CONCLUSION

Women's movement in Kerala, as in other parts of India, are confronted with two major challenges—social attitudes and gender anomalies in the various family laws.

Concerning social attitudes which contribute to the distress of women in India, Pratima Asthsana writes: 'The feminist ideals of the West are foreign to the spirit of Indian women's movement, whose leaders always kept in mind the ancient ideals and values of Indian culture, the high spirituality and the spirit of service and devotion that women symbolise'. This is practically true as many of the women's leaders while arguing for women's rights and working for women's upliftment respect and perpetuate the old values and concept about women and while demanding education and more opportunities for women, hold the view that a women's primary and most important duty is that of a wife and mother and consider women as inferior to men.

But the emergence and proliferation of the new women's groups in India which question all gender discrimination both in family and society is a welcome trend. These women's organisations took up many issues concerning women including dowry deaths, rape cases, sexism in media, wife beating and prostitution where justice is often denied to women. Besides, they are fighting legal battles for women's cases.
The serious gender anomalies in the various family laws in India were highlighted time and again by various organisations and official reports. The Shah Bano case followed by the Muslim Women Protection of Rights (on Divorce) Bill of 1986 turned the lights forcefully on this issue. This, however, got dissipated as communal passions were raised in Indian politics following the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. In the debate over a Uniform Civil Code itself opinions were divided and uncertain. In opposition to the idea arrayed the leaders and ideologies of the minority communities who viewed such efforts as attempts to impose the wishes of the majority, thereby depriving them of their rights and identities. In the name of religion, politics or communalism, women’s rights are neglected all the time.

However, over the last few months there has been a great deal of concentrated activity, particularly among women’s groups, to deal with this problem with a view to evolving a consensus for reform. The issues taken up by the women’s movements in other parts of India have some impact on Kerala where the advancement of women is remarkable in the fields of education, employment and such other fields. However in accordance with the great achievements made by women in the modern times, not much change has taken place in their attitudes. Dowry—now have spread like a wild fire even to those communities where the custom was not in vogue in the early period. (Eg. Nair Community). The general attitude, society towards women’s roles, their duties and values remains more or less same. Women with high education are not always getting an equal treatment with men either in home or in society. Their house-wife- mother image is often valued more than anything and
the roles assigned to them in home is not changed much. The power holders and decision-makers in most families are men. In passing these old concepts to generations also, women play a major role. This is not denying the fact that changes have come. But slowly and not in accordance with the great progress achieved by women of Kerala in many areas. Recently a great awareness spread throughout Kerala by the efforts of the women's movement. Reports from an educationally backward area highlight these changes. The report runs as follows: 'Malabar which perhaps houses the most conservative sects among the Muslims in India, is witnessing rather an unusual sight of Muslim women coming out of the harems in legions to rub shoulders with their male counterparts in every sphere of social life.' Many sects in Muslim community now appoint women as teachers in Madrasas (Institutions where religious education is given), which was unthinkable in earlier periods. Another encouraging situation for the women's movement in the state is that more and more women are coming forward to approach courts for justice. Legal aid centres have started functioning in some parts of Kerala with the initiative from women advocates and women's group leaders in order to provide free legal help and even financial assistance to women in distress who seek justice. Recently one of such centres was started in Manjeri, Malappuram with the initiative of a women's group. 'This centre has a panel comprising of fourteen advocates which offers expert legal advice to aggrieved women and agrees to appear on their behalf in various courts in the district. Feminist writing is a recent trend which positively contributes in portraying women's problems and act as powerful
instruments to remodel old concepts regarding women. This may strengthen the growth of the women's movement in the state.

The women's movement of the present period is very much different in their aims and objectives and in the mode of functioning. Earlier the movement never questioned patriarchy or women's typical roles in society. They were satisfied with the legal reforms and the right to education and employment. But today the women's movement aims at a discrimination-free society. They challenge all development strategies, the old concepts and want a restructuring of gender relationships in creating a more humane society for all. Women's issues are not women's issues only, but of society as a whole.

Women's movement in Kerala is only in its initial stage of functioning. However they are now able to attract public attention and more support. The response about the injustices levelled against women was immediate. As discussed in the IVth chapter, the recent developments - including the involvement of more and more women in anti-liquor agitations, fish workers struggle etc. is a positive development which could strengthen the women's movement.

But as discussed earlier, the criticisms levelled against the movement and the challenges they are facing are innumerable. Today among the women's groups which are scattered throughout Kerala some are really inactive due to the absence of full-time members and efficient leadership. The groups usually seem to take up only individual issues of women of their localities. Thus a collective and organised struggle against common issues concerning women is lacking in Kerala. This is due to the
absence of a united front incorporating all women's groups--though ideologically different--having the major aim of working for women's upliftment. Moreover, a change should come in the mentality of the majority who view women's movement and feminism as family destroying and man-hating. Feminists need to take the great responsibility of changing the attitude of both men & women. In Kerala, still only a minority is involved in the movement. Their number is less in women's wing of political parties too.

Compared to all other states in India, Kerala has certain unique features and have the great advantage of its women, registering much progress in many fields. Universal education is an important factor. Women activists should be able to change these favourable factors concerning women in such a way to strengthen the women's movement.