

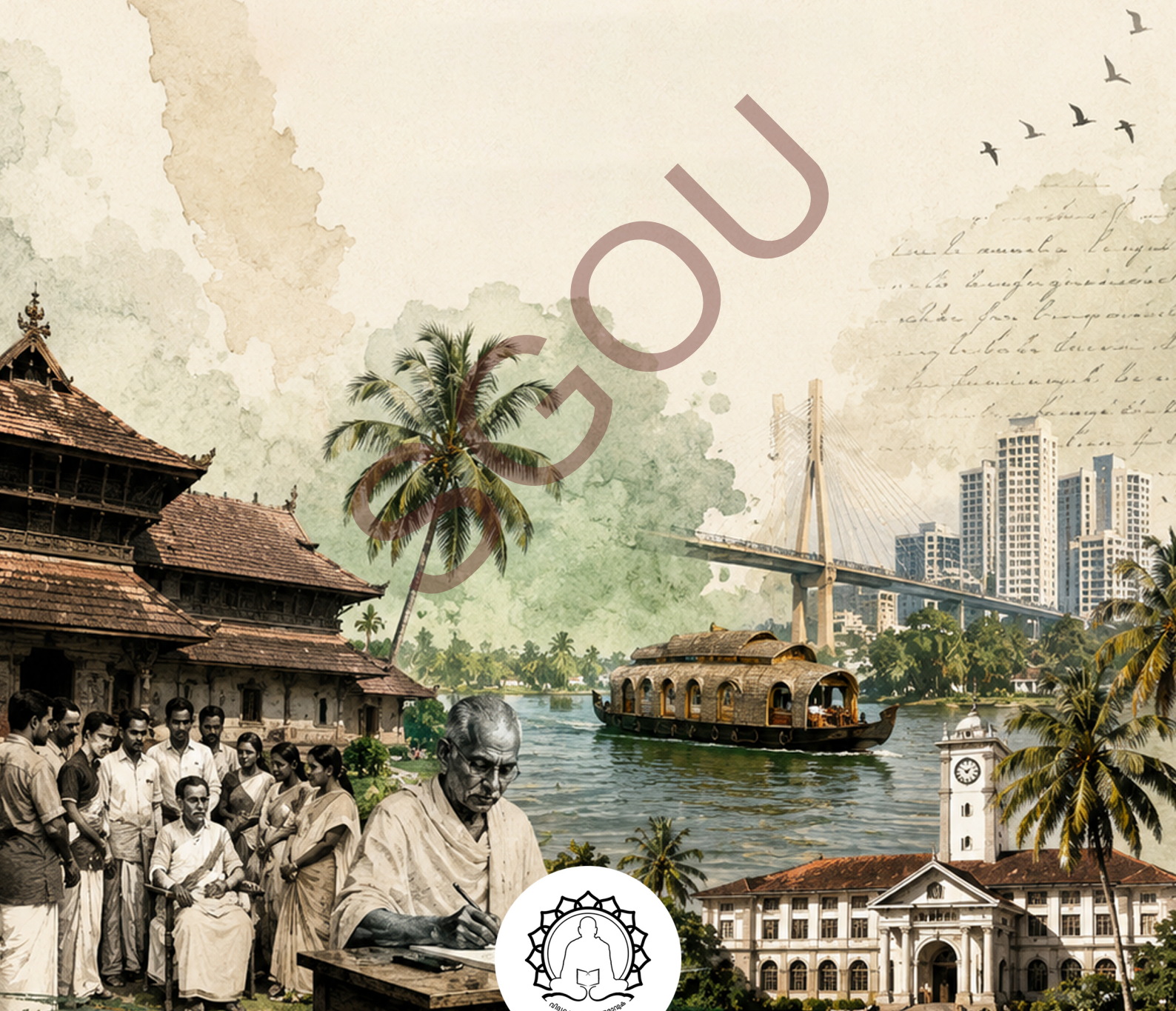
MAKING OF MODERN KERALA

COURSE CODE: SGB24HS306MC

Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)

Major Course

Self Learning Material



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

The background features a stylized landscape with rolling hills in shades of yellow and green. On the right side, there is a detailed illustration of a leafy branch. A large, faint, brown 'S' shape is overlaid on the page, passing behind the text.

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Making of Modern Kerala
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Four Year Undergraduate Programme
Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)
Major Course
Self Learning Material



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



MAKING OF MODERN KERALA

Course Code: SGB24HS306MC

Semester- V

Major Course

Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)

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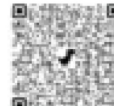
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Best regards,



Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.
Vice Chancellor
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01-08-2026

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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
- ◆ examine the role of the Attingal Rani, regional chieftains, merchant communities, and ordinary people in organising collective resistance
- ◆ explain the processes through which the English East India Company gradually established political supremacy over Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore
- ◆ assess the British interventions in land relations, forest management, trade regulation, and revenue systems, and their long-term impact on Kerala's society and economy

Prerequisites

Kerala's history is often celebrated for its rich cultural life, flourishing maritime trade, and influential social reform movements. At the same time, the region also has a long and powerful legacy of resistance. When the Portuguese first arrived on the Malabar Coast toward the close of the fifteenth century, Kerala became a centre of competition among European powers. Attracted by the immense profits of the spice trade, the Portuguese were soon followed by the Dutch and later the British, each seeking to control commerce and expand their political authority. Their attempts, however, did not go unchallenged. Local rulers as well as common people refused to remain passive observers. Through naval warfare, armed resistance, and strategic alliances, they worked to defend their independence and protect their interests.

One of the earliest figures to challenge European domination was Kunjali Marakkar, the naval chief of Zamorin of Calicut. In the sixteenth century, he organised a series

of naval campaigns that confronted Portuguese attempts to control the seas along the Malabar coast. The spirit of resistance continued in later periods as well. In the eighteenth century, Pazhassi Raja led a determined struggle in the Malabar region against British expansion. Similarly, in the early nineteenth century, Velu Thampi Dalawa openly rebelled against growing British influence in the administration of Travancore. Although these movements occurred in different regions and periods, they were united by a common aim: to defend political freedom, protect local economic interests, and uphold the dignity and autonomy of the region.

Keywords

Nuno da Cunha, Anjengo Revolt, Zamorin, Domination, Monopoly, Guerilla Warfare, Expansion, Trade, Treaty, Factory, Forts, Revenue, Merchants, Fleets

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, a Portuguese military commander, 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.

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



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.

1.1.3.1 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: Domination over Malayalam Speaking Regions

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

- ◆ The landing of Vasco da Gama on the Malabar Coast in 1498 opened a new chapter in Kerala's history.
- ◆ The Kunjali Marakkars developed effective naval guerrilla tactics and became powerful symbols of indigenous maritime resistance against Portuguese dominance in Malabar.
- ◆ Internal conflicts and political betrayals eventually led to the capture and execution of Kunjali Marakkar IV.

- ◆ In Travancore, British commercial activities at Anjuthengu Fort triggered resistance under the Attingal Rani, often regarded as the first organised revolt against British authority in Kerala.
- ◆ In Cochin, Sakthan Thampuran strengthened royal authority through administrative reforms, reduced the influence of feudal elites, and reorganised relations with merchant and religious communities.
- ◆ The Portuguese involvement reshaped Kerala's economy by weakening earlier Arab–Egyptian trade networks and introducing new goods, crops, architectural styles, and military technologies.
- ◆ The Portuguese also influenced agricultural production by encouraging the commercial cultivation of spices and coconuts, linking Kerala's rural economy more closely with European markets.
- ◆ The Dutch East India Company pursued profit through trade monopolies particularly in pepper using political influence and economic control rather than large-scale military conquest.
- ◆ British influence gradually moved beyond trade and developed into direct political control.

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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2

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
- ◆ interpret the significance of Pazhassi uprising against colonial encroachment

Prerequisites

Malabar, located along the northern coast of present-day Kerala, occupies a significant place in the history of resistance in South India. Known for its active ports and flourishing spice trade, the region attracted merchants and travellers from many parts of the world, creating a vibrant atmosphere of cultural and commercial exchange. Over time, however, Malabar also became an arena of political rivalry and repeated confrontations with outside powers. The struggles that unfolded here reflect the determination of its people to defend their land, livelihoods, and long-standing traditions from external control and unfair authority.

A major turning point occurred after the arrival of Vasco da Gama on the Malabar coast in 1498. Motivated by the profits of the spice trade, the Portuguese attempted to dominate local commerce and maritime routes. Their ambitions faced strong resistance from regional rulers, particularly the Zamorin of Calicut. In this struggle, the naval leaders known as the Kunjali Marakkars organised determined sea-based campaigns against Portuguese forces, marking some of the earliest organised attempts to resist European expansion and protect indigenous trading networks.

The eighteenth century marked the beginning of another period of upheaval. The military campaigns of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan reshaped the political arena of the region. After the eventual defeat of Tipu Sultan, the British East India Company strengthened its authority over Malabar. New revenue policies, the weakening of customary land arrangements, and British support for certain landlord groups created widespread discontent among the population. These developments contributed to rising tensions and laid the groundwork for further resistance in the region.

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 Elampilasseri, Attan Gurukul of Manjeri, Chemban Pokker of Vellattiri, and Hydros Kutty of Chavakkad, played decisive roles. 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 British East India Company slowly strengthened its influence in Malabar through temporary revenue arrangements and administrative supervision instead of direct rule.
- ◆ The appointment of Joint Commissioners marked the beginning of organised British involvement in the political, financial, and administrative affairs of the region.
- ◆ By gaining control over the pepper trade and altering the system of tax collection, the Company reshaped the local economy and reduced the authority of traditional rulers.
- ◆ Administrative reforms, such as dividing Malabar into northern and southern districts, helped the British improve their control and monitoring of the area.
- ◆ The rebellion of Pazhassi Raja began when the British refused to recognise his customary right to collect revenue in Kottayam, even though he had earlier supported them.
- ◆ Pazhassi Raja adopted guerrilla warfare in forest regions with the support of peasants, local landlords, and tribal communities.
- ◆ When the British attempted to annex Wayanad, the conflict intensified and led to a stronger phase of resistance.
- ◆ The movement gained wider support from different groups, including Nairs, Mappilas, peasants, and tribal communities, giving the struggle a broader social base.
- ◆ To suppress the uprising, the Company constructed military roads, organised local militias, offered rewards for informants, and used harsh military measures.
- ◆ The death of Pazhassi Raja in 1805 brought an end to one of the longest and most organised early resistance movements against British authority in 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?
4. In which year was Malabar transferred from the Bombay Presidency to the Madras Presidency?
5. Which ruler was denied the right to collect taxes in Kottayam, triggering major resistance?
6. What form of warfare did Pazhassi Raja primarily employ against the British?
7. Which region's attempted annexation sparked the second Pazhassi revolt?
8. Name the tribal community that played a crucial role in Pazhassi Raja's resistance.
9. Who led the British forces responsible for killing Pazhassi Raja?
10. 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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SGOU



UNIT

Resistance in Princely States

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ examine how the British exercised indirect control over princely states through treaties, subsidiary alliances, and political supervision, allowing rulers to remain in power while limiting their real authority
- ◆ explore how financial demands, military commitments, and British interference in administration created discontent in princely states such as Travancore and Cochin
- ◆ discuss the contribution of Velu Thampi Dalawa and Paliyath Achan in mobilising resistance and organising opposition against growing British influence
- ◆ assess how these struggles within princely states revealed the exploitative and colonial character of British rule

Prerequisites

Travancore and Cochin occupy an important place in the early history of resistance in Kerala. Unlike Malabar, which came under direct British rule after the defeat of Tipu Sultan, these regions continued to exist as princely states. Their rulers formally remained in power, but in practice their authority was increasingly influenced by the British through political representatives and treaty arrangements. As a result, the independence of these states gradually narrowed, and governance had to operate within limits imposed by colonial authority. This situation slowly created dissatisfaction and tension.

In Travancore, discontent grew as the British began to intervene more actively in matters of administration and finance. The most dramatic expression of this unrest appeared in the uprising led by Velu Thampi Dalawa between 1808 and 1809.

Serving as the Dewan of the state, Velu Thampi became increasingly troubled by the heavy financial burdens imposed by the British and the gradual erosion of Travancore's autonomy. His well-known 'Kundara Proclamation' appealed to the people to stand together against British domination. Although the revolt was eventually suppressed, it remains one of the earliest and most forceful expressions of resistance to colonial authority in Kerala.

Cochin also experienced similar pressures. Growing British involvement in political and economic affairs created uneasiness among sections of the ruling class and administrative officials. While the state did not witness a major uprising like that in Travancore during this period, disagreements and tensions were visible within the administration. Over time, British influence gradually reshaped traditional systems of taxation, diplomacy, and governance in both Travancore and Cochin, bringing noticeable changes to their political structure.

Keywords

Political Subordination, Economic Exploitation, Velu Thampi, Paliyath Achan, Kundara Proclamation, Princely States, Subsidiary Alliance, East India Company, British Resident, Treaty of Perpetual Friendship

Discussion

1.3.1 Nature of the Company's Authority in Princely States

Before the British imposed their preferred model of "development" on Travancore, they had already taken careful steps to weaken the kingdom's political autonomy. Travancore, once treated as an ally, gradually slipped into the position of a subordinate. This followed a familiar pattern seen across many Indian princely states: once a ruler entered into an alliance with a colonial power, escaping its grip became almost impossible. The British connection with Travancore began in the 1600s, when the East India Company set up a trading post at Vizhinjam for pepper and calico. Additional factories at Kovalam and Anjuthengu soon followed. However, the relationship changed when Marthanda Varma sought the Company's military help

to subdue rebellious Nair nobles and later to defend the state from the rising threat of Mysore. In 1788, this cooperation resulted in an agreement that allowed the Company to station two British regiments in Travancore at the state's cost.

Things took a more serious turn after Tipu Sultan's defeat in the Third Anglo-Mysore War, which ended with the Treaty of Seringapatam in 1792. Emboldened by victory, the Company pressed Travancore to transform the earlier agreement into a permanent alliance. The new treaty stripped Travancore of much of its political and economic freedom, effectively making it a tributary of a foreign trading corporation. In return, the Company promised to protect the state from any external threat. By the time the treaty was approved in 1797, the Raja was also required to supply troops for the Company's wars. These obligations placed



a tremendous financial strain on Travancore, draining its treasury through subsidies, compensation payments, and mandatory pepper deliveries. To meet these demands, the Raja was forced to borrow heavily 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 Tiruvitamkur

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 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 significant positions, Velu Thampi found himself with no way out. Rather than fall into British hands, he chose to end his life. He committed suicide at the Bhagavathi temple in Mannadi, bringing his resistance to a tragic end.

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 mobilise 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 relationship with Travancore slowly changed from friendly cooperation to a position where the state became increasingly dependent on British authority.
- ◆ The British commercial contact gradually developed into political control through a series of treaties that expanded their influence in the region.
- ◆ The introduction of the Subsidiary Alliance system placed significant financial obligations on Travancore.
- ◆ The presence of a British Resident in the court further reduced the freedom of the Travancore administration to make independent decisions.
- ◆ Economic pressures and reduced military allowances led to unrest within the army, resulting in occasional mutinies among the soldiers.
- ◆ The treaty signed in 1805 further limited the independence of Travancore by giving the British greater control over its defence and financial matters.
- ◆ In response to these developments, Velu Thampi Dalawa and Paliyath Achan organised resistance against increasing British interference.
- ◆ Through the famous Kundara Proclamation, Velu Thampi appealed to the people to unite and oppose foreign domination.
- ◆ The uprising eventually came to an end with the tragic death of Velu Thampi in 1809, marking a significant episode of early resistance to British power in Kerala.
- ◆ Velu Thampi found a dependable ally in Paliath Achan.
- ◆ Paliath Achan was arrested and deported to Madras.

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 Paliyam 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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4 UNIT

Resistance from Forest

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain how colonial forest laws turned forests into state-controlled areas focused on revenue and commercial exploitation
- ◆ analyse the impact of forest regulations and colonial revenue systems on tribal and hill communities
- ◆ recognise the role of Pazhassi Raja and the Kurichiyas, Kurumbas, and Paniyas in organising resistance against colonial power
- ◆ appreciate how guerrilla tactics, mobility, and deep ecological knowledge of forested regions became crucial tools for anti-colonial resistance

Prerequisites

In Kerala, forests were never just empty stretches of land, they were vital to the lives of local communities. For generations, they provided food, shelter, medicine, and a deep sense of belonging. For many tribal and rural populations, the forest was inseparable from daily life; it was the foundation of their existence. With the arrival of colonial powers, however, these forests became sites of control and conflict. The administration sought to dominate land and natural resources, imposing strict regulations on areas that had once been shared and managed communally. As the British and other colonial authorities tried to control trade routes and exploit timber and other resources, local communities began to resist, turning the forests into centres of anti-colonial struggle.

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.

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.

The Imperial Forest Department was established in 1864 under Dietrich Brandis. It played a significant role in shaping India’s forest laws and consolidated scientific forestry, which prioritised revenue, timber extraction, and climatic theories over local ecological knowledge. 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.

The Indian Forest Act of 1865 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.

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. 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 Indian Forest Act of 1878 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. The Forest Policy of 1894 openly declared 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.

1.4.2 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 important 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:

- ◆ understand the structure of the janmi–tenant system in Malabar and how colonial land policies disrupted traditional agrarian relationships
- ◆ analyse the effects of British land revenue measures, legal reforms, and forest regulations on rural communities in Malabar
- ◆ examine the economic, social, religious, and administrative factors that sparked early agrarian uprisings
- ◆ recognise how landlord exploitation, economic and social inequalities contributed to the emergence of peasant resistance and early rural protests

Prerequisites

The early peasant movements in Kerala grew out of long-standing agrarian inequalities and the changes brought by colonial rule. In Malabar, land was traditionally organised under a hierarchical system where janmis (landlords) held the ultimate rights, while tenants and agricultural labourers worked the land under insecure conditions. Although customary rules offered some protections, British administration intensified landlord power by legally reinforcing their rights and prioritising revenue collection.

In the Madras Presidency, British land revenue policies formalised the authority of janmis and reshaped land ownership. Tenants often faced excessive rents, eviction, and growing debt. The colonial legal system further strengthened landlord dominance, leaving peasants with few avenues to contest unfair treatment. In Travancore and Cochin, similar tensions emerged, driven by revenue demands and landlord control, though the political context differed. These pressures sparked increasing unrest among cultivators. Initial resistance included petitions, refusal to pay high

rents, and localised protests. Over time, these movements became more organised and occasionally violent. In Malabar, the Mappila peasants played a central role leading to several uprisings in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in major events such as the Malabar Rebellion.

Keywords

Janmi, Shahid, Kudiyans, kudikidappu, Kanam, Verumpattom, Kuzhikkanam, kanak-karan, Janmi, Mappilas, Khilafat, Non-cooperation, Wagon Tragedy, Mappila, Eviction

Discussion

1.5.1 The Peasant Uprising in Nineteenth Century

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.

1.5.1.1 Pallippuram Uprising (1841)

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, Thirurangadi, and Pandikkad. In each case, small groups of Mappilas targeted local officials or landlords whom they viewed as oppressors.

1.5.1.2 Manjeri Uprising (1849)

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, his house was searched, his elderly father was humiliated, and an arrest warrant was issued. These personal insults became the immediate spark for rebellion.

However, Athan Gurukkal's anger was not solely personal. He clearly understood the deeper suffering of the Mappila tenants, who were often mistreated by both landlords and government officials. They faced high rents, unfair accusations, and a system that offered them no justice. Athan felt that appealing to the authorities would not bring any change, as the government only protected the interests of the landlords and the existing oppressive structure. For him and many others, rebellion seemed the only way to draw attention to their problems and fight for dignity.

The uprising began in August 1849 when Athan gathered a small group of followers in Arikode and marched toward Manjeri. On their way, they reached Pandikkad, where their main target was the house of Marat Nambudiri, a powerful landlord who had recently increased rents and angered his tenants. Although the landlord fled before the rebels arrived, no major harm was done except to a servant who resisted. The incident highlighted how economic exploitation and religious sentiment worked together

to fuel Mappila uprisings in the nineteenth century, showing that the revolt was not just spontaneous violence but a response to long-standing injustice and humiliation.

After leaving Pandikkad, the rebels reached Manjeri on the morning of 27 August 1849 and walked straight into the temple where the local raja was praying with several Brahmins. They fired into the air, allowing everyone to flee without harming anyone. For eight days, the rebels held their ground inside the temple and fought off repeated attacks from British Indian troops. But by 3 September 1849, with their numbers dwindling and food supplies running low, 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.

1.5.1.3 Mattannur Uprising (1852)

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.

1.5.1.4 Malabar Rebellion

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.

Evictions became another major cause of unrest. Tenants could be thrown out for many minor reasons like 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).

1.5.2 Extent and Nature of Peasant Exploitation

The condition of peasants worsened once the British interfered with the existing land and revenue system. In the earlier *janmi* system, it was primarily the landless tillers, mostly from oppressed and untouchable castes, who suffered the harshest forms of exploitation. They worked the land but owned none of it, and due to strict caste rules and social restrictions, they were tied to the soil almost like bonded labourers. Their position was so weak that they could hardly organise or rise in revolt. As a result, the peasant movements that later emerged rarely included this most oppressed group.

Between the *janmis* and the landless labourers stood a wide range of tenant groups belonging to various hereditary occupation castes. These intermediaries held different levels of rights over the land; some leased paddy fields, others held garden lands, and artisanal castes often possessed nothing more than their small huts. The middle castes usually farmed the land and ranged from small cultivators to larger farmers. The *janmi* system was built on a complex network of traditional rights, duties, and claims. A tenant could not simply be evicted at the *janmi*'s whim; eviction occurred only if the tenant failed to fulfil customary obligations, such as paying dues.

However, when the British asserted their authority over the region, they introduced two major changes that completely disrupted the system. First, they treated the *janmi* as an absolute landlord, who now had the legal right to evict tenants. Second, they made tenants directly responsible for paying tax to the British. These measures combined features of both the *zamindari* and *ryotwari* systems, destabilising long-standing agrarian relationships in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar.

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.

1.5.3 Mappila Rebellions in Malabar: Agrarian Roots and Colonial Interpretations

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 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.



British officials tried to explain these uprisings as religious conflicts, usually portraying them as clashes between Hindu landlords and Mappila peasants. William Logan, the collector of Malabar, clearly linked these revolts to rural poverty and the deep agricultural distress in the region.

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

1.5.4 The Background of Tenorial Contradiction

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 (*kudiyar*) 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 Kanom 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
- ◆ examine the impact of missionary activities on Kerala society
- ◆ made aware of the spread of Western education in Kerala through the missionaries

Prerequisites

The history of Kerala cannot be fully understood without examining the role of Christian missionaries and their wide-ranging activities. Missionary activities became particularly prominent from the 16th century onward with the arrival of the Portuguese, and later through Protestant missions under British influence. Organisations such as the Church Mission Society and the London Missionary Society played a crucial role in expanding missionary work across different parts of Kerala. Their efforts were not limited to religious conversion; they also focused on education, social reform, and the spread of modern knowledge.

One of the most significant contributions of missionaries was in the field of education. They established schools, colleges, and printing presses, which helped promote literacy and the use of Malayalam as a written language. In addition to education, missionaries were actively involved in social reform. They challenged rigid caste practices, supported the upliftment of marginalised communities, and promoted women's education at a time when such ideas were not widely accepted.

Thus, missionary activities in Kerala were multifaceted. While their primary aim was the spread of Christianity, their influence extended far beyond religion, contributing significantly to the educational, social, and cultural transformation of Kerala society.

Keywords

Missionaries, Church Mission Society, London Missionary Society, Basel Mission, Western Education, Schools, Evangelisation

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 Ringeltaube, 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 School Roberts founded was later evolved into the 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

Prerequisites

Kerala underwent many important changes during the colonial period, and Christian missionary activity was one of the key forces behind this transformation. What began as limited contact gradually expanded with the arrival of European powers, especially Portugal and later Britain. Along with trade and political control, missionary groups became actively involved in shaping the social and cultural life of the region. Organisations like the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society set up schools, colleges, and hospitals, making modern education and basic healthcare more accessible to different sections of society. As a result, literacy levels improved, and a new group of educated people began to emerge in Kerala.

Missionary efforts also had a lasting impact on language and literature. The introduction of printing presses made it easier to produce books and newspapers in Malayalam. Translations of religious and other texts helped in refining the language and making it more standardised. Over time, this contributed to the growth of modern Malayalam literature and encouraged wider public discussion and exchange of ideas.

Missionary activism became an important factor in Kerala's transition towards a more modern society, influencing not just religion but also education, language, and social development.

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 and Knowledge: 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 Illikkunnu 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 Hawsworth, Mead, and others, established schools and boarding institutions for enslaved and marginalised 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 clothes, 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 Missionary activism in Kerala.
2. Analyse the role of the Missionaries in the introduction of a 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 successful 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

Prerequisites

Up to the nineteenth century, literary activity in Malayalam was largely controlled by the upper sections of society. Writing during this period was dominated by *kavyas*, which were heavily influenced by Sanskrit in both style and content, making them less accessible to ordinary people. However, things began to change in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Malayalam literature slowly started moving in a new direction, breaking away from strict classical conventions. Writers began experimenting with different styles and themes, influenced in part by Western literary ideas. This shift led to the rise of new forms of writing, especially the novel, which brought fresh ways of storytelling. At the same time, the short story also started gaining popularity. Together, these developments marked a gradual transition from a traditional literary system to a more modern and dynamic literary culture in Malayalam.

Keywords

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

Discussion

2.3.1 Emergence of New Literary Genres

2.3.1.1 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 *Vina 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 *Vina Puvu*, *Nalini*, *Lila*, *Sri Buddha ritam*, *Prarodanam*, *Chintavishtayaya 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. Vailloppilli 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 Chullickad, Kureppuzha Sreekumar, Murukan Kattakkada, and so on, break conventional themes and forms and explore new dimensions in Malayalam poetry.

2.3.1.2 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.

2.3.1.3 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.

2.3.2 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 marginalized figures as central characters?
5. Who translated Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* to Malayalam under the title *Paavamangal*?

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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4 UNIT

Changes in Family Structure

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this 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* system
- ◆ explain the significance of law making in the transformation of family structure and property relations in Kerala
- ◆ examine the traditional concept of the *tharavadu* as a joint family system in Kerala and its key features

Prerequisites

In earlier times, family life in Kerala was organised around the *tharavadu*, a joint household where several generations lived together as one unit. It was not just a place of residence, but also the centre of economic activity and social life. This system followed *marumakkathayam*, a matrilineal tradition in which descent and property were traced through the female line. Even though inheritance passed through women, the family was usually managed by the *karnavar*, the senior male member, and property belonged to the family as a whole rather than to individuals.

As time went on, this traditional arrangement began to change. From the nineteenth century, new influences such as colonial laws, the growth of modern education, changing economic conditions, and reform movements started to alter the way families functioned. The large joint households slowly broke down, and smaller, nuclear families became more common. At the same time, the practice of *marumakkathayam* weakened, and systems of inheritance began to favour individual ownership and, increasingly, the male line. These developments brought major changes to everyday life in Kerala.

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 the 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 *taravadus*. 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 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 Ezhava 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 *Adukkalayilninnnum Arangathekku* (From Kitchen to Stage) by V. T. Bhattathiripad strongly criticized 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 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 Muslims of Kerala who followed the matrilineal system, the demand for reform of succession laws was initially weaker than in other matrilineal

communities. However, as a movement on this issue gradually spread, Muslims also began to demand change. Due to this pressure, the *Mappila Marumakkathayam* Act was passed in 1933. This Act brought a shift from matriliney to patriliney among Muslims, except in the case of the Arakkal family. It granted members following *Mappila Marumakkathayam* the right to demand partition of their taravad property. The property obtained through such partition was thereafter governed by *Shariat* law.

The *Shariat* Act passed by the Central Legislature in 1937 was extended to the Muslims of Madras State by an Act of the Madras Legislature in 1947. As a result, the matrilineal Muslims of Malabar also became followers of the patrilineal system. Thus, the *Marumakkathayam* system, which had existed among several communities, gradually came to an end.

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 *Adukkalayilninnnum Arangathekku*?
8. The Christian Succession Act was passed in which year?
9. Which was the Act passed in 1933 to abolish the *Marumakkathayam* system among Muslims?

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
9. Mappila Marumakkathayam Act

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. Discuss the changes in family Structure and property relations among Nairs, Ezhavas, Nambuthiris, Christians and Muslims in Kerala.
4. 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 successful 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

Prerequisites

The colonial period brought significant changes to Kerala, especially in the way knowledge was created, organised, and used. When European powers such as the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company established their presence, they did not simply rule the region politically; they also reshaped existing systems of knowledge. What had earlier been preserved and passed on through local traditions gradually began to be reorganised into more structured and formal systems that suited administrative needs. This shift can be understood as the emergence of a new information order, where classification, record-keeping, and institutional control became central.

Fields such as medicine, plant knowledge, and land management were increasingly brought under systematic study. Indigenous medical practices like Ayurveda continued to exist, but alongside them, Western medicine began to spread through hospitals, dispensaries, and public health initiatives. This marked the beginning of organised healthcare in a modern sense. In the same way, knowledge about plants, which had long been part of local traditions, was collected and documented in a more scientific manner. Works like the *Hortus Malabaricus* show how European scholars worked together with local experts to record and classify this knowledge.

Another important development was the introduction of new administrative tools such as surveys and censuses. These helped the colonial state to better understand and control the region. Land was carefully measured and mapped, and systems of revenue were standardised. At the same time, censuses gathered detailed information about the population, including aspects like caste, occupation, and religion. Through these methods, society itself was broken down into categories that could be recorded and analysed.

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 systematized and institutionalized. Plant knowledge was classified and organized. The colonial state and native principalities initiated scientific surveys and censuses, which introduced new methods of data collection and documentation.

2.5.2 Institutionalization 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 institutionalized 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. Specialized 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, the 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 institutionalized 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 systematized under British rule. During these phases, deliberate efforts were made to collect, classify, and commercialize 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 organization 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 commercialisation. 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 centralized 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 mobilized to serve colonial interests, with commercialization 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 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 organized 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 the modern healthcare system in Kerala?
2. The British health policy began with the introduction of vaccination for.....
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 the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the structure and features of the caste system in colonial Kerala
- ◆ explain how caste influenced social, economic, and political life in regions like Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore
- ◆ examine forms of caste-based discrimination, including untouchability, unapproachability, and restrictions on mobility, dress, and education
- ◆ develop the ability to interpret historical sources and narratives related to caste practices in colonial Kerala

Prerequisite

This unit examines the evolution of the caste system in Kerala and its deep influence on society. From around the eighth to the thirteenth centuries CE, Kerala witnessed the growth of a highly rigid social order shaped largely by Brahminical Hindu traditions. Over time, caste became a powerful force that determined a person's position in society, occupation, place of residence, access to resources, and even patterns of daily interaction.

The social hierarchy placed the Namboothiri Brahmins at the highest level, while the Nairs held significant roles in governance and military service. In contrast, communities such as the Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, and various *Adivasi* groups experienced harsh discrimination, exclusion and different forms of forced or exploitative labour. Social practices like untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability created strict barriers between communities and controlled social relationships in everyday life.

Keywords

Savarna, *Avarna*, Hierarchy, Untouchability, Unseeability, Unapproachability, Slavery

Discussion

3.1.1 Savarna – Avarna Characterisation

In colonial Kerala, caste was enforced through highly visible and rigid practices of ritual purity and pollution. Social life was sharply divided between *savarna* (upper castes) and *avarna* (lower castes), leading to clear physical and social separation. Practices such as untouchability, unapproachability, and even restrictions on being seen were justified in terms of hierarchy, but in reality, they were often sustained by the dominance and authority of upper castes.

However, these strict rules were not always consistently followed. In urban centres, where upper castes were less involved in trade and commerce, norms related to distance-based pollution were frequently ignored. Ideas of purity and pollution were also present among marginalised groups like tribal and fishing communities, though these may not have originated from Brahmanical influence. Instead, such practices could reflect their own ways of maintaining group identity and social boundaries based on kinship or clan ties.

J. Devika, in her article titled, *The Defence of Aachaaram, Femininity and Neo- Savarna Power in Kerala*, defines the term *savarna* as the privileged caste communities that, from pre-colonial times, exercised control over land, material resources, and ritual authority. Although social and political conditions have changed over time, these communities have largely retained their privileged position. In contrast, *avarna* refers to historically

oppressed communities who laboured for the *savarna* and were subjected to practices of exclusion and humiliation, including untouchability and unseeability. Despite significant gains in education and economic participation, many *avarna* communities continue to face exclusion from social power in enduring and evolving forms.

Even so, the divide between *savarna* and *avarna* communities, reinforced by economic and political inequalities, often deepened social distance and fostered dehumanising attitudes. Kerala's pattern of scattered rural settlements may have unintentionally supported the practice of distance pollution, as people lived in more isolated spaces. This differed from many parts of northern India, where clustered settlements made such practices harder to maintain.

At the same time, Kerala's relatively widespread access to drinking water may have eased some of the hardships faced by lower castes. In contrast, in many parts of northern India, access to water was tightly controlled by upper castes, making everyday life far more difficult for marginalised communities.

For the upper castes in Kerala, the significant presence of Christian and Muslim communities reduced their reliance on *avarna* labour, which in turn made it easier to maintain practices like distance pollution. Meanwhile, communities such as the Ezhavas and Pulayas had their own rich traditions, including distinct religious practices and local cult centres rooted in popular culture.

An awareness of caste-based oppression began to emerge only when these communities started loosening their traditional social and economic ties, particularly with the gradual spread of colonial capitalism into Kerala's agrarian society. The rise of organised movements among the Ezhavas and Pulayas did not happen suddenly; it was shaped by a series of historical developments and changing conditions.

As a monetised economy and commodity-based production expanded, it came into conflict with the older social order built on rigid caste divisions and practices like distance pollution. These tensions could no longer be contained, and they played a key role in shaping new forms of resistance. The search for dignity, identity, and self-respect among *avarna* communities must be understood within this broader struggle between old hierarchies and emerging socio-economic forces.

3.1.2 Hierarchical Structure and Disabilities

Like many other parts of India, colonial Kerala was deeply structured by caste and gender-based divisions that shaped how people occupied and moved within social spaces. However, the arrival of European traders and the gradual imposition of their systems of knowledge and control brought significant changes, altering the region's economic, cultural, political, and spatial dynamics particularly in areas like Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar.

Kerala's economy at the time was largely agrarian, marked by landlord dominance, feudal relations, and rigid caste hierarchies. The population was diverse, including Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. Within the caste order, communities were ranked in a strict hierarchy, with groups like the Nambuthiris at the top, followed by Nairs and other intermediate castes, while communities

such as Ezhavas, Nadars, Parayas, and Pulayas occupied lower positions, with some even treated as slave castes.

This system enforced harsh inequalities and deeply entrenched practices based on ideas of purity and pollution. Lower-caste communities were denied fundamental rights, access to education, and opportunities for upward mobility. They were often subjected to degrading rules governing behaviour and bodily conduct. For instance, they were expected to stand in a submissive posture before upper castes and cover their mouths while speaking - a practice known locally as *ochhanam*. Such customs reflected not only social exclusion but also the everyday enforcement of hierarchy and control.

Kerala's traditional social order was deeply divided along caste lines, with strict rules built around the idea of *teendal*, or ritual pollution. This belief system led to a range of discriminatory practices such as untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability, and even forms of slavery.

3.1.3 Untouchability

Untouchability, a defining aspect of the caste system, was a social rule that strictly limited interaction between upper castes and marginalised communities. It not only prevented contact between these groups but also regulated relationships within different sub-castes, reinforcing separation and hierarchy in everyday life. What made Kerala distinctive was the extreme refinement of the concept of pollution, it was not limited to physical contact but could also occur simply by coming too close to a person of a higher caste.

Untouchability meant that lower castes were forbidden from touching upper castes. These rules were enforced with severity. In extreme cases, upper castes claimed the right to use violence if such norms were violated,



arbitrary and varying from place to place, demanded strict spatial separation, where even a shadow cast by someone from a marginalised community was thought to defile the supposed purity of upper-caste Hindus.

Lower castes were expected to stay out of sight of upper castes altogether. When upper-caste individuals travelled, they would call out warnings, prompting those considered “lower” to quickly move away or hide. In some cases, they were not even allowed to appear in public during the daytime for fear that their presence might cause “pollution.” These practices collectively pushed marginalised communities to the fringes of society, both physically and socially, reinforcing a deeply unequal and oppressive system.

3.1.5 Unapproachability

These practices were not just social but also tied to economic structures. Untouchability helped sustain hierarchical and exploitative relationships in a semi-feudal agrarian system, reinforcing the dominance of landlords over tenants, bonded labourers, and enslaved groups. It led to widespread marginalisation, including economic hardship, political exclusion, and cultural suppression.

The norms regarding proximity were Nairs should keep themselves 16 feet away from the Brahmins, Ezhavas should keep themselves 16 feet away from Nairs, Pulayas should keep themselves 32 feet away from Ezhavas, Nayadis should keep themselves 32 feet away from Pulayas.

Unapproachability followed a strict and often codified system, with each caste required to maintain a specific distance from others. For instance, certain communities had to remain dozens of paces away from Brahmins or Nairs, depending on their caste status.

3.1.6 Slavery

In the 19th century, the system of caste-based slavery in Kerala began to draw wider international attention, largely through the accounts of Anglican missionaries and British colonial officials who were influenced by abolitionist ideas. In their writings, the harsh conditions endured by Dalit communities such as the Pulayas, Parayas, Kuravas, and Cherumas were often compared to the system of slavery in the Atlantic world.

Historical records spanning from around the 9th to the 19th century clearly confirm the existence of slavery among so-called “untouchable” castes in Kerala. These sources also highlight the prevalence of slave transactions, which were an accepted part of the social and economic structure across the region. While most of these records point to the buying and selling of enslaved people within Kerala itself, there is also some evidence suggesting that individuals from the region were drawn into wider, even international, slave networks during the colonial period.

Documents from Travancore and Cochin show that the trade in slaves continued openly in local society until missionaries began to challenge it in the late 1840s. Ownership of slaves was not limited to upper-caste Hindu landlords; Syrian Christian landholders also participated in this system. Slave markets operated in several places, including Cochin, Kottayam, Changanassery, and Anikkat, and there are even accounts indicating that church buildings were used to confine enslaved people on certain days, particularly in the Cochin region.

Accounts recorded by missionaries reveal the harsh realities of slavery in Kerala, particularly the complete disregard for family bonds. Enslaved individuals were often sold separately, fathers, mothers, and children sent to different places, without

any concern for their emotional suffering. Landlords frequently interfered in their personal lives, breaking up families and deciding marriages according to their own interests.

In many cases, marriages among enslaved people were arranged by owners with the intention of increasing the labour force, as more children meant more workers for their fields. The oral traditions preserved within these communities also echo these experiences, highlighting the pain of forced separations, imposed relationships, and the broader patterns of exploitation, humiliation, and hardship that shaped their lives.

3.1.7 Caste based Hereditary Occupations

In Kerala’s caste-oriented social order, occupations were largely inherited through birth, giving people no freedom to pursue work outside the traditional duties linked to their caste. This led to a rigid and deeply unequal economic order that benefited the upper sections of society while exploiting the lower castes. Anyone who tried to cross these caste boundaries in employment often faced harsh consequences such as social exclusion, physical punishment, or other forms of humiliation. Access to education was also largely denied to the lower castes, preventing them from gaining skills or entering respected professions. As a result, poverty and social disadvantage continued from one generation to the next with very limited chances of improvement.

In the feudal society of Travancore, the *avarana* communities were compelled to perform unpaid services known as *Uliyam* and *Viruthi* for the state. These practices essentially amounted to forced labour imposed on the lower castes. Under this arrangement, people had to carry out various duties without receiving any payment. *Uliyam* was commonly used for public works such

as repairing roads, maintaining government buildings, and arranging supplies during festivals, while *Viruthi* referred to similar obligatory services carried out under another name.

Recap

- ◆ Colonial Kerala society was divided into *savarna* (upper castes) and *avarna* (lower castes).
- ◆ Practices like untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability enforced strict social separation.
- ◆ Colonial Kerala had a rigid caste and gender-based social hierarchy.
- ◆ Society was organised around landlordism, feudalism, and caste inequality.
- ◆ Untouchability prevented physical contact between upper and lower castes.
- ◆ Lower castes were sometimes forbidden even from being seen by upper castes.
- ◆ Unapproachability imposed fixed physical distances between castes.
- ◆ Kerala had a long history of caste-based slavery lasting until the 19th century.
- ◆ Occupations in Kerala were decided by birth and caste status.
- ◆ Lower castes had little freedom to choose different professions.
- ◆ *Avarna* communities in Travancore were forced to perform unpaid labour called *Uliyam* and *Viruthi*.

Objective Questions

1. What term was used for upper castes in Kerala society?
2. What term referred to lower castes in Kerala?
3. What practice prohibited physical contact between castes?
4. What was the Malayalam term for ritual pollution?
5. What was the submissive act of covering the mouth while speaking called?

6. What was the unpaid labour system in Travancore called?
7. What was another form of compulsory unpaid service known as?
8. Which social system fixed occupations by birth?
9. What system prevented lower castes from coming near upper castes?
10. What practice restricted lower castes from even being seen?

Answers

1. Savarna
2. Avarna
3. Untouchability
4. Teendal
5. Ochhanam
6. Uliyam
7. Viruthi
8. Caste
9. Unapproachability
10. Unseeability

Assignments

1. Explain the structure of caste hierarchy in colonial Kerala.
2. Discuss the practices of untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability.
3. Analyse the social disabilities imposed on lower castes in Kerala.
4. Examine how caste influenced economic and occupational structures.
5. Describe the role of religion and belief systems in sustaining caste practices.

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UNIT

Anti Caste and Anti-untouchability Movements

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the strategies and techniques used by social reformers in caste and anti-untouchability movements
- ◆ identify significant leaders and social reformers and their contributions to social change of Kerala society
- ◆ analyse the role of social, religious, and educational reforms in challenging caste discrimination
- ◆ recognise the role of collective action and community mobilisation in bringing social transformation

Prerequisite

The anti-caste and anti-untouchability Movements in Kerala arose as important social struggles aimed at opposing the deeply rooted caste inequalities that existed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kerala society was then marked by a strict caste hierarchy in which lower-caste communities faced severe discrimination and social exclusion. Practices like untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability deprived many people of basic rights, dignity, and freedom. Marginalised communities were prevented from entering temples, using public roads, attending schools, and accessing opportunities for social and economic progress.

These movements grew out of the need to resist long-standing injustice and oppression. Social reformers and community leaders began to question the caste system and worked towards building a society based on equality and human dignity. Influential leaders such as Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and Chattampi Swamikal inspired people to challenge discrimination and unite for social reform. Historic struggles such as the Vaikom Satyagraha and the Temple Entry movements became

symbols of the fight for social equality and justice. Over time, these reform efforts helped weaken caste barriers and played a major role in shaping a more equal and progressive society in Kerala.

Keywords

Talikkettukalyanam, Tirandukuli, Temple Entry Proclamation, Breast-Cloth Agitation, *Panthibhojanam*, *Sahodarya Prasthanam*, *Akilathirattu*, *Arul Nool*

Discussion

3.2.1 Strategies and Techniques of Movements

The reform movements in Kerala adopted several methods to fight social inequality and defend the rights and dignity of oppressed communities. One of the most effective approaches was symbolic resistance, where people openly challenged caste-based rules and discriminatory practices. Actions such as wearing clothes that were once forbidden to lower castes, entering roads and public places restricted to upper castes, and establishing temples without the approval of Brahmins became strong expressions of protest against the existing social system.

Reformers also realised that isolated efforts could not successfully oppose the deeply rooted caste hierarchy. Therefore, they focused on building collective strength through community organisations and social associations. These groups united people, spread awareness about social injustice, and organised meetings, campaigns, and public activities that encouraged communities to demand equal rights and reject oppressive customs.

Education was another major tool used by the reform movements. Social leaders believed that knowledge and learning were

essential for empowerment and progress. To support this goal, schools, libraries, and training centres were created for communities that had been denied educational opportunities for generations. Access to education helped people develop confidence, question social inequalities, and seek better opportunities in life.

Religious reform also played an important role in these movements. Instead of completely rejecting religion, many reformers tried to reinterpret religious teachings in a way that promoted equality, morality, and human values. They argued that religion should guide ethical living rather than justify discrimination and caste divisions. This approach helped them challenge orthodox beliefs while still remaining connected to the cultural and spiritual traditions of society.

3.2.2 Leaders and their Activities

3.2.2.1 Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928)

Sree Narayana Guru, born into an Ezhava family at Chempazhanthi near Thiruvananthapuram, played a decisive role in transforming Kerala's social landscape. Like Chattampi Swamikal, he challenged

the dominance of the Brahminical order and worked to reduce the harsh inequalities created by the caste system.

One of his most powerful interventions was the establishment of temples in different parts of Kerala. These shrines were intended mainly for the Ezhava community, but importantly, he opened them to communities considered even lower in the social hierarchy, such as the Pulayas. When questioned about his authority to consecrate temples as a non-Brahmin, he responded boldly that he was installing “an Ezhava Siva, not a Brahmin Siva,” directly confronting caste-based religious restrictions. Notably, in these temples, members of the Ezhava community themselves performed priestly duties. He also took a strong stand against wasteful and oppressive customs prevalent among the Ezhavas, including practices like *Talikettukalyanam* and *Tirandukuli*. Through persistent efforts, he succeeded in encouraging many to abandon these traditions.

Sree Narayana Guru’s spiritual outlook was remarkably inclusive and universal. His well-known message, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind,” reflected his vision of social unity and equality. Because of his far-reaching influence, he is often regarded as the father of Kerala’s modern renaissance.

At the heart of Sree Narayana Guru’s teachings was the idea that all people are equal because every human being shares the same spiritual nature. Influenced by the principles of *Advaita Vedanta*, he believed that caste distinctions were not created by God but were man-made divisions that stood in the way of social harmony and human progress. According to him, these artificial barriers weakened both the moral values and spiritual growth of society.

He attained *samadhi* at Varkala in 1928, which later became a major pilgrimage centre. The combined efforts of Sree Narayana Guru and Chattampi Swamikal awakened social awareness among Kerala’s Hindus, giving the reform movement a strong social purpose and a more practical direction.

Although Sree Narayana Guru initially focused on spiritual guidance and symbolic acts of reform, the movement later became more organised with the establishment of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903.

3.2.2.2 Ayyankali

It is also important to highlight the contributions of Ayyankali (1863–1941), a prominent leader who worked tirelessly against untouchability in Kerala. Born into the Pulaya community, which had long endured severe social oppression, he emerged as a strong voice for the rights and dignity of the marginalised sections of society. He led movements among the Pulayas and other oppressed groups, encouraging them to organise and demand social justice.

Inspired by the activities of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali initiated similar organisational efforts among the so-called “Harijan” communities. One of his major achievements was securing the right for the Pulayas to use public roads freely in the princely state of Travancore, a right that had long been denied to them.

In 1907, he founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam, modelled on the SNDP Yogam. This organisation soon expanded across the region and became a powerful platform for advocating education, rights, and social uplift for the oppressed communities. Recognising his leadership and dedication, the Travancore government nominated him to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha. This position

enabled him to raise issues of inequality and injustice within an official forum, while also building support from leaders of other communities.

The historic Temple Entry Proclamation deeply moved Ayyankali, as it marked a significant step toward social equality. When Mahatma Gandhi visited Travancore following this event, Ayyankali was publicly honoured at a gathering held in Venganur, his native village. The social progress achieved by the oppressed communities in Kerala owes much to Ayyankali's relentless efforts, determination, and lifelong commitment to justice and equality.

3.2.2.3 Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924)

Chattampi Swamikal was born at Kannanmula in Thiruvananthapuram into a Nair family, traditionally believed to have connections with a Nambuthiri Brahmin lineage. From an early stage, he questioned the rigid social hierarchy that gave Brahmins overwhelming dominance in society. He argued that other major Hindu communities, particularly the Nairs and the Ezhavas, should rightfully share a more active and equal role in social life.

His reform efforts were largely focused on the Nair community, as he felt that awakening social awareness among them would influence other non-Brahmin groups and accelerate broader social transformation. Through his teachings and activism, he encouraged the Nairs to recognise and challenge harmful customs that had taken root within their society.

Among the practices he opposed were untouchability, internal caste divisions, and expensive and irrational rituals such as *Talikettukalyanam* and *Tirandukuli*, which often placed a heavy financial burden on middle-class families. By addressing these

issues, he helped foster a spirit of reform and self-criticism within the community.

Chattampi Swamikal also worked closely with Sree Narayana Guru, sharing a common vision of religious and social renewal among Hindus. He passed away in 1924 at Panmana, where a temple and *ashram* established in his memory continue to attract many visitors even today.

3.2.2.4 Vaikunda Swamikal

Vaikunda Swamikal, also known as Muthukutti Swami (1809–1851), was born at Thoppil in present-day Kanyakumari district. He was a forward-thinking reformer who challenged social inequalities and injustices of his time. In 1836, he established an organisation called *Samatva Samajam*, aiming to address the hardships faced by avarnas and to question the shortcomings in the prevailing administrative system.

This organisation is regarded as one of the earliest social reform groups in Kerala, and Vaikunda Swami is often seen as a pioneer among early social revolutionaries in the region. His activism, however, led to his arrest in 1837 during the reign of Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma, after which he was imprisoned at Singarathoppu jail in Thiruvananthapuram. It is said that Ayyaguru, the jail official at the time, became his disciple.

Vaikunda Swami's efforts toward social equality are also believed to have influenced movements such as the Breast-Cloth (Upper-cloth) agitation. His literary works in Tamil, including *Akilathirattu* and *Arul Nool*, are valued for their blend of historical narrative, biographical elements, and philosophical ideas.

3.2.2.5 Poykayil Yohannan (1879-1939)

Poykayil Yohannan, who was also known as Sree Kumara Guru Devan, was a major

social reformer in Kerala during the early twentieth century. Living during the same period as Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali, he dedicated his efforts to addressing the oppression and exclusion faced by Pulaya and Paraya communities. His work combined spiritual reform, literary expression, and social activism to challenge caste inequality.

Born into a Pulaya family in Travancore, Yohannan personally experienced the discrimination and hardships imposed by the caste system. Dalit communities at the time were denied education, barred from temples and public spaces, and forced into humiliating forms of labour. These realities deeply influenced his thinking and inspired him to question the social and religious systems that upheld caste oppression.

In search of equality and dignity, Yohannan initially embraced Christianity, as many oppressed communities believed conversion could provide freedom from caste discrimination. He became associated with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, hoping its teachings on spiritual equality would create a more just environment. However, he soon recognised that caste prejudice continued even within the church. Dalit Christians were treated separately during worship and were rarely given leadership roles. This experience convinced Yohannan that true liberation could only come through a new spiritual and social vision shaped by the experiences and struggles of oppressed people themselves.

The ideas promoted by Poykayil Yohannan were deeply connected to the belief that religion should acknowledge the pain, struggles, and humanity of oppressed people. He strongly criticised both Hinduism and Christianity for either supporting caste divisions or remaining silent about the suffering of Dalit communities. In his view, these religious traditions had failed to represent the real experiences and history

of the oppressed. Unlike other reformers who tried to reinterpret traditional scriptures, he openly questioned the authority of texts such as the Vedas, Puranas, and even the Bible. He argued that these works did not reflect the lives, voices, or struggles of oppressed people, and their absence from such texts showed how society had historically excluded them.

3.2.2.6 Sahodharan Ayyappan (1889-1968)

Sahodaran Ayyappan was a prominent rationalist and anti-caste activist who played a crucial role in shaping ideas of equality in modern Kerala. He strongly opposed caste discrimination and promoted practical methods to challenge it in everyday life. His campaigns for inter-caste dining (*panthibhojanam*) and inter-caste marriage were not merely symbolic acts, but deliberate efforts to break down deeply rooted social barriers.

Ayyappan developed what came to be known as the *Sahodarya Prasthanam* (brotherhood movement), which sought to dismantle caste divisions through daily social practices. By encouraging people from different castes to eat together and form marital ties, he aimed to challenge the very foundations of caste-based separation and transform social relations at the grassroots level.

His ideas were also linked to broader political currents of the time. He drew inspiration from non-Brahmin movements and shared affinities with the vision of B. R. Ambedkar, particularly the emphasis on equality, liberty, and fraternity as the basis for reconstructing society. Ayyappan argued for fair political representation, equitable distribution of resources, and equal access to opportunities for marginalised communities.

Within this context, the anti-caste movement in Kerala expanded beyond



social reform into questions of political rights and representation. Strategies such as conversion to other religions were also considered by oppressed communities as a means of escaping caste oppression. These developments, in turn, compelled upper-caste Hindu groups to respond more actively to the issue of untouchability, leading to efforts to integrate lower castes into broader reform movements within Hindu society.

3.2.3 Appraisal of the Movements

The socio-religious reform movements in Kerala played a significant role in reducing the long-standing oppression faced by backward and marginalised communities. For centuries, society in Kerala was shaped by a rigid caste structure dominated by Brahmin supremacy. Recognising the injustice created by this system, reformers dedicated themselves to challenging caste discrimination and promoting social equality.

It was within this deeply unequal social environment that movements for social awakening began to emerge in Kerala. The influence of European presence, along with the spread of modern education and new reform ideas, contributed to the growth of social consciousness among both upper and lower-caste communities.

With the establishment of British colonial administration in India, modern cultural institutions and new forms of social organisation were introduced. These

developments created conditions conducive to social reform movements, which played a significant role in the emergence of modern Kerala. However, Kerala's experience of modernity differs from the European conception of modernity. While the European understanding is associated with scientific inquiry, industrialization, rationality, and progressive social change, Kerala's modernity has evolved alongside enduring religious traditions, mystical beliefs, and inherited social practices, resulting in a distinctive and often contradictory form of modern experience.

Reformers strongly opposed practices such as untouchability, pollution rules, and restrictions on temple entry. The reform movements also promoted education and social awareness among marginalised communities. Schools, community organisations, and social associations encouraged people to question traditional hierarchies and seek better opportunities. Education became an important means of empowerment and social mobility.

Another important contribution was the rise of collective identity and self-respect among oppressed communities. Reformers encouraged people to reject degrading customs and develop confidence in their own culture, traditions, and rights. These movements also influenced later democratic and political developments in Kerala by encouraging participation, equality, and social reform.

Recap

- ◆ Reform movements used symbolic protests to challenge caste discrimination.
- ◆ Lower castes protested by wearing restricted clothes and entering public spaces

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru was born in an Ezhava family near Thiruvananthapuram.
- ◆ Guru challenged Brahminical dominance and caste inequality in Kerala society.
- ◆ Ayyankali was a major leader against untouchability in Kerala.
- ◆ In 1907, Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam.
- ◆ Chattampi Swamikal criticised Brahmin dominance and caste hierarchy.
- ◆ Vaikunda Swami founded the Samatva Samajam in 1836.
- ◆ Poykayil Yohannan worked for the upliftment of Pulaya and Paraya communities.
- ◆ Sahodaran Ayyappan was a rationalist and anti-caste activist and he promoted inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage.
- ◆ Reform movements weakened caste discrimination and untouchability in Kerala.

Objective Questions

1. Which reformer gave the slogan “One Caste, One Religion, One God”?
2. Which organisation was founded in 1903 to support Narayana Guru’s movement?
3. At which place did Narayana Guru attain *samadhi*?
4. Which organisation was founded by Ayyankali in 1907?
5. Which community was the main focus of Chattampi Swamikal’s reforms?
6. Which reformer founded the Samatva Samajam?
7. In which year was Samatva Samajam established?
8. Which literary work was written by Vaikunda Swami?
9. Which reformer was also known as Sree Kumara Guru Devan?
10. What was the movement founded by Sahodaran Ayyappan called?

Answers

1. Sree Narayana Guru
2. SNDP Yogam
3. Varkala
4. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam
5. Nairs
6. Vaikunda Swamikal
7. 1836
8. Akilathirattu
9. Poykayil Yohannan
10. Sahodarya Prasthanam

Assignments

1. Explain the significance of the Vaikom Satyagraha in Kerala's social history.
2. Discuss the role of Sahodaran Ayyappan in promoting anti-caste ideology.
3. Examine the contributions of Vaikunda Swami to early social reform movements.
4. Analyse the role of organisations like the Nair Service Society in social reform.
5. How did the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha challenge caste discrimination?

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UNIT

Socio-Religious Reform Movements

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the emergence of social and political awareness among oppressed and marginalised communities
- ◆ recognise the role of reform movements in promoting self-respect, self-confidence, and collective identity
- ◆ examine how people began questioning traditional customs, superstitions, and caste hierarchies
- ◆ understand how reform movements reinterpreted religious beliefs and practices in a modern context

Prerequisite

The reform movements in Kerala played a major role in awakening social awareness among the people, particularly among the lower castes and other disadvantaged sections of society. With the spread of education, newspapers, public discussions, and reform organisations, many people started questioning practices like caste oppression, social inequality, and meaningless religious customs. This growing awareness encouraged people to reflect on their social position and demand justice, equality, and better opportunities in life.

Religious reformers stressed the idea that all people are equal in the eyes of God. Sree Narayana Guru spread the famous message, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity,” which inspired people to work towards unity and equality. These reform movements also promoted religious tolerance, mutual respect, and a sense of social responsibility. As a result, religion gradually became more open, inclusive, and connected to the needs of society.

The socio-religious reform movements in Kerala were strongly based on human values and welfare. Their goal was not limited to changing religious practices; they also aimed at improving the lives of ordinary people and safeguarding human dignity. Reformers believed that every person, irrespective of caste, religion, or social background, had the right to freedom, education, equality, and respect.

These movements highlighted values such as humanity, brotherhood, justice, and compassion. Reformers worked for the upliftment of oppressed communities by supporting education, securing access to roads and public spaces, promoting temple entry rights, and fighting against social discrimination. Their human-centred efforts greatly contributed to making Kerala a more progressive, equal, and socially aware society.

Keywords

Social Consciousness, Discrimination, Social Transformation, Social organisations, Religion, Representation

Discussion

Social reform movements in Kerala largely emerged through the efforts of the growing middle class, shaped by a blend of indigenous traditions and Western influences. Many of the leading reformers belonged to intermediate and lower caste communities, and this background strongly influenced the issues they chose to address. Their focus was primarily on the hardships faced by marginalised groups such as caste discrimination, rigid and costly social customs, lack of access to education, and problems related to alcohol consumption.

Interestingly, the question of women's liberation did not receive equal attention across all communities. In matrilineal societies and among several backward groups, women generally enjoyed a relatively better status. As a result, organised efforts for women's emancipation became more prominent mainly within the Nambutiri Brahmin community and among Muslims, where women faced stricter social restrictions.

Leaders such as Chattampi Swamikal (1853–1924) and Sree Narayana Guru (1854–1928) spearheaded efforts to challenge social inequality and promote a more just and inclusive society. Alongside them, reformers like Brahmananda Sivayogi, Vagbhatananda, and Vaikunda Swami also made significant contributions to the broader movement for social transformation in the region.

3.3.1 Creation of New Social Consciousness

Colonial rule in India played an important role in bringing changes to society, culture, institutions, and political life. In Kerala, the colonial period marked the beginning of a transformation from a rigid caste-based social order to a more modern, secular, and progressive society. The impact of colonialism introduced new ideas, systems of education, and administrative changes that challenged traditional social structures and opened the way for social reform.



These changes created favourable conditions for the rise of socio-religious reform movements. Marginalised and underprivileged communities, who had long suffered under caste oppression and social exclusion, began to organise themselves and demand equality and justice. At the same time, they faced strong opposition from the dominant and privileged sections of society who wished to preserve the existing social hierarchy.

Colonial rule brought deep and far-reaching changes to the social structure of Kerala by introducing modern ideas and institutions. These new ideas gradually weakened many traditional customs and social arrangements that had existed for centuries. Colonial laws and administrative reforms encouraged social reorganisation and created opportunities for people to unite and raise demands for their rights. At the same time, older forms of social unity, such as the joint family system, slowly began to decline under the influence of changing economic and social conditions.

The reform movements that developed during this period gave caste groups a new sense of identity and organisation within Kerala society. Over time, caste became not only a social factor but also an important political force that governments and political leaders could no longer ignore. Colonial administration, through its classification systems and modern bureaucratic methods, reduced the traditional dependence of caste groups on old social structures and encouraged them to organise independently.

Many caste associations supported reforms in family life and property relations. They promoted the idea of smaller families and separate households, believing that dividing ancestral property among individual members would provide greater economic freedom and improve living conditions. These organisations gradually became

influential social, economic, and political bodies that contributed significantly to social transformation in Kerala.

Almost every caste and community in the princely states of Kerala formed its own organisation and publications. These associations functioned as pressure groups that demanded government jobs, educational opportunities, political representation, and other benefits for their communities. Newspapers, magazines, public meetings, and discussions organised by these groups helped spread their ideas and highlight the problems faced by their members. In this way, they created social awareness, strengthened community unity, and encouraged people to actively participate in public life.

The reform movements that emerged during this period were progressive in nature and aimed at social liberation and human dignity. They questioned traditional beliefs, customs, and unequal power relations that had shaped society for centuries. Gradually, people's attitudes and outlooks began to change, giving greater importance to ideas such as equality, social justice, democracy, and human rights.

Over time, these reform movements expanded beyond social and religious issues and developed into broader struggles against colonial domination, feudal practices, and elite control over society. Through these movements, the lower sections of society gained confidence, awareness, and greater participation in public life, which helped reshape Kerala into a more inclusive and socially conscious society.

The socio-religious reform movements that emerged in Kerala during the colonial period reflected the growth of new ideas inspired by liberal Western thought. Although these movements carried a strong spirit of social change and reform, they largely followed peaceful and non-violent methods.

Reformers actively campaigned against caste discrimination, social inequality, child marriage, and other oppressive customs, while also supporting women's rights and widow remarriage. Their efforts were rooted in ideals such as individual freedom, social justice, equality, and democratic rights.

These reform movements aimed to create a society where people could enjoy equal opportunities regardless of caste or gender. Reform leaders believed that transforming social institutions and removing inequality were essential not only for social progress but also for national unity and political freedom. They understood that social reform and political awakening were closely connected to economic and cultural advancement.

The changing social, economic, and political conditions in colonial Kerala also encouraged the formation of several social organisations across the region. The princely states of Travancore and Cochin became major centres of reform activities. Through organised efforts, many communities demanded fair representation in government jobs and legislative bodies. However, these demands often faced strong opposition from privileged upper sections of society who were unwilling to give up their dominance.

The reform movements gradually helped spread political awareness among ordinary people. Over time, they developed beyond social reform into broader struggles against colonial rule, feudal structures, and elite control. Movements led by lower and marginalised communities gained considerable strength and support, making them an important force in Kerala's social transformation. The reform struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries greatly empowered oppressed communities politically, socially, and economically. They also encouraged wider participation in public life and contributed significantly to the rise of

nationalism and political movements during the colonial period.

3.3.2 Transforming of Religion and Human Nature of Reform Movements

An equally significant aspect of Kerala's socio-religious reform movements was the new way in which religion and its role in daily life came to be understood. In traditional Kerala society, religion was deeply connected with the caste order and often strengthened social inequalities. Control over religious practices and institutions largely remained in the hands of dominant castes, while access to temples, sacred learning, and participation in religious activities was denied to many lower-caste communities. As a result, religion was not merely a matter of faith and spirituality; it also functioned as a system that upheld social privilege and exclusion.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reformers began to question this structure and attempted to redefine the purpose of religion. They argued that true religion should promote equality, morality, and human dignity rather than support discrimination and oppression. Greater importance was given to values such as compassion, ethical living, and mutual respect, instead of rigid rituals and caste-based privileges. This new interpretation encouraged people to critically examine long-accepted customs and develop a broader and more inclusive social outlook.

Among the leading figures of this transformation was Sree Narayana Guru, whose ideas profoundly influenced religious thought in Kerala. He strongly opposed the belief that spiritual authority belonged only to certain castes. His well-known message of "one caste, one religion, one God for humankind" expressed his vision of equality and universal brotherhood. By establishing temples that welcomed communities



previously excluded from worship, he directly challenged the dominance of upper castes over religious institutions. These initiatives showed that religion could become a means of social upliftment and collective empowerment.

Chattampi Swamikal also contributed greatly to this intellectual and spiritual shift. Through his teachings and writings, he criticised orthodox interpretations that justified caste divisions and questioned the claim that only Brahmins had the right to interpret sacred texts. He encouraged common people to study religious literature themselves and understand its philosophical

meaning. His emphasis on rational thinking and spiritual equality weakened the belief that caste hierarchy was divinely sanctioned.

Over time, these reformist ideas changed the public understanding of religion in Kerala. Religion increasingly came to be viewed not as a rigid framework of social control, but as a source of ethical values and social responsibility. By reinterpreting religious traditions in a more inclusive manner, reformers were able to challenge discrimination while remaining connected to the cultural and spiritual traditions familiar to society.

Recap

- ◆ Social reform movements in Kerala emerged mainly through the efforts of the growing middle class influenced by both traditional Indian ideas and Western thought.
- ◆ Many reform leaders came from intermediate and lower caste communities, which shaped their concern for oppressed sections of society.
- ◆ Reformers focused on issues such as caste discrimination, social inequality, lack of education, expensive customs, and alcoholism.
- ◆ Colonial rule introduced modern education, administrative reforms, and new political ideas that changed Kerala society.
- ◆ Colonialism weakened rigid caste structures and encouraged the growth of socio-religious reform movements.
- ◆ Newspapers, journals, and public meetings played a major role in spreading reform ideas and social awareness.
- ◆ Reform movements promoted values such as equality, democracy, social justice, and human rights.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru preached the message of “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humankind.”
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru established temples open to communities that had earlier been denied access to worship.

- ◆ Chattampi Swamikal criticised caste-based religious interpretations and encouraged rational thinking.
- ◆ The reform movements transformed religion into a source of ethical values, social responsibility, and inclusiveness.
- ◆ These movements helped Kerala develop into a more progressive, democratic, and socially conscious society.

Objective Questions

1. Which class mainly initiated reform movements in Kerala?
2. Which reformer preached “One Caste, One Religion, One God”?
3. Which period brought modern education and administrative reforms to Kerala?
4. Which community saw major women’s emancipation efforts?
5. Which medium helped spread reform ideas widely?

Answers

1. Middle Class
2. Sree Narayana Guru
3. Colonial period
4. Nambutiris
5. Newspapers

Assignments

1. Evaluate the role of socio-religious reform movements in transforming Kerala society.
2. Discuss the contributions of major reformers in Kerala towards social equality and modernisation.

3. Analyse the role of organisations in promoting socio-religious reforms in Kerala.
4. Examine the impact of caste reform movements on education and social mobility.
5. Discuss the relationship between religion and social reform in Kerala.

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UNIT

Formation of Organisations

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the historical context that led to the emergence of caste-based organisations in Kerala, including social inequality and caste oppression
- ◆ identify major caste based organisations and explain their roles
- ◆ analyse how these organisations worked for the upliftment of their respective communities through education, social reform, and economic development
- ◆ evaluate the role of caste organisations in challenging social disabilities such as untouchability and discrimination

Prerequisite

Caste-based organisations in Kerala developed mainly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to the deeply unequal caste structure that shaped society at the time. Kerala's social order was heavily dominated by upper-caste influence, especially under Brahminical traditions, while many lower and middle caste communities experienced discrimination in education, employment, access to temples, use of public spaces, and other social rights. Faced with these inequalities, different communities started forming organisations to defend their interests, seek social justice, and improve their overall living conditions.

Among the most influential organisations were the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam), which worked for the upliftment of the Ezhava community under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru; the Nair Service Society (NSS), founded by Mannathu Padmanabhan to organise the Nair community; and the Yogakshema Sabha, which sought reforms within the Namboothiri community. Similar organisations also emerged among Christian and Muslim communities to encourage educational growth and social advancement.



Even though these organisations were formed on the basis of caste or community identity, their contributions extended far beyond their own groups. They played a major role in spreading literacy, challenging social oppression, encouraging democratic thinking, and contributing to the broader social and political transformation of Kerala.

Keywords

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Servants of India Society, *Talikettukalyanam*, *Tirandukuli*, Popular Assembly, Yogakshema Sabha

Discussion

3.4.1 Caste based Organisations

The emergence of caste-based organisations committed to social reform gave fresh momentum to the efforts of leaders like Chattampi Swamikal and Sree Narayana Guru. Among these, two of the most influential bodies were the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P.) and the Nair Service Society (N.S.S.), both of which played a key role in advancing social change. In addition to these organisations, newspapers and journals became powerful tools for promoting social reform and public awareness. Periodicals such as *Sujanandini*, started in 1891 by Kesavan Asan from Paravur, and *Kerala Kaumudi*, established in 1911 by C. V. Kunhiraman of Mayyanad, played a major role in bringing reformist ideas to the public and encouraging social change across Kerala.

3.4.1.1 Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam)

The S.N.D.P. Yogam was established on May 15, 1903, inspired by the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. Its first annual meeting

took place at Aruvippuram in 1904 under his guidance. In its early phase, figures like Dr. Palpu and Kumaran Asan were instrumental in shaping its activities. Over time, the Yogam emerged as the principal organisation representing the Ezhava community and contributed significantly to their social, educational, and economic advancement. Its central mission was to spread the message of Sree Narayana Guru and to promote both social uplift and spiritual renewal among marginalised communities.

3.4.1.2 Nair Service Society (1914)

The Nair Service Society (N.S.S.) was established on October 31, 1914, under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan along with a group of dedicated young followers. Inspired by the model of the Servants of India Society, the organisation focused on serving society at large, while paying particular attention to the needs of the Nair community.

In its formative years, the N.S.S. played a vital role in advancing social reform. It worked to break down sub-caste divisions, and actively opposed outdated and extravagant customs such as *Talikettukalyanam* and

Tirandukuli. The organisation also addressed issues within the joint family system and sought to reduce its negative effects. Beyond this, it contributed to broader reform efforts, including the fight against untouchability and the promotion of social harmony.

Reformist zeal was not limited to the Nairs and Ezhavas alone. Among the Namboothiris too, there was a growing urge for change. This led to the formation of the Yogakshema Sabha in 1908. The Sabha aimed to introduce progressive changes within the community, such as encouraging marriage for younger Namboothiri men within their own group, promoting English education, and challenging practices like the seclusion of women.

Prominent figures like E. M. S. Namboodiripad and V. T. Bhattathiripad were associated with the early activities of the movement. Their efforts reflected a strong desire to modernize the community, summed up in the Sabha's striking slogan: "Make the Namboothiri a human being."

3.4.1.3 Sahodhra Sangham

Another significant reform effort was the Sahodara Sangham, established in 1917 at Cherai by K. Ayyappan. The organisation strongly opposed caste divisions and worked to promote social equality. One of its major activities was encouraging *misra bhojanam* or communal dining, where people from different caste backgrounds, including communities such as the Arayas and Pulayas, shared meals together. This practice challenged traditional caste restrictions and helped weaken social barriers within society.

3.4.1.4 Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham (1907)

The movement led by Ayyankali, through the organisation Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS), began in 1907, even before similar reform initiatives emerged among the Nairs and Namboothiris. In

terms of chronology, it followed only the Ezhava movement and marked an early phase in the spread of modern ideas and new forms of political organisation among Dalit communities.

The SJPS grew rapidly, especially in the Travancore region, where it eventually developed an extensive network with nearly a thousand branches at its peak. The movement was notable for its bold and radical approach to mobilization and reform. One of its most distinctive features was the establishment of community courts.

These courts were created in response to the severe discrimination Dalits faced in accessing the formal judicial system. They were not permitted to approach official courts directly and had to communicate their grievances from a distance, often through intermediaries, a practice that was both humiliating and unjust. Rejecting this system, Ayyankali set up alternative courts within the community. These institutions followed procedures similar to formal courts and even involved the assistance of sympathetic legal practitioners. Ayyankali himself presided over the chief court, with several subordinate courts functioning under the SJPS framework. The system included support staff such as messengers and officials responsible for enforcing decisions, and it proved to be both organised and effective.

With the backing of the Diwans, Ayyankali was also able to hold annual meetings of the SJPS in Thiruvananthapuram, often after sessions of the Popular Assembly. Activists from different parts of the region participated in large numbers, with women forming a significant portion of the attendees.

3.4.1.5 Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS)

The Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS) was established in 1910 in central Travancore by Poykayil Yohannan and his



associates from Dalit communities. It arose as a strong reaction against the persistence of caste discrimination within Christian groups, particularly the unequal treatment of Dalit Christians by upper-caste Syrian Christians in institutions like the Church Mission Society. By 1926, the movement had expanded significantly, with around 10,000 followers spread across more than sixty parishes.

From the outset, the PRDS developed its own independent structures and offered a reinterpretation of Biblical teachings that reflected the lived experiences of oppressed communities. Its influence grew rapidly as it spread to different parts of Travancore. Yohannan encouraged his followers to improve their material conditions by acquiring land wherever possible and emphasised the importance of modern education, leading to the establishment of schools. The movement also organised collective efforts to demand access to public spaces.

After the death of Poykayil Yohannan in 1939, leadership briefly passed to his close associate Njaliyakuzhi Simon Yohannan. However, internal conflicts soon followed, and eventually Yohannan's second wife, Janamma, assumed control of the organisation. In 1950, under her leadership, a section of the followers declared themselves Hindus, leading to significant changes in earlier practices that had been shaped by Christian traditions.

It was during this later phase that Poykayil Yohannan came to be revered as Kumara Guru Devan. He was increasingly viewed as a divine figure who had taken birth among the oppressed to liberate them from the legacy of slavery and suffering. This transformation led to important shifts in the foundational beliefs of the PRDS. The emergence of the Guru Devan cult reflects a broader pattern in Kerala's social history, where influential reformers of the late 19th and early 20th

centuries were gradually elevated to a semi-divine or divine status, giving rise to new religious and social interpretations within their movements.

3.4.2 Women Organisations

Women's organisations made an important contribution to the growth of social reform movements in Kerala. Associations such as the Antharjana Samajam were formed to address the difficulties experienced by women in the Namboothiri community and to encourage education, awareness, and social change among them. In the same way, the Yogakshema Sabha supported reforms within the community and took steps to improve the position of women in society.

During the early twentieth century, many Mahila Samajams and women's groups also appeared across different parts of Kerala. These organisations worked to promote female literacy, encourage the education of girls, and spread awareness about hygiene, health, and sanitation. They conducted meetings, discussions, and skill-based programmes that helped women gain self-confidence and become more active in social and community affairs. For a large number of women, participation in such organisations became their first experience of public speaking and organised social involvement.

3.4.3 Nature of Caste-based Reform Movements

The caste-based reform movements that developed in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had both a community-centered and a broader social reform character. Although these organisations were initially formed to improve the conditions of particular caste groups, they eventually became important forces in the fight against caste oppression and social inequality across Kerala society.

At the early stage, most of these movements concentrated mainly on the welfare and progress of their own communities. Kerala's social structure was highly unequal, with strict caste divisions that imposed different forms of discrimination and restrictions on various groups. In such a situation, reformers felt that organised community action was necessary for social advancement. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam), for instance, worked for the educational and social upliftment of the Ezhava community. The Nair Service Society (NSS) aimed to strengthen the social and economic position of the Nair community and supported reforms related to family practices and inheritance. Likewise, the Yogakshema Sabha sought to introduce reforms within the conservative Namboothiri Brahmin community. Among the oppressed sections, organisations such as the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha and the Cheramar Mahajana Sabha struggled for essential rights including education, social recognition, and access to public places.

As these movements evolved, many reform leaders began to promote ideas that went beyond the interests of individual communities. Sree Narayana Guru, for example, advocated the principle of universal equality through his famous message, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind." The involvement of different caste organisations in struggles such as the Vaikom Satyagraha also reflected the growing commitment to wider social reform and equality.

Therefore, these caste-based movements cannot be seen merely as organisations working for narrow community interests. Even though they began with the objective of uplifting specific groups, they gradually played a major role in opposing caste discrimination, spreading ideas of equality, and shaping the social transformation of modern Kerala.

Recap

- ◆ The two most influential reform organisations were the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and the Nair Service Society.
- ◆ Newspapers and journals played an important role in spreading reform ideas and creating public awareness.
- ◆ The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam was established in 1903 based on the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru.
- ◆ The Nair Service Society was founded in 1914 under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan.
- ◆ The NSS also supported reforms in the joint family system and worked for social harmony.
- ◆ Reform movements also emerged among the Namboothiris through the Yogakshema Sabha formed in 1908.
- ◆ The Yogakshema Sabha promoted English education and opposed the seclusion of women.

- ◆ The Sahodara Sangham was founded in 1917 by K. Ayyappan at Cherai.
- ◆ Sahodara Sangham promoted equality and opposed caste discrimination through communal dining practices.
- ◆ Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham in 1907 for the upliftment of Dalit communities.
- ◆ The SJPS established community courts to help Dalits who faced discrimination in the official judicial system.
- ◆ The Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha was founded in 1910 by Poykayil Yohannan.
- ◆ Women's organisations such as the Antharjana Samajam worked for the welfare and education of women.
- ◆ Mahila Samajams promoted female literacy, health awareness, and women's participation in public life.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the SNDP Yogam established?
2. Where was the first annual meeting of SNDP Yogam held?
3. Which organisation was founded by Mannath Padmanabhan?
4. In which year was the Nair Service Society established?
5. Which Sabha was formed among the Namboothiris in 1908?
6. What title was later given to Poykayil Yohannan?
7. In which place was Sahodara Sangham established?
8. Who founded Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham?
9. Which organisation was founded by Poykayil Yohannan?
10. In which year was SJPS established?

Answers

1. 1903
2. Aruvippuram
3. NSS
4. 1914
5. Yogakshema
6. KumaraGuruDevan
7. Cherai
8. Ayyankali
9. PRDS
10. 1907

Assignments

1. Explain the social conditions that led to the rise of caste-based organisations in Kerala.
2. Discuss the role of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in the upliftment of the Ezhava community.
3. Analyse the contributions of Nair Service Society in reforming Nair society.
4. Examine the objectives and achievements of Yogakshema Sabha.
5. How did caste organisations promote education and social awareness in Kerala?

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UNIT

Anti-Caste Movement

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ analyse the nature of anti- caste movements in Kerala
- ◆ examine the strategies and techniques used in these movements
- ◆ evaluate the role of social reformers who actively participated in the movements
- ◆ understand how these movements contributed to the abolition or weakening of practices like untouchability

Prerequisite

The anti-caste movements in Kerala emerged as major campaigns for social justice during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These movements arose in response to the severe caste inequalities that existed in Kerala society, where lower-caste communities were denied many basic rights and freedoms. Marginalised groups were restricted from using public roads, entering temples, attending schools, and participating equally in social life.

Some of the most notable struggles during this period included the Vaikom Satyagraha, the Guruvayur Satyagraha, the Paliyam agitation, and the Temple Entry movement. These protests directly opposed caste-based restrictions imposed on public spaces and religious institutions. Their main objective was to ensure equal access to roads, temples, and other public institutions for people from all castes.

The Vaikom Satyagraha was among the first organised protests against untouchability in Kerala and focused on securing the right of lower castes to walk on the roads around the Vaikom temple. Later, the Guruvayur Satyagraha concentrated on the issue of temple entry and equal rights in places of worship. In the same

way, the Paliyam agitation fought against caste discrimination and restrictions that prevented lower castes from moving freely near temples and upper-caste households. These struggles eventually paved the way for important reforms such as the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 in Travancore, which allowed lower-caste Hindus to enter temples officially.

Keywords

Savarna Jatha, Satyagraha, Harijans, Temple Entry, Untouchability, Caste Discrimination

Discussion

3.5.1 Vaikom Satyagraha

The earliest major phase of this movement was the well-known Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924–25. It brought together prominent leaders such as T. K. Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon, Mannath Padmanabhan, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, C. V. Kunhiraman, and K. Kelappan. The central demand of the agitation was to secure access for Avarnas to the roads surrounding the Vaikom temple, which had long been restricted.

A notable feature of the movement was the *Savarna Jatha*, a procession led by Mannath Padmanabhan and supported by caste Hindus who stood in solidarity with the cause. The procession reached Trivandrum and presented its demands to the Regent, Setu Lakshmi Bai. Both the *Satyagraha* and the *Jatha* played a crucial role in shaping public opinion in favour of temple entry reforms.

The protest continued for nearly twenty months, during which the participants faced arrests and various forms of repression. Ultimately, the movement achieved success in 1925, aided by the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi. During his visit to Travancore, Gandhi held discussions with the Regent

and government authorities, and also met Sree Narayana Guru at Varkala.

As a result, the roads leading to the Vaikom temple were opened to all Hindus, irrespective of caste. However, this reform was initially limited to Vaikom and did not automatically apply to other temples in Travancore. Consequently, similar agitations emerged in places like Ambalapuzha, Tiruvarpu, and Suchindram. These continued efforts bore fruit, and by 1928, access to the approach roads of temples across Travancore had been extended to all Hindus, regardless of caste.

3.5.2 Guruvayur Satyagraha

Another landmark episode in the struggle against untouchability was the Guruvayur Satyagraha of 1931–32. Initiated on November 1, 1931, under the leadership of the Kerala Provincial Congress, the movement sought to secure entry for all Hindus into the Guruvayur temple. K. Kelappan led the agitation, while A. K. Gopalan served as the head of the volunteer corps.

The protest soon drew national attention, with activists from different parts of India arriving to support the cause. However, the Zamorin, who managed the temple, firmly

resisted the demand for reform. Early in the movement, T. Subramanian Tirumumbu, a key organiser, was arrested. Tensions escalated further when P. Krishna Pillai was violently attacked by temple authorities for ringing the temple bell, an act traditionally restricted to Brahmins.

A turning point came on December 26, when A. K. Gopalan was assaulted by opponents of the agitation. This incident provoked strong public reaction, leading protesters to attempt entry into the temple by dismantling barricades. In response, the temple authorities shut down the shrine and suspended rituals for nearly a month.

After about ten months of sustained protest, K. Kelappan began an indefinite fast in front of the temple on September 21, 1932. However, he ended the fast on October 2 following the advice of Mahatma Gandhi. Subsequently, the Congress organised a limited referendum among Hindus in Ponnani taluk to gauge public opinion on temple entry. Around 70 percent of those consulted supported allowing Harijans into the temple, with a significant number of supporters being women, despite prevailing conservative attitudes. Although the movement did not immediately achieve temple entry, it played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and strengthening the broader campaign to eliminate untouchability.

3.5.3 Paliyam Satyagraha

Even after independence, untouchability did not disappear entirely and continued in subtle and overt forms. This made it necessary to revive and intensify reform efforts during the late 1940s. One significant struggle of this period was the Paliyam Satyagraha.

At Chennamangalam, the road passing in front of the residence of the Paliat Achan, who had once served as the hereditary Chief Minister of Cochin remained inaccessible

to Avarnas and non-Hindus. In response, various political parties and social groups united to form an Action Council, launching a Satyagraha aimed at opening this road to people of all castes and religions.

The protest, which lasted for nearly one hundred days from December 1948 to April 1949, faced strong opposition from authorities. Participants endured arrests, police violence, and lathi charges. Despite these hardships, the movement was notable for drawing support from diverse sections of society, including members of the Cochin and Kodungallur royal families as well as individuals from Namboothiri households.

Tragically, on the hundredth day of the agitation, a freedom fighter named A.G. Velayudhan lost his life during a police lathi charge, leading to the suspension of the movement. Around the same time, a major reform occurred, temples in Cochin were opened to all Hindus regardless of caste. This development effectively ensured that Avarnas and even non-Hindus could use the Paliyam road, marking a significant step forward in the fight against caste-based discrimination.

3.5.4 The Temple Entry Movement

The struggle for temple entry reached its decisive breakthrough in 1936, when Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma of Travancore issued the historic Temple Entry Proclamation on November 12. The Temple Entry Proclamation granted all Hindus, regardless of caste, the right to enter and worship in temples that had previously been restricted by the upper castes. This landmark order, the first of its kind in India, marked a turning point in the social history of the region. Mahatma Gandhi praised it as a remarkable and transformative step, describing it as a charter that ensured spiritual freedom for the people.



While the proclamation was met with strong resistance from conservative sections of Hindu society, it inspired immense hope among the oppressed communities, especially the Harijans and other marginalised groups. The reform brought about a profound yet peaceful transformation within Hindu society, breaking long-standing barriers without violence.

However, similar changes did not occur immediately in other regions. It took nearly another decade for such reforms to be

implemented in Cochin and Malabar. In Cochin, the Temple Entry Authorisation Proclamation of 1947–48 opened temples to all Hindus regardless of caste, while in Malabar, the Madras Temple Entry Act of 1947 ensured the same rights. With India's independence, untouchability was formally abolished by law, and its practice became a punishable offence. Thus, the long and determined struggle against untouchability in Kerala ultimately led to meaningful and lasting social change.

Recap

- ◆ The Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924–25 was one of Kerala's earliest major anti-caste movements.
- ◆ Leaders such as T. K. Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon, Mannath Padmanabhan, and K. Kelappan participated in the Vaikom satyagraha.
- ◆ Mahatma Gandhi intervened in the agitation through discussions with Travancore authorities.
- ◆ The Guruvayur Satyagraha took place during 1931–32 against untouchability.
- ◆ The Guruvayur Satyagraha aimed to secure temple entry rights for all Hindus.
- ◆ The Paliyam Satyagraha was a post-independence anti-caste struggle in Kerala.
- ◆ The Temple Entry Movement reached a major breakthrough in 1936.
- ◆ Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma issued the historic Temple Entry Proclamation.
- ◆ The proclamation opened Hindu temples in Travancore to lower castes.

Objective Questions

1. Which movement is considered the earliest major anti-caste agitation in Kerala?
2. Who led the Savarna Jatha during the Vaikom Satyagraha?
3. Which Regent received the demands of the Savarna Jatha?
4. Which national leader intervened in the Vaikom Satyagraha?
5. By which year were temple approach roads across Travancore opened to all castes?
6. In which year did the Guruvayur Satyagraha begin?
7. Who headed the volunteer corps in the Guruvayur Satyagraha?
8. Which taluk conducted a referendum on temple entry?
9. Which post-independence movement demanded road access at Chennamangalam?
10. Which freedom fighter died during the Paliyam agitation?

Answers

1. Vaikom Satyagraha
2. Mannath Padmanabhan
3. Setu Lakshmi Bai
4. Mahatma Gandhi
5. 1928
6. 1931
7. A. K. Gopalan
8. Ponnani
9. Paliyam Satyagraha
10. A. G. Velayudhan

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of the Vaikom Satyagraha in the history of anti-caste struggles in Kerala.
2. Examine the role of the Guruvayur Satyagraha in challenging untouchability and promoting temple entry rights in Kerala.
3. Analyse the contributions of leaders like K. Kelappan and A. K. Gopalan.
4. Write an essay on the Paliyam Satyagraha and its contribution to social equality in post-independence Kerala.
5. Analyse the importance of the Temple Entry Movement and the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 in Kerala's social transformation.

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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:

- ◆ analyse the nature and significance of the early political struggles in Travancore, particularly the role of Velu Thampi and the emergence of organised public protest against misrule
- ◆ examine the causes, objectives, and impact of the Malayali Memorial and Ezhava Memorial in shaping political consciousness, demands for representation, and social justice in Travancore
- ◆ evaluate the role of educated middle-class communities, caste organisations, newspapers, and nationalist influences in the growth of political awakening and reform movements in modern Kerala
- ◆ assess the historical significance of the movements for representation in Travancore and their contribution to constitutional reforms, responsible government, and the democratisation of Kerala society

Prerequisite

To understand the political movements for representation in Travancore, learners should have a basic awareness of the social, political, and administrative structure of princely states under British rule, particularly the nature of governance in Travancore during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Learners should be familiar with the caste-based social hierarchy of Kerala society, the dominance of upper-caste elites in administration, and the exclusion of marginalized communities from education and government employment. An understanding of the role of the British Resident, the Diwan system, and the emergence of an educated middle class is also essential. Learners should possess prior knowledge about social reform movements in Kerala, the rise of community consciousness among groups such as the Nairs, Ezhavas, and

Syrian Christians, and the influence of modern education, print culture, and journalism in creating political awareness. Familiarity with early nationalist movements in India, including the Non-Co-operation and Civil Disobedience Movements, will help learners understand how wider Indian nationalism influenced political awakening in Travancore. Knowledge of prominent personalities such as Velu Tampi Dalawa, Dr. Palpu, G.P. Pillai, and K. Ramakrishna Pillai, along with concepts like constitutional reforms, civil rights, representation, and responsible government, will further enable learners to critically analyse the significance of the Malayali Memorial, Ezhava Memorial, and subsequent struggles for democratic rights in modern Kerala.

Keywords

Malayali Memorial, Ezhava Memorial, Representation, Non-Malayali Dominance, Political Consciousness, Marginalisation, Responsible Government

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 Nayers 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 early political agitations demanding good governance and constitutional administrative reforms.
- ◆ Velu Tampi mobilised people against corrupt ministers, demonstrating organised public political strength.
- ◆ Educated Travancoreans opposed non-Malayalee dominance in government employment and higher administrative positions.
- ◆ The Malayali Memorial demanded fair representation and constitutional reforms for Travancoreans in administration.
- ◆ G. Parameswaran Pillai emerged as an influential leader during early political awakening in Travancore society.
- ◆ Ezhava Memorial demanded educational access, civil rights, and government employment opportunities equally.
- ◆ Dr. Palpu led Ezhava community struggles against caste discrimination and social exclusion policies.
- ◆ Newspapers promoted political consciousness by criticising arbitrary administration and social inequalities continuously.
- ◆ Nationalist movements inspired political participation and reform demands among Travancore people extensively.
- ◆ Malayali and Ezhava Memorials strengthened democratic consciousness and social justice movements significantly.

Objective Questions

1. Who led the earliest political struggle in modern Travancore?
2. In which year did Velu Tampi lead the struggle against misrule?
3. What was the main demand of the Malayali Memorial?
4. Who is known as the father of the political movement in modern Travancore?
5. In which year was the Malayali Memorial submitted?
6. Who guided the Ezhava Memorial movement?

7. In which year was the Ezhava Memorial submitted to the Maharaja?
8. Which newspaper was edited by K. Ramakrishna Pillai?
9. To whom was the second Ezhava Memorial submitted?
10. Which organisation later emerged from the social reform movements inspired by these memorials?

Answers

1. Velu Tampi
2. 1799
3. Fair representation in government services
4. G. Parameswaran Pillai
5. 1891
6. Dr. Palpu
7. September 3, 1896
8. Swadesabhimani
9. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India
10. SNDP Yogam

Assignments

1. Analyse the causes and significance of the early political struggles in Travancore.
2. Examine the circumstances that led to the submission of the Malayali Memorial.
3. 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
4. Evaluate the role of newspapers and press in creating political awakening in Travancore.

5. Explain the significance of the Malayali and Ezhava Memorials in Kerala's social transformation.

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UNIT

Towards Active Phase

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the emergence of nationalism and political consciousness in Kerala through the activities of the Indian National Congress and the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee
- ◆ analyse the role of Home Rule Movement, Khilafat Movement, and Non-Cooperation Movement in shaping anti-colonial struggles in Malabar and Kerala
- ◆ evaluate the causes, nature, and consequences of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 in relation to agrarian exploitation, colonial rule, and communal relations
- ◆ examine different historiographical interpretations of the Malabar Rebellion, including nationalist, Marxist, and subaltern perspectives

Prerequisite

To understand this unit, learners should already be familiar with the political awakening in Travancore through the Malayali Memorial and Ezhava Memorial. They should understand the rise of political consciousness among different communities in Kerala, the demand for representation in administration, and the role of leaders like G. Parameswaran Pillai and Dr. Palpu. Learners also need basic knowledge about British colonial rule in Kerala, the growth of social reform movements, caste inequalities, and the emergence of early nationalist ideas. Familiarity with the formation of the Indian National Congress, the rise of political organisations in Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin, and the influence of national movements such as the Home Rule Movement and Non-Cooperation Movement will help learners understand the transition towards the active phase of Kerala's national movement.

Keywords

Indian National Congress, Home Rule Movement, Khilafat Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, Malabar Rebellion, Feudal Agrarian System

Discussion

4.2.1 Beginnings of the National Movement

With the establishment of British paramourcy 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 encouraged agrarian unrest and nationalism in early twentieth-century Kerala politics.
- ◆ Travancore Legislative Council became India's first democratic legislative body in 1888 historically.

- ◆ Malayali and Ezhava Memorials reflected growing political consciousness within Travancore society significantly.
- ◆ Indian National Congress gained support in Kerala towards the nineteenth century's closing years gradually.
- ◆ Kerala Provincial Congress Committee unified Congress activities across Kerala during 1921 politically.
- ◆ The Home Rule Movement gained momentum in Malabar after the First World War period significantly.
- ◆ K. P. Kesava Menon protested restrictions against Malayalam speech during the Calicut meeting.
- ◆ The Manjeri Conference rejected Montague-Chelmsford Reforms as disappointing and politically insufficient.
- ◆ Khilafat Movement emerged opposing dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after World War One globally.
- ◆ Gandhi supported Khilafat Movement promoting Hindu-Muslim unity against British colonial rule strategically.
- ◆ Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements merged, encouraging mass political participation across the Malabar region.
- ◆ Mappila Muslims resisted colonial oppression and exploitative feudal landlordism through organised movements actively.
- ◆ Wagon Tragedy symbolised colonial brutality after suppression of Malabar Rebellion during 1921 tragically.
- ◆ Malabar Rebellion reflected agrarian discontent, anti-imperialism, religious symbolism, and peasant resistance collectively.

Objective Questions

1. Who was the first nationalist leader of Kerala?
2. In which year was the Indian National Congress founded?
3. Which was the first democratic legislative body in India?
4. Who became president of the Indian National Congress from Kerala?
5. In which year was the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee established?
6. Who led the walkout from Calicut Town Hall in 1916?

7. Which conference was called “a Surat in reverse”?
8. Which conference was held at Ottappalam in April 1921?
9. Who was the prominent Khilafat leader in Tirurangadi?
10. What tragic incident caused the death of seventy Mappila prisoners in 1921?
11. Who declared an independent Khilafat state during the Malabar Rebellion?
12. Which organisation later promoted Muslim education and social upliftment in Kerala?

Answers

1. G. P. Pillai
2. 1885
3. Travancore Legislative Council
4. C. Sankaran Nair
5. 1921
6. K. P. Kesava Menon
7. Manjeri Conference
8. First All Kerala Political Conference
9. Ali Musliyar
10. Wagon Tragedy
11. Variankunnath Kunjahammed Haji
12. Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham

Assignments

1. Explain the growth of nationalist movement in Kerala. Examine the role played by the Indian National Congress in mobilising the people.

2. Discuss the significance of the Home Rule Movement in Malabar and evaluate the impact of the Manjeri Political Conference of 1920.
3. Discuss the features and impact of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements in Kerala.
4. Examine the causes, course, and consequences of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921.
5. Evaluate different historical interpretations regarding the nature of the Malabar Peasant Uprising.

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UNIT

Emergence of Congress

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the growth of Congress politics and nationalist mobilisation in different regions of Kerala, including Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin
- ◆ analyse the contributions of K. Madhavan Nair, K. Kelappan, C. Kesavan, and T.M. Varghese in the freedom movement in Kerala
- ◆ evaluate the significance of political conferences at Palakkad, Vadakara, Manjeri, and Ottapalam in spreading political consciousness and strengthening anti-colonial struggles
- ◆ examine the relationship between nationalism, social reform, anti-caste movements, and demands for responsible government in the making of modern Kerala

Prerequisite

To understand the emergence of Congress units and nationalist leadership in Kerala, learners should first become familiar with the broader context of the Indian national movement and its influence on Kerala society. The study of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Khilafat Movement in Kerala is essential, as these movements introduced mass political participation, Gandhian methods of protest, boycott campaigns, and Hindu–Muslim unity into Kerala’s political sphere. Learners should also understand the significance of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921, which reflected the interaction between agrarian discontent, anti-colonial nationalism, and religious mobilisation in Malabar. Knowledge of social reform movements in Kerala, including struggles against caste discrimination and untouchability, is equally important because early Congress leaders often combined nationalist

politics with social reform activities. Familiarity with the political conditions in Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin, including British rule in Malabar and princely administration in Travancore and Cochin, will help learners analyse the uneven growth of nationalist politics in different regions. Awareness of Gandhian ideology, Home Rule Movement activities, the role of educated middle classes, and the rise of political conferences and newspapers in spreading political consciousness will further enable learners to understand the formation of Congress units and the contributions of early nationalist leaders in Kerala.

Keywords

Indian National Congress, Political Mobilisation, Political Conference, Travancore State Congress, Cochin Praja Mandal

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. Vijayaraghavacharier, 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 Palakkad 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 Iyyer. 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.

4.3.2.4 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

- ◆ Indian National Congress formation in 1885 strengthened nationalist movements and political awakening in Kerala.
- ◆ Malabar became Kerala’s major Congress centre due to direct British colonial administration pressures.
- ◆ English-educated middle classes spread nationalist ideas and organised political activities across Kerala regions.
- ◆ Travancore State Congress formed in 1938 demanding responsible government, civil liberties, and democratic reforms.

- ◆ Cochin Praja Mandal promoted constitutional reforms and representative government in princely state administration.
- ◆ K. Madhavan Nair played significant role establishing KPCC and nationalist political mobilisation efforts.
- ◆ K. Kelappan, Kerala Gandhi, connected social reform movements with Gandhian nationalist political ideology.
- ◆ C. Kesavan actively participated in Travancore State Congress and responsible government agitations.
- ◆ Political conferences at Palakkad, Manjeri, Vadakara, and Ottapalam strengthened nationalist consciousness significantly.
- ◆ Ottapalam Conference supported non-cooperation movement and expanded Congress activities throughout Kerala regions.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Indian National Congress founded?
2. Which region became the principal centre of Congress activity in Kerala?
3. In which year was the Travancore State Congress formed?
4. Who was the first President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC)?
5. Which newspaper was founded with the help of K. Madhavan Nair?
6. Who is popularly known as the “Kerala Gandhi”?
7. Which satyagraha was led by K. Kelappan for temple entry rights?
8. Who presided over the first session of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee at Ottapalam?
9. Who served as the first secretary of the Malabar District Congress Committee?
10. Which conference was presided over by Dr. Annie Besant in 1916?
11. In which town was the fifth Malabar District Political Conference held in 1920?
12. Who led the extremist group during the Manjeri Conference?

Answers

1. 1885
2. Malabar
3. 1938
4. K. Madhavan Nair
5. Mathrubhumi
6. K. Kelappan
7. Guruvayur Satyagraha
8. T. Prakasam
9. Kunhirama Menon
10. Palakkad Conference
11. Manjeri
12. K.P. Kesava Menon

Assignments

1. Discuss the formation and growth of the Indian National Congress in Kerala and examine the regional variations in nationalist activities in Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin.
2. Analyse the role of K. Madhavan Nair in the development of nationalist politics and social reform movements in Kerala.
3. Evaluate the historical significance of the political conferences held at Palakkad, Vadakara, Manjeri, and Ottapalam in strengthening nationalist mobilisation in Kerala.
4. Discuss the role of the Travancore State Congress in the struggle for responsible government and democratic reforms in Travancore.
5. Assess the contribution of C. Kesavan and T. M. Varghese in the struggle for responsible government in Travancore.

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4 UNIT

Movements for Political Reform

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the nature and significance of political movements such as the *Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam* and the Abstention Movement in Travancore
- ◆ analyse the constitutional reforms introduced in Travancore and Cochin and evaluate their role in the gradual development of representative government
- ◆ examine the contributions of the Travancore State Congress and Cochin State Praja Mandal in the struggle for responsible government and democratic rights
- ◆ evaluate the impact of caste, community, and political mobilisation on the growth of nationalism and democratic consciousness in modern Kerala

Prerequisite

To understand the *Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam*, Constitutional Reforms, Abstention Movement, and the struggle for Responsible Government in Travancore and Cochin requires an understanding of the socio-political conditions that prevailed in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Learners should be familiar with the caste-based social hierarchy and administrative structure of princely states such as Travancore and Cochin, where political power and government employment were largely monopolised by upper-caste elites. Knowledge of earlier reform movements, including the Malayali Memorial and Ezhava Memorial, is essential to understand the emergence of demands for civic equality, representation, and constitutional rights. Learners should also understand the influence of social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru and the rise of community organisations such as the SNDP Yogam, which encouraged political consciousness

among marginalised communities. Familiarity with the growth of Indian nationalism, the role of the Indian National Congress, Gandhian methods of protest, and the spread of democratic ideas in British India will help learners understand how demands for responsible government developed in Travancore and Cochin. An awareness of concepts such as franchise, legislative councils, communal representation, civil liberties, dyarchy, satyagraha, and responsible government is also necessary for analysing the political transformations and popular agitations that shaped the democratic evolution of modern Kerala.

Keywords

Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam, Constitutional Reforms, Abstention Movement, Responsible Movement, Popular Assembly, Sree Moolam Assembly, Sree Chitra State Council

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 Moolam 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 Prakshobham demanded civic rights and equal employment opportunities in Travancore administration.
- ◆ Avarnas, Muslims, and Christians united against discriminatory recruitment practices in government departments.
- ◆ Civic Rights League formed during 1919 under leadership of E.J. John successfully.
- ◆ T. K. Madhavan actively supported the civic rights movement against social discrimination policies.
- ◆ Maharaja Sri Mulam Tirunal issued a Royal Proclamation separating Revenue and Devaswam departments.
- ◆ Revenue Department appointments became accessible for Avarnas, Christians, and Muslims after reforms.
- ◆ Devaswam Department positions continued to be reserved exclusively for Savarna communities in Travancore administration.

- ◆ Constitutional reforms of 1932 introduced significant legislative changes under Sri Chitra Tirunal.
- ◆ Sri Mulam Popular Assembly established during 1904 for expressing public administrative grievances directly.
- ◆ Legislative Council reforms gradually expanded franchise rights and increased elected member representation statewide.
- ◆ Women received equal franchise rights alongside men under Travancore constitutional reforms during 1921.
- ◆ The Abstention Movement opposed the property-based electoral system favouring the dominant Nair landowning community excessively.
- ◆ The Joint Political Congress demanded communal representation and reservation proportional to population strength statewide.
- ◆ C. Kesavan's arrest strengthened unity and intensified the Abstention Movement against government authoritarianism considerably.
- ◆ Travancore State Congress demanded responsible government through civil disobedience and mass political mobilisation.

Objective Questions

1. What was the main aim of the Pura Samatvavada Prakshobham?
2. Which organisation was formed in 1919 to fight discrimination in Travancore?
3. Who were the major communities involved in the Pura Samatvavada Prakshobham?
4. Who issued the Royal Proclamation of 1922 in Travancore?
5. Which department remained reserved for Savarnas after the 1922 reforms?
6. In which year was the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly established?
7. Who suggested the formation of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly?
8. Which Act reformed the Legislative Council in Travancore during 1919?
9. Who led the protests against the autocratic features of the 1919 reforms?
10. In which year were women granted equality in franchise and membership rights?

11. What was the popular name of the Abstention Movement in Travancore?
12. Which political organisation led the Abstention Movement?
13. Who was arrested for sedition after the Kozhencherry conference in 1935?
14. Which organisation was formed in 1938 to demand responsible government in Travancore?
15. Who became the first President of the Travancore State Congress?

Answers

1. Securing civic rights
2. Civic Rights League
3. Avarnas, Muslims, and Christians
4. Sri Mulam Tirunal
5. Devaswams Department
6. 1904
7. V. P. Madhava Rao
8. Legislative Council Reform Act of 1919
9. Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai
10. 1921
11. Nivarthana Prakshobham
12. Joint Political Congress
13. C. Kesavan
14. Travancore State Congress
15. Pattom A. Thanu Pillai

Assignments

1. Discuss the causes, objectives, and achievements of the *Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam* and examine its significance in the struggle for civic rights in Travancore.
2. Analyse the constitutional reforms introduced in Travancore between 1888 and 1932 and evaluate their impact on the growth of representative government and political consciousness.
3. Examine the origin, course, and consequences of the Abstention Movement (*Nivarthana Prakshobham*) in Travancore with special reference to communal representation and political rights.
4. Critically evaluate the role of the Travancore State Congress in the struggle for responsible government in Travancore.
5. Discuss the demand for responsible government in Cochin and analyse the contribution of the Cochin State Praja Mandal to democratic and constitutional reforms.

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SGOU



UNIT

Solidarity with the National Movement

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand Kerala's contribution to the Indian national movement
- ◆ analyse the role of nationalist leaders, students, workers, peasants, and women in mobilising Mass participation in the nationalist movement in Kerala
- ◆ evaluate the impact of Khilafat movement, Non cooperation movement and Quit India movement in fostering and strengthening the nationalist movement in kerala

Prerequisite

The learners are already familiar with the early political movements and the formation of the Indian National Congress in Kerala. They have studied the rise of political consciousness in Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin, the role of early Congress leaders, and the significance of political conferences and constitutional agitations. They are also aware of the growth of nationalist ideas through social reform movements, the activities of organisations such as the Travancore State Congress and Cochin Praja Mandal, and the struggle for responsible government in the princely states. This unit builds upon that background by examining Kerala's active solidarity with the wider Indian national movement through the Non-Cooperation Movement, Salt Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement. Learners should understand the role of peasants, workers, students, women, and political leaders in mass mobilisation, as well as the impact of Gandhian ideology, anti-colonial struggles, and regional resistance movements in shaping Kerala's contribution to India's freedom struggle.

Keywords

National Movement, Political Consciousness, Social Reform, Mass Mobilisation, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience, Salt Satyagraha, Quit India Movement

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. Alongside this event, conferences of tenants, Khilafat supporters, students, and farmers were also conducted at the same venue. The conference expressed full support for the Indian National Congress's call for non-cooperation in Kerala. It passed several resolutions urging the government to address the genuine grievances of the people. Notably, resolutions were adopted requesting lawyers to suspend their legal practice and shopkeepers to stop selling foreign cloth—such appeals were made for the first time in Malabar.

Following the Nagpur session, the Indian National Congress established committees at village, taluk, and district levels in

Malabar. Students and professionals who had boycotted courts, educational institutions, and government offices became full-time activists of the Congress. Khilafat Committees were also formed in various localities. Tenant farmers joined these efforts, resulting in the merging of the tenant, Congress, and Khilafat committees into a unified movement. The message of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements reached even the most remote parts of Malabar. The growing unity of the people against the British government and landlords alarmed the district authorities.

The District Collector served notices to K. Madhavan Nair and U. Gopala Menon—Secretaries of the South and North Malabar Congress Committees, respectively—accusing them of inciting disaffection against the British government and landlords through their propaganda. Efforts by the Congress to foster Hindu-Muslim unity were perceived as attempts to incite class antagonism. The government, unwilling to address the grievances of tenants burdened by both colonial and feudal oppression, remained indifferent. The Congress and Khilafat Committees continued to stress the importance of non-violent resistance. In August 1920, Mahatma Gandhi and Moulana Shoukath Ali visited Calicut to mobilise 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

- ◆ Nationalist consciousness in Kerala evolved from reform movements into organised anti-colonial resistance.
- ◆ Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin participated despite differing administrative and political structures significantly.
- ◆ Grassroots activism strengthened Kerala's contribution to India's broader nationalist freedom struggle considerably.
- ◆ The Non-Cooperation Movement transformed nationalism into a mass movement involving workers and students.
- ◆ Boycotts targeted foreign goods, courts, schools, colleges, and British administrative institutions widely.



- ◆ Congress committees expanded political activities throughout villages, taluks, and districts across Malabar.
- ◆ Khilafat and Congress committees united peasants, tenants, workers, and ordinary people politically.
- ◆ Government repression included arrests, prohibitory orders, censorship, imprisonment, and restrictions on public meetings.
- ◆ Salt Satyagraha inspired widespread participation and strengthened Civil Disobedience activities across Kerala regions.
- ◆ Volunteers organised marches, picketing campaigns, and protests against colonial economic exploitation and repression.
- ◆ Women and students actively participated through demonstrations, boycotts, satyagraha, and political mobilisation campaigns.
- ◆ Educational institutions emerged as important centres of nationalist protests and student activism activities.
- ◆ The Quit India Movement intensified resistance through strikes, demonstrations, underground activities, and sabotage campaigns.
- ◆ Workers, students, peasants, and youth collectively challenged colonial authority during nationalist struggles continuously.

Objective Questions

1. Who launched the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920?
2. Which incident led to the launch of the Non-Cooperation Movement?
3. In which year was the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) established?
4. Where was the first conference of the KPCC held?
5. Who presided over the first KPCC conference at Ottapalam?
6. Which movement aimed at withdrawing cooperation from British institutions?
7. Who visited Calicut in August 1920 to support the Khilafat Movement?
8. Which agreement led to the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1931?

9. Who led the Salt Satyagraha march from Kozhikode to Payyannur in 1930?
10. Which place became a symbolic centre of Congress activities during the Salt Satyagraha?
11. Name the secret publication circulated after the banning of KPCC.
12. Which educational institutions became centres of political activism during the Civil Disobedience Movement?
13. Which movement of 1942 called for Direct Action against British rule?
14. What was the name of the clandestine journal circulated during the Quit India Movement in Travancore?
15. Who was identified as the mastermind in the Kizharyur Bomb Case?

Answers

1. Mahatma Gandhi
2. Jallianwala Bagh Massacre
3. 1920
4. Ottapalam
5. T. Prakasan
6. Non-Cooperation Movement
7. Mahatma Gandhi and Moulana Shoukath Ali
8. Gandhi-Irwin Pact
9. K. Kelappan
10. Payyannur
11. Congress Bulletin
12. Zamorin's College and Maharaja's College
13. Quit India Movement
14. Swatantra Bharatam
15. K.B. Menon

Assignments

1. Evaluate the role of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee in organising nationalist activities and strengthening the freedom movement in Kerala.
2. Analyse the growth and impact of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements in Malabar and examine their role in shaping political consciousness in Kerala.
3. Examine the significance of the Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement in Kerala with special reference to the leadership of K. Kelappan and other nationalist activists.
4. Examine the course and impact of the Quit India Movement in Kerala and analyse the role played by students, workers, socialists, and the Indian National Congress in the struggle against colonial rule.
5. Critically evaluate the importance of the Kizhariyur Bomb Case and other acts of resistance in Malabar during the Quit India Movement and assess their contribution to Kerala's freedom struggle.

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BLOCK

New Political Consciousness

1

UNIT

Left Politics in Kerala

Learning Outcomes

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

- ♦ examine the spread of socialist and Marxist ideas within the Indian National Congress and their role in shaping left politics in Kerala
- ♦ analyse how peasants, workers, and youth movements contributed to the growth of communist politics and mass mobilisation
- ♦ explain the emergence of radical groups and the formation of the Communist Party of India in Kerala

Prerequisite

For a proper understanding of the emergence of left politics in Kerala, it is important to recall the themes studied in the previous block, particularly the evolution of early political movements, the growth of representative demands, and the shift from moderate to more active phases of political struggle. Learners are already familiar with the role of organisations such as the Indian National Congress in mobilising people through movements like the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India struggles, as well as the increasing politicisation of regions such as Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. They have also examined how peasant participation in events like the Malabar Uprising and broader nationalist agitations contributed to a growing political consciousness. Building on this foundation, it becomes clear that the limitations of earlier methods, along with rising awareness of social and economic inequalities, encouraged the emergence of new ideological currents within the nationalist movement. The introduction of socialist ideas through platforms like the Congress Socialist Party, along with the involvement of leaders such as E. M. S. Namboodiripad and P. Krishna Pillai, marked a shift towards class-based politics. This background helps learners connect earlier nationalist struggles with the rise

of organised movements among workers and peasants, the spread of Marxist ideas, and the gradual formation of the Communist Party as a new political force in Kerala.

Keywords

Congress Socialist Party (CSP), Marxist Ideology, Class Inequality, Communist Party, Trade Unions, Karshaka Sangham, Agrarian Struggles, Anti-feudal Movement, Mass Mobilisation, Socialist Ideas

Discussion

5.1.1 Spread of Leftist Ideology

The emergence of the Communist movement in Kerala was closely linked to the growth of socialist ideas within the Indian National Congress during the 1930s. The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) acted as an important platform through which radical leaders such as E. M. S. Namboodiripad, P. Krishna Pillai, and others gradually moved towards Marxist ideology. Growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of Gandhian methods, along with an increasing awareness of class inequalities, encouraged this shift. By the late 1930s, communist ideas began to take an organised form, and eventually, the Communist Party established its roots in Kerala, initially working within the Indian National Congress before emerging as an independent political force. The influence of leftists steadily expanded, developing a broad mass base among workers, peasants, students, and intellectuals. They organised trade unions and peasant struggles, initiated cultural campaigns, and disseminated Marxist ideas through literature, theatre, and social reform activities.

The shift towards socialist ideas became evident at the Calicut Conference in May

1934, where Congress leaders, inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to adopt a more radical economic programme. They also emphasised the need to organise workers and peasants along socialist lines. In the same year, a group of young Congress activists, led by P. Krishna Pillai and E. M. S. Namboodiripad, formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within the Indian National Congress. These young socialists focused on organising peasants and workers, leading strikes, forming unions, and spreading political awareness through study classes. The CSP's rise was closely associated with the growing political consciousness of peasants and workers, who had been mobilised during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In Malabar, a progressive section of Congressmen aligned themselves with socialist ideas, enabling the new formation to secure considerable influence within the Provincial Congress. The group aimed to bring about change from within the Congress by promoting socialist principles and linking political freedom with economic justice. Despite its increasing strength, the CSP continued to function within the organisational framework of both the Provincial Congress and the All India Congress Committee (AICC) until the outbreak of the Second World War

precipitated a division. By the close of the decade, Kerala had become an active arena of the national struggle.

The spread of socialist ideas was bolstered by the organisation of peasants. The establishment of the All-India Kisan Sabha in 1936 marked a significant step towards challenging entrenched systems of agrarian exploitation. In Malabar, the All-Malabar Karshaka Sangham emerged as its regional counterpart, developing a wide organisational network from district and taluk levels down to the villages. Its membership encompassed diverse agrarian groups, including tenants and landless cultivators from different caste backgrounds. Yet, mobilisation encountered serious obstacles, as poor peasants, lacking security of tenure, remained exposed to the coercive power of landlords and often hesitated to participate. Notwithstanding these difficulties, committed leadership and close engagement with the rural poor gradually transformed the organisation into an effective instrument of political pressure.

Between 1937 and 1939, agrarian struggles in Kerala assumed an increasingly militant and anti-feudal character. Activists addressed severe poverty and recurring famine conditions affecting artisans, craftsmen, and landless labourers. These movements, associated with the Left wing of the nationalist struggle, invited repression from the colonial state. Participants from both Congress and Socialist ranks were prosecuted under the Defence of India regulations. Their methods of resistance included organised campaigns such as social boycotts, refusal to pay rent and taxes, and other forms of direct action, which were often portrayed by the authorities as attempts to challenge established structures of authority at the local level.

Trade unions and peasant associations became the primary instruments for mass mobilisation. In regions such as Malabar,

Cochin, and Travancore, communists played a pivotal role in organising agricultural labourers, tenants, and industrial workers. Movements addressing feudal exploitation, high rents, low wages, and poor working conditions drew large segments of the population into political activity. Labour strikes, peasant struggles, and union activities not only addressed economic grievances but also fostered political awareness among the masses.

The influence of the Communist Party grew steadily throughout the 1940s. It provided strong leadership for mass struggles, linking local issues with broader questions of social justice and anti-imperialism. The party also contributed to the development of a unified political consciousness across different regions of Kerala, supporting movements like the Aikya Kerala movement. Major struggles, such as the Punnappara-Vayalar uprising, demonstrated both the strength of communist organisation and the willingness of the masses to challenge oppressive systems.

By the mid-twentieth century, the Communist movement had transformed political developments in Kerala. It shifted the focus of politics towards class issues, strengthened democratic and social rights movements, and laid the groundwork for future political advancements. The rise of communism thus marked a decisive phase in Kerala's history, characterised by mass mobilisation, ideological clarity, and sustained struggles for economic and social equality.

5.1.2 Formation of Radical Groups/Organisations

1. Communist League

The first political organisation representing an emerging sense of class-based identity, the "Communist League," appeared by March



1931. Despite its name, it had no formal connection with any established communist party outside the region. It comprised a small group of activists drawn to communist ideas who sought to disseminate them locally. The League published a Malayalam pamphlet titled *The Communist Party*, based on a document prepared by the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. This pamphlet, issued in Thiruvananthapuram, served as its policy statement. It criticised Gandhian methods of struggle, advocated for the active participation of workers and peasants in the national movement, and reflected the influence of the Russian Revolution and socialist ideals. The government soon banned the publication.

However, the League's activities remained limited, and it failed to gain widespread public support in Travancore. Some attempts were made to organise printing press workers in Thiruvananthapuram, but beyond a few meetings, its presence was not very strong. Nevertheless, the group made an important contribution by introducing a class-based understanding of the nationalist movement. This enabled its members to critically examine the role of the Indian National Congress from an early stage. Leaders like N. P. Kurukkal, who served as its secretary, strongly opposed both the Congress and Gandhian ideology, and even attempted to organise a boycott of Gandhiji's visit to Travancore.

2. All Travancore Youth League

The All Travancore Youth League emerged in August 1931, driven by the growing dissatisfaction among politically conscious young people in Travancore. Its inaugural gathering, held near Pazhavangadi in Thiruvananthapuram, brought together unemployed, nationalist-minded young men from across southern Travancore. These individuals were deeply committed to Indian independence and were critical of the limited, passive nature of Congress activities in the

region, which were largely dominated by educated elites and professionals. In contrast, the younger generation sought a more active and militant role in the nationalist struggle.

In its early phase, the Youth League functioned as an informal association without a fixed organisational structure. Meetings were frequently held at the residences of leaders such as Ponnara Sreedharan, and activities included organising public conferences and distributing pamphlets to disseminate nationalist ideas. These gatherings gained importance as prominent nationalist and left-leaning leaders were invited to address them. League members actively participated in Congress-led movements, including the Civil Disobedience Movement, and engaged in actions such as picketing shops selling foreign goods and liquor outlets. Their militant methods drew criticism from the older Congress leadership, who viewed them as unruly; nevertheless, the youth persisted despite repression and arrests. They also played a leading role in organising protest marches, including a Salt Satyagraha march from Thiruvananthapuram towards Payyannur.

In its second phase, the Youth League became closely associated with the demand for responsible government in Travancore. Even after the formation of the State Congress in 1938, the League maintained its independent identity, though many of its members supported the larger movement. It often acted as a pressure group, urging the State Congress to adopt a more vigorous approach. At times, it openly criticised the leadership, particularly when political action was withdrawn. When the State Congress suspended its struggle, the Youth League attempted to revive agitation, which led to severe repression by the authorities.

During its later phase, the League developed close ties with socialist and communist groups, particularly the Congress

Socialist Party. Leaders such as A. K. Gopalan established strong connections with the Youth Leaguers, and joint activities strengthened this alliance. Gradually, this association deepened, leading to the eventual merger of most Youth League members with the Communist Party in Travancore, especially as the State Congress weakened towards the end of the 1930s.

3. Radical Group

The emergence of the Radical Group became evident during the Karunagapally session of the State Congress in 1939. This informal body was composed mainly of younger members who were inclined towards socialist ideas. The group maintained close links with the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar, which played a significant role in its formation in May 1939.

The Radical Group functioned within the State Congress as a socialist-oriented section, similar to the role of the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar. However, the term "Radical Group" was deliberately used instead of "Socialist," as the latter was likely to create uneasiness among many Congress members. As internal conditions within the State Congress weakened, most members of the Radical Group later moved towards the Communist Party, though a section led by N. Sreekantan Nair remained outside. The group's main focus was on organising and strengthening trade unions.

The integration of the Radical Group and the Youth League with the Communist movement took place gradually and somewhat covertly. By around 1940, a few individuals in Malabar had already joined the Communist Party of India, though this development remained largely secret due to restrictions and the ban on communist activity in Travancore. As a result, the party did not function openly in its early phase. It was only by July 1942 that the Communist

Party in Travancore came into existence in an organised and public form.

At the same time, students emerged as an important group drawn towards socialist and radical ideas. Thiruvithamkur became a major centre of student political activity, where organisations like the Student Federation developed under left influence. From 1937 onwards, All Kerala Student Federation meetings were regularly organised, and the conferences held in 1938, 1939, and 1940 were considered significant in spreading political awareness among the youth.

In Cochin, although the political atmosphere was initially calm, the influence of socialist leaders gradually introduced more radical ideas. Early socialist figures associated with organisations like the Cochin State Congress and Cochin Praja Mandalam played a key role in organising trade unions, peasant movements, youth groups, and student bodies. By the 1940s, these movements came increasingly under the leadership of the Communist Party. The growth of trade unions and the political awakening of workers and rural people helped provide a strong social base for the rise of the communist movement in the region.

5.1.3 Communist Party

During the Second World War, the Provincial Congress in Kerala came under the strong influence of the Socialists. The socio-political landscape of Kerala underwent a significant radical transformation in the early 1930s. The rise of global revolutionary movements led by peasants and the working class under the banner of communism laid the foundation for revolutionary politics in the region. Simultaneously, the remarkable success of the Russian Communists in overthrowing capitalism and autocracy inspired the younger generation, strengthening their aspirations for social and political change. They rejected the All India Congress



Committee's call for Individual Satyagraha, preferring instead to oppose the war itself and organise struggles against imperialism. This difference of opinion led to a split within the Congress and contributed to the emergence of the Communist movement. In December 1939, a small group of leaders, including P. Krishna Pillai, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, N. C. Sekhar, and K. Damodaran, met secretly at Pinarayi and formed the Kerala unit of the Communist Party. By this time, many peasants had lost faith in moderate methods and were inclined towards more radical action.

The Communist Party, along with the All-Malabar Karshaka Sangham, decided to observe an Anti-Repression Day on 15 September 1940. Despite official bans, large numbers of peasants and workers gathered in protest. In places such as Thalasseri, Mattanur and Morazha, clashes broke out when the

police tried to suppress the demonstrations, and in some cases, firing occurred. Following these events, the government declared the Karshaka Sangham illegal and intensified repression. Many peasant leaders and activists in North Malabar were branded as Communists, forcing the movement to operate more secretly while continuing its struggle against landlords and British rule.

At the same time, prominent Congress leaders such as Abdurahiman Sahib, who had links with Subhas Chandra Bose and the All India Forward Bloc, were arrested and imprisoned. During this period, the Communist movement in Kerala mainly focused on mobilising peasants for strong action against both landlords and colonial authority, while Congress activists also attempted to organise people for the Quit India Movement in the early 1940s.

Recap

- ◆ Socialist ideas grew within Congress during the 1930s, influencing Kerala politics.
- ◆ The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934 under the leadership of E. M. S. Namboodiripad and P. Krishna Pillai.
- ◆ The Calicut Conference in 1934 adopted a radical economic programme inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru.
- ◆ The CSP effectively organised workers, peasants, unions, strikes, and study classes.
- ◆ Communist ideas spread widely among workers, peasants, students, and intellectual groups.
- ◆ The All-India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936 to challenge agrarian exploitation systems.
- ◆ The All-Malabar Karshaka Sangham mobilised tenants, labourers, and the rural poor across villages.

- ◆ Agrarian struggles from 1937–1939 became militant and anti-feudal, challenging landlord authority.
- ◆ Trade unions and peasant movements mobilised masses against exploitation and injustice.
- ◆ The Communist League, formed in 1931, introduced class-based ideas into Kerala politics.
- ◆ The Youth League, formed in 1931, mobilised youth and later aligned with socialist and communist movements.
- ◆ The Radical Group, formed in 1939, promoted socialism within the State Congress and strengthened unions.
- ◆ The Communist Party unit in Kerala was formed in December 1939 at Pinarayi.
- ◆ Key leaders included P. Krishna Pillai, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, N.C. Sekhar, and K. Damodaran.

Objective Questions

1. Which organisation served as a platform for disseminating socialist ideas within the Congress?
2. In which year was the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) formed?
3. Which 1934 conference indicated a shift towards a more radical economic programme?
4. Name the regional peasant organisation in Malabar that was affiliated with the Kisan Sabha.
5. Which organisation was established in 1936 to organise peasants at a national level?
6. What was the name of the first organisation formed in 1931 that reflected class-based ideas?
7. Which organisation emerged in Travancore in 1931, representing youth activism?
8. In which year was the Communist Party formed in Kerala?

Answers

1. Congress Socialist Party
2. 1934
3. Calicut Conference
4. All Malabar Karshaka Sangham
5. All India Kisan Sabha
6. Communist League
7. All Travancore Youth League
8. 1939

Assignments

1. Examine the role of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in the spread of socialist and Marxist ideas in Kerala during the 1930s.
2. Analyse the factors that contributed to the growth of leftist ideology within the Indian National Congress in Kerala.
3. Discuss the significance of peasant and labour movements in strengthening the Communist movement in Kerala.
4. Evaluate the contribution of organisations such as the All Travancore Youth League and the Radical Group to the development of left-wing politics in Kerala.
5. Trace the formation and growth of the Communist Party in Kerala up to the 1940s.

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UNIT

Trade Union Movement

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the social and economic conditions that led to the formation of trade unions in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the transition of trade unions from welfare-oriented bodies to more organised and militant movements addressing economic and political issues
- ◆ evaluate the impact of socialist and communist ideas in strengthening trade unions and shaping class consciousness and political awareness among workers

Prerequisite

For a proper understanding of the formation and growth of trade unions in Kerala, it is important to recall the themes discussed in the previous unit on Left Politics in Kerala. These include the spread of leftist ideology, the formation of radical groups, and the origins of the Communist movement. Learners should be familiar with how socialist ideas emerged within the Indian National Congress and gradually developed into a distinct ideological current through organisations like the Congress Socialist Party. They should also understand the role of early leaders and radical groups in mobilising workers, peasants, and youth, and how these efforts contributed to the rise of class-based politics in different regions of Kerala. This background helps to recognise that trade unions did not emerge suddenly, but were the result of growing political awareness, social reform movements, and dissatisfaction with existing economic and social inequalities. Learners should be able to connect the rise of trade unions with earlier developments such as the organisation of peasants and workers, the spread of Marxist ideas, and the increasing participation of the working class in both economic and political

struggles. This prior understanding provides the necessary foundation to analyse how trade unions evolved from welfare-oriented organisations into more organised and militant movements, closely linked with the growth of left politics in Kerala.

Keywords

Trade Union Movement, Coir Industry, Travancore Labour Association (TLA), Workers' Exploitation, Class Consciousness, Socialist, Communist Ideology, Labour Strikes, Political Mobilisation

Discussion

5.2.1 Formation of Labour Unions

The formation of trade unions in Kerala was closely linked to the growth of modern industries, especially the coir industry in regions like Alleppey (Alappuzha). Industrial expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the concentration of workers under harsh and exploitative conditions, including low wages, long working hours, and a lack of legal protection. Social inequalities, particularly caste-based discrimination, further worsened the condition of workers. These factors, along with the influence of social reform movements and emerging political awareness, created a favourable background for collective organisation among labourers.

The early phase of trade union growth began with the formation of the Travancore Labour Association in 1922 under the leadership of P. K. Bava. It was one of the first organised attempts to unite workers and address their grievances. Initially, the association focused on welfare activities such as healthcare, education, and mutual aid, while maintaining a cooperative relationship with employers. Over time, it expanded its activities by organising workers, raising

awareness, and intervening in labour disputes. Despite internal weaknesses and financial difficulties, it played a crucial role in spreading the idea of collective action among workers.

By the 1930s, trade unionism in Kerala became more organised and militant. Increased industrial competition, wage reductions, and worsening working conditions led to frequent strikes and labour protests. Trade unions gradually extended their influence beyond factory workers to include agricultural labourers and other sections of the working class. The rise of socialist and communist ideologies further strengthened the movement, providing ideological direction and linking labour struggles with broader social and political change. This marked the transition from early welfare-oriented unions to more active and organised labour movements in Kerala.

5.2.1.1 Tiruvitamkur/ Travancore

The early growth of trade unions in Travancore and Cochin was mainly inspired by humanitarian concerns and a spirit of brotherhood among workers. Many workers had already participated in social reform



movements such as prohibition, anti-caste campaigns, and temple entry struggles. Organisations like the 'brotherhood movement' led by K. Ayyappan in Cochin encouraged unity among workers. At this early stage, trade unions did not focus on demanding rights but functioned primarily as welfare organisations.

Alappuzha, the centre of coir production on the Malabar coast, saw the formation of the first labour union in Kerala on 31 March 1922. This organisation primarily worked for workers' welfare and even received support from some factory owners, although European employers opposed the idea of unions in their establishments. Initially, the movement had a social and non-political character. During the 1920s, the character of the union slowly changed. In July 1922, it was renamed the Travancore Labour Association (TLA). The association began spreading awareness through leaflets and, by 1924, started a journal called *Thozhilali*. It also opened a night school where workers were taught English, Malayalam, arithmetic, and public speaking. The TLA participated in the temperance movement and introduced welfare schemes such as death benefit funds, healthcare systems, and a workers' cooperative society registered in 1926.

Concurrently, workers began to connect their activities with the larger national movement. The TLA welcomed the Salt Satyagraha march passing through Alappuzha and honoured its leaders. Despite the strong presence of caste and communal divisions in society, the association remained open to workers of all communities.

During the 1930s, the trade union movement in Travancore entered a new phase, particularly within the coir industry in the Alappuzha-Cherthala region. Despite an increase in exports, prices plummeted, and the burden of this decline fell squarely on the workers. Consequently, wages were reduced

and working conditions deteriorated. With a significant number of unemployed labourers vying for work, the *mooppans* (labour contractors) gained considerable power, often acting arbitrarily and exploitatively. Labourers were subjected to various forms of exploitation by these *mooppans*, who were essentially their chiefs. They were compelled to pay a regular premium from their wages to the *mooppans*. The economic depression of the 1930s further exacerbated the plight of the working classes, leading to frequent strikes in coir factories. TLA, which had previously focused on welfare activities, was now forced to address workers' economic grievances directly. Its leadership struggled to resolve disputes between militant workers and rigid factory owners, resulting in frequent changes in leadership. During this period, more radical leaders gained support, with figures such as Kesava Dev rising to prominence and becoming Secretary of the TLA in 1933.

The struggles of this era strengthened unity among workers and enhanced their bargaining power. Workers gradually developed a clear understanding that their interests were diametrically opposed to those of their employers. This growing class consciousness also highlighted that conditions in rural workplaces were often worse than those in large factories. The TLA expanded its efforts to organise rural workers by opening branches in areas such as Ambalapuzha and Cherthala, with Muhamma emerging as a significant centre.

This burgeoning class awareness was also reflected in contemporary literature. Coir workers, many of whom were literate, contributed to a growing body of writings that later evolved into the Progressive Literary Movement in Malayalam. Publications such as the *Thozhilali* weekly disseminated new ideas, even serialising parts of Karl Marx's *Capital*. Workers' songs and poems, including

those by Kadamangalam Pappukutty, expressed themes of struggle, unity, and hope.

A major initiative undertaken by the TLA during this period was the decision to organise a *jatha* (procession) from Alappuzha to Thiruvananthapuram to protest against wage cuts and present workers' demands to the Maharaja. This marked an important shift, as the movement now directly challenged the state. Although the government banned the march and arrested the leaders, workers across the region responded with a general strike, demonstrating strong unity.

During the late 1930s, the expectations of the working class began to take a clear political form. The spread of socialist ideas instilled new confidence in workers and helped them recognise their role in political struggles. This transformation was largely due to the efforts of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) workers from Malabar, alongside members of the Youth League and other radical groups in Travancore.

In 1938, workers in Travancore decisively entered the political arena by participating in the movement for responsible government. To demonstrate their support, they organised a general strike in October 1938. Trade unions across the state joined the strike, and even transport services were affected when boat workers ceased work. The participation of workers in large demonstrations, including one led by Akkamma Cherian, symbolised their growing role in democratic struggles. The strike, led by socialist groups and Youth Leaguers, achieved remarkable success.

This movement soon led to direct conflict with the state authorities. Recognising the growing strength of the working class, the government responded with severe repression. The army was deployed, trade union offices were attacked, and many workers were beaten and arrested. One person lost their life, and hundreds were injured in police action.

Despite such harsh measures, the workers continued the strike for twenty-five days, displaying great courage. These experiences helped them understand the nature of state power and fostered strong opposition to princely rule. This spirit of resistance later re-emerged in a more organised form during the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising of 1946.

The struggles of 1938 also revealed the true allies of the working class. The CSP and Youth Leaguers stood firmly with the workers, while the State Congress showed hesitation and failed to give its full support. As a result, socialist leaders gradually assumed leadership of the movement and gained the confidence of the workers. During this period, trade unions were strengthened, and the TLA was formally renamed the 'Thiruvitamkur' / Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU). Concurrently, workers began to reject divisions based on caste and religion. A resolution of the workers' conference in 1937 declared that all labourers shared common interests and should unite along class lines rather than communal identities. This marked an important ideological shift in the labour movement.

5.2.1.2 Cochin

The political conditions in Cochin differed considerably from those in Travancore. Trade unionism emerged later in Cochin than in Travancore and Malabar. Despite its relatively late development, the trade union movement in Cochin was no less significant. The peasant struggle of 1931, led by K.M. Ibrahim, is regarded as the first major trade union struggle in Cochin and marked the beginning of the region's organised labour movement.

Although trade union activities spread in Cochin, influenced by Communists and Socialists in a manner similar to neighbouring regions, the Cochin government's response was more moderate. The state introduced



certain constitutional reforms, which were sufficient to satisfy the conservative leaders of the Cochin Praja Mandalam. These reforms allowed elected representatives to administer most departments, except crucial areas like finance and home, and made them responsible to the legislature. As a result, the demand for fuller democracy and more radical reforms was primarily taken up by a smaller group of radicals within the Praja Mandalam, alongside the Communists and Socialists. Consequently, the struggle for complete democratic change did not dominate political life in Cochin as strongly as in some other regions.

The Cochin Labour Union, established in 1933 at Palluruthy by a group of ordinary labourers, was the first trade union of its kind in Cochin. The union was formed primarily in response to a reduction in wages, which had adversely affected the workers' livelihoods. In 1935, an organisation called 'Labour Brotherhood', under K.K. Warriar began functioning at Trichur for the general welfare of the working class.

CSP activists in Cochin State successfully organised the working class in two centres: Thrissur and Cochin. Peedika Thozhilali Union, Rickshaw Thozhilali Union, General Workers Union, Amballoor Textile Workers Union, Toddy Workers Union, and others were active trade unions in Thrissur at the time. Ship Workers Union, Factory Workers Union, and Navika Thozhilali Union were powerful trade unions in Cochin.

However, the wave of strikes that followed the Second World War clearly showed the rising political awareness among the working classes in Cochin. Important strikes took place in places such as the Amballoor Textile Mills and among the toddy workers of Anthicadu, the latter being led by Communist activists. The Anthicadu movement was especially significant, as it combined economic demands with a broader political vision. The workers

themselves expressed this clearly by linking their struggle to the need for democracy in the post-war period. The agitation continued for several months, and during this time the workers succeeded in gaining support not only from other trade unions but also from the wider public. This movement played an important role in spreading leftist ideas and drawing many people in Cochin towards the Communist movement.

As India moved closer to independence, these struggles helped to strengthen the radical movement in Cochin. The experiences of the 1940s, including hardships and repression, gave the movement both strength and direction. Trade unions provided organisational leadership, while Communist ideology offered a clear sense of purpose. One of the most important results of this period was the growing awareness among workers of their role in shaping society, along with the increasing politicisation of the lower sections of society.

In Cochin, CSP activists organised workers in centres such as Trichur and Kochi, forming several trade unions among different sections of labourers. Efforts were also made to unite workers across Kerala. Beginning with conferences in Kozhikode (1935), Trichur (1937), and Alappuzha (1939), the movement gradually progressed towards forming a Kerala-wide trade union organisation. These developments later contributed to the growth of the Aikya Kerala movement.

5.2.1.3 Malabar

Leaders of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party, such as P. Krishna Pillai, took active steps to organise previously unorganised sections of society, including labourers, peasants, teachers, and the rural poor. These groups were mobilised around their specific class demands, and their struggles were closely linked with the broader anti-imperialist movement. In Malabar, where

large-scale industries were limited, industrial labour was mainly confined to tile factories, weaving units, and beedi production. Working conditions were generally harsh: wages were very low, employment was insecure, and working hours often exceeded eight or even nine hours a day.

Workers were denied basic benefits such as insurance and provident funds. Their low wages were partly due to a system in which factory owners, especially tile manufacturers in Calicut, employed middlemen to supply labour, thereby avoiding direct contact with workers. Wage levels remained extremely poor: demands were raised for a minimum daily wage of eight annas, while weavers earned about four annas per yard, beedi workers about five annas per thousand beedis, and garden labourers received six annas for men and four for women.

Attempts to improve working conditions through government regulations proved largely ineffective. Although factory laws introduced in 1935 fixed a maximum of fifty-four working hours per week, employers found ways to bypass these rules. Workers were made to work ten hours a day for five days and only four hours on the sixth day, allowing employers to reduce wages by paying only half a day's salary. Similarly, when the government abolished the system of penal deductions in 1937, employers resorted to suspending workers instead. Thus, official regulations often failed to bring real relief to labourers.

In this context, the organisation of trade unions gained momentum. From 1935 onwards, militant unions began to appear in and around Calicut, initially among tile factory and spinning mill workers, and later among soap workers, press workers, cart-load workers, and umbrella workers. In Trichur, the Labour Brotherhood Union was formed, bringing together workers from different

sectors, including motor, engineering, and rickshaw workers.

A significant step was taken in May 1935 with the holding of the All Kerala Workers Conference at Calicut, where P. Krishna Pillai assumed a leading role. Following the growth of unions, a wave of strikes broke out in places such as Feroke and Tiruvannur. While early strikes were mostly local, by 1936 workers began to develop a sense of unity. For instance, when wages were reduced in a weaving mill at Chirakkal, workers from other units joined in protest, demonstrating growing solidarity.

This unity was further solidified in 1937, when large-scale strikes involving thousands of workers occurred in areas such as Talap, Kakkad, and Chovva. These strikes were notable not only for their size but also for the participation of workers from multiple factories. Cross-sector support was evident, with beedi workers passing resolutions in favour of striking weavers. During these struggles, Socialists organised meetings and relief committees to support the workers.

Trade union activities gradually expanded beyond economic demands to encompass political issues. Workers participated in protests, such as the hartal against the new Constitution in April 1937. On "Demands Declaration Day" in September 1937, a massive procession was held in Calicut, where workers marched with red flags and convened for a public meeting. The All Malabar Labour Conference, presided over by S. A. Dange, demanded a 48-hour work week and official recognition of trade unions. Other demands included the extension of debt relief measures for the poor.

Between 1937 and 1939, efforts were made to unify different trade unions and strengthen the labour movement. Organisations such as the Cannanore Beedi Workers Union were formed, and conferences brought together



workers from across Malabar. Volunteer corps were also established in centres like Calicut, Tellicherry, and Cannanore to manage protests, organise meetings, and support union activities.

By the late 1930s, workers increasingly participated in wider political movements, including anti-war and anti-imperialist campaigns. They supported the struggles of other groups, such as peasants and teachers, and passed resolutions expressing solidarity with international movements, including support for Soviet Russia and demands for lifting the ban on the Communist Party of India. Workers also took part in protests against the arrests of national leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan and others, and joined campaigns against war and recruitment during 1939-40.

However, the outbreak of the Second World War and subsequent political developments impacted the unity of the labour movement. After the failure of the Cripps Mission and the launch of the Quit India Movement in 1942, divisions deepened. The change in Communist policy following the entry of the Soviet Union into the war led to the adoption of the “People’s War” line, which caused splits within trade unions and the formation of rival organisations such as the All Kerala National Workers Union. The post-war years witnessed a revival of militant trade union activity. New unions were formed in industrial centres like Cochin and Trichur, and significant strikes, such as those in Amballur Textiles and among municipal workers in Calicut in 1946, reflected the continued strength and importance of the labour movement.

5.2.2 Unified Trade Union Movement

By the 1940s, the trade union movement, under communist leadership, had become more organised and politically conscious.

Workers increasingly understood their role in social transformation, marking a new stage in the history of labour and political movements in Kerala. Developments in the taluks of Ambalapuzha and Cherthala in Travancore clearly illustrate the rise of political awareness among workers and the rural poor during this period. When the Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU) came under communist leadership, its membership and activities expanded rapidly, growing from approximately 7,400 members in 1939 to nearly 17,000 by the end of the Second World War. The influence of trade unions spread widely in these regions and gradually extended to other industrial centres such as Kollam and Punalur.

Trade unions began to encompass not only factory workers but also women, children and domestic labourers, demonstrating their strong hold over everyday life. Through these organisations, the Communist Party helped to cultivate leaders from among the working classes themselves. These leaders represented the interests of ordinary people and often settled community disputes, earning trust through their dedication and sacrifice.

The dissemination of communist ideas was another important feature of the era. By 1943, thousands of public meetings had been organised, reaching large audiences. Study classes were regularly conducted to teach the basics of Marxism to party workers and the general public. The publication of the weekly *Desabhimani* in 1942 and the circulation of pamphlets further strengthened ideological awareness. Party workers actively distributed literature in markets, festivals and public gatherings, underscoring the importance given to political education.

The trade union movement and communist ideology encouraged people to think beyond caste and religious divisions, focusing instead on economic conditions and class interests. Although differences within the nationalist

movement, particularly during the Second World War and the Quit India Movement, led to some divisions, including the rise of socialist groups opposed to communism, the left movement continued to grow.

During the 1940s, communists also promoted the idea of a united Kerala, despite

political divisions between Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Even though organisational difficulties and government opposition existed, the party maintained its broader vision. Much of its strength stemmed from its close connection with trade unions and rural movements, where its members remained active, often working in secrecy.

Recap

- ◆ Trade unions emerged with industrial growth, especially the expansion of the coir industry
- ◆ Workers faced exploitation, low wages, long hours and discrimination
- ◆ Social reforms and awareness encouraged collective organisation among labourers
- ◆ Travancore Labour Association formed in 1922 under P. K. Bava
- ◆ Early unions focused on welfare, education, and mutual support activities
- ◆ Trade unions gradually spread awareness and intervened in labour disputes
- ◆ By 1930s, unions became organised, militant, and strike-oriented movements
- ◆ Economic depression worsened conditions, leading to frequent worker protests
- ◆ Workers developed class consciousness and unity against employers
- ◆ Socialist and communist ideas strengthened ideological direction of unions
- ◆ Trade unions expanded to include rural, agricultural, and diverse workers
- ◆ Movement became political, linking labour struggles with democratic rights

Objective Questions

1. Which organisation was the first labour union formed in Kerala?
2. Who led the formation of the Travancore Labour Association in 1922?

3. In which year was the Travancore Labour Association established?
4. Name the journal started by the Travancore Labour Association in 1924.
5. Which ideology strengthened the trade union movement in the late 1930s?
6. Identify the later name of the Travancore Labour Association

Answers

1. Travancore Labour Association (TLA)
2. P. K. Bava
3. 1922
4. *Thozhilali*
5. Socialist ideas
6. Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU)

Assignments

1. Explain the factors responsible for the emergence and growth of the trade union movement in Kerala.
2. Examine the development of the trade union movement in Travancore and analyse its contribution to the growth of workers' political consciousness.
3. Discuss the growth of the trade union movement in Malabar and evaluate the role of the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party in organising the working class.
4. Compare the growth and characteristics of the trade union movement in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar.
5. Critically evaluate the significance of the unified trade union movement in Kerala and its contribution to the rise of communist politics and the Aikya Kerala movement.

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3

UNIT

Peasant Movement

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the origin and development of peasant movements in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the formation and role of organisations such as the *Karshaka Sangham* in organising peasants and promoting class consciousness
- ◆ examine the causes and nature of peasant struggles in Malabar and the princely states, with reference to agrarian exploitation, colonial policies, and the spread of socialist ideas
- ◆ evaluate the significance of Punnappra-Vayalar revolt in shaping political consciousness and anti-feudal movements in Kerala

Prerequisite

For a clear understanding of this unit, it is important to draw upon ideas studied in previous units, especially the emergence of left politics in Kerala and the development of trade union movements. Learners are already familiar with the spread of socialist and communist ideologies, the formation of radical organisations, and the role of leaders who mobilised workers and peasants. They have also studied how trade unions developed in regions like Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, and how these organisations addressed issues such as low wages, exploitation, and poor working conditions. This background helps in understanding how similar processes of organisation and resistance emerged in the agrarian sector.

It is also necessary to revisit earlier discussions on colonial economic policies, landlord-tenant relations, and the impact of British rule on different sections of society. Understanding how industrial workers organised themselves and how class-based thinking gradually developed provides a useful basis for comprehending the

transition from scattered peasant protests to organised agrarian movements. The connection between national movements and local struggles, already examined in previous units, is equally important here. This foundation allows for a better understanding of the formation of peasant organisations such as the Karshaka Sangham, the growth of collective struggles against feudal and colonial oppression, and the increasing role of socialist and communist ideas in shaping these movements. This unit builds upon earlier learning to explain how peasants became an organised and politically conscious force in Kerala's modern history.

Keywords

Peasant struggles, Anti-feudal movement, Malabar Kudiyan Sangham, Karshaka Sangham, Class consciousness, All India Kisan Sabha, Communist Party of India, Kayyur Revolt, Punnapra–Vayalar Uprising, Agrarian reforms

Discussion

For many centuries, Kerala's agrarian system was highly exploitative and oppressive, a condition exacerbated by the advent of the British Empire. The colonial land system, coupled with British revenue policies, unfair price mechanisms, and heavy extraction of surplus, created deep dissatisfaction among the peasantry. As a result, agrarian struggles emerged as part of wider anti-feudal and anti-colonial movements. Kerala witnessed a continuous history of peasant struggles during and after the colonial period. These struggles were driven by the peasants' desire to gain land ownership and improve their living conditions. Early uprisings such as the Pazhassi Revolt, Kurichiya Revolt, Velu Thampi Revolt, and the Koot disturbances were important expressions of resistance against colonial rule and landlord oppression. However, these early revolts were largely unorganised. Later, with the formation of peasant organisations, these struggles became more organised and effective, playing a key role in uniting peasants and strengthening their fight against colonial domination and landlord exploitation.

Peasant movements in Kerala began during the colonial period, but in their early stages, they were scattered and lacked unity. A more organised effort emerged with the formation of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham in 1915, which attempted to unite peasants despite serious obstacles like caste divisions and sectarian differences. Initially, many leaders of the movement came from upper-caste backgrounds, working among ordinary peasants to build trust and improve their conditions.

In South Malabar, tenant movements gained strength with the active participation of Moplah (Muslim) tenants, especially the *verumpattom* holders, who organised themselves through Karshaka Sanghams to secure their rights through collective action. By 1921, the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham had spread its branches across the region. Its leaders, often from the intermediary tenant class and associated with the Congress, raised peasant grievances, notably at the Pattambi conference of 1922. Although the Sangham played a role in challenging

landlord dominance, it struggled to mobilise large numbers of peasants due to their fear of landlords.

The situation worsened during and after the First World War and the subsequent economic depression, which pushed many tenants into extreme poverty, often reducing them to the status of wage labourers. This hardship led to stronger and more widespread peasant mobilisation. By the 1930s, left-leaning groups within the Congress began organising peasants and workers along class lines. The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 at Calicut marked a turning point, introducing socialist ideas and encouraging organised struggles against landlords. Leaders like P. Krishna Pillai and C.K. Govindan Nair played key roles in this phase.

The Congress Socialist Party helped to spread class consciousness through publications, cultural activities, and organised protests. It opposed illegal levies imposed by landlords and linked peasant struggles with the broader national movement. Mass campaigns such as the hunger march led by A.K. Gopalan from Malabar to Madras contributed to the political awakening of peasants. The movement also gained support by organising workers, teachers, and the unemployed. The formation of the All India Kisan Congress in 1936 (later renamed the All India Kisan Sabha in 1938) marked a new phase in the peasant movement, aiming to end economic exploitation and achieve political and economic power for peasants and other oppressed groups. Peasant movements in Kerala gradually evolved from scattered protests into organised, politically conscious struggles closely linked with socialist and nationalist movements.

5.3.1 Karshaka Sangham

The Karshaka Sangham emerged in Kerala, particularly in Malabar, before the

formation of the All India Kisan Sabha, through the efforts of Congress Socialist Party activists who had been working among peasants since the mid-1930s. These organisations aimed to address the severe problems faced by peasants, such as eviction, high land tax, unfair rents, heavy debts, and feudal exactions. The economic crisis caused by the Great Depression and the revenue settlement of 1929 worsened agrarian conditions in Malabar. In response, socialist-minded Congress leaders began organising Karshaka Sanghams in villages after the Civil Disobedience Movement to protect peasant interests and bring their grievances to the attention of the government.

The first Karshaka Sangham was established in 1935 at Naniyoor near Kolacheri in Taliparamba under the leadership of Vishnu Bharatheeyan and K.A. Keraleeyan. Soon, similar organisations spread to other areas such as Velloor, Karivelloor, and Kodakkad. These groups actively organised peasants against oppressive landlords (*jenmis*) and mobilised them through meetings, study classes, reading rooms, and protest marches (*jathas*). Inspired by wider peasant movements, especially the All India Kisan Sabha, the Karshaka Sangham played a crucial role in raising political awareness among peasants and encouraging them to fight for their rights.

The agrarian question gained national importance during the Faizpur Session of the Indian National Congress in 1936, where land issues were highlighted. Although the Congress attempted agrarian reforms after coming to power in 1937, internal opposition from landlords limited its success. Meanwhile, peasant movements grew stronger across India. In Malabar, the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham was formed under P. Narayanan Nair and K.A. Keraleeyan, lending new strength to anti-imperialist struggles. A major peasant meeting held at Parassinikkadavu

in 1936 demanded the abolition of caste-based discrimination and the reduction of feudal levies, along with amendments to the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929.

During the late 1930s, the Karshaka Sangham intensified its activities through organised marches and campaigns, forcing the government to appoint committees to study tenancy issues, though these efforts yielded limited results. With the establishment of the Communist Party of India in Kerala in 1940, the movement became more militant. Influenced by Marxist ideas, peasants began direct actions such as land occupation for cultivation, especially during wartime shortages. This led to widespread conflicts between peasants and landlords, often involving police repression. Several regions, such as Kavumbai and Kayyur, became centres of peasant agitation. The Kayyur Riot marked a turning point, where peasants sacrificed their lives in the struggle against oppression. In recognition of such sacrifices, the peasant movement observed 29 March as Peasant Day.

5.3.2 All Kerala Kisan Sangham

The All Kerala Kisan Sangham emerged as a unified peasant organisation when the Malabar Karshaka Sangham expanded to include Travancore and Cochin. Its first conference was held at Calicut in 1943 under the leadership of E. Kannan and P. Narayanan Nair. At that time, food scarcity caused by low production and poor distribution was a major concern. The Sangham also promoted the cultivation of unused government lands, but the colonial authorities opposed such efforts and even destroyed crops. Agitations spread to several regions, demanding agrarian reforms, and many peasants lost their lives in struggles against imperialism and feudal landlordism. In several cases, such as the death of Narayanan Nambiar, the government

reportedly concealed political killings as accidental deaths.

In Cochin, peasant movements began independently in the 1930s. Inspired by developments in Malabar, organisations like the Cochin Karshaka Sangham were formed, led by V. R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan and C. Achutha Menon. Although limited in reach, they addressed the issues of tenants and achieved some progress, including land distribution and the introduction of joint farming in Anamala.

In Travancore, peasant movements were comparatively weaker, though local struggles did occur. By the 1940s, Karshaka Sanghams were formed under leaders like C. S. Gopala Pillai. Regions such as Alleppey and Sherthalai witnessed stronger movements due to exploitation by landlords and industrial owners. The peasant-worker uprising during the Punnappra-Vayalar Uprising reflected growing resistance against oppressive rule.

5.3.3 Peasant Movements

The growth of peasant movements and organisations in Kerala formed an important part of the wider national movement. In 1934, the Congress Socialist Party was established, and its branches soon spread throughout different regions of Kerala. These groups played an active role in mobilising peasants and workers, bringing them into organised political activity.

In May 1935, the first All Kerala Trade Union Congress was held at Calicut, marking a significant step in the organisation of labour movements. The Communist Party organised bodies such as the Karshaka Sangham and other workers' organisations, which continued to function within the broader framework of the parent organisation. Literature also became an effective tool for mobilisation. The well-known drama *Pattabakki* by K. Damodaran exposed the problems of rural

indebtedness and the hardships faced by cultivators. It conveyed a strong message emphasising the unity of peasants and workers in their struggles.

During the 1940s, peasant movements in Kerala grew in strength and unity. The Karshaka Sangham emerged as a powerful organisation representing the collective interests of the peasants. Later, its activities became more militant, as peasants directly challenged oppressive landlords by harvesting crops and seizing stored grain. In places like Kayyur and Morazha, these struggles led to violent clashes with the police, resulting in the deaths of some police officers. In response, the authorities, supported by landlords, suppressed the movement, and the Karshaka Sangham was severely repressed.

At the same time, the Communist Party, which had been leading these movements, was banned for its anti-war stance during the Second World War. Many of its leaders were imprisoned, while others went underground. After the war and India's independence, the party commemorated the sacrifices of peasant martyrs by observing March 29 as 'All India Kisan's Day'. Although the Communist Party later altered its position on the war and temporarily supported the colonial government, the Karshaka Sangham continued its struggle against landlords, guided by Marxist ideas of class conflict.

Under Communist leadership, peasant movements became one of the most significant anti-colonial forces in Kerala, especially in North Malabar. Unlike the Congress-led individual Satyagraha during the war, which attracted little peasant participation, these movements mobilised large numbers of peasants into active resistance. They organised a series of uprisings in regions such as Mattanur, Morazha, Tellicherry, and Kayyur, demonstrating strong opposition to British rule even without the support of arms.

5.3.3.1 Tellicherry, Morazha and Mattanur

The peasant movement in Malabar grew more militant with the formation of organisations such as the Karshaka Sangham and the Communist Party. The Karshaka Sangham organised peasants and spearheaded their struggle against feudal exploitation and landlord domination. During the Second World War, the peasants' living conditions deteriorated. Prices of essential goods rose sharply, while their incomes remained low, leading to severe hardship and food scarcity. In several areas, peasants, led by the Karshaka Sangham, harvested crops from landlords' fields, resulting in clashes with the police who supported the landlords. Concurrently, the hoarding and black-marketing of essential commodities further intensified the suffering of ordinary people.

The wartime crisis also triggered political unrest. On 12 September 1940, the District Magistrate of Malabar banned meetings and public gatherings under the Defence of India Rules. In protest, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) observed 15 September 1940 as "Protest Day" (Anti-Depression Day). Although previously banned, the Communist Party gradually resumed activities by organising meetings and processions. At Tellicherry, police fired upon a public meeting at Jawahar Ghat, resulting in the deaths of Abu and Chathukutty, who were later regarded as the first martyrs of the communist movement in Kerala. This incident marked one of the earliest organised militant confrontations between a political movement and the colonial police.

Morazha in Chirakkal taluk also emerged as a centre of peasant resistance. On 15 September 1940, a clash between protesters and police led to the deaths of a Sub-Inspector and a constable. K. P. R. Gopalan, a prominent communist leader who organised the Morazha protest against

the British decision to involve India in the Second World War, was arrested and initially sentenced to death. However, due to widespread public protest, his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. Many other activists were also arrested.

On the same day, in Mattannur, the police dispersed a Protest Day gathering, which led to further violence. A police constable named Raman Nair was seriously injured and later died. Following these incidents, the government imposed a ban on the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham and its branches, in an attempt to suppress the burgeoning peasant movement.

5.3.3.2 Kayyur Revolt

Kayyur, a small village in the Kasaragod region, became a focal point of peasant resistance against feudal oppression and British imperialism in India. The activities of the Communist Party of India and the Karshaka Sangham, including anti-war campaigns and militant actions, led to severe police repression in the area. In Kinanur village, authorities confiscated the peasants' harvest in favour of the landlord, following a court order. In response, the Karshaka Sangham supported the peasants in harvesting the crops, with active participation from Kayyur workers.

On 28 March 1941, villagers organised a massive protest against police brutality. Many participants were members of the Karshaka Sangham. During the procession, a policeman named Subbaraiiah was asked to hold the Congress flag, but he refused. As tensions rose, he jumped into a river to escape, but the agitated crowd attacked him with stones, leading to his death. Following this incident, around sixty people, mostly Karshaka Sangham members, were arrested.

At that time, the Communist Party was banned, and many of its leaders were

imprisoned or working underground. Peasants organised defence committees to support the accused, but their efforts failed. Four activists—Abu Backer, Madathil Appu, Koyithattil Chirukantan, and Kunhambu Nair—were executed on 29 March 1943, in Cannanore Central Jail. Later, this day was commemorated by the All India Kisan Sabha in honour of the Kayyur martyrs. In the aftermath, peasant organisations in Malabar and Kasaragod were declared illegal.

The Kayyur revolt became a significant milestone in India's peasant movement. It strengthened class consciousness and unity among peasants under Communist leadership. The ban on peasant organisations followed the uprising, and rural areas continued to suffer from poverty and hardship in the post-war period. To address food shortages and prevent hoarding, peasants formed People's Food Committees. Although the government promoted programmes to increase food production, landlords often favoured wealthy peasants. In response, poorer peasants launched movements demanding the right to cultivate wastelands, marking 15 December 1946, as a day of action. These struggles inspired further peasant uprisings in places such as Cheemeni, Karivelloor, and Kavumbayi, highlighting the growing strength of agrarian movements in the region.

5.3.3.3 Karivelloor Incident

The post-war years, especially after the Second World War, brought severe hardship to ordinary people. Acute food shortages pushed many to the edge of starvation, while hoarding and black marketing became widespread. In response, peasants began militant struggles against hoarders, black marketers, and landlords. One notable example was the Karivelloor incident in the Malabar region. Here, an absentee landlord, Raja Varma Valiya Raja, had collected large quantities of paddy as rent and stored it, even during the food crisis.



When the Karshaka Sangham demanded that this grain be distributed locally at fair prices, the Raja refused and attempted to transport it elsewhere. Peasants resisted this move, leading to a confrontation in which police opened fire, killing two activists.

Peasant resistance also intensified in other areas. In Kavumbai, the Karshaka Sangham attempted to cultivate landlord-owned land, which led to clashes with the police and the death of four peasants. In Koothali, the government prevented peasants from cultivating land that they had previously used for shifting cultivation (punam), creating further distress. The peasants responded with strong protests, raising slogans asserting their determination to cultivate the land at any cost.

These struggles continued into the 1950s. Under the leadership of figures like C. H. Kanaran and M. K. Kelu, the Karshaka Sangham organised agitations against eviction and government policies. Although the government initially suppressed these movements and evicted peasants, continued resistance eventually led to the re-allocation of land. However, many peasants were arrested during these struggles, and in 1947, the Madras government even issued an ordinance to suppress such movements and imprison Communist activists.

5.3.3.4 Korom and Onchiyam

In 1948, several peasant struggles took place across different parts of Kerala as part of the wider anti-feudal movement led by the Karshaka Sanghams and supported by the Communist Party. In Korom, the Karshaka Sangham decided to seize surplus paddy stored in the granaries of the landlord Mavila Kunhambu Nambiar, protesting against hoarding and exploitation. On 12 April 1948, the paddy was taken and distributed among the people. This led to the arrest of leaders and a clash between the police and the public,

during which the police opened fire, killing a protester named B. Pokkan. Similar actions occurred in Payam and Thillankeri, where peasants seized food grains from landlords. In Thillankeri, police firing on a peasant march resulted in the death of five activists.

These incidents were part of a broader wave of anti-feudal struggles. In Pazhassi, two peasants, Athikka Unni Gurukkal and Vayali Damu, were killed by the police and the henchmen of landlords. On 29 April 1948, a secret meeting of Communist leaders at Onchiyam was discovered by the police, who attempted to arrest those present. The people resisted, leading to police firing and the death of eight individuals, while two others were killed in police custody. Altogether, eleven people lost their lives in what came to be known as the Onchiyam Incident.

Following this, Communist activists prepared to resist further repression and gathered at Munayakunnu with arms. However, the police attacked them on 1 May 1948, killing six peasant leaders. In another incident at Padikunnu, a landlord named Kandai Adhikari tried to prevent a Karshaka Sangham worker, Oorada Kannan Nair, from harvesting crops. When the Sangham intervened, the landlord sought police support. The workers were arrested, and three villagers were later taken and executed by the police. At the same time, the government imposed restrictions on the publication of materials critical of its actions, and many cases were filed against the circulation of pamphlets and booklets, which had been important tools for spreading political awareness, especially by the Communist Party during the independence period.

5.3.4 Punnapra-Vayalar Uprising

The repressive measures adopted by the government in Travancore led to intense clashes between peasants, workers, and

the police. C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar's authoritarian policies, coupled with his proposal for an independent Travancore State based on the so-called 'American Model,' met with strong public opposition. In protest, the slogan "*American Model Arabikkadallil*" (throw the American Model into the Arabian Sea) was raised. This proposal was actively resisted by the Travancore State Congress and the Communist Party of India.

During this period, workers' organisations, including the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union, Muhamma Coir Factory Workers' Union, and Cherthala Coir Factory Workers' Union, united to launch a strike. They presented twenty-seven demands, prominently featuring the end of the Diwan's autocratic rule and the establishment of a responsible government. An Action Committee was formed, convened by T. V. Thomas.

On 24 October 1946, a large assembly of workers gathered at Punnapra beach. Police arrived and opened fire on the crowd, resulting in violent confrontations between protesters and officers. Casualty figures vary across reports. Official records state that four police personnel were killed, while several policemen were captured by the workers. Many protesters were young, predominantly between sixteen and twenty-eight years of age. In response to the unrest, C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar declared martial law in Alleppey on 25 October.

The following day, the army advanced towards the agitation camp at Kattur, near

Alleppey. Workers resisted the troops, leading to further casualties, including the death of a worker in police firing. To impede the army's movement, protesters destroyed the Mayithara Bridge at Mararikkulam; however, it was later rebuilt by the troops and subsequently demolished again during the conflict. These clashes resulted in the loss of several workers' lives.

On 27 October 1946, troops reached the Vayalar camp, where the confrontation escalated to its peak. Heavy firing by the forces caused a large number of deaths. Many others, attempting to escape, jumped into the nearby backwaters. It is estimated that approximately 800 people were killed, with many more reported missing, though exact figures remain uncertain. These events became known as the Punnapra-Vayalar Uprising.

The uprising sent a powerful message to workers and peasants across regions like Malabar, encouraging them to fight against feudal oppression, unjust agrarian relations, and imperialist forces. As India approached independence, this radical movement evolved into a broad-based and organised force. Trade unions provided robust organisational support, while communist ideology gave it direction and strength. One of its most significant outcomes was the growing awareness among the working classes of their vital role in social transformation, leading to the politicisation of the lower sections of society.

Recap

- ◆ Kerala's agrarian system was highly exploitative, worsened by British revenue policies and colonial rule
- ◆ Early peasant uprisings, such as the Pazhassi Revolt and Velu Thampi Revolt, were largely unorganised.
- ◆ Organised peasant movements began with the formation of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham in 1915.
- ◆ The growth of tenant movements, especially among Moplah peasants, strengthened collective resistance against landlords
- ◆ The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 marked a turning point by introducing socialist ideas and class-based organisation
- ◆ Leaders like P. Krishna Pillai organised peasants on class-based political lines
- ◆ The Karshaka Sangham emerged in the mid-1930s to organise peasants against eviction, high rents, and exploitation.
- ◆ The establishment of the All India Kisan Sabha strengthened peasant struggles at a national level
- ◆ Peasant movements became more militant in the 1940s, involving direct actions like land occupation and crop seizure
- ◆ The Kayyur revolt symbolised sacrifice and resistance against colonial and landlord oppression
- ◆ Karivelloor and other incidents showed militant actions against hoarding and exploitation
- ◆ Punnapra-Vayalar uprising reflected organised resistance against princely rule and state repression.
- ◆ Under communist leadership, peasant movements became organised, politically conscious, and played a key role in anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles in Kerala

Objective Questions

1. Which organisation was formed in 1915 to unite peasants in Malabar?
2. When was the first Karshaka Sangham established in Malabar?
3. Where was the first conference of the All Kerala Kisan Sangham held?
4. Which peasant uprising in 1941 became a turning point in Kerala's agrarian movement?
5. Where was the first Karshaka Sangham established?
6. Which major peasant-worker uprising took place in 1946 in Travancore?

Answers

1. Malabar Kudiyan Sangham
2. 1935
3. Kayyur Revolt
4. Calicut
5. Naniyoor, near Kolacheri
6. Punnapra-Vayalar Uprising

Assignments

1. Examine the role of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham in the early organisation of the peasant movement in Kerala.
2. Discuss the contribution of the Congress Socialist Party to the growth of peasant consciousness and agrarian struggles in Kerala.
3. Evaluate the role of the Karshaka Sangham in mobilising peasants against feudal landlordism in Kerala.
4. Analyse the significance of the peasant movements in Kerala with special reference to Kayyur Revolt.
5. Critically examine the historical significance of the Punnapra-Vayalar Uprising in the history of Kerala's agrarian and labour movements.

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SGOU



4 UNIT

Class and Popular Movements

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the emergence and growth of teachers', student, and youth movements in Kerala in relation to social reform, public education, and democratic activism
- ◆ analyse the role of organisations such as AKPCTA, KSU, SFI, DYFI, MSF, and KCYM in shaping educational reforms, campus politics, and youth participation in Kerala
- ◆ examine the contribution of teachers, students, and youth organisations to Kerala's political culture, social justice movements, literacy campaigns, and public welfare initiatives

Prerequisite

Learners should already be familiar with the growth of new political consciousness in Kerala, the rise of left-oriented ideas, and the emergence of organised political movements during the late colonial period. Earlier discussions have introduced the spread of socialist and communist ideologies, the formation of radical groups, and the origins of the communist movement in Kerala. Learners are also expected to understand the development of trade union movements among workers in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, including the conditions of labourers, the formation of labour unions, and the methods of collective protest adopted by workers. In addition, learners should possess a basic understanding of peasant struggles, agrarian unrest, the rise of peasant movements, and major popular uprisings such as Punnapra-Vayalar, which reflected growing resistance against economic exploitation and feudal oppression. Familiarity with the broader social reform movements, nationalist struggles, and the politicisation of ordinary people in Kerala will help learners understand how teachers, students, and youth emerged as active participants in public life and

democratic struggles. Knowledge of the formation of Kerala state, the educational expansion of the region, and the ideological conflicts between Congress, Communist, socialist, and community-based organisations will also help learners analyse the growth of teacher organisations, student unions, youth movements, and campus politics in modern Kerala.

Keywords

Education, Equality, AKPCTA, KSU, SFI, DYFI, MATU, AISF

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

- ◆ Kerala promoted public education traditions through early experiments in free schooling.
- ◆ Gowri Parvati Bayi supported free education and established educational institutions in Travancore.
- ◆ Teachers in aided schools suffered exploitation, irregular salaries, and poor working conditions.
- ◆ Rural teachers organised unions demanding fair wages, dignity, and educational reforms statewide.
- ◆ Teacher unions spread socialist, anti-imperialist, and reformist ideas among rural communities actively.
- ◆ M. P. Paul legally challenged unfair salary reductions imposed by college management authorities.
- ◆ Tutorial colleges promoted better salaries, timely payments, and professional respect for teachers.
- ◆ Communist government abolished salary disparities between aided and government school teachers statewide.
- ◆ The Education Bill triggered opposition and contributed towards the Vimochana Samaram.
- ◆ All Kerala Private College Teachers Association demanded salary parity and direct government payments for aided teachers.
- ◆ The 1971 teachers' strike highlighted wage inequalities and irregular salary payment systems.
- ◆ Student-teacher movements demanded fee unification and affordable education across aided colleges statewide.
- ◆ The Direct Payment Agreement ensured treasury salary payments for aided college teachers statewide.
- ◆ Student organisations like KSU, AISF, and SFI strengthened campus activism and political participation.
- ◆ Youth organisations expanded activism through literacy campaigns, social welfare, and democratic movements.

Objective Questions

1. Who declared free education in Travancore in 1817?
2. Which institution received land endowment from Gowri Parvati Bayi?
3. What was the major teachers' organisation formed in Malabar during the 1930s?
4. Who challenged the salary cut imposed by St. Thomas College management in 1932?
5. Which Communist leader headed Kerala's first elected Communist government in 1957?
6. What was the name of the agitation that brought down the Communist government in 1959?
7. Which organisation was formed in 1958 to represent aided college teachers?
8. In which year did AKPCTA lead a major strike demanding direct salary payment?
9. What agreement introduced direct payment of salaries to aided college teachers?
10. Which Chief Minister led the government during the Direct Payment Agreement?
11. Which student organisation was formed in Kerala in 1957?
12. What was the famous student agitation launched by KSU for travel concessions called?
13. Which student organisation emerged in 1970 after the split in the Communist movement?
14. Which youth organisation was formed in 1980 in Kerala?
15. Which science movement inspired students through literacy drives and science clubs?

Answers

1. Gowri Parvati Bayi
2. CMS College Kottayam
3. Malabar Aided Teachers Union (MATU)
4. M. P. Paul
5. E. M. S. Namboodiripad
6. *Vimochana Samaram*
7. All Kerala Private College Teachers Association (AKPCTA)
8. 1971
9. Direct Payment Agreement (DPA)
10. C. Achutha Menon
11. Kerala Students Union (KSU)
12. Orana Samaram
13. Students' Federation of India (SFI)
14. Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI)
15. Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad

Assignments

1. Discuss the historical background of teachers' movements in Kerala and analyse the role of educators in the struggle for educational rights and social transformation.
2. Examine the causes, growth, and significance of teachers' organisations in Kerala with special reference to the working conditions of aided school teachers during the early twentieth century.
3. Analyse the contribution of M. P. Paul to the development of teachers' rights movements and educational reform in Kerala.

4. Discuss the origin and development of the fee unification movement in Kerala and examine the role of teachers' and students' organisations in securing the Direct Payment Agreement.
5. Analyse the growth of student and youth movements in Kerala and assess their contribution to political awareness, educational reforms, and democratic participation.

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UNIT

Cultural Awakening

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the role of the Grandhasala Prasthanam in promoting literacy, democratic participation, and cultural transformation in modern Kerala
- ◆ analyse the contributions of Jeeval Sahithyam, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham, and KPAC in shaping Kerala's progressive cultural sphere
- ◆ evaluate the impact of libraries, literature, drama, and cinema in spreading social awareness, political consciousness, and ideas of equality and modernity
- ◆ examine the contributions of P.N. Panicker, K. Damodaran, Vylloppilli Sreedhara Menon, Thoppil Bhasi, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan in the making of Kerala's modern public culture

Prerequisite

The study of this unit requires an understanding of the social and political changes that transformed the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Learners should already be familiar with the emergence of new political consciousness in Kerala, the spread of leftist ideology, and the rise of trade union and peasant movements that challenged feudalism, caste oppression, and economic inequality. Knowledge of social reform movements, the growth of literacy and print culture, and the development of public spaces for discussion and collective action will help learners understand how libraries, literature, drama, and cinema became instruments of social change. An awareness of the role played by teachers, students, youth organisations, and progressive cultural activists in shaping democratic values and public opinion is also essential for examining the cultural transformation of modern Kerala.

Keywords

Grandhasala Prasthanam, Library Movement, P.N. Panicker, Travancore Grandhasala Sangham Kerala Public Libraries Act (1989), Jeeval Sahithyam, Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham, KPAC (Kerala People's Arts Club), *Ningalenne Communistakki*

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

- ◆ Grandhasala Prasthanam democratized knowledge by spreading libraries across rural Kerala communities widely.
- ◆ Early libraries emerged through nationalist movements, social reforms, and vernacular print culture influences.
- ◆ Reading rooms became centres for discussions, self-education, and political awareness among villagers everywhere.
- ◆ British authorities often suspected libraries as centres encouraging dissent and political resistance activities.
- ◆ Travancore Grandhasala Sangham strengthened Kerala's library movement through organised democratic cultural initiatives.
- ◆ P.N. Panicker transformed libraries into instruments promoting literacy, dignity, and social development everywhere.
- ◆ Rural libraries expanded rapidly during 1960s and 1970s, enriching village cultural life significantly.
- ◆ Libraries provided inclusive public spaces for women, workers, and marginalized castes across Kerala.
- ◆ The emergency period weakened democratic functioning and reduced grassroots enthusiasm within the library movement significantly.

- ◆ Kerala Public Libraries Act restored democratic administration and participatory spirit within libraries successfully.
- ◆ Jeeval Sahithyam promoted socially committed literature reflecting struggles of ordinary people realistically everywhere.
- ◆ Progressive writers connected literature with ethics, Marxist ideas, and social transformation in Kerala.
- ◆ Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham encouraged cultural activism through literature, theatre, music, and discussions.
- ◆ KPAC popularised progressive politics using realistic drama and socially relevant theatrical performances effectively.
- ◆ Malayalam cinema and theatre reflected modernity, social justice, and changing cultural values powerfully.

Objective Questions

1. What was the library movement in Kerala popularly known as?
2. Which social reformers influenced the spread of the library movement in Kerala?
3. Which organisation was established in 1945 to strengthen the library movement?
4. Who inaugurated the Travancore Grandhasala Sangham?
5. Who is known as the central figure behind the revival of the library movement in Kerala?
6. What was the apex body formed after the creation of Kerala state in 1956?
7. Which Act passed in 1989 aimed to restore democratic administration in libraries?
8. What was Jeeval Sahithyam?
9. Which writer played a major role in shaping Jeeval Sahithyam?
10. In which year was Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham formed?
11. Who led the Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham during its formation?
12. What does KPAC stand for?

13. Which famous play written by Thoppil Bhasi popularised communist ideas in Kerala?
14. Which Malayalam film released in 1965 marked a turning point in Kerala cinema?

Answers

1. *Grandhasala Prasthanam*
2. Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali
3. Travancore Grandhasala Sangham
4. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer
5. P. N. Panicker
6. Kerala Grandhasala Sangham
7. Kerala Public Libraries Act
8. A progressive literary movement focusing on ordinary people and social issues
9. K. Damodaran
10. 1981
11. Velloppilli Sreedhara Menon
12. Kerala People's Arts Club
13. *Ningalenne Communistakki*
14. *Chemmeen*

Assignments

1. Analyse the origin and growth of the Grandhasala Prasthanam and examine its role in spreading literacy, political awareness, and democratic values in Kerala.
2. Evaluate the contribution of P.N. Panicker and the Kerala Grandhasala Sangham in transforming libraries into centres of social and cultural change.

3. Discuss the emergence of Jeeval Sahithyam in Kerala and explain how progressive writers used literature as a medium of social criticism and reform.
4. Examine the role of Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham in shaping Kerala's modern cultural sphere and promoting democratic and progressive cultural values.
5. Assess the contribution of KPAC and Malayalam cinema to Kerala's cultural revolution with special reference to Thoppil Bhasi, Ningalenne Communistakki, and the New Wave cinema movement.

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BLOCK

Kerala Since Independence

1

UNIT

Towards the State of Kerala

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the origin and growth of the Aikya Kerala Movement and its role in unifying Malayalam-speaking regions into a single state
- ◆ analyse the contributions of political organisations, leaders, and cultural bodies in promoting the demand for linguistic reorganisation and the formation of Kerala
- ◆ examine the process of integration of Travancore and Cochin and evaluate its significance in the political development of modern Kerala

Prerequisite

To understand the formation of the state of Kerala, learners should already be familiar with the growth of nationalism in India, the impact of the freedom movement, and the emergence of regional political consciousness in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Knowledge of the social reform movements led by figures such as Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali, the rise of the Indian National Congress, and the spread of democratic and linguistic ideas is essential for understanding the demand for a unified Malayalam-speaking state. Learners should also have an awareness of the political structure of princely states like Travancore and Cochin, the Malabar region under the Madras Presidency, and the role of linguistic identity in Indian politics. Familiarity with the activities of the Congress, Communist Party, peasant and labour movements, and the broader process of state reorganisation in post-independence India will help learners analyse the historical significance of the Aikya Kerala Movement and the formation of Kerala in 1956.

Keywords

Aikya Kerala Movement, Linguistic Reorganisation, Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), Nehru Committee Report, Travancore-Cochin Integration, States Reorganisation Commission

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 Gurukkul 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 Samasthanam*) 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

- ◆ Aikya Kerala Movement aimed at unifying Malayalam-speaking regions into one political state.
- ◆ The Nehru Committee recommended linguistic states, strengthening demand for a united Kerala.
- ◆ Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee actively promoted Aikya Kerala through public campaigns.
- ◆ Communist Party initially focused on peasant struggles during the post-war economic depression period.
- ◆ Communist movements later adopted democratic methods and parliamentary political participation strategies.
- ◆ Cheruthuruthi meeting strengthened Aikya Kerala Movement under K. P. Kesava Menon's leadership.
- ◆ Kerala Varma supported Travancore-Cochin unification, earning the title Aikya Keralam Thampuran.
- ◆ Aikya Kerala Conference of 1947 consolidated public support for linguistic state formation.
- ◆ Travancore and Cochin merged, forming Travancore-Cochin State in July 1949 officially.
- ◆ States Reorganisation Commission supported language as the basis for reorganising Indian states boundaries.
- ◆ Kerala officially formed in November 1956 uniting Malayalam-speaking regions into a single state.
- ◆ KPCC formation in 1921 reflected Congress acceptance of linguistic state principle nationally.

- ◆ Ottappalam Conference created a stronger common political identity among Malayalam-speaking people across regions.
- ◆ Cultural organisations strongly supported the Aikya Kerala Movement alongside political parties and leaders.
- ◆ States Reorganisation Act integrated Malabar and Kasaragod with Travancore-Cochin forming Kerala.

Objective Questions

1. What was the main objective of the Aikya Kerala Movement?
2. Which committee formally recommended the formation of Kerala on a linguistic basis in 1928?
3. Which organisation actively promoted the cause of Aikya Kerala from the 1920s onward?
4. In which year was the important Aikya Kerala meeting held at Cheruthuruthi?
5. Who presided over the historic Aikya Kerala Conference of 1947?
6. Who was known as “Aikya Keralam Thampuran”?
7. Which two princely states merged on 1 July 1949 to form Travancore-Cochin?
8. Who became the first Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin State?
9. Which commission recommended linguistic reorganisation of states in India?
10. On which date was the state of Kerala officially formed?
11. Which district of the Madras Presidency became part of Kerala in 1956?
12. Which region of South Canara was merged with Kerala in 1956?
13. Where was the first All Kerala Provincial Conference held in 1921?
14. Which political conference in 1928 passed a resolution supporting a separate Kerala province?
15. Who chaired the States Reorganisation Commission appointed in 1953?

Answers

1. To unite all Malayalam-speaking regions into a single state
2. The Nehru Committee
3. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC)
4. 1946
5. K. Kelappan
6. Kerala Varma VII of Cochin
7. Travancore and Cochin
8. T. K. Narayana Pillai
9. States Reorganisation Commission
10. 1 November 1956
11. Malabar District
12. Kasaragod
13. Ottappalam
14. Payyannur Political Conference
15. Syed Fazl Ali

Assignments

1. Trace the origin and growth of the Aikya Kerala Movement and analyse the factors that led to the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956.
2. Examine the role of the Indian National Congress and the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee in promoting the demand for linguistic reorganisation and Aikya Keralam.
3. Discuss the significance of the Aikya Kerala Conferences and evaluate the contribution of leaders such as K. Kelappan, K. P. Kesava Menon, and E. Moidu Maulavi to the movement.
4. Analyse the integration of Travancore and Cochin in 1949 and explain its importance in the political unification of Malayalam-speaking regions.



5. Evaluate the role of the States Reorganisation Commission and the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 in the creation of the state of Kerala.

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2

UNIT

First Communist Ministry

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the major political developments in early independent Kerala
- ◆ analyse the significance of the first democratically elected Communist Ministry under E. M. S. Namboodiripad and evaluate its contributions to social and economic reforms in Kerala
- ◆ examine the significance of the Land Reform measures and the Kerala Education Bill on the agrarian structure and educational system of Kerala
- ◆ assess the causes and consequences of the Vimochana Samaram and the subsequent political shifts that shaped Kerala's democratic and coalition-based political culture

Prerequisite

The unit First Communist Ministry requires a basic understanding of the political transition in Kerala after Indian independence, especially the emergence of mass political mobilisation and party competition in the early 1950s. Learners should be familiar with the role of the Indian National Congress in the freedom movement and post-independence governance, as well as the rise of the Communist Party of India as a strong ideological alternative representing peasants, workers, and landless labourers. Awareness of the socio-economic structure of Kerala, particularly the agrarian system dominated by landlords (*janmi* system), tenant cultivation, and rural inequalities, is essential to understand the background of land reforms and peasant struggles. Knowledge of key political developments such as early elections, coalition formation, and the increasing influence of social and religious organisations in politics will also help in comprehending the nature of conflicts that shaped the first Communist Ministry, its reform agenda, and the subsequent political movements in the state.

Keywords

Communist Party of India (CPI), E. M. S. Namboodiripad, First Communist Ministry, Kerala Legislative Assembly Agrarian Relations Bill, Kerala Land Reform Act, Janmi System, Kerala Education Bill, Vimochana Samaram

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 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.



Fig. 6.2.1 E.M.S Nambooriripad taking the oath of office as the first Chief Minister of Kerala before Governor B. Ramakrishna Rao on April 5, 1957

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:6.2.2 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

- ◆ By the early 1950s, the Communist Party of India (CPI) emerged as a powerful political force in Kerala, challenging Congress dominance.
- ◆ The CPI mobilised peasants, landless labourers, and rural working classes, building a strong grassroots base.
- ◆ Several Congress leaders from the freedom struggle continued in post-independence politics, while others shifted or left active politics.
- ◆ Leaders like K. Kelappan moved towards Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movements after brief electoral participation.
- ◆ Accamma Cherian, a freedom struggle icon, eventually withdrew from electoral politics after unsuccessful independent candidatures.
- ◆ The first Kerala Legislative Assembly election was held in 1957 under President's Rule.

- ◆ In the 1957 election, the CPI won 60 out of 126 seats and formed the first elected Communist government in the world.
- ◆ E. M. S. Namboodiripad became Chief Minister in 1957, heading an 11-member cabinet.
- ◆ The first Communist Ministry introduced progressive reforms in land, education, labour, and administration.
- ◆ The Agrarian Relations Bill (1957) aimed to abolish the *janmi* system and redistribute land to tenants and labourers.
- ◆ Strong opposition from Congress, NSS, the Church, and the Muslim League led to the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle).
- ◆ In 1959, the EMS Ministry was dismissed under Article 356, marking a major constitutional event in Indian history.
- ◆ Kerala introduced major land reform measures, culminating in the abolition of landlordism and redistribution of land to tenants.
- ◆ The Kerala Education Bill aimed to regulate private schools, improve teacher welfare, and promote free and compulsory education.
- ◆ After 1959, Kerala entered a long phase of coalition politics, with party splits (CPI and CPI-M) and shifting alliances shaping governance.

Objective Questions

1. Which political party emerged as a strong force in Kerala by 1951?
2. Which party did the CPI oppose in early Kerala politics?
3. In which constituency did K. Kelappan contest the 1952 general election?
4. Which movement did K. Kelappan later join after retiring from politics?
5. Who became the first Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957?
6. When was the first Kerala Legislative Assembly election held?
7. Which ordinance protected tenants from eviction in 1957?
8. Who introduced the Agrarian Relations Bill in 1957?
9. What system did the Agrarian Relations Bill aim to abolish?
10. Which major agitation led to the dismissal of the Communist Ministry in 1959?

11. Under which Article of the Indian Constitution was the Kerala government dismissed in 1959?
12. Which bill focused on regulating private educational institutions in Kerala?
13. Who was the Education Minister who introduced the Education Bill?
14. Which system was finally abolished by the Kerala Land Reform Act (1969)?

Answers

1. Communist Party of India (CPI)
2. Indian National Congress
3. Ponnani
4. Bhoodan Movement
5. E. M. S. Namboodiripad
6. March 1957
7. Kerala Stay of Eviction Proceedings Ordinance
8. K. R. Gouri Amma
9. Janmi system
10. *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle)
11. Article 356
12. Kerala Education Bill
13. Joseph Mundassery
14. Janmi system/landlord system

Assignments

1. How did the Communist Party of India (CPI) emerge as a major political force in Kerala after independence, and what factors contributed to its growth?
2. Examine the significance of the 1957 Kerala Legislative Assembly election and the formation of the first Communist Ministry under E. M. S. Namboodiripad.
3. Discuss the major features of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill of 1957 and explain the reactions it generated among different social and political groups.
4. What were the causes, course, and consequences of the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle) in Kerala?
5. Evaluate the impact of land reforms in Kerala during the post-independence period on agrarian structure and social relations.

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SGOU





UNIT

Kerala Model Development

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the concept and significance of the Kerala Model of Development
- ◆ analyse Kerala's achievements in health, education, literacy, population control, and other human development indicators
- ◆ examine the role of land reforms, government policies, decentralisation, and people's participation in Kerala's development process
- ◆ evaluate the contribution of public health services, social welfare programmes, and human development initiatives to improving the quality of life and sustainable development in Kerala

Prerequisite

This unit requires learners to have a basic understanding of the concept of development and its multidimensional nature, including the difference between economic growth and human development. A foundational awareness of Kerala's socio-political history, especially social reform movements and missionary-led educational initiatives, is essential to understand the roots of high literacy and social awareness in the state. Learners should also be familiar with post-independence political developments in Kerala, including land reforms, the emergence of coalition politics, and the role of Left and Congress governments in shaping welfare policies. Basic knowledge of key development indicators such as literacy rate, infant mortality rate, life expectancy, and per capita income will help in appreciating Kerala's distinctive achievements. An understanding of migration, particularly Gulf migration and remittances, is also important for grasping the economic background of the model. Additionally, familiarity with constitutional provisions related to decentralisation, welfare state policies, and public institutions will enable learners to critically engage with the idea of participatory development and the evolution of the Kerala Model.

Keywords

Human development, Literacy expansion, Public healthcare system, Kerala Model, Land reforms, Social welfare policies, Gulf remittances, Decentralised governance, Unemployment paradox

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, 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.

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

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 policymakers 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

- ◆ Kerala Model prioritises human development over rapid industrial economic growth.
- ◆ High literacy, healthcare, and life expectancy define Kerala's development approach.
- ◆ Social reforms and mass movements shaped Kerala's unique development path.
- ◆ Land reforms significantly reduced inequality and strengthened social justice.
- ◆ Kerala achieved low infant mortality and high life expectancy rates.
- ◆ Public education expansion created a highly literate population in Kerala.
- ◆ Kerala Model emerged through UN studies led by K. N. Raj.
- ◆ Amartya Sen supported human development indicators for evaluating progress.
- ◆ Gulf remittances strengthened Kerala's economy and supported welfare programmes.
- ◆ Decentralisation enabled people's participation in planning and governance processes.
- ◆ Kerala's political awareness ensured strong accountability and active public action.
- ◆ Health infrastructure improved through primary, secondary, and tertiary systems.
- ◆ Despite low income, Kerala achieved developed-country level social indicators.
- ◆ Unemployment remains a major contradiction within Kerala development model.
- ◆ Kerala Model combines welfare policies with strong social development outcomes.

Objective Questions

1. What is the Kerala Model of Development primarily focused on?
2. Which economist strongly supported human development indicators in Kerala?
3. What is the key indicator of Kerala's educational achievement?
4. Which international migration contributed significantly to Kerala's economy?
5. What do Gulf remittances mainly support in Kerala?
6. Which movement is considered a major part of Kerala's social development history?
7. What is the role of literacy in the Kerala Model?
8. Which sector is the backbone of Kerala's healthcare system?
9. What is Kerala's achievement in population control?
10. Which system supports decentralised governance in Kerala?
11. What is the major cause of educated unemployment in Kerala?
12. Which sector remains weak in Kerala despite high human development?

Answers

1. Human development and social well-being over rapid economic growth
2. Amartya Sen
3. High literacy rate
4. Gulf migration
5. Education, healthcare, housing, and family welfare
6. Social reform movements
7. It promotes political awareness and social participation
8. Public health system
9. Low birth rate and controlled population growth
10. Panchayati Raj system

11. Mismatch between education and job opportunities

12. Industrial sector

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of the Kerala Model of Development and examine the factors that contributed to its emergence.
2. Discuss the major features of the Kerala Model of Development with special reference to human development indicators such as literacy, health, and life expectancy.
3. Analyse the role of historical foundations, including social reform movements and missionary activities, in shaping Kerala's development trajectory.
4. Evaluate the contributions of Gulf remittances and decentralised planning in strengthening the Kerala Model of Development.
5. Critically assess the Kerala Model of Development by highlighting its achievements as well as its limitations, especially unemployment and economic imbalance.

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4 UNIT

Economic Changes

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the major economic changes in post-independence Kerala
- ◆ analyse the causes and consequences of Malayalee migration and evaluate its impact on Kerala's economy, society, and welfare structure
- ◆ examine the process of commercialisation of agriculture and assess its effects on food security, rural livelihoods, environmental sustainability, and market vulnerability
- ◆ evaluate the emergence and characteristics of the Malayalee middle class

Prerequisite

The study of this unit requires a basic understanding of the post-independence socio-economic structure of the state and the major historical processes that shaped its development trajectory. Learners should be familiar with the impact of land reforms and the abolition of landlordism, which restructured agrarian relations and influenced rural livelihoods. Knowledge of Kerala's emphasis on public investment in education, healthcare, and welfare policies is essential to understand how the state achieved high human development indicators despite limited industrial growth. An awareness of migration trends, especially the large-scale movement of Malayalees to the Gulf countries from the 1970s, is also important, as remittances became a key driver of Kerala's economy and consumption patterns. Additionally, learners should understand the shift from a subsistence-based agrarian economy to a commercial and service-oriented structure, along with the emergence of the Malayalee middle class shaped by education, social reforms, and migration. Together, these background ideas provide the foundation for analysing Kerala's unique economic model, where social progress and economic constraints coexist.

Keywords

Land reforms, Gulf migration, Remittances economy, Commercial agriculture, Cash crop cultivation, Agricultural fragmentation, Unemployment crisis, Service sector growth, Middle-class expansion, Export-oriented economy

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. Saradmoni 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 economy shifted from agriculture to services after independence significantly.
- ◆ Land reforms reduced landlordism but fragmented agricultural holdings extensively.
- ◆ Industrial growth remained limited despite strong human development indicators.
- ◆ Kerala invested heavily in education, healthcare, and welfare programmes statewide.
- ◆ Welfare expansion improved living standards but strained state finances greatly.
- ◆ Educated unemployment increased due to limited domestic job opportunities.
- ◆ Migration to Gulf countries reshaped Kerala's economy since 1970s onwards.
- ◆ Remittances boosted consumption, housing development, and service sector growth rapidly.
- ◆ Kerala evolved into a remittance-driven consumption and service economy structure.
- ◆ Agricultural economy shifted from subsistence crops to export-oriented plantations.
- ◆ Cash crops like rubber, pepper, and coconut became dominant extensively.
- ◆ Land fragmentation weakened food production and increased external dependence significantly.
- ◆ Environmental degradation increased due to plantation expansion in fragile zones.
- ◆ Malayalee middle class emerged through education, reforms, and migration income.
- ◆ Migration and remittances created prosperity but also social inequalities.

Objective Questions

1. Name one institution that supported agricultural commercialisation through cooperatives.
2. Which sector became dominant in Kerala's economy after the 1970s?
3. Which region attracted large-scale Malayalee migration in the 1970s?
4. What is Kerala's economy largely dependent on after the migration boom?
5. Which state sector received heavy investment after independence?
6. What major economic problem persisted in Kerala despite high literacy?
7. What type of agriculture replaced subsistence farming in Kerala?
8. Which crop became a major plantation crop in Kerala?
9. What happened to agricultural land after land reforms?
10. Which natural region faced ecological stress due to plantations?
11. Which sector emerged due to Kerala's consumption-based economy?
12. What major structural issue characterises Kerala's economy?

Answers

1. Cooperative marketing societies
2. Service sector
3. Gulf region
4. Remittance-driven economy
5. Education and healthcare
6. Unemployment
7. Commercial agriculture
8. Rubber
9. Fragmentation into smallholdings

10. Western Ghats
11. Tourism and retail sector
12. Limited industrial growth with high social development

Assignments

1. Explain the major economic transformations in post-independence Kerala and analyse the shift from an agrarian to a service-oriented economy.
2. Discuss the role of Malayalee migration to the Gulf countries in shaping Kerala's remittance-driven economy and its socio-economic impact.
3. Examine the process of commercialisation of agriculture in Kerala and evaluate its effects on food security and rural livelihoods.
4. Analyse the emergence of the Malayalee middle class and explain how education, land reforms, and migration contributed to its growth.
5. Critically assess the advantages and limitations of Kerala's economic model with special reference to unemployment, environmental concerns, and dependence on remittances.

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5 UNIT

Social Issues

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the major social issues in contemporary Kerala
- ◆ analyse the conditions and struggles of marginalised communities in Kerala
- ◆ examine the causes and consequences of land alienation
- ◆ assess the conflicts between ecological conservation and developmental projects in Kerala with reference to environmental movements, climate-related disasters, and sustainability debates

Prerequisite

Learners should have a basic understanding of the post-independence socio-economic development of Kerala, including the idea of the “Kerala Model” of development and its key features such as high literacy, public health achievements, and welfare-oriented governance. They should be familiar with fundamental concepts like social inequality, caste and class structure, marginalisation, unemployment, migration, and basic environmental issues. Awareness of Kerala’s land reforms, Gulf migration, and the growth of the service sector will help in understanding the background of current social challenges. Learners should also possess a general idea of how development can create both progress and contradictions, especially in relation to employment, resource distribution, and ecological balance. A preliminary understanding of social movements and state welfare policies will further support meaningful engagement with issues such as land alienation, environmental conflicts, and the struggles of marginalised communities discussed in this unit.

Keywords

Unemployment, Caste inequality, Marginalised communities, Adivasi land rights, Land alienation, Migration and remittances, Ageing population, Drug abuse and alcoholism, Ecological degradation, Social inequality

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. 6.5.1 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,

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. 6.5.2 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 inherent difficulty of balancing ecological protection with the developmental aspirations of a growing population.

Grassroots environmental movements in Kerala have also shown the tensions between industrial development and ecological sustainability. One of the most prominent examples was the Plachimada Anti-Coca-Cola Struggle in Palakkad district. In 2002, local residents, particularly Adivasi and Dalit communities, launched sustained protests against a bottling plant operated by Coca-Cola, alleging that the factory's large-scale extraction of groundwater had led to severe depletion of local water sources and contamination of drinking water. The agitation, under the leadership of Mayilamma, involved continuous sit-ins and demonstrations organised by the *Plachimada Coca-Cola Virudha Janakeeya Samara Samithi*. The protest gained national and international attention and eventually led to the closure of the plant in 2004 following intervention by the local panchayat and legal challenges.

Another major environmental justice movement emerged in northern Kerala over the health impacts of pesticide exposure. The Endosulfan Protests in Kerala developed after the aerial spraying of the pesticide Endosulfan on cashew plantations in

Kasaragod district from the late 1970s to early 2000s by the Plantation Corporation of Kerala. Residents of villages such as Padre in the Enmakaje Panchayat reported severe health problems, including congenital deformities, neurological disorders, cancers, and reproductive abnormalities. Sustained mobilisation by affected families, health activists, and civil society organisations led to widespread public debate and eventually resulted in the ban of endosulfan in India in 2011.

Earlier environmental struggles in Kerala also point towards the conflicts between 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 faces educated unemployment despite high literacy and social development.
- ◆ Migration to Gulf countries reflects structural unemployment in Kerala society.
- ◆ Caste inequalities persist despite land reforms and social movements.
- ◆ Dalits continue facing marginalisation and limited access to resources.
- ◆ Adivasi communities suffer landlessness, displacement, and cultural erosion.
- ◆ Coastal fishing communities face livelihood insecurity and ecological vulnerability.
- ◆ Migrant labourers experience poor living conditions and limited social protection.
- ◆ Ageing population increases pressure on Kerala's welfare and healthcare systems.
- ◆ Substance abuse and mental health issues are rising among youth.
- ◆ Land alienation continues through urbanisation and market-driven development.
- ◆ Environmental degradation affects forests, rivers, and coastal ecosystems in Kerala.
- ◆ Development projects create conflicts between ecology and economic growth.
- ◆ Western Ghats face ecological stress due to plantations and deforestation.
- ◆ Kerala experiences contradictions between welfare achievements and economic weaknesses.

- ◆ Social stress arises from migration, unemployment, and rising consumption aspirations.

Objective Questions

1. Which movement highlighted Adivasi land rights issues in Kerala?
2. Which group is described as the “new working class” in Kerala?
3. What law is mentioned for protecting forest rights of Adivasis?
4. Which committee studied the ecological issues of the Western Ghats in 2011?
5. Which committee revised the Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area coverage in 2013 to balance development and conservation?
6. Who led the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha in major land struggles?
7. Which protest demanded land rights in Pathanamthitta district (2007–2009)?
8. Which major environmental movement stopped a hydroelectric project in Kerala?
9. Which pesticide caused major health protests in Kasaragod district?
10. Which cyclone in 2017 exposed the vulnerabilities of Kerala’s coastal fisher communities?

Answers

1. Muthanga Adivasi land struggle (2003)
2. Migrant labourers from other Indian states
3. Forest Rights Act, 2006
4. Gadgil Committee
5. Kasturirangan Committee
6. C. K. Janu
7. Chengara Land Struggle



8. Silent Valley Movement
9. Endosulfan
10. Ockhi Cyclone

Assignments

1. Discuss the major social issues in contemporary Kerala and examine how they challenge the achievements of the Kerala Model of Development.
2. Analyse the problem of educated unemployment in Kerala. How does it contribute to migration and social stress in the state?
3. Evaluate the status of marginalised communities such as Dalits, Adivasis, and coastal fishing groups in Kerala with reference to social inequality and exclusion.
4. Explain the concept of land alienation in Kerala. How have Dalit and Adivasi movements responded to this issue in the post-reform period?
5. Critically examine the conflict between ecology and development in Kerala with suitable examples of environmental movements.

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

MODEL QUESTION PAPER - SET A

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FIFTH SEMESTER B.A (Honours) HISTORY EXAMINATION

MAJOR CORE COURSE

SGB24HS306MC - Making of Modern Kerala

2024-25 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any **eight** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.

(08 X 1 = 8 Marks)

1. Which revolt is considered the first organised revolt against the British in Kerala?
2. Which Mysore ruler invaded Kerala in 1766?
3. Who became the first Chief Minister of Kerala?
4. Who is regarded as the father of Kerala Renaissance?
5. In which year was the Malayali Memorial submitted?
6. Which ruler was called "Aikya Keralam Thampuran"?
7. Which newspaper was edited by K. Ramakrishna Pillai?
8. Who led the Travancore Labour Association?
9. Which committee recommended linguistic Kerala in 1928?
10. Which Nobel laureate supported the Kerala Model?

SECTION B

Answer any **six** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.

(06X2 =12 Marks)

11. Mention any two features of the Kerala Model of Development.
12. What is the significance of the Vizhinjam Port Protest?



13. What were the objectives of the Agrarian Relations Bill?
14. Mention any two major outcomes of the Punnappa–Vayalar Uprising.
15. What was the significance of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956?
16. What is the Onchiyam Incident?
17. Explain the causes of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921.
18. What was the Silent Valley Movement?

SECTION C

*Write a short note on any **six** questions of the following. Each question carries **five** marks.*

(06X5= 30 Marks)

19. Discuss the role of the Communist League in introducing communist ideology in Kerala.
20. Examine the role of the Travancore State Congress in the Quit India Movement.
21. Explain the circumstances leading to the fall of Kunjali IV.
22. Explain the features and impact of the Indian Forest Act of 1878.
23. Discuss the significance of Hortus Malabaricus in the history of Malayalam printing.
24. Explain the social and religious reforms introduced by Sree Narayana Guru.
25. Discuss the growth of the Home Rule Movement in Malabar.
26. Examine the role of C. Kesavan in the Travancore State Congress.

SECTION D

*Answer any **two** questions of the following. Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(02X10 =20 Marks)

27. Examine the role of Malabar in the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements of the early 1920s.
28. Examine Sree Narayana Guru's contribution to the struggle against caste inequality and social discrimination in Kerala.
29. Discuss the growth of Western education in Kerala during the nineteenth century and examine the role of Christian missionaries in this process.
30. Explain the significance of the Aikya Kerala Movement in the political integration of Kerala.



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MAJOR CORE COURSE

SGB24HS306MC - Making of Modern Kerala

2024-25 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any **eight** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.*

(08 X 1 = 8 Marks)

1. Who is known as the father of the political movement in modern Travancore?
2. Under which treaty did Malabar come under British control?
3. Which organisation was led by C. K. Janu?
4. In which year was the Imperial Forest Department established?
5. Who was the first Church Mission Society (CMS) missionary to reach Travancore?
6. Who established the Samatva Samajam in 1836?
7. Who led the Savarna Jatha during the Vaikom Satyagraha?
8. In which year was the Civic Rights League established in Travancore?
9. Under whose presidency was the Manjeri Conference of 1920 held?
10. Who compiled and published Hortus Malabaricus?

SECTION B

*Answer any **six** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.*

(06X2 =12 Marks)

11. Treaty of Seringapatam
12. Kunjali Marakkars
13. Pura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam
14. Sambandham System



15. Sahodara Sangham
16. Wagon Tragedy
17. Jeeval Sahithyam
18. Vimochana Samaram

SECTION C

*Write a short note on any **six** questions of the following. Each question carries **five** marks.*

(06X5= 30 Marks)

19. Examine the significance of the Kundara Proclamation in the early resistance against British rule.
20. Discuss the role of colonial surveys and censuses in the administration of Kerala.
21. Explain the significance of the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936.
22. Discuss the contribution of Ayyankali to the upliftment of oppressed communities in Kerala.
23. Examine the significance of the Kayyur Revolt in the history of peasant movements in Kerala.
24. Explain the significance of the Abstention Movement in Travancore.
25. Explain the significance of the Grandhasala Prasthanam (library movement) in Kerala's cultural awakening.
26. Examine the major features of land reforms in Kerala after independence.

SECTION D

*Answer any **two** questions of the following. Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(02X10 =20 Marks)

27. Analyse the significance of the Vaikom Satyagraha and Guruvayur Satyagraha in the struggle against untouchability in Kerala.
28. Discuss the growth of the trade union movement in Malabar and evaluate the role of the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party in organising workers.
29. Examine the contribution of the Malayali and Ezhava Memorials to the growth of political consciousness in Travancore.
30. Evaluate the Kerala Model of Development in the light of its achievements, contradictions and emerging challenges.

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