

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SOCIAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES OF MALABAR

In the social service field an important role was played by the women of Malabar during the national movement. Indian Renaissance which coincided with the rise and growth of Indian nationalism, climaxing in freedom for the country is singularly marked by the active participation of a large number of women along with those of men.¹ Malabar was not an exemption to this general rule. The Malabar society of the nineteenth century suffered much due to many social evils like caste system and the related discrepancies.² The same situation was continued in the early decades of the twentieth century also. Women who entered public life for the emancipation of the down trodden and the upliftment of the society suffered a lot. Many of them had to encounter stiff opposition at every level-from the house hold, community and society at large.

In this context, the services rendered by women personalities like Mrs.Nayanar, Manjeri Kamalambal, Karayi Damayanthi, C.K.Revathi Amma, T.C.Kunhachumma, P.M.Mariyumma. Amina Hashim, Ayisha Rauf, Haleema Abootty and so on are praise worthy. They entered the public life of

¹ Sushila Nayar and Kamla Mankekar, *Women pioneers In India's Renaissance*, New Delhi, 2002, introduction, p. 1.

² For details.See P.Bhaskaranunni, *Pathonpatham Noottandile Keralam*, Trichur, 1988.

Malabar through different situations and various organizations. Though they stepped out of their homes during the national movement, they did not involve themselves in the freedom struggle directly. But their activities contributed very much towards the broad national movement. Social service was central to their activities.

Kayaratt Madhavi Kutty Amma alias Mrs.Nayanar

“Mrs. Nayanar and Mr. Nayanar are not two, they are one.” These words reflect the nature of their work and contribution to the society.³ For a better understanding of the contributions of Kayaratt Madhavi Kutty Amma one has to know the role of V.R.Nayanar⁴ in the Malabar society as a social worker and as a humanist. He is hailed as ‘Gokhale of Kerala.’⁵

V. R. Nayanar was profoundly influenced by Gokhale and his noble ideals. He served as librarian of B.S.S. office at Poona for a few months and acquired practical training in voluntary social service.⁶ Thus Nayanar

³ Personal interview with Karthat Balachandran, at his residence, Palghat, on 11May 2007. He is a Freedom fighter who worked with V.R. Nayanar in connection with his reconstruction activities under the auspices of Devadhar Malabar Re-construction Trust.

⁴ V.R. Nayanar was born in a wealthy, aristocratic Jenmi family of North Malabar in 1900.⁴ His father Ayilliath Rairu Nambiar was a rich Tahsildar and mother Varikkara Kalliani Amma.⁴ As per his father’s wishes he joined the M.B.B.S. course in the Madras Medical College.⁴ But V.R. Nayanar was not at all attracted to the medical profession. His interest lay elsewhere, so he gave up his studies and returned home. His father sent him to visit places like Madras, Bombay, Poona and so on in order to help him to make up his mind. The journey was an eye-opener. In Poona he visited Servants of India Society or Bharath Seva Sangh⁴ and came in to contact with Gopala Krishna Gokhale

⁵ T. M Vijayan, “V.R. Nayanar; The Gokhale of Kerala”, cited in *Indica*, Vol.43, No.2, Journal of the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, Mumbai, September 2006, p. 139.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142

discovered his vocation and decided to spend the rest of his life in the service of the Indian people and the Indian nation. He returned to Malabar as a full member of B.S.S. at a critical period when the Mapilla Rebellion⁷ had devastated a considerable area in Malabar and its people. In order to manage the relief activities of the B.S.S. a trust was formed called Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust⁸ and V.R Nayanar was at first, a member of the Executive Committee of the Trust but soon became its Secretary.⁹ This marked the beginning of a silent revolution of serving the needy and the down trodden in Malabar¹⁰

During the Second World War the D.M.R.T. under the leadership of V.R.Nayanar had played yeomen service. Lack of proper food and medicine, resulted in the spread of epidemic throughout Malabar.¹¹ The starvation resulted in deaths and disease became a common occurrence. Harijans and other poor sections of the society suffered the most. Cholera took away the

⁷ See for the details of Malabar Rebellion, K. Madhavan Nair, *Malabar Kalapam*, (Mal.), Calicut, 1971, K.N.Panikkar, *Against Lord and State, Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921*, New Delhi, 1989 and M.Gangadharan, *Malabar Rebellion*, Allahabad, 1989.

⁸ Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust hereinafter referred as DMRT.

⁹ Sukumar Kootali, "Aa Jeevitham oru Samagra Veekshanam" cited in V. R. Nayanar *Smaranika*, p. 22.

¹⁰ The campaign against untouchability and caste system and promotion of the upliftment of women and the depressed classes were the priority programmes of the D.M.R.T. *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 26 January 2000, p. 3.

¹¹ T.P.R. Nambeesan, "Anusmaranagal; Sri V.R. Nayanarute Koote" cited in V.R. *Nayanar Smaranika*, p. 51.

lives of the elders of families leaving the kids orphans.¹² There Nayanar worked as a saviour like Fr. Daniel and Mother Theresa.¹³

The most important programme of Nayanar in this regard was the establishment of a series of orphanages in Malabar. In order to accommodate the orphan children he started thirteen camps in Malabar from Madayi in the north to Valappad in the south.¹⁴ In these orphanages children were admitted without any discrimination of caste and creed. Among these twelve were for boys and one for girls.¹⁵ The orphanage for girls is the 'Nayanar Balikasadanam' at Eranjipalam¹⁶ in Kozhikode, which exists even now. They were given free food, dress, shelter, education and were given training in different crafts like Spinning, Weaving, Book-binding etc.¹⁷

V.R. Nayanar died on 16 May 1945. The death of Nayanar left a vacuum in the public life of Malabar. The unexpected death of Nayanar was a great blow to the down trodden people of Malabar¹⁸ Before his death, Nayanar had brought all the girls from thirteen orphanages into Balika Sadanam at Eranjipalam. After his death all orphanages except Balika Sadanam were on the verges of closure. Seven years after his death, Balika

¹² K. Janaki Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹³ Sukumar Kootali, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Mathrubhumi* Daily, Kozhikode, 26 January 2000, p. 3.

¹⁵ K. Janaki Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁶ K. Balakrishnan, "Keralaparyatanam, V. R. Nayanar", *Desabhimani* Weekly, p. 28

¹⁷ Personal interview with Keezhedath Madhu, niece of Kayaratt Madhavi Amma, at her residence Calicut on 16 November 2007.

¹⁸ P. Krishnapillai, *Thozhilali Varga Prasthanam*, p. 104

Sadanam was also decided to close down due to lack of funds. It was during this period that Kayaratt Madhavi Kutty Amma, wife of Nayanar came forward to take care of the Balika Sadanam¹⁹ and it marked the real beginning in the realm of social service. Thus she became the saviour of Sadanam²⁰

Before marriage Mrs.Nayanar was a co-worker of Nayanar in social service activities.²¹ She was born in the Kayaratt family in 1905 at Kadambamazhipuram, Ottappalam. She belonged to a congress family, had enough social commitment and was involved in social service even before marriage.²² She was an active member of the D.M.R.T. She worked as a teacher in D.M.R.T. School, Tanur. After the death of her husband Mrs.Nayanar was in the forefront in running the Balika Sadanam. She was assisted and supported by like minded personalities such as V.S. Keraleeyan, V.M.Nair, Kayaratt Vasudeva Menon²³ Thikkotiyan, and many others.²⁴ Hundreds of poor Harijan girls found in Mrs.Nayanar their mother. She was an efficient lady with a good heart.²⁵ She brought them up as a mother with love and affection.

¹⁹ Kayaratt Madhavi Kutty Amma was the second wife of Nayanar who was popularly known as Mrs. Nayanar. V.R.Nayanar married her after the death of his first wife. Personal interview with Keezhedath Madhu, *op.cit.* ..

²⁰ K.Janaki Amma, *op. cit.*, p.33

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Personal interview with Karthat Balachandran, *op.cit.*, on 11 May 2007.

²³ Kayaratt Vasudeva Menon was the brother of Mrs.Nayanar.

²⁴ Thikkotiyan, *op.cit.*, p. 183, also see *Mathrubhumi* Kozhikode, 22 May 1945.

²⁵ Personal interview with Ammini Amma, at Balika Sadanam, Eranjipalam, on 15, November 2007. She was brought to Balika Sadanam by K.Kellappan in 1962, at the

Everybody in the Sadanam called her *Amma* and she was a mother in the true sense, though she had no children of her own. After marriage with V.R.Nayanar she stayed at Tanur, near D.M.R.T. school and after the death of her husband, she sold the house at Tanur and left to 'Sadanam' at Eranjipalam.²⁶ She provided every help to the girls to become ideal citizens. She made arrangements to get jobs for the educated girls and arranged marriages for them. Mrs. Nayanar dedicated her life completely for the upliftment of the orphan girls. Along with the activities of the Balika Sadanam Mrs.Nayanar also founded a Nayanar Children's Home Society in 1957²⁷ at Eranjipalam and many poor Dalit children were given education till her death in 1985. She was buried in the vicinity of the Sadanam.²⁸ The old lady almost single handedly struggled to keep the institution, which was dear to her husband, active.²⁹ After her death Thikkodiyan became the caretaker of the Sadanam. The Balika Sadanam is still functioning as Sadanam or house for destitute orphan girls in memory of Mr. and Mrs.Nayanar.

request of Mrs.Nayanar and from then onwards she is in the Sadanam. Now Ammini Amma is managing the Sadanam.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Nayanar Children's Home Society, memorandum of association, rules and regulations, Kozhikode, 1957.

²⁸ N.Madhavan Kutty, "Hard Days for Balika Sadanam", cited in Indian Express Daily, Kozhikode, 19 October 1989.

²⁹ *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 17, July 1985.

Manjeri Kamalambal

Manjeri Kamalambal is another prominent personality who entered the public life of Malabar during the national movement with the sole motto of social service. She was born on 16 May 1905³⁰ as the daughter of Manjeri Rama Iyer³¹ and Annapoorni Ammal. She was a great social worker and a co-worker of Mrs. Annie Besant. She was the first president of the Malabar branch of the Women Indian Association.³² After completing primary education at Madanapally, Adayar, under the auspicious of the Theosophical Society.³³ Kamalambal was given home tuitions for various other subjects including music by Mrs. Margaret Cousins,³⁴ a lieutenant of Annie Beasant. In Madanapally, Kamalambal was deeply influenced by the activities of the Theosophical Society.³⁵ Thus she was lucky to become the student of Margaret Cousins. Since Kamalambal was not interested in studying in a co-education school, as per the instruction of Margaret Cousins she returned to

³⁰ K.Karunakaran Nair, (ed.), *Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1975, p. 191.

³¹ Manjeri Rama Iyer was a leading lawyer in the Calicut Bar and a veteran leader. He was a nationalist who took initiative in implementing Khadi which intensified the boycott of foreign cloths. On 9 November 1929 The Kerala Yuvak Sangh was organized at Calicut with Manjeri Rama Iyer as president. This organization resolved to carry on active propaganda for Khadi, prohibition and traditional Kalari system. This organization was declared unlawful through a notification in the Font St.George Gazette, dated 1 February 1932.

³² Sammuel Aron, *Jeevitha Smaranakal*, (Mal.), p.100, for details see *Manasi*, Souvenir published by Mahila Bharatha Sangam, Calicut, 2005, p.11.

³³ *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 6, April 1967.

³⁴ Margaret Cousins was an Irish lady who came to India in connection with the activities of the Theosophical Society. She was the pioneer of women movements in India who founded the Women Indian Association in 1917.

³⁵ Personal Interview with Dr. G. Raman, son of Kamalambal, at his residence, Calicut on 15, January, 2008.

Calicut. Her connections with the Theosophical Society enabled Kamalambal to perform her duties as a social worker selflessly and honestly.

Kamalambal entered the public life of Malabar as a social worker at the age of fourteen along with her father.³⁶ Born in a Brahmin community, Kamalambal fought against the evil customs of that society like child marriage, dowry system and caste system.³⁷ Though she was encouraged by the support of her father, a Brahmin lady entering the public life of Malabar shocked the orthodoxy in the society. Her family was the first Brahmin family of Calicut to get involved in social service.³⁸ She was married to V.Gopala Krishna Iyer on 18 May 1921 at Adayar.³⁹ Her father worked as the right hand of Annie Besant who was the founder of the Home Rule League. Her husband V. Gopala Krishna Iyer was a loyal disciple of the Brahma Vidya Sangh and this gave her greater freedom and flexibility in her activities directed towards the freedom of the nation. Besides all these positive factors she was lucky to have the lessons of social service activities from her devoted teacher Margaret Cousins who was the model social worker of the period. All these multifarious positive factors were fully utilized by Kamalambal effectively through her self-less and dedicated work.⁴⁰ In 1924 when the

³⁶ *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 6 April 1967.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Reminiscences of V. Gopala Krishna Iyer, Husband of Kamalambal, 'A Desolate Husband's Lament', *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 6 April 1968.

⁴⁰ Reminiscences of Keezhadath Vasudevan Nair who worked with Kamalambal for a long time, *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 6 April 1969.

flood occurred in Calicut Kamalambal and Mooliyil Janaki worked hard to organize relief measures.⁴¹ Their work directed the attention of the society towards the pathetic health condition of the fishing community.⁴²

Kamalambal had played a long and important role in the public activities of Calicut. She served for a period of 45 years in various social service of Calicut. Kamalambal had served all prominent women associations in the city as secretary as well as president, she served in various official and non official committees organized for social service activities. At the age of 25 she became a member of the Malabar Secondary Education Trust and continued in that post for nine years. She was a life member of the Malabar Education Trust.⁴³ She held high position in the 'Ladies Club', which was the first women's organization in Kozhikode.⁴⁴ She became the president of the Women Indian Association at the age of thirty in 1935 and also became the president of All India Women's Conference in 1952 and continued for 15 years till her death in 1967.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 6 April 1967.

⁴² *Malayala Manorama*, Kozhikode, *op.cit.*

⁴³ *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 6 April 1967.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Malayala Manorama*, Kozhikode, 6 April 1967.

During the Second World War Kamalambal worked for extending the activities of the women's auxiliary corps. She was trained in giving first aid and home nursing and acquired Red Cross Medal and Medalian Certificate.⁴⁶

Kamalambal founded an organization called 'Lotus Circle' in Calicut for children below twelve years of age to propagate the ideas of universal brotherhood among all religions and to spread the ideas of Theosophical Society.⁴⁷ This organization gave training in fine arts like music, drama, drawing, etc for children. She also managed a *Balavrindavanam*, a school for children on the Montessori method.⁴⁸ Through the organization she worked a lot to increase the facilities for girl's education. For the working women Kamalambal founded a working women's hostel in Calicut. She was a member of the guild of services.⁴⁹ She organized the women wing of the Chalappuram Ganapath High School.

Kamalambal played a prominent role in conducting the first fine arts exhibition at Calicut.⁵⁰ She was a member of the advisory committee of the hospitals, advisory committee of All India Radio and advisory Board of the Rescue home and worked in all these committees very effectively.⁵¹ Kamalambal was a very good artist especially in Music and she educated girls

⁴⁶ *Mathrubhumi, op.cit.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Reminiscences of Keezhedath Vasudevan Nair, op.cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Mathrubhumi, op.cit.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

in music, dance, painting, etc. at Annie Hall in Calicut. She had a melodious voice and she sang beautifully. Her Prayer recitation of the 'Vande Mataram' was an inspiration for the listeners during the hey days of the national movement.⁵²

Kamalambal was a prominent member of the All India Khadi Swadeshi Exhibition Committee at Calicut from 1930-40.⁵³ She raised her voice in favour of equal rights to women volunteers along with male volunteers in that committee. For this she fought against her own brother, Manjeri Subrahmaniam who was the secretary of the committee.⁵⁴ This issue was settled in favour of Kamalambal with the interference of Suvicharananda Swami, who was the president of the committee.⁵⁵ She never allowed or tolerated anybody abusing women in any gathering or situation.

When we analyze the activities of Kamalambal, we realize that there are two sides to her personality and activities in her social work. On the one hand she carefully preserved herself as Manjeri Kamalam, a sensitive cultured woman, who pursued a straight course of doing her duty wherever it was decided she could best render service. On the other side she was always loyal to her chiefs and colleagues who in return regarded her as a leader. So

⁵² Reminiscences of V. Gopalakrishna Iyer, *op.cit.*

⁵³ Reminiscences of Keezhedath Vasudevan Nair, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Ganapath Rao was the founder of Ganapath High School. He later became a *Sanyasin* and adopted the name *Suvicharananda Swamiji*. See Paul Manalil, *Keralathile Bhasha Neunapakshangal* (Mal.), Calicut, 2006, p. 117.

far as the home front was concerned she proved to be a practical business like person, who assumed the reins, advised, criticized, overruled and smoothed every day difficulties out of the way.⁵⁶

Kamalambal died on 6 April 1967 at her residence at Annie Hall, Calicut. Her humility and staunch faith in God were her supportive factors in her social service activities. According to Moorkkoth Kunhappa, she was a golden link between the old feudal system and the new colonial social system which was come to an end with her death.⁵⁷ She worked very sincerely in all the progressive activities at Calicut. Through her life Kamalambal revealed what brotherhood of mankind is.⁵⁸ Her splendid speeches created a sense of optimism in the minds of the audience. She had an exemplary character and leadership qualities⁵⁹ and for this reason it was natural for the people to accept her as a great leader⁶⁰.

In short, Manjeri Kamalambal held responsible positions in social, educational, charitable institutions and associations and rendered remarkable service for the benefit of the society.

⁵⁶ Reminiscences of V.Gopala Krishna Iyer, *op.cit.*

⁵⁷ Reminiscences of Moorkkoth Kunhappa, *Malayala Manorama* Kozhikode 6 April 1967.

⁵⁸ Reminiscences of V.Gopala Krishna Iyer, *op.cit.*

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Ambikamma, Grand daughter of Swadeshbimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai, at her residence, Calicut on 3, October, 2005.

⁶⁰ Lakshmi, N. Menon, unveiled her portrait at Calicut Townhall on 6 April, 1968. She asked women to gain inspiration from the life and works on Kamalambal., *Mathrubhumi*, 6 April, 1968.

When compared to certain other castes of Malabar, women are given importance in the Thiyya community-in their inheritance, marriage systems, customs and manners, system of worship etc. Some of them could get the benefits of English education and colonialism. They were able to get the benefits of missionary education because of their poverty and the economic changes paved the way for their English education.⁶¹ These educated women stood against evil customs and blind beliefs regarding various aspects of life.

The life of Thiyya women of North Kerala was much different when compared to that of other areas .Since they did not have the fear of losing caste and were not under caste restrictions they could mingle with the Europeans and many women were sent to help the wives of the Britishers .So they could develop economically and culturally. This is seen in Kannur, Kozhikode and Tellichery.⁶²

The influence of social reformers is another important factor which led to the development of the women community there. The ideas of Sree Narayana Guru⁶³ towards women education and freedom through education had an important impact on the society. Almost all the activities of Vagbhatananda⁶⁴ were directed towards women education. He specified that

⁶¹ Manjula K. V, *Stree Vidyabhyasavum Samoouhika Mattavum* in *Kannur Kalathilude*, (Mal.), Kannur, 2006, p. 134.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶³ See for details, C.R. Mithra, *Sree Narayana Guru and Social Revolution*, Shertalai, 1979.

⁶⁴ See for details- M.S. Nair, *Vagbhatananda Guruvum Samoohika Navothanavum* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1998.

women education is essential for social progress. The *Atmavidya Sangham* founded by Vagbhatananda and the *Saraswathi Vilasa Vidya Peetam* at Thiruvangad had played an important role in the education of women and their freedom in the society. Hence the role of intellectuals in the nineteenth century especially of Sree Narayana Guru, Vagbhatananda and Swami Ananda Theertha had much influence in reforming the society of North Malabar especially the women community of Malabar.

Multifarious factors were instrumental in the women of Tellichery entering the public life of Malabar. The colonial situation combined with economic advantages through commercial contacts with people of other areas like Gujarat. These contacts often led to marriage and through that they got enough education and refined culture.⁶⁵ Convent education and the refined ideologies of the reformers provided ample opportunities to the women to act. This was made easy only due to the absence of caste restrictions and limitations.

Karayi Damayanthi

The first woman who appeared prominently in the public life of Tellichery was Karayi Damayanthi. She was born in 1865 as the daughter of a rich merchant called Karayi Bappu in a famous Thiyya family at Tellichery. She formed a '*Ladies club*' by the second decade of the twentieth century.

⁶⁵ C.K. Revathi Amma, *Sahasra Poornima* (Mal.), Autobiography, 1977, p. 46.

During that period there were only very few women associations in the whole of Kerala. Through this association she tried to develop reading habits among women by supplying books at their doorsteps. Thus the idea of the mobile library was first accomplished by Karayi Damayanthi.⁶⁶ The ladies club aimed at the educational and social progress of Thiyya women of Tellichery. She introduced informal education by giving training⁶⁷ in tailoring, child caring etc. Doctors were invited to give classes regarding child caring. These were the activities of the Ladies Club in its initial years.⁶⁸ This lady was a role model in the social life of Tellichery.⁶⁹

Karayi Damayanthi worked much for women education through her writings in early Malayalam magazines. She was a staunch advocate of women education and according to her, social progress is possible only through women education. She insisted on the essentiality of girls' schools in Tellichery. Since education in the convent school was costly, girls of lower income families could not go to the convent. Through her writings in *Mitavadi* she tried to awaken the Government to establish a high school for girls. She was critical of the fact that men were not trying to develop women education while they were working for the development of boys in various

⁶⁶ K.V. Manjula, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

⁶⁷ Meera Velayudan, "Growth of Political Consciousness Among Women in Modern Kerala", in *Perspectives in Kerala History*, Trivandrum, 1999, p. 505.

⁶⁸ Murkoth Kumaran, C.K. Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, introduction, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁹ A.V. Anil Kumar, "Randu Kalaghatangalile Kalahangal", (Mal.), in *Desabhimani Weekly*, Onam special, 2006, p. 111.

ways.⁷⁰ She also argued that women are not lower in intelligence than men.⁷¹

Karayi Damayanthi worked for the accomplishment of women education. Whenever girls who went to the convent with her daughters dropped out from schooling, she met their parents and forced them to send their children to school again. Further they were allowed to travel in horse carts along with her daughters. She sent lunch for the children of poor fishermen in the school.⁷²

Karayi Damayanthi was well assured of the fact that women could do all activities which men could do including journalism, book writing etc. She cited examples of Kunjukutty Thankachi, Theravath Ammalu Amma, and B.Kalliani Amma who proved themselves as good writers. Her intention was to inspire and empower women. Regarding the kind of education which should be given to girls Karayi Damayanthi opted to have the kind of education which would impart religious knowledge too so that they would develop right way in life.⁷³ Education should help women to take proper care of children, to have a basic knowledge regarding diseases, treatment etc. Again the education should help women to become full-fledged, efficient house wives.⁷⁴ When we analyze the contributions of Karayi Damayanthi, we find that she was a pioneer of women's movement in Tellichery. She was not a mere preacher of reform but an activist as well. On the one hand she tried to

⁷⁰ Karayi Damayanthi, "Nammude Streekalude Vidhyabhyasam", (Mal.) in *Mitavati*, Book 2, N.7, 1914, p. 17.

⁷¹ C.K. Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷³ Karayi Damayanthi, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

awaken the public about women education and on the other she showed the possibilities through her writings. For this she wielded her pen through the *Mitavadi* magazine of the period.

Karayi Damayanthi was a woman of generosity. She helped the neighbouring poor people on expensive occasions like marriage, death etc. At times she even donated her own children's ornaments to the poor for marriage. She donated generously believing in the maxim, "if we give earthen pot God will give us golden pot."⁷⁵ She even donated from the money she got after selling her property for the marriage of her daughter C K Revathi Amma.⁷⁶

Karayi Damayanthi was a social reformer. She was against child marriage and hence decided to get her daughter C.K.Revathi Amma married only at the age of fifteen. This was a great change and the inspiration was undoubtedly the visit and preaching of Sree Narayana Guru. The Guru asked the bridegroom to tie the *thali* on the occasion of the marriage, a custom not practiced till then.

C.K.Revathi Amma

Family is the basic social unit in which everyone lives in a network of mutual ties and obligations. It prepares the members as social beings through

⁷⁵ C.K.Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

transmission of tradition and the cultural, moral and spiritual values from one generation to another.⁷⁷ There is no better example to show this than C.K.Revathi Amma who carried on the same social commitment and service programmes of her mother, Damayanthi Amma. C.K.Revathi Amma was in the public life of Tellichery in various ways. Born in 1891 she was a well known novelist, play wright and social worker who lived in Tellichery. Her life spanned a fascinating spectrum of events.

Revathi Amma was educated up to fifth standard in the Sacred Heart Convent School at Tellichery. She was married at the age of fifteen to Paithal, the commissiar of Mahe. Marriage took her to Mahe which was a French enclave. Revathi Amma initiated many efforts to implement reforms among the women of Mahe. She was prompted for this by her own mother's social service activities and the family background .Further she was married to an influential family of Mahe in which the *Karanavar* (Head of the family) was the Mayor of Mahe and he accepted the social service mentality of Revathi Amma. Revathi Amma's public life began under the influence of all these positive factors.⁷⁸ More than that, she was influenced by the ideals of Sree Narayana Guru, especially the ideas regarding equality which is very similar

⁷⁷ Renjini. D. Nair, *Women Today, Disintegration of Matrilineal system and the status of Nair women in Kerala*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 33.

⁷⁸ C.K. Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

to French ideals of Democracy-Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.⁷⁹ All these helped Revathi Amma to work for the poor and needy and for social harmony.

Through the words of her grandmother Revathi Amma explored the evil customs which existed in the society and the resultant issues that occurred in the society especially regarding women. Child marriage was prevalent at that time. Usually girls were married before they attained the age of twelve. The girl would be kept in ignorance of her marriage. The child bride was not permitted to travel in the horse cart on the day of the marriage. If she violated this unwritten rule, she was ostracized (*brashtu*). To relieve herself from the ostracism, the *karanavar* must be propitiated suitably by offering betel leaves at the feet of the *karanavar* and doing penance. A special meeting would be held and the girl would have to repent before those gathered. On such occasions the *karanavar* would scold and behave badly. The bride would not be permitted to use any footwear. The girls after marriage were denied any kind of freedom in their husband's house. They would have to lead a life equivalent to that of a servant in the house.⁸⁰

Another social evil which was prevalent among the Thiyyas was the *talikettu kalyanam*. As per belief the function should be observed when a girl attained puberty. The *tali* was tied around the neck of the girl by her aunts. The function was as costly as a real marriage. Other social customs observed

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 41- 42.

as function by the Thiyya community of the period were *tirandukuli*, (function observed when a girl attained puberty), *pulikuti* (a custom observed during pregnancy) etc. In 1904 Sree Narayana Guru visited Tellichery as a part of the reform movement and he insisted on abolishing all these unwanted, lavish social customs. The visit of Sree Narayana Guru created awareness among the Thiyyas regarding social reforms and the construction of a temple was realized-that was the Jagannatha temple. Till then the Thiyyas had worshiped in the *Kavus* only. The prominent among them were Parassini Muthappan Matappura, Andallur Kavu, Cheerumba Kavu, etc.⁸¹

After the First World War, Red Cross societies were formed in Mahe to help the wounded and the members of the families of deceased *jawans*. In order to discuss its activities a meeting was held at the Bungalow of the *Mooppan saive*.⁸² Revathi Amma attended the meeting. In the meeting decision was taken to raise money by way of enacting out farce drama and send the money to the French Government. Revathi Amma had an important role in making it a success. This was the first activity of Revathi Amma as a social worker.

Revathi Amma as a Writer

Revathi Amma read many novels and she could form her own ideas and could write by including the social customs and manners of her own

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸² Mooppan Saive was the French Administrator of Mahe.

caste. Thus she developed as a writer at the age of thirty. She used to write when her husband went to office and she wrote late in the night. Her husband did not like this. He used to blow out the lamp and throw out the papers in which she wrote. But Revathi Amma continued to write patiently, tolerating her husband's rude behaviour and she was proud of that.⁸³ Thus she wrote the first novel which was later named *Randu Sahodarikal* (two sisters). The book was corrected by Moorkkoth Kumaran and was published by C.K.Damodaran, the manager of Vidyavilasam press.

Revathi Amma wrote farces to be enacted for the programmes of the *Stree Samajam*. They are *Sarala Vijayam* (victory of Sarala) and *Valiya tharavattile kutti* (The child of a big family). Revathi Amma wrote her second novel *Sobhana* when she was more than fifty two years old and it was published by the Vidyavilasam press. After the publication of this novel she became a familiar person to the public. She was offered various positions and honours even though she did not aspire for them. She wrote her auto biography *Sahasra poornima* (One thousand full moons) in 1977. The book portrays the history and culture of Tellichery in a vivid way.⁸⁴ It throws light in to many events of the period. She took twelve years to complete the work. It won the Kerala Sahithya Academy Award in 1980.

⁸³ Geetha Doctor, "My grandmother- C.K.Revathi Amma", cited in C.K.Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 264.

⁸⁴ C.K.Revathi Amma *op.cit.*, p. 129.

C.K. Revathi Amma as an Organizer

Revathi Amma was a dynamic person who never sat idle. When she was in Mahe she wanted to form an organization for women. She was motivated by other women organizations which were formed in some other cities which were in the fore front of education. Such associations were carrying out developmental activities for their own communities and for the country. She could gather such ideas from the news papers of the period and she decided to start such an association at Mahe also.

To start the women's association-*Stree Samajam* she got the support of Madam Dero, the headmistress of the Girls' School of Mahe who was well versed in English and French. Since she had visited many cities of India and abroad, she also wanted to establish such an association in Mahe. This social commitment and progressive thinking of Madam Dero helped Revathi Amma a lot to form the *Stree Samajam* in 1931. It was inaugurated by Mooliyil Janaki, a native of Kozhikode and it was presided over by Moopan Saive. Madam Dero was the president and C.K.Revathi Amma was the vice president of the *Stree Samajam*.⁸⁵ The secretary and treasurer of the Samajam were the teachers of the Girls' School. The monthly membership fee was Rs.1 per head. With this money a reading room was started under the auspices of the *Stree Samajam*. The *Stree Samajam* of Mahe under the leader

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

ship of Revathi Amma had contributed a lot to the cultural life of Mahe.⁸⁶ The *Stree Samajam* and the Vidyarthi Samajam worked together during the Second World War period in order to collect money towards the war fund.⁸⁷

When Gandhi visited Kerala to raise funds for Harijan upliftment, he visited Mahe on 13 January 1934. Revathi Amma was informed of the reception programme by Dr.M.K.Menon who was a congress worker. The meeting was held in the premises of the Puthalam Temple at Mahe.⁸⁸ The reception committee had donated a money bag containing an amount of Rs.301. The *Stree Samajam* under the leadership of C.K.Revathi Amma took the initiative to conduct the function at the request of M.K.Menon. After receiving the money bag Gandhi asked women to donate gold ornaments to the fund.⁸⁹

At this the women were in a dilemma for there was womanly interest for ornaments on the one side and patriotic Swarajist thinking on the other. But the situation was changed when Mrs.M.K.Menon and her sisters donated gold ornaments. Revathi Amma donated two bangles and a golden chain of her daughter⁹⁰ and many others followed suit.

⁸⁶ C.H.Gangadharan, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

⁸⁷ C.K.Revathi Aamma, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

⁸⁸ C.H.Gangadharan, *Mayyazhi*, Calicut, 1984, p. 127.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Chokiliyute Innalekal*, (Mal.), Chokli Grama Panchayat, 2005, p. 49.

Revathi Amma considered the blessings of Gandhi as an important factor for her social service activities afterwards.⁹¹

After shifting residence to Tellichery she had started a Mahila Samajam there also and it functioned well. By the time she published her second novel *Sobhana* she already held an honorable place in the society. She contested as a congress candidate in the District Board election without success. She was elected as one of the directors of the urban bank and held that post for three years.⁹²

C.K. Revathi Amma was selected to the Director Board of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam. She went to Quilon for every annual meeting of the Yogam.⁹³ By this time Guild of Service was founded in Tellichery and she became a member of that. With this she began to collect money under the banner of Mahila Samajam for raising funds for the Social Service League. Cultural programmes were conducted regularly on the occasion of the Republic Day. Only Samajam members participated in these programmes. In the Samajam only congress members were admitted as members. When Nehru visited Tellichery, they worked very hard to make the programme a success.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Apart from the social service for the down trodden the Guild of Service also ran a free hospital at Tellichery. That was donated by C.K.Revathi Amma and Narayani Rao. C.K.Revathi Amma was elected as the secretary of the hospital.⁹⁴

When the communist party was in power a rehabilitation centre was started due to the strenuous efforts of V.R.Krishna Iyer. The institution was aimed at protecting the poor and orphan boys and guiding them to have a normal life.⁹⁵ Even though there were Government employees to manage the centre C.K.Revathi Amma and other members of the Samajam worked for the smooth functioning of the institution. Since every activity needed fund to implement the schemes, fund raising was a great problem. C.K.Revathi Amma accompanied the members to collect money and she was nicknamed *pirivamma*.⁹⁶ The After Care Home was started in 1956 and she became the Chairman of the After Care Home in 1971. Advocate P.Kunhiraman was the founding Chairman of the After Care Home and C.K.Revathi Amma its secretary.

She worked in the Red Cross Society and was a member of the Tellichery co-operative milk society.⁹⁷ She functioned as the president of the Society for three years. She was appointed as the District Development

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁹⁶ A mother who collects money.

⁹⁷ C.K.Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

Council Member by the Kerala Government. Meanwhile the famous ophthalmologist Dr.Modi had conducted an eye camp at Tellichery. The patients were treated in Brennen College and Mission High School, Tellichery. Municipality and the Social Service League helped in the venture and made it a success. Politically the Social Service League had strong faith in the congress and the members helped the congress candidates during every election period in many ways.⁹⁸

The Samajam had worked for collecting fund for the rejuvenation work of the pond of the Thiruvangad Temple. She worked at this venture for three years successfully. Due to all these public activities many people accused her and her own brother and family ridiculed her as “angadi adu.”⁹⁹

She had visited various places in the country with her son Padmanaban who was the Indian Ambassador abroad. In 1958 the Tellichery women co-operative society was started¹⁰⁰ to help women and unmarried girls to earn a little extra money through the sale of jams and preserves and readymade garments.¹⁰¹ Ambassador Padmanaban laid the foundation stone of the building. C.K.Revathi Amma worked a lot for the construction of the building and for the maintenance of the society.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.

⁹⁹ A goat in the street.

¹⁰⁰ C.K.Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*

¹⁰¹ Geetha Doctor, *op.cit.*

Chinmayananda Swami was invited to conduct a *yajna* in 1962. In the working committee Revathi Amma was the General Secretary. She unfurled the flag in the premises of the SreeRamaswamy Temple as per the instructions of the Swami.¹⁰² That was a historical event because till then the Thiyyas were not even given permission to enter in to the temple. In such a temple Revathi Amma, a Thiyya woman unfurled the flag. After two years Swami was again invited to conduct *yajna* on 24 February 1965 at Tellichery and at that time he stayed in Revathi Amma's house. This elicited protests from the public and upper castes and she was ridiculed by them. But they all joined the programme gradually and made it a success. There after they called her family as "Royal Thiyyas."¹⁰³

C.K.Revathi Amma was appointed in the National Savings Board and Family Planning Board as member from the Kannur District. Due to the initiative and effort of C.K.Revathi Amma two L.P. Schools of Tellichery were upgraded to U.P. Schools when R.Sankar was the Chief Minister of Kerala. When ever she went to Trivandrum for official matters or to regress the grievances of the public she used to stay in the women's lodge of Gouri Amma.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² C.K.Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 222.

¹⁰³ Her own caste people did not like the visit of Chinmayananda Swami at her house and they asked her whether she was going to join the Nair caste. Personal interview with Padma Devarajan, daughter of C.K.Revathi Amma, at her residence, Tellichery on 15 October 2007.

¹⁰⁴ C.K.Revathi Amma, *op.cit.*, p. 234.

C.K.Revathi Amma went to Bombay when her son Ambassador Padmanabhan came there along with the King and Queen of Iran. She stayed in Bombay for three months in order to collect money for the construction of the Tellichery women's cooperative society building.

During the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1971, an unprecedented incident occurred in the peaceful town of Tellichery. Revathi Amma went and stood on the steps of the local mosque (Shaheedar Mosque).¹⁰⁵ This act of Revathi Amma prevented the mob from attacking it. Thus Revathi Amma acted expediently to re-establish communal harmony in Tellichery.

After performing so much of social services and duties in various capacities she actually wanted to withdraw from public life and she desired to go to Dakshineswaram but could not fulfill that. She had to continue the same busy schedule in her later life.

In many of these activities C.K.Revathi Amma did not get the support of her family members. Even her husband was not supportive at times. She worked undaunted and succeeded in overcoming all such hurdles.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Muslim Women in the Public Life of Malabar

Muslim community was also influenced by the socio-economic, educational and cultural movements of the modern period. The Muslims of Malabar, comparatively a backward community, showed trends of change¹⁰⁶ by the early decades of the twentieth century. Till then the traditional Madrassa and Dars education were the systems of education that were predominant among the Muslims.¹⁰⁷ Modern education for girls was almost forbidden. Sending a girl for education up to matriculation was unthinkable; college education of women was even more unthinkable. Modern secular education was slowly accepted by them and a few women acquired modern education and stepped out of their homes to be active in the social and political scenario.

The Muslim women of Tellichery showed signs of reform in their life and attitudes through convent education. Education equipped them to be instrumental in socio-political activities of the society. Tellichery, being the early settlement of the British in Malabar, had the unique privilege to be the ground for the lucrative trade of the period. Trade enabled the people to have exposure to the outside world. This was fruitfully combined with the educational opportunities which were effectively made use of by the progressive families of the area. Women from these families entered the

¹⁰⁶ S.M.Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, Calicut, 1983, p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

public life of Malabar and capitalized on the transformation, the society was undergoing.

T.C. Kunhachumma

Begum Thacharakkal Cannoth Areekkasthanath Kunhachumma¹⁰⁸ was born in 1889 as the daughter of O.Mayanali. Among the Muslim women who came forward into public life in the early decades of the twentieth century, she was in the forefront. Tellichery, in her time, had a sizeable Muslim population and she pioneered the social reform movement among them and indirectly involved in the political movements of the period. The financial power of the family and the support of her husband Kadankandy Kuttiamu Hajji enabled her to be active in the public life of her time.

The Muslims of Malabar observed the matrilineal system until the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the early decades of the century witnessed the gradual transformation from matrilineal to patrilineal. This was a social change of considerable importance and it was ensued by far reaching structural changes in the Muslim society of Malabar.¹⁰⁹ The first Muslim family to shift from the matrilineal to the patrilineal system was the Puthiya Maliyekkal (1919), while the Malabar Muslims were unanimously observing

¹⁰⁸ Herein after referred to as T.C.Kunhachumma.

¹⁰⁹ S.M.Mohammed Koya, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

Marumakkathiyam.¹¹⁰ This change happened when Kuttiamu Hajji constructed a thirty bed roomed house, in an acre of land for his wife, T.C.Kunhachumma and her nine children.¹¹¹

Therewith, 'the Maliyekkal house' became the pivot of the social reform movement among the Muslims and influenced the social, cultural and political life of the Muslims of Malabar. The social service mission of the Maliyekkal family has been fervently carried on by every successive generation of the family.

During the National Movement, Kunhachumma became a member of the women's wing of the All India Muslim league.¹¹² She attended the annual conference of the All India Muslim League held at Patna in 1938 and she was the only Muslim woman from Kerala who was elected to the women's wing of the League.¹¹³ Leaders like Ali brothers and their mother, Bi-amman were hosted by Kunhachumma and it may be noted that she even gifted a dollar chain to Ali Brothers to express her strong sympathies. When ever the nationalist leaders like Annie Besant or Suchetha Kripalani came to Kerala, they were received by the Maliyekkal family. The Maliyekkal family showed the will and the boldness to give succor to politicians and leaders in the time

¹¹⁰ Personal interview with P.V.Hameed, grandson of T.C.Kunhachumma, at his residence, Tellichery on 3 August, 2007.

¹¹¹ Personal interview with Maliyekkal Mariyumma, grand daughter of T.C.Kunhachumma, at her residence, Tellichery on 3rd December 2006.

¹¹² M.R., *Kunhachumma Oru Dheera Mahila, Malayala Manorama* supplement, Tellichery 18 November, 1967.

¹¹³ *Patayani*, Tellichery, 29 Jun 1988, p. 2.

of trouble and political tribulation. Abdul Rahiman Sahib and Yakoob Hassan received an unwholesome welcome on their visit to Kerala. The Muslim extremists revolted against them and their visit, waving black flags of protest. When the threats leaped out of control, the Maliyekkal family came to their rescue and offered asylum. Eminent men like Kamal Pasha, Abdullah Gandhi, K.P.Kesava Menon, Panambilly Govinda Menon and Moidu Moulavi enjoyed the family's gracious hospitality. Leaders like EMS. Nambuthiripad, AKGopalan, and Imbichibava many a time had lived underground under the cover of this family.¹¹⁴

Till her death in 1945,¹¹⁵ she had a massive sway among the women of Tellichery. For the first time the Muslim women of Kerala were organized under her leadership. In 1933 Kunhachumma formed the Tellichery Muslim Mahila Samajam in the court yard of her family and she was its president.¹¹⁶ In the initial phase of the Samajam, the women from her family and the women from the neighbourhood were its members.

The Muslim orthodoxy was displeased with her move. The Mahila Samajam was secular in nature, though was named "Muslim Mahila Samajam". Outstanding women like Chinnamalu Amma, Karthiayani Amma and Justice Janaki were active members of this association. The activities of

¹¹⁴ Personal interview with Maliyekkal Mariyumma, *op.cit.*

¹¹⁵ *Mathrubhumi*, 26 January, 1945.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the Samajam included the arranging of free blood testing camps, the free distribution of medicines for the needy and the organization of awareness classes. Even in the 1930s family planning awareness seminars were convened in the court yard of Maliyekkal family under the auspices of the Samajam¹¹⁷. The Samajam also took up a literacy mission and initiated the steps to impart adult education for the Muslims of Malabar.

In the time of the Second World War Kunhachumma took the initiative to recruit the unemployed youth in to the Army. She desired to help the youth with employment and their poor families with an income. She searched out the youth who were willing to join the army and helped them to get recruited. Her services were recognized by the British Government. In January 1945, the Madras Governor Sir Arthur Hop honored Kunhachumma in a function at Calicut and presented the Recruitment Medal to her.¹¹⁸ The British Government honored her for the role she played in the socio political activities of Malabar. She was the only one among the Muslim women of Kerala to be honored by the British.¹¹⁹

Equality of women

In her time, T.C.Kunhachumma was the vanguard of Muslim women reforms in Tellichery. The Muslim orthodoxy strongly protested against her

¹¹⁷ Personal interview, Maliyekkal Mariyumma, *op.cit.*

¹¹⁸ *Mathrubhumi*, 26 January, 1945.

¹¹⁹ *Malayala Manorama*, 28 October 1968.

progressive moves but protests failed to dampen her zeal. She realized that the Muslim women of her time could be empowered only through education and initiated the drive to impart education to them. She transformed her court yard into a venue for social activities.¹²⁰ Kunhachumma realized the starkness of the evil of child marriage which was rampant among Muslims. She campaigned against it in her own way among the women. She made women aware of the evils of child marriage. Muslim marriages in Kunhachumma's time were a platform of unhealthy extravagances which inflicted heavy financial burden on the families. People spent beyond their means to impress their kin with pomp. Kunhachumma unveiled to the women in her reach, the folly of extravagant spending in connection with marriages.

Kunhachumma realized that Muslim women lived in their homes as second class citizens often under the dictatorial rule of their unsympathetic husbands. The reformer in her ardently worked to establish the equality of women. As a bold step towards this, in 1920 she convened Tharaviya Namaskaram¹²¹ in the court yard of Maliyekkal family.¹²² Even today in the month of Ramzan ladies lead the Tharaviya Namaskaram. Women were also given training in Kalari, Kolkali and swimming.¹²³

¹²⁰ O.Aabu, *Anthapurathil oru Susaktha Sanghatana, Mathrubhumi* 25 December 1965.

¹²¹ Tharaveeya Namaskaram is performed in the month of Ramzan. The popular belief is that if this is observed the reward from God will be, twenty seven times more.

¹²² Personal interview with P.V.Hameed, *op.cit.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

In the post-independence era, the Maliyekkal family embraced the leftist political ideology. Positions of political power at varied levels were held by members of the Maliyekkal family. The administrative machinery of Tellichery has had many from the family. Amina Hashim who was the leader of the women's wing of the socialist party, Ramla Babu the Ex Tellichery Municipal Councilor, Amina Maliyekkal are people who continued the tradition of left politics.¹²⁴

The Tellichery Muslim Mahila Samajam was a relief centre for the poor people of Tellichery. Irrespective of their caste, needy students and poor girls who could not get married were helped by the Samajam. The Samajam went a long way under the able leadership of its founder T.C.Kunhachumma, her daughter P.M.Manumma and her daughter P.M.Mariyumma. The Samajam sustained itself and its activities, without seeking governmental aid of any kind, relying almost solely on the donations of benefactors. The services of the Samajam had far reaching influences in the Muslim society and have won recognition from many.¹²⁵

With in three decades, the Samajam changed the very nature of the Muslim society itself. The extravagant expenditure in connection with marriage which was celebrated in five or eight days was minimized to one day celebration mainly due to the Samajam's efforts. Expensive celebrations

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Malayala Manorama*, 28 October 1968.

like *Kathukuthu* (piercing of the ear) *Nalpathu Kuli* (a function on the 40th day after delivery), *Nathun Sadya* (feast in connection with the visit of sister-in-law) were abandoned with the efforts of the Samajam.¹²⁶

P.M.Mariyumma (1925 -)

The Muslim Mahila Samajam worked well under the leadership of P.M.Mariyumma, grand daughter of T.C.Kunhachumma. She is convent educated and a true follower of Kunhachumma in social service activities.¹²⁷ She is the second daughter of O.V.Abdullah (Senior) of Maliyekkal family. She joined the Tellichery Sacred Heart Convent School as per the advice of her father. She went to school at a time when formal education was a taboo for Muslim girls. In those times, girls were not permitted even to go out side the house alone. Only very few girls were lucky to have formal education up to third or fourth standard.

It was during such an atmosphere that a girl from Maliyekkal family went to the convent for English education and studied up to fifth form. Naturally it has been a matter of hot discussion among the Muslim community. “When I was a student I was the only Muslim girl in the convent”.¹²⁸ These were the words of Maliyekkal Mariyumma who was who was sarcastically called as ‘English Mariyumma’ by the public, at a time

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ O.Abu, *op.cit.*

¹²⁸ Personal interview with P.M.Mariyumma, *op.cit.*

when English language was considered by the orthodoxy as the language of the hell.

Her father Abdullah was well versed in religious subjects. Later he had gone to Cochin for trade and engaged in self study. His contacts with foreign traders who arrived for trade, gave him the chance to learn languages like English, Urdu, Hindi, Parsi, Kannada, and Tamil. He was well versed in Arabic and had translated *Burdabaith* from Arabic to English. He had a good library of different languages and this was handed over to Tellichery Darussalam Yatheemkhana (Orphanage) which was established under his initiative.¹²⁹

Mariyumma was married on 13 May 1943 to V.R. Mayan Ali, Military Recruiting Officer who later worked as inspector of General Insurance and as the Managing Director of the Ex-Servicemen Bus Service. He worked with the national movement and was an active member of the Muslim Majlis which was formed by the Muslims in the congress. Her father O.V. Abdullah, Abdulkalam Azad, E. Moidu Moulavi, Palat Kunhi Koya, Abdul Rahiman Sahib and P.P. Ummer Koya worked as a team for the Majlis. Through the public activities of her father and husband she could meet and get acquainted with many famous personalities. Ali brothers,

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Yakoob Hassan, E.Moidu Moulavi, EMS Nambuthiripad, A. K. Gopalan and General Kariappa were some among them.¹³⁰

Mariyumma entered the public life of Tellichery as the secretary of the Muslim Mahila Samajam which was founded by her grand mother. Later she became the president of the Samajam and continued the work of the Samajam till 1975. The death of her husband made her withdraw from public life and it adversely affected the activities of the Samajam.

Though the name of the Samajam was Muslim Mahila Samajam, the member ship was open to all others irrespective of caste barriers. O.C.Chinnamalu who was the District Education Officer and the social activist C.K.Revathi Amma were some among them. A.V.Kuttimalu Amma, Thankamma, the health Director, Panambilly Govinda Menon, K.P.Kesava Menon, Dr.Abdul Gaffoor and Nafeesath Beevi participated in various functions of the Samajam.¹³¹

She was an artist too. She was a member of the committee that was in charge of the selection of announcers to All India Radio. The other members were Konniyur Narendra Nath and N.K.Seshan.¹³²

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Desabhimani, 30 January 2005.

¹³² Personal interview with P.M.Mariyumma, *op.cit.*

Marks of modernity- Tellichery Sisters

The awakened Muslim families which had welcomed the values of renaissance and progressive ideas with open arms realized the necessity of education early enough. The women in such a family had gained English education in the 1930s itself. Vayyappurath Kunnath Kunhimayin Sahib sent his three daughters to the convent for English education for the first time in Malabar. For this he was accused and ridiculed by the public orthodoxy as *Khafir* Mayin.¹³³ These three girls were known as Tellichery sisters. They were Amina Hashim Ayisha Rauf, and Haleema Abooty. Amina Hashim was a doctor; Ayisha Rauf was the Muslim school Inspector at Malappuram under the British Government. After her marriage she went to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) with her husband and she was elected as the first woman Mayor of Colombo Municipality. Haleema Abooty was a house wife. These ladies revolutionized the dressing pattern of the Muslim society.¹³⁴ They wore skirt and blouse and went to the convent with their brothers who unlike the Muslim boys of the time, wore trousers and had cropped hair. Later when they grew older, they wore sari instead of traditional Muslim clothes.

It was a time when the Muslim girls were destined to live within the four walls of the house. They were not allowed to go outside freely, talk loudly or to have formal education. Vayyappurath Kunnath Kunhi Mayin

¹³³ *Malayala Manorama*, 29 August 1999.

¹³⁴ Personal interview with P.V.Siraj, son of Haleema Abooty, Tellichery 3 Aug, 2007.

Sahib decided to educate his three daughters along with his two sons. That was a revolutionary step in the history of Muslims in Malabar. When they went to the Sacred Heart Convent, Tellichery wearing skirt and frock, the orthodox people used to say, “see, *Khafir* Mayin’s children are going to school”. Those who got modern education were considered by the orthodoxy as outcastes and *Khafirs*.

Kunhi Mayin Sahib was educated and was well versed in religious matters and was a progressive. He bought books from the world famous Oxford, Macmillan companies, enriched his knowledge and maintained a good library.

Dr. Amina Hashim (1912 -1981)

The first Muslim girl who studied in an English medium school in Malabar was Amina Hashim. She had her primary education at Sacred Heart Convent Tellichery. She passed Intermediate from the Madras Queen Mary’s College and took MBBS from the Punjab University. She served as a Medical Practitioner in Bombay, Poona and in various parts of Kerala.¹³⁵

Amina was married to Villandavidutha Hashim Sahib, who was the Deputy collector of Malabar District under the British. Amina was immersed in the socio-cultural realms of Malabar and was active in political activities too. In 1950 she contested to the Madras legislative Assembly as a socialist

¹³⁵ Personal interview with P.V.Hameed, son of Haleema Abootty, *op.cit.*

party candidate, but lost.¹³⁶ P.R.Kurup, who later became a minister was the election agent of Amina.

Ayisha Rauf (1914-1991)

“Ceylon is a beautiful country and Colombo is a very clean city. If any of you get a chance to travel do not fail to see Ceylon.” These were the words of Kunhi Mayin Sahib to his children after his visit of Ceylon in 1930. These words were accomplished by his second daughter Ayisha Rauf. Little did she realize that she would marry a handsome Muslim man from Ceylon and so over in 1944 not only to live there but to enter the political scene as the first Muslim woman in politics?¹³⁷

Ayisha got primary education along with her sisters Amina and Haleema from the Tellichery convent. From there she went for higher studies to St.Anne’s College affiliated to Madras University. After a short while she became a member of the debating society. As a Muslim girl it required courage, tact and perseverance to step out of a strict mould of conservative traditions and bravely break the old traditional restrictions on Muslim girls. During this time she met Moulana Shoukkath Ali, Mohammed Ali and

¹³⁶ Kerala Muslim Directory, Cochin, 1960, p. 636.

¹³⁷ Roshan Pieris, Ayisha Rauf –the first woman Deputy Mayor, The Sunday Observer, 17 January 1988, p. 20.

Mahatma Gandhi along with her sisters. In the memories of Haleema, her sisters received Ali brothers by wearing *Khaddar* clothes.¹³⁸

Ayisha did her degree at Queen Mary's college affiliated to Madras University. She studied English, French, Economics Politics and History. She was unique as a Muslim girl and in later life she was a Muslim woman who stood out from the crowd of Muslim women by her accomplishments. She was the first Muslim Head Prefect of the Sacred Heart Convent. She was also the first Muslim girl to graduate from a University in the whole of the Malabar District. At Queen Mary's College she created further history, by not only participating in sports, but by being exceptionally good at Tennis and she represented the college in inter college sports.

After I graduated, I lectured for a couple of months at the training college, Tellichery and was soon appointed as Inspector of Muslim girls in Manjeri, in south Malabar. In the mean time I armed myself with a diploma in teaching too. When I passed out I was appointed as a special officer for women's education for the whole of Malabar."¹³⁹ In Malabar she worked for the progress of Muslim women in the society.

By then, slowly Muslim girls were stepping out of their homes seeking education. Yet they maintained all their traditions and customs which they respected. Ayisha sought to promote education among Muslim

¹³⁸ Personal interview with P.V.Hameed, son of Haleema Abootty, *op.cit.*

¹³⁹ Quoted in Roshan Pieris, *op.cit.*

girls. To Ayisha it was a sacred mission which all through her life she worked to fulfill.

“When I began my work I had many threatening letters from fellow Muslims saying it was a disgrace traveling alone by bus from place to place as an inspectress.”¹⁴⁰

So when ever possible her brother who was working as an Inspector of Boy’s schools at that time accompanied her. Once she nearly lost her life by drowning when she was crossing a river. In 1943 she was married to Mohamed Shareef Mohamed Rauf and in the next year she went to Ceylon with her husband.¹⁴¹ She continued her public activity there also¹⁴².

Haleema Abootty

The youngest of the three sisters was Haleema who too had convent education. After school, she joined Queen Mary’s College and passed the

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Kerala Muslim Directory, *op.cit.*, p. 638.

¹⁴² She was asked by the then Minister of Education Mr.C.W.W. Kanangara and the Director of Education Dr. Howes to report to the Principal of the Govt. Girls School Maradana. The school for the Muslim girls became the Muslim Ladies College and Ayisha was the first Principal of that college. In the school there were only twenty children on the first day (9.9.1946) but with in a month there were two hundred girls. Ayisha entered politics in Ceylon. She became a Member of the Ceylon Indian Congress and worked hard to better the lives of both men and women working on the plantations. There she campaigned for M.F.Ghany. Then she became the first Muslim woman Municipal Councilor. In the election for the Deputy Mayor the left group which had the same number of candidates as the Right’s group proposed Ayisha’s name. The votes were divided almost equally and she, a left supported candidate won by just one vote. That made her the first woman Deputy Mayor of Ceylon. She gave up politics in 1961 when the Government took over the school and she became a public servant. See Roshan Pieris, *op.cit.*

Intermediate. She was involved in social service activities in Tellichery. She was married to a congress man T.C.Abouty who was the son of T.C.Kunachumma, the founding president of the Tellichery Muslim Mahila Samajam. Haleema continued her social service activities even after marriage. She was an asylum to the poor women of Tellichery.¹⁴³ She patched up the quarrels which occurred among the neighbouring families in Tellichery. She used to go to the police station and to the collector's office in order to get relief for poor women.¹⁴⁴

Thus the reformation of the modern period is well reflected in the life and culture of Muslim community in Tellichery. The major factor which altered the life and culture of Muslim women was English education. At a time when the female education was considered as a 'taboo', the women of some progressive families were educated on modern lines. Further these convents educated women entered public life of Malabar mainly through social service activities. They performed their role well without considering caste discrepancies, social inequalities etc. All the women personalities who were brought under study in the present chapter were involved in social service activities without interfering in the political movements of the period. The women leaders responded to the need of the time and acted in the best interests of the people within their community and outside.

¹⁴³ Personal interview with P.V.Hameed, *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*