

Kerala Renaissance

The Quest for Inclusiveness



Dr. Alphons George
Sunitha Santhan
Anitta Mathew

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**Kerala Renaissance:
The Quest for Inclusiveness**

KERALA RENAISSANCE: THE QUEST FOR INCLUSIVENESS

**Dr. Alphons George
Sunitha Santhan
Anitta Mathew**

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PREFACE

As we reflect on the historical journey of Kerala, it becomes evident that the Kerala Renaissance marked a significant turning point in the social, cultural, and intellectual transformation of the region. It was a period characterized by the questioning of entrenched inequalities, the rise of progressive thought and the emergence of reform movements that sought to build a more just and inclusive society. The contributions of visionary leaders, social reformers, and thinkers played a crucial role in reshaping the social fabric of Kerala.

This book, *Kerala Renaissance: The Quest for Inclusiveness*, is an initiative of the Department of History, aiming to explore the various dimensions of this transformative period. It examines the struggles against caste discrimination, the promotion of education, the role of religion in social reform, and the emergence of new ideas that challenged traditional hierarchies. By bringing together different perspectives, this work seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how inclusiveness became a defining feature of Kerala's modern identity. Through a careful study of historical developments, movements, and personalities, this book highlights the continuing relevance of Renaissance ideals in contemporary society. It seeks to inspire readers to reflect on the values of equality, justice, and human dignity that continue to shape Kerala's social and cultural landscape.

On the completion of this work, we express our sincere gratitude to our Principal Prof. (Dr.) Sr. Minimol Mathew, for her constant encouragement and support, and to the Bursar, Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Vellachalil, for his guidance and motivation.

We also express our sincere gratitude to the Vice Principals for their valuable guidance and support throughout this endeavour. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed directly and indirectly to its completion.

Above all, we thank God Almighty for guiding us in successfully bringing this work to completion.

Editors

FOREWORD

It is with a profound sense of academic interest and a quest for history that I introduce to you the book *Kerala Renaissance: The Quest for Inclusiveness*, an edited volume carved out from the national seminar titled 'Bridging the Gaps: An Examination of Neglected Aspects in the Kerala Renaissance', organised by the Department of History and Malayalam at Alphonsa College, Pala on 6 January 2026. Writing a foreword to this academic masterpiece adds to my academic satisfaction. This academic endeavour reflects the department's ongoing dedication to critical historical analysis, social relevance, and the development of inclusive perspectives in the study of Kerala's past.

In the social and intellectual history of contemporary India, the Kerala Renaissance occupies a prominent position. It symbolises not merely a period of reform, but a complex process of social awakening characterised by struggles against caste tyranny, gender inequity, religious dogma, and cultural isolation. Although a great deal has been written on the well-known figures and movements of this transformative era, several aspects—voices from the margins, regional differences, everyday acts of resistance, and the intersections of class, caste, and gender—have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. The present book seeks to address this academic gap with clarity and purpose.

By foregrounding underrepresented social actors and overlooked themes, the chapters in this book offer a rich and nuanced re-examination of the Kerala Renaissance. Employing a range of analytical approaches and critical perspectives, the contributors challenge dominant narratives and illuminate alternative histories,

thereby expanding our understanding of inclusivity as both an aspiration and a contested process. The book thus reminds us that the Renaissance was not a singular or homogeneous phenomenon, but a dynamic and multifaceted historical experience shaped by dialogue, dissent, and social negotiation over a long period of time.

The interdisciplinary and inclusive character of this collection is what makes it special and invaluable. The contributions span a wide range of themes, including gendered interventions, subaltern experiences, intellectual traditions, and social and cultural histories, and reform movements beyond the canonical framework. Collectively, they underscore the importance of reinterpreting the Kerala Renaissance not merely as a legacy of reform, but as an ongoing pursuit of social justice, equality, and democratic engagement.

I must express my sincere appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the editors, Dr. Alphons George, Ms. Sunitha Santhan, and Ms. Anitta Mathew, whose intellectual vision and meticulous editorial work have given this book coherence and clarity. Their commitment to inclusivity and academic rigour is evident throughout the book. I also commend the Department of History for fostering a vibrant intellectual environment that brings together students, researchers, and scholars in meaningful engagement with history and its contemporary relevance.

I feel that this book is more than a compilation of seminar papers. It stands as an invaluable testament to the scholarly contribution for students, educators, researchers, and all those interested in the social history of Kerala and the broader debates surrounding inclusivity and social change in contemporary India. By revisiting the Renaissance through neglected perspectives, the volume invites readers to critically reflect on the unfinished nature of social reform.

As the title *Kerala Renaissance: The Quest for Inclusiveness* so

eloquently suggests, this work encourages us to view history as an ongoing dialogue rather than a closed chapter. I am confident that this book will stimulate further research, discussion, and critical reflection, while making a significant contribution to reimagining a more inclusive understanding of Kerala's social and historical development. I wish the Department of History, the editors, and the contributors every success in this important scholarly endeavour. I wish a wide readership for this book.

Prof. Dr. James John

Former Principal, St. Thomas College, Palai

Director, SJCT, Palai

EDITORS PROFILE



Dr. Alphons George is an accomplished scholar and Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Alphonsa College, Pala, Kottayam. She earned her Ph.D. in History from Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, in 2019, supported by the prestigious ICSSR Fellowship, with her research focusing on the Impact of the Vaikom Satyagraha on the socio-political history of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Holding an M.Phil. and M.A. in History from St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, a B.Ed. in Social Science from St. Thomas College of Teacher Education, Pala, and a B.A. in History from Alphonsa College, she has built a strong academic foundation. Her scholarly interests lie in modern Indian history, particularly the role of social reform movements in shaping political change in South India. She has actively contributed to the academic community by presenting papers at national and international seminars and publishing research articles in reputed journals, establishing herself as a dedicated historian committed to exploring the intersections of social reform and political transformation.



Ms. Sunitha Santhan is the Head of the Department of History at Alphonsa College, Pala. She obtained her Master's Degree in History from the University of Calicut. Ms. Sunitha Santhan has presented papers at various national seminars and has published research articles in reputed national journals,

including UGC CARE-listed publications. Her research interests include early modern Kerala history, church architecture, and the historical evolution of Christian communities in Central Travancore and Malabar. Her ongoing Ph.D. research focuses on church art, architecture, and the cultural exchanges that shaped Kerala's historical landscape during the early modern period.



Anitta Mathew is an Assistant Professor (on contract) at Alphonsa College, Pala, with a strong academic background in the humanities. She completed her Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from Alphonsa College, Pala, in 2017. Driven by a deep interest in historical studies, she pursued her Master's degree in History from St. Thomas College, Pala, where she secured a University Rank under Mahatma Gandhi University. She qualified the UGC-NET examination in 2019, demonstrating her academic excellence and eligibility for higher education teaching and research. Following this achievement, she has been actively engaged in the field of teaching, contributing to academic development and student learning. Her areas of interest include historical studies, interdisciplinary approaches to history, and contemporary perspectives in humanities education.

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Kerala Renaissance

The Quest for Inclusiveness

This book explores the Kerala Renaissance as a transformative phase in the history of Kerala, marked by powerful social reform movements that challenged caste oppression, gender inequality, and social exclusion. It highlights the contributions of visionary reformers, intellectuals, and cultural leaders who worked towards building a more just and inclusive society. By examining key developments in education, religion, and social practices, the book provides a clear understanding of how progressive ideas reshaped Kerala's social fabric. It also reflects on the continuing relevance of these movements, offering valuable insights into the foundations of modern Kerala and its commitment to equality and inclusiveness.



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