Colonial Encounters:

The English, like the Portuguese and the Dutch, came to Kerala primarily for commercial purposes. But unlike their predecessors, they were about to establish a colonial empire in India on the Malabar coast.

By the 17th century, the English had established relations with the native powers of Kerala such as the Samoothiri, the rulers of Venad and Attingal and established factors at Vizhinjam, Anjengo (Anjuthengu), Kozhikode and Thalasseri.

Relations with Kozhikode began in 1615 when Capt. Keeling arrived and concluded a treaty with the Samoothiri. As per the treaty the English promised assistance in helping to oust the Portuguese from Kodungallur and Kochi in return for freedom of trade in Kozhikode.

The English obtained from the ruler of Venad permission to build a factor at Vizhinjam in 1644. In 1684 a similar permission was obtained from the Kani of Attingal to build a factory at Anjengo. This was beneficial to the English as Anjengo commanded the line of water communication to the north and provided facilities for trade.

The factory at Thalassery was erected in the 1690s with the help of the Kolathiri and in spite of the opposition of Kurangoth Nair. It became one of the affiliated factories of Mumbai in 1702 and its affairs were administered by a chief and council called factors.

This was not without opposition. Kurangoth Nair raided the Thalassery factory during 1704-05. Then the English erected a fort in 1708. Later in 1719, the Kurangoth Nair entered into a treaty with the English granting them monopoly of pepper trade. The English could also oust the Ali Raja from Dharmapatanam and acquire the monopoly of trade from the Kolathiri.

By the end of the 18th century the English East India Company had acquired enough power to be 'courted, respected and feared by all the Rajahs'. This led to the acquisition of exclusive and duty free trade in spices and sandalwood.

In their fight against Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, the Company helped the local rulers. Thalassery became the protecting ground of many local chieftains. By the treaty of Sreerangapattanam in 1792, the whole of Malabar were ceded to the English by Tipu. After 1799, South Canara came into English possession. With regard to Thiruvitankur and Kochi, the English entered into separate treaties treating them as vassal states.

After Malabar came into their possession, the Governor of Bombay was authorized to negotiate provisional settlements with the local chieftains and a Joint Commission was set up. The Joint Commissioners made separate agreements with the local rulers fixing the revenue and setting their Malikhana. Later in 1793, Malabar was divided in two administrative divisions - northern and southern with headquarters at Thalassery and Cherpllassery respectively. Each division was placed under a superintendent. A supervisor and Chief Magistrate was appointed for the whole of Malabar with headquarters at Kozhikode. In 1796 the office of the Supervisor was merged in a Commission which was
abolished when Malabar was transferred from Mumbai to Madras Presidency (May 20, 1800). Major Macleod became the Principal Collector on Oct 1, 1801.

**Treaty Relations with Thiruvitamkur and Kochi**

As regards the native states, the Company entered in to separate and fresh treaties with Thiruvitamkur and Kochi. By the treaty of 1791, the Raja of Kozhi agreed to become a vassal of the English. The territories captured from Tippu were transferred to the Raja. He was assured full protection as an ally of the company. Kochi thus came under the political control of the British.

With regard to Thiruvitamkur, a treaty was signed in 1795. By this treaty, the Raja accepted British supremacy. The company agreed to help the state in the event of any external aggression. The treaty of 1805 signed at the initiative of Col. Macaulay and Velu Thampi made Travancore a subsidiary ally of the British accepting British protection. The treaty conferred on the British the specific power to interfere in its internal affairs. The treaty of 1805 resulted in the loss of political freedom of Thiruvitamkur.

Thus within a short span of time after the exit of Tippu, the whole of Kerala passed under the political control of the English East India Company.

**Agrarian settlement in Malabar**

The British policy was aimed at winning the support of the local chieftains to create a social base for their rule and to collect the maximum revenue to meet military expenditure.

The Janmam was recognized as property right and the Janmy as the absolute owner of the land. Kanom was seen both as a mortgage and a lease which could be terminated at the end of 12 years. Verumpattom was seen as a tenancy at will. British law courts could enforce the authority of the land lords. The revenue collected in 1801 was Rs.2008179.

The British agrarian settlement produced many consequences. It did not respect traditional practices and violated Janma Kana Maryada (norms). The state appropriated a large share of the peasant surplus. It resulted in the impoverishment of the peasantry.

In the settlement of 1805, the Kanakkar got only one-third after deducting from the gross produce the seed and exactly the same for expenses of cultivation; of the rest 60% was to be given to the State and 40% to the Janmy. No systematic survey and settlement was made till 1900 and the methods were very arbitrary.

Apart from the assessment being excessive it was unequal and great disparity exited between prevailing market prices and the rates adopted by government for valuation of produce in monetary terms for revenue collection.

The beginning of agrarian tension in rural areas may be considered as the direct outcome of these settlements. Revenue arrears accumulated and distrain and sale of property for the realization of revenue became common. This was in addition to attachment of household goods and physical maltreatment. Legally the revenue was to be realized from the landlord but they generally assigned this responsibility to the tenants by making it a condition of the title deed. So the burden fell on the peasants.

Janmy recognized as the absolute owner of the land, got the additional power of enhancing his due at the time of renewal of lease or give an over lease (Melcharth) to another who was prepared to pay a higher rent. The janmy could also approach the judicial courts for judgements in his favour. William Logan, an official of the British government, was critical of the imposition of European ideas of property on customary Malayali law. But
the government, keen to have ‘a political force on the side of the government’ ignored such notes of dissent.

Benjamin Ward and Corner surveyed land but their estimates of cultivated areas of Malabar and Travancore were rough estimates. But they found that the cultivated land area in Malabar was only about 0.58 million acres out of a total area of more than 5 million acres. The policy enunciated by the rulers of Thiruvitankur were more consistent and judicious. Francis Buchanan travelling through the state in 1800 found the ‘bulk of the rural population to be contented and prosperous’

Buchanan’s work has been cited as a good example of ‘Survey Modality’, a means of creating knowledge on the colonized people. He quantified whatever ‘knowledge’ he gained whether it was land measurement or population. Dispensing with traditional classifications of land, Buchanan classified land on the basis of its physical extent. These were faulty methods. The Buchanan suggested the conversion of forests in to plantations, production for the market and maximum utilization of resources. The European observer, in the words of K.N.Ganesh, ‘becomes a political merchant, resourceful businessman and ends up as an entrepreneur prepared to transform the landscape that he sees.’

**Plantations**

Plantations began to be opened towards the end of the 19th century. The British were the initial investors in plantations and British capital was largely attracted towards Thiruvitankur than to British Malabar. The British Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company and the Anglo American Direct Tea Trading Company were the largest foreign companies. Land was given on favourable terms. This led to an increase in number and in the area under cultivation in plantations. This generated employment. Transport and communication also developed.

**Education**

Education is a means of subjugation and a instrument for the dissemination of colonial ideology. Missionaries also regarded education as a means of spreading their culture and religion. Indigenous education system lost its relevance and English education was seen as a ‘superior’ one.

The last decades of the 18th century has been called the period of ‘Evangelical Revival’, a period of aggressive proselytisation by the London Mission Society, the Church Mission Society and the Basel Evangelical Mission. The missionaries made use of education and the printing press for proselytisation.

The school system was established and the Rani of Thiruvitankur made education the responsibility of the state. This differentiated the ‘formal’ educational system from the ‘informal’ one, a differentiation which did not exist in pre colonial Keralam. This became important as the Rani of Thiruvitamkur later decreed that study in the newly established educational institutions is essential for new appointments in governmental services.

In the new school prominence was given to English education. In some schools even the instruction was in English. Reading and writing, simple Arithmetic, English, Geography, history were taught at the elementary level. Missionary schools taught the Bible in addition.

Inspired by the missionary schools the Governments of Thiruvitamkur and Kochi intervened and Raja’s schools were opened. Schools were established in the Pravritis of Kochi and later Taluk schools were established.

The Government Press in Thiruvananthapuram started functioning in 1836 and in 1867 a text book committee was set up.
Administrative reform in Thiruvitamkur and Kochi, with separate judiciary and revenue administration, requiring a hierarchy of officials also led to the growth of English education. English education continued to be important even after 1859 when the Travancore Government began to encourage Malayalam education. English became the medium through which ‘advanced’ western scientific and technical knowledge was disseminated.

In Malabar, the Basel Mission opened primary schools in Kozhikode and Thalassery. They developed into colleges in later days. The modern Victoria College Palakkat was started as a school in 1866. The Samoothiri started a school in 1877 which later developed into a college.

**Early Revolts against the British Rule**

The early native resistance movements were led by such diverse elements as disposed local princes, feudal chieftains, aggrieved peasants, tribal communities and others. Kathleen Gough the anthropologist had classified these early movement in to five categories – restorative, religious, social banditry, terrorist vengeance and armed insurrection.

The revolts of Pazhassi Raja in Malabar, Velu Thampi in Thiruvitamkur, Paliath Achan in Kochi, the Kurichiyas in Wayanad and the Moplahs in Eranad and Valluvanad comes under this category.

During the British period there occurred stiff, violent resistance against them at Anjengo in 1695, at Thalassery in 1704 and again at Anjengo in 1721. The Patinjare Kovilakom Rajas of the Samuthiri family also raised the banner of revolt. Following the withdrawal of Tippu, the ruling Samoothiri returned to Kozhikode in 1792. When his request to restore the territories was turned down by the English, he revolted. The Raja was supported by Unni Muppan a Moplah Chief, Poligar chiefs of Coimbatore, Palakkad Raja and others. The British pursued the prince, arrested his nephews and brother and finally came to an agreement with the prince who agreed to live in peace, accepting a nominal pension from the company.

**The Anjengo Revolts**

Anjengo was one of the earliest commercial settlement of the English East India Company in India. During 1695 and 1721, there took place a serious anti British outbreak in the Attingal – Anchu tengu zones. They are known in history as the Anjengo Revolts.

It was in 1684 that the English E.I. Company obtained from the Rani of Attingal a sandy plot of land at Anchutengu for the establishment of a factory for trade purposes. Here they built a fort which was completed in 1695. A depot for military stores was also opened there. The factory was established there mainly to break up the Dutch monopoly in pepper trade. Soon Anjengo developed in to the most important British possessions on the West Coast, next only to Bombay.

Later, under pressure from the English factors at Anjengo, the Rani of Attingal was forced to grant them the monopoly of trade in pepper, the most valuable commercial crop of Kerala. With the monopoly of pepper trade, the English manipulated the price of pepper to the detriment of the interests of the local cultivator. The income which the cultivators had been getting from pepper trade was steadily decreased while the company amassed great fortunes.

Another cause of the revolt was displeasure of the Matampis. As allies of royal power, the E.I. Company earned their displeasure. The Matampis were influential local
leaders who mobilized the people of the locality. Moreover the unscrupulous methods of trading, their corrupt practices like private trade and amassing huge fortunes roused popular feelings against the company.

**Revolt of 1697**

The over bearing conduct and corrupt practices of the English factors antagonized the local people who launched a violent attack on the Anjengo fort in November 1697. They attacked the factors and massacred Englishmen. Their attempt to capture the fort failed and the rebels were forced to retreat in the face of the superior military might of the British. This led to a fresh agreement with the Rani of Attingal. By the new treaty, the Rani agreed to rebuild the factory and to pay 80,000 panams as compensation. The Queen had already granted the company permission to purchase all the pepper her country produced. In 1695, the English fortified the settlement but the Queen at the instigation of the Dutch opposed it. However the English completed the work in 1695. In spite of the failure of the revolt, the rebels continued to be hostile to the British.

**Revolt of 1721**

The local resentment erupted into a major crisis in 1721. The British continued to follow their old policy of economic exploitation. Further officers at Anjengo indulged in activities exhibiting racial arrogance. This precipitated the revolt of 1721.

The immediate provocation for the revolt, however was the Easter Dinner given by the company. During the course of the celebrations, a mistress of the company’s interpreter insulted a Muslim merchant by throwing coloured water or powder at him. The matter was reported to the chief factor who tactlessly ordered the punishment of the Muslim merchant instead of the real culprit. The infuriated merchant was waiting for an opportunity to wreak vengeance on the chief factor for his partiality. Although the Governor of Bombay tried for a compromise, the insult was not forgotten.

Added to this was the policy of the English factors to give costly presents to the Rani of Attingal to win more concessions. But the Nair chieftains demanded that the presents due to the Rani be handed over to them for transmission to her. This demand was resisted by the chief factor Gyfford who insisted to visit the Rani with the presents.

The British force was attacked on 15 April 1721 and 10 Englishmen including Gyfford were killed. The rebels then besieged the fort for about six months. It was lifted only when reinforcements came from Thalassery.

**Pazhassi Revolt (1793-185)**

The revolt of Pazhassi Rja was the most serious outbreak against the British in South India. It was the widest and largest resistance movement in the Kerala coast. The prime mover in the Rebellion was Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam. As he belonged to the Patinjare Kovilakom branch of the Kottayam royal family (Purakizhnad) which had its headquarters at Pazhassi, the rebellion is called as the Pazhassi revolt. Pazhassi Raj had maintained cordial relations with the company. But later the relations turned sour.

By the treaty of Seringapatam, which ended the 3rd Anglo Mysore War, the whole of Malabar fell under the company’s rule. This was the beginning of the conflict. The English proclaimed that they were the virtual rulers of Malabar and its people and that the chiefs were their subjects. In 1793, the company leased out Kottayam territory which had been in possession of the Mysoreans to Veera Kerala Varma, the ruler of Kurumbranad. There by they violated the previous agreement entered into with Pazhassi that after the exit of Tippu, Wayanad and Kottayam will be restored back to him. The lease was renewed for five years
in 1794. Pazhassi prevented the English from collecting revenue in Kottayam and threatened to cut down the pepper vines. When the British renewed the lease granted to Kurumbranad Raja for another five years, Pazhassi resented it and rebelled openly in 1795. As the Raja enjoyed the support of all section of the people, the English began to look up on him as ‘the most intractable and unreasonable of all the Rajas’ and took measures to subjugate him. The Raja sought asylum in the Puralimalai jungles and adopted guerilla system of warfare. The British troops stationed at Wayanad were forced to withdraw. Though reinforcement came in 1797, the British forces were overpowered by the Kurichiyas and Nairs, who assembled in groups, erected barriers, cut off British communications and refused to pay taxes. The eastern branch of the Samoothiris family allied itself with PazhassiRaja. The moplas of Malabar led by Chempan Pokker and the Gounders of Coimbatore joined the rebels. Pazhassi Raja also sought the help of Mysore in driving out the English from Wayanad. The hilly nature of the country and the strong support he received from the tribals prevented the British to take any effective action against the Raja.

By the agreement (1797) it was decided to withdraw British forces from Wayanad. The company also cancelled the lease granted to Kurumbranad Raja. Pazhassi was prevailed upon to call off the rebellion. He was granted a pension of Rs.8000 and he agreed to live in peace with the company. The company also agreed to restore the treasure captured from the Pazhassi Palace. Peace was thus restored for the time being, but it was only a truce soon to be violated.

The Second Pazhassi Revolt had all the characteristics of a mass upsurge. The Raja gathered people of all classes, castes and faiths under his banner. The Nairs, Kurichiyas, the local mappilas and Muslims from outside, the disbanded soldiers of Tippu formed the backbone of his army. The people of the plains also supported him. The tribals of the hills, the Kurichiyas and Kurumbas, rallied behind him.

The British move to take possession of Wayanad was the immediate provocation for Pazhassi to launch a second revolt. Pazhassi laid claim to the territory on the ground that it had been granted to him by Tippu and he insisted on possessing it. The Raja’s correspondence with the enemies of the English aggravated the situation.

The British government now deputed Arthur Wellesley (Duke of Wellington) as Commander of Malabar. The Duke had realized the seriousness of the situation. He devised minute plans of operations. A network of new roads were constructed. Military outposts were put up at strategic places to counter the hit and run tactics of the rebels. These devices, yielded results in the long run.

Kerala Varma began his epic resistance in 1800. The Wayanad region provided ample opportunities to the Pazhassi troops to indulge in guerrilla warfare. They came down the ghats and attacked British outposts and spice plantations. A large British force under Col. Stevenson was rushed to Malabar. Attacks and counter attacks followed.

The British forces in Wayanad tried to subdue the Raja. By May 1801, they captured all places of strategic importance in Wayanad. The Raja was forced to become a wanderer in the jungles. Many of his supporters were captured and hanged. His surrender seemed imminent. The British proclaimed an amnesty in Aug 1801; But it evoked no positive response. The Pazhassi troops continued their rebellious activities. In Oct 1802 they captured Panamaram fort. It was accomplished by Edachena Kunkan and Thalakkal Chandu. Pazhassi ravaged the British spice plantations at Anjarakandi. This was the climax of their success. The British rushed reinforcements to Wayanad an raised a Para Military force of Kolkars to deal with the situation.
In 1804, Thomas Harvey Baber came as Sub Collector. His arrival turned the tide of war in favour of the British. Baber was entrusted with the responsibility of crushing the rebellion. He formulated a new policy. The local people were made responsible for non-cooperation with the rebels. The Government announced handsome rewards for the capture of the rebels. A systematic hunt for the capture of the Raja was undertaken. These measures began to bear fruit. One of the immediate victims of the hunt was Thalakkal Chandu, the Kurichiya hero. His capture was a serious blow to the Pazhassi cause. The Raja was forced to withdraw to the jungles. His forces were attacked at Pulpalli. Baber charged and blockaded the Raja. On 30th November, 1805 the British troops surrounded him and after a severe battle of 15 hours on the banks of Mavilayithodu off Kangarapuzha in Wayanad, the Pazhassi forces were routed and the Raja was shot dead.

His immediate followers were either killed on the spot or captured prisoners along with his ailing wife. Baber was so touched by the gallantry of the Raja that he carried the Raja’s dead body in his own palanquin to Mananthavady and cremated it with full customary honour. Baber observes: “I was induced to this conduct from the consideration that although a rebel, he was one of the natural chieftains of the country and might be considered on that account as a fallen enemy”.

**Velu Thampi**

The revolt of Velu Thampi is a significant episode in the history of early resistance movements against the British. Velu Thampi hurled the flag of rebellion against the British in Thiruvithamkur and fell as a martyr to the cause of freedom.

Velayudhan Chempakaraman Thampi, popularly known as Velu Thampi was born in a Nair family of Thalakkulam near Nager Kovil in 1765 (6-5-1765). He had his education in Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam and was well versed in Persian and Arabic and military training in the Kalari. He entered the state service at the age of 19 as Karyakkar and earned reputation as an honest and efficient officer.

It was a critical time for Thiruvithamkur. The fortunes of the state had been at its lowest ebb. Although the king Balarama Varma was the ruler, it was only in name. The real authority was vested in the hands of a trio consisting of Udicheri Jayanthan Sankaran Nampurir the Diwan. Sankaranayanan Chetty the finance minister and Mathu Tharakan, the contractor-in-chief. Under these fortune hunters, the state became a machinery of oppression and exploitation. The coterie concentrated all power in their hands and began a reign of extortion. They resorted to forced contributions from the people to such an extent that the people were eager to get rid of the evil administrators. Velu Thampi as the Champion of the down trodden organized a large continent of Nairs, marched to the capital, petitioned to the King and persuaded him to dismiss the unpopular Diwan and his supporters. This was the first popular upsurge pioneered by Velu Thampi who came to lime light as the leader. On the advice of Macaulay the Resident, Velu Thampi was appointed as the Mulakumatissila Sarvadhi Karryakkar (Finance Minister) and later as Diwan or Dalwa in 1801.

As Dalawa, Velu Thampi proved himself to be an able administrator. To increase revenue a systematic resurvey of all garden and paddy lands and assessed the revenue (Kantezhuthu) taking into consideration the produce of the land. A new revenue code was framed. A new system of keeping accounts (Nal-vazhi) was started. He developed Kollam as a trading centre and markets were opened at Vaikkom and Changanassery.
The early relations of Velu Thampi with the company was cordial. It was at Macaulay’s advice that he was reinstated in the post. When there was the ‘Nair Mutiny’ the company helped the Dalawa by sending forces to crush the mutineers.

However the relations worsened after 1805. It was at the initiative of Velu Thampi that the treaty of 1805 was signed. The treaty gave the British the specific power to keep a subsidiary force in the kingdom and interfere in its internal affairs. It also increased the tribute to be paid to the company. The treaty virtually sounded the death knell of Thiruvitamkur as an independent state. Tributes to the company, however, could not be paid regularly and it resulted in the estrangement of relation between Velu Thampi and Macaulay. The Dalawa found that the Resident was using his power under the treaty of 1805 to interfere in the internal affairs of the state. Further the Resident cancelled an order issued by the Dalawa attaching the landed properties of Mathu Tharakan who owed an enormous amount to the state. The overbearing conduct of the Resident exasperated the Dalawa. Each now tried to get rid of the other – the Dalawa appealing to the Madras Government to recall the Resident and the Resident asking the Raja to dismiss Velu Thampi.

Velu Thampi now took the crucial decision to organize an open armed insurrection with the help of anti British elements. He entered into a secret pact with Paliath Achan, his counterpart in Kochi, who had similar grievances against Macaulay. They collected men and arms on a large scale. Velu Thampi had given Macaulay the impression that he is going to resign and retire to Calicut and the Resident sent a detachment of his bodyguard to escort the Dalawa. This was a clear move on the part of the Dalawa as he wanted to deplete the residency of its defenders.

The revolt began with the night attack on the residency at Kochi (Bolghatty Palace) under the leadership of Paliath Achan. However the attack on the residency failed to capture Macaulay as he had already managed to escape to a British Ship anchored in the harbour. The rebels consisting of 600 men plundered the Residency, broke open the jails at Kochi and set all prisoners free. In an outbreak at Alapuzha, 36 Englishmen were killed. The encounter at Kollam failed to achieve the desired results. The situation had become desperate for Velu Thampi who staged a strategic retreat to Kundara where he set up his headquarters and issued a call to arms.

The call to arms and to rise enmasse in defence of the king, country and religion issued by the Dalawa at Kundara on 1st Makaram 984ME (Jan 11, 1809) is known in history as the famous Kundara Proclamation. It motivated people to rise against the British.

Velu Thampi resolved to fight. However in a decisive engagement at Kollam, his forces were defeated. In the meantime Paliath Achan’s attack on the Residency failed. The British army under Col.Ledger entered Thiruvitamkur through Aruvamozhi and captured Udayagiri fort. The Raja sued for peace. Velu Thampi was dismissed and the new Dalawa ordered his arrest. Velu Thampi left the capital and reached Kilimanur. Before capture by the British troops, he committed suicide. His dead body was exposed on a gibbet at Kannanmoola and his relatives exiled.

There are differences of opinion among scholars about the Revolt of Velu Thampi. Rajayyan regards him as a traitor and Robin Jeffrey considers the revolt as a conservative one. As K.N. Panikkar has observed the conflict between the Resident and the Dewan was a conflict of interest, a conflict between expanding British imperialism and a representative of the Indian ruling elite desperately trying to defend its interests.

The Kurichiya Revolt (1812)
The Kurichiya Revolt of 1812 was the last of the early revolts against the British in Malabar. It remains as a distinctive and unique uprising.

The Kurichiyas were a tribal people inhabiting the mountainous terrain of Wayanad. They were the main supporters of Pazhassi Raja in his struggle against the British.

When Wynad was brought under their control, the British subjected the Kurichiyas to untold miseries. The British brought Wayanad under strict surveillance. The Kurichiyas were not allowed to have commercial contact with the coast. On top of this Collector Thomas Warden introduced a new revenue settlement which made it obligatory on the Kurichiyas to pay the revenues in cash rather than in kind. The defaulters were subjected to cruelties and their personal belongings were seized and sold. The oracles of the Kurichiyas gave mandates to avenge the wrong doer.

The Kurichiyas rose in revolt on 25 March, 1812. The rebels assembled in Kurichipad mountains and disarmed two revenue Kolkars. They attacked the police on 26th March 1812. The leaders issued orders in the name of Pulpally Murikkanmar, protecting deities of Wayanad to rise up in arms against the company. The rebellion spread to all parts of Wayanad. All roads in the vicinity of Mananthavady were guarded by the Kurichiyas. They prevented the supplies to the English troops. The Kurichiyas captured all strategic points and all passes leading to Wayanad. The Kuttiyadi pass was occupied by the Kurichiyas under Plakka Chandu, Ayira Veetil Konthappan and Manpila thondan Yamu.

Within a short time, the Revolt spread to the whole of Wayanad. The Kurichiyas cut supplies and reinforcements to the British troops in the valley. They besieged the British garrisons at Sultan Bathery and Mananthavady. The rebellion assumed the character of a mass uprising with wider appeal and assumed serious proportion.

However the rebellion was suppressed Baber pressed for military aid and brought reinforcements from S. Canara and Mysore. They moved to the jungles and surrounded the rebels. The rebels faced difficulties of getting supplies. Mysore detached 2000 troops to Wayanad. From Sreerangapatanam another contingent were send to subdue the rebels. From Kannur, infantry moved to the troubled spots. In spite of the crusading spirit of the Kurichiyas and the mass support enjoyed by them, they were ultimately forced to surrender. By May 8, 1812 peace was restored in Wayanad and the rebellion was completely crushed.

**Moplah Outbreaks and Agrarian Discontent: (Moplah Riots)**

The native Muslims of Malabar are generally called as mappilas or moplas. They concentrated mainly in the Eranad, Valluvanad and Manjeri regions of the present Malappuram district. There took place a series of outbreaks of the moplahs in the 19th century in Malabar. They were anti feudal and anti British.

The moplahs grew up to be a power to be reckoned with in the land between 11th and 14th century, as revealed from the writings of Alberuni, Al Idrisi and Ibn Batuta. According to Shaik Zain Ud din, they were patronized by the Samoothiri who gave them all facilities. In return, they helped the Samoothiri to increase his power and wealth. There existed a cordial relation between the native Hindus and the moplahs. The arrival of the foreigners, the Europeans, turned down the picture. The Europeans were able to dominate trade and consequently the fortunes of Mappilas began to decline. After Malabar came under the British their condition became worse. This was due to the revenue policy of the British. The company was mainly interested in the collection of revenue. The assumption of monopoly of trade by the company in salt, tobacco, timber and spices, resulted in great hardship for the people.
The revolt of Mappila chiefs like Unni Mutha Muppan and Athan Gurukkal hardened British attitude. In recruiting to the subordinate posts a distinct bias against the Mappilas became manifest. In course of time, the rural Mappilas began to perceive the administration as hostile to them. Further the Mappilas had only a limited exposure to modern education.

Against such conditions Mappilas rose in revolt. The earliest one is traced to 1836. More than 30 uprisings, small and big, broke out between 1836 and 1919. Except three, only very few Mappilas participated in such ‘outrages’. Certain peculiarities of the riots puzzled British officials and they couldn’t provide explanation. T.L. Strange was appointed as Special Officer in 1852 to report on Mappila disturbances Strange dismissed agrarian conditions as causading factors and concluded that they were motivated by “the most decided fanaticism.” So the commission recommended a policy of repression.

However, agrarian discontent had been raised as a causative factor by British officials and William Logan was appointed to enquire into and report on agrarian relations in Malabar. Logan submitted a report in three volumes. He examined 2200 petitions the majority of which were submitted by Mappilas. He reported that the tenants were rack rented, were chronically in debt and lacked security of tenure. He located the origin of the misery in the recognition of the Janmy as the absolute landlord with the right to arbitrarily enhance rent or evict the tenant. Logan, therefore, suggested the passing of agrarian legislation granting protection to the actual cultivator. The legislation should include permanent occupancy, the right of sale or transfer of interest in land and the right to one third of the average annual net produce to the actual cultivator. Logan had in mind the Kanakkaran and Verumpattakkaran who undertook direct cultivation and not the intermediary.

These proposals were not acceptable to the Madras Government because it went against the principle on which the British land revenue policy was based. The Janmies opposed it as granting permanency of tenure curtailed their powers. So the proposals of Logan were referred to a committee on which legislation could be undertaken. The committee rejected the proposals.

Colonial perception of the Mappilas contributed to the hardening of the government’s stand. The ‘Mappila’ had become a colonial stereotype. Many features-barbarian, illiterate, hungry for land, fanatic etc were attributed to him. Stereotype once created became self evident and so continued to be used. The situation did not change much till the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. Compensation for improvements Act remained the only legislation that was passed and it was in effective.

Nineteenth century Kerala

The Kerala Society was based on caste hierarchy. The high castes also constituted the land owning class. The lower castes and classes were deprived of many social privileges and economic rights. Even the backward communities were denied admission to temples, schools and public services. In addition to untouchability, unapproachability based on theendal (pollution) was widely practiced.

The traditional social order of Kerala began to crack by the 19th century. Politically the centralizing policies of Marthanda Varma and Sakthan Thampuran and the Mysorean invasions contributed to this. The work of missionaries, the growth of printing and early publications also contributed to a change in the cultural milieu.

The Christian missionaries ‘activities centred on a wide variety of areas such as education commence and industry, printing and cultural activities.
The Christian missionaries may be credited with the introduction of printing in Kerala. The printing presses were set up in Kochi and Vaipin in 1577. Later presses were set up in Kodungallur.


The setting up of presses were followed by publication of books and journals. Grammar book and dictionary in Malayalam were one of the first publications. ‘Samkhepa Vedartham’ on doctrine of ‘Christianity’ and ‘Varthamana Pustakom’ a travelogue by Thoma Kothanar were some of the earliest publications. Herman Gundert, a Basel Missionary published, in addition to books on grammar, theology and history, the earliest newspapers in Malayalam ‘Rajya Samacharam’ and ‘Paschimodayam’ from Thalassery.

Print technology and English education were depended on each other and were mutually supportive. Printing made books accessible to all without class/caste distinctions. The sacred halo surrounding the written text was thus removed.

English education and certain economic developments contributed to the emergence of a new social class who had access to the texts. They also contributed to the formation of public opinion and debated on public issues. This revolved around social reform, political change educational developments and other things. The Malayalam novel ‘Indulekha’ is a good example of the new spirit being reflected in literature.

A kind of ‘rediscovery’ was also made with the publication of epics and medieval ‘Manipravalam’ and ‘Kavyas’. A related development was the reform of the Malayalam language. The publication of books on grammar and dictionaries contributed to the standardization of vocabulary.

In Indulekha, the two main characters are representatives of colonial modernity. They are strongly rooted in tradition and are well versed in Sanskrit and Malayalam literature. But both are English educated and have attributes of modernity. This modernity was not the ‘natural’ consequence of colonialism; rather it emerged through manifold, cultural and social resistance to colonialism.

**Kerala ‘Renaissance’**

The onset of modernity has been called a ‘renaissance.’ This was fundamentally different from the European Renaissance. However the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century witnessed many attempts at reform and a fundamental transformation in social, religious and cultural spheres was brought about.

A critical interrogation of the past and a visualization of a possible future were the features of this process. Intense debates took place on a variety of subjects. In religion, many rituals were either reordered or rejected. New patterns of rituals and worship were also devised.

A major concern of the ‘renaissance’ was the caste system, especially certain casteist practices. Many caste organisations, with an agenda for reform, came up. That some of them developed into caste solidarity movement later was an ‘unfortunate development’.

**Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928)**

Sri Narayana Guru was one of the greatest social reformers of modern India.

Nothing much is known about Narayana Guru’s early life. He was born in 1854 in Chempazhanthy. As a child, he was curious and his mind was inquisitive and he displayed an eagerness to observe and learn. He learnt to read and write, showed deep interest in
Sanskrit, Tamil, Philosophy and Literature. In his early life he left home in search of truth, became a Sanyasi and led the life of a wandering mendicant. It was during this period that he came into close contact with Chattampi Swamikal and together they worked for a new social order.

**Early Activities:** The early activities of Narayana Guru was directed against Brahmin domination and the rigidity of the caste system. His aim was to motivate the depressed classes, especially the Ezhavas against the social inequality suffered by the lower castes.

Narayana Guru began his public activity as a rebel against the Brahmanical tradition. The right to install idols and officiate at temples was considered as the sacred duty and right of the Brahmin priests. The Guru decided to challenge this assumed monopoly. He installed a Siva idol at Aruvippuram. Subsequently he established more than sixty temples at Aruvippuram (1887) Varkala, Chirayankish, Vaikom Aluva, Palakkad, Kozhikode and Mangalore. Ezhavas were appointed as preists in these temples. The untouchables were permitted to ether and worship in these temples. The Aruvipuram installation provoked the caste Hindus and the Guru retorted: “It is not the Brahmin Siva we worship; but only the Ezhava (Tiyya) Siva”. When the Ezhava priests disregarded the still inferior communities, Narayana Guru declared “What is important is not idols, but ideals. Even if all the idols are put together, they cannot make one ideal.” As a corrective to this, the Guru installed a mirror with certain ideals written on board (at Ochira And Shertallai).

Narayana Guru put in to practice what he preached. His ideals are truth, duty, charity and love. He argued that every temple should become the centre of cultural activity of the people. He was against animal sacrifice and expensive celebrations. He stated that temples should have gardens, schools and workshops. He was against fanaticism. He preached the Universality of religions. All religions were in substance one. To adore duties, and explain his tenets Narayana Guru composed poems in Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam. The most important of them are Subrahmanya Keerthanam, Kundalinipattu, Advaitha Dipika and Daiva Satakam.

The Guru aimed at a social revolution. His ultimate objective was eradication of traditional evils (a) He attacked the cast system and untouchability. He stressed on the spread of education and economic opportunities for the depressed classes. His aim was not only spiritual upliftment, but also material advancement of the people. (b) He believed that all people belonged to one community. Among them there may be differences in status, but not of caste. He advocated interdining and intermarriages (c) Narayana Guru aimed to create educational and economic opportunities for all peoples (d) He advocated better treatment for women. He was against the pomp and waste that attended marriage. He opposed polygamy and polyandry (e) For the upliftment of the downtrodden, he stressed the need for education among them. He took initiation in establishing libraries and literary societies and the backward classes were encouraged to join educational institutions (f) He stood for the material advancement of the backward classes. He considered toddy tapping as an evil and Ezhavas in order to be progressive, has to abandon that profession. He encouraged the establishment of cottage industries like coir manufacturing. He organized an industrial fair in Aluva.

Narayana Guru founded the Sivagiri centre in 1904 and the Advaitha Ashram at Aluva in 1913. He convened a religious conference at Aluva in 1924 for the exchange of ideas. He stated that the conferences aimed at ‘to know and inform’ and not ‘to argue and win’. He founded in 1903 the SNDP Yogam for the social and spiritual uplift of the Ezhavas and personally guided its activities. Narayana Guru became the rallying point for the Ezhavas/Tiyyas to organize and unite. The Swami and the Sangham drew to them a brilliant
band of dedicated workers like Dr. Palpu and Kumaran Asan. The SNDP helped to impart to the lower castes a consciousness of their own dignity and strength.

**Ayyankali (1866-1944)**

Ayyankali was a great social reformer of Kerala. As a great champion of the depressed classes, Ayyankali devoted his life to the eradication of untouchability in Kerala. A contemporary of Narayana Guru, he worked for the upliftment of the Pulayas, the most suppressed and oppressed section of the society.

The condition of the Pulaya community was miserable. They were treated as untouchables. They had no place in the social, educational and religious life of the country. They enjoyed no right to education, no right to walk over the public roads. They were disallowed to possess land, wear gold ornaments and construct houses. They have to observe pollution – to keep distance at the sight of higher castes. They have to observe untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability. The Pulyas were mortgaged.

Ayyankali’s main work was aimed at the upliftment of the Pulayas. For this he had undertaken several steps.

**Right to use public roads:** The Pulayas were not allowed to travel through the public roads. Therefore Ayyankali’s initial struggles were directed to get secure the rights to work through public roads. He organized the Pulaya youths and walked along the prohibited roads and achieved the right to use public roads. In 1893, he challenged the restriction imposed by the upper castes upon the Pulayas to travel through public roads, by travelling in a bullock cart. The caste-Hindus beat him up for violating the tradition, but he continued the struggle.

**Right to Education:** Ayyankali did not get any formal education and he was illiterate. Therefore the next stage of his revolutionary movement was for getting admission to the Pulayas in schools. The converted Pulayas were enjoying the privilege of education in missionary schools. Ayyankali tried to get education for others in the community in government schools. However his attempts proved to be a failure. Therefore he tried to start new schools exclusively for the lower castes. Thus he founded the first school for the lower castes at Venganur in 1904, but it was burnt by the opposers. However, the Government established two schools for the Pulayas during 1895-96.

**An organisation for the Pulayas:** To instill confidence among the Pulayas, Ayyankali founded an organisation in 1906-07. It is called the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. The Sangham gave importance to work for the eradication of social inequalities. It fought for the right to education and the right to travel in public roads for the Pulayas and other lower caste people. The society petitioned to the government to grant admission to the lower castes in government schools. By 1910 the Pulayas were admitted in schools run by the government. The S.J.P.Sangham played a spectacular role in propelling the Pulaya community to the path of action and agitation.

**Organising agricultural labourers:** Ayyankali’s next attempt was to organize the agricultural labourers. The Pulayas and other lower caste people were the agricultural labourers. They worked in the land of the upper caste landlords and were cruelly exploited. They did not get any fixed wages. They were at the mercy of the landlords. Ayyankali attempted to retaliate the orthodox landlords. He prepared his adherents for a strike. He exhorted the Pulayas not to work in the field of the landlords who opposed the entry of Pulaya children in schools. It may be noted that this was the first strike by agricultural workers in Kerala with social and economic demands (1907-08). It was organized by Ayyankali not for any economic gains, but for the right for entry to schools.
As Legislator: Ayyankali was nominated as a member of the Sri Mulam Assembly in 1912. He availed this forum to project the grievances of his community and sought their redressal. The Pulayas were incapable of paying fees in schools like others. The economic backwardness and financial strain prevented them to avail educational opportunities. Therefore in order to redress their grievances, Ayyankali placed before the Assembly certain demands aiming at their economic relief. These demands include: (a) Pulaya children to be wholly exempted from paying fees, (b) They may be fed in schools at State expenses, (c) A separate allotment to be earmarked in the annual budget for the education of Pulaya children, (d) Special institutions be started solely for the teaching of handicrafts to Pulayas, (e) All state schools to be thrown open to them, (f) Scholarships to be given to children of the Pulayas.

He also made representation to the Government to absorb educated Playas in the education department.

Ayyankali spear headed the ‘Kallumala Agitation’. The Pulaya women used to wear only bead necklaces, which according to Ayyankali was a symbol of slavery. Ayyankali persuaded them to throw away their bead necklaces. When a public meeting of the Pulayas was convened at Perinad under the leadership of Ayyankali in 1915, it was attacked by the upper caste people. It soon developed into a rebellion known as the Kallumala Rebellion. At another meeting conducted at Kollam the Pulaya women folk threw away their ornaments in public.

The struggle launched by Ayyankali was taken up by others. K. Ayyappan organized an interdining of the Ezhavas and Pulayas. K.P. Karuppan founded the Kochi Pulaya Maha Sabha. The Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, formed on the model of SNDP later transformed itself into Pulaya Maha Sabha. Ayyankali became its first general secretary. Till his death in 1942, Ayyankali put his heart and soul for the upbringing of the Pulayas.

Chattampi Swamikal (1855-1924)

Chattampi Swamkial was one of the pioneers of social reform movements in Kerala. Along with Narayana Guru he has a pre eminent place in the social and cultural history of Kerala as social reformer and religious Savant. Besides a scholar, Chattampi Swamikal was a great author and litterateur. He has some important works to his credit. His ‘Adi Bhasha’ is a research work in the field of linguistics. In his ‘Jivitakarunya Nirupanam’, Swamikal expressed his profound faith in Ahimsa and denounced animal sacrifice. In ‘Christhumatha Nirupanam’, he summarized the teachings of Jesus Christ. In ‘Vedadhikaranirupanam’, he shatters the myth of Brahmin monopoly of the Vedas. His Advaita Chinta Pathati, expounds the principle of Advaitha philosophy. His contribution to literature earned for him a great place among the literary luminaries of Kerala.

V.T. Bhattatiripad

V.T. Bhattatiripad was one of the great social reformers of Kerala.

He was born on 24th March, 1896 in Mezhathur. He learned the Vedas and became a priest. He later joined the Congress. He also served in the editorial board of Yogakshemam weekly. It was a time that witnessed the socio-economic decline of the Namputiris. The Namputiri youths had only three duties to perform: ‘Eat, sleep and impregnate’ while their females have to ‘cook, serve and deliver’. The youths led an irresponsible and carnival life. The reformatory works launched by the Yogakshema Sabha were inadequate.

V.T. Bhattatiripad, therefore tried to activate the community by a series of pragmatic reforms. (a) Cutting tuft (kuduma), (b) Boycott of intermarriages, (c) Violation of acharas, (d) Interdining, (e) Establishment of schools.
He chalked out a radical plan of action.

The formation of the Nampitiri Youth League (Yuvajana Sangham) on 4th Aug. 1928 is a landmark. A journal called ‘Unni Namputiri’ was published under its auspices. The orthodox views presented through ‘Sudarsanam’ was countered by ‘Pasupatam’. V.T. Bhattatiripad was the editor, printer and proof reader of the journal.

V.T. made a social revolution by championing the cause of widow remarriage. He gave his sister-in-law to M.R.Bhattatiripad. This marriage in 1934 is the first known widow remarriage in the country.

Bhattatiripad also championed the cause of female education. A Female Education Commission was formed with Muthiringot Bhavatharatan Namputiri as its Secretary. The Commission consisted of leaders of other communities and submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission for English education.

Though served as a priest in early days, V.T. was a rationalist to the core. Though he was a priest (Sastham Kovile Santhikkaran) of the temple, he urged ‘Now let us set fire to temples’ in an article in Unninamputiri. For this an arrest warrant was issued against V.T. but the Madras Government of Rajaji disfavoured it.

V.T. was a prolific writer. His ‘Rajanirangam’ is a compilation of short stories. His most important works are ‘Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku’ (from the kitchen to the stage) and ‘Kannerum Kinavum’ (Tears and dreams) which made a profound impact on society. In these works he expressed the yearning of the community for reform. As a result of his thought provoking revolutionary articles and works, the Namputiris cast of their inhibitions and came to the forefront of the reform movements.

V.T. Bhattatiripad’s activities influenced the government. As a result, the Nambutiri Acts were passed by Thiruvitamkur, Kochi and Malabar governments giving legal rights to younger members of the community. The Namputiri community which was in the vortex of superstition was emancipated from its social decay by the Yogakshema Sabha and its dynamic youth wing headed by V.T. Bhattatiripad. He never pretended that he was a leader of the reform movement. What he cared was to see that things were done in such away as to propel this community to the path of progress. He was not intolerant of the progress of sister communities. He was more progressive than most of his contemporaries. V.T.B. has an abiding place in the progressive social reform movements of the country.

Other Reformers

There were several streams of social reform movements. The ‘Sahodara Prasthanam’ started by Sahodaran Ayyappan (1885-1968) was basically a movement against the social inequalities propounded by the caste system. He adopted a new method to fight against the caste system known as Panthi Bhojanam or interdining. In 1917, he conducted a feast. He was not against religion and he stated that religion should be a private affair of an individual. But the caste should be abolished. He worked with the Atmavidya Sangham and organized a literary association called Vidyaposhini and also a newspaper ‘Sahodaran’ and became the editor of ‘Yuktivadi’. He was contemptuously called as ‘Pulaya Ayyappan’ by the higher caste Hindus. Later he entered politics and became leader of the socialist party and became a member of the Legislative Assembly of Kochi and a Minister in the Congress Government.

C. Krishnan: C. Krishnan, the editor of Mitavadi was another social reformer. He worked for the abolition of the caste system.
Vagbhatananda; Vagbhatananda was a great reformer and philosopher of Kerala. He founded the Atma Vidya Sangham. He propagated the teachings of non duality for a better and egalitarian society. He took active interest in the Brahma Samaj. A great scholar, reformer, organizer, journalist, writer, philosopher and nationalist. Vagbhatananda was a rebel to the orthodox Hindus. He rejected idol worship, propagated Nirugunopasana, opposed all rituals and formalities and rejected caste system. He started a journal ‘Abhinava Kerala’ in 1921. As a great social reformer, he advocated reforms among the untouchables and treated them as children of God. He propagated inter caste marriage and inter caste dining. As a nationalist, he supported the civil disobedience movement launched by Gandhiji. He supported the constructive programme of the Father of the Nation and favoured the Temple Entry Movement. He took keen interest in the economic progress of the weaker section and associated with peasant movements.

Gender Question in Kerala

As is clear from the above, social reformers were concerned about the position of women and worked to ameliorate their miserable condition. Debates about systems of inheritance, marriage etc became common. The novel ‘Indulekha’ has conversations between the two protagonists about the prevailing marriage system among the Nairs.

The last decades of the 19th century witnessed rise of a Nair middle class into prominence. They were resentful of the privileges enjoyed by the Nambudiri landlords. They wanted to put an end to the Sambhandam relation, a temporary and loose marriage alliance between a Nambudiri male and a Nair female. The Government bowing to their demands appointed a Marriage Commission in 1891. Later an Act, allowing the registration of Sambandham, was enacted.

Closely related to marriage reform attempts were efforts to change the system of inheritance. It was in Thiruvitamkur that a movement to change the Marumakkathayam system was started. This resulted in an act being passed in 1912. It provided for Tavazhi partition. In 1925 another act was passed which provided for individual partition. This was followed by the Ezhava Act of 1925 and the Nanjinad Vellala Act of 1926. All these acts made polygamy illegal.

The Cochin Nair Regulation (1919) provided for partition of joint families. The Cochin Nair Act of 1937 put an end to Marumakkathayam as a system of inheritance.

In Malabar, a similar act was passed in 1933 in the form of Madras Marumakkathayam Act. Some of the Malabar Muslims had followed Marumakkathayam and in 1939 the Mappila Marumakkathayam Act was passed.

These social legislations went a long way in conferring gender equality in inheritance and marriage.

In the 20th century women entered public life as political activists – both as nationalists and as peasant and teachers movement activists – social reformers and as organizers of charitable societies. Traditionally defined roles of women were questioned and the first half of the 20th century saw the emergence of a ‘new woman’ in Kerala.