink about the social order. The emergence of intellectual and spiritual leaders like Muttukutty Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, and Aiyyankali influenced the society for new social order. The formation of various caste organisations like SNDP, NSS created social awareness among the people. The people started protest against social inequalities which paved the way for new legislations on inheritance and marriage gave relief to women. The government also made some reformatory acts like temple entry proclamation in 1936(Travancore), the historic movement for eradication of untouchability, the increasing entry of unprivileged classes to the public services, the progress of industrialisation led to a new and dynamic society. All these developments during the pre-independence period generated a climate which helped women to organise themselves and to create an atmosphere to raise the status of women. Women started to come out of four walls to assert their political rights in the form of social and economic equality\textsuperscript{54}.