

WOMEN AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN KERALA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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UNDER THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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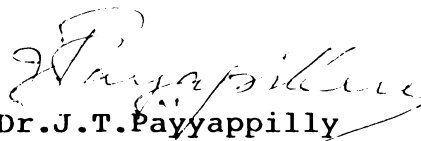
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October 1994

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the thesis "**Women and Political Change in Kerala since Independence**" is the record of bona fide research carried out by **Kochuthressia, M.M.** under my supervision. The thesis is worth submitting for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the Faculty of Social Sciences.



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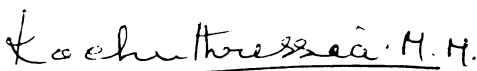
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the record of bona fide research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr.J.T.Payyappilly, School of Management Studies, Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin 682 022. I further declare that this thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title of recognition.


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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AD | Akali Dal |
| AIADMK | All India Anna Dravida Munnetta Kazhakam |
| AICC | All India Congress Committee |
| AIDWA | All India Democratic Women's Association |
| AIML | All India Muslim League |
| AITUC | All India Trade Union Congress |
| AIWC | All India Women's Conference |
| AKCC | All Kerala Catholic Congress |
| BLD | Bharatiya Lok Dal |
| BJP | Bharatiya Janata Party |
| BSP | Bahujan Samaj Party |
| CITU | Centre of Indian Trade Unions |
| CMP | Communist Marxist Party |
| CMS | Church Missionary Society |
| Cong(I) | Congress (Indira) |
| Cong(S) | Congress (Socialist) |
| Cong(U) | Congress (Urus) |
| CPI | Communist Party of India |
| CPI(M) | Communist Party of India (Marxist) |
| CPSU | Communist Party of Soviet Union |
| DMK | Dravida Munnetta Kazhakam |
| ESRM | Eazhava Savarna Reform Movement |
| FUW | Federation of University of Women |
| HMS | Hindu Mazdoor Sabha |

| | |
|--------|--|
| ICS | Indian Civil Service |
| INC | Indian National Congress |
| INC(U) | Indian National Congress (Urus) |
| IND | Independent |
| INTUC | Indian National Trade Union Congress |
| ISP | Indian Socialist Party |
| IUML | Indian Union Muslim League |
| JD | Janata Dal |
| J(G) | Janata (Gopalan) |
| JP | Janata Party |
| JS | Jana Sangh |
| J(S) | Janata (Socialist) |
| KAMS | Kerala Aikya Mahila Sangham (Kerala United Women's Organisation) |
| KC | Kerala Congress |
| KC(B) | Kerala Congress (Balakrishna Pilla) |
| KC(J) | Kerala Congress (Joseph) |
| KC(M) | Kerala Congress (Mani) |
| KCMS | Keraliya Catholic Mahajana Sabha (Kerala Catholic People's Forum) |
| KC(S) | Kerala Congress (Socialist) |
| KDWA | Kerala Democratic Women's Association |
| KLA | Kerala Legislative Assembly |
| KMF | Kerala Mahila Federation |
| KMS | Kerala Mahila Sangham |
| KPCC | Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee |
| KSP | Kerala Socialist Party |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| KSTA | Kerala School Teachers Association |
| KTP | Karshaka Thozhilali Party |
| KVC | Kerala Vanitha Congress |
| LD | Lok Dal |
| LDF | Left Democratic Front |
| LMS | London Missionary Society |
| LS | Lok Sabha |
| MC | Mahila Congress |
| ML | Muslim League |
| MLA | Member of Legislative Assembly |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NCW | National Council of Women |
| NDP | National Democratic Party |
| NDP(P) | National Democratic Party (Panikker) |
| NFIW | National Federation of Indian Women |
| NGO | Non-Gazetted Officer's Union |
| NPC | National People's Congress |
| NPPW | National Perspective Plan for Women |
| NRSP | National Revolutionary Socialist Party |
| NSS | Nair Service Society |
| RSP | Revolutionary Socialist Party |
| RSP(S) | Revolutionary Socialist Party (Sree Kantan Nair) |
| SAD(Mann) | Siromani Akali Dal (Mann) |
| SC | Scheduled Castes |
| SDP | Social Democratic Party |
| SNDP | Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (Yogam) |
| SP | Swatantra Party |
| SRP | Socialist Republican Party |

| | |
|--------|--|
| SRP(S) | Socialist Republican Party (Sreenivasan) |
| SSP | Samyuktha Socialist Party |
| ST | Scheduled Tribes |
| PCC | Pradesh Congress Committee |
| PSP | Praja Socialist Party |
| TCFWU | Travancore Coir Factory Worker's Union |
| TDP | Telungu Desam Party |
| TLA | Travancore Labour Association |
| UDF | United Democratic Front |
| UNFPA | United Nations Fund for Population Activities |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |
| UNO | United Nations Organisation |
| UTUC | United Trade Union Congress |
| WIA | Women's Indian Association |

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Scope of the Study

Once women and politics were considered to be mutually exclusive, occupying different spheres. Politics was looked upon as a public activity which meant male activity requiring typically masculine characteristics. Because of the conscious activities of women's movements in different parts of the world, this wrong notion has been gradually removed. The inherent structural features of political party systems blocking the entry of women into politics have also undergone significant changes. The demand for women's suffrage was raised in the 19th century in different countries. The women's suffrage movements pressurised the governments to initiate legislations removing many existing social evils against women.

By the beginning of this century, it was seen that the different countries of the world, one by one, started granting the right of franchise to women. This paved the way for the greater involvement of women in politics. The impact of politics on women, the politics of women's social position and the politics of feminism have since become widely debated issues all over the world, especially in countries where democratic systems of government are in existence.

Along with the granting of the right to vote to women, many governments took steps for their effective participation in political activities. But still, the political participation of women in most of the countries of the world has not become very significant. Generally, they play a very subdued role in the

political decision-making process. Even though the role of women in the politics of a country is a function of the status of women in society as a whole, the involvement of women in the politics of any country has been found to be very crucial. Politics is still mostly a male prerogative. The representation of women in the legislatures, in government and in other policy making bodies has not been found to be quite adequate. A wide disparity exists between women's formal political equality guaranteed statutorily in all democratic countries and the meaningful exercise of this political power by women.

The women of India are also no exception to this general phenomenon. The country's politics still reflect the traditional role of women in society under which they were banished to the fringes. Till the end of the 19th century, the Indian women suffered under the weight of numerous social evils like child marriage, sati, gender-based infanticide etc. During this century, Gandhiji played a very vital role in mobilising women all over the country. Large numbers of them participated in the freedom struggle.

After India became independent, it adopted a new Constitution which envisaged equality of women with men. Thus it ensured equal opportunity to women to participate in the political activities of the country on an equal footing with men in all respects.

But, even after 45 years of independence, it is seen that women are still left on the periphery of the political process. Effective and meaningful participation of women in politics remains elusive for most of them. The representation of women in

the state legislatures and in both the Houses of Parliament has been very marginal. The percentage of women members in the Lok Sabha to the total membership of the body has never touched a two-digit figure so far. Within these 45 years, India could field only five women as Union Cabinet Ministers. In the case of the various states also, the position of women's participation in political activities is not very different. On the whole, it is seen that in independent India the role played by women in the electoral politics of the country or in the day to day activities of the different political parties is very ineffective and insignificant.

The present study was undertaken to make an assessment of women's involvement in the political process of Kerala since independence. This small state in the southernmost part of India claims that it possesses certain unique features in its social fabric that makes it different from the rest of the country as far as the place of women in society is concerned.

Kerala has come in for high praise from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) not only for its high literacy rate but also for its good performance in the field of human resources development among the developing countries (623, p.4). According to the 1991 census, Kerala attained the highest literacy rate of 90.6 per cent as against 52.1 per cent at the all India level. The male literacy rate is 94.5 per cent. The female literacy rate is as high as 87 per cent in Kerala compared to 39 per cent at the national level. The decadal growth rate of population in Kerala during 1981-91 is 13.98 per cent where as the all India rate is 23.5 per cent. The infant mortality rate in the

state is the lowest in India. It is 26 per 1,000 in the state, while the national average comes to 100. The fertility rate in the state at the astonishingly low level of 2.3 children per woman, is lower than that of Thailand, China and the erstwhile USSR or Ireland (623, p.4). But, when it comes to per capita income, Kerala stands very low. It is only 71 per cent of the national average.

It is true that women in Kerala are not looked down upon. In certain communities, especially among Nairs and Christians, there has existed a greater degree of freedom for women. In the families in Kerala, the birth of a female child is not considered a curse, though people generally prefer a male as the first child. The sex ratio in the state is different from the national trend. This is the only state in the country where there is a sex ratio favourable to females. While there are only 929 females for every 1,000 men at the national level, in Kerala there are 1,040 females for every 1,000 men (62, p.46). It is also a fact that among all the states in the country, Kerala has the longest average life expectancy for its people.

In the political field, Kerala has got certain distinct characteristics. Kerala was the first state in India to have elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. This was in 1948, in the erstwhile State of Travancore, two years before the Constitution of India came into existence (431, p.152).

Kerala has its own pattern of political behaviour moulded by various political and extra-political forces, unique to the state. The Communist Party came to power through the ballot box for the first time in world history in Kerala in 1956. The peculiarities

of the party system in Kerala have often especially, in recent decades, led to the formation of only coalition governments. This has often resulted in the emergence of several regional and communal parties, ministerial instability, frequent declaration of presidents' rule etc. Yet, the state is regarded as highly politically conscious.

Both men and women in the state have contributed their relative share in shaping this political process, but men outnumber women in this respect. Political participation refers to those activities designed to influence decision-making carried on within the frame work of the political system. The objective of this study is to evaluate the political participation of Kerala women in bringing about the changes referred to above. Certain indicators used to assess women's political participation and the political role of women in society are the candidature of women in elections, women in office, women in local government and in legislative bodies, women's participation in elections as voters, as activists in political parties, in trade unions, in social organisations etc.

Such a detailed study has been attempted for the first time now. A few writers like Lucy Jacob (1979), Murickan.J (1975), Raju Abraham (1989), P.M.Mathew and M.S.Nair (1986) have made some studies, which have reference to certain aspects covered by the present study. This study gives a more comprehensive picture of women's involvement in the state's politics since independence.

Hypothesis

During the pre-independence period, the involvement of Kerala women in politics was very insignificant. The influence of traditional factors was the main reason for the poor participation

of women in politics. Even though the role played by Kerala women as a group in politics was not very significant, some women from different parts of the state took an active part in the freedom movement. Almost all of them belonged to the upper strata of society. Most of them were well educated. Moreover, they were able to enter politics because of the favourable attitude their families took towards their political participation. They came from families where their immediate male relatives such as father, brother, husband, uncle etc. were very actively involved in politics. These active male members encouraged their womenfolk to enter politics and gave them enough support to remain there.

In the post-independence period also the same trend continued. Even though the Constitution of India guarantees equality for men and women in society, women as a group do not actively participate in the political activities. It is true that they take part in large numbers in voting during the general elections. But even in the exercise of this right to vote, the influence of the male members of their families can often be seen.

There are only very few women who are active in day to day politics. Many of these activists usually come from families with political tradition. Some close male relatives of these women have been in politics and it is often with their encouragement and support that these women have entered politics. Such a situation implies that even today, males continue to dominate politics even where women are the functionaries.

Women are by and large very reluctant to contest in the elections. The political parties also do not take any special measures to encourage women to contest the elections. Generally

speaking, it is very difficult for a woman to get a party's ticket for candidature without the support of the male members of the party. The decision-making bodies of all political parties are also dominated by male politicians.

Today, the election expenditure to be met by a candidate is very high. A woman candidate may often find it difficult to raise sufficient funds for meeting such a huge expenditure by her own individual efforts. Her party may have to support her fully to achieve this. This may be one of the reasons for the reluctance of the political parties to support the candidature of a woman.

Male domination is not only seen in the political parties but also in the working of trade unions, in social organisations, legislative bodies, local self government etc. The decision-making organs of all these bodies are fully under the control of males. So women do not get any chance to influence the decisions of these important institutions in society. In short, the desires and aspirations of women, who form more than fifty per cent of the state's population are not properly reflected in the decisions taken by these vital institutions which shape and mould to a significant extent the present day politics of the state. In a way, it may be mentioned as one of the main reasons for the non-improvement of the status of women in society. Only through a more active participation of women in politics as a group, and by their increased involvement in other forms of organised activities which may enhance the social status of women, can the political role of women be improved.

Methodology

The methodology of the study consists of desk research. Efforts were made to collate and analyse the findings from the different studies related to the present topic of research made by other scholars in the past, though these have been very limited. The administrative reports of some relevant departments, a few periodicals and pamphlets were also examined. Direct investigation based on the records available with different government departments like Public Relations, Panchayat, Municipal Administration etc. and organisations like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), the Nair Service Society (NSS), Trade Unions etc. was also conducted for the study.

The information received from these sources was supplemented by personal interviews and discussions with women who have been active in the state political field though representing different political parties. The list of such persons interviewed appears in the end.

In addition to the above, with the help of a questionnaire circulated among them the opinion of 200 women was also collected in respect of constraints faced by them in taking part effectively in the political activities. Half of the respondents were selected at random from the rural areas and the other half from the urban areas. They were selected from various walks of life. The form of the questionnaire is given in the annexure 1.

Limitations

There is hardly any study on the involvement of Kerala women in politics. The data furnished by various governmental agencies

on the subject have often shown wide variances. This leads to the doubt as to how far such data can be considered factual and dependable. Moreover, the various agencies do not collect separate data relating to women. Most of the trade union organisations do not have up-to-date details regarding their female membership. Social organisations like the NSS or the SNDP also do not have details of their female membership. In this matter, political parties are also no exception. Lack of sufficient, dependable and correct data has therefore been the greatest limitation in conducting the study.

Footnoting in the Study

A bibliography has been prepared showing the primary and secondary sources in alphabetical order and serial numbers have been given to every source. In the study where ever a reference is indicated, the serial number under which the source is listed in the bibliography and the relevant page number are given in parenthesis. The year of publication of a book or article is given in parenthesis at the end of the title.

Chapterisation

The study is presented in the following 12 chapters. The first chapter is Introduction and the second chapter Survey of Literature.

In the third chapter an attempt is made to trace the gradual change that has occurred in the degree of women's participation in political matters in various countries. In the present century, considerable effort has been made by women's movements and feminist organisations to increase women's participation in all social

activities. But still women's political participation in different countries has not made a considerable advance.

The Indian scenario in respect of women's participation in politics is presented in the next chapter. In fact the women's involvement in the political activities of the country in the pre-independent period was more than that in the post-independent period. Their representation in the legislatures of various states and Union Parliament has also not increased much.

The traditional role of women in society and in Kerala politics has been analysed in the fifth chapter. This analysis gives a new insight into the problem of insignificant representation of women in the politics of the state at present.

The part played by women in the social reform movements, trade unions and political parties, is examined in the sixth chapter. The result shows that the contribution of women in the decision-making of such organisations is very insignificant.

The role of women as voters in the Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha elections is assessed in the subsequent chapter. The participation of women as voters in the elections is almost equal to that of men.

The share of women in law making and in the State administration is evaluated in the eighth chapter. It is seen that the participation of women in this respect has also been very insignificant.

In the subsequent two chapters the participation of women in the Indian Parliament and local administration has been analysed in detail. Even though there was ample opportunity for women to offer larger share of participation in the local administration, so far

women's contribution has been very insignificant. In Parliament also, the representation of women has been very meagre.

The eleventh chapter presents the results of the questionnaire survey which includes the analysis of the answers given to the questionnaire, leading to the revelation of the prominent constraints faced by women in Kerala in participating in the political activities effectively.

All the findings of the study and the recommendations for the improvement of political participation of women have been codified and given in the last chapter.

Chapter 2

Survey of Literature

There are only very few studies on the post-independent political developments in Kerala and the role and participation of women in them, and the impact of these developments on the political role of women. But certain studies on related topics pertaining to India and other countries by well-known Indian as well as foreign authors have been published. These, by and large, concentrate on the period after the medieval times since women did not play any important political role up to that period. They deal generally with the limitations of women in society, the impact of the political changes in various countries on the social status of women, the attitude of different political parties towards political participation by women, the political behaviour of women themselves etc. A careful examination of these works has paved the way for deciding upon the approach to the subject of this study.

Native Life in Travancore by Rev. Samuel Mateer (1883) gives a vivid picture of the social life of the people of Travancore (Southern part of Kerala) in the 18th and 19th centuries. He describes in general, the social status of the women of that period in the princely state of Travancore at that time. He gives many details in respect of the pathetic conditions of the women of the low caste who were living in abject poverty. They were treated in society with contempt and ridicule (334).

Mary Wollstonecraft writes in her book, A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1791) that human limitations are set not by nature, but by social environment and that men and women can learn anything, if they are given the proper opportunity. She argues

that women do not get adequate opportunities in society for their own improvement and consequent contribution to society in return (453).

Simone de Beauvoir in her book The Second Sex (1972) argues that since patriarchal times women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, even though women constitute numerically at least half of the human race. She further points out that this secondary standing is not imposed of necessarily by natural feminine characteristics, but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. She maintains that this has resulted in the general failure of women to have equal achievements with men in different fields (255).

Myron Weiner in Politics of Scarcity (1963) and Sukumaran Nayar V.K. in an article 'Communal Interest Groups in Kerala' in Donald Eugene Smith(ed) South Asian Politics and Religion (1966) explain how caste and religion-based organisations like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), the Nair Service Society (NSS) and the Christian Church exert great influence on the formation of policy and how their activities pressurise the administration and influence the legislations enacted by the state legislature. These caste or religious groups have assigned different status roles to women and to some extent this factor influences politics indirectly (452 and 369).

Victor M. Fic, drawing on his analysis of the elections in Kerala in 1957, points out in his book, Kerala, Yenan of India, Rise in Communist Power: 1937 - 69 (1970) that politics in Kerala is merely a projection of the aspirations and the strength of the

communal organisations in the political arena. This again reinforces the earlier hypothesis that depending on women's role politics sometimes takes different dimensions in different communities (284).

Martha Vicinus, in Suffer and Be Still : Women in the Victorian Age (1972) pictures the family as the cornerstone of Victorian society. She points out that in those days, women's sole function was marriage and procreation, and that her education was only to bring out her natural submission to authority and innate maternal instincts (445).

Sheila Rowbotham in Hidden from History (1973) analyses women's position in British society from the Puritan Revolution to the 1930s. She also explains how class and sex, work and family and social pressures have shaped and hindered women's struggle for equality (403).

In his work, The Decline of Nayar Dominance (1976) Robin Jeffrey presents a study of the social and political changes among the Nayar community resulting from the impact of a money economy, western style of education, improved communication system and a British-inspired system of law on the complex social structure of the erstwhile princely State of Travancore (South Kerala at present) in the period 1847-1908. This study deals with the breakdown of the matrilineal social system which prevailed in Travancore among a large section of high caste Hindus. It describes how a dominant caste was brought down from unquestioned supremacy to keen competition with other castes in 60 years. The impact of this social transformation on the status of women in Travancore is also vividly given (303).

Women in the Twentieth Century World (1977) by Elise Boulding draws a very optimistic picture of how the contributions of women can shape the future of the world (263).

Zollinger Giele and Andry Chapman Smock (eds.) in The Changing Position of Women in Family and Society: A Cross-National Comparison (1977) explains the role of women in eight societies - Egypt, Bangladesh, Mexico, Ghana, Japan, France, the United States and Poland. They conclude that a change in women's position in society cannot be accomplished without basic modifications in the nature of the family (459).

Julia O' Favlain and Lauro Martines (ed.) in the book Not in God's Image : Women in History (1979) focus on the condition of women in European societies from the early periods down to the middle of the 19th century. The book presents vividly the picture of women from different strata of society - their social status, the role played by them in society, the degree of freedom they enjoyed etc (375).

Margaret Stacy and Marion Price in Women, Power and Politics (1981) hold the view that though women in Britain had the right to vote for fifty years, very few women were found in politically powerful positions. They further argue in the book that the contributions made by women are systematically ignored by the policy makers and problem solvers of today (426).

Vicky Randall in Women and Politics (1982) looks at women's participation in politics, analysing the relevant data pertaining to many capitalist countries, including the USA and Britain and the socialist and developing countries. The book draws upon a wide range of historical studies to illustrate the implications of

male-dominated public policy making processes in all these countries. It also examines the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary feminist movements as a political force and their impact on policy making in the 1970s and 1980s (394).

Political Women : Current Roles in State and Local Government (1984) edited by Janet A Flammang analyses the role of women in politics at the state level and in local administration. The book discusses certain distinct features in respect of women's participation in politics; viz., how women transform traditional political concepts and paradigms, how female officials have a distinctive politics, how political parties are still problematic for women and how there is some significance even in women's token status in government and equality in status as voters (285).

Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth (eds.) in their book Women and the Public Sphere : A critique of Sociology and Politics (1984) point out the fact that politics, whether electoral or not, is concerned with the public sphere which is considered to be essentially a man's realm. The woman's sphere is treated as only private and, therefore, apolitical. Through a collection of essays this mistaken notion is challenged in this book (418).

Retrieving Women's History : Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society (1988) edited by S.Jay Kleinberg analyses state policies towards women and the links between women and politics. The essays on women, state and politics also examine the history of the evolution of women's political rights and their participation in the political process in a variety of geo-cultural regions (316).

Dick Kooiman in his work, Conversion and Social Equality in India : The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the 19th century (1989) analyses the problem of untouchability from a historical perspective by focussing on developments among some untouchable communities in South India. How the economic position and political power affect the ranking of the castes has been well described in this book (318).

World's Women : 1970 - 1990 (1990) published by the United Nations, presents the picture of how women of the world are denied high elective offices and critical policy making positions in spite of the fact that a majority of them enjoy the right to vote and that they constitute more than half of the total electorates in many countries. Of late, a large number of women have started working in the public sector. But they do not get chances to occupy top positions in trade unions, political parties, government or business (232).

Kerala Development Through Radical Reform (1992) by Richard W Franke and Barbara H Chasin examines the ancient and modern historical factors that have generated Kerala's radical political traditions. The authors arrive at the conclusion that even women's organisations in Kerala, sometimes linked to political parties, are dominated by males. For example, they point out that men are frequently the main speakers at women's organisation conferences (286).

Robin Jeffery in his work Politics, Women and Well-Being : How Kerala Became a Model (1992) argues that the disintegration of both a matrilineal social structure and a rigid system of caste, applicable to some of the dominant Hindu caste groups, generated

widespread politicisation. In this process, though women both gained and lost, they were able to retain a position of autonomy, which is unique in India. He further explains that in Kerala women have been able to acquire literacy and take salaried employment. Their independent income and skills in domestic management are crucial in shaping the Kerala middle class family. The anxiety of the families to educate their children including their daughters, and get their daughters married a little later in life than elsewhere, say in their early twenties, is the greatest single factor which explains Kerala's declining birth rate compared to the rest of India. Yet, he is of the opinion that even here women do not play a significant role in public affairs and politics (303).

Apart from the above, there are some major works by Indian authors, dealing with the role and participation of women in Indian politics. They provide some very useful basic materials for the present study.

Kogekar S.V in his study 'The role of women in General Elections in India 1951-52' published in The Status of Women in South Asia edited by A. Appodorai (1954) deals with the general elections to the lower houses of the State and Union Legislatures on the basis of adult franchise. It describes the role of women's organisations, attitudes of political parties towards women's problems, participation of Indian women in political campaigning, women's attitude towards contesting the elections, the female voting behaviour etc. His arguments are strengthened by the statistical data pertaining to the election scene (317).

In the same book, in an article entitled 'Political Rights of Women in India' Lakshmi N. Menon traces the historical background

of women's franchise in India and female participation in elected bodies during the pre-independence days. She discusses the legal and political status of women in independent India and their role during elections in political parties and as elected representatives. Her arguments have been strengthened by the use of data regarding the number of women in political parties and in legislatures in different states, the employment figures of women in various industries, women's participation in trade unions etc (344).

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the work Indian Women edited by Devaki Jain (1975) traces the birth and growth of women's movements in India. Having taken the organisational form in the early part of this century, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), the pioneer women's organisation in the country, was a positive and broad-based social force, with a large vision. It demanded equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life, including the right to vote. Later on, the movement gradually became weaker. In this book the author tries also to analyse some of the contributory factors for the decline of the movement (301).

The National Committee on the Status of Women (1971-1974) in its Survey of the Political Status of the Indian Women points out that the absence of an active women's movement and the failure of political organisations to mobilize women for tackling women's issues have prevented women from exerting adequate pressure on decision-making institutions. The report further says that the small number of women in the legislatures and their lack of influential positions in the decision-making bodies within the different political parties have very much limited their

responsibility to voice women's problems in important forums (190).

Tara Ali Baig in her book India's Women Power (1976) describes Indian women as 'Shakti' and 'Sati' who symbolise power and self-destruction. She argues that women have the power to assert, but yet, at times, they become the victim of male domination in society (248).

Usha Mehta in her article 'Indian women and their participation in politics' (1978) critically examines the factors which block the participation of women in politics and enumerates them as follows:-

- 1 Traditional society
- 2 Lack of education for women
- 3 Economic dependence of women on men
- 4 Domestic responsibilities
- 5 Political parties dominated by men and the perpetuating their regime.
- 6 Hostile attitude of their male rivals (508).

Vijay Agnew in Elite Women in Indian Politics (1979) makes an appraisal of the activities of women's organisations and the suffrage movement in India. She points out that the fairly progressive de jure position of women in India as well as the high participation of women in the freedom struggle have been entirely due to the great encouragement and patronage given by the male social reformers and by Gandhiji (234).

Sushila Mehta in Revolution and Status of Women in India (1982) concludes that political leaders and parties are not interested in bringing more women into the decision-making process. She justifies her conclusion by analysing from different angles many parliamentary elections held in India (338).

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in her work Indian Women's Battle for Freedom (1983) recounts the story of the mass participation of women in the Indian national movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The very important role played by Indian women in the extremist organisations run by Indian patriots is well presented in this book (271).

Rosebeh N. Billimoria, in a paper "Women in Active Politics: Problems, Impediments, Solutions" (1984) states that ever since the first general elections, women's numerical strength in either the Central or the State legislatures has been far disproportionate to their total strength in population. Women are very much under-represented in the higher positions of the political sphere. Male domination in political parties, their economic dependence, domestic responsibilities, fear of character assassination resulting in the malignment of women who enter politics, etc. are some of the reasons cited by the author for the reluctance of women to participate in political activities (478).

In Women's Rights: Myth and Reality (1984), Sachchidananda and Ramesh P. Sinha arrive at the conclusion that unless women in different parts of the country are made aware of their rights fully, women's social status cannot be improved (405).

In the study, The Political Behaviour of Women in Tamil Nadu (1985) V. Rajalakshmi makes an attempt to investigate the factors relevant to women's participation in politics. Covering nearly six decades from 1920 to 1980, the work traces the role of women in India's struggle for freedom and their subsequent involvement in politics in the state of Tamil Nadu. She analyses women's role as voters and as candidates. She also seeks to evaluate their impact on politics (390).

In the book, Women's Studies in India : Some Perspectives (1986) edited by Maithreyi Krishnaraj, the need to improve women's conditions in society by the political process is emphasised. They advocate that women's voice must be more effective in the decision-making process. This can be achieved only through larger representation of women in the relevant bodies. Today, women do not have any vital role in the decision-making process at all (322).

Rama Mehta while analysing the social position of Indian women points out in her book, Socio-Legal Status of Women in India (1987), that the exorbitant expenditure in fighting an election is one of the greatest constraints for a woman to enter electoral politics. The book adds that hooliganism, corruption and lack of decorum are some other factors that make women refrain from fighting elections (338).

Women's Oppression, Men Responsible, (1988) a work by Indu Prakash Singh includes a study on the political participation of women. From the study conducted specifically among the middle class women, it is estimated that only about 20 per cent of women are interested in becoming politicians. But 96 per cent of women are ready to fight for their rights (419).

In its report the Committee for the National Perspective Plan for Women: 1988 - 2000 concludes that the record of women's participation in the political process, other than the formal ones, has been quite creditable (127).

Even though women have been visible in mass movements, group upsurges and protest struggles, their presence is not felt in decision-making bodies. Even in the structures where women's

participation is substantial, they have not been given positions of power (127).

Neera Desai, in her work A Decade of Women's Movement in India (1988), traces the development of women's movement from East to West and North to South of the country. It gives details of the great efforts made by Indian women to raise the level of consciousness among themselves and to organise themselves in their struggle against subordination (279).

Roma Mitra and N.R.Mitra in their study, 'Participation of Women in Bihar Polity' deal with women's role in politics, with special reference to the Legislative Assemblies after independence, ie., from 1952 to 1990. Reference has also been made to the role of women in the pre-independent Legislative Assemblies of 1937 and 1946. The study reveals a gloomy picture of women's representation in Bihar politics. In Bihar, women hardly participate in the political decision-making process (510).

Women in India: Past and Present (1990) by Neelam Upadhyay and Rekha Pandey analyses the role played by women in the various elections in India. The authors conclude that though the number of women voters is substantial, women's participation in the actual political and decision-making process is quite low (437).

Neera Desai and Krishna Raj.M. point out in their study, Women and Society in India (1987), that very few Indian women really wield any effective political power. Though women have as large a stake in politics as men, they are conspicuous only by their meagre representation in all policy making bodies. The authors also point out the fact that at the time of elections, all political parties vie with one another in seeking the maximum support among women

voters in their favour, but are indifferent about women's problems later (278).

In addition, the following books, handbooks, studies and articles in journals and periodicals are also useful for understanding the intricacies of the problem, though all of them may not as such have a direct bearing on it.

Srinivas M.N. (1972) Social Change in Modern India (422); Pratima Asthana (1974) Women's Movement in India (247); A.R.Kamat (1976) 'Women's Education and Social Change in India' (493); Kapadia K.M. (1977) Marriage and Family in India (307); Srinivas M.N. (1978) The Changing Position of Indian Women (423); Jamila Brijbhushan (1980) Muslim Women in Purdah and Out of it (264); C.P. Goyal (1981) Caste and Voting Behaviour (293); Y.B.Damle (1982) Caste, Religion and Politics in India (275); Sankaranarayanan Patro (1984) 'Elections of Orissa Legislative Assembly since Independence: A Study of Comparative Political Performance of Women' (522); S.R.Maheswari (1984) Local Government in India (333); Parliament of India, The 7th Lok Sabha 1980 - 84: A Study (1985), (128); Durga Das Basu (1985) Shorter Constitution of India (253); Elections in India, Data Handbook and Lok Sabha Elections: 1952-85 (1986), (79); Anindita Mukkerji and Neelam Verma (1987) Socio Economic Backwardness in Women (355); Subhash C. Kashyap (1990) 'The Ninth Lok Sabha: Socio Economic Analysis of Membership' (496); Subhash C. Kashyap (1992) The Ten Lok Sabhas (310).

Apart from the above, there are a number of contributions by different authors in Kerala which were found useful for the present study.

P.K.K.Menon's The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala 1600-1885 (Vol.I) and 1885 - 1938 (Vol.II) (1970) is one of the very few books (in English) which give some details of the political participation of women in Kerala in the pre-independence period. It gives a historical sketch of the events in the three regions of Kerala, viz., Travancore, Cochin and Malabar and the role of women in those events (345 and 346).

Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala by Ravindran T.K. (1972) and Mitra C.R (1979) in Sree Narayana Guru and Social Revolution discuss the contributions of Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan in liberating the people belonging to the Eazhava community from the clutches of oppression and exploitation (397 and 354).

K.Karunakaran Nair (1975) in his Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala and P.M.Nair (1980) in his Swathanthrya Samara Senanikal (Freedom Fighters) mainly present some of the unforgettable contributions made by patriotic men and women during the freedom struggle (360 and 361).

Murickan J. (1975) in his article 'Women in Kerala: Changing Socio-Economic Status and Self Image' in Alfred de Souza (ed.) Women in Contemporary India states that even in a state like Kerala where the political consciousness of the people is known to be very high, women are still far from being partners with men in the political decision-making process. He adds that women continue to be exploited by the dominant male politicians who value them only for their votes, but do not recognise them as persons equally competent to participate in the decision-making process (358).

Lucy Jacob (1979) in her study 'Profiles of Women in Kerala' in the book Symbols of Power, edited by Vina Mazumdar, concludes that only a few women have ventured to contest the elections and to

participate in other political activities. She points out that in Kerala, the favourable sex ratio, better literacy and the economic and social position of women have no bearing on the participation of women in the elections. She also adds that political parties do not give much encouragement to activate women into entering politics (299).

Balakrishnan P.M. (1983) in Jathi Vyavasthithiyum Kerala Charithravum (The Caste System and Kerala History) and Bhaskaran Unni P. (1988) in Pathonpatham Noottandile Keralam (Kerala in the 19th century) describe the caste system prevailing in the State in the 19th century and later (250 and 257).

John P. John (1983) in Coalition Governments in Kerala analyses the nature of the internal quarrels among the partners of coalition governments which creates a certain political instability in the State as far as the lives of governments go. He concludes that coalition governments are inevitable due to the multiplicity of parties and interest groups which are based on caste and religious interests. He also makes a study of the other sociological factors that have made the formation of the coalition governments in Kerala a regular feature (305).

P.M. Mathew and M.S. Nair (1986) in their book Women's Organisations and Women's Interests place emphasis on two important aspects of women's organisations - economic and political. In the chapter, 'Women in Politics' they try to describe the active role played by Kerala women in a series of political incidents, trade union movements, social reform movements and in various agitations (337).

Travancore State Manuel (Vol. I, II and III) by Nagam Aiya

(1906), (236, 237 and 238); Cochin Tribes and Castes (Vol. I and II) by C.Anantha Krishna Aiyer (1906 and 1912), (240 and 241); The Cochin State Mannuel by C.Achuta Menon (1911), (340); History of Kerala by K.P.Padmanabha Menon (1929), (343); Travancore State Manuel (Vols.III and IV) by T.K.Velu Pillai (1940), (443 and 444); and Letters from Malabar by Jacob Canter Visscher (1962), (446) give a pre-independence period picture of the social, political, historical and anthropological details of the land and the people of the Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions which constitute Kerala today.

Similarly, A.Sreedhara Menon's notable works such as A Study of Kerala History (1967), (349); Social and Cultural History of India (1979), (350); Kerala History and its Makers (1987), (351) and Adhunika Keralam, Rashtriya Charita Samgraham: 1885 - 1957 (Modern Kerala: Concise Political History from 1885 - 1957), (1988), (352) give a very valuable information about Kerala and its men and women.

Jeevitha Samaram (Atmakatha), (Life's Battles - Autobiography) by Kesavan C. (1968), (312); Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences, Land Reforms in Kerala: 1850 - 1960 by Varghese.T.C (1970), (441); Kerala Society and Politics: A Historical Review by E.M.S.Namboodiripad (1984), (366); Kal Noottandu: Kerala Rashtriya Charithram (Quarter Century: Political History of Kerala) by Philip Cherian (1984), (381); Dynamics of State Politics: Kerala by N.Jose Chander (ed.) (1986), (269) and 1114 - nte Katha (The story of 1114), (Malayalam year) by Accamma Cherian (1990), (272) give a vivid picture of the socio-political development in Kerala from various angles. In the process of analysing the developments, light is thrown on the multifarious social, economic

and cultural forces that have shaped the existing political scenario in the state.

Thus, generally, the survey of the available literature in respect of topics which are very much related to the problem under study reveals many relevant facts useful for the present research. Some of them pinpoint the socio-economic factors which block the effective participation of women in politics in India and abroad. The direct relation between the social status enjoyed by women and their participation in politics is well presented by some literature. The universal phenomenon of very meagre participation of women in politics and in the decision-making processes in society is shown by some books. Most of the books try to explain vividly the extent of the limitations faced by women in the political front which prevent a fuller and greater participation by them. All the above pieces of information have helped the researcher to approach the problem of this study with a better perspective.

Chapter 3

An Overview of the Changing Political Role of Women World-wide

Studies regarding the participation of women in the political processes of various countries show that the very question of the political role of women has been taken up for serious consideration only during the last 150 to 200 years.

The position of women in the Western countries during the period up to the 19th century was one of subordination to men. The position of a wife in ancient Greece was simply that of a domestic drudge. To stay at home and take care of the home was her recognised role. Sparta was the only exception. There, women played an equal role with men not only in the time of peace, but also in the warfront though they were especially trained for maternity. In the Roman empire also, women's status was inferior (462, p.9). Even during the golden days of the Athenian democracy in the fifth century B.C., women had no role to play in politics. They did not take part in the meetings of the Ecclesia. Nor are there any references to the political role of women in the writings of Plato or Aristotle.

Most of the women in the world worked hard to serve their husbands, bear children, keep homes or, if unmarried, support aging parents. Art portrayed her as an object of mystery and beauty (338, p.25).

It was generally believed during the medieval times that women are inferior to men, not only physically but also intellectually. Writing about medieval women, Margaret Stacy and Marion Price have stated that it is not necessary at all to discuss the role of women in politics, during the medieval period because

there was no role for women in politics in that period. This does not however, mean that women were without power in the familial, economic and religious spheres (426, p.30). However, in those days not all men played important roles in politics.

It was with the breaking-up of medievalism and the rise of capitalism and democracy that the number of men playing an active role in politics gradually increased. The corner stone of Victorian society was the family and a woman's sole function was marriage and procreation. Martha Vicinus has pointed out that a woman's education was meant to bring out her "natural submission to authority and innate maternal instincts. Young ladies were trained to have no opinions, lest they should be too formed and too definite for a young man's taste and thereby unmarketable as a commodity" (445, p.x).

Therefore, in all countries, whether developed or underdeveloped, Asian, African or Anglo-Saxon, Communist, Capitalist or Fascist, small or big, Christian, Islamic, Hindu or Buddhist, tribal or non-tribal, till the 19th century society followed an ideology of two separate spheres for men and women which deprived women of their ability to participate in public or political life (414, p.14).

Only by the 19th century did the idea that women should have equal rights with men obtain any serious consideration, even in western countries. Before the industrial revolution in Europe, the power of the church stood heavily against any such suggestion (338, p.25).

The industrial revolution brought about considerable changes in the economic structure and production process of the earlier

period. In consequence, women were gradually alienated from the field of production which was not so in the case of agriculture. Once their participation in the production process decreased, their social and economic status also suffered a setback. Women's dependence on men increased. Women became more subordinate to men.

During the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, women were found at the barricades among rioting crowds and in political organisations (403, p.27). Still women were not granted equality in politics with men. Charles Dickens' novel A Tale of Two Cities illustrates very picturesquely this dual role of woman beside man. In spite of the continued collective action by women for getting equality with men in society, the outcome of the revolutionary period was only the repression of women. In the context of the French Revolution a woman called Mary Wollstonecraft published her book Vindication of the Rights of Women and attacked the whole cultural conditioning of girls (402, p.20).

In the beginning of the present century, women were forced to take to the path of agitation to get their due rights to participate in political activities in different countries. The first stage of the struggle was to get franchise. Women got enfranchisement in different countries at widely different times. Women started direct agitations for equal rights with men including the right to vote (435, p.259).

Till the end of the 19th century, no country except New Zealand had granted the right to vote to women. New Zealand was the first country to enfranchise its women in 1893. An organised demand for women's suffrage was not seen raised in any part of the world other than by some isolated groups in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Finland (508, p.31).

In 1848, two US women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organised a conference in New York. Over 100 women and some men signed a Declaration of Sentiments and adopted the resolution "that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure their sacred right to the elected franchise" (435, p.274). From that time onwards, until the Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution of America was ratified in August 1920, three generations of women used every political means available to secure what is now regarded as a fundamental right of women (435, p.274). The New York Conference is considered to be one of the earliest political actions organised by women.

The New York Conference was followed by an attempt in Kansas State in the United States to grant the right to vote for women by introducing a bill in the state legislature, proposing an amendment to the constitution. In 1867 two suffrage amendments were introduced in the legislature, one for enfranchising the coloured people and the other for enfranchising women. After the introduction of the bills in the legislature, powerful campaigns for and against the bills followed. Thus Kansas State became a scene of controversy and it received nationwide attention (435, p.274).

Women leaders like Susan B. Anthony, Stanton, Lucy Stone and Rev.Olympia Brown, the first woman to be ordained as a minister of the Universalist Church, made earnest campaigns for getting the women's suffrage amendment passed. Susan B. Anthony made her famous trek across Kansas, facing numerous difficulties. But, in spite of the spirited campaign organised by the women leaders, the women's suffrage amendment failed in popular referendum by a vote

of 9,070 for and 19,857 against (435, p.275).

In the 1880s and 1890s there were certain attempts in some other American States like Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho to enfranchise women in the local elections. But, nationally, the progress of the movement undertaken by women was not so steady. The movement seemed to slow down and falter in the late 19th century (435, p.275). Banners like "New York city denies the vote to lunatics, idiots and women" appeared in the streets against any legislative action to grant suffrage to women (74, p.348 and 435, p.274).

In the first decade of the present century demands for women's suffrage became stronger. The thought that the grant of right to vote to women would help to bring about social change grew among people. On March 8, 1908, the working women of the needle trade in New York city organised a demonstration demanding, among other things, franchise for women. The second International Socialist Women's Conference, held in 1910, exhorted all the countries of the world to observe 8th March as 'International Women's Day'. From 1911 onwards 8th March came to be observed as women's day in several countries. Thus in USA, from about 1908, the agitation for getting women's suffrage got intensified. The end came after another 12 years when women in America were enfranchised. This was in 1920 (435, p.275).

In Britain also the agitation for women's suffrage started by the end of the 19th century. It was peaceful at first. But, once the agitators felt that peaceful means would not help them achieve their goal the agitation took a violent turn. On 12th May 1904 the Women's Social and Political Union, which was formed in 1903 with

the slogan 'Votes for Women' along with a group of Lancashire textile workers and four hundred women from the Women's Guild, assembled outside the Parliament when the Women's Enfranchisement Bill was taken up for discussion there. When they found that the male legislators did not give any seriousness to the Bill, they tried to conduct a meeting there. But they were hustled away by the police. The agitationists resisted with all their might. At last they held a meeting at a place away from the House of Commons (403, p.78).

This incident was followed by a call for heckling at political meetings. Two young girls went to a meeting of the ruling party in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, in 1904. While the meeting was going on, the girls stood up and shouted, "Will the Liberal Government give women the vote?" They were promptly caught and thrown out. When they made an attempt to speak in the street outside they were arrested. Both of them refused to pay fine and they were jailed (403, p.78). Thereafter, on many occasions there were violent confrontations between the agitators and the police.

In November 1910 a demonstration in front of Parliament ended in a clash between the suffragettes, the police and a watching crowd. The fight went on for several hours. Many women were injured and two died (403, p.85).

When, in November 1911, the then British Prime Minister announced that he would accept a measure for universal manhood suffrage and exclude women, the suffragettes went on a demonstration, even attacking property. Windows were smashed all over the West - End, including those of Number 10, Downing street, the Prime Minister's residence (403, p.86).

Thus the agitation for women's suffrage was a burning issue in Britain when the first World War broke out in 1914. Many of the agitators readily offered to serve in the army for national security. In 1918 women over 30 years of age got the vote, but it was not until 1928 that women got the right to vote on the same terms as men (403, p.120).

In the first decade of the 20th century only two more countries granted the right to suffrage for women. Australia in 1901 and Finland in 1906 granted women the right to vote. (See Table 3.1)

But in the second decade of the 20th century more and more nations came forward to grant women's suffrage. Fourteen more nations enacted necessary legislation to grant women's suffrage before 1920. But in some of these countries, certain conditions were also attached for the exercise of the right. For example in Canada, in 1917, only women who were serving in the military or who had close male relatives serving in the military such as father, husband or son, were granted the right to vote at the federal level. Women were given the right to contest the elections at the federal level only in 1920 (435, P.269).

In the next two decades, ie, in the 1920s and 1930s a dozen more nations granted women's suffrage. But after the second World War, especially after the establishment of the United Nations, a large number of nations granted women the right to vote (For details, please see Table 3.1)

Table 3.1
The Years Granting Women's Right to Vote

| Country or Area | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|------|------------------------|
| New Zealand | - | 1893 | Sri Lanka - 1931 |
| Australia | - | 1901 | Maldives - 1932 |
| Finland | - | 1906 | Thailand - 1932 |
| Norway | - | 1913 | Uruguay - 1932 |
| Denmark | - | 1915 | Brazil - 1934 |
| Iceland | - | 1915 | Cuba - 1934 |
| USSR | - | 1917 | Turkey - 1934 |
| Austria | - | 1918 | Philippines - 1939 |
| Canada | - | 1918 | Panama - 1941 |
| Ireland | - | 1918 | Bulgaria - 1944 |
| Poland | - | 1918 | France - 1944 |
| United Kingdom | - | 1918 | Albania - 1945 |
| Federal Republic of Germany | - | 1919 | Guatemala - 1945 |
| Former German Dem.Rep | - | 1919 | Hungary - 1945 |
| Luxembourg | - | 1919 | Indonesia - 1945 |
| Netherlands | - | 1919 | Italy - 1945 |
| Czechoslovakia | - | 1920 | Japan - 1945 |
| United States | - | 1920 | Senegal - 1945 |
| Sweden | - | 1921 | Solomon Islands - 1945 |
| Mongolia | - | 1923 | Cameroon - 1946 |
| Ecuador | - | 1928 | Djibouti - 1946 |
| Portugal | - | 1931 | Korea - 1946 |
| Spain | - | 1931 | (D.People's R.) |

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|
| Liberia | - 1946 | Cote d'Ivoire | - 1956 |
| Romania | - 1946 | Egypt | - 1956 |
| Vietnam | - 1946 | Mali | - 1956 |
| Yugoslavia | - 1946 | Mauritius | - 1956 |
| Bangladesh | - 1947 | Somalia | - 1956 |
| Malta | - 1947 | Togo | - 1956 |
| Pakistan | - 1947 | Tunisia | - 1956 |
| Venezuela | - 1947 | Colombia | - 1957 |
| Belgium | - 1948 | Honduras | - 1957 |
| Israel | - 1948 | Malaysia | - 1957 |
| Korea, Republic of | - 1948 | Zimbabwe | - 1957 |
| Singapore | - 1948 | Madagascar | - 1959 |
| Surinam | - 1948 | United Rep. Tanzania | - 1959 |
| Costa Rica | - 1949 | Cyprus | - 1960 |
| China | - 1949 | Gabon | - 1960 |
| Syrian Arab Republic | - 1949 | Zaire | - 1960 |
| India | - 1950 | Burundi | - 1961 |
| Dominica | - 1951 | Rwanda | - 1961 |
| Nepal | - 1951 | Algeria | - 1962 |
| Argentina | - 1952 | Paraguay | - 1962 |
| Bolivia | - 1952 | Congo | - 1963 |
| Greece | - 1952 | Equatorial Guinea | - 1963 |
| Bhutan | - 1953 | Iran (Islamic Rep.) | - 1963 |
| Mexico | - 1953 | Kenya | - 1963 |
| Sudan | - 1953 | Morocco | - 1963 |
| Nicaragua | - 1955 | Botswana | - 1965 |
| Benin | - 1956 | Yemen | - 1970 |
| Comoros | - 1956 | Switzerland | - 1971 |

| | |
|---------------|--------|
| Jordan | - 1973 |
| Cape Verda | - 1975 |
| Angola | - 1975 |
| Guinea-Bissau | - 1977 |
| South Africa | - 1979 |
| Iraq | - 1980 |
| Vanuatu | - 1980 |

Source: The World's Women:1970 - 1990, The Trends and Statistics,
(United Nations, New York, 1990) pp.39-43.

In Asia, Mongolia was the first country to grant franchise to women. The Mongolian women got the right to vote in 1924, followed by Ceylon in 1931 and Thailand in 1932. Philippino women were enfranchised in 1939 and the Japanese in 1956 (232, p.41).

Immediately after the formation of the United Nations in 1946 a Commission on the Status of Women was appointed to monitor the conditions of women all over the world and promote women's rights. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, released by the UN on 10th December 1948, the equality between man and woman in all spheres of human life was specifically emphasised. In 1952 the UN Commission on the Status of Women initiated a convention on the political rights of women, often described as the first global mandate to grant equal political rights under the law - the right to vote, hold office and exercise public functions. Thereafter, a number of follow-up activities were undertaken by the world body to promote women's rights all over the world. Today women, almost everywhere, have the right to vote (232, p.7).

The Swiss women were enfranchised in 1971. The women of the principality of Liechtenstein, got the right to vote only in 1984. Some Islamic and African nations have granted only limited franchise to women (435, p.272).

In a few countries, in West Asia such as Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia etc. the right to vote was not given to women so far. Even though in the October 1992 elections Kuwait did not allow women to exercise franchise, the newly-constituted Parliament decided to grant the voting right to women. But, strangely, Kuwaiti women submitted a petition to the Parliament stating that it was a sin for women to vote or to contest in the elections (624, p.15).

The right to vote is only one part of the democratic political rights. The grant of women's suffrage alone does not ensure the participation of women in electoral politics, fully or independently. A UNICEF study made on the political behaviour of Arab women in 1972 revealed that many of them did not cast their votes in the national elections, even though they were already enfranchised. Again, it was observed that those who exercised their votes in the election did not do it independently. They simply obeyed the instructions of their male relatives in choosing the candidates (419, p.139). It indicates that along with the granting of women's suffrage, a sufficient number of awareness campaigns must also be conducted so as to enable them to exercise their rights fully and independently. This is a responsibility that women's organisations may have to take up.

In most of the countries adult franchise has been granted to women. Still, increased political participation of women is yet to

be realised in full. In this connection, the views of Kathleen Newland are relevant:

The near universal recognition of women's political rights and the strength of their voting numbers in many countries are nowhere reflected in their direct role in government. An enormous disparity exists between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. Though 99.5 per cent of the women in the world are legally entitled to participate in the political process the numbers of women in public office remain in most countries, appallingly low (371, p.9).

Newland's survey of the proportion of seats held by women in 35 national legislative bodies revealed that women rarely accounted for as much as 10 per cent of the total membership (371, p.9).

The present century has seen several women Prime Ministers and women Presidents as Heads of Government. At the end of 1990 the Governments of eight out of 159 UN member countries were headed by women. Ten women have become Prime Ministers of various nations (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2
Women Heads of Government in the 20th Century

Presidents/Queens

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|
| Corazón Aquino* | - | Philippines |
| Vigdís Finnbogadóttir* | - | Iceland |
| Violeta Chamorro* | - | Nicaragua |
| Ertha Pascal - Trouillot | - | Haiti |
| Lidia Geiler | - | Bolivia |
| Isabela Perón | - | Argentina |
| Mary Robinson* | - | Ireland |
| Elizabeth - II | - | United Kingdom |

Prime Ministers

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Margaret Thatcher | - | United Kingdom |
| Maria Liberia - Peters | - | Netherlands Antilles |
| Eugenia Charles* | - | Dominica |
| Gro Harlem Brundtland* | - | Norway |
| Indira Gandhi | - | India |
| Sirimavo Bandaranaike | - | Sri Lanka |
| Golda Meir | - | Israel |
| Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo | - | Portugal |
| Benazir Bhutto | - | Pakistan |
| Begum Khaleda Zia | - | Bangladesh |

Source: The World's Women; 1970-1990, the Trends and Statistics,
 (United Nations, New York, 1990) p.32

* In Office 31 December, 1990.

Generally speaking, women are very poorly represented in the seats of power and policy and decision-making processes. Women make up less than five per cent of the world's heads of state, heads of major corporations and top positions in international organisations. Women are not just behind in politics, they are a long way behind. This is in spite of the fact that women are found in large numbers in low level positions of public administration, in political parties, and in trade unions and business. Only 3.5 per cent of the world's cabinet ministers are women. Women hold no ministerial positions in 93 countries of the world (232, p.31).

Most women in government leadership are in such ministries as education, culture, social welfare and women's affairs. In some regions they are also making inroads into justice and legal affairs. But even in social fields, women average only 12 to 14 per cent in Eastern Europe and in the erstwhile USSR, nine per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and six per cent or less in the rest of the world. On the whole, women are least represented in executive, economic, political and legal ministries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Men maintain a strong hold on such key areas as defence, economic policy and political affairs in all regions (232, p.31).

Fifty UN member states have no woman in any of their top echelons of government. Although women have made some incursions in the past 20 years in the parliaments and at the middle management levels in several countries, their representation in these areas still averages less than 10 per cent and less than 20 per cent respectively. Their parliamentary representation is, however, supposed to increase by 35 to 50 percentage points to reach parity with men (232, p.6).

A study by the UN in 1990 revealed that women were shut out of all decision-making positions at the four highest levels of government in 49 countries - 21 in Africa, 16 in Asia and the Pacific, eight in Latin America and the Caribbean and four in Europe and North America. In only three countries do women hold more than 20 per cent of ministerial level government positions - Bhutan, the Dominica Republic and Norway (232, p.31). In Norway in 1986, in a Labour Government headed by a female Prime Minister, 37 per cent of the ministers were women. In 1985 it was 25 per cent (232, p.31).

In a few countries like Bahamas, Barbadas, Dominica, Finland and Norway there are enough women in decision-making positions exercising a strong influence in government. But where women have been confined to their traditional roles - as in North Africa and East and West Asia, their representation and influence in decision-making are very negligible (232, p.31).

In the matter of parliamentary representation, in 1987 women made up more than 15 per cent in less than 25 countries (see Table 3.3). Most of them are socialist countries.

Table 3.3

Percentage of Women in Parliament: 1987

Developed Countries: Europe

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Albania | (29) |
| Bulgaria | (21) |
| Czechoslovakia | (30) |
| Denmark | (29) |
| Finland | (32) |
| Former German Dem.Rep. | (32) |
| Hungary | (21) |
| Iceland | (21) |
| Netherlands | (20) |
| Norway | (34) |
| Poland | (20) |
| Sweden | (29) |
| USSR | (35) |
| Yugoslavia | (19) |

Africa

| | |
|------------|------|
| Mosambique | (16) |
| Seychelles | (24) |

Latin America and the Caribbean

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Cuba | (34) |
| Trinidad and Tobago | (17) |

Asia and the Pacific

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| China | (21) |
| Korea, Dem.People's Rep. | (21) |
| Mongolia | (25) |
| Vietnam | (18) |

Source: The World's Women:1970-1990, The Trends and Statistics,
(United Nations, New York, 1990) p.34

Survey reveals that in 1987-88, in nearly 100 countries women had no positions at the ministerial level. This included, among the developed countries, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Japan, Luxemburg, Malta, Spain and Yugoslavia. In Africa, in 1987-88, there were 31 countries where women held no position at the ministerial level. In Latin America and the Caribbean 24 countries and in Asia and the Pacific in 30 countries, women had no ministerial level representation (Table 3.4).

In 1987, only 10 per cent of the countries' parliamentarians were women. In that year the highest representation of women in the legislature was in Eastern Europe and in the then USSR - nearly 28 per cent, but the subsequent political restructuring in these regions tended to reduce the representation of women considerably. For instance, in Bulgaria the percentage of women in Parliament in 1987 was 21, but in 1990 it was reduced to a mere nine per cent. Similarly in Czechoslovakia women's representation was reduced from 30 per cent to six per cent; in Romania from 34 to four per cent and in the then USSR Supreme Soviet from 35 to 14 per cent and so on (232, pp.32 - 33).

Normally two paths are open for positions in the decision-making process in government - through politics or through the civil service. Both paths present difficulties for women. Political positions are often given from political parties, labour unions and interest groups, but in all these the voice of women is weak.

Table 3.4 gives a list of countries where women have achieved a 10 per cent level or more of ministerial positions.

Table 3.4

**Countries where Women have Achieved at least 10 Per cent
of the Positions at the Ministerial Level**

Percentage of Ministerial Level Positions Held by Women:

1987 - 1988

Developed Regions

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| Austria | (11) |
| Canada | (13) |
| Denmark | (14) |
| Finland | (12) |
| Fed.Rep.of Germany | (10) |
| Former German Dem.Rep. | (10) |
| Norway | (37) |
| Romania | (12) |
| Sweden | (17) |
| Switzerland | (11) |

Africa

| | |
|--------------|------|
| Burkina Faso | (12) |
| Burundi | (10) |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Senegal | (13) |
| United Rep. of Tanzania | (16) |
| Latin America and Caribbean | |
| Dominica | (22) |
| Guatemala | (12) |
| Uruguay | (13) |
| Asian and Pacific | |
| Bhutan | (25) |
| Philippines | (11) |

Source: The World's Women:1970-1990, The Trends and Statistics,
(United Nations, New York, 1990) p.37

Western Europe

Women make up a sizeable proportion of the membership of trade unions in Western Europe - roughly 30 per cent of the membership of the unions affiliated with the International Federation of Free Trade Unions (232, p.32). Their proportion of union membership ranges from more than 50 per cent in Denmark, Finland and Sweden to 30 to 33 per cent in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Italy and in the UK, 22 per cent in Federal Republic of Germany (prior to unification) and 10 to 15 per cent in Luxemburg and the Netherlands (232, p.32).

Women also figure well in the membership of political parties in many countries. In several Western European countries, for example, they make up from 25 to 45 per cent of the membership of the major political parties. But again they are grossly under-represented in the leadership of these parties (232, p.33).

Although statistics on women in bureaucratic careers are not generally available, one pattern seems to dominate. Many women work at the lowest echelons, but their representation dwindles rapidly as the pay, status and authority increase. This is true of men also. But in the lower or higher positions men are present in larger numbers than women.

United Nations

This pattern is reflected even in the United Nations. As was seen in the case of the national civil services, the proportion of women in top management positions in the United Nations is also quite low - 3.6 per cent. However, at the lower levels, the representation of women is much higher. But women are well-represented, only at the most junior professional levels - the only levels at which, staff are recruited on the basis of competitive examinations (232, p.34).

Recently addressing the UN Administrative and Budgetary Committee, the present UN Secretary General Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali committed himself to ensure a phenomenal increase in the number of high-ranking women in the UN Secretariat, so that they would be on par with men by the year 1995. He said, "For my part, I intend to do all I can to bring the balance in policy level positions as close to 50 to 50 as possible by the 50th anniversary of the United Nations" (624, p.14).

After reviewing women's studies in a number of societies, Rosaldo and Lamphere conclude:

Everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are

associated with fewer power and prerogatives than are the roles of men. It seems fair to say then that all contemporary societies are to some extent male-dominated and although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life (402, p.3).

The United States of America

In 1916, even before US women had universal suffrage, Jannette Rankin of Montana was elected to the US House of Representatives on a Republican ticket. In 1918 she ran unsuccessfully for the US Senate. In 1940 she won a second term in the House, again on Republican nomination (435, p.257). She was the only member of the US House to vote against the entry of the US into both the World Wars. Rankin served the House from 1917 to 1919 and from 1941 to 1943 (435, p.259).

Even though American women were enfranchised as early as 1920, in the 1924 elections women's turn-out ranged from around 20 per cent in the South to a maximum of 40 per cent in Illinois. For a long period, women trailed men in their voting turn-out rates. This gap between the exercise of franchise by men and women disappeared with 59 per cent of each sex voting by 1980 (435, p.275).

The first woman to be in the US Senate was Rebecca Latimer Felton. She was appointed in 1922 to complete the term of a Senator who had died in office. She served as a member of the Senate for only one day, before giving up her seat to a man who was elected to fill the vacancy (435, p.259).

The first woman Cabinet member in USA was Frances Perkins, who served as Secretary of Labour from 1933 to 1945 under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Only two women, in addition to Perkins, served in the Presidential Cabinets prior to the administration of President James Carter. Presidents Carter and Reagan appointed three women each to Cabinet level positions in their respective administrations. Women were appointed to 13.5 per cent of full-time senate-confirmed positions in the Carter administration and to nine per cent of all such positions in the first term of the Reagan administration (435, p.259).

Progress is perhaps most noticeable in USA at the State legislative level, where the proportion of women among state legislators more than tripled between 1969 and 1987, from four per cent to 15.5 per cent. By 1986, women also held 17.9 per cent of nominated positions in Governor's cabinets and 14.2 per cent of top state-wide elective offices across the 50 states. While till 1987 only eight women had ever served as Governors of States, in 1987 alone three women were elected as Governors (435, p.259).

But so far, no woman has been elected as the American President or Vice President.

At the beginning of the 100th Congress (1987-88) women held only 23 of the 435 positions in the House of Representatives and two of the 100 seats in the Senate. By early 1987 only a total of 123 women have served in the Congress during its history of 200 years (435, p.258).

After the 1992 elections the position of women's representation in the US House of Representatives and the Senate has improved. There were six women senators in 1992 instead of two in

the 1990 Senate. The total number of women in the US House has also come to 48 in 1992 (624, p.14). William Jefferson Clinton, the 42nd President of the United States of America announced that his Cabinet would truly reflect America in gender and representation for minorities (626, p.12). Accordingly, more women were nominated to key posts in his administration. President Clinton made history by appointing a woman, Jannet Rono, as the Attorney-General of the US. It was for the first time that a woman was appointed to this prestigious office in the Cabinet. Moreover, the first lady, Hillary Rodhan Clinton was appointed to head a national health care task force. On the whole, in the 1990s women seem to have made a big leap in the American political scene.

France

Although there is an underlying tradition of equality in France, stemming from the French Revolution, women have suffered from an inferior status written into the Napoleonic Code of the 19th century. Interestingly, two women served as Ministers of State, in the Popular Front Government of 1936, even before women won the right to vote in 1944 (411, pp.160-161). The first woman Minister of Cabinet rank was appointed to the Ministry of Health in 1947, under the Fourth Republic, in the government of Robert Schuman. She was Germanine Poinso-Chapins. However, there were no women ministers in the Government of the Fifth Republic until the election of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in May 1974. Although he was convinced of the need to include women in his government, Premier Jacques Chirac was reluctant to entrust any real power with them. Women were given impressive titles but, they were in fact excluded from the Government's inner circle of power.

In 1979 there were four women in the Cabinet (411, p.163). In France, the proportion of elective and appointive governmental positions held by women continues to remain low.

The United Kingdom

In contrast to France's rather late acceptance of women in politics, in Great Britain a woman was first appointed as cabinet minister as early as 1929. Women were first allowed to stand for elections to Parliament in 1918, even though women's suffrage was granted only in 1928. Of the seventeen women contesting in 1918 only one, Lady Astor, was elected. Between 1918 and 1971, 94 women were elected to Parliament and 27 attained ministerial positions, eight of them as Cabinet ministers. The Life Peerage Act of 1958 enabled women to be admitted to the House of Lords and by 1975, 26 women were made peeresses for life (411, pp.163-164).

In 1979, following the assumption of office as Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher appointed an all-male Cabinet of 22 members. But there were two women Ministers of State without cabinet rank in her government (411, p.167).

The Parliamentary seats occupied by women in Britain increased from 4.3 per cent in 1975 to 6.3 per cent by 1987 (232, p.39).

Although there have been a few individual women of influence, women never seem to have been fully integrated into British politics so far. Historically, of course, the British have accepted a female monarch to come to the throne by succession. But, the British do not seem to have generally accepted them as actual contenders for political power (411, p.167).

USSR before the Dissolution

The story is not much different in the case of USSR. The history of the Soviet Union, after the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, is the story of a brave experiment to transform it into a more egalitarian and just society. The first decrees of the Soviet Government of 1917 and the Soviet Constitution of 1918 declared for the first time in Russian history, equal rights for men and women and equal opportunities in employment, remuneration and promotion, equal pay for equal work regardless of sex, equal opportunities in social and political activity and so on (427, p.244).

The driving force in the political system of the USSR at that time was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In 1920 women made up only 7.4 per cent of party membership. By 1986 this had increased to 27.4 per cent of total CPSU membership (427, p.254). In 1986 women made up 33 per cent of the total number of deputies elected to the Supreme Soviet, the country's highest body of state authority (427, p.244).

An important form of women's political participation in state affairs is their professional juridical work. The number of elected women judges in the country in 1990 is about 4,000 or 37 per cent of the total number of judges (427, p.245).

Women made up over 59.5 per cent of the membership of trade unions, the largest public organisations in the country with a membership of more than 133 million in 1990. Women constituted more than one third as 35.8 per cent of the members of the trade union central body and 51 per cent at the national and regional levels. They had a number of trade unions in different industries (427, p.245).

The policy followed by the socialist government in Soviet Union gave preference to the consolidation of family and upbringing of children (427, p.246).

This is why the Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress in 1987, in the section dealing with the problem of improvement of class relations in society, paid special attention to the consolidation of the family. It stated:

A strong family is one of the principal pillars of society.....It is necessary to organise the practical work of state and public organisations so that it promotes in every way a strengthening of the family in its normal foundation (427, p.253).

It took hard work for the new socialist state to change over from its old moorings and morals which stood in the way of the liberation of women. Under the new state this liberation was to be achieved with the family as the basic unit.

Norway

Norway is one of the few countries that had woman Prime Minister. This was in the year 1981. Even though women's suffrage was granted in 1913, it was not until the 1970s that women had a significant number of representatives in municipal and national political institutions (252, pp.261-262).

In all governments formed after 1945, one or two female ministers have always been included in the Cabinet. In the 1980s the number was raised to four. In the national elections in 1985 women accounted for more than 25 per cent of the representatives (252, p.263).

In the general elections of 1983 in Norway, 37 per cent of the representatives elected to the national parliament were women. In May 1986 this historic achievement was repeated. In the Labour Government, headed by a female Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, 40 per cent of the ministers appointed were women (252, p.254). Once suffrage was won, the Liberal Party seems to have actively encouraged women into politics and government.

West Germany (Before Unification)

In Germany the right to vote was granted to women in 1919. But the first woman cabinet minister in a West German Government was appointed by Chancellor Adenauer. This was in the newly created Ministry of Health in November 1961. In response to the pressure exerted by women members of the Bundestag (the Lower House) from 1967 to 1976 there were two women 'regulars' in the cabinet (411, p.168).

In December 1972 Anne-Marie Renger of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was elected as the President of the Parliament. She became the first woman President of a Parliament in a West European country (411, p.170).

Even today the German political field is dominated by male politicians. The representation of women in the legislative bodies or in the cabinet or in top positions of the policy making bodies has ample scope for improvement.

In May 1975 the Commission of the European Community conducted an international poll on sex roles and men's and women's attitudes towards social problems in nine countries namely Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Britain. One of the findings of the Commission was

that politics is still considered to be a 'masculine field' by both men and women, but much less so by young women and by well-educated individuals (411, p.172).

Women in Asian Countries - China, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and India

China

In the past, China had promulgated many laws protecting women's rights, but "those laws were sporadic and lacked specific punitive measures" (622, p.8). But in 1992 a special law for women in China was adopted by the National People's Congress (NPC) which made China the first country in the world to introduce a comprehensive and exclusive law for women (622, p.8).

Other countries too have often passed laws to protect women's rights. But Yu Shutong, a law expert and adviser to the NPC, pointed out that "in most cases, they dealt with one aspect or the other, such as health, welfare, or equal pay". The Chinese law with its nine chapters and 54 articles, guaranteed the entire gamut of women's rights, ensuring gender equality in political, educational and cultural spheres, as well as in labour and marriage (622, p.8).

All available information indicates that over the last 45 years the conditions of Chinese women have improved substantially. The number of women working in government organisations has grown from 1,50,000 in the 1950s to 1.9 million in 1992. Moreover, in 1992 the country had 14 Ministers, 13 Vice Governors and 200 Mayors who were women over eight million women Scientists and Technicians (622, p.8).

But the feudalistic attitudes towards women still persist, especially in the more remote areas. Only a small proportion of Chinese women are actively engaged in political work. For example, although women account for half of the country's 1.13 billion population less than a fourth of the NPC's deputies are women.

Having made a detailed analytical study of the political status of women in six countries of the East, namely Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and India, Ruth Frances Woodsmall, arrived at the following conclusions:

- 1 The right to vote for women, in many of these countries, was the natural result of the recognition of the role of women in their national struggle.
- 2 Political equality for women was recognised without question in the adoption of the universal suffrage.
- 3 After suffrage was granted, a small educated minority among women in each country became active in public life and assumed political responsibility.
- 4 Though the number of women who enter politics is relatively small, many women of the educated minority are politically conscious and actively identified themselves with local and national affairs (455, p.371).

But this small enlightened minority in every country does not represent the full measure of women's political power supposedly ensured through universal suffrage. The vast electorate of women in these countries, mostly illiterate, confronts the educated minority in every country with the challenging problem of preparing women for the vote. Thus the major problem in most of these countries in the East, is no longer the acquisition of equal rights

for women, but the full exercise and utilisation by women of these rights which they have already gained, and their understanding of political equality (411, p.372).

On the whole, it is found that even by the fag end of the present century, women are seen not sufficiently represented in politics in most of the countries. In a majority of the countries, all over the world, adult franchise to women has been granted. But due to various reasons, the right is not properly utilised by women independently and effectively. But women are found increasingly in political parties and trade unions and in the lower level positions of the civil services. But, at present, in many countries, especially in developed countries, a change in the existing trend is visible.

Chapter 4

Women's Participation in Politics - The Indian Scenario

The participation of women in politics is closely related to the position and status of women in society. Women's access to education, property, social freedom, economic independence, employment status, etc. have an impact on the degree and quality of political participation of women in a country. In a study of women's participation in Indian politics, it becomes necessary to have an understanding of the general social status of women in the country.

The vedic literature claims that women in ancient India did not experience any kind of inequality with men in those days. It has been stated that women were held in high esteem. Among the several gods of the Hindu religion there were many women goddesses - the goddess of wealth, learning etc (243, p.10). In the Shakti cult, the supreme divine power is conceived of as a woman, either as Durga, distributing her bounties or as the formidable Chandi, killing Asuras or as Kali, adorned with garlands of several heads and arms, standing on the prostrate figure of Siva. The goddesses, other than those of the Shakti cult, have been endowed with remarkable charm, grace and dignity, luminous with the glow of restraint and yet not life-denying but shining in the fullness of life. It is with this richness of personality that goddesses like Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Parvati seem to have blessed the Indian women (404, p.44).

During the period of the Upanishads, i.e., from the 8th to the 5th century B.C., women enjoyed a high status in society. It is pointed out that women in those days had greater access to learning. Two great women scholars, Gargi and Maithreyi, were said

to have taken part in philosophical discussions and discourses along with men in royal courts (243, p.10).

But, with the spread of the caste system in Indian society, the status of women also started declining. Many evil practices and customs like child marriage, polygamy, pardah system, * sati, * prohibition of widow marriage etc, subsequently crept one by one into the social customs of the time. In short, till the end of the 19th century women in India lived under the weight of such cruel customs as infanticide, child marriage, sati etc. These women were socially weak, economically dependent and politically powerless (278, p.271).

* Purdah System

The system of Purdah is a practice of women keeping their faces veiled, so that others will not see them. In other words, it is a system of keeping women secluded. The system became quite common among rich Hindu families of Bengal, Bihar and U.P. in the 15th and 16th centuries. It became a common practice throughout Northern India when the country was under Islamic rule.

* Sati

The word sati means a chaste and virtuous woman. It also denotes the practice of immolation of women on the funeral pyre of their husbands. This barbarous custom was widely practised by the orthodox Hindus of Bengal, by the Rajputs, Jats and Sikhs of Northern India. On 4th December 1829 sati was declared illegal by Regulation XVII issued by Lord Bentick, the then Governor General of British India.

Kanak Mukherjee in her book, "Women's Emancipation Movement in India : A Marxist View" states:

It may be said, in general, that the beginning of women's emancipation movement coincides with the beginning of the Indian renaissance in the 19th century. In all the previous stages of society in India, women, in general, were dependent and subjugated. We may come across some examples of glorious awakening of individual women here and there, even from the time of the Vedic age, but we cannot claim that there was any general awareness about women's social rights or equality before the dawn of the 19th century renaissance (356, p.23).

After the arrival of the British in India British scholars, missionaries and bureaucrats had applied European standards and values in judging the position of women in India. They described Hindu women as being tradition-bound, religious and subservient, who functioned in an environment which was limited and oppressive. They condemned the customs and conventions of traditional Hindu society relating to women as peculiar, antiquated and inhuman (234, p.1).

The criticism made by the Britishers provoked many Indian reformers and nationalists. But most of them were also aware of the fact that such criticisms of the Indian society, including those related to the treatment of women in society contained large elements of truth. This was evident from the several reforms that they tried to introduce in Indian society subsequently. In fact these reforms, introduced during the 19th and early 20th centuries, can be described as the women's movement - although there was no formal organisation which represented or agitated for women's

rights (234, p.2).

Several social reform movements were launched in India in the 19th century by male reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen and Maharishi Karve. That was a period when several barbarous customs and practices like sati, female infanticide, polygamy, child marriage, devadasi* system etc. were practiced widely.

The torch bearer of Indian renaissance was Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774 - 1833). He founded the Brahma Samaj in 1828 as a forum for the followers of all religions and a matrix for the evolution of a casteless society. He prepared the famous petition to the then Governor General and got it signed by many people of high standing in society for the prohibition of sati. Sati was later abolished by Regulation XVII of December 4, 1829. But he, along with other social reformers, did not remain satisfied with the prohibition of sati. They campaigned against polygamy and bigamy. They also fought for property rights for women. They stood up against the dowry system (356, p.34).

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820 - 1891) passionately campaigned for the education of women and battled against an orthodox society and an indifferent government to establish numerous schools for girls. He also vigorously advocated widow

* Devadasi System

In the beginning of the 18th century dancing girls known as devadasis were engaged for temple services. Sometimes the parents consecrated their daughters to the gods of temples as an offering to the gods. The daughters lived with their parents and on festive occasions they went to the temples and entertained the deity with their dances and songs. They rendered the service till they were married.

marriage. In 1856 the Widow Marriage Reforms Act was enacted. The Census Report of 1891 indicated that in India, which included the present Burma, Bangladesh and Pakistan, out of a total population of 14, 01, 96, 135 as many as 2,26,57,429 were widows.

Of these 13,878 were under four years of age; 64,040 between five and nine; 17,532 between 10 and 14 and 41,60,548 between 15 and 34. The figures show the magnitude of the problem then (234, pp.24-25). The Act was a great blessing to women.

Swami Dayananda Saraswathi (1825 - 1883) began his Arya Samaj movement in the 1870s. By 1883, when he died, about 100 Arya Samajs had been established in the Punjab, U.P., Rajasthan and Bombay. He condemned child marriage and advocated equal status to women and favoured a system of national education.

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838 - 1884) joined the Brahma Samaj in 1857. He pleaded for the removal of the purdah system, introduction of widow marriage and intercaste marriage. He established many organisations like the Goodwill Fraternity Society, Brahma Bandhu Samaj and Brahma Vidyalaya. He was an advocate of the education of women. He strongly urged the abolition of early marriage of girls and the practice of polygamy.

Marrying a widow in 1893, Dhande Keshkar Karve (1858 - 1962) started the Widow Marriage Association in Poona and for several years served as its Secretary. He started the Hindu Widow's Home in 1896 and also opened a hostel for the children of remarried widows. Opening the Mahila Vidyalaya in Bombay in 1907, he later founded the Indian Women's University in 1916 there and later in 1932 served as its Vice Chancellor (356, p.34).

Pandita Remabai (1858 - 1922) was very much interested in the spread of education among women. She travelled to various parts of India with a mission to spread women's education and thereby emancipate them from social injustice and tyranny. She established a Mahila Arya Samaj at Poona to promote women's education and discouraged child marriage. She herself was a great scholar and the title "Pandita" was conferred upon her as a recognition of her scholarship.

Mahadev Govind Ranade, R.G.Bhandarkar and N.G.Chandravarkar initiated another social reform organisation viz., the Prarthana Samaj. Though primarily a religious organisation, the Prarthana Samaj began social reform work. It worked for women's education and an equal social and legal status for them.

A survey of the social reform movements in India in the 19th century reveals the fact that only very few women were associated directly with them, perhaps because women had little opportunity at that time to engage themselves in social work. But most of them belonged to the elite class.

Some of the Bengali women like Swarna Kumari Devi, daughter of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and sister of Ravindranatha Tagore and her two daughters Sarala Devi Chaudharani and Hiranmayee Devi, Sunita Devi, daughter of K.C.Sen and wife of Maharaja of Coochbehar Lady Abala Bose, wife of famous scientist J.C.Bose etc. formed certain local organisations which worked for the upliftment of women through education, handicrafts etc. The nationalist spirit was latent in all these small organisations (356, p.39). Some of the other noted women social workers of the period were Remabai Ranade from Bombay, Anandibai Joshi from Poona, Francesca Sohrabji,

a Parsi woman, Annie Jagannathan and Rukmabai of South India.

Thus, through the activities of leading social reformers in different parts of India, a movement for women's upliftment, their education and legal rights became widespread, late in the 19th century. There were active campaigns for female education, widow marriage, prevention of child marriage and polygamy and other such social evils.

But such ideas of social reforms in colonial India could not remain separate from the nationalist movement. Social renaissance was the first step towards nationalism. For bringing about such social reforms, it was easy to believe that a sovereign national government was necessary. The nationalist movement aimed at driving out the colonial forces from the country and sought to achieve the right to self government. And so, in course of time, it was only logical and natural for the social reform movements to broadbase themselves into the nationalist movement. The movement for women's emancipation thus came to be aligned with the nationalist movement. The leaders of the nationalist movement also fought for women's franchise and other legal rights for women (356, pp.41-42).

The participation of women in the nationalist movement opened up the path for female participation in politics. When the Indian National Congress was established in 1885, its leaders were particular about drawing more women into its fold from the very beginning. In the first session of the Indian National Congress Allan Octavian Hume, its founder, said:

Political reformers of all shades of opinion should never forget that unless the elevation of female elements of the nation proceeds 'pari passu', (with equal pace) with the work, all their labour for political enfranchisement will prove vain (356, p.44).

Women from the enlightened sections of society started joining the Congress from the beginning. In 1889 five women delegates namely, Kadambini Ganguly, Suvarnakumari Ghoshal, Pandita Remabai, Vidya Gouri Nilkantha and Srimati Nikaswa attended the fifth session of the Congress held in Bombay. Some of the prominent women leaders who were active in the women's movement were equally active in the national movement. Such were Madam Cama, Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Sarojini Naidu and others. Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu even became Presidents of the Indian National Congress in 1917 and 1925 respectively.

In 1905, when Bengal was partitioned the anti-partition movement developed into a nationalist movement in Bengal. Gradually, the anti-partition movement spread to other parts of India. In this movement and in the subsequent boycott movement, a large number of women participated.

Moreover, some women helped the revolutionary movements in different ways. The names of Margaret Noble, better known as Sister Niveditha, Sarala Devi and Madam Bhikaji Cama are worth mentioning in this context. Madam Cama went abroad to propagate the cause of India's freedom. She helped to send arms for the revolutionaries from abroad. Her home in Paris became the meeting place of young revolutionaries from India.

With the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene, the participation of women in the national movement acquired a new dimension. He encouraged women to participate in all aspects and phases of the nationalist movement, particularly in the constructive programme and the non-violent satyagraha movement initiated by him. He believed that a woman's nature was particularly suited to non-violent satyagraha, for it required not physical strength, but more courage and spiritual determination (234, p.34). Thus women in large numbers were encouraged to join satyagrahas and other nationalist activities, called for by the national movement.

With the establishment of the Home Rule League by Annie Besant in 1916, more women were attracted to the national movement. A women's branch was created in the Home Rule League to enable women to meet and discuss political issues without the inhibiting presence of men (234, p.35).

Women's franchise movement in India had started as early as 1917. A 14-member delegation under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu had met the Montague - Chelmsford Mission and submitted a memorandum demanding more rights and facilities for women in the country. The main demands of the deputation were to provide facilities for women's education, health, improved maternity welfare and to broaden and extend the franchise, offering them the same opportunities of representation as men. Margaret Cousins, who founded the Women's Franchise League in Ireland, was the secretary of the deputation (356, p.48).

The Secretary of State did not concede their demands. But the Indian National Congress supported them. Several public

meetings were held in different parts of the country to popularise the demands. Again in 1919, when the South Borough Commission visited India to consider the right of franchise, Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu led another deputation of women, demanding an equal right of franchise. Even though the Commission rejected their demands once again, it advised the Government of India to leave this question for the consideration of the Indian legislatures, treating the same as a domestic subject. Thereafter, one province after another enfranchised women. By 1929 all the provincial legislatures of India had given women the right to vote on the same terms as men, though not on a universal adult basis (356, p.49).

Women had participated in the first major political satyagraha in India in 1919. But this was in limited numbers. In Bombay and Punjab small groups of women organised political meetings. Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu addressed public meetings in Bombay to educate women. Kasturba Gandhi and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya openly sold proscribed literature on the public streets. In Punjab Sarala Chaudharani organised women on a political basis. In Lahore an increasing number of women were thus seen attending public meetings. Gradually more and more women were attracted to political activities. At the All India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C) session of 1922, of the 350 delegates, 16 were women (234, p.36).

To take part in the non-co-operation movement of 1921 women came out in larger numbers. They took out processions and attended public meetings. Gandhiji realised that a woman could "become the leader in Satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give, but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering

and faith" (315, p.13).

Gandhi's relentless propaganda in favour of charkha spinning and hand weaving of khadi was designed to bring the message of nationalism and freedom into every home, even in the remotest village. This was a remarkable way of taking the message of the freedom struggle to women.

The Salt Satyagraha in 1930 marked a new high watermark in women's participation in the movement. To make salt in defiance of British laws became a way of declaring one's independence in one's own daily life and also of revolutionising one's perception of the kitchen, as linked to the nation, the personal as linked to the political (315, p.17).

When Gandhiji did not allow women to participate in the Dandi March, Margaret Cousins wrote a spirited letter of protest to Gandhiji showing the injustice involved in the decision. Immediately, Gandhiji reversed his decision and chose Sarojini Naidu to lead the Salt Satyagraha after his arrest. She declared publicly that "the time has come when women can no longer seek immunity behind the shelter of their sex, but must share equally with their men comrades all the perils and sacrifices for the liberation of their community" (234, p.59). Women showed remarkable powers of patience and endurance in the art of picketing.

Swarup Rani Nehru, wife of Motilal Nehru and mother of Jawaharlal Nehru, received a severe lathi blow from the police. On 1st January 1931 Kamala Nehru, wife of Jawaharlal Nehru, was arrested for instigating the peasants not to pay tax (234, p.60). In the years after the salt satyagraha, during 1931 and 1932,

countless number of women participated in the freedom struggle. Women, especially from Delhi, Bengal and Bihar, played a very crucial role in the freedom movement at this stage.

Women showed extraordinary courage when they confronted the police or when they were sent to jail. In 1930, the year of the second All India Civil Disobedience Movement, the government made an attempt to auction liquor licence in Bombay which could not succeed because of obstruction by women (234, p.61). The Civil Disobedience Movement had provided women with an easy access to political activity. Even conventional religious symbols were used to spread political awareness. Every day Prabhat Pheris, or the beating of drums exhorting people to fight, were organised. In the mornings, traditionally, groups of women would leave their homes and walk to the temples singing devotional songs. But during the period of the Civil Disobedience Movement political themes were substituted for traditional religious hymns asserting the spirit of nationalism and patriotism (234, p.61).

A few of the women became members of the secret terrorist societies. This was mostly in Bengal. Brave women like Kalpana Dutt, Kalyani Bhattacharjee, Kamala Das Gupta, Latika Ghose, Bina Das, Preetilata Waddedar, Shanti Ghose, Sunita Chowdhury and many others were very active in these movements (234, p.61). Latika Ghose, the Oxford-educated niece of Aurobindo Ghose, had organised a women's group with about 100 members in Chittagong. This group was in touch with other terrorist societies of Bengal (234, p.63).

Vijay Agnew reports about the spirit which inspired Bina Das, the revolutionary woman leader. In Bina Das's own words,

My object was to die and if to die, to die nobly fighting against this despotic system of government, which has kept my country in perpetual subjection to its infinite shame and endless suffering and, fighting in a way which cannot but tell. I fired at the Governor impelled by my love of my country (234, p.68).

Sister Nivedita was well-known in Calcutta as a devotee of Swami Vivekananda and an ardent social worker. Her involvement with terrorist societies was for a long time not even suspected by the police (401, p.68).

The university campus in Calcutta produced large numbers of radical and politically conscious students. They were greatly influenced by the writings of Aurobindo Ghose, Swami Vivekananda and Bipin Chandra Pal (265, p.148).

The 1942 Quit India Movement provided women with an opportunity to take part on a massive scale in the freedom movement. Immediately after the announcement of the Quit India Movement, the authorities quietly arrested all the more important Congress leaders unexpectedly. Women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Sushila Nayyar and Vijayalakshmi Pandit peacefully allowed themselves to be arrested. But others like Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta and Sucheta Kripalini went into hiding and worked from there (234, p.70).

Later on, when a shadow A.I.C.C. was formed within the Congress, men and women like Sucheta Kripalini, Aruna Asaf Ali and Mridula Sarabhai who had successfully escaped arrest were all there.

Aruna Asaf Ali took up the active role of organising and directing the mass movement. She travelled incognito far and wide, in partial disguise, changing the style of her dress at times in order to evade the police. Police later offered Rs.5,000/- as a reward for any information leading to her arrest (234, p.72). She was helped by innumerable people, businessmen, industrialists, army officers and government officials (234, p.73). During this movement Usha Mehta and her friends organised a secret broadcasting station. They went ahead broadcasting news about the August revolution (234, p.74).

Thus the national movement in India enabled women to emerge from an oppressed and subordinate position to an enlightened one of equal participation with men in the social and political affairs of the country. Their participation in the terrorist societies and later in the not-so-non-violent underground activities associated with the 1942 Quit India Movement indicated that women could be assimilated into the mainstream of the struggle for freedom (234, p.74).

Women who participated actively in the nationalist movement had assumed for themselves bold and daring roles without inhibition and were not particularly concerned about having disregarded the conventions applicable to their sex.

By opening the gates to women's political participation, Gandhiji had facilitated the acceptance of the women's cause by the nationalists. Sarojini Naidu had been Gandhi's choice for Congress Presidentship in 1925, much before the emergence of a women's lobby within the Congress. Even more significant was the way women came to be represented in legislatures in the 1920s (315, p.20).

Women in the nationalist movement were represented in all aspects of Congress activity and levels of decision-making. They actively participated in the constructive programmes and the non-co-operation movement of Congress. Women joined in large numbers as members of the Congress. They were elected as delegates to the A.I.C.C. meetings and were nominated to the Congress Working Committee (234, p.80).

The sudden and massive entry of women into the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 opened up further opportunities for women to get themselves involved with the nationalist movement. This was the major reason why as early as in 1931 the Congress passed a resolution at its Karachi annual session, committing itself to the political equality of women regardless of their traditional role in Indian Society. It is significant to note that at that time, women in most European countries had not yet won the right to vote, despite their much longer history of struggle for the right (315, p.21).

Several prominent Congress women leaders, such as Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Mridula Sarabhai and Sucheta Kripalini expressed the need to establish a women's division within the Congress. They argued that it would help create among Congress women an awareness of themselves as a group and consciousness of their common interest and disabilities (234, p.83). Later, a separate Women's department was formed within the Congress. One main objective of the department was to train and educate women workers and spread political awareness among women. In fact, later on, all political parties in the country started organising separate wings for women workers.

The Congress had accepted in principle the complete equality of women. All the national leaders were one in stressing the importance of uplifting the social and political status of women.

Jawaharlal Nehru asked,

The future of India cannot consist of dolls and playthings and if you made half the population of a country a mere plaything of the other half, an encumbrance on others, how will you ever make progress? (300, p.69).

He was very proud of women who had joined active politics. He encouraged the women of his own family and close associates to join the nationalist movement. On the occasion of his wife's arrest, he wrote to his daughter Indira that "it was a pleasant new year gift to me" (234, p.96).

Pandit Nehru, in one of his speeches made on October 20, 1949 in New York, assessed the role played by the women of India in the freedom struggle in the following words:

Someone referred to the part that the women of India played in our struggle for freedom. There is no doubt that the part the women of India played was not only significant, but of paramount importance in that struggle; it made all the difference in the world. I am quite convinced that in India today progress can be and should be measured by the progress of the women of India. In a political and outward sense they had fewer barriers to face than the women of some European countries and, perhaps, even here; I mean in regard to the vote and other things. They had to face certain social barriers which you have not had. Our political movement swept away many of

those social barriers and brought the women out. That shows that our political movement was something much more than a political movement, because it affected the lives of all classes of people. It touched those unfortunate people who had suffered so long, who are called the untouchables. The movement affected them, affected the country's reaction to them. It affected women. It affected children. It affected the peasantry, the industrial workers and others. So it was a vital movement which affected every class and group in India. That is what a real movement should be. And in this movement the women of India, undoubtedly, played an exceedingly important part (374, p.508).

Gradually, women were getting more and more opportunities within the Congress organisation to hold key offices. Hansa Mehta was elected Parliamentary Secretary from 1937-39. Sarojini Naidu was elected to the Working Committee for many years. Later, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Mridula Sarabhai were also elected to the Working Committee. It is, however, a fact that women who were able to assume leadership roles in the Congress had certain unique advantages of education, wealth, liberal family background and support of the male members of the family. As wives and daughters of popular politicians they could take advantage of their family names and secure the goodwill of their colleagues in the Congress (234, p.80).

Even during the period of the freedom movement, women in India organised themselves in a variety of ways in an effort to improve their social position. But none of the organisations thus formed could provide a unified leadership to women on a national level. The Women's Indian Association organised in 1917 and the

All India Women's Conference organised in 1927 were the only two organisations with branches and offices throughout the country. They were nonpolitical organisations interested in promoting educational opportunities for women and improving their position through social and legal reforms. They, however, became increasingly involved in developing a women's suffrage movement in the country (234, p.104). These organisations were, in the real sense of the term, organisations of women social workers belonging to the upper strata of society.

During the formation of the Constituent Assembly in 1946 there was great pressure from all the women's organisations in the country for electing more women as their representatives. The Constituent Assembly of India was formed in December 1946 with 207 members, of which only 11 were women. Table 4.1 gives a state-wise break-up of the members and the composition of men and women in it. It may be remembered that the states mentioned below are as they were before the States' Reorganisation.

Table 4.1

Details of Constituent Assembly Members of India : 1946

| States | Number of Men | Number of Women | Total | Percentage of Women to Total |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------|------------------------------|
| Madras | 40 | 3 | 43 | 6.9 |
| United Provinces | 39 | 3 | 42 | 7.1 |
| Bihar | 29 | 1 | 30 | 3.3 |
| Bengal | 23 | 2 | 25 | 8 |
| Bombay | 18 | 1 | 19 | 5.3 |
| CP and Berar | 14 | - | 14 | - |
| Punjab | 12 | - | 12 | - |
| Orissa | 8 | 1 | 9 | 11.1 |
| Assam | 7 | - | 7 | - |
| N W F Province | 2 | - | 2 | - |
| Sind | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Delhi | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Ajmer - Merwara | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Coorg | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Total | 196 | 11 | 207 | - |

Source: Constituent Assembly Debates Vol.I to IV,
Official Report, 9-12-1946 to 23-12-1946
(Government of India, Delhi).

Thus the representation of women in the Constituent Assembly was not very significant. Of the total, women's representation was limited to a mere 19 per cent.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all citizens certain vital fundamental rights, upholding the principle of equality among which is the equality of sexes.

Article 14 of the Constitution says:

The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India (253, p.30).

Similarly, it is stated under Article 15 as follows:

- (1) The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
- (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to -
 - (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment
 - or
 - (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public (253, p.63).

Article 16 of the Constitution states that:

- (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

- (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the State (253, p.71).

Article 19 of the Constitution reiterates that

- (1) All citizens shall have the right
- (a) to freedom of speech and expression;
 - (b) to assemble peaceably and without arms;
 - (c) to form associations or unions;
 - (d) to move freely throughout the territory of India;
 - (e) to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India; (and)
 - (f) to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

Apart from the above fundamental rights, Article 326 states as follows:

The elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage; that is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than* [eighteen years] of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by or under any law made by the appropriate Legislature and is not otherwise disqualified under this Constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature on the ground of non-residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election (253, pp.961-962).

In spite of such constitutional provisions, in actual practice, political participation of women and their role in the

* Substituted by the Constitution (Sixty-first Amendment) Act for "twenty-one years".

state's decision-making process have not been upto the declared objectives of the Constitution.

In a message to the United Nations Women's Conference in Mexico on June 26, 1975, Indira Gandhi sought to show the reasons for such insufficient participation of women in politics.

Women are not weak by themselves, but because they are so handicapped from birth, by customs and social attitudes, that they have no chance of developing their innate strength. Women's emancipation owes much to the support and, in India, even public initiative of men leaders.

.....

Men, and unfortunately even women, are conditioned by our man-oriented society. We tend to accept norms which men have made without questioning their validity. Instead of imitating men, should not the norms themselves be examined in depth? Women should have equality of opportunity and programmes for their health, education and employment and better conditions of work. But surely, this is not the sum total of what we ask. So long as woman has within her the archaic seed of dependence, no legislation or society can ensure her rightful position. Status is the outcome of history, heritage and social and economic environment.

.....

Women's status will be determined by her capacity to see with clarity and sympathy and by her will to act (94, pp.719-720).

Women in Elections

In the first General Elections held in independent India in 1952 and in successive elections, women exercised their franchise

and contested for seats in the Parliament and in the state legislative assemblies. A close look at the performance of women as voters and contestants in the general elections reveals some interesting characteristics of women's participation in politics in India since independence.

Voting is the most important and the basic means by which citizens are assimilated into the political process and learn the art of exercise of power (278, p.274). When India held the first general elections, the biggest experiment of democracy in 1952, millions of men and women participated in the direct democratic political process for the first time in the history of the nation. But, unfortunately, 28,00,000 women were denied the right to vote in the first elections, as their names were not properly registered. Even then there were 7,72,86,000 eligible women voters (478, p.116). But the turn-out of women voters in the first general elections was very poor. Only 38.14 per cent of eligible women voters turned out to exercise their franchise. The percentage of voter turn-out in respect of men as well as women in all the ten general elections is given in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Voting Percentage in the Lok Sabha Elections : 1952 - 1991

| Year | Total Voting | Percentage Turn-out of Men Voters | Percentage Turn-out of Women Voters | Difference between the Percentage of Men and Women Turn-outs |
|------|--------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1952 | 46.60 | 53.51 | 38.14 | 15.37 |
| 1957 | 47.74 | 55.57 | 38.77 | 17.00 |
| 1962 | 54.76 | 62.05 | 46.63 | 15.42 |
| 1967 | 61.33 | 66.73 | 55.48 | 11.25 |
| 1971 | 55.35 | 61.00 | 49.15 | 11.85 |
| 1977 | 60.49 | 65.63 | 54.96 | 10.67 |
| 1980 | 56.92 | 62.15 | 51.22 | 10.93 |
| 1984 | 63.61 | 68.17 | 58.06 | 10.11 |
| 1989 | 61.95 | 66.13 | 57.32 | 8.81 |
| 1991 | 56.73 | 61.58 | 51.36 | 10.22 |

Source: 1. General Election Reports: 1952 - 1984,
(Election Commission, Delhi).

2. Election Archives and International Politics,
Nos. 185-186, Vol.23, Jan.-Feb., 1992,
Delhi, p.85.

The above statistics indicate a general trend of gradual increase in the turn-out of women voters. Their percentage increased from 38.14 in 1952 to 58.06 in 1984. Similarly the difference between the percentages of voter turn-out of men and women is seen to decline from 17 to 10.11 over the years.

An analysis of the percentage of votes polled in the 1989 elections shows that the all India turn-out of voters was 61.95 per cent as against 63.61 per cent in the 1984 elections. In the 1989 elections 66.13 per cent of men exercised their franchise, whereas the percentage of women who voted was only 57.32. While men voters' turn-out recorded a steady growth in successive elections, except in 1971 and 1980, women voters' turn-out fluctuated all through and touched an all-time high level in 1984 when an unprecedented 58 per cent of women went to the polls. The women turn-out, despite a little rise, remained far behind the male turn-out. In 1989 this difference was 8.81 per cent.

Table 4.3 gives the number and percentage of men and women who contested and were elected as members to the Lok Sabha in all the general elections conducted so far in India since independence. Figure 4.1 indicates the trend of their representation in percentage from the first to the tenth Lok Sabha.

Table 4.3

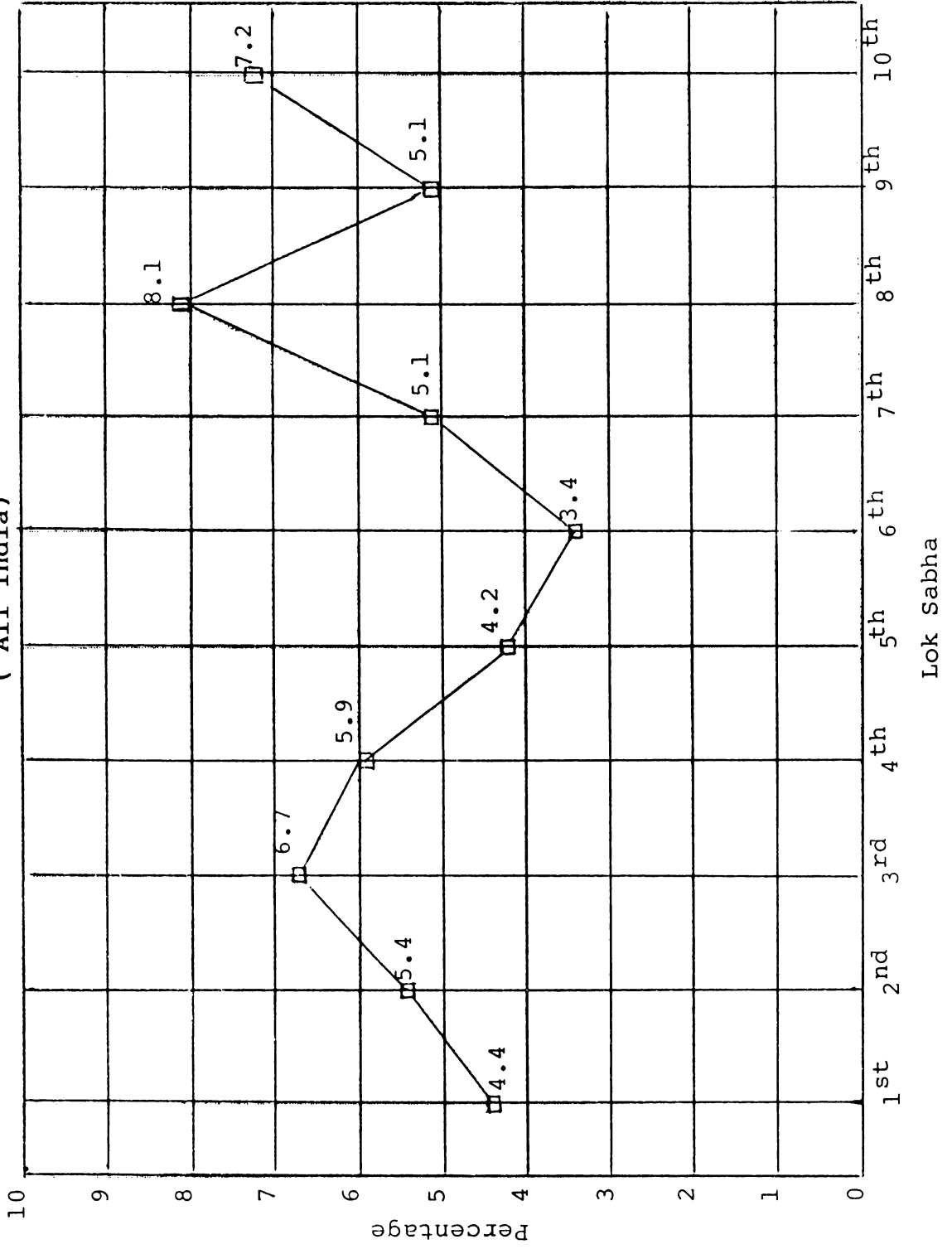
Number of Women Contested and Elected to the Lok Sabha: 1952 - 1991

| Year | Total Number of Seats | Number of Men Elected | Number of Women Elected | Number of Women Contested | Percentage of Elected Women to the Total Elected |
|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 1952 | 499 | 477 | 22 | 53 | 4.4 |
| 1957 | 500 | 473 | 27 | 42 | 5.4 |
| 1962 | 503 | 469 | 34 | 65 | 6.7 |
| 1967 | 523 | 492 | 31 | 62 | 5.9 |
| 1971 | 521 | 499 | 22 | 82 | 4.2 |
| 1977 | 544 | 525 | 19 | 70 | 3.4 |
| 1980 | 544 | 516 | 28 | 142 | 5.1 |
| 1984 | 544 | 500 | 44 | 164 | 8.1 |
| 1989 | 525 | 498 | 27 | 198 | 5.1 |
| 1991 | 541 | 502 | 39 | 307 | 7.2 |
| Total | 5,244 | 4,951 | 293 | 878 | 5.55 |

- Source: 1 General Election Reports: 1952 - 1984
(Election Commission, Delhi).
- 2 Election Archives and International Politics,
Nos. 185 - 186, Vol.23, Jan.-Feb. 1992, Delhi,
p.84.
- 3 Who's Who : 1952 to 1985 and 1991
(Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

Figure 4.1

Women Members, Percentage-wise : The First to Tenth Lok Sabha, 1952 - 1991
(All India)



The number of women contestants in the election to the Lok Sabha has increased over the years. In 1952 there were 53 women contestants, while in 1989 the number increased to 198. But the number of women elected to the House of the People has not increased significantly. The lowest number of women members in the Lok Sabha was 19 in 1977 and the maximum number of women members in the Lok Sabha was only 44 in 1984. Percentage-wise, the minimum representation of women in the Lok Sabha came down to 3.14 in 1977 and the maximum was 8.1 in 1984. But in the 1989 elections the percentage of women membership to the total membership again came down to 5.1. In the 1991 elections it increased to 7.2 per cent.

Generally speaking, contestants have a far greater probability of getting elected when they are sponsored by well-known political parties. The disparity between the percentages regarding the number of women contestants and those among them who got elected is indicative of the conservative approach of major political parties in putting up women candidates. Otherwise the percentage of women candidates who won should have been higher.

In the case of Rajya Sabha elections also, the position of women representation has indicated more or less the same trend. In 1970 among the 240 members of the Rajya Sabha, there were only 14 women. Percentage-wise it was only 5.8. But in 1980 there were 29 women out of a total membership of 244. Thus the representation of women in the Upper House was up to 11.8 per cent (508, p.32).

In respect of women's representation in the State Legislative Assemblies, it is seen that from 1957 to 1988 it varied between 0.71 per cent to 10.38 per cent. Almost the same trend is seen to continue in the subsequent elections too.

Thus, on the whole, it is observed that the representation of women in the legislatures in India since independence has not grown in any significant way at all.

All political parties vie with each other in attracting the votes of women at the time of elections. All the election manifestos of political parties recognize that women constitute a backward section of the society and, therefore, special provisions have to be made to bring them on par with men. But, at the same time, records show that the number of women put up by the different political parties as candidates in the elections is very meagre. Table 4.4 shows the number of women candidates put up by the different parties in the general elections to the Lok Sabha from 1952 to 1991 and the party affiliations of the elected women members. The maximum number of women candidates was in the elections of 1991. There were 307 women candidates in that election. The Congress Party fielded a sizeable number of women candidates among them viz., 39 in 1984. All the other political parties fielded only an insignificant number of women candidates in the elections.

Table 4.4

Party Affiliation of Women Candidates and the Number of Women Elected to the Lok Sabha: 1957 - 1991 (All India)

| Year | Congress | | C P I | | C P I (M) | | Swathantra | | Janatha | | B J P | | S S P | | B S P | | Independent | | Others | | Total | |
|-------|----------|----|-------|-----|-----------|----|------------|----|---------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---|-------------|---|--------|----|-------|-----|
| | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 1957 | 26 | - | - | 4 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 7 | - | 5 | 2 | 42 | 27 |
| 1962 | 33 | - | - | 2 | 2 | - | 9 | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | - | 13 | - | 65 | 34 |
| 1967 | 33 | - | - | 3 | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 10 | 3 | 13 | 2 | 62 | 31 |
| 1971 | 14 | - | 21 | 15 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 29 | 1 | 11 | 3 | 82 | 22 |
| 1977 | - | - | 22 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | - | 15 | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | 24 | - | 4 | 2 | 70 | 19 |
| 1980 | 10 | - | 32 | 20 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | - | 20 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | 60 | - | 15 | 3 | 142 | 28 |
| 1984 | - | - | 39 | 36 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | - | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 96 | 1 | 20 | 3 | 164 | 44 |
| 1989 | - | - | - | 13 | - | 3 | - | 3 | - | 2 | - | 5 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 27 |
| 1991 | - | - | - | 23 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | 10 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 39 |
| Total | 116 | 73 | 114 | 113 | 19 | 12 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 8 | 39 | 14 | - | 15 | - | 1 | 234 | 5 | 81 | 15 | 627 | 271 |

* Figures 1 and 2 below political parties denote, 1 = No. of contestants; 2 = No. of successful candidates. Blank Columns indicate either the party was not in existence or data was not available.

- Source: 1 National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988 - 2000 AD, Report of the Core Group set up by the Department of Women and Child Development (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 1988).
 2 Election Archives and International Politics, Nos. 185 - 186, Vol. 23, Jan. - Feb. 1992, Delhi.
 p. 83-84.
 3 Tenth Lok Sabha : Who's Who (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi, 1992).

Commenting on the low participation of women in the electoral politics of the nation, Lakshmi N. Menon, former Union Minister of State for External Affairs in the Jawaharlal Nehru Ministry, (1957-66), pointed out two important reasons for it. According to her, there was a sort of indifference among all political parties in bringing more women to the forefront. There was also a certain degree of inherent hesitation and lack of interest on the part of women to take part in political and social activities. These two factors, among others, stood in the way of more active participation by women in the political process.

She further added that she belonged to a generation which was electrified by the national liberation struggle and which gave great importance to lofty ideals and moral values that were in tune with the country's great tradition. She pointed out that in her younger days, she could travel alone even at night fearlessly and with confidence. She added that society had changed a good deal now. The present situation would not even permit women to move freely and safely even during day time. According to her, this is also one of the reasons why many women do not come into politics. She emphasised that all efforts should be channelised to build up a value-based society which would ensure safety and security to women. Such a situation would enable more women to participate in the political process more actively (642).

In the highest of the seats of power also, very few women could attain positions as cabinet ministers. The present Minister of Urban Development Sheila Kaul is only the fifth woman cabinet minister since the birth of independence. The case of women as Ministers of State or even as Deputy Ministers is not much different.

Table 4.5

Women Ministers in the Central Government of India : 1952 - 1991

| Years | Cabinet Ministers | Ministers of State | Deputy Ministers |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1952 | 1 | - | 1 |
| 1957 | - | - | 2 |
| 1962 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 1967 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 1971 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 1977 | - | 2 | - |
| 1980 | 1 | - | - |
| 1984 | 1 | 3 | - |
| 1989 | - | 1 | 1 |
| 1991 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| Total | 7 | 15 | 14 |

Source: 1. Who's Who:1952 to 1985 and 1991,
(Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

2. India 1990, A Reference Annual,
(Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi, 1990).

Table 4.5 shows the number of cabinet ministers and other ministers in the Council of Ministers of India since 1952. It is seen that in no ministry formed after independence has there been more than one woman minister of cabinet rank. In all Councils of Ministers, only one or two women were appointed as ministers.

Raj Kumari Amritha Kaur, Sushila Nayyar, Indira Gandhi, Mohsina Kidwai and Sheila Kaul have been the five women who held minister-ships of cabinet rank in the Union Ministry so far.

Moreover, in almost all the ministries it would appear that certain portfolios are specially reserved for women. Women's Welfare and Child Development, Health, Culture, Education, etc. are usually the portfolios that are set apart for women. Indira Gandhi, as the Prime Minister, handled several portfolios including Defence, Coal, Chemicals, Atomic energy, Communications, Planning, Science and Technology, Electronics, Irrigation etc. No other woman minister was even given any of the above portfolios in any ministry so far (220, p.117).

Thus, on the whole, even today the country's politics reflects the long tradition of Indian society under which women are banished to the fringes (627, p.2). Mamata Banerjee, a former Union Minister, said,

When we talk of equal justice, it should embrace every sphere. Women are not getting proper representation in the higher offices and the 30 per cent panchayat reservation for women may not have much effect if we do not rectify the situation at the higher level (627, p.2).

Just as it is seen that the level of representation of women in legislative bodies is inadequate, the role of women in the political parties, trade unions, and other social movements is also not very note-worthy. Studies show that though it might be difficult for women to participate very actively in the day-to-day activities of trade unions or political parties, women have been a

major source of strength to them organisationally (127, p.158). But, in the policy making bodies of parties and trade unions, women's representation is very meagre. In the service organisations also the trend is the same.

Thus, even though women played a very important role in the national movement, their role in shaping the politics of India since independence has not been very significant.

The Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, set up a Core Group in 1988 to study and report about the issues relating to the nature of political participation of women, the problems faced in this respect and the strategies to be evolved to ensure their more effective participation. The Core Group, in its report, stated as follows:

Broad-based political participation of women is severely limited due to a nexus of traditional factors. These are the domination of Indian politics by consideration of caste, class, religion, feudal and family status etc., all of which are parochial, essentially patriarchal forces that work in favour of men against women. Consequently women are still left on the periphery of the political process and political participation remains elusive to most of them, in spite of their voting in election and also the capture of some seats of power and influences (127, pp. 153-154).

Chapter 5

The Traditional Role of Women in the Society and Politics of Kerala : A Historical Perspective

During the pre-independence period the present Kerala State consisted of three distinct political entities, viz., Malabar as part of the then Madras Presidency and the two princely States of Cochin and Travancore. Organised political movements were started in these regions at different times. The political activities of each region had certain special features too, unique to that area and linked to their social and political systems. Generally, the nexus between traditional factors and the evolution of politics in the three regions was very pronounced.

The influence of traditional factors was also very much in evidence in the case of women's participation in politics in the three regions. The impact of caste and religion, the family structure among the different communities, the family status, the familial and social role of women among these communities etc. on the nature and degree of political participation of women in the three regions was very marked. An overview of the traditional, social and political status of women in Kerala in the pre-independence period may, therefore, be of help to bring out the nature of the difficulties that lie behind an active and significant role for women in the political process of the state.

The European travellers and the Christian missionaries who visited Kerala between the 16th and 19th centuries have left interesting records about the condition of women during this period (458, p.16). One such writer Jacob Canter Visscher wrote about the living conditions of women in Kerala in the middle of the 18th

century as follows:

The women marry at a very early period of life and are to be seen sitting with babies on their knees at an age when in our country they would be playing and running about with children. A girl is considered marriageable when she has attained her 13th year; and then all the suitors begin to flock around her. As she obtains womanhood earlier, her bloom is proportionately sooner over than in our country (446, p,94).

The Caste System

The dominant features of the Hindu society during the 19th century were based on the predominance of the upper castes and the relatively subordinate position occupied by the lower castes. The Brahmins were dominant and they declared that the duty of a woman was to serve her husband and be confined to the kitchen (458, p.12). The outcome was that the status of women became one of favoured slaves (458, p.12). Wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of a minority. The society became a closed one, where a minority enjoyed all rights and privileges (348, p.95).

People of the lower castes were condemned to lifelong slavery. The lower class women were even prohibited from clothing themselves properly. They were prohibited from covering the upper part of their body. It was taught that every man and woman must die in the caste or religion in which he or she was born. It was caste that generally decided the nature of social relationships and status of individuals. Excommunication from his caste for a caste Hindu was worse than death (457, p.127).

The upper castes enjoyed several immunities and privileges which were denied, over the centuries, to the members of the lower castes like the Eazhavas, Harijans and other backward or lower caste groups. The structure and character of the Hindu society in Kerala during the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries has been summed up by a researcher in the following words: "the higher (caste), the more were its rights and privileges; the lower the caste, the more bitter were its sufferings of slavery and bondage" (468, p.60).

Society was broadly divided into two groups: a powerful minority having access to religious learning and political power and the vast majority with no real right to religion and no power in politics. They were a condemned lot and were called "Avarnas" or the casteless or the outcastes (468, p.67). In the erstwhile princely state of Travancore (South Kerala) the high caste people would not even sell their land or buildings lying adjacent to the upper caste residential area to lower caste people, even at a price higher than what was offered by members of the higher caste group, probably because of the fear that such proximity may lead to some intermingling of castes.

The virtual monopoly of administrative jobs that the higher caste Hindus enjoyed till the 20th century in the Travancore area, was not quite true, at least in theory, of the Malabar region. This was because this region was before independence directly under the British rule, as part of the Madras Presidency. The British administration at least outwardly insisted that entry to the civil service should not be based on caste. But the social, educational and economic status of the individual even here was still

determined by his position in the caste hierarchy (120, p.74). In the erstwhile princely States of Cochin and Travancore, the hold of the caste system was even more suffocating than in the Malabar region. Until the 20th century governmental positions were denied to members of the lower castes and non-Hindus (120, p.74).

But, everywhere, there was not much difference in the status of women. They were treated inferior to men (304, p.2).

Opportunities for attaining higher positions in life were open only to members of the higher castes. For example, in Kerala out of the 16 people who had entered the Indian Civil Service (ICS) from Kerala during the years 1892 to 1904, 15 were Brahmins. In 1914 out of the 124 District Munsiffs, 93 were Brahmins. In 1944 out of the 650 registered degree holders, 452 were Brahmins (495, p.32).

But even within the higher caste groups, women mostly lived without education, training for a profession or any real knowledge of the world. The majority of women spent their time mainly within the four walls of their homes.

The Status of Namboodiri Women in Ancient Kerala

Among the Hindu caste groups, the Brahmin or Namboodiri women enjoyed high and unlimited superiority. They were reputed for their beauty and cleanliness (251, pp.153-154). The Namboodiri women also enjoyed the privilege of covering their bosoms when they went outside their homes to the temples or so, but then they had to cover their whole body when they went out. They wore gold and other ornaments, which generally consisted of three or four bracelets of brass, a necklace of gold or precious stones, and earrings of gold or diamonds depending upon their economic status (251, p.154).

The Namboodiris practised a peculiar traditional set of marriage and inheritance system not in evidence among other caste groups. This is said to have been evolved to preserve intact their family structure and the ownership and control over their landed properties and other assets. Within the Namboodiri household, only the eldest male members was allowed to marry a Namboodiri girl, while the younger members maintained a sort of marriage called 'Sambandhams', with girls belonging to the immediately lower caste of Nairs. In the latter cases, the bride, ofcourse, was never taken into the groom's house. She continued to live with her own family, that is her mother's house. The husband only 'visited' her. The husband never ate there. It has been said that, strictly speaking, the Namboodiri father was not even supposed to touch his own children born of Nair women and that if he did, he would have to get purified by a bath (251, p.155). These children born out of such a wedlock did not have any right of inheritance to their father's property, as in the case of the children born out of the marriage of the eldest male member to a Namboodiri girl. This enabled the Namboodiri family to maintain and keep the family property in tact.

Mitra points out that in many parts of Kerala, a custom prevailed that a poor tenant, when married, should dedicate his better half's first night to the local landlord Namboodiri for his sexual gratification (354, p.83).

In some parts it was made part of the custom that beautiful virgins of lower castes should serve in temples as the maidens of God (devadasis) and perform dances there. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai

writes about the devadasi system which had spread throughout Kerala in the 11th century as follows:

About this time, the priest began to propagate new doctrines of morality. One such law was that all the beautiful girls should be socialised and assigned to the temples for the service of Gods. In Kerala, women who took the livery of the Gods became the public property of the Namboodiris and came to be regarded as honoured members of society (383, pp.315-316).

The practice of marriage among Namboodiris also implied that many Namboodiri women could never marry at all. This was because there were not simply enough first born Namboodiri boys for all the Namboodiri girls to marry. The caste system prevented them from marrying men from outside their own caste or subcaste group.

Logan states that if a Namboodiri wanted to get his daughters married he had to be rich enough to give each of them a heavy dowry and an illom (the Tharavad or family of a Namboodiri). Many an Illom came to be drained of its resources in this way (329, p.128). As a result, many Namboodiri women were kept inside the lavish family compounds of these feudal estates, never getting married and never being exposed to the possible company of men outside their families. Since men were allowed to have more than one wife, some Namboodiri girls were married to elderly, already married Brahmins. When married to these aged men, their lives might not have been very much different from those of their unmarried sisters (329, p.129).

The seclusion of these privileged women meant that they could not get into any profession, go to markets or schools or to be even

seen outside their family compounds. On those rare occasions when they went outside their sheltered homes to a neighbouring temple or so, they were enveloped in clothes all over and covered by a cadjan umbrella (335, p.215). They were to cook, but were not allowed to eat with the husbands for it was considered indecent and contrary to custom (251, p.158). How extreme their home-bound existence was, is indicated by their very surnames, which some Namboodiri women use even today. After their names, almost as a Namboodiri women's surname, they were called antharjanam, or an "inside-person", a reference to their being inside their large homes all their lives (286, p.19 and 329, p.127).

Like the Brahmin ladies in other parts of the country the Namboodiri women observed perpetual widowhood, but they did not shave their heads or in any other way disfigure themselves (484, p.136). Disfiguring of widows was done among higher castes elsewhere, probably as a declaration of their widowhood and to ensure that they did not attract the attention of other males. In one sense, the Namboodiri males were largely very mundane persons and some even just pleasure-seekers, though there were also a number of scholarly men among them. But most of them considered that all properties including women were Parasurama's gift to them* (349, p.10 and 236, p.210). Absolute freedom in sexual life

* According to legend, Parasurama, son of the great Rishi Jamadagni and his wife Renuka, was one of the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Krishna. The land of Kerala is said to have been created by him. The legend holds that Parasurama threw his Parasu (mazhu or axe) across the Arabian sea from Gokarnam, now in Karnataka, to Kanyakumari (now in Tamil Nadu) and that the sea water receded upto the spot where it fell at Kanyakumari. The tract of territory so thrown up is said to constitute the land of Kerala.

was assumed by some, as the right of every male Namboodiri and absolute surrender to them was ordained for the females of lower castes.

A Namboodiri girl suffered the worst pangs of isolation when she attained puberty. She was not allowed to mingle with or even be seen by the male members of even her own family, including her own brothers. A married woman was allowed to see only her husband and an unmarried one only her father among the males. If a girl was found friendly with a boy, she could be ostracized or excommunicated or driven out of her home for so called immoral conduct. She, therefore, lived enveloped in a cloud of fear (271, p.117).

Thus the life of the Namboodiri women up to roughly the first quarter of the 20th century was very deplorable. The well-known writer and social reformer V.T.Bhattathiripad, sums up the sad plight of the Namboodiri women in the following words:

In the social set-up of the Namboodiri community, the individual, especially woman was insignificant. They were scape-goats of male ascendancy that formed the axis of the society. Dowry, family tradition and polygamy were the holy weapons employed to destroy their personality and they were merely playthings in the social hierarchy (259, p.38).

Nair Women and their Social and Familial Life

The status of the women of the Nair caste, next in the hierarchical order of the caste system in Kerala, was however quite different from that of the Namboodiri women. They enjoyed a large degree of social freedom and, perhaps influence, than the women of

the Namboodiri caste (50, p.100). Many of them were literate (335, p.38). Female literacy in the erstwhile Travancore State is reported to have been less than half a per cent. In 1875 in total 5,377 women were reported to have been able to read and write, among whom nearly half were Nairs (304, p.18). They were not dependent on their husbands. Gopala Panikker described a Nair family thus:

A mother and all her daughters, all her brothers and sisters, and the descendants on the sister's side, in short, all the women's relatives on the female side, however distant their relationship, live together in the same block of buildings, have a common table, enjoy all her property, and share it after her death in common with one another (377, p.14).

Marumakkathayam (matrilinearity) and tharawad (joint family) have been associated with Nairs, though these were not exclusive to the Nairs. Logan, quoting Gundert, has listed 26 castes of Malabar which followed marumakkathayam system (329, p.155).

C.J.Fuller wrote in 1976 thus:

In the past, the Nayars lived in matrilineal joint families, known as taravads. The taravad comprised all the matrilineal descendants of a common ancestress and a child, ofcourse, belonged to its mother's taravad. A taravad might have consisted of a set of sisters, their brothers, their children and their daughters' children, but many taravads contained a much wider span of relatives. For instance, it might have included the matrilineal descendants of several sets of sisters, each of these sets being linked through a common mother's mother, or more remote ancestress.

A taravad might have had twenty, thirty or even more members, all living together in one large house. Each taravad was an independent economic unit; its members collectively owned property from which they derived their livelihood (287, p.2).

Nair women in many parts of Kerala under the marumakkathayam system proper, did not depend upon husbands for maintenance. It is difficult for the modern mind to comprehend the nature of their relationship as it is very difficult to define it in terms of today's norms. A woman of a marumakkathayam family may enter into marriage or sambandham (alliance) with men of her own caste or with men belonging to a higher caste. Women are reported to have had a say in entering into a sambandham (382, p.36).

It is also stated that they also had the freedom to end their marriage or sambandham at any time they wanted. A woman who had used the latter freedom was not necessarily looked down upon as long as it did not border on promiscuity. This was the case with widows also. Widow marriage was an accepted practice (382, p.38). All these were something unheard of in most of the other parts of India. They did not show any reluctance to enter into sambandhams with Namboodiris and that this often enhanced their status in the family. The prestige of a Nair girl went up often on the number of Namboodiris she was able to court (448, p.93).

Nair women as well as women of certain lower castes in the Malabar area loved heroic deeds and that they themselves sometimes practised the martial arts. They took delight in attending public functions. James Forbes describes a special kind of a festival on the full moon day in September. After the monsoon, when a serious

engagement with bows and arrows, spears and lances took place between two sections of Nair families, which determined the prestige of the respective families, Nair women have been reported to be present at such festivals, well-attired and covered with ornaments (335, p.91).

Though the Nair women enjoyed considerable social influence, they also suffered from certain disabilities. The proper form of presenting themselves before an honoured or respectable person was to be, by custom, with uncovered breasts and those who acted contrary to the custom were punished severely. The Rani of Attingal in South Kerala is thus reported to have ordered the breasts of a woman to be cut off, for daring to appear before her after covering her upper part in 1682 (383, p.295 and 335, pp.61-62). This custom of uncovering breasts by Nair women in Travancore continued till 1865, in which year it was abolished by a royal decree (383, p.295 and 335, pp.61-62).

The tali rite and the sambandham were two cardinal features of the traditional Nair marriage system (287, p.99). The tali rite used to be performed with great pomp and was largely attended. Before puberty, each Nair girl underwent the talikettukalyanam (ceremony of tying the tali). When the girl had her first menses a ceremony was conducted announcing the advent of puberty. This particular puberty rite was known as thirandukuli or vayassariyi-kkal. On attaining sexual maturity, they are allowed to enter into sambandham which was their marriage and which involved sexual relationship. Sambandhams could be broken by either party at will. If a Nair woman was convicted of caste offence of a serious nature, she could be excommunicated from her caste and thrown out of her

tharawad (347, p.273). Nair women were free to have sambandhams with Namboodiris or men of their own caste, but not with men below their caste. In certain parts of Kerala, during certain months such as of the South West monsoon of June-July-August, the members of the lower castes like Pulayas, Mannans etc. may even permit themselves to abduct a Namboodiri or Nair woman. This was known as pulappedi or mannappedi (349, p.268). This was not, however, very prevalent.

Thus though the Nair women enjoyed a higher status than women of all other castes, except the Namboodiris, they too were subjected to certain unwholesome customs and practices of the period. With regard to social freedom, they enjoyed a better position than the Namboodiri women.

As Bhaskaran Unni states, their life was restricted to the kitchen and the house, where they looked after the household stores, the dairy products like ghee, milk etc., mainly overseeing that the maid servants worked properly or took accounts of the clothes given to the washerman for washing etc. (257, p.293). By the behaviour of her kith and kin, as well as of the society around, she was given the impression that she was a second class citizen in her own society (257, p.294).

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, the well-known social historian, writes that "the woman who does not yield to the wishes of the man of the same or superior caste is immoral and is to be put to death immediately" (383, pp.315-316). There might be a bit of exaggeration in such a statement but this is indicative of the status of woman compared to that of man.

The Nadar and the Eazhava Women

The social conditions of the Nadars in the southern most taluk and of the Eazhavas in the erstwhile Travancore area were deplorable in the beginning of the 19th century. The Nadar and the Eazhava women, who were untouchables but were considered above the outcastes such as the Pulayas and Parayas in social position, were even forbidden to wear any clothing above the waist (257, p.743). This was especially so in South Travancore. The local rulers regarded this practice as ordained by religion and they, therefore, implemented it with rigidity and harshness. This was to establish the superiority of the higher castes over them and to distinguish them from women of the higher castes. This compulsion on the part of the savarnas or the upper castes sowed the first seeds of open discontent among the lower castes. This resulted later in the outbreak of the Channar* revolt in South Travancore in 1828 (257, p.743).

* Channars

The Channars are a class of Hindus who originally belonged to the Tinnevelly district of Tamil Nadu and the southernmost taluks of erstwhile Travancore. They are different from the Channars of the Malabar area who enjoy a higher social status, just below the Nairs. The Channars of the South belong to the SC/ST category, while the Channars of Malabar are OBCs. They belong to one of the races that are commonly classed as Dravidians, Tamil being their mother tongue. The Channars of Travancore seem to have migrated into the southern taluks of Travancore either from or through the district of Tinnevelly. Their hereditary occupation is that of agricultural workers and of climbing the palmyra palm and the manufacture of coarse sugar, known as jaggery. The people of this caste are ordinarily called Channars by people of other castes, but they themselves use the term Nadar. The word Nadar is also used as a title. There are Hindus and Christian convert Nadars in southernmost Kerala who intermarry.

This revolt can in a way be described as the first organised struggle for freedom and liberation of the lower castes from the rigidities of the traditional caste system in the history of Kerala. The interesting part of it was that the revolt was over the question of the modesty of their women. They were able to wrest the right to wear tops or upper clothes only after undergoing great sufferings. This revolt brought about important changes in the social and political attitudes of the lower caste people in the erstwhile South Travancore area.

This 'upper-cloth revolt' was a great landmark in the social and political history of Kerala. It was for the first time that the weaker sections of the people of Kerala organised themselves into an open revolt against the dominance of the upper castes. It marked the beginnings of a series of protests of the backward communities for equality before law and equal protection of laws. Although the royal proclamation granting women the right to dress properly contained certain reservations, the Nadar and Channar

Eazhavas

The term 'Eazhava' is supposed to have come from 'Izham' corruption of 'Simhalam' (Ceylon or Sri Lanka). Tradition refers to the island of Ceylon as their original home. The introduction of the coconut tree into Kerala is attributed to them. They can, to some extent, be categorised along with the Channars of the Malabar region. In the caste hierarchy the Eazhavas of south Kerala and the Channars of North Kerala come just below Nairs. Dr. Caldwell, a great authority on South Indian Channars, says "It is tolerably certain that the Eazhavas and Tiyas who cultivate the coconut palm of Travancore are descendants of Channar coolies from Ceylon". Eazhavas are known as Chovans or Chogans in parts of the Central and North Travancore.

women sometimes ignored these reservations and exercised their full freedom in these matters at their own risk, viz., to dress decently and freely move about in the streets and market places in spite of strong opposition from the privileged classes (257, p.743).

It was in one sense this outburst of the suppressed classes that were echoed later in the 'Malayali Memorial', the Vaikom Satyagraha, the Guruvayoor Satyagraha and other similar socio-political movements for equality (456, p.157).

As a result of these social changes the women of the avarna (outcaste i.e., those who were outside the varna or caste system) were now allowed to carry umbrellas, use open roads, wear shoes or gold ornaments, carry pots of water on the hip, build houses higher than a single storey, milk cows or even use the ordinary language of the country (335, p.41). They were obliged to render 'oozhiyam'* to the government and to the privileged classes (335, p.41). Even when they were publicly molested, it was, often, neither questioned by the government nor by other savarna classes (caste groups) in general.

* Oozhiyam was a system of giving personal services free of charge to the government by low caste people. This system prevailed in the erstwhile States of Travancore and Cochin. Oozhiyam services were of two kinds, viz., (1) forced manual labour and (2) supply of vegetables and provisions to the palace, temples and oottupuras (charitable institutions where free meals were given to them by Brahmins). Manual labour was exacted for the requirements of the palace and other institutions, occasional repairs to public roads, assistance to the police in carrying messages and guarding prisoners and watching the villages. In fact, the system of oozhiyam or gratuitous service was used for harassing the low caste people in society. The force behind the system was coercive authority and the power of the government.

Social practices like talikettukalyanam, tirandukuli, (ceremonies when a girl comes of age) pulikudi (ceremonies when a girl becomes pregnant) etc. which prevailed among both the Nair and the Eazhava communities necessitated a good deal of expenditure, leading often to their economic impoverishment (250, p.251). Under the marumakkathayam system, prevalent among the Nairs and certain other caste groups a person was entitled to inheritance from his/her mother's family.

The system, however, favoured women more than men. With the break-up of the joint family system and the introduction of the 'alohari' or property inheritance by individuals as provided for under several enactments like the Nair Regulation Act of 1925 women were more favoured than men in the partition of the tharawad properties. While a woman was entitled to an equal share of the family properties for herself and separately for each of her children or grand children by daughters, men were entitled only to a single share. Their children were not individually and separately entitled to the father's property. But their children were entitled to an equal share of their mothers' tharawad properties. They could also stake a claim, as per the will of their father, for a share of his own personal earnings. This meant that under this inheritance system the wife and children of men in the Nair and Eazhava communities were not legally entitled to any inheritance from the man's family. This caused some resentment in the families (250, p.324).

Polygamy and polyandry were not uncommon, especially in the earlier periods. At a later period, the practice of the bridegroom's sister, presenting clothes and escorting the bride to her

new house, also came into vogue among the Eazhavas and Nairs (250, p.324). This inheritance system and related social practices are indicative of the higher status that the Nair and Eazhava women enjoyed compared to women in other communities.

The government officials who, by and large, belonged to the upper castes are reported to have shown unusual diligence in exacting payment of taxes from the lower caste families. Ringeltaube, the first protestant missionary in Kerala, has recorded many instances of such harsh treatment meted out to people of the lower castes for non-payment of taxes on their property. He says, "The women, in the absence of their husbands, are tortured by having rice pestles twisted into their hair or a great stone placed on four small pebbles on their backs standing all the time in an unnatural posture" (348, p.586). It has also been reported that chastity was considered a cardinal virtue by the Nadar and Eazhava women and that they proved to be good wives and affectionate mothers (458, p.22).

Low Caste Women and their Relative Status

To the lowest category belonged the outcastes who were often treated like slaves. This group was composed of the Pulayas, Parayas, Vedars and others. According to Mateer, they were steeped in ignorance (335, p.42). It was the women agricultural labourers who had a direct involvement with actual cultivation. Till the middle of the 19th century, the majority of them were "agrestic slaves" who were brought and sold along with or without the land on which they worked (181, p.35). These old 'agrestic slaves' are grouped today under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Buchanan who visited Malabar in 1800 found that husbands and wives were not

generally sold separately, but children could be separated from their parents and sometimes between themselves (181, p.35). But certain other writers have recorded some instances where women were sold separately from their families. These slaves were offered as presents to the friends or as gifts to the temples and were bought, sold and mortgaged in the same manner as land or cattle or any other similar property (335, p.43).

Horrible as it may appear now, these slave women and men were to move away from the road or path to an 'untouchable' distance on the approach of a high caste man or woman walking on the same path. They were also required to shout out about their presence on the path to warn in advance of their approach.

As Samuel Mateer has recorded,

It is most painful to see a poor and inoffensive woman, with a load on her back, or burdened with an infant, compelled to scramble up the steep sides of the road and retire into the jungle, to allow a high caste man to pass or seeking for a favourable chance to cross the highway, or go along it. she waits till one party has gone and then makes a dash but perhaps is balked by meeting another party in the opposite direction (334, p.290).

It is illustrative of the economic privations of these outcaste women when Anantha Krishna Iyer points out that "Pulaya women are sometimes seen kneeling in water to gather in their basket any grain that may have been left in the fields after harvest. They catch fish from the backwaters and make baskets and coarse mats for sale" (240, p.118).

One humiliating kind of tax that existed in certain parts of Kerala in the last century was the 'breast tax'. Young women aged between 16 and 35 belonging to such very low caste groups had to pay this tax (354, p.87). It is said that an Eazhava lady of Cherthala, unable to bear the severity and rigour of sircar (government) revenue officers entrusted with the duty of revenue collections, cut off one of her breasts and presented it to them and ended her life in profuse bleeding (320, pp.179-180). That place is still called 'Mulachi Parambu' meaning the 'Land of the Breast Woman' (354, p.87).

The slave women worked as actively as the men for a living. Most of them were engaged in agricultural operations, such as gathering leaves and cutting twigs for fertilizing, carrying them to fields, transplanting, weeding, reaping or threshing for paddy etc. They laboured in manuring the soil, planting or reaping throughout the day in the agricultural season. In the evenings, they returned to their huts, tired and hungry, to work again to cook rice and eat it with just some salt and raw chillies.

During the months of scarcity the Vedar women went to the jungles and satisfied their hunger with wild roots and tubers. The Pulayas ate crabs, tiny fishes, snails, eggs of red ants and the winged white ants (334, pp.200-215). They were not permitted to enter the markets or public roads and that affected their sales and purchases (334, p.215).

Superstitious beliefs and consequent cruelties multiplied their sorrows arising from ignorance and oppression. They attributed all their sufferings to the evil influence of malignant spirits. Young mothers lived in ceaseless terror of unknown

spiritual agencies out to harm their children. Sometimes, it is stated that young girls were sacrificed to satisfy the gods and goddesses. R.N.Yesudas cites one such incident from a Madras Church record. This did not happen in Kerala, but is still illustrative of the practices of the time. The record stated:

A zamindar was trying to build up a bund, which the waters carried away as often as he made the attempt. Some Brahmins told him that he would never succeed till he had offered upon the bund three young girls. Three girls of 14 or 15 years were selected, the dreadful sacrifice was made and the ground was stained by the blood of these innocent victims (458, p.24).

While commenting upon such superstitious beliefs Martha Mault, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, wrote: "perhaps there is no part in India where the devil is so much worshipped as in this" (458, p.24).

No legal form of marriage existed among the slaves. The mother enjoyed only very few rights over her children. Only the eldest born, whether son or daughter of a Pulaya couple belonged to the master of the father; the other children were the property of the master of the mother (446, p.71). In case of indigence, a Pulaya mother could sell a child, but not for more than sixty Panams* (446, p.71). Female slaves of the right age fetched a higher price on account of their capacity to 'produce children' (334, p.58).

* A Panam is a silver coin that was in prevalence in the old Travancore State. Its value was equivalent to four 'chakrams', each chakram being of the value of 1/28.5 of a rupee of that time. A Panam was thus one seventh of a rupee of those days.

Christian Women

There are two important communities, which exist outside the Hindu caste system in Kerala. They are the Mapillas or Malayali Muslims, found mostly in the Northern parts of Kerala and the Christians, found mainly in the erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Cochin in the southern half of Kerala (395, p.22).

The Christian women enjoyed a little more freedom in the family, when compared to women of other caste or religious groups. Visscher says that excepting for the St.Thomas Christians, all those who were converted by the Roman Catholics were either the slave children or people belonging to the lowest Hindu castes, lower than the Nadars or the Eazhavas. The lower castes joined Christianity to free themselves from the disabilities that they suffered under the Hindu caste order. And when they became Christians they hoped to become more liberated from the rigidities of the Hindu caste order, irrespective of sex, even though in practice they continued to experience some sort of a caste discrimination even after conversion. But they were permitted to enter some public places which were unapproachable to them earlier (446, p.113).

But even in the case of Christian women, some of the older customs prevailed. For example, it was not uncommon that they were married off at the age of six or seven to boys of 10 or 12 years of age. This was similar to the practice of the talikettu system of the caste Hindus. But, in the case of Christians, polygamy was prohibited (446, p.68). Yet they too maintained their own versions of the caste customs, based largely on the Hindu caste groups from among which they had been originally converted. Thus the 'higher

caste' Christians never permitted the lower caste ones inside the premises of their houses or allow themselves to intermingle with the "low caste Christians" (395, p.22). Marriages between the high caste and low caste Christians were prohibited. But, whether high caste or low caste, the Christian women, compared to others, enjoyed a little more freedom than women of comparable caste groups from among the Hindus. Claudius Buchanan wrote in 1811:

And the people of the neighbouring villages came round, women as well as men. The sight of the women assured me that I was once more (after a long absence from England) in a Christian country. For the Hindu women and the Mohammedan women, and in short, all women, who are not Christians, are accounted by the men of an inferior race and in general are confined to the house for life like irrational creatures (458, p.27).

Bartholomeo says that Christian women distinguished themselves by simplicity of manners, diligence and contentment (458, p.26). Syrian Christian families were patrilineal and patriarchal (303, p.18).

Emphasis on monogamy was the one enduring factor which had raised women's status in Christianity (303, p.18). There were other factors also. It may generally be said as a possible hypothesis that the higher the caste group, the lower the status of women. Nair women were an exception, because of their special inheritance system of matrilinearity which gave them some economic freedom and the rights of divorce and remarriage. Similarly, the poorer a family, the greater the contribution of women to the family economy and the higher the status of women in that family.

Christian women, especially in families that migrated to other parts of the state, worked as hard, if not harder than men. Their voice in the running of the family affairs was higher. This is especially so about the economically poorer families, even when in social hierarchy they ranked higher. Monogamy among Christians was partly the consequence of this economic interdependence between man and woman, even though religion also played a major part in the pursuit of the practice. It is perhaps truer to say that the lower the economic status of the family the higher would be the status of women and vice versa.

But the concept of permanency of marriage with no provision for divorce had in one sense affected adversely the status of women among the Catholics and some other groups. The Holy Bible emphasizes certain qualities of a woman such as her capacity for work, caring for her family, kindness and charity for the needy outside the home, and wisdom. She can participate in all religious ceremonies, though she has not been granted full ecclesiastic responsibility in the Church organisation, except among the Methodists (190, p.16). But, Christianity does not stress marriage as a woman's sole destiny. She has an independent moral entity and responsibility.

Because of this particular feature and tradition, Christian women were the first to come out into society and seek education and employment as nurses, doctors, teachers and also as social workers to serve the needy people (190, p.16). Though fewer taboos existed among or about Christian women, the basic concept of their inferiority to man was beyond dispute.

In general, the Catholic families of Kerala, both Syrian and Latin, were not different from the traditional Indian families with regard to the role relations* (464, p.277). The domination of the head of the family and also the special place of the male children in the family are, to some extent, still prevalent in Catholic families. The husband is in charge of the family finance, even where the woman is an active partner. All inheritance follows the male line (462, p.53). This was partly because of the dowry system. In theory, the wife is to be supported by the husband, but she has no strict right to the family properties or to the dowry she

* Syrian Christians are found in the erstwhile Central and North Travancore, in the Cochin State and in the Malabar district of the British India. They claim to be the descendants of the converts made by the Apostle St. Thomas on this coast or of early Christian immigrants from Persia or Mesopotamia. It is said that the members of the Church of Malabar are called Syrians not because they have a Syrian ancestry, but because they had a Syrian liturgy. They are not of the Syrian nation, but of the Syrian rite.

In addition to the Syrian Christians there are throughout Travancore a large number of Latin Catholics who follow the usual Latin rite. They are descendants of converts made in the last four centuries after the Portuguese landed in India and they have never used the Syrian rite. A majority of them have been converts from the fishermen community and are, therefore, seen in the coastal areas of the state. They are socially treated as inferior to the Roman or Syrian Catholics.

has brought in. The girls may expect a dowry which is negotiated and given by the father. After marriage, she is supposed to belong to her husband's family*.

Muslim Women

The Muslim community, found in larger numbers in the Malabar region, was another group which existed outside the hierarchical order of the Hindu community. Among the Muslims, polygamy was not prohibited by law or custom, but public opinion had discouraged the perpetuation of the practice (462, p.228). This has been especially so in the more recent times and among the educated Muslims.

* On 24th February 1986, the Division Bench of the Supreme Court of India pronounced a historic judgement in respect of Christian succession rights in a case filed by Mary Roy and others from Kerala. In the erstwhile Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions, the Christians followed three separate laws in respect of inheritance, namely, the Travancore Christian Succession Act (1916), the Cochin Christian Succession Act (1921) and the Indian Succession Act (1925) respectively.

As per the Travancore Christian Succession Act, the daughters were not legally entitled to get the father's property. They are only entitled to get dowry which is equivalent to one fourth of the property, the son gets his share or an amount of Rs.5,000/- whichever is less. But as per the Indian Succession Act, both the son and the daughter are entitled to get equal share of the father's property. Mary Roy and others challenged the constitutional validity of the Travancore Christian Succession Act in a country where equality before law or equal protection of laws to all persons is guaranteed.

The Supreme Court pronounced that validity of the Travancore Christian Succession Act, 1916, ended with effect from 1951 and that the Indian Succession Act, 1925 is applicable to all Christians in Kerala since then, as per the terms and conditions of a central law passed by the Parliament, after the acceptance of the Constitution of India. Therefore as far as Christian inheritance is concerned, both sons and daughters are now entitled to get the father's property equally.

Mohammedan law permits a male Muslim to have as many as four wives at a time. A fifth marriage is possible after a divorce, but this was not usual and was generally looked down upon. But it is not lawful for a Mohammedan woman to have more than one husband at a time (462, p.229).

According to Muslim law, any husband who is of a sound mind and has attained puberty may divorce his wife whenever he desires without assigning any reason, at his mere whim and caprice. A divorce (talak) may be effected orally or by a written document. But if a Muslim woman wants to seek a divorce vide the dissolution of the Muslim Marriage Act 1939, extremely difficult or rather impossible conditions are to be fulfilled.

Girls were traditionally married off just before or immediately after puberty. Marriage was usually arranged by the parents. It was not until 1894 that a Kerala Muslim took a Bachelor of Arts degree. He was from the Malabar area (303, p.19).

As a rule, women could not go to the mosque. They offered prayers at home. The main area of activity of the Muslim women was their home. There were only few opportunities for them to go out, especially among the economically better off sections.

The dowry system was widespread among the Muslims as among the Christians. In the matter of inheritance of property, Muslim women in Kerala, as in the rest of India, have claim for only half of the share of Muslim men.

The Muslim community was one in the matter of seclusion of women from men. The purdah system was universal, though it was not observed in Kerala as strictly as elsewhere. They considered it a sin to show themselves off to strangers. This discouraged them

from attending schools. The wealthy families may arrange private tuition in their own homes for educating the young girls, but this education was more often confined to the Koran and other religious texts. But with the weakening or even the disappearance of the purdah system, this condition gradually changed (462, p.53).

Women's Inequality and the Caste System

The conclusion of the foregoing analysis is that traditionally women suffered directly from the general male domination and this was aggravated by casteism and other social customs which were prevalent in Kerala in 19th century. Uneducated, even illiterate and superstitious as they were, it was easy for others to subject women to all kinds of domination and exploitation. Even women who belonged to the richer and the higher caste families, like the Namboodiris, suffered on account of male domination. Even when women of the higher caste might have enjoyed a marginally better status than their counterparts in the lower caste families, they were also victims of sexual exploitation by members of the higher castes and of greater economic exploitation in wages than in the case of males.

In short, irrespective of whether a woman belonged to the Hindu, Christian or Muslim religion or to the higher castes or lower castes, they had to suffer more as women than men. There was little pride in being a woman in those days.

The Arrival of Missionaries

The process of modernisation, initiated in part through the introduction of English education and western liberal thoughts and the consequent efforts of the local rulers and social reformers to

bring about social changes, went a long way in shaping the present day social and political status of the women of Kerala. With the spread of education, the liberation of women from the traditional social order was initiated in Kerala.

Direct state activity in the field of education began in 1817 when Rani Gouri Parvati Bai, who was acting as the Regent of the Travancore State, with the assistance of Col. Munro, introduced free and compulsory education at the primary level in government schools in Travancore (350, p.299 and 237, p.459).

Margaret Mead, a missionary of the London Missionary Society (LMS), started a boarding school for girls at Nagercoil in South Travancore in 1819*. This was the first girls' school in the southern part of Kerala (443, p.692). The girls' schools, founded at the missionary stations, trained the girls in western concepts of order, cleanliness, and work. It also educated them in the English language. This helped them to move up the social scale.

The LMS missionaries concentrated their activities in the South Travancore area and worked especially for the uplift of the female population. In central Kerala, the work for female education was undertaken by the missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The Basel Mission and other Christian

* Nagercoil is at present the headquarters of the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. This district became part of Tamil Nadu with the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. Till then, Kanyakumari district and its headquarters at Nagercoil were part of the erstwhile princely State of Travancore and later of the Travancore-Cochin State.

Missions contributed to the spread of female education in Malabar and Cochin.

The missionaries drew the attention of the government to the need for educating the females and got schools opened for them. With the missionary activities in the field of female education Kerala, and especially its southern part, began to excel other parts of the country in this respect.

The Reign of Ranis

The erstwhile State of Travancore was ruled by three princesses on different occasions - two in the 19th century and the third in the 20th century. Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai (1810 - 1815) assumed the reigns of government in 1810 after the demise of Balarama Varma (349, p.327). Gouri Parvati Bai (1815 - 1829) acted as Regent during the period of the minority of His Highness Swathi Tirunal and Rani Sethu Lakshmi Bai acted as Regent from 1824 to 1831 during the minority of His Highness Sri Chithira Tirunal Balarama Varma (349, pp.329-334).

Their administrations were noted for their relative broad-mindedness and their more liberal attitude towards social freedom and equality. They made this liberal attitude an objective to build a more modern state based on certain considerations of social equality without discrimination of sex, creed, caste or religion. This helped to bring about major changes in the social and political role of women in the state.

The reign of Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai saw the introduction of several enlightened reforms. On assuming the reigns of administration she appointed the British Resident, Col. Munro as Diwan and she was ably assisted in the task of administration by him.

Slavery was abolished in Travancore by a royal proclamation in 1812 though the total abolition of slavery and the enfranchisement of slaves took place only in 1855 (349, p.328). The scheme of judicial administration was totally reformed. She also took steps to do away with corruption in administration.

The regency of Gouri Parvati Bai was an era of administrative and social progress in the history of the Travancore State. Agriculture and trade registered remarkable progress during her period (349, p.329). She also introduced several reforms to establish greater social freedom and civic equality. The women of the Eazhava and other lower caste communities were permitted to wear ornaments of gold and silver, which were forbidden before, except on payment of atiyars which was a special payment to the king for this privilege (238, p.254 and 349, p.329). It was Rani Gouri Parvati Bai who relieved the females from the burden of carrying torches during the royal processions (236, p.480).

All persons, irrespective of caste and status, were permitted by a royal proclamation to have tiled roofs for their houses. Christian missions were given all facilities to carry on their evangelising activities (349, p.329). Thus her regency was an epoch of liberal administration.

The regency of Setu Lakshmi Bai was also a very remarkable period in the history of Travancore. She appointed M.E.Watts as the Diwan and he helped her to introduce a number of reforms in the state. One of the notable reforms of the regency was the formation of village panchayats under a law passed in 1925 for developing self-government in rural areas (349, p.334). She also introduced some progressive social reforms like the abolition of the devadasi

system in the temples of South Travancore and of the primitive custom of animal sacrifice in temples. The Nair Regulation Act of 1925 which sought to make changes in the law of inheritance among Nairs was another important measure of the period.

In the history of social reforms in the state, the administration of the three princesses, spanning a total period of more than a quarter century, stands out as a major watershed. The reforms they initiated were continued under subsequent administrations also.

Religious and Social Reform Movements

The early decades of the 20th century witnessed the beginnings of powerful social reform movements in Kerala. In the context of certain economic changes and the spread of education, strong social reform movements against certain disabilities and evils associated with the operation of the caste system, took shape. The demand for social equality initiated by these social reform movements can, in a larger historical sense, be described as the earliest steps towards democratic mass movements in Kerala. These movements originated mostly in the erstwhile Travancore state of South Kerala.

In North India the social reformers were drawn mostly from among the high caste Brahmins and other Hindus. But in Kerala the rise of social reformers was mostly from among the ranks of the backward communities (397, pp.16-17). The social reforms from among the Hindus took a concrete form through the teachings and later the organisational activities of Sree Chattampi Swamikal (1854 - 1924) and Sree Narayana Guru (1856 - 1928), (349, p.381).

The social reform movements initiated by Chattampi Swamikal and Sree Narayana Guru made a great impact on the public life of Kerala during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (349, p.414).

Chattampi Swamikal belonged to the Nair community. His work had, in general, led to a social awakening among Nairs in particular and other Hindus in general (349, p.372). A sense of decline or lack of direction had gradually pervaded the Nair community, especially after the break up of the joint family system and this gave an impetus to the spirit of reform that expressed itself in the activities of men like Chattampi Swamikal. This was also evident in the literary works of the time, in the press and in organisational activities. This had over a period of time resulted in certain legislative enactments (120, p.70).

The Yogakshema Movement among the young Namboodiris was started in 1908. It agitated for the right to marriage of all the junior Namboodiri males from within their own community itself, to popularise the study of English among them and to abolish the purdah system among the Namboodiri females (346, pp.469-70). The Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham or Youth League, a radical organisation under the leadership of V.T.Bhattathiripad and K.N.Kuttan Namboodiri, and their monthly periodical, "The Unni Namboodiri", helped to disseminate progressive ideas of social revolution among the members of the Namboodiri community (346, pp.469-70). The movement had its impact among the lower communities as well.

The literary creations of certain Namboodiri writers like 'Ritumati' (1969) (the Pubescent), 'Atmahuti' (1964) (Self-immolation) and 'Adukalayil Ninnu Arangathekku' (1978) (From

Kitchen to Stage) portrayed some of the issues faced by Namboodiri women like the right to property, polygamy, the practice of old men marrying young girls and the right of women to have a say in their marriage etc. They reflected the desire for changing the prevailing practices and values among the Namboodiris (544, p.62).

The contribution and leadership provided by Parvati Nenmanimangalam deserve special mention in this movement for Namboodiri women's emancipation in central Kerala. The Namboodiri women used to assemble in the kitchens of Namboodiri homes (525, p.396). Such an organised effort for emancipation was not evidenced by women of the lower castes, probably because the problem of the oppression of women was more acute among the Namboodiri families than among others.

Lalithambika Antharjanam, a well-known literary figure in Malayalam belonging to the Namboodiri caste, has, in her autobiography and other literary works, described the sad plight of the Namboodiri women in the early decade of this century and the movements for their emancipation (245, pp.73-74).

Chandu Menon's powerful novel 'Indulekha' (1959) highlighted not only the changing self-perception of their own social life among the Nairs, but also of the educated woman as an individual person with a right of choice in marriage. Indulekha, the heroine of the novel, is well read and exercises her right to select her husband in the matrilineal household and to make decisions about her own life even if it went against the wishes of the karanavar or the male head of the Nair family (341).

The well-known Malayalam novelist C.V.Raman Pillai, in his novel Marthanda Varma (1891), has depicted two female characters in utter contrast to each other (393). The passive role that women had to play in a typical Nair family is represented in the character of Parukutty in the novel Marthanda Varma. But the character of Subhadra, depicted in the same novel, is in total contrast to that of Parukutty. Subhadra may perhaps be described as the first politically active woman character in Malayalam literature (512, p.28).

The rise of caste organisations at that time helped to rouse different sections of the Hindus from their age-old slumber and to give the Hindu social reform movements in Kerala a new sense of direction which later took a political turn. Some of these organisations later developed themselves into very powerful movements, exerting considerable influence on the subsequent political developments in the state. Thus it is seen that the religious and social reform movements in Kerala played a vital role in arousing a new social consciousness among women in the state under various castes and helped them to be more active participants in the national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The general political awakening in the nation, due to the independence struggle, had its response in Kerala also in the first quarter of this century.

Kerala Women in the Freedom Movement

The national freedom struggle had varying impacts in the different regions of pre-independent Kerala. Till the 1930s there had been no organised political movement in the two princely states of Travancore and Cochin. The Indian National Congress had adopted

a policy of non-interference in the affairs of the princely states. But a nationalist body called the All India States Peoples' Conference had been formed with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as President. This was a loose federation of the organisations of people in the princely states, agitating against princely autocracy and for 'responsible' government. In Malabar, however, which was directly under British rule, pro-Indian National Congress Political Conferences were held from time to time. The people here were alert and watchful of the developments all over India against the British rule. They were consequently considerably influenced by the political developments outside.

This phase of the growth of the Indian National Congress and its activities was represented in British Malabar by the educated classes who took a lively interest in its work. The Home Rule League that began its activities in India in 1916 under the leadership of Annie Besant, and the political activities of Lokmanya Balagangadhar Tilak evoked positive response in Malabar. The Malabar District Conference held at Palghat in Malabar on 4th and 5th March 1916 under the presidentship of Annie Besant was an important landmark in the history of freedom struggle in the northern part of Kerala (275, p.14). A branch of the Home Rule League was started in Malabar in 1916.

It is from this year onwards that a continuous record of nationalist activity in that area came to be maintained (346, p.232). Branch committees of the Congress and of the Home Rule League were organised in several villages in the Malabar District. Public meetings were held and political consciousness aroused. A large number of people, irrespective of caste and creed, actively

participated in these conferences. But women from aristocratic and middle families, as a class, did not actively participate in such public activities (346, p.232). Politics continued to be mostly a men's domain.

But the seeds of women's political activism in Kerala had already been sown in the social reform movements of the early 1920s. Struggles that developed along with the independence movement, such as the temple entry struggle, Yogakshema movement, struggle for reservation of jobs in public services for backward castes, and the struggles of peasants for security of tenure attracted certain sections of women. This helped to improve the social position of women also (337, p.128). Attention was drawn to the social conditions of women also, even though the above were mainly social reform movements for the uplift of the lower caste people.

The increasing participation of women in various socio-political movements enabled them to widen their interests and opened up new vistas before them. This led, in course of time, for a demand for free, universal and compulsory women's education. It was realised that women's education was a necessary precondition for women's improved position and status in society (523, p.14).

The active participation of women in public life was, at first, confined to the social reform movements and the trade union movements, mainly in the Travancore area and the peasants' movements in the Malabar area. The growth of the nationalist and the communist movements in the late 1930s and the movement for 'responsible' or democratic government under the aegis of the Maharajah based on the British model in the princely state of

Travancore, formed the background of the anti-imperialist, nationalist and democratic movement which came up subsequently (337, p.129).

The general political awakening in the Travancore State soon manifested itself in the agitation for the reform of the Legislative Council of 1919 (346, p.60). Women in Travancore had exercised equal right of voting with men (238, p.328). The franchise was a statutory right to members of all communities and also to women. But it was not universal and was confined to a section of the population based on the extent of property ownership.

Kerala women were, thus, in a better position than their counterparts elsewhere in India. The princely government had enacted laws in 1921, providing for special representation for women in the state legislature. Not less than two seats in the Assembly were thus reserved for women and these seats were to be filled in by nomination (238, p.328).

But, at the same time, there was prohibition against women standing for election as members of the legislature. To the women in England and USA, franchise was a reward for their contribution and service in the First World War. But a section of the Kerala women became eligible to be members of the legislature of the state in the year 1922-23, with the establishment of the Sri Moolam Praja Sabha (Sri Moolam Popular Assembly) in the Travancore State (346, p.63).

Prior to 1920 there was no special legislative machinery in the Cochin State, though, occasionally, certain committees were appointed to help the government in drafting Bills. In October

1918, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, the Maharaja of Cochin announced his intention to associate his people "more directly and formally" with the government. The constitutional reforms in 1920 suggested that franchise should be as broad as possible, characterised by the exercise of the right to vote by all the adult members in a family, including women (346, p.378). Thus, the new proposals contained also the enlightened principle of enfranchisement of the women of the state (346, p.379). Of course, they were based on paternalistic benevolence, yet it was also indicative of a progressive move towards the evolution of a fully constitutional or responsible government. Cochin was hailed as the first princely state to have set the stage for a responsible government. The new reform was looked upon as an important stage in the constitutional progress of Indian states.

The social reform movements were expressions of the quest for a new social order based on egalitarian concepts of social justice (406, p.200). In the rest of India the freedom struggle primarily aimed at getting rid of the British rule. In India the social reform movements of the 19th century had gradually become enlarged into the nationalist movement. In the same way, agitations by different sections of people in Kerala against certain social disabilities suffered by them had grown into a larger sense of social justice. These had become the foundations for the struggle for freedom and representative government. The struggle for equality of women with men was, thus, a part of this larger struggle, something which had not been witnessed in many other parts of India.

The commencement of the Civil Disobedience Movement under Gandhi's leadership in 1921 and the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 had given a new direction to the freedom movement in India. These developments were reflected in Kerala politics also. The nationalist movement drew a good number of Kerala women out of their sheltered homes. Their participation in the nationalist movement gave them not only a consciousness of their own strength, but also a new vision of their rightful place in society. They were assisted in this by the fact that the movement was supported by their families also. All this made women aware of their responsibility towards the larger society outside their own families. They thus organised themselves to discover their proper place at home and in society (437, p.35). Women did not enter politics as silent spectators, but as active participants in the non-violent struggle for freedom.

The civil disobedience movement was confined mainly to Malabar which was under direct British rule. The All Malabar Karshaka Sangham and the Trade Union Congress helped to bring the nationalist movement to the grass roots level (327, p.2). These movements of peasants and workers inaugurated an era of militant struggles in Kerala. At that time Malabar was under direct colonial rule as part of the Madras Presidency. It was a period of strong anti-feudal and anti-imperialist agitations by the peasants and the working class. People suffering from poverty and oppression revolted against landlords who were given protection by the colonial rulers. In these political campaigns Congressmen and Communists were equally active, the latter perhaps more (327, p.2).

The political developments in Travancore and Cochin were partly influenced by communal forces. The leading political event in Travancore in the last decade of the 19th century was the Malayali Memorial of 1891. This was a mass memorandum, submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore against the imposition of non-Malayalee brahmins from outside the state in the state administration and the policies pursued in this respect. There was also the agitation against the Dewanship of the non-Malayalee V.S.Subramoniya Iyer, known as 'Pattar Prakshobanam' from 1929 to 1931. The 'Nivarthana' or abstention movement* from 1931 onwards, the promotion of the Joint Congress and finally the emergence of the Travancore State Congress in 1938 were the major political developments of the period (430, p.7). There were peasant agitations against landlords. The industrial workers in the coir industry belt of Cherthala and Alappuzha in Travancore organised agitations against the coir factory owners. And it was their experience that the princely government headed by the Dewan sided

* Abstention Movement

The constitutional reforms of 1932 in Travancore during the regime of Sri Chitra Thirunal provided for restricted franchise, limited to men having possession of property and other specified qualifications. Because of this restriction, the Eazhavas, the Muslims and the Christians who constituted nearly 70 per cent of the population, apprehended that they would secure for them only a smaller number of seats in the enlarged legislature than the Nairs. They demanded the apportioning of the seats on the basis of population. When the government refused to concede to their demands they started the Abstention Movement, exhorting the voters to abstain from voting. The government, at last, conceded their demands to a certain extent by introducing communal reservation in the appointment to public services.

with the coir factory owners. These agitations came to a culmination with the declaration of an independent Travancore State in 1947 by the then Dewan C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer, soon after the announcement of Britain quitting India. The Dewan tried to impose what was called the American model Constitution on the state and this led to a well-organised mass movement against it (430, p.7).

The Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25) was organised to agitate for the right of the untouchables to temple entry. The Siva temple at Vaikom is very holy to the Hindus. As in the case of all temples, admission to the temple was restricted to the higher caste Brahmins, Nairs, etc. Eazhavas and, of course, the untouchable outcastes had no right to enter the temples for worship. The Vaikom Satyagraha was organised to get the right to temple entry for the lower castes. This was a major turning point in the history of social reform movements in the state. The agitation attracted active women's participation (349, p.378). The satyagraha movement had the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi who himself visited Vaikom to bless the agitation. Interestingly, a large number of the members of the higher caste Hindus also took an active part in the satyagraha. Along the route of the jatha or procession from Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram, a group of women from Mayyanad near Kollam extended a hearty welcome to the jatha. They arranged "pidiyari fund" (a handful of rice movement, as contribution from each family, every day) to feed the satyagrahis (398, p.91). They also organised a public meeting under the presidentship of N.Meenakshi Amma (346, p.127). The involvement of these women in such public activities provided them enough training to take part in the freedom struggle which followed.

During the early years of the nationalist movement, women at first took part in the propagation of the Khadi and Swadesi movement. But many of them later plunged headlong into the movement, even courting arrest and imprisonment in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 and the successive Civil Disobedience Movements from 1921 onwards (346, p.273). Khadi and Swadesi became important symbols of nationalist work in Kerala as in other parts of India. Gandhi looked upon Khadi work as the foundation of India's economic freedom.

At Kannur, on 28th April 1931, the Rashtriya Sthree Sabha (National Women's Organisation) was formed. It consisted of 35 women. Its object was to organise training classes in spinning, popularise the study of Hindi and propagate prohibition and Swadesi (346, p.232). Women also formed committees for effective Khadi work. They organised a number of classes in spinning, carried on a house-to-house campaign and distributed charka and cotton among a large number of people throughout Malabar (346, p.196).

Malabar women who, by custom, never used to participate in public activities thus threw themselves wholeheartedly into the nationalist movement. This participation was particularly noticeable after 1930, when the Salt Satyagraha was launched. Even Namboodiri women of orthodox, aristocratic families gave up their exclusiveness from society and undertook political activities. The Yogakshema Mahasabha and the Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangham (Namboodiri Youth League) encouraged them to enter into active social and political activities. In the Malabar area even a few Christian women from rich families came forward to take part in the nationalist movement, even though the Christian community, in these

early years, was hesitant to identify themselves with the nationalist movement.

Women in large numbers from all castes, religions and classes participated in the freedom movement. A.V.Kuttimalu Amma, Kamala Prabhu, C.Kunhikavu Amma, Kunhilakshmi Amma, M.Karthyani Amma, Mattilda Kallen, Grace Aaron, Margaret Pavamani, M.K.Janaki Amma and Iswari Amma were some of the earliest women freedom fighters to lead the nationalist movement in the Malabar area (299, p.229).

It was symbolic of the patriotic fervour of Kerala women that, when the news about women satyagrahis in Bombay being subjected to cruel treatment got around, some women of high social standing in Kozhikode took out a protest procession on Jawahar Day, 14 November 1930 (346, p.232). Narayani Amma, her aged mother and other elderly women present on the occasion blessed the young women who were proceeding to defy the law and court arrest. Though they were stopped by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate they marched forward. They were arrested. That was the first occasion in which women were arrested in Kerala for the cause of the freedom movement. In pronouncing judgement, the Magistrate specially remarked that this was the first time that women in Malabar joined the political movement (346, p.215). Karthyani Amma alone was taken to jail.

The leaders organised their camps at Verkot House, which belonged to an old and aristocratic family and was the venue of many important events during the civil disobedience movement. Many members of the family, including old women, were active in the nationalist movement and courted imprisonment during the period 1930 to 1947 (346, p.183).

On December 6, 1930, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee

(KPCC) and the War Council were declared as unlawful associations by a notification issued in the Fort St. George Gazette of the Government of Madras Presidency. On 11 December 1930 these two organisations were declared dissolved. A senior Congress leader designated 'Dictator' was to be in entire command of the Satyagraha in Kerala, in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Potheri Madhavan was nominated as the first 'Dictator'. In case of arrest, the Dictator was to nominate his successor (346, p.220). That was the proposed arrangement.

Women also did not lag behind in taking the responsibilities of Dictatorship. In the first period of Dictatorship during the civil disobedience movement there were seven Dictators. Among these four were women. Gracy Aaron in 1931 became the third Dictator of the KPCC. She was the first woman to assume office as Dictator. She was nominated as a member of the KPCC in June 1930 (360, p.1). On 13th January 1931 she led a procession to the Kozhikode beach, accompanied by P.Devaki Amma, Smt.L.S.Prabhu, Smt.Ganesh Pai, Vedavathi Ammal and two male volunteers. She hoisted the tricolour flag there and led the public burning of foreign cloth in support of the Swadesi movement (360, p.1). All the women and men volunteers were arrested by the police. They were sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment and asked to give 'guarantee of good behaviour' for six months after release from jail.

When L.S.Prabhu, the fourth Dictator was arrested, he nominated Easwari Ammal, wife of T.R.Krishnaswamy Iyer, as his successor (360, p.39). Easwari Ammal, the fifth Dictator, and M.K.Janaki Amma had already courted imprisonment at Kozhikode in 1931. The sixth Dictator K.Kunhilakshmi Amma and other prominent

leaders appealed to the people of Kerala to observe Motilal Day in accordance with Gandhi's instructions (360, p.114).

K.K.Kunhilakshmi Amma, a teacher in Cochin Government Service and N.Sarojini Bai, a teacher under the Malabar District Board resigned their office to join the Satyagraha movement. They went to the Big Bazar, Kozhikode holding the tri-colour flag high and posted themselves before a piecegoods shop selling foreign clothes as part of the Swadesi movement (346, p.222). This was the first occasion in which women in Malabar undertook picketing. The violation of the forest laws and boycott of foreign clothes and liquor shops resulted in women being subjected to police repression. The visit of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya to Kerala in 1931 gave a big fillip to women's participation in the nationalist movement in Malabar (346, p.226).

On her arrest, Kunhilakshmi Amma nominated Margaret Pavamani, wife of Benjamin Pavamani of the Kozhikode Bar, as the next Dictator. She was the fourth woman Dictator. It was Margaret Pavamani who nominated a New Kerala Provincial Congress Committee as an emergency measure. The 59 members nominated by her included new blood, besides members of the old guard (346, p.225).

Educated women from well-to-do families in Malabar came in larger numbers to the forefront. They picketed the foreign cloth shops. In Palghat such work was organised by Smt.T.R.Krishnaswamy Iyer, Smt.R.V.Sarma, Mattilda Kallen, C.R.Devaki Amma and M.K.Janaki Amma, who, with the aid of an enthusiastic band of volunteers and some of the members of the local bar, picketed the leading wholesale and retail shops in the town and spread the message of Gandhiji even in the remote villages.

In Kozhikode the biggest commercial centre of Malabar, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, who had visited Malabar at that time, took up the leadership of the movement. She was ably assisted by a band of enthusiastic women workers. They picketed the shops of the leading cloth merchants selling foreign cloth. The men organisers laboured to maintain orderliness and discipline (346, p.226).

At Thalassery Margaret Pavamani and P.M.Kamaladevi, assisted by a few women volunteers, organised the picketing. At Kannur also women came forward and from 19th March onwards picketed the foreign cloth shops selling foreign cloth.

Women who took active part in the Swadesi movement generally hailed from respectable middle class families, mostly of the higher castes, and were educated. Their participation in the movement enhanced its appeal and respectability. The women had originally started their political work through the Khadi and Swadesi movement. But soon, many of them entered into more direct and active politics, courting arrest and imprisonment.

In May 1931 the Provincial Women's Conference was held at Badagara in Malabar under the Presidentship of Padmavathi Asher of Tirupur. The conference resolved that all Hindus, irrespective of caste differences, should have free access to all public places and demanded the recognition of the equal rights of women, consistent with their number, to enter into service in all administrative institutions (346, p.232).

Khadi Pracharana Sangh, formed at Kozhikode by a large number of educated persons including a number of women, tried to instil political consciousness and the nationalist spirit in the minds of women. M.Kartyayani Amma, who had given up her job in government

service to take part in the nationalist movement, was one of the most active workers of the Sangh. During the Swadesi movements of 1931 and 1932 the picketing of foreign cloth shops in different parts of Kerala became quite widespread. The leaders included many women. They went on foot to the various parts of each taluk, organising route marches through villages, singing national songs, spinning on the takli and addressing public meetings. This movement was led mostly by educated women, assisted by men volunteers, including lawyers and students. In the first Swadesi Art and Industrial Exhibition conducted at Kozhikode and in the third All India Khadi and Swadesi Exhibition held at Kannur in 1932, the Women's Indian Association and Mahila Sangh of Kozhikode took an active part. Public meetings were held in connection with the exhibition in which also women participated in large numbers (360, p.26).

In 1932 a second period of 'Dictatorship' in the KPCC dawned in Malabar. Among the 25 'Dictators', three were women also. Lalitha Prabhu became the fifth 'Dictator'. She was arrested and fined for her political activities. In order to realise the fine, the government officials forcibly took away all the movables in her house through a court order and tried to auction them. But the local people did not participate in the auction and there were no buyers. This made the authorities more angry. They tried to seize her "Mangalya Sutra", the sanctified 'tali' symbolising marriage, which she resisted strongly. As press reports described it, in the public court she roared like a lioness that no one could take away her tali as long as she was alive and that they could remove it only from her dead body (567, p.2 and 538, p.7).

In 1932 C.Kunhikavu Amma and A.V.Kuttimalu Amma became the seventh and ninth 'Dictators' respectively. Kuttimalu Amma was another freedom fighter of national standing, who provided leadership to the freedom movement in the Malabar area. She was sentenced to jail several times (567, p.2 and 538, p.7). Mattilda Kallen, gave up her job as a teacher to join the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1931. She was selected in 1932 as a 'Dictator' of the Kerala Youth League (360, p.189).

Apart from the District Conferences, there were several other conferences also, held at the taluk and village levels. Women were active in this field also. For example, Narayani Amma who presided over the Kuttiadi Village Conference on 8th August 1932 was sentenced along with three other volunteers to rigorous imprisonment for six months. A.V.Lakshmi Amma, President of the Azhikode Village Conference held on 4th September 1932 was given one year's rigorous imprisonment (346, p.259). The Temple Entry Committee constituted by the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee was dissolved on 6th January 1932 as the latter body itself had been declared as unlawful. A special committee was then formed under the leadership of P.M.Kamalavathi to organise the Satyagraha (346, p.270).

During the Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931-32) which was also an agitation for temple entry for the lower caste people, there was active participation by people belonging to different castes, including men and women of the higher castes. Kamalavathi was chosen as Captain of the Satyagraha movement, after A.K.Gopalan was arrested and put in jail. Besides Kamalavathi, Devaki Amma and Kunhikavu Amma were in active leadership. The Satyagraha movement

exerted a strong impact on young students, both boys and girls (291, p.148).

In 1934 C.Kunhikavu Amma was elected as the President of the Provincial Congress Committee. She was the first woman to hold the office (346, p.224). Her election was indeed a tribute paid to the role played by the women of Malabar in the nationalist movement.

During the general elections in Malabar, on 16th February 1937, there was a good deal of enthusiasm among the voters. The women were also in the forefront, marching to the polling booths in processions singing national songs (346, p.399). Women not only took part in the election campaign actively for elections to the Municipal Councils and Provincial Assemblies, but also got elected as members to those councils and assemblies. A.V.Kuttimalu Amma and C.K.Leela Krishnan were among the women elected to the Provincial Legislature (346, p.400).

The great awakening in Malabar had its immediate impact in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore where the people came forward to propagate prohibition and the use of Khadi. The educated women of Cochin like P.Amriamma, P.Visalakshi Amma, T.Lekshmikutty, M.Kartyayani Amma, M.Lekshmikutty Amma, K.Kamalam, T.Subhadra, Smt.Ikkanda Warriar, Smt.T.C.Achutha Menon and others, in general, belonged to middle-class families. They organised the picketing campaign of foreign cloth shops in Thrissur town on 25th April 1931, with the help of A.V.Kuttimalu Amma and Margaret Pavamani from Kozhikode (346, p.230). Another group of women from Thrissur, consisting of Smt.T.K.Madhavan, Rugmini Amma, Lakshmi Gopalakrishnan and others also actively participated in the agitation (346, p.231). M.Kartyayani Amma, who was a practicing

lawyer and who later left the bar at the behest of Gandhiji in 1946 to become a full time Khadi worker, was the main organiser (360, p.198).

As regards Travancore, picketing of foreign cloth shops was organised at many places including Ambalapuzha and Thiruvananthapuram, where it was organised mainly by K.Kumar, a disciple of Gandhiji. A lot of women also participated in them.

In 1937- 38 when the Cochin Praja Mandal and the Travancore State Congress were formed to demand responsible governments in these princely states, many women such as Accamma Cherian, Smt.John Kuruvila, Annie Mascarene, Smt.Pandalam K.P.Raman Pillai, Smt.Ikkanda Warriar and Smt.T.C.Achutha Menon joined the movement. All of them had worked as main functionaries of the State Congress and Praja Mandal at one time or the other and all of them had been in jail on different occasions (569, p.2).

Smt.John Kuruvila and Smt.Pandalam K.P.Raman Pillai were arrested and sent to jail in 1938 when they were functioning as Presidents of the Travancore State Congress. Annie Mascarene, who had also been named President of the Travancore State Congress, was very active in the State Congress throughout. Along with her, the two sisters, Accamma Cherian and Rosamma Punnoose were also in the forefront of the movement. In the Indian Communist Party, women leaders like Rosamma Punnoose, Subhadramma, Radhamma, K.R.Gouri Amma and Koothattukulam Mary were in the front row of all the political struggles. On different occasions they were arrested and sent to jail (272, p.34).

The political career of Annie Mascarene is in a way representative of the political activism of certain women leaders

of the time. She was a dynamic leader of the Congress who occupied several high offices in the State Congress in various capacities. She was one of the founder-leaders of the Travancore State Congress in 1938 (360, p.31). In 1938 she undertook a propaganda tour in central Travancore along with Pattom Thanu Pillai, the then President of the Travancore State Congress. She was very active in the Quit India Movement of 1942 in Travancore. In 1944 she was elected as Secretary of the Travancore State Congress (360, p.32). She was the first woman candidate, to be returned unopposed to the Travancore Legislative Assembly in 1948 and the first woman Minister (1949) in the state after independence. She was also a member of the Constituent Assembly of India. She was elected to the Indian Parliament in 1952 with the maximum number of votes for any candidate from the State in that election.

In the history of the State Congress, the good work done by Smt. John Kuruvila would also be well-remembered. When A.J. John, President of the State Congress, was arrested in 1938, Smt. John Kuruvila was nominated as the next President. Immediately after her nomination as President she was arrested and sentenced to simple imprisonment for three and a half years. She was the first woman in Travancore who courted arrest during the 1938 State Congress agitation (360, p.31).

After N.V. Chacko, President of the State Congress, was arrested Smt. Pandalam K.P. Raman Pillai was nominated as the President of the State Congress.

Since the State Congress was not permitted to function as a legally valid organisation all the Presidents of the State Congress at that time were named "Dictators".

Accamma Cherian, the twelfth President of the State Congress was a person of outstanding courage and leadership qualities. She joined the Congress after resigning her job as the Headmistress of a high school in 1938 to participate in the struggle for responsible government in Travancore (568, p.3 and 360, p.9). On September 1938 she led a team of 10,000 volunteers to the state capital to present a memorandum to His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore. But she was prevented by the police from doing so (568, p.2).

The Punnapra-Vayalar agitation of the organised coir workers under the leadership of the Communist Party of India in 1946 in the Cherthala-Alappuzha belt and the declaration of the Satyagraha by the Travancore State Congress subsequently in 1947 were major events in the history of the freedom struggle in Travancore. The Punnapra-Vayalar agitation resulted in the loss of several hundreds of lives (480, p.25). In this agitation hundreds of working class women actively participated.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya has written that it was the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 which allowed women to experience the first taste of the freedom movement and to throw off the shackles of fear, marking the birth of freedom for them (271, p.106). Women from all walks of life came out to join the freedom movement. This is true in the case of the women of Kerala also in respect of their participation in the freedom struggle. However, this participation in 1930 was only in the Malabar area.

Of all the three regions of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, the nationalist movement sprouted first in Malabar. It was in 1916 that the first political meeting was held in Palakkad under the

presidentship of Annie Besant. Thereafter the annual political meetings were held in different parts of Malabar and several national leaders participated in these meetings. The leadership of veteran politicians like C.Sankaran Nair, K.P.Kesava Menon, K.Madhavan Nair, Moideen Koya etc. helped to bring up a very active political movement in Malabar in 1920s and 1930s. The participation of women in politics in Malabar was also very striking. In 1923 Sarojini Naidu came to Palakkad to preside over the annual conference of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. Similarly, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya used to visit the Malabar area occasionally and gave inspiring leadership to the women of the area. A lot of women in Malabar came forward to participate in the nationalist movement.

One point worthy of special reference is that most of the women leaders were able to enter politics because of the opportunity provided to them by the political activism of the immediate male relatives of their family - father, brother, husband etc. Lalitha Prabhu, Easwari Ammal, A.V.Kuttimalu Amma, Margaret Pavamani, M.Kartyayani Amma etc. were greatly encouraged and supported by their immediate male relatives to enter the nationalist movement. In all these cases, either the husband, son, brother or father of the women activists was also active participant in the nationalist movement. It is also to be noted that most of the women who entered politics belonged to the middle class or the upper middle class families.

The waves of the nationalist movement reached the princely states of Cochin and Travancore a little later. In 1938 the Travancore State Congress was formed. The Cochin Praja Mandal was

also formed in 1936. The formation of the Praja Mandal provided an opportunity for women to enter politics.

In Cochin and Travancore also almost all the women, who were active in politics in those days got the support and encouragement of their male relatives as was seen in the case of women in the Malabar region. Thus, even in the matter of women becoming active in politics, an indirect male domination or decisive male influence is evident.

Chapter 6

Kerala Women in Social Reform Movements, Trade Unions and Political Parties

It was noted earlier that different types of popular movements like the social reform movements, trade unions and other similar organisations had exerted considerable influence on the political developments of the country before independence. This phenomenon has been particularly noticeable in Kerala. For a better understanding of the role of women in the political development of Kerala, it is, therefore, considered necessary to analyse the role played by women in these organisations, movements and parties.

The early decades of the 19th century witnessed the beginnings of powerful social reform movements throughout the country. The structural changes in the economy brought about by colonial rule and the rise of an educated middle class due to the spread of English education tended to create tensions within the traditional caste and social structure.

Social reform movements of this early period were often directed at ameliorating the social backwardness of particular sections of society. They also tended to bring about certain changes in the traditional religious customs and practices. On a deeper analysis, it might be possible to discover that strong economic compulsions affecting certain sections of the Indian society in transition were also behind many such social reform movements.

The progressive social reform movements, among other things, also initiated a more positive approach towards questions relating

to the status and role of women in society. They championed the cause of women on issues such as widow marriage, age of marriage, civil marriage, purdah system, polygamy etc. The basic thrust of the Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj etc. was for religious reforms. There had always been such strong links between movements for religious and social reforms and politics in the different phases of Indian history.

The different social reform movements in the country, in its different parts, were to a large extent occasioned by the introduction of direct British rule in India from 1858 onwards and the consequent drive for modernisation. But they were also interestingly the precursors of the freedom movement in the country. For example, in Bengal or even in Travancore and Malabar later, the initial thrust for the emergence of the nationalist movement was provided by the social reform movements. The Bengal renaissance to end social oppression had a great impact upon the growth of the nationalist movement in the region. In Travancore the Eazhava Savarna Reform Movement (ESRM), a movement of the backward castes, could influence the coir workers and agricultural workers. This consisted largely of men and women from the lower castes who protested against the autocratic rule of the princely state which supported the caste Hindus. They were landlords or coir factory owners. Similarly in Malabar a movement of the Thiyya caste for social reform gradually merged with the peasant movement, and later with the nationalist movement. Even after the achievement of freedom the political ethos of the social reform movements was to some extent sustained. The political significance of such social reform movements in different parts of the country

was more or less the same.

The social reform movements, which made the greatest impact on the public life of Kerala, were of local origin. This was largely because the religious and caste hierarchical system of Kerala had a certain uniqueness of its own. Kerala's was not a society based on the principles of social freedom and equality. This was, of course, the case with other parts of India also. The law that prevailed in the land was not one of equality. The upper castes enjoyed several privileges and immunities. Thus the prominent social reform movements in the state were organised on the basis of castes and religious groups. The Hindu society could develop no solidarity as such within itself, as it was divided vertically and even horizontally on the basis of caste (268, p.14). Within the Hindu fold itself there were two powerful sets of communities - the Namboodiris and Nairs on the one side and the Eazhavas in Travancore and the Thiyyas and Thandans in Malabar. The Christians were outside the caste hierarchy of the Hindus, but they had their own caste system. In reality a system of inclusion and exclusion was developed amongst them vis a vis caste (268, p.14).

These communities demanded greater opportunities for employment in government services and larger representation in the law making bodies. Other religious groups and their subcastes were marginal in this game of power, until the formation of Kerala in 1956. After 1956 the Muslims also entered the field of politics more actively through the All India Muslim League. All through the history of the Kerala State, their influence in the state politics has been undeniably decisive as the balancing force between the

left and right fronts in the general elections.

Some of the social reform organisations have in the post-independence period even initiated the establishment of their own political parties. In Kerala the most influential of such caste or religious groups are the Nair Service Society (NSS), the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) and those under the auspices of the Christian Churches. These organisations have some influence in the political system of the state. A close examination of the role played by women in the activities of these organisations will help to show certain aspects of women's role in the political development of the state.

Women and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam

In Kerala, Eazhavas were treated in many places as avarnas and untouchables. They were often victims of exploitation by the caste Hindus or the savarnas. They felt aggrieved that the upper caste Hindus enjoyed many privileges and immunities denied to them. On September 3, 1896 an Eazhava Memorial was prepared and signed by 13,176 people. The Memorial was submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore under the leadership of Palpu, demanding due share for Eazhavas in education and in government service (349, p.356). That was the beginning of a conscious effort for the upliftment of Eazhavas in Kerala. Later on, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam was founded by the social reformer, Sri Narayana Guru on 15th May 1903. This was a landmark in the history of Kerala (336, p.55).

The SNDP Yogam was established to popularise the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru and to bring about social and spiritual regeneration among the Eazhavas and other backward communities (349, p.382). Sri Narayana Guru also promoted the idea of strict

monogamy and abolition of talikettu kalyanam (349, p.382). In 1905 in Kollam he exhorted all to put an end to the practice of expensive marriage ceremonies and puberty rites - terendukuli, pulikudi etc. because these often resulted in the economic ruin of the families concerned and adversely affected the social status of women in particular (543, p.64). Sri Narayana Guru earnestly advised his followers to aspire for freedom or liberation through education and turn to industrial and commercial pursuits for material prosperity. He ridiculed untouchability and encouraged intercaste marriages and interdining as a means of erasing untouchability.

Professor M.K.Sanoo, in his book "Narayana Guru", explains the background in which the SNDP Yogam was established:

Seeds of organised political agitation started sprouting here and there under inspiration from Dr.P.Palpu and Barrister G.P.Pillai. A society with 11 shareholders was registered in 1899 to manage the affairs of the temple (where Swamiji had installed a Sivalinga earlier). Swami had an idea that the society could expand its activities and become an instrument for improving the religious and social conditions of the Eazhavas of Kerala. Out of this desire was born, some three years later, the SNDP Yogam (410, p.62).

The SNDP Yogam was a social organisation to begin with, but came to play a major political role, especially in the southern part of Kerala in a subsequent period (346, p.45). It was in effect the Congress of the Eazhavas of Kerala (410, p.76).

The weak and disunited Eazhava community which had suffered suppression for so long, suddenly woke up to its spiritual tradition under the leadership of Sri Narayana Guru and became one of the strongest and best organised groups among the Hindus. The SNDP Yogam established by him became the central organ of the entire Eazhava community and was instrumental in achieving a social, political, spiritual and educational transformation of the group within the short period of a single generation (410, p.171).

Palpu understood the significance of the organising of women by the SNDP Yogam. He suggested that a women's conference be held during the annual conference of the Yogam. Accordingly, a women's conference was held during the first annual conference of the SNDP Yogam in 1904 (441, p.105). Later on, in the 1930s the SNDP Vanitha Samajam was formed in Alappuzha with C.I.Rukmini Amma, Kadambari, Bhargavi Amma and Kalikutty Asatty as its main functionaries (474, pp.127-130). K.R.Gouri was also one of the active members of the Samajam. The main issues discussed by the Samajam were women's unity, household duties, care of children and husbands etc. (442, p.105). The organisation attracted more and more women and many of them attended public meetings and participated in public demonstrations (474, p.129).

Palpu's aim in organising the Yogam and its other activities was, by and large, political. He was determined to fight the Travancore government for its consistent denial of civic and human rights to Eazhavas. They were kept arbitrarily out of schools and colleges. They were humiliated with cries of untouchability and unapproachability. Temples and public roads were out of bounds for them. Caste was the excuse for keeping out even well-

qualified candidates (410, p.72).

Thus the women who were active in the Vanitha Samajam were actually getting some political training also. Many of these women later on joined the trade union movement in Alappuzha in the late 1930s (474, p.129). From the very beginning of the establishment of the SNDP Yogam the problems of women were given top priority in the agenda of the movement.

Since independence this organisation has exerted great influence in the political affairs of the state. In 1974 it was decided to launch a new political party of its own. This is the Socialist Republican Party (SRP).

According to the report of the General Secretary of the SNDP Yogam, presented at the annual conference held in 1992, the total membership of the Yogam was 8,25,399 (573, p.3). The number of women members was not separately shown. But it is pointed out that there were 1,193 Mahila Sanghams in the state even though the SNDP Yogam itself has 3,514 branches. The objective of the Yogam is to form one Mahila Sangham under each branch of SNDP.

The activities of the Yogam are guided and controlled by a Board of Directors. There are 124 members in the Board of Directors, elected by the annual conference in 1992. But no woman member is seen elected to this body in 1992. In the Yogam Council also, which controls the day-to-day affairs of the organisation, there are no women members. Thus it is seen that women do not have much of a significant role in the decision-making organs of the SNDP Yogam.

Women and the Nair Service Society (NSS)

Eleven years after the SNDP Yogam came into existence, the Nair Service Society was formed at Changanasseri. This was on October 31, 1914 at the residence of the late Mannath Padmanabhan. He was the driving force in founding the NSS. It was aimed at promoting the social and educational advancement of the Nair community. Many of its early leaders like Changanasseri Parame- swaran Pillai, Mannath Padmanabhan and M.N.Nair favoured the abolition of the matrilineal system (430, p.6). The reason for this demand is explained by Robin Jeffrey, in his book 'Politics, Women and Wellbeing: How Kerala Became a Model'

By 1914, men like Mannam, as Mannath Padmanabhan was popularly known, advocated family reform. They called for legal recognition of patriliney so that a man's property descended to his wife and children, not his nephews. They also demanded that any member of a matrilineal joint-family be given the legal right to claim his or her share of the family's assets. No longer should unanimous consent be necessary before a family could divide. Finally, Mannam aimed to abolish sub-caste distinctions among Nayars and weld them into a united community. His Nair Service Society would, he hoped, make them capable of the disciplined, united action that often seemed to characterise the Christian Churches (304, p.41).

The main issues which made Nairs gather round the NSS were many. First, their exploitation by Brahmins (Namboodiris as well as Tamil Brahmins) especially with regard to the exploitation of

their women by them, second; their own system of inheritance (maru-makkathayam), third; the need to put an end to expensive customs like thalikettu kalyanam and thirandukuli and fourth; the need for educational and economic development of the community, so that it can compete with other communities (336, p.57). The organisation considered education as a chosen instrument for social change and dedicated itself to start educational institutions. The institutions that the NSS developed later - more than 1,100 schools and 23 colleges by 1980s - provided the organisation with a capacity for vigorous survival (304, p.106).

Even though NSS launched its own political party only in 1973 - the National Democratic Party (NDP) - it was able to play an effective role in the state's politics on grounds of a decisive vote bank. The Vimochana Samaram (The Liberation Struggle) launched against the first communist ministry of Kerala in 1959 was led by Mannath Padmanabhan. He was actively supported by the Catholic organisations. The agitationists demanded the dismissal of the ministry. Subsequently the government was dismissed on 31st July 1959. The political muscle of the NSS came to be recognised from this time onwards.

Soon after its formation, the NSS realised the necessity for mobilising women and improving their social status. In the annual conference of the NSS held at Changanasseri in 1916 a resolution was passed urging the organisation to hold separate meetings for women who were otherwise reluctant to attend public meetings. However that conference itself was attended by a large number of women (364, p.129).

Thereafter, special women's sessions were conducted along with the NSS annual conferences. In a very important women's conference in 1930 some NSS women leaders like Lakshmikutty Nethyaramma, Thottakattu Madhavi Amma and Kaduthuruthi Kalyani Amma exhorted women to work together for the betterment of their social status (364, p.335). In fact, it was a call for the growth of a powerful women's movement.

The NSS decided to start independent Vanitha Samajams. But these Samajams did not have separate representation in the Prathinidhi Sabha of the NSS (General Council) which elected the office-bearers of the organisation.

The organisational matters of the NSS are guided and controlled by a Board of Directors consisting of 27 members, elected for a period of three years. There were no women members at all in this policy making body of the organisation except once when D.Gomathy Amma was elected to the Board of Directors of the organisation (362, p.470).

The General Secretary of the organisation is elected by the 300-members Prathinidhi Sabha (General Council), one third of those members retire every year. The electoral college for the election of members of the Prathinidhi Sabha consists of elected representatives of 4,600 and odd Karayogams which are the local organs of the organisation. The local organs elect 56 taluk unions, besides institutional and individual (shareholders) members (628, p.1). Women do not have, by and large, any representation in the General Council which means that they do not get any opportunity for effective participation in the policy making process of the organisation.

Christian Organisations

The Christians have a well-knit organisational set-up, with parishes as the base and the metropolitans at the apex. A political scientist has remarked, "The church provided them with unity and advice and leadership. The Christian community was at one time the only one in Kerala to have a strong organisation and other communities emulated them sometime or other" (363, p.10). The spread of education and contacts with the European missionaries helped Syrian Christians to develop as a community.

At Mannanam near Kottayam in 1866 Nazrani Jathy Aikya Sangham (The United Organisation of the Christian Community) was established. This was with the objective of the social uplift of Syrian Christians, with due emphasis placed on education, civic duties and share in government (336, p.50).

In 1905 another organisation, the Catholic Mahajana Sabha (Catholic People's Forum) was formed at Mannanam and regular meetings, known as Samoohya Sannelanam (Social Conference) used to be conducted (520, p.143). The formation of the Keraliya Catholic Mahajana Sabha (Kerala Catholic People's Forum) (KCMS) in 1918 at Changanasseri speeded up the growth of the movement begun at Mannanam in 1866.

Later on in 1930 the All Kerala Catholic Congress (AKCC) was formed at Cherthala to protect the rights of Roman Catholic Christians in Travancore.

At present, each diocese has a pastoral council, consisting of members from the parishes and important institutions of the diocese to discuss and decide upon its various activities. Till 1965 women were not given any representation in this body. Now

women are also included as members of the council though they are few. Likewise, each parish has a parish council, consisting of representatives of the parish to discuss matters pertaining to that particular parish. In these councils also, the representation of women was quite meagre.

Generally it is seen that the role played by women in the decision-making process of the Christian organisations has not been very significant.

Women and Trade Unions in Kerala

Kerala is a state where the trade unions are active in the industrial, agricultural and service sectors. Most of them are affiliated to the recognised national federations of trade unions associated with different political parties. The national federations namely, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the United Trade Union Congress, (UTUC), the Hindu Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) are closely associated with the Congress (I), CPI, RSP, BJP and the CPI (M) respectively (436, p.139).

Apart from the trade union movements in the industrial and agricultural sectors, employees in the service and banking sectors have also formed militant trade unions, which are often known as service organisations. Since the service organisations of the state government employees have been recognised under the Kerala Government Servants' Conduct Rules, 1960 they cannot be affiliated to any recognised national trade union federation. Even though they are working under the Kerala Government Servants' Conduct Rules, it is not a secret that all the employees organisations have

close links with different political parties working in the state. The unions and their members openly support the agitations launched by the political parties in one way or another. Thus the political involvement of these organisations has all along remained an undisputed fact.

The trade union movement originated in Kerala with the birth of an organisation, called, the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) in the Empire Coir Works in Alappuzha in 1922. At that time there were more women workers than men in the coir industry. As per the 1931 census 41,980 men and 95,014 women were working in the coir industry (56, p.27). Most of the workers, especially the women workers, were subjected to indecent treatment and exploitation in wages. The TLA was the first to get registration under the Travancore Trade Unions Act of 1937. On registration the TLA was renamed as the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (TCFWU) (436, p.93). It soon became a very powerful organisation commanding the support of coir workers.

The struggle of the coir workers in Alappuzha was focussed on issues like wages, retrenchment, fines etc. The issue of maternity benefit was also raised (385, p.38). The general strike by coir workers in 1934 in Alappuzha led to the formation of the Ambalapuzha Taluk Coir Spinning Workers Union with a woman, K.Devayani as its Secretary (543, p.70).

The trade union movement spread itself fast in other parts of the state. The Press Workers Union formed in 1931 at Thiruvananthapuram, the Cochin Labour Union formed in 1931-32, the Labour Union in Kozhikode of 1932 and the North Malabar Labour Union in Kannur formed in 1931 were some of the earlier trade union

organisations thus formed in the state.

The trade unions, especially those which were working in Alappuzha in the 1938-39 period, also raised political demands, such as adult franchise, responsible government, release of political prisoners from jail, repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, withdrawal of the ban on Youth League and the State Congress etc., along with the usual trade union demands (321, p.52). The TCFWU leaders were very much involved with the political activities in the state. Such political activities were conducted with the help of women and even children. For example, secret circulars of the strike committees' statements were distributed with the help of women and children (321, p.56).

In the 1940s, women were very active in the trade union movements. Some of them emerged as the front line leaders of the movement. Meenakshi, Devayani, Lakshmikutty, Gomati Dev and Dakshayani were some of the very active trade union leaders of the 1940s. Meenakshi became a full-time activist of the TCFWU and, later, she became a member of the Communist Party of India.

In 1943 the issue of equal wages for men and women workers was taken up in a factory. Struggles conducted within the factories led to the formation of women's factory committees. The women's factory committees took up the general problems of women, like the physical violence inflicted on wives by husbands, desertion and husbands preventing wives from participating in political activities (543, p.73).

The constitutional reforms sought to be introduced by Sir.C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer, known as the American model, attracted opposition from the trade unions which supported the state

Congress. They joined the agitations initiated by the State Congress. At one stage they even took the initiative and with the inspiration from the Communist Party, launched the Punnapra-Vayalar agitation which was a purely political movement (476, p.53).

The Punnapra-Vayalar movement was, in a way, the climax of the struggle by the working class for political freedom. Women were, in large numbers, as active as men in this movement. During the period of the movement a ban was declared on the activities of the trade unions. Martial law was declared in the Alappuzha - Cherthala area, where the movement had its base. Many women activists were arrested, tortured and raped by the army and the police (337, p.137).

Many of the active women trade union leaders began taking interest in the movements for the liberation of women in the 1950s.

Since independence the trade union movement has grown tremendously. But even in the traditional industries like coir, cashew, plantations etc., where most of the workers are women, they are not seen in the leadership except in rare instances.

Rosamma Punnoose, who was the president of the Plantation Workers Union for a number of years, says that even today the circumstances are not congenial for women to work outside home. Susheela Gopalan, the President of the Coir Workers Federation, says that women are reluctant to be active because the politicisation of women and their participation in activities outside the home tend to affect family life (543, p.72).

Meera Velayudhan, in her study of the coir workers of Alappuzha, agrees with the widely prevalent opinion that women cannot face tense situations, and that they are reluctant to

participate in trade union activities (543, p.71). Perhaps due to this passivity, women have not been coming to the forefront of trade union movements in the state since independence.

The same trend is reflected in the trade union organisations working in the service sector too. The members of these organisations are educated. Still the women members do not come to the forefront of such organisations.

The Kerala School Teachers Association (KSTA) is a leading organisation of the school teachers in Kerala. It represents about 40 per cent of the school teachers of the state. Out of the 1,15,480 school teachers of Kerala teaching in the Lower Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary sections, KSTA has 75,423 teachers as its members. Among them 43,407 (57.56%) are women teachers and 32,016 (42.44%) are male teachers. But in the Executive Committee of that organisation, consisting of 25 members, there are only two women. In the State Committee there are 75 members, of which only eight are women.

The Kerala NGO Union is a leading organisation of the state government employees. Its present membership (1992) comes to 96,559. But the exact ratio of the male and female members of the organisation is not available, although it is presumed that 27 per cent of the membership constitute women.

In the State Executive Committee of the organisation there are 55 members, of which only eight members are women. Only one woman is included in the 15-member Secretariat of the Organisation. No woman is there among the seven office-bearers of the organisation.

Similar is the case with other employees' organisations in the service sector. The Joint Council of State Service Organisations is also another important organisation of the state government employees. It is a confederation of 24 different organisations of state government employees. The State Committee of this organisation consists of 35 members. Of these 35, only two are women. All the eight office-bearers and the seven secretariat members are men.

The Kerala Gazetted Officers' Association, which has a membership of more than 14,000, has only one woman in its 15-member State Executive Committee. All the office-bearers are men.

The Kerala Government Secretariat Association is a major organisation of the secretariat employees of the state. In the 11-member Executive Committee of the Organisation there are only three women. However, the post of a Vice-President goes to a woman.

Thus generally women do not play a significant role in the policy making of the trade union organisations in the state since independence.

Women in Political Parties

Women's active participation in politics in Kerala can be traced to the early 1920s. The Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 provided the appropriate context for this. Moreover, some women's organisations also prepared the ground for the effective participation of women in politics. Mainly they were the Women's Indian Association (WIA) (1917), Federation of University Women (FUW) (1920), National Council of Women (NCW) (1925) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

(1926). These organisations were engaged in "trying their best to improve the status of women in society, politically and economically" (416, p.140). These organisations actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the forties, women's democratic movements were organised in different parts of the country. In fact they became the actual training ground for some women to participate in politics effectively in later years. Some women leaders in Kerala, closely associated with the communist movement, decided to establish a new women's organisation in 1943, viz., the Kerala Mahila Sangham (KMS). Among the leaders who took the initiative were Thankamma Krishna Pillai, K.R.Gouri, Rosamma Punnoose, Radhamma Thankachy etc. It was formed with the idea of organising primarily the working class sections of women. A large number of working women of the coir industry joined the organisation and they participated in workers' struggles in different parts of the state. Many members of the KMS joined the historic Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. The organisation was later affiliated to the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), which was formed in 1954 under the guidance of women leaders closely associated with the Communist Party of India. Thus in the latter half of the 1950s there were two important national organisations of women: AIWC under the patronage of the Indian National Congress and the NFIW under the control of the Communist Party of India.

In 1964 when the Communist Party of India was split and a new party, Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), was formed, the effect of the split was seen in the women's organisation also. Most of the women's organisations in various states which were affiliated to the NFIW were also divided. In the KMS also the

split occurred. Under the leadership of K.R.Gouri and Susheela Gopalan a new organisation by name the Kerala Mahila Federation was formed and later on it became a branch of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) formed in 1981 under the patronage of CPI (M). Thereafter the Kerala Mahila Federation was renamed as Kerala Democratic Women's Association. Thus in the national level three major women's organisations, viz., the AIWC, the NFIW and the AIDWA have come to stay under the patronage of the three major political parties, viz., the Indian National Congress, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) respectively. The state units of these women's organisations have consequently become the women's wings of these parties. Following this all the political parties also started forming their own wing in the state.

In Kerala the Mahila Congress (MC) is linked to the Congress (I), the Kerala Democratic Women's Association (KDWA) is linked to CPI (M), the Kerala Mahila Sangham to CPI, the Bharatiya Mahila Morcha to BJP, Mahila Janata Dal to Janata Dal, the Kerala Aikya Mahila Sangham (KAMS) to RSP and the Kerala Vanitha Congress (KVC) to the Kerala Congress. These organisations take part in political activities associated with the parties with which they are linked (337, p.138).

Apart from the above major political parties in the state, other smaller parties such as Congress (S), Janata Party, Socialist Republican Party (SRP), Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the National Democratic Party (NDP) also have their own women's wing. The Muslim League does not have a women's wing so far. Even under the amended Constitution of the Muslim League, which has a State Council of 290

members, there is not a single woman represented in the body even though the Constitution per se does not prohibit women from becoming members of the body. The State Council members are elected by the primary members. The women's organisations generally function within the broad framework of the party with which they are affiliated or associated with.

Even though there are women's wings for the parties, they are admitted as members of the political parties too. National Perspective Plan for Women, prepared by the Core Group set up by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India observed:

Parties in their manifestos promise to women all opportunities for increased participation in social, economic and political life. Yet, the record of most of the parties is poor so far as women are concerned. Though exact figures are not available, it can be safely presumed that membership of women in parties does not exceed 10 to 12 per cent of the total membership. Parties hardly make a sincere attempt to reach out to women or to put them in positions of authority (127, p.157).

The access to significant decision-making positions in political parties continues to elude women. Today very few women hold important positions in the political parties. A look at the position of women in all the major political parties in Kerala is very relevant in this context.

Indian National Congress (I)

The premier political party in the country, the Indian National Congress declared the following in the election manifesto issued during the 1937 elections:

The Congress has already declared that it stands for removal of all sex disabilities, whether legal or social, in any sphere of public activity. It has expressed itself in favour of maternity benefits and protection of women workers. The women of India have already taken a leading part in the freedom struggle, and the Congress looks forward to their sharing in an equal measure with the men of India the privileges and obligations of a free India (356, p.59).

In tune with the above sentiments, the party in its Constitution (as amended at the Delhi Session of the AICC on July 22, 1990) states that the object of the party is the establishment in India, by peaceful and constitutional means, of a Socialist State based on Parliamentary democracy in which there is equality of opportunity and of political, economic and social rights.

The membership of the party is open to any person of the age of 18 or above irrespective of sex, caste or religion. But there are two types of membership in the party - primary and active. A primary member may become an active member on enrolling 25 primary members biennially if he or she fulfils certain specified conditions laid down in the Constitution. Even though equal opportunity is offered to men and women to be an active member of the party, many women cannot become active members of the party, fulfilling all the conditions laid down. Since active membership is a must for being elected to organisational positions, the number of women who hold key positions in the party is also very few.

In the state level the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) is the highest decision-making body. It consists of members elected by the Block Congress Committees, Presidents of District Congress

Committees, AICC members residing in the pradesh, members elected by the Congress Legislative Party in the state, members co-opted by the PCC Executive from special elements not adequately represented etc. The first category included under the above mentioned 'special elements' is women.

The present membership of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) is 300 out of which 295 are male members. Only five women members are there in this important organ of the party. In the Executive Committee of the KPCC, there is only one woman in the 29-member body. Thus it is seen that even though both men and women have equality of opportunity in the party, only very few women can become members of the decision-making bodies of the party.

The total number of women members in the party, as primary or as active members, is not available with the party sources. This is the case with almost every political party in the state.

Communist Party of India (Marxist)

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is one of the leading political parties of the state. It has been in power on several occasions. In the Constitution of the party, membership is open to any Indian citizen above the age of 18. Equal opportunity is thus offered to both men and women to join the party as a member and to work for it and to get elected to any position in the party. But, in spite of the opportunities, only a very few women could come to the top positions in the party.

In the national level, the Polit-Bureau and the Central Committee are the highest policy making bodies of the party. In the 19-member Polit-Bureau no woman is a member. There are only

four women in the 44-member Central Committee of the party.

As per the report of the party presented in the 14th Annual State Conference in 1991 there are 2,27,424 members in the party. But the number of women members of the party was not available in the report. But it was stated in the report that 6,78,740 women were working with the women's wing of the party. In the 91-member State Committee of the CPI (M) there are only six women members. Thus, generally it is seen that the participation of women in the decision-making or policy-framing bodies of the CPI (M) is very insignificant.

Communist Party of India (CPI)

The Communist Party of India has been one of the important constituents of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala for more than a decade now. From the very inception of the party, it had revealed its concepts on the question of women's equality and gender justice. The draft programme of action of the party published in 1930, under the section 'Emancipation of Women' declared:

The Communist Party of India fights for the complete social, economic and legal equality of women. It fights for the complete abolition of night work for women and prohibition of underground work for women (in the coal mines and in all branches harmful for females). The Communist Party of India fights for leave of absence from work at full rate of wages, two months before and after child birth, with free medical aid, and for the establishment of creches in all factories and workshops employing women, at the expense of employers, such creches to cover small children

and infants at breast; with a special apartment for feeding. Nursing mothers shall have their working day reduced to six hours (356, p.58).

In the preamble of the party's Constitution also, it emphasises the fact that the party opposes all old and outdated concepts which deny equal rights to women. Still in this party also women's participation is very insignificant.

The party's membership is open to all men and women who complete the age of 18 years. But there are two types of membership - candidate membership and full membership. On joining the party a person may be considered as a candidate member for the first six months from the date of admission. After the expiry of the period of six months full membership will be granted to a candidate member, after considering the suitability of the person to be a full member. The details regarding the number of candidate members or full members of the party or the number of women members in the party are not available.

In the 21-member National Executive Committee of the party there is only one woman representative. The State Council of the Communist Party of India in Kerala has 141 members, including members of the Control Commission, representatives of the candidate members, representatives of veterans and the permanent invitees. Out of this, only six are women. Among the office-bearers of the party there is no woman.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

Though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the main opposition party in the Lok Sabha, its strength in Kerala is very poor. So far it could not send any of its representatives to the

Kerala Legislative Assembly, even though the party put up many candidates in the general elections to the Assembly.

In its Constitution it emphasises the fact that the party aims at establishing a democratic government which ensures social and economic justice, equality of opportunity, religious freedom and freedom of expression to all citizens irrespective of caste, religion and sex.

The membership of the party is open to all who complete the age of 18.

The party constitution stipulates the inclusion of a minimum number of women in all the committees, from the local committee upto the national committee. The minimum number of women among the office-bearers of the party has also been specified in the Constitution. Perhaps this is the only political party in the country which ensures the inclusion of women in its party organs constitutionally.

In the party two types of membership are there - ordinary member and active member. If a person has to become an active member of the party that person must have been an ordinary member of the party at least two years and must have paid Rs.100/- to the party. Usually women find it very difficult to fulfil the specified condition for becoming an active member of the party. However, the actual figures relating to the membership of the party are not available.

The Constitution of the party insists that there should be at least one woman in the local committee and at least one woman vice-president if the number of members in the committee exceeds 11. In the regional committee also it is ensured that there should

be at least three women members and at least one woman office-bearer has been insisted on for the district committee also. In the state committee of the party, according to the Constitution, there shall be 61 members, of which five members shall be women. There shall be at least one officer-bearer also among the fifteen. Thus it is seen that at every stage the involvement of women in the decision-making bodies has been ensured by the Constitution.

At present the State Committee of the party has 61 members, of which six are women. Among the office-bearers also, there is a woman. Out of the 20 members elected to the National Council of the party, one is a woman.

Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP)

The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) has been working in Kerala for more than four decades. The membership of the party is open to both men and women of 18 years and above. But there are three types of membership, viz., primary, general and active. On joining the party a person becomes a primary member. Only after six months from the date of joining the party, may a primary member be considered for general membership. A general member of the party will be considered for active membership only on the basis of the performance of that person in the party activities. It is mentioned that the active member may offer his or her full time for party work. Thus it is very difficult for women to get active membership in the party. But only an active member of the party is eligible to be elected to all official positions of the party. Consequently, the inclusion of women in different committees of the party is a very remote possibility.

The State Executive Committee of the party consists of 27 male members only. There is a powerful policy making body of the party viz., State Secretariat. All its nine members are men.

Janata Dal

The Janata Dal is very weak in Kerala. The State Committee of the party has got a membership of 65, out of which 63 are men.

From the above analysis we can conclude that in almost all the major political parties in the state the participation of women in the top decision-making bodies is very insignificant. A common phenomenon observed is that no political party maintains an up-to-date break up of the male and female members of the party. Moreover, almost all political party sources seem to be reluctant to divulge the exact picture of the membership position.

The weak participation of women in the political field is viewed differently by women political leaders themselves. Rosamma Chacko, one of the General Secretaries of the KPCC and a member of the 10th State Legislative Assembly, admitted that women were treated as second grade citizens in the country and that this situation would continue for a long time to come. She was not hesitant in admitting that all the key positions of all political parties were monopolised by men. She further stated that whatever little political consciousness was achieved by a small section of women, was only because of the work of the women's movements and not at all by the work of the political parties. She was of the firm opinion that during election times or on other occasions of dividing offices of power among the party members, the men at the helm of affairs would conveniently and deliberately forget about

women, thereby showing gross discrimination against them (648).

K.C.Rosakutty, another Congress (I) member of the 10th State Legislative Assembly, said that the male domination in the field of politics was the main factor preventing women from entering the field of politics. According to her every woman has a hidden desire to come out of the domestic responsibilities, which are now exclusively of women, and to take part in public activities. She stated that the male political leaders did not really approve of women's entry into electoral politics generally because they could thereby share the seats amongst themselves (647).

K.R.Gouri, former Minister in various Communist-led Kerala Ministries, said that in a tradition-bound and caste-oriented society like that of Kerala no woman could freely think of entering the political and public fields. She added that though schooling for girls and salaried jobs for women are considered desirable in such a society, the participation of women in politics was not looked upon with favour. She said that a woman going for public activities might become the target of gossip and scandal-mongering (529, p.13).

Hymavati Tayat, a former CPI - (M) Mayor of Kozhikode and the former Chairperson of the State Social Welfare Board, maintained a similar view. She said that in spite of the willingness and enthusiasm shown by women to be active in public life, men discouraged them and hardly welcomed them for participation in public activities (639).

Meenakshi Thampan, sitting CPI member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, said that even though Kerala women have great educational and employment opportunities, they have not yet cast

off their social fetters because of tradition. She further said that the status of the major breadwinner in the family always went to men, even though women also worked hard within the household or outside. Thus, on the pretext of bearing all the family financial burdens on his shoulders, the husband assumed himself to be completely free from other domestic responsibilities, leaving them totally to his wife. According to her this is one of the major obstacles in the path of women entering politics (643).

A careful study of the party manifestos issued by the major political parties shows that there is complete agreement among them that women constitute a backward and oppressed section of society to whom special opportunities will have to be granted to make them equal to men. However, all the parties were conspicuously silent on the greater participation of women in politics as such, but all of them want to offer opportunities for the increased participation of women in economic and social activities. Thus, generally speaking, it is seen that the participation of women in the political parties is not very significant.

How has this situation arisen? It will not be quite fair to say that there is some sort of a deliberate conspiracy by men to keep women out of social or political activities. Tradition has played the key role in keeping women out of active politics or civic affairs. Home, by tradition, has been the key area of responsibility or activity for women. A departure from this tradition-bound thinking is difficult or slow to come by. As pointed out in Chapter 3, this has been the experience even of the economically and socially better developed countries of the West. In spite of the greater opportunities for economic independence for

women in these countries, the role of women in politics has not yet become anywhere equal to that of men. Many critics of the American Constitution have commented that no Jew, Catholic, Negro or woman can ever become the President of the United States. The election of the President John F. Kennedy, who was a Catholic, to the highest office of the land disproved one of these premises. But the others still continue. No woman has yet become the President of the USA. If this binding of tradition is so strongly experienced even in a country like the United States of America, which became free from the trappings of feudalism, religion and other traditional factors dominating the politics of Britain and other European countries in an earlier period when the migration to the United States occurred, it is no wonder that these trappings continue to inhibit the evolution of a proper and fairer role for women in politics in a country like India. And Kerala is no exception in this regard. Only a more conscious and deliberate action by women themselves can, perhaps, achieve for them their due share in politics and other social activities.

Chapter 7

Kerala Women as voters in the Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections

The right to vote is a fundamental right of a citizen in a democratic country. The participation of people in the democratic process is basically and uniformly ensured by this right. Voting is an act of choice by an independent individual from amongst a set of alternatives - individuals or policies. This is at the heart of modern democracy. Usually people exercise this significant right to elect their own representatives to the respective legislative bodies, which give expression to the hopes and aspirations of their electors. Thus the right to vote, guaranteed in all democratic constitutions, assumes great significance.

In many countries franchise was first limited only to men. The question of women's voting rights became a live issue only by the last decade of the 19th century. As Vicky Randall points out, "Although voting may have its limitations as a criterion of political participation, women's exercise of the vote has a special meaning against the background of the suffragist struggles. The suffragettes, however mistakenly, perceived the vote not simply as a symbol of political emancipation but as a means to effective political participation" (394, p.36).

Even at the beginning of the 20th century, women were granted the right to vote in the national elections in only four countries - New Zealand (1893), Australia (1902), Finland (1906) and Norway (1913), (537, p.47). The struggle for women's suffrage was carried

on in many countries, including England and the USA. The second International Socialist Women's Conference in 1910 exhorted women all over the world to unite together to fight for winning this vital right in all the countries (356, p.12). Moreover, as suggested by Clara Zetkin, the Secretary of the International Socialist Women's Organisation, the conference also decided to observe March 8th as International Women's Day, in commemoration of a great demonstration held on March 8, 1908 by the working women of the Needle Trades of New York, demanding the right to vote for women, among other demands. After that the demand for women's franchise was continuously raised in different parts of the world. In some countries women have only recently been enfranchised, the well-known example being Switzerland, where women were not allowed to vote in elections until 1971.

In pre-independent India, certain categories of women like those who owned land or paid taxes, were granted the right to vote in certain provinces as early as in 1919. Similarly, a very limited number of women received the right to vote in the elections of 1935. But the Constitution of India recognises universal adult franchise for both men and women without any discrimination, vide Art. 326.

Travancore became the first state in India to have elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. This was when the erstwhile State of Travancore held elections in 1948, nearly two years before the enactment of the Constitution of India and three years before the rest of India held general elections on that basis (236, p.454).

The significance of the granting of this right to women on equal footing with men has been commented upon by many social leaders including judges, politicians, writers, women activists etc. The exercise of franchise was a great step towards initiating women to think independently to be equal with their counterparts.

Kerala women have been able to exercise the right of franchise ten times in elections to the Legislative Assembly and nine times in the Lok Sabha elections after the formation of the State of Kerala in 1956. An objective analysis of how they exercised this right in all these elections under different political situations, may bring out certain significant aspects of women's political participation and of their political behaviour.

Kerala witnessed elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1957, 1960, 1965, 1967, 1970, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1987 and 1991 and to the Lok Sabha in 1957, 1962, 1967, 1971, 1977, 1980, 1989 and 1991 (35). The census figures in respect of Kerala from the very beginning of this century onwards indicate that the sex ratio in Kerala has been quite different from that of the national average. At the national level, the number of women against 1000 men has been gradually decreasing from 972 in 1901 to 929 in 1991. But in Kerala, the number of women against 1000 men gradually rose from 1004 in 1901 to 1030 in 1991. Thus, during the period of all the above elections from 1960 to 1991, there were more women voters than men (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1

Details of Electorates and the Votes Polled in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections (1957 - 1991)

| Year | Electorate | | % of Electorate | | | | Votes Polled | | | | Percentage of Total Votes Polled |
|------|--|-----------|-----------------|-------|-------|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Total | Men | Women | Men | Women | Total | Men | Percentage of Total | | Percentage of Total | |
| | | | | | | | | Men | Women | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 1957 | 88,51,443 (75,14,626 electors) ¹ | 44,83,437 | 43,68,006 | 50.65 | 49.35 | 58,99,822 (50,34,799 electors) | 30,77,607 | 68.64 | 28,22,215 | 64.61 | 66.65 |
| 1960 | 96,01,601 (80,38,268 electors) ² | NA | NA | NA | NA | 82,28,812 (69,19,312 electors) | NA | NA | NA | NA | 85.72 |
| 1965 | 85,57,716 | 41,59,312 | 43,98,404 | 48.60 | 51.40 | 64,28,937 | 32,46,277 | 78.05 | 31,82,660 | 72.36 | 75.12 |
| 1967 | 86,13,658 | 42,54,257 | 43,59,401 | 49.39 | 50.61 | 65,18,272 | 32,88,902 | 77.31 | 32,29,370 | 74.08 | 75.67 |
| 1970 | 1,01,69,467 | 50,46,578 | 51,22,889 | 49.62 | 50.38 | 76,34,451 | 38,61,731 | 76.52 | 37,72,720 | 73.64 | 75.07 |
| 1977 | 1,14,62,487 | 56,74,101 | 57,88,386 | 49.50 | 50.50 | 90,78,459 | 44,63,042 | 78.66 | 46,15,417 | 79.74 | 79.20 |
| 1980 | 1,32,63,837 | 65,64,487 | 66,99,350 | 49.49 | 50.51 | 95,87,663 | 48,06,807 | 73.22 | 47,80,856 | 71.36 | 72.28 |
| 1982 | 1,31,15,587 | 64,75,800 | 66,39,787 | 49.37 | 50.63 | 96,41,193 | 47,60,548 | 73.51 | 48,80,645 | 73.51 | 73.51 |
| 1987 | 1,59,50,019 | 78,66,828 | 80,83,191 | 49.32 | 50.68 | 1,28,46,689 | 63,33,373 | 80.58 | 65,13,316 | 80.58 | 80.54 |
| 1991 | 1,96,08,945 | 96,88,768 | 99,20,177 | 49.40 | 50.60 | 1,44,33,823 | 71,48,582 | 73.78 | 72,85,241 | 73.44 | 73.60 |

1 Since there were 102 single-member constituencies and 12 double member constituencies 75,14,626 voters were required to cast 88,51,443 votes.

2 Since the number of constituencies remained the same 80,38,268 electors were to cast 96,01,601 votes.

Source: 1 Reports of General Elections: 1957 - 1987 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

2 Assembly Elections since 1951 (Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990). (Percentages in columns 9 and 11 are computed by the researcher).

3 Report of General Elections: 1991 (Election Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1992).

N A Not Available

In the Kerala Legislative Assembly elections, the lowest percentage of voting occurred in 1957. Only 66.65 per cent of the total electorate exercised their franchise. In all the other nine elections the voting percentage has ranged from 72 to 85 per cent. In the 1960 elections, which was conducted after the dismissal of the Communist Ministry, the voting percentage went up to 85.7 per cent. At that time all the noncommunist forces in the state made a combined effort against the Communist Party in the elections. Thus, effective campaigning and maximum mobilisation of votes were made by both the main contending sides. Therefore, the percentage of voting went up. Commenting on this particular election, The Hindu wrote, "Kerala set up in this election what is perhaps a world record in any free country for the percentage of voters exercising their franchise" (633, p.12). In the 1987 Assembly elections also, more than 80 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise.

In all these elections the turn-out of the women voters was also quite impressive. In the 1957 elections, out of 43,68,006 women voters, only 28,22,215 women had exercised their right to vote. They comprised only 64.61 per cent of the total women voters, which meant that 35.39 per cent did not exercise their right. That was the lowest women turn-out for voting in any election in the state. The turn-out of the male voters in that election was 68.64 per cent. Thus there was only a four per cent difference in the turn-out of the male-female voters. In all subsequent elections women registered, in general, a turn-out of more than 71 per cent. In 1987 the percentage of women turn-out went beyond 80 per cent. The percentage of male turn-out in the

Table 7.2

Percentage of Votes Exercised by Men and Women in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections
from 1957 - 1991

| Year | Men | | | | Women | | | Percentage 7 |
|------|-----------|---|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 1957 | 44,83,437 | | 30,77,607 | 68.64 | 43,68,006 | 28,22,215 | 64.61 | |
| 1960 | NA | | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | |
| 1965 | 41,59,312 | | 32,46,277 | 78.05 | 43,98,404 | 31,82,660 | 72.36 | |
| 1967 | 42,54,257 | | 32,88,902 | 77.31 | 43,59,401 | 32,29,370 | 74.09 | |
| 1970 | 50,46,578 | | 38,61,731 | 76.52 | 51,22,889 | 37,72,720 | 73.64 | |
| 1977 | 56,74,101 | | 44,63,042 | 78.66 | 57,88,386 | 46,15,417 | 79.74 | |
| 1980 | 65,64,487 | | 48,06,807 | 73.22 | 66,99,350 | 47,80,856 | 71.36 | |
| 1982 | 64,75,800 | | 47,60,548 | 73.51 | 66,39,787 | 48,80,645 | 73.51 | |
| 1987 | 78,66,828 | | 63,33,773 | 80.50 | 80,83,191 | 65,13,316 | 80.58 | |
| 1991 | 96,88,768 | | 71,48,582 | 73.78 | 99,20,117 | 72,85,241 | 73.44 | |

Source: 1 General Elections Report: 1957 - 1987 (Election Commission, Delhi).

2 Assembly Elections since 1957 (Department of Public Relations, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

3 Report of General Elections: 1991 (Election Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1992).

N A Not Available

election was also 80.58. The percentage of invalid votes in all these elections has been uniformly very negligible. In the Assembly elections the lowest percentage of invalid votes was in 1980 (0.48 per cent) and the highest was in 1967 (3.63 per cent), (268, p.196). This indicates the high quality of the electorate with regard to its awareness of the right to vote and its exercise.

As mentioned earlier, the highest percentage of the total votes polled in any Assembly election held in Kerala was in the 1960 elections. It was a mid-term poll. There was no change in the number of constituencies or seats from that of the earlier 1957 elections. This mid-term poll was necessitated because of the dismissal of the Communist government of the state by the President of India. The dismissal of the ministry was the culmination of an agitation named "Vimochana Samaram" (liberation struggle) launched by all the major noncommunist groups in the state in which large numbers of men and women especially from the middle class Nair and Christian families took part.

Cyriac Thomas in his article "The Church and Elections" pointed out,

"The Communist rule of 28 months and the frequent confrontations it had with the Church and its interests and the controversial 'liberation struggle' that followed, in fact made to surface the active role of the church in the politics of the state. The 'liberation struggle' for which the personnel and funds were supplied by the Church and the Christian community culminated in the ouster of the first elected Communist government and no doubt, added to the political

prestige of the Church in Kerala. In the mid-term poll that followed in 1960 the bishops and the clergy demonstrated an almost equal concern and anxiety regarding the outcome of the election" (434, p.92).

It was true that in the mid-term election of 1960 that followed the 'liberation struggle' an unprecedented grand alliance of all the noncommunist forces in the state, viz., the NSS, the SNDP, the Churches and the Muslim League was formed to oppose the Communists. This definitely encouraged a larger number of women voters to exercise their franchise just as in the case of men, and probably under pressure from the male members of the family. K.P.Bhagat, in his study "The Kerala Mid-term Elections of 1960: The Communist Party's Conquest of New Positions" thus concluded, "In 1960, Keralite women exhibited unprecedented interest in politics and according to a correspondent, they were responsible for the defeat of the Communists" (278, p.275). This was perhaps why the voting percentage in the 1960 elections touched an all time high of 85.72 per cent.

Cyriac Thomas in his article 'The Church and Elections' cited above states thus:

"Almost every day on the eve of the election priests spoke from the pulpit during the service, explaining the importance of the election and the devastating consequences of a possible Communist victory again. Bishop Sebastian Vayalil of Palai went a step further and warned his people that a Catholic, under no circumstances, should vote for

a Communist or a fellow-traveller. He instructed that in all Churches under his jurisdiction special prayers be conducted every day after the holy mass for the victory of the democratic forces, till the election was over" (434, p.93).

Bishop Sebastian Vayalil issued a pastoral letter on 15th January, 1960 to this effect. Similar literature for indoctrination and the special prayers offered in the Churches influenced the Christian women considerably and this was perhaps reflected in the massive turn-out of them in voting.

Cyriac Thomas in his article continues,

"The voting pattern shows that the candidates of the Democratic Front were returned mainly from either the Christian belt or from constituencies where the Christians constituted a decisive bulk of voters, due to the efforts of the Church leaders. The bishops and the clergy took it as their prestige and of the Church and left no stone unturned to see the Communists defeated at the polls" (434, p.93).

Even though it was not possible for other communal organisations such as the NSS or the SNDP to influence their women voters in such an organised way as the Christian, especially Catholic Church could do, they also worked hard to influence the members of their respective communities through a door-to-door campaign and other activities to take an active part in the 'liberation struggle'. The Muslim League instructed Muslim women to vote against Communism through their own religious network of communications. On the whole, it can be seen that in the 1960

elections, women voters of the state exercised their franchise along with men, in greater numbers largely because of the sustained and organised efforts made by the noncommunist religious and communal organisations in the state.

In the subsequent assembly elections in 1965, 1967 and 1970 the overall percentage of voting remained almost stagnant at about 75 per cent. Details are given in Table 7.1. Further analysis shows that in all these three elections the percentage of men who exercised franchise was greater than that of women who voted in the elections. In 1965 elections, while 78.05 per cent of the men cast their votes, only 72.36 per cent of the women turned out for voting. Thus the difference between the men and women voters' turn-out was 5.69 per cent which is statistically significant. This has been the largest difference between male and female voting behaviour observed in any Assembly election in the state so far. The 1965 Assembly elections were conducted after the occurrence of the major split in the two major political parties of the state - the Communist Party and the Congress Party in 1964. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was formed after a split with the Communist Party of India (CPI).

In the period after the 1959 liberation struggle, the Congress Party in Kerala experienced intense group rivalries and intrigues. There were a series of allegations and counter allegations. It finally culminated in a major split within the Party. The defection of the 15 MLAs en masse from the party paved the way for the formation of a new regional party, viz., the Kerala Congress. As a result, a good number of Christians drifted away from the main stream of the Indian National Congress (268, p.96).

Table 7.3
Percentage of Men and Women in the Total Population since 1941

| Year 1 | Population | | Percentage of Men 5 | Percentage of Women 6 |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Total 2 | Women 4 | | |
| 1941 | 1,10,31,541 | 54,43,296 | 49.34 | 50.66 |
| 1951 | 1,35,49,118 | 66,81,901 | 49.32 | 50.68 |
| 1961 | 1,69,03,715 | 83,61,927 | 49.47 | 50.53 |
| 1971 | 2,13,47,375 | 1,05,87,851 | 49.60 | 50.40 |
| 1981 | 2,54,53,680 | 1,25,27,767 | 49.22 | 50.78 |
| 1991 | 2,90,32,828 | 1,42,30,391 | 49.01 | 50.99 |

Source: Census Report, Paper 3 of 1981 Kerala;
Census Report, 1991, Provisional.

Table 7.4
Percentage of Men and Women in the Total Population
During Election Years (Projections)

| Year | Men | Women |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1957 | 49.41 | 50.59 |
| 1960 | 49.45 | 50.55 |
| 1965 | 49.52 | 50.48 |
| 1967 | 49.55 | 50.45 |
| 1970 | 49.58 | 50.42 |
| 1977 | 49.35 | 50.65 |
| 1980 | 49.25 | 50.75 |
| 1982 | 49.19 | 50.81 |
| 1987 | 49.09 | 50.91 |
| 1991 | 49.01 | 50.99 |

Source: Women in Kerala: 1984 (Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984).

In the 1965 elections, perhaps for the first time, the Bishops of the Catholic Church stood divided with regard to an open expression of their political sympathies (268, p.96). This phenomenon might have indirectly influenced the percentage of Christian women voters who exercised their franchise. Because of the division among the Bishops there was no concerted, organised move from the side of the Church to influence women voters as in 1960. However the 1965 election turned out to be an abortive one since no single party or combination of parties was able to procure a majority and form a government. Thus, the stillborn legislature was dissolved and President's rule continued in Kerala till March 1967.

In the next two elections in 1967 and in 1970 the total women voters in the state outnumbered men. But the total turn-out of the women voters was less than that of the men voters in both the elections in terms of the respective percentages of the total.

The 1977 elections to the Assembly were held immediately after the withdrawal of the National Emergency proclaimed in the country in 1975, vide Art.352 of the Constitution. The elections to the Lok Sabha were also held alongwith it. As a result of a fresh delimitation of Assembly constituencies effected in 1974, Kerala had 140 Assembly constituencies during the 1977 elections. Female voters (57,88,386), marginally outnumbered their male counterparts (56,74,101) by one per cent. Even though in many of the states an anti-Congress wave was visible in the 1977 elections, the Congress Party in Kerala was able to mobilise all noncommunist forces in a Front led by it. Political parties like the Muslim League, the Kerala Congress and the National Democratic Party (NDP), which have communal vote banks under their control, were all in the same

Front. In the 1977 elections to the Assembly 70.20 percentage of the electorate exercised their votes. Moreover, the turn-out of the women voters had surpassed that of the male voters by 1.08 per cent. While 44,63,042 out of 56,74,101 of men voters (78.66 per cent) cast their votes, 79.74 per cent (46,15,417) of the total women voters (57,88,386) exercised their franchise. The NDP, a political projection of the Nair Service Society, in its maiden attempt in the election arena, bagged five seats. But, though there was a greater turn-out of women voters amongst themselves and a greater turn-out of the women than men in voting, only one woman candidate was elected to the Kerala Assembly in 1977.

In the next three elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1980, 1982 and 1987 the male-female turn-out in the elections was almost equal. In the 1980 and the 1982 elections 72.28 per cent and 73.51 per cent of voters cast their votes, while in the 1987 elections 80.54 per cent of voters exercised their franchise. In the 1980 elections the percentage of men who voted was 73.22, while that of women came only up to 71.36. But, in the next two elections in 1982 and in 1987, 73.51 per cent and 80.50 per cent men cast their votes and more or less the same percentage of women namely 73.51 in 1982 and 80.58 in 1987 also exercised their franchise.

In the 1980 Assembly elections certain interesting features were observed. Women were in a majority in all the Assembly constituencies in the districts of Malappuram, Palakkad and Thrissur, while men outnumbered women in all the constituencies of two hill districts, viz., Wynad and Idukki. On the whole, women voters outnumbered men in seven districts and in 90 constituencies, while the male voters were in majority only in 50 constituencies.

Kannur, Malappuram, Palakkad, Thrissur, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram were the women-dominated districts and Kozhikode, Wynad, Ernakulam, Idukki and Kottayam were the districts where men were in a majority. The increasing potential for women as voters becomes evident from this election onwards.

In the 1982 elections also, the female voters outnumbered the male voters by 1,63,987. Moreover, in 91 constituencies out of the 140 in the state, women voters were more in number than men. In the next elections to the Assembly in 1987 the position again changed. In 93 Assembly constituencies women outnumbered men voters. There was a clear difference of 1.36 per cent between male and female voters. Almost the same trend was maintained in the 1991 elections too.

The number of voters in the 1991 elections increased to 1,96,08,945 from the 1,59,50,019 voters in the 1987 elections. Of them, women voters outnumbered men by 2,31,409. Out of the 140 Assembly constituencies, women outnumbered men as voters in 98 constituencies. Moreover, in 58 constituencies, the percentage of women who exercised their franchise was greater than that of men. In one constituency, namely Adoor, 86.39 per cent of women voters exercised their franchise, while only 73.99 per cent of men electors voted. The difference came to 12.40 per cent. This phenomenon exploded the prevailing myth that women are by and large indifferent to politics and in the exercise of their right to franchise. In 74 constituencies women exercised their franchise at a higher percentage than the overall percentage of voting in the state, viz., 73.09 per cent (See Table 7.1).

Elections to the Lok Sabha

So far in Kerala nine elections to the Lok Sabha have been conducted. Four of them in 1957, 1967, 1977 and 1991 were held alongwith the Assembly elections. Even though in 1980 both the elections were conducted, they were not held together. The Lok Sabha elections preceded the Assembly elections in that year. The percentage of votes polled in these elections varied from 62.16 to 79.29. The lowest turn-out (62.16 per cent) occurred in the 1980 elections and the highest (79.29 per cent) in the 1989 elections. An analysis of the voting percentage of men and women voters in the Lok Sabha elections, as may be seen from Table 7.6, reveals that the turn-out of the male voters ranged from 63.58 per cent to 79.17 per cent and that of women voters varied from 60.78 to 80.16 per cent. The invalid votes in all these Lok Sabha elections were also not many.

In the 1957 Lok Sabha elections the total votes polled was 66.56 per cent. While 68.64 per cent of male voters participated in the voting, only 64.41 per cent of female voters had turned up. The political parties which contested the Lok Sabha elections of 1957 were the Indian National Congress, the Communist Party of India, the Praja Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party. The Muslim League, which contested the elections was not recognised as a political party by the Election Commission in 1957. A total number of 389 candidates contested the elections. There were also 75 Independents in the fray, which included 19 candidates fielded by the Muslim League. There were, thus, no direct communal groupings in that election. But in the 1962 elections the percentage of polling went upto 70.55. In these elections there

Table 7.5

Details of Electorate and Votes Polled in the Lok Sabha Elections in Kerala (1957 - 1991)

| Year 1 | Electorate | | | Percentage of Electorate | | | Percentage of Votes Polled | | |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------|-------|
| | Total 2 | Men 3 | Women 4 | men 5 | Women 6 | Total 7 | Men 8 | Women 9 | 10 |
| 1957 | 91,60,553 | 46,61,986 | 44,98,567 | 50.89 | 49.11 | 60,97,825 | 32,00,077 | 28,97,728 | 66.56 |
| 1962 | 80,03,142 | 39,55,346 | 40,47,795 | 49.42 | 50.58 | 56,45,940 | 29,30,721 | 27,15,219 | 70.55 |
| 1967 | 86,16,556 | 42,43,849 | 43,72,707 | 49.25 | 50.75 | 65,17,765 | 32,73,117 | 32,44,648 | 75.64 |
| 1971 | 1,02,17,893 | 50,78,582 | 51,39,311 | 49.70 | 50.30 | 65,93,446 | 33,40,227 | 32,53,219 | 64.52 |
| 1977 | 1,14,60,901 | 56,75,507 | 57,85,394 | 49.52 | 50.48 | 90,77,000 | 44,70,867 | 46,06,133 | 79.20 |
| 1980 | 1,32,66,764 | 65,60,800 | 67,05,964 | 49.45 | 50.55 | 82,46,713 | 41,71,058 | 40,75,655 | 62.16 |
| 1984 | 1,42,76,072 | 70,49,482 | 72,26,590 | 49.38 | 50.62 | 1,10,11,029 | 53,80,038 | 56,30,991 | 77.13 |
| 1989 | 1,90,03,126 | 93,83,597 | 96,19,529 | 49.37 | 50.63 | 1,50,67,192 | 73,93,886 | 76,73,306 | 79.29 |
| 1991 | 1,96,57,976 | 97,15,824 | 99,42,152 | 49.42 | 50.58 | 1,44,02,414 | 71,38,464 | 72,63,950 | 73.26 |

Source: 1 Report on the General Elections from 1957 to 1984 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

2 Report on Parliamentary Election: 1989 and 1991 (Election Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram).

Table 7.6

Percentage of Votes Exercised by Men and Women in the Lok Sabha Elections
in Kerala : 1957 - 1991

| Year | Men | | | | Women | | |
|------|------------------|------------|------------|------------------|------------|------------|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | Votes to be Cast | Votes Cast | Percentage | Votes to be Cast | Votes Cast | Percentage | |
| 1957 | 46,61,986 | 32,00,097 | 68.64 | 44,98,567 | 28,97,728 | 64.41 | |
| 1962 | 39,55,346 | 29,30,721 | 74.10 | 40,47,796 | 27,15,219 | 67.08 | |
| 1967 | 42,43,849 | 32,73,117 | 77.13 | 43,72,707 | 32,44,648 | 74.20 | |
| 1971 | 50,78,582 | 33,40,227 | 65.77 | 51,39,311 | 32,53,219 | 63.30 | |
| 1977 | 56,75,507 | 44,70,867 | 78.77 | 57,85,394 | 46,06,133 | 79.67 | |
| 1980 | 65,60,800 | 41,71,058 | 63.58 | 67,05,964 | 40,75,655 | 60.78 | |
| 1984 | 70,49,482 | 53,80,038 | 76.32 | 72,26,590 | 56,30,991 | 77.92 | |
| 1989 | 93,36,226 | 73,93,886 | 79.19 | 95,72,159 | 76,73,306 | 80.16 | |
| 1991 | 97,15,824 | 71,38,464 | 73.47 | 99,42,152 | 72,63,950 | 73.06 | |

Source: 1 Report on General Elections : 1957 - 1984 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

2 Report on Parliamentary Elections 1989 and 1991 (Election Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram).

was a difference of 7.02 per cent in the men-women turn-out. While 74.10 per cent of men cast their votes, only 67.08 per cent of women exercised their franchise.

In the first four elections to the Lok Sabha there was a lesser turn-out of women voters than men voters. But in the 1977 elections the women voters' turn-out was more than that of men. In that election 79.67 per cent of women voters voted as against 78.77 per cent of men voters who exercised their franchise.

But in the next Lok Sabha election in 1980 the trend again changed. The general enthusiasm of the voters in that election was at a very low ebb. C.P.Suresh in his article "Electoral Politics" states,

"The election campaign by the rival combinations of political parties in Kerala was by no means as furious or exciting as it used to be. The election took place in an atmosphere of unreality and scepticism with no great issues to inspire the electorate. There was no sign of any new 'wave' other than some marginal swing here and there" (430, p.177).

The percentage of voting came down to a mere 62.16 per cent. The percentage of women turn-out was only 60.78, while 63.58 per cent of men cast their votes.

In the next Lok Sabha elections held in 1985 the percentage of voting went up to 77.13 per cent. In the total number of voters there was an increase of one million over that of the 1980 elections. Women voters (72,26,590) outnumbered their male counterparts (70,49,482). Moreover, 77.92 per cent of women voters cast

their votes in that election. But the men voters' turn-out was a little lower at 76.32 per cent. In this election, two prominent incidents influenced the polling. The election was conducted immediately after the assassination of the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. The election results probably reflected a sympathy wave in favour of the Congress Party in the state. This sympathy wave might have perhaps influenced the women voters much more than men. The Kerala Congress, the Muslim League, the NDP and SRP were fighting together in the elections as the United Democratic Front (UDF). These parties also tried their best to persuade more women to vote. Thus the voting rate of women in this particular election surpassed that of men voters. The same trend was maintained in the 1989 elections too. The percentage of women voting touched the all-time high of 80.16 per cent. In the same elections a lesser percentage of men had exercised their right to vote. Only 79.19 per cent was the male voter turn-out.

In the last elections in 1991 also the difference between the percentage turn-out of men and women voters was almost negligible. While 73.47 per cent of men voters voted, 73.06 per cent of women voters also participated in the voting. Thus, in the election scene of Kerala the women voters were not behind the men in exercising their right to vote. At times, their turn-out was higher than that of men voters. It has been observed that in more than half of the total constituencies women voters outnumber men voters. Since the turn-out of the women voters has also been gradually increasing, in many of the constituencies women voters are able to influence the election results more decisively than men.

The Emerging Features

The detailed analysis of the voting pattern and behaviour of women in Kerala from the 1957 to the 1991 elections indicates certain features connected with the political participation of women in the state.

One great difficulty with the Indian political scene is that it is impossible to generalise the inter-relationship between any single factor and political behaviour. Patterns of the political behaviour of women from different regions show different relationships, influenced as they are by interrelated factors like the social status of women, their economic position, the cultural norms and above all the regional outlook towards women's role in the wider society.

A study conducted by a group of sociology students in the Cochin area, which tried to analyse the factors that influence a person in taking a decision to vote for a particular party arrived at the following conclusion. The most prominent factors are:

- 1 religion and caste
- 2 influence of relatives
- 3 promises, eg., job opportunities, road construction, water supply etc.
- 4 money and other rewards
- 5 threat.

Religion and caste were ranked by the respondents as the most powerful motives. The influence of relatives came next, followed by promises, then money and other rewards (537, p.53).

Of the above five factors, religion and caste have exercised a tremendous influence in the voting behaviour of women in Kerala. In Kerala, the most influential communal groups are the NSS, the SNDP Yogam and the Christian Churches (391, p.4). The NSS had launched its own party, viz., the NDP in 1972. The SNDP Yogam similarly organised its own political party, called the Socialist Republican Party (SRP) in 1975. After the split in the Congress Party in 1964 the Christian Churches had started offering support to the newly formed political party, viz., the Kerala Congress. Apart from the above-mentioned parties, the Indian Union Muslim League, which had originally been founded in 1937 and had suffered a setback after the partition of India in 1947, has had a revival and has been fully patronised by the Muslim community. In all the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Kerala the above parties had been acting as pressure groups. They have some influence, especially among the women voters. Whenever all these communal groupings unite under any election front of the right or left, usually the former, a majority of the votes of women are likely to swing in favour of that front. On such occasions the percentage of women voting is seen to have increased.

According to some observers, caste, personality and family status of candidates also appear to be important to voters perhaps more than party ideology or affiliation. Factors like education, religion, class and tradition also seem to affect women's participation (127, p.155).

According to Victor M Fic, "the politics in Kerala was merely a projection of the aspiration and strength of the communal organisations in the political arena" (537, p.53).

It was noted above that women voters outnumbered their male counterparts in many constituencies in the various elections. Since the sex ratio is generally favourable to women in most constituencies in Kerala, the sex factor is likely to be more and more significant in the coming years. Moreover, the percentage of women voting in the elections is also on the increase. In some of the elections the percentage of women turn-out was greater than that of men. The trend in the increasing turn-out of women voters shows perhaps that there is an increasing awareness in women regarding their political rights, duties and responsibilities as citizens. Still the women in the state have not so far succeeded in pressurising the different political parties to award increasing representation for them in the political parties or in the elected bodies of the state. At present, the strength of the votes of women can play a very decisive role in the outcome of any election, if these votes can be mobilised as a block vote.

The percentage of invalid votes in the elections has also been on the decrease over the years. This indicates the quality of voters - both men and women who are politically well informed and well experienced. The high literacy rate and educational standards, better communication facilities and frequent elections have contributed significantly to this development.

The participation of women as voters in the elections to the Assembly has been very high. But their participation as voters in the election to the Lok Sabha has been less. This might be due to a number of factors, including perhaps the fact that they are more attracted by the local issues and local candidatures which are

highlighted in the Assembly elections, than by the more remote national and international issues.

Still the question as to why women, with all their admirable participation in the electoral politics as voters, cannot perform a significant and meaningful role in the state political process remains unanswered.

Chapter 8

Kerala Women in the Legislature and State Administration

One of the cardinal principles of democracy is the rule of law. It means that the exercise of the powers of the government shall be conditioned and regulated by law. The unfettered executive discretion in administration or the arbitrary exercise of the will of the rulers is thus, effectively checked by the law in force and of the people in a democracy. The rule of law is, thus, in one sense, the guardian of people's freedom. This goes to emphasise the importance of law making and the role of the legislature in a democratic set-up. In theory, at least, the will of the people and their dreams and aspirations are suitably transformed into vital legislation by the law makers.

The aspirations and interests of different sections of people are to be effectively reflected in the law making institutions. After thorough deliberations, a law is made as the fruit of collective wisdom. The women members of the State and Union Legislatures in India have a double responsibility to shoulder. They are to represent the interests of the voters of their respective constituencies generally and also to reflect the problems faced by women in society. In fact, the quality of the participation of women in politics may be gauged by their behaviour as voters and also by the extent to which their interests are represented in the state legislatures, in the union parliament and in other policy and decision-making bodies.

In most countries of the world the women legislator is so rare a phenomenon that this very scarcity ought to attract

interest. Lenin, in his speech on the International Women's Day in 1921, said that "the masses cannot be drawn into political life unless women are brought to play their part in it" (267, p.3). And women in Kerala constitute more than half its population.

The Constitution of India provides a framework for women's political participation at the elementary level through universal adult franchise of women under Article 326 of the Constitution.

Article 15 of the Constitution has already reassured this right by prohibiting any discrimination on ground of sex. In spite of these constitutional provisions the results have been less than satisfactory. As Nirmala Buch points out,

Though women are legally supposed to enjoy the same right as men to seek seats to the Union and State Legislatures and the local bodies, the statistics of their participation in election contests have been highly disappointing. Ever since the first general election their numerical strength either in the Union or in the State Legislatures has been far from proportionate to their total strength in the population. Municipalities and Panchayats continued to have a token representation of women only to the extent that the law provides for co-option and reservation (479, p.75).

It is a fact that women cannot continue to compete on equal terms with men because of traditional as well as persisting social inhibitions. They are unable even today to mobilize the resources or the support of any political party to elicit support for their political participation or to contest the elections except as voters. Even if they are able to make the extra effort necessary

to do so, they find themselves handicapped, burdened as they are with household and child caring chores and responsibilities. They are not also adequately motivated, though there has been a rapid rise in political activity by women over the years. There have also been some activities among women, though not adequate, in movements in defence of their own interests and rights as citizens (634, p.3).

The Committee on the Status of Women in India concluded that the indifference of political parties to the problems of women is one of the reasons for the small number of women candidates in the elections (190, p.105). No political party has adopted any norm or definite policy guidelines about the percentage of women candidates to be sponsored by them in elections (479, p.75). The uniformly reluctant nature of the political parties to field women candidates is partly a consequence of the traditional male domination in politics or of the reluctance of women to enter a field like politics, where competition is tough. It is very different from taking up a job, which is easier and more immediately rewarding in money terms than being in active politics. The high cost of electioneering also makes women reluctant to contest elections as Independent candidates. Apart from being very expensive, it is also very risky to contest an election as an Independent candidate, without the support of a political party. Political parties in their election manifestos promise women all opportunities for their increased participation in social, economic and political activities. Yet, the record of almost all parties is poor when it comes to the actual involvement of women in these activities or the implementation of these promises in their governmental or party activities (127, p.157).

Kerala has a fairly healthy record of rapid growth in women's political mobilisation and women's literacy. But it has lagged behind in electing women members to the legislature. An analysis of Kerala elections to the Parliament and the State Legislative Assembly reveals that as in other states of India and other countries of the world, in Kerala also women have been extremely underrepresented in the legislatures as well as in the policy making bodies of the political parties. This is true about women's participation in other professions also. Thus, the inadequate participation of women in electoral politics is part of a general problem relating to the status of women in Kerala society.

Women and Elections to the State Legislature

Travancore Legislature: 1888 - 1947

"Travancore was the first among the Native States in India to recognise the value of a Legislative Council as an indispensable adjunct to civilised and enlightened government. As early as in 1888 a Council consisting of eight members was constituted" (92, p.1). But, from 1888 to 1921, no woman could become a member of the Travancore Legislative Council.

The first Legislative Assembly of Travancore was established in 1904. Three years later, the Assembly was empowered to elect four members to the Legislative Council. Earlier, the House was not given any right to have a say in the administration. In 1919 the Legislative Council was reorganised and it was empowered to discuss the budget. The members had the right to put interpellations, but not supplementaries (233, p.89).

In October 1921 the composition and character of the Council underwent further changes. The strength of the Council was raised to 50. For the first time, a woman was nominated to the Council. Mary Punnen Lukose was the first woman nominated to the Council and later on, in 1925 she was chosen to act as Minister of Public Health (233, p.89). Thus she became the first woman to be a member of the Legislative Council in any of the Indian states.

In 1921 the Council members were allowed to move resolutions on matters of public interest and to ask supplementary questions and to vote on budget demands. Freedom of speech was also granted in the Council but, of course, within limits (233, p.89).

Mary Punnen Lukose continued to be a member of the Second Council (1925-28) and the Third Council (1928-31). Apart from her, two more women members were nominated to the Third Council. Thus there were three women members in the 64-member Council. But in the Fourth Council (1931-32) Anna Chandi, the first woman to become later a High Court Judge in India was alone nominated to the 67-member Council (233, p.962). These developments are indicated in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1

Travancore Legislative Councils: 1921 - 32

| Year | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----|-------|
| First Council (1921-25) | 66 | 65 | 1 |
| Second Council (1925-28) | 71 | 70 | 1 |
| Third Council (1928-31) | 64 | 61 | 3 |
| Fourth Council (1931-32) | 67 | 66 | 1 |
| Total | 268 | 262 | 6 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888-1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) pp.962 - 966.

On January 1, 1933 a bi-cameral legislature was created in Travancore, with the Sri Mulam Assembly as the Lower House and the Sri Chitra State Council as the Upper House. Suffrage was limited to the propertied classes. But women did not have the right to vote. The Dewan was the President of both the Houses. Along with that the privileges, functions and powers of the legislature were also enhanced. The members of the Assembly were allowed the privilege to vote on demands for grants and to reduce or to reject any item of the demands (233, p.89). This system continued till September 4, 1947 when the establishment of responsible government was proclaimed by the Maharaja.

In the 27th session of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly in 1931, five women were nominated to the 99-member Assembly. In the next session in 1932 also four women were nominated to the House of 100 members (233, pp.966-1006). Thereafter, till 1947, women members were there, both in the Sri Mulam Assembly and in the Sri Chitra State Council, as shown in Table 8.2 and 8.3.

Table 8.2

Number of Members in the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly: 1933 - 47

| Year | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|-----------|------------------|-----|-------|
| 1933 - 37 | 105 | 102 | 3 |
| 1937 - 44 | 161 | 157 | 4 |
| 1944 - 47 | 110 | 109 | 1 |
| Total | 376 | 368 | 8 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) pp.1011 - 1015.

Table 8.3

Number of Members in the Sri Chitra State Council: 1933 - 47

| Year | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|-----------|------------------|-----|-------|
| 1933 - 37 | 72 | 70 | 2 |
| 1937 - 44 | 121 | 118 | 3 |
| 1944 - 47 | 70 | 68 | 2 |
| Total | 263 | 256 | 7 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala;

1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat,
Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990)
pp.1015 - 1019.

A glance at the number of women present in both the Assembly and the Council clearly reveals that the membership of women in the Travancore legislative bodies was grossly inadequate compared to their proportion in the population, educational level and social status among all the major caste and religious groups. But a beginning was made.

In 1947, after the declaration of the establishment of responsible government by the Maharaja, the new Assembly was elected on the basis of adult suffrage. It had an elected President unlike the Dewan President in the earlier legislative bodies. The legislature was also to function as the Constituent

Assembly of Travancore. The Constituent Assembly held its first sitting on March 20, 1948.

Developments in Cochin: 1925 - 1947

In April 1925 a Legislative Council was established for the first time in the erstwhile princely state of Cochin. Voting rights were restricted to the propertied classes. The Council was given the power to enact laws and to discuss and vote on the budget demands. In 1938 the system of diarchy was introduced in the state. That was considered as a unique constitutional reform at that time.

In the Cochin Legislative Councils, from 1925 to 1945, women members were nominated (see Table 8.4). In the first and the second Councils in 1925 and 1928, one woman each was nominated. In 1931 and 1935 the number was raised to two each. In 1938 three women were nominated to the 90-member Council. But in 1945 the representation of women was considerably increased by the nomination of four women to a House of 66 members.

Table 8.4

**Membership of the Cochin Legislative Council: 1925 - 45
and Representation of Women**

| Year | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|-------|---------------------|-----|-------|
| 1925 | 51 | 50 | 1 |
| 1928 | 61 | 60 | 1 |
| 1931 | 62 | 60 | 2 |
| 1935 | 57 | 55 | 2 |
| 1938 | 93 | 90 | 3 |
| 1945 | 66 | 62 | 4 |
| Total | 390 | 377 | 13 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) pp.1019 - 1025.

On August 14, 1947, the Maharaja of Cochin issued a proclamation establishing responsible government in the state. In 1948 adult franchise was granted and the Legislative Council was renamed as the Legislative Assembly.

The two erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated on July 1, 1949 into the Travancore - Cochin State. The new Assembly was composed of the members of the Constituent Assembly of Travancore and Legislative Assembly of Cochin. The

first meeting of the Legislative Assembly of the Travancore - Cochin State was held on July 11, 1949, under the presidentship of an elected Speaker. The Ministers of the erstwhile states of Travancore and Cochin continued as Ministers of the new state also, which was headed by the Chief Minister of Travancore State (233, p.90). The Maharaja of Travancore called the Rajapramukh was the constitutional head of the state.

During 1948-49 the Legislative Assembly of Cochin had two women members as against 56 men. The Travancore Legislative Assembly had four nominated women members, among its 121 members (Table 8.5). Thus, when the two States of Travancore and Cochin were integrated into the Travancore - Cochin State, and the two Assemblies were merged to form the Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly, there were six women members in the 179-member house (Table 8.5).

Table 8.5

**Number of Members of the Cochin and Travancore Legislative
Assemblies for the Period: 1948 - 49**

| Assembly | Period | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----|-------|
| Cochin Legislative Assembly | 1948 - 49 | 58 | 56 | 2 |
| Travancore Legislative Assembly | 1948 - 49 | 121 | 117 | 4 |
| Total | | 179 | 173 | 6 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) pp.1025 - 1026.

General elections were held in the erstwhile Travancore - Cochin State from December 10, 1951 to January 5, 1952. Even though no party secured an absolute majority, a minority ministry was formed by the Indian National Congress. In that Assembly there was only one woman member, as against 109 men. She belonged to the Communist Party of India. This minority ministry was voted out of power on 23rd September, 1953 and fresh elections were held in February, 1954 for the 118 seats in the Assembly. Out of this, only two women were elected to the Assembly (Table 8.6). They were K.R.Gouri, belonging to the Communist Party of India and T.C.Leela Devi Amma, an Independent candidate.

Table 8.6

Membership of the Travancore - Cochin
Legislative Assembly: 1949 - 56

| Period | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|-----------|---------------------|-----|-------|
| 1949 - 52 | 179 | 173 | 6 |
| 1952 - 53 | 110 | 109 | 1 |
| 1954 - 56 | 118 | 116 | 2 |
| Total | 407 | 398 | 9 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) pp.1028 - 1034.

In this election also, no party secured an absolute majority. Again, a minority government was sworn in, with the support of some other parties. In February 1955, the ministry was defeated on the floor of the House and a new ministry was sworn in. That ministry also could not complete its term and the state came under President's rule. This situation continued till the formation of the Kerala State on November 1, 1956.

Legislative Experience of Malabar Region

The Malabar region consisting of five districts of the present day Kerala State, was just one of the districts of the Madras Presidency under the British rule. It continued to be so under the Madras State after independence till the reorganisation of states in 1956. The Malabar District was represented in the Madras Legislative Assembly from 1920 onwards. But till 1956, there was no woman representative from the Malabar region in the Madras Legislative Council (Table 8.7). But in the Legislative Assembly, a lone woman member represented the Malabar region in the 1937-46 period and in the 1946-51 period (Table 8.8).

Table 8.7

**Number of Members who Represented the Erstwhile Malabar District
in the Madras Legislative Council: 1921 - 56**

| Year | Men | Women |
|--------------|-----------|----------|
| 1921 - 23 | 5 | - |
| 1923 - 26 | 9 | - |
| 1927 - 30 | 4 | - |
| 1930 - 36 | 5 | - |
| 1937 - 56 | 8 | - |
| Total | 31 | - |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala; 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) p.1034.

Table 8.8

Number of Members who Represented the Erstwhile Malabar District
in the Madras Legislative Assembly: 1937 - 51

| Year | Total Membership | Men | Women |
|-----------|---------------------|-----|-------|
| 1937 - 46 | 16 | 15 | 1 |
| 1946 - 51 | 20 | 19 | 1 |
| Total | 36 | 34 | 2 |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) p.1035.

In Table 8.9, the names of all the women members of various legislative bodies in pre-independent Kerala are given. It reveals the fact that many of them were repeatedly nominated or elected to the various bodies. Therefore, in effect, the number of women involved in the legislative activities was very few.

Table 8.9

Women Legislative Members in Pre-independent Kerala

I Women Representatives in Travancore Legislative
Councils: 1921 - 32

First Council (1921 - 25)

| | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Mary Punnen Lukose | Nominated |
|---|--------------------|-----------|

Second Council (1925 - 28)

| | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Mary Punnen Lukose | Nominated |
|---|--------------------|-----------|

Third Council (1928 - 31)

| | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Elizabeth Kuruvila | Nominated |
|---|--------------------|-----------|

| | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|
| 2 | Gomathynayagam Pillai | " |
|---|-----------------------|---|

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---|
| 3 | Mary Punnen Lukose | " |
|---|--------------------|---|

Fourth Council (1931 - 32)

| | | |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | Anna Chandy | Nominated |
|---|-------------|-----------|

II Sri Mulam Popular Assembly: 1904 - 31

i Twentyseventh Session (1931)

| | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Smt.A.Sankara Pillai | Nominated |
|---|----------------------|-----------|

| | | |
|---|-------------|---|
| 2 | Anna Chandy | " |
|---|-------------|---|

| | | |
|---|----------------------|---|
| 3 | Codiveetil C.Rudrani | " |
|---|----------------------|---|

| | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| 4 | Peninah Mosco | " |
|---|---------------|---|

| | | |
|---|-------------|---|
| 5 | P.Meenakshi | " |
|---|-------------|---|

ii Twentyeighth session (1932)

| | | |
|---|--------------|-----------|
| 1 | T.V.Narayani | Nominated |
|---|--------------|-----------|

| | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| 2 | Walsalam Rose | " |
|---|---------------|---|

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|
| 3 | Mary Alexander | " |
| 4 | B.Bhagirathi Amma | " |

Bicameral Legislature

a Sri Mulam Assembly

i First Council (1933 - 37)

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | T.Narayani Amma | Nominated |
| 2 | Gnanasigamany Hepzibah | " |
| 3 | Mary Punnen Lukose | " |

ii Second Council (1937 - 44)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Devaki Antharjanam | Nominated |
| 2 | T.Narayani Amma | " |
| 3 | C.O.Ponnamma | " |
| 4 | Mary Punnen Lukose | " |

iii Third Council (1944 - 47)

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------|
| 1 | T.Narayani Amma | Nominated |
|---|-----------------|-----------|

b Sri Chitra State Council

i First Council (1933 - 37)

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Smt.D.H.Watts | Nominated |
| 2 | Mary Punnen Lukose | " |

ii Second Council (1937 - 44)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Ranganayaki Ammal | Nominated |
| 2 | Thressiamma Kora | Elected |
| 3 | Mary Punnen Lukose | Nominated |

iii Third Council (1944 - 47)

- | | | |
|---|------------------|-----------|
| 1 | P.Thankamma | Nominated |
| 2 | Thressiamma Kora | Elected |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| IV | Cochin Legislative Council: 1925 - 49 | |
| | i First Council (1925 - 28) | |
| | 1 Thottakkattu Madhavi Amma | Nominated |
| | ii Second Council (1928 - 31) | |
| | 1 Smt.G.Pavithran | " |
| | iii Third Council (1931 - 35) | |
| | 1 Parvathi Nenminimangalam (Special Member) | |
| | 2 Smt.Swaris | Nominated |
| | iv Fourth Council (1935 - 38) | |
| | 1 Smt.G.M.D'Souza | Nominated |
| | 2 P.Meenakshykutty Amma | " |
| | v Fifth Council (1938 - 45) | |
| | 1 Smt.C.R.Iyyunni | Elected |
| | 2 K.Joshua Anni | " |
| | 3 Thankamma N.Menon | " |
| | vi Sixth Council (1945 - 48) | |
| | 1 Annie Joseph | Elected |
| | 2 K.Dhakshayani Velayudhan | " |
| | 3 Dr.(Mrs.)T.Francis | " |
| | 4 Smt.K.M.R.Menon | " |
| V | Cochin Legislative Assembly: 1948 - 49 | |
| | 1 Annie Joseph | Elected |
| | 2 Dr.(Mrs.)T.Francis | " |
| VI | Travancore Legislative Assembly: 1948 49 | |
| | 1 Accamma Cheriyan | Elected |
| | 2 Annie Mascarene | " |
| | 3 Devaki Gopidas | " |

VII a Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly: 1949 - 52

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---------|
| 1 | Accamma Cheriyan | Elected |
| 2 | Annie Joseph | " |
| 3 | Annie Mascarene | " |
| 4 | Devaki Gopidas | " |
| 5 | Dr.(Mrs.)T.Francis | " |
| 6 | Thankamma N.Menon | " |

b Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly: 1952 - 53

| | | |
|---|-----------|---------|
| 1 | K.R.Gouri | Elected |
|---|-----------|---------|

c Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly: 1954 - 56

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---------|
| 1 | K.R.Gouri | Elected |
| 2 | T.C.Leeladevi Amma | " |

VIII Members who Represented the Erstwhile Malabar District in Madras Legislative Council/Assembly**Madras Legislative Assembly****a First Assembly (1937 - 46)**

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---------|
| 1 | A.V.Kuttimalu Amma | Elected |
|---|--------------------|---------|

b Second Assembly (1946 - 51)

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---------|
| 1 | A.V.Kuttimalu Amma | Elected |
|---|--------------------|---------|

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

Elections to the Kerala Legislative Assembly

The first general elections were held in Kerala during the period, February 28 to March 11, 1957. Thereafter, nine more elections to the Legislative Assembly have been conducted in Kerala so far. Thus, since independence, altogether 13 elections were held - two general and one mid-term elections to the erstwhile Travancore - Cochin State Assembly, and ten elections to the Kerala State Legislative Assembly.

Though there are no legal restrictions on women contesting elections, very few women have ventured to do so and enter the legislature. An objective analysis of the results of the general elections after independence shows that the part played by women in legislative politics is negligible and insignificant. It is clear from Table 8.10 that, over the years, there have been some variations in the total number of women candidates in the elections. This has varied in accordance with the increase in the total number of seats of the Assembly after the several delimitations of the constituencies. Still, it cannot be said that there has been any significant improvement in the number of women candidates contesting the elections.

Altogether, in all the ten elections to the Kerala Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1991, a total number of 6,120 candidates contested for 1,351 seats. Of these, there were only 156 women candidates, forming a meagre 2.54 per cent of the total number of candidates. Further analysis shows that since the same persons had contested in several elections, the exact number of women who were involved in the election process as candidates was a meagre 100 (Table 8.11). For example CPI(M) K.R.Gouri was a

candidate in all the ten elections and K.R.Saraswathy Amma (Congress) contested in eight elections. More than 20 women filed their nominations in more than one general election.

The maximum number of women candidates fielded in any one election was 34 in the 1987 elections. But the total number of candidates in the field in that election was 1,260. Percentage-wise it was only 2.6 per cent of the total number of candidates. But in the 1991 elections, about 3.5 per cent of the total number of candidates were women, i.e., 27 women out of a total of 775 candidates. In the 1967 elections, only nine women were fielded as candidates as against a total of 423 candidates contesting the elections. Thus it can be observed that even though there were more women voters than men in the electorate, women did not get their due share in the selection of candidates. It may be due to either the non-availability of sufficient number of politically conscious and ambitious women politicians or perhaps to the reluctance of various political parties to field more women candidates. This latter might have been due to different reasons such as the absence of an adequate number of women in the leadership of political parties, the inadequacies that women suffer from vying with men for seats of power, fear of their electoral prospects or simply a hidden prejudice in men against women being recognised as leaders.

Table 8.10

Women in the Elections to the Kerala State Legislative Assembly : 1957 - 1991

| Year of Elections | Contestants | | Total Contestants | Elected | | Total Elected | Percentage of Elected Women in Total Membership | | Percentage of Votes Polled for Women Candidates in the Total Votes Polled | Percentage of Men and Women in the Total Population | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|-------------------|---------|-------|---------------|---|-------|---|---|-------|
| | Men | Women | | Men | Women | | Men | Women | | Men | Women |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 1957 | 379 | 10 | 389 | 120 | 6 | 126 | 95.24 | 4.76 | 3.09 | 49.32 | 50.68 |
| 1960 | 299 | 13 | 312 | 119 | 7 | 126 | 94.44 | 5.56 | 4.58 | 49.32 | 50.68 |
| 1965 | 547 | 11 | 558 | 130 | 3 | 133 | 97.44 | 2.26 | 2.65 | 49.47 | 50.53 |
| 1967 | 414 | 9 | 423 | 132 | 1 | 133 | 99.25 | 0.75 | 2.03 | 49.47 | 50.53 |
| 1970 | 495 | 10 | 505 | 131 | 2 | 133 | 98.50 | 1.50 | 1.75 | 49.47 | 50.53 |
| 1977 | 558 | 11 | 569 | 139 | 1 | 140 | 99.29 | 0.71 | 1.60 | 49.60 | 50.40 |
| 1980 | 589 | 13 | 602 | 135 | 5 | 140 | 96.43 | 3.57 | 2.68 | 49.60 | 50.40 |
| 1982 | 682 | 18 | 700 | 135 | 5 | 140 | 96.43 | 3.57 | 2.12 | 49.22 | 50.78 |
| 1987 | 1,226 | 34 | 1,260 | 132 | 8 | 140 | 94.29 | 5.71 | 6.11 | 49.22 | 50.78 |
| 1991 | 775 | 27 | 802 | 132 | 8 | 140 | 94.29 | 5.71 | 4.76 | 49.01 | 50.99 |
| | 5,964 | 156 | 6,120 | 1,305 | 46 | 1,351 | 96.56 | 3.44 | 2.96 | 49.34 | 50.66 |

Source: 1 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

2 Assembly Elections since 1951 (Department of Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 1990).

3 Kerala Gazette Extraordinary, 1991 April 30 (Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

4 Report to General Elections in India; 1952 - 1987 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

5 Dakshina Sandesam, 1954 March 15, p.4-6.

6 Women in Kerala: 1989 (Department of Economics and Statistics, Thiruvananthapuram, 1989) p.3.

The percentages in columns 8, 9 and 10 have been computed by the researcher.

Table 8.11

Party-wise Break-up of Women Candidates and of those Getting Elected in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections : 1957 - 1991

| Year | Contested | | | | | | | | | | | Elected | | | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|---------|---------|--------|-----|-----|-----|----|--------|-----|-----|---------|-----|--------|--------|-----|----|--------|-----|-------|
| | INC | CONG(I) | CONG(U) | CPI(M) | CPI | BJP | BSP | KC | JANATA | PSP | IND | TOTAL | INC | CON(I) | CPI(M) | CPI | KC | JANATA | IND | TOTAL |
| 1957 | 6 | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 10 | 3 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | 6 |
| 1960 | 7 | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 13 | 5 | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 7 |
| 1965 | - | 5 | - | 3 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 2 | 11 | - | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 3 | |
| 1967 | - | 5 | - | 1 | - | - | 2 | - | - | 1 | 9 | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | |
| 1970 | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 5 | 10 | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 2 | |
| 1977 | - | - | - | 3 | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | 6 | 11 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | |
| 1980 | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 7 | 13 | - | - | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 5 | |
| 1982 | - | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | - | - | - | 12 | 18 | - | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 5 | |
| 1987 | - | 5 | - | 6 | 3 | 4 | - | - | - | 16 | 34 | - | 3 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | 8 | |
| 1991 | - | 7 | - | 4 | 1 | 7 | 1 | - | - | 7 | 27 | - | 5 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 8 | |
| Total 13 | 26 | 1 | 22 | 14 | 13 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 58 | 156 | 8 | 8 | 12 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 46 |

Source: 1 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala 1888-1988, A Centenary Souvenir (Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990)

2 Assembly Elections since 1951 (Public Relations Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

3 Report to General Elections in India: 1952-1987 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

4 Dakshina Sandesam, 1954, March 15, p.4-6.

5 Kerala Gazette Extraordinary, 1991 April 30 (Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

A party-wise break-up of the candidatures of women also indicates that, by and large, all political parties have been uniformly reluctant to give more seats to women (Table 8.11). Of the 156 candidates so far fielded in the various elections, 58 had filed their nominations as Independents. Only 98 candidates were fielded by the various political parties. In the first general elections in 1957, the Indian National Congress put up six women candidates and the other major political party, viz., the Communist Party of India fielded three. One woman candidate was put up by the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). In the electoral field at that time, there were in all 379 men candidates. It is interesting to note that no Independent woman candidate contested in this election. But in the next election in 1960, two Independent women candidates filed their nominations, apart from the seven women candidates, three fielded by the Indian National Congress and four by the undivided Communist Party. Thereafter, in all the subsequent elections Independent women candidates also appeared on the scene. In the 1987 elections as many as 16 Independent women candidates were there in the field while all the political parties together fielded only 18 women candidates. This perhaps indicates that there are more willing women political activists in society than are recognised by the political parties, who venture to contest the elections as Independent candidates and who are ready to spend a certain amount of money as election expenses. The situation is also perhaps indicative of the weak position that women occupy in the different political parties. But certainly there cannot be a sufficient number of such women activists in the political scene unless the various political parties make a more

deliberate effort to field more women candidates in the general elections. Unless such a development takes place the role of women in politics may continue to remain subdued.

A glance at the party-wise participation of women candidates in the 10 elections taken together, from 1957 to 1991, reveals that the Congress has so far put up a total of 26 women candidates the Communist Party of India (Marxist) 22, the Communist Party of India (CPI) seven, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 13 and the Kerala Congress five. In addition, the Janata Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Congress (U) have fielded one candidate each and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) has put up two candidates. In the 1957 and 1960 elections, the undivided Congress Party and the undivided Communist Party fielded 13 and seven women candidates respectively. But it is surprising to note that in a very significant election as that of 1977, which was held after the withdrawal of the national emergency, the major political party in the country, viz., the Congress (I) put up no woman candidate at all though it was a very keen and prestigious fight for the party which itself was the ruling party and was headed by a woman as the President of the party and as the prospective Prime Minister of the country.

In such a crucial fight, in the normal course, the party would have made every effort to cultivate every section of the population for support. The total absence of women candidates perhaps implies that women are yet to emerge as an organized vote bank or that women themselves are not perhaps very much concerned that there are not a large number of women candidates taking part in the elections as candidates.

An analysis of the electoral success of the women candidates in the various elections may perhaps act as an indicator of more significant conclusions. Out of the 156 women candidates who contested the 10 elections from 1957 onwards, 46 came out victorious. The list of women candidates who won the elections and became members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1991 is given in Table 8.12. It shows that representation of women in the legislature was the weakest in the period of the 1965 to 1977 elections (4 elections) out of the ten elections after the formation of Kerala. Again, some of them were elected to the Assembly for more than one term and therefore the actual number of women who became members of the legislature from 1957 to 1991 is only 23. It is found that 3.4 per cent of the successful candidates were women, even though there were only 2.54 per cent of women candidates among the total number of contestants. In the Kerala Legislative Assembly the representation of women has varied from 0.71 per cent to 5.71 per cent.

Table 8.12

**List of Elected Women Members of the Kerala Legislative
Assembly: 1957 - 1991**

| 1957 Elections | | 1960 Elections | |
|-----------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
| K.O.Aysha Bai | CPI | K.O.Aysha Bai | CPI |
| K.R.Gouri | CPI | K.R.Gouri | CPI |
| Rosamma Punnoose | CPI | Kusumam Joseph | Cong. |
| Kusumam Joseph | Cong. | Sarada Krishnan | Cong. |
| Sarada Krishnan | Cong. | Leela Damodara Menon | Cong. |
| Leela Damodara Menon | Cong. | Nabeesath Beevi | Cong. |
| | | K.R.Saraswathy Amma | Cong. |
| 1965 Elections | | 1967 Elections | |
| K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) | K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) |
| K.R.Saraswathy Amma | KC | | |
| Susheela Gopalan | CPI(M) | | |
| 1970 Elections | | 1977 Elections | |
| K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) | Bhargavi Thankappan | CPI |
| Pennamma Jacob | IND | | |
| 1980 Elections | | 1982 Elections | |
| M.Kamalam | Janata | M.Kamalam | IND |
| K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) | K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) |
| K.R.Saraswathy Amma | IND | Rachael Sunny | IND |
| Bhargavi Thankappan | CPI | Bhargavi Thankappan | CPI |
| Devootty | CPI(M) | Devootty | CPI(M) |

| 1987 Elections | | 1991 Elections | |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
| M.T.Padma | Cong.(I) | M.T.Padma | Cong.(I) |
| K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) | K.R.Gouri | CPI(M) |
| Bhargavi Thankappan | CPI | Sobhana George | Cong.(I) |
| Leela Damodara Menon | Cong.(I) | Alphonsa John | Cong.(I) |
| Rosamma Chacko | Cong.(I) | Rosamma Chacko | Cong.(I) |
| Rosamma Punnoose | CPI | K.C.Rosakutty | Cong.(I) |
| Mercy Kutty Amma | CPI(M) | N.K.Radha | CPI(M) |
| Nabeesa Ummal | IND | Meenakshi Thampan | CPI |

Source: 1 Assembly Elections since 1951 (Public Relations Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

2 Report to General Elections in India; 1952 - 1987
(Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

3 Kerala Gazette Extraordinary, 1991 April 30 (Kerala Government, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

As revealed in Table 8.12, in the 1977 legislature there was a lone woman member. The Communist Party of India (CPI) fielded just one woman candidate in the elections. She came out successful. In the 1967 elections also, only one woman candidate had emerged successful to enter the 133-member House. In the 1987 and the 1991 elections, there were eight women candidates and each had succeeded in becoming a member of the House. It can be seen that the participation of women in legislative politics indicates a slightly upward trend, both in the number of women candidates contesting and in winning the elections from 1980 onwards.

In the first two general elections to the State Assembly in 1957 and in 1960, altogether 13 women candidates had won. Of them, nine candidates had been fielded by the Indian National Congress and four by the Communist Party of India (undivided). After the splits in the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party, a visible change could be seen in the pattern of success carved out by the divided parties. Even though Congress (I) fielded 14 women candidates in total in the six elections between 1965 and 1982, no woman candidate was elected. But in all these elections the CPI(M) alone could field women candidates who won. On the other hand the CPI opened its account for successful women candidates only in the 1977 election and, thereafter, in all the subsequent Legislative Assemblies, the CPI had its woman legislator. Apart from these three major parties, the Kerala Congress and the Janata Party won one seat each for their women representatives. Moreover, five Independent women candidates out of 58, also won the elections. However, they were all supported by political parties.

The above statistics indicate that the percentage of success for women candidates, when they are sponsored by the political parties, is comparatively better than their chances of success as Independents. Out of the 98 candidates fielded by the various political parties in the past ten elections, 41 candidates came out victorious (41.8 per cent). At the same time, out of 58 Independent women candidates, only five won the election (0.86 per cent). Moreover, all these five successful candidates were fielded as Independent candidates supported by certain political parties.

But all the political parties, major as well as minor, have not sponsored a sizeable number of women candidates in any election. The maximum number of women candidates fielded by any political party in any of the previous elections to the 140-member legislative assembly has only been seven.

The Congress (I), the largest political party in the country, did not have even a single elected woman representative in the Kerala Legislative Assembly from 1965 to 1987. It is significant that such a situation exists even in the case of a major political party like the Congress (I). It is often alleged that women aspirants do not get a fair deal at the time of the selection of candidates for elections in the various political parties.

Leela Damodara Menon, former Member of Parliament and a three-time member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly has openly expressed this view on the participation of women in the electoral politics. According to her, "Today politics is nothing but a tussle for power. Women, with all their limitations, cannot come out successful in that fierce fight. Even the ability to mobilise money from the public is considered to be an added qualification for a politician" (641).

She also finds exorbitant election expenditure a great hindrance to women to come into electoral politics, especially when women do not enjoy economic self-reliance in society. As an example, she points out, "Today, elections place all emphasis on propaganda. Election expenditure is soaring high. In 1957 and in 1960 when I contested at Kunnamangalam I had only one vehicle and that too was a jeep" (641). This is not possible now, when in an

election hundreds of vehicles are needed. She holds the view that all political parties maintain a kind of dislike for women, especially when the party tickets are given for contesting the elections (641).

Bhargavi Thankappan, former Member of Parliament and a former Deputy Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, also expressed her point of view on the same issue, in a personal interview held on 8th February, 1992. She emphatically said that even though there were many women who were capable of becoming very successful politicians, they were not given sufficient opportunity by political parties. She alleged that it was the usual practice of all political parties to keep women confined to the women's wing of the parties. For improving women's participation in social and political activities, she suggested sufficient reservation for women in elected bodies (636).

The opinion of these two experienced women politicians of the state shows that a deliberate initiative from all the political parties is positively required to bring more women into electoral politics. However, this would be possible only if more women become more active in the working of the political parties and effective in their decision-making bodies.

Parallel to the phenomenon of the same candidates contesting the elections several times it is seen that among the few successful candidates the same women win again and again, bringing down the total of the number of women winning elections. Even though 46 seats were won by women candidates in all the elections taken together, it was shared only by 23 individuals, as the same candidate was winning more than once in several cases (Table 8.12).

For example, K.R.Gouri was elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly nine times. She was defeated only once. This was in the 1977 elections. Similarly Bhargavi Thankappan was elected four times in a row in the 1977 to 1987 elections. On the whole 12 persons won the elections more than once (see Table 8.12). Only very rarely new persons, both men and women, are given tickets in the elections by the different political parties. But this tendency is found to be gradually changing in the last two general elections, held in 1987 and 1991. In the 9th Legislative Assembly, constituted after the general elections of 1987, four new faces were there among the women members. Similarly in the 10th Legislative Assembly too, five of the eight successful women legislators were newcomers.

Table 8.13

Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections - Percentage of Men and women Candidates

Elected and the Total Men and Women Contested : 1957 - 1991

| Year of Elections | 1 Number of Men Contested | 2 Number of Men Elected | 3 Percentage of Men's Election | 4 Number of Women Contested | 5 Number of Women Elected | 6 Percentage of Women's Election | 7 Number of Women Elected | 8 Percentage of Women's Election |
|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1957 | 379 | 120 | 31.7 | 10 | 6 | 60 | | |
| 1960 | 299 | 119 | 39.8 | 13 | 7 | 53.84 | | |
| 1965 | 547 | 130 | 23.76 | 11 | 3 | 27.27 | | |
| 1967 | 414 | 132 | 31.88 | 9 | 1 | 11.11 | | |
| 1970 | 495 | 131 | 26.46 | 10 | 2 | 20.00 | | |
| 1977 | 558 | 139 | 24.91 | 11 | 1 | 9.10 | | |
| 1980 | 589 | 135 | 22.90 | 13 | 5 | 38.46 | | |
| 1982 | 682 | 135 | 19.80 | 18 | 5 | 27.77 | | |
| 1987 | 1,226 | 132 | 10.76 | 34 | 8 | 23.52 | | |
| 1991 | 775 | 132 | 17.03 | 27 | 8 | 29.63 | | |
| Average | 5,964 | 1,305 | 24.9 | 156 | 46 | 30.07 | | |

Source: 1 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala: 1888 - 1988, A Centenary

Souvenir (Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

2 Assembly Elections since 1951 (Public Relations Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

3 Report to General Elections in India: 1952 - 1987 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

4 Kerala Gazette Extraordinary, 1991 April 30 (Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

The percentages of columns 4 and 7 have been computed by the researcher.

A further analysis of the rate of success of men and women candidates in the elections reveals some interesting features. In the ten elections to the Kerala Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1991, an average of one in every four male candidates who contested (24.9 per cent) was elected. But this was 30 per cent in the case of women candidates (Table 8.13). This was perhaps because the total number of women candidates who were fielded were much less than men. This meant that the probability of success for women candidates in the elections has been slightly better than that of men. In the 1987 elections 1,226 men contested the elections. Of this 132 came out successful. But, in the same election, out of 34 women contestants eight won. For the same seat, a large number of men filed nomination papers, thus rendering the possibility of the election of male candidates bleak. Only very few women candidates appear in the field, but a better percentage of them come out victorious. This is, of course, not to imply necessarily that men or women vote sex-wise. If they were to do so, the representation of women in the legislative bodies should have been much more.

Table 8.14 indicates the number of women members elected to the Assembly in all the ten elections with the percentage of women representation in every Assembly. Figure 8.1 indicates the trend of representation of women. Figure 8.1 shows that there has been an increasing trend of women representation in the legislative assembly from the sixth general election onwards.

Table 8.14

Representation of Women Members in the First to Tenth
Kerala Legislative Assembly: 1957 - 1991

| K L A | Total Number of Seats | Number of Members | Percentage to the Total |
|----------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| First (1957) | 126 | 6 | 4.76 |
| Second (1960) | 126 | 7 | 5.56 |
| Third (1965) | 133 | 3 | 2.26 |
| Fourth (1967) | 133 | 1 | 0.75 |
| Fifth (1970) | 133 | 2 | 1.50 |
| Sixth (1977) | 140 | 1 | 0.71 |
| Seventh (1980) | 140 | 5 | 3.57 |
| Eighth (1982) | 140 | 5 | 3.57 |
| Ninth (1987) | 140 | 8 | 5.71 |
| Tenth (1991) | 140 | 8 | 5.71 |
| Total | 1,351 | 46 | 3.44 |

Source: 1 Assembly Elections since 1951 (Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

2 Election Report:1991 (Election Commission, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

Figure 8.1
 Women Members, Percentage-wise : The First to Tenth KLA, 1957 - 1991

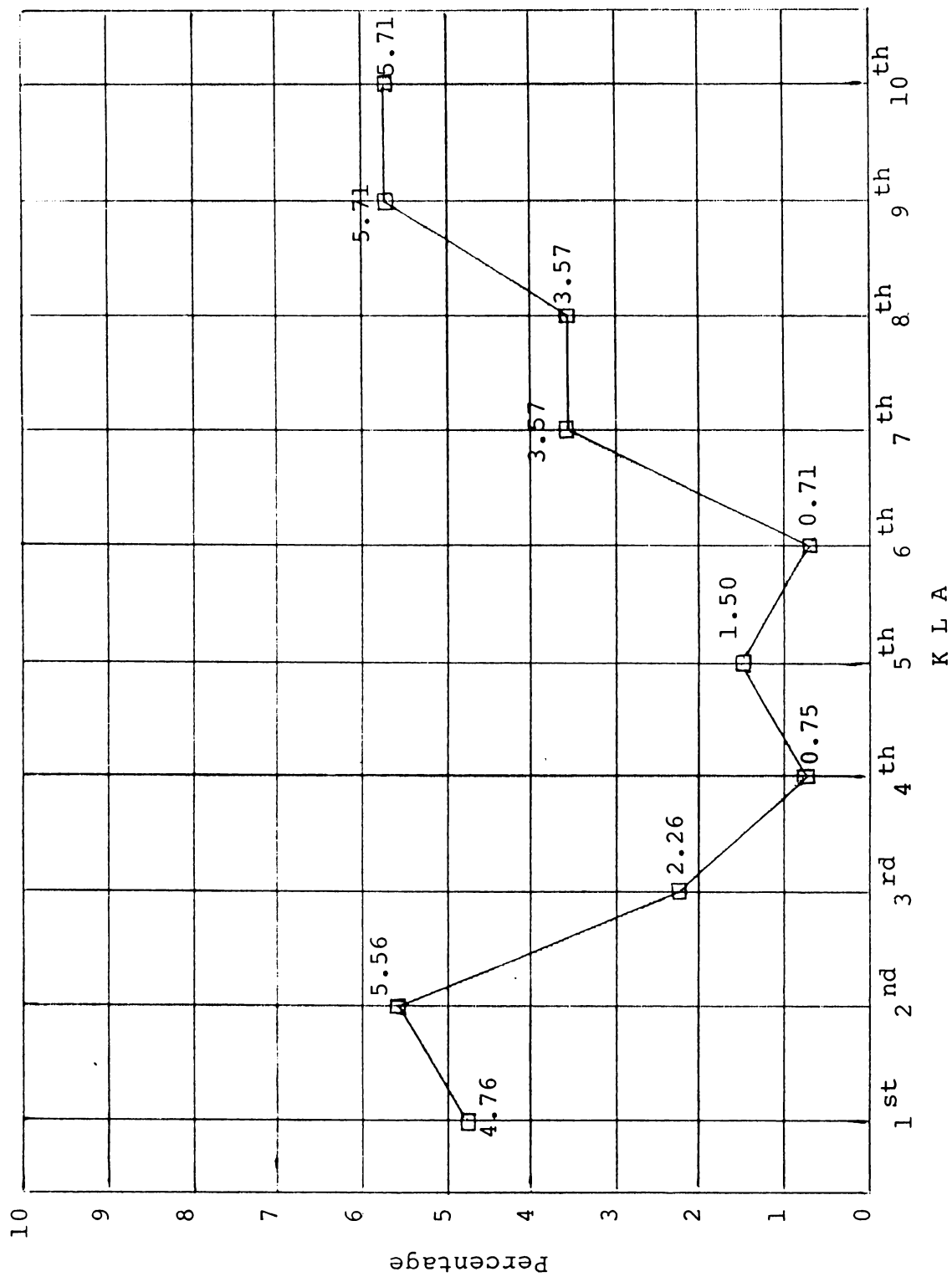


Figure 8.2
Men Contested and Elected in the KLA Elections: 1957-1991

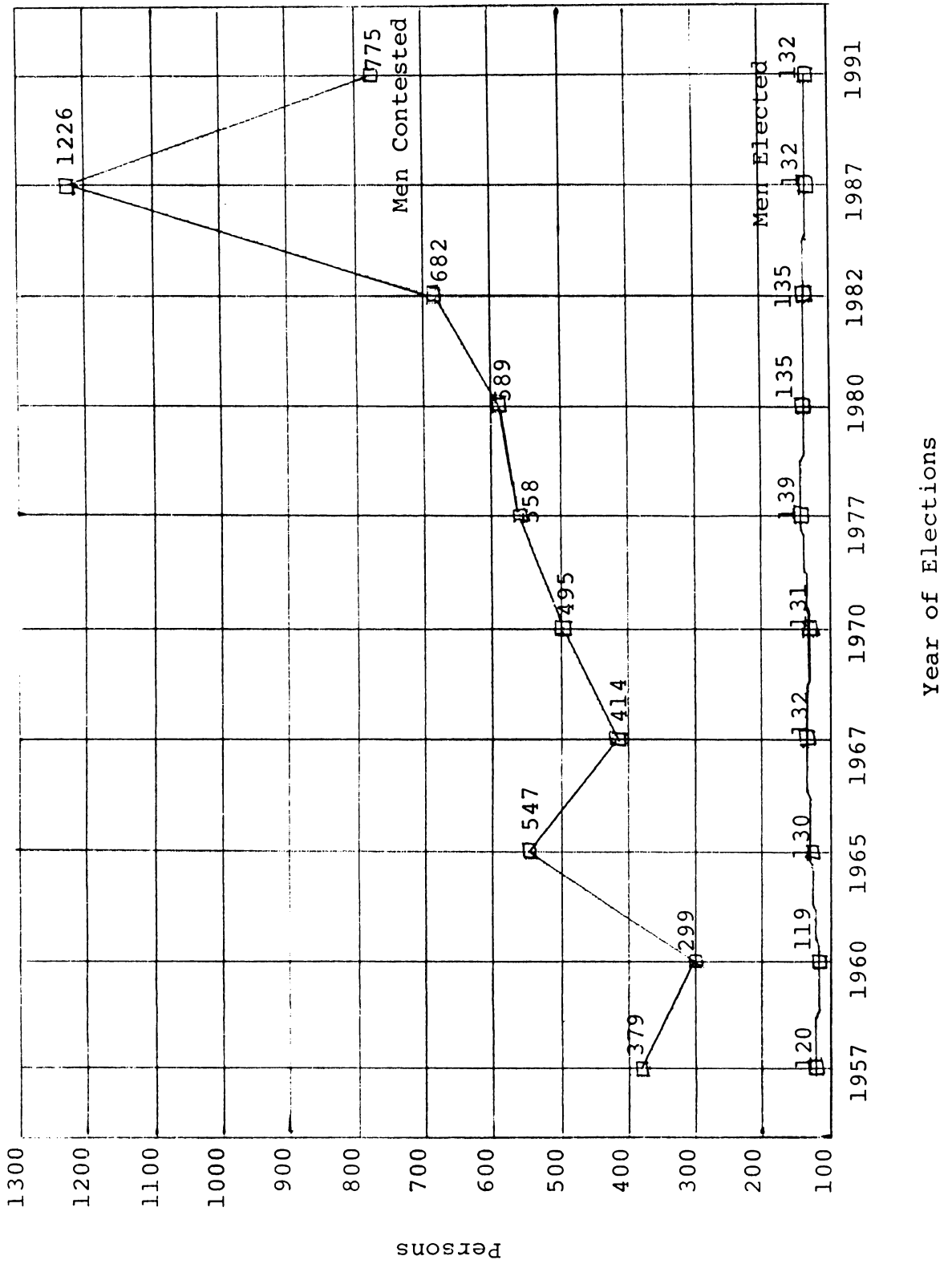
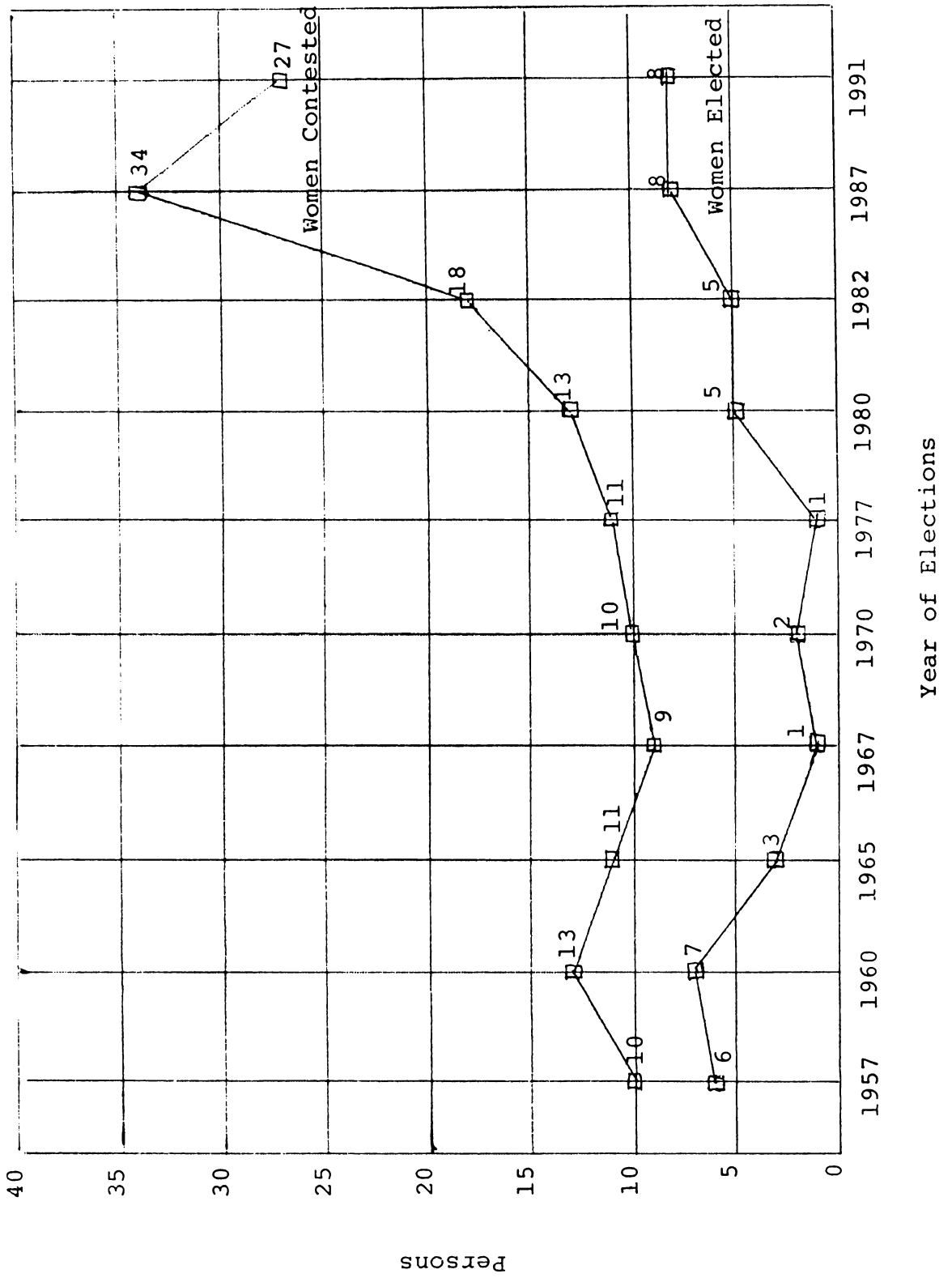


Figure 8.3
 Women Contested and Elected in the KLA Elections: 1957-1991



Based on the number of men and women who contested the various elections and got themselves elected, a graphical representation was made (Fig.8.2 and 8.3). It is seen that in the different elections there is great variation in the number of men contestants, but there is no consequent change in the total number of elected men candidates. In the Figure 8.2 the line representing the number of men candidates shows many downward and upward trends. But this is not reflected in the results. The line representing the number of elected men goes almost as a straight line, showing no wide variation in the election outcome.

The line also shows that there has been no such wide variation in the number of women candidates in the different elections. Nor has there been any great change in the number of women elected.

This difference between the number of men and women candidates and the number of successful men and women candidates is indicative of the stagnant nature of women's participation in politics. Judging by the politics of elections, it goes to affirm that there has not been any significant change in the role of participation of women in the state since the advent of independence. The achievement of independence and the establishment of a democratic process in the state, including universal adult franchise, has not brought about any significant change in the political role of women. This is not, however, true of women's literacy or of employment of women in public services or other white collar jobs (611, p.12).

During all these elections it was noted earlier that in the total population of the state women were more in number than men

(Table 8.10). The same trend was observed in the total number of voters also, though the total number of persons who voted in the elections does not always show the same result.

There appears to be some relationship between the nature of electoral alliances among different political parties and the apportioning of seats to women candidates in the different elections.

In the 1957 elections there was no electoral alliance. All the major political parties in the field had put up women candidates, even though their number was not very impressive. The Indian National Congress sponsored six women candidates, the Communist Party of India three and the Praja Socialist Party one. Thus a total of ten women candidates were in the field. But in the 1960 elections an electoral alliance was formed among the Congress, the PSP and the Muslim league. Thus the number of seats for which each party put up its own candidates was lesser than that in the previous election. In the 1960 elections Congress, the biggest party in the alliance, alone allotted seven seats to women candidates. But the other two partners in the alliance, the PSP and the Muslim League did not field any woman candidate in the election. The undivided Communist Party put up four women candidates. Two women candidates contested as Independents. Thus the total number of women contestants increased to 13 and the number of women elected also increased from six to seven.

Before the 1965 elections a fresh delimitation of the constituencies was held. The number of constituencies increased to 133 from the previous 126. In 1964 the Communist Party was split into two, viz., the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the CPI (M)

and the Communist Party of India (CPI). In the same year some of the dissidents from the Indian National Congress formed a new party, viz., the Kerala Congress (KC). In this election the Indian National Congress (INC) contested in all the seats, without forming any alliance with other political parties. But the CPI(M) had an electoral understanding with the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) and the Muslim League. The CPI was in alliance with the RSP which had an understanding with the Kerala Congress (35, p.7).

Even though the total number of seats in the Assembly had increased from 126 to 133 the Congress Party put up only five women candidates in this election. The newly formed Kerala Congress also fielded one woman candidate. Thus these parties together put up only six women candidates as against the seven candidates fielded by the undivided Congress Party in the previous elections. Similarly, the undivided Communist Party had put up four women candidates in the 1960 elections. But when it was divided into the CPI(M) and the CPI, together they put up only three women candidates in the 1965 elections. Again, the total number of women candidates remained 11 as in the previous elections. But the candidates elected came down to three from the previous seven. As the political parties got divided and new alliances were formed, the number of seats allocated to women and the number of women elected got reduced. This is not to suggest that this was a regular pattern that can be observed in the different elections in the state, but there is sufficient reason to examine this as a hypothesis that, with the proliferation of political parties and the formation of electoral fronts, women's active role in politics as candidates in the elections underwent a decline.

In the 1967 elections a new polarisation among political forces took place, leading to new electoral alliances. A United Front, consisting of the CPI(M), the CPI, the Muslim League, the RSP, the Karshaka Thozhilali Party (KTP) and the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) was formed. The Congress fought the elections single-handedly. The Kerala Congress was reported to have an electoral understanding with the Swatantra Party and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which were very weak in the state (35, pp.7-8). In this election also the Congress (I), which was fighting the elections single-handedly, sponsored five women candidates as in the previous election. But the newly formed alliance of non-Congress parties, viz., the United Front put up only one woman candidate, fielded by the CPI(M). The total number of women contestants came down to nine. Only one candidate came out successful.

In the 1970 elections the whole combination changed. A new election front was formed by the Congress, the CPI, the RSP, the ML and the PSP. The other front consisted of the CPI(M), the SSP, the KSP, the KTP, and the Indian Socialist Party (ISP). The Kerala Congress and INC (Nijalingappa Group) fought the elections together as a sort of third front (35, p.10-11).

The first front led by the Cong.(I), the CPI, the RSP, the ML and the PSP put up only three women candidates. The CPI, the RSP and the ML within the front did not put up any woman candidate at all. The other front led by the CPI(M) put up only one woman candidate. The other partners of the front the SSP, the KSP, the KTP and the Indian Socialist Party did not field any woman candidate. Thus as the number of parties in an alliance increases

and as the share of seats allotted to each party comes down, the number of seats allotted to women also comes down in the case of all political parties. Women candidates become much more dispensable than otherwise.

As a result of the fresh delimitation of Assembly constituencies in 1974 the number of seats in the Kerala Legislative Assembly was increased to 140. General elections to these were conducted in 1977. The Congress, the CPI, the ML, the RSP, the KC and the PSP formed a new political alliance against the other front consisting of the CPI(M), the Bharatiya Lok Dal (Janata), the Muslim League (Opposition) and the Kerala Congress (Pillai Group). Splits had occurred in the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress before the 1977 elections. Moreover, the National Democratic Party (NDP), formed under the initiative of the Nair Service Society, supported the latter front (35, pp.8-9).

There were only five women candidates sponsored by the different political parties in the election in 1977. Six women candidates contested as Independents. The front led by the Congress Party fielded two women candidates, while the latter fielded three women candidates. Only one woman was elected to the Assembly.

Before the 1980 elections the Congress was again split into the INC(I) and the INC(U). The Kerala Congress also followed suit, leading to the formation of the Kerala Congress (Mani) KC(M) and the Kerala Congress (Joseph) KC(J) parties. The Indian Union Muslim League also experienced a split with the formation of the All India Muslim League (AIML).

In the 1980 elections two political fronts - the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) appeared on the scene. The Congress (I), the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), the KC(J), the PSP, the NDP and the Socialist Republican Party (SRP), which was a new political organisation initiated by the SNDP, together formed the UDF. The LDF consisted of the CPI(M), the CPI, the INC(U), the KC(M), the KC(PG), the AIML and the RSP. The UDF had an electoral understanding with the Janata Party too.

The two alliances, the United Democratic Front consisting of six partners and the Left Democratic Front consisting of seven partners fought each other in this election. In this election also there were only six women candidates sponsored by the political parties. The Congress (I) put up one candidate, the Congress (U) one, the CPI(M) two, the CPI one and the Janata Party one. Seven women contested the election as Independents. The total number of women candidates elected was five. The trend becomes more and more obvious. As the number of political parties increases and a combination of political parties fight elections forming political fronts, the seats at the behest of each party become less and less in number. As a consequence fewer and fewer women get seats allotted to them as candidates.

The political alliances underwent a further change in the 1982 elections. The UDF included seven parties, viz., the Congress (I), the IUML, the KC(M), the KC(J), the NDP, the SRP, the Janata (G), the RSP(S) and the National Revolutionary Socialist Party (NRSP). The LDF comprised the CPI(M), the CPI, the Congress (S),

the AIML, the RSP, the Kerala Congress (Socialist) and the Lok Dal. The Janata Party had seat adjustments with the LDF (35, p.9).

In this election too it was found that only six women candidates in all were fielded by the political parties. But 12 women contested the election as Independents. In the final results three party sponsored candidates and two Independent candidates won the election. Many individual parties in the different fronts did not sponsor women candidates at all in the election.

In the 1987 elections also the major political fronts remained the same but there were some slight additions to and subtractions from the respective fronts. The UDF included the Congress (I), the IUML, the KC(J), the KC(M), the NDP(P), the SRP(S) and the RSP(S), while the LDF comprised the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP, Congress (S), the Janata and the Lok Dal. But in this election a third front consisting of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Hindu Munnani also appeared on the election scene. A number of small organisations also fielded some Independents in the election.

In this election a slight improvement in the number of women candidates put up by the political parties could be observed. The Congress Party put up five candidates, the CPI(M) six candidates, the CPI three and the BJP four. In addition, there were sixteen Independent women candidates in the field. On the whole eight women candidates were elected.

In the 1991 elections also both the electoral fronts, viz., the UDF and the LDF were the main opponents. There were, however, slight alterations in the composition of the fronts. The LDF consisted of the CPI(M), the CPI, the Janata Dal, the Congress (S),

the RSP and the KC(J). The UDF was comprised of the Congress (I), the ML, the KC(M), the NDP, the Communist Marxist Party (CMP) and the KC(B).

In the 1991 elections, political parties like the Congress, the CPI(M), the CPI, the BJP and the Kerala Congress together put up 20 women candidates. With seven Independent candidates also in the field, there were in all 27 women candidates in the election fray. Only eight of them came out victorious. Thus in almost all the ten past elections to the State Legislative Assembly different electoral alliances were formed by various political parties, often cutting across ideological differences. This phenomenon had its indirect impact on the active participation of women as candidates in the electoral politics of the state. When the grand alliances of parties are formed for fighting the elections, the number of seats available to each party gets reduced. And this results in a fewer number of seats being allotted to women candidates as women get more easily eliminated in the stiffer competition for seats within political parties.

A very prominent political party in the state, viz., the Indian Union Muslim League, which had shared power with the different political fronts at different periods, has never put up woman candidate of its own in the elections so far. Similarly, the smaller political allies in the electoral fronts also do not usually set apart any seat for women. Thus when more and more parties join the political alliances and are given their due share in seat allocations, the women members of those political parties get lesser and lesser opportunities to participate in the electoral politics as candidates. In other words, generally speaking, the

polarization of political parties under different umbrellas acted as a check on the number of women candidates fielded by them in the elections.

Kerala Women as Members of Legislative Assembly

The overall picture of elections to the Legislative Assembly in Kerala brings out the fact that the participation of women in the electoral politics as candidates has so far been very meagre. The representation of women in the Assembly has also been continuously very poor. But even though women constituted only a very negligible number in every Assembly so far, the women members of the House have, generally speaking, performed well. The performance of many of them as members of the legislative assembly, especially their contributions to the discussions on issues affecting women such as dowry, rape, female unemployment and illiteracy etc., have won widespread appreciation. Many examples can be cited.

Even during the period of the Sri Mulam Assembly in the 1930s and 1940s the women members showed their mettle through impressive performances. T.Narayani Amma was a member of the Sri Mulam Assembly. While she took part in the discussion on the Report of the Education Reforms Committee in the Sri Mulam Assembly in 1933, she put forward very thought-provoking and farsighted suggestions regarding women's education in the state. She was profusely quoting examples and experiences from the international scene, thus showing the extent of her wide knowledge and the dimension of her vision on the subject (134, p.482). Similarly her capacity for exposition and uncanny argument kept the whole House in amazement

when she spoke on the question of recruitment of women in the public service in the Sri Mulam Assembly in 1934 (134, p.483). She wanted to introduce an anti-dowry bill in the Assembly in the 1940s. Though the dowry system was not so widely prevalent in the erstwhile State of Travancore, as in some other parts of India at that time, and was limited to certain religious communities, she took a farsighted approach to the issue and demanded the immediate eradication of this serious social evil (132, p.483). She strongly argued that in whatever form it was in practice, the dowry system would vitiate the sanctity of marriage and would act often as the cause of unhappy alliances and family quarrels (132, p.483).

The Sri Mulam Assembly witnessed the brilliant performance of some other women legislators too. P.Thankamma in 1946 wanted the government to take steps for village upliftment and also for the development of cottage industries, especially to keep women engaged during their leisure hours (141, p.264). Accamma Cherian brought to the notice of the House through her inspiring speech, the problems of the poor agriculturists who had to labour hard due to the new and unjust rules and regulations passed in 1923 (141, p.302). Thressiamma Kora, another prominent member of the House argued forcibly for the right of the people to build centres of worship like temples, mosques, churches and burial places (233, p.522). Thus, even in the pre-independence period, some of the women legislators performed their roles very impressively.

T.Madhavi Amma, Smt.G.Pavithran, Parvati Nenminimangalam, Smt.K.Joshua, Annie Joseph, Dr.(Mrs)T.Francis etc. had participated in the legislative proceedings very purposively and constructively. They had raised several issues in the Legislative Assembly, such as

old age pension for widows, appointment of women teachers in primary schools, Namboodiri community reforms, establishment of cosmopolitan hostels for women, prevention of the devadasi system of dedication of women to Hindu temples, prevention of dowry, removal of untouchability etc.

In 1947, in the Cochin Legislative Council, Dakshayani Velayudhan and Dr.(Mrs.)T.Francis wanted the government to implement the Minimum Wages Bill to fix the minimum wages for the Harijans who were tillers of the soil and the most illiterate and poverty-stricken people (155, p.349; 156, p.408).

Before the 1948 elections, more than ten associations in the Cochin state gave a memorandum to the government, requesting more seats for women in the council. Smt.K.M.R.Menon and Dr.(Mrs.) T.Francis raised the above matter in the Council and wanted one seat each to be reserved for women in every taulk (157, p.38). Dr.(Mrs)T.Francis introduced the Cochin Removal of Discrimination of Women's Wage Bill and the Cochin Women's Fundamental Right to Property Bill in the Council (158, p.512).

Accamma Cherian, Annie Mascarene and Devaki Gopidas were the prominent women members of the Travancore Legislative Assembly towards the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties. Issues like a college for women students, expansion of public libraries, improvement of food and agricultural production, development of the coastal area of the Travancore State, better living conditions for the female prisoners etc. were brought to the notice of the Assembly by these women representatives. Women representatives also suggested measures of legislation to discourage communal organisations (159, p.726).

Annie Mascarene argued for the security of jobs and of emoluments for employees to check corruption in public service (152, p.193). K.R.Gouri, as a member of the Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly in the 1950s, argued for the welfare measures to be adopted in the case of nurses and midwives.

From 1957 to 1991 only 23 women became members of the Legislative Assembly of Kerala. Of them 12 were elected to the Legislative Assembly more than once. Among them, legislators like K.R.Gouri, Bhargavi Thankappan, Leela Damodara Menon, K.O.Aysha Bai, Pennamma Jacob and Susheela Gopalan were particularly impressive (531, pp.1-4).

K.R.Gouri, who was elected to the Travancore - Cochin Assembly twice and to the Kerala Legislative Assembly nine times, proved to be one of the best legislators of the state. In 1957 she became a Cabinet Minister in the first Communist Ministry headed by E.M.S.Namboodiripad. In fact, she was the first cabinet woman Minister in any of the Indian states. A lawyer by education, she was made the Revenue Minister (163, pp.2233-37). She made a landmark in the history of land reforms in the country by introducing the Land Reform Act of Kerala in the Legislature, in her capacity as the Revenue Minister. During the different spells of her office as Minister, she piloted very significant legislations in Kerala. The Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill 1968 was really a turning point in the social history of the state. Similar was the Kerala Women's Commission Bill, 1991. It was drafted and introduced by K.R.Gouri. In 1992 she was awarded the "V.Gangadharan Memorial Award" for being the most efficient among

the present members of the Assembly and the living former MLAs (572, p.1).

K.O.Aysha Bai was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1957 and 1960. She became the first Deputy Speaker of the Kerala Assembly.

Bhargavi Thankappan was elected to the Legislative Assembly four times. In the 1977 elections she was the only woman to be elected to the 140-member Legislative Assembly. In spite of her being the only woman in the Assembly she did not show any special inhibitions in being so or in participating in the discussions in the Assembly. In the 1971 Lok Sabha election she was elected from the Adoor constituency and therefore, when she came to the Legislative Assembly as a member she had enough experience as a parliamentarian. When the question of equal wage for equal work for both men and women came up for discussion in the Assembly in 1977, she made a very forceful plea for the acceptance of the above principle by quoting profusely from well-established documents (168, p.58). She also favoured a national wage policy and wanted special attention for industrial units run by women's organisations.

Leela Damodara Menon was a member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly three times, in 1957, 1960 and 1987. She had also served as a member of the Rajya Sabha from 1974 to 1980. Moreover, she very creditably represented India in the United Nations and at several international conferences. In fact she was brought to politics by her husband, the late K.A.Damodara Menon, a veteran Congress leader. In his autobiography he writes, "every evening I used to attend some congress meetings and reach home very late.

I felt that Leela was fed up with this practice of mine. Therefore I decided to take her also for the evening programmes of the Congress. In the beginning she was keenly listening to all speeches. But later on she started addressing the public meetings. This has become the first training for Leela to enter the domain of politics" (342, p.104). Thus she has become a full-time political worker. Her contributions to the women's movement at the national level is also worth mentioning. With such a social and political background, she participated efficiently in the Legislative Assembly discussions while she was a member of the Kerala Assembly. She had always been very forceful and powerful when questions directly pertaining to women's issues came up for discussion. Once, while taking part in such a discussion in 1987, Leela Menon suggested the sanctioning of pension to women suffering from their husbands' habitual drinking and other atrocities (177, p.24). Even in 1962 she stressed the necessity for giving special vocational training for women to enable them to raise the educational standards among women (154, p.3). Her views on issues directly pertaining to women were keenly listened to by the members of the House always, irrespective of their political affiliations. Her viewpoints on the Kerala Women's Commission Bill were also widely appreciated.

In 1960, when the Kerala Legislative Assembly was discussing the Panchayat Bill, especially the section stating that a nominated woman member of a Panchayat had all the rights of an elected member, "except the right to vote at the election of the President" Kúsumam Joseph, then member of the Assembly strongly argued that a nominated woman member should have all the rights of an elected

member under the existing circumstances (153, p.7). Another member K.R.Saraswathy Amma argued that it was not correct to deny the right to vote in the election of a President to a person who had herself the right to become a President (154, p.8).

Thus it can be seen from the past Kerala Legislative Assembly proceedings that the performance of women MLAs in the Assembly has been generally good. They used to take part in the discussions on all important issues and give very constructive suggestions. In spite of all limitations, some of them were able to win the respect of the whole Assembly by their performance.

Since 1947, many women from Kerala, including some of the freedom fighters, have been active in politics at the state, national or international levels and have held responsible positions at the different levels. A.V.Kuttimalu Amma from Malabar continued to be a member of the erstwhile Madras Legislative Assembly till 1952. She had also been a member of the Congress Working Committee from 1958 to 1962 (299, p.231).

Women as Ministers

Yet, women have been very much under-represented in high positions in the political system as also in other professions. Table 8.15 shows the number of women ministers in the State Ministries since the formation of Kerala.

Table 8.15

**Cabinet Chronology - Membership of the Council of Ministers of Kerala
(Men - Women Break-up) : 1957 - 1991**

| Period 1 | Men 2 | Women 3 | Name of Women Minister 4 | Portfolio 5 |
|-------------------------|----------|------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| April 1957 - July 1959 | 10 | 1 | K.R.Gouri | Land Revenue and Excise |
| Feb. 1960 - Sept. 1962 | 11 | - | - | - |
| Sept. 1962 - Sept. 1964 | 11 | - | - | - |
| March 1967 - Nov. 1969 | 13 | 1 | K.R.Gouri | Revenue, Food and Civil Supplies |
| Nov. 1969 - Aug. 1970 | 8 | - | - | - |
| Oct. 1970 - March 1977 | 23 | - | - | - |
| March 1977 - April 1977 | 15 | - | - | - |
| April 1977 - Oct. 1978 | 18 | - | - | - |
| Oct. 1978 - Oct. 1979 | 16 | - | - | - |
| Oct. 1979 - Dec. 1979 | 6 | - | - | - |
| Jan. 1980 - Oct. 1981 | 16 | 1 | K.R.Gouri | Agriculture and Social Welfare |
| Dec. 1981 - March 1982 | 8 | - | - | - |
| May 1982 - March 1987 | 25 | 1 | M.Kamalal | Co-operation |
| May 1987 - April 1991 | 19 | 1 | K.R.Gouri | Industries and Social Welfare |
| June 1991 - | 19 | 1 | M.T.Padma | Fisheries |

Source: 100 Years of Legislative Bodies in Kerala 1888-1988, (A Centenary Souvenir, Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

In Kerala, in the period after independence the Congress Party had two women as ministers, the Communist Parties only one - but the same person served as Minister four times - and the Janata Party only one. After the formation of the Kerala State in 1956 only three women have served as Ministers, though K.R.Gouri was Minister in four governments.

Annie Mascarene, who was one of the founder leaders of the Travancore State Congress in 1938 and the member of its first Working Committee, member of the United Kerala Committee in 1946, member of the Travancore Legislative Assembly (1948-52) and Member of Parliament from 1952-57, had the credit of being the first woman minister in the ministry of T.K.Narayana Pillai (1949-51) in the erstwhile Travancore - Cochin State (369, p.32).

After the formation of the Kerala State in 1956 K.R.Gouri was minister four times - Revenue and Excise Minister (1957-59), Revenue, Food and Civil Supplies Minister (1967-69), Agriculture and Social Welfare Minister (1980-81) and Industries and Social Welfare Minister (1987-91), (233. pp.680-687). Kerala witnessed revolutionary changes in agricultural relations through the passage of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Act in 1968 by the Communist government in power at that time. In this context, special mention has to be made about the tremendous effort put in by K.R.Gouri, as the then Revenue Minister in 1967, who introduced the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill (63, p.43).

She was mainly responsible for the enactment of the Kerala Women's Commission Bill, 1990 too in the Kerala Legislative Assembly.

M.Kamalam was the Minister for Co-operation during the Seventh Kerala Legislative Assembly (1982-1987). She was also a member of Sixth Kerala Legislative Assembly (1980-1982). M.T.Padma was a member of the Eighth Kerala Legislative Assembly (1987-1991). At present, in the Ninth Kerala Legislative Assembly since 1991, she is a Minister holding the portfolios of Fisheries and Rural Development.

An examination of the portfolios allocated to women shows that the portfolios assigned to women ministers have been in the areas of Revenue, Food, Agriculture, Industry, Social Welfare, Co-operation etc. Portfolios of Finance, Home, Education etc. have not been allocated to women ministers so far.

The only woman from Kerala who held the post of a Minister in the Union Ministry was Lakshmi N.Menon. She was a Deputy Minister (1957-1962) and a Minister of State for External Affairs (1962-1966). Moreover, she was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister from 1952 to 1957. She represented India in the U.N. General Assembly. She was the chairperson of the All India Women's Conference for 1958-1959. The nation recognised her valuable services by decorating her with Padmabhooshan in 1957 (362, p.493).

The Socio-economic Background of the Men and Women Members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly from 1957 - 1991

The Kerala Legislative Assembly, the supreme representative institution of the state, has been playing a very important role in shaping the destinies of the people in many ways. After every general election a new set of representatives of the people come to the Assembly. The character of this important body is very much related to the quality, outlook and background of its members. They come from all parts of the state with different educational backgrounds, from varying age groups, from very diverse professional groups and with different political affiliations. Thus an analytical study of the socio-economic background of the members of the Legislative Assembly assumes significance. Here a comparative study of the socio-economic background of the men and women members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1991 is attempted.

During this period ten elections were conducted and altogether 1,305 men (96.56 per cent) and 46 women (3.44 per cent) were elected to the Assembly. The elections held in 1965 proved invalid. Since no single party or combination of parties could form a stable ministry, the legislature was subsequently dissolved and the President of India took over the state administration.

The number of men and women elected to the Assembly in all the ten elections under different political parties is given in Table 8.16. The Table 8.16 reveals many interesting features:

Table 8.16
Party Position of Men and Women Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly: 1957 - 1991

| Party | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1965 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total | | |
|------------------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | |
| Indian National Congress | 40 | 3 | 58 | 5 | 36 | - | 9 | - | 30 | - | 38 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 211 | |
| Communist Party of India | 57 | 3 | 27 | 2 | 3 | - | 19 | - | 16 | - | 22 | 1 | 16 | 1 | 12 | 1 | 14 | 2 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 197 | |
| Praja Socialist Party | 9 | - | 20 | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 33 | |
| Muslim League | - | - | 11 | - | 6 | - | 14 | - | 11 | - | 13 | - | 14 | - | 14 | - | 15 | - | 19 | - | - | 117 | |
| Revolutionary Socialist Party | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 6 | - | 6 | - | 9 | - | 6 | - | 4 | - | 5 | - | 2 | - | - | 39 | |
| Communist Party of India (Marxist) | - | - | - | - | 38 | 2 | 51 | 1 | 29 | 1 | 17 | - | 33 | 2 | 28 | 2 | 37 | 2 | 26 | 2 | 2 | 259 | |
| Samyukta Socialist Party | - | - | - | - | 13 | - | 19 | - | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 38 | |
| Kerala Congress | - | - | - | - | 22 | 1 | 5 | - | 12 | - | 20 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 59 | |
| Swantantra | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | |
| Kerala Socialist Party | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | |
| Karshaka Thozhilali Party | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | |
| Indian Socialist Party | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | |
| Janata | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | 4 | 1 | 8 | - | 7 | - | - | - | - | - | 25 | |
| Kerala Congress (PG) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 5 | |
| All India Muslim League | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | - | 5 | - | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 | |
| Congress (U) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | 21 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 21 | |
| Kerala Congress (M) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | - | 6 | - | 4 | - | 10 | - | - | - | 28 | |
| Kerala Congress (J) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | 8 | - | 5 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 20 | |
| National Democratic Party | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | 4 | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 8 | |
| Congress (I) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 17 | - | 34 | - | 30 | 3 | 51 | 5 | 132 | 8 | 132 | |
| Socialist Republican Party | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | |
| Congress (S) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | 6 | - | 3 | - | - | - | 15 | |
| Lok Dal | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | |
| Communist Marxist Party (CMP) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | |
| Janata Dal | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 2 | |
| Independents | 14 | - | 2 | - | 11 | - | 6 | - | 15 | 1 | 9 | - | 1 | - | 5 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 2 | - | - | 73 | |
| Total | 120 | 6 | 119 | 7 | 130 | 3 | 132 | 1 | 131 | 2 | 139 | 1 | 135 | 5 | 135 | 5 | 132 | 8 | 132 | 8 | 132 | 8 | 1,305 |
| Total Seats | 126 | 126 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 140 | 1,351 | |

Source: General Election Reports : 1957 - 1982 (Election Commission, Delhi)

So far 25 political parties were able to send their representatives to this august body but 10 of them could send only less than 10 members each. Strangely it is seen that the present opposition party in the Lok Sabha, viz., the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) did not succeed in sending even a single representative of the party to the Kerala Assembly so far.

Out of 1,351 members of the Assembly, 271 members were sent by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), 219 by the Indian National Congress, 208 by the Communist Party of India, 140 by the Congress (I) and 117 by the Muslim League. The Indian National Congress, Congress (U) and Congress (I) together sent 380 members to the Assembly, while the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India together sent 479 members. Table 8.16 reveals that the leftist parties had an upper hand in the matter of representation in the Assembly.

In the case of women representation in the Assembly, 18 out of these 25 political parties failed to send even one woman representative to the Assembly so far. Of the 46 women representatives 23 were sent by the CPI and the CPI(M) together. Sixteen members were from Congress parties - the Indian National Congress and the Congress (I) together. Four women members were elected as Independents. The National Democratic Party, the Kerala Congress and the Janata were able to send one woman member each to the Assembly.

Even though the Muslim League sent 129 representatives to the State Legislative Assembly through various elections, no woman member was among them. The party has not so far fielded any woman candidate in any of the elections to the Legislative Assembly or to

the Lok Sabha. Similarly the Kerala Congress (PG), the Kerala Congress (M) and the Kerala Congress (J) could not send any female representative to the Assembly. Thus generally it is found that in the Kerala Legislative Assembly the women members were either from the Communist bloc or from the Congress bloc.

Even though 46 seats were won by the women candidates, some of them were elected more than once. Thus the actual number of women who won the election and became members of the Assembly was 23. The personal details of all the women MLAs of Kerala are given in Table 8.17.

Table 8.17

Personal Details of Women MLAs of Kerala

| S.No. | Name | Party | Constituency | Total No. of Years of Experience in Legislature | Education- al Quali- fications |
|-------|---------------------|----------|--|---|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Alphonsa John | Cong.(I) | Sultan Bathery (1) | 3 | BSC., BEd. |
| 2 | Aysha Bai K.O. | CPI(M) | Kayamkulam (2) | 6 | B.A., B.L. |
| 3 | Bhargavi Thankappan | CPI | Naduvathur (1) (Including Kilimanoor (3) in Lok Sabha) | 16 | M.A |
| 4 | Devooty P. | CPI(M) | Azhikode (2) | 7 | Upper Pri- mary |

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|---------------|--|---|---|
| 5 | Gouri K.R | CPI CPI(M) | Cherthala (2) Aroor (6) | 36 (Including the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly) | B.A., B.L. |
| 6 | Kamalam M. | Janata (G) | Kalpatta (2) | 7 | Inter- mediate |
| 7 | Kusumam Joseph | Cong. | Karikode (2) | 6 | B.A. |
| 8 | Leela Damodara Menon | Cong. | Kunnamanga- lam (2) Pattambi (1) | 14 (Including six Years in Rajya Sabha) | Diploma in Hindi, B.A. |
| 9 | Meenakshi Thampan | CPI | Kodungallur (1) | 3 | M.A. |
| 10 | Mercykuttiyamma | CPI(M) | Kundara (1) | 2 | M.A., L.LB. |
| 11 | Nabeesath Beevi | Cong. | Alappuzha (1) | 4 | B.Sc., B.L. |
| 12 | Nabeesa Ummal | CPI(M) | Kazhakoottam (1) | 2 | M.A |
| 13 | Padma M.T | Cong. (I) | Quilandi (2) | 5 | M.Sc., B.Ed., L.LB. |
| 14 | Pennamma Jacob | IND | Muvattupuzha (1) | 7 | S.S.L.C |
| 15 | Racheal Sunny | Cong. (S) | Ranni (1) | 1 | S.S.L.C |
| 16 | Radha N.K | CPI(M) | Perambra (1) | 3 | S.S.L.C |
| 17 | Rosakutty K.C | Cong. (I) | Sultan Bathery (1) | 3 | B.Sc., B.Ed. |
| 18 | Rosamma Chacko | Cong. (I) | Idukki (1) Chalakydy (1) | 5 | Sahitya Visarad, Rashtra Bhasha Visarad |
| 19 | Rosamma Punnoose | CPI | Devikulam (1) Alappuzha (1) | 4 | B.A., B.L |

| | | | | | |
|----|--------------------|--------------|--|---|---------------|
| 20 | Sarada Krishnan | Cong. | Kozhikode (1) | 6 | B.A |
| 21 | Saraswathiamma K.R | Cong. NDP | Chenganoor (2) | 6 | B.Sc., B.L |
| 22 | Sobhana George | Cong. (I) | Chenganoor (1) | 3 | M.A |
| 23 | Susheela Gopalan | CPI(M) | Cherthala (1) Ambalapuzha (1) Alappuzha (1) Chirayinkil (1) | 13 (Including five Years in Lok Sabha) | B.A |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram).

The bio-data of the male members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly (except the bio-data of the members elected in the 1965 elections) collected from the legislature library is used here for a comparative study of the socio-economic background of the men and women members of the Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1991. The study seeks to discuss the parameters of the age profile, level of educational qualifications, occupational background and previous legislative experience of the members of the tenth Kerala Legislative Assembly.

Age - Profile

The minimum age limit prescribed by the Constitution of India to contest the election to the State Legislative Assembly is 25 years. But the upper age limit for membership in the Assembly is not laid down. So the members of the Assembly may be from varying age groups.

Table 8.18

Average Age of Men and Women in the KLA : 1957 - 1991

| Year | Men | Women |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1957 | 42.25 | 31.7 |
| 1960 | 41.43 | 36.64 |
| 1967 | 46.52 | 49.5 |
| 1970 | 45.15 | 44.5 |
| 1977 | 47.5 | 39.5 |
| 1980 | 46.34 | 51.5 |
| 1982 | 47.59 | 51.5 |
| 1987 | 50.48 | 54.5 |
| 1991 | 49.27 | 47 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

Percentages are computed by the researcher.

Figure 8.4
Percentage of the Average Age of Men in the KLA, 1957 - 1991

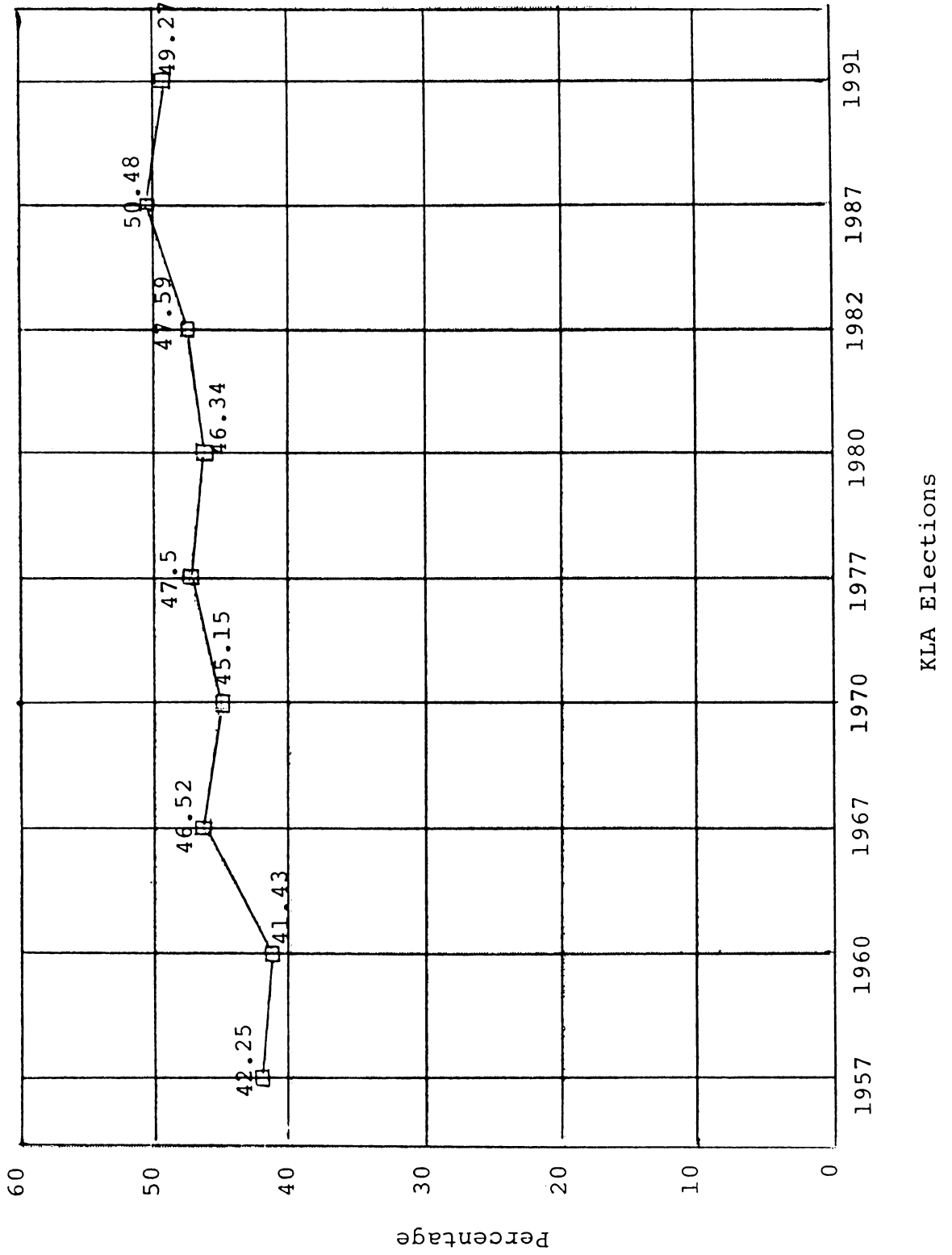
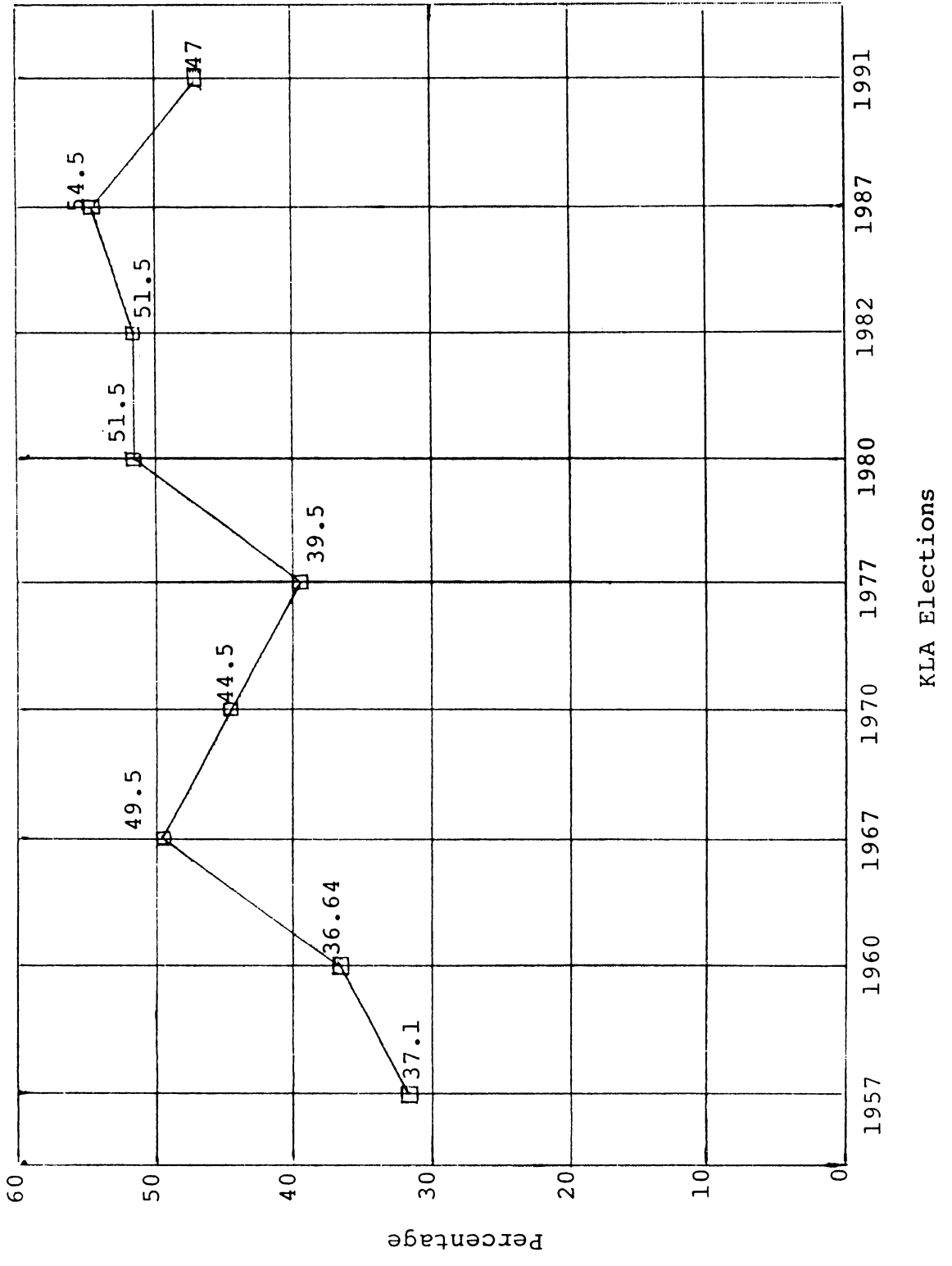


Figure 8.5
Percentage of the Average Age of Women in the KLA, 1957 - 1991



For the purpose of a detailed study the members may be categorised into five different age groups with a span of nine years each beginning with the age group of 25-34 years and ending with 65-74 years.

The average age of men and women members in nine State Legislative Assemblies from 1957 to 1991 is shown in Table 8.18 and is indicated graphically in Figure 8.4 and 8.5 placed below. The data in respect of the third Kerala Legislative Assembly (1965) is not included in this study since the data is not available fully. It is seen therefrom that the average age of men in every alternate Legislative Assembly was increasing gradually. In 1957 the average age of male members in the Assembly was 42.25, but in 1991 it rose to 49.27. In terms of average age, it can be seen that with the passage of every election older male members were preferred as the members of the Assembly. The average age of men was gradually increasing and the increasing trend is clearly seen in Figure 8.4.

The average age of female members was fluctuating with wide variations. In 1957 the average age of women members was only 31.7, while that of the male members was 42.25. In the next two elections average age was on the increase and reached 49.5. But in the fourth Assembly the average age of women MLAs had come down to 44.5, and again in the next Assembly it still went down to 39.5. In the Legislative Assembly constituted after the 1987 election, the average age of women members had touched 54.5. On the whole, in five Assemblies the average age of women members was less than that of the men members. The average age of men as well as of women members of the House was the highest in the ninth Legislative Assembly constituted in 1987, i.e., 50.48 and 54.5 respectively. Thus by this yardstick, in terms of average age, the ninth KLA (1987) had the distinction of being the "oldest" House thus far.

In the Tables 8.19 and 8.20, the men and women members of all the nine Kerala Legislative Assemblies are categorised into five different age groups. It is seen from Table 19 that the male members belonging to the age group of 35-44 have the largest representation (392) followed by the members belonging to the age group of 45-54 (355). In the case of women members also, those belonging to the age group of 35-44 have the largest representation. It indicates that generally the middle-aged members have a numerical command in the House.

But in the fourth Legislative Assembly (1967) more than half of the male members of the House (53.79 per cent) belonged to the first group, i.e., 25-34 age group. That was the only Assembly where the youths had got predominance. But in that Assembly there was only one woman member and she belonged to 45-54 age group.

Table 8.19
Age-group Distribution of Men Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly : 1957 - 1991

| Age Groups | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total Total | |
|-------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 25 - 34 | 25 | 20.83 | 30 | 25.21 | 71 | 53.79 | 12 | 9.16 | 17 | 12.14 | 18 | 13.24 | 14 | 10.29 | 8 | 6.01 | 6 | 4.51 | 201 | 17.03 |
| 35 - 44 | 53 | 44.17 | 51 | 42.85 | 46 | 34.85 | 53 | 40.46 | 32 | 22.86 | 36 | 26.47 | 38 | 27.94 | 33 | 24.81 | 50 | 37.59 | 392 | 33.22 |
| 45 - 54 | 29 | 24.17 | 25 | 21.00 | 13 | 9.85 | 48 | 36.64 | 58 | 41.43 | 55 | 40.44 | 50 | 36.76 | 45 | 33.83 | 32 | 24.06 | 355 | 30.08 |
| 55 - 64 | 10 | 8.33 | 11 | 9.24 | 1 | 0.75 | 16 | 12.21 | 28 | 20 | 25 | 18.38 | 28 | 20.59 | 32 | 24.06 | 31 | 23.30 | 182 | 15.42 |
| 65 - 74 | 3 | 2.5 | 2 | 1.68 | 1 | 0.75 | 2 | 1.53 | 5 | 3.57 | 2 | 1.47 | 6 | 4.41 | 15 | 11.28 | 14 | 10.52 | 50 | 4.24 |
| Total | 120 | | 119 | | 132 | | 131 | | 140 | | 136 | | 136 | | 133 | | 133 | | 1,180 | |
| Total Seats | 126 | | 126 | | 133 | | 133 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 1,223 | |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

The percentages have been computed by the researcher.

Table 8.20

Age-group Distribution of Women Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly : 1957 - 1991

| Age Groups | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total | |
|-------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 25 - 34 | 5 | 83.33 | 2 | 28.57 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 12.5 | 1 | 12.5 | 9 | 20.93 |
| 35 - 44 | 1 | 16.67 | 5 | 71.42 | - | - | 1 | 50 | 1 | 100 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 12.5 | 3 | 37.5 | 14 | 32.55 |
| 45 - 54 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 100 | 1 | 50 | - | - | 2 | 40 | 2 | 40 | 1 | 12.5 | 2 | 25 | 9 | 20.93 |
| 55 - 64 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 40 | 2 | 40 | 3 | 37.5 | 1 | 12.5 | 8 | 18.60 |
| 65 - 74 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 25 | 1 | 12.5 | 3 | 6.98 |
| Total | 6 | 7 | 7 | 126 | 1 | 133 | 2 | 133 | 1 | 141 | 5 | 141 | 5 | 141 | 8 | 141 | 8 | 141 | 43 | 43 |
| Total Seats | 126 | 126 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 1,223 | 1,223 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

The percentage have been computed by the researcher.

Among the male members, the youths belonging to 25-34 age group have got the least representation (4.51 per cent) in the tenth Assembly (1991). From eighth Assembly onwards the representation of youths in the 25-34 group has been coming down. In the ninth and tenth Assemblies the representation of male members belonging to 65-74 age group has been considerably increased. They have got 11.28 per cent and 10.52 per cent representation respectively. It shows that electorates prefer experienced politicians as their representatives to inexperienced youths.

Women, belonging to the age group of 25-34, had the largest representation in the first Kerala Assembly in 1957. Five out of the total six members belonged to this group. That much of predominance for youths in the representation of women members had never been seen in any other Assembly. In the ninth Assembly (1987) older people got greater representation. Five out of eight female members in that Assembly was above 55 years of age. In the tenth Assembly also two women members are above 55 years of age. Among the female members also, the emerging trend is the increasing representation of older people in the House.

Educational Background

Even though the Constitution of India does not stipulate any formal educational qualification for membership in the State Legislative Assembly the members elected to Kerala Legislative Assembly, both men and women, possessed good academic qualifications.

For making a study on the educational background of the MLAs, the educational qualifications of the members have been broadly

Table 8.21

Educational Background of Men Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly : 1957 - 1991

| Educational Background | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total | |
|-----------------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Undermatriculates | 52 | 43.33 | 34 | 28.57 | 50 | 37.88 | 33 | 25.19 | 40 | 28.57 | 24 | 17.64 | 27 | 19.85 | 25 | 18.79 | 23 | 17.29 | 308 | 26.10 |
| Matriculates | 7 | 5.83 | 9 | 7.56 | 14 | 10.60 | 29 | 22.14 | 24 | 17.14 | 37 | 27.21 | 41 | 30.15 | 26 | 19.54 | 27 | 20.30 | 214 | 18.14 |
| Undergraduates | 7 | 5.83 | 3 | 2.52 | 3 | 2.27 | 17 | 12.98 | 27 | 19.28 | 23 | 16.91 | 10 | 7.35 | 23 | 17.29 | 24 | 18.05 | 137 | 11.61 |
| Graduates | 10 | 8.33 | 23 | 19.33 | 24 | 18.18 | 21 | 16.03 | 12 | 8.57 | 15 | 11.03 | 23 | 16.91 | 20 | 15.03 | 24 | 18.05 | 172 | 14.58 |
| Law graduates | 36 | 30 | 41 | 34.45 | 32 | 24.24 | 25 | 19.08 | 21 | 15 | 27 | 19.85 | 27 | 19.85 | 31 | 23.30 | 31 | 23.30 | 271 | 22.96 |
| Postgraduates | 6 | 5 | 7 | 5.88 | 8 | 6.06 | 6 | 4.58 | 16 | 11.43 | 10 | 7.35 | 8 | 5.88 | 4 | 3.01 | - | - | 65 | 5.51 |
| Medical graduates | 2 | 1.67 | 1 | 0.84 | 1 | 0.75 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 2.25 | 2 | 1.50 | 9 | 0.76 |
| Engineering graduates | - | - | 1 | 0.84 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.75 | 2 | 0.17 |
| Chartered Accountants | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.75 | 1 | 0.08 |
| Master in Business Administration | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.71 | - | - | 1 | 0.08 |
| Total | 120 | 119 | 132 | 131 | 132 | 133 | 133 | 141 | 140 | 136 | 136 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 133 | 141 | 141 | 133 | 1180 | 1223 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

The percentages have been computed by the researcher.

Table 8.22

Educational Background of Women Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly : 1957 - 1991

| Educational Background | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total | | | |
|------------------------|------|-----|------|-------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | | |
| Undermatriculates | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 50 | - | - | 1 | 20 | 2 | 40 | - | - | 1 | 12.5 | 5 | 11.63 | | |
| Matriculates | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | - | - | - | 2 | 4.65 | | |
| Undergraduates | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | | |
| Graduates | 3 | 50 | 4 | 57.14 | - | - | 1 | 50 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 25 | 2 | 25 | 11 | 25.58 | | |
| Law Graduates | 3 | 50 | 3 | 42.86 | 1 | 100 | - | - | - | 2 | 40 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 2 | 25 | 1 | 12.5 | 14 | 32.56 | |
| Postgraduates | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 100 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 4 | 50 | 4 | 50 | 11 | 25.58 |
| Total | 6 | 7 | 7 | 126 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 43 | 43 | |
| Total Seats | 126 | 126 | 126 | 126 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 133 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 1,223 | 1,223 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

The percentages have been computed by the researcher.

classified into ten categories, viz., (1) undermatriculates, (2) matriculates, (3) undergraduates, (4) graduates, (5) law graduates, (6) postgraduates, (7) medical graduates, (8) engineering graduates, (9) chartered accountants, (10) master's degree in business administration.

Table 8.21 and 8.22 show the number of men and women members of nine KLAS under each category of qualification and its percentage.

26.1 per cent of the male members were undermatriculates and they have got the largest representation. But the law graduates also constituted 22.26 percentage of the total male membership and their representation stood second. More than half of the male members (55.85 per cent) of the Assembly had educational qualifications below graduate level.

One significant point to be observed is that in every Assembly a considerable number of law graduates were members. The highest representation of law graduates was 34.45 per cent in the second Assembly (1960) and the lowest was 15 per cent in the sixth Assembly (1977). In the ninth and tenth Assemblies the largest single category is that of law graduates. They had 23.30 per cent of representation each in both the Assemblies.

The members with professional qualifications like medical graduation, engineering graduation, chartered accountancy or masters degree in business administration etc. were very few.

As far as the male members are concerned, the level of academic qualifications does not show any upward swing with each successive Assembly. The level of educational qualification remained the same more or less in almost all the Assemblies.

Table 8.22 reveals that the general level of education of women members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly was higher than that of the male members. In the first Assembly (1957) all the six women MLAs were graduates. Three of them were law graduates. In the next Assembly (1960) also all the seven women members were graduates. Again three of them were law graduates.

A scrutiny of the educational qualifications of all the 23 women members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly reveals that 17 of them possess qualifications equal to graduation or above. Seven of them are law graduates; three women possess the B.Ed degree too. Only one member is an undermatriculate. Thus it is seen that even though the number of women elected to the Assembly was very few, the women members possessed high academic qualifications.

Occupational Background

The members elected to the Legislative Assembly come from different strata of society with different occupations. Thus the occupational background of the members assumes significance when the general quality of the performance of the House is assessed. For the purpose of the present study certain well recognised professions and occupations are taken into consideration.

Table 8.23 and 8.24 show occupational details of men and women members of nine Kerala Legislative Assemblies.

Table 8.23

Occupational Background of the Men Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly: 1957 - 1991

| Occupational Background | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total | |
|-------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Agriculturists | 16 | 13.33 | 10 | 8.40 | 20 | 15.15 | 22 | 16.79 | 20 | 14.28 | 13 | 9.56 | 13 | 9.56 | 14 | 10.52 | 11 | 8.27 | 139 | 11.78 |
| Businessmen | 1 | 0.83 | 3 | 2.52 | 1 | 0.76 | 4 | 3.05 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 5.15 | 5 | 3.68 | 5 | 3.76 | 7 | 5.26 | 40 | 3.39 |
| Educationalists | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | 4.58 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 2.20 | 2 | 1.47 | 2 | 1.50 | - | - | 20 | 1.69 |
| Engineers | - | - | 1 | 0.84 | 1 | 0.76 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 0.17 |
| Industrial Workers | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 1.53 | 1 | 0.71 | 2 | 1.47 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 5 | 0.42 |
| Journalists | 2 | 1.67 | 1 | 0.84 | 3 | 2.27 | 11 | 8.40 | 5 | 3.57 | 6 | 4.41 | 7 | 5.15 | 2 | 1.50 | 2 | 1.51 | 39 | 3.31 |
| Lawyers | 28 | 23.33 | 40 | 33.61 | 34 | 25.75 | 24 | 18.32 | 23 | 16.43 | 23 | 16.91 | 25 | 18.38 | 20 | 15.04 | 30 | 22.56 | 247 | 20.93 |
| Medical | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Practitioners | 1 | 0.83 | 1 | 0.84 | 1 | 0.76 | 2 | 1.53 | 3 | 2.14 | 2 | 1.47 | 2 | 1.47 | - | - | 3 | 2.26 | 15 | 1.27 |
| Planters | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.76 | - | - | 3 | 2.14 | 2 | 1.47 | 3 | 2.20 | - | - | - | - | 9 | 0.76 |
| Poets | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.75 | - | - | 1 | 0.08 |
| Social and | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Political Workers | 54 | 45 | 44 | 36.97 | 41 | 31.06 | 36 | 27.48 | 43 | 30.71 | 55 | 40.44 | 53 | 38.97 | 68 | 51.12 | 65 | 48.87 | 459 | 38.90 |
| Teachers | 7 | 5.83 | 12 | 10.8 | 17 | 12.89 | 17 | 12.98 | 13 | 9.28 | 12 | 8.57 | 12 | 8.51 | 13 | 9.77 | 6 | 4.51 | 109 | 9.24 |
| Trade Unionists | 11 | 9.17 | 7 | 5.88 | 13 | 9.85 | 7 | 5.34 | 15 | 10.71 | 11 | 8.09 | 14 | 10.29 | 8 | 6.02 | 9 | 6.77 | 95 | 8.05 |
| Total | 120 | | 119 | | 132 | | 131 | | 140 | | 136 | | 136 | | 133 | | 133 | | 1,180 | |
| Total seats | 126 | | 126 | | 133 | | 133 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 1,223 | |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

The percentages have been computed by the researcher.

Tabale 8.24

Occupational Background of the Women Legislators of the Kerala Legislative Assembly : 1957 - 1991

| Occupational Background | 1957 | | 1960 | | 1967 | | 1970 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1987 | | 1991 | | Total Total | | | |
|------------------------------|------|----|------|-------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-------------|----|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | | |
| Educationalists | 2 | 33 | 4 | 57.14 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | | |
| Lawyers | 3 | 50 | 4 | 57.14 | 1 | 100 | 1 | 50 | - | 1 | 100 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 2 | 25 | 2 | 25 | 7 | 16.28 | |
| Social and Political Workers | 3 | 50 | 3 | 42.86 | - | - | 1 | 50 | - | - | 2 | 40 | 3 | 60 | 2 | 25 | 2 | 25 | 2 | 25 | 16 | 37.21 |
| Teachers | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 25 | 1 | 2.33 |
| Total | 6 | 7 | 7 | 126 | 1 | 133 | 2 | 133 | 1 | 141 | 5 | 141 | 5 | 141 | 8 | 141 | 8 | 141 | 8 | 43 | 43 | |
| Total Seats | 126 | | 126 | | 133 | | 133 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 141 | | 1,223 | 1,223 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

The percentages have been computed by the researcher.

Going by any single category, social and political workers account for the largest representation among the male members of the Assembly. Among the male members, 38.9 per cent of them are social and political workers. The second largest group among them are lawyers. They constitute 20.93 per cent of the total male members. Agriculturists, who form 11.78 per cent of the total, are the third largest group.

In the ninth Assembly (1987) the social and political workers had the largest representation. They formed 51.12 per cent of the total male membership in the House. But they had the least representation (27.48 per cent) in the fifth Assembly (1970). There were maximum number of lawyers (44) in the House of 126 members in 1960. In that Assembly there were 40 men lawyers and four women lawyers.

In the fifth Kerala Assembly there were 22 agriculturists; all of them were male agriculturists. No woman agriculturist has ever been a member of the Kerala Assembly.

Among the women members of the Assembly, the lawyers were having the major representation in almost all the Assemblies. The second position went to the category of social and political workers. Another category of women who were elected as members, were educationists. But their number was very small.

Generally there were very few professional groups like, engineers, doctors, journalists, chartered accountants etc. among the members of the Kerala Assembly. A critical analysis of the occupational background of the members gives an impression that the membership of the House is somewhat exclusively reserved for social and political workers, lawyers, agriculturists and trade unionists.

The actual cream of society or the intelligentsia does not seem to have rightful representation in the Legislative Assembly of Kerala.

Legislative Experience of Members

Table 8.25 gives the prior legislative experience of the members of the tenth Kerala Legislative Assembly (1991).

There are 141 members, including the nominated member, in the tenth KLA of which 133 are men and eight are women. Among the women, one has been the member of the House nine times while there is no male member with the same experience. But there are four male members who were elected to the House eight times. Similarly among the male members there are four with the prior experience of seven terms, three with six terms, 10 with five terms, 15 with four terms, 25 with three terms and 22 with two terms. There are only 50 male members and four women members who have no prior legislative experience. In a House of 141 members, more than 61 per cent of the members have prior legislative experience.

Table 8.26 gives the legislative experience of all the women members of the House from 1957 - 1991. As stated earlier, only 23 women were elected to the 10 Assemblies so far. Of them 11 had only one term, eight two terms, two three terms and one member four terms as MLAs. One member has been a member in all the KLAs except one. Generally it is found that the voters have a preference for experienced members to the new members without previous legislative experience, especially in the case of women candidates.

Table 8.25

Statement Showing the Prior Legislative Experience of the
Members of the Tenth KLA : 1991

| Membership of KLAs | Number of persons | |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------|
| | Men | Women |
| All the 10 KLAs | - | - |
| Nine KLAs (9 terms) | - | 1 |
| Eight KLAs (8 terms) | 4 | - |
| Seven KLAs (7 terms) | 4 | - |
| Six KLAs (6 terms) | 3 | - |
| Five KLAs (5 terms) | 10 | - |
| Four KLAs (4 terms) | 15 | - |
| Three KLAs (3 terms) | 25 | - |
| Two KLAs (2 terms) | 22 | 3 |
| One KLA (1 term) | 50 | 4 |
| Total | 133 | 8 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1992 (Kerala Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram).

Table 8.26

Statement Showing the Legislative Experience of the Women Members
From the First to Tenth KLA : 1957 - 1991

| Membership of KLAs | Number of persons |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| All the 10 KLAs | - |
| Nine KLAs (9 terms) | 1 |
| Eight KLAs (8 terms) | - |
| Seven KLAs (7 terms) | - |
| Six KLAs (6 terms) | - |
| Five KLAs (5 terms) | - |
| Four KLAs (4 terms) | 1 |
| Three KLAs (3 terms) | 2 |
| Two KLAs (3 terms) | 8 |
| One KLA (1 term) | 11 |
| Total | 23 |

Source: Who's Who: 1957 - 1991 (Secretariat, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram).

**A Comparative Study of the Women Representation in the
Kerala Legislative Assembly and the Women Membership
in other State Legislatures of India**

The number of women elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly through various elections held during the period from 1957 to 1991 has been found to be very meagre. In spite of the fact that women constitute more than 50 per cent of the state's population and that the female literacy in the state is the highest in the country, Kerala did not show even an increasing trend in the female representation in the Assembly with the passage of every election. In this context, an attempt is hereby made to examine the women membership in other state legislatures and to compare the emerging picture with the position in Kerala.

The number of men and women elected to various state legislatures through elections conducted during the period from 1957 to 1988 in respect of 15 major states in India, including Kerala, is given in Table 8.27. Their percentage-wise representation is given in Table 8.28.

Table 8.27 shows that generally the representation of women in all the state legislatures has been very thin and inadequate as in the case of Kerala. In most of the State Assemblies the number of women has been less than ten. Exceptions are very few in number. The Bihar Legislative Assembly has the credit of having the largest ever number of women members. After the 1957 election there were 33 women members in the 318-member Bihar Legislative Assembly. Percentage-wise also it was the highest representation of women (19.38 per cent) in a State Assembly. In the next

Table 8.27

Number of Men and Women Elected in 15 State Legislative Assemblies in India : 1957 - 1988

| States | 1957 | | 1962 | | 1967 | | 1970-72 | | 1977-78 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1984-85 | | 1987-88 | |
|----------------|------|----|------|----|------|----|---------|----|---------|----|------|----|------|----|---------|----|---------|----|
| | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W |
| Andhra Pradesh | 95 | 10 | 284 | 10 | 273 | 12 | 261 | 26 | 284 | 10 | - | - | 278 | 12 | 284 | 10 | - | - |
| Assam | 103 | 5 | 100 | 4 | 115 | 5 | 118 | 8 | 125 | 1 | - | - | 108 | 1 | 121 | 5 | - | - |
| Bihar | 285 | 33 | 294 | 24 | 308 | 10 | 305 | 13 | 311 | 13 | 312 | 12 | - | - | 309 | 15 | - | - |
| Gujarat | 149 | 5 | 142 | 12 | 160 | 8 | 160 | 8 | - | - | 177 | 5 | - | - | 166 | 16 | - | - |
| Haryana | - | - | - | - | 77 | 4 | 76 | 5 | 86 | 4 | - | - | 83 | 7 | - | - | 85 | 5 |
| Karnataka | 190 | 18 | 188 | 18 | 208 | 6 | 205 | 11 | 215 | 9 | - | - | 222 | 2 | 216 | 8 | - | - |
| Kerala | 120 | 6 | - | - | 132 | 1 | 131 | 2 | 139 | 1 | 135 | 5 | 135 | 5 | - | - | 132 | 8 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 269 | 19 | 277 | 8 | 286 | 10 | 280 | 17 | 310 | 10 | 302 | 18 | - | - | 289 | 31 | - | - |
| Maharashtra | 371 | 25 | 251 | 13 | 261 | 8 | 243 | 27 | 280 | 8 | 269 | 19 | - | - | 272 | 16 | - | - |
| Orissa | 135 | 5 | - | - | 135 | 5 | 138 | - | 140 | 7 | 142 | 5 | - | - | 139 | 8 | - | - |
| Punjab | 145 | 9 | 146 | 8 | 102 | 2 | 98 | 6 | 114 | 3 | 111 | 6 | - | - | 113 | 4 | - | - |
| Rajasthan | 167 | 9 | 167 | 8 | 178 | 6 | 171 | 13 | 192 | 8 | 190 | 10 | - | - | 184 | 16 | - | - |
| Tamil Nadu | 195 | 10 | 198 | 8 | 230 | 4 | 229 | 5 | 232 | 2 | 229 | 5 | - | - | 226 | 8 | - | - |
| Uttar Pradesh | 410 | 20 | 411 | 19 | 418 | 7 | - | - | 414 | 11 | 401 | 24 | - | - | 394 | 31 | - | - |
| West Bengal | 244 | 8 | 241 | 10 | 272 | 8 | 275 | 5 | 290 | 4 | - | - | 287 | 7 | - | - | 281 | 13 |

Source: General Election Reports : 1957 - 1988 (Election Commission, Delhi).

Table 8.28
Percentage of Men and Women Membership in 15 State Legislative Assemblies in India : 1957 - 1988

| States | 1957 | | 1962 | | 1967 | | 1970-72 | | 1977-78 | | 1980 | | 1982 | | 1984-85 | | 1987-88 | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|---------|------|---------|------|-------|------|-------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% | M% | W% |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 90.48 | 9.52 | 96.60 | 3.40 | 95.79 | 4.21 | 90.94 | 9.06 | 96.60 | 3.40 | - | - | 95.86 | 4.14 | 96.60 | 3.40 | - | - |
| Assam | 95.37 | 5.4 | 95.24 | 3.81 | 95.83 | 4.17 | 93.65 | 6.35 | 99.21 | 0.79 | - | - | 99.08 | 0.92 | 96.03 | 3.97 | - | - |
| Bihar | 89.62 | 10.38 | 92.45 | 7.55 | 96.86 | 3.14 | 95.91 | 4.09 | 95.99 | 4.01 | 96.30 | 3.70 | - | - | 95.37 | 4.63 | - | - |
| Gujarat | 96.75 | 3.25 | 92.21 | 7.79 | 95.24 | 4.76 | 95.24 | 4.76 | - | - | 97.25 | 2.75 | - | - | 91.21 | 8.79 | - | - |
| Haryana | - | - | - | - | 95.06 | 4.94 | 93.83 | 6.17 | 95.56 | 4.44 | - | - | 92.22 | 7.78 | - | - | 94.44 | 5.56 |
| Karnataka | 91.35 | 8.65 | 91.26 | 8.74 | 97.20 | 2.80 | 94.91 | 5.09 | 95.98 | 4.02 | - | - | 99.11 | 0.89 | 96.43 | 3.57 | - | - |
| Kerala | 95.24 | 4.76 | - | - | 99.25 | 0.75 | 98.50 | 1.50 | 99.29 | 0.71 | 96.43 | 3.57 | 96.43 | 3.57 | - | - | 94.29 | 5.71 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 93.40 | 6.60 | 97.19 | 2.81 | 96.62 | 3.38 | 94.28 | 5.72 | 96.88 | 3.13 | 94.38 | 5.63 | - | - | 90.31 | 9.69 | - | - |
| Maharashtra | 93.69 | 6.31 | 95.08 | 4.92 | 97.03 | 2.97 | 90 | 10 | 97.22 | 2.78 | 93.40 | 6.60 | - | - | 94.44 | 5.56 | - | - |
| Orissa | 96.43 | 3.57 | - | - | 96.43 | 3.57 | 100 | - | 95.24 | 4.76 | 96.60 | 3.40 | - | - | 94.56 | 5.44 | - | - |
| Punjab | 94.16 | 5.84 | 94.81 | 5.19 | 98.07 | 1.92 | 94.23 | 5.77 | 97.44 | 2.56 | 94.87 | 5.13 | - | - | 96.58 | 3.42 | - | - |
| Rajasthan | 94.89 | 5.11 | 95.43 | 4.57 | 96.74 | 3.26 | 92.93 | 7.07 | 96 | 4 | 95 | 5 | - | - | 92 | 8 | - | - |
| Tamil Nadu | 95.12 | 4.88 | 96.12 | 3.88 | 98.29 | 1.71 | 97.86 | 2.14 | 99.15 | 0.85 | 97.86 | 2.14 | - | - | 96.58 | 3.42 | - | - |
| Uttar Pradesh | 95.35 | 4.65 | 95.58 | 4.42 | 98.35 | 1.65 | - | - | 97.41 | 2.59 | 94.35 | 5.65 | - | - | 92.71 | 7.29 | - | - |
| West Bengal | 96.83 | 3.17 | 96.02 | 3.98 | 97.14 | 2.86 | 98.21 | 1.79 | 98.64 | 1.36 | - | - | 97.62 | 2.38 | - | - | 95.56 | 4.42 |

Source: General Election Reports: 1957 - 1988 (Election Commission, Delhi).

The percentages have been computed by the researcher.

election held in 1962 too, the performance of women in Bihar was good. They could obtain 7.55 per cent representation in the Assembly by winning 24 seats. But in all the subsequent Assemblies the female representation was only just around four per cent.

In 1984-85 the Legislative Assemblies of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh had 31 women members each. But percentage-wise they were only 9.69 per cent and 7.29 per cent respectively of the total membership of the House. As far as those states were concerned, 1984-85 recorded the highest women representation in the respective legislatures.

In 1957 Andhra Pradesh had the maximum women representation in its State Assembly. But at that time only Telengana region went to the poll. There were 10 women members among the total 105 members, thus making a 9.52 per cent representation. But, in the 1970-72 period the 287-member Andhra Pradesh Assembly had 26 women members (9.06 per cent) and that was the highest women representation in the Assembly. But in this case also it is found that in all other Assemblies, the percentage of women representation was around four per cent only.

In the case of West Bengal where the Left Democratic Front has been in power for a long period, the maximum number of women in the Assembly was 13 in 1987-88 and the maximum representation of women in the House was only 4.42 per cent in the same year. In all other Assembly elections the women were very rarely elected.

Rajasthan is a state where the literacy among women has been the lowest. But the Rajasthan legislature had women representatives up to eight per cent in 1984-85. In the 200-member House there were 16 women members in that Assembly in that particular

year. Generally there had been more than four per cent representation for women in all the Assemblies of the state.

Tamil Nadu, our neighbouring state, maintains a very poor record in the matter of women representation in its State Legislature even though the state opted to have women Chief Ministers twice. In 1957 the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly had ten women members in a House of 205 members, i.e., a women representation of 4.88 per cent. In all the subsequent elections only less than 10 women members were elected in each election. In 1977-78, it had the lowest women representation of 0.85 per cent in the Assembly.

Several states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh etc. had a better record of women's representation in their legislatures than the female representation in the Kerala Legislative Assembly. That does not mean that these state legislatures had adequate women representation. Generally the women membership in all the state legislatures is very inadequate and weak. Even with the passage of time, no trend of more representation of women in the state legislatures is seen. In fact, in the case of most of the states the number of women members has been decreasing.

Table 8.29 gives the total number of seats, the number of women contestants and the number of women elected in every election since 1957 up to 1987-88 in respect of all the 15 states. Table 8.29 shows that the number of women contestants after every election was gradually increasing even though the number of elected women did not increase. The increase in the number of candidates has been prominent since 1980. In all the states under reference, the maximum number of women candidates were in the field in

Table 8.29

Number of Women Contested and Elected in the Assembly Elections to 15 State Legislative Assemblies in India : 1957 - 1988

| States | 1957 | | | 1962 | | | 1967 | | | 1970-72 | | | 1977-78 | | | 1980 | | | 1982 | | | 1984-85 | | | 1987-88 | | |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected | Total Seats | W Contested | W Elected |
| Andhra Pradesh | 105* | 18 | 10 | 294 | 24 | 10 | 285 | 20 | 12 | 287 | 49 | 26 | 294 | 47 | 10 | - | - | - | 290 | 73 | 12 | 294 | 77 | 10 | - | - | - |
| Assam | 108 | 8 | 5 | 105 | 4 | 4 | 120 | 9 | 5 | 126 | 12 | 8 | 126 | 21 | 1 | - | - | - | 109 | 3 | 1 | 126 | 29 | 5 | - | - | - |
| Biher | 318 | 42 | 33 | 318 | 45 | 24 | 318 | 29 | 10 | 318 | 46 | 13 | 324 | 94 | 13 | 324 | 77 | 12 | - | - | - | 324 | 104 | 15 | - | - | - |
| Gujarat | 154 | 12 | 5 | 154 | 20 | 12 | 168 | 14 | 8 | 168 | 22 | 8 | - | - | - | 182 | 24 | 5 | - | - | - | 182 | 42 | 16 | - | - | - |
| Haryana | - | - | - | - | - | - | 81 | 7 | 4 | 81 | 13 | 5 | 90 | 20 | 4 | - | - | - | 90 | 25 | 7 | - | - | - | 90 | 35 | 5 |
| Karnataka | 208 | 22 | 18 | 206 | 28 | 18 | 214 | 10 | 6 | 216 | 28 | 11 | 224 | 28 | 9 | - | - | - | 224 | 38 | 2 | 224 | 114 | 8 | - | - | - |
| Kerala | 126 | 10 | 6 | - | - | - | 133 | 7 | 1 | 133 | 9 | 2 | 140 | 11 | 1 | 140 | 13 | 5 | - | - | - | 140 | 17 | 5 | - | - | 140 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 288 | 43 | 19 | 285 | 16 | 8 | 296 | 17 | 10 | 297 | 30 | 17 | 320 | 48 | 10 | 320 | 50 | 18 | - | - | - | 320 | 76 | 31 | - | - | - |
| Maharashtra | 396 | 50 | 25 | 264 | 35 | 13 | 269 | 17 | 8 | 270 | 53 | 27 | 288 | 42 | 8 | 288 | 49 | 19 | - | - | - | 288 | 83 | 16 | - | - | - |
| Orissa | 140 | 15 | 5 | - | - | - | 140 | 13 | 5 | 138 | 12 | - | 147 | 17 | 7 | 147 | 17 | 5 | - | - | - | 147 | 25 | 8 | - | - | - |
| Punjab | 154 | 18 | 9 | 154 | 14 | 8 | 104 | 8 | 2 | 104 | 14 | 6 | 117 | 18 | 3 | 117 | 19 | 6 | - | - | - | 117 | 33 | 4 | - | - | - |
| Rajasthan | 176 | 21 | 9 | 175 | 16 | 8 | 184 | 10 | 6 | 184 | 17 | 13 | 200 | 32 | 8 | 200 | 31 | 10 | - | - | - | 200 | 46 | 16 | - | - | - |
| Tamil Nadu | 205 | 24 | 10 | 206 | 16 | 8 | 234 | 13 | 4 | 234 | 15 | 5 | 234 | 24 | 2 | 234 | 17 | 5 | - | - | - | 234 | 46 | 8 | - | - | - |
| Uttar Pradesh | 430 | 35 | 20 | 430 | 55 | 19 | 425 | 38 | 7 | - | - | - | 425 | 63 | 11 | 425 | 94 | 24 | - | - | - | 425 | 169 | 31 | - | - | - |
| West Bengal | 252 | 16 | 8 | 251 | 16 | 10 | 280 | 19 | 8 | 280 | 17 | 5 | 294 | 29 | 4 | - | - | - | 294 | 26 | 7 | - | - | 294 | 294 | 36 | 13 |

Source: General Election Reports: 1957 - 1988 (Election Commission, Delhi).

* Only Telengana went to the poll.

1984-85. In that year there were 169 women candidates in U.P but only 31 were elected. Similarly in Karnataka there were 114 women candidates, in Bihar 104, in Maharashtra 83 and in Madhya Pradesh 76. Thus in the eighties an increasing trend in the number of women who are ready to contest elections, is clearly visible in almost all the states. But that trend is not so prominent as far as Kerala is concerned.

Chapter 9

Kerala Women in the Indian Parliament

The Indian Parliament has, over the years, played a very significant and crucial role in the growth of the democratic system in our country. In an attempt to usher an egalitarian social and economic order in our country it has shaped and brought out a number of legislations. The position that the Parliament occupies in the Indian polity is well presented in the following words of our former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi:

Parliament is the commanding centre of our political system and Government's responsibility to the legislature at the centre and in the states is beyond dispute (231, p.67).

Both the Houses of Parliament, namely, the House of the People or the Lok Sabha and the Council of States or the Rajya Sabha have their distinct roles to play. Members of the Lok Sabha are directly elected by the people, while members of the Rajya Sabha are elected by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies. Twelve members of this House are nominated by the President of India.

After the acceptance of the Constitution of India, ten elections were conducted to the Lok Sabha. From 1952 onwards every second year elections to the Rajya Sabha were conducted for one third of its seats. Compared to the representation of men the membership of women in both the Houses of Parliament during all these years has been very meagre. The insignificant representation of women in legislative bodies is however found to be common in almost all the countries of the world.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Report for 1992, the membership of women in the legislatures of the various countries of the world has been very insignificant and their representation has been decreasing from 1988 onwards. As per the report, the average representation of women in 171 legislatures of the world comes only to 10.1 per cent in 1992, while in 1988 it was 11.00 per cent (573, p.3).

Some exceptions to this general trend are also given in the report. Seychelles which has got 25 MPs in total has eleven women MPs among them, giving 45.8 per cent representation for women in Parliament. Similarly in Finland women have a representation of 39 per cent, Norway 35.8 per cent, Denmark 33 per cent and China 21 per cent. Apart from these nations both the developing and the developed nations have a poor record in this respect. Out of the total 35,884 MPs of these 171 national legislatures, there are only 3,626 women members (573, p.3).

The percentage of women representation in the legislatures of six Asian countries, including India, and two western countries in the year 1975 (International Year of Women) and 1987 (one year after the International Decade of Women) is given in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1

Percentage of Parliamentary Seats Occupied by Women

| Country | 1975 | 1987 |
|------------|---------------|------|
| India | 4.3 | 8.3 |
| Bangladesh | 4.8 | 9.1 |
| Pakistan | 4.1 | 8.9 |
| Sri Lanka | Not Available | 4.8 |
| China | 22.6 | 21.2 |
| Japan | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| USA | 3.7 | 5.3 |
| UK | 4.3 | 6.3 |

Source: Women Parliamentarians in India, Jain C.K.,
(Surjeet Publications, New Delhi, 1993) p.90.

In all these countries, except China, the women representation has been less than 10 per cent. In the case of China it has been above 20 per cent. Strangely enough it is seen that even in an advanced country like Japan the representation of women in its legislature was only a meagre 1.4 per cent both in 1975 and in 1977. In the United States also the women representation is very poor.

In this connection the women representation in the legislature of the UK, which has the oldest democratic system, is worth considering in detail. Table 9.2 gives the total membership of men and women in the House of Commons from 1945 to 1992, along with the number of women candidates for every election.

The number of women contested in the election has risen from 74 in 1951 to 568 in 1992. The increase in the number of candidates is more than seven times. But such an increase is not there in the number of women elected to the House. Till 1983 the women representation in the House has never exceeded five per cent of its total membership. Only in 1987 and in 1992 has the representation of women in the House gone up to 6.31 per cent and 9.21 per cent respectively. In 1992 there were 60 women members of Parliament in the House of 651 members. That was the maximum number of women ever represented in the House of Commons. Still it was only less than 10 per cent of the total membership.

To conclude, the representation of women in the national legislatures of most of the countries of the world is still very insignificant.

Table 9.2
Men and Women Membership in the House of Commons (U.K)
: 1945 - 1992

| Year | Total Number of Seats | Number of Women Candi- dates | Number of Women Elected | Percen- tage of Women Represen- tatives | Number of Men Elected | Percentage of Men Representa- tives |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1945 | 640 | 87 | 24 | 3.75 | 616 | 96.25 |
| 1950 | 625 | 126 | 21 | 3.36 | 604 | 96.64 |
| 1951 | 625 | 74 | 17 | 2.72 | 608 | 97.28 |
| 1955 | 630 | 87 | 24 | 3.81 | 606 | 96.19 |
| 1959 | 630 | 75 | 25 | 3.97 | 605 | 96.03 |
| 1964 | 630 | 89 | 28 | 4.44 | 602 | 95.56 |
| 1966 | 630 | 80 | 26 | 4.12 | 604 | 95.88 |
| 1970 | 630 | 97 | 26 | 4.12 | 604 | 95.88 |
| 1974 (Feb.) | 635 | 143 | 23 | 3.62 | 612 | 96.38 |
| 1974 (Oct.) | 635 | 150 | 27 | 4.25 | 608 | 95.75 |
| 1979 | 635 | 206 | 19 | 2.99 | 616 | 97.01 |
| 1983 | 650 | 276 | 23 | 3.54 | 627 | 96.46 |
| 1987 | 650 | 327 | 41 | 6.31 | 609 | 93.69 |
| 1992 | 651 | 568 | 60 | 9.21 | 591 | 90.79 |

Source: The Times Guide to The House of Commons April 1992

Edited by Alan H Wood and Roger Wood
(Times Newspaper Ltd., London, 1992) p.282.

The Indian Parliament also shows the same trend. Table 9.3 shows the representation of men and women in all the ten Lok Sabhas, from 1952 to 1991. There were only 294 elected female Members of Parliament, whereas there were 4,927 elected male Members of Parliament. On an average, women members had a representation of 5.6 per cent, while the male members had a representation of 94.4 per cent of the total membership. The maximum representation of women in the Lok Sabha came only up to 8.1 per cent in 1984 and the minimum went down to 3.4 per cent in 1977. From 1980 onwards the women representation in the Lok Sabha has been above five per cent.

The state-wise membership of women in all the ten Lok Sabhas from 1952 onwards is given in Table 9.4. Of the total 294 women members of the Lok Sabha, 53 were sent by Uttar Pradesh, 38 by Bihar, 31 by Madhya Pradesh, 26 by West Bengal and 25 by Andhra Pradesh. The states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have sent 18, 17 and 16 women representatives respectively to the Lok Sabha so far. When compared with the above states, Kerala's contribution in this respect is very poor. Only seven women members were sent to the Lok Sabha by Kerala. No woman representative from Kerala was a member in the second, third, sixth and eighth Lok Sabhas. Even the states of Rajasthan, Assam, Gujarat and Punjab, where literacy among women is very low when compared to the women-literacy in Kerala, have sent more women representatives to the Lok Sabha. Two states, namely, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal had their women representatives in all the Ten Lok Sabhas.

Table 9.3
Representation of Men and Women Members in the Lok Sabha :
1952 - 1991 (All India)

| Lok Sabha | Year | Total Number of Seats | Number of Men Members | Percentage of Men Representatives | Number of Women Members | Percentage of Women Representatives |
|-----------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| First | 1952 | 499 | 477 | 95.6 | 22 | 4.4 |
| Second | 1957 | 500 | 473 | 94.6 | 27 | 5.4 |
| Third | 1962 | 503 | 469 | 93.3 | 34 | 6.7 |
| Fourth | 1967 | 523 | 492 | 94.1 | 31 | 5.9 |
| Fifth | 1971 | 521 | 499 | 95.8 | 22 | 4.2 |
| Sixth | 1977 | 544 | 525 | 96.6 | 19 | 3.4 |
| Seventh | 1980 | 544 | 516 | 94.9 | 28 | 5.1 |
| Eighth | 1984 | 544 | 500 | 91.9 | 44 | 8.1 |
| Ninth | 1989 | 529 | 501 | 94.71 | 28 | 5.29 |
| Tenth | 1991 | 514 | 475 | 92.93 | 39 | 7.07 |
| | | 5,221 | 4,927 | 94.4 | 294 | 5.6 |

Source: Women Parliamentarians in India, Jain C.K.,
(Surjeet Publications, New Delhi, 1993) p.937.

Table 9.4

State-wise Women Members of the Lok Sabha : 1952 - 1991 (All India)

| States | 1952 | 1957 | 1962 | 1967 | 1971 | 1977 | 1980 | 1984 | 1989 | 1991 | Total |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Andhra Pradesh | - | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 25 |
| Assam | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | - | - | - | 9 |
| Bihar | 2 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 1 | - | 5 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 38 |
| Delhi | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 5 |
| Goa, Daman, Diu | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Gujarat | - | - | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | 2 | 8 |
| Haryana | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| Jammu and Kashmir | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 3 |
| Karnataka | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 17 |
| Kerala | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 2 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 2 | - | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 31 |
| Maharashtra | - | - | 1 | 3 | - | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 18 |
| Nagaland | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Orissa | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 2 |
| Punjab | 1 | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | 1 | - | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| Rajasthan | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 12 |
| Sikkim | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 2 |
| Tamil Nadu | 2 | 1 | 3 | - | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | 2 | 3 | 16 |
| Tripura | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 4 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 53 |
| West Bengal | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 26 |
| Anglo-Indian (Nominated) | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| NA | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 4 |
| Total | 22 | 27 | 34 | 31 | 22 | 19 | 28 | 44 | 28 | 39 | 294 |

Source: 1. Who is Who; 1952 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

2. General Election Reports : 1952 - 1988
(Election Commission, Delhi).

NA Not Available.

A detailed analysis of the Kerala Women's representation in the Lok Sabha is made below, against the above background of the women representation from different states.

The first general elections to the Lok Sabha were held in Travancore - Cochin State from December 10, 1951 to January 5, 1952. There were also elections to five Lok Sabha constituencies in the Malabar area which was then part of the Madras State. Of the eleven Lok Sabha constituencies in the Travancore - Cochin State one was a dual member constituency. In the Malabar area also there was one dual member constituency. Thus, with 16 constituencies, the Travancore - Cochin State and Malabar together had a representation of 18 members in the Lok Sabha (126, p.1).

By the time of the 1962 general elections the system of dual member constituencies had been discontinued. But then also Kerala continued to have a representation of 18 members in the Lok Sabha.

In the 1967 and 1971 elections Kerala had 19 seats. In 1977 this was raised to 20 (233, p.93). Thus, Kerala at present, has 20 Lok Sabha constituencies, inclusive of the two seats reserved for Scheduled Caste/Tribe candidates.

At the time of the general elections of 1967, a new polarisation of political forces had taken place leading to a new electoral alliance. This was the formation of the United Front of the CPI(M), the CPI, the IUML, the RSP, the SSP, the KTP and the KSP. The Congress faced the elections alone.

So far, in the 10 elections to the Lok Sabha from 1952 to 1991 in Kerala, 986 candidates had contested altogether for 192 seats (Table 9.5). Among them there were only 38 women candidates. A further examination of the list of women candidates of different

Table 9.5
Kerala Women in the Elections to the Lok Sabha : 1952 - 1991

| Year | Contestants | | Total Contestants | Elected Candidates | | Total Elected | Elected Men's % to the Total Seat | Elected Women's % to the Total Seat |
|-------|-------------|-------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Men | Women | | Men | Women | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1952 | 46 | 1 | 47 | 17 | 1 | 18 | 94.44 | 5.56 |
| 1957 | 57 | 1 | 58 | 18 | - | 18 | 100 | 0 |
| 1962 | 49 | 1 | 50 | 18 | - | 18 | 100 | 0 |
| 1967 | 57 | 3 | 60 | 18 | 1 | 19 | 94.74 | 5.56 |
| 1971 | 63 | 4 | 67 | 18 | 1 | 19 | 94.74 | 5.56 |
| 1977 | 60 | 3 | 63 | 20 | - | 20 | 100 | 0 |
| 1980 | 91 | 3 | 94 | 19 | 1 | 20 | 95 | 5 |
| 1984 | 144 | 7 | 151 | 20 | - | 20 | 100 | 0 |
| 1989 | 212 | 5 | 217 | 19 | 1 | 20 | 95 | 5 |
| 1991 | 169 | 10 | 179 | 18 | 2 | 20 | 90 | 10 |
| Total | 948 | 38 | 986 | 185 | 7 | 192 | 96.15 | 3.85 |

Source: 1 Report of General Elections from 1952 - 1989 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

2 Lok Sabha Elections, Reportage, since 1952 (Public Relation Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

3 General Elections to the House of the People: 1991 (Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

political parties reveals some significant facts. Susheela Gopalan of CPI(M) had filed her nomination in six elections, viz., in 1967, 1971, 1980, 1984, 1989 and 1991. Annie Mascarene of the Congress contested the elections twice - in 1952 and 1957. Similarly, Bhargavi Thankappan of CPI was a candidate for the Lok Sabha elections twice - 1971 and 1991. Thus, in effect, only 29 women were in the election fray in all the ten Lok Sabha elections.

Another peculiarity observed in respect of these women candidates is that 11 out of these 29 candidates were candidates for election to the Legislative Assembly also in some other elections. That means that there were only 18 new faces in the election front during this period. Further, most of them were Independent candidates.

In the 1952, 1957 and 1962 elections, only one woman candidate each was in the field. Gradually, the number increased to three and four respectively in the next two elections in 1967 and 1971. But in the 1977 and 1980 elections the number of women candidates was only three each. However in the latest Lok Sabha elections held in 1991, ten women candidates fought in the elections, eight of them were sponsored by various political parties. In the case of men also, the number of candidates has been increasing, but only gradually. The total number of men who contested in the 1987 elections was 212. In the next elections in 1991, it came down to 169 as against the 10 women candidates in that election.

On the whole, Kerala could send up women members only in six parliaments. This was in 1952, 1967, 1971, 1980, 1989 and 1991. Even though the total number of seats won by the women candidates

in the Lok Sabha elections in Kerala is seven, all these seats were won by only four persons, some getting elected more than once. Annie Mascarene was sent to the Lok Sabha in 1952. Susheela Gopalan was elected thrice - in 1967, 1980 and 1991. Bhargavi Thankappan was the winner in the 1971 elections. Savithri Lekshmanan was elected to the Lok Sabha, twice, in 1989 and 1991. The maximum number of women members at a time to the Lok Sabha from Kerala has been only two in 1991.

A party-wise analysis of the women candidature in the Lok Sabha elections in Kerala shows that, apart from Independents, the CPI(M) had fielded the maximum number of women candidates totalling seven (see Table 9.6). The Congress (I) had put up four candidates. The CPI chose four women as candidates in the different elections. Even though none of its representatives has won an election so far in Kerala, the BJP also put up a total of three women candidates. Other parties like the Lok Dal have put up one candidate each. In all these elections altogether 16 women contested as Independents.

In the same Table 9.6, the number of women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala under each political party is also shown. Out of the seven women representatives from the State, three were sent by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), two by the Congress (I) and one by the Communist Party of India. One Independent candidate was also elected in 1952. Thus it is seen that four out of seven women members were sent to the Lok Sabha by the CPI(M) and CPI together while the Congress sent only two members.

In this connection, the party-wise analysis of the women representation in the Lok Sabha is also given in Table 9.7, to

provide a comparative study with the position in Kerala. The maximum number of women Members of Parliament, i.e., 211 were elected to the Lok Sabha on the Congress ticket. The Bharatiya Janata Party which has no woman member from Kerala, has sent 15 women members to the Lok Sabha. The CPI had 13 women members, while the Janata Party 12 and the CPI(M) eight women members. Thus on the national level the Congress Party had the upper hand in the women representation in the Lok Sabha. But, in respect of Kerala, the CPI(M) maintains its supremacy.

In the case of women candidates for elections to the Lok Sabha from Kerala, 50 per cent of the candidates, apart from the Independents, were fielded by the CPI(M) and the CPI together, while the Congress Party put up only four women candidates out of a total of 22 candidates. In the case of the elected candidates also the CPI(M) and CPI together had four women members while the Congress only two out of the total of seven.

CPI(M) had nominated Susheela Gopalan as its candidate in as many as six elections and she won three times. Another woman candidate sponsored by the party was Josphine, but she was defeated. But the CPI had put up Bhargavi Thankappan twice and then nominated two new candidates, Meenakshi Thampan and E.J.Vijayamma as its candidates. But only Bhargavi Thankappan could get elected. Vijayamma had no political background, and was put up as a candidate, perhaps because of her caste background. The Congress (I) put up Savithri Lekshmanan twice as its candidate from the same constituency and on both occasions she won. No other candidate sponsored by Congress (I) had been elected. Among the Independents, Annie Mascarene has been the sole candidate to get

Table 9.6

Party Details of Contested and Elected Women to the Lok Sabha Elections from Kerala :

1952 - 1991

| Year of Elections | Women Contested | | | | | | Women Elected | | | | Total |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------|-----|--------|--------|----------------|---------------|-----|-----------|----------------|-------|
| | Cong-ress | CPI(M) | CPI | BLD JP | BJP LD | Inde-pend-ents | CPI(M) | CPI | Cong-ress | Inde-pend-ents | |
| 1952 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| 1957 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1962 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1967 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| 1971 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| 1977 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1980 | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | 3 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| 1984 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 6 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1989 | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | 5 | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| 1991 | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Total | 4 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 7 |

Source: 1 Report on General Elections from 1952 - 1989 (Election Commission, Government of India, Delhi).

2 Lok Sabha Elections; Reportage since 1952 (Public Relations Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990).

3 General Elections to the House of the People: 1991 (Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram).

Table 9.7

Party Position of Women in the Lok Sabha in India : 1952 - 1991

| Party | 1952 | 1957 | 1962 | 1967 | 1971 | 1977 | 1980 | 1984 | 1989 | 1991 | Total |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Congress | 17 | 22 | 25 | 24 | 16 | 8 | 21 | 39 | 17 | 22 | 211 |
| Communist Party of India | 1 | 2 | 2 | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 13 |
| Communist Party of India (Marxist) | - | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | 8 |
| Janata | - | 2 | - | - | - | 8 | 2 | - | - | - | 12 |
| Swatantra | - | - | 5 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 7 |
| Janata Dal | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Akali Dal | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| BJP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 5 | 10 | 15 |
| BSP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Janata (S) | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| SSP (Sikkim) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| AIADMK | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Independents | 2 | - | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 5 |
| TDP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| SAD (Mann) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Jana Sangh | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 2 |
| NA | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 8 |
| Total | 22 | 27 | 34 | 31 | 22 | 19 | 28 | 44 | 28 | 39 | 294 |
| Total Seats | 499 | 500 | 503 | 523 | 521 | 544 | 544 | 544 | 529 | 514 | 5,221 |

Source: Who's Who : 1952 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

NA Not Available

elected in the 1952 elections from the erstwhile Travancore - Cochin State. But then she had a strong background as a freedom fighter. She also belonged to a caste group which has a strong presence in the constituency.

For the first time, in the 1991 elections, women improved their tally both in the number of candidates in the field and in the number of members elected to the Lok Sabha. Ten women candidates were fielded by different political parties and two of them won the elections. In all the previous Lok Sabhas, the maximum number of women members from Kerala was only one. The trend in the increase of women who contested and got elected is reflected in the graphical representation (Figure 9.1 and 9.2).

Figure 9.1
Men Contested and Elected in the Lok Sabha Elections from Kerala: 1952-1991

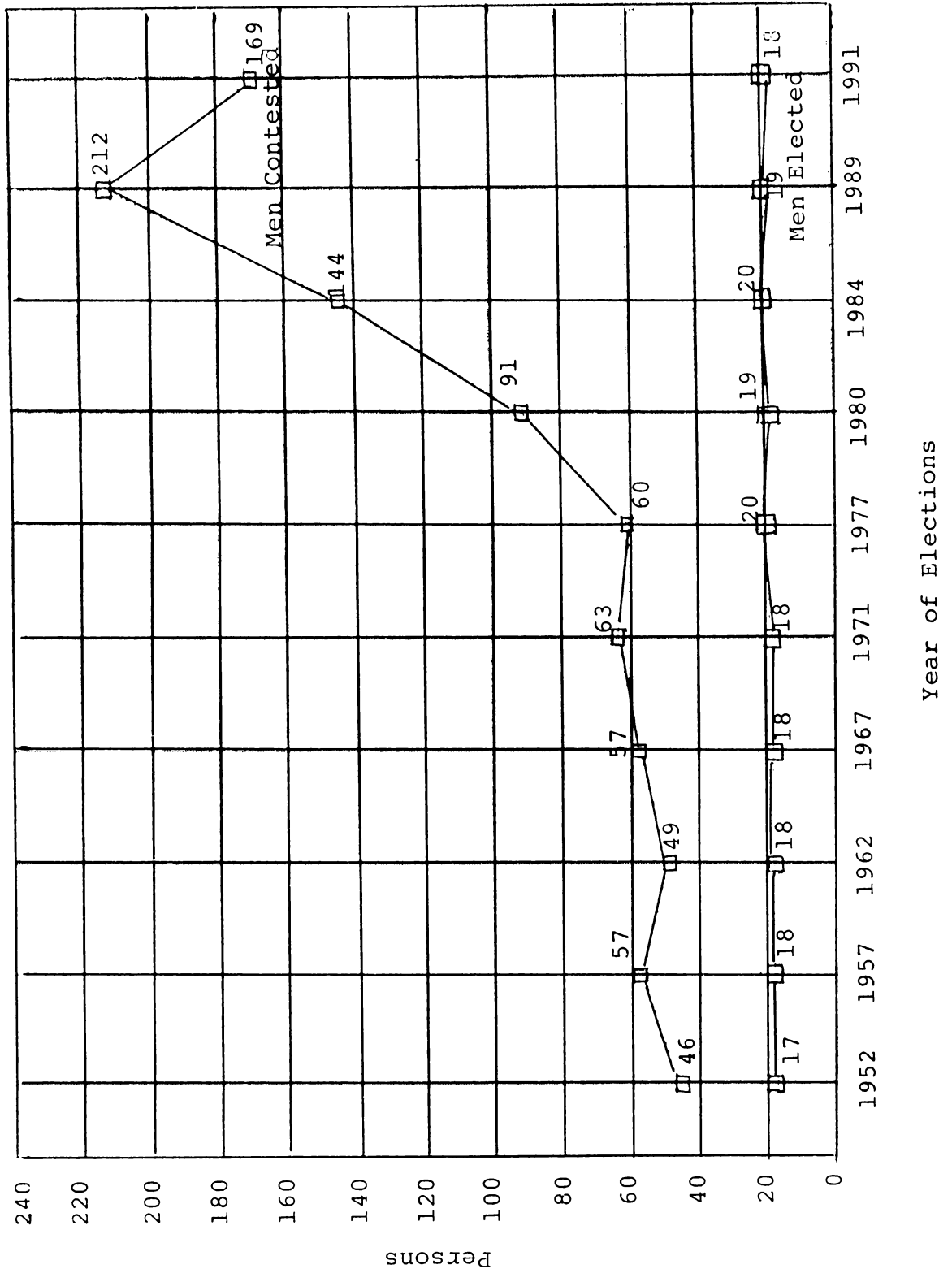
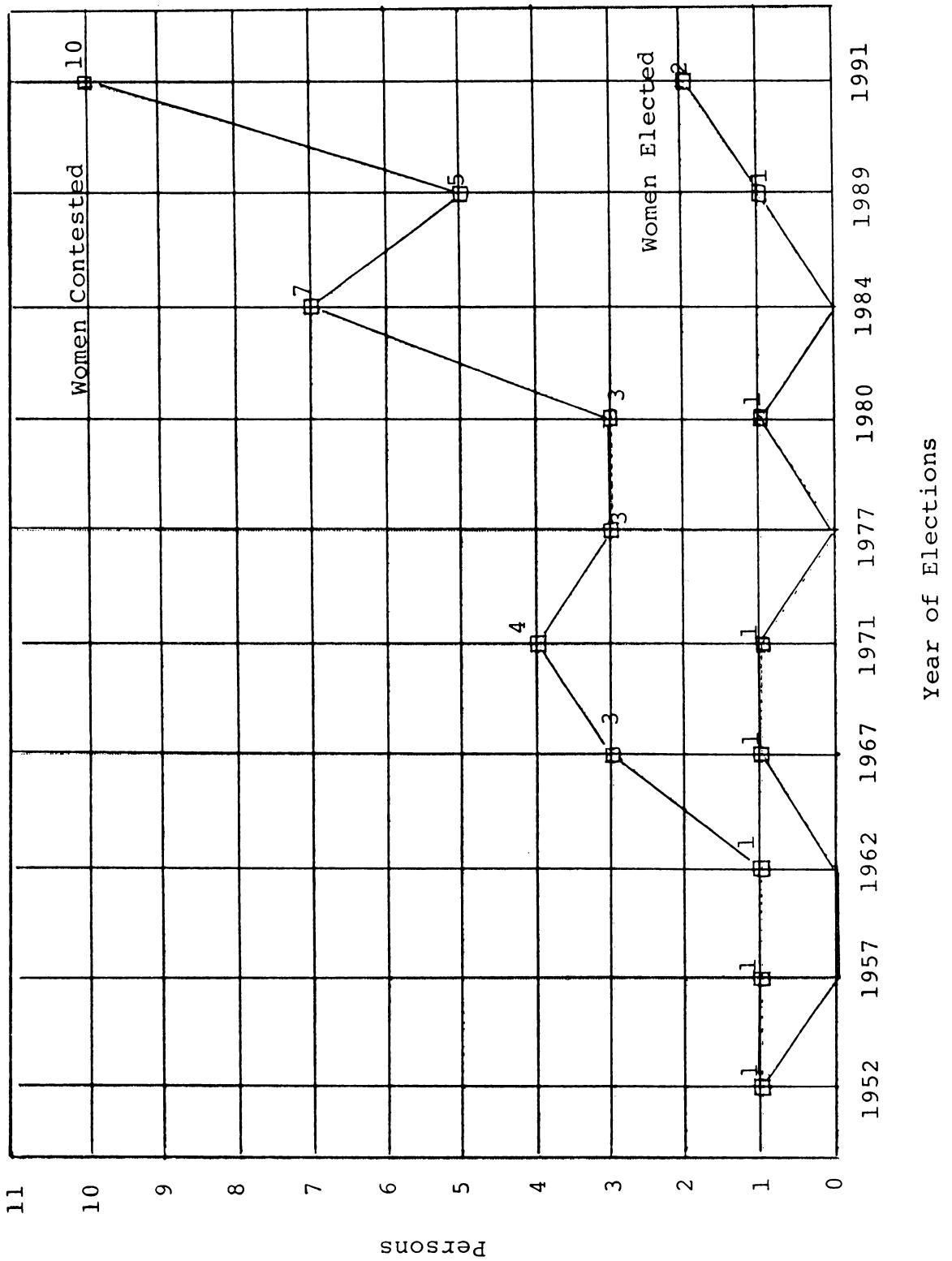


Figure 9.2
 Women Contested and Elected in the Lok Sabha Elections from Kerala: 1952-1991



The line representing the number of men's candidature is seen gradually rising and the peak was reached in 1989. But, in the number of men candidates elected, there has been no significant change. The reason for this may be that from the very beginning men have been getting more or less the maximum possible representation in the Lok Sabha. This is of course indicative of the fact that women's representation in the Lok Sabha from Kerala had been very negligible and almost stagnant. The graphical line representing the number of women elected to the Lok Sabha reaches the maximum in 1991. In the case of the total number of women candidates also the highest was in 1991. Generally the very poor representation of women from the State in the Lok Sabha can be easily noted from the Figure 9.2. The membership of women from Kerala in the Lok Sabha has generally been limited to one. It was only in 1991 that it went up to two.

Age Profile of the Members of Lok Sabha

Even though the Constitution of India lays down no upper age limit for membership of the Lok Sabha, it prescribes a minimum age of 25 years, to contest election for the membership of the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and 30 years for the membership of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha). Table 9.8 gives the distribution of men and women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala from 1962 to 1991 by six different age groups with a span of ten years each, starting from 25-34 and ending with 75-84.

During this period Kerala has sent only six women to the Lok Sabha as its members, one belonging to the age group of 25-34, two to 35-44, two to 45-54 and the remaining one to 55-64. No woman

Table 9.8

Age-group Distribution of Men and Women Elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala : 1962 - 1991

| Age Group | 1962 | | 1967 | | 1971 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1984 | | 1989 | | 1991 | | Total | |
|---------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| 25 - 34 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | 4 | - | 2 | - | 15 | 1 |
| 35 - 44 | 4 | - | 7 | 1 | 6 | - | 5 | - | 6 | - | 6 | - | 3 | 1 | 3 | - | 37 | 2 |
| 45 - 54 | 9 | - | 6 | - | 7 | - | 6 | - | 8 | 1 | 6 | - | 5 | - | 8 | 1 | 55 | 2 |
| 55 - 64 | 2 | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | 7 | - | 6 | - | 6 | - | 5 | - | 4 | 1 | 34 | 1 |
| 65 - 74 | 2 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | 7 | - |
| 75 - 84 | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| Total | 18 | - | 18 | 1 | 18 | 1 | 20 | - | 19 | 1 | 20 | - | 19 | 1 | 18 | 2 | 150 | 6 |
| Total Members | 18 | 19 | 19 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 156 | |

Source: Who's Who: 1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

above the age of 64 years was elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala State even though nine men above the age of 65 years, two of them being even above the age of 74 years were elected to the Lok Sabha. Out of the 150 men elected to the Lok Sabha during the same period of 1962 - 1991, 55 (36.66 per cent) belonged to the 45-54 age group and 37 (24.66 per cent) to the 35-44 age group. In the case of women also, out of a total of six, two members each (33.33 per cent) belonged to the same two age groups.

As shown in Table 9.9, the average age of the men who were elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala, was the highest in 1971 and that was 50.16. Surprisingly, the average age of women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala was the lowest in that year; it was only 29.5. In 1991 the average age of elected women had gone up to 54.5 and that was the highest average age of women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala. The average age of men elected to the Lok Sabha in 1967 was 47.27 and that was the lowest as far as men are concerned.

By this yardstick, in terms of averages, men above the average age of 47 years only were elected, while women below the average age of 30 years were also elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala. An overall picture of the women representation in the Lok Sabha during the same period, age-wise, as given in Table 9.10, shows that the maximum number of women members in the Lok Sabha belonged to the age group of 45-54. Of the total 245 women members, 98 belonged to this age group. Fiftytwo of them belonged to the age group of 35-44 and another 49 belonged to the 55-64 age group. Only two women were elected to the Lok Sabha from the age group of 75-84. In the case of Kerala women also, the same trend

Table 9.9

Average Age of Men and Women Elected to the Lok Sabha
from Kerala : 1962 - 1991

| Year | Men | Women |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1962 | 49.5 | - |
| 1967 | 47.27 | 39.5 |
| 1971 | 50.16 | 29.5 |
| 1977 | 48.5 | - |
| 1980 | 48.97 | 49.5 |
| 1984 | 47.35 | - |
| 1989 | 48.45 | 39.5 |
| 1991 | 48.92 | 54.5 |

Source: Who's Who: 1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

The percentage was computed by the researcher.

Table 9.10

Age-group Distribution of Women Members of the Lok Sabha
from 1962 - 1991 (All India)

| Age Group | 1962 | 1967 | 1971 | 1977 | 1980 | 1984 | 1989 | 1991 | Total |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 25 - 34 | 4 | 4 | 2 | - | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 23 |
| 35 - 44 | 14 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 52 |
| 45 - 54 | 10 | 15 | 12 | 13 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 17 | 98 |
| 55 - 64 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 14 | 4 | 5 | 49 |
| 65 - 74 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 17 |
| 75 - 84 | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| N A | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 4 |
| Total | 34 | 31 | 22 | 19 | 28 | 44 | 28 | 39 | 245 |

Source: Who's Who:1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

N A Not Available.

was seen. Of the total six women elected from the state, one-third of them belonged to the 45-54 age group and another one-third belonged to the 35-44 age group.

Educational Background

Even though our Constitution does not stipulate any formal educational background for membership of Parliament, one can observe from Table 9.11 that the members elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala possessed good educational qualifications.

For this study the educational qualifications of the members have been broadly classified into eight categories, viz., (1) undermatriculates, (2) matriculates, (3) undergraduates, (4) graduates, (5) law graduates, (6) postgraduates, (7) medical graduates, (8) engineering graduates.

Table 9.11 shows the educational background of men and women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala from 1962 - 1991. All the women members from the state were well qualified. Of the six women members from the state, three were graduates and the remaining three postgraduates. Graduates, law graduates and postgraduates constituted 82 per cent of the male members. Moreover, there were four engineering graduates and one medical graduate. Only less than 15 per cent of the members were below the level of graduation. Table 9.12 gives the educational background of the women members of Lok Sabha from 1962 - 1991. 21 per cent of the total women members were below the level of graduation. Of the total 245 members, 96 (39.1 per cent) were graduates and 68 (27.7 per cent) were postgraduates. When compared with the women members of the Lok Sabha, the women members of Kerala were better qualified.

Table 9.11

Educational Background of Men and Women in the Lok Sabha Elected from Kerala :

1962 - 1991

| Educational Background | 1962 | | 1967 | | 1971 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1984 | | 1989 | | 1991 | | Total |
|------------------------|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|-------|
| | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | |
| Undermatriculates | 3 | - | 5 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 5 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 17 |
| Matriculates | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 4 |
| Undergraduates | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Graduates | 5 | - | 6 | 1 | 9 | - | 9 | - | 7 | 1 | 5 | - | 3 | - | 3 | 1 | 47 |
| Law graduates | 5 | - | 2 | - | 3 | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | 6 | - | 9 | - | 9 | - | 38 |
| Postgraduates | 3 | - | 5 | - | 4 | 1 | 7 | - | 4 | - | 5 | - | 6 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 38 |
| Medical graduates | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Engineering graduates | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 4 |
| Total | 18 | - | 18 | 1 | 18 | 1 | 20 | - | 19 | 1 | 20 | - | 19 | 1 | 18 | 2 | 150 |
| Grand Total | 18 | | 19 | | 19 | | 20 | | 20 | | 20 | | 20 | | 20 | | 156 |

Source: Who's Who: 1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

Table 9.12

Educational Background of Women Members of the Lok Sabha:

1962 - 1991 (All India)

| Educational Background | 1962 | 1967 | 1971 | 1977 | 1980 | 1984 | 1989 | 1991 | Total |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Undermatriculates | 8 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 32 |
| Matriculates | 2 | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 17 |
| Undergraduates | - | 3 | 2 | - | 2 | 2 | 4 | - | 13 |
| Graduates | 11 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 11 | 14 | 14 | 17 | 96 |
| Law graduates | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | 3 | 7 |
| Postgraduates | 9 | 11 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 12 | 7 | 13 | 68 |
| Medical graduates | 2 | 2 | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 8 |
| NA | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 4 |
| Total | 34 | 31 | 22 | 19 | 28 | 44 | 28 | 39 | 245 |

Source: Who's Who: 1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

NA Not Available

Occupational Background

The members of the Lok Sabha come from various walks of life. Table 9.13 gives the occupational background of men and women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala during the period 1962 - 1991. Of the six women members Kerala had sent to the Lok Sabha, four were social and political workers and the other two teachers. In the case of men also, the maximum number (48) of members were social and political workers. But 46 out of 150 were lawyers.

The occupational background of women members of Lok Sabha from 1962 to 1991 is given in Table 9.14. It is seen from the table that 55.5 per cent (136/245) of them were social and political workers. Moreover, 16.7 per cent (41/245) of the total women members were agriculturists. In Kerala, no woman member of the Lok Sabha was an agriculturist.

Women Elected to the Rajya Sabha from Kerala

Table 9.15 gives the actual representation of women members in the Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 1993. At the end of every second year one third of the total number of members would be replaced by newly elected members. So far Kerala could send only three women as members of the Rajya Sabha after its formation. Bharati Udayabhanu was elected to the Rajya Sabha for a period from 1958 - 1964. Devaki Gopidas was a member of the Rajya Sabha from 1962 - 1968. The third woman elected to the Rajya Sabha from Kerala was Leela Damodara Menon and she continued as a member from 1974 - 1980. All the three women were elected under the banner of the Congress Party. All of them were graduates too.

Table 9.13

Occupational Background of Men and Women Elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala : 1962 - 1991

| Occupational Background | 1962 | | 1967 | | 1971 | | 1977 | | 1980 | | 1984 | | 1989 | | 1991 | | Total | |
|------------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| Agriculturists | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 8 | - |
| Businessmen | - | - | 1 | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | 10 | - |
| Educationists | 1 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | 3 | - | - | - | 10 | - |
| Engineers | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 3 | - |
| Journalists | 2 | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | 13 | - |
| Lawyers | 6 | - | 2 | - | 4 | - | 5 | - | 6 | - | 7 | - | 9 | - | 7 | - | 46 | - |
| Medical Practitioners | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Planters | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Social and Political workers | - | - | 11 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 9 | - | 4 | 1 | 3 | - | 4 | - | 4 | 1 | 48 | 4 |
| Teachers | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 2 |
| Trade Unionists | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 18 | - | 18 | 1 | 18 | 1 | 20 | - | 19 | 1 | 20 | - | 19 | 1 | 18 | 2 | 150 | 6 |
| Grand Total | 18 | | 19 | | 19 | | 20 | | 20 | | 20 | | 20 | | 20 | | 156 | |

Source: Who's Who: 1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

Table 9.14

Occupational Background of Women Members of the Lok Sabha from 1962 - 1991 (All India)

| Occupational Background | 1962 | 1967 | 1971 | 1977 | 1980 | 1984 | 1989 | 1991 | Total |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Agriculturists | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 41 |
| Diplomats | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Educationists | - | - | - | 1 | - | 3 | - | - | 4 |
| Film Stars | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 |
| Journalists | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | 4 |
| Lawyers | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| Medical Practitioners | 2 | 2 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 7 |
| Social and Political Workers | 23 | 22 | 12 | 10 | 18 | 21 | 14 | 16 | 136 |
| Teachers | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 11 | 36 |
| NA | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 4 |
| Total | 34 | 31 | 22 | 19 | 28 | 44 | 28 | 39 | 245 |

Source: Who's Who: 1962 - 1991 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi).

NA Not Available

Table 9.15

Representation of Women Members in the Rajya Sabha :
1952 - 1993 (All India)

| Year | Total Number of Seats | Women Members | Percentage of the Total |
|------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1952 | 216 | 15 | 6.9 |
| 1954 | 219 | 17 | 7.8 |
| 1956 | 232 | 20 | 8.6 |
| 1958 | 232 | 22 | 9.5 |
| 1960 | 236 | 24 | 10.2 |
| 1962 | 236 | 18 | 7.6 |
| 1964 | 238 | 21 | 8.8 |
| 1966 | 240 | 23 | 9.6 |
| 1968 | 240 | 22 | 9.2 |
| 1970 | 240 | 14 | 5.8 |
| 1972 | 243 | 18 | 7.4 |
| 1974 | 243 | 17 | 7.0 |
| 1976 | 244 | 24 | 9.8 |
| 1978 | 244 | 25 | 10.2 |
| 1980 | 244 | 29 | 11.8 |
| 1982 | 244 | 24 | 9.8 |
| 1984 | 244 | 24 | 9.8 |
| 1986 | 244 | 28 | 11.4 |
| 1988 | 245 | 26 | 10.2 |
| 1990 | 245 | 24 | 9.7 |
| 1993 | *233 | 17 | 7.3 |

Source: Women Parliamentarians in India, Jain C.K.,
(Surjeet Publications, New Delhi, 1993) p.939.
*12 vacancies in Rajya Sabha in Feb. 1993.

To conclude, the women representation in both the Houses of Parliament has been very meagre. The representation of women from Kerala in the Lok Sabha as well as in the Rajya Sabha has been very insignificant. But it is seen that those who have been elected to the Houses were well qualified.

Chapter 10

Kerala Women in Local Administration

Only the direct participation of people at the grass roots level would help to change a representative democracy into a truly participatory democracy. This is possible only through decentralisation of powers and the strengthening of the local administration. The local administrative units have to be provided with wide financial and administrative powers. This may make it easier to handle prevailing social inequalities and local economic problems. This may also contribute considerably to the planning and implementation of the developmental activities in these respects. It might also be possible to enhance the role of women in the political and developmental processes through a dynamic local government. Women who are unable to contribute much to the political and social processes at the state or national level because of various reasons may find it easier and more fruitful to participate in the democratic process at the local administrative level. Thus the participation of women in local administration is a very significant necessity.

The leaders of the freedom movement were wedded to the ideal of "democratic decentralisation". They conceived the Panchayati Raj institutions as a forum for taking collective decisions, in which process all in the villages had a voice and act as an agency which could more directly check the corrupt or evil practices prevailing in society.

It was because of these expectations that the organisation of village panchayats finds specific mention in the Directive

Principles of State Policy. The debates in the Constituent Assembly also bear witness to these expectations of the founding fathers of the Constitution regarding the working of the local government, especially in the context of India's traditions with reference to panchayati raj.

Article 40 of the Constitution of India categorically lays down as follows:

The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government (420, p.301).

In the 1950s, panchayati raj institutions were established in the country to provide an institutional base for people's involvement in development planning. The launching of the Community Development Programmes during this period was also motivated by this consideration (72, p.4). By the end of the VI Plan all the States and Union Territories had enacted legislation establishing panchayati raj institutions. The only exceptions were the states of Meghalaya and Nagaland and the Union Territories of Lakshadweep and Mizoram. A three-tier system had been adopted in 12 states and in one union territory, a two-tier system in four states and in two union territories and a one-tier system of panchayats in four states and in four union territories (72, p.4).

The establishment of the institution of village councils (panchayats) at the village level in 1961 provided opportunities for women to participate in the decision-making process at the local level. Earlier, women's organisations had provided a place for casual gatherings of women to discuss their social and economic

problems and they participated in some selected development programmes. Women's participation in these local bodies was encouraged by co-opting them as a special category(491, p.9). The growing emphasis on local government was deemed to be a vehicle for change in the economic, political and social conditions of women. Analysing the working of the panchayati raj system, Antolini Denise in 1984 emphasised the impact of local female officials on public policy and politics, and examined three related areas; viz., local women's impact on the governing process and the practice of representation; the influence of elected women on public policy; and the effect of the attitudes and behaviour of female office holders on the access of other women to power (246, p.24).

The participation of women at different levels of local government gave them a new status in society and permitted them easier access to social and political activities. It also gave them an opportunity to work in groups on projects of common interest, associate themselves with the ongoing development programmes, participate in the decision-making process, articulate women's needs and finally share leadership in the national development process (491, p.10). This kind of representation gave them closer physical proximity to the centres of power. Because women labour under the dual burdens of home and work, their compulsion set aside home responsibilities in order to function on the national scene becomes far more pressing than that of men (262, p.280). Hence whether they are seeking influence as community activists, members of political parties or as governmental officials, their ability to combine family work and a social role is greatly enhanced by the ease and convenience of working in their own communities (262, p.280).

The participation of women in panchayati raj institutions has therefore been recognised as a step towards equality of the sexes. The Committee on the Panchayati Raj institutions, 1978 recommended reservation of two seats for women in panchayats and the co-opting of women in case they did not come through elections (127, p.156). It also suggested that a committee of women be set up within the panchayats, to implement specific programmes for women and children (127, p.156).

The co-option of two women, however, did not bring much of an impact on women's participation in the panchayati raj bodies. Co-option was only in writing and not in the spirit of getting women involved in panchayat activities. Thus, the later provision for the participation of women in the panchayats, with reservation of more seats gave better scope for women members to participate effectively and independently in the democratic and political processes and to influence decision-making. The National Perspective Plan for Women, therefore, recommended reservation of 30 per cent seats for women at the panchayat and zilla parishad levels and in the local municipal bodies (127, p.156).

Opinion is divided regarding the provision of reservation of seats for women in a state like Kerala, which stands first in literacy and particularly in women's literacy, among Indian states. While one school of politicians and social workers argue against reservation for women, another group is of the opinion that under the present political set-up, it is necessary that at least for one or two or more elections, women should be given reserved constituencies (605, p.4). This would enable them to get involved in the developmental activities of the state and contribute their

share to the political and civic life. This would also boost the morale and confidence of women and would attract more women into public life including elections. This will function as a strong fortress against the tyranny of sex against women.

Local Administration in Kerala

Local administrative bodies are not new to Kerala. In many of the sessions of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly in Travancore, demands had been raised for the creation of local boards with a view to fostering and developing local self-government, even in rural areas.

It is thus reported in the Travancore State Manual by T.K.Velu Pillai:

The domain of urban and rural self-government was the great training ground from which political progress and a sense of responsibility have taken their start and it was felt that the time has come to quicken the advance, to accelerate the rate of progress and thus to stimulate the sense of responsibility in the average citizen and to enlarge his experience (441, p.244).

In the Travancore State panchayats were first established under the Travancore Village Panchayats Act 1925 (195, p.3).

Before the formation of the Kerala State 892 panchayats were in existence and they were governed by the Travancore - Cochin Panchayat Act of 1950 in the Travancore - Cochin State. The Panchayats in Malabar were governed by the Malabar Panchayat Act of 1951 (325, p.28).

Balwant Ray Mehta Committee and its Report

The Balwant Ray Mehta Committee was appointed in 1956 by the Government of India for the study of Community Projects and National Extension Service under the leadership of Balwant Ray G.Mehta with five other members.

The Committee was constituted to study and report on the Community Projects and National Extension Service with a view to fostering economy and efficiency, with specific reference to the following aspects:

- 1 The content of the programme and the priorities assigned to different fields of activity within it.
- 2 The arrangements for the execution of the programme with special reference to
 - a intensification of activities in the sphere of agricultural production
 - b co-ordination between
 - i the different Ministries/Departments at the Centre
 - ii the Centre and the States and
 - iii the different agencies within the Community Projects Administration and other State Government Organisations/Departments (323, p.115).

When the Balwant Ray Mehta Committee was at work at the national level the first elected Communist Government of Kerala headed by E.M.S.Namboodiripad as Chief Minister, appointed a Committee on 15 August 1957 for suggesting administrative reforms. The Committee was headed by V.K.N.Menon, a well-known expert on public administration (481, p.161).

Quite a few abortive attempts had been made earlier to introduce democratic institutions at the district level also in the state. The 1957 Committee submitted its report on July 26, 1958. Following the recommendations of the Committee, the Kerala Panchayat Bill and the Kerala District Councils Bill were introduced in the Legislative Assembly for enactment on December 9, 1958 and on April 16, 1959 respectively. But both of them could not be enacted into law as the government itself was dismissed from power by the President of India and the Assembly was dissolved (481, p.161). When Pattom A.Thanu Pillai became Chief Minister, the Kerala Panchayat Act, 1960 and the Kerala Municipal Corporation Act, 1961 were enacted, unifying the existing local government laws of the Travancore - Cochin State and the Malabar region and enlarging the functions and financial resources of the local bodies (298, p.125). This marks a new milestone in the administration of the village affairs. The Act was passed on the basis of the recommendations contained in the Balwant Ray Mehta Committee. It was hoped that it would achieve the object of extending democratic principles in the administration of villages.

In February 1964 the government headed by R.Sankar introduced the Kerala Panchayat Union Councils and Zilla Parishad Bill in the State Legislative Assembly. This bill also could not be proceeded with. The administrative reorganisation and the economic committee headed by M.K.Vellodi, which was appointed during the President's rule in 1965, generally endorsed the view of the 1964 committee. Then again, the government headed by E.M.S.Namboodiripad introduced the Kerala Panchayati Raj Bill in 1967. The Bill contemplated a two-tier system - panchayats at the basic level and zilla parishads

at the district level. This bill also could not be enacted as law because the ministry soon ran into rough weather and resigned on October 24, 1969 (481, p.162).

When the government under the Chief Ministership of C.Achutha Menon took charge in October, 1970 the Kerala District Administration Bill, 1971 was introduced in the Kerala Legislative Assembly. The bill also could not be enacted, because the normal term of the Assembly was over before the enactment. However, the bill was again introduced in the assembly on 1st August 1978 when A.K.Antony was the Chief Minister. The bill was passed in the Assembly in 1979 and received the President's assent on May 18, 1980. It was notified on May 27, 1980 (73, p.4).

Women and Panchayat Elections in Kerala

The first elections to the Panchayats of Kerala was held in 1963 on the basis of the Kerala Panchayat Act, 1960 (325, p.32). The elections commenced in November 1963 and were completed in all the districts in December 1963. The elected members assumed charge in the same month. A detailed analysis of the elections in its various aspects throws light on many significant features, especially in respect of women's participation in the election to the local bodies.

Elections were conducted in 922 panchayats for a total of 7,714 members to be elected by the electorates in 6,988 wards (114, p.96). Some of the wards were eligible to elect two members - one from the general seat and the other from the reserved seat for candidates from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There were no contests in four panchayats because all the members of those

panchayats were returned uncontested. Similarly, members were elected unanimously without contests in 600 wards in the state (17, p.7).

Nomination papers were filed by 31,748 people for 7,714 seats. But later on, 12,687 nominations were withdrawn leaving 19,061 candidates in the field (17, p.7; 228, p.5).

The total population of these panchayats as on date was 1,69,03,715 of which 83,61,927 (49.47 per cent) were men and 85,41,788 (50.53 per cent) were women. Out of the total population only 67,80,525 were eligible voters (33,67,329 men and 34,13,196 women). Out of them 26,69,665 men and 26,35,446 women exercised their franchise in that election. The percentage of the poll made by male and female voters came to 79.04 and 77.40 respectively. Altogether the percentage of voting in that election was 78.23 (114, p.96). The figures given above indicate that generally the voters showed the same kind of enthusiasm in taking part in the elections to the local bodies as they showed in the elections to the Assembly and Parliament. In most of the Assembly and the Lok Sabha elections, the percentage of voting had ranged between 70 to 80. Again the data indicate that the participation of women in the election as voters was more or less the same as that of men.

For the general seats only 81 women candidates were in the field. Out of them 15 candidates came out successful. There were 726 seats reserved for the members belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Fifteen women candidates were also elected from these constituencies (194, p.21).

In the Kerala Panchayat Act 1960, provision was made to nominate women to those panchayats where no women were elected. The nomination could be done on the condition that the person so nominated should qualify to be a member of the panchayat in accordance with the provisions of the Act (194, p.21). Thus, after the election 907 women members were nominated to 907 panchayats to represent female voters, as per the provisions of the Act.

When the election of the Presidents and Vice-Presidents was conducted, one woman candidate, G.Sumathi of the Congress Party was elected as the President of the Chithira Panchayat in Kollam district (17, p.9).

The total outcome of the election presented a very disappointing picture as far as women were concerned. Out of the total 7,714 seats, only a paltry number of 30 seats were won by women.

Several factors can be attributed to the very insignificant representation of women in the panchayats after the elections. Women's lack of previous experience in the field of politics, the unwillingness or unpreparedness of women to contest in the elections, or the low level of general acceptance by the electorate to send women as their representatives, might be some of the prime reasons for the discouraging results of the election of women to the panchayat bodies. Anyway the meagre representation of women in the panchayats at that time hardly gave any scope for women members to participate effectively or independently in a very important democratic political process or to influence decision-making.

Another significant phenomenon observed after the election was that many women members resigned their membership after the

constitution of the new panchayat committees (19, pp.42-43). The large number of resignations of women members was either due to their conviction that they could not function effectively as members under the then prevailing social conditions or due to their incompetence. On the whole, it was found that effective participation of women in the local administration after the first panchayat election was very weak and insignificant.

Those who voted in the election consisted of 26,69,665 men and 26,35,446 women (114, p.96). Women constituted 49.6 per cent of the total voters who exercised their franchise. Thus it is seen that in the first panchayat election, the participation of women in the election as voters was almost the same as that of men.

Later, in 1967, the Kerala Panchayat Act, 1960 was amended, with the intention of enhancing women's representation in local administration. The reservation of seats for women was ensured by the amendment. The Act states: "In every panchayat there shall be reserved one seat for women in such ward as has the largest number of women electors, among the wards in the panchayat" (392, p,146).

The next panchayat elections were held in the state only in 1979, after a gap of 16 years. Even at that time, it was not possible to conduct the elections in all the panchayats. Out of the 993 panchayats in the state as on 1st August 1979, elections were conducted only in 931 panchayats. In the remaining 62 panchayats, elections could not be conducted due to various reasons, such as pendency of petitions on ward divisions, fixing of reservation seats, proposal of delimitation of panchayats, writ petitions in the High Court etc. (33, p.1).

The elections were conducted in 8,777 wards of 931 panchayats. On the whole, 33,630 candidates contested the elections. Out of them 10,310 candidates contested as Independents. The remaining 23,320 candidates were fielded by recognised political parties.

Out of the 8,777 elected members, 7,841 were men and 936 women. Only five women were elected from the general seats. All the remaining 931 winners came from the seats reserved for women (for details, see Table 10.1). Thus, because of the provision of reservation for women in the panchayats, the representation of women in local administration came to be enhanced. It is of course possible to argue that had there been no provision for reservation more women might have been elected from the general wards (99, pp.1-226).

Moreover, in some panchayats the Presidentship and the Vice-Presidentship also went to women. Women were elected as Presidents in 17 panchayats and as Vice-Presidents in 62 panchayats (99, p.1-40), (for details see Table 10.2). A new awareness of the problems and limitations to be faced by women in such positions must have also been acquired by these newly-elected Presidents and Vice-Presidents.

Table 10.1

Details of Kerala Panchayat Election : 1979

| S.No. | Districts | Number of Panchayats | Number of Wards | Number of Men Elected | Number of Women Elected from Reserved Seats | Number of Women from General Seats |
|-------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 79 | 781 | 702 | 79 | - |
| 2 | Kollam | 95 | 962 | 867 | 95 | - |
| 3 | Alappuzha | 91 | 862 | 771 | 91 | - |
| 4 | Kottayam | 67 | 646 | 579 | 67 | - |
| 5 | Idukki | 45 | 389 | 344 | 45 | - |
| 6 | Ernakulam | 76 | 706 | 630 | 76 | - |
| 7 | Thrissur | 98 | 941 | 841 | 98 | 2 |
| 8 | Palakkad | 85 | 764 | 679 | 85 | - |
| 9 | Malappuram | 83 | 778 | 695 | 83 | - |
| 10 | Kozhikode | 93 | 870 | 776 | 93 | 1 |
| 11 | Kannur | 119 | 1,078 | 957 | 119 | 2 |
| Total | | 931 | 8,777 | 7,841 | 931 | 5 |

Table 10.2

Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Panchayat Election : 1979

| S.No. | Districts | Men Presi- dents | Women Presi- dents | Men Vice- Presidents | Women Vice- Presi- dents |
|-------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 76 | 3 | 76 | 3 |
| 2 | Kollam | 92 | 3 | 90 | 5 |
| 3 | Alappuzha | 91 | - | 82 | 9 |
| 4 | Kottayam | 67 | - | 59 | 8 |
| 5 | Idukki | 42 | 3 | 40 | 5 |
| 6 | Ernakulam | 74 | 2 | 70 | 6 |
| 7 | Thrissur | 96 | 2 | 89 | 9 |
| 8 | Palakkad | 84 | 1 | 76 | 9 |
| 9 | Malappuram | 82 | 1 | 82 | 1 |
| 10 | Kozhikode | 91 | 2 | 92 | 1 |
| 11 | Kannur | 119 | - | 113 | 6 |
| Total | | 914 | 17 | 869 | 62 |

Source: Kerala Gazette No.38 dated 23rd September 1980, pp.1-40

(Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980).

The experience of some of them as panchayat Presidents makes interesting reading. For example, A.Vijayalekshmi Amma, of CPI(M), the then President of Thevalakkara Panchayat of Kollam District remarked that the male members of the panchayat were doing their best to keep the woman panchayat President and the male Executive Officer always at loggerheads. Moreover, she said that as President she had to face a lot of problems in the day-to-day administration and she rarely got any support from the male members (536, p.35).

Another woman President K.Omana, also of the CPI(M) of Thodiyoor Panchayat, concluded from her experience that our society was reluctant to see women at par with men (536, p.35).

But Sarojini Balanandan, also of CPI(M), the Kalamassery Panchayat had a different version about her experience during her term of office. She expressed her happiness in having been able to complete her term as President of the Panchayat in a most satisfactory manner. She recollected the encouragement and support given to her by her husband, who is a well-known Marxist leader and trade unionist, in effectively discharging her duty. She attributed her success partly to her active and personal involvement in the administration and partly to the help received from her husband (536, p.18). But, perhaps significantly, she was silent about her male colleagues in the panchayat.

After the second elections to the panchayats, the Kerala government made an attempt to implement the policy of decentralisation of power in the panchayat department. With this end in view in 1987 S.B.Sen, former Vice-Chairman of West Bengal Planning Board was requested to study the working of the panchayats in

Kerala and suggest immediate changes in the pattern of administration, so that panchayats would get more power and responsibility. Former Chief Secretary and currently Vice-Chairman, State Planning Board, V.Ramachandran, was also requested to make suitable proposals for implementing schemes for decentralisation of power at district and at lower levels too (325, p.44).

An amendment was made to the existing Act in 1987. As per the new Kerala Panchayats (Amendment) Act 1987, the number of seats to be reserved for women in each panchayat had been raised to two, instead of the then existing one (101, p.3). The Act also suggested certain criteria for selecting the wards for the reservation of seats for women.

- a The wards which have higher percentage of women voters compared to men voters.
- b The wards which have a higher concentration of women's activities as indicated by the existence of Anganwadis, women's industrial units, Mahila Samajams and other voluntary women's organisations.
- c The wards which are comparatively more prominent in respect of female literacy and female educational progress and have educational institutions specially intended for girls.
- d Two adjacent wards may not, as far as possible, be reserved for women (102, p.2).

In the third panchayat elections held in 1988 the above provision was effectively implemented and, thereby, the representation of women in the panchayat committees increased considerably.

In the 1988 panchayat elections, 2,036 women members were elected from 999 panchayats. But later on 16 panchayats were upgraded as Municipalities. The results of the remaining 983 panchayats are shown in Table 10.3

From 9,986 wards, spread over 983 panchayats, 9,981 candidates were elected. The elections to five wards were subsequently cancelled. Among the newly-elected members, 2,010 were women. Twentytwo of them belonged to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Moreover, 38 of the total women were elected from the general seats. The representation of women in the panchayats touched 20 per cent of the total membership. Moreover, 20 Presidents and 129 Vice-Presidents of the panchayats were also women (123, p.1).

In the total number of candidates also, there was a considerable increase for women. Out of 32,841 candidates, 5,911 were women, forming about 18 per cent of the total (586, p.4). This occurred because of the fact that reservation was ensured for women at least in two wards in every panchayat. Thrissur district was in the forefront in fielding the maximum number of candidates with a total of 3,304, out of which 1,004 were women (586, p.4). The same district also elected the maximum number of women Presidents and Vice-Presidents; viz., four and 15 respectively. At least 10 districts had elected one or more women Presidents and all the 14 districts had elected more than three women Vice-Presidents (123, p.7). Thus, generally, there was an increase in the representation of women in the panchayats in the 1988 elections.

Table 10.3

Details of the Third Panchayat Elections : 1988 (As on 27-11-1990)

| S.No. | Name of Districts | Number of Panchayats | Number of Wards | Number of Total Members Elected | Women Elected | Women Presidents | Women Vice Presidents | Women in General Seats |
|-------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 84 | 886 | 885 | 169 | 1 | 12 | 2 |
| 2 | Kollam | 71 | 805 | 804 | 150 | 3 | 7 | 9 |
| 3 | Pathanamthitta | 53 | 497 | 497 | 109 | - | 10 | 3 |
| 4 | Alappuzha | 71 | 717 | 717 | 147 | 1 | 13 | 5 |
| 5 | Kottayam | 72 | 724 | 723 | 144 | 1 | 13 | 1 |
| 6 | Idukki | 51 | 480 | 480 | 103 | 2 | 9 | 1 |
| 7 | Ernakulam | 83 | 816 | 815 | 177 | 1 | 12 | 4 |
| 8 | Thrissur | 98 | 1009 | 1009 | 202 | 4 | 15 | 3 |
| 9 | Palakkad | 89 | 867 | 867 | 182 | - | 15 | 3 |
| 10 | Malappuram | 94 | 987 | 986 | 182 | - | 5 | - |
| 11 | Kozhikode | 77 | 804 | 804 | 156 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 12 | Wayanad | 24 | 247 | 247 | 48 | - | 5 | - |
| 13 | Kannur | 79 | 778 | 778 | 161 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 14 | Kasergod | 37 | 369 | 369 | 74 | - | 5 | - |
| Total | | 983 | 9,986 | 9,981 | 2,010 | 20 | 129 | 38 |

Source: From the files of Directorate of Panchayat, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990.
Keralathile Panchayathukal (Panchayats in Kerala), (Public Relations Depart-

So far, in Kerala, three elections to the panchayats have been held. After every election, the percentage of representation of women in the panchayats has gradually increased. Suitable amendments were made in the Kerala Panchayat Act, from time to time, to enable this increase in women's representation, either by increasing the number of women nominated to these bodies or by providing for reservation for women in certain fixed number of wards in a panchayat. When reservation by ward for women was introduced, it was found that more women came forward to contest the elections. In the absence of such a condition, women were found to be very few in the election scene. They were either reluctant to contest against men in the general seat, or various political parties were hesitant to field more women candidates in the election, perhaps because of the general belief that the possibility of women coming out successful in the elections is bleak.

But, even in the last elections, the representation of women has come up to only 20 per cent, though women constitute more than 50 per cent of the total population. But it was found that the degree of involvement of women panchayat members in local developmental activities had increased considerably. Some of the women panchayat members were found to be performing well.

Women in the Municipal Administration in Kerala

The present Municipalities Act, combining the previous Malabar, Cochin and Travancore Acts on municipal administration was enacted with effect from 1st September 1960. By this particular enactment, the municipal administration in the state was unified. The Department of Local Bodies was bifurcated on 19th January 1962,

into the Department of Panchayats and the Department of Municipalities. The first general elections to the Municipal councils in Kerala was conducted in September 1963 (1, p.1). But elections to the Pala Municipal Council were not conducted then. Subsequently, in 1979 and in 1988 two more elections to the Municipal Councils were conducted in Kerala.

The data pertaining to the representation of men and women in the Municipal Councils of Kerala, after the elections of 1963, 1979 and 1988, are shown in Tables 10.4, 10.5 and 10.6. It is seen that the representation of women in the different municipalities in the state has not been very significant so far. In the Kerala Municipal Act 1960, there was a provision for providing reservation for women in all the municipalities. Accordingly, it was provided that if the total number of members in a municipal council was 20 or less, one seat was to be reserved for women and if the number exceeded 20, there were two seats reserved for them (635, p.4). At the time of the first municipal elections in 1963, the total strength of the councils varied from 16 to 36. In fact, this provision for reservation helped to have at least a token representation for women in the municipal councils after the first and second elections.

In the first municipal elections held in 1963, 664 members were elected in the 27 municipalities. Out of them, only 41 members were women, constituting barely six per cent of the total (Table 10.4). This was almost as low as the representation of SCs and STs in the Councils. Women representatives were elected only from those constituencies exclusively reserved for women. No woman was elected from any general constituency. Out of the 27 munici-

palties, eight were having a membership of more than 30 in their councils. But in those councils too, women had a representation of only two each.

After 16 years, the second elections were held in 1979. The total number of municipalities then were 31. The provision for reservation for women in the municipal elections was continued without any change, as in the previous elections. But after the elections, it was found that there was no improvement in the representation of women in the municipal councils.

Out of the 724 seats in all the 31 municipalities, only 45 seats exclusively reserved for women were won by women. As in the previous elections, no general seat was won by a woman. The percentage of women representation in the municipal administration was only 6.22 (16, p.19).

But in the third municipal elections held in 1988, there was a significant increase in the participation and performance of women candidates. Before the elections, the number of seats reserved for women in every municipal council was raised from two to three each by suitable legislation. That step itself was a great encouragement to bring more women into the election front as candidates. Altogether 381 women filed their nomination papers as candidates - 346 from the reserved seats and 35 from the general seats. Out of them 134 women emerged successful - 129 from the reserved seats and five from the general seats. While the male candidates recorded a success of 29.5 per cent by getting 981 elected from a total of 3,318 male candidates, 35 per cent of the women candidates who contested came out successful. But this is also indicative of the smaller number of women candidates who had

contested as is evident from the fact that only 12 per cent of the total successful candidates were women (77). Even though the percentage of representation of women in municipal councils had increased when compared to the previous elections, it was not sufficient for them to make an effective impact in the decision-making processes of the councils or adequate in proportion to the total number of women in the population. From Table 10.6, it is clear that in most of the councils, only the number of seats reserved for them went to women. Thus, in almost all the Municipal Councils, the effectiveness of the representation of women was not felt.

A party-wise analysis of the successful women candidates reveals some significant facts. All the major political parties had fielded women candidates in the 1988 election and had carved out victories too. While the Congress (I) captured 52 seats, the CPI(M) got 20 seats. The Muslim League got a share of 16 women councillors, elected from various municipalities. Moreover, the CPI, the Kerala Congress (Mani group), the Kerala Congress (Joseph group), the Janata Party and the National Democratic Party (NDP) got their representatives among the women Municipal Concillors. Thirty one Independent candidates also won the election. Details are given in Table 10.7.

Table 10.4

**Total Membership and Strength of Municipal Councils as on
31st March 1963 and the Representation of Women and
Scheduled Castes and Tribes**

| S.No. | Municipalities | Member- ship | Women Rep. | Percent- age to Total | Rep. of SC/ST | Percent age to Total |
|-------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1 | Neyyattinkara | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 2 | Attingal | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 3 | Kollam | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 2 | 6.25 |
| 4 | Alappuzha | 36 | 2 | 5.56 | 1 | 2.78 |
| 5 | Mavelikkara | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 6 | Cherthala | 24 | 2 | 8.33 | 2 | 8.33 |
| 7 | Kayamkulam | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 2 | 7.14 |
| 8 | Thiruvalla | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 9 | Kottayam | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.13 |
| 10 | Pala | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 11 | Changanassery | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 1 | 3.57 |
| 12 | Vaikom | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 13 | Fort Kochi | 24 | 2 | 8.33 | 1 | 4.17 |
| 14 | Mattanchery | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.13 |
| 15 | Ernakulam | 36 | 2 | 5.56 | 1 | 2.78 |
| 16 | Aluva | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 17 | Perumbavoor | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 18 | Parur | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 19 | Muvattupuzha | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 20 | Irinjalakuda | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 21 | Thrissur | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.13 |
| 22 | Kunnamkulam | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 23 | Chittur | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 24 | Palakkad | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 2 | 6.25 |
| 25 | Badagara | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 1 | 3.57 |
| 26 | Thalassery | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.13 |
| 27 | Kannur | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 1 | 3.57 |
| | Total | 664 | 41 | 6.11 | 31 | 4.90 |

Source: Administration Report : 1962-63 (Department of Municipalities Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram) pp.8-9
The percentages in columns 4 and 6 have been computed by the researcher.

Table 10.5

Total Membership and Strength of Municipal Councils as on
31st March 1978 and the Representation of Women and
Scheduled Castes and Tribes

| S.No. | Municipalities | Member- ship | Women Rep. | Percent- age to Total | Rep.of SC/ST | Percent- age to Total |
|-------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Neyyattinkara | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 2 | Attingal | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 3 | Kollam | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 2 | 6.25 |
| 4 | Punalur | 24 | 2 | 8.33 | 2 | 8.33 |
| 5 | Alappuzha | 36 | 2 | 5.56 | 1 | 2.78 |
| 6 | Mavelikkara | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 7 | Cherthala | 24 | 2 | 8.33 | 2 | 8.33 |
| 8 | Kayamkulam | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 2 | 7.14 |
| 9 | Thiruvalla | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 10 | Kottayam | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.13 |
| 11 | Pala | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 12 | Changanassery | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 1 | 3.57 |
| 13 | Vaikom | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 14 | Aluva | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 15 | Perumbavoor | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 16 | Parur | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 17 | Muvattupuzha | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 18 | Irinjalakuda | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 19 | Thrissur | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.13 |
| 20 | Kunnamkulam | 16 | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 |
| 21 | Chalakydy | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 22 | Kodungallur | 20 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 10.00 |
| 23 | Chittur | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 24 | Palakkad | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 2 | 6.25 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|------------|----|---|------|---|------|
| 25 | Badagara | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 2 | 7.14 |
| 26 | Thalassery | 32 | 2 | 6.25 | 2 | 6.25 |
| 27 | Kannur | 28 | 2 | 7.14 | 1 | 3.57 |
| 28 | Kasergod | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 29 | Malappuram | 20 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| 30 | Tirur | 24 | 2 | 8.33 | 1 | 4.17 |
| 31 | Ponnani | 24 | 2 | 8.33 | 2 | 8.33 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--|-----|----|------|----|------|
| Total | | 724 | 45 | 6.13 | 38 | 5.63 |
|-------|--|-----|----|------|----|------|

Source: Administration Report : 1978-79 (Department of Municipalities, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram) p.19

The percentages in column 4 and 6 have been computed by the researcher.

Table 10.6

Kerala Municipality Election Details : 1988

| S.No. | Districts | Number of Municipa- lities | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|---|--|------------------|--------------------|---|----------------|----|
| | | | Men Candi- dates | Women Candi- dates in Reserved Seats | Women Candi- dates in General Seats | Men Elec- ted | Women Elec- ted | Women Elec- ted from General Seats | Total Seats | |
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 4 | 272 | 32 | 1 | 80 | 12 | - | 92 | |
| 2 | Kollam | 2 | 235 | 13 | 6 | 56 | 6 | 2 | 64 | |
| 3 | Pathanamthitta | 2 | 218 | 23 | 3 | 49 | 6 | 1 | 56 | |
| 4 | Alappuzha | 5 | 371 | 40 | 4 | 121 | 15 | - | 136 | |
| 5 | Kottayam | 4 | 339 | 32 | 1 | 92 | 12 | - | 104 | |
| 6 | Idukki | 1 | 65 | 9 | - | 21 | 3 | - | 24 | |
| 7 | Ernakulam | 7 | 440 | 53 | 4 | 130* | 21 | - | 151 | |
| 8 | Thrissur | 6 | 417 | 46 | 2 | 122 | 18 | - | 140 | |
| 9 | Palakkad | 3 | 253 | 25 | 8 | 73 | 9 | 2 | 84 | |
| 10 | Malappuram | 4 | 304 | 30 | 1 | 100 | 12 | - | 112 | |
| 11 | Kozhikode | 1 | 80 | 10 | - | 29 | 3 | - | 32 | |
| 12 | Kannur | 2 | 168 | 16 | 3 | 58 | 6 | - | 64 | |
| 13 | Kasergod | 2 | 156 | 17 | 2 | 50 | 6 | - | 56 | |
| | Total | 43 | 3,318 | 346 | 35 | 981 | 129 | 5 | 1,115 | |

Source: From the records of the Directorate of Municipalities, Thiruvananthapuram.

* In one seat election was countermanded.

Table 10.7

Party Affiliation of Elected Women in the Municipal Elections: 1988

| S. No. | Districts | Con. (I) | CPI (M) | CPI | K. Con. (M) | K. Con. (J) | BJP | JP | ML | NDP | IND | Total |
|--------|--------------------|----------|---------|-----|-------------|-------------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|-------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 7 | 4 | 1 | | | | | | | | 12 |
| 2 | Kollam | 5 | 3 | | | | | | | | | 8 |
| 3 | Pathanamthitta | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | | 5 | 7 |
| 4 | Alappuzha | 3 | 2 | 3 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 4 | 15 |
| 5 | Kottayam | 4 | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 5 | 12 |
| 6 | Idukki | | | | | 2 | | | | | 1 | 3 |
| 7 | Ernakulam | 9 | 3 | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 7 | 21 |
| 8 | Thrissur | 10 | 1 | | | | | | | | 5 | 16* |
| 9 | Palakkad | 6 | 3 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | 11+ |
| 10 | Malappuram | 3 | 1 | | | | | 5 | | | 3 | 12 |
| 11 | Kozhikode | 1 | 1 | | | | | 1 | | | | 3 |
| 12 | Kannur | 3 | 1 | | | | | 2 | | | | 6 |
| 13 | Kasergod | | | | | | | 6 | | | | 6 |
| Total | | 52 | 20 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 16 | 2 | | 31 | 132 |

Source: From the Records of the Directorate of Municipalities,
Thiruvananthapuram.

* Did not mention the party of two women seats.

+ Two successful general seats were included.

No woman was elected as Chairperson of a municipality anywhere in the state. But five women were elected as Vice-Chairpersons. At the same time, women were able to exercise influence in municipal administration in some other capacity. Among the Municipal Commissioners at that time, six were women (77). They were only government servants, but must have been able to exercise a certain amount of influence in the municipal administration as executives. But in general, the representation of the state has been very weak.

Women in City Corporations

Municipal Corporations were established with a view to ensuring better municipal government in big cities. In Kerala, steps had been taken towards the formation of municipal corporations even before independence. In 1941 Thiruvananthapuram was declared as the first municipal corporation in the state. Later, two more municipal corporations were established. These were Kochi and Kozhikode.

Elections to these Corporations had taken place simultaneously with the elections to panchayats and municipalities, as per the provisions of the Kerala Municipal Corporation Act, 1961. As per this Act, two seats were reserved for women in every Corporation Council (100, p.4). Still in the first two elections held in 1963 and 1979, no woman was elected to the Corporation Councils.

In 1988, an amendment was made to the Kerala Municipal Corporation Act. This led to an increase in the number of seats

reserved for women in each Municipal Corporation from two to four (101, p.5). Each Corporation would also have 50 divisions and each division would elect one Councillor each. Out of this 50, four divisions were to be reserved for women in the 1988 elections.

In the 1988 election, 43 women candidates filed nomination papers. The number of male candidates was 534. Three women had filed their papers from general seats, but none of them could win. Altogether there were 150 seats in all the three corporations. Out of this, 138 seats went to men and 12 seats were won by women. Percentage-wise, 92 per cent went to men and only eight per cent to women (77). Each Corporation had only four women members as against 46 male members. In other words, the representation of women in the Municipal Corporations was absolutely the bare minimum prescribed by law and confined to the reservation provision. They could not make any visible impact on the electorate in the elections.

The 12 women elected to the three Corporation Councils belonged to five different political parties. Six members belonged to Congress (I), three to CPI(M) and one each to CPI, BJP and the Congress (S). It is significant that no Independent woman candidate was elected in any Corporation (77). So far, only one woman had become the Mayor and another one the Deputy Mayor of a Corporation. During the period 1988-89, Hymavati Thayat of the CPI(M) was the Mayor of the Kozhikode Corporation. In 1992 Santhamma, CMP (Communist Marxist Party) became the Deputy Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation.

On the whole, women have not been able to play any significant role in politics at the level of municipal corporations.

Table 10.8

Kerala Corporation Election Details: 1988

| S.No. | Corporations | Men Candi- dates | Women Candi- dates | Women Candi- dates (Gene- ral) | Men Ele- cted | Women Elec- ted (Res- erved) | Women Elec- ted (Gene- ral) | Total |
|-------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--|---------------------|--|---|-------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 219 | 14 | 1 | 46 | 4 | - | 50 |
| 2 | Kochi | 169 | 15 | 2 | 46 | 4 | - | 50 |
| 3 | Kozhikode | 147 | 11 | - | 46 | 4 | - | 50 |
| Total | | 534 | 40 | 3 | 138 | 12 | - | 150 |

Source: From the records of the Directorate of Municipalities,
Thiruvananthapuram.

Table 10.9

Party Affiliation of Elected Women in the
Corporation Elections: 1988

| S.No. | Corporation | Cong.(I) | CPI(M) | CPI | BJP | Con.(S) | Total |
|-------|--------------------|----------|--------|-----|-----|---------|-------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | - | 4 |
| 2 | Kochi | 4 | - | - | - | - | 4 |
| 3 | Kozhikode | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 4 |
| Total | | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 12 |

Source: From the records of the Directorate of Municipalities,
Thiruvananthapuram.

Women and the District Administration

The Kerala District Administration Bill was unanimously passed by the Kerala State Legislative Assembly in 1979. The Act provided for the formation of District Councils in all the districts of Kerala. The formation of District Councils was meant as a measure to decentralise administration by delegating certain powers to the district level. It was felt that there was too much of centralisation of powers at the level of the Government Secretariat at Thiruvananthapuram. The measure was, therefore, meant to give people greater access to the centres of power (558, p.3).

As per the Act, every District Council was to consist of such number of members as the government may fix in accordance with the scale of one member for every 50,000 population of the district.

The National Perspective Plan for Women proposed reservation of seats for women in panchayats and zilla parishads in order to increase their political participation in local administration (127, p.15). It recommended that, "reservation should be made for 30 per cent seats at panchayat and zilla parishad levels and local municipal bodies for women". It also recommended that "wherever possible, higher representation of dalits/tribals, women of weaker sections should be ensured" (127, p.15). The Kerala District Administration Act was in tune with these proposals.

The Left Democratic Front Government, which came into power in 1987, had promised this measure in their election manifesto. It was in fulfilment of this assurance that the District Council elections were held on January 29th 1991. Thirty per cent of seats were reserved for women in every District Council.

The election attracted national attention for the following reasons:

- a This was the first election held after vesting the district councils with enormous powers. About 150 subjects were transferred under the Act from the state to the districts - which would make Kerala a federation of districts, a unique feature in the Panchayati Raj system in the country.
- b National and international issues like the Gulf war, the Mandir Masjid dispute, reservation for backward castes etc. were bound to influence the elections rather than local issues.
- c The Congress (I) could not gain control of even a single district and contrary to the usual electoral experience, the ruling Left Democratic Front gained absolute majority in 12 out of the 14 districts (504, p.1320).

As far as women are concerned, the following conditions were included in the Kerala District Administration Act, to provide reservation of seats for them.

- 1 There shall be reserved in every district council seats for women as have the largest number of women voters and the seats so reserved shall not be less than 30 per cent of the number of members notified under Section 4:

Provided that out of the seats so reserved, one seat having the largest number of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes shall be for a woman belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes:

Provided further that, where seats to which women are eligible for reservation under this section happen to be the same seats where the population of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes is the largest for the purpose of reservation under Section 5, Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, as the case may be shall be given preference to such seats and instead equal number of other seats, where the women voters are the largest next in order, shall be reserved for women under this section.

- 2 Nothing contained in Sub-Section (1) shall be deemed to prevent women from standing for election to seats not reserved for women or to prevent women belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes from standing for election to seats reserved for women (407, pp.4-5).

As per the Act, every District Council was to have a President, a Vice-President and five Standing Committees to deal with Finance, Development Welfare, Public Welfare, Public Works and Education. The Act proposed to replace the District Collectorate, which is a legacy of the colonial past, by the District Council (504, p.1320). The Act contains provisions for the effective decentralisation of economic and political powers from the State Secretariat to the District Councils.

Even though the first District Council election in Kerala held in 1991 did not evoke much interest in the electorate in general, women appeared to be more interested and involved in the election process than before (609, p.8). Kerala is the second state of India, after Karnataka, which has provided for reservation

of 30 per cent of seats for women. The elections were held at a time when the campaign for total literacy in the state had taken off. Numerous young women worked as instructors in the Total Literacy Programme. In fact, there were more women instructors than men instructors in the literacy programme. According to the Kerala Saksharatha Samithy Report, out of the 1,46,740 instructors, 52,826 were men and 93,914 women (113). This new social activity and the resultant interaction with people might have perhaps encouraged women in large numbers to involve themselves in the District Council elections in various capacities, as candidates, campaigners and voters.

In the 1991 District Council elections there were 474 divisions in the 14 districts. Out of this, 144 divisions were reserved for women, 55 divisions for Scheduled Castes and seven divisions for Scheduled Tribes (Table 10.10).

In the election field, there were 545 women and 1,732 men candidates for the final contest (for details see Table 10.11). In fact, in no previous election in the state, had there been so many women in the election field as candidates. Out of the 545 women candidates, 15 were contesting from the general seats and the remaining 530 from the reserved seats for women (Table 10.11). It was specially noted that a large number of women candidates were well-educated and belonged to different religious communities such as Hindu, Christian and Muslim, even though they were fielded by different political parties (609, p.8). Women candidates won only in the 144 reserved constituencies. All the remaining 330 seats were won by men (Table 10.10).

Table 10.10

District Council Elections: 1991

| S.No. | Districts | Women (30%) | Men | Total | SC | ST |
|-------|--------------------|----------------|-----|-------|----|----|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 12 | 28 | 40 | 4 | 1 |
| 2 | Kollam | 12 | 28 | 40 | 5 | - |
| 3 | Pathanamthitta | 7 | 16 | 23 | 4 | - |
| 4 | Idukki | 6 | 14 | 20 | 3 | 1 |
| 5 | Kottayam | 11 | 23 | 34 | 3 | - |
| 6 | Alappuzha | 12 | 26 | 38 | 4 | - |
| 7 | Ernakulam | 12 | 28 | 40 | 4 | - |
| 8 | Thrissur | 12 | 28 | 40 | 5 | - |
| 9 | Palakkad | 12 | 28 | 40 | 7 | 1 |
| 10 | Malappuram | 12 | 28 | 40 | 4 | - |
| 11 | Wayanad | 6 | 14 | 20 | 2 | 1 |
| 12 | Kozhikode | 12 | 28 | 40 | 4 | - |
| 13 | Kannur | 12 | 27 | 39 | 4 | 1 |
| 14 | Kasergod | 6 | 14 | 20 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | | 144 | 330 | 474 | 55 | 7 |

Source: District Council Elections 1991: Reportage, Compiled by Research and Reference Section (Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

Table 10.11

Details of the Candidates of the District Council Elections : 1991

| S.No. | Districts | Men Candi- dates | Women Candi- dates | Women Candi- dates in Gen. Seat | Total Candi- dates |
|-------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 174 | 49 | 1 | 224 |
| 2 | Kollam | 157 | 44 | 2 | 203 |
| 3 | Pathanamthitta | 94 | 29 | 2 | 125 |
| 4 | Idukki | 104 | 21 | 1 | 126 |
| 5 | Kottayam | 129 | 51 | 2 | 182 |
| 6 | Alappuzha | 123 | 53 | - | 176 |
| 7 | Ernakulam | 125 | 39 | 5 | 169 |
| 8 | Thrissur | 158 | 39 | - | 197 |
| 9 | Palakkad | 111 | 42 | 1 | 154 |
| 10 | Malappuram | 128 | 42 | - | 170 |
| 11 | Wayanad | 89 | 21 | - | 110 |
| 12 | Kozhikode | 141 | 43 | 1 | 185 |
| 13 | Kannur | 125 | 36 | - | 161 |
| 14 | Kasergod | 74 | 21 | - | 95 |
| Total | | 1,732 | 530 | 15 | 2,277 |

Source: District Council Elections 1991: Reportage, Compiled by Research and Reference Section (Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991).

George Mathew, in his study on the Social Background of the District Council Members in Kerala: 1991 has pointed out that the religious composition of the members was almost proportionate to the population pattern existing in the State. Hindu candidates were 57 per cent (percentage of Hindus in Kerala 58.15), Christians 23 per cent (the State has 20.56 per cent Christians) and Muslim 17 per cent (Kerala's Muslim population is 21.25 per cent), (504, p.1320).

Moreover, it was observed that women candidates were more educated than men candidates (609, p.8). The analysis of the election results highlights the fact that all of the elected candidates were literates. Fiftyone per cent of the elected members had completed the higher secondary, 28 per cent were graduates and 13 per cent postgraduates. Those who had studied up to the primary school level were only just seven per cent of the total (504, p.1320).

Of all the District Councils, the Ernakulam District Council alone elected a woman President. Thrissur, Alappuzha and Kottayam Districts had women Vice-Presidents.

The District Council elections certainly brought about greater recognition to women in the political field. The formation of the District Council was aimed at making Kerala a state, where the benefits of decentralisation could be effectively realised. The District councils were vested with vast powers in developmental activities. This included special powers to undertake development activities that would devote special attention to the welfare of women.

Thus the District Council Administration would have been a very effective training ground for the members, especially women members, to take part in political activities. But, unfortunately for the District Councils, the new government of the UDF which came to power after the 1991 general elections, was not very keen on continuing this experiment with the District Councils and therefore nullified them.

Though less glamorous than the state or national scene, local politics significantly affects the lives of men and women at the community level (246, p.23). During the 1991 District Council elections a large number of women were seen actively involved in political activities. Later also, it provided a rich opportunity to women to function effectively as members of the District Councils. The 30 per cent reservation for women in the District Council was a significant factor that enabled women to engage themselves in active politics. Some women leaders like Rosamma Punnoose MLA even held the view that on the basis of population, women were entitled to a bigger share of involvement than men and, as such, the 30 per cent reservation was quite inadequate (646). Anyway, now with the District Councils deprived of almost all their powers, the women in the state have lost an opportunity to get sufficient training in political activities.

It should, however, be stated that without the emergence of a real initiative from the women themselves, the role of women in politics cannot be further enhanced. Reservation is no panacea for the present backwardness of women's involvement in politics. As in the case of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, reservation cannot help them far. And women are inhibited from playing a more

active role in public affairs due to factors of tradition and gender related prejudices against women entering politics and public affairs. Politics related to local administration would have been an excellent entry point for women who would like to be socially and politically more active. But this has not happened so far, very largely because of the tardy and indifferent way in which the provisions for panchayati raj and local administration contained in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India have been implemented so far, all over the country, including Kerala.

Chapter 11

Women on the Impediments for their Participation in Politics

Facts and figures furnished in all the preceding chapters of this study prove that the participation of women in the political activities as well as in the decision-making process in various bodies has been at a very low ebb. Some prevailing constraints are the obvious reason for this state of affairs. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in spite of these constraints a few women have come up to the political leadership and become members of the Legislative Assembly, Parliament and the Cabinet. But their number is very small.

Some women leaders have revealed some of the impediments which they had to overcome in their political career. They were more or less unanimous in their opinion that women in large numbers cannot come to the political field only because of the aforementioned constraints.

Under these circumstances it was decided to conduct a sample survey among the women of Kerala to elicit their opinion on the impediments for their political participation. The opinion survey covered 200 women from both the rural and the urban areas of the state (100 each). Data collected in the sample survey is given in the appendix 2. It was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire. An earnest effort was made to select women from the various age groups, from different professions and with different educational background. A simple analysis of the personal details of the samples given below subscribes to the above statement:

All these 200 women were selected from different age groups - 36 from the 18-24 age group, 45 from 25-34, 46 from 35-44, 40 from 45-54, and another 33 from above 55 years. Of the 200 women respondents 112 are married. And the remaining 88 women comprise 55 unmarried persons, 28 widows and five divorcees.

The educational background of these 200 women shows that most of them have passed the SSLC. Only 17 women have a qualification lower than the SSLC. There are 35 postgraduates and 78 graduates among them. 115 (57.5 per cent) women are employed in various institutions. Thus it is seen that the samples selected for this study represent a good cross section of Keralite women.

Most of the respondents are very much politically conscious. Eightynine per cent of the rural women and ninetytwo per cent of the urban women among the respondents regularly cast their votes in the general elections. Almost all of them said that they exercised their franchise quite consciously and of their own accord and not because of any pressure from anybody else. But most of them seem to express their political consciousness only up to the exercise of their voting right. To a question as to whether they like to be in politics, only 32 per cent from the rural area and a mere 18 per cent from the urban area gave an affirmative answer. At the same time, 65 per cent of the rural and 66 per cent of the urban respondents expressed their opinion that women should definitely be there in politics because it is absolutely essential today in the prevailing conditions. Though personally they found it very difficult to enter politics because of various reasons, they put forward some cogent reasons for their argument that women should participate actively in political affairs. These can be summarised as follows.

1 Only women can understand the real problems of women in
all their dimensions and make the society be more
conscious of the same.

2 They can find better and quicker solutions for women's
problems.

3 They will be more capable of voicing the needs of women in
society.

4 Since women constitute more than half of the population,
they must be given fair representation in governmental
agencies and political institutions.

5 To make the constitutionally guaranteed right of equality
a reality.

6 Women's adequate representation in the process of
governing is a must for bringing in real democracy.

7 Women can reduce the level of corruption in politics.

While a large majority of the respondents advocated the entry
of women in large numbers in politics, a minority put forward some
counter arguments too. They made a strong plea that women should
not enter politics mainly for the following reasons.

1 According to our tradition, the role of the woman as a
dutiful wife or as a loving mother is more appreciated
than her role in politics or in public life.

2 In a prejudicial and biased social set up, no woman can
think freely and participate in public life. From birth
onwards women are encouraged to live a restricted life.

3 Women entering politics should have great courage and will
power to face the unusual problems arising out of the day
to day political activities. Most women do not possess it.

4 Most women do not have personal interest in politics.

Even though only a minority of the respondents maintain the above viewpoints, the mere fact of the existence of such a minority opinion is also very significant in Kerala.

Of the 200 women who responded, 19 per cent are the members of various political parties, but only 14 per cent take part actively in political activities. It is seen that 28.5 per cent of the total respondents have some of their close relations such as father, mother, brother, sister, husband, son or daughter in active politics. Twentysix women out of the total 200 respondents (13%) had contested in some of the previous elections, held at the Panchayat, Municipality and District levels.

Based on their previous political experience, 64 women gave their opinion on the attitude of men towards their participation in politics. While 23 of them (35.9%) admitted that they got full encouragement from men for their activities, 12 (18.7%) said that they obtained only partial encouragement. But 25 per cent of them were very much discouraged by men, and 20.4 per cent of the respondents maintained that men were absolutely indifferent to their participation in politics.

Regarding the various constraints on women participating in politics, most of the respondents expressed their views very frankly and forcefully. Eightyfive per cent of the respondents revealed their apprehension that their participation in politics prevents them from doing full justice to their families. Almost all those who were party members as well as all those who had contested the elections previously, concurred fully with this opinion. It was their firm opinion that once women choose politics

as their main field of activity, they would be forced to concentrate more on public life. The resulting neglect of the family would adversely affect the upbringing of their children. At the same time, if they do not devote more time for public activities, they may not thrive in politics. Thus, it becomes almost impossible for women, under the present social set-up, to devote equal attention to family and to active political life. In a male-dominated social set-up, it is very difficult for women to seek political power or office. Society has already fixed certain roles for women - the roles as a mother, a wife, a daughter-in-law and the like, but among them the role of women as a politician has not been visualised.

Nearly 81 per cent of women were of the opinion that in a tradition-bound society like that of Kerala it would be very difficult for women to take part in politics. In most cases women do not get any encouragement or support from the family for political involvement. Severe social criticism to the extent of character assassination is one of the main stumbling blocks for women's entry into politics.

A large number of respondents (70%) said that by and large, the prevailing state of morality in the political system is not conducive for women to take part actively in it.

A good number of the respondents (66%) stated that many of the important meetings of the political parties as well as public functions are organised late in the evenings or at nights and that women might not be able to attend these meetings and functions and return home without the help of a male member either from the party

or from the family. The availability of such a member is almost impossible. This deters women from participating in these meetings.

Sixtyone per cent of the women admitted that even though many women are gainfully employed and they have some economic independence, they are not totally free from the control of the male members of the family. This virtual economic dependence acts as a discouraging factor for women's participation in active politics.

Nearly 75 per cent of the respondents feel that the lack of leadership training and non-availability of experience in public life make them nervous and force them to keep away from the political field.

About 60 per cent of the women hold the view that society as a whole, especially men, is not fully aware of the necessity of women's participation in politics for the upliftment of society and for the success of democracy. Nor do women themselves feel the necessity of an organised collective effort to increase their political participation.

Thus generally, the respondents pointed out some very prominent obstacles in the path of women which prevent them from participating effectively in the political affairs of the state. They demand better attention from the society as a whole for an early improvement of the existing situation, thereby paving the way for the emergence of a real and total democracy in India.

Chapter 12

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the present study which was undertaken to evaluate the involvement of the women of Kerala in political activities and in the decision-making process of various bodies like the legislative assembly, parliament, political parties, trade unions, local self-governments, social organisations etc. the following findings were arrived at.

1 The participation of women in the national movement opened up the path for female participation in politics in Kerala too as in other parts of India. Even though women played a very important role in the national movement, their role in shaping the politics of the state since independence has been very insignificant and ineffective.

2 Most of the women leaders were able to enter politics only because of the opportunity provided to them by the political activism of some of their immediate male relatives - father, brother, husband, uncle etc. Thus here also an indirect male influence is evident.

3 Even today the state's politics reflects the long tradition of our society under which women are banished to the fringes. This tradition has played a key role in keeping women out of active politics or civic affairs. The home, in accordance with our tradition and age long practice has been the key area of female responsibility and activity. A departure from this tradition-bound thinking is difficult or slow to come by. Also the remnants of feudalism, religious practices and other traditional factors characterised by male superiority continue to inhibit the evolution

of a proper and fairer role for women in politics.

4 In Kerala caste or religious groupings like the Nair Service Society, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and those under the control of the Christian Churches or Islamic Organisations have tremendous influence on politics. But women do not have much of a significant role in the decision-making bodies of these organisations.

5 Normally women do not come to the leadership of the trade union movements in the state. The same trend is very well reflected in the trade union organisations working in the service sector too. Therefore women do not have practically any role in the policy making of the trade unions in the state.

6 In the case of almost all the political parties working in the state too, women do not play any notable role in formulating the policy or implementing the programmes of the parties. In the decision-making bodies they do not have even representation. A common phenomenon observed is that no political party maintains an up-to-date break-up of the male and female membership of the party. Moreover almost all the political party sources seem to be reluctant to divulge the actual position of the membership of their parties.

7 Kerala women exercise their right to vote in the general elections in great numbers. In all the elections to the State Legislative Assembly from 1960 to 1991, there were more women voters than men. At times their turn-out was also higher than that of men voters. Religion and caste factors are found to have great influence in the voting behaviour of the women in Kerala. They are more enthusiastic in exercising their votes in the Assembly

elections than in the elections to the Parliament perhaps because of the fact that they are more attracted by the local issues and local candidatures than by the more remote national or international issues which are highlighted in the elections to Parliament.

8 Kerala women have also been extremely under-represented in the State Legislature. An objective analysis of the results of all the general elections to State Legislature since independence, shows that the part played by women in legislative politics is negligible and insignificant. Altogether in all the 10 general elections to the KLA from 1957 to 1991 a total number of 6,120 candidates contested for 1,351 seats. Of them there were only 156 women candidates, forming a meagre 2.54 per cent of the total number of candidates. It may be due either to the non-availability of a sufficient number of politically-conscious and willing women politicians or perhaps to the reluctance of various political parties to field more women candidates.

9 A party-wise break-up of the candidature of women indicates that, by and large, all political parties have been uniformly reluctant to give more seats to women. Of the 156 women candidates so far fielded in all the Assembly elections in Kerala since 1957, 58 persons contested the elections as Independents. Only the remaining 98 candidates were fielded by the various political parties.

10 Some relationship is observed in the number of political parties in political alliances and the number of seats allotted to women candidates, in different elections. Whenever more political parties join an electoral front, women get a fewer number of

candidatures in the election. As the number of political parties increases and combinations of political parties fight elections forming political fronts, the seats at the behest of each party become less and less. In consequence, fewer and fewer women are able to get seats allotted to them as candidates.

11 It is specially noted that a very prominent political party in the state, viz., the IUML, which had shared power with the different political fronts at different periods had never put up a woman candidate so far in any election.

12 Out of the 156 women candidates who contested the elections from 1957 to 1991, 46 came out victorious. A further analysis shows that even though 46 seats were won by women candidates in all the elections together, it was shared only by 23 individuals, with the same candidate winning more than once in several cases. Thus, again, it shows the participation of lesser number of women in legislative politics.

13 Judging by the politics of elections, it is affirmed, that there has not been any significant change in the role or participation of women in the state since the advent of independence.

Even though women constituted only a very negligible number in every Assembly, their performance as members of the Legislative Assembly was found to be notable.

14 After the formation of the Kerala State in 1956, only three women have served as Ministers, even though one of them was a Minister in four governments. Thus the representation of women in ministerial positions is also found to be meagre.

15 Eighteen out of the 25 political parties in the state failed to send at least one woman member to the State Legislative

Assembly. It is also found that women members elected to the KLA so far, were either from the Communist bloc or from the Congress bloc.

16 Generally the middle-aged members among the men and women have a numerical command in the KLA. Also, experienced politicians seem to be preferred by the electorates as against inexperienced youths.

17 Even though the number of women elected to the KLA was very few, the women members have better academic qualifications than the men.

18 Among the women members of the Assembly the major representation goes to the law graduates, many of them being practising lawyers. Social and political workers represent the second largest group among them. The majority of the total members of the house are social and political workers, lawyers, agriculturists and trade unionists. The intelligentsia of the society like scientists, economists or other experts in any special field do not seem to get a rightful representation in the KLA.

19 When compared to the legislative houses of other states like Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh etc., the KLA has a lesser record of women's representation.

20 The number of women contestants at every election is gradually increasing even though the number of elected women does not increase much. The increase in the number of candidates is not very prominent in Kerala, while that trend has been very prominent in the other states since 1980.

21 As far as the number of women elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala is concerned, the performance is very discouraging. On the whole, only to six parliaments could Kerala send up women members. Even though the total number of seats won by the women candidates in the Lok Sabha elections in Kerala is seven, all these seats have been won by only four persons, some getting elected more than once.

22 In the Lok Sabha elections also the women candidates, who won, are found to be educationally better qualified than the men candidates.

23 In the elections for the local administration bodies like the panchayats, municipalities, corporations and district councils also the number of successful women candidates was not adequate. In the first elections in 1963, the percentage of women representation in all these local bodies was very bleak. At that time there was no reservation for women candidates. When reservation for women was introduced, more women came forward to contest the elections.

24 In the 1991 district council elections 30 per cent of the seats were reserved for women and it gave an excellent opportunity for women to participate in the local administration more intimately. Out of the 14 district councils one council was even led by a woman. Still, among the contestants in the general seats, not many women were found, despite the fact that local administration would have been an excellent entry point for women who wish to participate intensely in the political activities.

25 From the opinion survey conducted among women, the following conclusions were obtained.

Many of them are of the opinion that women should also actively participate in the political affairs of the country for various reasons. It is generally emphasised by many respondents that women alone must raise the women's issues found in society for general debates in forums. It was also pointed out that only by giving adequate representation for women, who are more than 50 per cent in population, would democracy become meaningful. The participation of women in politics was shown as a necessity to ensure equality in society guaranteed by the Constitution.

Coming to the main constraints which prevent women from participating in political activities, most of the respondents pointed out the following:

- a Domestic responsibility and opposition and discouragement from the family.
- b Social criticism and character assassination.
- c Moral degradation in the political sphere.
- d Financial difficulties.
- e Lack of personal interest.
- f The time and venue of political meetings, discussions etc. are often selected for the convenience of the male party members only. Always they are unsuitable for women.
- g Most of the respondents who are active political workers now, are of the opinion that male domination clearly pervades all the political parties.
- h Lack of political awareness on the part of women and lack of training facilities in the political field.

Recommendation

1 Effective campaigns must be organised by voluntary agencies and social organisations to create a new awareness in society that equality of women with men in all spheres of life is a must for the success of democracy and that political participation of women as effectively as of men is a pre-requirement for the uniform development of society.

2 Fifty per cent reservation may be provided for women in the assembly as well as in the parliamentary elections and in the elections of the local administration till such time that an adequate number of women get actively involved in political activities in the country.

3 Today most of the women's organisations in the country often deal with socio-economic problems only. They must turn their attention to the political issues of the country also and encourage and train women to take part in the political process.

4 All the committees and commissions constituted by the government must have adequate representation for women.

5 The constitution of all political parties should stipulate for the inclusion of a minimum number of women in all the committees from the local to the national levels. A minimum number of women must be included among the office-bearers of the party too.

6 Since the male domination in society is reinforced by the influence of caste and religion, the campaign for equality for women with men must be seriously started on the religious front also.

7 The mass media in the country may take up the women's questions seriously and they should give emphasis for gender equality in all their presentations.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

- 1 Name:
- 2 Age: 18-24/25-34/35-44/45-54/Above 55
- 3 Marital Status: Married/Unmarried/Widow/Divorcee
- 4 Area of Permanent Residence: Rural/Urban
- 5 Educational Qualifications: Upto SSLC/SSLC/Pre-Degree/Degree/
Postgraduate.....
- 6 Employment: Employed/Unemployed
If employed, Name of Employment
- 7 Monthly income : Nil/upto Rs.500/Rs.501-Rs.1000/
Rs.1001-Rs.2000/Above Rs.2000/-
- 8 Do you exercise your franchise in the general elections?
Regular/At times/Never
- 9 Is it because of any persuasion or of your own accord, you cast
your vote?
Persuasion/own accord
- 10 Is there any close relative who work actively/worked actively
in the field of politics?
Father/Mother/Brother/Sister/Husband/Son/Daughter
- 11 Do you like political activity?
Yes/No
- 12 Do you have an opinion that women should actively participate
in politics?
Yes/No
- 13 What is your reason for such opinion?

- 14 What, according to you, are the reasons for women's usual lack of interest in actively taking part in politics?
- Fear of Social criticism
 - Opposition from near and dear ones
 - Domestic responsibility
 - Due to the degradation of values in politics
 - Own indifference
 - Economic limitations
 -
- 15 Are you a member of any political party?
- Yes/No
- 16 Do you participate actively in politics?
- Yes/No
- 17 Only because you are a woman, do you face any special difficulty while you are participating in political activities?
- Yes/No
- 18 What type of attitude do you get from your male colleagues in the party?
- Encouraging/Discouraging/Indifferent
- 19 Did you ever contest in an election?
- Student Politics/Panchayat/District Council/
Legislative Assembly/Parliament/None
- 20 As a woman, did you find any special difficulty in conducting election work?
- Yes/No

21 Can you participate in the day to day activities of the Party?

Yes/No

If not, why?

22 What is your general opinion on the constraints faced by women in taking part in political activities?

Appendix 2

Details Concerning the Respondents to the Sample Survey
Conducted with the Help of the Questionnaire
in Appendix 1

Table 1
Age Groups (Q.No.2)

| Age Groups | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 18-24 | 17 | 19 | 36 |
| 25-34 | 24 | 21 | 45 |
| 35-44 | 18 | 28 | 46 |
| 45-54 | 23 | 17 | 40 |
| 55 and above | 18 | 15 | 33 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 200 |

Table 2
Marital Status (Q.No.3)

| Marital Status | Rural | Urban | Total |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Married | 59 | 53 | 112 |
| Unmarried | 27 | 28 | 55 |
| Widow | 12 | 16 | 28 |
| Divorcee | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 200 |

Table 3
Educational Background (Q.No.5)

| Education | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Up to SSLC | 9 | 8 | 17 |
| SSLC | 16 | 6 | 22 |
| Pre-degree | 31 | 17 | 48 |
| Degree | 37 | 41 | 78 |
| Postgraduate | 7 | 28 | 35 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 200 |

Table 4
Employment Position (Q.No.6)

| Employment | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Employed | 47 | 68 | 115 |
| Not employed | 53 | 32 | 80 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 200 |

Table 5
Voting Habits (Q.No.8)

| | Regularly | At times | Never | Total |
|-------|-----------|----------|-------|-------|
| Rural | 89 | 2 | 9 | 100 |
| Urban | 92 | 6 | 2 | 100 |
| Total | 181 | 8 | 11 | 200 |

Table 6
Persuasion for Voting (Q.No.9)

| | Persuasion | Own accord | Total |
|-------|------------|------------|-------|
| Rural | 11 | 89 | 100 |
| Urban | 8 | 92 | 100 |
| Total | 19 | 181 | 200 |

Table 7
Relatives in Politics (Q.No.10)

| | Yes | No | Total |
|-------|-----|-----|-------|
| Rural | 28 | 72 | 100 |
| Urban | 29 | 71 | 100 |
| Total | 57 | 143 | 200 |

Table 8
Liking for Politics (Q.No.11)

| | Yes | No | Total |
|-------|-----|-----|-------|
| Rural | 32 | 68 | 100 |
| Urban | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| Total | 50 | 150 | 200 |

Table 9
Opinion on Women in Politics (Q.No.12)

| | Yes | No | Total |
|-------|-----|----|-------|
| Rural | 65 | 35 | 100 |
| Urban | 66 | 34 | 100 |
| Total | 131 | 69 | 200 |

Table 10
Nature of Political Participation (Q.No.16)

| | Active | Not Active | Total |
|-------|--------|------------|-------|
| Rural | 14 | 2 | 16 |
| Urban | 16 | 10 | 26 |
| Total | 30 | 12 | 42 |

Table 11
Men's Attitude Towards Women's Political
Participation (Q.No.18)

| | Encouragement | Partial encoura- gement | Indiff- erent | Discour- agement | Total |
|-------|---------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------|
| Rural | 11 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 30 |
| Urban | 12 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 34 |
| Total | 23 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 64 |

Table 12
Contest in Election (Q.No.19)

| | Yes | No | Total |
|-------|-----|-----|-------|
| Rural | 14 | 86 | 100 |
| Urban | 12 | 88 | 100 |
| Total | 26 | 174 | 200 |

Table 13
Constraints (Q.No.22)

| Constraints | Opinion in percentage (Rural and urban together) |
|---|---|
| Domestic difficulties | 85 |
| Tradition-bound society | 81 |
| Weak morality in the political system | 70 |
| Night Programmes | 60 |
| Economic dependence | 61 |
| Lack of leadership training and non-availability of experience in public life | 75 |

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**List of Persons with whom detailed Interviews were held by the
 Researcher for the purpose of the study**

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 636 | Bhargavi Thankappan, ex - MLA | (CPI) |
| 637 | Devaki Warriier | (CPM) |
| 638 | Gouri K.R., MLA | (CPM) |
| 639 | Hymavathi Thayat | (CPM) |
| 640 | Kusumam Joseph, ex - MLA | (Congress) |
| 641 | Leela Damodara Menon, ex - MLA | (Congress) |
| 642 | Lakshmi N.Menon, ex - Union Minister | (Independent - Congress) |
| 643 | Meenakshi Thampan, MLA | (CPI) |
| 644 | Nabeeza Ummal, ex - MLA | (CPM - Independent) |
| 645 | Pushpitha John | (Educationist) |
| 646 | Rosamma Punnoose, MLA | (CPI) |
| 647 | Rosakutty K.C., MLA | (Congress) |

- 648 Rosamma Chacko, MLA (Congress)
- 649 Savithri Lakshmanan, MP (Congress)
- 650 Susheela Gopalan, MP (CPM)