INTRODUCTION

The status of women constitutes a problem in almost all societies and is a matter of worldwide concern. The growing sensitiveness has been manifested by the emerging trends in favour of women in the international scene. This has culminated in the convening of the World Women's Conference at Mexico in 1975 and the declaration of the period from 1975 to 1985 as the international decade for women. A second conference held under the aegis of the United Nations at Copenhagen in 1980 adopted a "Programme for Action" for the second half of the decade for women. The third conference held in Nairobi in 1985 was distinguished by the adoption of the 'Forward Looking Strategies'. Efforts are being made at the United Nations for securing 50 percent of the top U.N jobs for women by 2000 A.D. The U.N Women's Conference held at Beijing, China, in September 1995, has demonstrated once again the concern and resolve to widen the platform for action and to obtain greater equality of opportunity for women.

Women in India have suffered due to the peculiar socio-cultural structure of the society which is based on religious and social factors such as caste, class and sex. Despite the laws and other governmental and non-governmental measures for women's upliftment, majority of them had been continued to live in a
state of bondage. The advent of social reform movements in the nineteenth century signaled the onset of efforts for the emancipation of women. The political awakening in the course of India's struggle for freedom gave an impetus to the process of liberation of women in the country. Women's movement in India lost its sense of direction and vitality with the attainment of Indian Independence. But the 1960's witnessed a new spurt of enthusiasm. Women's movements have gathered considerable strength since then and have come to gain wide recognition and acceptance. The National Commission for Women formed with the continuous influence of the women's movement is taking up serious measures to check the increasing violence against women in the country. Moreover, after studying the overall condition of women, it has recommended and moved a proposal to the concerned ministry to reserve 30 percent of the government jobs to women. In line with the National Commission, the Kerala State Government has already introduced the Women's Commission Bill in the Legislative Assembly to establish the same in Kerala.

Besides, various conferences of women are being held to discuss women's problems, their movements, future strategies and to press the government to formulate policies in favour of women. The National Conference on women's movement was held twice in Bombay in 1980 and 1985 and once in Patna in 1988. The fourth National Conference was held in Kerala in 1990 on the initiative of women's groups in Kerala. All these provide some hope for women in the state. Compared to the early women's movement, the
present day women's movement has had its own ideologies, new strategies of action, different perspectives regarding women's issues and is trying for networking throughout the country.

The State of Kerala situated in the southern most part of India, deserves particular note in a study on the condition of women. The State with its legacy of matrilineal joint family system, had been noted for the dominant position enjoyed by women in considerable section of society for a long period. What however marks out the region is the progress achieved in female education. The starting of schools by Christian missionaries in the early part of the nineteenth century and the benevolent attitude of the native rulers had opened avenues for education for girls since very early days. Christian missionary activities also helped to awaken certain sections of women against some of the unjust social practices to which they were subjected. The caste-based reform movements which spread all over Kerala in the last part of the nineteenth century further facilitated organised campaigns for the uplift of women. One of the first campaigns was a movement organised by the low caste Channar women early in the nineteenth century in opposition to the ban on covering the upper part of their body. The Channar Revolt (widely known as Marumarakkal Samaram) which lasted for about three decades was one of the successful movements organised by women in Kerala. A similar movement was organised by Namboothiri women against Ghosha, the enforced use of an umbrella to conceal themselves.
The advent of the Indian National movement in Kerala transformed the caste based movements into a wide political movement which sought freedom for the country. The Civil Disobedience Movement of the 1930's was conspicuous by the enthusiastic participation of women, as the subsequent satyagraha campaigns, khadi movement and quit India agitation.

Compared with the other parts of India, the condition of women in Kerala is much better, especially in literacy and health. The various demographical indicators like sex-ratio, life standard index, and birth and death rates all show that women of Kerala are better placed. Yet, in Kerala too, the status of women in society has been far from satisfactory. The matrilineal system which had assigned to women in Kerala a superior position, is fast disintegrating in Kerala, due to political and economic changes and patrilineal influence. Women are hardly visible in positions of authority and responsibility. Their representation is poor in the Legislative Assembly. Majority of the women in Kerala are engaged in the most arduous of jobs, requiring long hours of drudgery, and are paid discriminatory wages as elsewhere in the country. Women's typical roles are those of wife and mother, and even when she performs productive roles, it is perceived as only marginal, supplementing the family income. Violence and sexual exploitation are on the increase as elsewhere. Dowry deaths which were unheard of in the past, are very much a social reality in present day Kerala.
This state of affairs has brought into focus, issues relating to women and their movements in Kerala. The period from 1975, marked by the celebration of International Women’s Year and International Women’s Decade (1975-1985), saw a major shift in the nature of women’s movement in the state too. The ‘Shah Bano’ case and the Muslim Women’s Protection of Rights (on Divorce) Act had its ripples in Kerala. The legal battle for securing equal share of parental property, the movement within fishing community challenging patriarchal values, the anti-liquor agitations led by victims of alcoholic husbands, the activities of the women’s wing of political parties and social and religious bodies and the emergence and proliferation of autonomous women’s groups under women’s own leadership, all epitomize the growing strength of the women’s movement in Kerala.

A notable development in the state of Kerala is the passing of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, reserving 33.33 percent of seats to women. The presidentship in each of these local self-governing bodies has also been reserved for them. In the recent elections to Panchayats and Municipalities, about four thousand five hundred and fifty three women were elected to village panchayats, five hundred and sixty eight to block panchayats and one hundred and four women to district panchayats. They have assumed charge as presidents in three hundred and thirty one village Panchayats, fifty one block panchayats and five district panchayats. In eighty one municipalities and in one of the three corporations women have become presidents. This new development
marks a major break through with brighter prospects for the empowerment of women in the State. It has helped to moderate the disapproval of people towards the participation of women in politics. Sharing of power should make them confident and self assertive, empower them economically and strengthen the women's movements in Kerala.

The major objectives of this study are (i) to trace the history of women's movement in Kerala, starting from caste-based social reform movements in the nineteenth century; (ii) to analyse the recent trends in women's movement with special reference to political organisations and autonomous women's groups; and (iii) to study the challenges faced by the women's movement in Kerala and to assess their prospects and strategies.

This study is based mainly on the data collected through official publications and books, besides discussions and interviews with women group leaders and other persons prominent in academic circles, and analysis of media reports. Government documents such as study papers, committee reports, gazetters, census reports, five year plans, reports and publications of various departments, legislations, and Kerala administration reports were consulted.

The institutions visited for the purpose include Research Centre for Women’s Studies, Sreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersy Women’s University, Bombay, Mother Teresa Women’s University, Kodaikanal, Women’s Studies Centre, Alagappa University,
Karaikudi and various research centres and offices of women's organisations.

The problems of women and their movements in the West have been the theme of several published works. Notable contributions to the subject, particularly the origins of the women's movements in Britain and America have been made by scholars like Mariamies and Jayavardhana\(^1\), Barbara Ryan\(^2\), Christine Bolt\(^3\) and Barbara Sinclair Deckard.\(^4\) Barbara Ryan analyses both early women’s movement and the contemporary movement in United States. Christine Bolt has attempted a detailed history of the British and American women’s movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the present study concentrates more on the women’s movement in India, particularly in Kerala, an elaborate and intensive survey of literature on the movements in the West has not been attempted.

Social science literature have not paid much attention to women’s issues in India until recently. A movement in the academia could be seen only after the declaration of 1975 as International Women’s Year. Some researchers and writers have discussed the problems of women at various levels in India. Women’s participation in and their contribution to the national movement also received some attention from academicians. But compared to many other areas of women’s studies, not many studies are available on the theme 'Women’s movements'. Paucity of literature on the status of women and their movements in Kerala
did pose a great challenge to the present study. However an earnest attempt was made to compensate the same through extensive use of journals and newspapers and interactions with women's organisations and activists. Though the study is concentrated mainly on the Kerala context, the origins of the movements in Britain and America and the nature of women's movements in India have been studied in order to present the theme in a larger perspective.

Among the various Government documents relating to women, *Towards Equality* and *National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 A.D* are significant as they are systematic and analytical in their portrayal of women's problems and issues. Studies on women in India are relatively new and less in number.

However, a comprehensive study is attempted by Jana Matson Everett. Her book, entitled *Women and Social Change in India* discusses in detail the background, emergence and ideology of the women's movement in India, and narrates its similarities and differences with the women's movements in Britain and United States. *Women's Movement in India* by Pratima Asthana presents a systematic study giving a detailed account of women's movement in India before the attainment of independence.

Notable contributions in the subject, supported by case studies, has been made by Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi. Aruna Asaf Ali's book, *Resurgence of Indian Women*, marked by information gained through her active and intimate association
with the national movement and one who worked with many women's organisations. She concentrated on Gandhiji and Nehru and their policies and opinions while dealing with the women's movement and freedom movement. Reference also should be made of the research study by S. Sreedevi whose book, *Gandhi and the Emancipation of Women in India*, focuses on the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to the emancipation of women in India.


Conference papers, booklets, working papers and study reports form a major part of literature on women’s movements in recent times. Papers presented by researchers and scholars at various national conferences on women’s studies, UGC seminar on Social movements for the Under-privileged held in Bombay in 1983, Conference on Women's Status and Development at Warangal in 1982, and the National Seminar on *A Decade of Women's Movement in India*
held at Bombay in 1985 have helped to add to literature on women's movements.

The concept of feminism, women's movement and the different approaches to feminism are dealt within the series of publications of the Research Centre for Women's Studies, Bombay. An edited work of Maithreyi Krishnaraj on Feminism\textsuperscript{14} contains a collection of articles of eminent scholars like Julie Stephens, Gail Omvedt, Radha Kumar and Susie Tharu. Other publications of Women's Research Centre, Bombay, include \textit{Emergence and Development of Women's Organisations in India}, \textit{Feminism and the Women's Movement in India}\textsuperscript{15} and \textit{Emergence and Proliferation of the Autonomous Women's Organisations in India}.

Not many studies have come out discussing women's problems or women's movements in Kerala. The books on Kerala history generally do not provide much information about women's movements in the region. Women's role in the national movement in the state has been discussed in the \textit{History of Freedom Movement in Kerala} by P.K.K. Menon\textsuperscript{18}, while K. Karunakaran Nair's book, \textit{Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala}\textsuperscript{19}, give short biographical sketches of some prominent women in Kerala. Further light in this area is thrown by P. Bhaskaran Unni, E.M.S. Namboothirippad, P.K. Balakrishnan, William Logan, V. Nagam Aiya, V.T. Bhattathirippad, V. R. Menon, M. S. A. Rao, K.P. Padmanabha Menon and others.\textsuperscript{20}

The autobiographies and biographies of prominent leaders including V.T. Bhattathirippad, E.M.S. Namboothirippad, C.Kesavan
and Mannathu Padmanabhan\textsuperscript{21} also provide some information relating to the conditions of women and about the origins of women's movement in Kerala. Other notable studies include an analysis of women's organisations in Kerala concentrating on women's cooperatives and women's societies, by P.M. Mathew and M. S. Nair,\textsuperscript{22} a case study by M. Indu Menon\textsuperscript{23} which examines the role of education in raising the status of Muslim Women in Kerala, an interesting narration about the historic struggle by the agricultural labourers for more wages and rights and the role of women agricultural labourers in the movement, by N.K. Kamalasanan.\textsuperscript{24}

As the very title shows, \textit{A History of Women's Education in Kerala} by R.N. Yesudas\textsuperscript{25} give an account of female education in Kerala in the pre-independence period. The author has succeeded a certain extent in presenting the efforts of Christian Missionaries as well as that of the government in the field of women's education. The study come to the conclusion that 'The Introduction of English Education and Western Liberal Thought' among women by the Christian missionaries and the consequent efforts of the local rulers and social reformers in the field of female education went a long way in shaping the present women of Kerala. \textit{Politics, Women and Well-being} by Robin Jeffry\textsuperscript{26} explains how the shaping of a new public world affected the material well-being of Kerala people. He was of the opinion that the vital roles played for this was the opening out of politics, the growth of readiness among ordinary people to try to influence decisions
and the ambiguous changes in the position of women. The changes in the condition of women which form a small section of the book is described through portraits of four women namely Janamma(1860-1940), Mary Ponnen Lukose (1886-1976), Akkamma Cherian (1909-82) and K.R. Gouri (born in 1919).

As evident from the above review of literature, studies on women of Kerala are comparatively few and hence the researcher had to depend considerably on interviews and discussions with academicians and activists and on articles and reports in various newspapers and journals. The journals utilised for the study include Seminar, Commonwealth Law Bulletin, Economic and Political Weekly, Mainstream, Kurukshetra, Yojana, Alternatives, Kerala Calling, Manushi, The Week, India Today, Illustrated Weekly, Equality and Kerala Padanangal.

The dissertation includes five chapters, besides an introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter presents the conceptual framework for the study and traces the origins of women’s movement, particularly in Britain and America.

Chapter II, entitled The Women’s Movements in India, examines the emergence of the movement during the nineteenth century, the formation of women’s organisations and the fillip the movement received during the Indian national movement under Mahatma Gandhi. The progress registered by the women’s movement in the post-independence period, its identification with militant mass movements in the 1960’s and 1970’s involving industrial
workers, tribals and agricultural labourers, the anti-rape movement, the women’s movements during the International Women’s Year (1975) and the Women’s Decade (1975-85) and the working of independent women’s organisations under women’s own leadership are also discussed in the chapter.

Chapter III presents the emergence of women’s movement in Kerala in a historical perspective. It traces its origins during the early part of the nineteenth century consequent to Christian missionary activities and the reform movements in the caste-ridden society of Kerala, and examines the efforts of caste based organisations like Yogakshema Sabha and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam to improve the conditions of women. It also assesses the impact of the Indian national movement in Kerala and the nature of women’s participation in the working class movements involving agricultural labourers, and industrial workers.

The nature of the women’s movement in Kerala during the post-independence period is the theme of discussion in chapter IV. The individual as well as organisational efforts of women against discriminatory laws and patriarchal values and the functioning of social organisations and political parties have been examined in this chapter. An attempt is also made to analyse the recent trends in the women’s movement in Kerala where a number of independent women’s groups have emerged with the clear objective of fighting anything which discriminates against or oppresses women.
Chapter V examines the various factors which hinder the progress of women's movements in Kerala, and to discuss its prospects and strategies.

One mentionable change adopted with regard to the references cited is the omission of the traditional Latin abbreviation of 'op.cit.' to indicate that a work has already been cited. The procedure that has been followed in this work to refer to a work which has already been cited in the same chapter is as follows:


36. Asthana, n.8, p.115.

The abbreviation 'n.8' in reference no. 36 means that the book has been cited earlier as reference no. 8.

Women's studies, the intellectual arm of women's movement, is widely recognised as a subject of study in the academic circles. It serves as a tool for examining the status of women, the nature of oppression to which they are subjected and the need and strategy to redeem their position. Research relating to women as a major part of women's studies should help as a catalyst to women's movements. Besides, this can fill the gaps of knowledge, lead to purposeful action and betterment of society. Moreover, it helps in making women visible in history. History is generally silent about women's issues and struggles. Economists do not give due consideration to women's work in the home and thereby bypass the nexus between the relation in the family and
capitalist development. This study represents an attempt to recapture the main trends in the history of women's movement in India in general and Kerala in particular with a view to securing for women their rightful place in history. It also endeavours to provide a stimulus to women's movements by bringing to focus their positive role in the upward social mobility of women. The efforts made in the study to identify the factors which pose challenges to women's movements, it is hoped, would encourage new initiatives to re-orient them and to ensure better prospects for them.
REFERENCES


