

MAKING OF MODERN KERALA

COURSE CODE: B21HS06DC

Discipline Core Course

Under Graduate Programme in History

Self Learning Material



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SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Making of Modern Kerala

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Semester- VI

**Discipline Core Course
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(with Model Question Paper Sets)**



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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala



Making of Modern Kerala

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for Undergraduate Programme in History

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Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

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Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-03-2026

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BLOCK

Early Resistance



UNIT

Early Resistance against Europeans

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the historical background and structural causes of early resistance in Kerala, with particular emphasis on European, especially English, attempts to monopolise maritime trade networks and commercial routes
- ◆ examine the role of the Attingal Rani, regional chieftains, merchant communities, and ordinary people in organising collective resistance, situating their actions within the broader political and economic transformations of the period
- ◆ explain the processes through which the English East India Company gradually established political supremacy over Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore, moving from commercial presence to territorial and administrative control
- ◆ assess the mechanisms of colonial economic exploitation, including British interventions in land relations, forest management, trade regulation, and revenue systems, and their long-term impact on Kerala's society and economy

Prerequisite

Kerala's past is often remembered for its vibrant culture, thriving overseas trade, and progressive social movements. Yet, alongside these achievements runs a strong and enduring tradition of resistance. When the Portuguese reached the Malabar Coast at the end of the fifteenth century, Kerala soon became a focal point of European rivalry. Drawn by the profits of the spice trade, the Portuguese followed by the Dutch and eventually the British attempted to dominate trade and extend their political influence. However, their ambitions were met with firm opposition. Local rulers

and ordinary communities refused to remain silent spectators. They responded with naval battles, armed confrontations, and shifting alliances to defend their autonomy.

Among the earliest defenders was Kunjali Marakkar, the naval commander of the Zamorin of Calicut, who led determined campaigns against Portuguese control of the seas in the sixteenth century. In the eighteenth century, Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam continued this spirit of defiance through sustained resistance against British authority in Malabar. Likewise, Velu Thampi Dalawa of Travancore rose in rebellion in the early nineteenth century, protesting British interference in regional governance.

Keywords

Nuno da Cunha, Anjengo Revolt, *Karyakar*, *Pravarthikar*, *Kovilakathumvathukkal*, *Zamorin*, Domination, Monopoly, Guerilla Warfare, Expansion, Trade, Treaty

Discussion

1.1.1 Early Resistance in Malabar

Vasco da Gama's arrival at Calicut in May 1498 opened a completely new chapter in Kerala's history. King Domo Manuel of Portugal had sent him east with a clear mission: to find a new sea route to India and strengthen Portugal's trade with the East. While their initial goal was purely commercial, the Portuguese soon began to dream of building a political empire in India by bringing local rulers under their control.

The long-standing hostility between the Zamorin of Calicut on one side and the rulers of Cochin, Kolathunadu, and other smaller states on the other created a situation that worked in Portugal's favour, at least for a time. The Raja of Cochin, who had long struggled under the dominance of the Zamorin, saw the arrival of the Portuguese as a chance to gain powerful support and break free from his rival's influence.

The Portuguese received a cold welcome in Calicut, and their early dealings with the

Zamorin were tense and disappointing. These experiences pushed them closer to the Cochin Raja, leading to an alliance in which both sides agreed to support each other in war and defence. The conflicts that followed turned the Zamorin into the chief defender of Kerala's independence against Portuguese expansion, while the Cochin Raja aligned himself with the newcomers. The Kolathiri of North Malabar also aided the Portuguese, motivated by his own rivalry with the Zamorin, though he did resist them at certain times. The rulers of Quilon and Purakkad, too, became Portuguese allies. Ultimately, it was the support of these local powers that allowed the Portuguese to dominate trade along the Kerala coast for more than 150 years.

1.1.1.1 Kunjali Marakkars

The early history of the Kunjali Marakkars is not completely clear. Tradition says that they were originally seafaring traders from Cochin. When the Portuguese established themselves there, these merchants relocated to Ponnani, which was under the Zamorin.

The Zamorin welcomed them and soon brought them into his service. Over time, they rose to become the admirals of the Calicut navy.

The Kunjalis carefully selected the most skilled and courageous men for their naval forces. Among them, Kutti Ali stood out as the bravest. In 1524, under his leadership, the Calicut fleet dealt serious blows to Portuguese ships. Kutti Ali relied on small, swift, armed boats to fight the much heavier Portuguese vessels, and he perfected a kind of naval guerrilla warfare. His quick, “hit-and-run” attacks caused major disruption to Portuguese shipping and trade.

In response, Henrique de Menezes led a large expedition against him, destroying many of Kutti Ali’s vessels at the port of Ponnani. The following year, in 1525, the Portuguese attacked Pantalayani Kollam, a key base of the Kunjalis. During this attack, the Arayan of Purakkad, who had joined the Portuguese as an ally, was shot and wounded by the Portuguese Governor, who wrongly suspected him of treachery. This incident turned the Purakkad chief firmly against the Portuguese, and in the wars that followed, he actively supported their enemies.

During this period, the Portuguese were under severe pressure from the Zamorin’s forces on land. Unable to hold their position, they destroyed their fort at Calicut and withdrew. Out at sea, however, Kutti Ali and his fleet continued their relentless attacks on Portuguese ships. When Lopo Vaz de Sampayo became Governor (1526–1529), he launched strong measures to end the threat posed by Kutti Ali. In 1528, the Portuguese fleet went into action again, and this time Kutti Ali was captured near Barkur.

After his capture, the Zamorin reorganised his navy. Leadership passed to Pachachi Marakkar, a relative of Kutti Ali, along with Ali Abraham, a merchant from Cairo, and

Kunjali II, Kutti Ali’s young son. Under this renewed command, the Kunjali Marakkars grew more daring. They began attacking Portuguese settlements not only in Indian waters but also in Ceylon and along the East Coast. Their operations disrupted Portuguese trade so heavily that shipping in the region almost came to a halt.

The situation became so serious that Governor Sampayo was dismissed by the Portuguese crown. Nuno da Cunha replaced him in October 1529. The new Viceroy restored Portuguese dominance at sea by constructing a strong fort at Chaliyam and stationing troops there. The area belonged to the Raja of Vettattunad (Tanur), and the fort was built with his approval. With Chaliyam under their control, the Portuguese could easily strike at the Zamorin’s naval forces and also use the fort as a springboard for deeper attacks into his territory. It became a constant strategic threat, almost like holding a weapon directly at the Zamorin’s throat.

The Portuguese capture of Chaliyam did not shake the determination of the Kunjali Marakkars. In 1531, Kutti Ali Marakkar, the Zamorin’s most prominent naval commander was killed, and his position was taken over by Kunjali II. Kunjali II soon became notorious for capturing Portuguese ships and killing their entire crews, something he carried out with grim regularity.

The Zamorin’s navy and the Portuguese fleet clashed repeatedly on the open sea. During Martin D’Souza’s siege of Edappalli in 1536, Kunjali suddenly appeared near Cochin and forced the Portuguese to abandon their campaign and withdraw. Around this time, the Zamorin attempted to seek assistance from the Turks, who had gained control of Egypt. However, his efforts failed. Although an Egyptian fleet eventually reached the coast of Gujarat, it merely displayed its strength and returned without engaging the Portuguese.

Years of warfare had exhausted the Zamorin. The continuous conflict had drained his treasury, especially as trade at Calicut declined and revenue fell sharply. Realising the need for peace, he agreed to a formal treaty with the Portuguese in January 1540. According to this agreement, the Zamorin promised to sell pepper from his territories to the Portuguese at the same prices charged in Cochin. He also agreed to recognise Portuguese issued passes for Arab traders. In return, the Portuguese pledged to remain neutral in any conflicts between the Zamorin and other local rulers.

The treaty turned out to be mutually beneficial. The Portuguese secured control over trade at Calicut, while the Zamorin gained the freedom to act against neighbouring powers without the fear of Portuguese interference. This arrangement soon encouraged similar treaties with the rulers of Purakkad and Quilon. The Raja of Purakkad was even honoured with the title “Brother-in-Arms to the King of Portugal.”

After the Portuguese were driven out of Chaliyam, the Kunjali Marakkars rose to great power. Kunjali III, now the head of the family, built a strong fort known as Marakkar Kotta at Kottakkal (Putupattanam) with the Zamorin’s approval. He enjoyed the status and privileges of a Nair chieftain under the Zamorin. However, relations soon grew strained. When the Zamorin allowed the Portuguese to set up a factory at Ponnani, the Kunjalis were deeply angered. In two major naval battles, in 1586 and 1589, they dealt the Portuguese heavy defeats. A few years later, in 1591, peace was temporarily restored thanks to a Catholic priest who acted as mediator.

The Zamorin entered into an alliance with the Portuguese to bring down the Kunjalis. In 1593, their combined forces launched an attack on Marakkar Kotta, but the campaign failed disastrously. Heavy losses were

suffered on both sides, mainly because the army and navy could not coordinate their efforts. After this setback, the Zamorin and the Portuguese agreed that in any future assault, the Zamorin would take charge of land operations while the Portuguese would handle the naval side.

In 1595, Kunjali IV took over as leader of the Marakkars. He strengthened the fort at Kottakkal and began openly challenging the Zamorin’s authority. He even adopted grand titles such as “King of the Moors” and “Lord of the Indian Seas.” His defiance grew more blatant; he mutilated one of the Zamorin’s elephants and insulted a Nair noble sent to question him.

1.1.1.2 The Fall of the Kunjalis

In 1600, the Zamorin launched a massive assault on Kunjali’s fortress, surrounding it with an army of about 6,000 soldiers. The Portuguese fleet under André Furtado supported him from the sea. Realising that he could no longer hold out, Kunjali surrendered to the Zamorin after receiving a solemn promise that his life would be spared. However, the Zamorin went back on his word. He handed over the very admiral who had once fought for him to the Portuguese. Kunjali IV and his loyal followers were taken to Goa, where they were executed. His body was cut into pieces and displayed publicly at Bardez and Panjim. His head was preserved in salt, sent to Cannanore, and placed on a pole as a warning to the local Muslim community.

The fall of the Kunjali Marakkars remains one of the saddest chapters in Kerala’s history. What makes it even more tragic is the betrayal by the Zamorin, the same ruler whose power the Marakkars had defended for decades against Portuguese aggression. In a cruel twist of fate, they were destroyed through a partnership between the Zamorin and the very enemies they had fought so fiercely.



1.1.2 Early Resistance in Travancore

1.1.2.1 Anjuthengu Revolt

After the Dutch took over the areas in Kerala once dominated by the Portuguese, the English shifted their base from Cochin to Calicut in search of better trade prospects. However, trading in Calicut did not turn out as they had hoped. Facing difficulties, the English began looking for a more favourable location. In 1684, they approached the Attingal Rani and received permission to set up a trading factory at Anchuthengu (Anjengo). A few years later, in 1690, they were granted approval to build a fort there, which was completed by 1695. With these new factories, forts, and storage facilities, British trade along the west coast grew stronger, and Anjengo soon developed into an important centre, a busy port town, and a growing settlement on the Malabar coast.

To protect their interests, the British also set up an armoury inside the fort. However, their growing presence and behaviour created tension with the local people. British traders forced villagers to sell pepper at fixed prices, leaving them with little choice or profit. This led to anger and frustration among the locals. In 1697, they even attempted to attack the fort, though the effort failed.

By 1721, tensions at the Anjengo factory had reached a breaking point. William Gyfford, the Company's Chief at Anjengo, had already angered the local community with his arrogant behaviour and questionable trade practices. Even though the English tried to maintain goodwill by offering pricey gifts to the Rani of Attingal every year, resentment continued to simmer among local leaders.

During this period, the Pillais and Matampis insisted that the annual tribute and gifts meant for the Rani should be routed through them, as was customary.

Gyfford flatly refused, and this immediately escalated the situation. Determined to assert his authority, he marched to the Attingal palace with around 140 Englishmen to personally present the gifts. This show of force deeply offended the locals.

On 15 April 1721, the assembled group was suddenly attacked, and all the Englishmen were killed. Following this, the rebels advanced toward Anjengo Fort and laid siege to it. The fort, defended by gunner Samuel Ince, held out for nearly six months. This uprising became known as the first organised revolt against British authority in Kerala.

Eventually, British troops from Tellicherry arrived and managed to crush the rebellion. Once the conflict ended, the Company negotiated with the Attingal Rani and secured terms that worked entirely in their favour. They were granted monopoly rights over pepper, compensated for all losses suffered during the attack, and even obtained permission to establish factories wherever they wished.

1.1.3 Nature of European Control over Resources

1.1.3.1 The Portuguese

The arrival of the Portuguese brought noticeable changes to Kerala's economy. Their presence disrupted the centuries-old trade network that connected Kerala with Arabia and Egypt. At the same time, trade with Europe expanded significantly, bringing new wealth into the region. As European traders visited more frequently, European tastes, fashions, and luxury goods also began to appear in Kerala. As trade patterns shifted, some towns flourished while others declined. Calicut, Cochin, and Chaliyam became major centres of trade, while Quilon and Cranganore gradually lost their prominence. Contemporary accounts even claimed that

Cochin could “rival some of the finest cities in Europe.”

The Portuguese also played a major role in introducing a variety of new crops to India. Cashew, tobacco, custard apple, guava, pineapple, and papaya were among the plants they brought. They helped make Kerala’s spices, such as pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and ginger, popular in European markets by organising direct shipments. They encouraged large-scale, scientific cultivation of pepper and ginger, and ordinary people soon embraced spice farming as a profitable activity. The Portuguese also improved methods of coconut cultivation. Under their influence, coconuts began to be grown not just for household needs but as a commercial crop. They even promoted better-quality varieties for wider use.

1.1.3.2 The Dutch

Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch paid their officials regularly, and for most of their rule, their finances in Kerala remained stable. Their bookkeeping was strict, and they tried to keep expenses as low as possible. The Commandeur and the Chief Administrator, however, were allowed to engage in private trade of their own. The Dutch military establishment in Kerala was relatively small and did not place a heavy financial burden on the Company. Their real focus was trade and profit. To manage this efficiently, the Dutch East India Company operated two separate departments, one for imports and another for exports.

They imported goods such as sugar, copper, tin, lead, camphor, and silk. However, pepper was the most important export, and the Dutch worked tirelessly to secure a monopoly over its trade. In addition to pepper, they also exported high-quality cotton textiles, especially the fine fabrics produced in Eraniel and Kottar. Cardamom was another significant export item. Besides

the income earned through trade, the Dutch collected revenue from several estates they either directly governed or leased out. They also profited from selling tobacco and arrack, and even from the export of slaves, which served as a reminder of the darker side of their commercial activities.

1.1.3.3 The British

The establishment of British authority over Kerala was a gradual process that unfolded through wars, treaties, and political alliances during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The regions of Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore came under British control in different ways, but eventually all became part of the British colonial system.

The years of Mysorean expansion brought considerable tension to the English East India Company’s establishments along the Kerala coast. The Company’s trading centre at Tellicherry frequently found itself in a precarious situation. In 1764, Ananta Rao, representing Hyder Ali, approached the English officials and secured from them a promise that they would remain neutral if conflict arose between Mysore and the local rulers of Kerala. This assurance of neutrality significantly aided Hyder Ali’s swift advance into Kerala in 1766.

However, matters changed during Hyder’s second campaign in 1773, when tensions escalated into direct confrontation between Mysorean forces and the English at Tellicherry. The balance of power shifted once the British launched their major offensive against Srirangapatnam in 1790. As British troops advanced, Mysorean garrisons began retreating from Kerala, and their key positions gradually collapsed. The capture of Palghat Fort by Colonel Stuart on 22 September 1790 proved decisive, effectively paving the way for British dominance across Malabar. Although Malabar formally passed into British hands under the Treaty of Seringapatam in

1792, the Company did not immediately assume full administrative control. Instead, it proceeded cautiously, weighing the political and practical implications before directly managing the newly acquired territory.

The settlement concluded through the Treaty of Seringapatam resulted in a major territorial shift in South India. Under its terms, Tipu Sultan surrendered extensive territories to the British, including almost the entire Malabar region (with the exception of Wayanad), as well as Cochin and Coorg. The situation changed further after the final defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799, when Srirangapatnam fell to British forces. Following this victory, South Canara covering areas such as Kasaragod and Hosdurg also came under British control. In the years that followed, the British consolidated their authority in Malabar and South Canara by gradually sidelining local chiefs, often granting them pensions in exchange for relinquishing power.

In contrast, their approach toward Travancore and Cochin was different. Rather than annexing these kingdoms outright, the British signed separate agreements with their rulers, reducing them to dependent allies under British supremacy while allowing them limited internal autonomy. The Company signed treaties with the rulers of Cochin and Travancore. In 1791, Cochin signed a new treaty in which the Raja agreed to become a subordinate ally of the English and pay them an annual tribute. In return, the

Company promised to help him regain the territories that Tipu Sultan had taken from Cochin, but even after recovery, those lands would remain under the Company's overall authority. The British also assured the Raja of full protection as long as he remained loyal. By 1800, Cochin was brought under the control of the Madras Government, effectively placing it under British political dominance.

Travancore faced similar pressure. The Company insisted that the Travancore Raja bear the entire cost of the campaign. The Raja appealed to Lord Cornwallis, who responded more sympathetically. This led to a treaty in 1795, through which the Raja acknowledged British supremacy, while the Company pledged support if Travancore ever faced an external attack. Colonel Macaulay was later appointed as the British Resident in the State.

A new treaty was signed in 1805, further strengthening British control. Travancore became a subsidiary ally, agreeing to accept British protection and pay an annual tribute of Rs. 8,00,000. Importantly, the treaty gave the British the authority to intervene in the State's internal matters whenever there was unrest or conflict. The Raja was also required to follow any advice the Company offered on internal administration. Negotiated by Velu Tampi Dalawa, this treaty effectively marked the end of Travancore's political independence.

Recap

- ◆ Vasco da Gama's arrival in 1498 drew Kerala into European commercial imperialism, where Portuguese maritime ambitions exploited local political rivalries, especially between the Zamorin of Calicut and neighbouring rulers, to dominate coastal trade.

- ◆ The Kunjali Marakkars, as naval commanders of the Zamorin, pioneered effective maritime guerrilla warfare against Portuguese shipping, emerging as the most formidable symbols of indigenous sea power and resistance in Malabar.
- ◆ Despite decades of loyal service, internal fractures and shifting alliances culminated in the betrayal and brutal execution of Kunjali IV, marking the tragic end of organised maritime resistance in Malabar.
- ◆ In Travancore, British commercial aggression at Anjuthengu provoked popular resistance under the Attingal Rani, culminating in the 1721 massacre that stands as Kerala's first organised revolt against British authority.
- ◆ In Cochin, Saktan Tampuran consolidated royal power through administrative centralisation and social reordering, weakening feudal elites and redefining relations with merchant and religious communities to strengthen the modern state.
- ◆ Portuguese intervention reoriented Kerala's economy by dismantling older Arab–Egyptian trade networks, introducing European goods, crops, architectural styles, and military technologies, and reshaping coastal centres such as Calicut, Cochin, and Chaliyam into hubs of Eurocentric commerce.
- ◆ Beyond trade, the Portuguese transformed patterns of production by promoting the commercial cultivation of spices and coconuts, integrating Kerala's agrarian economy more tightly into European markets.
- ◆ The Dutch pursued commercial dominance through calculated political interference, fiscal discipline, and trade monopolies, especially in pepper, while maintaining a relatively small military presence focused on profit rather than territorial conquest.
- ◆ British authority marked a decisive shift from commercial influence to direct political subordination, as treaties with Cochin and Travancore imposed subsidiary alliances, tribute payments, and the right of intervention in internal affairs.

Objective Questions

1. In which year did Vasco da Gama arrive at Calicut, marking the beginning of European maritime intervention in Kerala?
2. Which local rivalry initially helped the Portuguese establish their foothold along the Malabar coast?
3. Who were the Kunjali Marakkars, and under whose authority did they serve?
4. What naval strategy made the Kunjali Marakkars particularly effective against Portuguese ships?
5. What event is regarded as the first organised revolt against British authority in Kerala?
6. Which treaty formally marked the loss of Travancore's political independence under British rule?
7. Which European power attempted to monopolise the pepper trade in Kerala through strict commercial and administrative control after defeating the Portuguese?
8. What major economic change did the Portuguese introduce by encouraging large-scale spice cultivation in Kerala?
9. Which ruler of Cochin carried out major administrative reforms to weaken the feudal nobility and centralise state power?
10. When did the Treaty of Seringapatam was signed?

Answers

1. 1498
2. The rivalry between the Zamorin of Calicut and the Raja of Cochin
3. Naval commanders of the Zamorin of Calicut

4. Naval guerrilla or hit-and-run warfare using small, swift boats
5. The Anjuthengu (Anjengo) Revolt of 1721
6. The Subsidiary Treaty of 1805
7. The Dutch
8. Transformation of spice farming into a commercial, export-oriented activity
9. Saktan Tampuran
10. 1792

Assignments

1. Compare the policies of the Portuguese and the Dutch in Kerala, and explain how the people and rulers responded.
2. Analyse the political and economic factors that shaped Kerala's early resistance against European powers.
3. Examine how the structure of Kerala's society and economy influenced its resistance to European domination.
4. Describe the impact of early anti-European struggles on the later freedom movements in Kerala.
5. Analyse the role of traders and local people in resisting English control during the Anjengo Revolt.

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Suggested Reading

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UNIT

Resistance in Malabar

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse how the East India Company consolidated political authority in Malabar through treaties, administrative restructuring, and revenue control
- ◆ examine the causes and course of the Pazhassi revolts, with particular attention to guerrilla warfare and the use of forested landscapes
- ◆ evaluate the impact of British land revenue policies and political interference on local rulers, peasants, and tribal communities
- ◆ assess the significance of the Pazhassi Revolt in the history of early resistance against British Colonial rule in Kerala

Prerequisite

Malabar, stretching along the northern coastline of present-day Kerala, holds an important place in the story of resistance in South India. Famous for its busy ports and thriving spice trade, the region was also a meeting ground for different cultures and commercial interests. Over time, however, it became a zone of intense political contest and repeated struggles against external domination. The history of Malabar's resistance reveals the strong resolve of its people to safeguard their territory, traditions, and economic rights in the face of foreign intrusion and unjust authority.

The situation began to change dramatically after the Portuguese landed on the Malabar coast in 1498. Eager to control the profitable spice trade, they attempted to impose their dominance over local commerce. This move was strongly opposed

by regional powers, especially the Zamorin of Calicut. The naval expeditions led by the Kunjali Marakkars represent some of the earliest structured efforts to challenge European expansion and protect indigenous trading interests.

The eighteenth century brought new disturbances. The campaigns of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan altered the existing balance of power in the region. After Tipu Sultan's defeat, the British East India Company tightened its grip over Malabar. Changes in revenue administration, disruption of customary land systems, and British backing of particular landlord groups led to growing dissatisfaction among different sections of society, setting the stage for further resistance.

Keywords

Company Rule, Revenue Settlement, Guerrilla Resistance, Forest Warfare, Anti-Colonial Mobilisation, Treaty of Seringapatam, Joint Commissioner, Guerilla, Malikhana, Kolkar, Kurichyas, Kurumba

Discussion

1.2.1 Company's Consolidation and Claim over Revenue

Although the Treaty of Seringapatam (1792) placed Malabar under British control, the Company did not immediately assume full administrative responsibility. Nor did it honour Lord Cornwallis's earlier assurance that the former rulers, who had been displaced by Tipu Sultan, would be restored to their lands. Instead, General Abercromby, the Governor of Bombay, was sent to work out temporary arrangements with the local chiefs for revenue collection in the coming year and to suggest a provisional system for governing the newly acquired region.

Acting on his advice, the Company appointed two Commissioners, Mr. Farmer and Major Dow, to oversee Malabar's political settlement and manage its administration. They concluded revenue agreements with

the principal local authorities, including the Zamorin and the Raja of Chirakkal. Under these agreements, the chiefs were allowed to retain limited authority but were placed under Company supervision and required to pay a fixed annual tribute. Initially, these arrangements lasted only one year, but they were later renewed in five-year terms.

In December 1792, Jonathan Duncan and Charles Boddam joined as additional Commissioners, and together the four officials, now known as the Joint Commissioners, introduced a new administrative framework for Malabar. They declared that trade in all commodities would be open, except for pepper, which the Company maintained as a monopoly. They also issued a proclamation banning the slave trade. Over time, they entered into individual agreements with various local rulers, settling their claims and clearly defining their subordinate position under Company rule. The allowances (*Malikhanas*) granted to the chiefs were also

adjusted in a manner that seemed acceptable to all parties.

On March 30, 1793, the British reorganised Malabar by dividing it into two administrative units, Northern and Southern, headed from Tellicherry and Cherpulasseri. Each area was placed under a Superintendent, while overall authority rested with a Supervisor and Chief Magistrate based in Calicut. This official was responsible for overseeing the entire province and coordinating the work of the Superintendents.

In 1796, however, the post of Supervisor was abolished and replaced by a special Commission appointed to investigate complaints that the Zamorin had raised against James Stevens, the outgoing Supervisor. This arrangement lasted only a few years. When Malabar was formally transferred from the Bombay Presidency to the Madras Presidency on May 20, 1800, the Commission was dissolved. Soon after, on October 1, 1801, Major Macleod took charge as the Principal Collector, assuming responsibility for the district under the new administrative setup.

1.2.2. Battle between Pazhassi Raja and the Company

During the Anglo-Mysore War, many Malabar Rajas supported the British, believing that once the fighting was over, the British would restore their traditional powers and positions. To address these expectations, a joint commission was established to clarify the agreements between the East India Company and the local rulers. Through this process, the Company formally defined the rights of each chieftain and recognised them as its local agents.

Most chiefs were allowed to collect taxes in their territories, which gave them a sense of authority and control. However, there was

one major exception: Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam. He was denied the right to collect taxes, a move that deeply angered him and eventually pushed him toward rebellion. This was particularly striking because Pazhassi Raja had earlier supported the British during the Third Anglo-Mysore War. His revolt against them did not happen all at once; instead, it unfolded in two clear phases between 1793 and 1805, marking one of the most determined resistance movements in Kerala's history.

1.2.2.1 The First Pazhassi Revolt

After Tipu Sultan's defeat, the East India Company, working together with local landlords, tried to firmly re-establish its control over Malabar. As part of this plan, the Company introduced a new taxation system that demanded higher rates. Local chiefs were given the responsibility of collecting these taxes. In Kottayam, however, the right to collect taxes was handed over to the Kurumbanad chief, even though Pazhassi Raja was the recognised ruler of the region. This provocation set the stage for conflict.

Feeling sidelined and supported by local landlords, peasants, and tribal communities, Pazhassi Raja began organising resistance against the British. A wide range of groups - Nairs, Mappilas, Kurichyas, and Kurumbas joined his struggle, turning it into a broad-based movement. When the British attacked his palace, Pazhassi retreated into the Wayanad forests. From there, he launched a guerrilla campaign, using quick, surprise attacks that exhausted the British forces and eventually drove them down to the plains. Unable to suppress him completely, the British finally agreed to negotiate. The resulting settlement offered Pazhassi an annual pension of 8,000 rupees, bringing the first phase of his uprising to an end.



1.2.2.2 The Second Pazhassi Revolt

The second phase of the Pazhassi revolt was triggered mainly by British attempts to take over Wayanad. After the fall of Seringapatam in 1799, the Partition Treaty placed Wayanad under Pazhassi Raja's authority. So when the British tried to claim the region for themselves, Pazhassi firmly resisted, insisting on his rightful control. To defend his territory, he brought together a strong force made up of Nairs, Kurichyas, and local Mappilas. With their help, he built an organised and determined guerrilla army. Key figures in this resistance included Kannavath Sankaran Nambiar, Kaiteri Ambu Nair, Edachanna Kungan Nair, and the Kurichiya leader Talakkal Chandu, all of whom played crucial roles in the struggle.

The rebellion gained new momentum when Pazhassi Raja moved down the Kuttyadi ghats and joined forces with Unni Moota Muppan and several prominent landholders of Iruvazhinad, including the Kamburath, Peruvayal, and Kannavath Nambiar families. On 1 March 1803, a group of armed rebels attacked the Calicut prison in an attempt to free the inmates. Around this time, Arthur Wellesley, who had recently taken charge of the army, personally set out to confront the growing resistance in Wayanad. Meanwhile, Pazhassi's fighters struck at British positions, raiding the fort at Panamaram and attacking plantations in Anjarakandy.

To weaken the guerrilla movement, the British responded by building new roads and setting up military camps across the region. Peasants and tribal communities continued to stand with Pazhassi, partly because they were angered by the new currency system and rising taxes introduced by the Company. Determined to break the resistance, the British offered rewards for information about Pazhassi and his men. They also created a local military force called the

Kolkar, whose knowledge of the forests and terrain proved crucial in tracking down the rebels. Over time, many of Pazhassi's leaders and fighters were captured and executed. The long struggle finally came to an end on 30 November 1805, when Pazhassi Raja was killed in an encounter with forces led by British officer Thomas Harvey Baber.

1.2.2.3 Appraisal of Pazhassi Raja

The British anthropologist Kathleen Gough described the Pazhassi uprising as an effort to reclaim the authority and traditional rights of local chieftains. However, the movement was far more than that. Pazhassi Raja drew support from a wide range of people, including Nair landlords, Mappilas, peasants, and tribal communities, all of whom were unhappy with British interference. The policies introduced by the Company had angered almost every section of society in Malabar, creating a strong wave of anti-British feeling.

Pazhassi did not stand alone; many local leaders offered him both military and moral support. Among them were the Parappanad Raja, Kannavath Shekharan Nambiar, Elampulayan Kunhan, Kaitheri Ambu, Kaiteri Kumaran, Kaiteri Eman, Puttan Veetil Rairu, Meena Koran, Shekhara Varier, Paitalott Nair, and Mylodan Kanchan Nambiar. Mappila communities from both northern and southern Malabar joined the struggle as well. Several influential figures, such as Unni Mootha Moopan of Elampilasser, Attan Gurukul of Manjeri, Chemban Pokker of Vellattiri, and Hydros Kutty of Chavakkad, played decisive roles.

The British often dismissed the southern Mappilas with derogatory labels such as "robbing Mappilas" or "jungle Mappilas." However, despite these attempts to discredit them, they remained strong allies of Pazhassi. In the north, Mappila leaders like Chalad

Thangal, Haidar Kunhikutty, Elampulan Kunhan, Vavantullan Kunhi, and Kunhi Moideen Muppan of Kurumbranad also collaborated closely with him.

Ultimately, the Pazhassi revolt was not merely about restoring the power of a single ruler. It reflected the shared resentment of

the local population, including peasants, landholders, and tribal groups, against British encroachment into their land, livelihoods, and cultural traditions. It became a collective stand against colonial domination and the disruption of their age-old way of life.

Recap

- ◆ After the Treaty of Seringapatam, the East India Company gradually consolidated control over Malabar through temporary revenue arrangements and administrative supervision rather than through immediate direct rule.
- ◆ The appointment of Joint Commissioners marked the beginning of systematic British intervention in Malabar's political, fiscal, and administrative structures.
- ◆ By monopolising the pepper trade and restructuring revenue collection, the Company transformed Malabar's economy while reducing local rulers to subordinate agents.
- ◆ Administrative reorganisation, including the division of Malabar into Northern and Southern districts, strengthened British surveillance and governance.
- ◆ Pazhassi Raja's rebellion emerged from the British refusal to recognise his traditional right to collect revenue in Kottayam, despite his earlier support for the Company.
- ◆ The first phase of the Pazhassi revolt relied on forest-based guerrilla warfare supported by peasants, landlords, and tribal communities.
- ◆ British attempts to annex Wayanad triggered the second and more intense phase of Pazhassi Raja's resistance.
- ◆ The Pazhassi movement drew strength from a broad coalition of Nairs, Mappilas, peasants, and tribal groups, giving it a mass character.
- ◆ The Company responded to resistance through military roads, local militias, monetary rewards, and systematic repression.
- ◆ The death of Pazhassi Raja in 1805 marked the end of one of the most sustained and organised anti-colonial resistance movements in early modern Kerala.

Objective Questions

1. Which treaty formally placed Malabar under British control?
2. Who were the first two Commissioners appointed to manage Malabar's administration after 1792?
3. Which commodity did the Company retain as a monopoly despite declaring free trade in Malabar?
- a) *In which year was Malabar transferred from the Bombay Presidency to the Madras Presidency?*
4. Which ruler was denied the right to collect taxes in Kottayam, triggering major resistance?
5. What form of warfare did Pazhassi Raja primarily employ against the British?
6. Which region's attempted annexation sparked the second Pazhassi revolt?
7. Name the tribal community that played a crucial role in Pazhassi Raja's resistance.
8. Who led the British forces responsible for killing Pazhassi Raja?
9. In which year did the Pazhassi revolt finally come to an end?

Answers

1. Treaty of Seringapatam (1792)
2. Mr. Farmer and Major Dow
3. Pepper
4. 1800
5. Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja

6. Guerrilla warfare
7. Wayanad
8. Kurichyas
9. Thomas Harvey Baber
10. 1805

Assignments

1. Explain the nature of resistance under Pazhassi Raja against the British.
2. Write a brief account of the Kurichiya Rebellion and its outcome.
3. Discuss the role of Malabar's social groups, such as the Mappilas, Kurichiyas, and Nairs, in resisting foreign domination.
4. "Pazhassi Raja's struggle was one of the earliest and most intense anti-British resistances in Kerala." Discuss.
5. Examine the British response to Pazhassi Raja's rebellion.

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UNIT

Resistance in Princely States

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the nature of British indirect rule in princely states through treaties, subsidiary alliances, and political control
- ◆ examine how economic pressures, military obligations, and administrative interference generated resistance in Travancore and Cochin
- ◆ explain the role of indigenous leaders such as Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan in organising opposition to British authority
- ◆ evaluate how resistance movements in princely states exposed the colonial nature of British rule

Prerequisite

Travancore and Cochin hold a special position in Kerala's early history of resistance. Unlike Malabar, which was brought under direct British control after Tipu Sultan's defeat, these two regions continued as princely states. Their rulers remained on the throne, but real authority was increasingly shaped by British influence through Residents and subsidiary treaties. Over time, this limited sovereignty created friction, as local governance had to function within boundaries set by colonial power. Such pressures gradually gave rise to resentment and resistance.

In Travancore, opposition grew as British involvement in administrative and financial matters became more intrusive. The most striking episode was the revolt led by Velu Thampi Dalawa, the Dewan of Travancore, in 1808-09. Frustrated by mounting financial obligations to the British and the steady weakening of the state's

and increase taxes, causing widespread resentment among his subjects.

Rather than apply pressure from outside, the Company tightened its hold from within. In 1800, a British Resident was appointed in Travancore to ensure strict compliance with every clause of the treaty. The mounting financial burden soon reached a breaking point. When the government tried to reduce the allowances of the Nair soldiers in 1804 to cut costs, a mutiny erupted. The British immediately used the unrest to enforce yet another treaty more favourable to their interests. Despite his displeasure, the Raja had little choice but to agree, especially under the relentless pressure of the Resident, Macaulay, and his ally, the Dalawa.

The Treaty of Perpetual Friendship and Alliance signed on 12 January 1805, marked a turning point in the relationship between Travancore and the British. Although the state continued to appear independent on paper, the treaty effectively dismantled its political, military, and financial freedom.

Under this new arrangement, the East India Company took full charge of protecting Travancore from any threat, whether from within or outside the state. In return, Travancore had to agree to heavier financial commitments. The annual subsidy it owed the Company increased significantly, creating greater pressure on the state's already fragile economy.

One of the most crucial changes was the shift in military control. The Company now had the authority to decide where its Subsidiary Force would be stationed. Previously, this decision lay with the Travancore government, but the 1805 treaty removed that privilege. Whether the British troops stayed inside Travancore or at its borders was now entirely in the hands of the Company. In short, while Travancore retained a ceremonial image of self-rule, the

treaty left the Raja with very little real power. The British gained firm control over the state's defence, finances, and administrative decisions, reducing Travancore's autonomy to a mere formal label.

1.3.2 Veluthampi in Travancore

With the introduction of the Subsidiary Alliance, many Indian states came under the indirect control of the East India Company. The princely states of Cochin and Travancore were particularly unhappy, as the arrangement allowed the Company to interfere in their internal matters and weakened the sovereignty of their rulers. The growing intrusion sparked resistance, led by two powerful figures: Velu Thampi, the Dalawa (Prime Minister) of Travancore, and Paliyathachan, the Prime Minister of Cochin.

Velu Thampi had risen to prominence after successfully organising a popular protest against administrative corruption, forcing the Travancore Raja to listen to public grievances. His influence played a major role in shaping the 1805 treaty between Travancore and the British. Tensions escalated when the British Resident, Colonel Macaulay began to meddle directly in the state's affairs. He overturned Velu Thampi's order to confiscate the lands of Mathu Tharakan, a powerful merchant who owed large sums to the Travancore treasury. Macaulay also pressured the Dalawa to pay overdue tribute to the Company at a time when the state was already facing financial difficulties. These actions further strained the relationship between Velu Thampi and the British.

Matters finally reached a breaking point on the night of 18 December 1808, when Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan launched an attack on the Resident's house in Cochin. Although their attempt failed and Macaulay managed to flee to Malabar, it marked a



decisive moment in their resistance against British domination.

1.3.2.1 Kundara Proclamation

At the beginning of the uprising, Velu Thampi moved from Alleppey to Quilon. After he left, a few British officials were killed in Alleppey, further heightening tensions. Setting up his headquarters at Kundara, he issued his well-known declaration on 11 January 1809, in which he openly accused the British of domination and urged the people to rise together in a patriotic struggle against foreign rule. His message struck a chord, and many rallied behind him.

A fierce battle soon took place at Quilon, where British forces destroyed Velu Thampi's house and inflicted heavy losses on his supporters. As the British tightened their grip and captured his key positions, Velu Thampi found himself with no way out. Rather than fall into British hands, he chose to end his life. He died by suicide at the Bhagavathi temple in Mannadi, bringing his resistance to a tragic end. His dead body was taken to Trivandrum and displayed on a Public gibbet at Kannamula by the British officials.

Although his uprising did not succeed, Velu Thampi deserves recognition as one of the early forerunners of India's freedom movement. He stands out as one of the first modern Indian leaders to mobilize ordinary people against foreign authority, drawing upon both his influence among the public and his powerful oratory to inspire resistance. While he was unable to accomplish his larger objective of overthrowing British control, the conditions of the time made success extremely difficult. The political climate, limited resources, and overwhelming strength of the British worked against him. Even so, his bold attempt left a lasting mark and occupies an important place in the early history of anti-colonial struggle in India.

1.3.3. Paliath Achan in Cochin

Paliath Achan was the head of the influential Paliam family of Nair chiefs based at Chendamangalam in present-day Ernakulam district. From 1632 to 1809, members of this family traditionally served as hereditary Prime Ministers of the Kingdom of Cochin. The Paliam household commanded vast landed estates reportedly controlling nearly half of the kingdom's land, and the Achan of the family held a position of authority next only to the ruler.

In 1731, Paliath Komi Achan, who was then the family head, was formally appointed as the Prime Minister of the Cochin Raja. Over time, several members of the family played prominent roles in the political developments of the region. Some even became involved in resistance movements directed against European powers and their local supporters.

When tensions grew between the British and native rulers, the Travancore Dalawa Velu Thampi found a dependable ally in Paliath Achan. Cochin had long been dissatisfied with the East India Company, particularly because many of its territorial disputes had been resolved in ways that weakened the state. British officials frequently interfered in Cochin's internal matters, complicating its administration. Matters escalated when the British Resident, Colonel Macaulay, granted protection to Kunhikrishna Menon of Nadavaramba, who had fallen out with the Paliath Achan. When the Resident refused to hand him over despite repeated demands, the Achan decided to join forces with Velu Thampi in launching a rebellion against British authority.

After the suppression of the revolt, the British strengthened their hold over both Cochin and Travancore. Paliath Achan was arrested and deported to Madras, and he was

never permitted to return to Cochin. Soon afterwards, on 6 May 1809, Cochin entered into a subsidiary alliance with the British, agreeing to maintain a British force within its territory for protection, thereby formalising its subordinate status under colonial power.

Recap

- ◆ The British gradually reduced Travancore from an ally to a subordinate state.
- ◆ Early trade relations later turned into political domination through treaties.
- ◆ The Subsidiary Alliance placed heavy financial burdens on Travancore.
- ◆ Increased taxes and forced payments caused widespread public resentment.
- ◆ The appointment of a British Resident weakened Travancore's internal autonomy.
- ◆ Military mutinies broke out due to financial strain and reduced allowances.
- ◆ The 1805 treaty removed Travancore's control over its defence and finances.
- ◆ Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan led resistance against British interference.
- ◆ The Kundara Proclamation called upon the people to resist foreign domination.
- ◆ The revolt ended tragically with the death of Velu Thampi in 1809.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Treaty of Perpetual Friendship and Alliance signed?
2. Which colonial strategy enabled the British to exercise control over Travancore without direct annexation?
3. Which treaty formally reduced Travancore to a position of political and military subordination to the Company?

4. Who emerged as the principal leader of resistance against British interference in Travancore?
5. Where did Velu Thampi establish his headquarters during the resistance movement?
6. Who was the hereditary Prime Minister of Cochin from the Paliath family?
7. In which year did Cochin become a subsidiary ally of the British?
8. In which year was the famous Kundara declaration issued?
9. Who was appointed as the Prime Minister of the Cochin Raja in 1731?
10. When did the Treaty of Seringapatam was signed ?

Answers

1. 1805
2. Indirect rule through the Subsidiary Alliance system
3. The Treaty of Perpetual Friendship and Alliance of 1805
4. Velu Thampi Dalawa
5. Kundara
6. Paliath Achan
7. 1809
8. 1809
9. Paliath Komi Achan
10. 1792

Assignments

1. Describe the economic and administrative policies of Velu Thampi Dalawa that brought him into conflict with the British.
2. Discuss the joint efforts of Veluthampi Dalawa and Paliath Achan in resisting British dominance.

3. Explain the importance of the Kundara Proclamation in Travancore's anti-colonial struggle.
4. Write a short account of Paliath Achan's leadership in Cochin's resistance movement.
5. How did Veluthampi's leadership influence the anti-British spirit in Kerala?

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UNIT

Resistance from Forest

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain how colonial forest legislations transformed forests from shared ecological spaces into state-controlled economic resources
- ◆ examine the impact of colonial revenue systems and forest laws on the livelihood, culture, and autonomy of tribal and hill communities
- ◆ assess the role of Pazhassi Raja and forest-dwelling communities such as the Kurichiyas, Kurumbas, and Paniyas in organising resistance through forest-based strategies
- ◆ understand guerrilla warfare, mobility, and ecological knowledge as key elements of anti-colonial resistance emerging from forest regions

Prerequisite

In Kerala, forests have never been empty stretches of greenery. For generations, they have sustained communities by providing food, shelter, medicine, and a sense of belonging. For many tribal groups and rural populations, the forest was not separate from life; it was life itself. When colonial powers began extending their authority into these regions, the forests gradually became zones of conflict. Control over land and natural resources became a priority for the colonial administration. What had once been shared and traditionally managed spaces were now brought under strict regulation. As outside authorities tried to dominate trade routes and exploit timber and other resources, resistance began to take root in these regions.

Keywords

Colonial Forestry, Adivasi Communities, Customary Rights, Forest Legislations, State Monopoly, Kurichiya Revolt, Guerrilla Warfare, Ecological Resistance, Wasteland, Adivasi

Discussion

From an environmental historical perspective, forests in pre-colonial India were not merely natural landscapes but living socio-ecological systems sustained through customary use, collective access, and ritual practices. For adivasi communities, forests functioned as spaces of subsistence, identity, and cosmology. Shifting cultivation, hunting, gathering, and seasonal mobility represented adaptive ecological strategies rather than primitive practices, ensuring sustainable interaction with the environment.

Colonial rule radically altered this relationship. The British introduced a capitalist and utilitarian vision of forests, reducing them to repositories of commercially valuable timber. Forests were no longer viewed as shared ecological commons but as economic assets to be surveyed, classified, and exploited. This transformation marked a decisive rupture in human–nature relations and laid the groundwork for forest-based resistance across India.

The establishment of the Imperial Forest Department in 1864 under Dietrich Brandis further consolidated scientific forestry, which prioritised revenue, timber extraction, and climatic theories over local ecological knowledge. The Indian Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878 expanded state control by reclassifying forests as reserved, protected, or village forests. This legal reorganisation systematically erased customary rights, criminalised subsistence activities, and rendered forest dwellers trespassers on their own land. The Forest Policy of 1894 reinforced this logic by openly declaring that

forests existed primarily to serve imperial economic interests, not community welfare. From an environmental historical lens, these policies represent ecological dispossession enforced through law.

1.4.1 Company's Forest Legislations

As human societies shifted from gathering food to growing it, forests were steadily cleared to make way for cultivation and settlements. For the adivasi communities, who had lived in and around forests for centuries, these landscapes were not just sources of livelihood; they were central to their social, economic, and ritual life. However, things began to change drastically from the late 19th century. Forest-dwelling communities, who once moved freely and used forest produce without restrictions, suddenly found themselves barred from these traditional rights. This shift was tied to the rise of a new economic mindset: the bourgeois view of the forest as a source of profit. Forests were no longer seen as shared, living spaces but as commodities that could be exploited, regulated, and owned.

When the British established their rule in India, they brought their capitalist understanding of forests with them. They introduced commercial agriculture, implemented new forms of land settlement, and expanded revenue collection. These changes accelerated the displacement of adivasis from their lands and limited their access to forest resources.



The pattern of interaction between the colonial administration and the forests of Malabar in the early phase of British rule clearly challenges the idea that colonial governance was environmentally neutral. In 1806, the British introduced a timber monopoly across Malabar and Travancore, asserting direct control over valuable forest resources. A year earlier, in 1805, the responsibility for managing the forests of Malabar had been shifted from the Madras Presidency to the Bombay Presidency, reflecting the growing administrative importance attached to forest wealth.

Before British intervention, local communities had engaged with the forests in ways that were largely regulated by customary practices and subsistence needs. However, colonial rule brought systematic extraction and large-scale exploitation, which proved far more destructive. British forest policies disrupted the traditional occupational structure of tribal communities in Malabar, many of whom depended on forest produce for their livelihood.

At the same time, the British government began passing laws to “protect” forests, but these policies were less about conservation and more about securing timber for commercial use. The demand for wood, especially for railway sleepers, led to massive deforestation. The profits from selling forest timber enriched the colonial government and British companies, while the adivasis, who had lived sustainably in the forests for generations, were pushed to the margins.

In 1855, Governor-General Lord Dalhousie issued a directive that completely changed how forests, especially teak forests, were treated in India. He declared teak a government-owned resource and banned its free trade. This marked a major shift, as what had previously been seen as “wasteland” or community space was reclassified as state

property under what became known as the Forest Charter of 1855.

A few years later, in 1864, the British created the Imperial Forest Department, which began shaping India’s forest laws with guidance from the German forester Dietrich Brandis. Brandis argued that forests played a vital role in influencing rainfall, climate, and water sources, ideas that the colonial state used to justify taking full control of forested regions.

This thinking laid the foundation for the Indian Forest Act of 1865, which granted the government sweeping powers over forests and grazing lands. The real intention behind the law was clear: to establish a complete British monopoly over India’s forest resources. Under this act, the state could regulate access, restrict traditional usage, and control timber extraction, leaving forest communities with little to no say in the management of the lands they had depended on for generations.

The Forest Act of 1878 marked another major step in extending British control over India’s wooded regions. Through this law, the colonial government claimed ownership over all *wastelands*, a term they used broadly to include forests that communities had utilised for generations. The administration was now empowered to draw boundaries and declare certain areas as reserved or protected forests.

In practice, this meant that the customary rights of local people were severely reduced or denied altogether. In protected forests, even the limited rights the government initially granted could be withdrawn at any moment. The Act also introduced a three-part classification system, dividing forests into reserved forests, protected forests, and village forests - a structure designed primarily to strengthen the state monopoly over valuable forest resources rather than safeguard community interests.

After the Forest Act of 1878, the land-use policies that followed continued to strengthen this approach. Instead of viewing forests as shared community resources, the colonial state increasingly treated them as assets to be regulated, taxed, and commercially exploited, often at the cost of the people who had traditionally depended on them.

The Forest Policy of 1894 was the first official forest policy introduced in India, and it firmly reinforced the idea that forests existed mainly to serve the colonial economy. The policy focused heavily on the commercial extraction of timber and other forest products, placing forests under firm state control and promoting settled agriculture. Much of its direction came from Dr. Voelcker's 1893 report, *Improvement of Indian Agriculture*, which influenced how the British thought forests should be used and managed.

1.4.2 Relation between Company and Forest Dwellers

British rule brought major changes to the social and economic life of the tribal communities in Malabar, especially the Kurichyas and Kurumbas, who had taken an active role in the Pazhassi uprising. The new policies introduced by the colonial administration disrupted their traditional ways of living and created serious hardships. Because they had supported Pazhassi Raja, both groups faced harsh retaliation. Many lost their small patches of land, and the British banned their traditional slash-and-burn farming practices. They were also forced to adopt the new currency system and pay taxes in cash rather than through agricultural produce, which placed an enormous burden on already vulnerable communities.

These measures pushed the tribes into deep economic distress. To meet the new

revenue demands, many were compelled to sell off their belongings through public auctions. On top of this, colonial officials treated them as inferior and subjected them to various forms of oppression, worsening the difficulties they were already facing.

1.4.3 The Kurichiya Revolt

The reforms introduced by the British created serious disruptions in the everyday life of the tribal communities. Inspired by Pazhassi Raja, many of them began to resist colonial rule. Religious figures like the Velichapads and respected elders encouraged the tribes to defend their traditions and beliefs, often invoking the Murikkanmar deities of Pulpally to strengthen their resolve. The harsh treatment they received from local British officers known as *Vattathoppikar* deeply affected their identity and way of life. As a result, many tribal fighters joined Pazhassi Raja in the hope of restoring native authority. Even local peons and policemen abandoned their posts to support the movement.

Leaders such as Ramanambi, Palakka Chanthu, Konthappan, and Neela Thodan played key roles in the uprising, which lasted from 25 March to 1 May 1812. Although the Kurichya revolt was eventually crushed by British troops from Mysore and Canara, it stands out as the only tribal rebellion in Kerala against colonial rule.

A combination of pressures pushed the tribes toward revolt: the new economic rules, changes in the currency system, the ban on slash-and-burn farming, constant harassment by British officials, the seizure of their property, social marginalisation, the inspiration of Pazhassi Raja, and the leadership of tribal headmen. Together, these factors created widespread anti-British sentiment and ultimately sparked the Kurichya uprising.



Recap

- ◆ Forests in pre-colonial Kerala functioned as complex socio-ecological systems sustained through customary use rather than formal ownership.
- ◆ Colonial rule introduced a utilitarian and capitalist conception of forests, transforming them into commodified state resources.
- ◆ British forest legislation systematically dismantled indigenous rights and redefined forest dwellers as illegal occupants.
- ◆ The Forest Act of 1865 marked a decisive shift by declaring valuable timber, especially teak, as state property.
- ◆ Scientific forestry under the Imperial Forest Department prioritised revenue extraction over ecological balance and community welfare.
- ◆ Colonial forest policies disrupted subsistence practices such as shifting cultivation, precipitating widespread economic distress among tribal communities.
- ◆ In Malabar, forest-dwelling groups like the Kurichiyas and Kurumbas formed the backbone of resistance against colonial authority.
- ◆ Pazhassi Raja's struggle exemplified forest-based resistance rooted in ecological knowledge and guerrilla warfare.
- ◆ The Kurichiya Revolt of 1812 represented a collective defence of land, livelihood, and cultural identity against colonial intrusion.
- ◆ Forest struggles across India constituted ecological protests against dispossession, revealing the inseparable link between environmental control and colonial domination.

Objective Questions

1. Which act introduced a three-part classification system, dividing forests into reserved forests, protected forests, and village forests?
2. Which tribal community in Malabar actively supported Pazhassi Raja?
3. Which department was established in 1864?
4. Who issued the Forest Charter of 1855?
5. Which report influenced the 1894 policy?

6. Who were the leaders of the Kurichya revolt?
7. Which was the first official forest policy introduced in India?
8. Which act granted the government sweeping powers over forests and grazing lands?
9. In which year did the British create the Imperial Forest Department?
10. What major change was introduced by the Forest Charter of 1855 regarding wastelands and community spaces?

Answers

1. The Indian Forest Act of 1878
2. Kurichyas and Kurumbas
3. Imperial Forest Department
4. Dalhousie
5. Voelcker
6. Ramanambi, Palakka Chanthu, Konthappan, and Neela Thodan
7. The Forest Policy of 1894
8. Indian Forest Act of 1865
9. 1864
10. Reclassification of wastelands and community-managed forest areas as government property

Assignments

1. Describe the participation of forest communities in Pazhassi Raja's resistance against the British.
2. Explain the causes and course of the Kurichiya Rebellion (1812).
3. Discuss how British forest laws affected traditional forest dwellers and triggered resistance.

4. Trace the role of tribal groups such as Kurumbas, Paniyas, and Kurichiyas in resisting colonial authority.
5. Write a note on guerrilla tactics used by forest-based resistance groups in Kerala.

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UNIT

Early Peasant Movements

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the nature of the janmi–tenant system in Malabar and how colonial land policies altered traditional agrarian relations
- ◆ assess the impact of British land revenue systems, legal reforms, and forest policies on rural society in Malabar
- ◆ analyse the economic, social, religious, and administrative factors that led to early agrarian uprisings, including revenue pressure, eviction, and indebtedness
- ◆ explain the role of landlord oppression, economic insecurity, and social inequality in triggering early peasant protests

Prerequisite

The early peasant movements in Kerala emerged as a response to deep-rooted agrarian inequalities and the transformative impact of colonial rule on traditional land relations. Kerala's agrarian structure, particularly in Malabar, was historically characterised by a hierarchical system in which *janmis* (landlords) held superior rights over land, while tenants and agricultural labourers cultivated it under varying degrees of insecurity. Though this system had its own customary regulations, the advent of British rule intensified exploitation by legally strengthening landlord rights and prioritising revenue extraction.

In the Malabar region, which came under the Madras Presidency, British land revenue policies redefined land ownership and formalised the authority of the *janmi*. Tenants were often subjected to rack-renting, eviction, and mounting indebtedness.

As revenue demands increased, peasants were forced to pay far beyond their capacity, sometimes in kind and sometimes in cash. *Janmis*, under pressure from the colonial government, began evicting traditional tenants and re-leasing the land to new occupants who could pay higher amounts. This pushed many peasants into deep misery, and naturally, their anger turned toward the *janmis*, who acted as the immediate agents of British policies. At the same time, the *janmis* also became resentful, as the British appropriated most of the surplus that once went to them.

1.5.2 The Peasant Uprisings in Malabar

Most of the peasant uprisings in the 19th century took place in the Ernad and Walluvanad taluks of South Malabar. These areas were relatively backward in education and agricultural development, yet together they contained nearly 37 percent of the district's Mappila population. In Ernad, Mappilas made up nearly 60 percent of the population, and in Walluvanad about 35 percent.

Life in these regions was far from easy, especially for the Mappilas. Apart from small-scale trading, their livelihood depended almost entirely on the land, which they held as tenants, tenants-at-will, or worked on as agricultural labourers. Their hardships grew worse because too many people depended on too little land, and because wetland farming dominated the region. Wetland cultivation made it much easier for landlords to evict tenants and impose higher rents, and these two taluks saw some of the highest eviction rates in the whole of Malabar.

With poor access to education and almost no alternative employment, land became the central hope for the Mappilas as well as others living there. Between 1836 and 1840, five uprisings were officially recorded, though

detailed reports about them are missing. Only a small number of insurgents participated in these early incidents.

1.5.2.1 Pallippuram Uprising

The uprisings in Pallipuram (April 1841) and Mannur (November 1841) stemmed from growing conflicts between peasants and landlords in Malabar. The most notable case involved Kunholan, a tenant who lost his land through an overlease and killed his landlord with the help of his sons and neighbours. Believing that their actions would grant them martyrdom, the group attacked a village peon who disturbed their prayer and then the landlord, whose complaint they feared would lead to further loss of land. Supported by local Mappilas, they resisted arrest and chose to fight the army rather than surrender, resulting in the death of all eleven rebels.

Similar small-scale uprisings continued through the early 1840s, with incidents reported in Pallipuram, Tirurangadi, and Pandikkad. In each case, small groups of Mappilas targeted local officials or landlords whom they viewed as oppressors. However, these events were recorded only in brief and factual official reports, which did not explore the deeper social, economic, or tenurial tensions created by colonial policies and worsening peasant–landlord relations.

1.5.2.2 Manjeri Uprising

The Manjeri uprising was a small but intense revolt led by Athan Moyan Gurukkal and Kunhi Koya Tangal. Most of those who joined them were poor Mappila tenants and labourers who lived with constant hardship and had little to lose. Athan Gurukkal came from a family known for resisting authority, and he was respected for settling disputes in his community. When he once protected a poor Mappila accused of theft, the authorities restricted his activities, cutting off his traditional means of livelihood. Soon after, he was falsely implicated in a robbery,



Athan Gurukkal decided to move to the Angadippuram temple, which was believed to have enough provisions for survival. As Conolly later noted, the rebels mainly wanted an open space for direct combat and a secure place for food and defence. They had no intention of desecrating temples; if they had wanted to, they had plenty of chances during the week when the area lay unprotected. Instead, they stayed only to fight, not to escape, and ultimately met their end in battle on 4 September 1849, choosing to die with weapons in their hands.

1.5.2.3 Mattannur Uprising

The Mattannur uprising in North Malabar clearly showed how deeply land-related tensions drove many of the nineteenth-century Mappila revolts. The conflict began with nine men from the Chooryoot and Tayyil families, both tenants of the powerful and unpopular Kallatil Brahmin, a wealthy landlord, pepper trader, and moneylender. His frequent rent hikes, harsh treatment, and the threat of eviction pushed these families into desperation. Wealthy Mappilas of the Kottale family, who had their own rivalry with the Brahmin over land, encouraged the tenants to resist. Because the Kottale family had both resources and influence, ordinary Mappila peasants saw them as defenders against oppressive landlords.

With their support, the tenants prepared for a violent uprising. After a symbolic pilgrimage to Mamburam, they quietly planned for two months and then acted. On 5 January 1852, they attacked the Kallatil Brahmin's house, killing him and his household, burning records, searching for valuables, and taking cash. They then moved toward Irikkur to help another wealthy Mappila, Vallapillangath Hassan Kutty, who was locked in a long-standing land dispute with the powerful Hindu landlord Kuliath Anandan. However, when

they attacked Anandan's fortified house on 8 January 1852, they were met by hundreds of armed defenders. In the fierce fight that followed, all the rebels were killed, bringing the uprising to a violent end.

1.5.2.4 Malabar Rebellion

During the nineteenth century, while the Malabar district was experiencing gradual developments in administration, economy, and social life, it was also troubled by a series of violent incidents commonly referred to as the Mappila Rebellions. Between 1836 and 1856, about twenty-two outbreaks were reported from various parts of Malabar, especially in the taluks of Ernad and Valluvanad. Many of these incidents involved attacks by groups of Mappilas against Hindu janmi landlords, and in several cases temples were also targeted.

The causes behind these disturbances have long been debated. One interpretation presented them primarily as acts driven by religious fanaticism. This view was strongly supported by Thomas Lumisden Strange, who was assigned to investigate the uprisings. He concluded that the disturbances were deliberate acts motivated by religious zeal and advised the government to adopt strict measures to suppress them. Following his recommendation, the colonial administration established the Malabar Special Police in 1854 to deal firmly with such incidents.

Despite these repressive steps, violence did not immediately subside. In 1855, a dramatic incident occurred when Henry Valentine Connolly, the District Magistrate of Malabar, was assassinated in his residence at Calicut by four Mappila prisoners, highlighting the continuing unrest in the region. As disturbances continued in Malabar, a growing number of observers began to argue that the Mappila Rebellions were rooted less in religious motives and more in severe agrarian distress and widespread poverty.

Several factors including persistent poverty, agrarian grievances, and elements of religious hostility continued to fuel dissatisfaction among sections of the Mappila community and occasionally led to violent incidents. Over time, however, new employment opportunities in the army, plantations, railways, and expanding commercial sectors, along with the gradual spread of modern education among more prosperous Mappilas, helped to ease tensions and contributed to a more stable social environment.

1.5.3 Extent and Nature of Peasant Exploitation

In Malabar, British rule was met with resistance from many sections of society, including local chiefs, members of royal families, landlords, peasants, and tribal communities. Among these, the strongest and most prolonged opposition came from the Mappila peasantry in the southern taluks of Ernad, Valluvanad, and Ponnani. From the 1830s to the 1880s, these regions became the centre of several agrarian uprisings. The protests were directed not only against the British authorities but also against the Hindu upper-caste landlords who controlled the land.

The root cause of these movements lay in the agrarian policies imposed by the colonial government. After Mysorean rule ended, the British reinstated the earlier social and economic system, which placed landownership firmly in the hands of upper-caste Hindu landlords and turned land into private property. This shift triggered widespread unrest, especially in the southern taluks. Between 1836 and 1853 alone, twelve major uprisings were recorded.

Rural poverty and disruptions in agriculture, exacerbated by British policies, pushed peasants into revolt. The British extracted a high amount of land revenue from

Malabar; for example, in 1821, the collection reached 94,749. Their revenue system had two defining features: the state claimed the largest portion of the agricultural produce, and the landlord (*Janmi*) was recognised as the absolute owner of the land. These measures reinforced the power of upper-caste landlords and deepened the hardships of the peasants, setting the stage for repeated resistance.

The British collected an extremely large share of land revenue in Malabar. In some southern taluks like Ernad, Valluvanad, Palghat, and Ponnani, they took almost 70% of the income from agricultural crops. Under this system, revenue agreements were made with intermediaries and *janmies*. The actual cultivators, the peasants who worked the land, received only about one-third of what they produced.

At the same time, Malabar's population was growing. However, there was no new industry, no technological improvement, and no increase in cultivable land. This created serious pressure on the tenants. The government often demanded more produce than the fixed land revenue. Because land was limited and demand for it was high, landlords could easily raise rents and evict tenants more frequently.

Evictions became another major cause of unrest. Tenants could be thrown out for many minor reasons: late rent, failure to offer customary gifts, not obeying social rules, or even an accidental remark. The competitive tenancy system forced peasants to produce surplus, pay heavy rents, and borrow money from intermediaries. This pushed many families into poverty and increased their fear of eviction. All these pressures, poverty, debt, high rents, and constant insecurity led peasants in the southern taluks to revolt. Some attacked and killed oppressive landlords. They did not run away afterward, as many

believed they were sacrificing themselves for a higher cause and saw their actions in terms of *shahid* (martyrdom).

British officials tried to explain these uprisings as religious conflicts, usually portraying them as clashes between Hindu landlords and Mappila peasants. However, the Mappila peasants were primarily reacting to harsh British policies and exploitative landlords. Later, William Logan clearly linked these revolts to rural poverty and the deep agricultural distress in the region.

In 1881, the British government appointed William Logan as a special commissioner to investigate the Mappila uprisings in the southern taluks of Malabar. Logan conducted an in-depth study by examining official records, travelling through villages, and interviewing thousands of people. He spoke to 7,994 peasants and discovered that 4,401 of them were trapped in debt amounting to nearly 17 lakh rupees, with interest rates ranging from 12% to as high as 36%. Logan's report focused on the real issues behind the unrest: poverty, harsh agricultural relations, illegal evictions, and the heavy burden placed on tenants. He argued that these were the true causes of the riots, not religion.

Logan challenged the usual colonial interpretation that framed the uprisings as Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Instead, he highlighted the economic and agrarian problems that affected cultivators and exposed the power imbalance between tenants and landlords. To address the root causes, Logan suggested several reforms. He recommended reducing the rent on cultivated land, banning unauthorised evictions, and protecting tenants from additional duties and unfair taxes. He also stressed the need to regulate moneylenders and to ensure compensation for tenants who were evicted. Logan proposed new laws to clearly define the rights and responsibilities

of cultivators and landlords, including the idea of *kudikidappu*, the right of tenants to remain in their homesteads. His proposals influenced the Tenant Improvement Act of 1887, which introduced compensation for tenants for improvements they had made to the land.

1.5.4 The Background of Tenurial Contradiction

The history of land relations in Kerala is usually examined in three broad phases: the pre-colonial period, the era of colonial rule, and the years after independence. Kerala's tenure system had several unique characteristics. It was primarily a caste-based *janmi* system, and for centuries it shared many similarities with European feudalism, though the caste hierarchy gave it a distinct form. These patterns emerged partly due to Kerala's geography and partly because of the long survival of numerous small kingdoms and principalities, each with its own administrative traditions. Scholars have often noted that Kerala had one of the most complex and varied sets of land tenures, not only in India but also when compared to many regions of the world.

The way land was held and managed in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore did not develop in a uniform manner. Each area evolved its own tenurial system and agrarian structure, and these differences still influence Kerala's socio-economic landscape. Even so, certain features were common across all three regions. Chief among them was the dominance of upper-caste groups in the highest layers of land ownership and authority.

In Malabar, the social and political setup before Haidar Ali's invasion in 1766 was very similar to the rest of Kerala. The region was divided among several small rulers who frequently fought one another, resembling

a feudal order. Society was strictly divided along caste lines, with the Namboothiri Brahmins at the top. Land was owned mainly by four groups: the Rajas, temples, Namboothiris, and Naduvazhis.

Crown lands, known as *cherikal* lands, were the primary source of income for the Rajas. Temple lands, or *Devaswom* lands, belonged to the temples. The Namboothiris had gained vast areas of land through religious grants, while Naduvazhis held land in proportion to the number of Nair warriors they maintained, ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand, to support the kings during warfare. Three major types of land tenure were common in Malabar: Verumpattom, Kanam, and Kuzhikanam.

Verumpattom

Under this system, the tenant (*kudiyan*) received only a small portion of the produce, usually equal to the amount of seed plus an equivalent amount, while the rest went to the *janmi*.

Kanam

The tenant's share was minimal, often only about ten per cent. Rent was usually paid either in cash or as a fixed share of the harvest. The landlord retained the right to reclaim the land at any time simply by repaying the principal amount, though in practice, evictions were rare, and *kanakkarars* (usually Nairs) continued to hold the land for generations.

Kuzhikanam

In this system, the *kanakkaran* was allowed to enjoy the full produce of the land for a fixed period, usually two or more years. Once the period ended, he was entitled to compensation for any improvements he had made, in addition to getting back the money he had lent.



Land belonging to Namboothiris, temples, Rajas, and chieftains was cultivated under these various tenures. Since the upper castes, especially the Namboothiris and Nairs,

considered agricultural labour beneath their social status, most of the actual cultivation was carried out by enslaved communities.

Recap

- ◆ British interference in Malabar's agrarian system transformed the *janmi*-tenant hierarchy, imposed direct taxation, and intensified the exploitation and vulnerability of peasants.
- ◆ Early peasant movements employed a spectrum of resistance strategies, including petitions, boycotts, migration to forests, and at times violent uprisings, in response to landlord oppression and economic hardship.
- ◆ The Pallippuram, Manjeri, and Mattannur uprisings exemplify how Mappila tenants mobilised against oppressive landlords and colonial authorities, reflecting the interplay of economic distress and social injustice.
- ◆ Systemic factors such as high rents, evictions, debt, and inadequate access to cultivable land underpinned recurring agrarian unrest in Ernad, Valluvanad, and Ponnani during the nineteenth century.
- ◆ The Malabar Rebellion of 1921 emerged from deep-seated grievances over colonial land policies and exploitative tenancy, initially encompassing multi-communal participation before gradually assuming a communalised character under conditions of repression.
- ◆ Three major types of land tenure were common in Malabar: *Verumpattom*, *Kanam*, and *Kuzhikanam*.

Objective Questions

1. Which community mainly held Kanam rights?
2. What were the crown lands called?
3. Who were the key leaders of the Manjeri uprising of 1849?
4. Temple lands were known as?
5. Who proclaimed the "Republic of Ernad"?
6. What were the primary causes that led to the Malabar Rebellion of 1921?

7. Who were the principal leaders of the Malabar Rebellion in Ernad and Valluvanad?
8. Who led the Manjeri uprising?
9. In which year did the Manjeri uprising occur?
10. Which North Malabar uprising occurred in 1852?

Answers

1. Nairs
2. Cherikal
3. Athan Moyan Gurukkal and Kunhi Koya Tangal
4. Devaswom
5. Kunhammad Haji
6. Economic exploitation under British rule, oppressive land revenue systems, harsh treatment by landlords, and immediate triggers such as the arrest of Mappila leaders and rumours of mosque desecration.
7. Variamkunnath Kunhammad Haji, Kalathingal Mammad, and Ali Musaliar in Ernad; Sithi Koya Thangal and Embichi Koya Thangal in Valluvanad.
8. Athan Gurukkal
9. 1849
10. Mattannur

Assignments

1. Explain how land tenure systems contributed to peasant discontent in 19th-century Kerala.
2. Discuss the nature of early peasant protests in Malabar under colonial rule.
3. Describe the role of peasants in resisting *janmi* oppression during the pre-modern period.

4. Write a short note on the *Mappila* peasant resistance in Malabar.
5. Analyse the impact of British administrative interventions on Kerala's agrarian structure.
6. Trace the socio-economic factors that triggered early peasant unrest in Travancore and Cochin.

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BLOCK

Towards Modernity



UNIT

The Role of Missionaries

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ introduced to the activities of Church Mission Society, London Missionary Society and Basel Mission in Kerala
- ♦ familiarised the role of missionaries in bringing modernity to Kerala society
- ♦ made aware of the spread of Western education in Kerala through the missionaries

Prerequisite

This unit requires learners to have a basic understanding of the historical role of Christian missionaries in Kerala, especially during the nineteenth century, a period marked by social and cultural awakening. During this time, traditional social structures and practices were increasingly questioned, and reform movements began to emerge.

Learner should be familiar with the contributions of social reformers and the activities of Christian missionary groups in promoting education, social awareness, and institutional change. While missionary work was closely connected to the colonial system, their interventions also helped encourage social mobility, literacy, and new forms of social organisation.

An awareness of the complex relationship among missionary activities, colonial rule, and social reform is essential to critically understand the transformations in Kerala society discussed in this unit.

Keywords

Missionaries, Church Mission Society, London Missionary Society, Basel Mission, Western education, modern healthcare

Discussion

Western education began to spread in Kerala at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Three major missionary groups played an important role in this process: the Church Mission Society, the London Missionary Society and the Basel Mission. The Church Mission Society expanded its work across Travancore and Cochin. The London Missionary Society worked mainly in southern Travancore. The Basel Mission focused on the Malabar region. Their initiatives marked a significant turning point in Kerala's social and cultural history.

2.1.1 The Church Mission Society

The Church Mission Society (CMS) played a major role in the spread of modern education in Central Kerala during the nineteenth century. Its missionaries introduced new educational practices, established schools, and worked among different social groups, contributing significantly to Kerala's educational development.

The first CMS missionary to reach Travancore was Rev. Thomas Norton, who arrived in 1816. He began his work in the Alappuzha region, especially among oppressed caste groups. Soon after, other missionaries such as Benjamin Bailey (1816), Joseph Fenn (1818), and Henry Baker Sr. (1819) continued and expanded CMS activities, mainly among the Syrian Christian community in and around Kottayam.

The CMS missionaries quickly turned their attention to formal education. They

established a grammar school in Kottayam in 1821. Before 1825 they had opened a girls' school in Alappuzha. In 1820, Amelia Baker founded the first girls' school in Kottayam, marking an important step in women's education. CMS College at Kottayam, founded in 1817, also became a major centre of higher learning under the leadership of its first principal, Benjamin Bailey. Meanwhile, in 1818, Rev. J. Dawson, with support from the Cochin Government, established an English school in Mattancherry. By 1878, the CMS missionaries were running 141 schools across the region. Benjamin Bailey established the CMS Press at Kottayam in 1821, marking the beginning of large-scale Malayalam printing in Kerala.

Through their efforts, the CMS missionaries laid the foundation for modern primary and higher education in Kerala. Their schools, colleges, and initiatives in women's education played a crucial role in shaping the region's educational landscape.

2.1.2 The London Missionary Society

The London Missionary Society (LMS) was established in Travancore with the support of Col. Munroe. The first phase of Protestant missionary work began in 1806 under the leadership of the Prussian missionary Wilhelm Ringeltaube, who established schools in Nagercoil and other centres in southern Travancore. After Ringeltaube, Rev. Charles Mead, who arrived in 1817, became the most prominent missionary of



the LMS. He expanded the mission's educational activities across southern Travancore and played a leading role in its development between 1817 and 1873.

In 1818, Mead and Knill, the successors of Ringletaube, established a seminary at Nagercoil, around which a boarding school and a day school were also opened. Mrs. Charles Mead founded the first girls' school in Travancore, marking a major step forward in women's education. In 1831, the Maharaja of Travancore visited the Nagercoil seminary and invited the missionary John Roberts to establish a school in Thiruvananthapuram. The Free Schools established by John Roberts later developed into University College Thiruvananthapuram. At the request of the Maharaja, the printing press set initially up at Nagercoil was shifted by the missionaries to Thiruvananthapuram, where it eventually became the Government Press.

By 1824, LMS missionaries were operating 47 schools in different parts of southern Travancore. Although the Travancore government initially did not permit missionary work in Thiruvananthapuram, this policy changed in 1838. In that year, the King granted land at Kannanmoola to Rev. Cox, an LMS missionary supported by the British Resident, Fraser. Within eight years, the missionaries established 14 boys' schools and 3 girls' schools in the capital.

Western education was a central area of LMS missionary activity. The missionaries opened schools for children of all castes and religions, creating educational opportunities for oppressed caste groups who had previously been denied access to formal learning. They established day schools in villages, boarding schools in major centres, and placed strong emphasis on the education

of women.

2.1.3 Basel Mission

The Basel German Evangelical Mission played a major role in laying the foundation for Western education in the Malabar region. The first group of Basel missionaries arrived in Kozhikode in 1834, and their work was mainly concentrated in the northern parts of Kerala. They aimed to establish vernacular elementary schools in the areas under their mission and admitted students from all castes and religions.

The Basel Mission started its educational work in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first mission school in Malabar was opened in Thalassery in 1839, followed by an English school in Kannur in 1841. Later, they set up a primary school in Kallai (1848) and an English school in Thalassery (1856). Vernacular schools were also established in Chombala and Kozhikode in 1864, and a Franco-vernacular school opened in Mahe in 1881. In 1866, the Basel Mission founded a high school in Palakkad that later became the Government Victoria College. They also established educational institutions such as the Malabar Christian College. Girls were taught reading, writing, sewing, and weaving as part of the mission's commitment to women's education. By 1900, with British support, more than forty Basel Mission schools were operational across Malabar, including in Kasaragod, Taliparamba, Melparamba, Ottapalam, Vaniyamkulam, Vadakara, Koyilandy, Koothuparamba, Kannur, Payyannur, Palakkad, Vadakkancherry, Kozhikode, and Thalassery.

The Basel Mission also contributed to healthcare and industry. Dr. E. Lieben Darfer opened the first mission hospital in Kozhikode

in 1892, and a leprosy hospital was established at Chevayur in 1903. Dispensaries were later opened at Vaniyamkulam and Sultan Bathery. The missionaries encouraged local employment by starting a weaving factory and dye house in Kannur in 1852, and a tile manufacturing factory in 1854. Through these educational, medical, and industrial initiatives, the Basel Mission made a lasting impact on the development of the Malabar region.

While the missionaries' primary objective was evangelisation and the training of new converts, their role in shaping Kerala's educational landscape remains significant. Their efforts opened the doors of learning to the oppressed caste people who had long been denied access to education. The introduction of English education broadened people's horizons, enabling them to engage with modern Western ideas. Thus, the missionaries made a lasting contribution to the social and intellectual transformation of Kerala.

Recap

- ◆ Western education began to spread in Kerala in the early nineteenth century.
- ◆ Missionaries played a key role in this process.
- ◆ Three major missionary groups involved in this process were the Church Mission Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Basel Mission.
- ◆ The Church Mission Society worked mainly in Travancore and Cochin.
- ◆ The London Missionary Society focused on southern Travancore.
- ◆ The Basel Mission concentrated on the Malabar region.
- ◆ Their efforts opened the doors of education to oppressed caste communities.
- ◆ The missionaries made a lasting contribution to the social and intellectual transformation of Kerala.
- ◆ Their efforts marked an important turning point in Kerala's social and cultural history.

Objective Questions

1. Which missionary initiated the activities of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Kerala?

2. The Free School established in Thiruvananthapuram under the supervision of the London Missionary Society later became which college?
3. Who was the first missionary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to begin work in Travancore?
4. Benjamin Bailey was a member of which missionary group?
5. Under whose leadership did the Church Missionary Society (CMS) establish the first girls' school in Kottayam?
6. Which missionary group played the primary role in the Malabar region?
7. Where did the Basel Mission establish their first mission school in Malabar?

Answers

1. Wilhelm Ringletaube
2. University College
3. Rev. Thomas Norton
4. Church Missionary Society (CMS)
5. Amelia Baker
6. Basel German Evangelical Mission
7. Thalassery

Assignments

1. Discuss the social and educational awakening in Kerala after the arrival of the Christian Missionaries.
2. Examine the role of the London Missionary Society in the socio-educational sector in Kerala.
3. Discuss the role of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the spread of modern education in Central Kerala.
4. Explain the role of the Basel German Evangelical Mission in educational and humanitarian fields in the Malabar region.

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UNIT

Impact of Missionary Activism

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ assess the social and educational engagement of Christian missionaries in Kerala
- ◆ understand Missionary activism in Kerala
- ◆ examine the impact of the introduction of the printing press
- ◆ locate the encouragement of local employment by the Missionaries through the establishment of some industries
- ◆ assess the anti-caste activities by the Missionaries

Prerequisite

This unit requires learners to have a basic understanding of the social conditions of Kerala in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the caste system functioned as a major structure of social exploitation. During this period, access to education was largely controlled by elite castes, which limited wider exposure to modern and progressive ideas.

Learners should be familiar with the limited nature of educational opportunities and how social hierarchy shapes access to knowledge. They should also be aware that Christian missionaries were among the first to make systematic efforts to extend education to oppressed caste communities. An understanding of this historical background is essential for engaging meaningfully with the themes and arguments discussed in this unit.

Keywords

Christian Missionaries, printing press, Arnos Padiri, *Hortus Malabaricus*, *Samkshepa Vedartham*, Benjamin Bailey, Hermann Gundert, anti-caste activities,

Discussion

The social and educational engagement of Christian missionaries in Kerala began in the mid-sixteenth century following the arrival of the Portuguese. The Jesuits, a Roman Catholic missionary order, were the pioneers in this endeavour. They established seminaries and religious educational institutions in centres such as Kodungallur, Angamaly, and Vaipikota, and opened the first school in Cochin. Subsequently, educational centres were set up in Varappuzha and Kollam, offering instruction in Portuguese and Latin. Several missionaries, including Bishop Francis Ros, contributed significantly to the development of the Malayalam language. Among them, Ernst Hanxleden - popularly known as Arnos Padiri - deserves special mention. A German Jesuit and eminent Malayalam scholar, Arnos Padiri compiled the first Malayalam dictionary and authored notable literary works, including *Puthanpana*. However, by the nineteenth century, Catholic missionary educational activities had declined considerably. This decline was largely due to British patronage of Protestant missionaries and the reluctance of Portuguese Jesuits and Italian Carmelites to embrace English education.

2.2.1 New Mode of Education: Emergence of Printing and New Industries

Protestant missionaries, supported by the rulers of Travancore and Cochin and the British administration, played a decisive role in introducing Western education in

Kerala. Although their primary objective was religious conversion and their activities were shaped by the colonial ideology of the 'white man's burden', their interventions contributed - both directly and indirectly - to a broader social awakening in the region.

The activities of Christian missionaries played a decisive role in the development of the Malayalam language, particularly through the introduction of printing. Printing in Kerala began in the sixteenth century with the initiatives of Roman Catholic missionaries, especially the Jesuits. Printing presses were established at centres such as Kochi, Kollam, Vaippikkotta, and Ambazhakad. The first book printed was a Tamil translation of *Doctrina Christiana*, originally written by St. Francis Xavier. In fact, all four Jesuit presses initially produced works exclusively in Tamil rather than Malayalam. Thus, although printing was introduced early in Kerala, Malayalam as a printed language emerged only gradually.

The Malayalam script first appeared in print in *Hortus Malabaricus*, a monumental botanical encyclopedia prepared under Dutch patronage with the assistance of indigenous medical practitioners of Kerala. Written in Latin, the work was published in twelve volumes in Amsterdam between 1678 and 1703 and is recognised as the earliest printed text to contain Malayalam words.

Catholic missionaries made significant contributions to the codification of the Malayalam language through grammatical and lexicographical works. The first



grammar of Malayalam was prepared by Fr. Anjelose Francis in 1712. The first Malayalam dictionary was compiled by Arnos Padiri (John Ernestus Hanxleden), a German Jesuit who arrived in Kerala in 1699. In addition to his grammatical and lexicographical works, Arnos Padiri also composed several Malayalam poems. A major milestone in Malayalam printing was the publication of *Samkshepa Vedartham* written by Fr. Clement and printed in Rome in 1772. This was the first complete book printed in Malayalam using Malayalam types.

A new phase in Malayalam printing began when printing was undertaken within India itself. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Protestant missionaries arriving in Kerala engaged in a serious study of the language. In 1799, Robert Drummond published *A Grammar of the Malayalam Language* from Bombay, which is regarded as the first Malayalam book printed in India. Another grammar was compiled by F. Spring. Both works were intended primarily to help officials of the English East India Company learn Malayalam.

Printing within Kerala itself had to wait until the arrival of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and its missionaries at Kottayam. Benjamin Bailey played a pioneering role in this phase. He established the CMS Press at Kottayam in 1821, marking the beginning of large-scale Malayalam printing in Kerala. The first Malayalam book printed at this press appeared in 1824. It was a collection of eight children's stories translated from English by Bailey himself. In 1846, Bailey published a Malayalam–English dictionary. He further contributed to the growth of Malayalam journalism by publishing the first Malayalam magazine, *Jnanikshepam*, from the CMS Press in 1848. Benjamin Bailey also played a crucial role in reforming the Malayalam script. Prior to the advent of printing, Malayalam

was written in a style known as *chathura vativu* (square form). Bailey modified this into *vatta vativu* (round form), which was more suitable for printing and became the standard script.

A Catholic priest and social reformer, Chavara Kuriakose Elias, established a press in 1846 at Mannanam. The first publication of this press, which officially began operations under the name St. Joseph Press, was a prayer book called *Jnana Peeyusham*. In 1887, a newspaper called *Nasrani Deepika* was started.

Parallel developments took place under state and other missionary initiatives. A government printing press was established at Thiruvananthapuram in 1836 during the reign of Swathi Thirunal, and a lithographic press was added there in 1865. Dr. Hermann Gundert, a Basel Mission missionary, made notable contributions to Malayalam printing in northern Kerala. In 1842, the Basel Mission established a printing press at Mangalore, from which several of Gundert's Malayalam works were published. He later set up a lithographic press at Illickunnu Bungalow near Thalassery, which became the first printing press in northern Kerala. From this press, the first Malayalam newspaper, *Rajyasamacharam*, was published in 1847, followed by another newspaper, *Paschimodayam*, in the same year. Together, these missionary and institutional efforts laid the foundations for the growth of Malayalam printing, literature, journalism, and modern linguistic standardization.

Along with educational institutions, the missionaries encouraged local employment. For this purpose, they started some industries. They established a weaving factory and a dye house in Kannur in 1852, and a tile manufacturing factory in 1854.

2.2.2 Impact of Missionary Activism

One of the most significant aspects of nineteenth-century social change in Kerala was the role played by Christian missionaries in challenging caste oppression. Missionary organisations, such as the Church Mission Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Basel Mission, actively opposed entrenched caste hierarchies in Kerala.

Missionary initiatives played a crucial role in improving the social mobility of oppressed caste communities through modern education. Several missionaries, including Norton, Mrs. Baker, Joseph Peet, John Hawksworth, Mead, and others, established schools and boarding institutions for enslaved and marginalized caste groups in Travancore and Cochin. These efforts often faced fierce resistance from dominant castes. The first school opened under the Thiruvalla Mission in 1850 was attacked and nearly burned down on multiple occasions. Similarly, the admission of students from oppressed castes to the CMS College, Kottayam, during the tenure of its principal Richard Collins (1855–65), led to strong protests from dominant caste groups and ultimately resulted in his removal.

Missionaries also took a strong stand against the system of slavery prevalent in the region and, at times, openly opposed British colonial authorities. For instance, during the *Channar* women's agitation (1858–59)

demanding the right to wear upper cloths, missionaries criticised the British Resident for failing to support the movement.

The education of girls was another area in which Protestant missionaries made pioneering contributions. The CMS and LMS, along with the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, placed considerable emphasis on female education. Under the leadership of missionaries such as Mrs Norton, Mrs Benjamin Bailey, Mrs Henry Baker, and Augusta Blandford, numerous girls' schools were established across Travancore. At this time, the Travancore government showed little interest in promoting female education. By the mid-nineteenth century, only two government-run girls' schools existed - one for Christian girls in the Cantonment (1858) and another for Brahmin girls in Karamana (1859). Notably, the first government girls' school was established nearly four decades after missionaries had opened the first girls' school in 1819.

By the first half of the nineteenth century, Christian missionary activities had expanded vigorously across Travancore, Cochin, and British Malabar. Their presence and activities brought about a fundamental transformation in Kerala's educational landscape, facilitating the dissemination of Western education and liberal ideas. In sum, the educational and social interventions of Christian missionaries played a crucial role in Kerala's nineteenth-century social transformation.

Recap

- ◆ The social and educational work of Christian missionaries in Kerala began in the middle of the sixteenth century.
- ◆ Jesuit missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church were the first to take up this work.



- ◆ During the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries played a key role in spreading Western education in Kerala.
- ◆ They received support from the rulers of Travancore and Cochin and from the British government.
- ◆ Missionary activities greatly influenced the growth of the Malayalam language.
- ◆ They promoted Malayalam mainly through the introduction of printing.
- ◆ *Hortus Malabaricus*, prepared with Dutch support, is considered the earliest printed work that included Malayalam words.
- ◆ Arnos Padiri, also known as John Ernestus Hanxleden, compiled the first Malayalam dictionary.
- ◆ In 1821, Benjamin Bailey established the CMS Press at Kottayam, which led to large-scale printing in Malayalam.
- ◆ Dr. Hermann Gundert of the Basel Mission made important contributions to Malayalam printing in northern Kerala.
- ◆ Missionaries also helped to start several industries in the region.
- ◆ They played an important role in questioning and opposing caste-based discrimination.
- ◆ Christian missionaries were pioneers in promoting education for girls in Kerala.

Objective Questions

1. In which field did the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society mainly work?
2. Which work was the first to have Malayalam words in print?
3. Who compiled the first Malayalam dictionary?
4. Which is the first complete book printed in Malayalam which used Malayalam types?
5. Who founded CMS Press in Kottayam?
6. Where did Chavara Kuriakose Elias establish his press?

7. Who took the initiative to establish the first printing press in the Malabar region?
8. Who was the principal of Kottayam CMS College who faced strong protests from upper-caste sections for admitting students from oppressed castes during 1855–65?
9. Where did missionaries establish a weaving factory in the Malabar region?

Answers

1. Female education
2. Hortus Malabaricus
3. Arnos Padiri (John Ernestus Hanxleden)
4. *Samkshepa Vedartham*
5. Benjamin Bailey
6. Mannanam
7. Dr. Hermann Gundert
8. Richard Collins
9. Kannur

Assignments

1. Discuss the impact of the Missionary activism in Kerala.
2. Analyse the role of the Missionaries in the introduction of new mode of education in Kerala.

3. Examine the cultural impact of the establishment of printing in Malayalam.
4. Discuss the Missionary activism in Kerala against caste oppression.

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UNIT

New Aesthetics

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the emergence of new literary genres in Malayalam
- ◆ assess the development of Malayalam poetry
- ◆ examine the major phases of the development of the writing of novels and short stories in Malayalam
- ◆ evaluate the Western literary traditions in Malayalam literature

Prerequisite

Until the nineteenth century, Malayalam literary writing was in the hands of the elite sections of society. During that period, *kavyas* with an emphasis on Sanskrit were the primary form of writing. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Malayalam literature began to undergo modernisation. The rigid traditional structures of poetry were broken, and new literary forms such as the novel emerged under the influence of Western literary traditions. Along with the development of short stories, Malayalam literature gradually moved towards a modern literary culture.

Keywords

New literary genres, Novels, Poetry, Short stories, Western influence, Social critique.



Discussion

Emergence of New Literary Genres

2.3.1. Malayalam Poetry

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, a vigorous debate ensued over the fundamental principles of poetry between Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran and A. R. Raja Raja Varma. The former represents the conservative poetic tendency and the latter represents progressive literary culture. Almost all major literary figures of the time aligned themselves with one or the other camp. The immediate literary outcome of this polarisation was the composition of two Mahakavyas: *Umakeralam* by Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer, representing the traditional school, and *Kesaviyam* by K. C. Kesava Pillai, representing the progressive outlook. This clash of ideas helped Malayalam poetry renew its creative vitality.

The poetic expressions of Kumaran Asan, Vallathol Narayana Menon, and Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer marked the emergence of a significant era of Malayalam poetry. Each of these poets possessed a distinct individuality and was guided by independent ideals, thereby enriching Malayalam poetry with diversity and depth. Among them, Kumaran Asan alone did not compose a *Mahakavya*; nevertheless, his short lyrical poem *Veena Puvu* earned him enduring fame as a Mahakavi. Asan introduced Romanticism into Malayalam poetry with remarkable sensitivity and richness, foregrounding love and compassion as central poetic values. His major works include *Veena Puvu*, *Nalini*, *Lila*, *Sri Buddha Charitam*, *Prarodanam*, *Chintavishtaya ya Sita*, *Duravastha*, *Chandala Bhikshuki*, and *Karuna*. His long association with the S.N.D.P. Yogam as General Secretary enabled him to develop a deep awareness of the social

realities of Kerala. This consciousness of social inequality inspired him to challenge caste oppression and advocate reform, themes powerfully articulated in poems such as *Duravastha* and *Chandala Bhikshuki*. In every sense, Asan was a revolutionary figure who liberated Malayalam poetry - and Kerala's social consciousness - from the constraints of rigid traditionalism.

Vallathol Narayana Menon is often described as the poet of Indian nationalism and freedom, though nationalism represents only one dimension of his poetic achievement. From *Chitrayogam* to the poems collected in *Sahitya Manjari*, one can trace the intellectual and artistic evolution of this master poet. Vallathol excelled in reinterpreting Puranic themes with dramatic vitality and romantic charm. His major works include *Badhira Vilapam*, *Bandhanasthanaya Anirudhan*, *Sishyanum Makanum*, *Magdalana Mariyam*, *Kochu Sita*, *Achanum Makalum*, and *Sahitya Manjari*. He also enriched Malayalam literature through his translations of the *Valmiki Ramayana* and the *Rig Veda*.

Most of Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer's works are based on Puranic or historical themes. Poems such as *Karnabhushanam* and *Pingala* are distinguished more by their ethical depth than by aesthetic innovation. Ullur's *Umakeralam* is notable for drawing its theme from local history, a departure from conventional Puranic subjects. Written in a highly ornate and complex style, his poetry emphasises moral and philosophical values. Ullur's contribution to Malayalam prose is equally monumental. His five-volume *Kerala Sahitya Charitram*, published posthumously, remains an unparalleled work in Malayalam literary historiography.

Several other poets of this period deserve recognition for their significant contributions.

K. P. Karuppan used poetry as a weapon against social inequality and caste oppression. Nalappat Narayana Menon left his mark with his elegy *Kannunirtulli*.

Edappalli Raghavan Pillai and Changampuzha Krishna Pillai represent another important phase in modern Malayalam poetry. Changampuzha articulated the emotional turbulence of his generation, drawing inspiration from fleeting moments of life and expressing himself with lyrical spontaneity. The musical quality of his poetry and its romantic appeal, evident in works like *Ramanan*, earned him immense popularity among the youth.

Poetry remains the most vibrant branch of modern Malayalam literature, a fact exemplified by the stature of *Mahakavi* G. Sankara Kurup. Sankara Kurup achieved national recognition when *Odakuzhal* received the first Bharatiya Jnanpith Award in 1966. His poetry reflects a dual engagement with spiritual inquiry and material reality, responding equally to global political events and metaphysical concerns. His achievement elevated Malayalam poetry to a position of honour within modern Indian literature.

Malayalam poetry has also been enriched by poets such as K. K. Raja, Balamani Amma, Vennikulam Gopala Kurup, P. Kunhiraman Nair, and Edasseri Govindan Nair.

The next generation of poets brought fresh perspectives and innovative styles to Malayalam poetry. Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon stands out for harmonising national and international concerns with fundamental human emotions. Alongside him, poets such as M. P. Appan, K. Ayyappa Panikkar, O. N. V. Kurup, Sugatha Kumari, Chemmanam Chacko, and Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan have continued to expand the horizons of modern Malayalam poetry through

experimentation and social engagement.

The next wave of poets, like Sachithanandan, A. Ayyappan, Balachandran Chullikkad, Kureepuzha Sreekumar, Murukan Kattakkada, and so on, break conventional themes and forms and explore new dimensions in Malayalam poetry

2.3.2. Novels

The evolution of the Malayalam novel as a distinct literary form began with the publication of *Kundalata* (1887) by T. M. Appu Nedungadi. However, the first truly accomplished novel in the language is widely acknowledged to be *Indulekha* (1889) by O. Chandu Menon. Through a sensitive portrayal of Kerala's feudal society, *Indulekha* highlights the transformative impact of English education on social life. The novel's central figure, *Indulekha*, embodies the ideal of modern, emancipated womanhood and represents the emergence of a progressive social consciousness. The novel's lucid style, finely drawn characters, and subtle humour secure its status as a landmark in Malayalam literature. Chandu Menon's later work, *Sarada*, addresses another degenerative aspect of feudal society, the obsession with litigation, but the novel remained incomplete, with only its first part published.

C. V. Raman Pillai stands alongside Chandu Menon as a foundational figure in the development of the Malayalam novel. His major works, *Marthanda Varma*, *Rama Raja Bahadur*, *Dharma Raja*, and *Premamrutam*, occupy a prominent place in the literary canon. The first three are historical novels rooted in the political and social history of Travancore. C. V. Raman Pillai displays remarkable skill in animating historical figures and situating them convincingly within their historical milieu.

Among the most prominent modern novelists are Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P. Kesavadev, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, S. K. Pottekkat, and Uroob. These writers collectively challenged rigid traditionalism and forged an intimate connection between literature and the lived experiences of ordinary people.

The formation of the Progressive Writers' Association (*Purogamana Sahitya Samiti*) in 1937 marked a turning point. Many writers who later gained prominence as novelists emerged from this movement. Marginalised figures such as scavengers, agricultural labourers, factory workers, and rickshaw pullers became central characters in fiction. Novels like *Odayilninnu* (Kesavadev), *Thottiyude Makan* (Thakazhi), *Balyakalasakhi* (Basheer), *Vishakanyaka* (Pottekkat), and *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum* (Uroob) exemplify this phase, reflecting a deep engagement with Kerala's social realities.

In Thakazhi's novels, even the landscape emerges as a living presence. He aligned himself with the aspirations of the peasantry, fisherfolk, and urban poor. His novel *Chemmeen* played a pivotal role in introducing Malayalam literature to a global readership. Kesavadev's fiction, marked by intensity and dynamism, introduced Malayalam's first proletarian hero, Pappu.

Basheer's novels combine social critique with a deep exploration of the human psyche. Love, in its many forms, occupies a central place in his narratives. These dimensions of life are visible in his works such as *Balyakalasakhi* and *Pathummayude Aadu*.

The next generation of novelists includes Cherukad, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, O. V. Vijayan, Vilasini (M. K. Menon), M. Mukundan, Anand, Sara Joseph, V. K. N. and so on. Influenced by Western narrative techniques, these writers probe both the

external structures and inner dimensions of social life.

Today, Malayalam novel writing is evolving into new themes, topics, and dimensions through writers like K.R. Meera, Benyamin, Subhash Chandran, and S. Hareesh. Ramakrishnan, and so on.

2.3.3. Short Stories

The Malayalam short story developed as an independent genre under Western influence. By the 1930s, the genre matured significantly, with writers such as Ponkunnam Varkey, Lalithambika Antharjanam, E. M. Kovur, and Karur Neelakanta Pillai making notable contributions.

Western writers like Maupassant, Chekhov, and Gorky shaped early short fiction in Malayalam. Writers increasingly focused on psychological insight, social decay, and protest against injustice. Thakazhi's stories evolved from intimate emotional studies to broader social narratives, Kesavadev's stories foreground class conflict and moral struggle. Basheer's narratives blend personal experience with satire and linguistic vitality.

Ponkunnam Varkey's stories reflect a strong ethical commitment and often critique religious institutions. Pottekkat combines realism in theme with romanticism in treatment. Karur Neelakanta Pillai's humorous narratives transform simple incidents into profound reflections. E. M. Kovur excelled in satire, exposing the pretensions of modern society. Lalithambika Antharjanam's stories powerfully articulate the inner lives of Namboothiri women.

The Malayalam short story continues to evolve, with writers such as T. Padmanabhan, Madhavikutty, Kakkanadan, M. Mukundan, Zachariah, and so on expanding its thematic and stylistic horizons.

2.3.4. Influence of Western Literary Traditions

O. Chandu Menon occupies a pioneering position in Malayalam literature as the first novelist to adopt the Western novel form and realistic narrative techniques. He departed from the heavily Sanskritised and poetic literary tradition. He consciously sought to introduce this new mode of Western prose writing to the Kerala readership. He focused on depicting the realistic life of contemporary society, especially the Nair community of Kerala in the late 19th century. These features are most effectively expressed in his novel *Indulekha*. Structured on the English novelistic model, *Indulekha* engages with pressing social issues such as the influence of English education, critiques of feudalism and polygamy, caste oppression, and women's agency in decision-making. He wrote in a simple, colloquial style that was easy to read, rejecting the excessive use of complex, archaic Sanskrit words. This style, which effectively connected Western literary styles with contemporary Indian social realities, was also followed by later writers.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Malayalam literature witnessed

a significant influx of translated works from Europe, which played a crucial role in shaping its modern literary sensibilities. Malayalam readers were introduced to the writings of major European authors such as Balzac, Maupassant, Zola, Tolstoy, and Gorky during this period. Translations of Russian writers, including Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Gogol, Chekhov, and Sholokhov, and of French authors such as Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, and Jules Verne further broadened the literary horizons of Malayalam readers. Influential modern political and philosophical novels like Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Narakov's *Chain of Terror*, and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* were also made available in Malayalam through translation. Notably, A. Balakrishna Pillai translated Pirandello's novel under the title *Omanakal*. One of the most important early translations that influenced Malayalam was made by Nalapattu Narayana Menon. He translated Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* as *Paavamangal*. Overall, these translations of Western literary works profoundly influenced Malayalam literary forms, particularly the evolution of the novel.

Recap

- ◆ In the latter half of the nineteenth century, new literary genres and aesthetics emerged in Malayalam literature.
- ◆ The writings of poetry, novels, and short stories underwent major transformations during this period.
- ◆ Important Malayalam poets included Kumaran Asan, Vallathol, Ullur, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, G. Sankara Kurup, Balamani Amma, O. N. V. Kurup, Sugatha Kumari, and so on.
- ◆ Malayalam novel writing adopted Western techniques and styles. Leading novelists were O. Chandu Menon, C. V. Raman Pillai, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P. Kesavadev, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, S. K. Pottekkat, Uroob, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, O. V. Vijayan, Sara Joseph, and so on.



- ◆ The Malayalam short story emerged as a separate literary form under Western influence.
- ◆ It continues to develop through writers like T. Padmanabhan, Madhavikutty, Kakkanadan, M. Mukundan, Zachariah, and so on.

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote the poem *Chandala Bhikshuki*?
2. Which is the first novel in Malayalam?
3. Who was the first writer to introduce the genre of historical novel in Malayalam?
4. Who wrote the novel *Odayilninnu* featuring marginalised figures as central characters?
5. Who translated Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* to Malayalam under the title *Paavangal*?

Answers

1. Kumaran Asan
2. *Kundalata*
3. C. V. Raman Pillai
4. P. Kesavadev
5. Nalapattu Narayana Menon

Assignments

1. Discuss the emergence of new aesthetics and literary genres in Malayalam.
2. Explain the major transformations in Malayalam poetry writing.
3. Evaluate major shifts in the writing of novels in Malayalam.
4. Discuss the influence of Western literary traditions in Malayalam literature.

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UNIT

Changes in Family Structure

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the changes in family structure and property relations in modern Kerala
- ◆ assess the dissolution of *Tharavadu* and *Marumakkathayam*
- ◆ assess the significance of law making in the transformation of family structure and property relations in Kerala

Prerequisite

This unit requires learners to have a basic understanding of the *Marumakkathayam* system of inheritance in Kerala, especially among the Nair community. Under this matrilineal system, family life was organised around the *tharavadu*, or joint family, and property was passed through the female line. The children of a male member did not have legal rights in his *tharavadu*, and property did not pass to his wife or children.

Learners should be familiar with the growing criticism of this system in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in relation to property rights, family organisation, and gender relations. They should also be aware of how changing economic conditions and the spread of modern education led to new inheritance laws.

An understanding of these legal and social changes, and their influence on similar reforms among Ezhava, Namboothiri, Christian, and Muslim communities, is essential for engaging meaningfully with this unit.

Keywords

Family Structure, Property Relations, *Tharavadu*, *Marumakkathayam*, *Sambandham*, Law Making

Discussion

2.4.1. Changes in Family Structure and Property Relations among Nairs: Dissolution of *Tharavadu* and *Marumakkathayam*

A section of Kerala's population followed the *Marumakkathayam* system. Among Nairs, *Sambandham* was the socially recognised alliance constituting matrimony among matrilineals. *Marumakkathayam* centred in the *tharavadu* which consisted of all the descendants of a common ancestress in the female line. The children of a male member had no rights within his own *tharavadu*, since they belonged to his wife's family. Therefore, a man's children had no rights in his own *tharavadu*. The paternal property was not inherited by wife or children.

The growth of a cash economy and the social changes under colonial rule weakened the unity of Nair *tharavadus*. The excessive authority of the *Karanavan* over junior members undermined family harmony. The loose nature of marital ties also affected family stability. New economic conditions created opportunities for junior members to earn independent incomes. Education gave the middle-class new ideas and cultural outlooks. All these factors weakened the solidarity of the *tharavadu*. As a result, the Nairs began to demand changes in customary laws. They questioned the traditional systems of inheritance, marriage, and the joint ownership of family property. Nairs living in towns

and cities strongly opposed the old value system reflected in *tharavadu* organisation and marriage practices. The first organised effort for reform was the Malabar Marriage Association, founded in 1879. The association prepared a Bill and submitted it to the government. It sought legal recognition for Nair marriages and a common law for inheritance and related matters. However, due to government indifference, the Bill had no effect. The issue was raised again in 1890. On 24 March 1890, Sir C. Sankaran Nair introduced a Bill in the Madras Legislative Council. While presenting the Bill, he stated that under existing law, Nair wives were treated as concubines and their children as illegitimate. He argued that this made it necessary to legalise marriage and protect the rights of children.

The Bill had several main objectives. One aim was to legalise Nair marriage practices by registering *sambandham* with the government. This was intended to address moral concerns about the supposedly unregulated nature of Nair marital unions. Another objective was to make bigamy a punishable offence. The Bill also proposed legal provisions for the dissolution of marriage, divorce, and the restitution of conjugal rights. To examine these issues, the Madras government appointed a commission. The commission studied all aspects of the Bill in detail. The investigation showed strong opposition to the Bill. This opposition came from Nambuthiri landlords, *karanavans* of *tharavadus*, and

even from a section of educated Nairs and a few women. As a result, the Bill was passed in a diluted form. The Act only stated that a registered *sambandham* would be treated as a legal marriage. It provided maintenance rights to the husband's or father's self-acquired property. However, the Nairs showed little interest in this law. Most of them ignored the provision for registering marriages. Between 1897 and 1904, only fifty-seven *sambandhams* were registered. The Act had several limitations. It failed to regulate *sambandham* between Nairs and Nambuthiris. This was because Nambuthiri personal law did not allow a valid marriage outside their caste. Such relationships were brought under legal control only later, through the Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act of 1933. Another major weakness of the Act was that it did not include provisions for partitioning the *tharavadu*.

In Travancore, the institutions of *tharavadu* and marriage also came under criticism by the end of the nineteenth century. Social reformers began to question their relevance and functioning. In 1897, P. Thanu Pillai, the Chief Secretary of the Travancore Government, introduced a Nair Marriage Regulation in the Legislative Council. The aim was to give legal recognition to Nair marriages. However, strong conservative opposition prevented the proposal from succeeding. Despite this setback, progressive Nair sections continued their efforts for reform for more than ten years. As a result, in 1907–08 (1083 M.E.), the Travancore Government appointed a committee to examine the issue in detail. In 1912, the Travancore Legislative Council passed the Travancore Nair Regulation I of 1088 (M.E.). This regulation went beyond the Malabar *Marumakkathayam* Act of 1896. It recognised *sambandham* as a legal form of marriage. It also validated Nambuthiri - Nair unions and declared polyandrous unions illegal. The regulation provided important social and economic relief. It granted wives and

children the right to maintenance. It also allowed them to inherit half of the self-acquired property of a husband or father who died without leaving a will.

The Nairs of Kochi also took part in reform movements. Their efforts led to the passing of Cochin Regulation XII of 1095 M.E. (1920 C.E.). This regulation went further than the reforms in Travancore. It clearly prohibited polygamy - this provision aimed to protect Nair women and strengthen the institution of monogamous marriage.

In 1925, Travancore passed the Nair Regulation II of 1100 M.E. This Act allowed the individual partition of *taravads*. It also made provisions for divorce. In addition, it made financial support by husbands to their wives and children compulsory. Later, the Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act of 1933 introduced major changes. It permitted the partition of *tharavadus*. It also legalized inheritance from father to son. Similarly, the Cochin *Marumakkathayam* Law of 1938 brought further reforms. It allowed individuals to partition the *taravad*. Under this law, a husband's or father's wife and children became the legal heirs to his property.

Soon after laws allowing individual partition were enacted, many people filed partition cases in the courts of Travancore, Madras, and Kochi. As a result, Nair *tharavadus* began to break up rapidly into smaller units. In Travancore alone, 32,900 *taravads* divided their property within five years of the new laws. The end of matriliney also brought certain benefits. It allowed greater freedom of choice and encouraged individual initiative.

2.4.2. Changes in Family Structure and Property Relations among Ezhavas?

The Ezhavas did not follow a single, uniform system of marriage or inheritance. In Travancore, about sixty per cent of them

followed the Marumakkathayam system. Around 30% practised *misradayam*, in which the deceased's property was shared equally by the children and the anantharavas. Nearly ten per cent followed makkathayam, or the patrilineal system. While the Nairs sought changes to marriage and inheritance through legal reforms, the Ezhavas initially adopted a different approach. Under Sree Narayana Guru's religious leadership, they introduced new marriage rites. However, the Nair Regulation of 1912 strongly influenced them. It encouraged them to adopt a similar legal strategy to reform their inheritance laws. As a result, the Ezhava Regulation of 1925 was passed in Travancore. Its objectives were largely similar to those of the Nair Regulation. The Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1933 also applied to the Thiyyas of Malabar. These laws gave legal recognition to Ezhavas and Thiyya marriages and made divorce more difficult. These laws provide financial support to wives and children from their husbands.

2.4.3. Changes in Family Structure and Property Relations among Nambuthiris

The Nair Regulations, which legalised *sambandham* and permitted inheritance from father to son, also directly affected the personal laws of the Nambuthiris, especially the system of primogeniture. Under the Nambuthiri primogeniture, only the eldest son in a family had the right to marry within his own caste. The younger sons were not permitted to marry women of their own caste. If they formed alliances outside the caste, the children born from such relationships had no claim to their father's property.

The Nair Regulations effectively ended many abuses of the Nambuthiri system of primogeniture. One major abuse was the practice of irregular unions entered into by Nambuthiri youth without any social

or legal responsibility. Radical sections among the Nambuthiri youth also realised that their personal laws were oppressive to women. Since only the eldest son was allowed to marry within the community, very few Nambuthiri women could marry. As a result, many women remained unmarried throughout their lives and died as spinsters.

Marriage was considered a sacred duty for women. Therefore, young Nambuthiri girls often had no option but to marry elderly Nambuthiri *karanavans*. This practice led to many Nambuthiri women becoming widows at a very young age. These conditions prompted Nambuthiri reformers to launch social reform movements through organisations such as the Yogakshema Sabha and the Nambuthiri Yuvajana Samajam. Their aim was to reform outdated personal laws.

The Yogakshema Sabha spread progressive ideas within the community. It demanded that Nambuthiri men should marry women from their own community. This helped reduce the number of spinsters and widows. The famous drama *Adukkalayilninnum Arangathekku* (From Kitchen to Stage) by V. T. Bhattathiripad strongly criticised the ill-treatment of Nambuthiri women. These activities created an unprecedented social awakening among the Nambuthiris.

The Nambuthiri youth demanded a Malayala Brahmana Regulation. Their sustained efforts resulted in the Travancore Malayala Brahman Regulation of 1930 and the Madras Nambuthiri Act of 1933. These laws allowed junior members of Nambuthiri families to marry within the caste. They also recognised the children of junior members as legal heirs to family property. Consequently, polygamy and irregular relationships with Nair women came to an end. Under these laws, every member of a *Nambuthiri illam*, both men and women, received equal rights over family property. As a result, Nambuthiri women began to



live with dignity and self-respect.

2.4.4. Changes in Family Structure and Property Relations among Christians

In Christianity, the Synod of Diamper, held in Kochi in 1599, was an early reform initiative. It took the lead in opposing social evils such as untouchability, child marriage, polygamy, and polyandry. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was little demand for a new law of succession among Christians. This was, although Christian inheritance laws lacked uniformity.

One reason for this limited interest was that most Christians followed the provisions of the Indian Succession Act. Nevertheless, R. V. Kulantha Swamy Pillai, a leading member of the Catholic Indian Association of Thiruvananthapuram and a member of the Sree Mulam Assembly, raised the issue. With the support of other Christian members of the Assembly, such as T. C. Cheriyan and C. P. Thomas, he urged the government to remove the disabilities faced by Hindu converts to Christianity in matters of inheritance. They demanded legislation that would allow converts to enjoy property rights on par with those of other sects in the state. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the Tiruvitamkur–Kochi Christian Association also actively worked towards achieving this objective.

In 1911, the Government of Travancore appointed a committee under the chairmanship of P. Cheriyan to examine the issue. The committee recommended the passing of a new law with specific provisions. According to its recommendations, daughters should receive a share of their father's property only if they have not received any dowry. Sisters and aunts could be excluded from inheritance, while brothers and uncles should be entitled to inherit. The committee also

suggested that widows should receive one-fourth of the property if the deceased had left behind father, brother or sister.

The Syrian Christians generally opposed any radical changes that might affect their customary laws. They argued that daughters should not receive a share of their father's property. They also maintained that widows should have only the right to maintenance and not a fixed share in property. Therefore, they were reluctant to grant women equal rights. Due to this strong opposition, the proposed legislation was postponed.

However, continuous pressure from the Latin Christians, Nadar Christians, and a progressive section of the Syrian Christians forced the government to act. As a result, the Christian Succession Act was passed in 1916. The Act allowed all Christian communities to make wills to regulate the succession of their property. It also granted widows a definite share in their husband's property, equal in proportion to the share given to the children.

Overall, this regulation adopted a discriminatory attitude towards women. It did not treat women as equal to men. Women were mainly given dowry, while control over land remained with men. Despite these limitations, the Act introduced a common law of succession for all Christian communities in Travancore. It also permitted inter-sectional marriages among various Christian groups. A similar Act with the same provisions was passed in Kochi in 1921.

2.4.5. Changes in Family Structure and Property Relations among Muslims

Among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar, traditional family organisation followed the *marumakkathayam* (matrilineal) system. The basic unit was the *taravad* (joint matrilineal household) consisting of a woman, her

children and descendants in the female line. Descent and inheritance were traced through the mother, and property belonged corporately to the lineage. Women therefore occupied a central position in property relations, while men mainly enjoyed maintenance rights. Husbands did not form the core of the household and marital relations were often visiting in nature; the maternal kin group was stronger than the conjugal unit. Even self-acquired property frequently reverted to the taravad, preserving collective ownership.

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this system came under increasing pressure. Colonial courts applying Anglo-Muhammadan law emphasised individual ownership and patrilineal succession. Educated Muslim reformers also criticised matriliney as inconsistent with Islamic inheritance because property passed to sisters' children rather than to one's own wife and children. Economic change and the rise of private property further strengthened demands for reform.

A series of legislations gradually modified the system. Mappila Succession Act (1918) permitted self-acquired property to devolve according to Islamic inheritance rules instead of reverting to the *taravad*, strengthening the father-child relationship and encouraging individual ownership. Furthermore, Mappila Wills Act (1928) allowed testamentary transfer and increased personal control over property. Later, Mappila Marumakkathayam Act (1939) provided for partition of joint family property, defined the powers and accountability of the *karanavan* (manager), introduced maintenance rights, and regulated sale, mortgage and succession. Property obtained after partition followed Islamic inheritance, thereby weakening corporate lineage authority.

The Marumakkathayam Act of 1939 attempted to modernise and regulate the *marumakkathayam* system, a form of inheritance in which descent and property passed through the female line, by defining rights within the joint family (*taravad*), clarifying the powers and responsibilities of the family manager (*karnavan*), and legally permitting individual members to claim partition of property. It introduced accountability in management, maintenance rights for members, and rules regarding sale, mortgage and succession, thereby weakening the absolute authority of the joint matrilineal household and moving society toward individual ownership and nuclear family structures. Overall, the Act marks a transition from customary kinship-based property relations to a codified, modern legal framework aligned with changing social and economic conditions.

These measures did not immediately abolish matriliney. Collective property and lineage ties often persisted, sometimes reinterpreted through Islamic institutions such as wakf. However, the balance of rights shifted: the authority of the *taravad* declined, the conjugal family gained importance, and husbands and children acquired stronger inheritance claims while women's earlier economic dominance reduced.

Thus, the early twentieth century witnessed not a sudden change from matriliney to patriliney but a gradual restructuring of the family system. Mappila society adapted to colonial law, Islamic reform and modern economic relations, transforming the matrilineal *taravad* into smaller, more individual-property-based family units while retaining certain older elements.



Recap

- ◆ A section of Kerala's population followed the *Marumakkathayam* system.
- ◆ Among Nairs, *Sambandham* was the socially recognised alliance constituting matrimony among matrilineals.
- ◆ The paternal property was not inherited by the wife or children.
- ◆ *Marumakkathayam* Acts were passed to abolish *sambandham* and *Marumakkathayam* Systems.
- ◆ Similar acts were also passed among Ezhavas and Nambuthiris.
- ◆ New legislation among Christians and Muslims also made major transformations in their family structure and property relations.

Objective Questions

1. In which year Malabar Marriage Association was founded ?
2. In which year was the Madras Marumakkathayam Act implemented?
3. Which was the Act in Travancore which recognised *sambandham* as a legal form of marriage?
4. Which law enacted by the Madras government reformed the *Marumakkathayam* system by recognising inheritance from father to son?
5. Under whose leadership were new marriage rites introduced among the Ezhavas?
6. Which is the major organisation that worked for social reform related to inheritance rights among the Nambuthiris?
7. Who wrote the play *Adukkalayilninnun Arangathekku*?
8. In which year the Christian Succession Act was passed ?

Answers

1. 1879
2. 1933
3. Travancore Nair Regulation I of 1088 (M.E.)
4. Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1933
5. Sree Narayana Guru
6. Yogakshema Sabha
7. V. T. Bhattathiripad
8. 1916

Assignments

1. Discuss changes in family structure changes in the property relations among various communities in Kerala.
2. Examine the process of the dissolution of *Tharavadu* and *Marumakkathayam* systems in Kerala.
3. Explain the significance of law-making in the transformation of family structure and property relations in Kerala.

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UNIT

New Information Order

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ assess new information order which took place during the colonial period
- ◆ understand the institutionalisation of medicinal practice and knowledge in the early modern period
- ◆ examine organisation of plant knowledge in Kerala
- ◆ assess the significance of the surveys and census in 19th and 20th centuries

Prerequisite

This unit requires learners to have a basic understanding of the changes introduced during the colonial period, especially the emergence of new systems of knowledge and information. During this time, traditional medical practices were gradually replaced or supplemented by modern, institutionalised medical systems, and Western medicine was introduced in Kerala for the first time.

Learners should be familiar with the beginnings of scientific research on Kerala's rich plant resources, which contributed to the growth of modern botany and also encouraged the commercial exploitation of natural wealth. They should also be aware of how colonial authorities and local rulers strengthened their control through systematic surveys, mapping, and population censuses. An awareness of these developments is essential for critically understanding the impact of colonial knowledge systems and governance discussed in this unit.

Keywords

New Information Order, Western medical system, missionary hospitals, Vaccination, *Hortus Malabaricus*, Survey, Census.

Discussion

2.5.1. New Information Order

The historical processes of the colonial period significantly shaped the emergence of a New Information Order in Kerala. The interaction between the colonial system and indigenous society brought about profound transformations in several traditions in the land. Medicinal practices and bodies of medical knowledge were systematised and institutionalised. Plant knowledge was classified and organised. The colonial state and native principalities initiated scientific surveys and censuses, which introduced new methods of data collection and documentation.

2.5.2. Institutionalisation of Medicinal Practice and Knowledge

Modern medical practices were introduced to Kerala during the colonial period. In contrast to traditional practices, the Western medical system, with its emphasis on scientific diagnosis, prevention, and treatment, gradually established a foothold in the region. For the first time, modern hospitals and dispensaries were established, laying the foundation for an institutionalised healthcare structure. Missionary organisations, particularly the London Missionary Society, along with the colonial state, played a crucial role in opening new avenues in health, especially by promoting scientific methods of diagnosis and treatment. Specialised hospitals and treatment systems were developed to address deadly

diseases such as leprosy and smallpox. This period also saw the institutionalisation of the nursing profession and the entry of women into it, creating new avenues of employment and expanding the healthcare workforce. Medical infrastructure steadily expanded, with the establishment of public hospitals in Travancore and Cochin, as well as missionary hospitals. This period also witnessed the spread of medical dispensaries to wider areas. Missionary medical missions further contributed by training local personnel and extending healthcare services. Together, these developments facilitated the emergence of an early, systematic model of public health in Kerala.

There were certain similarities in the introduction of modern medicine across Malabar, Travancore, and Kochi. However, the process of institutionalisation varied significantly across these regions.

The introduction of Western medicine in Malabar was an important milestone in the development of modern health care. British health policy began with the introduction of smallpox vaccination. Vaccination was introduced in Malabar in 1801. In 1845, first public hospital opened at Calicut. The mental hospital opened in 1872 at Puthiyara near Calicut and received civil patients from Malabar, South Canara, Coimbatore, and the Nilgiris. The Basel Mission, which provided a livelihood for people, also addressed issues of health and medical care. In addition to treating 'general' ailments, the Basel medical missionaries took special care of patients with leprosy. They had established the



Leper Hospital at Chevayur in Kozhikode and started treating and rehabilitating the ‘ostracised’ lepers.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Travancore witnessed the emergence of a modern system of public health administration. The introduction of vaccination in 1813 marked an important beginning in preventive healthcare. This effort was institutionalised with the creation of a separate vaccination department in 1865–66. Further developments followed with the organisation of a sanitary department in 1895, headed by a sanitary commissioner. Special schemes were introduced in selected taluks to prevent cholera and provide intensive public health services. With the establishment of the Public Health Department, Travancore implemented a range of programmes to control and prevent disease, including measures against smallpox, cholera, malaria, and typhoid, along with vaccination drives and public health education initiatives.

The earliest effort to introduce European medical treatment in Cochin was undertaken by the missionary Rev. J. Dawson, who established a dispensary at Mattancheri in 1818. Vaccination was introduced in Cochin during the first decade of the nineteenth century, marking an early move toward preventive healthcare. This initiative was formalised with the organisation of a separate vaccination department in 1886. Significant institutional developments followed under state patronage. In 1848, Diwan Sankara Variyar established the first government hospital, known as the Charity Hospital, at Ernakulam. Specialised medical institutions also emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examples of these specialised institutions include a mental hospital opened in Thrissur in 1892 with accommodation for 14 patients, and the first leprosy hospital established at Venduruthi in 1909. The growing concern for public health

was further reflected in the organisation of a Sanitary Department in 1908, which was later reconstituted as a Public Health Department under the supervision of the Chief Medical Officer.

Alongside the expansion of Western medicine, indigenous medical systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and naturopathy continued to thrive in Kerala. The relationship between these traditions and Western medical practices was neither linear nor uniform; instead, it was marked by a complex process of interaction, adaptation, and exchange. Through this engagement, Kerala’s rich botanical and medicinal knowledge also contributed to the development of European medical understanding. Overall, colonial medicine brought about significant transformations in Kerala’s health sector by introducing modern medical infrastructure and scientific methods, while simultaneously reshaping the space in which traditional systems of healing operated.

2.5.3. Organisation of Plant Knowledge

The organisation of plant knowledge in Kerala took shape during the Dutch period. It was further systematised under British rule. During these phases, deliberate efforts were made to collect, classify, and commercialise Kerala’s abundant plant resources. Colonial authorities pursued this agenda by drawing heavily on indigenous knowledge systems. In doing so, they relied extensively on local expertise. Indigenous physicians such as Itti Achuthan played a crucial role in transmitting botanical knowledge to colonial administrators. The primary objective behind the collection and systematic organisation of botanical knowledge was to facilitate the exchange of knowledge. This process found its most notable expression in the compilation of the *Hortus Malabaricus* during the Dutch period.



Hortus Malabaricus was the earliest printed compilation on the flora of India. Originally written in Latin, it was published in Amsterdam between 1678 and 1693. The production of this monumental work was the result of the sustained efforts of numerous scholars and botanists, physicians and folk medical practitioners, as well as engravers and illustrators. Compiled by Hendrik van Rheedee over nearly thirty years, the twelve-volume treatise was based on discussions with indigenous scholars, such as Itty Achuthan. The plant names recorded in *Hortus Malabaricus* are also written in Malayalam and Konkani and rendered in multiple scripts, including Nāgari, Malayalam (Kolezhuthu), Arabi Malayalam, and Roman. The volumes document 742 plants, detailing their characteristics, medicinal properties, methods of processing and preparation, and the diseases for which they were prescribed. Itty Achuthan's contribution to this work is among the most significant efforts to document Kerala's traditional medical knowledge system. In addition to him, three Konkani physicians - Appu Bhatt, Vinayak Pandit, and Ranga Bhatt - also played important roles in its composition.

The British period marked an intensive phase of botanical research closely tied to commercialization. A range of policies was introduced with the explicit aim of testing, standardising, and marketing plant products, particularly medicinal plants and spices, for imperial markets. The establishment of the Botanical Survey of India in 1890 institutionalised the systematic survey, classification, and documentation of plant resources under a centralised authority. Simultaneously, the colonial state actively promoted the cultivation of commercially valuable crops such as tea, coffee, indigo, etc. To facilitate large-scale resource extraction, forest departments were created and forest laws enacted, enabling greater state control

over forests. In essence, botanical knowledge during this period was mobilised to serve colonial interests, with commercialisation at its core.

2.5.4. Surveys

Plans for introducing a systematic and scientific survey and settlement in Malabar emerged by the mid-nineteenth century. These colonial surveys assumed great administrative importance for the British. They served multiple purposes, including mapping natural resources, fixing land revenue, consolidating territorial authority, and deciphering the region's intricate land tenure arrangements. Through detailed land surveys and population censuses, the colonial state sought to transform local landscapes and agrarian relations into legible and governable units. A pioneering role in this process was played by Lieutenants Ward and Conner, who, between 1816 and the 1820s, carried out extensive topographical surveys of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. Their work resulted in comprehensive memoirs that combined geographical observations with demographic, social, and economic data. Later, in the 1880s, William Logan was appointed to examine land tenures in Malabar. His Report on the land revenue administration of the Malabar District emerged as a seminal text on the region's agrarian structure and analysis of landlord-tenant relations.

Survey operations in Travancore began as early as the eighteenth century. However, these early surveys, based on *kettezhuth* (information gathered by hearing) and *kandezhuth* (information gathered by observation), lacked scientific precision and did not fully conform to systematic or modern survey methods. The first proper survey-related land settlement in Travancore was conducted in 1772–73 and covered all cultivable areas, including both fields and gardens. This was followed by another

settlement in 1802–03, in which land area and revenue assessment were determined through local inspection and information. A further settlement undertaken in 1818 focused only on garden and dry lands and largely followed the methods of the earlier exercise. The settlement process was repeated once again in 1837. However, all these early settlements were marked by significant limitations in terms of accuracy, coverage, and uniformity. These deficiencies were addressed mainly through a comprehensive survey of the entire state, followed by a systematic revenue settlement inaugurated by a Royal Proclamation in 1886. The defining features of this new survey and settlement included accurate measurement, clear demarcation, detailed mapping, valuation of all kinds of property, and the registration of titles, thereby laying the foundation for more rational and efficient revenue administration. Unlike earlier efforts, this survey covered the entire territory of the state, including waste lands, uncultivated areas, and previously unassessed tracts. A uniform standard for land assessment based on acres and cents was introduced; many obsolete cesses were abolished; and complex tenure systems were simplified. Garden assessments were made permanent, eliminating periodic revisions. The settlement process was finally completed by the end of 1910.

The cadastral survey in Cochin was initiated in 1898 under the supervision of Mr. Thompson, an experienced officer from the Madras Survey. As the fieldwork progressed, the preparation of land registers, field measurement books, village maps, and other final survey records was carried out simultaneously. In addition to the general survey, several special surveys were undertaken, including verification of the Cochin–Travancore boundary, demarcation and surveying of multiple forest blocks, and detailed surveys of various hill ranges within forest reserve areas.

2.5.5. Censuses

In Travancore, censuses were conducted at regular intervals. Although carried out under royal authority, these exercises were closely aligned with the broader census framework of British India. The census reports provided extensive statistical information on population size and composition, including data on religion, caste, age, language, occupation, literacy, and housing conditions. Many of these findings were systematically compiled and published by officials, making the census a key instrument of administrative knowledge.

A major general census of Travancore, conducted in 1901 under the orders of the Maharaja, illustrates the methodical nature of this process. A detailed plan of operations was prepared, mainly following the guidelines laid down by the British India. The census was carried out in three distinct phases. At first, houses were numbered and house lists prepared. The habitual residents were then enumerated by house-to-house visit, and the particulars were entered on forms called Census schedules. This was the Preliminary enumeration. The last stage was the Final or synchronous enumeration of the population, resident as well as floating. The entries made at the preliminary enumeration were checked and brought into agreement with the facts as they stood on the Census date.

From 1881, censuses in the princely state of Cochin were conducted at the same time as those in the rest of India. They were carried out under the general supervision of the Census Commissioner for India. Because of this, the census reports of Cochin became part of the All-India Census Series. This helped maintain uniform methods and classifications. The 1901 census produced a detailed report on the kingdom. It provided information on religion, age, sex, and occupations. Later censuses added more details. The 1911 census highlighted the social and



cultural diversity of Cochin's population. The 1941 census included data on workers and dependents, agriculture, industry, trade, and land tenure systems. Together, these censuses recorded population changes and provided valuable insights into the state's social and economic structure.

Census operations in British Malabar began in 1871. These censuses generated extensive information on the demographic composition of villages, taluks, and particular social groups. Like census practices elsewhere in British India, the Malabar censuses - especially from 1871 and more rigorously

from 1881 onward - were comprehensive surveys that recorded details on population size, caste, religion, occupational categories, and so on. Beyond mere enumeration, the colonial census functioned as a key administrative instrument. By translating the region's social complexity into statistical categories, the British administration was better able to comprehend and regulate Malabar's diverse population. The data collected complemented other official investigations, such as William Logan's studies on land tenures. They contributed to a broader understanding of agrarian relations and social structures essential for colonial governance.

Recap

- ◆ Colonial rule played a major role in shaping a new information system in Kerala.
- ◆ During this period, medical practices and medical knowledge were organised systematically.
- ◆ Modern hospitals and dispensaries were established for the first time.
- ◆ This marked the beginning of an institutional healthcare system.
- ◆ Knowledge about plants was collected and classified.
- ◆ *Hortus Malabaricus* became the earliest printed work on the plants of India.
- ◆ The organisation of plant knowledge began during the Dutch period in Kerala.
- ◆ It became more systematic under British rule.
- ◆ During these periods, efforts were made to collect, classify, and use plant resources for commercialisation.
- ◆ The colonial state and local rulers introduced scientific surveys and censuses.
- ◆ These methods created new ways of collecting and recording information.
- ◆ For the British, surveys were important tools of administration.

Objective Questions

1. Who introduced modern healthcare system in Kerala?
2. Which disease marked the beginning of British health policy in India through the introduction of vaccination?
3. Where did the Basel medical missionaries established the Leper Hospital?
4. Who compiled and published *Hortus Malabaricus*?
5. Which indigenous physician played a major role in compiling *Hortus Malabaricus*?
6. In which year the British established the Botanical Survey of India?
7. Which British officers pioneered the survey process in Kerala during the British period?

Answers

1. Christian Missionaries and British administration
2. Smallpox
3. Chevayur in Kozhikode
4. Hendrik van Rheede
5. Itti Achuthan
6. 1890
7. Lieutenants Ward and Conner

Assignments

1. Evaluate the institutionalisation of medicinal practice and knowledge in colonial Kerala.
2. Examine the organisation of plant knowledge in Kerala in the Dutch and British periods.

3. Discuss the importance of the process of the initial surveys and census in Kerala
4. Discuss the significance of the compilation and publication of *Hortus Malabaricus* in the organisation of plant knowledge in Kerala.

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BLOCK

Anti-Caste and Reform Movements



UNIT

Caste in Colonial Kerala

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the structure of caste hierarchies in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the Forms of Caste-Based Discrimination
- ◆ interpret the Role of the State and Religion in Enforcing Caste
- ◆ examine the Intersection of Gender and Caste

Prerequisite

This course assumes that students have a basic understanding of how the caste system developed in Kerala and how it shaped society over time. Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries CE, Kerala's social structure was strongly influenced by Brahminical Hinduism and became one of the most strictly regulated caste systems in Indian history. It affected almost every aspect of life, including social status, living spaces, types of work, access to justice, and everyday interactions.

At the top of this hierarchy were the Namboothiri Brahmins, followed by the Nairs, who played important roles in administration and the military. Communities such as Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, and Adivasi groups faced severe discrimination, social exclusion, and forced or exploitative labour. Practices like untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability strictly limited social contact between castes.

These inequalities were supported by religious beliefs, royal authority, and customary laws. Caste rules also affected men and women differently, shaping their social roles and opportunities. Understanding this historical background and its long-term impact is essential for students to critically engage with the issues discussed in this course.

Keywords

Untouchability, Avarna, Savarna, Unapproachability, Pollution, Segregation, Agrestic Slavery, Antharjanam, Sambandham

Discussion

3.1.1 Caste Hierarchies in Traditional Kerala Society

The caste system in Kerala evolved under the influence of Brahminical Hinduism, which was consolidated between the 8th and 13th centuries CE with the arrival of Brahmin settlers from northern India. The Namboothiri Brahmins, who established themselves as the highest caste, played a crucial role in shaping Kerala's social order. The existing indigenous groups were assimilated into the caste hierarchy, often in subordinate positions. The *Manusmriti* and local texts such as the Keralolpathi provided religious and legal sanction for caste divisions.

The Namboothiri Brahmins stood at the apex, enjoying immense religious and social authority. Below them were the Nairs, followed by Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, and other Dalit and Adivasi communities, who were subjected to varying degrees of exclusion and oppression. Unlike in North India, there are no genuine Kshatriya or Vaishya, and the use of these categories in this area refers only to local castes that have successfully claimed Vaishya or Kshatriya status. In the Kerala context, the Namboothiri Brahmins, along with foreign Brahmins, Nairs, and Syrian Christians, form the “savarna” groups, while all other castes outside the varnashrama system constitute the “avarna”.

The Brahmins enjoyed the supreme position in society, and feelings of caste superiority prevented them from forming

relationships with other people. The Brahmins held exclusive authority to interpret sacred laws, which formed the foundation of all other laws in the region. They also had the power to issue final legal judgments. To ensure their well-being, the king allocated substantial state funds to construct Ootupuras, where Brahmins were provided with free meals and entertainment. Their religious practices, deities, and social customs deeply influenced and captivated the people of the land, even though they avoided all forms of manual labour and lived on temple income, land revenues, and donations. The Brahmins justified their actions by invoking divine sanction, crafting an aura of sacred authority within the social order. This carefully constructed image was crucial to maintaining their ties with the actual tillers who worked the Brahmins' lands.

Nairs occupied a second place next to the Brahmins in the social hierarchy. Although they ranked below the Brahmins, they enjoyed many privileges in society. They were originally referred to as Malayala Shoodras till the 1890s. It was their access to and control over resources, especially land, that made them occupy such an exalted status in society. They served as administrators, warriors, and landlords, managing agricultural production and enforcing the caste order. They thus dominated the underprivileged castes economically and collected taxes, fees and gifts from them. The Nairs followed a matrilineal system of inheritance known as *Marumakkathayam*, where property and lineage were traced through the female line. This system granted women a significant



cases, even their shadow was considered polluting by the upper castes. It is to be noted that the Adivasi groups like Paniyas, Kurumbas and Ulladan were also socially excluded and marginalized in similar ways.

3.1.2. Forms of Caste Discrimination

- ◆ Unapproachability and Unseeability
- ◆ Segregation in public spaces
- ◆ Clothing and Language restrictions
- ◆ Occupational restrictions
- ◆ Skewed justice
- ◆ Unwarranted taxes and fees
- ◆ Slavery
- ◆ Denial of education and temple entry

The Nadars of Southern Travancore were engaged in occupations of toddy tapping and agriculture. They were excluded from upper-caste temples, schools, and public spaces, and faced many restrictions on dress and social conduct. Christian missionary activities produced changes in the socioeconomic status of the community in the mid nineteenth century. There was also a collective unity among the Nadars through the teachings of Ayya Vaikundar Swamikal (1809-1851).

3.1.2.1 Untouchability, Unapproachability and Unseeability

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savarna to undergo ritual purification, which might involve elaborate ceremonies. Even indirect contact, such as touching an everyday object handled by an Avarna, was considered defiling as such Untouchables were barred from entering temples, drawing water from public wells, or sharing spaces like schools and markets.

They were deprived of basic freedoms and faced numerous hardships, especially because they were required to give way to upper castes, which restricted their movement in public spaces. The practice of unapproachability or “distance pollution” stipulated a prescribed distance which lower castes had to keep themselves from upper castes and was to be strictly followed. Communities like the Ezhavas and Pulayas were required to maintain a distance of 32 and 64 feet, respectively, from Brahmins. The mere sight of a Nayadi was believed to pollute a Brahmin, necessitating ritual purification, hence unseeability in this case. They could only move at twilight or after dark, and had to announce their presence with a sound or call so that others could avoid seeing them. The low castes could not walk along the roads, but only through the jungles and marshes. Moreover, they were forced to dwell in fields, forests and marshy land.

Many public highways were inaccessible to members of the lower castes. This was because when the Nair nobles came out in public roads, an attendant of theirs preceded them, shouting po, po (get away, get away!) so that they would not be polluted by a person of low caste, even by chance encounter within the prohibited distance. Failure on the part of the lower caste to make way for the Nair or other upper castes on public roads even led to them being murdered with the connivance of the custodians of law and order. Even The shadow of a lower-caste person was considered polluting.

Even in relations between the upper castes, varying degrees of pollution were observed. Thus the Tamil brahmins polluted the Namboothiri by his touch and a Nair the Tamil brahmin. There were innumerable subcastes within the various castes, and between them there was no intermarriage or even interdining. This ban was strictly enforced among the Nairs and the Ezhavas. Even the lower castes, which were themselves subjected to the social disability of untouchability, practised discrimination in their dealings with castes considered as inferior to them in the social scale.

The social scene in Kerala presented many such paradoxes. The caste system operated in such an irrational and oppressive manner that Swami Vivekananda, who visited the State in 1892, called Kerala the ‘madhouse of India’.

3.1.2.2 Segregation in Public Spaces

Public spaces were governed by rigid caste-based segregation, designed to uphold the ritual purity of the upper castes. Every public space, from roads to riverbeds, was restricted to lower castes by the state itself. As such, it was not a social practice but state-engineered segregation codified in over 200 royal proclamations between 1700 and 1900.

Important temple roads and streets near upper-caste houses were inaccessible to lower castes. During processions or official visits by upper-caste dignitaries, Avarnas had to vacate public roads or hide. Travelling on public roads by a Pulaya or Nayadi was considered a violation of caste norms and could result in beatings or even capital punishment. As stated earlier, many public roads were inaccessible to members of the lower castes. Rev. Mateer states that “the use of public highways was forbidden to outcastes and anyone daring to pass on within polluting distance of a Nayar would be cut down



at once. To secure immediate recognition of such classes they were required to be uncovered above the waist.”

Villages and towns were spatially divided based on caste. The traditional settlements followed a concentric pattern, with Brahmins and temple authorities living at the centre, usually around temples (*agraharams*). Nairs occupied the next concentric ring around the Brahmins, where key economic activities were located. Avarnas were forced to reside in distant, isolated hamlets, often near forests, swamps, or fields. Their homes were poorly built, often lacking basic facilities such as sanitation, proper roads, clean water, and schools. In contrast, Brahmin homes (*Illams*) and Nair residences (*Tharavads*) were large, well-built, and located in elevated, dry, and safe areas with access to temples, schools, and administrative centers.

Similarly, water resources such as rivers, ponds, tanks, and even wells were regulated and restricted. All the common wells were constructed in the first two circles of the savarnas. Avarnas could not dig their own wells or ponds. Instead isolated wells were dug, after state sanction, for avarna use. But they were often located far from their settlements, poorly maintained, or lacking sufficient water, especially during dry seasons. When it came to riverine bodies the avarnas could only access the downstream channels, near sewage outlets. They were not permitted to bathe or even stand on the banks of sacred water bodies. Access to temple ponds (*kulams*) was completely prohibited for lower castes, and any form of misstep resulted in extreme punishment. This was mainly because the temple pond was considered the more integral part of the temple complex, working, especially pertaining to the conduct of purificatory rituals. In fact, it was on this pretext of “temple water bodies being polluted” that the savarnas denied temple entry till the 1930s.

Avarnas were denied full access to markets and could not sell or purchase goods freely in common spaces. In many areas, they had to wait at the periphery of the market, and upper castes would avoid contact with them altogether. In some places, they had to wait for a specific day or time each week to access the market. The practice of untouchability was strictly enforced, and any breach of the code could result in severe punishment, including death.

As a result, the oppressed castes were left with virtually no livelihood options and were forced to take up degrading and low-paying jobs, barely enough to meet their most basic needs.

3.1.2.3 Clothing and Language Restrictions

The upper castes ensured that the clothing, movements, demeanour and choice of words of the lower castes showed deference, humility and submission.

Clothing was not just a matter of personal choice or modesty, but a powerful symbol of caste identity and hierarchy. Lower castes were barred from covering their upper bodies. The lower cloth, too, was to be given by the upper castes as a token, not made or purchased by the avarnas. The cloth given would be coarse and unbleached. The customary laws did not allow them to wear these clothes neatly and were to be kept in an untidy manner. The piece of cloth as such was a marker of caste identity. Umbrellas and footwear were the most popular symbols of status and dignity. They were solely reserved for the savarnas. It is important to realise that these restrictions weren’t about modesty but visual markers of discrimination.

The avarnas had to use degrading words for self-reference and honorific words while referring to the savarnas, such as: *adiyan* (I) and *thampuran* (god); *chetta* (hut) and *koilidam* (Lord’s place); *chathu* (avarna

death) and *kalam cheythu* (savarna death); *kallari* (grain with stones) and *nellu* (grain for the lord); *kidangal* (avarna children) and *thamprankochu* (lord's children) and so on.

Their body language also had to show submission when addressing the savarna. Along with the stipulated distance, they were supposed to bend their bodies and cover their mouths with their hands. Even the sound that was made by the untouchables as they approached was considered a source of pollution. Hence they were only allowed to speak in a low-pitched voice and that too with a hand always covering their mouth, lest their breath should go and pollute the people around.

Any kind of imitation of upper caste manners or language was a punishable offence.

3.1.2.4 Occupational Restrictions

In traditional Kerala society, an individual's caste determined their profession, with no room for occupational mobility. This ensured that the upper castes maintained a monopoly over knowledge, religion, and landownership while the Lower castes were trapped in servile roles, regardless of their skills or interests.

Occupations were determined by hereditary status, and individuals had little or no freedom to choose work outside their caste-assigned roles. This created a closed, unequal, and exploitative economic structure. If a person attempted to take up a profession outside their caste, they faced severe social penalties, including ostracism, violence, or ritual punishment. Lower castes were denied access to education, which further prevented them from entering skilled or respected professions. The system created generational poverty, with little opportunity for upward mobility.

Within the feudal structure of Travancore, the avarnas were forced to do *Uliyam* and *Viruthi* chores for the state. By this system, the lower castes were mandated to do certain voluntary services to the state without remuneration; basically, forced labour. *Viruthi* also connects the same practice under a different name. *Uliyam* was used by the state mainly for repairing roads and public buildings and for acquiring provisions during festivals.

These occupational roles were sacralized by religious belief, often justified by the concepts of karma and dharma, which held that each person must do the work assigned by birth. This religious sanctioning made the caste system appear natural and unchangeable, discouraging resistance.

3.1.2.5 Unwarranted Taxes and Fees

The avarnas not only faced social exclusion and occupational restrictions, but were also subjected to various unjust and humiliating taxes and fees. Many lower castes, especially Pulayas, Parayas, Ezhavas, and Nayadis, were required to pay ritual and customary fees simply to perform basic activities or to access common rights.

Breast Tax or *Mulakkaram* was imposed on lower caste women, especially Ezhavas and Dalits, if they chose to cover their breasts in public, something considered a privilege of upper-caste women. This humiliating tax was a clear tool of gendered and casteist control. Head Tax or *Talakkaram* was a tax imposed on lower caste men for existing within upper-caste-dominated spaces or attempting to assert any social dignity. Similarly, they were charged for conducting weddings, rituals, or funeral ceremonies, even if they were not permitted to perform these rites in the same way as the upper castes. They often had to pay for purification

rituals if they were accused of “polluting” an upper-caste person either by touch, speech, or even visibility. Houses, ladders, boats, nets and even moustaches were all taxed. Every occupational class had to pay some cess or another to the State, or perform services without remuneration. If any remuneration was paid, it was paid in kind. As stated by Rev. Mateer, “Everything at all taxable, was availed of and every special occasion was made an excuse for squeezing the laborious classes of their hard earnings.”

All of this contrasted with the brahmins, who didn’t even have to pay land tax. Thus it can be clearly seen that these were not economic taxes in the modern sense, but caste-imposed levies designed to reinforce social hierarchy and keep marginalized communities in a state of permanent subjugation.

3.1.2.6 Skewed Justice

The law that prevailed in the land was not equalitarian. Caste determined legal rights. Upper castes often received lighter penalties or escaped punishment altogether, while Avarnas faced brutal consequences. For example, a Nair killing a Pulaya would face a fine, while a Pulaya stealing food could be executed. The Brahmins even enjoyed immunity from death penalty. It was also the prerogative of Brahmin judges to give judgements in all important cases. Until the reorganisation of the judicial system, it was the special privilege of the Brahmin judges, *vaidikar* as they were called, to give judgements in all important civil and criminal cases.

Avarnas could not freely access courts or legal authorities; even approaching such institutions required the sanction or support of an upper-caste intermediary. Because lower castes were seen as ritually polluting, their physical presence in courtrooms or administrative spaces was restricted. The

penal code was extremely severe as far as the lower castes were concerned, with the death penalty being imposed even for ordinary offences like theft, killing of cows, etc. Trampling to death under an elephant, thrusting a spear through the body (*Kazhuvetti*), blowing from the mouth of a cannon, hanging spread over three days (*Chitravadham*), mutilation, etc., were visual forms of punishment carried out to create blind obedience through fear. The members of the lower castes were treated in the most inhuman and barbarous manner by the officials of the kingly court. Travancore’s legal system was designed to dehumanize, not protect, the oppressed. Though British rule tended to liberalise and humanise the penal code to some extent, the Naduvazhis and the upper-caste landlords continued to enjoy their position of predominance.

3.1.2.7 Slavery

Slavery in simple terms in the condition of human beings forced to labour for other human beings without any form of self-respect or self-satisfaction in return. It ranges from the simple bonded labour to chattel slavery. Some of the most prominent forms of slavery that we see in history include chattel slavery, *agrestic* slavery, forced labour, and bonded labour. Scholars who study the caste system see various aspects of the above-mentioned within the hierarchical construct of the caste system. That is why the caste system is seen as a kind of slave system, especially for those from the lowest rung of the *avarna* population.

From a more Marxian point of view, the kind of slavery that is seen most prevalent in Kerala is agrarian slavery mainly because the practice of power was chiefly related to land or those who own it. A large portion of the Pulayas, Paraya and Kuruva castes were attached to these lands and transferred along with it. Often referred to as *adima* they are made to toil and bought and sold

like property under this system. They were forced to dwell in huts made of mud and reeds situated away from the visibility of the upper castes.

Vinil Paul narrates how these low castes were auctioned in open markets like cattle. The *janmi* landlords or uppercastes had even the power to put them to death without being called to account. J. W. Gladstone points out that if a man was born into the slave caste he was destined to live and die as a slave. If the owner of the slaves happened to die without heirs, the slave would become a government slave. In short, the slaves were not being treated as human beings entitled to any rights or privileges.

Even though slavery was formally abolished in Travancore in June 1855, the social and economic conditions of the Pulayas, Parayas and Kuruvas remained largely the same until the early twentieth century.

3.1.2.8 Denial of Education and Temple Entry

Historically, the avarnas were prohibited from learning Sanskrit or studying scriptures, meting out harsh punishments like cutting out tongues and pouring molten lead in ears. Although government-run schools teaching English were established in Travancore in the mid-nineteenth century, they were barred to avarnas. School admission rules in Travancore explicitly prohibited children from lower castes, especially Ezhavas and Pulayas, from enrolling. Even in rare cases where Avarna children were allowed near educational institutions, they were forced to sit outside classrooms or remain physically separated from upper caste students. Christian missionaries, particularly CMS (Church Mission Society) and London Missionary Society, opened schools that admitted Ezhavas, Pulayas, and other oppressed

communities, providing an alternative source of education for Avarnas. The upper caste and the Travancore state resented missionary efforts, leading to arson attacks and the burning of missionary educational institutions. In 1896, the Travancore government rejected a petition by Ezhava leader Dr. Palpu seeking educational rights for his community. The rejection was based on the argument that granting higher education to Ezhavas would disrupt the “existing social order.”

Temples in Travancore and Cochin were regarded as centres of ritual purity, accessible only to upper castes. Entry for the avarnas was not only restricted to the inner sanctum but also extended to temple premises, approach roads, and temple festivals. The Travancore state legally and ritually upheld temple restrictions. Temple rules codified the prohibition on Avarna entry and provided for strict social punishment for violations. The 1829 “Purification” Edict required Brahmin priests to conduct ritual cleansing if an Avarna’s shadow crossed temple gates or in the scenario that the Monsoon winds carried Avarna voices into temple compounds. The temple also had enforcement mechanisms in place to keep away the avarnas. This includes placing physical barriers like barricades, signs and thorn fences around the temple’s perimeters and buckets of cow urine to “purify” contaminated zones.

3.1.3 Gender and Caste

The intersection of gender and caste in traditional Kerala created a multilayered structure of oppression and regulation. While caste was the primary determinant of social hierarchy, gender played a crucial role in maintaining caste purity and lineage control. Women’s bodies and sexualities became central to the reproduction of caste boundaries, with different expectations and restrictions imposed based on both caste position and gender identity.



social mobility, the family was still dominated by male *karnavars* (maternal uncles), and women's roles were largely domestic.

Lower caste women: Unlike upper-caste women who were kept out of sight, lower-caste women were hyper-visible in public spaces due to their labour roles. Their bodies were viewed as open and accessible, often leading to sexual exploitation by upper-caste men. Lower-caste women were denied access to education, religious spaces, and even public roads. They were barred from participating in rituals or claiming any public presence as equal citizens. Lower-caste women, including Ezhava and Pulaya women, were historically forbidden from covering their upper bodies in public. The *Channar Revolt* (1820s–1850s) by Nadar women in Travancore was a major protest against this practice.

The idea of ritual pollution was deeply gendered. Menstruation, childbirth, and widowhood were seen as polluting conditions. Women were isolated or ritually excluded during these periods. Caste purity was maintained through strict control over women's sexuality and marital choices. Any relationship across caste lines, especially initiated by women, was met with social boycott or violence.

The dreadful custom known as *pulappedi*, or *Mannappedi*, or *Parappedi* was observed in this period. According to this primitive custom, the members of the lower castes, like Pulayas, Mannans, etc., enjoyed the privilege of harassing women of higher castes, particularly the Nair castes, during certain months every year. The Pulayas used to roam about freely in the night during these privileged months in order to abduct women belonging to the Nair caste. The custom was such that those women of the Nair caste who were carried away by Pulayas or Mannans or at least “polluted by their touch” or even

hit by a stone or stick thrown at them, were treated as outcasts. This custom is referred to by Sheikh Zainuddin and Duarte Barbosa. These primitive customs highlight the fact

that, irrespective of being upper caste or lower caste, women in general were oppressed within the patriarchal Malayali society.

Recap

- ◆ Kerala's caste system was extremely rigid, ritualistic, Brahmanical.
- ◆ Texts and royal decrees legitimised caste hierarchy and exclusion.
- ◆ Untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability enforced through strict social norms.
- ◆ Lower castes faced distance rules, road bans, pollution restrictions.
- ◆ Avarnas denied access to temples, education, markets, public services.
- ◆ Hereditary occupations fixed caste roles, eliminating social mobility.
- ◆ Subcastes reinforced exclusivity and blocked upward social mobility.
- ◆ Justice differed by caste, privileging elites, brutalising Avarnas.
- ◆ Pulayas and Parayas enslaved as adimas, tied to land.
- ◆ Slavery abolished in 1855, but social impacts persisted.
- ◆ Upper-caste women confined; lower-caste women sexually exploited systematically.

Objective Questions

1. Which state-funded institution provided free meals to Brahmins?
2. Which caste occupied the highest position in the traditional Kerala caste hierarchy?
3. What form of slavery involved transferring laborers along with land ownership?

4. What term refers to the Brahmin-Nair marital alliance system?
5. What was the local text that provided religious sanction to caste divisions in Kerala?
6. What humiliating tax was imposed on lower-caste women for covering their breasts?
7. Which caste was referred to as Malayala Shoodras until the 1890s?
8. Which Ezhava leader's petition for education rights was rejected in 1896?
9. Which ritual tribunal tried Nambudiri women accused of sexual misconduct?
10. Who called Kerala a "madhouse of caste" in 1892?

Answers

1. Ootupuras
2. Namboothiri
3. Agrestic Slavery
4. Sambandham
5. Keralolpathi
6. Mulakkaram
7. Nair
8. Palpu
9. Smarthavicharam
10. Vivekananda

Assignments

1. How did the concepts of ‘savarna’ and ‘avarna’ operate in Kerala’s caste system? Provide examples of castes categorized under each.
2. Examine the economic exploitation of lower castes through *Uliyam*, and unjust taxes. How did these practices sustain feudal agrarian relations?
3. Critically examine the institution of slavery in Kerala with reference to agrestic slavery and its impact on Pulayas and Parayas. Was the 1855 abolition truly effective?
4. Compare the status of Nair and Ezhava women in pre-modern Kerala. How did matriliney empower Nair women, yet reinforce caste hierarchies?

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UNIT

Anti-caste and Anti-untouchability Movements

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the nature of caste oppression and social disabilities in nineteenth-century Kerala
- ◆ analyse the reform ideology and strategies of Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali
- ◆ evaluate the role of organisations such as SNDP Yogam, SJPS, and PRDS in social transformation
- ◆ assess the contribution of Dalit movements in shaping Kerala's modern social consciousness

Prerequisite

This unit requires learners to have a basic understanding of the social conditions of Kerala in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when society was marked by severe caste oppression, religious exclusion, and everyday humiliation of marginalised communities. During this period, rigid Brahminical norms regulated clothing, movement, worship, and social behaviour, deeply restricting personal freedom and dignity.

Learners should be familiar with early forms of resistance, such as the assertion of public rights by marginalised groups, which challenged these discriminatory practices. These everyday acts of protest laid the foundation for organised social reform movements.

The unit focuses on three major movements that transformed Kerala's social structure: the Sree Narayana Movement, the struggles led by Ayyankali, and the movement of Poyikayil Yohannan. Although their approaches differed, all aimed to oppose caste domination and to promote equality, self-respect, and human dignity.

An understanding of their social backgrounds, ideologies, and mobilisation methods is essential for critically engaging with the themes of avarna resistance and social transformation discussed in this unit.

Keywords

Sreenarayana Movement, Aruvippuram Consecration, *Villuvandi Samaram*, Poykayil Yohanam

Discussion

The reform movements in Kerala employed a range of strategies to challenge social discrimination and promote dignity among oppressed communities. One important technique was symbolic protest, which directly questioned caste-based customs and social restrictions. Acts such as wearing prohibited clothing, entering public spaces reserved for upper castes, or consecrating temples without Brahmin authority served as powerful challenges to the established social order.

Another important strategy was community organisation and mobilisation. Reformers understood that individual resistance was not sufficient to confront the rigid caste hierarchy. As a result, they established associations and community organisations that helped bring people together, raise awareness, and coordinate collective action. These organisations organised meetings, campaigns, and social programmes that encouraged people to question oppressive customs and assert their rights.

The promotion of education also formed a central element of the reform strategies. Many leaders believed that education was essential for social upliftment and empowerment. Schools, libraries, and vocational institutions were established to provide opportunities

for communities that had long been denied access to learning. Education helped cultivate a new social consciousness and encouraged people to challenge traditional hierarchies.

Reform movements also relied on religious reinterpretation as a means of social transformation. Instead of rejecting religion altogether, many reformers sought to reinterpret religious teachings in ways that emphasised equality, morality, and human dignity. By presenting religion as a force for ethical living rather than social hierarchy, they were able to challenge orthodox practices while still appealing to the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of the people.

3.2.1 SreeNarayana Guru

The avarnas, consisting of the Ezhavas downwards, were victims of social disabilities. The Ezhavas were educationally, economically and socially backward. They were subjected to numerous forms of oppression, including denial of temple entry, education, government jobs, and even access to public roads and water sources. Their main occupation was toddy- tapping and agriculture, while the learned professions of trade, commerce and industry were closed to them

These conditions produced a growing sense of dissatisfaction among marginalised communities. Western education, missionary activities, and the spread of new ideas about equality and human dignity also contributed to a climate in which traditional social hierarchies began to be questioned. Even when English education made its impact on the community, those Ezhavas who benefited from it had to go outside the State for employment, as the public services were not open to them in the princely States of Travancore and Cochin. The example of Dr Palpu, who was denied entry into the Travancore service and consequently sought employment in the Mysore medical service, illustrates this point. It was within this broader environment that Narayana Guru articulated a reformist vision aimed at both spiritual and social transformation.

Sree Narayana Guru, born in 1855 at Chempazhanthi in Travancore, spent his youth making a careful study of Hindu religious and philosophical works and forming his own ideas of Hinduism. Subsequently, he took to sanyasa and led the life of a wandering mendicant. In those days, he was popularly known as Nanu Asan, but later attained fame as Sree Narayana Guru. During his years of wandering, he met Chattampi Swamikal and Thycaud Ayyavu, which shaped his belief that spiritual enlightenment and social reform must go hand in hand.

3.2.1.1 Guru's Reform Ideology

At the centre of Narayana Guru's thought was a philosophy of social equality rooted in spiritual unity. Drawing inspiration from Advaita Vedanta, Guru argued that all human beings shared the same fundamental spiritual essence. Therefore, caste divisions were not divinely ordained but socially constructed barriers that prevented the moral and spiritual progress of society.

His famous declaration "One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind" encapsulated this philosophy. The statement was not merely a religious slogan but a radical critique of caste-based social organisation. By emphasising the unity of humanity, Guru rejected the hierarchical ideology that placed Brahmins at the top of the social order and relegated others to inferior positions.

Unlike some reformers who sought to destroy religion altogether, Narayana Guru attempted to reform religion from within. He believed that religion could serve as a powerful instrument for social uplift if it was freed from ritualism and caste exclusivity. For him, spirituality was inseparable from ethical living, social justice, and human dignity.

Another important element of Guru's ideology was the emphasis on self-respect and self-improvement. He encouraged oppressed communities to cultivate education, moral discipline, and economic independence. According to him, social emancipation required not only the removal of oppressive structures but also the internal strengthening of the community.

3.2.1.2 Temple Consecration as a Strategy of Reform

One of the most striking strategies adopted by Narayana Guru was the consecration of temples by non-Brahmins. The first and most famous example occurred in 1888 at Aruvippuram, where Guru installed a Siva idol. According to traditional practice, only Brahmins were permitted to perform such rituals. Guru's action therefore directly challenged the ritual monopoly of the Brahmin priesthood.

When critics questioned his authority to consecrate the idol, Guru reportedly responded that it was an "Ezhava Siva" rather than a Brahmin Siva, thereby exposing the



absurdity of associating divinity with caste identity. This act symbolised the right of oppressed communities to participate in religious life on equal terms.

Following the Aruvippuram event, Guru established several temples across Kerala. These temples functioned not only as places of worship but also as centres of community organisation and cultural awakening. In some instances, Guru replaced conventional idols with symbolic objects such as mirrors or lamps, emphasising introspection, knowledge, and the divine presence within the individual.

3.2.1.3 The SNDP Yogam

While Guru's early activities were primarily spiritual and symbolic, the movement gradually developed an organised structure with the formation of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1903. The organisation was established with the assistance of prominent followers such as Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu and the poet Kumaran Asan.

The SNDP Yogam served as the institutional framework for implementing Guru's reform ideas. Its activities focused on education, social organisation, and economic progress. The organisation established schools, reading rooms, and hostels in order to improve access to education among the Ezhava community. It also encouraged entrepreneurship and vocational training so that members of the community could move beyond traditional occupations.

Through annual conferences, publications, and public discussions, the SNDP Yogam spread Guru's message of social equality and self-respect. The organisation helped transform Guru's philosophical ideas into a broad social movement that mobilised large sections of Kerala society.

3.2.1.4 Social Reform Through Education

Education occupied a central place in Sree Narayana Guru's programme of social reform. He believed that the persistence of caste oppression was closely connected with ignorance, lack of access to learning, and the social isolation of marginalised communities. In nineteenth-century Kerala, communities such as the Ezhavas were largely excluded from formal education and from institutions where knowledge was produced and transmitted. Guru recognised that without intellectual empowerment, social equality would remain difficult to achieve. For this reason, he consistently encouraged members of oppressed communities to pursue education and cultivate a spirit of inquiry.

For Guru, education was not limited to literacy alone. He viewed it as a means of awakening self-respect, critical thinking, and social awareness. Education, in his understanding, enabled individuals to question unjust customs and to recognise that the inequalities of caste were not natural or divinely sanctioned. By gaining knowledge, people could develop the confidence to participate more actively in society and aspire to occupations and roles that had previously been denied to them. In this sense, education became a tool of empowerment that allowed marginalised communities to challenge their own historical marginalisation.

Guru also encouraged the establishment of schools, libraries, and centres of learning through the networks that later emerged around the SNDP Yogam. These institutions helped create new opportunities for younger generations who might otherwise have remained confined to hereditary occupations. At a broader level, the spread of education contributed to the emergence of a socially conscious community that could articulate its demands for equality and dignity in public life.

3.2.2 Ayyankali

The reform movement led by Ayyankali (1863–1941) emerged within the rigid and oppressive caste order of Travancore society. Among the communities most severely affected by this system were the Pulayas, who were treated as untouchables and subjected to extreme social and economic exploitation. They were denied access to public roads, markets, temples, and educational institutions. Pulayas were also bound to agricultural labour under feudal conditions and had little opportunity for social mobility.

Ayyankali was born in 1863 at Venganoor in southern Travancore and grew up witnessing the humiliation and hardships endured by his community. From an early age he developed a deep sense of injustice against the caste system. Although he had no formal education, he possessed strong leadership qualities and an instinctive understanding of the importance of dignity, equality, and collective resistance.

The broader social reform climate of Kerala also influenced him. The activities of organisations such as the SNDP Yogam and reformers like Sree Narayana Guru demonstrated that organised movements could challenge long-standing social hierarchies. Inspired by these developments, Ayyankali began to mobilise the Pulaya community and articulate a programme of reform aimed at securing civil rights and social dignity.

3.2.2.1 Ayyankali's Reform Ideology

At the core of Ayyankali's reform ideology was the belief that social equality and human dignity were fundamental rights. He rejected the idea that caste hierarchy was natural or divinely ordained and instead viewed it as an unjust system created to maintain the

privileges of dominant groups.

Ayyankali emphasised the importance of self-respect and collective assertion among oppressed communities. He believed that the Pulayas should no longer accept humiliation or restrictions imposed by caste society. Instead, they needed to cultivate confidence, unity, and a sense of their own worth.

Another important aspect of his ideology was the belief that education was essential for liberation. Ayyankali understood that ignorance and social exclusion had kept Dalit communities in a condition of dependency. Access to education, therefore, was not merely about learning but about gaining the intellectual tools necessary to challenge oppression and transform society. In addition to education, Ayyankali also recognised the significance of economic justice and labour rights. As most Pulayas worked as agricultural labourers under harsh conditions, he emphasised the need to organise them and demand fair wages, humane treatment, and freedom from bonded labour practices.

Ayyankali's strategies often involved bold symbolic acts that challenged caste restrictions in everyday life. One of the most famous examples was the *Villuvandi Samaram* (Bullock Cart Protest) of 1893. At that time, lower-caste individuals were forbidden from using certain public roads that were reserved for upper castes.

Ayyankali deliberately defied this rule by riding a decorated bullock cart through one such road. This act provoked strong opposition from dominant castes, but it also became a powerful symbol of resistance. By claiming the right to travel on public roads, Ayyankali asserted the basic principle that public spaces belonged to all citizens, regardless of caste.

Such acts of defiance were not isolated gestures but part of a broader strategy aimed at breaking the psychological barriers created



by caste oppression. They encouraged the Pulaya community to overcome fear and assert their rights in public life. Education became one of the central focuses of Ayyankali's reform movement. He believed that the long-term emancipation of Dalits depended on the ability of children to receive formal schooling.

In 1904, he established a school for Dalit children in Venganoor, but it was immediately attacked and destroyed by upper-caste groups. Despite this setback, Ayyankali continued to press for the right of Dalit children to attend government schools. His campaign intensified during the following years. In several instances, Pulaya families attempted to send their children to schools, leading to violent clashes with upper-caste groups who opposed their entry. Ayyankali responded by organising protests and mobilising agricultural labourers. One of the most notable actions occurred when he encouraged Pulaya workers to refuse agricultural labour until their children were allowed access to education. This mobilisation has often been described as one of the earliest organised agricultural labour strikes in Kerala, linking the demand for education with broader questions of labour rights and social justice.

Gradually, these persistent struggles forced the Travancore government to reconsider its policies. The Educational Code of 1909–1910 formally removed many of the restrictions that prevented children from lower castes from attending government schools, although social resistance continued in practice.

3.2.2.2 Formation of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham

To organise these struggles more effectively, Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) in 1907. The organisation aimed to unite oppressed communities and provide a structured platform for social and political mobilisation. Through

meetings, campaigns, and community gatherings, the Sangham educated people about their rights and encouraged them to pursue education, maintain discipline, and cultivate self-respect. It also established schools in Dalit settlements and supported families whose children faced discrimination in educational institutions. The Sangham gradually expanded into a large network of branches across Travancore, helping to build solidarity among Dalit communities and strengthening their collective voice.

Ayyankali also understood the importance of representation within formal political institutions. In 1910, he was nominated to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, the legislative council of Travancore. His presence in this body was historically significant, as it marked one of the earliest instances of a Dalit leader participating in a representative political institution in India.

Within the Sabha, Ayyankali consistently advocated for reforms such as school admission for Dalit children, improved labour conditions, access to public spaces, and protection from caste discrimination. His participation helped bring the concerns of marginalised communities into official political discussions.

Ayyankali's reform movement played a crucial role in the social transformation of Kerala. Through a combination of symbolic resistance, organisational mobilisation, labour activism, and political advocacy, he challenged the entrenched caste system and demanded recognition of Dalit rights. More importantly, his movement helped cultivate self-respect and collective identity among oppressed communities, encouraging them to move from a position of submission to one of organised resistance. In this sense, Ayyankali's strategies and reform ideology contributed significantly to the broader process of social awakening that reshaped Kerala society in the early twentieth century.

3.2.3 Poyikayil Yohannan

Poykayil Yohannan (1879–1939), also known as Sree Kumara Guru Devan, emerged as an important reformer in early twentieth-century Kerala. A contemporary of Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali, Yohannan addressed the social and spiritual marginalisation of the Pulaya and Paraya communities through a distinctive combination of religious reform, poetry, and political activism.

Born into a Pulaya family in Travancore, Yohannan experienced the harsh realities of caste oppression from an early age. Dalit communities were denied access to education, excluded from temples and public institutions, and forced into degrading forms of labour. These experiences shaped Yohannan's understanding of social injustice and led him to question both the religious and social foundations of caste hierarchy.

Like many members of oppressed communities at the time, Yohannan initially turned to Christianity, hoping that conversion would offer dignity and equality. He joined the Marthoma Syrian Christian Church, believing that the Christian emphasis on spiritual equality might provide a path out of caste oppression. However, he soon realised that caste distinctions continued even within the church. Dalit converts were segregated during worship and were rarely allowed positions of authority. This disillusionment convinced Yohannan that genuine emancipation required a new spiritual framework rooted in the lived experiences of the oppressed.

3.2.3.1 Reform Ideology

The reform ideology of Poykayil Yohannan centred on the idea that religion must recognise the suffering and humanity of oppressed communities. He argued that traditional religious systems—both Hindu and Christian—had either ignored or legitimised caste hierarchy. As a result, they failed to

address the historical experiences of Dalits.

Yohannan therefore sought to create a religious movement that affirmed Dalit identity and dignity. Unlike many reformers who attempted to reinterpret existing scriptures, Yohannan openly rejected religious texts such as the Vedas, Puranas, and even the Bible, arguing that they did not contain the history or voice of the oppressed. According to him, the absence of Dalits from these texts symbolised their exclusion from the moral imagination of society. Instead, Yohannan proposed the idea of a living and visible God who understood the suffering of the oppressed. This conception of divinity emphasised immediate moral and social transformation rather than distant spiritual salvation. In doing so, Yohannan transformed religion into a platform for protest against caste oppression and a means of rebuilding collective identity among Dalit communities.

3.2.3.2 Formation of the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS)

In 1909, Yohannan founded the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS) at Eraviperoor in Travancore. The organisation represented both a religious movement and a social reform initiative. Its central aim was to create a spiritual and social space where Dalits could assert their identity without the constraints imposed by caste society. The PRDS rejected ritual hierarchies and scriptural authority and instead drew upon oral traditions, songs, and collective memory. Through these practices, Yohannan encouraged his followers to reclaim their past and reinterpret their experiences of suffering and resilience.

The movement also emphasised education, economic self-reliance, and social discipline. Yohannan urged his followers to pursue modern education and acquire land or property wherever possible. These



strategies were intended to strengthen the economic and intellectual position of Dalit communities and reduce their dependence on dominant caste groups. Within a few years, the PRDS expanded across several regions of Travancore, attracting followers from various marginalised communities who found in the movement a powerful expression of dignity and self-respect.

One of the most distinctive features of Yohannan's movement was his use of poetry and songs as instruments of social critique. Composed in Malayalam, his verses articulated the pain and humiliation endured by Dalit communities under the caste system. In many of his poems, Yohannan referred to the "erased history" of the oppressed, suggesting that the suffering of Dalits had been deliberately excluded from official historical narratives. Through poetic expression, he sought to restore this lost memory and affirm the collective experiences of his people. These songs were performed within PRDS gatherings and gradually became an important medium through which ideas of resistance, dignity, and social awareness were communicated among followers.

Alongside his religious activities, Yohannan also participated in formal politics. In 1921, he was nominated to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, the legislative council of Travancore. Within this body he raised issues such as denial of education, landlessness, social discrimination, and restrictions imposed on Dalit communities. Although his influence within the council was limited due to the dominance of upper-caste elites, his presence itself symbolised an important shift. For the first time, a leader who openly spoke about the historical oppression of Dalits had entered the formal political arena.

Poykayil Yohannan's movement represented a unique strand within Kerala's social reform tradition. While many reformers challenged caste through reinterpretation of existing religious traditions, Yohannan went further by questioning the authority of those traditions themselves.

Through the PRDS, his poetry, and his political activism, he created a new framework in which religion became a medium for reclaiming Dalit history, dignity, and identity. In doing so, Yohannan contributed significantly to the broader social awakening that transformed Kerala society in the early twentieth century.

Recap

- ◆ Avarna communities suffered severe caste-based social and economic disabilities.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru advocated spiritual unity and social equality.
- ◆ Temple consecration challenged Brahmin monopoly over religious authority.
- ◆ SNDP Yogam institutionalised Guru's programme of social reform.
- ◆ Ayyankali mobilised Dalits through protests, education, and labour activism.

- ◆ Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham organised Dalit social and political mobilisation.
- ◆ Poykayil Yohannan created PRDS affirming Dalit identity and dignity

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) founded?
2. In which year was the Aruvippuram temple consecrated by Sree Narayana Guru?
3. Which organisation was founded by Ayyankali in 1907 for the upliftment of the depressed classes?
4. Which social reformer led the Villuvandi Samaram in Travancore?
5. Who founded the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS)?
6. Which caste community was primarily represented by the SNDP Yogam?
7. Which community did Ayyankali mainly organise for social reform?
8. What was the name of the religious and social organisation founded by Poykayil Yohannan?
9. What slogan associated with Sree Narayana Guru emphasised social unity?

Answers

1. 1903
2. 1888
3. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham
4. Ayyankali
5. Poykayil Yohannan

6. Ezhava
7. Pulaya
8. PRDS
9. One caste, one religion, one God for humankind

Assignments

1. Examine the reform ideology of Sree Narayana Guru and its significance in Kerala's social transformation.
2. Discuss the role of Ayyankali in promoting education and civil rights among the Pulaya community.
3. Analyse the strategies adopted by social reformers to challenge caste discrimination in Kerala.
4. Evaluate the significance of Poykayil Yohannan's PRDS movement in the assertion of Dalit identity

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UNIT

Socio-Religious Reform Movements

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand how socio-religious reform movements created new social consciousness in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the role of education in promoting social awareness and equality
- ◆ examine how reformers reinterpreted religion to challenge caste hierarchy
- ◆ evaluate the organisational and grassroots nature of reform movements in Kerala

Prerequisite

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed important social changes in Kerala through a series of socio-religious reform movements. These movements emerged in response to the rigid caste system, social inequalities and oppressive customs that had long shaped Kerala society. Traditional social structures placed people in strict hierarchical positions, where lower caste communities were subjected to discrimination, untouchability and denial of basic rights such as education, temple entry and access to public spaces. Reform movements gradually challenged these oppressive conditions and contributed to the emergence of a more egalitarian society.

The reform movements in Kerala were not merely religious in character. They were closely connected with broader social and intellectual developments such as the spread of modern education, missionary activities and the growth of new economic opportunities during the colonial period. These developments encouraged people to question existing social practices and seek reforms within their communities. Reformers attempted to reinterpret religion, promote social equality and create

awareness among the oppressed sections of society. Through their efforts, Kerala experienced a significant transformation in social consciousness, religious outlook and patterns of social organisation.

Keywords

Social Consciousness, Religious reform, Caste hierarchy, Social equality, Modern education, Community organisations

Discussion

3.3.1 Creation of New Social Consciousness

One of the most important contributions of the socio-religious reform movements in Kerala was the creation of a new social consciousness among the people. For centuries, caste hierarchy had been accepted as a natural and unquestionable part of social life. Lower caste communities were often forced to internalise their inferior status, and resistance against such practices was limited. However, the reform movements gradually encouraged people to challenge these long-standing inequalities.

The spread of Western education played an important role in this transformation. Missionary schools and other educational institutions introduced ideas of equality, liberty and human dignity. Educated individuals began to examine social customs critically and questioned the legitimacy of caste-based discrimination. Education also created opportunities for members of oppressed communities to improve their social and economic conditions, which in turn strengthened their confidence to demand equal rights.

Reform leaders and social activists further contributed to the awakening of social

consciousness by organising communities and encouraging collective action. Leaders such as Sree Narayana Guru emphasised the importance of self-respect and social upliftment. His famous message, “One caste, one religion, one God for humankind,” challenged the ideological foundations of caste hierarchy and promoted the idea of universal equality. Through the establishment of temples, educational institutions and social organisations, he helped create a sense of unity and dignity among marginalised communities.

Similarly, other reformers and organisations worked to mobilise different sections of society. Community organisations encouraged education, social reform and political awareness among their members. These efforts gradually weakened the rigid structures of caste domination and created a broader sense of social awareness. People began to recognise that social inequalities were not divinely ordained but were products of human institutions that could be changed.

As a result of these developments, the oppressed communities started demanding greater access to education, employment and public spaces. Movements for temple entry and social equality gained strength across Kerala. The emergence of this new

social consciousness played a crucial role in shaping later political movements and democratic struggles in the region.

3.3.1.1 Nature of Reform Movements

One of the most distinctive features of the reform movements in Kerala was that they were largely initiated by members of the oppressed or marginalised communities. Unlike many other regions of India where reform movements were led mainly by the educated upper classes, in Kerala the earliest expressions of protest came from the so-called *avarna* or lower castes who directly experienced caste oppression. Their struggles focused on removing caste disabilities and achieving social dignity. These movements demanded access to roads, temples, schools, and public facilities that had previously been denied to them. In this sense, the reform movements represented a grassroots challenge to the entrenched caste hierarchy.

Another important aspect of these movements was their emphasis on social equality and human dignity. Reformers questioned practices such as untouchability, caste discrimination, and restrictions on social mobility. They argued that all human beings were equal and deserved the same rights and opportunities. Many movements also advocated for the abolition of oppressive customs and encouraged people to adopt more rational and humane social practices. Through public protests, community organisations, and social campaigns, reformers gradually challenged the legitimacy of traditional hierarchies and helped reshape social attitudes.

Education played a central role in the nature of the reform movements. The spread of modern education, often facilitated by missionary institutions and new schools, created a new awareness among the

people. Education enabled individuals from marginalised communities to question existing social norms and demand equality. It also helped cultivate a new generation of thinkers and leaders who were willing to challenge orthodoxy and promote progressive ideas. As education spread, it contributed to the development of a broader social consciousness that encouraged reform and modernisation.

The reform movements were also closely connected with religious transformation. Many reformers attempted to reinterpret religious teachings in ways that emphasised equality and ethical living rather than ritual hierarchy. In doing so, they challenged the authority of orthodox religious institutions and promoted a more inclusive understanding of faith. These ideas encouraged people to move away from rigid ritualism and embrace a more ethical and socially responsible approach to religion.

Another notable feature of these movements was their organised and collective character. Reformers established various organisations and associations to mobilise people and coordinate social action. These organisations worked to promote education, social reform, and community upliftment. They also organised protests and campaigns that demanded equal rights and access to public spaces. Such collective efforts helped transform isolated grievances into broader social movements that could influence public policy and social attitudes.

3.3.1.2 Transformation of Religion and Human Values

Another important dimension of the socio-religious reform movements in Kerala was the rethinking of religion and its relationship with everyday human life. In pre-modern Kerala society, religion was closely intertwined with caste hierarchy and social inequality. Religious authority was largely controlled

by dominant castes, and many rituals and customs reinforced social divisions. Access to temples, sacred knowledge, and participation in religious life were often restricted to the upper sections of society, while lower castes faced exclusion and discrimination. In this context, religion functioned not only as a spiritual system but also as a mechanism that legitimised social hierarchy.

The reform movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to challenge this situation by redefining the meaning and purpose of religion. Reformers argued that religion should not be used to justify inequality or oppression. Instead, they emphasised the ethical and humanistic aspects of religious teachings. According to them, the essence of religion lay in moral conduct, compassion, and respect for fellow human beings rather than in rigid ritual practices or inherited privileges. This reinterpretation of religion gradually encouraged people to question long-standing customs and to adopt a more inclusive outlook.

A central figure in this transformation was Sree Narayana Guru, whose teachings and actions significantly reshaped religious thinking in Kerala. Guru rejected the idea that spiritual authority was confined to particular castes. His famous message, often summarised as “one caste, one religion, one God for humankind,” reflected his vision of a society based on equality and mutual respect. By consecrating temples that were open to communities who had previously been denied access to places of worship, he directly challenged the traditional monopoly of upper castes over religious institutions. These acts demonstrated that religious spaces could also serve as centres of social reform and community empowerment.

Chattampi Swamikal also played an important role in questioning orthodox religious interpretations. Through his writings and teachings, he criticised the rigid caste

structure and rejected the claim that Brahmins alone possessed the authority to interpret sacred texts. He encouraged ordinary people to study religious literature and understand its deeper philosophical meaning. By emphasising spiritual equality and rational inquiry, he helped weaken the belief that caste hierarchy had a divine origin.

These reformist ideas gradually altered the way religion was perceived within Kerala society. Religion began to be viewed less as a rigid system of ritual control and more as a source of ethical guidance and social responsibility. The reinterpretation of religious traditions allowed reformers to challenge discrimination while still working within a cultural and spiritual framework familiar to the people.

3.3.2 Chattampi Swamikal and the Reform Movement

Born in 1853 as Kunjan Pillai in Kannammoola near Thiruvananthapuram, he grew up in a society marked by rigid caste divisions and unequal access to knowledge. Although he belonged to the Nair community, his family’s limited financial resources prevented him from receiving formal education. Yet this did not hinder his intellectual growth. Through observation, discussion, and independent study, he gradually acquired knowledge of Sanskrit, Tamil, philosophy, and religious literature. This unconventional path to learning later shaped his critical outlook toward social hierarchy and religious authority.

One of the most significant aspects of Chattampi Swamikal’s contribution was his role in fostering a new social consciousness in Kerala. During the nineteenth century, caste hierarchy structured almost every aspect of social life. Access to education, religious institutions, and public spaces was controlled by dominant castes, especially the Namboodiri Brahmins. Many communities

internalised these hierarchies as natural or divinely sanctioned. Swamikal's writings challenged this acceptance of inequality. Through works such as *Pracheena Malayalam*, he questioned the historical foundations of Brahmanical dominance in Kerala. In particular, he rejected the widely circulated myth that the land of Kerala had been gifted to Brahmins by Parasurama. By exposing this narrative as a later ideological construction, he undermined the moral legitimacy of Brahmanical supremacy.

This critique was not merely theological. Swamikal approached caste from a historical and social perspective. He argued that caste divisions had developed through human institutions rather than divine will. According to him, the control of land, ritual authority, and knowledge allowed a small elite to dominate the social order. In contrast, the labouring communities—such as Pulayars and Parayars—who sustained the economic foundations of society were relegated to the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy. By highlighting these contradictions, Swamikal encouraged people to see social inequality as a historical condition that could be questioned and transformed. His ideas helped cultivate a critical awareness among communities that had long been excluded from intellectual discourse.

Closely connected with this awakening of social consciousness was Swamikal's reinterpretation of religion. In the traditional order of Kerala, religion had become closely intertwined with caste privilege. Sacred knowledge and ritual authority were concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority were excluded from participation in religious learning. Swamikal challenged this monopoly. He argued that the Vedas and other sacred texts were not divine revelations beyond question but compositions produced by human thinkers. Such a claim weakened the authority of those who claimed exclusive

rights over religious interpretation.

Swamikal also questioned the prohibition that prevented women and Shudras from studying the Vedas. By examining early religious literature, he pointed out that such restrictions were not inherent to the earliest traditions but were later social conventions. In doing so, he shifted the discussion from ritual hierarchy to ethical spirituality. Religion, in his view, should nurture moral values such as compassion, equality, and self-discipline rather than reinforce social divisions. His approach encouraged people to understand spirituality as a personal and ethical pursuit rather than a system of inherited privilege.

Another striking feature of Swamikal's thought was his openness to diverse intellectual traditions. His studies were not confined to Sanskrit texts alone. He explored Tamil Saiva literature, Siddha philosophy, and elements of Buddhist and Jain thought. He was also aware of Christian and Islamic teachings. This wide intellectual engagement shaped his pluralistic understanding of religion. For Swamikal, truth could not be confined within the boundaries of a single tradition. Wisdom emerged through dialogue between cultures and philosophies. Such an outlook challenged the exclusivist tendencies of orthodox religious institutions and promoted a broader cultural vision of Kerala society.

The nature of the reform associated with Chattampi Swamikal was somewhat different from later organised social movements. He did not build large institutional networks or mass organisations. His influence operated primarily through ideas—through conversations, writings, and the circle of students and thinkers who gathered around him. Yet this intellectual intervention proved deeply influential. By questioning established beliefs and encouraging rational inquiry, he created an atmosphere in which social

reform could flourish.

An important dimension of his work was his historical approach to Kerala society. Swamikal attempted to understand the past not through mythological narratives but through rational examination. He analysed the emergence of Brahmanical authority in relation to land ownership and social power. This method introduced an early form of historical sociology into Kerala's intellectual discourse. By presenting caste as a historically constructed system rather than a sacred order, he opened the possibility of challenging it through social reform.

Swamikal's ideas also influenced other reformers who played major roles in Kerala's transformation. His association with Sree Narayana Guru is particularly noteworthy.

Their interactions during the late nineteenth century created an intellectual climate that questioned caste privilege and emphasised spiritual equality. While Narayana Guru later organised institutional reforms and community movements, Swamikal's philosophical critique had already laid much of the groundwork for such efforts.

In many ways, Chattampi Swamikal can be seen as one of the early thinkers who prepared the intellectual foundations of Kerala's social reform movements. His challenge to Brahmanical authority, his defence of universal access to knowledge, and his reinterpretation of religion all contributed to a gradual transformation of social attitudes. He encouraged people to see society not as a fixed hierarchy but as a historical formation capable of change.

Recap

- ◆ Socio-religious reform movements generated a new social consciousness in Kerala society.
- ◆ The spread of modern education encouraged critical engagement with caste discrimination.
- ◆ Religion was reinterpreted through ethical principles such as equality and human dignity.
- ◆ Reformers challenged ritualism and the ideological foundations of caste hierarchy.
- ◆ Grassroots struggles articulated demands for social justice, rights, and dignity.
- ◆ Community organisations played a crucial role in mobilising people for social reform.
- ◆ Chattampi Swamikal articulated a powerful critique of Brahmanical dominance in Kerala.
- ◆ His writings defended universal access to knowledge and spiritual learning.

- ◆ He interpreted caste hierarchy as a historical and social construct rather than a divine order.
- ◆ His intellectual interventions influenced later reformers, including Narayana Guru.

Objective Questions

1. Who proclaimed the message “One caste, one religion, one God for humankind”?
2. Which thinker critically challenged the Brahmanical monopoly over sacred knowledge?
3. Which type of educational institution contributed significantly to the spread of modern education in Kerala?
4. Which social structure historically dominated traditional Kerala society?
5. Which concept emphasised dignity, equality, and equal access to social opportunities?

Answers

1. Narayana Guru
2. Chattampi Swamikal
3. Missionary schools
4. Caste system
5. Equality

Assignments

1. Examine the role of education in creating new social consciousness in Kerala.
2. Analyse how reformers reinterpreted religion to challenge caste hierarchy.

3. Discuss the grassroots nature of socio-religious reform movements in Kerala.
4. Evaluate the role of organisations and collective action in social reform movements

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UNIT

Formation of Organisations

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the historical context and emergence of caste-based reform movements in Kerala
- ◆ evaluate the contributions of major organisations and leaders to social transformation
- ◆ examine the role of caste associations in challenging social inequalities and discrimination
- ◆ assess the participation and impact of women and women's organisations in Kerala's social reform movement

Prerequisite

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a transformative era in Kerala's political history, as the region witnessed the rise of organized movements challenging caste oppression, colonial subjugation, and feudal hierarchies. What began as petitions for representation, such as the Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava Memorial, soon evolved into broader struggles for social justice, political rights, and self-respect. These movements were not isolated; they were part of a broader wave of awakening in which marginalised communities, including Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, and others, asserted their dignity through education, journalism, and legislative action.

Simultaneously, caste-based organizations like the SNDP Yogam, Nair Service Society (NSS), and Pulaya Maha Sabha emerged, reflecting both reformist and reactionary currents within Kerala's complex social fabric. The period also saw the birth of radical political ideologies of socialism and communism taking root among

peasants and workers, while the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League navigated the turbulent waters of nationalism and communal identity.

This unit explores how these diverse movements – social, political, and ideological – shaped modern Kerala. From the courtroom to the streets, from petitions to satyagrahas, the struggles of this era laid the foundation for Kerala's distinctive trajectory of social democracy and progressive politics.

Keywords

Caste Hierarchy, Social Reform Movement, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Nair Service Society, Yogakshema Sabha, Dalit Assertion, Women's Activism

Discussion

3.4.1 Caste-Based Reform Movements in Kerala

The social reform movements that emerged in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were closely connected to the realities of the caste system. Kerala society at the time was deeply hierarchical, with rigid notions of purity and pollution regulating social interactions, access to public spaces, education, and employment. Communities placed at the lower end of this hierarchy faced severe discrimination, including untouchability and unapproachability. In response to these conditions, several caste-based organisations emerged across Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. These organisations sought to reform their respective communities while simultaneously challenging social discrimination and demanding equal rights. Although they began as community-based initiatives, many of them gradually evolved into significant social and political movements.

3.4.1.1 SNDP Yogam and the Mobilisation of the Ezhava Community

One of the most influential caste-based reform organisations in Kerala was the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, founded in 1903 under the spiritual inspiration of Sree Narayana Guru and with the organisational leadership of figures such as Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu and Kumaran Asan. The organisation aimed primarily at the upliftment of the Ezhava community, which had long been subjected to social exclusion and denied access to education, government employment, and temple worship.

In its early years, the SNDP Yogam focused on social and educational reforms. It promoted the establishment of schools, encouraged modern education, and worked to eliminate practices that kept the community socially and economically backward. The organisation also continued the strategy of petitioning the Travancore government, a method earlier adopted by Dr. Palpu, demanding equal access to education and government service.



Gradually, the SNDP Yogam became an important platform for political mobilisation. With the introduction of representative institutions in Travancore, such as the Sri Moolam Assembly, SNDP leaders began to participate in legislative politics. Leaders like T.K. Madhavan used their positions to raise issues of untouchability, civil rights, and temple entry. The organisation also played a crucial role in mobilising support for the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25), which demanded the right of lower castes to use public roads around the Vaikom temple. Through such involvement, the SNDP Yogam helped transform social reform into a broader movement for civil and political rights.

3.4.1.2 Nair Service Society and Reform within the Nair Community

The early twentieth century also witnessed reform movements within communities that were traditionally placed higher in the caste hierarchy. The Nair Service Society (NSS) was founded in 1914 by Mannath Padmanabhan to address social and economic problems within the Nair community.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, many Nairs believed that their social influence had declined due to changing economic conditions, the rise of other communities, and the impact of modern education. Mannath Padmanabhan argued that the community needed organised action in order to adapt to these changes. The NSS therefore worked to promote education, social organisation, and economic development among the Nairs.

One of the major concerns of the organisation was the reform of the Marumakkathayam system, the matrilineal system of inheritance prevalent among the Nairs. This system had often led to disputes over property and inheritance within large joint families. The NSS campaigned for

legislative reforms, which eventually resulted in the Nair Regulation Acts of 1921 and 1925 in Travancore. These laws introduced changes in property rights, allowed individual partition of family property, and contributed to the gradual transformation of traditional family structures. The NSS also participated in wider social reform movements. During the Vaikom Satyagraha, Mannath Padmanabhan organised the Savarna Jatha, a procession of upper-caste supporters who demanded the removal of restrictions on lower-caste access to public roads near temples.

3.4.1.3 Yogakshema Sabha and Reform among the Namboothiris

Another significant caste-based reform organisation was the Yogakshema Sabha, established in 1908 to promote reform within the Namboothiri Brahmin community. Despite their high ritual status, Namboothiris maintained several conservative customs that restricted social mobility and personal freedom within the community.

One of the key issues addressed by the Yogakshema Sabha was the traditional practice in which only the eldest Namboothiri male was permitted to marry within the community. Younger males were often forced into relationships outside the community, while many Namboothiri women remained unmarried throughout their lives. The Sabha advocated reforms that would allow all Namboothiri men to marry and improve the status of women.

The organisation also encouraged the study of modern subjects, including English, and promoted progressive ideas through its publication *Unni Namboothiri*. Reformers such as V.T. Bhattathiripad and E.M.S. Namboothiripad were associated with the movement. Their efforts contributed to broader debates about social reform and

eventually influenced the Malayala Brahmin Regulation of 1931, which introduced legal reforms related to inheritance and the management of Namboothiri family property.

3.4.1.4 Dalit Movements and Community Organisations

While reform movements within upper and intermediate castes sought internal social changes, movements among oppressed communities focused on overcoming severe discrimination and achieving basic rights. Several organisations emerged to mobilise Dalit communities and articulate their demands.

In the princely state of Cochin, Krishnadi Asan founded the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha in 1913 to organise the Pulaya community. The first meeting of the organisation was famously conducted on rafts in Vembanad Lake after authorities denied permission to hold it on land. Despite early difficulties, the movement later gained momentum under leaders such as P.C. Chanjan and K.P. Vallon, who represented the community in the Cochin Legislative Council. Through these efforts, the organisation demanded access to education, land, and basic civic rights for Dalit communities.

Similarly, Pandit K.P. Karuppan worked for the upliftment of the Dheevara (fisher-folk) community. In 1910 he established the

Vaala Samudaya Parikshkarini Sabha, which aimed to promote education and social reform among the Vaala section of the community. Karuppan used literature, songs, and public speeches to challenge caste discrimination and spread awareness about the importance of education and social unity. His famous work Jathikummi criticised the caste system and became widely popular among marginalised communities.

Another important leader was Pampady John Joseph, who founded the Cheramar Mahajana Sabha in 1921. John Joseph attempted to reconstruct the historical identity of the Pulaya community by using the term “Cheramar,” suggesting that they were descendants of the ancient Chera people. Through this reinterpretation of history, he sought to restore dignity and self-respect among Dalits. The organisation encouraged education, established schools and libraries, and submitted petitions demanding social equality and the abolition of untouchability.

The Parayar Mahajana Sangham, founded in 1922 by Kavarikulam Kantan Kumaran, also worked for the upliftment of the Paraya community. The organisation promoted education, campaigned against social practices that hindered economic progress, and demanded access to land and public institutions. Through these efforts, the Sangham sought to instil a sense of collective identity and dignity among the Parayas.

The caste-based reform movements that emerged in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a dual nature. While they were primarily organised for the upliftment of specific caste communities, they also gradually contributed to the broader struggle against caste discrimination and social inequality. Thus, these movements were both community-oriented and socially reformative.

In the beginning, most reform organisations focused on the development of their own communities. Kerala society at that time was deeply structured by a rigid caste hierarchy, where different communities faced varying degrees of

social restrictions and discrimination. As a result, reform leaders believed that progress could only be achieved through collective organisation within each caste group. For example, the SNDP Yogam worked for the advancement of the Ezhava community by promoting education and social reform. The Nair Service Society (NSS) focused on improving the social and economic conditions of the Nair community, including reforms in family structure and inheritance. Similarly, the Yogakshema Sabha attempted to reform conservative practices among the Namboothiri Brahmins. Among the oppressed communities, organisations such as the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha and the Cheramar Mahajana Sabha worked to secure basic rights like education, social dignity, and access to public spaces. Although these movements initially concentrated on community uplift, many reformers gradually adopted broader egalitarian ideas. Leaders such as Sree Narayana Guru emphasised universal equality through the message of “*One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind.*” Similarly, the participation of various caste organisations in movements like the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25) showed that reform efforts were expanding beyond individual communities.

In conclusion, these movements in Kerala were not purely egalitarian in their initial stages, as they mainly focused on the development of their own communities. However, over time they contributed significantly to challenging caste discrimination and promoting social equality, playing a crucial role in the social transformation of modern Kerala

3.4.2 Women Organisations in Kerala's Social Reform Movement

The social reform movement in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought profound changes to society. While many reform initiatives were led by prominent male leaders, women also played a significant role in challenging social inequalities and oppressive customs. Their contributions were visible through organised movements, public activism, and literary interventions that questioned deeply rooted patriarchal practices. As education spread and new ideas of equality and justice emerged, women gradually began to participate in public life and social reform activities.

In traditional Kerala society, women faced several restrictions. In some communities, particularly among the Namboothiris, women lived under strict systems of

seclusion. Namboothiri women, known as *Antharjanams*, were expected to remain inside their homes and had very limited opportunities for education or social interaction. Widowhood imposed even harsher conditions, as widow remarriage was prohibited and women were often condemned to lives of isolation. The reform movements that emerged in Kerala began to question such practices and opened new possibilities for women's participation in society.

One of the important figures associated with reform among Namboothiri women was Parvathy Nenmenimangalam. She was actively involved in the Ghosha Bahishkarana Movement, which emerged in the late 1920s as a protest against the system of *ghosha* or seclusion imposed on Namboothiri women. The movement encouraged women to abandon symbols of seclusion such as the *marakkuda* (palm-leaf umbrella) and to appear freely in public spaces. Parvathy

Nenmenimangalam also supported reforms in marriage practices within the Namboothiri community. One of the most significant achievements of this reform movement was the organisation of widow remarriages, which challenged long-standing social taboos and helped improve the social status of women within the community.

Another important reformer was Arya Pallam, who worked for the upliftment of Namboothiri women and the reform of oppressive customs. She participated in the Ghosha Bahishkarana Movement and supported campaigns promoting women's education and social awareness. Arya Pallam was associated with organisations such as the Antharjana Samajam and the Yogakshema Sabha, which worked for reform within the Namboothiri community. These organisations created platforms where women could discuss their experiences and collectively demand social change.

A major literary voice of this reformist tradition was Lalithambika Antharjanam, a prominent Malayalam writer and social critic. Born into a conservative Namboothiri family, she experienced the restrictions imposed on women within the community. Her writings powerfully portrayed the emotional and social struggles faced by Namboothiri women living under patriarchal control. Through short stories, essays, and novels, Lalithambika Antharjanam criticised practices such as seclusion, denial of education, and restrictions on women's freedom. Her famous works highlighted the silent suffering of *Antharjanams* and called for social transformation. Literature thus became an important medium through which the voices of women could challenge injustice and advocate reform.

Women from other communities also contributed significantly to Kerala's reform movements. A. V. Kuttimalu Amma emerged as a prominent activist who combined social

reform with participation in the nationalist struggle. She joined the Indian National Congress and actively took part in major campaigns such as the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Salt Satyagraha. Her involvement in these movements reflected the growing participation of women in public and political life. After independence, she continued to work for social welfare and the promotion of women's education.

Another notable leader was Akkamma Cherian, a courageous figure in the freedom movement in Travancore. She became famous for leading a mass protest march to the Kowdiar Palace in 1938 against the policies of the Travancore government. Because of her leadership and bravery, she came to be known as the "Jhansi Rani of Travancore." Akkamma Cherian also helped mobilise women through various organisations that encouraged participation in political protests and public campaigns.

Women's organisations also played a crucial role in strengthening the reform movement. Groups such as the Antharjana Samajam were established to address the problems faced by women within the Namboothiri community and to promote education and social awareness. Similarly, the Yogakshema Sabha worked for reforms within the community and supported initiatives aimed at improving women's status.

In addition, several Mahila Samajams and women's associations emerged across Kerala during the early twentieth century. These organisations focused on spreading female literacy, encouraging girls' education, and raising awareness about health and sanitation. They organised meetings, discussions, and training programmes that helped women develop confidence and engage in community activities. For many women, these associations provided the first opportunity to speak publicly and participate in organised social work.



Recap

- ◆ Kerala's caste hierarchy created severe social discrimination.
- ◆ Reform movements emerged to challenge caste-based inequalities.
- ◆ SNDP Yogam worked for upliftment of the Ezhava community.
- ◆ Education and political participation were key SNDP strategies.
- ◆ NSS promoted social reform and unity among Nairs.
- ◆ NSS advocated reforms in the Marumakkathayam inheritance system.
- ◆ Yogakshema Sabha reformed conservative practices among Namboothiris.
- ◆ Namboothiri reformers promoted education and social progress.
- ◆ Dalit organisations demanded rights, dignity, and education.
- ◆ Leaders mobilised oppressed communities through organisations and activism.
- ◆ Women challenged patriarchal customs through activism and literature.
- ◆ Women's associations promoted literacy, awareness, and social participation.

Objective Questions

1. Who founded SNDP Yogam?
2. Which organisation represented the Ezhava community?
3. Who founded the Nair Service Society?
4. Which organisation reformed Namboothiri customs?
5. Who organised the Savarna Jatha?
6. Which satyagraha protested caste restrictions at Vaikom?
7. Who founded the Cheramar Mahajana Sabha?
8. Which community was organised by the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha?
9. Who wrote the poem *Jathikummi*?

10. Who founded the Parayar Mahajana Sangham?
11. Which writer criticised the suffering of Antharjanams?
12. Which movement protested Namboothiri women's seclusion?
13. Who led the Kowdiar Palace protest march?

Answers

1. Sree Narayana Guru
2. Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam)
3. Mannath Padmanabhan
4. Yogakshema Sabha
5. Mannath Padmanabhan
6. Vaikom Satyagraha
7. Pampady John Joseph
8. Pulaya Community
9. Pandit K. P. Karuppan
10. Kavarikulam Kantan Kumaran
11. Lalithambika Antharjanam
12. Ghosha Bahishkarana Movement
13. Akkamma Cherian

Assignments

1. Examine the role of caste-based organisations in Kerala's social reform movement.
2. Analyse the contributions of SNDP Yogam in the upliftment of the Ezhava community.

3. Discuss the role of Dalit organisations in challenging caste discrimination.
4. Evaluate the role of women and women's organisations in Kerala's social reform movement.

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UNIT

Anti-Caste Movement

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the background and objectives of the Vaikom Satyagraha and its role in challenging caste discrimination in Kerala.
- ◆ identify the major leaders and organisations involved in the Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagrahas.
- ◆ analyse the significance of temple entry movements in the broader context of Kerala's social reform movements.
- ◆ evaluate the outcomes and limitations of the Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagrahas in achieving social equality.
- ◆ assess the historical importance of the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 in transforming caste relations in Travancore.

Prerequisite

The period between the 1920s and 1940s in Kerala marked a decisive rupture in the region's socio-political fabric, driven by a series of grassroots movements that challenged caste hierarchies, religious exclusion, and authoritarian rule. This unit provides a broad exploration of Kerala's journey from caste oppression to civic emancipation, situating landmark agitations like the Vaikom Satyagraha, Guruvayur Satyagraha, and the Paliyam Satyagraha within the broader narrative of social justice and democratization. These movements were not isolated protests but interconnected struggles.

At one level, the unit interrogates how the fight for temple entry became a symbolic and strategic front in the battle for dignity, equality, and public citizenship for marginalized communities. At another, it analyses how the politics of exclusion

– manifested in laws, customs, and institutional practices – was systematically dismantled through coalition-building, civil disobedience, and mass mobilization. The evolution of the Abstention Movement and the Responsible Government campaign reflects a shift from demands for social access to more radical visions of political enfranchisement and state accountability. By tracing this trajectory, the unit not only recovers the subaltern energies behind Kerala’s social transformation but also critiques the later tendency to attribute reform to elite benevolence, particularly in the case of the Temple Entry Proclamation.

Ultimately, this unit reveals how caste reform, civil rights, and democratic assertion in Kerala were not gifts from above but hard-won gains of sustained, often painful, mass struggle laying the foundation for one of the most progressive social orders in postcolonial India.

Keywords

Vaikom Satyagraha, Temple Entry Movement, T.K. Madhavan, Guruvayur Satyagraha, K. Kelappan, Travancore, Temple Entry Proclamation

Discussion

3.5.1 Vaikom Satyagraha 1924-25

The Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25) stands as one of the most significant social reform movements in modern Indian history, marking a pivotal moment in the struggle against caste-based discrimination and untouchability in Kerala. This nonviolent protest, centred around the Vaikom Mahadeva Temple in the princely state of Travancore, challenged the oppressive caste system that barred lower-caste Hindus from using the public roads surrounding temples.

The genesis of this movement began with T.K. Madhavan’s efforts to raise awareness about temple entry. Madhavan wrote about the question of temple entry in his newspaper *Deshabhimani* in the December issue of 1917, declaring that “temple entry is my birthright.” This demand was frequently expressed by him in the *Sri Moolam*

Assembly but fell on deaf ears. After years of failed petitions, Madhavan met Gandhi in 1923 at the Kakinada session of the Indian National Congress (INC). T.K. Madhavan played an important role in advocating for the plight of the avarnas, and at Gandhi’s behest, a resolution was passed for the “eradication of untouchability” as the main item for the constructive programme for the future. Acting on this resolution, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) established a dedicated action committee during its February 1924 meeting in Ernakulam. This committee, comprising prominent leaders including T.K. Madhavan, Kurur Neelakandan Nambootiripad, T.R. Krishnaswamy Aiyar, and convenor K. Kelappan, strategised the historic Vaikom Satyagraha. The peaceful protest commenced on March 30, 1924, with the objective of securing access to the approach roads of Vaikom’s renowned Siva Temple for avarnas.

However, both the Devaswom authorities and the Travancore government responded with stringent measures, erecting barricades around the temple perimeter and issuing restraining orders against the satyagraha leaders. On this first day, a batch of three men consisting of a Pulaya, an Izhava, and a Nayar entered the prohibited area and were arrested by the police. The next day, two Ezhavas and a Nayar made a similar attempt.

Along with T.K. Madhavan, several prominent leaders such as K.P. Kesava Menon, Mannath Padmanabhan, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, C.V. Kunhiraman, George Joseph, and K. Kelappan actively participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha. Mahatma Gandhi offered his unwavering moral support to the movement. Sree Narayana Guru also visited the satyagrahis, boosting their morale and confidence. His

ashram at Vaikom, the Velur Mutt, served as the base camp for the protestors. Several other eminent national leaders, including

C. Rajagopalachari, S. Srinivasa Ayyangar, Swami Shraddhanand, and E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, visited the site and expressed their solidarity. A group of twelve Akalis from Punjab supported the agitation by running a free kitchen, which provided meals daily to hundreds of volunteers.

The satyagrahis were subjected to oppression by the government militia as well as thugs sent by the temple authorities. In one brutal episode, Amachadi Thevan, a Pulaya satyagrahi, was attacked and lime was poured into his eyes, partially blinding him. He was later arrested and tortured by the police. T.K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan, and K.P. Kesava Menon were also arrested and manhandled by the police.



Fig.3.5.1. Vaikom Satyagrahis 1924. Sitting bottom row: Amachadi Thevan (middle); sitting middle row: K.P. Kesava Menon (middle), T.K. Madhavan (far right)

Following the death of the reigning Maharaja, Sri Moolam Tirunal, in August 1924, Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi ascended the throne. In response, Mahatma Gandhi recommended submitting a petition signed by caste Hindus urging the new ruler to open the Vaikom temple approach roads to all communities. Following Gandhi's advice, caste Hindus decided to organise a *Savarna Jathato* personally deliver the petition to the Maharani. The procession began from Vaikom on November 1, 1924, under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan, and was later joined in Thiruvananthapuram by another group led by Dr. M.E. Naidu from Nagercoil. On November 12, the delegation, led by Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai, met the Maharani and submitted the petition, which had gathered over 25,000 signatures by then. She avoided immediate repression of the protesters and even released many of the jailed satyagrahis, but at the same time resisted radical demands to fully open all temple roads.

When Mahatma Gandhi visited Vaikom in March 1925 to help resolve the crisis, he sought a meeting with Setu Lakshmi Bayi to discuss a peaceful solution. However, she refused to meet him personally, citing royal protocol and social norms. After prolonged negotiations between Gandhi, government officials, and representatives of the satyagraha, a compromise was reached in November 1925. Three of the four roads (north, south, west) around the Vaikom temple were opened to all castes, while the eastern road remained restricted. New roads were built for lower castes, maintaining a distance from the temple's "sacred" eastern entrance. The final decision was framed as an act of royal benevolence, but in reality, it was the result of political pressure and public agitation rather than personal initiative by the Maharani.

This partial victory disappointed radicals

like Periyar and Sri Narayana Guru, who wanted full temple entry. Nevertheless, it set the stage for subsequent temple entry movements organised in Tiruvarpu, Suchindram, and Ambalapuzha in the same decade.

3.5.2. Guruvayur Satyagraha

The next most popular struggle connected with the campaign for temple entry was the Guruvayur satyagraha of 1931-32. While the Vaikom movement achieved partial success, temple entry remained prohibited, creating momentum for further agitation. The Indian National Congress's growing attention to social reform under Gandhi's leadership provided impetus, with the 1931 Vadakara conference of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) resolving to launch an all-Kerala campaign against untouchability. Guruvayur was strategically chosen as the site for this new satyagraha because of its religious significance and location in Malabar district (then part of Madras Presidency), separate from the princely state of Travancore where the Vaikom movement had occurred. The temple's trustees, the Zamorin rulers, maintained an uncompromising stance against temple entry for lower castes, setting the stage for confrontation.

The Guruvayur Satyagraha officially commenced on November 1, 1931, organised under the auspices of the KPCC with K. Kelappan as its principal leader. The movement followed Gandhian principles of non-violent resistance, with volunteers attempting peaceful entry into the temple while facing arrests and repression. National-level leaders like Rajagopalachari and K.F. Nariman visited Guruvayur in this early phase. Apart from Kelappan, other prominent leaders associated with the Satyagraha included A.K. Gopalan, Mannath Padmanabhan, and N.P. Damodaran.

The Satyagraha attracted nationwide attention, and political workers from all over India converged on Guruvayur to extend help to the satyagrahis. The Zamorin, who was the trustee of the temple, adopted an uncompromising attitude towards the demands for temple entry. T. Subrahmanian Tirumumbu, the captain of the temple entry campaign, was arrested on November 7. P. Krishnan Pillai was brutally assaulted by the temple officials for ringing the bell in front of the sri kovil, a privilege enjoyed by Brahmins only. One of the major events connected with the Satyagraha was the assault on A.K. Gopalan on December 26 by the opponents of the Satyagraha movement. This incident aroused the passions of the people, who tried to force entry into the temple by breaking through the barricades. The temple was closed, and all poojas were

suspended for about a month.

The satyagraha then lingered on for about ten months without any decisive result. In order to sustain the morale of the satyagrahis and to force an early decision on the issue at stake, Kelappan embarked on “a fast unto death” in front of the temple on September 21, 1932. At this stage, Gandhi intervened and advised Kelappan to break the fast, which he did on October 2, 1932. Gandhi took objection to the move on the grounds that it had not been consulted with him nor prior notice given to the temple authorities. However, Gandhi assured that he would himself share the next fast with Kelappan if the temple was not opened to the Avarnas by a stipulated date. However, this assurance was not carried out.



Fig.3.5.2. Kelappan during his fast in October 1932

The only limited outcome of the Guruvayur satyagraha was the referendum held in Ponnani Taluk among the caste Hindus in December 1932 to ascertain whether they favoured temple entry. C. Rajagopalachari, assisted by K. Madhavan Nair and U. Gopala Menon, supervised the conduct of the poll. Out of 20,163 persons who recorded their votes, 77% (15,568) voted in favour of temple entry, 13% (2,579) against, and 10% (2,016) remained neutral. A significant feature of the referendum was that an overwhelming

majority of women, i.e., more than 8,000, voted in favour of temple entry. The result of this referendum helped to dispel the wrong impression that the caste Hindus in Malabar were opposed to temple entry. Taking note of the sentiment in favour of temple entry, Dr. P. Subbarayan gave notice of a Bill on temple entry to be moved in the Madras Legislative Council on January 8. Guruvayur Day was celebrated all over Kerala to declare support for the proposed Bill. Thus, though the Guruvayur Satyagraha failed to achieve its immediate objective, it helped to create an unprecedented awareness about caste discrimination and built strong public opinion favouring temple entry.

3.5.3. Paliyam Satyagraha

The specific issue that triggered the Paliyam Satyagraha was the denial of access to roads and temples under the control of the Paliyam family to avarnas and non-Hindus. The region of Chendamangalam, situated in present-day Ernakulam district, was historically dominated by the Paliath Achans, a powerful Nair aristocratic family that served as hereditary Prime Ministers to the Cochin royal family. In the aftermath of the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 in Travancore, similar demands began to be raised in Cochin. However, the Cochin government, which still upheld certain caste-based restrictions due to pressure from conservative elements like the Paliyam family, was reluctant to enforce social reforms. The denial of access was not only seen as a violation of civil rights and human dignity but also an affront to the spirit of Indian independence, prompting widespread agitation.

Attempts by some avarnas to walk along this road led to sporadic clashes. In response, the Cochin State Praja Mandal, the Communist Party of India, the SNDP Yogam, and the Pulaya Mahasabha joined forces to form an Action Council to organise a Satyagraha to compel the Paliyam family to

open their roads and temples. The Satyagraha was formally launched by C. Kesavan on December 4, 1947. Although the Paliyam family had obtained a court order upholding their right to ban the use of the road by non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus, the volunteers selected by the Action Council for the purpose defied the ban and courted arrest every day. The Paliyam family, backed by the Cochin royal administration, responded with repression. A police camp was set up at Thekke Madhom, and armed forces were deployed. Protesters were arrested, beaten, and even imprisoned. Tensions escalated, leading to clashes between caste Hindus and Satyagrahis in some areas. On the 100th day of the protest (March 1948), police brutally lathi-charged protesters, resulting in the death of A.G. Velayudhan, who became the movement's martyr. The satyagraha was suspended in the wake of this tragic incident.

After 97 days of relentless struggle, the Paliyam family and the Cochin administration relented. The Cochin government issued an order removing restrictions on public roads in Chendamangalam, thereby granting all communities equal access. On Vishu day (April) 1948, all temples in Cochin were opened to all Hindus, irrespective of caste.

3.5.4. Temple Entry Proclamation

The movement for temple entry registered its victory when Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore, issued his famous Temple Entry Proclamation on November 12, 1936. The Proclamation, which is the first of its kind in India, stands as one of the most significant milestones in India's social history.

On the eve of his 24th birthday, Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma issued the Temple Entry Proclamation as a "Gazette Extraordinary." The decree stated: "Henceforward, no Hindu by reason of birth

or caste shall be excluded from entering and worshipping at temples controlled by the state.” This bold declaration applied to all 1,526 temples under Travancore’s administration, including major shrines like the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Trivandrum and the Kanyakumari Devi Temple. Gandhi hailed it as “the great wonder of modern times.”

The greatest impact of the Temple Entry Proclamation was that it legally dismantled one of the most visible forms of caste-based discrimination in public religious life. Thus, it forced the Hindu orthodoxy to reconsider and reframe its relationship with marginalised communities. Even so, it should not be thought that, soon after the proclamation,

social stigma and discrimination disappeared overnight. Many temples continued to resist entry of lower castes in subtle ways.

However, in modern times, the perception has been propagated that the Temple Entry Proclamation was a ‘benevolent concession’ of the Travancore Royal Family. This is a complete disregard and disrespect for the countless number of people, mostly avarnas, who protested and gave their lives over the years to attain this right. Thus, the Temple Entry Proclamation must be rightly seen as the culmination of a people’s movement that forced the Royal Family to bow down.

Recap

- ◆ Vaikom Satyagraha challenged caste restrictions on temple roads.
- ◆ T.K. Madhavan initiated organised struggle against untouchability.
- ◆ Nonviolent protests demanded road access around Vaikom temple.
- ◆ National and regional leaders supported the Vaikom agitation.
- ◆ Travancore government repression failed to suppress satyagrahis.
- ◆ Compromise opened three temple roads to lower castes.
- ◆ Guruvayur Satyagraha expanded temple entry movement in Kerala.
- ◆ The referendum revealed strong support for temple entry.
- ◆ Temple Entry Proclamation legally ended caste-based temple exclusion.
- ◆ Paliyam Satyagraha ended caste-based road and temple restrictions

Objective Questions

1. What was the main demand of the Vaikom Satyagraha?
2. Which year was the Temple Entry Proclamation issued?
3. Which newspaper first raised temple entry demands?
4. Which leader led the Guruvayur Satyagraha?
5. Which satyagrahi was attacked and blinded during the Vaikom Satyagraha?
6. When was the Travancore State Congress formed?
7. Who was martyred during the Paliyam Satyagraha?

Answers

1. Access to temple roads for lower castes
2. 1936
3. T.K. Madhavan's *Deshabhimani*
4. K. Kelappan
5. Amachadi Thevan
6. 1938
7. A.G. Velayudhan

Assignments

1. Was there a level of coordination between the sociopolitical movements between the three regions of Malabar, Cochin or Travancore, or did they function as isolated events?
2. Compare and contrast the strategies and outcomes of the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924- 25) and Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931-32). How did Gandhi's involvement shape each movement differently?

3. Critically analyze the reactions of various communities and political groups to the Temple Entry Proclamation.

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BLOCK

Early Political Movements in Kerala



UNIT

Movements for Representation

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ critically examine the historical and structural factors that led to the formulation of the Malayali Memorial of 1891
- ♦ analyse the political implications of the Malayali Memorial for administrative practices and representative claims in Travancore
- ♦ trace and interpret the socio-political grievances articulated through the Ezhava Memorial of 1896 within the framework of caste and social exclusion

Prerequisite

A meaningful study of the Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava Memorial requires familiarity with the social structure and administrative framework of late nineteenth-century Travancore, particularly the intersection of caste hierarchy, education, and access to state employment. Learners should understand how colonial modernity and princely governance together produced new expectations of merit, representation, and political participation among emerging educated groups, while simultaneously reinforcing entrenched social exclusions.

It is also essential to recognise the memorials as instruments of early political negotiation, through which different social groups articulated competing claims to representation and justice. An awareness of how privileged communities sought to protect regional and linguistic interests, alongside the efforts of marginalised castes to challenge systemic discrimination, will enable learners to situate these memorials within the broader evolution of democratic consciousness, reform movements, and the politics of representation in modern Kerala.

Keywords

Malayali Memorial, Ezhava Memorial, Representation, Travancore Administration, Non-Malayali Dominance, Political Consciousness, Socio-economic Marginalisation, Government Services, Narayana Guru, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam

Discussion

4.1.1. Early Struggles in Travancore

The princely states of Travancore had its own struggles and agitations of a political character from the very beginning of the British period. The agitations that occurred in the early period aimed at the establishment of good governance, while those of the later period focused on the achievement of political rights, such as the association of the people at various levels of administration. In this unit, we shall briefly review the history of these agitations with particular reference to the struggles that culminated in the achievement of responsible government in Travancore in 1947.

The earliest political struggle in modern Travancore was led by Velu Tampi in 1799 against the misrule of the triumvirate composed of Jayantan Sankaran Nambudiri, Sankaranarayana Chetti, and Mathu Tharakan, to which reference has already been made. Velu Tampi mobilised thousands of people under his banner and led them to Trivandrum to present their grievances to the sovereign. The demonstrators demanded the dismissal of the unpopular ministers, and the Raja had to accede to their demands, appointing the leaders of the people as his ministers. This incident is significant as it demonstrated, for the first time, the organised strength of the people. However, in the first half of the 19th century, apart from the revolt against the British led by Velu Tampi Dalawa,

there were no other political upheavals, and the internal administration of the State was carried on by the rulers in an atmosphere of relative peace, with the advice of Diwans who were brought in from outside.

4.1.2. Demand for Jobs and Positions: Malayali Memorials

The non-Malayalee Brahmins enjoyed free meals, free education, preferred employment positions, and a monopoly in higher education and government roles, while enforcing a social order that was unacceptable to the educated sections of other communities. The Maratha Rao aristocracy dominated public life in Travancore and monopolised the highest posts. As early as February 1843, the Resident, Major General Cullen, informed the Government of Travancore that he opposed the prevailing mode of patronage distribution. The government requested the Resident to advise the Maharaja, when filling a vacant position, to select from among the natives of respectability and rank; however, the Dewan did not translate this advice into action.

The educated middle class in Travancore asserted itself. There was widespread resentment among the educated classes against the government's policy of importing personnel from outside, particularly from Tamil Nadu. Tamil Brahmins were appointed to hold the most important posts in the public service, even when individuals with similar qualifications were available within the state. The first

general complaint was that the Nair section of the population was being subjected to humiliation. The state frightened Nair members by denying them proper remuneration and keeping them from a “proportionate share” in the administration. The Syrian Christian and other communities were also practically shut out from state patronage.

The educated groups from various communities joined together for different reasons to organise a *Malayalee Prastanam*. The Nairs took the lead in organising it, with Christians and Ezhavas joining them. In 1882, three students from Maharaja’s College, Trivandrum, were expelled on suspicion of having contributed articles to newspapers protesting against the State Government’s policy of appointing non-Travancoreans to the State service. They were G. Parameswaran Pillai (later known as Barrister G.P. Pillai), R. Ranga Rao (son of Diwan Peishkar R. Ranganatha Rao), and N. Raman Pillai (son of former Diwan Nanu Pillai). The order of expulsion was issued by Diwan Rama Iyengar with the special sanction of the ruler, disregarding the objections raised by the College Principal, John Ross, an Englishman. Considering G. Parameswaran Pillai’s role in this episode, he has come to be known as ‘the father of the political movement’ in modern Travancore.

On 11 January 1891, the leading communities — the Nambudris, Nayars, Ilavas, Syrian and Latin Christians, Anglo-Indians, landlords, merchants, and officials — jointly submitted a memorial to Maharaja Sri Mulam Tirunal (1885-1924). Among the leaders who spearheaded this initiative were K.P. Sankara Menon, P. Palpu, and G. Parameswaran Pillai. The ‘Malayali Memorial’, or ‘The Travancore Memorial’, as it was called, was signed by over 10,028 citizens. The primary issue cited in the Memorial was the denial of ‘a fair share in the government of their country and their systematic exclusion from the highest grades of its services’

for Travancoreans. They provided a large number of facts and figures in support of this demand. Additionally, to secure public sympathy, they organised political meetings in various parts of the state. The press in Travancore and beyond also engaged in active propaganda in support of the memorialists. Consequently, the Government agreed to receive a deputation to discuss administrative plans with them. However, it later withdrew the offer on the grounds that it would create ill will between the people of the state and those from outside.

The Memorial was the first serious document submitted to the authorities by the people of Travancore to effect constitutional and administrative reforms and secure civil and political liberties. The Memorial was drafted by K.P. Sankara Menon and is considered a landmark in the political awakening of the people. The Brahmins viewed the Malayalee Sabha as a threat to their supremacy and began harassing the Nair members, denying promotions to some of them. Anti-Memorialist meetings and signature campaigns against the memorialists were organised. Throughout June 1891, there were meetings, counter-meetings, and pamphlets arguing the case for each group. However, the administration sought to weaken the opposition by pitting one community against another. The Government won over the Nayars by granting some concessions. Disappointed by this turn of events were the Ezhavas.

4.1.3. Ezhava Memorial

The Malayali Memorial neglected the interests of the Ezhava community. The Ezhavas were disappointed with the government’s actions against them, as several English schools in the state continued to be closed to Ezhavas. Guided by Dr. Palpu, the Ezhavas submitted a separate petition called the Ezhava Memorial to the Maharaja, containing 13,176 signatures, on 3 September



1896. It is noteworthy that Ezhavas and other backward communities were being denied the right of admission to government schools or entry into public services at that time.

Dr. Palpu himself had to seek employment in the Mysore service after being denied entry as a doctor in the Travancore Medical Department. The Ezhava Memorial requested the Maharaja to confer on the Ezhavas the same rights and privileges enjoyed by those of their caste who had converted to Christianity. The response of the Travancore Government to the Ezhava Memorial was negative, which disappointed the memorialists. Consequently, a second Ezhava Memorial was presented by the leaders of the Ezhava community to Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, during his visit to Trivandrum in 1900. This memorial drew the Viceroy's attention to the manifold grievances of the Ezhava community and sought early redress. The Viceroy maintained that the Paramount power could not interfere in such 'minor details of administration'. Thus, the second Ezhava Memorial also failed to produce any positive result. Nevertheless, the Ezhava Memorial agitation helped to rouse the social and political consciousness of the Ezhavas and prepared them for future struggles in the cause of social justice.

For nearly four decades following the submission of the Malayali Memorial to the Government, communalism played a dominant role in shaping the politics of the state. With the Nayers holding most of the high positions in public services and the Christians gaining certain positions, the condition of the Ezhavas appeared miserable. They demanded the reservation of seats in public services and the legislature. In the meantime, a keen competition emerged between the Nayers and the Christians for public appointments. During the regency of Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931), when K. George, a Christian, was appointed Chief Secretary to the Government, the Nayers raised their voices in protest, declaring that

the regency rule was directed against their welfare.

Since the Malayali Memorial agitation, the press in Travancore has played a major role in creating political awakening among the masses. Among the newspapers, the Malayala Manorama, the Malayali, the Purasuraman, the Western Star, the Nazrani Deepika, and the Kerala Taraka deserve special mention. These newspapers published articles on 'the arbitrary features of the Government and the prevalent evils of society.' K. Ramakrishna Pillai, the editor and publisher of Swadesabhimani, a Malayalam periodical, and considered 'a fighter for the freedom of the press,' wrote articles vehemently attacking the actions of the Maharaja and his Diwan, P. Rajagopalachari (1907-1913). Greatly provoked, the Government proceeded with the suppression of Swadesabhimani on 26 September 1910. Exiled from the state, Ramakrishna Pillai died at Cannanore in Malabar on 28 March 1910. The fate of Ramakrishna Pillai added to popular revulsion against the administration of the Diwan.

In addition to these events, the nationalist movement in India had a natural influence upon the state. When Gandhi started his Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920, the inhabitants of Trivandrum organised a Congress Committee to hold meetings and processions and to promote the boycott of British goods. During the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-32, several young men from Travancore went to the British province and actively participated in it. Picketing of foreign cloth shops was also undertaken in Travancore. In several places, especially at Trivandrum, Alleppey, and Ambalapuzha, shops dealing with foreign goods were picketed. The leaders who participated in these agitations became active workers in the politics of the state. In fact, the participation of the people of the state in the work and programmes of the Indian National Congress contributed to the political awakening in

Travancore. Moreover, the formation of Congress governments in some of the British Indian provinces in July 1937 and the announcement of constitutional reform for Cochin in January 1938 evoked popular interest in similar reforms in the state. Meanwhile, the agitation for temple entry added a new dimension to the political situation.

4.1.4. Significance of the Malayali and Ezhava Memorials

The Malayali Memorial (1891) and Ezhava Memorial (1896) were landmark petitions in the political and social history of modern Kerala. They represented the awakening of a politically conscious middle class and the assertion of rights by marginalised communities within the rigidly hierarchical Travancore society. The Malayali Memorial, spearheaded by educated non-Brahmin upper-caste Hindus and Christians, primarily demanded equitable access to government employment, challenging the monopoly of Tamil Brahmins in state services. In contrast, the Ezhava Memorial, submitted by the socially oppressed Ezhava community under the leadership of Dr. Palpu, went further by demanding not only jobs but also access to education and civil rights, thus

highlighting the deep-seated caste inequalities in Travancore.

These petitions signified the shift from religious reform to the political articulation of rights. As Robin Jeffrey observes in *The Decline of Nair Dominance* (1976), these memorials marked the beginning of politicised caste assertions in Kerala. The movements laid the groundwork for the growth of caste-based political mobilisation and contributed to the evolution of a public sphere in the princely state. Moreover, K. N. Panikkar, in his work *Against Lord and State* (1992), emphasises that these memorials reflect a significant stage in the democratisation of society in Travancore, with lower and intermediate castes beginning to assert their entitlements in modern, constitutional forms.

The Malayali and Ezhava Memorials were more than mere petitions, they were catalysts for change, challenging both Brahminical hegemony and colonial administrative bias. Their legacy can be traced through subsequent social reform movements, the rise of the SNDP and other community-based organisations, and the eventual transformation of Kerala into one of the most socially progressive states in India. They remain pivotal moments in the region's journey toward social justice and egalitarianism.

Recap

- ◆ Travancore witnessed political agitations aimed at responsible government and administrative reforms.
- ◆ Velu Tampi led the first major political uprising in Travancore against ministerial misrule in 1799.
- ◆ The early 19th century saw peace under rulers advised by non-native Diwans despite Velu Tampi's revolt.
- ◆ Non-Malayali Brahmins dominated education and government posts, sidelining native educated Malayalis.



- ◆ Educated Travancoreans protested outsider dominance, demanding fair representation in public service appointments.
- ◆ Malayali students expelled in 1882 sparked an early political movement against non-native appointments.
- ◆ G. Parameswaran Pillai, an expelled student, emerged as the father of the modern Travancore political movement.
- ◆ The 1891 Malayali Memorial demanded Travancoreans' fair share in administration and civil rights.
- ◆ 10,028 signed the Malayali Memorial; it mobilised public opinion through meetings and press.
- ◆ Brahmins opposed the Memorial, inciting communal divisions; the Government pacified Nayars with concessions.
- ◆ Ezhavas, ignored by the Malayali Memorial, submitted their own under Dr. Palpu in 1896.
- ◆ The Ezhava Memorial sought education, employment, and civil rights similar to those of Christian converts.
- ◆ The second Ezhava Memorial presented to Lord Curzon in 1900 failed to yield any reforms.
- ◆ The press, especially *Swadesabhimani*, played a key role in political awakening; Ramakrishna Pillai was exiled.
- ◆ Memorials catalysed caste-based political mobilisation, influencing Kerala's future social reform and egalitarian progress.

Objective Questions

1. Who led the early political uprising in Travancore in 1799?
2. What was the main demand of the demonstrators led by Velu Tampi in 1799?
3. Which community dominated high government posts in Travancore during the 19th century?
4. Who first expressed official concern over the distribution of government patronage in Travancore in 1843?
5. Which section of Travancore society initially led the *Malayali Prastanam*?
6. Which student who was expelled from Maharaja's College, later emerged as a prominent political leader?

7. What was the date of submission of the Malayali Memorial?
8. How many people signed the Malayali Memorial?
9. What was the main demand of the Malayali Memorial?
10. Which community felt neglected by the Malayali Memorial?
11. Who led the Ezhava Memorial movement?
12. In which year was the Ezhava Memorial submitted to the Maharaja?
13. To whom was the second Ezhava Memorial submitted?
14. Which newspaper editor was exiled for criticising the Travancore administration?

Answers

1. Velu Tampi
2. Dismissal of unpopular ministers and redress of public grievances
3. Tamil Brahmins
4. Resident Major General Cullen
5. The Nairs
6. G. Parameswaran Pillai
7. January 11, 1891
8. 10,028 citizens
9. Fair share in government services for native Travancoreans
10. Ezhava community
11. Dr. Palpu
12. September 3, 1896
13. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India
14. K. Ramakrishna Pillai

Assignments

1. Critically analyse the Malayali Memorial of 1891 as an early articulation of representative politics in Travancore, examining its social base, political objectives, and long-term implications.
2. Examine the Ezhava Memorial under the leadership of Dr Palpu as a decisive intervention in caste-based exclusion, and assess its role in reshaping claims to rights, representation, and social justice in Travancore.
3. Assess the role of the press and print culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in producing political awareness, public debate, and reformist consciousness in Travancore.
4. Evaluate critically how the penetration of all-India nationalist movements, particularly the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements, transformed political mobilisation, communal alignments, and power relations in Travancore.
5. Evaluate the impact of communal politics in Travancore following the Malayali and Ezhava Memorials.

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UNIT

Towards Active Phase

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ examine the global and local factors behind the Khilafat Movement
- ◆ identify major leaders and events of the Malabar Uprising
- ◆ analyse the role of Mappila Muslims in anti-colonial resistance
- ◆ explore differing historiographical interpretations of the 1921 rebellion

Prerequisite

In this unit, learners are expected to have a foundational understanding of India's colonial history, particularly the political and social conditions under British rule during the early 20th century. Familiarity with the broader context of the Indian National Movement - including the formation of the Indian National Congress, the emergence of Gandhian strategies like non-violent protest, and pan-Islamic movements such as the Khilafat agitation - is essential. A basic knowledge of Kerala's socio-economic structure during the colonial period, especially the agrarian system in Malabar, will aid in comprehending the causes and consequences of the 1921 uprising.

It is also important that learners are aware of key national movements between 1919 and 1922, including the Non-Cooperation Movement, which created a backdrop for regional agitations like the Malabar Rebellion. Prior exposure to religious, caste, and class dynamics in Kerala - particularly the position of the Mappila Muslim community - will enhance understanding of the complexities

surrounding the revolt. Lastly, students should be familiar with different historiographical approaches, such as nationalist, Marxist, and subaltern perspectives, to critically engage with debates about the nature and legacy of the Malabar Peasant Uprising. This background will enable a nuanced analysis of the unit's themes.

Keywords

Khilafat Movement, Mappila Muslims, Ali Musaliar, Variamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji, Malabar Peasant Uprising, Tenancy Issues, Historiographical Debate

Discussion

4.2.1. Beginnings of the National Movement

With the establishment of British paramountcy in Kerala and the systematisation of the colonial mode of exploitation by the turn of the twentieth century, agrarian unrest and the beginnings of nationalism converged. In 1885, G. P. Pillai, editor of the *Madras Standard* and the first nationalist leader of Kerala, initiated agitations for civil rights in the Tiruvitāmkur state, which was more politically engaged than Cochin or Malabar. The Travancore Legislative Council, formed in 1888, was the first democratic legislative body in India. The Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava Memorial, two major popular representations submitted to the government, provide insight into the extent of political activity in Tiruvitāmkur.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Kerala welcomed the Indian National Congress (INC), which was founded in 1885. C. Sankaran Nair, a nationalist leader from Kerala, even became the president of the INC. The formation of a district committee of the INC in 1908 was a significant political event in contemporary Malabar, where the Home Rule Movement began to emerge in various parts over the subsequent years.

In 1916 and 1917, the annual meetings of the district Congress committee were held in Kozhikode. Congress committees were also formed in Tiruvitāmkur and Kochi, leading to an increase in political activities. In 1921, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) was established by integrating all Congress activities in Kerala, and this integrated committee organised the first All-Kerala Political Conference in that same year.

4.2.2. Home Rule Movement

The Great War (1914-1918) provided impetus to the national movement in Malabar. In 1916, a public meeting held in the Calicut Town Hall to mobilise 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 the vast majority of the audience. The incident was symbolic as it demonstrated the rising tempo of the national movement. The end of the war saw the announcement of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919), which sparked a great controversy over whether the reforms should be accepted. The fifth Malabar District

Political Conference, held at Manjeri on April 28, 1920, in the presence of Dr. Annie Besant, 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 division at the conference between moderate and extremist elements. The landlords and wealthy individuals left the Congress organisation, and its leadership passed into the hands of extremists, who championed the cause of the peasants, workers, and 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.

4.2.3. Non-cooperation

The origins of the Khilafat Movement lie in the aftermath of World War I. The Ottoman Empire, which had sided with the Central Powers, faced a catastrophic defeat. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in 1920, sanctioned the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. It not only stripped the Ottoman Sultan of much of his territory but also threatened the very institution of the Caliphate. For Muslims around the world, the Caliph was not merely a political figure but a spiritual head of the Islamic world. The weakening of the Caliphate stirred intense emotions among Indian Muslims, who felt that an attack on the Ottoman Caliph was equivalent to an attack on their religious identity.

In India, this anxiety found expression in the form of the Khilafat Movement, which sought to pressure the British government to preserve the authority and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Caliph. Leaders such as Maulana Mohammad Ali, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and Mahatma Gandhi emerged as prominent champions of this cause. Gandhi, seeing

in the Khilafat Movement a potential to bridge the religious divide and build a united front against colonial rule, extended his full support. This convergence gave rise to the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement, one of the first mass-based, pan-Indian resistance campaigns against British imperialism.

With Mahatma Gandhi's assumption of leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920, a new era began in the history of the national movement in Malabar as well. The Non-Cooperation Movement, which started after the Nagpur Congress that year, made considerable headway; therefore, for a while, the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements merged into a single movement in which both Hindus and Muslims participated with great enthusiasm. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Shaukat Ali visited Malabar to organise 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 prominent Congress leaders who attended the conference were manhandled by the police.

The movement gained popularity in southern Malabar, especially in the Eranad and Valluvanad taluks, where the Mappila population was most concentrated. Important Khilafat committees were established in towns such as Tirurangadi, Manjeri, Pookkottur, and Perinthalmanna. These committees organised mass meetings, religious sermons, and boycotts of British goods and institutions. Mappila preachers used Friday sermons (khutbahs) to link the fall of the Caliphate with local oppression. The message was clear: Muslims had a religious obligation to resist not only the destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate but

also the injustices perpetrated by colonial rule and feudal landlordism at home.

4.2.3.1. Role of Mappila Muslims in Malabar

The Mappila community had a complex history of resistance against both the colonial state and local Hindu landlords. As early as the 19th century, there had been sporadic Mappila outbreaks, often characterised by religious fervour and peasant unrest. These incidents were mostly localised and lacked coordination, but they revealed the pent-up frustration within the community. The Mappilas viewed themselves as victims of a double colonisation—by the British rulers and by the upper-caste Hindu landlord class.

When the Khilafat Movement reached Malabar, it provided the ideological glue to unify and radicalise this discontent. Leaders like Ali Musliyar, a respected religious teacher, transformed the Khilafat narrative into a localised call for Islamic justice. He, along with other preachers, called for solidarity with Islam while encouraging resistance against oppression at home. This dual messaging resonated strongly with the rural poor. For many Mappilas, joining the Khilafat agitation was not only a spiritual obligation but also an opportunity to assert their rights and dignity.

The Non-Cooperation Movement, which began under Gandhi's leadership in 1920, further accelerated this process. Khilafat and Congress activists began holding joint meetings and rallies in Malabar. Mappilas participated in campaigns to boycott British courts, schools, and goods. However, the social and economic disparities remained unresolved. The Congress leadership failed to adequately address the specific concerns of the Mappila peasantry, and this neglect became increasingly apparent as the situation in Malabar deteriorated.

4.2.3.2. Aftermath and Decline

The collapse of the Khilafat Movement at the national level occurred after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk abolished the Caliphate in Turkey in 1924. In Kerala, the movement had already been overshadowed by the Malabar Rebellion, which left deep scars on Hindu-Muslim relations and transformed the social landscape of the region.

The British repression following the rebellion was severe. Thousands of Mappilas were killed, imprisoned, or deported. The Wagon Tragedy of 1921, in which 70 Mappila prisoners died of suffocation in a sealed train carriage, remains one of the most tragic episodes of colonial brutality in Indian history. The entire Mappila community was subjected to surveillance, and the term “Mappila” became unfairly associated with fanaticism and violence in colonial and mainstream nationalist narratives.

Despite this tragic turn of events, the Khilafat Movement in Kerala left a lasting legacy. It marked the first large-scale political mobilization of Muslims in the region and contributed to the development of a new political consciousness, particularly among marginalised rural communities. In the long run, the movement laid the groundwork for the growth of Muslim reformist organisations such as the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham and later political entities like the Indian Union Muslim League.

4.2.4. Malabar Rebellion (1921)

The social structure of Malabar, particularly in the northern part of present-day Kerala, was deeply stratified, with a **feudal agrarian system** dominated by upper-caste Hindu landlords (mostly Namboodiris and Nairs) and Mappila Muslim tenants and agricultural labourers at the bottom.

The socio-economic structure of Malabar in the early twentieth century was marked by deep hierarchies and rigid land tenure systems. The agrarian structure of the region was dominated by the *janmi* system, where the *janmis*—mostly upper-caste Hindu landlords such as Namboodiris and Nairs—exercised absolute rights over land, while the Mappilas, who formed the majority of the cultivating class in Ernad and Walluvanad taluks, were subjected to multiple layers of tenancy. The *kanam* and *verumpattam* tenants had few legal rights and were vulnerable to eviction and exploitation. Although the colonial state had introduced certain judicial reforms in the nineteenth century, the administration and courts mostly upheld the rights of landlords, leaving the tenants unprotected. Historian K. N. Panikkar notes in *Against Lord and State* that the colonial legal system reinforced the landlord class and legitimised oppression under the guise of law. The Mappila peasants were thus marginalised economically and socially, suffering under a feudal structure supported by British rule.

In addition to the structural exploitation, several immediate factors triggered the rebellion. The early 1920s saw a surge in peasant mobilisation, influenced by the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement. The Khilafat agitation, aimed at preserving the Ottoman Caliphate after World War I, resonated deeply among Indian Muslims, including the Mappilas. Local religious leaders, such as Ali Musliyar of Tirurangadi, played a significant role in organising mass gatherings and encouraging political activism among the rural Muslim population. The Non-Cooperation Movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, further united Hindus and Muslims under a common platform of anti-colonial resistance. Political meetings, boycotts of British goods, resignations from government services, and mass mobilisations created a charged atmosphere. However, British authorities became increasingly

alarmed by the growing unity and began to crack down on Khilafat and Congress leaders in Malabar.

A particularly provocative incident occurred in August 1921 when British police raided the mosque at Tirurangadi and arrested Ali Musliyar along with other leaders. This act, perceived as an attack on Islam, ignited widespread fury. What followed was a mass uprising that engulfed large parts of Ernad and Walluvanad. Mappila peasants, armed with traditional weapons, attacked police stations, government buildings, and the homes of *janmis* and their agents. The rebellion, initially directed against symbols of colonial and feudal oppression, gradually took on a communal dimension, with increasing incidents of violence against Hindu landlords and their allies. The collapse of British administrative authority in many areas led to the emergence of parallel governance, with the most notable example being the short-lived rebel regime under Variankunnath Kunjahammed Haji.

Variankunnath Kunjahammed Haji, a charismatic leader and former participant in the anti-British movements, declared an independent Khilafat state in rebel-held areas. He issued passports, dispensed justice through sharia courts, and attempted to maintain order. Haji's administration represents an important and controversial moment in the history of the uprising. While some viewed him as a freedom fighter, others accused him of tolerating communal violence and forced conversions. His leadership came to an end when he was captured by the British and executed in early 1922.

The British government responded with overwhelming and brutal force. Troops were brought in from other parts of the country, and aerial bombardments were employed to suppress the rebellion. Thousands were killed, many villages were burned, and mass arrests followed.



4.2.4.1. Consequences and Historical Significance

The Malabar Rebellion had far-reaching consequences for both the nationalist movement and communal relations in Kerala. One immediate effect was the weakening of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation alliance. The Indian National Congress, which had initially supported the Khilafat cause, distanced itself from the rebellion due to its violent nature. Gandhi, who had advocated for non-violent civil disobedience, expressed deep disappointment and even described the rebellion as a “mob frenzy.”

The rebellion also contributed to a significant communal divide in Malabar. The violence committed by sections of the rebel group against Hindus, regardless of motive, created an atmosphere of distrust and hostility. Many Hindus fled the affected regions, and the memory of the rebellion continued to shape Hindu-Muslim relations in Kerala for decades. Conversely, the Mappila Muslims faced severe backlash and alienation. They were branded as fanatics, and the colonial government implemented stringent measures to keep the community under control.

From a historiographical perspective, the Malabar Rebellion has been subject to multiple interpretations. Colonial historians depicted it as a religiously motivated riot led by fanatic elements. Nationalist historians emphasised the betrayal of non-violence and lamented the communal turn. However, Marxist and subaltern historians have provided a more nuanced analysis. Scholars like K. N. Panikkar and M. Gangadharan argue that the rebellion was fundamentally a peasant uprising with religious overtones. It was driven by deep socio-economic inequalities and enabled by a broader pan-Islamic consciousness. The violence, while regrettable, must be understood within the context of systemic oppression and political

mobilization.

The failure of the rebellion also exposed the limitations of the Congress-led national movement in addressing the specific concerns of marginalised communities. The Khilafat Movement itself began to wane after 1922, and it was officially buried with the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924. For the Mappilas, the aftermath of the rebellion led to a period of introspection and community reform. The emergence of organisations like the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham in the late 1920s aimed to promote education, social upliftment, and political participation within constitutional frameworks.

4.2.5. Conceptualising the Malabar Peasant Uprising

The question of how to conceptualise the Malabar Peasant Uprising has been central to historiographical debates in postcolonial India. Nationalist historians, particularly those aligned with the Indian National Congress, have viewed the rebellion with caution. Leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who initially supported the participation of Muslims in the national movement, distanced themselves from the rebellion after it turned violent. Gandhi condemned the rebellion as an aberration that deviated from the principles of non-violence and communal harmony. According to this interpretation, the uprising was a tragic episode in which genuine political goals were overwhelmed by religious fanaticism.

In contrast, Marxist historians have attempted to interpret the rebellion as a class-based uprising. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, in his *History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala*, emphasised the material conditions of the Mappila tenants and portrayed the uprising as a spontaneous revolt against feudal oppression and British imperialism. In this view,

the communal dimension of the rebellion was either secondary or a result of deliberate colonial exaggeration. K. N. Panikkar supports this interpretation by highlighting how centuries of land-based exploitation had generated a collective consciousness among the Mappilas, which found expression through religious symbols but was fundamentally anti-feudal and anti-imperialist in nature. Panikkar argues that religion, in this case, served as a unifying ideology for a marginalised community whose political voice had been silenced by both landlords and the colonial administration.

Yet the rebellion also featured real and troubling instances of communal violence. Hindu men and women were attacked, and in some cases, forcibly converted. Temples were desecrated, and fear spread among the Hindu population, many of whom had initially supported the Khilafat movement. This has led to a counter-interpretation that frames the rebellion not as a peasant uprising but as a jihad against non-Muslims. This line of argument was popular among British administrators and later appropriated by Hindu nationalist historians.

Scholars such as C. Gopalan Nair and R.C. Majumdar have echoed similar themes. In their view, the rebellion represents a violent manifestation of Islamic zealotry, fuelled by the Khilafat cause and manipulated by fanatical ulemas. This interpretation, however, is contested by modern scholars who argue that it lacks social and economic context and ignores the structural oppression faced by the Mappila peasantry.

In more recent years, postcolonial and subaltern scholars have attempted to move beyond the binary of class versus religion. They argue that the Malabar rebellion must be understood in its full complexity, as a confluence of multiple forces—agrarian

discontent, religious symbolism, colonial violence, and emergent nationalism. Seema Alavi and Barbara Metcalf have suggested that the Khilafat movement, far from being merely religious, represented a form of Muslim cosmopolitanism that was deeply political and anti-imperialist. The Mappilas, influenced by these currents, viewed their struggle not just as a local rebellion but as part of a larger global Islamic resurgence.

The long-term consequences of the Malabar Uprising were significant for Kerala's political and social evolution. In the immediate aftermath, the British government passed stricter laws and militarised the region. Communal relations between Hindus and Muslims deteriorated, and the trust built during the early days of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation alliance was shattered. Many Muslims, disillusioned by the Congress's lukewarm response, withdrew from the mainstream nationalist movement. However, this political vacuum was later filled by the growth of the Communist Party in Kerala, which found support among both Hindu and Muslim peasants by emphasising class unity and land reforms.

The memory of the rebellion continued to shape Kerala politics for decades. During the land reform movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the uprising was reinterpreted as an early expression of class struggle. At the same time, communal interpretations of the rebellion remained potent in right-wing narratives, especially in electoral politics. The figure of Variankunnath Kunjahammed Haji became a symbol of resistance for many, while others remembered the rebellion as a period of violence and terror. Monuments, literature, and films have all contributed to the contested legacy of 1921, ensuring that it remains a part of Kerala's collective memory.

Recap

- ◆ British paramountcy in Kerala sparked a convergence of early nationalism and agrarian unrest.
- ◆ G.P. Pillai initiated political agitations in Travancore, highlighting early civil rights activism.
- ◆ The Travancore Legislative Council of 1888 was India's first democratic legislative institution.
- ◆ Malayali and Ezhava Memorials reflect the rising political consciousness in late 19th-century Travancore.
- ◆ C. Sankaran Nair led the INC, and Malabar's INC committee began in 1908.
- ◆ The 1921 Kerala Provincial Congress Committee unified political activities across Kerala regions.
- ◆ World War I events, like the Calicut walkout, demonstrated increasing public participation in nationalism.
- ◆ The 1920 Manjeri Conference split moderates and extremists, empowering peasant-aligned Congress leadership.
- ◆ The Khilafat Movement emerged post-WWI as Muslims rallied to protect the Ottoman Caliphate.
- ◆ Gandhi allied with Khilafat leaders, forming a pan-Indian anti-colonial resistance.
- ◆ The Khilafat Movement energised Mappila regions, uniting anti-feudal and anti-colonial sentiments.
- ◆ Ali Musliyar's leadership localised Khilafat goals and inspired the political awakening of rural Mappilas.
- ◆ The Tirurangadi mosque raid sparked the 1921 mass uprising led by Mappila peasants.

- ◆ Variankunnath Kunjahammed Haji declared a Khilafat state before the British crushed the rebellion.
- ◆ The Malabar Rebellion's legacy includes communal rifts, peasant mobilisation, and contested historiographical narratives.

Objective Questions

1. Who was the first nationalist leader from Kerala to initiate civil rights agitations in Travancore?
2. Which state in Kerala was politically more active during the early national movement?
3. Who became the President of the Indian National Congress from Kerala?
4. In which year was the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) formed?
5. What treaty marked the formal dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire?
6. Which event symbolically represented the rising national movement in Malabar in 1916?
7. Who led the rebel Khilafat regime during the Malabar Rebellion?
8. What tragic event occurred in 1921 involving the death of Mappila prisoners?
9. Which system dominated the agrarian structure of Malabar in the early 20th century?
10. What was the immediate cause of the Malabar Rebellion in August 1921?
11. Who described the Malabar Rebellion as a “mob frenzy”?
12. Which organisation emerged in the 1920s promoting Muslim reform in Kerala?
13. Who argued that the Malabar Rebellion was fundamentally an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist movement?

Answers

1. G. P. Pillai
2. Travancore (Tiruvitāmkur)
3. C. Sankaran Nair
4. 1921
5. Treaty of Sèvres
6. K. P. Kesava Menon's walkout from Calicut Town Hall
7. Variankunnath Kunjahammed Haji
8. Wagon Tragedy
9. Janmi system
10. Raid on Tirurangadi mosque and arrest of Ali Musliyar
11. Mahatma Gandhi
12. Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham
13. K. N. Panikkar

Assignments

1. Critically assess the role of the Indian National Congress in shaping early nationalist politics in Kerala, with special reference to the formation of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee and the All-Kerala Political Conference of 1921.
2. Examine the socio-economic background of the Mappila community in early 20th-century Malabar and discuss how it contributed to the outbreak of the 1921 rebellion.
3. The Malabar Rebellion of 1921 has been variously described as a religious riot, a peasant uprising, and a nationalist movement. Evaluate these interpretations with appropriate historiographical references.

4. Analyse the causes and consequences of the Khilafat Movement in Kerala.
5. Discuss the legacy of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 in the political and communal history of Kerala. How has its memory been shaped and reshaped over the decades?

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UNIT

Emergence of Congress

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain and contextualise the emergence, organisation, and expansion of Indian National Congress units in different regions of Kerala
- ◆ critically evaluate the political contributions of leaders such as K. Kelappan, T. Prakasam, and C. Kesavan to the nationalist movement in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the role of regional and provincial conferences in facilitating nationalist mobilisation and political coordination
- ◆ trace comparatively the patterns of political awakening and nationalist engagement in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar

Prerequisite

Before engaging with this unit, learners are expected to possess a foundational understanding of the Indian national movement, particularly the ideological evolution and organisational framework that culminated in the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Familiarity with colonial administrative structures in British India, as well as the political organisation of princely states such as Travancore and Cochin, is essential for appreciating the regional specificities of Congress activity in Kerala.

Learners should also be acquainted with the contributions of early national leaders including Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, in order to situate the interventions of regional figures such as K. Kelappan, T. Prakasam, and C. Kesavan within the broader nationalist discourse. An understanding

of the distinction between British-administered provinces and princely states is crucial for analysing the differing political opportunities and constraints faced by Congress activists. Prior exposure to early reformist and political movements in Kerala, including civil rights campaigns and memorial movements such as the Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava Memorial, will further enhance comprehension of how local grievances gradually crystallised into organised nationalist politics.

Keywords

K. Kelappan, T. Prakasam, C. Kesavan, Ottappalam Conference, Manjeri Conference, Palakkad Conference, Vadakara Conference

Discussion

4.3.1. Formation of Congress Units in Kerala

4.3.1.1 Role of Early Leaders

Nationalism in India gathered momentum during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, with the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 marking a decisive institutional turn in the anti-colonial struggle. These developments resonated strongly in Kerala, particularly in the Malabar region, which emerged as the principal centre of Congress activity in the state. Being directly under British administration, Malabar experienced the combined pressures of colonial exploitation and feudal dominance, creating fertile ground for nationalist mobilisation.

The early influence of the Congress in Malabar was largely mediated through the English-educated middle classes, who played a pivotal role in disseminating nationalist ideas and organising political activity. Under the Congress banner, these groups functioned as intermediaries between all-India political developments and local society, gradually drawing wider sections of the population

into the freedom struggle. Individuals from Malabar who had been exposed to nationalist politics in other parts of India returned to the region as carriers of political consciousness, further strengthening local mobilisation. The Gandhian phase of the national movement, with its emphasis on mass participation and moral politics, proved particularly attractive to educated youth in Kerala, many of whom willingly abandoned secure employment and social privilege to join the struggle.

In Travancore and Cochin, nationalist politics evolved under markedly different conditions. As princely states governed by powerful monarchs and overseen by British Residents, political organisation was viewed with suspicion by the ruling authorities. Nevertheless, Congress sympathisers gradually established informal networks to propagate nationalist ideas and challenge autocratic governance. The formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1938 represented a significant milestone in this process. Although not initially recognised as a formal unit of the Indian National Congress, it effectively functioned as its regional counterpart, articulating demands for civil liberties, responsible government,

and democratic reform. The Travancore State Congress played a crucial role in consolidating nationalist and anti-monarchical forces within a unified political framework.

Political mobilisation in Cochin developed along parallel but more restrained lines. The growth of nationalist consciousness was driven largely by the educated middle classes, who channelled their demands through organisations such as the Cochin Praja Mandal. This body sought constitutional reforms and representative government and gradually aligned itself with the broader strategies of the All India Congress Committee. Together, the experiences of Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin illustrate the uneven yet interconnected trajectories through which Congress politics took root in Kerala, shaped by regional contexts, administrative structures, and social hierarchies.

K. Madhavan Nair

K. Madhavan Nair was one of the most notable early freedom fighters from Kerala. He played a foundational role in establishing Mathrubhumi and served as the first President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). Born on December 2, 1882, into an ordinary family in Manjeri, located in the Ernad Taluk of South Malabar, he pursued higher education at Madras University. For a brief period, he worked as a teacher at M.G.M. High School in Thiruvalla, in the erstwhile Travancore State.

In 1909, he completed his law degree from Trivandrum Law College and began practising law in Manjeri. He initially worked under Lawyer Anandan Nair but soon, within two years, started his independent legal practice. In April 1911, he married Karumathin Kakkuzhi Kalyani Amma. His independent thinking and fearless nature often led to conflicts with his peers. While studying for his F.A., he attended the 18th

Congress session held at Ahmedabad. The speeches delivered by Surendranath Banerjee and Dadabhai Naoroji left a deep impact on him. In particular, Dadabhai's statement—"the triumph of liberty is not won in a day"—left a lasting impression. A conflict with Munsiff Venkateswar Ayyar and several personal reasons led him to shift his residence and legal practice to Calicut in 1915, marking a turning point in his life.

In Calicut, he developed close associations with K.P. Kesava Menon, C. Krishnan, Lawyer C. Achuthan, and Manjeri Ramayyan, who significantly influenced his political and social journey. Although C. Krishnan mainly focused on community-based issues and social reforms rather than mainstream politics, Madhavan Nair collaborated with him in campaigns against untouchability and other reform movements. One significant event was the Thali incident. During that period, oppressed castes were prohibited from using the roads adjoining the Thali Temple in Calicut. Historically, this road had been under the Zamorin's authority but had later come under British administration. When the District Collector, Evan, went on a two-month leave, Mr. A.J. Thorne IAS temporarily took charge. Under pressure from orthodox Hindu groups, he allowed "No Entry" boards for untouchables to be placed at both entrances to the Thali Temple roads on November 1, 1917.

Upon learning of this development, C. Krishnan, Manjeri Ramayyan, K. Madhavan Nair, and K.P. Kesava Menon decided to challenge the discriminatory restriction. They travelled along the disputed road in C. Krishnan's official governance cart. Although Madhavan Nair, Ramayyan, and Kesava Menon, being from upper castes, faced no potential obstruction, they accompanied C. Krishnan, who belonged to a lower caste, to ensure his protection from possible resistance. Their action was successful. Not only did they pass through the road without any hindrance,

but they also removed the discriminatory boards. Spectators gathered on either side of the road applauded their courageous act and encouraged them. This bold move effectively ended the untouchability dispute surrounding the Thali Temple premises.

K. Kelappan (1889–1971)

K. Kelappan, often referred to as the “Kerala Gandhi,” was one of the most prominent early Congress leaders in Kerala. Born in the Malabar region, Kelappan was deeply influenced by Gandhian philosophy and played a key role in integrating nationalist and social reform agendas. A teacher by profession, he became a full-time political activist after joining the Indian National Congress.

Kelappan’s leadership during the Vaikom Satyagraha and later during the Guruvayur Satyagraha stands out as pivotal contributions to both civil rights and the freedom movement. He firmly believed that political freedom was meaningless without social equality. His emphasis on non-violence, truth, and *satyagraha* aligned perfectly with Gandhian ideals, making him a respected figure in both national and regional circles. Kelappan also played a crucial role in organising the Salt Satyagraha in Kerala and was arrested several times during the Civil Disobedience and Quit India Movements. In the post-independence period, he joined the Sarvodaya movement and remained active in constructive programmes such as rural development and educational reform.

T. Prakasam (1872–1957)

Though primarily associated with Andhra politics, Tanguturi Prakasam made significant contributions in the Malabar region, especially in the early stages of nationalist mobilisation. As a prominent lawyer, editor, and later Chief Minister of Madras Presidency and Andhra State, Prakasam’s influence extended

beyond his native Andhra. In 1921, during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements, Prakasam visited Kerala and inspired local leaders with his oratory and commitment to national causes. His support and leadership helped consolidate the Congress presence in Malabar and encouraged more South Indian leaders to coordinate their efforts.

Prakasam was also instrumental in promoting the use of vernacular languages in political communication, recognising their importance in reaching the rural masses. His influence can be seen in the growing number of local newspapers and pamphlets that supported the Congress ideology in Malayalam.

C. Kesavan

C. Kesavan was one of the three key leaders of the Travancore State Congress, alongside Pattom Thanu Pillai and T.M. Varghese. He was born on May 23, 1891, into a modest Ezhava family in Mayyanad, near Quilon. His education took place in Quilon, Ernakulam, and Trivandrum. Initially, he worked as a teacher before pursuing a law degree in Trivandrum and beginning legal practice in Quilon. Kesavan was deeply influenced by the philosophies of Sree Narayana Guru, Mahatma Gandhi, and Karl Marx. He was committed to the temperance movement and the eradication of untouchability, and he also served as the General Secretary of the SNDP Yogam. From 1933 onwards, he emerged as a prominent leader of the Abstention Movement in Travancore. On June 7, 1935, he was arrested for delivering a speech at a public meeting in Kozencherry, tried for sedition, and sentenced to two years in prison. Kesavan played a vital role in the formation of the Travancore State Congress and served on its Working Committee. He faced multiple arrests during the struggle for responsible government in Travancore. During the Quit India Movement in 1942,



he was sentenced to one year imprisonment and was released on July 19, 1943. After Independence, Kesavan was elected to the Travancore Assembly and joined the first cabinet led by Pattom Thanu Pillai, though he resigned after a few months. In 1951, he became the Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin and was elected to the State Assembly in 1952. He passed away on July 7, 1969, in Mayyanad.

T.M. Varghese

Varghese was born in 1886 at Pallikkal, Mavelikkara, in the erstwhile Travancore State. A distinguished lawyer by profession, he became actively involved in the agitation for responsible government. He emerged as a key leader of the Abstention Movement in Travancore and was elected to the Travancore Legislative Assembly from the Pathanamthitta Constituency, where he served as Deputy Speaker. In 1938, he strongly advocated for the establishment of responsible government within the Assembly. As one of the founding members and a Working Committee member of the State Congress, Varghese played a leading role in directing its activities for over a decade. Between 1938 and 1943, he faced multiple arrests. Following Independence, he served in the cabinet led by Pattom Thanu Pillai. Upon the merger of Travancore and Cochin, he was appointed Speaker of the Travancore-Cochin Assembly in July 1949. Subsequently, he held the position of Minister in the cabinet of A.J. John. Varghese passed away on December 31, 1961.

4.3.2 Political Conferences: Ottappalam, Manjeri, Palakkad and Vadakara

The early 20th century witnessed a significant political transformation in Kerala, influenced by pan-Indian nationalist currents and local socio-political dynamics. In this context, political conferences held

in Ottappalam, Manjeri, Palakkad, and Vadakara played a pivotal role in mobilising people, articulating regional aspirations, and integrating Kerala more firmly into the broader Indian nationalist movement. These conferences served as critical platforms for discussing and popularising issues such as civil liberties, agrarian reforms, and demands for representative self-governance. They also laid the ideological and organisational groundwork for the emergence of more structured political mobilisations in the subsequent decades, including the formation of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) and the radicalisation of agrarian and workers' movements.

In Malabar, organised political activities began only during the second decade of the 20th century. A significant initiative undertaken by the Congress during this time was the establishment of the Malabar District Congress Committee in 1910, with Mr. Kunhirama Menon serving as its first secretary. The primary objective of the District Congress Committee's meetings was to select delegates to participate in the sessions of the Indian National Congress. The political conference held in Calicut in 1913, under the presidency of C. Vijayaraghavachari, succeeded to some extent in raising political consciousness among the people. The Home Rule Movement, launched in 1916 under the leadership of Dr. Annie Besant and Lokamanya Tilak, received a favourable response in Malabar and marked the real beginning of nationalist-inspired political activity in the region. A local branch of the Home Rule League was established in Calicut, with Mr. Manjeri Rama Iyyer as president and K.P. Kesava Menon as secretary. The District Home Rule League and the District Congress Committee collaborated closely, both functioning under the leadership of K.P. Kesava Menon. The movement attracted a considerable number of students and young people. Numerous public meetings and

processions were organised across Malabar under the joint auspices of the Home Rule League and the District Congress Committee.

In 1916, the Chairman of the Calicut Municipality convened a public meeting at the Town Hall to gather support from the local population for the British in the First World War. During the meeting, when Kesava Menon, the District Congress Secretary, began his speech in Malayalam, the District Collector, Evans, insisted he continue in English. In response, Kesava Menon halted his speech in protest and walked out of the meeting. Most of the audience followed him, leaving only the Collector and a few officials behind. This incident is regarded as possibly the first public protest against British rule in Malabar.

4.3.2.1. Palakkadu Conference

The first Malabar district political conference, held in 1916 at Palakkad under the presidency of Dr. Annie Besant, was an important landmark in the history of the national movement in Malabar. One of its key resolutions urged the formation of committees throughout the district aimed at achieving self-government. The conference also adopted resolutions appealing to the authorities to grant home rule to Indians and to release political prisoners. The attendees primarily belonged to the educated middle class. The success of the Palakkad conference served as a motivating force for both the leaders and the general public. The second district political conference took place in 1917 at Calicut, presided over by Sri C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. Delegates from various parts of Malabar, as well as from Travancore and Cochin, participated in the event. The conference addressed several pressing issues, such as India's demand for self-government, the Arms Act, elementary education, and tenancy reforms. The arrest of Dr. Besant in mid-1917 sparked a heightened sense

of national awareness among the people of Malabar.

The third Malabar District Political Conference was convened in 1918 at Tellicherry, with Mr. Azad Alikhan Bahadur serving as president. This conference passed significant resolutions advocating for the Indianisation of the army, the introduction of primary education, and the repeal of oppressive laws.

4.3.2.2. Vadakara Conference

The fourth Malabar District Political Conference, held at Badagara (Vadakara) in 1919 under the presidency of K.P. Raman, focused on key political developments with specific attention to the issues affecting Malabar. The leaders of the national movement in the region recognised the harmful impact of the caste system and untouchability. They identified these social evils as significant barriers to political participation and activity. In response, the nationalists formulated concrete strategies to combat them. One of their initial steps was to pass resolutions during their meetings, calling upon public opinion and religious institutions to actively work towards the eradication of untouchability. In addition to resolutions, they sometimes took direct action. A notable instance of such action occurred when Zamorin's College in Calicut refused admission to students from lower castes. The nationalists responded by organising protests to demand their inclusion. Another meaningful initiative taken by early nationalists to challenge caste-based discrimination was the organisation of inter-dining events. Numerous such gatherings were held across Malabar, where caste Hindus dined together with members of the lower castes, thereby challenging rigid social norms.

The nationalists also opposed the exclusion

of untouchables from public spaces. A prominent example is the road adjacent to the Tali temple in Calicut, which was closed to so-called polluting castes on the grounds that their presence would desecrate the area. Dismissing such notions as superstitious and baseless, the nationalists appealed to the elite to grant access to public roads for all castes. To confront these elite conventions, leaders like K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Madhavan Nair, and Manjeri Rama Iyyer walked along the road near the Tali temple accompanied by C. Krishnan, a Tiyya lawyer, and a group of individuals from various lower castes. This bold act encouraged the general public to assert their rights by walking through the restricted road and even removing the board that barred the entry of lower castes. A significant outcome of the Tali road protest was that it inspired untouchable communities in other parts of Malabar to launch similar movements of resistance.

4.3.2.3. Manjeri Conference

In April 1920, the fifth Malabar District Political Conference was convened at Manjeri under the presidency of Mr. Kasturi Ranga Iyengar. This event marked the culmination of the early series of district political conferences in Malabar and held particular significance. It signalled a decline in the considerable influence that Dr. Annie Besant had previously exerted over the political developments in the region. The Manjeri conference also reflected a shift in both the composition of its delegates and the nature of the Congress's discussions. Approximately 1,300 delegates participated, including a notable number of Muslim peasants.

The conference became a ground for confrontation between two factions—the moderates, led by Dr. Annie Besant, and the extremists, led by K.P. Kesavamenon. Landlord representatives aligned themselves with the moderates, while tenants and workers supported the extremists. One

of the major resolutions adopted at the conference stated that India was prepared for self-government and expressed dissatisfaction with the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. Although Dr. Besant and her supporters strongly opposed this resolution, it was overwhelmingly passed. In protest, Mrs. Besant and her followers walked out of the meeting. Several other resolutions were also passed at the Manjeri conference, including demands for tenancy reforms, the regulation of factory working hours, and the abolition of child labour. This conference highlighted the growing nationalist sentiment in Malabar and expanded the mass base of the nationalist movement in the region. It clearly demonstrated that Malabar prioritised national objectives and collective policy over the views of any individual leader. Thus, the event holds a significant place in the history of Malabar's political struggle.

During the pre-Gandhian period, the nationalist movement in Malabar was largely dominated by upper castes and elite groups, with early political conferences under their control. At that time, Mappilas and lower-caste Hindus were not very active in the national movement. However, Malabar emerged as a key participant in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements of the early 1920s. The region witnessed widespread boycotts of foreign goods, law courts, and educational institutions. Many individuals resigned from their jobs, lawyers ceased practising, and students withdrew from schools and colleges. In the same year, 1920, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee was established.

4.3.3.4 Ottapalam Conferences

The inaugural session of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee took place at Ottapalam on April 23, 1921, with T. Prakasan presiding over the meeting. This event marked the first representative assembly of Congress members from the

regions of Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin. Delegates from all district committees were present. Alongside this, several other gatherings—including the tenants’ conference, Khilafat conference, students’ conference, and farmers’ conference—were also held at the same venue.

The conference fully endorsed the Indian National Congress’s resolution on non-cooperation as applicable to Kerala. Numerous resolutions were adopted, appealing to the government to address the genuine grievances of the populace. During the Ottapalam session, resolutions urging lawyers to cease their practice and shopkeepers to stop selling foreign cloth were also passed. These were the first such appeals in Malabar. The conference affirmed the non-cooperation resolution passed at the Nagpur Congress and called upon the people to join the movement to end colonial rule and achieve ‘swaraj’. However, moderates and members of the Home Rule Leagues boycotted the Ottapalam Conference due to their strong opposition to the non-cooperation movement. The overwhelming participation of delegates from across Kerala, the orderly conduct of the conference, and particularly the enthusiasm of the local public disturbed the district authorities. In response, the delegates were

assaulted by the police without any provocation. Despite this, the delegates displayed remarkable restraint in the face of police harassment. The police’s efforts to incite the Congress workers ultimately failed.

The police assault on Ramunni Menon, secretary of the Ottapalam Conference, and Ahmad Khan, a Khilafat leader from Madras, led to tensions between the local population and the police. However, the leaders managed to calm the people and urged them to remain peaceful despite the provocation. As *The Hindu* noted, this incident served as a significant lesson in non-violence. K. Madhavan Nair observed that “after the Ottapalam Conference, there was a resurgence of Khilafat and Congress activities.” The common people became politically aware, and communal harmony prevailed among them. This period witnessed the expansion of Khilafat and Congress activities in Malabar, which alarmed the District Collector. Determined to suppress the growing movement, he resorted to mass arrests. The detention of Khilafat leaders by the police ignited the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. The uprising was partly fuelled by the tenancy movement, the Khilafat agitation, and the non-cooperation campaign.

Recap

- ◆ The Congress became a unifying platform for Kerala’s educated middle class.
- ◆ Malabar’s stronger colonial presence intensified the region’s nationalist struggle.
- ◆ K. Madhavan Nair’s activism linked legal advocacy to civil rights and nationalism.
- ◆ The Travancore State Congress, formed in 1938, challenged monarchical authority and demanded rights.
- ◆ Cochin’s Praja Mandal advocated democratic reforms and aligned with Congress ideology.



- ◆ K. Kelappan blended social reform with Gandhian politics during Kerala's freedom struggle.
- ◆ T. Prakasam inspired Kerala's leaders through speeches and vernacular political communication.
- ◆ C. Kesavan championed temperance, anti-untouchability, and Travancore's democratic transformation.
- ◆ T.M. Varghese led the Abstention Movement and shaped Travancore's post-independence politics.
- ◆ Early 20th-century political conferences united Kerala under nationalist and civil rights agendas.
- ◆ The Home Rule League and Congress Committee mobilised youth across Malabar by 1916.
- ◆ The Palakkad Conference of 1916 demanded home rule and prisoner release resolutions.
- ◆ The Vadakara Conference tackled caste discrimination and called for inclusive public access.
- ◆ The Manjeri Conference in 1920 reflected a grassroots shift from elite to mass politics.
- ◆ The Ottapalam Conference of 1921 triggered wider Congress-Khilafat movements and British crackdowns.

Objective Questions

1. Which region of Kerala saw the earliest and most intense nationalist activities?
2. Who was the first President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC)?
3. What was K. Madhavan Nair's profession before he entered full-time politics?
4. Which early Congress leader is known as the "Kerala Gandhi"?
5. The Travancore State Congress was formed in which year?
6. Who inspired K. Madhavan Nair during the 18th Congress Session at Ahmedabad?
7. Who presided over the first Malabar district political conference held at Palakkad in 1916?

8. What resolution led to Dr. Annie Besant walking out of the Manjeri Conference in 1920?
9. Who was the President of the 1920 Manjeri Conference?
10. Which incident is considered the first public protest against British rule in Malabar?
11. What was the main goal of the Cochin Praja Mandal?
12. The Ottapalam Conference of 1921 was boycotted by which groups?
13. Which events partly contributed to the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921?

Answers

1. Malabar
2. K. Madhavan Nair
3. Lawyer
4. K. Kelappan
5. 1938
6. Dadabhai Naoroji and Surendranath Banerjee
7. Dr. Annie Besant
8. A resolution asserting India's readiness for self-government
9. Kasturi Ranga Iyengar
10. Kesava Menon's protest at the Calicut Municipality meeting in 1916
11. To demand democratic reforms and responsible government
12. Moderates and members of the Home Rule League
13. Khilafat agitation, tenancy movement, and the non-cooperation movement

Assignments

1. Discuss the emergence and growth of the Indian National Congress in Kerala with special reference to the role of Malabar.
2. Evaluate the role of K. Madhavan Nair and C. Kesavan in Kerala's freedom struggle and social reform movements.

3. Analyse the significance of the major district political conferences held in Malabar between 1916 and 1920 in the context of the national movement.
4. Write a comparative account of the nationalist activities in Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin during the early 20th century.
5. Critically examine the role of key Congress leaders like K. Kelappan, T. Prakasam, C. Kesavan, and T.M. Varghese in shaping the nationalist movement in Kerala.

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UNIT

Movements for Political Reform

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ trace the evolution of representative institutions
- ◆ examine the causes of the Abstention Movement
- ◆ evaluate demands for backward class representation
- ◆ analyse struggles for responsible government

Prerequisite

Before engaging with the unit “Movements for Political Reform,” learners are expected to have a foundational understanding of the socio-political structure of princely states in colonial India, particularly Travancore and Cochin. Familiarity with the administrative systems under British paramountcy and the limitations of civil liberties within princely rule is essential for contextual comprehension. Learners should also be acquainted with the broader Indian nationalist movement, especially the ideological shift from moderate constitutional methods to mass mobilisation, as this backdrop heavily influenced reformist tendencies in native states.

Basic knowledge of the caste hierarchy and social composition in Kerala will be beneficial, particularly regarding the socio-political exclusion of backward classes and the emergence of social reform movements in the early 20th century. Learners should also understand the significance of representative institutions, such as legislative councils and popular assemblies, and how demands for these institutions reflected deeper democratic aspirations.

A preliminary awareness of key reformist leaders, the role of newspapers in political awakening, and the influence of national movements like the Indian National Congress and the Civil Disobedience Movement on local politics will help learners better grasp the interconnections between regional and national political developments in this unit.

Keywords

Pourasamatva Vadam, Sree Mulam Popular Assembly, 1932 Reforms, Abstention Movement, Responsible Government, Communal Representation, Cochin Praja Mandal, Backward Classes, Princely States, Constitutional Reform

Discussion

4.4.1. Poura Samatvavada Prakshobham

One of the significant political movements in Travancore during the early part of the 20th century was the agitation popularly known as the Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam. Its primary aim was to secure civic rights. The movement was collectively undertaken by three major social groups: the Avarnas of the Hindu community, Muslims, and Christians. These communities were aggrieved by their exclusion from appointments in the Land Revenue Department, which also oversaw the administration of the Devaswams. The government's policy in this matter effectively amounted to a denial of social justice.

To combat this unjust discrimination, leaders from the three communities came together to establish the Civic Rights League in 1919. Prominent figures such as E.J. John and T.K. Madhavan spearheaded the movement and raised the issue with the authorities. In response, Maharaja Sri Mulam Tirunal issued a Royal Proclamation in 1922 that led to the bifurcation of the Land Revenue Department into two distinct departments: Revenue and Devaswams.

Following this division, members of the Avarna Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities were permitted to take up posts in the newly created Revenue Department, while the Devaswams Department remained reserved for the Savarnas.

As a result of the efforts of the Civic Rights League, the notion of equal opportunity in government employment—regardless of caste or religion—was acknowledged, albeit in a limited form. The Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam thus succeeded, at least in part, in achieving its intended goal.

4.4.2. Constitutional Reforms

In 1932, Maharaja Sri Chitra Tirunal introduced constitutional changes in Travancore. This reform represented a significant step in the series of constitutional changes made in the state since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. During the reign of Sri Mulam Tirunal (1885-1924), an attempt was made to associate people with legislative work. In 1888, he constituted a Legislative Council consisting of the Diwan as President and not more than eight members, authorised to discuss

matters relating to legislation. However, it functioned primarily as a deliberative body. In 1898, the Council was enlarged, with the minimum number of members fixed at eight and the maximum at fifteen, two-fifths of whom were non-officials. The sanction of the Diwan was made necessary for the Council's consideration of any issue affecting the public revenue of the state and the religious rights and usages of the people.

In response to popular demand and at the suggestion of Diwan V.P. Madhava Rao (1904-1908), the Maharaja inaugurated another legislative body, the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, on 22 October 1904. It was constituted with a view to "afford the people an opportunity of expressing directly to the Government their wants and wishes and of representing their views regarding administrative measures adopted from time to time."

The Popular Assembly consisted of one hundred members, of whom seventy-seven were elected by general constituencies and the remaining twenty-three by the Government. Every person who paid an annual land revenue of not less than fifty rupees, or whose net income was not less than 2,000 rupees, and every graduate of a recognised university of not less than ten years' standing and residing in the taluq, was given the right to vote and contest elections. The Assembly had no control over the executive and was neither legislative nor representative in character. At most, the members of this body could make representations to the Diwan. By an Act promulgated on 6 September 1919, the Legislative Council was reformed. This Act raised the strength of the Council to twenty-five and broadened the franchise considerably.

It granted the right to the people to elect members to the Council, but the Government reserved the right to nominate some of the

official members. It conceded to the members the right to interpellate the Government and to discuss the annual budget. It forbade the Council from 'considering any measure affecting the provisions of the Act' and affirmed the prerogative of the ruler to make and pass regulations and proclamations independently of the Council. Even though the Act of 1919 was an improvement over that of 1893, several citizens considered this retention of power by the Maharaja to be 'autocratic and reactionary.' Led by Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai, they organised protest meetings and demanded reform of the Legislative Council.

In response to popular demand, the Government amended the Regulation of 1919. The new reforms, introduced on 2 October 1921, effected changes in the composition, functions, and powers of the Council. It raised the strength of the Council from twenty-five to fifty, of whom twenty-eight were elected and twenty-two nominated. Of the latter, seven were non-officials. The Council was invested with the powers to vote on the budget, to move resolutions, and to ask questions. The scope of the franchise was further broadened. All persons paying an annual land tax of five rupees or a profession tax to a municipality, and all graduates of a recognised university, were made eligible to vote in the general constituencies. Women were placed on complete equality with men in matters of franchise and membership. Yet every legislative measure passed by the Council required the assent of the ruler, who retained the right to legislate independently of the Council.

After the assumption of power by Sri Chitra Tirunal on 6 November 1931, further reforms were attempted. As suggested by C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, his Constitutional Adviser, the young Maharaja promulgated the Legislative Reforms Act II on 28 October 1932. Under this scheme, the Sri Mulam

Prajasabha and the Legislative Council were replaced by the Sri Mulam Assembly (Lower House) and the Sri Chitra State Council (Upper House). The Assembly consisted of seventy-two members, of whom sixty were non-officials and twelve were officials. Of the sixty non-officials, forty-three were elected by general territorial constituencies and five by special constituencies representing merchants, planters, landholders, and industrialists. Fourteen non-official seats were reserved for nomination by the Government to give representation to minority communities and other inadequately represented interests.

The Sri Chitra State Council was composed of thirty-seven members, of whom twenty-seven were non-officials and ten were officials. Of the non-official members, sixteen were elected by general territorial constituencies and six by special constituencies, including political pensioners, landholders, and planters. Five non-officials were nominated by the Government. The Diwan was the president of both the Assembly and the Council.

The qualification required for the franchise was relaxed. All persons holding land within the state assessable to a land tax of one rupee or more, or a municipal tax of five rupees, and all graduates of recognised universities in the British Empire were eligible to exercise the franchise for the Assembly. For the Council, the property qualification was fixed at the payment of an annual land tax of twenty-five rupees or a municipal tax of five rupees, and the educational qualification was limited to graduates of ten years' standing. However, the Act of 1932 limited the duration of the Assembly and the Council to four years. In special circumstances, the government could dissolve either chamber before the completion of four years or extend its period. Regarding their powers, both chambers had the right to initiate and pass legislation. All legislative measures generally required the

assent of both chambers to become laws. The legislature was not given the right to enact any measure relating to or affecting the provisions of the Regulation and the rules framed thereunder.

This restriction was intended mainly to preserve the royal prerogative unimpaired. The legislature was denied the right to discuss or vote upon any subject affecting the external relations of the state and some aspects of internal administration without the prior permission of the Diwan. Furthermore, the executive head was vested with the emergency power to pass laws independent of the legislature. In the words of T. K. Velu Pillai, 'the reform was calculated to facilitate the progressive development of the state with a national as distinguished from a communal outlook.' Despite its progressive character in certain respects, the reforms did not satisfy the political aspirations of the people in general.

4.4.3. The Abstention Movement (Nivarthana Prakshobham)

Instead of creating a peaceful situation, as expected by the government, the Constitutional Reforms of 1932 complicated the socio-political condition in Travancore. The different communities and religious groups viewed these reforms from the perspective of the respective benefits they sought to derive. These reforms provided for an electoral scheme based upon property qualifications. As the Nair community formed the major landowning class, the other sections of society developed an apprehension that the Nairs would secure seats in excess of what they deserved on a population basis. On this ground, the Ezhavas, Muslims, and some sections of the Christians opposed it. They demanded the institution of communal electorates or the reservation of seats for different communities strictly in proportion to

their population. The government, however, refused to make any change to its original scheme.

In order to secure their demands, they decided to launch an agitation commonly called 'Nivarthanam' or the Abstention Movement. They formed a common political organisation known as the Joint Political Congress. It should be noted that the Reforms of 1932 also provided for the nomination of a few non-official members to the Legislature. On 9 January 1933, a deputation of the Joint Political Congress submitted a memorial to the Diwan, T. Austin (1932-1934). It demanded that the non-official seats in the Legislature be filled by election rather than by nomination.

4.4.3.1. Government Response and Political Consequences

The Government refused to consider their demand but agreed to hold a conference to discuss the issue. However, this conference did not materialise, as the leaders refused to compromise on their demands, and the Government withdrew the offer and ordered the holding of general elections according to the Act of 1932. Greatly disappointed, the Joint Political Congress held a meeting at the L. M. S. Hall in Trivandrum on 25 January 1933 and decided to abstain from the elections. As a follow-up measure and to educate public opinion, they organised meetings in various locations. At the same time, they made it clear that their agitation was not directed towards paralysing the administration. Yet, in view of the worsened situation, the Government banned meetings and demonstrations throughout the state.

In an earnest attempt to appease the aggrieved communities, the Government revised the electoral system to provide adequate representation to minority communities and promised to effect further changes after giving a fair trial to the revised

system. The new scheme provided for the holding of elections in June 1933. When the election came, the Joint Political Congress not only abstained from it but also requested the Government to dissolve the newly constituted Legislature. Ultimately, this led to communal rivalry between the Nairs and other communities. The tide of agitation underwent a sudden change following the arrest of C. Kesavan, one of the stalwarts of the movement.

On 13 May 1935, the Joint Political Congress held a conference at Kozhencherry in central Travancore, with C. Kesavan as President. The conference demanded the dismissal of C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer from the office of Legal and Constitutional Adviser to the Maharaja. In his presidential address, C. Kesavan attacked the monopoly enjoyed by the Nairs in the general administration and condemned the policy of the Government. Consequently, he was arrested on charges of sedition and sentenced to two years' imprisonment and fined Rupees 500. This impolitic step further strengthened the unity of the Joint Political Congress.

As the agitation continued, the Government decided to accept the principle of reservation of seats. Based on a report submitted by E. Subramonia Aiyer, the Commissioner for Franchise and Delimitation, the Government issued orders on 20 August 1936. Accordingly, the franchise was widened by reducing the property qualification, and the electorates were reconstituted to provide for multiple seats. A specified number of seats was reserved for the Latin Catholics, Ezhava, and Muslim communities in the general constituencies. With the introduction of the single non-transferable vote system, everyone who paid one rupee or more as tax was given the vote for the Assembly. On 23 August 1936, the abstentionists welcomed this scheme and decided to withdraw all agitational programmes.



In the Abstention Movement, the Government faced an organised agitation aimed at securing equal political rights and privileges for all people. Although the Joint Political Congress was formed with the declared objective of securing political rights for the backward communities, it ultimately paved the way for more organised movements. Communal leaders understood that political parties could be constituted on the basis of common principles, and rights could be wrested through organised opposition. It should be recognised that the Abstention Movement created communal rivalry between the Nairs on one side and the Christian, Ezhava, and Muslim communities on the other. However, realising that communal rivalry would weaken their cause and strengthen the authority of the Diwan, they deemed it imprudent to quarrel indefinitely over a handful of Government offices or representation in the Legislature. The Nair leaders also saw it as unwise to dissociate themselves from other communities. Taking this opportune moment, E.V. Krishna Pillai took steps to bring different communities together under a common platform. Ultimately, the Joint Political Congress gave way to the State Congress, and the attainment of responsible government became the common objective.

The political movement led by the Joint Political Congress took a peaceful turn when the new Legislature convened. With all their demands conceded, it called off the agitation in August 1936. When the elections were held under the revised scheme in April 1937, the Joint Political Congress, led by T.M. Varghese, captured twenty-six out of the fifty-eight elected seats in the Assembly.

4.4.4. Struggle for Responsible Government in Travancore

The sequence of developments in Travancore underscored the pressing necessity for the early establishment of responsible government. In February 1938, the Joint Political Congress was reconstituted as a new body named the Travancore State Congress, with Pattom A. Thanu Pillai appointed as its first President. Prominent figures like C. Kesavan, T. M. Varghese, and others from the Joint Political Congress also assumed leadership roles in the newly formed State Congress. The primary objective of this organisation was to secure complete responsible governance for the people of Travancore.

The Travancore State Congress resolved to undertake direct action in pursuit of this goal. Before initiating its final course of action, it submitted a memorial to the Maharaja, emphasising the necessity of granting responsible government to the citizens without delay. This memorial also included several allegations against the Diwan, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar, and demanded his removal from office. In response, the Travancore government opted to suppress the proposed agitation with a firm approach. Both the State Congress and the Youth League were declared unlawful associations.

In this context, the State Congress Working Committee resolved to initiate a Civil Disobedience movement starting from 26 August 1938. The movement was launched vigorously as scheduled, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of all major

Congress leaders. Violent confrontations between civilians and the police broke out in various parts of the state. In Neyyattinkara, police firing led to the death of a person named Raghavan. In Alleppey, workers declared a general strike, bringing public life to a halt. On 24 October, a massive public gathering and protest occurred in Alleppey, during which police opened fire on marching workers.

Later, the State Congress's Action Council organised a large demonstration in Trivandrum in November, coinciding with the Maharaja's birthday celebrations. Confronted with an escalating crisis, the government lifted the ban on the State Congress and the Youth League and released all imprisoned leaders.

Despite this, the State Congress struggled to resume its routine political operations, as the government remained antagonistic towards the organisation. The Diwan, C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar, demanded the withdrawal of the memorial submitted to the Maharaja as a prerequisite for any dialogue regarding constitutional reforms. Acting on Gandhiji's advice, the State Congress Working Committee decided to withdraw the memorial. However, this decision led to internal dissension, resulting in a split within the organisation. The radical faction broke away and subsequently evolved into the Communist Party.

4.4.5. Demand for Responsible Government in Cochin

The Cochin District Congress Committee became increasingly active in the public sphere of Cochin during the late 1930s. In 1937, a political conference was convened at Trichur, presided over by Dr. Pattambi Sitaramayya. Around this time, the Indian National Congress adopted the Haripura

Resolution of 1938, which resolved not to interfere in the internal matters of princely states. Consequently, the proposal for launching an agitation for responsible government under Congress leadership was temporarily set aside. In the meantime, the Cochin government introduced a scheme of constitutional reforms as a measure to appease public sentiment. Unlike Travancore, where the government sought to suppress the demand for responsible governance, Cochin opted for a progressive approach by addressing the demand incrementally.

These constitutional reforms were incorporated in the Government of Cochin Act, which was enacted on June 17, 1938. A dyarchical system, modelled after the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms implemented in British India, was introduced in Cochin. Under this arrangement, a popularly elected Minister—selected by majority vote from the Cochin Legislative Council—was entrusted with the administration of various government departments such as agriculture, co-operation, public health, panchayats, industries, and others. The Legislative Council was composed of 58 members, with 38 chosen through elections conducted under the new reform scheme. Two prominent factions emerged in the Cochin Legislature: the Cochin Congress, holding 13 seats, and the Cochin State Congress, with 12 seats. Ambat Sivarama Menon, the leader of the Cochin Congress, became Cochin's first popularly elected Minister. He was later succeeded by Dr. A.R. Menon, who stepped down in February 1942 following a no-confidence motion, and was succeeded by T.K. Nair.

4.4.6. Rise of Cochin State Praja Mandal

The experiment in Dyarchy failed to satisfy the progressive sections of the population of Cochin. In 1941, a new political organisation called the Cochin State Praja



Mandal was formed under the leadership of V.K. Krishnan; Ezhuthachan, T.K. Nair, and Panampilli Govinda Menon were other top leaders of this political party. The party started a state-wide agitation for the achievement of responsible government in Cochin. Meetings and demonstrations were held all over Cochin demanding the end of Diwan's rule and the transfer of full political power to the elected representatives of the people. The government tried to suppress the agitation and arrested the leaders.

The Cochin Praja Mandal adopted Gandhian methods of political agitation—non-violent protest, *satyagraha*, and constitutional negotiation. It distanced itself from violent or extremist ideologies and focused on peaceful democratic mobilisation.

Soon after its formation, the Praja Mandal launched campaigns to increase public awareness about the need for responsible government. It organised public meetings, distributed pamphlets, and sent memoranda to the Maharaja demanding reforms.

Despite limited media freedom and state restrictions, the organisation succeeded in galvanising support from a wide spectrum of society, including teachers, students, lawyers, and progressive landlords. The Praja Mandal also built alliances with local caste and community organisations, which helped widen its social base.

One of the most significant early campaigns was the demand for the formation of a representative Legislative Council based on adult franchise. Although Cochin had a Legislative Council since 1925, it had limited powers and was not fully elected. The Praja Mandal's efforts contributed to the expansion of the council and the gradual introduction of electoral politics in the state.

After Indian independence in 1947, Cochin was merged with Travancore in 1949 to form the Travancore-Cochin state. This was a precursor to the formation of the linguistic state of Kerala in 1956. With this merger, the Cochin Praja Mandal merged into the Travancore-Cochin Congress, which eventually became part of the broader Indian National Congress in the region.

Recap

- ◆ Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam sought civic rights for excluded communities.
- ◆ Civic Rights League formed in 1919 against employment discrimination.
- ◆ Proclamation of 1922 bifurcated departments, opening jobs for Avarnas.
- ◆ Sree Mulam Popular Assembly was created in 1904 for public representation.
- ◆ Reforms of 1919 broadened the Council's scope but upheld the Maharaja's authority.
- ◆ Reforms of 1921 introduced an elected majority and equal franchise for women.

- ◆ Reforms of 1932 created a bicameral legislature with limited legislative powers.
- ◆ The Abstention Movement was launched against unfair representation in the 1932 reforms.
- ◆ The Joint Political Congress demanded communal reservation and electoral fairness.
- ◆ The government conceded reservation after mass agitation and arrests.
- ◆ The movement transformed into the State Congress, seeking responsible governance.
- ◆ The State Congress launched civil disobedience in Travancore in 1938.
- ◆ Violent repression followed the protests; leaders were arrested, and the ban was later lifted.
- ◆ Cochin introduced dyarchy in 1938, and the first elected minister was appointed.
- ◆ The Cochin Praja Mandal led peaceful protests demanding full democracy.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Civic Rights League formed?
2. Who were the key leaders of the Civic Rights League?
3. Which community was *not* allowed to work in the Devaswams Department after the 1922 reforms?
4. When was the Sree Mulam Popular Assembly inaugurated?
5. Which communities led the Abstention Movement (*Nivarthana Prakshobham*)?
6. What was the name of the common political organisation formed during the Abstention Movement?
7. Who presided over the Kozhencherry conference in 1935?
8. Who became the first president of the Travancore State Congress in 1938?

9. In which year was the Government of Cochin Act passed, introducing dyarchy?
10. What was the main method of protest adopted by the Cochin State Praja Mandal?

Answers

1. 1919
2. E.J. John and T.K. Madhavan
3. Avarna Hindus, Christians, and Muslims
4. 22 October 1904
5. Ezhavas, Muslims, and some sections of Christians
6. Joint Political Congress
7. C. Kesavan
8. Pattom A. Thanu Pillai
9. 1938
10. Non-violent protest and satyagraha based on Gandhian principles

Assignments

1. Examine the significance of the Pura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam in the socio-political transformation of Travancore. How did it contribute to the concept of civic equality?
2. Discuss the evolution of constitutional reforms in Travancore from the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1888 to the Legislative Reforms Act of 1932. What were the limitations of these reforms?
3. Critically analyse the causes, major events, and outcomes of the Abstention Movement (Nivarthana Prakshobham). How did it impact communal relations and the course of political mobilisation in Travancore?

4. Evaluate the role of the Travancore State Congress in the struggle for responsible government. How did the political tactics of the organisation shape the modern democratic movement in Kerala?
5. Trace the development of constitutional reforms in Cochin from the introduction of dyarchy under the Government of Cochin Act (1938) to the activities of the Cochin State Praja Mandal.

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UNIT

Solidarity with the National Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ identify and contextualise the principal phases, events, and regional manifestations of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Kerala.
- ◆ critically analyse the leadership and political interventions of K. Kelappan and P. Krishna Pillai during the Civil Disobedience and Salt Satyagraha movements in Kerala.
- ◆ examine the participation of students, youth organisations, and underground networks in the Quit India Movement of 1942 within the Kerala region.
- ◆ assess the nature of popular mobilisation in Kerala and its interaction with all-India nationalist strategies during the final phase of the freedom struggle.

Prerequisite

Before engaging with this unit, learners are expected to possess a sound understanding of the broader trajectory of India's national freedom struggle, including the early phase of nationalist politics, the formation and objectives of the Indian National Congress, and the ideological contributions of major national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose. Familiarity with key national developments, including the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Khilafat Movement, and the wider apparatus of colonial repression, is essential for situating the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India movements within their historical context.

Learners should also be acquainted with the political, social, and cultural milieu of early twentieth-century Kerala, particularly the dynamics of caste, socio-religious reform, and the gradual expansion of political consciousness in Travancore, Cochin,

and Malabar. Prior knowledge of the role played by the press, students, youth groups, and reformist leaders in shaping public opinion will aid in understanding regional mobilisation. An awareness of the chronology and character of mass movements at the all-India level, combined with the ability to engage critically with historical sources, biographies, and political discourse, will enable a nuanced appreciation of Kerala's solidarity with the national movement.

Keywords

Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience, Salt Satyagraha, Quit India Movement, K. Kelappan, P. Krishna Pillai, Kozhikode Salt March, Student Activism

Discussion

Kerala's participation in the Indian national movement represents a significant chapter in the broader freedom struggle. While the mainstream narrative of Indian nationalism is often centred on North Indian developments, regions like Kerala contributed substantially through grassroots activism, social reform, and resistance to colonial and feudal authority. From the early decades of the 20th century, political consciousness in Kerala evolved from social reform to organised nationalist struggle, which was particularly evident during the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt Satyagraha, and the Quit India Movement.

Although the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, as well as the Malabar district under the Madras Presidency, had different administrative structures, all three regions reflected a growing resonance with the Indian National Congress-led freedom struggle. Kerala's participation in the national movement was marked by mass mobilisation, the convergence of social reform and political struggle, and the rise of charismatic local leaders such as K. Kelappan, T. K. Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon, and A. K. Gopalan, among others.

4.5.1. Non-Cooperation Movement in Kerala

The Non-Cooperation Movement was launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the British betrayal of the Khilafat cause. It was a call for the complete withdrawal of cooperation from British institutions—legislative councils, schools, law courts, and titles. This marked the transition of Indian nationalism into a mass movement involving peasants, students, and workers.

Malabar played a significant role in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements of the early 1920s. The region witnessed widespread boycotts of foreign goods, law courts, and educational institutions. Many individuals resigned from their jobs, lawyers ceased their legal practices, and students withdrew from schools and colleges. In 1920, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) was established. Its first conference was held on April 23, 1921, at Ottapalam under the leadership of T. Prakasan. This was the first representative meeting of Congress members from Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin, with delegates from all district committees in attendance.



support for the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. They were received with great enthusiasm by the people of Malabar, and their visit sparked a new sense of awareness among the masses.

The Kerala Provincial Congress Committee invited Yakub Hassan, a prominent Khilafat leader from the Madras Presidency, to tour the district and educate the public on the value of non-violence in the forthcoming struggle. However, the government imposed prohibitory orders on public gatherings, leading to the cancellation of meetings scheduled at Parappanangadi, Tanur, and Calicut. K. Madhavan Nair, Yakub Hassan, P. Moideen Koya, and U. Gopala Menon were arrested under Section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Public meetings were banned under Section 144, and the arrested leaders were sentenced to six months of imprisonment. Their imprisonment brought widespread attention to the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. Additionally, Section 144 was used indiscriminately to ban public meetings and speeches by leaders, while Congress and Khilafat leaders faced threats of prosecution. Meanwhile, landlords took advantage of the situation by evicting tenants on flimsy grounds to maximise their profits, and the district administration and courts supported their interests. The government consistently ignored the complaints of tenant farmers. The Congress's attempts to expose the injustices inflicted on tenants by landlords and administrators were portrayed as efforts to inflame Muslim communal sentiments to further the non-cooperation movement.

4.5.2. Salt Satyagraha

The brutal repression during and after the Malabar Rebellion significantly altered the course of the national movement in Malabar throughout the rest of the 1920s. As part of the nationwide protest against the Simon Commission, a few public meetings were

held in Malabar. At the Kerala Pradesh Congress Conference held in Payyannur in 1928, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, a resolution was passed urging the national leadership of the Congress to declare the attainment of “Poorna Swaraj” (complete independence) as its ultimate goal.

A renewed vigour was infused into the national movement in Malabar with the launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Salt Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi in March 1930. The Salt Satyagraha served as a symbolic beginning of the broader Civil Disobedience Movement across the country. Among the seventy-eight volunteers who accompanied Gandhi to Dandi, five were Malayalees. In Malabar, the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) decided to break the Salt Laws at Kozhikode and Payyannur.

On 21st April 1930, K. Kelappan led a march from Kozhikode to Payyannur with 32 volunteers. Around the same time, another march, led by T.R. Krishnaswamy Ayyar, set out from Palakkad to Payyannur. These actions had a profound impact on the public. Hundreds of Congress volunteers, led by local leaders, rallied in Payyannur to participate in the agitation. Volunteers from Travancore and Cochin also joined the campaign to break the Salt Laws at Payyannur and Kozhikode. In a short time, Payyannur became a symbolic centre for Congress activists in Kerala. Initially, the authorities refrained from arresting volunteers at Payyannur. However, this stance shifted following the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi on 5th May 1930.

At the Kozhikode beach, police brutality was particularly severe. On 12th May, leaders such as P. Krishna Pillai and Mohammed Abdurahman, who took part in the Satyagraha, were mercilessly beaten by the police. Volunteers like P. Krishna Pillai and R.V. Sharma courageously resisted

police attempts to seize the national flag from them. Across Malabar, volunteers raised the tricolour and pledged to protect it, even at the cost of their lives. The following day, police conducted a lathi charge on the volunteers at the Payyannur camp as well. Prominent Congress leaders in Malabar, including K. Kelappan, Madhavan Nair, and Mohammed Abdurahman, were arrested.

Volunteers engaged in picketing liquor shops and boycotting foreign goods as part of the broader Civil Disobedience Movement. Members of the Youth League from Travancore, such as Ponnara V. Sreedharan, K. Kumar, N.C. Sekhar, and N.P. Kurikkal, arrived in Malabar to join the protests and faced brutal torture. Despite repression, hundreds of Congress volunteers willingly courted arrest. The district administration moved to suppress the movement by banning the KPCC, labelling it an unlawful organisation. In response, the Congress began circulating a secret publication titled Congress Bulletin. Students boycotted classes and actively supported the movement by helping to mobilise resources.

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar, like in many parts of India, was gaining significant momentum. However, the campaign was suspended following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact signed on 4th March 1931.

4.5.2.1. Women and Students in the Movement

One significant aspect of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Kerala was the growing participation of women and students. Women like Accamma Cherian and K. Devaki Amma were among those who defied traditional roles to join picketing, protests, and boycott campaigns. Educational institutions like Zamorin’s College and Maharaja’s College became hotbeds of political activism. Students formed volunteer corps, hoisted Congress flags,



and participated in satyagraha. Many were arrested and dismissed from educational institutions, marking a generational shift in Kerala's political landscape.

The British authorities responded with repression—mass arrests, lathi charges, censorship, and the imposition of fines. Despite this, the spirit of defiance remained alive. After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931, there was a temporary suspension of the movement. However, with its resumption in 1932, leaders like Kelappan and A. K. Gopalan were arrested again.

The movement deepened the link between national politics and regional struggles, making Kerala an integral part of India's independence campaign.

4.5.3. Quit India Movement in Kerala

The Quit India Movement of 1942 marked a crucial juncture in India's struggle for independence. Major political entities such as the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialist Party, and the Forward Bloc collectively decided to initiate Direct Action against British colonial rule. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) resolved to lead a non-violent mass uprising. However, the Communist Party of India (CPI) altered its stance following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union and supported the British war efforts.

4.5.3.1. Impact in Malabar and Travancore

The Quit India Movement reverberated strongly in Malabar. A significant factor was the CPI's changed position regarding World War II, resulting in their withdrawal from the Quit India campaign, despite having considerable influence over the people of Malabar.

In Travancore, the State Congress, along with its student wing and various labour unions led by N. Srikantan Nair, actively supported the movement. For a brief period, regional politics merged with the broader national struggle. The Travancore Government, mimicking British India's repressive measures, declared the AICC and other Congress bodies illegal and restricted the dissemination of movement-related news. A socialist faction within the Congress emerged in Malabar, led by Dr. K.B. Menon. This group held public meetings, organised protests, and promoted boycotts of schools, colleges, and courts in defiance of governmental bans.

4.5.3.2. Repression in Travancore

A clandestine journal titled *Swatantra Bharatam* was circulated during this time. On 10th August 1942, the Travancore Government invoked Rule 56 of the Defence of Travancore Rules, banning public gatherings, demonstrations, and processions for 15 days. Law enforcement officials were instructed to prevent hartals and shop closures in support of the movement. A State Congress Working Committee meeting held on 17th August in Trivandrum resolved to align with the Quit India Movement, adopting an anti-government stance and discouraging cooperation with the British war effort.

The Congress aimed to bring government machinery to a standstill through mass civil disobedience. Fearing student mobilisation, the government identified the State Congress as a major threat, accusing it of inciting students towards violence. Motivated by patriotic ideals and the spirit of sacrifice, students emerged as the primary force behind the State Congress in Travancore.

The arrest of national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad further inflamed student unrest.

Although 9th to 11th August were holidays, residential students of Government Law College, Trivandrum, held protests as early as 9th August. Students from Trivandrum, Alwaye, and Nagercoil led demonstrations, wearing black badges and chanting slogans in support of the arrested leaders.

On 12th August, 1942 students of University College, Trivandrum, passed a resolution condemning the arrests and pledged to boycott educational institutions until an agreement was reached between the British Government and the Congress. Student demonstrations continued for days, including strikes, hartals, black flag protests, and hunger strikes. Several student leaders were arrested. Salahuddin, a prominent figure who urged students to implement the Congress's plans to paralyse the colonial administration, was sentenced to two and a half years of rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs. 500. In response to the growing protests, the government shut down schools until 31st August and colleges until 15th September. Students from Union Christian College, Alwaye, and St. Berchman's College, Changanassery, also held hunger strikes and demonstrations.

4.5.3.3. Acts of Sabotage in Malabar

As police repression intensified, Congress Socialists in Malabar turned to secret activities and sabotage. On 19th August, they burned down the Chemancheri Railway Station and the local Registrar's office. Soon after, they destroyed the Ulliyeri Bridge on the Quilandy–Balusseri road, cut telegraph lines, and removed postal equipment. The sabotage was usually carried out at night, making it difficult for authorities to trace the perpetrators. Within days, the Thalassery Sub Court, Naduvannur Registrar's Office, and the salt depot at Chombal were targeted. An explosive was placed on the Feroke Bridge. In early September 1942, there were

frequent disruptions in Calicut and Kottayam, including the cutting of telegraph wires.

A secret meeting was held at Verkot House in late October 1942 by a group from Bombay to intensify sabotage efforts. Participants included E. Vasudevan Nair and Suniyil Achuthan from Quilandy, under the leadership of K.B. Menon. Gandhi's latest message was read aloud, sparking great enthusiasm. The group decided to observe 17th November 1942 as "All Kerala Sabotage Day." Responsibilities for sabotage across various regions in Malabar were assigned during the meeting.

Muhammad Naha from Parappanangadi, who served as treasurer for the Wandoor and Manjeri Firka committees, was tasked with bombing Parappanangadi Railway Station and the Panampuzha bridge. He requested Rs. 500, six sticks of dynamite, four hand bombs, and two incendiary devices. K.V. Chanthu took on the mission of attacking Victoria College, Palakkad, and K.T. Alavi, a former Secretary of the Ernad Firka Committee, offered to destroy the Vadakkumpad Railway Bridge.

4.5.3.4. Trade Unions and Workers' Role

The coir workers of Alappuzha, led by Congress Socialist elements, staged strikes and processions. The Alappuzha struggle demonstrated the increasing involvement of the working class in the freedom movement. A. K. Gopalan and other socialist leaders viewed the movement not merely as political emancipation but also as a means to challenge social hierarchies and economic exploitation.

The British response in Kerala was brutal. Hundreds were arrested, meetings banned, and newspapers censored. In many towns, Congress offices were sealed, and volunteers detained without trial. Despite this, the movement became a turning point in Kerala's nationalist trajectory, inspiring



a new generation of activists.

Historian S. Gopal notes that “the Quit India Movement, although suppressed, fundamentally altered the colonial power equation. It demonstrated that British rule in India was no longer sustainable without mass repression”

4.5.3.5. The Kizhariyur Bomb Case

Kizhariyur, a secluded village near Akalapuzha, was chosen as the site for bomb-making due to its remote location and natural cover of hills and water bodies. Signals were arranged to alert activists in case of police presence. Meetings were held at Verkot House and Kollam Charaka Club, finalising 17th November as the date for coordinated sabotage.

On 18th November, the Sub-Inspector of Badagara Police Station received reports of the Mukkali Fish Curing Yard being destroyed and telegraph wires being severed the previous night. Several explosions occurred across Kannur district. The Pallikkunnu Post Office was partially damaged, and the railway tracks near Kannur station were cut. The police launched a crackdown and arrested several individuals.

The *Kizhariyur Bomb Case* resulted in a major conspiracy trial. K.B. Menon, identified as the mastermind, was named the first accused among 32 conspirators. He went underground and managed to evade arrest multiple times before being captured with the help of relatives. Ultimately, 27 of the accused were arrested and brought to trial. K.B. Menon and three others received ten-year imprisonment. Menon was held at Calicut Sub Jail for four months, Tanjore for eight months, Vellore for a month, and later transferred to Alipur Jail for 14 months. The remaining five, including M.K. Manjooran, T.P. Kunhirama Kidavu (son of K. Kelappan), M.A. Sadanandan, O. Chekkutty, and Verkott Raghava Kurup, remained underground and were declared absconders.

The Quit India Movement witnessed the united efforts of men and women from all backgrounds—across caste, creed, and class—employing various forms of resistance. The *Kizhariyur Bomb Case* stands out as a bold and courageous episode in Malabar’s freedom struggle. Although the conspirators did not attain their immediate objectives, their determination and patriotic fervour brought the nation a step closer to independence.

Recap

- ◆ Kerala’s national movement blended social reform with political activism against colonial and feudal oppression.
- ◆ The Non-Cooperation Movement in Kerala saw mass resignations and student protests.
- ◆ Khilafat and Congress movements in Malabar unified peasants, tenants, students, and professionals in resistance.
- ◆ The Ottapalam Congress conference (1921) united leaders from Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin in protest.

- ◆ Khilafat propaganda in Malabar triggered arrests, prohibitory orders, and suppression of public gatherings.
- ◆ Gandhi and Shoukath Ali's visit to Calicut stirred mass enthusiasm for national causes.
- ◆ The Salt Satyagraha began in Kerala with marches led by K. Kelappan and others.
- ◆ Violent police repression followed the Salt March, especially at Kozhikode and Payyannur gatherings.
- ◆ Women and students actively participated in Civil Disobedience, facing arrest and institutional expulsion.
- ◆ The Quit India Movement witnessed underground sabotage activities and mass student-led demonstrations across Kerala.
- ◆ CPI's withdrawal from Quit India in Malabar contrasted with Travancore's strong State Congress agitation.
- ◆ *Swatantra Bharatam* circulated clandestinely, spreading anti-government sentiment during Quit India in Travancore.
- ◆ Acts of sabotage included burning railway stations, damaging bridges, and cutting communication lines.
- ◆ Trade unions, especially coir workers in Alappuzha, joined the freedom movement through strikes.
- ◆ The Kizhariyur Bomb Case revealed Kerala's boldest conspiracy, with K.B. Menon as a key figure.

Objective Questions

1. Which movement in Kerala began after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre?
2. In which year was the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) established?
3. Where was the first KPCC conference held in 1921?
4. Who presided over the Kerala Pradesh Congress Conference at Payyannur in 1928?
5. Which leader led the Salt Satyagraha march from Kozhikode to Payyannur?
6. Which coastal town in Kerala became the symbolic centre of the Salt Satyagraha?

7. Which Congress leader was arrested during the Salt Satyagraha at Kozhikode?
8. Which journal was circulated secretly during the Quit India Movement in Travancore?
9. Who guided the sabotage group in Malabar during the Quit India Movement?
10. Which bridge was targeted by K.T. Alavi during the sabotage campaign?
11. Where was the bomb-making centre located during the Quit India Movement in Malabar?
12. Which movement was marked by acts of sabotage, strikes, and underground activities in Kerala?

Answers

1. Non-Cooperation
2. 1920
3. Ottapalam
4. Nehru
5. Kelappan
6. Payyannur
7. Mohammed Abdurahman
8. Swatantra Bharatam
9. K.B. Menon
10. Vadakkumpad
11. Kizhariyur
12. Quit India

Assignments

1. Examine the role of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) in mobilising support for the Non-Cooperation Movement in Kerala.
2. Discuss the significance of the Salt Satyagraha in Kerala with special reference to leadership and public participation.
3. Evaluate the impact of student and women participation in Kerala's Civil Disobedience Movement.
4. Analyse the nature and objectives of sabotage activities during the Quit India Movement in Malabar.
5. Critically assess the importance of the *Kizhariyur* Bomb Case in the context of Kerala's freedom struggle.

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BLOCK

New Political Consciousness



UNIT

Left Politics in Kerala

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain how leftist ideology spread across Kerala society
- ◆ identify key radical groups that shaped Kerala's politics
- ◆ trace major factors behind the origins of Kerala's communist movement
- ◆ evaluate the role of early leaders influencing Kerala's Left movement

Prerequisite

Learners approaching the unit Left Politics in Kerala should possess a nuanced understanding of Kerala's modern history and socio-economic milieu, alongside familiarity with India's 19th- and 20th-century political developments to apprehend the interplay between ideological currents and regional political trajectories. Prior insight into colonial administration, particularly the impact of British rule on social hierarchies, agrarian structures, and emergent political consciousness, is indispensable for contextualising the rise of leftist movements. A grasp of core political concepts such as ideology, class, labour mobilisation, nationalism, and social reform, coupled with an awareness of early labour struggles, caste movements, and peasant agitations across Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, provides the critical substratum for understanding the diffusion of radical thought. Familiarity with global ideological currents, notably socialism, Marxism, and anti-colonial movements, is vital, given the international entanglements of Kerala's communist origins in events like the Russian Revolution and transnational workers' movements. Proficiency in analysing historical documents, speeches, memoirs, and political tracts further enables learners to interpret the expansion of leftist ideology, the organisation of radical groups, and the formative

dynamics of the early communist movement, thereby equipping them to engage with the unit's thematic and historical intricacies with discernment.

Keywords

Leftist Ideology, Radical Groups, Communist Movement, Class Struggle, Peasant Mobilisation, Labour Movement, Colonial Policies

Discussion

5.1.1. Spread of Leftist Ideology in Kerala

Leftist ideology in Kerala emerged as a powerful intellectual, political, and social force during the early 20th century. Its growth was shaped by a combination of international socialist currents, national anti-colonial struggles, and specific socio-economic conditions within Kerala. The rise of leftist thought was neither spontaneous nor isolated; rather, it was the outcome of sustained ideological exchanges, grassroots mobilisation, socio-political movements, and the influence of a progressive literary tradition.

5.1.2. Influence of the Russian Revolution on Indian Nationalist Circles

The Russian Revolution unfolded in two major phases: the February Revolution, which overthrew the Tsarist autocracy, and the October Revolution, which brought the Bolsheviks under Lenin to power. What made the October Revolution globally significant was not merely the replacement of a monarchy with a socialist republic but the revolutionary message it carried: the working class, peasants, and soldiers could dismantle centuries-old structures of oppression through organised struggle.

The new Soviet government proclaimed principles that challenged the global capitalist order:

- ◆ Abolition of private ownership of land
- ◆ Redistribution of land to peasants
- ◆ Workers' control of factories
- ◆ Establishment of an egalitarian social order
- ◆ Right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination

These radical ideas resonated among anti-colonial movements worldwide. For Indians living under British rule, the Soviet model demonstrated that an imperialist regime could, in fact, be overthrown through mass mobilisation.

News of the Bolshevik Revolution reached India through newspapers, political journals, and returning migrants. Although British censorship attempted to suppress favourable reports about the Soviet state, Indian intellectuals, especially in Bengal, Punjab, and Bombay, eagerly followed developments in Russia.

Indian nationalists admired Russia not just for its revolution but for the speed at which it

abolished feudal privileges and reorganised society. Young leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and M.N. Roy were profoundly influenced by Marxist ideas. Nehru admired the Soviet experiment in planned economic development, while Bose viewed the Soviet Union as a model for anti-imperialist mobilisation. M.N. Roy, one of the earliest Indian communists, directly engaged with international communist organisations and helped found the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1920 in Tashkent. Through these leaders, Marxist vocabulary began entering mainstream nationalist discussions. The Congress Socialist Party (CSP), formed in 1934, further enabled the spread of leftist thinking within India's major nationalist forum. India's industrial workforce grew significantly during the early 20th century, and the Russian Revolution inspired many labour leaders to organise systematic trade union activities. The All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), founded in 1920, emerged partly under the influence of socialist ideals.

Peasant movements, particularly in Telangana, Bengal, Bihar, and Kerala, drew inspiration from Soviet land reforms. The idea that landless peasants could challenge feudal and colonial systems emboldened various rural uprisings.

During the 1920s and 1930s, several study circles emerged in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore, where young intellectuals and students discussed Marxism, socialist theories, and international political developments. These groups were instrumental in translating global leftist ideas into the socio-economic context of Kerala.

Individuals such as P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan (AKG), EMS Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, C. Achutha Menon, and K. Kelappan, who were initially involved in the nationalist movement, became key channels

for introducing Marxist interpretations of class, labour exploitation, and anti-imperialist struggle.

5.1.2. Formation of Radical Groups in Kerala

The emergence of radical groups in Kerala during the early twentieth century was closely connected to the broader process of anti-colonial nationalism, social transformation, and class-based struggles in the region. Unlike many other parts of India, Kerala witnessed an unusually strong interaction between social reform movements, nationalist activities, and the increasing political consciousness among workers, peasants, and students. This unique historical background enabled the rise of radical elements within the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), the growth of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), and the gradual crystallisation of the communist movement.

5.1.2.1. Emergence of Radical Elements within the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC)

From the early 1920s onwards, the Congress became the central platform of anti-colonial politics in Kerala. However, the socio-economic problems of the region—particularly feudal agrarian relations, tenant exploitation, caste oppression, and poor working conditions in plantations and coir industries—created fertile ground for the growth of radical ideas within the Congress organisation itself. Young leaders and activists, inspired by Marxist, socialist, and anti-imperialist philosophies, began to question the limits of moderate nationalism and demanded more decisive action against both colonial authority and indigenous social injustices.

Growth of Ideological Awareness

Radicalisation within the KPCC was significantly influenced by global currents. The Russian Revolution of 1917 deeply impacted educated youth in Kerala, particularly students exposed to socialist writings through newspapers and clandestine pamphlets. They saw in the Bolshevik Revolution a model for revolutionary change and economic justice. The global depression of the 1930s, widespread unemployment, and increasing inequality further strengthened their ideological convictions.

Many Congress volunteers who took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement returned from prisons with new political insights. In jail, they interacted with leaders from other regions and were introduced to Marxist literature. Upon release, they became more critical of the limitations of Congress policies, especially its hesitation to confront class oppression within Indian society. As a result, a radical ideological undercurrent developed within the KPCC.

Tension Between Moderates and Radicals

The KPCC leadership was largely composed of middle-class and upper-caste elites, many of whom favoured negotiation, constitutional reforms, and gradual social change. In contrast, the emerging radical youth argued for mass mobilisation based on class issues. They believed that nationalism without social revolution would not liberate the peasants or workers from exploitation.

This ideological tension revealed itself in debates over policies such as:

- ◆ support for labour strikes
- ◆ organisation of tenant farmers
- ◆ response to caste oppression and feudal controls

- ◆ acceptance of socialist ideas within the Congress framework

Moderate leaders worried that such radical initiatives would alienate landlords and merchants, who were also influential supporters of the Congress. However, radicals insisted that ignoring class inequalities would weaken the nationalist struggle itself.

5.1.2.2. Role of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in Nurturing Early Communist Leaders

The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was founded in 1934 as a socialist wing within the Indian National Congress. In Kerala, the CSP quickly attracted a new generation of activists who were interested in socialist ideology and mass mobilisation.

The CSP played a crucial role in providing ideological education and organisational training. It functioned as the meeting point for leaders who would later build the communist movement in Kerala. Through study circles, public meetings, and political discussions, the CSP exposed its members to Marxist theory, anti-imperialist literature, and the economic critique of colonialism.

The CSP emphasised:

- ◆ class analysis of society
- ◆ the need for organised working-class leadership
- ◆ the importance of linking nationalism with socio-economic transformation
- ◆ unity between peasants, workers, and students

This ideological training helped the cadres develop clarity about their role in the broader revolutionary struggle. By the late 1930s, some CSP leaders in Kerala were already



functioning as communists, although the Communist Party of India (CPI) was an underground organisation due to British repression. These activists used the relative openness of the CSP to introduce communist ideas among Congress workers.

The CSP also offered a platform for these radicals to:

- ◆ recruit new activists
- ◆ organise labour unions
- ◆ mobilise peasants against feudal landlords
- ◆ challenge caste hierarchies
- ◆ establish contacts with underground CPI networks

Thus, the CSP acted as a protective umbrella under which the early communist nucleus grew. By the early 1940s, ideological differences between the CSP and the communists sharpened. The communists believed that the Congress leadership remained essentially bourgeois and could not lead a revolutionary transformation. They emphasised building independent class organisations of workers and peasants. This shift eventually led to the formal emergence of a separate communist party structure in Kerala, which would not have been possible otherwise. Many of Kerala's first-generation communist leaders, such as P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and others, began their political journeys within the CSP.

5.1.2.3. Labour and Peasant Mobilisation in Kerala

The rise of radical groups was inseparable from the labour and peasant movements that developed across Kerala during the early 20th century. Harsh economic conditions, exploitative labour relations, and social

oppression provided the material background for the emergence of class-based political consciousness. The radicals within the KPCC and CSP recognised these grievances and made the mobilisation of workers and peasants a central component of their political strategy.

Kerala's industrial sector in the early twentieth century was small but significant. The coir industry, tile factories, cashew processing units, plantations, and harbour labour formed the backbone of wage labour. Working conditions were extremely poor, characterised by long hours, low wages, and no job security. These industries provided the ideal conditions for the emergence of early trade unionism.

The first labour organisations emerged in Travancore and Malabar in the 1920s and 1930s. Congress volunteers, inspired by socialist ideas, began to help workers organise. The nationalist movement also encouraged workers to assert their rights, as the fight against colonialism symbolised broader resistance to exploitation. Many of these unions were directly led by CSP activists who would later become communists. Through strikes, marches, and negotiations, workers began to understand the power of collective action. A number of landmark strikes and protests played a crucial role in shaping radical politics in Kerala. These events demonstrated the capacity of workers to organise and resist exploitation, bringing the issues of labour rights into the mainstream political arena.

Coir workers in Alappuzha faced some of the worst conditions: long hours, meagre wages, and seasonal unemployment. Under the influence of radical leaders, they organised several protests demanding wage increases, better working conditions, and the right to unionise. These strikes often met with severe repression from factory owners and the colonial state. Cashew factories

employed large numbers of women who faced gender-based exploitation and poor wages. The mobilisation of women workers was significant because it brought gender issues into the labour movement and marked one of the earliest instances of women's participation in organised class struggle in Kerala. In Kochi, harbour workers organised against oppressive contract systems, demanding regular employment and fair wages. These struggles highlighted the exploitative role of middlemen and contractors.

Plantation workers in tea, rubber, and coconut estates suffered severe exploitation, often living in isolated estates with minimal legal protections. Protests in the 1930s and 1940s played a crucial role in linking plantation labour issues with broader anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles.

5.1.3. Origins of the Communist Movement in Kerala

The emergence of the communist movement in Kerala represents one of the most remarkable chapters in the social and political history of modern India. Kerala's transition from a caste-dominated, agrarian, and semi-feudal society to a politically conscious and socially mobilised region is deeply intertwined with the spread of leftist ideology and the rise of leaders who inspired the masses with ideas of equality, class struggle, and social justice. Among the Indian states, Kerala witnessed an exceptionally strong reception of communist thought, eventually becoming the first place in the world where a communist party came to power through democratic elections in 1957. The roots of this phenomenon lie in the early twentieth-century socio-economic conditions, the ideological currents from across the world, and the disciplined organisational efforts of early communist leaders.

The origins of the communist movement in Kerala were not sudden; they developed from anti-caste struggles, agrarian agitations, working-class movements, and the growing influence of socialist literature in Malayalam. Leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, EMS Namboodiripad, and A.K. Gopalan played decisive roles in shaping the ideological base, organisational strength, and mass orientation of the movement. The Consolidation of communist groups in 1939 is often considered a turning point because it created a unified political force capable of addressing the complex social realities.

The early decades of the twentieth century in Kerala were marked by intense contradictions. While the princely states of Travancore and Cochin and the Malabar region under British rule witnessed major reforms in education, agriculture, and public administration, large sections of the population remained oppressed under the structures of caste hierarchy and feudal land relations. Tribal communities, agricultural labourers, tenant cultivators, and workers in coir, cashew, and handloom industries were subjected to exploitation and lived in conditions of poverty. These vulnerabilities provided fertile ground for radical political ideas, especially those that promised liberation from inequality and exploitation.

5.1.3.1 Formation of CPI in Kerala

In this context, it is essential to examine the emergence and growth of the Communist movement and its significant role in the political transformations that took place in Travancore. Earlier reference has been made to the All Travancore Youth League, which functioned in close cooperation with the Travancore State Congress during its struggle for responsible government. The Youth League was founded in 1931 through the initiative of politically conscious

young leaders such as Ponnara Sreedhar and N. P. Kurup. With the formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1938, the Youth League functioned as its more radical and militant wing. Over time, the organisation increasingly came under the influence of young activists who were inspired by socialist and Communist ideologies. This ideological shift marked an important phase in the politicisation of the youth and the working classes in Travancore.

The Alleppey–Shertallai (Alappuzha–Cherthala) region, characterised by a dense concentration of industrial and agricultural labourers facing severe economic deprivation, emerged as the cradle of the Communist movement in Travancore. The area had a large workforce estimated at over 70,000 men and women including fishermen, coir workers, toddy tappers, oil mill workers, beedi workers, and agricultural labourers. Under Communist leadership, these workers were organised into several trade unions, which became powerful instruments of collective mobilisation. A distinctive feature of this region was the concentration of land ownership in the hands of powerful janmi landlords, while tenants (kudiyans) possessed virtually no security of tenure or legal protection. Subjected to intense economic exploitation and supported by an administrative system perceived as favouring landlord interests, the peasantry and labouring classes increasingly turned towards organised political action.

As trade unions strengthened and workers began to employ collective methods such as strikes and demonstrations to assert their rights, resistance from employers and landlords intensified. Consequently, the socio-political atmosphere in the region became highly charged with tension and conflict. During August–September 1946,

workers in the coastal belts of Alleppey and Shertallai launched a series of strikes protesting against both the repressive policies of the Travancore government and the sharp rise in prices, marking a decisive stage in the consolidation of Communist influence in the region.

5.1.4. Leaders and Their Contributions

5.1.4.1. P. Krishna Pillai and Organisational Strategies

Among the pioneers of the communist movement in Kerala, P. Krishna Pillai is often regarded as the architect of its organisational foundation. His contribution lies not only in ideological advocacy but also in the practical methods he introduced for building a disciplined, resilient, and mass-oriented political structure.

Krishna Pillai emerged from a background of social reform and nationalist activism. He began his public life through reading rooms, libraries, and youth movements, which played a crucial role in spreading progressive ideas. His involvement with the Congress Socialist Party and exposure to Marxist literature strengthened his belief in class-based politics.

Organisational Strategies by P. Krishna Pillai

P. Krishna Pillai adopted a methodical and pragmatic approach to organisation, combining ideological clarity with practical mass mobilisation. A central aspect of his strategy was the establishment of Marxist study circles across different regions, through which activists were encouraged to engage deeply with political theory, ideological texts, and critical debates. These study groups played an important role in shaping politically

conscious cadres who could interpret social realities through a Marxist framework. Alongside ideological training, he focused on building strong workers' and peasants' unions, firmly believing that the vitality of the communist movement must arise from the participation and strength of the working masses. Under his leadership, trade unions in industries such as coir, cashew, and handloom expanded rapidly, creating organised platforms for labour struggles.

Reading rooms and libraries were also transformed into centres of mobilisation and political education, where young activists gathered to discuss social problems and explore solutions grounded in Marxist thought. Krishna Pillai simultaneously stressed the importance of discipline, secrecy, and unwavering commitment among party members, thereby creating a dedicated cadre system capable of enduring repression from colonial authorities and princely state administrations. His organisational vision further extended into rural areas, as he travelled extensively through villages, cultivating close relationships with agricultural labourers and tenant farmers. This direct engagement significantly strengthened the agrarian base of the movement. Through these combined efforts, the communist movement developed into a disciplined and structured political force capable of mobilising large sections of society and resisting state oppression. His martyrdom in 1948 ultimately came to symbolise the sacrifices made by early communists in their struggle for social justice and the emancipation of the oppressed.

The ideological contributions of E. M. S. Namboodiripad

His contributions marked by a profound reinterpretation of Kerala's social and political structure through a Marxist analytical framework. He interpreted Kerala's caste

system not merely as a ritual or cultural hierarchy but as a structure deeply intertwined with economic exploitation, arguing that feudal landlords and dominant upper castes sustained their authority through the combined mechanisms of caste privilege and control over land. Extending this analysis, he undertook a historical study of feudalism in Kerala, examining the evolution of *janmi* landlordism and explaining it in terms of class relations and material conditions rather than religious or customary practices alone. EMS also connected local social and agrarian struggles with broader anti-imperialist and socialist movements, thereby situating Kerala's political transformations within national and international revolutionary currents. A significant aspect of his contribution was the development of a scientific approach to political practice; he emphasized that political movements must arise from objective material realities and historical conditions rather than emotional or purely rhetorical mobilization, which strengthened the intellectual credibility of the communist movement. Furthermore, through his extensive writings on agrarian relations, labour issues, and democratic rights, he provided sustained theoretical guidance to peasant and working-class struggles, offering activists a coherent ideological direction grounded in historical and social analysis.

Role in Mass Mobilisation

A. K. Gopalan (AKG) possessed a rare capacity to inspire and mobilise people across caste, religious, and regional divisions, making him one of the most influential mass leaders in Kerala's political history. He played a decisive role in organising tenant farmers and agricultural labourers, actively participating in struggles against *janmi* landlord oppression in Malabar. Through sustained agitations, he demanded fair rents, security of tenure, and protection

from arbitrary eviction, thereby transforming agrarian discontent into organised political resistance. At the same time, he extended his efforts to industrial centres such as Calicut, Kannur, and Alappuzha, where he mobilised workers employed in textile, beedi, and coir industries, strengthening labour consciousness and collective bargaining power.

AKG's political approach was distinguished by his ability to connect broader ideological struggles with the everyday realities of ordinary people. His speeches consistently addressed issues such as poverty, hunger, landlord exploitation, and workers' rights, translating Marxist ideas into a language accessible to common citizens. This close engagement with popular concerns enabled him to significantly expand the social base of the communist movement, particularly in Malabar, which gradually emerged as one of the strongest centres of communist support in India. His deep commitment to social justice, combined with a simple and

egalitarian personal lifestyle, made him a powerful symbol of resistance and dignity, representing the humanistic dimension of communist politics and ensuring that the movement remained grounded in lived social struggles rather than abstract ideology.

The efforts of leaders such as P. Krishna Pillai, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, AKG, and their contemporaries collectively laid a strong organisational and ideological foundation for the Communist Party in Kerala. The emergence of the party was not the result of a single moment but evolved through a gradual historical process shaped by political developments from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. By the mid-1940s, the communist movement in Kerala had matured into a well-structured organisation capable of leading large-scale popular struggles, combining ideological clarity, organisational discipline, and extensive mass support, thereby becoming one of the most powerful regional communist movements in India.

Recap

- ◆ Leftist ideology in Kerala developed through sustained mobilisation and progressive intellectual traditions.
- ◆ The Russian Revolution inspired global anti-colonial struggles and challenged capitalist domination.
- ◆ Soviet principles like land redistribution and workers' control influenced Indian activists.
- ◆ News of the Bolshevik Revolution spread through newspapers despite British censorship.
- ◆ Nehru and Bose admired the Soviet socialist transformation.
- ◆ M.N. Roy helped establish the Communist Party of India in 1920.
- ◆ Study circles in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore discussed Marxist theories.

- ◆ Krishna Pillai and EMS introduced Marxist interpretations of class oppression.
- ◆ Radical elements emerged within the KPCC, questioning moderate nationalism and the limits of social reform.
- ◆ Economic depression and unemployment in the 1930s strengthened socialist convictions.
- ◆ Tensions grew within the KPCC between radicals favouring mass action and cautious moderates.
- ◆ The Congress Socialist Party provided ideological training and organisational guidance.
- ◆ The CSP acted as a bridge, introducing communist ideas among Congress workers.
- ◆ Labour and peasant mobilisation increased under CSP leadership in the 1920s and 1930s.
- ◆ Coir, cashew, and harbour workers organised strikes against exploitation and poor wages.
- ◆ P. Krishna Pillai built disciplined cadre networks and strengthened mass-based unions.
- ◆ EMS developed a Marxist theoretical framework interpreting the caste system through class analysis.
- ◆ A.K. Gopalan led powerful mass mobilisation against *janmi* oppression in Malabar.

Objective Questions

1. Which revolution inspired the spread of socialist ideas in India?
2. Who led the Bolshevik Revolution?
3. Which organisation was founded in 1920 influenced by socialist ideals?
4. Which Indian leader helped establish the Communist Party of India in Tashkent?
5. Which socialist wing of the Congress was formed in 1934?
6. Which state became a major centre of coir workers' struggles?
7. Who is regarded as the organisational architect of the communist movement in Kerala?

8. Which leader is considered the major Marxist theoretician in Kerala?
9. In which year was the Communist party of India(CPI) formed in Kerala achieved?
10. Which committee became the platform for early radical politics in Kerala?
11. Which industry saw large involvement of women workers in early strikes?
12. Which social system in Kerala did EMS analyse through class theory?
13. Which region of India saw early peasant uprisings influencing radical groups in Kerala?

Answers

1. Russian Revolution
2. Lenin
3. AITUC
4. M.N.Roy
5. CSP
6. Alappuzha
7. Krishna Pillai
8. EMS
9. 1939
10. KPCC
11. Cashew
12. Caste
13. Telangana

Assignments

1. Analyse the influence of the Russian Revolution on the spread of socialist and leftist ideologies in Kerala.

2. Discuss the emergence of radical elements within the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). How did ideological conflicts between moderates and radicals contribute to the rise of class-based politics?
3. Evaluate the role of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in nurturing early communist leadership in Kerala. How did the CSP function as a bridge between nationalism and socialist ideology?
4. Examine the significance of labour and peasant mobilisation in shaping radical political movements in Kerala.
5. Assess the importance of the 1939 formation of CPI in Kerala and the contributions of leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, EMS Namboodiripad, and A.K. Gopalan to the ideological and organisational development of the communist movement in Kerala.

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UNIT

Trade Union Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the emergence and growth of labour unions historically.
- ◆ describe major organisational methods adopted by early trade unions.
- ◆ analyse key actions and struggles of regional labour unions.
- ◆ compare trade union developments in Tiruvitamkur, Kochi, and Malabar.

Prerequisite

Before engaging with the unit “Trade Union Movement: ” students should have certain foundational knowledge and skills that will help them follow the themes effectively. A basic awareness of India’s social and economic conditions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is essential, as the rise of labour unions is closely linked to changes in industry, colonial policies, and labour relations. Students should be familiar with the early phases of industrialisation in India, including the growth of plantations, mills, factories, and other labour-intensive sectors, since these formed the background for the emergence of organised labour activities. It is also important for students to know the general features of colonial governance in princely states, particularly in Travancore, Cochin, and the Malabar region under British rule. This understanding helps to recognise why labour issues differed across these regions and how political structures influenced workers’ rights and collective actions.

A preliminary understanding of social stratification, caste relations, and traditional occupational systems will enable students to see how workers’ identities shaped their participation in trade unions. Students should also have a basic knowledge of key concepts such as labour rights, collective bargaining, wage disputes, strikes, and employer-employee relations, as these terms recur throughout the unit. Familiarity with early nationalist movements and emerging leftist ideologies

will support a better grasp of how political ideas influenced labour mobilisation. Some exposure to historical research skills such as reading primary accounts, interpreting reports, and linking events to broader social developments will further help learners engage with the narrative of trade union growth.

Overall, these prerequisites will equip learners with the background needed to explore how labour unions were formed, how they functioned, and how they shaped the socio-political landscape of Tiruvitamkur, Kochi, and Malabar.

Keywords

Trade Union, Labour Movement, Collective Bargaining, Strike, Worker Mobilisation, Industrial Relations, Plantation Labour, Wage Dispute, Travancore–Cochin Labour, Regional Unionism

Discussion

5.2.1. Formation of Labour Unions

The factory workers of Travancore formed a significant and influential segment of the labour force. They organised themselves under the *Travancore Labour Association*, which had been established in 1921. Although a Factory Act was introduced in 1914, it failed to adequately address workers' grievances. As highlighted by the newspaper *Malayala Manorama*, wages were extremely low and insufficient even for basic living. In several coir factories, wages were not paid on time, and when payment was made, it was often given in kind at inflated prices. Appeals made by the workers to the Government received little attention. With the spread of modern political ideas, workers gradually developed class consciousness. This new awareness encouraged them to be more vocal and assertive about their rights, resulting in growing unrest expressed in various ways.

A major development occurred with the passing of the Travancore Trade Unions Act on 14 May 1938, which led to the formation

of several trade unions. Among them, the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union, founded at Alleppey on 24 July 1938, became the most prominent. After the formation of the State Congress, workers actively supported the movement for responsible government and participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Leaders such as P.K. Kunju, P.N. Krishna Pillai, V.K. Velayudhan, C.K. Velayudhan, and R. Sugathan emerged as prominent figures in the labour union sphere. From March 1939 onward, the radical wing of the State Congress began to dominate the labour movement. This strengthened the momentum of labour activities and made the movement more forceful. Recognising the need for a unified platform, representatives of various trade unions met at Quilon on 2 July 1939 and formed the All-Travancore Trade Union Federation. Its main aim was to guide individual unions and promote unity among the workers across Travancore.

The outbreak of the Second World War (1939–1945) brought severe difficulties to the working classes. The principal industry, coir manufacturing, was significantly affected as



shipping to European markets came to a halt. As a result, most of the 300 coir factories, which employed over 25,000 workers, were forced to shut down, leading to large-scale unemployment. At the same time, prices of food and essential commodities rose sharply, causing poverty and hunger to become widespread. The harsh economic conditions created by the war, along with the rising cost of living, generated strong demands from workers for higher wages and a dearness allowance.

5.2.1.1. Formation of the All-Travancore Trade Union Congress

The organisation of the All-Travancore Trade Union Congress (A.T.T.U.C.) marked a turning point in the labour movement. On 26 January 1942, it was formally inaugurated at Alleppey, with T.V. Thomas as president, P.N. Krishna Pillai and C.K. Karunakara Panikkar as vice-presidents, N. Srikantan Nayar as general secretary, P.G. Padmanabhan and C.G. Sadasivan as secretaries, and K.P. Janardhanan Nayar as treasurer. Its primary objectives were:

- ◆ to unite all labour organisations,
- ◆ to promote the economic, social, and political interests of the labourers, and
- ◆ to strive for the progress of the workmen by establishing connections with other labour organisations worldwide.

Organised under militant leadership, the labourers developed their programmes along Communist lines. The Government, on the other hand, decided to proceed against the organisation of trade unions. It decried the declared aims and objectives of the Trade Union Congress and cautioned that “... it would be difficult for employers of labour to negotiate with unions not exclusively

concerned with the trades in which such employers are interested, and that the difficulties or grievances connected with one branch of industry were sought to be remedied by strikes or other demonstrations in a totally unconnected industry.” On these grounds, the administration banned the participation of prominent leaders in public meetings for two months from 28 January 1942.

The All Travancore Trade Union Congress (A.T.T.U.C) emerged as one of the most significant labour-based mass organizations in princely Travancore during the final phase of colonial rule. By the mid-1940s, industrial workers, coir labourers, agricultural labourers, and lower-paid employees were facing severe economic exploitation, insecure employment, and political repression. In this context, the ATTUC articulated a comprehensive charter of demands on 27 October 1946, combining economic, social, and political reforms. These demands reflected not merely trade-union concerns but a broader democratic aspiration aimed at securing workers’ rights, agrarian justice, and responsible governance. The movement thus represented an important stage in the transformation of labour struggles into a wider popular movement for social equality and political change in Travancore.

Among the long list of demands submitted, the following were central because they directly addressed workers’ livelihood, security, and democratic rights:

- ◆ Bonus as Deferred Wages
- ◆ A 25% Wage Increase
- ◆ Maternity Benefits for Women Workers
- ◆ Accident Insurance
- ◆ Implementation of the Payment of Wages Act

- ◆ Statutory Status for Tripartite Industrial Relations Committees

5.2.2. Growth of Communist Influence

By 1940–1942, most labour unions in Travancore came under the influence and control of the Communist Party. The Communists capitalised on the growing dissatisfaction among industrial workers and focused their efforts on strengthening organisational work. Labour leaders such as T. V. Thomas, R. Sugathan, V. L. Thomas, C. O. Mathew, P. A. Solomon, K. V. Pathrose, C. K. Velayudhan, and K. Vasudevan were accused by the police of delivering “revolutionary speeches” that encouraged workers to adopt a confrontational stance against the capitalists, especially in Alleppey.

These leaders distributed pamphlets highlighting the hardships faced by workers and urging them to “wake up from lethargy, organise themselves, achieve equality, and struggle for their rights even at the risk of their lives.” Under this new leadership, workers demanded higher wages and better working conditions. When peaceful negotiations failed, employers retaliated by closing down their factories.

5.2.2.1. Shift in Communist Attitude (1941)

In 1941, the Communist Party underwent a significant change in policy. After the Soviet Union joined the Second World War in June 1941, the Communists treated the war as “their own war.” Reflecting this shift, the Working Committee of the Travancore Trade Union Congress, which met in Alleppey on 31 March 1942, passed a resolution urging trade unions and workers to maintain peace in the industrial sector and cooperate with the government’s war efforts.

While supporting the war effort, the resolution also expressed concern for

creating conditions that would allow trade union activities to be carried out without government interference. Furthermore, the Trade Union Congress called upon workers and peasants to prepare themselves to “take up arms against fascism.”

5.2.2.2. Political Position of the Coir Factory Workers’ Union

At its annual conference held on 25 January 1942 in Alleppey, the Travancore Coir Factory Workers’ Union passed a resolution stressing that the establishment of a responsible government was an urgent need. This contradicted earlier statements made by leaders of the Travancore Trade Union Congress, who had repeatedly asserted that the labour movement would not involve itself in political agitations.

However, the conference discussions made it clear to the government that labour leaders intended to organise workers in support of the State Congress to achieve responsible government.

5.2.2.3. Impact of the Quit India Movement

The Quit India Movement (1942) created a serious rift between the Communists and the State Congress. Following the national policy of the Communist Party of India, the Communists and the trade unions in Travancore distanced themselves from the movement. On 2 September 1942, the Managing Committee of the Coir Factory Workers’ Union passed a resolution stating that launching civil disobedience at a time of external danger was an invitation to fascist forces. It declared that workers must resist these threats and support the cause of a national government. Therefore, workers were instructed to stay away from the civil disobedience campaign planned by the Indian National Congress and the State Congress. Because of this position, the Communist



leaders and labour activists began receiving favourable treatment from the Travancore Government.

5.2.2.4. Strengthening Communist Organisation

Taking advantage of the political situation, the Communists intensified their organisational activities. The Party conducted study classes, established volunteer camps at centres such as Alleppey, Kottayam, Changanacherry, Quilon, and Balaramapuram, and trained workers in “guerrilla warfare,” squad drills, and related activities. They distributed revolutionary literature among industrial labourers and held the government responsible for workers’ hardships. During this period, key Communist leaders of Travancore, K.C. George and P.T. Punnoose, visited Malabar for guidance. Prominent Malabar leaders, including E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan, K. Damodaran, P. Krishna Pillai, and C.H. Kanaran, frequently travelled to major industrial centres to strengthen the movement. With their help, labourers were gradually drawn away from independent trade unions and brought under Communist control. By the end of 1945, the labour force of Alleppey, numbering over 40,000, had come firmly under the direct leadership of the Communist Party.

Alleppey (Alappuzha) and its surrounding areas formed the centre of Kerala’s coir industry. Both European companies and local entrepreneurs operated mechanised mills and engaged workers in piece-rate coastal cottage industries. For many workers, employment was seasonal, and a significant number of them were women involved in spinning, beedi work, and coir-related activities. Wages were meagre, and labour protections were limited. These economic hardships, along with community bonds and the expanding public sphere shaped

by the press and social reform movements, created favourable conditions for organised labour activities.

5.2.2.5 Formation and Role of the Travancore Labour Association (TLA)

The Travancore Labour Association (TLA) emerged as the first stable labour organisation in the princely state. Historical accounts show that the TLA was active during the 1920s and 1930s, organising coir factory workers, dock employees, and other related labour groups. It played a crucial role in transforming scattered grievances into coordinated collective action through petitions, demonstrations, and strikes. The TLA served as an institutional foundation for later unions with clearer political affiliations, particularly those aligned with the Communist Party and the Congress Socialist faction. Two major leaders shaped the early labour movement in Travancore. R. Sugathan (born 1901), initially a teacher and social reformer, became a key organiser of coir workers in the 1930s and later emerged as a committed trade unionist and Communist figure. His organisational work in Alleppey and his involvement in the TLA were significant.

T. V. Thomas (born 1910) rose from labour activism to political leadership, eventually becoming an important labour minister and a public representative of union-based politics in Travancore-Cochin. The work of Sugathan, T. V. Thomas, and their peers highlights how labour leadership in Travancore blended working-class mobilisation, anti-caste reform, and institutional politics. The TLA employed a combination of workplace mobilisation, such as strikes and slowdowns, legal interventions through petitions, and strategic alliances with supportive intellectuals and political groups. Its key achievements included raising awareness about factory conditions, securing limited

improvements in wages and working hours in certain units, and ensuring that labour issues gained prominence in the politics of the princely state. The organisational strategies pioneered by the TLA later influenced unions linked to the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and Communist movements.

The labour movements in Travancore, Kochi, and Malabar were more than a set of scattered strikes; they marked a continuous social and political restructuring of the working classes in southern Kerala. These movements demonstrate how workplace grievances, when combined with political dedication, local leadership, and innovative organisational practices, can transform labour relations and contribute to broader social change. For learners of labour history, these regional experiences provide valuable empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the interplay of class, caste, gender, and political ideology in shaping modern labour movements.

5.2.3. Trade Union Movement in Malabar

The leaders of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party began organising previously unorganised sections of society such as labourers, peasants, teachers, and the rural poor. These groups were mobilised around specific class-based demands, and their struggles gradually became integrated with the broader anti-imperialist movement. Since Malabar did not possess large-scale industries, organised labour was mainly concentrated in a few tile factories and weaving mills. Beedi production also employed a considerable number of workers.

The working conditions of labourers were generally poor and insecure. Workers had no guarantee of job security, and in several factories the working hours exceeded eight hours per day, while in others they extended beyond nine hours. Labourers were not

provided with insurance or provident fund benefits, and wages were extremely low. One of the reasons for this condition was the system through which factory managers—particularly the tile manufacturers of Calicut—entered into contracts with labour suppliers rather than dealing directly with the workers. Under such circumstances, workers raised the demand for a minimum wage of eight ‘annas’.

Different categories of labourers received very low wages. Weavers were paid four ‘annas’ for every yard of cloth woven. Beedi workers earned an average of five ‘annas’ for every thousand beedies produced. Garden labourers received six ‘annas’ for men and four ‘annas’ for women. Although the government introduced factory regulations and other labour-related measures, these failed to improve the condition of workers because factory owners found various ways to circumvent the rules.

In 1935, factory regulations limited the working hours in industries to fifty-four hours per week. However, the factory owners devised a system whereby workers were made to work ten hours per day for five days and four hours on the sixth day. This arrangement enabled the owners to pay only half a day’s wages for the sixth day, thereby effectively reducing the workers’ weekly earnings. Thus, the government regulations ended up increasing the workers’ daily burden while reducing their weekly wages. Similarly, when the government abolished the practice of collecting penalties from workers in 1937, factory owners adopted another method by suspending workers from employment.

5.2.3.1. Growth of Trade Unions and Workers’ Collective Action

Militant trade unions began to emerge in and around Calicut at the beginning of 1935. The first groups to be organised were



workers from tile factories and spinning mills. Later, several other unions were formed, including the Soap Workers Union, Press Workers Union, Cart Load Workers Union, and Umbrella Workers Union. In the same year, the Labour Brotherhood Union was organised in Trichur. This organisation led a number of unions such as the Motor Workers Union, Engineering Workers Union, Press Workers Union, and Rickshaw Workers Union.

In May 1935, an All-Kerala Workers Conference was held at Calicut, and P. Krishna Pillai was appointed as the Secretary of the All Kerala Workers Union. After the formation of these unions, a number of strikes occurred in places such as Feroke, Tiruvannur, and other localities. Many of these strikes were localised and involved one or two factories. However, by 1936 the workers began to develop a sense of solidarity and collective identity. When the management of a weaving mill in Chirakkal reduced wages, members of two other manufacturers' unions organised a joint meeting and protested against the wage cut.

This collective spirit strengthened further in 1937, during which numerous strikes involving thousands of workers took place. Workers in weaving factories at Talap, Kakkad, and Chovva in Chirakkal Taluk went on strike demanding higher wages. In June 1937, workers from four weaving firms in Tellicherry also went on strike. These strikes differed from those of 1935 not only in their duration but also in the number of participants involved. The participation increased as workers from different factories joined together in the strikes. The collective spirit of the workers was also evident in the resolutions passed by beedi workers expressing solidarity with the workers of the weaving industry. During and after these strikes, the Socialists organised public meetings and formed relief committees to support the striking workers.

5.2.3.2. Political Orientation of the Trade Union Movement

Trade union meetings gradually began to pass political resolutions as their concerns were not confined only to economic demands. On 1 April 1937, a hartal was organised in protest against the new Constitution. During meetings held before the hartal, the socialists urged workers to ensure its success. On 19 September 1937, observed as "Demands Declaration Day," a massive procession was organised in Calicut. Workers from all the trade unions in the town marched together carrying red flags. The procession concluded at the beach, where a public meeting was presided over by P. Narayanan Nair.

On 14 November, the All Malabar Labour Conference, presided over by S. A. Dange, passed a resolution demanding a forty-eight-hour work week and the recognition of trade unions. Several other resolutions were also adopted, including the demand to extend the Moratorium of Debts Bill passed by the government. Although many strikes occurred during the latter half of 1937 and throughout 1938, they were mainly focused on increasing wages and improving working conditions.

Between 1937 and 1939, attempts were made to unify the various trade unions and to establish workers' volunteer corps. These efforts were aimed at strengthening organisational unity. In 1937, the Cannanore Beedi Workers Union was formed, and in 1939 Cannanore hosted the All Malabar Beedi Workers Conference. By December 1938, well-organised workers' Volunteer Corps had been established in Calicut, Tellicherry, and Cannanore. These corps managed crowds during protests, provided guards of honour at conferences, and helped in organising meetings.

5.2.3.3. Trade Unions and National Political Developments

By 1939, an increasing number of workers participated in anti-war and anti-imperialist activities. Strikes continued during the latter half of 1939. Workers also extended support to other sections of society, particularly assisting primary school teachers and peasants in their struggles. In trade union meetings, resolutions were passed sending greetings to Russia, demanding the removal of the ban on the Communist Party of India, and condemning the war.

These activities indicate that the trade union movement was not driven solely by narrow economic interests. Workers actively supported Congress candidates and celebrated the formation of a Congress Ministry on 14 July 1937. They also protested against the arrest of Meher Ali and Jayaprakash Narayan at joint meetings organised by the Congress and several trade unions. In 1939 and 1940, workers participated in anti-war and anti-recruitment campaigns. They also took part in the hartal against the imperialist war on 26 January 1940 and observed “Anti-Repression Day” on 15 September 1940.

The workers thus became an important social base for both the Congress and the Kerala Congress Socialist Party in the towns and taluk headquarters. However, large-scale repression of political activists hindered the growth of the trade union movement. International developments also influenced the political situation in India. After the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, Germany advanced across Europe and Japan expanded into South-East Asia. The failure of Sir Stafford Cripps’s negotiations in 1942 hardened the position of the Congress, leading to the adoption of the “Quit India” resolution at the AICC session in Bombay in August 1942.

Meanwhile, the entry of the Soviet Union into the war on the side of the Allies in June 1941 led the Communists to reassess their earlier position on the war. In December 1941, the Polit Bureau approved the “People’s War Policy,” which called for cooperation with the war effort rather than opposition. Subsequently, the ban on the Communist Party of India was lifted on 23 July 1942. However, this new policy created divisions within the labour movement and resulted in the formation of rival trade unions.

On 3 November 1942, weaving and plant workers established the All Kerala National Workers Union in Cannanore. Similar “National Unions” were also formed by beedi workers in Tellicherry, Ponnani, and Cannanore.

After the war, militant trade union activities revived. In December 1945, the Port Cargo Labour Union was established in Cochin. Tile factory workers in Trichur were organised at Pudukkad, Manali, Ollur, and Karuvannur. One of the most significant strikes of this period occurred at Amballur Textiles. In September 1946, the municipal workers of Calicut also went on strike.

These developments demonstrate that the trade union movement in Malabar gradually evolved from small, localised labour struggles into a broader movement that combined economic demands with political and anti-imperialist objectives.

5.2.4. Trade Union Movement in Cochin

The overall political situation in Cochin was markedly different from that of Travancore. Although the spread of trade union activities in Cochin was almost similar to that in Travancore under the leadership of the Communists and the Socialists, the response of the Cochin government differed considerably. Notably, the government introduced certain constitutional reforms



which satisfied the conservative leadership of the Cochin Praja Mandalam. Through these constitutional amendments, all government departments except finance and home were made responsible to the legislature and were administered by representatives of the people. As a result, the demand for more comprehensive reforms and complete democracy remained confined to a small group of radicals within the Praja Mandalam and to the Communists and Socialists in Cochin State. Consequently, political struggles did not dominate the political developments in Cochin to the same extent as in Travancore.

5.2.4.1. Growth of Trade Unions and Workers' Struggles

Activists of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in Cochin State played an important role in organising the working class, particularly in two major centres Trichur and Cochin. Several trade unions functioned actively in Trichur during this period, including the *Peedika Thozhilali Union*, *Rickshaw Thozhilali Union*, *General Workers Union*, *Amballoor Textile Workers Union*, and *Toddy Workers Union*. In Cochin, strong trade unions such as the *Ship Workers Union*, *Factory Workers Union*, and *Navika Thozhilali Union* emerged and gained considerable influence among the workers.

The wave of strikes that occurred after the Second World War demonstrated the increasing level of political awareness among the working classes of Cochin. Among the major labour agitations were the strike at the Amballoor Textile Mills and the strike by the toddy workers of Anthicadu. The Anthicadu struggle was led by the Communists and continued for several months. While the workers initially fought for the resolution of their economic grievances, they also developed a strong ideological conviction that social inequalities could only be eliminated

through the attainment of full democratic rights for the people. During the course of the agitation, the Anthicadu toddy workers succeeded in gaining the support of various labour unions as well as the broader public.

5.2.4.2. Towards an All-Kerala Trade Union Movement

An important achievement of the trade union movement during the 1930s was the attempt to develop labour organisation on a pan-Kerala basis. The first conference of trade unions in Kerala was held at Calicut in 1935 alongside the conference of the Congress Socialist Party. One of the major issues discussed at the workers' conference was the necessity of establishing an all-Kerala trade union movement. Subsequently, in 1937, it was decided to convene the second All Kerala Workers' Conference at Trichur. In February 1939, the third All Kerala Workers' Conference took place at Kanjikuzhy, near Alleppey in Travancore. As a result of this conference, the Kerala State Trade Union Council was formed. These developments within the trade union movement significantly influenced the activities of the *Aikya Kerala Prasthanam*, which eventually contributed to the successful unification of Kerala.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the 1940s witnessed the political consolidation and systematic expansion of the trade union movement. This phase facilitated the wider spread of Communist ideology among the rural population. Compared to the earlier stage of labour union awareness, the new phase reflected a more organised and constructive form of political consciousness. Workers increasingly began to recognise their historical role as agents of social transformation and as the vanguard of a new social order. In this context, the experiences of the working class during the 1940s were highlighted, particularly in relation to the historic Punnapra–Vayalar uprisings of 1946.

Recap

- ◆ Travancore factory workers organised under the Travancore Labour Association to voice grievances.
- ◆ The early Factory Act of 1914 failed to address low wages and delayed payments.
- ◆ The spread of modern political ideas helped workers develop class consciousness and assert rights.
- ◆ The Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union became influential after its formation in July 1938.
- ◆ The All-Travancore Trade Union Federation unified unions and strengthened labour solidarity in Travancore.
- ◆ The Second World War halted coir exports, causing mass unemployment and rising food prices.
- ◆ A.T.T.U.C., formed in 1942, aimed to unite labour bodies and promote worker welfare.
- ◆ The government restricted A.T.T.U.C. leaders, fearing politically motivated strikes and demonstrations.
- ◆ Communist leaders organised Kisan Sabhas to mobilise agricultural labourers across Travancore.
- ◆ The All-Travancore Agricultural Union was formed in 1944, soon coming under Communist influence.
- ◆ The Coir Workers' Union supported responsible government, contradicting earlier apolitical union claims.
- ◆ The Travancore Labour Association transformed scattered workplace grievances into organised collective actions.
- ◆ A.T.T.U.C.'s 1946 general strike prompted the Dewan to promise mechanisms for redress.

Objective Questions

1. Which association organised Travancore factory workers in the early 1920s?
2. Which year witnessed the passing of the Travancore Trade Unions Act?
3. Which industry collapsed during World War II, causing mass unemployment in Travancore?

4. Who was the first president of the A.T.T.U.C., formed in 1942?
5. Which political party gained dominance over labour unions by 1940–1942?
6. Which country's entry into World War II changed Communist policy in 1941?
7. Which workers' union passed a resolution favouring responsible government in January 1942?
8. Which national movement created a rift between Communists and the State Congress?

Answers

1. TLA / Travancore Labour Association
2. 1938
3. Coir
4. T. V. Thomas
5. Communist
6. Soviet Union
7. Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union
8. Quit India

Assignments

1. Examine the growth and consolidation of labour organisations in Travancore from the 1920s to the 1940s, highlighting the role of major unions and leaders.
2. Discuss how the outbreak of the Second World War affected the economic conditions of Travancore's working classes and contributed to the rise of labour unrest.
3. Analyse the formation and objectives of the All-Travancore Trade Union Congress (A.T.T.U.C.) and evaluate its impact on labour politics in Travancore.
4. Evaluate the emergence and growth of agricultural workers' unions

in Travancore during the 1940s, with special reference to the role of Communist leaders.

5. Assess the major labour agitations and strikes in Travancore, Kochi, and Malabar, focusing on their causes, outcomes, and long-term significance for Kerala's labour movement.

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UNIT

Peasant Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the emergence of Karshaka Prasthanam as a political force
- ◆ examine key factors shaping major peasant riots in Malabar
- ◆ evaluate the political dimensions of peasant upsurges in princely states
- ◆ assess the causes and impacts of the Punnapra and Vayalar uprisings

Prerequisite

Before engaging with this unit on the Formation of Karshaka Prasthanam and its Politics, Peasant Riots in Malabar, and the Upsurges in Punnapra and Vayalar, students are expected to possess certain foundational knowledge that will help them grasp the historical, social, and political dimensions of the topics covered. A basic awareness of the socio-economic structure of Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is essential, particularly regarding agrarian relations, tenancy systems, and the hierarchical rural order that shaped the experiences of peasants. Students should be familiar with the broader context of colonial rule in India, including the economic policies of the British and their impact on land revenue, agricultural production, and rural distress.

A preliminary knowledge of Indian nationalist movements and the emergence of early labour and peasant organisations will also support a deeper engagement with this unit. Awareness of the rise of leftist ideologies, the spread of socialist thought, and the formation of working-class politics in the early twentieth century provides a useful background for exploring the growth of Karshaka Prasthanam and associated mobilisations. Students should also be acquainted with the political

landscape of princely states in Kerala, particularly Travancore and Cochin, where distinct power structures influenced the nature of peasant protests.

Familiarity with key historical concepts such as class struggle, popular resistance, colonial exploitation, and state repression will enable learners to interpret the causes and consequences of the peasant uprisings discussed in this unit. A general understanding of important mass movements in Kerala, including the role of trade unions and community-based organisations, will further help in contextualising events like the Punnapra and Vayalar struggles. These prerequisites will ensure that students approach the unit with the conceptual grounding necessary for thoughtful analysis and critical reflection.

Keywords

Karshaka Prasthanam, Agrarian Politics, Peasant Riots, Malabar Uprisings, Princely States, Tenancy System, Punnapra, Vayalar Revolt

Discussion

5.3.1. Formation of Karshaka Prasthanam

Understanding the emergence of Karshaka Prasthanam requires a deeper examination of Kerala's agrarian relations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the agricultural system was dominated by a hierarchical land tenure arrangement. A small group of landlords, temple institutions, and *jennmis* controlled vast tracts of land, while the actual cultivators - tenants, *verumpattakkars*, *kudikidappukars*, and agricultural labourers - worked under oppressive conditions. The tenants were bound by customary dues, insecurity of tenure, and frequent evictions. Agricultural labourers, particularly those belonging to depressed castes, were subjected to extreme social discrimination, limited mobility, and economic exploitation.

Before the establishment of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), organised peasant

movements began to take shape in Kerala, particularly in Malabar, largely due to the efforts of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) activists. Since 1934, these activists had been working among the peasantry, responding to their growing hardships and initiating organised resistance. The primary aims of these early associations were to oppose evictions, demand the reduction of land tax, ensure fair rent, secure relief from crushing indebtedness, and eliminate various feudal levies that burdened tenants.

The economic crisis triggered by the Great Depression, coupled with the 1929 revenue settlement, further deteriorated the conditions of peasants in Malabar. By 1932, in the aftermath of the Civil Disobedience Movement, several Congress workers influenced by socialist ideas resolved to establish Karshaka Sanghams in every village. Their intention was not only to highlight the grievances of the agricultural population before the government but also

to defend the peasants from the exploitative practices of landlords and revenue authorities.

With the formation of the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party, greater organisational focus was placed on addressing the problems of peasants who, until then, had remained largely unorganised. This renewed urgency led to the formation of structured peasant associations. The first notable step in this direction occurred in July 1935, when a branch of the Karshaka Sangham was established at Naniyoor near Kolacheri in Thaliparambu. The organisation elected Vishnu Bharatheeyan as its inaugural President and K. A. Keraleeyan as its Secretary. This Kolacheri unit is considered the pioneer among organised peasant bodies in Kerala.

Inspired by its success, similar Karshaka Sanghams soon emerged in Velloor, Paralem, Karivelloor, and Kodakkad, where the Samyuktha Karshaka Sangham was formed. The activities of these organisations were primarily directed against the domination of local jenmies, particularly influential landlords such as thej enmi of Thazhekattil Mana. These efforts marked the early phase of structured peasant resistance against feudal authority in the region.

The formation of the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936 significantly strengthened the activities and direction of the Karshaka Sangham. AIKS provided ideological and organisational inspiration, enabling local peasant groups to adopt more coherent strategies. Following the example of the Kisan Sabha, the Karshaka Sangham mobilised peasants by convening conferences, organising study classes, and undertaking marches. The *jathas* (marches) conducted by the Sangham were especially effective, as they drew the attention of peasants who still feared their landlords and helped bring their grievances before the wider public.

These processions became a crucial tool for political mobilisation and awareness-building in rural society.

As Marxist ideas began to spread more widely in Kerala during this period, activists emphasised the importance of organising and empowering the masses. For them, the central task of a Marxist was not merely to articulate principles but to mobilise the oppressed through sustained grassroots work. The Karshaka Sangham, through its sustained campaigns and collective action, laid the foundation for a more militant and politically conscious peasant movement, which later became a defining feature of Kerala's socio-political history.

5.3.1.1. Early Mobilisations and the Influence of Social Reform Movements

Before the appearance of a coordinated peasant movement, Kerala experienced a series of social reform interventions, especially from organisations such as the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, Nair Service Society (NSS), and various Christian reform associations. Although these movements were primarily aimed at social equality and caste reform, they indirectly influenced agrarian consciousness.

Social reformers challenged caste restrictions, opened educational opportunities, and questioned the legitimacy of birth-based hierarchies. As lower-caste communities gained access to education and public life, they also acquired the vocabulary to articulate economic injustices. The gradual rise of a literate peasantry enabled the rural poor to recognise their position within the agrarian structure and nurture the idea of collective resistance.

The nationalist movement, particularly the civil disobedience and non-cooperation

phases, also had a significant effect. While Gandhian politics emphasised non-violence and constructive programmes, it created spaces for rural mobilisation and offered organisational frameworks through the Indian National Congress. Peasants in various parts of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar participated in local struggles against unfair taxation, evictions, and feudal dues. These early efforts were not yet part of a consolidated Karshaka Prasthanam, but they constituted its preliminary foundation.

5.3.1.2. Formation of Early Peasant Organisations

The earliest structured peasant associations in Kerala developed during the late 1930s. In Travancore, the All Travancore Tenant Farmers Association began addressing eviction issues and disputes surrounding *pattom* (rent). In Malabar, the Kerala Karshaka Sangham was established with the explicit objective of organising tenants against the *jenmi* system. These organisations became precursors to a more cohesive Karshaka Prasthanam. The Communist Party worked covertly within these associations, often transforming them into mass organisations capable of large-scale mobilisation. Study circles, reading rooms, and night schools helped peasants acquire political consciousness. Cultural troupes and drama groups, such as the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC), later played a significant role in spreading the message of agrarian reform.

By the early 1940s, the movement had taken a more unified shape, with peasant associations participating in nationwide bodies like the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS). Kerala's peasants thus became part of the wider Indian peasant movement, strengthening their organisational character.

5.3.1.3. Rise of Communist Ideology

A critical factor in the formation of Karshaka Prasthanam was the penetration of Marxist and socialist ideas into Kerala's political landscape during the 1930s and 1940s. The growth of leftist intellectual circles in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Calicut provided the theoretical basis for interpreting agrarian problems within frameworks of class struggle and exploitation. Students returning from cities like Madras and Bombay, where communist activities were more organised, contributed to the spread of radical thought. By the end of 1942, Communist leaders took the initiative to mobilise agriculturists across Travancore. They entrusted the responsibility of forming Kisan Sabhas (Peasant Unions) to C. S. Gopala Pillai, a senior Communist leader. Communist leaders in Malabar also showed a deep interest in this organisational effort.

To raise awareness, they distributed printed Malayalam leaflets in Alleppey, prepared exclusively for Kerala's agricultural labourers, highlighting their challenges and hardships. To gain wider support, they conducted study classes and strongly criticised the government's food policy. The organising committee of the All-Kerala Kisan Sangham urged the ryots of Travancore to join the movement to protect their rights. As a result, several Karshaka Thozhilali Sanghams (Agricultural Workers' Unions) were established in different regions. In June 1943, an office of the All-India Kisan Sangham was opened at Koothattukulam in central Travancore, and many volunteers were recruited.

The leaders of different parties now felt the necessity of creating a common organisation for the agriculturists of Travancore. Accordingly, on 16 September

1944, they inaugurated an All-Travancore Agricultural Union at Poonjar in central Travancore, in the presence of delegates sent by the Communist Party, the State Congress, and the labour unions. K. Sanku Pillai was elected as president, C. Kesavan, P.T. Chacko, and K. K. Chellappan Pillai as vice-presidents, C. S. Gopala Pillai as secretary, and K.R. Elankath as treasurer. Though it was organised with the active cooperation of the State Congress, this Agricultural Union too came under the control of the Communists. By organising the workers into a strong union, the Communists instilled revolutionary ideas. Consequently, disputes between agricultural workers and their employers over wage rates, working hours, and other issues assumed violent overtones in the agricultural areas, particularly Kuttanad.

5.3.2. Peasant Disturbances in Malabar

Under the leadership of P. Krishna Pillai and E. M. S. Namboodiripad, a section of young activists within the Provincial Congress established the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934. The emergence of the CSP was strengthened by the expanding participation of peasants and workers who had actively engaged in the Civil Disobedience Movement. A progressive group of Congress leaders from Malabar, along with several others, joined the Socialist Party and played a significant role in enabling the CSP to secure control over the Provincial Congress. Nevertheless, until the split that occurred during the Second World War, the CSP continued to function as an integral component of both the Provincial Congress and the All-India Congress Committee (AICC). From 1938 onwards, Kerala became increasingly involved in the national liberation struggle, while simultaneously agitating for responsible government in the Princely State of Travancore.

The All-India Kisan Sabha was established in 1936 with the objective of achieving complete independence from an exploitative socio-economic order. As an extension of this organisation, the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham was formed, comprising units at the district, taluk, and village levels. The Sangham included even landless cultivators and represented a broad spectrum of tenants belonging to different castes. However, peasants in the lowest strata lacked secure tenure and remained entirely dependent on landlords. Organising them into a collective body proved challenging, as many feared harsh reprisals from landlords. Influenced by leftist ideology, peasants gradually united and organised themselves in opposition to both landlordism and British imperialism.

Between 1937 and 1939, peasant activists in Kerala concentrated on anti-feudal struggles. They made determined efforts to address acute poverty and widespread starvation affecting artisans, craftspeople, and landless labourers. These activities were identified as part of the Left Civil Disobedience Movement, and activists from both the Congress and the CSP were arrested under the Defence of India Act. It was commonly alleged that they organised militant actions involving criminal intimidation, social boycotts, campaigns for non-payment of rent and taxes, and attempts to establish parallel authority. The growth of the Communist Movement in Kerala was closely connected with anti-imperialist and anti-landlord struggles in British Malabar, with all these movements sharing clear and mutually reinforcing links. The Communist Movement in Kerala was also distinguished by its strong association with movements for social reform, temple entry, and resistance to caste oppression.

During the Second World War, the Socialists gained control of the Provincial

Congress and declined to comply with the AICC's call for Individual Satyagraha. Instead, they aimed to organise a movement against the war and promote resistance to imperialism. This development led to a split that culminated in the formation of the Communist Party. In December 1939, a clandestine meeting at Pinarayi attended by P. Krishna Pillai, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, N. C. Sekhar, and K. Damodaran resulted in the establishment of the Communist Party of Kerala, with recognition from S. V. Ghate of the Communist Party of India. The AICC's call had little impact on most peasants, who were already conscious of the necessity for decisive political action.

On 15 September 1940, the Communist Party, in collaboration with the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham, observed Anti-Repression Day. Despite official prohibitions on public gatherings and processions, large numbers of peasants and workers assembled to protest against repression. In Tellicherry, Mattannur, Kayyur, and Morazha, police excesses against demonstrators resulted in violence and firing. Subsequently, the British government declared the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham and its affiliated units unlawful, thereby enabling intensified police repression. Authorities categorised all peasant activists and nationalists in north Malabar as Communists. Consequently, anti-landlord and anti-imperialist struggles in Malabar assumed a more deeply entrenched and clandestine character. During this period, the police also arrested and imprisoned senior Congress leader Abdur Rahaman, who was then associated with Subhash Chandra Bose's All India Forward Bloc. The Communist Movement signified organised peasant mobilisation for radical action against landlords and the British administration, with primary emphasis on the political mobilisation of peasants against both landlordism and imperial rule.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Malabar experienced periodic peasant

riots. Some were spontaneous reactions to unbearable rent conditions, while others were organised actions involving lower castes and marginal tenants. The earliest disturbances occurred in the Valluvanad and Ernad areas, where eviction and rent enhancement were particularly severe. In the 1840s and 1850s, several riots erupted when janmis attempted mass evictions. The introduction of new legal mechanisms enabled landlords to auction the rights of cultivation, depriving tenants of their traditional protections. Peasants resisted forcibly by refusing to vacate fields, obstructing revenue officials, and sometimes turning violent against landlord agents. Although these disturbances did not acquire a large-scale political nature, they indicated the growing anger in rural Malabar.

5.3.3. Peasant Disturbances in the Princely States

While Malabar formed part of the Madras Presidency, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin had different political and administrative structures. Yet, these regions also witnessed notable peasant unrest arising from oppressive land systems, caste discrimination, and exploitative revenue policies. In both states, the traditional land systems were deeply hierarchical. The *janmi-kanam-verumpattam* structure existed here as well, though with regional variations. The state extracted heavy land revenue through intermediaries, and cultivation was bound by several customary obligations. Landless labourers, mainly from oppressed castes such as the Pulayas and Parayas, lived under conditions close to bondage until the late nineteenth century.

The princely states maintained strict caste regulations. Agricultural labourers faced severe restrictions regarding public movement, dress, housing, and access to public resources. This social oppression formed an important backdrop to peasant



mobilisations.

The Chengannur Riot

One of the early instances of collective peasant protest in Travancore occurred in Chengannur. The immediate cause was the oppressive system of forced labour (*oozhiyam*), excessive taxation, and mistreatment of lower-caste cultivators by local authorities. Peasants assembled to object to the actions of revenue officials, leading to a violent confrontation. This incident, though local, reflected growing dissatisfaction with Travancore's revenue administration. It marked the beginning of systematic criticism of feudal and caste-based oppression.

The Vaikom and Guruvayur Movements as Peasant-Linked Struggles

Although primarily known as temple-entry agitations, the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25) and the Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931–33) carried strong agrarian undertones. The lower-caste communities that participated in these movements were predominantly agricultural labourers and small tenants. Their struggle against caste restrictions was intimately linked to their economic oppression. By challenging the social order upheld by landlords and dominant castes, these movements indirectly strengthened peasant consciousness. Temple entry was not merely a religious demand; it was a declaration of dignity by communities long subjected to severe agrarian and caste exploitation.

5.3.4. The Upsurges in Punnapra and Vayalar

The uprisings at Punnapra and Vayalar in 1946 occupy a central place in the political and social history of Kerala, representing one

of the most intense mass-based confrontations against princely autocracy during the final phase of India's freedom struggle. Emerging from the socio-economic tensions in Travancore and shaped by the expanding influence of socialist and communist ideologies, these events became defining moments that showcased the political awakening of workers and peasants in the region. The upsurges were not isolated events but the culmination of decades of oppression, hardship, and discontent under a feudal economic system and an increasingly authoritarian state. As such, they demand detailed examination from historical, political, and ideological perspectives in order to appreciate their complexity and long-term impact on Kerala's political evolution.

The socio-political atmosphere was further charged by the policies of the Dewan of Travancore, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. Though he initiated certain modernisation efforts, his governance style was widely perceived as authoritarian and intolerant of dissent. His ambitious attempt to transform Travancore into an independent sovereign state after the British withdrawal alarmed many political groups, who feared that such a move would entrench autocratic rule further. Opposing this plan became a rallying point for a vast cross-section of Travancore society.

5.3.4.1. Reform of 1946

In January 1946, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer announced a constitutional reform under certain circumstances. In the economic sphere, post-war developments further worsened the situation. The food shortage that prevailed during the war period did not abate even after its conclusion. There were irregularities in the rationing system. As the prices of coir products fell, the owners of small factories closed down their establishments, leaving about 20,000 labourers unemployed, most of whom were in Ambalapuzha and Sherthalai

taluqs. Taking advantage of the food crisis and acute unemployment, extremist leaders held propaganda meetings in which they attributed sole responsibility for the sorry state of affairs to the government. These developments posed a serious threat to the administration.

In addition, rapid political and constitutional changes occurred in India following the end of the war. On 19 September 1945, Lord Wavell, the Viceroy, announced the British Government's intention to convene a constitution-making body to discuss the early realisation of full self-government in India with those elected. In December 1945, elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures were held, and the Congress succeeded in forming ministries in seven out of eleven provinces.

These developments forced the Diwan to reconsider his policy, and on 16 January 1946, he announced a constitutional reform to be introduced shortly. According to the announcement, the Legislature would continue to be composed of two Houses: the Lower House, elected on the basis of territorial constituencies and universal adult suffrage, and the Upper House, composed of elected representatives of various interests and professions on a functional or facultative basis. As it provided for universal adult suffrage for the Lower House without communal electorates, the abolition of the official block and the nominated element in both Chambers, the election of presidents and deputy presidents for both Houses, and independence of the judiciary, it was hailed as 'the most far-reaching so far attempted in any Indian state or British India'. According to the Government, this reform was 'modelled on that of the United States of America' in terms of relations between the legislature, executive, and judiciary. Official papers widely publicised it as 'the outcome of the wise statesmanship and broad outlook of

an accomplished political genius'.

In reality, however, the reform made no significant departure from the constitution promulgated in 1932. It kept the rights and prerogatives of the Maharaja intact and retained overriding powers with the executive, which was not responsible to the legislature. By introducing this constitutional reform, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer sought to safeguard his position as Diwan within the monarchical setup and to bring an end to the issue of responsible government.

The political parties of the state had been waiting for an opportunity to rehabilitate their fortunes. On 30 August 1946, the Working Committee of the State Congress met in Trivandrum and decided to enter into peace talks with the Government regarding the constitutional scheme and representation to the Constituent Assembly of India on the basis of full responsible government. In pursuance of this, on 13 October 1946, A. Thanu Pillai and T. M. Varghese met the Diwan and held discussions. Before beginning the talks, the Diwan presented two principles on which there could be no compromise or discussion:

- ◆ the supremacy of the legislature, subject to certain safeguards and veto, and
- ◆ the obligation of the executive to carry out the directions of the legislature.

Consequently, the leaders deemed the talks meaningless and decided to suspend them. The Communist Party, on the other hand, condemned the State Congress's 'subordinate' move for peace talks, even after the Diwan had declared in unambiguous terms his intention not to introduce responsible government. They characterised the reform as 'a new edition of diwan rule which would be more harmful than before' and appealed

to the people to rally under their banner to organise a struggle to terminate diwan rule forever.

5.3.4.2. Outbreak of Violence

At a time when factory labourers were manoeuvring for an open revolt against the Government, conflicts arose between agricultural workers and landlords. In an effort to counter the violent activities of the workers, the landlords gathered groups of people to their side. At Kadakkarappally, a village near Sherthalai, clashes occurred on 13 and 14 October 1946 between these groups, resulting in the death of a person who was a paid agent of a landlord. Upon being informed, the Government took firm measures. The military that arrived on the scene raided the Coir Factory Workers' Union Office at Sherthalai, removed the flag from the Labour Union Office, arrested labour leaders, and assaulted several workers. In protest against the military action at Kadakkarappally, the Travancore Trade Union Congress called for a sympathetic one-day strike in Alleppey on 17 October 1946. Most of the labour unions responded. After the strike in Alleppey, some workers went in a body to Punnappra, a coastal area five kilometres south of Alleppey, and urged the local fishing workers to join the strike. Meanwhile, an armed Communist mob attacked certain employers and workers who had informed the police of their activities. A tense situation developed in this area, but upon the arrival of the military, the crowd dispersed into the sands and darkness.

In a bid to counter military action, the labourers proceeded to organise labour camps in and around their various union and branch offices and in the interior areas. More than a dozen camps were established in places such as Olathala, Attayal, Vatakkal, and Kalarkode near Alleppey town. Ex-military

men from Malabar provided training in military techniques, and sharpened stakes made from arecanut trees and sharp granite pieces were stockpiled as weapons. They converted the office building of the Coir Factory Workers' Union at Sherthalai into the nerve centre of their activities. By the middle of October 1946, the situation appeared explosive.

5.3.4.3. Suppression of Rebellion

The administration considered these actions to be an 'organised terrorist movement' and resolved to suppress it ruthlessly. To address the situation, the Government deployed police and military forces to the taluqs of Sherthalai and Ambalapuzha. Under the provisions of the Travancore Criminal Law Amendment Act 1 of 1938, the Government declared on 19 October 1946 that the Fish Workers' Union at Alleppey and Punnappra, the Coir Factory Workers' Union at Sherthalai, the Travancore Communist Party, and all bodies or persons connected with them were unlawful associations. Subsequently, it declared sixty labour unions controlled by the Communist Party to be illegal.

As previously decided, on 22 October the labourers began a general strike, which continued the following day. On 24 October, Travancore was en fête with the thirty-fourth birthday celebrations of the Maharaja. On the same day, an armed Communist mob, over a thousand strong, attacked the Armed Reserve Camp at Punnappra, killing four police constables. In the clash that ensued, the military shot dead twenty-eight individuals from the crowd.

On 25 October, the Government proclaimed Martial Law in the taluqs of Sherthalai and Ambalapuzha and appointed Major R. Ranga Prasad and Major C. Rajagopal Menon as the army 'administrators' respectively in

these taluqs, under the command of Major General V. N. Parameswaran Pillai, who took charge of the situation. Additionally, to coordinate the efforts of the military and civil authorities, the Maharaja placed the Travancore State Forces under the direct command of C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer and conferred upon him the rank of Lieutenant General. With the assumption of military and police power under his supreme command, the Diwan adopted stern measures to suppress the revolt. Armed parties raided the labour camps and attacked the Communists. The latter, on their part, dismantled bridges, breached roads, and cut off telephone and telegraphic lines. While the military was engaged in repairing the dismantled bridge at Mararikulam on 26 October, the labourers from the neighbouring Communist camps attacked them from different sides. The military detachments opened fire, resulting in the deaths of several labourers. In an attempt to disperse the camps at Kattoor, a coastal village near Alleppey, a military detachment arrived and clashed with the Communists on 25 October. Two individuals died in the ensuing firing.

On 27 October, large-scale incidents occurred at three locations: Sherthala-Olathala, Menasseri, and Vayalar. A military detachment attacked the labour camps at Olathala and Menasseri in the morning and advanced to Vayalar in the afternoon, employing motor boats. Vayalar, surrounded by swamps and seas, was not easily accessible and had become a major centre of Communist activity. A mob numbering more than a thousand, armed with spears, arecanut staves, daggers, swords, axes, country explosives, and a few guns, boldly confronted the detachment. In the fighting that followed, the military resorted to heavy firing, resulting in a large number

of ill-equipped Communist casualties. The Vayalar incidents marked the collapse of the uprising. The leaders dispersed the camps, and T. V. Thomas, president of the A.T.T.U.C, appealed to the labourers to return to work as the situation returned to normal. The administration withdrew Martial Law effective from 10 November 1946.

5.3.4.4. The Role of the Communist Party

The Communist Party's involvement in the Punnapra-Vayalar upsurges remains a subject of scholarly debate. The party played an indispensable role in mobilising workers and peasants in the preceding years, building strong organisational networks across Travancore. Its ideology resonated with labourers facing exploitation and with tenants resisting eviction. Party leaders such as T. V. Thomas, R. Sugathan, and others contributed significantly to building class unity and political awareness. However, whether the party sanctioned the armed confrontation remains contested. Some accounts suggest that the uprisings were not centrally planned but grew out of spontaneous popular resentment. The CPI leadership in Kerala was itself divided on how far to escalate protests into militant resistance. While some local units took proactive measures to defend themselves, others were overwhelmed by the speed with which events unfolded. Nevertheless, the Communist Party emerged from the events with enhanced political legitimacy among workers and the lower social strata. The sacrifices of the people of Punnapra and Vayalar became integral to the Communist narrative of struggle against feudalism and autocracy.

Recap

- ◆ Agrarian relations in Travancore and Cochin were dominated by hierarchical land tenure.
- ◆ Tenants faced insecurity, customary dues, and frequent evictions under oppressive conditions.
- ◆ Congress Socialist Party activists organised peasants in Malabar from 1934 onwards.
- ◆ Early peasant aims included opposing evictions, reducing land tax, and ensuring fair rent.
- ◆ The Great Depression and the 1929 revenue settlement worsened peasant hardships in Malabar.
- ◆ The first organised Karshaka Sangham was formed at Naniyoor, Kolacheri, in July 1935.
- ◆ Vishnu Bharatheeyan and K. A. Keraleeyan led the pioneering Kolacheri Sangham.
- ◆ Karshaka Sanghams spread to Velloor, Paralem, Karivelloor, and Kodakkad regions.
- ◆ The formation of AIKS in 1936 strengthened the ideological direction of peasant movements.
- ◆ Jathas and study classes mobilised peasants, overcoming the fear of landlords.
- ◆ Social reform organisations like SNDP and NSS expanded agrarian political consciousness.
- ◆ The Civil Disobedience Movement opened organisational space for rural mobilisation.
- ◆ Communist leaders mobilised agriculturists across Travancore by 1942.
- ◆ The All-Travancore Agricultural Union was formed at Poonjar on 16 September 1944.
- ◆ Early peasant riots in Malabar protested eviction and rent enhancement.
- ◆ Mappila uprisings rooted in agrarian oppression despite religious framing.
- ◆ Vaikom and Guruvayur movements strengthened dignity and awareness among agricultural labourers.
- ◆ Punnapra–Vayalar upsurges became intense mass confrontations against autocratic rule.
- ◆ Post-war unemployment and food shortages triggered widespread discontent in Travancore.

- ◆ Martial law was declared in Sherthalai and Ambalapuzha following violent clashes in 1946.
- ◆ Armed Communist groups attacked the Armed Reserve Camp at Punnapra.
- ◆ Severe military suppression resulted in high casualties among organised labourers.

Objective Questions

1. Which organisation was formed nationally in 1936 to support peasant struggles?
2. Who was elected the first President of the Karshaka Sangham at Naniyoor?
3. Which economic crisis intensified the hardships of peasants in Malabar?
4. Which political party actively supported early peasant movements in Kerala?
5. What was the major uprising of 1921 in Malabar led mainly by Mappila tenants?
6. Who was the Dewan of Travancore during the Punnapra-Vayalar uprisings?
7. Which major satyagraha in 1924-25 carried agrarian undertones?
8. Which organisation provided ideological inspiration to the Karshaka Sangham?
9. Where was the All-Travancore Agricultural Union inaugurated in 1944?
10. Which art organisation later popularised agrarian reform ideas through dramas?
11. Which revenue practice in Travancore caused the Chengannur Riot?
12. Which year marked the formation of the first Karshaka Sangham branch?
13. Which princely state witnessed major conflicts during Punnapra and Vayalar?
14. Which taluks were placed under Martial Law during the uprising?
15. Which coastal area near Alappuzha became a key centre of rebellion?

Answers

1. AIKS (All India Kisan Sabha)
2. Vishnu Bharatheeyan
3. Great Depression
4. Congress Socialist Party (CSP)
5. Malabar Rebellion
6. C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer
7. Vaikom Satyagraha
8. All India Kisan Sabha
9. Poonjar
10. KPAC
11. Oozhiyam (forced labour)
12. 1935
13. Travancore
14. Ambalapuzha and Sherthalai
15. Vayalar

Assignments

1. Examine the socio-economic conditions that led to the emergence of Karshaka Sanghams in Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin. Discuss the role of the Congress Socialist Party in shaping these early peasant organisations.
2. Analyse the agrarian tensions and political circumstances that culminated in the Punnappa–Vayalar upsurge.
3. Discuss the influence of the Great Depression and the 1929 revenue settlement on agrarian unrest in Malabar. How did these factors accelerate organised peasant resistance?
4. Critically evaluate the impact of social reform movements such as the Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagraha on the development of political consciousness among agriculturists and rural labourers.

5. Explain the role of the Communist leadership in expanding the scope of peasant struggles in Kerala during the 1940s.

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UNIT

Class and Popular Movements

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand how youth and teacher activism shaped Kerala's education system
- ◆ analyse key protests that transformed access and equity in education
- ◆ evaluate the political and social consciousness created by campus movements
- ◆ explain the long-term impact of collective action on policy reforms

Prerequisite

A thorough engagement with this unit presupposes familiarity with the historical evolution of modern education in Kerala, particularly the nineteenth-century reforms that expanded literacy, scientific learning, and access beyond caste-restricted domains. Students should appreciate the role of missionary schools and state initiatives such as Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi's 1817 proclamation in institutionalising public education and promoting female learning. An understanding of the emergent public sphere, wherein students from diverse backgrounds interrogated hierarchies and teachers from marginalised communities championed literacy, social justice, and civic responsibility, will provide essential context. Such knowledge enables learners to situate Kerala's educational transformation within broader processes of social reform, critical debate, and participatory civic culture.

Keywords

Public Education, Aided Teachers, Direct Payment Agreement, Student Activism
Fee Unification, Youth Organisations, Campus Politics

Discussion

5.4.1 Teachers' Movements in Kerala

Kerala's long tradition of public education provides important context for the teacher movements that swept the state in the mid-20th century. Kerala, and its predecessor kingdoms Travancore and Cochin, had early experiments in free education as far back as 1817 when Gowri Parvati Bayi, Queen of Travancore, declared a right to free schooling and endowed land for CMS College, Kottayam. Over the next two centuries, Kerala's educators became central to demands for "free and fair education for all," often risking imprisonment or even their lives in mass protests against exclusionary policies. This heritage—that education is a public good and that teachers should defend it—underlies later demands for equal pay and funding.

By the early 20th century, aided school teachers in Kerala (largely from poor and

rural backgrounds) were exploited by private managers. Salaries were pitiful and erratic; in some cases, teachers were paid with "pronotes" or IOUs instead of money. In this climate, teachers began organising into unions. In Malabar, the Malabar Aided Teachers Union (MATU) and similar local associations emerged in the 1930s, calling attention to dire working conditions. Despite their poverty, rural teachers developed strong community ties and became a self-conscious "rural intelligentsia." Inspired by the national freedom struggle and local social reform efforts, these educators opened reading rooms, joined workers' protests, and spread socialist and anti-imperialist ideas in village life. By the 1940s, teachers were among the most politically active citizens, joining both the Congress and the Communist Party. Many historians argue that their activism laid the groundwork for Kerala's communist movement.

M P Paul



M. P. Paul occupies a distinctive place in the history of Kerala's educational and intellectual life as one of the earliest and most courageous defenders of teachers' rights. His legal challenge in 1932 against the salary cut imposed by the management of St. Thomas College, Thrissur, at a time when teachers' wages barely ensured subsistence, was an unprecedented act of resistance against ecclesiastical authority and managerial arbitrariness. By taking the Bishop and college management to court, Paul exposed the moral contradiction of enforcing austerity on teachers while leaving institutional finances untouched, thereby asserting the principle that educators were entitled to dignity, fair remuneration, and legal protection. His subsequent establishment of tutorial colleges was not merely an entrepreneurial response to his dismissal but a conscious intervention in the educational sphere, offering alternative institutional spaces that practised timely payment, better wages,

and professional respect for teachers. Through these actions, Paul transformed a personal struggle into a broader critique of exploitative educational governance, laying an early foundation for teachers' rights consciousness in Kerala and demonstrating how legal assertion, institutional innovation, and ethical commitment could together challenge entrenched power structures.

After Indian Independence and the creation of the Kerala state in 1956, teacher organisations gained stronger footing. The first elected Communist government in 1957, led by E. M. S. Namboodiripad, responded to their long-standing demands. One major achievement during this period was the abolition of pay disparities between government and aided school teachers. Previously, aided teachers received lower and often irregular “annual grant” salaries. The 1957–59 Education Bill aimed to regulate private education and expand reservations but faced intense opposition from caste and religious managements. This contributed to the “Vimochana Samaram,” or Liberation Struggle, which ultimately brought down the Communist government in 1959. Still, despite this political turbulence, the momentum among teachers continued. By the end of the decade, region-based teachers' unions had federated under statewide associations, mirroring the linguistic and administrative unification of Kerala.

Higher education followed a similar path. In 1958, the All Kerala Private College Teachers Association (AKPCTA) was formed as a democratic and secular body to represent aided college lecturers. The association brought together teachers who had long demanded parity with their government college counterparts. When the 1958 Education Act provided for direct government salary payments to aided school teachers, college lecturers demanded the same. However, government action remained limited. In 1962, Kerala introduced a grant-in-aid code to fund colleges, but it did not

implement University Grants Commission (UGC) scales nor did it fully cover salary payments. Aided college teachers, especially in rural areas, continued to receive low and irregular wages. Some teachers were still being given “pronotes” in place of actual salaries.

This frustration culminated in 1971 when AKPCTA led a two-month strike demanding direct salary payments and improved conditions. The strike was forceful, but internal political divisions weakened it. One Congress-aligned leader was accused of ending the strike without consensus, sparking a split in the movement. The government gave some assurances, but the demand for direct payment remained unresolved.

The next major phase began in 1972, when a joint movement of students and teachers formed around the idea of fee unification. At the time, aided colleges charged higher tuition than government colleges. Student groups across political ideologies, ranging from the Congress-backed Kerala Students Union (KSU) to the leftist Students Federation of India (SFI), demanded that all students pay the same fees regardless of their institution. This sparked widespread strikes and boycotts that lasted over fifty days.

Teachers played a critical role. AKPCTA members held “parallel classes” on roadsides and protested in front of the offices of powerful caste and religious trusts that ran many aided colleges. They believed that fee cuts would expose managements' reliance on tuition and pressure them to concede

to direct government payment of salaries. Some institutions hesitated; for example, R. Sankar of the SN Trust refused to close his colleges, likely to avoid losing income. Others, like the Nair Service Society, took a harder stance and threatened to shut down all their colleges.

After nearly two months of deadlock, the Achutha Menon-led government stepped in. The resulting compromise became known as the Direct Payment Agreement (DPA). Under this agreement, the state treasury would pay aided-college teachers directly. In return, college managements retained some control over admissions and appointments, typically around 35 per cent. This agreement marked a turning point: it unified the payment system between public and aided colleges and reaffirmed the aided sector's place within Kerala's public education framework. It also achieved substantial fee reductions, improving access to higher education for many students from poor and marginalised communities.

The fee unification and direct payment movements were more than financial protests; they were political acts. AKPCTA had both Congress-aligned and Communist-aligned members, and student groups reflected this same divide. Each side claimed credit for the movement's success. Some pointed to government insiders who negotiated the agreement, while others emphasised grassroots organising by leftist students and teachers. In truth, it was the unity across these lines that brought real change. The struggle proved that educators and students, working together, could influence even sitting governments.

The legacy of these movements is long-lasting. Today, government salaries and standardised fees are the norm in Kerala's aided colleges. Yet challenges remain. For example, the 1972 Direct Payment Agreement still grants management a share in faculty

appointments, complicating current efforts to implement reservation policies. Teacher unions continue to push for reforms, including shifting hiring power to the state's Public Service Commission.

5.4.2 Student and Youth Movements in Kerala

The story of student and youth movements in Kerala begins well before the formation of the state in 1956. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the region's schools and colleges in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar became important sites of political awakening. Students were exposed to nationalist literature, newspapers, and reform movements that challenged caste hierarchy and colonial administration. Organisations such as the Travancore Students Federation and the Kerala Students Congress emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, carrying the influence of the freedom struggle onto the campuses. Although these early bodies did not have large organisational networks, they played a significant role in building a generation of youth who combined political interest with a growing commitment to public life. College libraries, hostel debates, and reading groups helped create a climate in which dissent and civic participation gradually became part of student culture.

After independence, Kerala's campuses continued to absorb social tensions, ideological contestations, and hopes for reform. The formation of the Kerala Students Union (KSU) in 1957 marked a new phase in student politics. Aligned with the Indian National Congress, KSU grew rapidly at a time when Kerala was witnessing the rise of Communist parties and radical reform movements. The organisation quickly gained visibility through the "Orana Samaram," a successful strike demanding student travel concessions. The campaign demonstrated how student bodies could influence administrative decisions and opened the door



to later agitations focused on fees, academic reforms, and campus rights. Throughout the 1960s, KSU expanded its presence in schools, arts colleges, and professional institutions. Many of its early leaders later joined public life, demonstrating how student politics often served as a preparatory ground for Kerala's political leadership.

The rise of the Left in state politics further strengthened student mobilisation. The All India Students Federation (AISF), originally linked to the Communist Party of India, had already established a foothold in Kerala. However, the split in the communist movement in the 1960s led to the creation of the Students' Federation of India (SFI) in 1970. SFI quickly emerged as a powerful force across the state's campuses. Its organisational discipline and ideological clarity helped it expand into government colleges, aided institutions, and university centres. SFI actively engaged with questions of education policy, secularism, and student welfare. One of the most influential campaigns of the 1970s was the agitation for fee unification. Students across political lines demanded that all colleges, whether government-run or aided, adopt uniform and affordable fees. The agitation lasted weeks and involved strikes, marches, and negotiations. It demonstrated the capacity of student organisations to shape major policy decisions in higher education.

Student politics in Kerala has never been confined to organisations aligned solely with the Congress or the Left. The Muslim Students Federation (MSF), associated with the Indian Union Muslim League, played an important role in addressing the educational concerns of the Muslim community, especially in Malabar. MSF's activities involved securing hostel facilities, scholarships, and representation for students from historically marginalised backgrounds. The Students' Christian Movement (SCM), with roots in the early twentieth century,

added a broader social justice and ecumenical outlook to campus life. Its programmes often linked faith with community service, gender justice, and interreligious dialogue. These organisations ensured that the educational landscape reflected the diversity of Kerala's social fabric.

The expansion of youth organisations after the 1970s widened the arena of activism beyond campuses. The formation of the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) in 1980 provided a platform for young people outside formal education. DYFI addressed issues such as unemployment, land rights, literacy, and environmental protection. Its activities included house-to-house surveys, public health campaigns, and community service programmes. During floods, epidemics, and other emergencies, DYFI volunteers were often among the first to mobilise relief. This gave the organisation a reputation for combining political commitment with social action. It also created a bridge between campus activism and broader youth participation in local governance and public welfare.

Parallel to these secular and ideologically driven bodies, faith-based organisations made important contributions. The Kerala Catholic Youth Movement (KCYM), founded in 1978, developed a widespread network across dioceses. Its activities included leadership training, cultural events, charity initiatives, and environmental programmes. KCYM provided a platform for young Catholics to participate in community life while gaining organisational skills and public confidence. Its presence was especially strong in central and southern Kerala. Although KCYM did not generally adopt confrontational politics, it has participated in public debates related to minority rights and educational policy. Similar networks existed in other communities as well, such as the Yuvajana Sangham of the SNDP among the Ezhava

community and student groups associated with the Nair Service Society.

Alongside political and community-linked organisations, Kerala also witnessed educational and cultural movements that influenced students and youth indirectly. The Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) inspired generations of young people through science clubs, nature camps, and literacy drives. Film societies introduced students to world cinema and nurtured critical thinking. Reading rooms and libraries established during the library movement encouraged a culture of public debate and discussion. These initiatives created an environment where students and youth encountered not only political agitation but also intellectual engagement, rationalist thought, and cultural experimentation.

Through the decades, student and youth movements have remained closely connected to Kerala's political culture. College union elections became a training ground for leadership, negotiation, and public speaking. Student organisations frequently engaged

with government departments to demand changes in examination systems, hostel facilities, campus safety, and academic policies. Many of Kerala's ministers, legislators, and administrators began their careers in student unions, carrying forward the experience of campus mobilisation to public office. This continuity helped sustain a political climate in which young people remained active participants rather than passive observers.

As Kerala entered the era of globalisation, youth organisations adapted to new forms of mobilisation. Digital media, online campaigns, and issue-based movements became increasingly important. Students responded to changes in national education policies, environmental issues, and debates around secularism and civil rights. Youth organisations broadened their scope to include mental health awareness, support for survivors of violence, and digital literacy programmes. The methods changed, but the underlying spirit of engagement persisted.

Recap

- ◆ Early reforms established Kerala's strong public education foundation
- ◆ Aided teachers organised against exploitation and erratic salaries
- ◆ Rural educators became politically conscious grassroots leaders
- ◆ Teacher activism influenced early communist mobilisation in Kerala
- ◆ Post-1957 reforms reduced disparities in teacher pay
- ◆ Education Bill resistance triggered the Liberation Struggle movement
- ◆ AKPCTA unified college teachers demanding payment parity
- ◆ The 1972 fee struggle led to the Direct Payment Agreement
- ◆ Student unions shaped campus politics and policy debates
- ◆ Youth groups expanded activism through welfare and mobilisation

- ◆ Faith-based organisations strengthened leadership and community engagement
- ◆ Contemporary youth movements adapt activism to digital spaces

Objective Questions

1. Which early nineteenth-century Travancore ruler declared free education a public right?
2. What was the primary grievance of aided school teachers before Kerala's state formation?
3. Which organisation represented aided college lecturers in Kerala from 1958 onward?
4. In which year did the AKPCTA-led two-month strike demanding direct salary payment take place?
5. What agreement in 1972 established direct payment of salaries to aided college teachers?
6. Which student organisation was formed in 1957 as the Congress-backed student wing?
7. Which Left-aligned student body was founded in 1970 and became a major force in Kerala?
8. What major issue united both teachers and students in the 1972 fee agitation?
9. Which youth organisation linked to the CPI(M) became known for community welfare work?
10. Which Christian youth organisation organised leadership training and service initiatives across dioceses?

Answers

1. Gowri Parvati Bayi
2. Irregular and unequal salaries paid by private managers
3. All Kerala Private College Teachers Association (AKPCTA)

4. 1971
5. The Direct Payment Agreement (DPA)
6. Kerala Students Union (KSU)
7. Students' Federation of India (SFI)
8. Demand for uniform and reduced college fees
9. Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI)
10. Kerala Catholic Youth Movement (KCYM)

Assignments

1. Examine the historical factors that shaped teachers' movements in Kerala and discuss how these movements contributed to the transformation of public education in the state.
2. Analyse the evolution of student organisations in Kerala since the 1950s and evaluate their role in shaping political consciousness and public policy.
3. Discuss the relationship between youth organisations and broader social movements in Kerala, with special attention to how groups like DYFI and KCYM have influenced community welfare and cultural identity.
4. Assess the combined impact of teacher, student, and youth movements on the development of equitable access to education in Kerala, using examples from major protests and policy reforms.

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UNIT

Cultural Awakening

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ comprehend the historical significance of libraries in democratising access to knowledge and fostering a reading public in Kerala
- ◆ critically examine the role of performing arts as instruments of early cultural reform and social intervention
- ◆ analyse the ways in which progressive literature, theatre, and cinema have shaped political awareness and collective consciousness.
- ◆ evaluate the contribution of these cultural movements to Kerala's broader process of social and cultural transformation
- ◆ assess how these movements supported Kerala's wider cultural transformation

Prerequisite

The cultural reformation that underpinned modern Kerala was the outcome of a sustained historical process rather than a sudden rupture, nurtured by institutions that disseminated ideas, debate, and imaginative expression into the public sphere. Central to this process were the library movement and the performing arts, which functioned as critical sites of cultural mediation. Libraries dismantled the social monopolisation of knowledge by providing ordinary people with access to books, periodicals, and public discussions, thereby cultivating habits of collective reading, political awareness, and critical enquiry. They enabled rural and urban populations alike to engage with contemporary social issues, question entrenched hierarchies,

and participate in informed civic discourse. In parallel, theatre and, subsequently, cinema emerged as powerful cultural forms that translated abstract ideas of reform into emotionally resonant and accessible narratives. Organisations such as the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) employed drama as a pedagogical and political tool to foreground questions of class, inequality, and social justice, while Malayalam cinema extended this cultural engagement by exploring the ethical, social, and psychological tensions of a society in transition. Together, these cultural practices played a decisive role in shaping public consciousness and consolidating Kerala's wider project of cultural transformation.

Keywords

Library Movement, KPAC, Progressive Literature, Cultural Reform, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham, Performing Arts, Malayalam Cinema

Discussion

5.5.1 The Grandhasala Prasthanam

In the story of Kerala's modern transformation, one movement runs quietly yet powerfully in the background: the library movement, known in Malayalam as *Grandhasala Prasthanam*. Born from grassroots activism and nurtured by the dreams of reformers, it played a defining role in shaping the reading habits, political awareness, and cultural refinement of the Malayali mind. More than a network of buildings and books, it was a civilisational turning point, a movement that took knowledge from elite hands and planted it firmly within the reach of the ordinary villager.

In pre-independent Kerala, reading was not widespread. Libraries, where they existed, were isolated, elite, and urban. Books were rare. Yet in the early decades of the twentieth century, something began to stir. The nationalist movements, the social reform waves led by figures like Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali, and the spread of

vernacular print culture all began to converge. In this setting, the library was not merely a storehouse of books; it became a tool of transformation.

By the 1910s and 1920s, small libraries and reading rooms began to spring up across Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. Sometimes set up in temple courtyards or local schools, these institutions were more than places to borrow books; they became meeting points, hubs of discussion, and platforms for self-education. The Congress party, even in its early stages, recognised their potential. Village-level resolutions were passed to establish libraries wherever possible, tying political awakening with the cultivation of knowledge.

But the early library movement faced hurdles. In Malabar, British colonial authorities looked suspiciously at these reading rooms, viewing them as breeding grounds for dissent. In Travancore and Cochin, funding was sporadic, and many libraries faded away within a few years. Yet the idea of a collective reading space

persisted. The formation of library committees and sanghams across regions attempted to give shape and structure to these scattered efforts.

A major breakthrough came with the establishment of the *Travancore Grandhasala Sangham* in 1945. It was inaugurated under the shadow of colonial power by the controversial Diwan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, but its vision was forward-looking and democratic. At the centre of this revival stood P.N. Panicker, a teacher from Neelamperoor with an unshakable belief in the power of books. Where others saw neglect, he saw possibility. Travelling from village to village, Panicker helped organise reading rooms, secured government grants, and trained local organisers. For him, a library was not just a room with books; it was a springboard for self-improvement and social dignity.

The Sangham's early years focused on building an ecosystem: sourcing books, training librarians, standardising catalogues, and rallying local support. By the time of Kerala's formation in 1956, the movement had matured into a statewide network. The *Kerala Grandhasala Sangham* took over as the apex body, bringing together hundreds of rural libraries under one umbrella. Affiliation meant access to grants, training, and a shared sense of purpose. The book, once a symbol of privilege, had become a tool of democracy.

The 1960s and 70s saw an explosion of library activity. Rural libraries popped up in villages, townships, and even small hamlets. Some began as bamboo huts with little more than a cupboard of books and a bench, but many grew into fully equipped institutions with reading halls, children's sections, and cultural clubs. Plays, poetry readings, debates, and local history projects thrived in their halls. Grandhasalas became the cultural soul of the village, as much as the temple or mosque once had been.

It wasn't just about books. These spaces played a deeper political and social role. For marginalised castes, women, and landless workers, libraries were among the first non-religious public spaces where they could gather as equals. They read newspapers together, debated issues, and even planned community initiatives. The library became a place of dignity.

The Emergency period of the mid-1970s saw a sharp decline in democratic functioning. The library movement, too, came under bureaucratic control. The Kerala Grandhasala Sangham was replaced by an arbitrary Control Board that functioned with little local accountability. Grassroots enthusiasm waned, volunteerism declined, and the once-vibrant network began to stagnate. This phase continued into the 1980s.

A revival effort emerged with the passing of the *Kerala Public Libraries Act* in 1989. This legislation aimed to restore a democratic structure to library administration, ensuring that library councils at the district and state levels would be elected from the grassroots. Slowly, the movement reclaimed its participatory spirit. In 1994, after a gap of nearly two decades, democratic elections were once again held within the library council system. While challenges remained, chiefly declining reading habits and underfunding, the structure was back in place.

Today, Kerala boasts one of the most extensive rural library networks in India. Over 8,000 libraries operate under the state's library council, and many more function independently. While digital media and changing lifestyles have led to a drop in footfall and book circulation in recent decades, these libraries continue to adapt. Many now offer computer literacy programmes, host online access points, and serve as information centres for government services. And yet, nostalgia alone cannot



sustain a movement. The decline in youth interest, poor funding for new books, and an over-reliance on ageing infrastructure remain serious issues. Some libraries function only a few hours a day. The culture of evening literary clubs and amateur theatre, once a staple of the Grandhasala scene, has dimmed in many places. There is an urgent need to redefine what a public library means in the digital age.

Still, it would be a mistake to dismiss the movement as merely a relic of Kerala's reformist past. In many places, libraries remain the only free, shared space where community members can sit together regardless of class or caste. They still host debates, organise workshops, and serve as emergency hubs during natural calamities. In districts like Malappuram, Kannur, and Kottayam, local bodies continue to fund and support these spaces, seeing their relevance not only in terms of books but as democratic institutions. P.N. Panicker's legacy lives on not just in statues or memorial lectures, but in every small, under-lit room where a young reader flips open a book for the first time or an old farmer pores over a newspaper to understand his rights. The *Grandhasala Prasthanam* was never just about literacy. It was about opening minds, building a thinking citizenry, and keeping alive the idea that knowledge, above all else, belongs to the people.

5.5.2 Jeeval Sahithyam

Kerala's cultural awakening drew momentum from many directions, but the shift within its literary sphere stands out as one of the most influential developments of the twentieth century. During the 1930s, a group of writers began to argue that literature should not remain detached from the lives of ordinary people. Their work gradually came to be known as Jeeval Sahithyam. The term suggested a form of writing that was alive, immediate, and socially grounded.

It encouraged authors to look closely at workers, peasants, and those pushed to the margins of society.

This movement questioned the idea that literature existed solely for aesthetic pleasure. It preferred themes drawn from everyday struggles and placed ethical responsibility at the heart of artistic creation. Writers such as K. Damodaran shaped much of this shift. His work drew from Marxist thought but remained firmly rooted in Malayalam literary traditions. He believed that literature could sharpen public understanding and help society interpret its own contradictions.

The emergence of this progressive current took place alongside other forms of cultural and social activity in Kerala. The library movement spread reading habits across villages and small towns. Reformers challenged caste practices that had shaped social life for centuries. Rationalist groups encouraged scientific thinking and public debate. Jeeval Sahithyam aligned itself with these larger trends, although it focused on the moral and imaginative dimensions of social change. It attempted to redefine how Malayalis perceived their world by using storytelling and poetry as instruments of reflection.

5.5.2.1 The Role of Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham in Shaping a Modern Cultural Sphere

The institutional phase of this progressive tradition emerged in 1981 with the formation of the Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham. The organisation grew out of the Deshabhimani Study Circle and came under the leadership of the poet Vylloppilli Sreedhara Menon. His involvement signalled that the group sought serious cultural engagement rather than narrow ideological advocacy. From its earliest meetings, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham expanded the boundaries

of its work. It welcomed writers, theatre practitioners, musicians, painters, and film enthusiasts. The intention was to create a broad cultural platform that could support artistic expression across many forms.

Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham treated culture as an area deeply connected to social change. It encouraged discussions on caste, gender, inequality, and communal divisions. Its activities promoted the idea that cultural production carries responsibility and that artists have a role in shaping the ethical character of society. Reading circles, theatre workshops, and public gatherings became regular features in both urban and rural settings. Small branch units grew across the state. Through these local groups, the organisation introduced cultural activity even in regions that had limited access to literary spaces.

The decentralised nature of Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham helped it reach audiences far beyond elite artistic circles. Villagers and students attended poetry events, stage performances, and discussions on contemporary issues. This widened participation ensured that cultural activity became a part of daily life rather than an occasional event restricted to cities. While other movements, such as the library network or the people's science movement, addressed knowledge and rational inquiry, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham shaped the emotional and interpretive aspects of public life.

The organisation also demonstrated an ability to reassess its own methods. As Kerala encountered rapid changes through globalisation and new media, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham debated how literature and art should respond to shifting realities. It encouraged younger artists to participate and frequently reassessed its cultural strategies. This reflective approach helped the movement maintain relevance even as patterns of reading and entertainment underwent transformation.

In recent years, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham has continued to express strong support for artistic freedom and democratic values. It responds to debates on censorship and cultural restrictions with statements that emphasise the importance of open expression. Its position is based on the belief that a society grows intellectually only when artists and writers can work without fear.

5.5.3 Reflections of Modernity: Drama (KPAC) and Cinema in Kerala's Cultural Revolution

Kerala's cultural revolution in the mid-twentieth century unfolded across many sites: the village reading room, the political street, the public meeting, and the cinema hall. Theatre and film together formed two of the most visible and persuasive arenas where ideas about modernity, class, and social justice were explored. The drama made the arguments theatrical and immediate. Film created images that entered private life. Both helped to remap public sensibilities in ways that ordinary party politics alone could not.

The Kerala People's Arts Club emerged as a decisive force in this process. Founded by young activists with ties to the Communist movement, KPAC built a repertory and repertoire that spoke directly to working people. Its plays combined narrative clarity with popular forms, songs, colloquial speech, stock characters, and direct address to make political ideas accessible to wide audiences. KPAC's founding in the early 1950s transformed theatre from a largely urban pastime into a mass instrument of persuasion and education.

The landmark play that announced this new theatre was *Ningalenne Communistakki* (*You Made Me a Communist*). Written by Thoppil Bhasi and first staged in the



early 1950s, it placed family tensions and land disputes within a larger politics of class awakening. The play's narrative follows ordinary lives as they confront feudal power, economic insecurity, and the appeal of organised labour. Its success was not merely aesthetic; it helped make communist ideas intelligible, respectable, and morally persuasive to audiences who had rarely encountered such arguments on stage. The play toured the countryside, stirred conversation in tea shops and village squares, and became a central cultural vehicle for political mobilisation.

Thoppil Bhasi himself stands at the intersection of drama and politics that defines the era. A committed activist and a careful craftsman of scenes, he wrote with an eye to popular reception. His scripts channelled ideological content through recognisable characters and domestic conflicts. That strategy reduced the distance between politics and lived experience. It also shaped a new dramatic realism, one in which social critique was embedded within narrative empathy rather than abstract polemic. Bhasi's role as playwright, director, and public intellectual helped secure theatre's place as a medium of social learning.

While KPAC dramatised social contradictions on wooden stages and in open grounds, Malayalam cinema developed its own idioms of modernity. Film had a head start in scale: cinema halls drew people from towns and villages and projected images that became part of popular memory. The film *Chemmeen*, released in 1965 and adapted from a major Malayalam novel, marked a turning point in cinematic ambition. It brought together regional narrative, social depth, and formal polish, winning national recognition.

The decade that followed saw the emergence of a more reflective, auteur-centred cinema. Filmmakers like Adoor

Gopalakrishnan introduced a language of restraint, attention to interior life, and an engagement with social change that differed from both mainstream melodrama and KPAC's didactic immediacy. The so-called New Wave in Malayalam cinema mixed influences from global art cinema with local concerns, producing films that asked how modernity was experienced within households, rather than merely imposed from outside. The film society movement and increased exposure to European and Japanese cinema helped nourish directors who wanted to explore mood, memory, and social rhythm rather than solely plot.

The relationship between KPAC theatre and Malayalam cinema was not competitive in simple terms. They shared personnel, aesthetics, and audiences. Many actors and writers moved between stage and screen. Stagecraft taught economy of gesture and clarity of speech, while cinema offered a larger visual register and a different scale of intimacy. Together, they formed a cultural circuit. A play that stirred public discussion could become a film or inspire cinematic motifs. A film could return ideas to the theatre in the form of adapted scenes, songs, or narratives. This cross-pollination helped entrench progressive themes across media.

Both theatre and film also responded to changing patterns of modern life. Land reform, migration, rising literacy, and the growth of factory and office employment reconfigured social relations. These transformations produced new dramatic subjects: marital tensions over wage insecurity, generational conflicts about work and education, the moral ambiguities of sudden upward mobility, and the persistence of caste and gender hierarchies despite material change. KPAC dramatised collective action and mobilisation, while cinema explored solitude, aspiration, and the psychic cost of social transition. Each medium framed modernity in ways that the other could not.

There were limits and debates. KPAC's close association with a single political movement made its theatre deeply effective in certain historical moments, yet vulnerable to charges of partisanship. Some critics argued that political theatre simplified complexity for propaganda. Filmmakers faced a different critique: as commercial pressures grew, a portion of Malayalam cinema turned to formula and sensationalism. The New Wave's achievements always ran the risk of being marginalised by a mainstream hungry for stars and box office returns. These tensions meant that the cultural revolution was never monolithic. It was contested, negotiated, and repeatedly reinvented. The long view shows cultural change to be cumulative. KPAC's mass theatre taught large audiences that politics could be discussed openly, that class analysis had moral force, and that culture could be a tool of education. Cinema expanded the representational range of Kerala's public life and allowed inner worlds, not only political programmes, to occupy social imagination. The two forms operated on different registers and on different

temporalities. Theatre created immediate public encounters, while film made durable images that circulated in private memory.

Modern Kerala's cultural map continues to bear the imprint of those decades. Contemporary directors still draw on the human scale that KPAC made familiar. Contemporary playwrights take cues from the theatrical economy of storytelling that made ideas legible to diverse publics. Audiences, more literate and mobile than before, still seek works that connect ethical questions with personal experience. In the end, drama and cinema together helped mould a modern public in Kerala: a public that expects narrative to explain social causes, that treats art as commentary, and that accepts cultural expression as a legitimate site of political claim-making. They reflected modernity not merely as technological change but as transformed social relations, altered moral claims, and renewed expectations about justice. In that sense, the stage and the screen were both instruments and mirrors of a transforming society.

Recap

- ◆ Libraries opened knowledge to Kerala's rural communities.
- ◆ Reading rooms encouraged debate and public participation.
- ◆ Library networks strengthened early cultural consciousness statewide.
- ◆ Performing arts brought social issues to common audiences.
- ◆ KPAC drama connected politics with everyday experiences.
- ◆ Plays shaped ethical awareness through accessible storytelling.
- ◆ Cinema expanded the scope of cultural imagination.
- ◆ New Wave films explored life under social change.

- ◆ Theatre and cinema reshaped Kerala's shared public space.
- ◆ Progressive literature deepened reflection on lived realities.
- ◆ Cultural institutions linked learning with democratic engagement.
- ◆ Libraries and the arts laid foundations for reform.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Travancore Grandhasala Sangham established?
2. Who is widely regarded as the Father of the Library Movement in Kerala?
3. What was the core idea behind Jeeval Sahithyam?
4. Which organisation evolved from the Deshabhimani Study Circle in 1981?
5. Name the landmark KPAC play written by Thoppil Bhasi in the early 1950s.
6. Which Malayalam film, released in 1965, marked a major breakthrough in cinematic recognition?
7. What role did rural libraries play in pre- and post-independence Kerala's social life?
8. Which writer significantly shaped the early progressive literary movement in Kerala?
9. What major influence shaped Kerala's New Wave cinema in the 1970s?
10. What key function did KPAC theatre serve in Kerala's cultural and political climate?

Answers

1. 1945
2. P. N. Panicker

3. To create literature grounded in everyday life and social reality
4. Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham
5. *Ningalenne Communistakki*
6. *Chemmeen*
7. They served as open public spaces for reading, discussion, and community engagement
8. K. Damodaran
9. Exposure to world cinema through film societies and international art films
10. It used theatre as a mass medium to spread social and political awareness

Assignments

1. Trace the evolution of the library movement in Kerala from early village reading rooms to the Kerala Grandhasala Sangham. Discuss the socio-political forces that shaped its growth.
2. Examine the role of Jeeval Sahithyam in redefining literary purpose in Kerala. How did it intersect with social reform movements of the early twentieth century?
3. Analyse the cultural impact of KPAC drama in shaping political consciousness in Kerala. How did *Ningalenne Communistakki* influence public imagination?
4. Discuss how Malayalam cinema and KPAC theatre together contributed to shaping ideas of modernity in Kerala. Highlight points of convergence and divergence.
5. Watch films like *Chemmeen*, *Elippathayam*, and *Neelakuzhil*, and write an essay on the value of such films as a source for understanding the social history of Kerala.

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BLOCK

Kerala Since Independence



UNIT

Towards the State of Kerala

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept of Kerala as a linguistic and cultural entity
- ◆ trace the origin and growth of the Aikya Kerala Movement
- ◆ examine the socio-political factors that led to the formation of the Kerala state in 1956

Prerequisite

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the idea of uniting all Malayalam-speaking regions into a single political entity began to take shape. A sense of belonging among Malayalis was fostered by their linguistic and cultural affinity. However, political boundaries did not reflect this unity. At that time, the Malayalam-speaking population was divided among three distinct administrative units: Malabar, which was part of the Madras Presidency under direct British rule; Travancore, a princely state with its own ruler; and Cochin, another princely state under hereditary monarchy. Furthermore, certain Malayalam-speaking areas, including present-day Kasaragod and Hosdurg taluks, were part of the South Canara district of the Madras Presidency. This fragmentation hindered the realisation of a united Kerala.

Keywords

Aikya Kerala, State Reorganisation Commission, Linguistic Reorganisation, Cultural Identity, State Formation, Travancore-Cochin, Malabar, Kerala State

Discussion

6.1.1. The Aikya Kerala Movement

By the 1920s, the idea of unifying the Malayalam-speaking regions into a single political unit had become a central aim of the Congress in Kerala. The Nehru Committee's recommendation of 1928 in favour of forming Kerala based on linguistic identity gave this goal formal recognition. From that point onward, the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee worked steadily to promote the cause, organising campaigns to secure public support. This vision became a central plank of the Congress's political agenda, and in the 1945 provincial assembly elections, it was presented to the people as a major promise.

At the same time, the political energies of the Communist Party were directed elsewhere. As Gurukul and Varier note, the Communists concentrated on peasant struggles during the difficult years of the post-war depression (1946-48), fighting against both economic exploitation and demanding distributive justice. These agitations frequently led to violent clashes and police repression. In response, the Government of India banned the Communist Party and its trade unions, forcing the movement to reassess its strategies.

The Communists gradually moved away from violent confrontation and embraced democratic forms of protest. They initiated large-scale campaigns to create a politically conscious public capable of active participation in parliamentary democracy. Electoral politics soon became their main route to political influence and power.

6.1.2 Towards the Formation of Kerala

The Provincial Congress pressed vigorously for the creation of a unified Kerala based on linguistic identity. In 1946, a crucial meeting of the Aikya Kerala Movement was held at Cheruthuruthi, under the leadership of K. P. Kesava Menon, who proposed this demand. Among its proponents was Kerala Varma VII (1870-1948), the ruler of Cochin from 1946 to 1947. He advocated for the unification of Travancore and Cochin, inspired by the national policy of political integration. This earned him the title *Aikya Keralam Thampuran* ("The King of United Kerala").

The following year, 1947, witnessed the historic Aikya Kerala Conference, presided over by K. Kelappan, which further consolidated public support for the cause. The issue soon reached the national level. At its Jaipur session in 1948, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) appointed a high-powered committee to examine the recommendations of the Dhar Committee regarding the formation of linguistic states.

On 1 July 1949, the princely states of Cochin and Travancore merged to form the Travancore-Cochin State (*Tiruvitamkur-Kochi*), T. K. Narayana Pillai became the first Chief Minister of the newly integrated state, presiding over its inaugural popular assembly. Panampalli Govinda Menon later served as its final Chief Minister before the ministry's collapse in 1956, which led to the imposition of President's Rule.

The decisive step towards linguistic reorganisation came with the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission,

which endorsed language as the primary criterion for state boundaries. This paved the way for the integration of the Malabar District and Kasaragod with Travancore-Cochin. On 1 November 1956, the state of Kerala was formally established, uniting Travancore, Cochin, the Malabar District of the Madras Presidency, and the Kasaragod region of South Canara into a single political entity defined by the Malayalam language.

6.1.2.1 The Congress and Linguistic States

In 1921, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) came into existence on a *linguistic basis*. The whole of the Malabar district and the states of Travancore and Cochin were brought under a single organisational framework. Its formation implied that the Indian National Congress accepted the principle of linguistic states, at least in theory. That same year, the first All Kerala Provincial Conference convened at Ottappalam. For the first time, delegates from all three regions attended a political gathering of such magnitude. The event created a sense of common identity among Malayalis.

By 1927, the Congress publicly declared its support for the reorganisation of provinces on linguistic lines. The Nehru Committee of 1928, established by the All Parties Conference to draft a model constitution for independent India, also recommended the creation of linguistic states. The Committee argued that such states would promote cultural traditions, facilitate educational progress through the use of the mother tongue, and encourage greater public participation in political life.

Between 1928 and 1947, the Congress reiterated this position on several occasions. In its 1945 election manifesto, it promised to

reorganise the states of India along linguistic lines “as far as possible” if the party came to power.

6.1.2.2 Demand for Aikya Keralam

An increased demand for a separate Malayalam-speaking state gradually became prominent during the 1920s and 1930s. The State People’s Conference and the All Kerala Kudiyan Conference, both held at Ernakulam in 1928, passed resolutions calling for the creation of a separate province of Kerala. Similar resolutions were adopted at political conferences held at Payyannur (1928), Badagara (1931), and Calicut (1935). In 1938, the Travancore District Congress Committee organised a political conference at Trivandrum under the chairmanship of Pattabhi Sitaramayya. It proposed a sub-federation comprising Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin. However, during British rule, and while Travancore and Cochin remained princely states, the formation of such a unified province was not feasible.

Following the Second World War, as the transfer of power in India became imminent, the demand for linguistic states regained momentum. The Maharaja of Cochin supported the proposal for a united Kerala. In a message to the Cochin Legislative Council on 29 July 1946, he addressed the necessity of forming such a state and expressed his readiness to merge Cochin into it for the welfare of the people.

This idea was consistently endorsed in the annual sessions of the Cochin State Praja Mandal, which formed in 1941. However, the Travancore government was less enthusiastic. Nevertheless, cultural organisations like the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishad supported the concept with great interest. In 1946, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee

established a sub-committee to promote the Aikya Kerala cause vigorously. It was chaired by K. P. Kesava Menon and included Vallathol Narayana Menon. The Maharaja of Cochin, Sri Kerala Varma II was the first to propose the idea of a united Travancore-Cochin state, in line with the Indian policy of integrating princely states.

6.1.2.3 The Aikya Kerala Conferences

The first major conference of the movement was held at Trichur in April 1947, presided over by K. Kelappan. Delegates from all parts of Kerala, representing various cultural and political bodies, attended. The demand for the early formation of Aikya Kerala was moved through a resolution by leader E. Moidu Maulavi. A 100-member Aikya Kerala Council was elected at this conference to work towards this objective.

Another convention was held at Alwaye in 1949 under the auspices of the Aikya Kerala Council. The participants were delegates from Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin. They created a smaller 15-member action committee, with K. Kelappan as President and K. A. Damodara Menon as Secretary. This committee presented a memorandum to the Dhar Commission demanding the formation of a Kerala state comprising Malabar, Travancore, Cochin, Coorg, Nilgiris, Gudalur, South Canara, Mahe, and Lakshadweep.

6.1.3 Integration of Travancore and Cochin

On 1 July 1949, Travancore merged with Cochin into the new state of Travancore-Cochin, to be called *Thiru-Kochi*. The rulers of both states willingly signed the Covenant of Integration. The Travancore ruler, Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma, became the *Rajapramukh* (constitutional head of

the state), while the Cochin ruler, Rama Varma Pareekshith Thampuran, abdicated his throne for the larger public good. Paravoor T. K. Narayana Pillai became the first Chief Minister.

The combined legislative assembly of the new state had 178 members: 120 from Travancore and 58 from Cochin. In the years that followed, the state was led by Chief Ministers C. Kesavan, A. J. John (the first elected CM), Pattom Thanu Pillai (the first non-Congress Malayali CM), and Panampilly Govinda Menon. In 1956, the state came under President's Rule.

6.1.4 Formation of Kerala State (1956)

Even though Travancore-Cochin was formed, the vision of Aikya Kerala remained incomplete. While V. P. Menon and T. K. Narayana Pillai considered it progress, others, including K. Kelappan, were not in favour. Kelappan resigned from the presidency of the Aikya Kerala Committee and raised objections to the retention of a Maharaja as the constitutional head of the state.

Political differences also emerged. Some Malabar Congress leaders supported the creation of a Southern State (*Dakshina Samsthanam*) by merging Travancore-Cochin with the Madras State. However, the Travancore-Cochin Pradesh Congress Committee and the Aikya Kerala Committee opposed this and continued to demand a united Malayalam-speaking state.

In December 1953, the Government of India appointed the States Reorganisation Commission, chaired by Syed Fazl Ali, to examine the question of linguistic reorganisation. The Government of Travancore-Cochin, the Aikya Kerala Committee, and several cultural bodies submitted memoranda supporting the formation of a united Kerala.

The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 brought this vision to reality. Four southern taluks of Travancore-Cochin, which is Tovala, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode, along with part of Shencottah taluk, were transferred to the Madras State

(now Tamil Nadu). The Malabar district and the Kasaragod taluk of South Canara district were merged with the rest of Travancore-Cochin to form the new state of Kerala. Hence, on 1 November 1956, the state of Kerala officially came into existence.

Recap

- ◆ Kerala was historically divided among Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin.
- ◆ Malayalam was the unifying cultural and linguistic force.
- ◆ The Aikya Kerala Movement aimed to bring all Malayalees under one administration.
- ◆ Congress leaders and cultural activists mobilised support for unification.
- ◆ Travancore and Cochin were merged in 1949 as a precursor.
- ◆ The States Reorganisation Commission favoured linguistic states.
- ◆ Malabar was added to Travancore-Cochin to form Kerala in 1956.
- ◆ Kerala was officially formed on 1st November 1956.

Objective Questions

1. What was the main goal of the Aikya Kerala Movement?
2. When was the state of Kerala formed?
3. Under which presidency was Malabar before 1956?
4. Which two princely states merged in 1949?
5. What role did language play in Kerala's formation?
6. Which cultural element supported Kerala's identity?
7. Which commission recommended the formation of linguistic states?
8. Name the regions that were united to form Kerala.
9. In which year were Travancore and Cochin merged?
10. Who were some key contributors to the Aikya Kerala Movement?

Answers

1. To unite all Malayalam-speaking regions into one state
2. 1st November 1956
3. Madras Presidency
4. Travancore and Cochin
5. It acted as a cultural and political unifying factor
6. The Malayalam language and shared traditions
7. The States Reorganisation Commission
8. Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin
9. 1949
10. K. Kelappan, Pattom Thanu Pillai (among others).

Assignments

1. Trace the evolution of the Aikya Kerala Movement from its inception to 1956.
2. Analyse the cultural factors that contributed to Kerala's unification.
3. Trace the historical development of linguistic movements in Kerala.
4. Discuss the impact of state formation on regional identity in Kerala.
5. Create a timeline showing the major events leading to Kerala's formation.

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UNIT

First Communist Ministry

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the formation and significance of the first Communist ministry in Kerala
- ◆ describe the major land reforms, educational policies, and administrative reforms introduced by the ministry
- ◆ identify the causes and major events of the Vimochana Samaram
- ◆ evaluate the impact of these reforms and the struggle on Kerala's socio-political development

Prerequisite

The Aikya Kerala Movement reflected the long-standing demand of Malayalam-speaking people for a separate state of their own. In 1946, the Provincial Congress began to push for the creation of a linguistic state through this movement. The demand gained further strength in 1949 when the princely states of Travancore and Cochin were merged to form the Travancore-Cochin State under the rule of the Raja of Travancore. After the fall of the Travancore-Cochin ministry in 1956, the region came under President's Rule. Meanwhile, the States Reorganisation Commission recommended that language should be the principal basis for reorganising state boundaries. As a result, on 1 November 1956, the state of Kerala was officially formed by merging Travancore, Cochin, the Malabar District of the Madras Presidency, and the Kasaragod region of South Canara into a single Malayalam-speaking state.

In Kerala's first Assembly election of March 1957, the Communist Party of India secured a majority with 60 seats, making history by forming the world's first

democratically elected Communist government under E. M. S. Namboodiripad. The new government introduced major reform measures such as the Agrarian Relations Bill, presented by K. R. Gouri Amma, and the Education Bill, introduced by Joseph Mundassery. Both generated strong resistance from conservative and religious groups, eventually leading to a mass agitation known as the *Vimochana Samaram* or Liberation Struggle. Following this unrest, the President of India, on the advice of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, dissolved the Communist Ministry on 31 July 1959. In the years that followed, most ministries in Kerala remained unstable and short-lived until political conditions began to stabilise in the 1980s. In this unit, we shall examine the developments that led to the formation of the First Communist Ministry in Kerala, followed by an analysis of its land reform initiatives, education policies, administrative measures, and finally the circumstances that culminated in the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle).

Keywords

Communist Ministry, Land Reforms, Educational Policy, *Vimochana Samaram*, EMS Namboodiripad, Agrarian Structure, Liberation Struggle, Administrative Reforms, Class Conflict

Discussion

6.2.1 Political Developments in Early Independent Kerala

By 1951, the Communist Party of India (CPI) had emerged as a formidable political force in Kerala. They positioned themselves in direct opposition to the Congress Party, which they characterised as a representative of feudal and capitalist interests. The CPI successfully mobilised small peasants and landless agricultural labourers. Many Congress leaders from the freedom movement continued within the party after independence, although some pursued alternative political paths. K. Kelappan contested the 1952 general elections from the Ponnani constituency as a candidate of the *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party* and secured a seat in the Lok Sabha. After completing his five-year term, Kelappan

withdrew from active politics and embraced Sarvodaya ideals. He went on to establish a rural institute at Tavanur and participated in the *Bhoodan* (land gift) movement in Kerala. T. M. Varghese, another Congress leader, became a minister in the cabinet of A. J. John. Accamma Cherian, often referred to as the ‘Jhansi Rani of Travancore’ for her role in the independence struggle, retired from the Congress after being denied a party ticket in 1952. She contested as an independent from Muvattupuzha and stood again in 1967, but was unsuccessful, eventually withdrawing from electoral politics altogether.

6.2.2 The First Election in Kerala

The first Legislative Assembly election in the newly formed state of Kerala took place in March 1957, while the state was under

President's Rule. The contest was primarily between the Congress and the CPI. Out of 126 constituencies, the CPI secured 60 seats, leading to the formation of a Communist government in Kerala. With the backing of a few independents, the CPI formed a ministry on 5 April 1957 under E. M. S. Namboodiripad (EMS). This government, with its 11-member cabinet, was historically significant as the first democratically elected Communist ministry in the world.

6.2.2.1 The First Communist Ministry

In the first Communist Ministry, C. Achutha Menon was entrusted with Finance, while K. P. Gopalan handled Industry. K. R. Gouri Amma, one of the most prominent women leaders of her time, served as Minister for Revenue and Excise. Joseph Mundassery was given charge of Education and Cooperation, and T. V. Thomas took responsibility for Labour, Employment, and Transport. P. K. Chathan Master oversaw Local Self-Government, while T. A. Majeed was in charge of Public Works. K. C. George handled Food and Forest, and V. R. Krishna Iyer, who later became a distinguished judge of the Supreme Court, managed the portfolios

of Irrigation, Prisons, Law, and Electricity. Health was administered by A. R. Menon.

Although the first Communist Ministry lasted only twenty-eight months, it significantly influenced the socio-economic development of Kerala. The government introduced several progressive measures during this brief period. Land reforms aimed at curbing the dominance of large landlords stood at the centre of their agenda. Administrative restructuring, decentralisation, education, health, and labour were important fields that received considerable attention. These efforts also included the establishment of minimum wage standards.

Two major legislative initiatives generated intense debate in Kerala's political and social circles. A significant reform initiative came on 18 December 1957, when Minister K. R. Gowri Amma introduced the *Agrarian Relations Bill* in the Assembly. The bill sought to abolish the *janmi* (landlord) system and restructure land ownership in favour of tenants and agricultural labourers. Such radical legislation, however, provoked sharp resistance. The Congress, along with various anti-Communist upper-caste, upper-class, and religious organisations, united to oppose



E.M.S Nambooriripad taking the oath of office as the first Cheif Minister of Kerala before Governor B. Ramakrishna Rao on April 5, 1957

the ministry. The Catholic Church, the Nair Service Society, and the Indian Union Muslim League were among the major opponents. Despite intense opposition, the bill was passed on 10 June 1959. Yet political dissent and agitation intensified across the state in what came to be known as the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle). After months of unrest, and on the advice of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of India invoked Article 356 of the Constitution, dismissing the state government and dissolving the Legislative Assembly on 31 July 1959.

The Agrarian Relations Bill sought to place ceilings on land ownership, thereby reducing the power of traditional landlords. This move was widely welcomed by peasants and landless workers but strongly resisted by landed elites. The second initiative, the Education Bill, attempted to regulate private educational institutions, particularly those under church management, by bringing them under state supervision.

6.2.3 Land Reform

The Land Reform Act, introduced during the post-independence period, brought about fundamental changes in the agrarian economy and society of Kerala. Kerala became the first state in India to abolish landlordism, known as the *Janmi system*, through an agrarian reform. This achievement was not solely the result of government action but was connected to the growth of leftist movements in Kerala and the continuous peasant struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. In regions like north Malabar, peasant organisations had emerged during the 1930s with a strong demand to abolish landlordism. Their continued agitations and organised movements created the social and political conditions that made land reforms possible after independence.

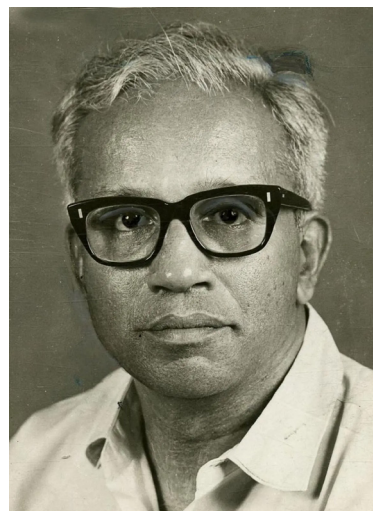


Fig:6.1.2 E. M. S. Namboodiripad

Land reform was declared the first and foremost priority of the Communist Government formed in 1957 under E. M. S. Namboodiripad. The party announced that all cultivable government wastelands would be distributed to landless and poor peasants. Another step was to restore evicted tenants to their holdings, allowing them to regain their right to cultivate. The government further pledged to introduce an agrarian reform law. This legislation was designed to establish fair rents, secure tenure for tenants, set ceilings on land ownership, and redistribute surplus land among the landless.

Stay of Eviction Proceedings Ordinance of 1957

Responding to the long-standing demands of peasant organisations, the Communist Government introduced measures that directly benefited tenants and landless labourers. Within just one week of assuming office, the government issued the *Kerala Stay of Eviction Proceedings Ordinance of 1957*. This legislation provided protection to tenants and hutment dwellers by preventing

their eviction until a reform bill was finalised. The Ordinance suspended all eviction proceedings, whether initiated by landlords or the courts. It extended its coverage to all categories of tenants, including new forms of leases and *kudikidappukar* (hutment dwellers). This not only provided relief to the oppressed tenant population.

The Ministry then moved forward by drafting the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, which was introduced in the Legislative Assembly on 21 December 1957 by the then Revenue Minister, K. R. Gouri Amma. The Bill represented a turning point in the history of land legislation in post-Independence India. It was more radical than previous attempts, addressing not just tenancy security but also land redistribution. Through this Bill, the Communist Government sought to break the backbone of landlordism, transform rural society, and ensure social justice for peasants and agricultural labourers.

6.2.3.1 The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill

The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill restricted the conditions under which landlords could repossess land, limiting them to cases such as the establishment of religious institutions, the construction of residential buildings, or personal cultivation. The Bill also introduced a system of fair rent specifically for double-crop rice fields. It set a ceiling of fifteen acres per adult or household of five members. Land belonging to religious and charitable institutions was exempt from these provisions. The government exempted land for public purposes, accepted the surrender of surplus land with compensation, and invalidated land transfers made after certain stipulated dates.

Two bodies, the Land Board and the Land Tribunal, established under the provisions of the Bill, were designed to ensure that people's representatives participated in the

implementation of the Act. Land surrendered to the government was redistributed by the Land Board to landless individuals and those whose holdings fell below the legal ceiling. The Land Board consisted of three government officials and members elected by the state legislature.

The Bill was initially passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly on 10 June 1959 and sent for the President's assent on 27 July 1959. However, the President did not approve the Bill, and the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, directing that amendments be made. This controversy led to the resignation of the EMS Ministry amidst the Liberation Struggle. Then, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP)-Congress alliance won the next Assembly elections, and a coalition government assumed power on 22 February 1960. The new government redrafted the Bill, which was passed again on 15 October 1960. Nevertheless, judicial interventions by the Kerala High Court and Supreme Court limited its application, particularly in regions under the Ryotwari system, such as Hosdurg, Kasaragod, and parts of Travancore.

In December 1963, the Kerala Legislative Assembly amended the Bill, and the revised Kerala Land Reform Act was finally approved by the President on 31 December 1963. A further development occurred in 1969 when the United Front Ministry resigned due to internal differences. A new coalition government, led by the Communist Party of India (CPI), came into power, and C. Achutha Menon became Chief Minister. Under this administration, the Kerala Land Reform Amendment Act of 1969 was enacted, abolishing the traditional Janmi system effective from 1 January 1970.

The abolition of the Janmi system, marked by the slogan 'land to the tiller', long championed by peasant movements, was realised. Over 2.7 million tenants became the rightful owners of the land they



had long cultivated, rather than remaining under the exploitative Janmi landlords. This reform restructured land ownership. People's committees, composed of Panchayat members and representatives from mass organisations, were established to supervise the implementation of the land reform measures.

6.2.4 Education Policy

Soon after assuming office, the government announced its intention to establish a statutory framework aimed at improving general education and the conditions of teachers. As part of this programme, the Kerala Education Bill was introduced in the State Assembly on 7 July 1957. The primary purpose of the Bill was to serve as protective legislation for teachers employed in privately managed schools. Joseph Mundassery, the Education Minister, emphasised that the Bill sought to safeguard teachers' rights and improve their working conditions. The Government acknowledged that private educational institutions had played a major role in promoting education in Kerala, whether motivated by religious proselytisation, social service, or other aims. The proposed Education Act included measures to regulate the appointment and service conditions of private school teachers, authorised the government to intervene in cases of mismanagement, allowed direct payment of teachers' salaries by the government, and permitted the state to take over schools when necessary for the public interest.

The Education Act mandated that the government would provide free and compulsory education to all children within a specified timeframe. It stipulated that the state would supply free noonday meals, clothing, textbooks, and other necessary writing materials to students. The collection of tuition fees at the primary and upper primary levels was abolished, thereby aiming

to remove financial barriers to education for all sections of society.

6.2.5 Vimochana Samaram (Liberation Struggle)

The introduction of the Education Bill, along with the Agrarian Relations Bill, faced strong opposition from political parties and religious communities, especially the Nairs and Christian groups. This resistance culminated in the *Vimochana Samaram*, or 'Liberation Struggle', which began on 12 June 1958. The movement, led by Mannath Padmanabhan, head of the Nair Service Society (NSS), gained support from all non-Communist political parties in Kerala, including the Congress, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), and the Muslim League. The opposition claimed that the Communist Government sought to attack the autonomy of society, undermine religious and social freedoms, and threaten democratic values. The movement organised widespread *hartals* (strikes) and public meetings demanding the resignation of the Communist Ministry.

The agitation intensified as picketing of government offices and schools increased, accompanied by frequent school closures. Mannath Padmanabhan appealed for united resistance from all communities, irrespective of caste or creed, to force the dismissal of the Communist Government. The NSS specifically opposed the land reform measures, demanding an income-based ceiling on land ownership, while the Church's opposition was primarily directed against the provisions of the Education Bill. The conflict persisted for fifty days and ultimately led to the dismissal of the Communist Ministry. According to the Governor's report submitted to the President of India, the constitutional machinery in Kerala had broken down due to the agitation.

Following the recommendation of the Union Cabinet, the President of India dismissed the Ministry and dissolved the State Assembly on 31 July 1959, invoking Article 356 of the Indian Constitution. This event marked the first occasion in India's history where a democratically elected government was dismissed under constitutional provisions.

6.2.6 Political Shifts and Coalition Governments in Kerala

Following the dismissal of the first Communist ministry in 1959, Kerala entered a long phase of coalition politics. In 1960, a coalition of the Congress, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), and the Muslim League assumed power. Pattom A. Thanu Pillai of the PSP took on the position of Chief Minister, with R. Sankar of the Congress as Deputy Chief Minister. However, Pattom Thanu Pillai resigned on 25 September 1962, paving the way for R. Sankar to become Chief Minister. Soon after, the members of the Praja Socialist Party resigned. During Sankar's tenure, a diluted version of the *Land Reforms Bill* was passed in 1963. His ministry survived until September 1964, when it was brought down by a Congress-led no-confidence motion moved by P.K. Kunju, which was supported by fifteen Congress members of the assembly headed by K. M. George. The defeated Congressmen, under the leadership of K. M. George, formed a new party named the Kerala Congress.

After the fall of the Sankar ministry, President's rule was once again imposed on Kerala. It was during this time that the

Communist Party of India faced a split into two factions, which came to be known as the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), emerging in 1964. The split within the Communist Movement of India was not entirely based on theoretical differences. A majority of the workers and sympathisers, especially in Bengal and Kerala, sided with the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Following President's rule in 1964, Kerala witnessed fresh Assembly elections in 1965. However, no party achieved a majority in the Assembly, so President's rule continued for some time. After an abortive election that resulted in President's rule, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Muslim League, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), the *Karshaka Thozhilali* Party, and the Kerala Socialist Party formed a coalition government after the March 1967 general election, with E. M. S. Namboodiripad (EMS) as Chief Minister. This ministry passed a revised *Land Reforms Bill* in 1969, which became the *Land Reforms Act*. However, internal differences led to EMS's resignation in October 1969. The 1970s and 1980s also witnessed ongoing political instability in Kerala. C. Achutha Menon (CPI) then formed a new coalition government and oversaw the landmark implementation of the 1969 Act, which abolished the *janmi* landlord system in January 1970, liberating around seven lakh tenants. Yet, national legal constraints prevented the full redistribution of agricultural land to the tillers, leaving the long-standing slogan "land to the tillers" unfulfilled.

Recap

- ◆ Formation of Kerala as a state in 1956 and the first general elections in 1957.
- ◆ Emergence of the Communist Party of India (CPI) as a major force; electoral victory.
- ◆ Kerala became the first Indian state to elect a Communist government through democratic means.
- ◆ EMS Namboodiripad was the first Chief Minister of this ministry (1957-59).
- ◆ Land reforms aimed to abolish feudal land ownership and protect tenant farmers.
- ◆ Opposition from landlords and propertied classes.
- ◆ The Education Bill attempted to bring equity and regulation to private education.
- ◆ Controversy over state control vs. church-run institutions.
- ◆ Both reforms triggered strong opposition from influential social groups.
- ◆ *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle)- Coalition of religious groups, landlords, Congress, and other opposition factions.
- ◆ It saw widespread civil unrest and campaigns against the EMS government.
- ◆ The Central Government dismissed the Communist ministry in 1959.

Objective Questions

1. Who was Kerala's first Chief Minister from the Communist Party?
2. In which year was the first Communist government formed in Kerala?
3. Name the party that formed the first Communist Ministry.
4. What was the main aim of Kerala's land reforms under the Communist ministry?
5. Which controversial bill targeted private educational institutions?
6. Which Article of the Constitution was used to dismiss the Communist ministry?

7. Name the ordinance issued to prevent the eviction of tenants in 1957.
8. Who was the Finance Minister in the first Communist Ministry of Kerala?
9. Who was the Minister for Education and Cooperation in the first Communist Ministry?
10. Who was the Revenue Minister in the first Communist Ministry?
11. Which movement demanded the dismissal of the Communist Ministry in Kerala?

Answers

1. E.M.S. Namboodiripad
2. 1957
3. Communist Party of India (CPI)
4. To abolish feudal land ownership and protect tenants.
5. The Education Bill of 1957
6. Article 356
7. Stay of Eviction Proceedings Ordinance
8. Achutha Menon
9. Joseph Mundassery
10. K.R. Gouri Amma
11. *Vimochana Samaram*

Assignments

1. Evaluate the successes and failures of the first Communist Ministry in Kerala.
2. Examine the provisions and controversies surrounding the Education Bill of 1957.



3. Write a short note on *Vimochana Samaram*.
4. Assess the impact of early land reforms on Kerala's agrarian structure.
5. Conduct fieldwork on popular and social memories about the first Communist Ministry of Kerala through oral history interviews.

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UNIT

Kerala Model Development

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the idea and significance of the Kerala Model of Development
- ◆ recognise Kerala's achievements in health, education, and population control
- ◆ explain the role of government policies and political participation in Kerala's development
- ◆ identify how public health services and social welfare improved the quality of life in Kerala

Prerequisite

Kerala was formed on 1 November 1956 by merging Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar under the linguistic reorganisation of states, as Malayalam was the common language. After independence, Kerala focused strongly on improving education, public health, and social welfare. Even though the state did not grow quickly in terms of industries or per capita income, it achieved remarkable progress in human development. Kerala's high literacy rate, low infant mortality, longer life expectancy, and controlled population growth gained worldwide attention. This special combination of strong social development despite limited economic growth is known as the Kerala Model of Development. In the 1990s, decentralisation reforms and the People's Planning Campaign, guided by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, further strengthened local self-governments, making development more democratic and people-centred

Keywords

Kerala Model, Human Development Index, Public Health, Education, Social Justice, Welfare State, Left Politics, Decentralisation

Discussion

6.3.1 Understanding the Kerala Model of Development

The Kerala Model of Development refers to a unique approach followed in Kerala that prioritises social well-being over rapid industrial or economic growth. This model focuses on improving people's lives through high literacy, good healthcare, long life expectancy, low infant mortality, and controlled population growth. It emerged from development studies in the 1970s, which highlighted that progress should include land reforms, poverty reduction, child welfare, and universal education. Economists like K. N. Raj and Amartya Sen strongly supported the use of human development indicators to guide policy-making in the state. With major reforms such as the redistribution of land, strong public education, and social security systems like pensions and employment programmes, Kerala achieved results similar to those of many developed countries despite having a lower per capita income. These achievements are linked to the state's politically aware society, active social movements, and continuous government commitment to welfare. Although Kerala shares some similarities with states like West Bengal, its economic, social, and political progress remains distinctive, giving rise to what is now widely recognised as the Kerala Model.

Kerala has frequently been highlighted for achieving high social development indicators,

including literacy, health outcomes, and social equity, despite its historically low per-capita income and limited industrial expansion. These achievements have attracted national and international attention, leading many observers to regard the state as an exemplary model of social progress. However, K. Saradamoni argues that the Kerala Model has acquired a “halo,” a form of celebratory narrative that tends to obscure the complexities, struggles, and contradictions underlying Kerala's social achievements. According to Saradamoni, this romanticised image risks giving the impression that Kerala's progress is both effortless and replicable, without considering the social and historical conditions that produced it. For her, Kerala's achievements did not emerge suddenly or solely through top-down state initiatives. Instead, they are the cumulative product of long-term social reform, popular struggles, and community mobilisation. Reform movements among various caste groups, missionary interventions in education, and early political organisations contributed to the transformation of Kerala's social environment. This historically embedded culture of critical awareness, public debate, and organised resistance shaped the trajectory that later came to be celebrated as the Kerala Model.

When economists and social scientists speak of the “Kerala Model,” they refer to a development trajectory that stands out not just in India, but globally. The term itself,

KERALA MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT SALIENT FEATURES

- ◆ Priority to human development
- ◆ High literacy and education
- ◆ Strong public healthcare system
- ◆ Low infant mortality & high longevity
- ◆ Land reforms & social equity
- ◆ Welfare-oriented state policies
- ◆ Decentralised governance
- ◆ High political awareness
- ◆ Controlled population growth
- ◆ Support from Gulf remittances

as Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier note in *History of Kerala*, originated from a set of policy recommendations prepared in the 1970s by a UN study team headed by economist K. N. Raj. The central idea was simple but transformative: equitable growth should be anchored in land reforms, poverty alleviation, universal education, and child welfare.

Over the decades, the phrase “Kerala Model” has come to denote a wider set of state-led interventions that produced unusually high human development indicators despite relatively low per capita income. As Gurukkal and Varier explain, this combination includes high literacy rates, wide access to healthcare, low infant mortality, long life expectancy, and one of the world’s best-controlled population growth rates. These achievements were not accidental; they resulted from deliberate state priorities such as basic education, public health, land redistribution, and social security in the form of employment guarantees and pensions.

By the late 20th century, Kerala’s performance was puzzling to economists. How could a state with low income, high unemployment, and persistent budget deficits record development indicators comparable to, and in some cases surpassing, those of advanced economies? This paradox is what gave the Kerala Model its distinct identity in development studies literature. As Gurukkal and Varier observe, the state had “a politically active, highly literate and healthy population” despite economic limitations and had narrowed gender and access gaps in higher education more successfully than most parts of India.

Bill McKibben, the American anthropologist and environmentalist, described Kerala in almost admiring disbelief. He noted that with an income of less than \$300 per capita, Kerala nevertheless had infant mortality rates lower than America’s, literacy rates among the world’s highest, and a birth rate that was not only below America’s but falling faster.

An important, if often understated, part of the story is the Gulf migration boom of the 1970s and beyond. As large numbers of Keralites migrated to West Asian countries for work, the remittances they sent home became a lifeline for the state's economy. This influx of private income, as Gurukkal and Varier point out, provided the Left-led government with the financial base to maintain and expand its social development programmes. Without such revenue, sustaining high literacy rates, low infant mortality, universal healthcare access, and enhanced life expectancy would have been a much greater challenge.

Equally crucial was the social environment in which these policies were implemented: high political participation, grassroots activism, and a cadre of leaders committed to public welfare. It is argued that the Kerala Model, therefore, is not just about indicators and policies; it is about a political culture in which development is seen as a shared social responsibility. A critical approach is required when studying Kerala's developmental experience. Without such an approach, one may overlook the structural tensions that persist beneath the surface, particularly issues such as unemployment, economic stagnation, and rising social anxieties. The introduction thus frames Kerala not as a flawless model, but as a society whose significant social successes coexist with equally significant vulnerabilities.

6.3.1.1 Historical Foundations of Kerala's Social Development

A key element in understanding the Kerala Model lies in examining the historical foundations that prepared the ground for the state's later achievements in literacy, health, and social equity. Some historians argue that Kerala's development trajectory cannot be viewed as an isolated post-independence phenomenon; rather, it is anchored in a

long tradition of social reform, educational expansion, and community-level mobilisation that began in the 19th century.

Various caste and community organisations, such as the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement among the Ezhavas, the Nair Service Society (NSS), and Christian missions, played a pioneering role in promoting literacy and modern education. Missionaries established schools, encouraged mass education for marginalised groups, and fostered new social aspirations. It is argued that these interventions gradually eroded older caste rigidities and opened up opportunities for wider participation in public life. These reform movements were not merely religious or cultural initiatives but acted as vehicles of social empowerment. They challenged entrenched hierarchies, spread modern political ideas, and helped create a literate and socially conscious population. This process laid the groundwork for what later became visible in Kerala's literacy achievements, high social awareness, and democratic participation.

6.3.2 Parameters of the Kerala Model of Development

The Kerala Model of Development is identified as a development pattern that prioritises human development indicators over conventional economic growth indicators. Kerala has recorded high achievements in sectors such as education, health, and social welfare, despite its comparatively low per capita income and limited industrial base. This development experience has drawn national and international attention due to the coexistence of advanced human development standards and modest economic performance.

One main reason for this success has been attributed to Kerala's long history of

public action and social reform. Various social reform movements contributed to the reduction of caste-based discrimination and the spread of education. Post-independence governments continued to invest in welfare schemes, including universal access to education, strengthened healthcare networks, subsidised food distribution, pension schemes, and housing programmes. The government also invested heavily in welfare measures such as public hospitals, government schools, pensions, food security, and housing. These services were made available in both villages and urban areas. Because of such efforts, Kerala achieved better demographic results, such as low birth rates, low death rates, and slower population growth. This shows that health and education reached ordinary people.

Kerala has been known for its high standard of living even though it is not a rich industrial state. People generally have access to good housing, clean drinking water, electricity, sanitation, and better food. One of the major reasons behind this improvement has been identified as the large number of Keralites working abroad, especially in Gulf countries, since the 1970s. The money they send back home (remittances) helps families spend more on education, healthcare, and other needs. This money also supports the state's economy and reduces poverty.

Education and healthcare remain the strongest pillars within this development structure. Kerala maintains the highest literacy rate in India due to widespread schooling facilities and a social commitment towards education.

6.3.2.1 Literacy and Educational Expansion

The expansion of literacy occupies a central position in the narrative of Kerala's development. The statistical record shows a

dramatic rise in literacy, from 15% in 1901 to 70.4% in 1961, with further increases in the decades that followed. These figures demonstrate how Kerala achieved near-universal literacy well before most Indian states began to close the educational gap.

As we discussed earlier, some scholars have argued that the exceptional rise in literacy is not the result of a single reform or policy initiative; instead, it is the cumulative product of missionary efforts, princely-state initiatives, and mass political mobilisations. Missionaries and reform movements established schools across regions and communities, especially in Travancore and Cochin, and encouraged instruction even among lower castes who had historically been denied educational access. This democratisation of education cultivated a culture of learning that eventually permeated all levels of society. The literacy movement, far from being confined to formal institutions, developed into a widely shared social aspiration. Households increasingly saw schooling as a means of securing dignity, mobility, and modern identity. This shift significantly altered Kerala's social atmosphere.

The growth in literacy had profound political consequences. A literate population became more capable of understanding public issues, participating in political processes, and holding the government accountable. Literacy and political consciousness reinforce each other, creating a dynamic in which citizens continuously evaluate state policies and assert their rights. Kerala's literacy achievements are foundational to the Kerala Model because they broadened access to schooling across caste and community lines, produced a socially aware and politically engaged population, created high expectations of state service delivery, and provided the skills necessary for later achievements in health

and social welfare. Hence, it can be argued that Kerala's educational progress is not merely one component of the model; it is the enabling force that shaped all subsequent dimensions of the state's social development.

6.3.2.2 Public Health System and Healthcare Infrastructure in Kerala

Kerala's health indicators such as low infant mortality, high life expectancy, and near-universal access to basic care, have long been cited as evidence of the state's social advancement. The state's healthcare system, comprising an extensive network from primary health centres to advanced hospitals, has resulted in high life expectancy and low infant and maternal mortality rates. These indicators place Kerala on par with global standards of health achievement. Kerala shows a favourable sex ratio, indicating improved survival and social status for women. The state has the highest sex ratio in India, meaning more females per 1,000 males. Women in Kerala have better education, better healthcare, and greater participation in social and political life. However, there is also a contradiction in Kerala's development pattern. The state still has high unemployment, and the government often faces financial pressure. Yet, Kerala continues to maintain strong human development because the people are politically active and raise their voices for their rights. Trade unions, public organisations, and ordinary citizens participate in decision-making and hold the government accountable for welfare needs.

Kerala's outstanding health indicators are the result of a well-planned and extensive public health system that has evolved over decades. The state has implemented a three-tier healthcare structure comprising Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Community Health

Centres (CHCs), and district hospitals, ensuring that essential medical services reach both rural and urban populations. Preventive care, maternal and child health services, and immunisation programmes have been central to reducing infant and maternal mortality rates, contributing significantly to increased life expectancy. Kerala has also invested in human resources, training health workers, nurses, and doctors, and promoting community-based initiatives that encourage health awareness and participation. Local self-governments, particularly following decentralisation reforms, have played a crucial role in managing and monitoring health services, integrating community feedback, and implementing health campaigns tailored to local needs. This combination of accessible healthcare infrastructure, preventive and curative services, and strong community engagement explains why Kerala consistently achieves health outcomes comparable to those of developed countries, despite its modest per capita income.

The widespread availability of health services has contributed significantly to Kerala's demographic outcomes. Improvements in maternal health, child survival, and disease control were made possible because medical facilities were located within reachable distance for most communities. However, scholars like Saradamoni argue that while Kerala's health achievements are impressive, they should not be idealised or assumed to be uniformly effective. The health sector, like other aspects of the Kerala Model, carries structural weaknesses that tend to be overshadowed by celebratory narratives.

Overcrowding in government hospitals has been identified as one of the issues. Large patient loads put continuous pressure on staff and facilities, leading to long waiting times and inadequate attention for complex medical

issues. Despite the wide coverage, the quality and efficiency of services often fall short of expectations. Many government institutions lack adequate diagnostic equipment and specialised services. While primary care is widely accessible, access to advanced or preventive care remains limited, especially in rural areas. It is argued that this gap weakens the effectiveness of the health system and pushes many patients towards the private sector.

Another important concern is the increasing reliance on private hospitals, which offer advanced services but at significantly higher costs. This shift reflects a broader tension within Kerala's developmental model: although public services exist, their limitations encourage households to seek private alternatives, often at a financial strain. Critics argue that this growing dependence on private institutions could undermine the egalitarian nature of Kerala's health system in the long run. This represents a contradictory divergence between Kerala's welfare-oriented image and the lived realities of its population.

Another point of discussion is that, since Kerala's citizens are literate and politically conscious, they expect efficient and reliable health services. This expectation creates constant pressure on the government but also leads to dissatisfaction when institutional weaknesses become apparent. Some scholars argue that Kerala's health sector represents both the strengths and the internal strains of the Kerala Model, which demonstrates impressive social achievements while simultaneously revealing structural weaknesses that need serious attention.

6.3.2.3 Gulf Remittances

While Kerala's industrial development and per capita income remain modest compared to other Indian states, its economic structure has played a crucial role in sustaining high social development. Agriculture, small-scale

industries, the service sector, and trade form the backbone of the local economy, but a defining feature of Kerala's economic context has been the migration of workers to Gulf countries, particularly from the 1970s onwards. Millions of Keralites found employment in construction, services, and professional sectors in West Asia, sending substantial remittances back home. These remittances became a vital source of private income, significantly increasing household purchasing power and enabling investments in education, healthcare, housing, and small businesses. At the state level, remittance inflows provided indirect support to public welfare programmes, allowing the government to fund social development initiatives even amid high unemployment and budgetary constraints. The Gulf migration phenomenon, therefore, not only enhanced family welfare and social mobility but also reinforced the Kerala Model by supplementing the state's capacity to provide education, health, and social security to its citizens, creating a unique synergy between migration-led income and human development outcomes.

6.3.2.4 Decentralisation of Power and People's Planning

A major pillar of the Kerala Model of Development is the effective decentralisation of power and governance, which enables ordinary citizens to participate in decision-making and developmental planning. Kerala's socio-political foundations for decentralised governance can be traced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the regions of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, although administratively separate under British rule, experienced similar social inequalities characterised by upper-caste dominance. The socio-religious reform movements led by reformers such as Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and others promoted equality, social justice, and the rights and duties of the people.



These grassroots movements cultivated strong political consciousness and civic engagement, thereby laying a solid foundation for devolving governance to lower levels of society. As public political participation increased, the demand for greater access to governance and development processes strengthened, ultimately shaping Kerala's unique path towards decentralisation.

After the formation of the State of Kerala in 1956, efforts were initiated to restructure governance systems to reflect democratic aspirations. The Administrative Reform Committee of 1957, chaired by the first Chief Minister, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, proposed the establishment of panchayats and municipalities with administrative and revenue-related responsibilities. Based on these recommendations, the Kerala Panchayat Act 1960, the Kerala Municipalities Act 1960, and the Kerala Corporation Act 1961 were enacted to unify laws governing local bodies across the state. The first elections to 922 panchayats were held in 1963, marking an initial step towards devolution. However, decentralised governance remained limited in its scope for several decades, as panchayats and municipalities were largely confined to civic administration. Long gaps between subsequent elections and a lack of political consensus further delayed effective decentralisation during the pre-1990s period.

Meaningful empowerment of Local Self-Governments began only after the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992, which mandated the institutional strengthening of rural and urban local bodies. Kerala initially delayed the implementation of these constitutional reforms due to political and administrative uncertainties. However, after considerable public pressure and strong criticism of the first draft Bill, the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 and the Kerala Municipalities Act 1994 were finally enacted, incorporating

wider powers and clearer responsibilities for local institutions. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were formally established in a three-tier structure, and the first elections under the new system were held in September 1995. Consequently, decentralisation in Kerala gained strong legal backing and became an essential component of public administration.

A significant transformation occurred in 1996 when the State Government launched the landmark People's Plan Campaign (PPC) to strengthen participatory democracy. Around 35–40 per cent of the State Plan funds were devolved to Local Self-Governments, enabling them to design, implement, and evaluate development projects according to local priorities. This extensive devolution of funds, functions, and functionaries marked a paradigm shift in planning practice. The Campaign ensured that development was not dictated solely by officials or elected representatives; instead, people were involved through grama sabhas in rural areas and ward committees in urban centres at every stage of the planning process. It also promoted transparency, accountability, and empowerment by creating new institutional mechanisms, training programmes, and participatory methodologies to support local planning.

Kerala became one of the first Indian states to genuinely operationalise the constitutional mandate of decentralisation, and several major initiatives were launched to support this transition. These included: (1) a Local Self-Government Action Plan, (2) the Modernising Government Programme (MGP), (3) a Decentralisation Support Programme, and (4) capacity-building projects aimed at strengthening administrative efficiency and human resource development. Among these, the Modernising Government Programme played a crucial role, with one-third of its initiatives specifically focused on enhancing the functioning of Local Self-Governments,

improving institutional capabilities, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of decentralised governance reforms.

The People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning (PCDP) represented a major evolution in Kerala's development discourse, emerging during a period when concerns were raised about the limitations and stagnation of the Kerala Model. It revived the historical legacy of mass mobilisation and collective responsibility by encouraging people, regardless of caste, religion, class, or political affiliation, to participate actively in planning and monitoring development activities. The programme covered all tiers of local governance, including 990 village panchayats, 152 block panchayats, 14 district panchayats, 52 municipalities, and three municipal corporations. For the first time in India's post-Independence history, nearly 40 per cent of the Ninth Five-Year Plan funds were reserved for projects formulated at sub-state levels. Training modules, handbooks, and support systems were created to ensure scientific, inclusive, and efficient planning. Through this, the planning process in Kerala shifted from being bureaucratic and centralised to being people-centred and participatory.

6.3.3 Political Continuity and its Role in Welfare Policies

Since the 1950s, Kerala has experienced a stable alternation of governments dominated mainly by Left-oriented coalitions (Communist Party-led) and Congress-led coalitions, both of which prioritised social development, education, and health. This continuity allowed for the long-term implementation of programmes such as land reforms, universal education, and public health expansion without frequent policy reversals. Political stability also enabled the state to maintain consistent funding for social welfare schemes, including pensions,

housing, and nutrition programmes, as well as to build institutional capacities for effective delivery. Moreover, the strong presence of trade unions, civil society organisations, and grassroots movements created a political culture in which citizens could actively hold governments accountable, ensuring that welfare policies remained responsive to local needs.

The government has invested in both universal and targeted programmes that address health, education, income security, and nutrition, ensuring that the benefits of development reach all sections of society. For instance, the Public Distribution System (PDS) provides subsidised food grains to low-income families, helping to reduce hunger and malnutrition, while programmes like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) focus on early childhood nutrition, health check-ups, and pre-school education. Furthermore, Kerala's Social Security Pension Scheme extends financial assistance to the elderly, widows, disabled persons, and other vulnerable groups, offering them a degree of economic security and social dignity. Housing schemes such as the Indira Awaas Yojana and state-sponsored rural housing initiatives have improved living conditions, providing access to basic amenities like clean water, electricity, and sanitation. Complementing these schemes, programmes like *Kudumbashree* empower women economically and socially, creating community-based micro-enterprises that promote both livelihood generation and local development.

6.3.3.1 Political Consciousness, Public Action and Accountability

A major argument that emerges is that Kerala's development cannot be understood without examining its exceptional tradition of political consciousness and organised public action. Unlike in many regions where



state initiatives preceded public engagement, Kerala's welfare achievements were decisively shaped by the assertiveness of its people, who have historically demanded accountability and participation. Kerala's population possesses a particularly high level of political awareness, a feature directly linked to the spread of literacy and reformist movements discussed earlier. This widespread literacy facilitated the circulation of political ideas through newspapers, pamphlets, and public meetings, enabling even ordinary citizens to engage with issues of governance and rights.

It has been argued that Kerala's social gains cannot be attributed solely to state policies; they emerged from continuous public pressure exerted by workers' unions, peasant organisations, student movements, women's collectives, and various community bodies. These groups mobilised against inequality, demanded access to public services, and resisted forms of exclusion that prevailed under earlier social structures. The distinctive feature of Kerala's development is this "culture of mobilisation", through which people across classes and castes learned to articulate grievances, negotiate their demands, and hold ruling authorities accountable. This deep-rooted political culture shaped not only electoral politics but also administrative priorities, compelling successive governments to expand welfare spending, improve service delivery, and maintain transparency.

Kerala's print culture, comprising newspapers, weekly magazines, and pamphlet literature, played an important role in sustaining public engagement. Widespread literacy meant that political debates and critiques reached households across regions and classes. It has been suggested that this created an environment where the public could scrutinise government performance and respond collectively to policies perceived as unjust or ineffective. As a result of this dynamic, Kerala developed a system in

which governments remained continuously aware of public expectations. Policies related to education, health, welfare distribution, and land reform were shaped by the need to respond to citizens who were not passive recipients but active participants in the political process. Scholars argue that these pressures were instrumental in fostering a political climate committed to social development. The people of Kerala, not merely its political leadership, were the primary agents driving social change.

6.3.4 Reassessing the Kerala Model - A Critical Evaluation

One of the most persistent challenges has been high unemployment, particularly among educated youth, which has created pressure on the state's labour market and contributed to ongoing migration. The economy remains dependent on remittances, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in the Gulf region and limiting the development of a robust industrial base. Fiscal constraints and recurrent budget deficits pose difficulties in sustaining social welfare programmes, especially in the face of rising healthcare and pension costs. Furthermore, while the state has succeeded in achieving gender parity in literacy and health, structural inequalities in income and asset distribution persist, and large segments of the population remain economically vulnerable. Finally, rapid social change and population ageing are emerging as new challenges, placing additional pressure on health, social security, and local governance systems. These limitations indicate that while the Kerala Model is a significant example of human development, it must continue to adapt to economic, demographic, and global challenges to remain sustainable.

Some scholars criticise the idealisation that obscures the contradictions and tensions essential to understanding Kerala's development. The widespread praise tends

to present the model as a universal template that could be replicated elsewhere, while ignoring the historical and social complexities that shaped it. This form of uncritical admiration prevents scholars and policy-makers from identifying the weaknesses embedded within the system. One of the central arguments is that Kerala's development displays a deep mismatch between social advancement and economic capacity. The social sphere is robust due to literacy, reform movements, and welfare commitments. However, the economic sphere remains fragile because of stagnation in agriculture, slow industrialisation, and a lack of employment opportunities. This imbalance has created a situation where achievements at the social level cannot be fully sustained without corresponding economic transformation. These costs are rarely acknowledged in mainstream discussions, which tend to focus only on literacy and life expectancy. Scholars have also argued that development should not be measured by numerical indicators alone. Social distress, manifested in suicides, crime, emotional breakdowns, and aspirations blocked by unemployment, must form part of the assessment.

6.3.4.1 Unemployment and Emerging Social Tensions

Kerala suffers from an unemployment crisis that cuts across social groups. This is not merely a temporary or cyclical problem but a systemic outcome of the state's developmental trajectory. Large numbers of young people complete secondary and higher education each year, but the economy does not generate sufficient suitable jobs. Government employment, long considered the most desirable, cannot absorb the steady inflow of job seekers. Private-sector opportunities remain limited due to weak industrial and manufacturing bases. These factors collectively create an environment

in which educated unemployment is widespread and persistent. This mismatch between educational attainment and job availability is one of the most revealing contradictions of the Kerala Model. Kerala encouraged the expansion of schooling and higher education, creating a population with elevated aspirations and expectations of white-collar employment. However, the state's economic base did not grow at a comparable pace, leaving many qualified youth without opportunities. This contradiction cannot be glossed over, as it generates long-term social tensions and psychological strain.

The productive sectors capable of generating steady employment, particularly industry and agriculture, have been stagnant. Agriculture remains overburdened and unremunerative, and industrial development never attained significant momentum. This further contributes to the employment crisis. Young people often avoid agricultural work due to aspirations for social mobility, industry does not offer mass employment, and large segments of the workforce are forced into precarious, low-paying jobs.

Overseas migration, particularly to the Gulf countries, emerged as a direct response to the unemployment crisis. Here, it is essential to identify migration as a symptom of economic stagnation, not merely as an individual choice. Many households depend heavily on remittances, which then feed back into consumption, education spending, and housing investments. This creates a "remittance economy," where domestic employment opportunities remain secondary. In other words, migration acts as a safety valve that prevents the unemployment crisis from becoming unmanageable. These contradictions indicate that Kerala's development must be reassessed. Social achievements remain significant, but they cannot be sustained indefinitely without addressing underlying economic weaknesses.



Recap

- ◆ The Kerala Model is known for achieving social development without high income levels.
- ◆ Kerala leads India in literacy, life expectancy, and gender equity.
- ◆ Public investment in health and education played a major role.
- ◆ Political continuity in welfare policies ensured long-term gains.
- ◆ Decentralised governance through the People's Plan was a landmark initiative.
- ◆ An active civil society and political awareness among the people were crucial.
- ◆ Education contributed to both empowerment and migration.
- ◆ Reform movements in Kerala increased political awareness and promoted equality.
- ◆ The remittances from Gulf migration strengthened Kerala's household income and welfare system.
- ◆ Decentralisation empowered local bodies to plan and implement development projects.
- ◆ The People's Planning Campaign ensured direct citizen participation in governance.
- ◆ Women's education, Kudumbashree, and political participation improved gender equality.
- ◆ Kerala continues to face challenges such as unemployment and fiscal stress despite high human development.

Objective Questions

1. Which sector did Kerala invest heavily in post-independence?
2. What was the People's Plan Campaign focused on?
3. Name any two human development achievements of Kerala.
4. Who led the People's Planning Campaign launched in 1996?

5. Through which Constitutional Amendments was decentralisation strengthened in India?
6. What economic factors contributed significantly to Kerala's development since the 1970s?
7. What is the role of Kudumbashree in Kerala's development?
8. Why is Kerala known for a favourable sex ratio?
9. How does the Public Distribution System support welfare in Kerala?
10. What contradiction exists in Kerala's development pattern?

Answers

1. Health and education
2. Decentralised planning and grassroots governance
3. High literacy and low infant mortality
4. The State Government of Kerala under Left Democratic Front leadership
5. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments
6. Remittances from Malayalee migrants in the Gulf
7. It promotes women's empowerment and income through self-help groups
8. Women have better access to healthcare, education, and political participation
9. It provides subsidised food grains to reduce hunger and support poor families
10. High human development coexists with high unemployment and financial pressure

Assignments

1. Explain the features and significance of the Kerala Model of Development.
2. Discuss the impact of land reforms, education, and public health on Kerala's social progress.



3. Describe the evolution of decentralised governance in Kerala, with reference to the People's Planning Campaign.
4. Evaluate the contribution of women and Kudumbashree to Kerala's human development success.
5. Analyse how remittances from the Gulf countries influenced Kerala's economy and welfare programmes.
6. Discuss the limitations of the Kerala Model of Development.

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UNIT

Economic Changes

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the major economic changes that transformed Kerala's society and economy
- ◆ describe the causes and effects of Malayalee migration
- ◆ understand how commercialisation of agriculture changed traditional farming practices
- ◆ analyse the rise of the Malayalee middle class and its role in Kerala's social and economic progress

Prerequisite

Kerala once had an agrarian economy in which agriculture, primarily crops like paddy and coconut, formed the primary source of livelihood. Society functioned under a feudal land system where landlords held most of the land, and peasants worked under them with limited rights. Later, major land reforms and educational developments introduced in the mid-20th century weakened feudal control and created new opportunities for social progress. However, unemployment and poverty continued to rise after independence, prompting people to search for better jobs outside Kerala. At the same time, increasing literacy and awareness encouraged aspirations for improved living standards. These factors together laid the foundation for the economic changes, large-scale Malayalee migration, the commercialisation of agriculture, and the rise of a new middle class discussed in this unit.

Keywords

Migration, Remittances, Class Consciousness, Commercialisation, Agriculture, Middle Class, Gulf Boom

Discussion

6.4.1 Economic Changes in Kerala

Post-independence Kerala experienced a distinctive economic transformation shaped by land reforms, public investment in social sectors, and a structural shift from primary to service-oriented activities. The abolition of landlordism and redistribution of land reduced traditional agrarian hierarchies, but it also led to the fragmentation of agricultural holdings and declining profitability in farming. As a result, Kerala witnessed limited growth in industrial production and agricultural productivity when compared to other Indian states, despite high levels of human development indicators.

The state invested heavily in education, healthcare, and welfare programmes, which contributed to an improved quality of life and a highly literate workforce. This, however, placed considerable pressure on state finances and did not always translate into adequate employment opportunities within the domestic economy. Unemployment and underemployment persisted as major challenges, especially among educated youth.

Above all, the period from the 1970s onwards marked a shift towards a remittance-driven economy. Large-scale migration to the Gulf region stimulated household consumption, real estate development, and small-scale commercial activities. Remittances became a crucial economic stabiliser, significantly contributing to poverty reduction and enhancing access to modern amenities. Kerala gradually evolved into a consumption-oriented and service-sector-dominated economy, where tourism, retail, higher education, and healthcare emerged as key revenue-generating sectors. Although the development experience

remains an example of social progress with limited industrial growth, it reflects a unique model where welfare achievements coexist with economic vulnerabilities.

6.4.2 Malayalee Migration

Migration from Kerala initially took the form of movement to other parts of India, especially to the tea plantations of Assam and the ports and trading centres of Bombay and Madras during the early twentieth century. Internal migration was driven by land scarcity, unemployment, and the collapse of traditional occupations under colonial rule. These early patterns laid the foundation for a mobile labour force seeking opportunities beyond the state's borders. The most transformative phase began in the 1970s with the oil boom in West Asia. Young Malayalee workers, particularly from Malabar, migrated in large numbers to the Gulf countries in search of better wages. Migration soon became a household strategy for economic mobility. Remittances significantly contributed to poverty reduction, higher consumption levels, and the growth of the service sector in Kerala, reshaping the state's socio-economic structure into a remittance-driven economy.

By the late twentieth century, migration, primarily to the Gulf countries, became a defining feature of Kerala's economy and society. Large numbers of Malayalees, especially young men, left the state in search of employment opportunities that were unavailable locally. This movement occurred across districts, cutting across caste lines and involving both skilled and unskilled workers. For many households, migration is no longer a temporary coping strategy but has become a central part of their livelihood system. Families depend on remittances for daily



consumption, education, medical expenses, and housing improvement. Scholars like K. Saradamoni have argued that this large-scale migration cannot be interpreted merely as an expression of the Malayalee desire for global mobility. Instead, it is a structural outcome of the state's chronic unemployment and limited economic expansion. Thus, migration is a direct indicator of the internal imbalances of the Kerala Model.

Remittances have become a major source of income for a significant proportion of households. They fuel consumption spending, the construction boom, investments in private education, and the growing reliance on private healthcare. These inflows strengthen household economies even when domestic employment opportunities are scarce. Remittances also indirectly support the state's welfare profile by easing the financial burdens that would otherwise fall entirely on government programmes. Hence, migration is not simply a desire for foreign opportunities; it is a structural response to Kerala's chronic unemployment and fragile economic base. Migration functions as a "safety valve," preventing economic collapse. It absorbs the educated unemployed population that Kerala cannot employ and reduces the social unrest that would otherwise emerge from large-scale joblessness. However, Kerala's remittance-driven economy masks deeper structural problems rather than solving them.

What we discussed is that migration also led to considerable social change. Families experienced improvements in housing, education, and health facilities due to increased income. However, new social challenges emerged, including the emotional burden on families left behind, gendered labour divisions, and increasing social aspirations that sometimes led to consumerism and dependency. Migrants also introduced new cultural influences from the Gulf, transforming lifestyles, architecture, and consumption patterns in Kerala's rural

society. Social prestige became closely tied to Gulf migration, altering the aspirations of younger generations.

Return migration became more prominent after the 1990s owing to economic fluctuations in the Gulf and the ageing of first-generation migrants. The Government of Kerala introduced welfare measures such as the Pravasi Welfare Fund, support for returnees to start enterprises, and reintegration schemes. Despite these efforts, many return migrants continue to face employment mismatches and insecurity, as domestic industries cannot fully absorb their skills.

6.4.3 Commercialisation of Agriculture

6.4.3.1 Transformation from Subsistence to Export-oriented Agriculture

After independence, Kerala's agricultural economy experienced a decisive shift from subsistence-based cultivation to a commercial and market-driven structure. Traditionally, rice, pulses, and tapioca ensured local food availability, but the combination of better prices and international demand motivated farmers to adopt cash crops. By the late twentieth century, rubber, pepper, coconut, cashew, and cardamom became dominant, positioning Kerala as a key supplier of plantation commodities for global and domestic markets. This transformation enabled many rural households to improve their incomes and provided an essential economic base for regions such as Kottayam, Idukki, and Wayanad. However, the shift came at the cost of declining food-grain cultivation. Large tracts of paddy fields were either converted into rubber plantations or diverted to real estate, resulting in increased dependence on imported rice from other Indian states. The commercial logic of agricultural production led to a situation where the state became more prosperous yet more vulnerable to external



food supplies. This paradox remains a core debate in Kerala's agricultural historiography.

Despite its limitations, commercialisation expanded Kerala's engagement with global trade networks and created rural entrepreneurial opportunities. Cooperative societies, export agencies, and credit institutions emerged to support plantation agriculture. The commodity boom also stimulated small-scale processing industries such as coir, cashew, and spice processing, contributing significantly to rural employment and women's labour participation.

6.4.3.2 Impact of Land Reforms and Fragmentation

Kerala's land reforms dismantled traditional landlordism and ensured more equitable land ownership. Tenants who previously worked under oppressive arrangements gained legal rights and eventually acquired ownership of land. This social transformation significantly weakened feudal relations and improved the bargaining power and dignity of agricultural workers. Yet, the reforms also fragmented agricultural land into numerous smallholdings, often less than half a hectare. Small plots proved economically unviable for mechanised farming or large-scale paddy cultivation. Farmers, therefore, turned towards cash crops such as rubber, which yield higher returns from limited land. This trend explains why Kerala performed well in social equity while still struggling to modernise its food production systems.

The fragmentation also created uneven patterns of agricultural prosperity, with plantation belts experiencing more economic growth compared to coastal and backward districts reliant on declining paddy and fishing sectors. Regional disparities emerged, complicating developmental planning and food security strategies.

6.4.3.3 Environmental and Market Vulnerabilities

The expansion of plantations into ecologically fragile zones, particularly in the Western Ghats, has contributed to deforestation, habitat loss, and soil erosion. Monoculture plantations such as rubber and eucalyptus have reduced biodiversity and water retention capacity, raising concerns about the sustainability of commercial agriculture. Scholars frequently highlight an inherent tension between economic gains and environmental protection in Kerala's development pathway.

Market volatility also poses serious challenges. The incomes of small farmers are closely tied to unpredictable global commodity prices. The decline in rubber prices in the 2010s, for instance, led to widespread financial stress among Malayalee farmers. This situation underscored the absence of diversified income sources and the vulnerability of households dependent on single-crop economies. Furthermore, the labour shortage driven by commercialisation, partly due to migration and rising service sector opportunities, has increased production costs. The state has become reliant on migrant labourers from other parts of India to sustain agricultural operations, fundamentally transforming rural labour dynamics.

6.4.4 Malayalee Middle Class

The emergence of the Malayalee middle class is rooted in the socio-political transformations that began under colonial rule and accelerated after independence. Widespread access to education, especially through missionary institutions, government schools, and later public-funded universities, facilitated upward social mobility among communities that were previously marginalised. The spread of literacy and the decline of caste-based

work restrictions enabled a broader section of society to aspire to professional employment. This contrasted sharply with earlier periods when the upper castes dominated administrative and intellectual spaces.

Land reforms also played a major role by eroding feudal hierarchies. Farmers and agricultural labourers gained dignity and material improvements, which encouraged class mobility. However, the majority of the emergent middle class came from educated groups who found work in the public sector, teaching, and ‘white-collar’ services. The state’s prioritisation of welfare and social equity thus laid the foundation for a socially inclusive middle class, making Kerala distinct within India. Above all, the influence of reform movements, such as those led by Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and Christian missionaries, promoted equality, literacy, and modern attitudes. This reshaped social structures, enabling communities such as Ezhavas and Christians to gain stronger economic roles, contributing significantly to the composition of the middle class.

Literacy and universal schooling created a population with elevated expectations and a desire for white-collar employment. Families invest heavily in education as a route to social respectability. This generates strong middle-class values around professionalism, government jobs, and overseas employment. Many middle-class households are supported by migrant income. Remittances fund private schooling, healthcare, and urban housing.

Keeping all this in mind, educated unemployment leads to intense stress, particularly among middle-class youth. Hence, the middle class reflects the contradictions at the heart of the Kerala Model. Their aspirations arise from the state’s educational achievements, while their frustrations stem from the state’s inability to generate adequate employment. Migration becomes their primary economic lifeline. This middle class experiences a

crisis of expectations, caught between the promise of education and the reality of economic stagnation.

6.4.5 Role of Migration and Remittances

The expansive migration to the Gulf region from the 1970s dramatically enlarged the middle class in Kerala. Remittance income improved living standards for millions of rural households, leading to significant consumption-driven growth. Access to modern housing, private education, health services, and new consumer goods became markers of middle-class identity across the state. Migration thus opened up opportunities unattainable within Kerala’s limited industrial economy. This Gulf-linked middle class is unique because its economic base lies outside the state’s borders. Dependence on foreign labour markets created a globalised lifestyle while preserving strong social and emotional ties to local communities. These dynamics reshaped rural society; concrete homes, modern architecture, and urban functionalities spread even to villages. However, this prosperity also widened inequalities between migrant and non-migrant households. Non-migrant families, especially older agricultural groups, often struggled to maintain similar standards of living. This economic divide remains a structural social concern.

The Malayalee middle class is highly politically conscious and actively participates in electoral and civic processes. Kerala’s vibrant democratic culture and high literacy ensured that this class did not remain passive beneficiaries of development but instead shaped state policy through strong unionisation, public debate, and social mobilisation. Many public welfare and participatory governance reforms are credited to middle-class activism.



Recap

- ◆ Kerala's economy shifted from agriculture to a remittance-driven service sector model.
- ◆ Land reforms reduced feudal inequalities but fragmented agricultural holdings.
- ◆ The state achieved high literacy and health standards through welfare spending.
- ◆ Gulf migration has been the primary source of economic growth since the 1970s.
- ◆ Remittances improved living standards and fuelled consumer-driven development.
- ◆ Commercialisation of agriculture led to a shift from food crops to cash crops.
- ◆ Kerala became dependent on food imports due to the decline of paddy cultivation.
- ◆ Plantation crops made farmers vulnerable to global price fluctuations.
- ◆ A socially diverse Malayalee middle class emerged through education and migration.
- ◆ Kerala's development is marked by equity and social achievements despite weak industrial growth.

Objective Questions

1. What is one major economic impact of land reforms in Kerala?
2. Name any two major cash crops of Kerala.
3. Which region became the main destination for Kerala's emigrants from the 1970s?
4. What sector dominates Kerala's economy today?
5. Mention one major environmental concern linked to plantation agriculture.
6. Which class in Kerala expanded significantly due to remittances?
7. What is a major consequence of declining paddy cultivation in Kerala?

8. Name one institution that supported agricultural commercialisation through cooperatives.
9. What is one socio-economic challenge faced by returning migrants in Kerala?
10. Which major welfare achievement enables Kerala's skilled labour force?

Answers

1. Reduction of landlordism and increased smallholder farming
2. Rubber and pepper
3. Gulf/West Asian countries
4. Service sector
5. Deforestation, soil degradation, or biodiversity loss
6. The Malayalee middle class
7. Increased dependence on food imports from other states
8. Cooperative marketing societies
9. Employment mismatch or financial insecurity
10. High literacy and quality public education

Assignments

1. Evaluate the role of Gulf migration in transforming Kerala's economy and society since the 1970s.
2. Discuss the commercialisation of agriculture in Kerala and its consequences for food security.
3. Analyse the growth and characteristics of the Malayalee middle class in the context of Kerala's development model.
4. Critically assess Kerala's economic transformation from an agrarian system to a service-sector and remittance-driven economy.

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UNIT

Social Issues

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify key social issues affecting contemporary Kerala
- ◆ explain the challenges faced by marginalised social groups
- ◆ analyse the causes and impacts of land alienation
- ◆ discuss the effects of environmental degradation on livelihoods

Prerequisite

Kerala has often been held up as a model of social development due to its high literacy, low infant mortality, and strong welfare programmes. However, beneath these achievements, significant social challenges persist. Marginalised groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, coastal fishers, and migrant labourers face economic insecurity, landlessness, and limited access to resources. Land alienation has remained a pressing issue, particularly for Adivasis and small farmers, as market-driven development and urbanisation encroach upon traditional lands. Environmental concerns have also intensified in Kerala, with deforestation, plantation expansion, unplanned urban growth, and climate-related disasters threatening both ecosystems and human livelihoods. The state faces ongoing tensions between economic development and ecological conservation, exemplified by controversies over industrial projects, tourism, and Western Ghats management.

Keywords

Marginalisation, Land Alienation, Environment, Ecology, Development, Sustainable Development, Welfare

Discussion

6.5.1 Social Issues in Contemporary Kerala

Kerala has long been celebrated for its progressive social indicators, including high literacy levels, low infant mortality, and widespread access to welfare. However, beneath this visible progress lie a range of persistent social issues that continue to challenge the egalitarian narrative of the “Kerala Model.” One of the core concerns relates to unemployment, especially among the educated youth. With limited industrial expansion and a heavy dependence on the service and government sectors, Kerala has faced structural unemployment that disproportionately affects educated women. This paradox, high education but limited job creation, has created social stress and contributed to waves of migration in search of work, particularly to the Gulf region.

Another major issue relates to social inequalities, especially concerning caste and community identities. Although the state has made remarkable progress in dismantling overt caste discrimination through land reforms, reservations, and social movements, forms of caste-based hierarchy still shape access to resources and political representation. The marginalisation of Dalits, Adivasis, and coastal fishing communities reflects this continued reality. Dalit households often continue to live in segregated settlements with lower asset ownership, while Adivasis face systematic displacement from their traditional habitats and insecure livelihoods. Women from these communities are doubly disadvantaged due to intersectional discrimination, revealing that gender empowerment in Kerala remains uneven across class and caste lines.

Kerala also faces modern forms of social stress, including an ageing population and related welfare burdens. Due to high life expectancy and low birth rates, a significant portion of Kerala’s population now falls into senior age groups, necessitating expanded care infrastructures and social support. Additionally, issues such as alcoholism, drug abuse among youth, road accidents, domestic violence, and mental health concerns have become increasingly prominent in Kerala’s discourse. Scholars argue that rapid social mobility, shifting family structures, and rising aspirations rooted in migration-driven consumer culture have created psychosocial conflicts. Thus, while Kerala’s achievements remain impressive, these ongoing social challenges highlight the need to address structural contradictions within its development experience.

6.5.1.1 Marginalised Social Groups in Kerala

Despite Kerala’s globally recognised achievements in social development, structural inequalities continue to shape the lives of several marginalised groups. Among them, Dalits remain significantly disadvantaged compared to the general population. While land reforms eliminated feudal landlordism, many Dalit communities, historically agricultural labourers, received only marginal holdings or continued without land ownership. This economic insecurity is reinforced by residential segregation and limited occupational mobility. Although educational attainment among Dalits has improved, caste-based discrimination persists subtly in hiring practices, marriage, and access to social networks, demonstrating that social empowerment has not matched formal legislative progress.

Adivasis (Indigenous communities) are another highly marginalised group, concentrated primarily in Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, and Pathanamthitta. Their marginalisation stems largely from historical dispossession of forest lands, especially during plantation expansion in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many Adivasi families today struggle with chronic poverty, landlessness, malnutrition, and poor access to healthcare, despite welfare schemes. Their cultural autonomy has also eroded due to forced assimilation and the intrusion of market forces into forest economies. Notable mobilisations, such as the Muthanga Adivasi land struggle (2003), expose the structural failures in addressing Indigenous land rights.

Coastal fishing communities represent another vulnerable group, facing occupational hazards, declining marine resources, and increased vulnerability to natural disasters. Mechanised trawling, introduced in the 1980s, intensified resource depletion and widened class divisions within the sector. Small-scale artisanal fishers face uncertain incomes and displacement due to coastal erosion, climate change, and tourism-driven land acquisition. Women in fishing communities, who dominate the post-harvest sector, experience unstable work and limited social protection. The Ockhi Cyclone (2017) brought national attention to their precarity and inadequate state preparedness.

Moreover, Kerala has seen a rise in migrant labourers from other Indian states, often referred to as the “new working class” of Kerala’s development. They work in construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and domestic services, sectors local labour avoids due to better educational opportunities and improved living standards. These migrants, largely from Bihar, Odisha, Bengal, and Assam, endure poor housing, low wages, and limited access to healthcare and social services. Their challenges reveal

contradictions within Kerala’s welfare system: while inclusive in principle, it struggles to fully protect those outside traditional social policy structures.

6.5.1.2 Land Alienation in Kerala

Although the state’s post-independence land reforms were pioneering in dismantling feudal landlordism and granting tenancy rights, land alienation has continued in different and more complex forms. One significant dimension concerns Adivasis, who traditionally depended on collective access to forests for livelihood and cultural survival. Over decades, colonial and post-colonial policies facilitated the conversion of these forest areas into cash-crop plantations, wildlife reserves, and revenue land. As a result, large sections of Adivasi communities became landless labourers in territories that were once their own. Despite legal protections under the Forest Rights Act (2006), implementation has been slow and often contested by state agencies and conservation groups.

Land alienation also affects other vulnerable communities, such as Dalits and coastal groups. Even after receiving land through redistribution, Dalit farmers often acquired small and economically unviable plots, leading many to sell their property under financial pressure. Mechanisms such as informal debts, real estate speculation, and urban expansion have resulted in a fresh wave of dispossession. This challenge is particularly evident in rapidly urbanising regions like Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram, where infrastructure and tourism projects have displaced lower-income settlements. Coastal dwellers face the dual threat of aggressive land acquisition for development and the natural process of coastal erosion, which has made habitation increasingly precarious.

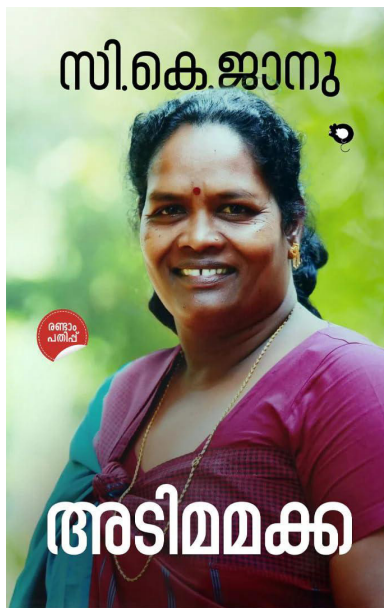


Fig: Book cover of C K Janu's autobiography ADIMAMAKKA

Political mobilisation around land alienation has become a defining element of social activism in Kerala. Movements such as the Adivasi Gotra Maha Sabha, led by C. K. Janu, brought widespread attention to broken promises in land redistribution, culminating in the Muthanga struggle. In January 2003, adivasi communities occupied a portion of the Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary in Wayanad to protest the government's failure to restore tribal lands alienated in the name of development. Long deprived of their traditional land, livelihood, and cultural identity, the adivasis viewed the occupation as a struggle for survival and dignity. The state's forcible eviction of the protesters resulted in the death of one tribal person and injuries to several others, exposing the continued marginalisation of indigenous communities in Kerala. The movement was led by C. K. Janu, whose leadership reflected growing tribal resistance. Janu's autobiography 'Adimamakka' mentions her disillusionment with mainstream political parties that had failed to honour commitments to land restoration. Some scholars argue that the Muthanga struggle shows the limitations of Kerala's land reform process, which

largely excluded adivasis. Critics have also considered it an unfinished agenda of social justice within Kerala's otherwise 'celebrated development model'.

The persistence of landlessness among Dalit communities has also generated significant protest movements in the post-reform period. One of the most prominent was the **Chengara Land Struggle** (2007–2009), widely regarded as one of the largest Dalit land movements in Kerala after the land reforms. The struggle was led by Laha Gopalan and the *Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi*, when thousands of landless Dalit families occupied around 3000 acres of plantation land owned by Harrison Malayalam Limited in Pathanamthitta district. The protesters demanded five acres of land for cultivation and housing for landless families, and the occupation continued for nearly two years, drawing public attention to the continuing landlessness of Dalits despite the state's land reform programme.

Similar demands for land redistribution emerged in the **Arippa Land Struggle** in Kollam district, where landless Dalit families organised by the *Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi* occupied forest land at Arippa demanding land for cultivation and housing. The movement reflected tensions between forest conservation policies and the livelihood rights of landless communities, a conflict that in some ways paralleled the struggles of Adivasi groups over forest access.

Dalit mobilisation around land rights also took symbolic forms such as the ***Nilpu Samaram* (Standing Strike)** organised by the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha under the leadership of C. K. Janu and activists like Geethanandan in Thiruvananthapuram. The protest began on 9 July 2012 in front of the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, where Adivasi protesters stood continuously in a non-violent demonstration demanding

land rights and the implementation of rehabilitation policies. The agitation lasted 162 days, drawing wide support from students, intellectuals, social activists, and members of civil society across caste and religious backgrounds. Under sustained public pressure, the Kerala government eventually entered into negotiations and agreed in principle to several of the protesters' demands, including measures for land distribution to thousands of Adivasi families, greater implementation of forest rights, and programmes aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities. These movements collectively show the continuing exclusion of Dalit agricultural labourers from effective land redistribution.

Similarly, environmental and fisher rights groups have resisted forced displacement for industrial corridors, ports, and tourism zones, with the Vizhinjam Port protest being a recent example. These struggles highlight an evolving conflict between people's rights and state-led development agendas. Scholars argue that land alienation in Kerala is no longer merely a historical legacy of feudalism but increasingly a consequence of market-driven development, resource extraction, and neoliberal policy frameworks. Therefore, the issue remains central to debates on social justice, sustainability, and the future of inclusive development in Kerala.

6.5.1.3 Issues of Ecology vs Development in Kerala

Kerala's rapid development has consistently generated tensions between environmental conservation and economic growth. The state's unique geography, with the Western Ghats, rivers, backwaters, and coastal zones, makes it both ecologically rich and environmentally vulnerable. Commercial agriculture, urbanisation, tourism, and industrial projects have placed increasing pressure on fragile ecosystems. Plantation agriculture, particularly rubber,

cardamom, and tea, has led to deforestation, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss in the Western Ghats, which UNESCO recognises as a global biodiversity hotspot. Such ecological degradation threatens both the livelihoods of local communities and the long-term sustainability of natural resources.



Fig: Madhav Gadgil

Infrastructure and developmental projects, such as dams, highways, ports, and urban expansion, have created conflicts with environmental priorities. The Gadgil Committee (2011) and Kasturirangan Committee (2013) reports highlighted the need for strict ecological management of the Western Ghats, but implementation has been contentious. The Gadgil Committee (Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel), chaired by Madhav Gadgil, recommended that the entire Western Ghats, covering six states and 44 districts, be declared an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA), with graded protection zones and prohibitions on mining, polluting industries, and large-scale development. It emphasised strong community involvement and governance, but its stringent restrictions faced opposition from local populations and political groups. The Kasturirangan Committee (High-Level Working Group) later revised this approach in 2013, reducing the ESA coverage to roughly 37% (about 60,000 sq. km) in order to better balance environmental protection with developmental needs. Local communities fear restrictions on land use and resource access, while environmentalists emphasise the urgent need for conservation. These debates reflect the

development projects and ecological conservation. One of such movements was the **Silent Valley Movement**, a major environmental campaign during the late 1970s and early 1980s against a proposed hydroelectric project in the Silent Valley region of Palakkad district. Environmentalists, scientists, writers, and civil society groups argued that the dam would destroy one of the last remaining tracts of tropical evergreen forest in the Western Ghats, home to several endangered species including the Lion-tailed Macaque. The movement gained nationwide attention with support from scientists such as M. K. Prasad and organisations like the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad. In 1983, the Government of India decided to abandon the hydroelectric project, and the area was later declared the Silent Valley National Park, marking a landmark victory for environmental activism in India.

Similar debates have continued in recent decades over the proposed **Athirappilly Hydroelectric Project Protests** in Thrissur district. Environmental groups and local communities have opposed the project on the grounds that it would threaten the biodiversity of the Chalakudy river basin, affect riparian forests, and disrupt the livelihoods of indigenous communities such as the Kadar. These struggles demonstrate the long-standing tradition of environmental mobilisation in Kerala and the continuing debate over balancing energy needs and ecological preservation.

Climate-related disasters have further exposed Kerala's ecological vulnerabilities. The floods of 2018 and 2019, worsened by deforestation, reclamation of wetlands, and unplanned urbanisation, caused massive loss of life, property, and livelihoods. Coastal erosion, landslides, and riverbank collapses remain pressing concerns. Scholars note that Kerala's experience underscores the need for integrated development planning, where environmental sustainability is not treated

as a secondary consideration. The challenge lies in harmonising economic growth, social equity, and ecological protection, a balance critical for the state's long-term resilience.

Recap

- ◆ Kerala has high social development indicators but faces persistent social inequalities.
- ◆ Marginalised groups include Dalits, Adivasis, coastal communities, and migrant labourers.
- ◆ Dalits continue to face economic, educational, and residential disadvantages despite reforms.
- ◆ Adivasis have lost traditional lands due to plantations, forests, and development projects.
- ◆ Coastal fishing communities experience occupational hazards and resource depletion.
- ◆ Migrant labourers from other Indian states face poor wages, housing, and healthcare access.
- ◆ Land reforms reduced feudal landlordism but did not fully prevent landlessness.
- ◆ Adivasi and Dalit communities remain vulnerable to land alienation and displacement.
- ◆ Environmental pressures include deforestation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and floods.
- ◆ Conflicts between ecology and development require balancing conservation with livelihoods.

Objective Questions

1. In which year did the Muthanga Adivasi land struggle take place?
2. Name one ecological hotspot under threat in Kerala.
3. Which committees were appointed to protect the Western Ghats?
4. Who was the leader of the Adivasi Gotra Maha Sabha and the Muthanga land occupation?
5. Which Act of 2006 protects the forest and land rights of Adivasis in India?

6. Which cyclone in 2017 exposed the vulnerabilities of Kerala's coastal fisher communities?
7. Which expert committee recommended declaring the Western Ghats as an Ecologically Sensitive Area?
8. Which committee revised the Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area coverage in 2013 to balance development and conservation?
9. What ecological issue has rubber, cardamom, and tea plantation expansion in Kerala primarily caused?
10. What is the social paradox in Kerala caused by high literacy and low industrial job creation?
11. What problem arises when urbanisation, tourism, and real estate expansion displace vulnerable communities in Kerala?
12. What type of fishing method, introduced in the 1980s, caused resource depletion and increased vulnerability among small-scale fishers?

Answers

1. 2003
2. Western Ghats
3. Gadgil Committee (2011) and Kasturirangan Committee (2013)
4. C. K. Janu
5. Forest Rights Act (FRA)
6. Ockhi Cyclone
7. Gadgil Committee
8. Kasturirangan Committee
9. Deforestation and biodiversity loss
10. High unemployment among educated youth
11. Land alienation and loss of traditional livelihoods
12. Mechanised trawling

Assignments

1. Analyse the social challenges faced by Dalits and Adivasis in Kerala despite progressive reforms.
2. Discuss the causes and consequences of land alienation among marginalised communities in Kerala.
3. Evaluate the impact of environmental degradation on livelihoods in Kerala's Western Ghats and coastal zones.
4. Examine the role of social movements in protecting the rights of marginalised groups in Kerala.
5. Critically assess the conflict between ecological conservation and economic development in Kerala.

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS





SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Model Question Paper (SET- A)

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name:

SIXTH SEMESTER B.A HISTORY EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE

B21HS06DC - MAKING OF MODERN KERALA

(CBCS - UG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any ten questions of the following. Each question carries one mark.

(10X1 = 10 Marks)

1. Who was the naval commander of the Zamorin of Calicut who led resistance against the Portuguese?
2. In which year was Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja killed by British troops?
3. Which British policy brought Travancore and Cochin under indirect control of the British?
4. Who was the first CMS missionary to reach Travancore in 1816?
5. Who compiled the first Malayalam dictionary?
6. Which organisation was established in 1903 to institutionalise Sree Narayana Guru's reform ideas?
7. Which organisation was founded by Poykayil Yohannan in 1909 to address the spiritual and social needs of Dalit communities?
8. Which publication was used by the Yogakshema Sabha to promote progressive ideas?
9. Who founded the Cheramar Mahajana Sabha in 1921?
10. Which newspaper was edited by G. P. Pillai ?
11. Name the leader popularly referred as the 'Kerala Gandhi'?
12. Who declared the right to free schooling in Travancore in 1817?
13. Name the author of the famous play *Ningalenne Communistakki*?
14. Who served as the Minister for Revenue and Excise in the first Communist Ministry of Kerala?
15. Who became the *Rajapramukh* of the Travancore–Cochin State after its formation?



SECTION B

Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.

(10X2 =20 Marks)

16. Treaty of Seringapatam
17. Indian Forest Act of 1865
18. London Missionary Society
19. *Sambandham*
20. *Kettezhuth* and *Kandezhuth*
21. *Pulappedi*
22. SNDP Yogam
23. C. Kesavan
24. Abstention Movement
25. Kizharyur Bomb Case
26. P.Krishnapillai
27. All Kerala Private College Teachers Association
28. *Jeeval Sahityam*
29. Thiru-Kochi
30. *Nilpu Samaram*

SECTION C

Write a short note on any **five** questions of the following. Each question carries **four** marks.

(5X4 = 20 Marks)

31. Examine the historical significance of the Kunjali Marakkars in resisting Portuguese expansion along the Malabar Coast.
32. Evaluate the findings of William Logan regarding the causes of the Mappila uprisings in Malabar.
33. Elaborate on the contribution of Kumaran Asan to Malayalam poetry, with reference to his social vision.
34. Examine the role of Benjamin Bailey and the CMS Press at Kottayam in the development of Malayalam printing, literature, and journalism.
35. Assess the importance of surveys and settlements introduced during the colonial period in transforming land administration in Kerala.
36. Discuss how segregation in public spaces and restrictions on clothing and language reinforced caste hierarchy in traditional Kerala society.
37. Discuss the contributions of Parvathy Nenmenimangalam and Arya Pallam to the reform movements among Namboothiri women.

38. Examine the historical significance of the Punnapra–Vayalar uprisings in the political evolution of Kerala and the growth of mass political consciousness.
39. Explain the major political developments that strengthened the demand for *Aikya Kerala* before independence.
40. Analyse the concept of the Kerala Model of Development.

SECTION D

*Answer any **two** questions of the following. Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(2X10 =20 Marks)

41. Evaluate the major policies and reforms introduced by the first Communist Ministry in Kerala and their impact on the socio-economic development of the state.
42. Discuss how the Vaikom and Guruvayur movements reflected broader debates about modernity, morality, and social rights in early twentieth-century Kerala.
43. Evaluate the development of the trade union movement in Malabar. How did workers' economic demands gradually merge with political and anti-imperialist struggles?
44. Critically analyse the different historiographical interpretations of the Malabar Rebellion, including colonial, nationalist, Marxist, and subaltern perspectives.



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Model Question Paper (SET- B)

QP CODE:

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Name:

SIXTH SEMESTER B.A HISTORY EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE

B21HS06DC - MAKING OF MODERN KERALA

(CBCS - UG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.

(10X1 = 10 Marks)

1. Which treaty placed Malabar under the control of the British East India Company in 1792?
2. In which year Velu Thampi issued the Kundara Proclamation?
3. Who founded the first girls' school in Kottayam in 1820?
4. In which work did the Malayalam script first appear in print?
5. In which year was a systematic revenue settlement inaugurated in Travancore through a Royal Proclamation?
6. Where did Sreenarayana Guru consecrate the famous Siva idol in 1888?
7. Which protest led by Ayyankali in 1893 challenged caste restrictions on the use of public roads?
8. Which work of Chattampi Swamikal questioned the historical foundations of Brahmanical dominance in Kerala?
9. Who founded the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha in 1913?
10. In which year was the Travancore State Congress formed?
11. Name the two prominent leaders of the Civic Rights League movement?
12. Which writer strongly influenced the development of *Jeeval Sahithyam* with ideas inspired by Marxist thought?
13. Which famous play written by Thoppil Bhasi popularised communist ideas among the people of Kerala?
14. Which act was introduced in Travancore in 1914 to regulate factory labour?
15. Which ruler of Cochin was known as 'Aikya Keralam Thampuran'?



SECTION B

Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.

(10X2 =20 Marks)

16. Kundara Proclamation
17. *Verumpattom*
18. *Hortus Malabaricus*
19. *Indulekha*
20. *Smarthavicharam*
21. Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha
22. Manjeri Conference 1920
23. Cochin State Praja Mandal
24. Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC)
25. Travancore Labour Association
26. *Orana Samaram*
27. *Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham*
28. *Vimochana Samaram*
29. Plachimada Anti-CocaCola Struggle
30. Chengara Land Struggle

SECTION C

Write a short note on any **five** questions of the following. Each question carries **four** marks.

(5X4 = 20 Marks)

31. Discuss the role of William Gyfford in the outbreak of the Anjuthengu Revolt. How did his actions intensify the conflict with the local leaders?
32. Evaluate the significance of the Kurichya Revolt in the history of anti-colonial resistance in Kerala.
33. Explain the main features of the *Marumakkathayam* system among the Nairs.
34. Outline the role of the Basel Mission in promoting education and social development in the Malabar region.
35. Examine how census in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore helped the colonial state understand and govern social diversity and population structure.
36. Explain the economic and occupational restrictions imposed on *avarna* communities, including practices like *Uzhiyam*, *Viruthi*, and unjust taxes.
37. Analyse the significance of the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 in Travancore.
38. Examine the historical significance of the Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava

Memorial in the democratisation of Travancore society.

39. Discuss the significance of the Aikya Kerala Movement in shaping the political identity of Malayalis.
40. Evaluate the role of the Muthanga Adivasi Land Struggle in bringing attention to the landlessness of Adivasi communities in Kerala.

SECTION D

*Answer any **two** questions of the following. Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(2X10 =20 Marks)

41. Discuss the social base of the Pazhassi Raja revolt. How did the movement reflect collective opposition to British colonial policies in Malabar?
42. Compare and contrast the reform ideologies of Sreenarayana Guru and Ayyankali. How did their approaches reflect the social conditions of their respective communities and contribute to the broader social transformation of Kerala?
43. Evaluate the role of the Communist Party in the Punnappra–Vayalar uprisings, discussing the debates regarding whether the revolt was organised or spontaneous.
44. Critically evaluate the Kerala Model of Development. Discuss the major contradictions and limitations of the Kerala Model of Development as pointed out by scholars.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാതൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണം

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണം

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**DON'T LET IT
BE TOO LATE**

**SAY
NO
TO
DRUGS**

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



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