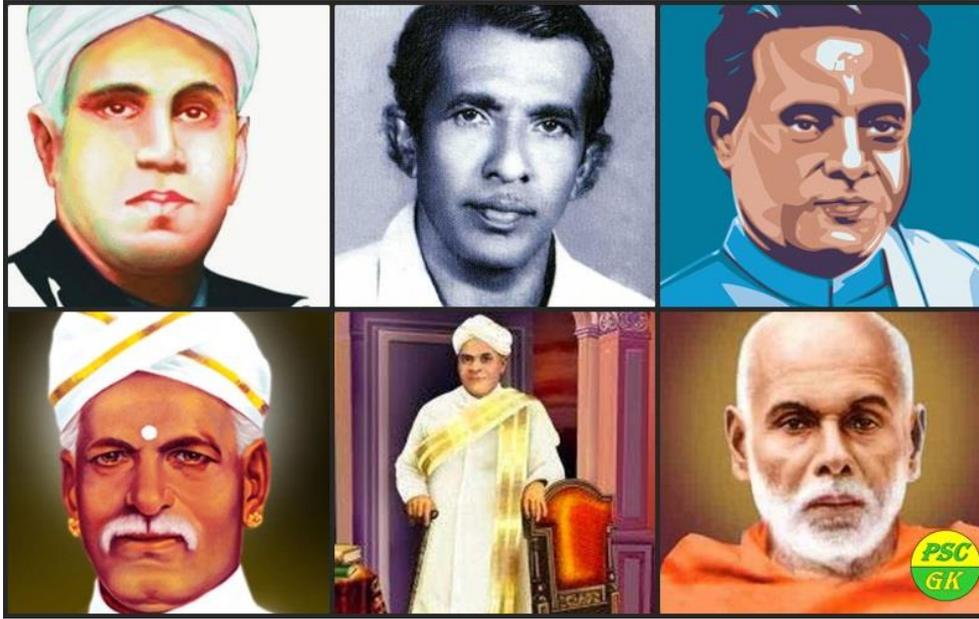


Kerala Renaissance



SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS

- The second half of the 19th century witnessed various social reform movements in Kerala. From 1812 until almost the close of the century subversive forces were forming and developing in Kerala society. The Kerala society was awakened by the activities of various social reformers and the society started showing the symptoms of a social renaissance. A number of socio-religious reform movements took shape in Kerala.
- They were also the earliest democratic mass movements in Kerala. The cooperation given by the colonial rulers provided a new impetus for the social reform movements in Kerala.

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- Spread of Modern education also helped for the growth of a new social consciousness among the people of Kerala. The current social transformation gradually led Kerala into the mainstream of political struggle for freedom and responsible government in the 20th century.
- The mass especially the lower orders in the Hindu society awaked against social injustice and evils.
- This period marks an important turning point in the history of modern Kerala as it paved the way for revolutionary changes to the social life of the people. These movements were peaceful and non-violent, though there was an undercurrent of militancy in them.
- These movements were of the utmost significance because Kerala had, for centuries, tolerated the caste system in its most oppressive form. The complexity of the caste system of Kerala had made the lower caste people untouchables and unapproachable. The advent of the British separated the caste system from the administrative machinery.
- But the social status of a person was still determined according to caste hierarchy. The influence of the caste system was more rigid in the states of Cochin and Travancore.
- Government jobs were not given to the lower castes there up to the beginning of the 20th century. British rule and modern English Education prepared the people to struggle against the caste rigidity and restrictions in the society.
- The reform movements in Kerala were initiated and led by the middle class under the influence of both traditional and western ideas
- . The reformers of Kerala came mainly from intermediate and lower caste backgrounds. Their caste perspective School of Distance Education History of Modern Kerala Page 35 was clear from the nature of the issues they supported.
- They were the problem of the lower castes, expensive obscurantist social customs and practices, education, temperance etc. Colonial domination

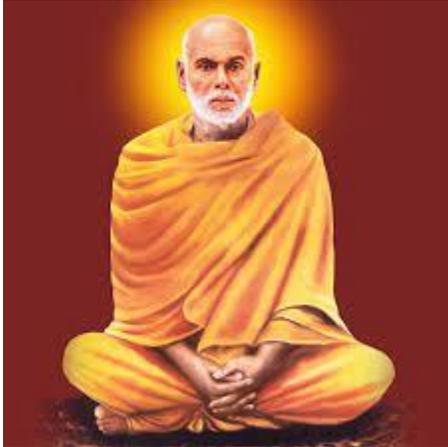
and the spread of education brought about social change in the 19th century Kerala.

- The colonial rule introduced a new economic order which was characterized by British bureaucracy, commercialization of agrarian economy, development of transport and communication and western concept of private property inland. Changes also took place in public administration.
- This led to better job opportunities for the educated people in bureaucracy. As financial position improved the perspective of life also underwent a change. Such a change in the economic field was also responsible for social change among the lower castes

Reformers of Kerala

The reformers of Kerala belonged to two broad categories. The first group believed that changes in beliefs and behavior are to be effected through their influence of religion. Thus **Chattampi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Theerthapada Swamikal, Sadanada Swami, Vagbhadananda and their followers** helped spiritual revitalization as the basis for the advancement of society. The second group of reformers organized themselves under non religious leadership and gained their ends through constitutional means.

Sree Narayana Guru



The most important personality among the social and religious reformers of Kerala during the 19th century was Sri Narayana Guru. He struggled against the upper caste domination in the society. He tried to uplift the socio economic and religious position of the lower caste people. His social reform movements were among the Ezhavas. This inspired other reformers to struggle for social recognition and equality. Sree Naranayan Guru was born in 1885 at Chempazhanthy village near Trivandrum. He received the traditional education and was well versed in Sanskrit and Philosophy. During his early life itself he had started criticizing the rigidity of the caste system. He was also against the Brahmin domination of the Hindu society. His early activities were directed to inspire the people, especially the Ezhavas against social inequality.

Aruvippuram Prathishta

Sree Narayana Guru initiated a social reform movement through the '**Aruvippuram Installation**' It was a social revolution in the making of Kerala. Sreenaranayana Guru established a Shiva temple at Aruvippuram near Trivandrum by installing a rock from the Neyyar River as Sivalinga on the

Sivaratri day of Kumbha month in 1888 (1063 Aandu). Through this he started a silent revolution in the history of Kerala. According to the Brahmanical tradition, the installation of the deity was the right of the Brahmins. This act of Sree Narayana Guru provoked the Upper caste Hindus. It was enough to shake the age-old religious hegemony of the Brahmanas. It also represented the self determination of the lower caste people to fight against the caste rigidity and the upper caste domination. It caused a social revolution, which uprooted the old social system of Kerala. Gradually, Aruvippuram became a pilgrim center. On Vavu (Full moon) day, people began to come there to offer sacrifices. The disciples of the Guru which included the famous poet Kumaran Asan, decided to give food to the pilgrims which led to the creation of 'Vavoottu Yogam' (serving food to the people who come as pilgrims). In 1889, Vavoottu Yogam had been expanded.

Thus an organization, '**Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam**' had formed. In continuation of the Aruvippuram installation Guru established several temples in the various parts of Kerala. Lower caste people were permitted in the temple founded by him. Various educational institutions, libraries and reading rooms were established at different places. He worked hard for the eradication of the evil customs prevailing among the Ezhavas. 'Pulikudi' and 'Thaliket' were considered as unnecessary festivals and ceremonies. He was against the luxurious way of conducting marriage.

He had to face a lot of opposition from high caste Hindus and even from his own community. He spread the message of 'one caste one religion and one God for men' He called on the people to strengthen themselves through organization and free themselves through education. He founded the Sivagiri Ashram in 1904 and the Advaita Ashram at Alwaye in 1913. His philosophy is Advaita, which is based upon Upanishads. The awareness created by Sreenarayana Guru touched all the castes of Hindu religion. It paved the way for the greater social reform movement in Kerala.

SNDP Movement



A number of backward class movements were launched in the pre-independence period. The backward classes organized themselves against the Brahmanas, in particular as they thought that most of the socio-economic advantages were cornered by them depriving the agricultural intermediate castes and communities. These were similar to Jyotiba Phule's Sathyasodak Samaj movement with the similar aim of ending oppression by the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas were the first to exploit modern educational and employment opportunities. The upper non-Brahmana caste failed to get access to these opportunities. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement, among the Ezhavas of Kerala, is an example of the conflict between the depressed classes and the upper non-Brahmin castes. SNDP Yogam is a charitable society established in 1903 May 15 by the efforts of a group of people who worked hard for the upliftment of the socially backward classes, with the guidance and blessings of Sree Narayana Guru.

It was established as a charitable society working for the spiritual and educational upliftment of the Ezhava community for the past years. It mainly aimed at maintaining and propagating the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. It is the shining story of the change of an almost food gathering society into a

cosmopolitan world order. The history of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam is the rise of the socially backward, depressed classes in Kerala. It is the social development of Ezhava from (according to the 824 Royal Order) mere 'owner of thalaippu and ladder' ' to the present state. Yogam is the first organization which envisaged Kerala as a whole.

Educational Institutions

Sree Narayana Trust has been one of the pioneer educational agencies in the field of higher education in Kerala since 1940. This Trust is one of the subsidiary units of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) for promoting the educational activities of the community "means Sree Narayaneeyar " the society called followers of Guru Narayana. He was the chief architect behind the social renaissance in Kerala and the institutions under the Trusts follow the footsteps of Guru whose motive is to imbibe strength through organization and to seek liberation through education. SN Trusts aims at realizing the high ideals of Guru who professed the welfare of all without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or religion. The Sree Narayana Trusts was formed by the former Chief Minister of Kerala Sri R.Sankar in 1952 for managing the Sree Narayana College, Kollam. Later educational institutions were started all over Kerala for the upliftment of the socially and educationally backward strata of the society. At present there are 50+ educational institutions and 4 hospitals. But soon it became quite difficult to maintain many such institutions by the Yogam, whose main objective was the propagation of Narayana Guru's vision among the masses. Under such circumstances, under the leadership of Sankar, the Sree Narayana Trust was started. Though these educational institutions were started to help socially and economically backward sections of the society, in the recent years there had been widespread allegations against instances of bribery and corruption in SN Trust institutions in the form of capitation fees which had malafide intentions to serve the interests of richer sections.

REFORMERS

Kumaranasan

Kumaranasan was one of the makers of modern India. He was a famous poet of Malayalam and was a close associate of the SNDP Yogam. Asan was born in a merchant family belonging to the Ezhava community in April 1873 in Kayikkara village near Thiruvananthapuram. He was the second son in a family of nine children. School of Distance Education History of Modern Kerala Page 38 His father Narayan Perungadi was well versed in Malayalam and Tamil literature and his mother was Kali. He developed taste in Kathakali and classical music and he was trained in Mathematics and Sanskrit. He had a passion towards these subjects. At an early age itself he got two jobs- a teacher and a clerk, but he left these two for attaining higher education in Sanskrit. He undertook a studentship in poetry under Manamboor Govindan Asan. He learned yoga and tantra and worked as an apprentice in a Muruga temple at Vaikom.

During this time he was blessed with writing poetry. He composed a few devotional songs for the benefit of regular worshipers at this temple. He made use of poetry as an instrument of social change. He represented romanticism in Malayalam with its beauties. He was a revolutionary in every sense who liberated Malayalam poetry from the clutches of traditionalism. After EZhuthachan Malayalam poetry reaches its height of emotion is Asan. Deeply moved by the social inequalities in society, he raised his voice against the evils of the caste system. In his childhood he was dogged by ill health. At the age of 18, with his father's request, Sree Narayana Guru visited his house. At that time he was bedridden. The great saint suggested that Kumaran Asan should stay with him and he became his disciple. He was greatly attracted by the teachings and activities of Sree Narayana Guru. After his contacts with Sree Narayana Guru, he took an intensive study of Hindu religious philosophy. This was followed by a strenuous study of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit literature.

For this purpose he spent about five years in Bangalore, Madras and Calcutta. It was at this time that he was also introduced to English language and literature with which he became closely acquainted. After his return to Kerala he plunged into the task of organizing the S.N.D.P.Yogam for the allround upliftment of the Ezhava community.

When he was in Bengal, he was experiencing the 19th century Renaissance under Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananada Saraswathi, Iswarachandra Vidyasagar and others. He was attracted to the Bengal Renaissance and the great poet Tagore. Born in a community condemned for centuries to untouchability, he fought against the inequalities of a caste ridden society and passionately stood for individual dignity, social freedom and the brotherhood of man. After his education he returned to Kerala and once again participated in the SNDP Yogam activities as its General Secretary. By the time of his General Secretaryship SNDP Yogam turned into a large organization with specific objectives for the progress of all lower castes. SNDP became a political organization.

At the time of his retirement SNDP Yogam had nearly two thousand members and branches all over Kerala. SNDP raised its voice of abolition of caste, temple entry and teetotalism. Some of the earliest works of the poet were Subrahmanya Sathakam and Sankara Sathakam, wherein Asan voiced his devotional aspirations. He wrote his School of Distance Education History of Modern Kerala Page 39 famous work Veena Poovu in 1907 which is a literary classic. It paved the way for a new movement in Malayalam literature. His elegy Prarodanam mourns the death of his contemporary and friend A R RajarajaVarma, the famous grammarian. His khandakavyas like Nalini, Leela, Karuna and Chadalabhiksuki won great popularity even today. In Chinthavishtayaya Seetha he display his poetic artistry, while in Duravastha he patiently and skillfully tears down the barriers created by feudalism, orthodoxy and casteism and consummates the dictum of Guru, "One Caste, One Religion

, One God for men". He wrote his epic poem Budha Charitha for which he got inspiration from Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia. He died at the age of 51 in a boat accident while returning from Kollam from a function in Alappuzha. Kumarananasan was the only poet in Malayalam who became Mahakavi without writing a mahakavya.

Ayyankali

Another noted social reformer of modern times in the cause of eradication of untouchability in Travancore was Ayyankali. He was born on 28 August 1863 into a Pulaya family at Venganoor near Trivandrum. Ayyankali became extremely conscious of the low social and economic condition of the pulayas and the bondage enforced upon them by the higher castes and therefore he fought for the emancipation of his people. His first attempt at asserting his right and freedom was when he bought a bullock-cart which was then a luxury for the pulayas. The higher caste neighbors were jealous and annoyed at him for buying a bullock cart.

The first attempt of Ayyankali was to assert the right of using public roads for himself and his people who were denied this right for a long time. Moreover, those who remained as Hindus lacked a leader who could organize them to claim this right.

In 1907, Ayyankali formed an organization by name " Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham". The main objective of this was the socio-economic emancipation of the pulayas. Ayyankali fully realized the importance of education for the social advancement of his people. As a first step, he opened a school for the pulayas at venganoor in 1904. The attempts of Ayyankali were successful in drawing the attention of the Government to the educational needs of the

pulayas and many other concessions needed for their education. As in the case of many other communities, he also demanded employment opportunities for the pulayas under the government.

Thus the social reformers came from time to time as atomic individuals and worked to liberate the oppressed class from the feudal lords and other social evils. They ignited the depressed class movement in the whole of Travancore and educated the people to fight for self respect and liberation from oppression.

Chattampi Swamikal

Like Sri Narayana Guru, another social reformer who worked for the abolition of untouchability in Kerala was Chattampi Swamikal. He was born on August 25, 1853 in a Nair family at Kannammoola in the outskirts of Trivandrum. Though he did not have much of a formal education; he was endowed with an intellect of high caliber. At the age of 24, he undertook an extensive tour of south India. In the course of which he established contacts with many religious saints of repute and got opportunities of acquiring mastery of Hindu theological literature as well. In his late twenties, he returned to Trivandrum and plunged into religious activities aimed at the eradication of social evils like untouchability.

His learned discourses as well as works on religion, philosophy and the brotherhood of man, soon won him a wide circle of disciples. By identifying himself with the aspirations and problems of the common people in his speeches, writings and social activities, Chattampi Swamikal gave the reform movement in Kerala an intellectual appeal, a social basis and a practical turn.

Chattampi Swamikal had a liberal social outlook. He wielded his pen as an instrument of social change. He believed that early society was based on the principles of social freedom and equality and that Chaturvarnya was introduced by the Brahmins in order to further their own self-interest. By projecting the picture of an original casteless society in ancient Kerala and of what they have wrought in it by the introduction of Chaturvarnya, Chattampi Swamikal kindled social awareness among the people and gave an impetus to the social-religious reform movement in Kerala.

He always expressed his profound faith in the philosophy of Ahimsa and non-violence. He denounced the primitive custom of animal sacrifice observed in Temples as barbarous and inhuman and thus set the pace for its isolation in Temples owned by the Devaswom Department in Travancore during the Regency of Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931). In his religious work 'Padadhikari Nirupanam', Swamikal shattered the myth of Brahmins' right to the monopoly of Vedic learning and asserts the right of every Hindu, irrespective of caste, to have free access to the treasures of the Vedic lore. His other work 'Sarvamatasamarasyam' gives the gist of the truths common to all faiths and emphasizes the fundamental unity of religion. He worked in close co-operation with Sri Narayana Guru in the common cause of Hindu social and religious regeneration. His death in 1924 was a great loss to the cause of social reform movements in the whole of Travancore.

Pandit Karuppan

Pandit Karuppan (1885 – 1938) was a poet, dramatist and social reformer who made a relentless crusade against untouchability and social evils. Hailing from a community of inland fishermen, Karuppan worked well to steer socio-economically and educationally backward communities to the front. Being the first human rights activist of the Cochin State, he used his literary ability and managerial skill to fight illiteracy, social injustice, casteism and superstitions. He also campaigned for the rights of lower-caste people. As a social reformer, Karuppan quit his teaching job and organized the people of his own community. Various sabhas were formed aimed to achieve the upliftment of the subaltern dalit castes. He even persuaded other communities like Velas, Sambavas, Ulladas and Kudumbis to form similar Sabhas to give impetus to their fight against social evils and injustice.

Mannathu Padmanabhan

Mannathu Padmanabhan (1878 – 1970) was a social reformer and a freedom fighter who is recognised as the founder of the Nair Service Society (NSS). Being a visionary reformer, Padmanabhan organized the Nair community under the NSS. Even though he started his career as a government school teacher, he changed his profession and started practicing law. With an ambitious mind to uplift the status of the Nair community, he started the Nair Service Society in 1914. He fought for social equality, took part in the Vaikom and Guruvayoor temple- entry and anti-untouchability agitation. In 1959, Padmanabhan along with Christian Churches led a united opposition against the Education bill introduced by the State Ministry, which was known as the Vimochana Samaram (liberation struggle). The movement caused the dismissal of the Communist government and even sowed seeds to introduce President's rule in the state. He was honored with the title Bharata Kesari by the President of India and also received Padma Bhushan in 1966.

V.T.Bhattathiripad

Vellithruthi Thazhathu Karutha Patteri Raman Bhattathiripad(1896–1982), popularly known as V. T. Bhattathiripad or V. T. was a prominent freedom fighter who played a key role in removing casteism and conservatism that existed in the Namboothiri community. He tried to reform the conservative practices of the Namboodiri community. V.T can be credited for starting the progressive theater movement of Kerala. His drama 'Adukkalayil Ninnum Arangathekkku' was the first play in Malayalam which had a definite and concrete social objective. The slogans became very popular during the period which sought for the transformation of "Brahmans into human beings".

Dr. Palpu

Padmanabhan Palpu (1863 - 1950) was a bacteriologist and social revolutionary who is known as the "political father" of the Ezhavas. Palpu studied at colleges in Trivandrum Madras and then went to England and completed his medical training at London and Cambridge. Returning to India, his low caste status prevented him from obtaining employment in the Travancore Health Service which made him move to Mysore in order to get work. As Palpu became aware about the importance of education as a way of socio-economic advancement and also as means to improve health, Palpu attempted to highlight inequalities in Travancore society and organized a petition duly signed by 13,176 Ezhavas. He presented it to the Maharajah of Travancore and demanded their right to admission in schools which were managed by the colonial government and also access to employment in public service. As a result of this, drastic changes happened in the Travancore with their demands getting satisfied.

Vakkom Moulavi

Vakkom Muhammed Abdul Khadir Moulavi, (1873 – 1932) popularly known as Vakkom Moulavi was a social reformer, prolific writer, Muslim scholar, and freedom fighter who laboured hard for the social upliftment and moral renewal of his community. As a scholar in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Malayalam, he encouraged the Muslims to take English education and be an active part in modern progressive movements. He popularised Arabic-Malayalam by publishing an Arabic-Malayalam monthly called Al Islam. He founded the Travancore Muslim Mahajana Sabha and Chirayinkil Taluk Muslim Samajam for social uplifting the Muslims and propagating liberal ideas among them. Maulavi Sahib has contributed a lot to the educational and social fields which transformed the Muslim community in the state.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara

Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805 -1871) was the co-founder and first Prior General of the first congregation for men in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church which is now known as the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate(CMI). After his elementary education, he joined the seminary. After being ordained in 1829, Father Kuriakose along with two other priests founded a community named 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. As a social reformer, Kuriakose Elias Chavara played a large role in educating the people of the lower ranks of society. He first introduced the system called "A school along with every church" later known as 'Pallikudam' making free education available for everyone. As he believed that intellectual growth and the education of women was the first step towards overall social wellbeing, the first religious congregation for women was

founded. With the help of an Italian missionary, Fr. Leopold Beccarohe, Fr. Kuriakose Elias started an Indian religious congregation for women, the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.

T K Madhavan

TK Madhavan was a social reformer and journalist who led crusades for the eradication of untouchability. He was born in 1880. Madhavan was a disciple of Sree Narayana Guru. He founded Deshabhimani weekly with K P Kayyalakkal. He took part in the Congress conference of 1923 at Kakinada and earned the support of Mahatma Gandhi in the fight against caste prejudices. He was one of the leaders of Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924. He passed away in 1930.

Sahodaran Ayyappan

Ayyappan was a journalist, thinker and social reformer. He was born in Cherai in 1889. Sahodaran movement was established by him to fight against the discrimination in the name of castes and untouchability. He organized Mishrabhojanam in 1917, in which people from different castes had meals together. He founded an organization named Vidyaposhini and established the newspaper Sahodaran to propagate his ideas. He passed away in 1968.

Vagbhatananda

Vagbhatananda Gurudeva (1885–1939) was a social reformer who played a crucial role in the social reform movement in modern Kerala. His magnetic personality and oratorical skill engrossed him with a large number of

supporters. He founded the Atmavidya Sangham, a group of professionals and intellectuals who had a more secular approach to reform. He condemned caste barriers and idol worship and urged his followers to reject such practices. Being a vigorous campaigner against addiction to liquor, his teachings helped to strengthen the base of the nationalist movement mainly in north Kerala.

Thycaud Ayya

Thaikkattu Ayyavu Swamikal (1814–1909) was a spiritualist who is considered to be one of the greatest social reformers of Kerala. He was the first to break customs related to caste in Kerala when caste restrictions and untouchability were at its peak. Ayyavu wrote several books on Bhakthi, Jnana and Yoga in Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam with Brahmootharakandom, Pazhani Daivam and Ramayanam Pattu prominent among them. His disciples Chattampi Swami, Narayana Guru, Swayam Prakasini Amma, and others followed the teachings of their great teacher.

Ayya Vaikundar

Vaikunta Swami (also known as Muthukutti Swamy) (1809–1851) was a man of progressive social outlook. Even though he was also called as Mudichoodum Perumal, he had to give up the name as it could only be used by the upper class people during the time. So parents called him Muthukutty. After learning Nalvazhi Moodur, Thirukural and the Bible he went for a pilgrimage and meditation in Thiruchendur. Returning at the age of 24, he called himself Vaikunda Swami. He tried to alter certain social customs which were prevailing at that time among Nadars. In 1836, he founded an organization called 'Samatva Samajam' to fight for the redressal of the gripe of the Avarnas. The

Samatva Samajam being one of the earliest social organizations, Vaikunda Swamikal became a pioneer social revolutionaries in Kerala. As his popularity increased, the King of Travancore arrested him and tortured. After returning from imprisonment, Vaikundar inspired a group of his devotees to undertake a religious exercise called Thuvayal Thavas.

Poikayil Yohannan (Kumara Guru)

Poikayil Yohannan (1878 – 1939), known as Poikayil Appachan to his followers, or Kumara Gurudevan was a Dalit activist, poet, Christian preacher who founded the socio-religious movement Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha ('God's Church of Visible Salvation'). Born as a bondsman to a Syrian Christian family, he had to follow Christianity and a Christian name, called Johannan. Well literate and versed with Bible, Johannan sought to create a sense of unity among the Christian Dalit communities. Even though he joined the Marthoma church, as he realized that the church treated Dalits as an inferior class, he left the church. In 1909, Johannan left Christianity and formed his own Dalit liberation movement named 'Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha' (PRDS). Known as Poikayil Appachan or Kumara Gurudevan later, Johannan advocated devout liberation, and sought to empower and unite the Dalits. Poikayil Yohannan bought several acres of land and set up schools and industrial training centers in various places. He even established several government aided schools for Dalit education.

Brahmananda Swami Sivayogi

Brahmananda Sivayogi (1852-1929) the founder of the Sidhasramam was a strong advocate in the Yoga system of philosophy. He founded the 'Ananda

Maha Sabha' in 1918. Sivayogi fought against various social evils and wished to bring changes in the Marumakkathayam system of inheritance, widow marriage, prohibition of liquor and female education. He laid stress on happiness (ananda) which was essential for the welfare of mankind. He has written more than 15 books including Mokshapradipam and Ananda Sutram. His personality and teachings truly influenced the social life of Kerala.

Vaikom Satyagraha: Kerala's First Anti-Caste Movement



On 30th March 1924, Satyagrahis by the name of Kunjappu, Bahuleyan and Venniyil Govinda Panicker walked hand in hand towards a notice board that read, "Ezhavas and other low castes are prohibited through this road." The policemen patrolling the road would stop the three men and ask them their caste. Kunjappu would declare his Pulayan caste, Bahuleyan would assert his Ezhava caste and Venniyil Govinda Panicker would proclaim he was a Nair. Kunjappu and Bahuleyan would be denied entry on the premise that they belonged to a 'lower caste'.

The three men would, nevertheless, stand their ground, and they would be arrested. As each man got arrested, more Satyagrahis would take their place, marking the commencement of the Vaikom Satyagraha: one of Kerala's foremost organized agitations against Hindu 'upper caste' orthodoxy for securing the basic civil right of marginalized castes to access all public roads surrounding the Shiva temple in Vaikom, Travancore.

The Anti-Untouchability Committee

While most historical accounts credit the roots of the Vaikom Satyagraha to M.K Gandhi, its seeds were laid by Dalit revolutionary, T.K. Madhavan, who believed that marginalized castes must not only assert their basic civil right of accessing public spaces but they also demand equality in the eyes of God. He submitted a resolution to the Travancore legislative council demanding a right to temple entry and worship for all people irrespective of caste and community, while submitting repeated memorandums to the royal government for lifting the ban for marginalized castes to access Vaikom's temple roads.

THE SATYAGRAHA MARKED THE BEGINNING OF WHAT WOULD GO ON TO BECOME A NATIONWIDE TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT THAT CONTINUES TILL DATE.

While his efforts were to no avail, it spurred the formation of the Anti-Untouchability Committee (AUC) in January of 1924, under the leadership of T.K Madhavan and other anti-caste radicals such as KP Kesava Menon and K Kelappan; a committee that would go on to play an unrivaled role as the primary architects of the Satyagraha.

The Protest

The first target of the committee were the four public roads leading to the Shiva Shrine in Vaikom, with 'marginalized castes' being denied access to them. It was decided that this climate of casteism would be defied by a group of

satyagrahis, who would move to enter the temple roads in batches of three. A week later even TK Madhavan and KP Kesava Menon courted arrest, with their arrest spurring volunteers to come in from the Tamil country. Among them was Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, a man who would come to be known as the 'Father of Modern Tamil Nadu' for igniting the 'Self-Respect Movement' against Brahmanical orthodoxy and the structural exploitation of marginalized castes. Throwing himself into the struggle, he was the only Satyagrahi to be arrested twice, his tenacity earning him the appellation of the Vaikom Virar (the fearless hero of Vaikom).

As Travancore's jails began brimming with a deluge of protestors, the temple authorities changed tactics, by barricading the roads and arming them with police guards. In the spirit of passive resistance, the satyagrahis changed tactics as well, by stationing themselves outside the barricade and embarking on a hunger strike that would last days. Many accounts recall the satyagrahis standing in waist deep water to continue their protest in the face of heavy rains inundating the temple roads.

But what most accounts conveniently seem to overlook in their efforts to romanticize the lives and sacrifices of people we shall never even begin to fathom, are the repeated atrocities committed on the Satyagrahis by the 'upper caste' orthodoxy. The orthodoxy arranged for the Satyagrahis to be beaten up, thrown into neck-deep waters and have irritants poured into their eyes, an unprecedented barbarity in the face of a peaceful protest. The justification of this barbarity lay in the belief the Brahmanical orthodoxy held, that marginalized castes were reaping the benefits of the 'bad karma' they had accumulated in their previous life.

The March

The atrocities committed against the Satyagrahis by the Hindu orthodoxy and the bigoted resolve of the temple authorities, called for the need to escalate the Satyagraha's demands to the royal government. On Gandhi's advice, a March consisting of 'upper caste' Hindus who supported the reform commenced in Vaikom and ended at the capital of Trivandrum. The marchers armed with 25,000 signatures of 'forward caste' Hindus, submitted a memorandum to the Maharani Sethulakshmi Bai of Travancore for opening the Vaikom's temple roads to all castes. The Maharani passed over the resolution to the legislature, where it was met with the narrowest margin of defeat, namely 22 to 21 votes. This defeat deeply affected the morale of the satyagrahis, magnified in the face of the escalating atrocities committed against them by the Brahmin orthodoxy.

This incited a statewide agitation, with the boycott of 'upper caste' temples and tensions began mounting in Travancore. It became glaringly obvious that a settlement had to be reached, and in 1925 the princely authorities withdrew the prohibitory order on three of the four temple roads. However, the fourth road remained a 'Brahmin only' path from which Muslims and Christians were excluded, continuing to perpetuate not only Brahmanical but Hindu ascendancy.

The Women

Women played an unprecedented role in the Vaikom Satyagraha, with the large-scale participation of women being witnessed for the first time during the Satyagraha, marking the passage of women into the socio-political consciousness of the country. It also brought a number of prominent women activists to the forefront; most of the women who were formerly known as the wives of the Satyagrahi leaders, emerged as leaders in their own right, going on to drive the women's movement in India for the coming decades.

Women such as Narayani Amma, Meenakshi Amma, Thirumalai Amma and Nagammai Amma, were at the forefront of the Satyagraha, empowering women from across the country to join the fight, however most historical accounts have done them a disservice, by either omitting them or presenting them as the wives of prominent leaders, rather than the forces they were in themselves.

The Impact

To many, the Vaikom Satyagraha did not yield the desired outcome, some believing the settlement was humiliating in face of the revolutionary cause. However, the precedent it set for Hindu orthodox and colonial nations could not have been prophesied. Almost a decade later, in November 1936, the historic Temple Entry Proclamation was signed, which removed the age-old ban on the entry of marginalized castes into the temples of Travancore. In many ways, the Satyagraha marked the beginning of what would go on to become a nationwide temple entry movement that continues till date.

IT ALSO BOUGHT A NUMBER OF PROMINENT WOMEN ACTIVISTS TO THE FOREFRONT; MOST OF THE WOMEN WHO WERE FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE WIVES OF THE SATYAGRAHI ACTIVISTS, EMERGED AS LEADERS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT, GOING ON TO DRIVE THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA FOR THE COMING DECADES.

The Satyagraha also built a bridge between the social justice and independence movements in India, by bearing testament to the efficacy of non-cooperation as a mode of protest, while also rallying princely states like Travancore into the burgeoning freedom struggle. But most notably, it opened an insulated and unquestioning country's eyes to the realities of caste at a time when national harmony in the name of the freedom struggle had assumed precedence over daily human right violations taking place in its name.

But the Vaikom Satyagraha was above and all a revolt against sacerdotal discrimination: the denying of morality, equality and justice in the name of custom and tradition. It was a fight against discrimination that was deeply structural; a way of perpetuating the caste status quo by ensuring that marginalised castes were denied basic opportunity to live lives of freedom and dignity. But what made this discrimination even more insidious was its invisibility, as it was not viewed as arising from human choice and intention but rather the will of whatever religion, custom or tradition it was hiding behind.

Temple Entry Proclamation



- In Travancore the movements for the mitigation of the severities of caste, if not its total abolition, have been popular. The teachings of Sree Narayana Guru gave a momentum to the forces which were generated by the extension of western education among the masses and the tolerant policy pursued by the State in recognising the legitimate claims of the backward communities.
- The promulgation of the Temple Entry Proclamation was a
- reform of far-reaching importance, not only to the teeming millions of Travancore but a momentous act of emancipation and hope to the whole of India. The Proclamation runs as follows: "**Profoundly convinced**

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of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and

- **on all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries, adapted itself to the needs of changing times, solicit that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth or caste of community, be denied the consolations and the solace of the Hindu faith.** "His Highness the Maharaja had earlier in his reign commanded
- the appointment of a committee to examine the question of Temple Entry for the 'Avarnas' to find out the extent of the demand for reforms, to ascertain the attitude of the Savarna castes, to examine the question in the light of the Hindu scriptures and formulate proposals as to the lines on which
- the reform might be affected. The committee expressed their considered opinion that a Parishad of learned persons, well versed in the theory and practice of Hinduism, should be summoned, and that the reform might be affected by the ruler with their approval.
- They also suggested certain methods by which the rigor of the custom excluding the Avarnas from the temple might be softened.
- But the Maharaja did not believe in half measures. With an outlook which no Indian monarch had been able to entertain for a couple of thousands of conservative years,

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- His Highness the Maharaja Sree Chitra Thirunal affixed the Sign Manual to the momentous Proclamation. It was on the eve of the Maharaja's birth day in 1112(1936 A.D.) that the edict was promulgated. The
- Proclamation was received throughout India with delight and admiration. It was welcomed by the whole civilized world. To the Hindus it was a matter of pride and fresh hope.
- The Repercussions of the Proclamation were so great that the Christians and Muslims were so great that the Christians and Muslims were equally warm in giving it a hearty reception.
- **Dr. C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer** referred to the day of the Proclamation as a unique occasion in the history of India and specially of Hinduism. Gandhiji expressed the hope that "all other Hindu Princes will follow the noble example set by this far-off ancient Hindu State." The Prime Minister of Madras described the Proclamation as the "**greatest religious reforms in India after the time of Asoka**".
- The Maharaja gave the biggest charity that any ruler could give to his subjects in opening the doors to every class and creed.

Beginnings of the National Movement



British Malabar played a leading part in the National movement which culminated in the achievement of Independence by India in 1947. The Indian National Congress founded in 1885 had its adherents in Malabar from very early days. In 1897 Sir C. Sankaran Nair, a distinguished son of Malabar, presided over the Amravati session of the Congress. A conference was held at Calicut under the auspices of the Congress in 1904 with C. Vijayaraghavachariar in the chair. A District Congress Committee was formed in Malabar in 1908. A branch of the All India Home Rule League founded by Dr. Annie Beasant in 1916 also started functioning in the district. K. P. Kesava Menon functioned as the Secretary of the District Congress Committee, as well as of the Home Rule League. From 1916 onwards political conferences were held in Malabar to bring the grievances of the people to the attention of the Government. British Malabar 282 A Survey of Kerala History Home Rule Movement The Great War (1914-1918) gave an impetus to the National movement in Malabar. In 1916 a public meeting held in the Calicut Town Hall to mobilize public support for the war efforts of the Government created history. K. P. Kesava Menon who was denied permission by Collector Innes to address the meeting in Malayalam staged a walkout from the hall accompanied by

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the vast majority of the audience. The incident was symbolic in so far as it demonstrated the rising tempo of the National movement. The end of the war saw the announcement of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) and a great controversy arose as to whether the reforms should be accepted or not. The fifth Malabar District Political Conference held at Manjeri on April 28, 1920, in the presence of Dr. Annie Beasant passed a resolution declaring the reforms to be unsatisfactory and disappointing. It also called for the early introduction of agrarian reforms in Malabar. The conference was attended by 1,309 delegates from all parts of the district. Following the passage of the resolution there was a cleavage at the conference between the moderate and extremist elements. The landlords and rich men left the Congress organization and its leadership passed into the hands of extremists, who championed the cause of the peasants, the workers and the middle class. Manjeri may be called 'a Surat in reverse', for here, unlike at Surat in 1907, the Moderates and not the Extremists had to leave the Congress.

Non-co-operation

With the assumption of the leadership of the Indian National Congress by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 began a new era in the history of the National movement in Malabar as well. The Non-co-operation movement which was started after the Nagpur Congress of the year made considerable headway in Malabar. There was a widespread boycott of foreign goods, courts of law and educational institutions in the district. Meanwhile, the Khilafat movement was started as a protest

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against the action of the British Government in disrupting the Turkish Empire and depriving the Sultan of Turkey of his spiritual headship as the Khalifa. This agitation also made a tremendous impact on the Muslim population of Malabar. The Khilafat work was organized all over the country under the auspices of the Congress and therefore, for a while the Congress and Khilafat movements merged themselves into a single movement in which Hindus and the Muslims took part with great enthusiasm. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Shaukat Ali visited Malabar to organize Khilafat Committees and to accelerate the tempo of the National movement against the foreign government. In April 1921 the first All Kerala Political Conference attended by delegates from Malabar, Travancore and Cochin was held at Ottappalam under the presidency of T. Prakasam. Several of the prominent Congress leaders who attended the conference were manhandled by the police.

Malabar Rebellion (1921)



The most important event connected with the political movement in Malabar during this period was the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. The progress of the Khilafat movement in Ernad and Valluvanad taluks

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created alarm in official quarters and the Government brought these two taluks under Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. The British police let loose a reign of terror against the Mappilas. The attempted arrest of Vadakke Vittil Muhammad, the Secretary of the local Khilafat Committee at Pukottur in Ernad taluk, led to a series of violent clashes between the police and the Mappilas in the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks. The Mappilas attacked police stations, looted Government treasuries and destroyed Government offices. The rebellion was led by such leaders as Variankunnath Kunjahammad Haji, Sithi Koya Tangal of Kumaranputhur and Ali Musaliyar. The rebels achieved a large measure of success in extirpating British authority in their strongholds like Malappuram, Tirurangadi, Manjeri and Perinthalmanna and establishing their own government in these places. The Government rushed British and Gurkha troops to the trouble-spots in a desperate bid to crush the revolt. Martial law was declared and repressive measures were adopted. One of the tragic episodes of the rebellion was the 'Wagon Tragedy' in which 61 of the 90 Mappilas carried as prisoners in a closed railway goods wagon from Tirur to Coimbatore on November 20, 1921, had died of suffocation by the time the train reached Podanur. Sumit Sarkar calls the incident 'the Black Hole of Podanur'. In the later stages of the Malabar Rebellion the Mappilas committed several violent atrocities and forfeited the sympathy of the majority community. What began originally as a reaction against police repression turned out in its last phase to be a sort of communal flare-up in which the Hindus became the special targets of

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attacks by the Mappilas. There were even some cases of forcible conversion and looting of the wealth and property of the Hindus. It is pointed out by writers who look upon the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 as an agrarian or Janmi-Kudiyani conflict that the Mappilas engaged in these outrages were tenants who were being harassed and exploited by Hindu Janmis. The latter, it is alleged, had helped the police in ferreting out the rebel leaders and this provided the provocation to the Mappila tenants to turn against the Hindu Janmis and indulge in acts of violence bordering on religious fanaticism. This would suggest that religious fanaticism was not the cause but the result of the outbreak of 1921. The Congress leaders like M.P. Narayana Menon, K. P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan, E. Moidus Maulavi and Muhammad Abdur Rahiman tried their best to check the violent turn of events, but their efforts did not prove successful. The rebellion was at last suppressed by the British Government with an iron hand. The rebel leaders were captured and shot, while hundreds were either imprisoned or deported. It is estimated that about 10,000 people lost their lives in this rebellion. It may be mentioned that the Rebellion of 1921 was a gigantic national upheaval against British authority and not a mere Mappila outbreak as British writers have characterized

Salt Satyagraha

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The Salt Satyagraha which began under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in March 1930 had its repercussions in Kerala as well. Payyannur was the main venue of the Salt Satyagraha in Malabar. Several batches of Satyagrahis from Calicut, Palghat and other parts of Kerala marched to Payyannur to take part in the struggle. The Satyagraha went off peacefully in the early stages, but with the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi on May 5, affairs took a new turn. The Government resorted to a series of repressive measures to break up the struggle. On 12th May the Satyagrahis who assembled at Calicut beach to break the salt laws were attacked by the police party and more than 30 persons were wounded. P. Krishna Pillai and R.V. Sarma exhibited rare heroism in defending the National Flag from forcible seizure by the police on this occasion. The Satyagraha camp at Payyannur was raided and its inmates were lathi-charged. All the top leaders of the Congress like K. Kelappan, Muhammad Abdur Rahiman, and K. Madhavan Nair were arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. Side by side with the Salt Satyagraha, the Congress workers also organized the picketing of toddy shops and the boycott of foreign goods. The Civil Disobedience movement came to an end with the release of Gandhiji on January 26, 1931, and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 4, 1931. The withdrawal of the movement was disapproved by the younger elements in the Congress organization but there was no immediate split in the party. The fifth All Kerala Political Conference which met at Badagara on May 5, 1931, under the presidency of J. M. Sen Gupta

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passed, among others, an 285 important resolution urging temple entry. The Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931- '32) was an offshoot of this resolution.

Punnappra-Vayalar Upheaval



The **'Quit India' movement** of 1942 did not produce any serious repercussions in Travancore as most of the top leaders of the Congress were then in jail and the Communists had decided to support the British Government in their war efforts. The end of the war, however, saw a violent political upheaval in the State under Communist auspices. In January 1946 Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar announced his proposal for constitutional reforms which provided for an irremovable executive on the 'American model'. The State Congress rejected the scheme as unacceptable. The slogan 'American Modal Arabi Kadalil' rent the air everywhere in the State. The Communists organized a violent struggle in their strongholds in Alleppey District in a bold bid to put an end to the autocratic rule of the Diwan and achieve responsible government. In October 1946 Vayalar and Pinnappra witnessed a violent mass upheaval in which the workers openly challenged the authority of the Government

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and came into violent clash with the police and the military. Political Movements in Travancore and Cochin 294 A Survey of Kerala History On October 25 the Travancore Government declared Martial Law in Alleppey and Cherthala and Diwan Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar himself assumed supreme command of the police and military operations in the area. The Travancore armed forces stationed in Cherthala town moved against the Communist Camp at Vayalar (October 26 and 27) which lay surrounded by water on three sides. The workers at Vayalar put up a stiff resistance with bamboo spikes, stones and axes, but the police and the military opened fire with machine guns in a determined move to crush the insurrection. In the massacre that took place at Vayalar on October 27, 1946 more than 150 persons lost their lives on the spot and many more succumbed to injuries later. In the shootings which took place in two other places on the same day 130 people were killed. It is estimated that about a thousand people lost their lives in the Punnapra-Vayalar outbreak. The tragic events of Vayalar and Punnapra came as a rude shock to public opinion all over the State and stiffened the attitude of the people against the Diwan Sir. C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar and his continuance in office.

Responsible Government in Travancore

The achievement of responsible government in Travancore came as the dramatic climax to a series of sensational developments that took place

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in the year 1946-47. The Indian Independence Act (1946) provided for the lapse of Paramountcy of the British Crown over the Indian States with effect from the date of withdrawal of the British power from India. Sir. C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar announced on June 11, 1947, that Travancore would set itself up as an independent State with effect from the date on which the British withdrew from India. The action of the Diwan aroused a bitter controversy inside and outside the State. Travancore was again in the vortex of a political struggle and the Government resorted to a series of repressive measures to meet the situation.

One of the highlights of the struggle was the police firing at Pettah, Trivandrum, in which three persons including a student by name Rajendran were killed.

A few days after the incident, an unsuccessful attempt was made on Sir **C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar's** life when the Diwan was attending a function in the Swati Tirunal Academy of Music at Trivandrum (July 25, 1947). The Diwan escaped with minor injuries and very soon left the state for good. Immediately after this incident the Maharaja intimated to Lord Mountbatten, the Governor-General, his decision to accept the Instrument of Accession and take Travancore into the Indian Union. Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar resigned the office of Diwan on August 19, 1947, and was succeeded in that office by P.G.N. Unnithan. On March 24, 1948, the first popular Ministry of Travancore consisted of Pattom A. Thanu Pillai, C. Kesavan and T. M. Varghese was installed in the office. The Thanu Pillai Ministry had to resign office on October 22, 1948, following the split in the

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Congress Legislature Party and a new Ministry headed by T. K. Narayana Pillai came to power. It was while this Ministry was in office that the integration of Travancore and Cochin took place on July 1, 1949.

Early Political Agitations in Cochin

As in Travancore, in Cochin also the desire for good government asserted itself even in the early days of British rule. A notable instance of an organized political move to change the status quo was in 1834.

The administration of Edamana Sankara Menon, the Diwan, was so corrupt and inefficient that a deputation consisting of representatives of the Brahmin, Nair and Christian communities waited on the Governor of Madras at Ooty and presented a charge-sheet against the Diwan. Menon was placed under suspension and was later sentenced to five years' rigorous imprisonment after a judicial trial. There was a similar move against Diwan Venkata Rao (1856-1860) who had also proved himself to be unpopular. Deputations of leading citizens waited on the Governor of Madras at Ooty and Madras and demanded the dismissal of the Diwan. In 1859 when the Governor of Madras visited Cochin a crowd of 10,000 people surrounded the Bolgatty Residency and demanded the dismissal of the Diwan. Venkata Rao was compulsorily retired in 1860. The abdication of Sri Rama Varma (1890-1914), the Cochin ruler, owing to differences of opinion with the paramount power, was also a notable political development in the history of modern Cochin.

Early Congress Activities

The National movement in British India under the leadership of the Indian National Congress had its echoes in Cochin. A committee of the Indian National Congress was functioning in Trichur, even as early as 1919. Several Congressmen from the State took part in the various Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements carried on under Gandhi's leadership and courted arrest. In 1933 the peasants and workers of Cranganore agitated for relief from the burden of indebtedness and necessary reforms had to be introduced to redress their grievances.

'Electricity Agitation' (1936)

The most spectacular of the agitations in Cochin was the one organized in Trichur town in 1936 as a protest against the decision of the Cochin Government under the Diwan Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chetti to entrust the distribution of electric power in the town to a private company. The agitation, in spite of its localized character and limited objectives, helped to bring the people of all castes and communities on a common platform and as such it was a truly popular movement. Leaders like E. Ikkanda Warriar and Dr. A. R. Menon came into the limelight during this agitation. The Government of Cochin adopted repressive measures to put down the agitation and ultimately it fizzled out. However, it served to bring the influential Christian community of Trichur into the National movement in the State.

Demand for Responsible Government

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In the late thirties, the Cochin District Congress Committee made itself active in the public life of Cochin. In 1937 a Political Conference was held at Trichur Political Movements in Travancore and Cochin 296 A Survey of Kerala History under the presidency of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramiah. The talk of an agitation for responsible government in Cochin was in the air. The Indian National Congress had by its Haripura Resolution of 1938 decided to keep aloof from active entanglement in the affairs of the Native States and hence the idea of an agitation for responsible government under the auspices of the Congress was shelved for the time being. In the meantime, the Government of Cochin announced a scheme of constitutional reforms in a move to placate public opinion. It may be mentioned in this context that while in Travancore the Government tried to suppress the political agitations for responsible government in that State, its counterpart in Cochin adopted an enlightened policy of meeting the demand in stages.

Dyarchy in Cochin

The constitutional reforms referred to above were embodied in the Government of Cochin Act passed on June 17, 1938. A scheme of Dyarchy on the pattern of the system which prevailed in British India under the

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Montague-Chelmsford reforms was introduced in Cochin. 'The Constitution', said Dr. A. B. Keith, "is wisely framed as a first contribution to the achievement of responsible government in full". A popularly elected Minister chosen by majority vote from among the members of the Cochin Legislative Council was given charge of certain Departments of the State Government like Agriculture, Co-operation, Public Health, Panchayats, Industries etc. The Legislative Council was to consist of 58 members of whom 38 were elected. In the elections held under the new scheme two distinct groups emerged in the Cochin Legislature, viz., the Cochin Congress (13 seats) and the Cochin State Congress (12 seats). The leader of the former group, Ambat Sivarama Menon, became the first popular Minister of Cochin and on his death Dr. A. R. Menon was sworn in as Minister on September 5, 1938. In February 1942 Dr. Menon resigned in the wake of a no-confidence motion and was succeeded by T. K. Nair.

Rise of Cochin State Praja Mandal

The experiment in Dyarchy did not satisfy the progressive sections of the population of Cochin. Hence in 1941 a new organization called the Cochin State Praja Mandal was formed with the declared objective of starting an agitation for the achievement of responsible government. The Government of Cochin with A.F.W. Dixon as Diwan decided to put down the proposed agitation. The first annual session of the Praja Mandal scheduled to be held at Irinjalakuda in January 1942 was banned, but in spite of police vigilance the conference did take place. Some of the

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delegates who attended it were arrested and sent to jail. The ban on the Praja Mandal was withdrawn in due course and the arrested delegates were released, but the organization was not in a position to carry on its activities in a normal way. The 'Quit India' movement of 1942 led to the revival of political activity in Cochin. Several demonstrations and meetings were held in the State under the auspices of the Praja Mandal and many of its active workers were arrested. 297 The movement gave an opportunity to the Praja Mandal to rehabilitate itself and the effect was seen in the elections to the Cochin Legislature held in May 1945 when 12 out of the 19 candidates who contested on its ticket got elected. The Praja Mandal members functioned as an active opposition in the Legislature. In the meantime, the Maharaja of Cochin had transferred a few more departments to the control of the Legislature and one more Minister was appointed from among its members

Praja Mandal in Office

The Cochin State Praja Mandal held its annual session at Ernakulam in July 1946 and drew up plans for a State-wide agitation for the achievement of responsible government in Cochin. The 29th of July when the State Legislature opened its session in Ernakulam was observed as 'Responsible Government Day'. The Praja Mandal members boycotted

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the session and later a Memorial was submitted to the Maharaja by 20 members of the Legislature urging the need for the early grant of responsible government. A no-confidence motion was passed in the then Council of Ministers consisting of Parambil Lonappan and K. Balakrishna Menon. The Ministers resigned and their departments were transferred to the control of the Diwan. On August 17, 1946, the Maharaja sent a message to the Legislature expressing his willingness to transfer all departments of the State Government except Law and Order and Finance to Ministers responsible to the State Legislature. The Praja Mandal in alliance with two other small groups decided to form a Ministry. The two groups were the Progressive Party led by T.K. Nair and the Socialist Party led by K. Ayyappan. The first popular Ministry of Cochin consisting of Panampilli Govinda Menon, C.R. iyyunni, K. Ayyappan and T. K. Nair assumed office on September 9, 1946. This is also the first instance of a Coalition Ministry being formed in modern Kerala. On August 14, 1947, the Maharaja of Cochin issued a Proclamation taking away even the Departments of Finance and Law and Order from the Diwan. While Finance was transferred to the control of the popular Ministry, the portfolio of Law and Order was entrusted by the Maharaja to T. K. Nair, one of the Ministers, to be administered by him under his guidance. The arrangement broke down and finally ended in the resignation of all the Ministers except T. K. Nair. The immediate cause of the resignation was the controversy over the propriety of a lathi charge which took place at Rajendra Maidan, Ernakulam, on October 18, 1947. A new Cabinet of three

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Ministers headed by T. K. Nair was sworn in. In the general elections held to the Cochin Legislative Council in September 1948 the Praja Mandal was returned with a clear majority. It is worth noting in this context that this was the first ever election to be held to a Legislature anywhere in India on the basis of universal adult franchise. By this time the Praja Mandal had merged in the Indian National Congress and hence the first Congress Ministry assumed office in Cochin with E. Ikkanda Warriar as Chief Minister (September 20, 1948). During the tenure of office of this Ministry the State of Cochin was merged with Travancore (July 1, 1949) and the new State of Travancore-Cochin came into existence.

The formation of the State of Kerala on November 1, 1956, marked the realization of a long cherished desire of the Malayalam-speaking people to have a State of their own. Public opinion had been in favor of the formation of such a State since the early decades of this century. The division of Kerala by the British into three administrative units, viz., Malabar, Travancore and Cochin acted as an obstacle to the early formation of such a State. Moreover, a portion of the Malayalam-speaking area, viz., the present Kasargod and Hosdurg taluks formed part of a fourth administrative unit, viz., the district of South Canara. An account of the popular movement for the formation of the State of Kerala, or Aikya Kerala as it was popularly called, comprising all the areas

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referred to above and the political history of the State since its formation in 1956 are given in the following sections. **Aikya Kerala Movement**

One of the earliest resolutions on the subject of united Kerala was passed at the State Peoples' Conference held at Ernakulam in April 1928. The Conference was attended by delegates from all parts of Kerala and one of the resolutions passed therein called for the early formation of Aikya Kerala. The Payyannur Political Conference held in May 1928 under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru also passed a resolution requesting the Central Congress leadership to take steps to constitute Kerala into a separate province at the time of the framing of a Constitution for Free India. The series of All-Kerala Political Conferences held under the auspices of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee since 1921 helped to bring political workers from all the three administrative units on a common platform and to make them think in terms of a united State. The movement for the formation of a Kerala state gathered momentum in the forties when the prospects of Indian independence looked bright. In a message sent to the Cochin Legislative Council on July 29, 1946, Sri Kerala Varma, the then Maharaja of Cochin, expressed himself in favor of the early formation of a Kerala State comprising Travancore, Cochin and British Malabar. A sub-committee of the Kerala Provincial Congress formed for the purpose met at Cheruthuruthy late in 1946 under the presidentship of K. P. Kesava Menon and decided to convene an Aikya Kerala Conference at an early date. The Aikya Kerala Conference held at Trichur in April 1947 under the presidentship of K. Kelappan was an

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offshoot of this decision. It was attended by hundreds of delegates from all parts of Kerala and was more Travancore - Cochin and Kerala 299 representative in character than any other conference held in Kerala till then. The reigning Maharaja of Cochin, Sri Kerala Varma, attended the conference and spoke in favor of the establishment of a united Kerala State comprising British Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. The conference passed a resolution moved by the Congress leader E. Moidu Maulavi, urging the early formation of Aikya Kerala and also elected a standing council of 100 members to follow it up by action. In February 1949 a similar Aikya Kerala Convention was held at Alwaye and in November 1949 another at Palghat to press for the formation of Kerala State

Integration of Travancore and Cochin

In the meantime, the policy of merger and integration of Native States initiated by the States Ministry of the Government of India under the guidance of Sardar Vallabhai Patel had improved the prospects of the early formation of a united Kerala. On July 1, 1949, the State of Travancore-Cochin came into existence. This was the first positive step taken in the direction of the formation of the State of Kerala. The State of Travancore-Cochin started functioning under good auspices. The Maharajas of the two States willingly signed the Covenant of Integration. The Maharaja of Travancore became the Rajapramukh of the new State while the Maharaja of Cochin offered "to efface himself completely in

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order that his people might enjoy a larger life". The Legislatures and the Ministries of the two States were combined to form the Legislature and the Ministry of the new State of Travancore-Cochin. It was decided to locate the capital of the State at Trivandrum and the High Court at Ernakulam.

Formation of Kerala State



It was during the period of President's Rule in Travancore-Cochin that the decision on the reorganization of the States of the Indian Union on linguistic basis was taken by the Government of India. Under the States Reorganization Act of 1956 the four Southern taluks of Tovala, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode and a part of the Shencottah taluk were separated from Travancore-Cochin and included in Madras State. The district of Malabar and the Kasaragod taluk of South Canara district were added on to the remaining portions of Travancore-Cochin to constitute the new State of Kerala. The State of Kerala formally

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came into existence on November 1, 1956, with a Governor as the head of the State. The last vestiges of princely rule in Kerala also disappeared with the end of the institution of Rajapramukh consequent upon the formation of the new State.

Constitutional Developments in Kerala

- The first general elections to the Kerala State Legislature were held in February and March 1957.
- The Communist Party of India and a few Independents supported by it secured 65 of the 126 seats in the Legislature. President's Rule came to an end on April 5, 1957 and a Communist Ministry under the Chief Ministership of E. M. S. Namboothiripad came to power.
- Some of the legislative measures and policies of the Communist Government evoked opposition in certain quarters and led to an agitation for its overthrow in 1959. The agitation known as 'Vimochana Samaram Or **'Liberation Struggle'** began on June 12 under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan, the N.S.S. leader and all the non-Communist political parties of Kerala including the Congress, the P.S.P., the R.S.P. and the Muslim League took part in it.
- The agitation took such a serious turn that the police had to open fire in four places, viz., Ankamali, Pullivila, Vettukad and Cheriatura killing all 15 persons. Towards the end of July the administration of the State had virtually broken down.
- The Governor of Kerala reported to the President of India that the constitutional administration of the State had collapsed and on July 31,

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1959, the President issued a Proclamation taking over the administration of the State under Section 356 of the Constitution of India.

- **Travancore - Cochin** and **Kerala** 302 A Survey of Kerala History In February 1960 fresh elections were held to the Kerala State Legislature. There was now an electoral alliance between the Congress, the P.S.P. and the Muslim League against the Communist Party.
- The triple alliance annexed 95 seats as against 29 seats won by the Communist Party and Independents supported by it.
- In the wake of the victory of the alliance a Congress-P.S.P. Coalition Ministry with Pattom A. Thanu Pillai, the P.S.P. leader, as Chief Minister was sworn in on February 22, 1960, and President's Rule came to an end.
- The Speakership of the Assembly went to the Muslim League in this new set-up. In September 1962 Pattom A. Thanu Pillai was appointed as the Governor of Punjab State and R. Sankar, the leader of the Congress Party, became the Chief Minister.
- The P.S.P. eventually left the alliance owing to differences of opinion with its partner, the Muslim league leaving even earlier. The Congress Ministry under R. Sankar resigned office on September 10, 1964, following the defection of 15 members from the Congress Legislature Party and their support to the opposition in getting a motion of no-confidence passed against the Congress Government on the floor of the Legislature.
- The rebel Congress M.L.A.s organized a new party called the Kerala Congress. With the fall of the Sankar Ministry Kerala State was again placed under President's Rule.

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- The major political development of the period was the split in the Communist Party, viz., the Marxist Communist Party as distinct from the Communist Party of India.
- Meanwhile, the Praja Socialist Party had merged with the Socialist Party of India and a new party called the Samyukta Socialist Party had also come into existence. In the midterm elections of 1965 all the political parties contested independently of each other without any electoral alliance. Hence none of the parties got a clear majority of seats in the new Legislature.
- On the report of the Governor that it would not be possible to form any stable ministry in the State the President of India issued another Proclamation on March 24, 1965, dissolving the newly elected Legislative Assembly of the State.
- The State of Kerala continued to be under President's Rule. In the General Election of 1967 a united front of seven political parties led by the Communist Party (Marxist) was voted to power with a thumping majority of 117 out of the 133 seats in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, the Indian National Congress and the Kerala Congress being reduced to the position of small groups in the Legislature.
- A United Front Ministry headed by E. M. Sankaran Namboothiripad, the leader of the Communist Party (Marxist), assumed office in Kerala on March 6, 1967, and the long spell of President's Rule came to an end.
- The Namboodiripad Ministry, however, fell in October 1969 and a new Non-Marxist Coalition Ministry under the leadership of C. Achutha Menon,

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the leader of the C.P.I., was sworn in on November 1, 1969. The Communist Party (Marxist) emerged as the main opposition party in the State Legislative Assembly.

- On August 1, 1970, the Achutha Menon Ministry resigned following its decision to seek a fresh mandate from the 303 people through a new General Election.
- The State Assembly was dissolved and President's Rule was proclaimed. In the General Election held in September 1970 a united front under the joint leadership of the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India won a clear majority.
- A new ministry under the leadership of the C.P.I. leader C. Achutha Menon assumed office (October 4, 1970), with the support of the Congress Party. The Congress formally entered the Ministry on September 25, 1971.
- In the normal course, the next General Elections should have taken place in Kerala in the latter half of 1976. However, in the wake of the declaration of Emergency by the President of India in June 1975, and the decision to postpone elections throughout the country, the General Elections due to take place in Kerala in 1976 were postponed. In these circumstances the second Achutha Menon Ministry continued in office for its full term of five years and even beyond a record as far as Kerala State was concerned.
- A significant development of the period was that the Kerala Congress which was till then in the opposition also joined the Ministry. With the withdrawal of the Emergency, General Elections were held in the country in March 1977.

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- Whereas the elections brought the newly formed Janata Party to power at the Centre and in many North Indian States, Kerala presented an entirely different picture.
- Here the united front consisting of the Indian National Congress, the Communist Party of India, the Indian Union Muslim League, the Kerala Congress and the Revolutionary Socialist Party annexed 111 of the total of 140 seats.
- A new Ministry headed by K. Karunakaran, the leader of the Congress Legislature Party, assumed office on March, 23, 1977. However, the Karunakaran Ministry was short-lived as the Chief Minister had to resign after a month on the issue of police excesses committed in what came to be known as the 'Rajan Case'.
- The fall of the Karunakaran Ministry was followed by the formation of a new ministry headed by A. K. Antony, President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee.
- Though not a member of the Legislative Assembly at the time of his being sworn in as the Chief Minister, Antony soon got himself elected to the Assembly in a bye-election. The Antony Ministry was in office from April 25, 1977, to October 28, 1978.
- It was during this period that the Indian National Congress faced a vertical split on the issue of the continued leadership of the party by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. A. K. Antony who headed the anti-Indira section in the party resigned office in protest against the decision of his party High Command to support Mrs. Gandhi in the Chikmagalur bye-election.

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- The new Ministry which assumed office on October 29, 1978, was headed by P. K. Vasudevan Nair, the leader of the C.P.I.
- It continued to be in power till October 12, 1979, when the Chief Minister tendered his resignation following differences of opinion among the front partners on the issue of the validation of what is known as the Gift Deeds Legislation.
- Another Ministry headed by the Muslim League leader C. H. Muhammad Koya held office from October 12 to December 5, 1979.
- The major political parties kept themselves out of Travancore - Cochin and Kerala 304 A Survey of Kerala History this ministry which included the representatives of such small groups as the P.S.P. and the N.D.P. but it survived in office for a short period thanks to the support extended to it by the Congress (I), Congress (U) and some other groups.
- The Koya Ministry resigned in the wake of the withdrawal of support by the Congress (U) and the Kerala Congress (Mani group). President's Rule was proclaimed on December 5, 1979, and elections to the Legislative Assembly were held in January 1980. The Left Democratic Front led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) captured 93 out of 140 seats in the Legislature.
- The new Left Democratic Front Ministry headed by E. K. Nayanar, the Marxist leader, was sworn in on January 25, 1980. The Nayanar Ministry fell on October 20, 1981, following the withdrawal of support by the Congress (Antony group) and Kerala Congress (Mani group) and Kerala came under President's Rule (October 21 to December 27, 1981).

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- Meanwhile, there was a realignment of parties and the erstwhile Congress (I) led opposition emerged as the majority party in the Legislature with the formal entry of the Congress (Antony group) and Kerala Congress (Mani group) into its ranks.
- A new ministry under the Congress (I) leader K. Karunakaran assumed office on December 28. It sustained itself in power with the casting vote of the Speaker and subsequently resigned (March 17, 1982) following the loss of majority in the Assembly as a consequence of defection.
- Kerala had another spell of President's Rule from March 17 to May 23, 1982. In the general elections to the Kerala Assembly held in May 1982 the United Democratic Front led by the Congress (I) had an edge over the rival Left United Front led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). It won 77 out of 140 seats in the Assembly. A new coalition ministry with Karunakaran, the Congress (I) leader, as Chief Minister assumed office on May 24, 1982. It continued in office for the full term. In the general election held to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in March 1987 the United Democratic Front suffered defeat at the hands of the opposition Left Democratic Front and a new L.D.F.
- Ministry with the C.P.M. leader E. K.Nayanar as Chief Minister came to power in Kerala on March 25, 1987. It had the support of 79 members in a house of 140 members. It is significant to note in this context that the Left Democratic Front had gone to the polls with the clear stand that it would have no alliance with communal or caste-based parties and that this stand was endorsed by the electorate.

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- Thus after a long spell a Coalition Ministry without the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress as partners came to office in Kerala, thereby opening a new chapter in the history of coalition politics in the State. The Nayanar Ministry continued till June 24, 1991 when the United Democratic Front was voted back to power and another Ministry with the Congress (I) leader K. Karunakaran as Chief Minister assumed office. This ministry had to lay down office on March 22, 1995 with the resignation of the Chief Minister K. Karunakaran following a revolt in the ranks of the coalition partners against his leadership.
- A new U.D.F. Ministry with A.K. Antony as Chief Minister came to power. In May 1996 the LDF was voted to power and E.K.Nayanar again became the Chief minister.
- In May 2001 general elections were held and the UDF under the leadership of the Congress came to power having won 100 seats in the Assembly. Another ministry headed by A.K.Antony came to power and it continued to be in office till his resignation following the total rout of the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections of 2004.
- On August 31, 2004 Oommen Chandy succeeded A.K.Antony as Chief Minister. However in the general elections held in May 2006, the LDF was voted to power with 98 seats to its credit and a new ministry with V.S.Achuthanandan as Chief minister was sworn in