CHAPTER-I
HISTORY OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA AND THE GEO-SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF TRAVANCORE

The concept of ‘Mother Goddess’ that originated in Indus Valley is a historical truth. Indians feminized the country and personified it with the ‘Mother Goddess’, who is the most hallowed deity in the Hindu Pantheon\(^1\). It is worthy to note that the deity of learning itself was depicted as a woman, Goddess Saraswathi. Likewise wealth, charity and energy were represented by Lakshmi, Parvathi and Durga respectively. Our country itself has been called *Bharat Mata*, in contrast to the Fatherland of the West\(^2\).

From the Indus Valley period till Early Vedic period, women had an important role to play in the decision making process. The women figurines discovered from Indus Valley denote the system of worship of ‘Mother Goddess’ who was the mistress of every living being and who controlled the entire biological reproduction\(^3\). They attributed a relation between the woman who delivers the child and the Mother Earth who delivers grains. The reproductive power of women was revered and celebrated. Rig Vedic age granted full liberty to womenfolk to excel in social, political, economic, religious and intellectual arena. There was no gender discrimination in Vedic age in imparting education\(^4\). The educational system of Vedic India included both men and women in its folds. Both could submit to the discipline of Brahmacharya. After the course the women were termed ‘Brahmavadinis’\(^5\). They were life long students of sacred texts. ‘Brahmavadinis’ used to aim at a very high excellence in scholarship.

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2. *translation.babylon.com/English/Bharatmata*
4. *http://hinduism.about.com/od/history/a/vedic-women.html*
No male was considered complete or perfect without his wife. She was his *ardhangini*. The performances of Vedic ceremonies were considered invalid without the wife joining her husband as his full partner. Women had accessibility in the popular assemblies *Sabha* and *Samiti*. In short, the Rig Veda presents an amazing picture of Indian woman who was revered as the queen of the household enjoying social, political, religious and property rights. The Rig Veda also speaks of Vishpala, wife of Khela, a tribal chief, who fought battles along with her husband and lost her leg in one such encounter\(^6\). In many respects, the present day Indian women had to wait a long time to recapture some of the rights the Vedic women enjoyed.

During the later Vedic period, there were scholars like Maitreyi and Gargi. In the philosophical tournament held under the auspices of king Janaka of Videha, the complex philosophical questions were raised by the lady philosopher Gargi. She launched her attack on Yajnavalkya, the newly arrived philosopher with commendable confidence\(^7\).

Since the Later Vedic age, the role of women was limited to wifehood and motherhood. The ideal woman was pictured as the one who was home loving, caring, maternal and not having any desire of her own. The ideal of devoted *pativrata* was prevalent\(^8\).

During the Epic age, the position of women further decayed. Mahabharatha presents the examples of *sati*, polygamy, polyandry etc. A woman was considered to be a moving commodity which could be put on bet and could be sold or purchased\(^9\). But we also get quite contrary views from the Epics. Sita, Ahalya, Draupadi, Tara and Mandodari were regarded as the five ideal and revered women of India\(^10\). Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana paved the philosophical basement for enslaving women inside the framework of a family.

\(^7\) B.S. Chandrababu and L. Thilagavati, *op.cit.*, p.103.
\(^10\) Ibid.
According to ‘Manusmriti’, “a woman’s father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth and her sons guard her in old age. She is not fit for independence”\(^{11}\). The issue of political rights of women is not clearly depicted in Indian legal texts. The political arena that was opened to her through the *Sabha* and *Samiti* in early Vedic times was closed in subsequent centuries. Thus Indian society from the Later Vedic period has set apart Indian women inside a traditional framework.

The duties of a traditional woman included service to family members, housekeeping, cooking, gardening, spinning, weaving, growing medicinal herbs, classification of grains, maintenance of granary, care of domesticated animals, accounting, reading and writing. Her feminine quality was determined by the level of obedience to her husband and his family.

It was during this dark period of Indian womanhood, Mahavira and Buddha emerged, quarrelling with the existing Brahmanical traditions. The monastic life of Jainism offered women the best opportunities for intellectual and aesthetic cultivation. From the time of Parswanatha to the present, women have been admitted to the religious order of nuns. There were many pious and learned nuns during the heyday of Jainism such as Jayanthi, daughter of king Sahasranika of Kosambi and Priyadarsana, daughter of Mahavira himself\(^{12}\).

Buddha gave women, choice between marriage and monastic life\(^{13}\). In response to Ananda’s doubt about women’s status in the cult, Buddha definitely stated that women were as capable of gaining enlightenment as men. In this sense Buddha may be regarded the first Feminist who did not pay notice to the existing socio-cultural practices as far as women are concerned\(^{14}\). The Buddhist nunneries opened out to women, opportunities for education, self-culture and varied shares.

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of social service in which they made themselves the equals of men. The nuns were provided with the knowledge of deepest problems of philosophy, subtle mystical experiences and intense meditative exercises\textsuperscript{15}.

The earliest known anthology of women’s literature in India certainly, and possibly anywhere in the world took shape when the songs composed by the Buddhist theris, which date back to the sixth century B.C. were collected into the ‘Therigatha’\textsuperscript{16}. The fund of wisdom of bhikkunis has survived through these songs written by theris like Mutta, Dhamma, Vimala, Subha, Sumangalamata, Madhika, Ubbiri and Ambapali who were champions of Feminist cause in olden times. ‘Therigathas’ show the capability and political observation of the bhikkunis and they are superb records of women experience of that time. This Buddhist text makes a point of how one world religion accepted since its very beginning, the right and equality of women in spiritual practice. ‘Therigatha’ may be read as the oldest existing testament to the Feminist experience of Buddhism\textsuperscript{17}.

The great grammarian Patanjali, author of ‘Mahabhashya’, used the word ‘Sakitiki’ to indicate ‘a female bearer of spear’\textsuperscript{18}. Amazonian body guards of armed women were employed in the palace of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya\textsuperscript{19}. Similarly Kautilya in his ‘Arthasastra’ refers to women soldiers armed with bows and arrows. It may also be noted that there is a sculpture at Barhut of about the second century B.C which represents a woman carrying a weapon on horseback as belonging to the forefront of the cavalry\textsuperscript{20}.

In Mauryan Empire there were women spies and women were appointed for the security of the king, which shows faith in the competence and faithfulness of women. Sanghamitra, the daughter of Asoka was also a great scholar and

\textsuperscript{15} Tripath Sharma, Women in Ancient India, Ess Ess Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p.22.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.2.
\textsuperscript{18} R.C. Majumdar, (ed.), The Age of Imperial Unity, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1980, pp.563-564.
\textsuperscript{19} V. A. Smith, The Early History of India, Pragun Publication, New Delhi, 2006, p.130.
social worker who went to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism\textsuperscript{21}. Asoka’s second queen Karuvaki is mentioned in the ‘Queen’s Edict’ inscribed on a pillar in Allahabad, in which her religious and charitable donations are referred to\textsuperscript{22}. In Gupta period, Kumara Devi who was born in the Lichchavi clan, ruled jointly with her husband Chandra Gupta I and issued gold coins with her name along with the family name of her parents, ‘Lichchavayah’\textsuperscript{23}. The name of the queen is inscribed with the honorific prefix ‘Sri’ and she is the first queen in ancient India, who appears on coins\textsuperscript{24}. In the famous ‘Allahabad Pillar Inscription’, Samudra Gupta prides himself as the son of Kumaradevi. The term ‘Lichchavidauhitra’ used by Samudra Gupta shows how he took pride in his pedigree on his mother’s side\textsuperscript{25}. Queen Prabhavati Gupta, daughter of Chandra Gupta II, and wife of Vakataka king Rudrasena II, ruled Vakataka Kingdom in the fourth Century A.D. as regent for her minor son\textsuperscript{26}. She is associated with ‘Poona Copper Plate Inscription’\textsuperscript{27}.

In the opinion of Hiuen Tsang, Rajyasri, the sister of Harsha Vardhana, might have ruled jointly with her brother\textsuperscript{28}. In the Hindu mythology, the woman is portrayed as Shakthi\textsuperscript{29}. A remarkable feature of the Hindu mythology is the manifestation of God as ‘Ardhanareeswara’, ‘Sita Rama’ ‘Uma Maheswara’, ‘Lakshmi Narayana’ and ‘Radha Krishna’ in which the divine consorts are compounded inseparably into one entity\textsuperscript{30}. During the Sangam period, a female child was welcomed and there existed a good level of gender equality. One-tenth of the Sangam writers were women such as Auvvayyar, Kuramakal Elaveyiniar,
Nanmullaiyar, Peymakal Elaveyini, Kakkai Padiniyar and Nachellaiyar\textsuperscript{31}. With the eighth century Tamil poetess Karaikkal Ammayar begins a long line of women poet saints in the medieval Bhakti Movement\textsuperscript{32}. Karaikkal Ammayar is one of the Saiva Nayanars. Her songs are included in the ‘Thirumurai’, the eleventh book of the canonical literature of Tamil Saivism\textsuperscript{33}. Thilagavathi and Mangayarkkarasi were two women mystics mentioned in ‘Thiruthondar Puranam’\textsuperscript{34}. Andal, the best example of bridal mysticism was the illustrious daughter of Saint Periyalvar\textsuperscript{35}.

The ‘Bhakti Movement’ of fifteenth century embarked a Renaissance in Hindu society as a whole and women society in particular. Mirabai of Chittor royal family continues to live with us through her beautiful devotional songs dedicated to Giridhar Gopal. Saraswathi, wife of Mandana Misra was another Bhakthi saint. Poetess Kshemasri was a disciple of Kabirdas. Nanibai and Matabai, daughters of Dadu, Sahajabai and Dayabai, disciples of Charan Das, and Sachadevi, the mother of Chaitanya deserve mention. Beginning with Muktabai in the thirteenth century and ending with Bahinabai in the seventeenth century, the voices of some dozen women saints are recorded in medieval Maharashtra history\textsuperscript{36}.

Akka Mahadevi, a Virasaivite of twelfth century was a lady who reached exceptional philosophical heights. In the South, the names of a number of women writers have come down to us, such as Thirumalamba Devi of Vijayanagar empire who was the author of ‘Varadambika Parinayam’, Gangadevi, the author of ‘Madurai Vijayam’ and Manorama Thampuratti, the Sanskrit scholar of Calicut. Queen Ratnaprabha, a character in the book ‘Katha Sarit Sagaram’ comments that confinement of women in household is nothing but absurdity\textsuperscript{37}. In

\textsuperscript{32} Susie Tharu and L. Lalitha, (eds.), op.cit., p.56.
\textsuperscript{33} B.S. Chandrababu and L. Thilagavathi, op.cit., p.215.
\textsuperscript{34} R.K. Tandon, State of Women in India, Indian Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 1998, p.7.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid
\textsuperscript{36} Mandakranta Bose, (ed.), op.cit., p.192.
the field of administration, Indian women produced some prominent figures. The history of early medieval period presents women who had brilliant administrative talents. Among these, first come the Bhaumakara queens of Orissa, who succeeded to the throne six times one after the other. The records of this dynasty indicate that women ruled Orissa successively for about fifty years\textsuperscript{38}. Such a succession of women is rarely found in Indian history. The first known queen of this dynasty, Thribhuvana Mahadevi, accepted the titles ‘Paramabhattarika’, ‘Maharajadhiraja’ and ‘Parameswari’.\textsuperscript{39} Various charters issued by the Bhaumakara queens reveal their gravity towards administration. The number of womenfolk who served as governors, feudatories and village heads in the Bhaumakara state exceeded the present number of female civil servants in India.

The rule of Queen Didda from Kashmir is another example. She outshines her contemporary kings of North India as an energetic and powerful queen who ruled over the destiny of Kashmir for nearly twenty three years. The King Kshemagupta was nicknamed ‘Didda Kshema’ reflecting the power of his queen, who acted as the real king\textsuperscript{40}. The ‘Srinagar Buddhist Image Inscription’ of 989 A.D., now preserved in Sri Pratap Museum, Srinagar, mentions Queen Didda with the masculine epithet ‘Rajan’ instead of more appropriate ‘Rajni’\textsuperscript{41}.

Domingo Paes and Nuniz, famous Portuguese travellers had written in their accounts that in Vijayanagar kingdom, women were present in each and every field. There were references about Rudramba Devi of thirteenth century who defended the Kakatiya throne from all external threats for a long time, in the writings of Marco Polo. Rudramba erected tanks, canals and wells, granted concessions to merchants, built hospitals, endowed religious foundations with rich gifts of land and founded Brahmana settlements to encourage learning. On occasions of emergency, she did not hesitate to take the field in person to lead her

\textsuperscript{38} Biswarup Das, \textit{The Bhaumakaras, Buddhist Kings of Orissa and Their Times}, Oriental Publications, Delhi, 1978, pp.77-83.

\textsuperscript{39} V. Rajendra Raju, \textit{Role of Women in India’s Freedom Struggle}, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994, p.2.

\textsuperscript{40} Anjali Verma, “Women Administrators in Epigraphic Sources (A.D. 600 – 1200)”, \textit{Indian Historical Review}, Vol. 37, ICHR, New Delhi, 2010, p.5.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}
troops against the enemy. ‘Nayankara system’ is measured as her main contribution to the political and administrative system, which afterward became one of the illustrious features of Vijayanagar Empire. Though a woman, she was undoubtedly one of the greatest rulers of Andhra.

Her sister Ganapampa deserves to be remembered as one of the few Andhra women who actually wielded the sceptre and governed a kingdom in her own right. Akkadevi of Karnataka was a ruler of Chalukya dominions such as Banavasi, Kisukadu and Masavadi for nearly half a century. She is described in inscriptions as fierce in battles and as having subjugated a large number of enemies. Shila Mahadevi of Rashtrakuta Empire ruled jointly with her husband Dhruva. She bore the imperial titles ‘Parameswari’ and ‘Paramabhattarika’, made grants of land at her own will and issued her own orders to the officers. Nayanika, wife of Satavahana king Satakarni, wielded great influence on her husband and he issued several silver coins on which the name of Nayanika was inscribed. After Satakarni’s death, Nayanika was appointed as the regent of her minor sons and she successfully administered the kingdom. The ‘Nanaghat Inscription’ gives information about ‘Aswamedha’ and ‘Rajasuya’ sacrifices performed by Nayanika.

Mangamma of Madurai, wife of Chokkanatha Nayaka, ruled as the regent of her son and grandson. Chennammaji of Vijayanagar ruled the kingdom in the name of her husband, Somasekhara Nayaka and also founded a town called Somasekharapura. Umayamma Rani of Attingal defeated a Mughal adventurer who attacked Travancore. Van Rheede mentions her in his records.

There were other examples for courageous Indian women such as Sultana Raziya who seemed destined to become one of the most powerful rulers of the

Delhi Sultanate. As Sultana, Raziya adopted men’s dress and contrary to custom, she led armies into battlefield\textsuperscript{47}. She established schools, academies, centre for research and public libraries and Hindu works in sciences, philosophy, astronomy and literature were studied in schools and colleges\textsuperscript{48}.

Rani Kurmadevi, a Rajput princess of Patan, led a battle in person against Kutbuddin Aibak and defeated him\textsuperscript{49}. Rani Padmini of Mewar and Rani Karnawathi of Mewar were models of Rajput heroines of the middle ages. It is believed that Allauddin Khilji was infatuated by the beauty of Rani Padmini, the wife of Rana Ratan Singh and invaded their capital, Chittor. Just before the surrender, Rani Padmini and her Rajput women immolated themselves in fire and performed \textit{Jauhar} so that they may not be molested by the enemy. Rani Karnawathi of Mewar, wife of Maha Rana Sanga, administered the state on behalf of her son Vikramjit. She strenuously opposed the attack of Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. When Chittor was sacked in 1535, hundreds of Rajput women under her leadership burnt themselves in \textit{Jauhar}\textsuperscript{50}. Rani Durgavati defended her kingdom of Gondwana against the Mughals under Akbar. She defeated the Mughal army under Kwaja Abdul Majid Asaf Khan in 1562. But in the battle of 1564, understanding the inevitable defeat, she killed herself in the battlefield\textsuperscript{51}.

There is nothing of importance and interest in the history of Ahmednagar except the heroic resistance offered by Chand Bibi to Akbar’s son Prince Murad in 1595\textsuperscript{52}. The Maratta queen Ahilya Bai Holker was successful in internal administration and organized a regiment of women\textsuperscript{53}. The influence of Jijabai was a prime factor in the making of Sivaji’s career. Jijabai was a woman of virtuous temperament and extraordinary intellect and infused into her child’s

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\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, p.99.
\textsuperscript{49} B.S. Chandrababu and L. Thilagavati, \textit{op.cit.}, p.146.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.146-148.
\textsuperscript{51} \texttt{www.indianmilitaryhistory.org/kings/durgavati/durgavati.html}
\textsuperscript{52} R.C. Majundar, et.al., \textit{An Advanced History of India}, Mac Millan India Limited, New Delhi, 2004, p.358.
\textsuperscript{53} \texttt{www.in.com/ahilyabai-holkar/biography-7575.html}
\end{flushright}
mind, high, inspiring ideas by reciting stories of heroism, spirituality and chivalry. Tarabai, wife of Maratta king Rajaram, resisted Aurangazeb successfully. It was due to her undaunted opposition, after her husband’s death, Aurangazeb was unable to establish a kingdom in Deccan. Nur Jehan, the esteemed wife of Jahangir was clever in political matters and equally gifted in literature also. Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of Shajahan, had political genius and administrative skill and often assisted her husband in the tough task of administering the empire. Gulbadan Begum, Salima Sultana, Jehanara, Roshanara, Zebunnisa, Ziatunnisa, Bibi Waliya etc. represented the culture of the Mughal court. The period from the invasion of India by Muhammad of Ghor to the establishment of British authority in Bengal in the second half of eighteenth century, witnessed in general, a deterioration of the position of women in India.

Over the entire Gangetic Valley, social conditions remained upset for nearly three hundred years, till the time of the Great Mughals. The periods of continuous invasion upset the social institutions and traditional political structures. Rigorous seclusion of women became the rule. The conveniences of education which the Buddhist nunneries had provided, vanished with the total desertion of convents and monasteries. Evils like purdah, sati, female infanticide, dowry system, polygamy etc. crept into the society. The huge section of women community simply passed into the past, performing their daughter-wife-widow roles.

The arrival of the British marked a wholly new phase in Indian society. The British paralyzed the country by heartless colonialism. To safeguard national honour and independence, men and women fought shoulder to shoulder. The sacrifices of Indian women form a golden page of Indian history. The saga of women’s participation in freedom struggle began in the year 1817 when Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British Colonel Malkam and defeated him in guerilla warfare. In 1824, Rani Chennamma of Kittur, Karnataka, bravely

54. R.C. Majundar, et.al., op.cit., p.505.
57. http://www.bolokids.com
resisted the armed might of the East India Company. The symbol of resistance to British rule in India was Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, the queen of the Maratta ruled princely state of Jhansi in North India and the leader of 1857 revolt. Due to her sacrifices, she became an icon of Indian nationalist movement. Sir Hugh Gough esteemed Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi as “the best and bravest military leader of the rebels”.

Several queens of minor principalities also took part in the Revolt of 1857. Rani Avantibai of Ramgarh raised an army of four thousand men and led it by herself against the British in 1857 when the British tried to annex her State after the death of her husband Vikramaditya Singh. Avantibai fought most valiantly but when her defeat became imminent she killed herself with her own sword and became a martyr on 20 March, 1858. Another woman whom we remember in this context was Hazrat Mahal Begum. She was the wife of the deposed ruler of Lucknow. She actively took part in the Revolt of 1857 against the ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ under which Dalhousie wanted her to surrender Lucknow. She gave stiff resistance. But after the fall of Lucknow, she escaped to Kathmandu and died in exile.

Christian missionaries and modern English education entered India along with the British. The movement against polygamy, purdah, sati, child marriage, caste system and other such social evils was an advantage to women. The progressive Indians drank deep western liberal ideas of equality, rationality and humanitarianism. The English educated young men tried to examine every aspect of life rationally and thus helped the process of modernization. As a result of missionary interference, women education received encouragement and a number of women educational centres such as Bethune College, Calcutta, Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow etc. sprang up.

Nineteenth century gave birth to many socio-religious reformers. Never before or since then, had there been the advent of so many great men in a short time.

60. R.C. Majumdar, et.al., op.cit., p.774.
61. http://orissa.gov.in
time. The nineteenth century Renaissance was also the starting point of Indian women’s liberation struggles. Ram Mohan Roy was the first man to speak out publicly against the injustices on women in the name of tradition and religion. He laid the foundation of all the principal movements for the elevation of the Indians which characterize the nineteenth century. In 1822, he wrote a pamphlet, ‘Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Females’ which supported the property rights of Hindu widows. Ram Mohan Roy’s efforts to abolish sati started the long process of reform towards the traditional Indian ideals of womanhood. On 4 December 1829 was passed the famous ‘Regulation XVII’ which declared sati illegal and punishable by courts. The Western thought introduced new ideas about women’s roles and capabilities.

‘Brahma Samaj’, ‘Arya Samaj’, ‘Prarthana Samaj’ etc. were male-guided, male-inspired organizations which worked for education and uplift of women and for giving them experience with public work. The ‘Brahma Samaj’ worked strongly against sati, polygamy, dowry system and other social evils. Freedom and equality of women and widow remarriage were the focuses of the Samaj. ‘Navavidhan Sabha’ of Kesab Chandra Sen welcomed Miss. Mary Carpenter to Calcutta to encourage women education.

The educated women of ‘Brahma Samaj’ especially women from Tagore family indulged in social reform movements. In Madras, ‘Theosophical Society’ encouraged women education. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar worked for women education, supported widow remarriage and worked against child marriage and polygamy. His attempts became fruitful in 1856 when ‘Widow Remarriage Act’ was passed. Sree Ramakrishna Paramahamsa adored his wife Sarada Devi as ‘Divine Mother’ and highlighted the idea of equality between men and women. Swami Vivekananda put forward the ideal of women who attained education which also suits to the ideals of religion. He laid great stress on the traditional

62. Ibid., p.809.
63. Ibid., p.819.
values of chastity and family life of women and was totally against their subjection. Sister Nivedita, disciple of Swami Vivekananda also worked for the uplift of Indian women.

R. G. Bhandarkar, M.G. Ranade and others organized ‘Prarthana Samaj’ in Bombay for social reform. B.M. Malabari formed a women association called ‘Seva Sadan’ and worked for widow remarriage and against child marriage. M.G. Ranade, G.K. Gokhale and others dedicated their lives for the uplift of motherland. Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai started and taught in schools for lower class girls. Ramabai Ranade, wife of M.G. Ranade, started ‘Hindu Ladies Club’ which opened classes for illiterate women and widows. She started ‘Poona Seva Sadan’, ‘Seva Sadan Nursing School’ and Medical Schools. In Poona, Mrs. Ranade led the agitation for compulsory primary education for girls. Saraladevi Chaudharani, Swarnakumari Devi, Hiranmayi Devi, Suniti Devi, Saroj Nalini Datt, Abala Bose and many others organized several ‘Mahila Samitis’.

Maharani Tapaswini, popularly known as ‘Mataji’, was the niece of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. She is reported to have taken part in the revolt of 1857 for which she was interned in Trichonopoly. After her release she devoted her time to the study of Sanskrit and the practice of ‘yoga’. She opened a Sanskrit school at Bengal called ‘Mahakali Sanskrit Patasala’ This school was styled as a genuine Indian attempt at developing female education. Tapaswini helped Tilak to start an ammunition factory at Nepal. But the British discovered it and the plan failed. Rani Swarnamayi, widow of the Raja of Kassimbazar, encouraged the spread of education in her state. Poor students, widows and orphans received her special care. She generously offered money for the building fund of Indian Association. D. K. Karve, Viresalingam Pantulu and Venkata Ratnam Naidu worked for women education, women marriage rights and against Devadasi system in South India. Periyar E.V. Ramaswami Naicker and the ‘Dravidian Movement’ contributed much for the development of the concept of women’s

68. Ibid., p.311.
69. Ibid., p.307.
70. Ibid., pp.310-311.
The famous poet Subramanya Bharathi often used the image of ‘Mother India’ and linked the subjection of India with the subjection of women. Bharati Dasan was another ardent advocate of women’s rights. Viresalingam Pantulu founded ‘Hitakarini Samajam’ and a woman’s magazine called ‘Satihita Bodhini’. He had the fortune of a spirited, committed and understanding woman as his wife. His wife Kandukuri Rajyalakshamma allowed him to donate all their property to ‘Hitakarini Samajam’. She was mainly responsible for ‘Mahila Patasala’, ‘Mahila Prarthana Samajam’ and ‘Rescue Home’ at Rajamundry. Chorangudi Seethamma was the founder of ‘Tripurasundari Samajam’, at Guntur in Andhra Pradesh in 1916. She conducted an informal school for women and a night school in a nearby village. She also maintained child widows at her home till they were married. The literary writings of Michael Madhusoodan Datt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindra Natha Tagore reflected the movements in favour of women uplift.

Chandramukhi Basu and Kadambini Ganguly became the first female graduates of the British Empire in 1886 and the latter was the first female physician of South Asia to be trained in European medicine. It was Pandita Ramabai who laid the foundation of the movement of women’s liberation in India. She was an embodiment of glorious womanhood of India. It was her effort that resulted in nine women delegates attending the 1889 session of the Indian National Congress. She started ‘Arya Mahila Samaj’ at Poona and later ‘Sarada Sadan’ at Bombay. In 1881, she gave evidence before the Hunter Commission emphasizing need for abolition of child marriage and promotion of women education. She went to England in 1883, studied at ‘Ladies College’, Cheltenham and taught Sanskrit in the same college. In 1885, she visited

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71. Ibid., p.298.
73. Ibid., p.19.
76. Ibid., p.37.
America. Her book ‘The High Caste Hindu Women’ became very popular there and in 1887, ‘Ramabai Association’ was formed at Boston\(^{78}\). She also established ‘Mukthi’ and ‘Kripa Sadan’ at Poona for destitutes and wandering women\(^{79}\). Her social contribution was recognized by British government which awarded her the ‘Kaiser-i- Hind’ gold medal in 1919\(^{80}\).

By the end of the nineteenth century, women themselves took up the task of creating organizations such as ‘Bamabodhini Sabha’, ‘Brahmika Samaj’, ‘Bama Hitashini Sabha’, ‘Banga Mahila Samaj’, ‘Sakhi Samiti’, ‘Tripura Sundari Samajam’ etc. and ‘women’s question’ was the central issue in these organizations\(^{81}\).

In 1882, Swarnakumari Devi, daughter of Devendra Nath Tagore, started ‘Ladies Society’ at Calcutta for educating and imparting skills to poor women and widows. In 1905, ‘Bharat Mahila Parishad’, women’s wing of ‘National Conference’ was started. The Indian National Congress had a wing of ‘Desh Sevikas’ i.e., female servants for the country who pledged to nonviolent methods of popularizing social reforms\(^{82}\). They gave up their life of ease, joined in processions, flag salutations and hartals, cooked and nursed in Congress hospitals, sold khadi clothes, picketed shops and courted arrests. The credit for starting the first all India women’s organisation, ‘Bharat Stree Mahamandal’ in 1910 must go to Sarladevi Chaudharani, the brilliant daughter of Swarnakumari Devi\(^{83}\). These organizations took up issues like women’s education, abolition of social evils, Hindu law reform, moral and material progress of women, equality of rights and opportunities and women’s suffrage. It could be said that Indian women’s movements worked for two goals i.e., uplift of women and equal rights for men and women. Many factors provided the required motivation to the Women’s Movement of India. They are effect of western education on the

\(^{78}\) Surekha Panandikar, *op.cit.*, p.45.
perception of balancing sex roles, leadership provided by educated elite women,
interest of male social reformers in changing social practices certified by religion,
changing socio-religious attitudes and philosophies and generous attitude of
nationalist leaders towards the Women’s Movement and their passionate support
to women campaigns.

The image of *Bharat Mata* became popular with the Indian Independence
Movement of the late nineteenth century. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s novel
‘Anand Matt’ published in 1882 introduced the hymn ‘Vande Matharam’ which
soon became the song of emerging freedom movement in India. The birth of
Indian National Congress in 1885 furnished a political platform for women.
Education enabled reformist women from various regions and religious
persuasions of India like Pandita Ramabai, Saradaben Mehta, Muthulakshmi
Reddy, Cornelia Sorabji, Sarladevi Chaudharani, Abala Bose, Sarojini Naidu,
Begum Hamid Ali, Abru Begum, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Vilasindivei
Shenoy, Vidya Gouri Nilkanth, and many others to emerge as key players in the
Indian reform movement aimed at liberating women.

Saraladevi Chaudharani sacrificed most of her jewellery and also gave up
the ‘Padmavathi Gold Medal’ of the Calcutta University, which she had been the
first recipient. Saraladevi Chaudharani also formed a physical fitness club
called ‘Akara’ and a gymnasium called ‘Byayam Samiti’ which also provided
links with the *biplabis*. In 1902, she introduced ‘Birashtami Utsav’, followed by
‘Udayaditya Utsav’, which paid homage to Bengali heroes. After her marriage
with Rambhuj Datta Chaudhari of Lahore, she worked to spread nationalism in
Punjab, edited the Bengali journal ‘Bharathi’ and had close links with ‘Suhrid
Samiti’, a secret revolutionary society. A handful of foreign ladies such as Sister
Niveditha, Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Nellie Sen
Gupta, Mira Ben, Sarla Ben and others were also attracted towards Hindu
religion and philosophy and participated in India’s plight for freedom. Annie
Besant, the most important among the foreign women, was an Irish born

85. banglarmati-banglarjol.blogspot.com/
Theosophist, who became active in Indian Freedom Movement. Through the weekly ‘Commonweal’ and daily ‘New India’, she popularized the demand for self government. In 1916, she formed the ‘Home Rule League’ which dominated the political scene of India till the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi. She was an ardent advocate of women education, widow remarriage and uplift of women. She became Congress President in 1917. Women from palaces such as Maharani Chimna Bai II, wife of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda should also be remembered for her fight for women’s rights. She presided over the first session of All India Women’s Conference in 1927 at Poona. Chimna Bai had close friendship with Madam Cama. Her twin passion were freeing India and giving its women a voice.

Women’s participation in the political life of present day India dates back to early twentieth century when organizations such as ‘Women’s Indian Association’ (W.I.A.), ‘The National Council of Indian Women’ (N.C.I.W.) and the ‘All India Women’s Conference’ (A.I.W.C.) were formed in 1917, 1926 and 1927 respectively.

The first modern organization of women, ‘The Women’s Indian Association’ was started at Madras in 1917 by three Irish Theosophists, viz., Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant and Dorothy Jinarajadasa, and soon it became a rallying point for women of action.

‘The National Council of Indian Women’ was formed in 1925 as a national branch of ‘International Council of Women’. It collected information, prepared memoranda and presented them to authorities. Its founder was Mehribai Tata, wife of Sir Dorabji Tata. India’s first lady barrister, Cornelia Sorabji, and the first Indian woman to pass bar exam, Mithan J. Lam were active workers of N.C.I.W. From 1938 to 1944, Rani Setu Parvathi Bai of Travancore served as its President.

86. www.thecolorsofindia.com
89. http://www.tatacentralarchives.com
President\textsuperscript{90}. ‘All India Women’s Conference’ was the first all India women’s organization\textsuperscript{91}. It was founded in 1927 to function as an organization for the uplift and betterment of women and children. Lakshmi N. Menon, a woman from Kerala, served as its President from 1955 to 1959\textsuperscript{92}.

Another significant woman’s organization was the ‘Young Women Christian Association’ (Y.W.C.A.) which was founded in Bombay and Calcutta, in the year 1887 and 1893 respectively. The main purpose of Y.W.C.A. in India was the same as it was in London i.e., to provide women a safe and respectable place of living in big cities and also to unite women for prayer, mutual help, sympathy and instruction in spiritual life\textsuperscript{93}. The Y.W.C.A. has been concerned with the status and welfare of women for more than a hundred years. The Y.W.C.A. in India was organized by English educated elite in India. The decision makers of Y.W.C.A. happened to be the Christian wives of politicians, bureaucrats, and professionals who were in close relationship to British rulers. They aimed at women education and social welfare activities for the uplift of Indian women.

The tribal women should also be given due credit for playing their roles in freedom struggles. Women belonging to tribes like Munda, Manaki (Singbhum District, Bihar), Santhal, Bhil (Khandesh District, Maharashtra), Kurichiyas and Kurumbras (Wayanad District, Kerala) should be remembered for their sacrifices. After the martyrdom of the Naga leader Jadonag in 1931, Guidinlieu, popularly known as \textit{Rani}, continued to lead the armed struggle of the Nagas from Manipur\textsuperscript{94}. She was released from prison only after 15 August 1947.

There was no woman delegate among those who entered their names in the register at the inauguration of Indian National Congress. A woman delegate

\textsuperscript{90} Geraldine Forbes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.77.
\textsuperscript{91} Brinda Karat, \textit{Survival and Emancipation: Notes from Indian Women’s Struggles}, Three Essays Collective, Harayana, 2005, p.3.
\textsuperscript{92} G. Kumara Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.90.
\textsuperscript{93} K.S. Durrany, \textit{The Women’s Movements in the Religious Communities in India}, ISPCK, Delhi, 2002, p.70.
participated for the first time in the fifth annual session in 1889 and she was Kadambini Ganguly. The common people including women were for the first time galvanized into political action with the partition of Bengal in 1905. ‘Bande Mataram’ was the rallying cry of the anti-partition agitators. Women contributed their jewellery for the promotion of Swadeshi movement.

Saraladevi, a niece of Rabindranatha Tagore, opened an emporium called ‘Lakshmi Bhandar’ in Calcutta for popularizing Swadeshi goods. When the Congress session was held in Ahmedabad in December 1921, women functioned as Congress volunteers for the first time in Congress history. There were a total of 131 volunteers or ‘Swayam Sevikas’ who were led by Nandubehn Kanuga.

Indian women effectively participated in the labour movements also. By the 1920s the presence of women in the worker’s movement was noticeable. Bombay was the centre of worker’s movement. The struggle launched by the Communist Party of India in Tebhaga, Telengana etc. revealed the readiness of the masses to participate in the battle against foreign and native exploiters.

There were women participants in the revolutionary terrorist movements also. They conveyed secret messages to their male colleagues, provided food and shelter to absconders, smuggled and concealed weapons, circulated prohibited books and provided financial aid. Madam Bhikaji Cama worked outside India and organized the dispatch of revolutionary literature and arms to India from Paris. At the ‘Socialist Congress’ at Stuttgart in August 1907, she unfurled a flag of Indian freedom which she designed. She also started a journal from Paris in 1909 called ‘Bande Mataram’. Terrorists like Bina Das who shot at Bengal Governor Sir. Stanley Jackson, Kalpana Dutt, Pritilata Waddedar and Kanaklata Barua, who were involved in ‘Chittagong Armoury Case’, Ujjwala Majumdar, who was involved in the ‘Darjeeling Governor Shooting Case’, Santhi Ghosh and Suniti Chaudari, who were members of ‘Yugantar Party’ and killed the Executive

96. Ibid., p.4.
97. Ibid., p.79.
Magistrate C.G.C. Stevens, of Komila district, Bengal, were examples. Nanibala Devi, a Bengali revolutionary and leader of ‘New Yugantar Party’ was the first political prisoner of British India\(^{100}\). Lathika Ghosh, the Oxford educated niece of Aurobindo Ghosh, organized a women’s terrorist group at Chittagong\(^{101}\).

Between 1917 and 1945, there were two main issues that the women’s movements took up. They are political rights for women and reform of personal laws. When Lord Montague visited India to introduce constitutional reforms, Indian women demanded political rights. A memorandum signed by twenty three women from different parts of the country demanding voting rights for women was submitted to Montague and Chelmsford. Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant went to England to present evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee for granting franchise to women in India. The Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Parliament finally agreed to remove the sex disqualification but left it to the provincial legislatures to decide how and when to do so.

Never perhaps since Buddha preached his message, has any single individual transformed the destinies of so many millions as did Gandhiji. He considered women as a noble sex\(^{102}\). When he planned his non violent battle for Indian Independence, it became an open invitation to women, for this technique was eminently suited to them. At first a large proportion of women who participated in the nationalist movement were simply part of the general crowds. Slowly they began to take part in social reform, campaign for *khadi* and village industries, uplift of Harijans etc. Infact no reformer of the twentieth century looked at the women’s question so systematically and as scientifically as Gandhiji did\(^{103}\). Gandhiji worked consciously to feminize the freedom movement. He realized that there was a source of immense untapped power in the womanhood of India. He declared that the struggle for women’s equality was an integral part of the movement for *Swaraj*. Gandhiji’s opinion about women was

\(^{100}\). B.S.Chandrababu and L.Thilagavati, *op.cit.*, p.314.
“To call women the weaker sex is libel; it is man’s injustice to women. If by strength is meant, moral power, then women is immeasurably man’s superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage”\textsuperscript{104}. His choice of non-violent \textit{Satyagraha} as the mode of struggle also allowed women to play a far more active and creative role. By picking salt as the symbol of a country wide \textit{Satyagraha}, he brought the movement into every home and kitchen. Annie Besant became Congress President as early as 1919 and Sarojini Naidu was Gandhiji’s choice for Congress President in 1925.

In 1932, when the Civil Disobedience Movement started, a large number of women came to the vanguard. The period witnessed the emergence of Indian women as speakers, marchers, picketers, civil resisters and even ‘dictators’. A large number of women were imprisoned in this battle. Thousands of women all over India strode down to the sea, bearing vessels of clay, brass and copper. They broke their ageold shell of social seclusion and burst into the battlefield of ‘Salt Satyagraha’, turning the struggle into a beautiful epic.

In Madras, Rukmini Lakshmipati, the leader of Salt Satyagraha in the South was arrested. Her trial and conviction was a new phase in the ‘Salt Satyagraha’\textsuperscript{105}. Indira Gandhi organized the army of young children by name ‘Vanar Sena’ resembling the band of monkey army of Sri Rama\textsuperscript{106}. Its members carried secret messages between political workers. ‘Seva Dal’ camps for women were opened all over the country to train them for political work. Many women of all classes and walks of life, even housewives and uneducated, joined picketing, moved from house to house, collecting clothes and donations, courted arrests and were imprisoned in distant jails, showing that there was nothing which could really prevent them from moving beyond traditional roles.

\textsuperscript{106} B.S. Chandrababu and L. Thilagavati, \textit{op.cit.}, p.321.

Jawaharlal Nehru was proud of women who had joined politics. He suggested that they should have freedom to choose from a wide variety of roles and not be confined to the role of a wife, mother and home maker. He encouraged the women of his family and close associates to join the Nationalist Movement.\textsuperscript{107}

In Kerala also, there were prominent couples like V.V. Varkey and Akkamma Cherian, P.Krishna Pillai and Thankamma Krishna Pillai, T.V. Thomas and K.R.Gowri Amma, A.K. Gopalan and Suseela Gopalan, P.T. Punnoose and Rosamma Punnoose, C.S. George and Koothattukulam Mary, M.N. Govindan Nair and Devaki Panicker, C. Unniraja and Radhamma Thankachi, E. John Kuruvilla and Elizabeth Kuruvilla, Pandalam K.P. Raman

\textsuperscript{107. Ibid., p.95.}
Pillai and Mrs. Pandalam K.P. Raman Pillai, A.P.Udayabhanu and Bharathi Udayabhanu, Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon and A.V.Kuttimalu Amma, Kozhippurathu Narayana Menon and A. V. Lakshmi Amma, K. A. Damodara Menon and Leela Damodara Menon, K. P. Madhavan Nair and Pavizhom Madhavan Nair, C. R. Iyyunni and Annie Iyyunni, R. Velayudhan and Dakshayani Velayudhan, K. K. Nair and Sakuntala Nair and so on. The families of Akamma Cherian, Rosamma Punnoose, K.R. Gowri Amma, Koothattukulam Mary and others were also politically active.

Some other prominent women personalities also plunged into Indian National Movement. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first South Indian woman to take medical degree and the first woman doctor of Madras\textsuperscript{108}. She was a member of W.I.A. and the first woman to become Member of Legislature in India. She started the first Children’s Hospital in India, i.e., in Madras in 1927 and an orphanage for women called ‘Avvai Home’ in 1930\textsuperscript{109}.

During the Quit India Movement, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kripalani and Usha Mehta distinguished themselves in various roles. During that time, when prominent leaders were behind the bars, Aruna Asaf Ali hoisted the national flag on Gowalia Tank Maidan on 9 August, 1942\textsuperscript{110}. She lived underground for four years. She published bulletins and edited ‘The Inquilab’ with Ram Manohar Lohiya. A prize of five thousand rupees was announced as a reward for her capture. If the heroine of the Revolt of 1857 was Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, that of Quit India Revolt was Aruna Asaf Ali\textsuperscript{111}. The initiative to organize a secret broadcasting station and of purchasing a transmitter was undertaken by Usha Mehta and her friends. Among the women who participated in the war front, Lakshmi Seghal who served as the Commander of the ‘Rani of Jhansi Regiment’ of Indian National Army remains outstanding. She also served as the Minister of Social Welfare and Medicine in ‘Azad Hind Fauj’.

\textsuperscript{108} G. Kumara Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.12-13.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} V. Rajendra Raju, \textit{op.cit.}, p.80.
\textsuperscript{111} S.R.Bakshi and S.R.Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.213.
The Freedom Movement offered a wonderful opportunity for women to show their interest and capability in public affairs and brought to prominence, some women political leaders. More than their individual contribution in winning Swaraj, their role in public affairs gave an unassailable claim for a political status equal to man in the developing democratic order. The Indian National Congress, by encouraging women’s involvement in active politics, broadened its base and enlarged its claim to represent Indian people.

Women also played prominent roles in the days of partition riots and risked their lives by helping others. Participation in politics during nationalist movement was an act of patriotism and at that time political life was a respectable vocation for women. It may also account for the decrease of women politicians in the post independence period in India.

In course of time, women began to take part in elections also. Women candidates toured their constituencies and made countless speeches. In 1937, when Congress ministries were formed in Bombay, Madras, Bihar, Orissa, Central Provinces and Assam, there were a number of women in legislatures. When they were selected to Parliament, they worked in a varied range of subjects. Vijayalakshmi Pandit was the first woman to serve as Minister. She held the portfolio of Local Self Government and Public Health in the government of the United Provinces. Rugmini Lakshmipati and Jyothi Venkatchalam held ministerial posts in the Madras Cabinet. Simultaneously, women legislators made their appearance in the Central Assembly. Women like Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai, Renuka Rai and Hansa Mehta were members of Constituent Assembly of 1946. Since independence, Indian women have occupied responsible posts such as Ambassadresses to various nations, President and Prime Minister of India, Governors, Chief Ministers and Ministers of states etc.

The main area of the present research is Travancore, a princely state of India, which is now a part of Kerala state and the role played by its women in its

political process. Kerala is a geographically segmented state with its own language Malayalam, its own national festival Onam, its own calendar ‘Malayalam Era’ or ‘Kollam Era’ beginning from 825 A.D. and its own myth of origin. It had its own peculiar geography and religion. Each household had its own kavu and kulam and the Grihanatha himself was the priest. As long before as the third century B.C. the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Chinese and the Babylonians had trade relations with Kerala. The Arab and the Jewish traders exported Kerala spices to the West. These contacts in turn led to the arrival of Christianity and Islam to Kerala.

The land is blessed with two monsoons, i.e., South East Monsoon from June to September and the North West Monsoon from October to December. It has substantial wealth of minerals and spices. Tea and coffee plantations can be seen in High Ranges and rubber plantations in the low land country. Sands are rich in rarer metals and hydro electric potential is enormous. Geography and climate are responsible for the absence of villages in the accepted sense of the word.

As each household enjoyed its own water supply from a well; there was no need to live together for purposes of irrigation. Each house stood in a compound surrounded by mud walls, within which grow the trees, plants and spices used by the family. Homesteads were separate, each surrounded by its own paddy fields, coconut groves and tapioca shrubs. Travancore presented a big share of newspaper readers and listeners which resulted in a great dynamism and attention in religion, politics, culture and literature. No part of India had such a production of newspapers and every newspaper was read by or read to an average of ten persons. The people belonged to various communities like Namboothiris, Tamil Brahmins, Nairs, Ezhavas, Nadars, Pulayas, Parayas, Tribals, Christians and Muslims. The ‘Sangam period’, i.e., the first five centuries of the Christian

era, presented a liberal and cultured life in the history of Kerala. There was no caste system. There was universal education and high literacy level.

Kerala also presents a great tradition of women participation in politics and society. Before Aryanisation, system of inheritance through mother’s line called Marumakkathayam prevailed in Kerala. A number of thavazhis constituted a Tharawad. The Bhagavathi was consecrated in the machu of many aristocratic families and strict purity was maintained by all members especially by the women of the family. The Mother Goddess was the family deity of the Malayalis. Kerala was known as ‘Pen Malayalam’ at that time.

Even before freedom movement, Kerala women had relation with politics. We can see enthusiastic stories of brave women in the Northern Ballads. Kerala was once known to the outer world as ‘Pennarasu nadu’ and provided examples of illustrious women rulers such as Umayamma Rani of seventeenth century, Rani Gangadhara Lakshmi of seventeenth century and Arackal Bibis of eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Kerala was well known for its women warriors and heroines such as Unniarcha, Mathileri Kanni, Kunjithalu, Maniyooridam Vana Kunji Manka, Neeliyam Churam Vana Kunjimathu, Kodumala Kunki and Poomathai Ponnamma who were pictured in the Vadakkan Pattukal. Unniarcha, who defeated the jonakas of Nadapuram and reinstated the right of women to walk freely through the streets of Nadapuram, was the symbol of courage, freedom, determination etc. Ezhava woman Archa and Dalit woman Poomathai Ponnamma were courageous women who protested against their landlords.

After the Aryanization and Sanskritization of South India, the world of knowledge became the monopoly of upper classes. Education was completely denied to women and lower classes. As a result, status of women declined, from freedom to

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bondage and from honour to disgrace. Caste system crept into the society and everything including women became Parasurama’s gift to Brahmins\textsuperscript{119}.

In aristocratic families, the voice of womenfolk revolved inside the four walls of the kitchen. Their voices were prohibited to hear outside. Religious customs, traditions, legends, proverbs, family relations, laws of the land, literature, art etc. moulded the identity, personality and individuality of women in that traditional framework. From birth onwards, a girl was trained by statutes. Some proverbs of the land such as “It will not become dawn if the hen crows”, “The place where women rule will damn”, “A man who hears his wife’s advice will perish”, “Land and women will give more yield if tortured” etc. indicate the inferior status of women\textsuperscript{120}.

During the years of British rule, Kerala was divided into three parts viz., the British Indian District of Malabar and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. The princely state of Travancore formed the southern most portion of the west coast of India. Innumerable peculiarities distinguished Travancore from the rest of the country. Lt. Ward and Conner observes: “The ancient history of this tract, at present commonly known as ‘Malayalam’ which bounded by the sea and Ghauts stretched South from ‘Gokurn’ to ‘Ku-neea Kumary’ concealed amidst the tables and trifling details of the ‘Kerala Oolputhee’ can now be but faintly traced. The origin of Kerala as there recorded may be considered as somewhat apocryphal but if not created for the priesthood, it was at least early adjudged to their obedience”\textsuperscript{121}. Travancore had three geographical regions in long narrow strips. To the east situated the almost unbroken barrier of Western Ghats covered by magnificent forests. The central strip of flat country was covered with terraced rice fields, coconut and areca palms, jackfruit trees, mango trees, cashewnut trees, tamarind plants, plantain, elephant yam etc. There were a series of hills and

valleys and numerous rivers, lagoons, lakes, canals and backwaters which provided almost continuous water transport.

The princely state of Travancore existed between Western Ghats and Arabian Sea in the shape of an unpeeled shrimp\textsuperscript{122}. It had been the dream of poets, the delight and admiration of every traveller. Its boundaries were Cochin and Coimbatore in the North, Western Ghats, Tinnevelly, Madurai and Coimbatore in the East, Indian Ocean in the South and Arabian Sea and portions of Cochin in the West\textsuperscript{123}.

Travancore is the abbreviated English form of ‘Thiru-Vitham-Kodu’, once the capital of the kingdom and the residence of the court, but now a petty village thirty miles to the South East of Trivandrum\textsuperscript{124}. ‘Thiru-Vitham-Kodu’ is said to be an alteration of ‘Sri-Vazhum-Kodu’ i.e., a place where the Goddess of prosperity dwells\textsuperscript{125}. The name Travancore is an anglicized form of ‘Thiru-Vitham-Kodu’\textsuperscript{126}. It was certainly one of the most picturesque portions of India.

Travancore was a purely Hindu State dedicated to ‘Sri Padmanabha’, the tutelary deity of Travancore kings\textsuperscript{127}. It was Marthanda Varma who ruled from 1729 to 1758, expanded the kingdom of Venad into Travancore and rightly known as ‘the Maker of Modern Travancore’. Protecting Hinduism through performing state rituals, providing charities for Brahmins and undertaking the management of temples, were the main duties of the Maharajas. The Maharaja was considered as the representative of God on Earth.

The Namboothiris were the first group in the caste hierarchy of the Hindus. With the support of Parasurama legend, the Namboothiri Brahmins became spiritual leaders and extensive land owners. The entire arable land of Kerala became their possessions and thereby their mastery over the land was

\begin{itemize}
  \item[122.] George Gheverghese Joseph, \textit{op.cit.}, p.12.
  \item[123.] \textit{Ibid.}, p.3.
  \item[125.] \textit{Ibid.}
  \item[127.] Koji Kawashima, \textit{Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1858-1936}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, pp.16-17.
\end{itemize}
asserted. They claimed the land as a gift of Parasurama. It was said that their bodies were sacred, their travels were processions and their food was known as nectar. They were addressed Yeman by low class people and their houses were known as Illams. They stood chief in social status, wealth and education and they retained their superiority for nearly ten centuries.

The birth of a girl child was not considered auspicious or fortunate among the Namboothiris. Namboothiri women were called antarajanam which literally means ‘belonging to indoors’. She was seldom seen outside the Illams and was restricted to a life of religious rituals and isolation. Whenever the Namboothiri women went outside, they were vigilantly hidden from public watch enveloped by a cloth called ghosha and wrapped by a cadjan umbrella called marakkuda and was preceded by a Nair woman called Urshal who warned the travellers by producing the sound, ‘Ahai, Ahai ….’ Namboothiri women lived within polygamous households with very rigid rites of female chastity.

Namboothiri women and girls were brought up as second grade people when compared to men and boys. They had to use certain ornaments such as ‘Kaasali’, ‘Poothali’, ‘Kettarumbu’, ‘Kazhuthila’, ‘Mani’, ‘Ottuvala’, ‘Pichalavala’, ‘Chittu’, ‘Malathithali’, ‘Kamuthithali’, ‘Marakkoradu’, ‘Kozhalin mothiram’, ‘Palacka mothiram’, ‘Pappadathali’ etc. according to their status within the community. They were not allowed to eat with their husbands. Widow Remarriage was not permitted. They had no gender equality, right to inheritance of property and not even the primary human rights such as right to move freely in society. Women in the Illams followed a highly ritualized form of domesticity and had large amounts of household labour. They were subjected to a strict and careful dresscode. Many

129. R. N Yesudas, op.cit., p.10.
132. Ibid.
male reformers have remarked that a naked and brutal sort of patriarchy operated in the Illams.\footnote{J.Devika, Engendering Individuals, The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam, Orient Longman Private Limited, New Delhi, 2007, p.122.}

Once a Namboothiri girl attained puberty, she was predestined to spend her life in strict privacy at home. The only option opened to Namboothiri woman was either to become one of the wives of a Namboothiri man or to lead a secluded life of spinsterhood in their Illams.\footnote{Leela Gulati and Ramalingam, op.cit.} In case of immoral affairs, Namboothiri women were subjected to a trial called ‘Smartha Vicharam’ and if found guilty, were excommunicated from the community.

In order to prevent the breakdown of their vast estates, only the eldest son was permitted to marry within the caste. The wife in this marriage was called by the same word for the ceremony of this marriage, i.e., Veli. The eldest son could have up to four wives. Other sons known as Aphans could not marry from their own caste, but can have Sambandam with Nair women, and their offsprings were absorbed into the Nair community.\footnote{I.C.P.Namboothiri, Viplavathinte Ulthudippukal, (Mal.), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2002, p.18.} In such cases, the father never even touched his children and if he did so, he would have to get purified by a bath. The golden age of the Namboothiris had its natural downfall with the advent of the British in India during the eighteenth century.

The second group in the caste hierarchy was the Nairs who were primarily soldiers. The lower class people stood before them trembling with fear at a prescribed distance, half bend, breast bared, and hand closing the mouth\footnote{Lt. Ward and Conner, op.cit., pp.95-96.}. The Nairs were originally Dravidians who were the followers of Naga cult\footnote{Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Thampuran, Keralam, (Mal.), Kerala Book House, Kodungalloor, 1959, p.18.}.

The Nair women remained free and influential also due to their peculiar matriarchal system of inheritance called Marumakkathayam, which became a dominant system since fourteenth century. Property passed not from father to son, but from mother to daughter. Under this system, people lived in a cluster of joint...
families known as *Tharawad*. Women’s birth right in *Marumakkathayam* families did not change. The children were brought up in mother’s *Tharawad*.

The wife was called *Achi* and the husband was called *Nair*. The husband had no responsibility to look after his wife and children, who lived in their matrilineal *Tharawad*. Nairs visited their wives’ houses every night, after having dinner in their own houses. Nairs provided clothes, oil and necessary accoutrements to their wives during festivals like *Onam* and *Thiruvathira* and that was their only duty towards their families. The idea of father was only hearsay to children in *Marumakkathayam* families. They usually ignored that person who visited their mother at night and returned home very early itself. Men with lighted country torches moving through country fields and lanes were a usual sight at night. Children were brought up by their uncles rather than their own fathers.

Probably the most important effect of the *Marumakkathayam* system was that it had left *Malayali* women with an influence and an independent outlook which one will not find anywhere else in India. They enjoyed strength, social security, freedom of socialization and the freedom to lead an active outdoor life and to communicate with nature. Women set up branches of new *Tharawads*. Mother Goddess is venerated in each *Tharawad* as the protector of the family. This was in direct opposition to the marginalization of women in major societies all over the rest of the world. The system accorded women greater freedom, choice and respect than they would have found elsewhere in the world until the twentieth century.

Matriliny distinguished old Kerala from the rest of India. It also gave women a unique importance. Even in the old days, in the ruling families which followed the matriarchal customs, the senior woman of the family always acted as regent while the ruler was minor. Great was the surprise of Dutch and English

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merchants, when they found themselves negotiating trade treaties with bare-
boasted but dignified and capable Ranis. 143

Besides Sambandham and Marumakkathayam, other socio-economic
institutions of medieval Travancore which influenced the life of upper class
women included ‘Devadasi System’, ‘Talikettu Kalayanam’, ‘Pulappedi’ and
‘Mannappedi’, ‘Smartera Vicharam’, etc. The economic status of women also
varied according to caste and religion. Upper class women had no right for wage
earning by working outside. The lower class women worked hard, but earned
very little. The Nair women owned assets but had no individual rights. Thus,
women in the Kerala society were restricted by men. Her secular and spiritual
destinies were not in her hands but in the hands of men.

The third group in the caste hierarchy included the Channars and Ezhavas
who were subjected to degradation and harassment from the hands of government
and high caste people. The Channars or Nadars were industrious, simple minded
and unskilled. The approved duty of this caste was to extract juice from palm
trees and make it into jaggery. They also had to observe the rules of
untouchability and do forced labour to the Government, temples and landlords.

The Ezhava and Nadar communities were not allowed to use fine clothes
and jewellery, umbrella, shoes etc. to milk cows and to carry pots of water on
their hips. Moreover, they were not allowed to use ordinary language of the state,
nor could they attend schools. They had no access to the temples, public offices,
routes etc. and enjoyed little religious freedom. 144 Their womenfolk were
forbidden to wear anything above their waist. 145 A large number of taxes like
‘Kettupattusthanam’, tax for ‘Pandal sthanam’ etc. were levied upon Ezhavas. 146
‘Tharitheeruva’ was a tax on Ezhava weavers 147. ‘Tharikkadama’, ‘Tharippanam’

etc. were also levied upon the Ezhavas who were weavers. An obnoxious tax called ‘Mulakkaram’ or breast tax was levied upon Ezhavas and other depressed class women. An Ezhava woman of Cherthala protested against this by cutting off her breasts before the taxing officers and embraced death. That place is even today known as ‘Mulachipparambu’ in Muhamma near Cherthala.

There were other socially disadvantaged groups like Pulayas or agricultural labourers and the Parayyas or manual workers. They were among the most neglected and poverty-stricken section of the whole population. They were the lowest section of feudal society in Travancore. They were denied even the basic human rights. They could not use public roads and could not dress properly. Their women were not allowed to cover their breasts and were subjected to sexual exploitation. Often they were used to plough the lands along with the oxen. Their food was kanji, poured in a hole dug in the Earth. At times of drought, they were sacrificed to save the fields. They couldn’t come near temples and they had their own gods.

Innumerable groups of tribal people also were living in remote forests, probably the remnants of the earliest inhabitants, living primitive lives, hunting, fishing, scratching the soil for bare subsistence and building their houses on trees.

There were three main groups among Christians i.e., the Syrian Christians, the Latin Catholics and Protestant Christians. The Muslims also formed a major section of the total population of Travancore. Also, there have been Jews living in Kerala since the first century A.D. Jainism and Buddhism also flourished here.

Thus Travancore presented a diversity of races and religions. In the shadow of toleration rarely paralleled in the history of the world, the followers of different faiths have lived here for centuries.

The Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French visited Kerala. The invasion of Travancore by Tipu Sultan in 1789 brought Travancore into closer affairs and ultimate subordination to the English. The English made separate treaties with Travancore and Cochin who thus became their subordinate allies. The earliest of the political struggles in modern Travancore was the one led by Veluthampi Dalawa in 1799 but the rebellion was stamped out by the British forces\textsuperscript{152}.

Travancore was lucky for having two enlightened Maharanis, i.e., Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai and Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai. With the help of Colonel Munro, they transformed Travancore into the model state of India, peaceful, progressive and prosperous. Even though they were brought up in a conservative background, they had flexibility of mind to reconcile with ‘Colonial Modernity’. The depressed classes of Kerala could never forget these two \textit{Ranis} because they took many bold steps to set free the depressed classes from their chains of bondage\textsuperscript{153}. The reign of Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai from 1810 to 1815 saw the introduction of several enlightened reforms\textsuperscript{154}.

The era of social legislations began in Travancore in the year 1812 with the prohibition of purchase and sale of persons during the reign of Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai. On 5 December 1812, Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai issued a royal proclamation which abolished slavery and slave trade in Travancore\textsuperscript{155}. This proclamation can be considered as the beginning of the liberation movement in Travancore. Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai, with the assistance of Colonel Munro, re-organized the administrative system in British model. She introduced the Secretariat system\textsuperscript{156}. She also replaced the titles of ‘Karyakkar’ and ‘Thirumukham Pillai’ with the new names of ‘Thahsildar’ and ‘Samprati’\textsuperscript{157}. The vast accumulation of wealth

\textsuperscript{152}. Louis Ouwerkerk, \textit{op.cit.}, p.36.  
\textsuperscript{153}. C. Kesavan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.97.  
\textsuperscript{154}. P. Shungoonny Menon, \textit{History of Travancore from the Earliest Times}, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1985, p.363.  
\textsuperscript{155}. \textit{Ibid.}, p.371.  
\textsuperscript{157}. \textit{Ibid.}, p.228.
and property in the hands of *Devaswam* authorities was a menace to the peace of the country and Munro re-organised *Devaswam*.  

Each landholder was given a ‘pattayam’ in which the extent of land held by him, nature of the tenure, government demand etc. were noted. An efficient system of audit and accounts was introduced. *Choukies* were established in suitable places to prevent smuggling. Judicial administration was also reformed. With the help of Colonel Munro, in 1812, she issued new laws called ‘Chattavariola’ for taxation department, civil department and criminal department. Five Zillah courts were set up at Padmanabhapuram, Thiruvananthapuram, Mavelikkara, Vaikkom and Alwaye. It was during her period, Europeans were allowed to enter the palace and communicate freely with royal family members. European doctors were also allowed to examine them.

Modern medicine was introduced in Travancore in 1811 when Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai appointed a European as a medical attendant to the royal family. Vaccination was introduced by Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai herself in 1813 within a few years of its discovery and it laid the foundation of preventive medicine in the state. In 1813, she increased the wages of porters who were avarnas. On 1 Karkkadakam 989 M.E., she abolished the poll tax levied on Ezhavas and other similar castes. On her death in 1814, Colonel Munro installed the thirteen year old Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai as the ruler of Travancore.

It was during the reign of Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai from 1815 to 1829 that the sovereignty of Travancore was extended over the territories of Edappally.

166. S.Raimon (ed.), *Selected Proclamations of the Sovereign*, Kerala State Archives Department, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 2005, p.5.
chief. She abolished repulsive taxes like ‘Chettupattom’\textsuperscript{167}. She also continued the social reforming activities of Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai. In 1817, she started vernacular schools in Travancore and the state accepted the whole expenditure of education of its people.

In 1817, in a rescript addressed to Venkat Rao, the Dewan Peshkar of Kollam, she proclaimed the educational policy of the state thus: “...that the state should defray public cost of educating the people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby”\textsuperscript{168}. She sanctioned the starting of public schools at Mavelikkara, Karthikappally, Thiruvalla and Kottarakkara\textsuperscript{169}. Thus the window to English education was opened by Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai. She gave immense freedom to English missionaries.

There are a plethora of rescripts which designate the award of cash and kind to missionaries who have been promoting English education. Rent free land and rent free timber were provided for the erection of churches. Rev. Mead was appointed as the Judge of Zilla court at Nagercoil. She passed an order that all articles imported from outside for the use of the press be delivered duty free. Permission was given to C.M.S. missionaries to commence its operations at Kottayam. A grant was given to Rev. Norton at Alleppey to build a church and school to teach the Syrians\textsuperscript{170}. A grant of tax free land was given to Benjamin Bailey for constructing a bungalow at Chungam hills at Kottayam\textsuperscript{171}.

C.M.S. missionaries were given a tract of land at Kallada in Kollam, called ‘Munro Island’. She also gave generous grant of Rs.21, 200 at the instance of Colonel Munro for the foundation of C.M.S. College\textsuperscript{172}. Thus the government

\textsuperscript{167}. \textit{Nittu Volume V}, 993-4-23, Vol.96, p.37, State Central Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{169}. P.Shungoony Menon, \textit{History of Travancore from the Earliest Times, op.cit.}, p.398.
\textsuperscript{171}. \textit{Nittu Volume III, 997-2-4, Vol.15, p.30, State Central Archives, Trivandrum.}
\textsuperscript{172}. \textit{www.swatithirunal.in}
co-operated entirely with the missionaries in the educational endeavour with cash, kind and concession. Christian missionaries were also given all facilities to carry on their evangelizing activities. In 1816, the Rani issued new copper coins withdrawing the current coins.\textsuperscript{173} In 1817, she issued a proclamation for the speedy disposal of criminal cases and in 1818 she issued licences for the manufacture and sale of arrack and toddy.\textsuperscript{174}

On 1 May 1818, Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai, issued a proclamation to the effect that the Sudras, Ezhavas, Nadars and other castes could, in future, use gold or silver ornaments as they desired without informing the Government of their intention and without paying ‘Adiyara tax’.\textsuperscript{175} She took initiative for the prohibition of \textit{Oozhiyam} and introduced large scale coffee cultivation in Travancore. She gave top priority to the cultivation of waste lands and hill tops. In 1817, all people irrespective of caste were permitted to have tiled roofs to their houses.\textsuperscript{176} She also took steps to prevent robbery in villages.\textsuperscript{177}

Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai appointed teachers in many places for teaching Malayalam, Tamil and Arithmetic for a salary of fifty \textit{panams} per month. In 1818, with a proclamation of Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai, the first text book in Malayalam language came into being.\textsuperscript{178}

Colonel Munroe gave great help to the missionaries in spreading English education and establishing schools in Travancore. Education paved the way for social reform movements which helped the people to get out of their ageold slumber. Freedom movement, Trade Union movement, political journalism and new ideologies led Travancore towards modernization, democratization and politicization of all sections especially women. Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai, imbued with a deep sense of her duty, promulgated numerous enactments during her reign. She possessed a cultivated mind, adopted many measures helpful for the

\textsuperscript{173} S.Raimon, \textit{(ed.)}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.24.
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Ibid.}, p.69.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid.}, p.83.
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Cover Files 16442/1846 Bundle No.21}, Directorate of State Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{177} S.Raimon, \textit{(ed.)}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.221.
\textsuperscript{178} N.Sam, \textit{Keralathile Samoohya Navothanavum Sahityavum}, (Mal.), N.Sam,Trivandrum, 1988, p.100.
improvement of her kingdom. Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai also issued a proclamation which restricted the amount of dowry and made it compulsory that the entire Brahmin maidens above fourteen years old should be married off before they reach fourteen\textsuperscript{179}. Among the illustrious rulers of Travancore, the names of Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai and Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai remain noteworthy.

\textsuperscript{179} S.Raimon, (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.175.