

**WOMEN'S EDUCATION DEBATES IN
KERALA: FASHIONING
*STHREEDHARMAM***

Ph.D. Thesis submitted

to

MANIPAL UNIVERSITY

by

TEENA ANTONY



Centre for the Study of Culture and Society

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

(Affiliated to Manipal University)

BANGALORE - 560004

March 2013

Bangalore

1 March 2013

Declaration

I, Teena Antony, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled **Women's Education Debates in Kerala: Fashioning *Sthreedharmam*** contains original research work done by me in fulfillment of the requirements for my Ph.D. Degree in Cultural Studies from the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society and that this report has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other institution. This work has not been sent anywhere for publication or presentation purpose.

Teena Antony

Bangalore

1 March 2013



Centre for the Study of Culture and Society
(Affiliated to Manipal University)
'Pramoda', Flat No-302, 70/1, Surveyor Street,
Basavanagudi, Bangalore-560 004

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Dr. Tejaswini Niranjana

(Supervisor)

Dr. Rochelle Pinto

(Member, Ph.D Committee)

Ashish Rajadhyaksha

(Director)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a large number of people I am grateful to for helping me with the writing and completion of this work.

I thank my supervisor, Tejaswini Niranjana, without whom my thesis would not have taken off or taken the direction it did. Thank you for giving me free rein in choosing a topic close to my heart and giving me critical guidance at junctures when I did not know how to proceed.

I need to thank J. Devika who has had a formative influence on my work in various ways: for directing me to the rich archives and for valuable suggestions as to what needed to be done to take forward my interest in the field of women's studies in Kerala.

I am indebted to CSCS faculty, especially Mrinalini Sebastian and Rochelle Pinto, for their critical comments that helped me at the initial stages of writing this thesis. I would not have been able to reach this juncture without the intellectually stimulating atmosphere provided by the various talks, courses, WIPs, conferences and seminars; the new ways of seeing, reading and analysing texts/movies/law/history taught by S.V. Srinivas, Sitharamam Kakarala, and Ashish Rajadhyaksha.

I am grateful to Prof. P. Madhavan, Prof. Venugopala Panikkar, Dr. Stany Thomas, Dr. T.K. Anandi, Mr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Susan John for their help at various stages of this work.

I also need to thank Maheshwari, Pushpa and the other librarians of CSCS. I need to thank in particular Nagaraj, Padma, Nagesh and Bharati for taking care of my various requests on time with perpetual smiles, and Sheetal for reminding me that I must finish on time.

I am grateful to the Librarians and staff of Appan Thampuran Memorial Library, Ulloor Smaraka Grandhashala, Sree Chithira Tirunal Grandhashala, St. Joseph's Monastery library, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Orthodox Theological Seminary and Collins Memorial library.

I am indebted to Philip for making it possible for me to access materials bypassing official red tape.

Shirley aunty and Jose uncle, Santha aunty and Jose uncle, Santha aunty and Ousepachan uncle, Bobby chetan, Joe chetan, Mattachan chetan, Neena chechi and Tom chetan and Daisy aunty - thank you for food, time, advice, help and support.

Jose Uncle and Jyothi, thank you for last minute editing.

I thank

Asha, for being the best mentor ever ...

Dunkin, Sahana, Bitasta, Sushmita, Sushumna, for friendship, laughter, fun, critical guidance...

Ashwin, Ratheesh, Radhika, Rajeev, Sujith, Sashikala, Kanti, Nitya, Elizabeth, Sneha, especially Maithreyi, for reading my chapters at various stages and suggestions...

Meera and Ambika for getting the details of the various contacts and for other help ...

Girija chechi for boosting my flagging self-confidence...

Arya, Roopa, Anila – thank you for helping with the editing and for being there.

This work would have stopped half way through if I had not had non-academic help from the following people –

Chachan and Amma by supporting me in various ways,

Anu and Manu by turning a blind eye to my idiosyncrasies,

Titta by carting around books/materials at the drop of a hat,

Joe, Rajani, Rochas, Anil and Bini by their concern and love,

Chechi and Chitra by making sure I could concentrate on my work,

Lisa Chechi and Makothakat achan by directing me to the wonderful world of English Literature,

Ashok and Jose by being there for me and reminding me constantly that there is more to life than deadlines,

To Daddy for wanting me to make something of my life,

And Amma for pushing me, believing in me and taking pains to ensure that I had help at critical junctures in my life.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction to the field

In 2003, I was teaching in a small town in Kerala. In a casual conversation one of my students mentioned a wedding she had attended in her village. The bride was from a town a few hours from her place. A girl who had come with the bridal party was wearing a short kurta (a kameez which stops slightly above the knee), which became an object of curiosity to the villagers. Extremely shook up by the girl's outfit, my student's brother later confided in her that he had felt like tearing it off her. After my initial shock at what I read as an over the top reaction to a dress worn by young Malayali women, I was intrigued: why is it that a 20 year old man, with secondary school education and access to television and print media, and not part of any political/religious group find the instance of someone wearing a short kurta so offensive? Why does this young man take the perceived transgression by someone unknown to him as a personal affront? Why did my student remember the dress and describe that instead of the wedding per se? Why am I upset over something someone else felt at a time and a location far away from mine?

Introduction to thesis and research problem

It is a generally held view, though much contested in academia that Kerala is far ahead of India in respect of literacy, women's status, general health and life expectancy. When I first decided to do a Ph.D, all I wanted to do was work on women and Kerala. With a broad field like women and Kerala, I needed to narrow it down to a specific set of issues/problems that would be both interesting and challenging. It was by chance that I discovered that there was this huge archive of materials from the early 20th century which has not been analysed until now. I started looking at a variety of

materials from different archives and noticed that there were a large number of articles in women's magazines from this period about women's education. At a time when the state of Kerala¹ is presented in general as having one of the highest literacy rates for women, it is also surprising that not much is known about the history of women's education in the state. Other than some linear accounts of how women's education progressed in Kerala, detailed academic work has not been done on this field from the period 1880 to 1940. These magazines were painting a picture of women and education that was vibrant and different from developmental discourses and celebratory accounts of the Kerala model. A typical example of how women's educational status is represented is given below:

Kerala has built a tradition for female education since the beginning of the 19th century. Western education was introduced as early as the beginning of the 19th century, especially under the patronage of the rulers of Travancore and the initiative of Christian Missionaries. School education in Travancore was compulsory for children in the age group of 5-10 without any gender discrimination. Therefore, Kerala leads the other states of India in women's education and literacy. 85% of women in Kerala are literate, and girls outnumber boys in higher education.²

¹ The state of Kerala was formed in 1956, merging the princely states of Travancore, Cochin and Kasargode taluk of South Canara with Malabar, which was a province of the Presidency of Madras. O. Chandumenon uses the term Kerala in *Indulekha* (1889). One of the textbooks used for the matriculation examination in 1937 has a chapter on "Aikyakeralam" (united Kerala). This was even before the state of Kerala had formed in 1956. Therefore, there was always a sense of being a Malayali among the residents of the area even when politically there was no unified Kerala state. See: K. Vasudevan Mussath, "Aikyakeralam," in *The Malayalam Text Book for Detailed Study - Group A for the SSLC Public Examination and for the Matriculation Examination: 1937* (Calicut: Madras and Andhra Universities, 1936).

² From the site of Kerala State Women's Development Corporation: <http://www.kswdc.org/education.htm> [cited 14 September 2009]

The articles in the magazines from the early 20th century were different in the sense that for the women getting an education was replete with tensions of various kinds – the women writers were having to state that education would not lead them astray, having to prove that it was necessary to learn how to manage a family, hoping that it would provide them with upward social mobility, proving to the Westerners that Indians were ‘modern,’ training for new jobs like teaching, midwifery etc. while maintaining the gender-power relations, etc. – and developmental discourses do not capture the nuances of what it meant for these women to get educated. It was also fascinating for me to see how some of the concerns expressed by the writers of the time were similar to those voiced in 21st century women’s magazines. These writers from the early 20th century were championing the creation of a new space for women and could probably be called the first Malayali feminists.³ This was a part of women’s history that, I felt, provided insight into the current notions of ‘what a woman should be’ in the state.

I decided to base my research project on the debates on women's education in Malayalam-speaking regions between the 1880s and the 1930s. It was during this time, particularly from the 1920s to 1935, that an image of the Malayali woman was constructed indirectly through the debates on education in the magazines. This image was steeped in the middle class notions of the writers and often took on predominantly Nair characteristics. Earlier notions about women were along caste, community and religious lines. Travancore and Cochin were Princely states at the time, while the rest of present day Kerala, particularly Malabar, was under British rule. These two states

³ The term feminism carries with it a wealth of meaning and different schools of thought, both Indian and Western. Here it refers to an awareness of women’s oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family, and conscious action by women and men to change this situation. From: Kamala Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan. *Some Questions on Feminism and Its Relevance in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986.

had a high level of female literacy compared to other parts of India.⁴ The native governments had a stake in this field. The Travancore and the Cochin governments were offering incentives in the form of abolishing fees for girls at primary school levels (Jeffrey, 1987).⁵ There are detailed administrative reports on the state of education (in school and college) by the Department of Education in Travancore and Cochin which emphasize the governments' interest in the field. There was also interest among the people of the region as is evident from the large number of articles on education in the magazines/journals of the period,⁶ the increase in the number of private management schools⁷ and the steadily increasing number of literate women in the Malayalam-speaking regions. Other than these factors there was a personal reason why I chose the above locations for my research - I grew up and obtained my education in Kochi⁸ and Thiruvananthapuram.⁹ This work has been for me a way of discovering the past; of uncovering the difficulties faced by women who wanted to get educated a century ago and of exploring what went into the making of the education system that I was a part of.

⁴ The Census report for 1951 placed women's literacy rate at 31.65% in Kerala. Only Delhi recorded a higher rate. Mysore which was a princely state had a women's literacy level of 9.16%.

⁵ The two governments worked at different paces in offering incentives to lower castes, girls and Muslims. Travancore abolished fees for girls in primary schools in 1896 and Cochin in 1909.

⁶ I have collected around 85 articles that are specifically on education and other articles that mention education from between 1891 to 1960.

⁷ The number of schools under private management in Travancore was 2643 in 1938 as opposed to 2575 in 1927; the number of schools under private management in Cochin was 893 in 1938 as opposed to 879 in 1937. For details see: C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, "Travancore Administration Report: 1113 M.E. 1937-1938 A.D. Eighty Second Annual Report," (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1939), "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1113 M.E," (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1939), M.E. Watts, "Travancore Administration Report: 1102 M.E. 1926-1927 A.D," (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1928).

⁸ Cochin is spelled so now.

⁹ The capital city of Travancore is called so now. Earlier it was called Trivandrum.

In many of the popular women's magazines the debates during the turn of the century had been specifically on the question of whether or not women should be given education. The thesis looks at a particular shift in the debates that happened in the 1910s and carried through to the 1930s. **The debate now becomes one about what kind of education women should be given.** The project proposes to account for some of the questions raised by my preliminary reading of the sources [some of the women's magazines, government records and a few fictional materials from 1880 to 1940] and to map the changes in the meaning of concepts like *sthreedharmam* [roughly translated as woman's duties], *parishkaaram* [roughly translated as reform] and *sthreeswaathandryam* [roughly translated as women's independence]. My interest would be in understanding the role played by the education debates in the way in which these concepts were formulated and how these discussions then constructed the image of a Malayali woman that was different from earlier notions of the Malayali woman. I specifically show how the notion of the Malayali woman is often conflated with the image of the Nair woman in the magazines and even in the government writings. I demonstrate how writers from other communities question this notion in subtle ways consciously or unconsciously.

The writings on women's education were at their height during 1920 to 1935 and decrease after this period. Interest in women's education waned and the model of education put forward after 1940s was one that suited the emerging nation's needs and aspirations. In terms of curriculum women and men received the same kind of schooling after most of the schools in India started to be converted to Basic schools around 1951-52 (Nair, 1989). In this drive the special status that women's education had in Travancore-Cochin was done away with. One of the reasons for this dwindling interest could have been that women's magazines (except for a couple of magazines)

stopped being published around 1940 as a result of a shortage of newsprint (*History of Press in Kerala*, 2002), and in the general magazines the concerns were towards laying the foundations for an education that would foster nationalist sentiments and bring up a generation that would think of themselves as Indians as opposed to Keralite/Travancorite/Kochinite etc.

Methodology and hypothesis

This work is an exploratory research study and aims to provide insights into the cultural history of women from Kerala by looking at the field of women's education in Kerala before the 1940s. It is an exploratory study since there are very few academic works specifically on the period before the 1940s in the field of women's education. The overarching methodology draws from the fields of women's studies, history and literary studies. Textual analysis of historical documents (magazines, census materials, administrative reports, education codes) and literary materials (fictional and non-fictional) has been the main method by which this has been done.

Since this work is an exploratory study it starts off with a working hypothesis: I would like to propose that the concept of *sthreedharmam* was deployed to construct an image of the modern Malayali woman in the educational debates and in the process *sthreedharmam* itself gets reconstituted. The writings and discussions on and around women's education then become one of defining *sthreedharmam*.

Style guide

I need to make some clarifications as to the spellings and other stylistic devices I have used in this thesis since both of these were constantly problematic. I use the '[]' bracket when I need to mention something tangential to what is being said, especially

when the tangent is necessary to an argument that is yet to be made and so cannot be relegated to a footnote. I have also put the source in the footnote when the author is not known and the title of the text is too long to be included in the main text. Spellings of the writers and the magazines were sometimes difficult to pin down since in various places they would be spelt differently.

I have tried to maintain the same spellings for words/names throughout. But sometimes in the quotations the writer(s) would use a different spelling and the difference is maintained. For example, the word Diwan is usually spelled with an ‘i’ but reverts to an ‘e’ when the text uses the ‘e’. Another example is the spelling of ‘Namboothiri’ where the ‘b’ is followed by ‘ooth’ except when referring to the magazine *The Unninambudiri*.

Another aspect of this thesis is that I have had to explain in the footnotes and sometimes in the main text the various places which would be well-known to Keralites but would be unfamiliar to people from outside Kerala. Some of the well known social, religious and political movements have also been explained which might appear redundant to Keralites, but had to be included nevertheless because this work is not being submitted in a University within Kerala.

Chapters

In the next sections of this chapter I introduce the archives and the materials I have used in this thesis. I also engage with critical and scholarly work already done in the field of women’s history and education in Kerala and show how my work differs from them. The second chapter titled “Malayalam magazines and the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam*” explores the concept *sthreedharmam* and shows how the concept is re-fashioned through the debates on education in the women’s magazines.

Sthreedharmam is re-fashioned because it was not a new concept but a fashioning of something that was already in place. I use the term education to mean not just formal education but also a wide range of practices that come under the term including curriculum, models put up for consumption in the form of novels, stories and other fictional and non-fictional materials, teachers and even customs and practices in daily life that work towards educating the woman. The social domain in the early 20th century Kerala was divided into the public and the domestic (Devika, 2008). The public sphere was where the political, economic and intellectual fields were located. Domestic realm was the aspect of social life which was seen as ‘naturally ordained’ for women as opposed to the public domain. Located within the home, women’s magazines, fictional materials, government documents, etc. projected this space as in need of an entity, that could manage it, and had capacities which were specifically ‘womanly’. *Sthreedharmam* encompasses these womanly capacities. In the early 20th century, *sthreedharmam* includes (formal) education in its ambit, which was not an aspect of earlier notions of it. I explore the various meanings and nuances the term acquires during this period. *Sthreedharmam* is related to *sthreethwam*, the essence of being a woman. In the 20th century *sthreedharmam* included nurturing *sthreethwam* within oneself. I also show how both *sthreedharmam* and *sthreethwam* are connected to the concept of *sthreeswaathandryam* and how the early writers, particularly the proto-feminists have to show that *sthreeswaathandryam* and education will not lead women astray and make them forget their *sthreedharmam*. In the second section of the chapter I show how the discussions happening in Kerala parallel similar discussions in other parts of India, but are also different from them.

The next chapter titled “Ideas and practices in formal education” looks at formal structures of education. The first section of the chapter sets out the historical

trajectory of women's education while simultaneously doing a selective analysis of the curriculum that was put in place for women's education.¹⁰ In the second section of the chapter I analyse four textbooks that were used in high schools in Kerala to show how *sthreethwam* and *sthreedharmam* were fashioned through formal education. I try to see if education led to individuation¹¹ of the Malayali woman or placed her firmly in the space of the domestic. I also show there were constant tensions within the official discourse as to the kind of education that women needed – (professional and domestic) useful skills or (art and cultural) accomplishments and how this complicates the individuation process of the woman.

The fourth chapter, “Malayali women: Imagined and real” tries to figure out if there is a homogenous figure of the Malayali woman in the late 19th century and early 20th century Malayali imagination. It does this through an analysis of fictional material from the period - *Indulekha*, *Sukumari*, *Apbhande Makal* and *Parangodiparinayam*; “Oru Yadhaartha Barya” and “Thalachorillatha Sthreekal;” and *Pennarashunadu*. These texts are used as writings that imagine the ideal world and engage with their present in order to do so. They then justify and prescribe these ideal worlds for the reader to conform to. These texts are read as archival materials that engage with the larger universe of meaning that they occupy and interact with. The chapter delineates how tradition¹² and modernity¹³ are seen as important aspects in the development of

¹⁰ I was not able to get a comprehensive list of textbooks used in Malayalam-speaking regions. Therefore this section is a study of whatever I was able to salvage from the archives. Moreover a complete study of the curriculum/syllabus would have to be a project in itself.

¹¹ Individuation is used in the sense of the development of the individual from a social group and the movement of the self of the individual away from the dictates of the community/group. From: Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹² Tradition is defined as the handing down of knowledge or the passing on of a doctrine or technique. Tradition changes in the process of handing down though it is commonly perceived to be frozen and static. In this thesis it is used to refer to customs and practices peculiar to Malayalis that existed right

the self of the ideal (fictional) woman. The chapter shows how conjugality and the domestic are reinforced as the state and the space that women should aspire to in early 20th century even while advocating education as a necessary quality for women. The second section of the chapter, which is treated as an extended endnote, analyses the autobiographies of two women, a writer B. Kalyani Amma and a politician K. R. Gowriamma. This is included as a counter point to the fictional rendering of women in the first section. This section is not a detailed analysis of their lives but is used to trace the development of the self and formal educational experiences of ‘real’ women from the period.

In the final chapter titled “In Conclusion” I review issues of the magazine *Vanitha* from the period 2007-2008 to show how some of the ideas that get entrenched about women in the 20th century are played out in a popular magazine almost a century later. I do not do a thorough analysis rather indicate to some of the commonalities and differences between the magazines from the two periods. I refer to the Kerala Development Report for 2008 to show how some of the ideas about women are played out in the current social scenario. In the appendix, I have included a brief history of education in Kerala before the advent of the missionaries; a summary of a letter written

before the advent of modern education. For details see: Romila Thapar, "Tradition," in *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity - A Twentieth Century Anthology*, ed. Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998).

¹³ Modernity in the context of Malayalam-speaking regions was different from the Western variant. Literary critics use the term *navodhanam* to refer to Malayali modernity, which was a movement in literature of stepping away from Sanskrit texts to new forms like the novel and the short story and the revival of older literary forms like the drama. Social, cultural and political critics see this Malayali modernity as an amalgamation of different strands of thoughts like Humanism, Rationalism, Liberalism, Marxism, monotheism, etc. In the thesis the term is used in the latter sense of the term, but also as the changes that accrued with contact with the British and modern education. For details see: P. Govinda Pillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Oru Marxist Veekshanam - Onnam Sanchika* (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2004).

to the Madras government by the Maharaja of Travancore Rama Varma, “Observations on Education;” and a list of photographs pertaining to the thesis.

The archives

The most difficult and interesting aspect of beginning to write this thesis had been in collecting the materials. I have used a variety of materials ranging from women’s magazines, journals, census reports, administrative reports, governments files, education reports, Diocesan Gazettes, a few biographies, textbooks, essays, novels, short stories and a play from before 1940. Most libraries had a catalogue which showed books from before the 1940s, but often when I started looking for them, they would be missing or in shreds. It was quite by chance that I was able to get a few textbooks and novels from the period. All the archives and libraries had discarded or not maintained texts by non-canonical writers. I had planned on including newspapers in my list, but had to give up the plan because without knowing specific dates it became difficult to find relevant articles from the period 1880-1940. Even with the magazines, I had access to only those published from 1891, and have had to rely on other writings about the period to get information on magazines from before this period.

The archives I visited could be roughly divided into four: (a) the old libraries that had books, and/or newspapers and magazines from the early 20th century - Ulloor Smaraka Grandhashala, Sree Chithira Tirunal Grandhashala and State Central Library in Thiruvananthapuram: St. Joseph’s Monastery library, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Orthodox Theological Seminary and Collins Library of Church Missionary Society College in Kottayam: archives of *Satyadeepam* and *Deshabhimani* in Ernakulam: Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Appan Thampuran Memorial Library in

Thrissur: Deshaposhini Vayanashala and personal collections of Dr. T.K. Anandi in Kozhikode;¹⁴ (b) the government archives that had census reports, administrative reports, government files, education reports and a few books - the State Archives, the Central Archives and Kerala Legislature library in Thiruvananthapuram: Regional Archives in Ernakulam: Regional Archives in Kozhikode; (c) the university/college libraries that had research thesis/works by other scholars on education and history - University Library of Kerala University in Thiruvananthapuram: Malayalam Department library of Sree Kerala Varma College in Thrissur: C.H. Mohammed Koya Library and History Department library of Calicut University; (d) Other libraries - Sakhi Women's Resource Centre and Centre for Developmental Studies (CDS) library in Thiruvananthapuram.

The magazines

The list of magazines used in this thesis is given below. Additional details on publication are given when available in brackets. *Lakshmibai*,¹⁵ *Sharada* (It was the first women's magazine to be published by women)¹⁶ and *Mahila* (It started in 1921 and went on to run for twenty years without any serious breaks – the longest that a

¹⁴ Calicut is called Kozhikode now.

¹⁵ A women's magazine which started to be published from Thrissur (a district in central Kerala north of Kochi) in 1905 and with breaks was published till 1940. For details see: C.G. Herbert, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1106 M.E," (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1932).

¹⁶ Edited by B. Kalyani Amma, T.C. Kalyani Amma and T. Ammukutty Amma, this magazine started in 1904-5 from Tripunithura (A town in Ernakulam district) and went on till 1908. It started again in 1915 and was published till 1924. For details see: G. Priyadarsanan, *Masikapatanangal* (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 1974), K. Saradmoni, *Sthree, Sthree Vadam, Sthree Vimochanam* (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1999b), "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D.," (Trivandrum: Department of Statistics, 1924).

women's magazine had been published in the early part of 20th century)¹⁷ are the well-preserved magazines in the archives. All the (available) volumes of *Sharada*, *Mahila* and *Lakshmbai* were referred to for this thesis. Articles from the other magazines were used depending on availability.

Vanitha Kusumam (It had one of the highest circulation figures),¹⁸ *Shrimathi*,¹⁹ *Sumangala* (The only family magazine to be published in Malayalam),²⁰ *Vanitharathnam* (details not available), *Bhashasharada*,²¹ *Mahilamandiram*²² and *Maryrani* (details not available) are the other women's magazines of the time used in this thesis. Other than these a few general magazines like *Bashaposhini*,²³ *Vidyavinodhini* (This was the second literary magazine to be published in

¹⁷ Edited by B. Bhageerathamma, this magazine started from Chengannur (a town in Alappuzha district, south of Kochi). For details see: Priyadarsanan, *Masikapatanangal*, "The Statistics of Travancore: 21st Issue: 1115 M.E.: 1939-1940 A.D." (Trivandrum: Department of Statistics, 1941).

¹⁸ Edited by V.C. John, this magazine started in 1927. For details see: Rita M. Antony, "Bhaasha Sahithyapurogathikku Bhashaposhini Masika Vahicha Panku Kollavarasham 1114vare - Oru Padanam" (University of Calicut, 2005), Priyadarsanan, *Masikapatanangal*, Nalini Satish, "Significant Contributions of the Women Writers of Kerala to the Literature of Fiction of Malayalam (Short Story and Novel) Upto 1980 - A Study" (University of Calicut, 1990), "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105 M.E. 1929-1930 A.D." (Trivandrum: Department of Statistics, 1931).

¹⁹ This magazine was edited by Anna Chandy. For details see: "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105 M.E. 1929-1930 A.D."

²⁰ It started in 1916 from Kayamkulam (a town in Alappuzha district, south of Kochi) and was edited by P.K. Joseph. For details see: Priyadarsanan, *Masikapatanangal*, "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D."

²¹ This magazine started in 1915 from Punalur (A town north of Thiruvananthapuram) and was published by R. Vellupilla. It went on till 1919. For details see: Priyadarsanan, *Masikapatanangal*.

²² This magazine was edited by G. Parukutti Amma. For details see: "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105 M.E. 1929-1930 A.D."

²³ Started by Kandathil Varghese Mappillai in 1892, and later edited by P.K. Kocheepan Tharakan, *Bashaposhini* is published to date. For details see: "The Statistics of Travancore: 21st Issue: 1115 M.E.: 1939-1940 A.D.", "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D."

Malayalam),²⁴ *Sahityachandrika* (details not available), *The Unninambudiri* (It dealt with matters related to the Namboothiri community),²⁵ *Gurunathan*,²⁶ *Paurasthyadoothan* (details not available), *Mangalodhayam*,²⁷ *Malayalamasika*,²⁸ *Mathrubhumi*,²⁹ *Sadhguru*,³⁰ *Rajarshi*,³¹ *M.N. Nair Masika*³² and *Vidyalokham* (details not available) have also been used minimally.

The writers

The medium of magazines being of an ephemeral nature not much is known about the writers. Well-known poets, playwrights and educationists of the times used to write in the magazines including the women's magazines. Many of the male contributors to the magazines are known even today, but not the women contributors.

²⁴ This magazine was started in 1889. For details see: Antony, "Bhaasha Sahityapurogathikku Bhashaposhini Masika Vahicha Panku Kollavarasham 1114vare - Oru Padanam".

²⁵ It was published from Thrissur. For details see: Herbert, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1106 M.E."

²⁶ This magazine was edited by B. Shiva Rama Pillai and was published from Parur (A town in Ernakulam district) and stopped publication in 1940. For details see: "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D."

²⁷ This magazine, published from Thrissur, dealt with literary and social matters. It was started in 1907 and went on till 1972. For details see: Herbert, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1106 M.E."

²⁸ This magazine began to be published in 1929 by the Manorama Samajam of Kottakkal. From: J. Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-Forming in Twentieth Century Kerala* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2007a).

²⁹ This weekly was started in 1932 from Kozhikode and is published to date. From: <http://mathrubhumi.info/static/about/about.htm> [cited 07 September 2009].

³⁰ This literary magazine was published from Irinjalakuda (A town in Thrissur district). For details see: P. Narayana Menon, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1098 M.E," (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1923).

³¹ A literary magazine published from Thrissur. For details see: "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1120 M.E," (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1946).

³² This magazine was edited by M.N. Damodaran Nair and published from Ernakulam. For details see: "The Statistics of Travancore: 21st Issue: 1115 M.E.: 1939-1940 A.D."

K. Lakshmi Amma, a contributor, is said to be one of the earliest women officers in the Travancore Education department (Devika, 2005c).³³ She is also said to have been associated with Nair reformism. K. Chinnamma (1882-1930) was an Assistant Inspectress with the Travancore Education department. She began the Shree Mulam Shashtyabhdapoorthy Smaraka Hindu Mahila Mandiram at Trivandrum, an institution for educating and training poor girls. This institution used to publish the magazine *Mahilamandiram*. Edattatta Rugmini Amma, used to write under her married name Mrs. Kannan Menon, and was the first woman to be educated in a convent in North Malabar. Her husband was a prominent figure in Nair reformism. K. Chinnamallu Amma (d.1958) was a teacher and a social worker. She had the unique experience of appearing for a public examination in which her book was included in the syllabus. B. Anandavalliamma was a Professor of English and later, Principal of the Women's College in Thiruvananthapuram (Saradmoni, 1999). R. Eshwarapilla was a teacher, school inspector, thinker and writer (Saradmoni, 1999). B. Bhageerathiamma (1890-1938), the editor of *Mahila* was known to be a powerful public speaker and a vocal advocate of an active, informed and disciplined domestic role for women. She was one of the women considered for membership in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha³⁴ in 1927. B. Kalyani Amma was a writer and a teacher. Her work *Vyazhavattasmaranakal* (1916) is a well known biography on her husband Swadeshabimani Ramakrishan Pillai.

The women's magazines dealt with topics like – women-related (women's education, home management, women's dependency, chastity, women and reform in

³³ All the biographical details are taken from J. Devika's book, *Her-Self: Early Writings of Malayalee Women on Gender 1898-1938* (2005) unless mentioned otherwise.

³⁴ This was the first ever legislative council in Travancore. The Maharaja constituted it in 1904. It was not a law making body, but provided people participation in the administration. In the beginning membership was limited to landlords and merchants. From: <http://keralaassembly.org/history/popular.html> [cited 17 January 2012].

rituals/customs, childcare, conjugality, famous women, foreign women), literature (mythology and puranas, writers, poems, novels, short stories, criticism), science & health (body, science, agriculture, health, recipes, Ayurveda, medicine), art & history (art, artists, history, historical figures, music), general (lifestyle, astrology, *parishkaaram*, national news, theology, general knowledge, ethics, economics, behaviour, spirituality). The functions of these magazines were to educate women, make them capable of judgement and through these achieve progress in their status (Satish, 1990). These writings bring to light how reason, rhetoric, history, mythology, irony and humour was used in reform movements claiming to liberate women. Except for a few magazines like *The Unninambudiri*, *M.N. Nair Masika*, *Maryrani* and *The Muslim Vanita*, which were for specific communities/castes, the other magazines were purportedly for the general reader. However, since many of the writers were from the Nair caste, often the articles were written explicitly for women belonging to this caste. So the writers would speak about the need for changes in the condition of the Nair woman as opposed to the Christian woman, Bengali women and so on, but the overall vision of the magazines was for the generic Malayali woman. It was assumed that there was a collective of 'Women' with common interests, inclinations, duties, and rights.

I had done around 12 interviews with women and men who did their formal education in Kerala before the 1940s. I have included their comments and inputs in the footnotes when they concur with or drastically differ from the main text of the thesis. These women were teachers, doctors and housewives from different parts of Kerala. Their sense of Kerala and education was different from that of the writers or the government agents. Since the interviews were in the nature of a preliminary survey and not done in depth they have not been included in the main text of this thesis.

Through the literature

Since this thesis overlaps the fields of history, women's studies, literature and education, literature from these different fields need to be mentioned here.

The works on education per se usually attribute the high levels of literacy among women in Kerala to a combination of factors – work done by the missionaries in the 19th century, the interest on the part of the government and the system of matriliney among a large majority of Malayalis (Gladston, 2006; Saradamoni, 1999). Factors like introduction of co-educational system, free boarding, introduction of vocational education, appointment of lady teachers in girls' schools, establishment of training institutions for teachers, establishment of press, publication of literature, opening of libraries and reading rooms, development of health care sector and development of various industries are areas that had also aided women's education (Gladston, 2006) but not been researched in detail. Hepsi Gladston's work is specifically on the history and development of education of women in Kerala from 1819 to 1947 (Gladston, 2006). This work pays more importance to the work by the various missionary groups and passes over the other factors that aided the development of education. It does not delve into the reasons for or provide the cultural aspects of what it meant for women to be educated or the nuances of the nature of education provided by the missionaries.

The role played by the governments of Travancore and Cochin in the progress of literacy is emphasised by scholars who have worked specifically on the field of education (Nair, 1989, Jeffrey, 1992). The various acts that were passed and the measures taken by the governments are mentioned to support this line of argument. Jeffrey's work on education lauds the crucial role played by women in making Kerala a highly literate state. It also takes in to account the caste differences that were an

important aspect of life in Kerala and how these influenced the schooling system and literacy rates. A differing take on this position asserts that the state was only one of the players in the transformation of Kerala into a highly literate state in India. The efforts of foreign missionaries – London Missionary Society (LMS) consisting of the Evangelicals, Anglicans and Dissenters, and the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission – the various indigenous churches like the Syrian Christian Enterprise together with the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP)³⁵ and Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sanghom (SJPS)³⁶ were equally important in the educational upliftment of the depressed classes in the 19th and 20th centuries (Mathew, 1999). Another comprehensive and nuanced work on the socio-economic conditions in educational development in Kerala places the onus for the same on the commercialisation of the economy and the resultant demand for basic literary skills, changes in the social structure and the rise of elites from castes/communities who then lay claim to the bureaucratic positions linked to education, and the settlement pattern in Kerala that made access to schools easy for a large section of the population (Tharakan, 1984b). While these works provide a comprehensive history of the high literacy rates and educational accomplishments of Malayalis, they do not provide a history of the ideas and practices inherent in the educational system in the early 20th century and how it affected women.

J. Devika's work on 20th century Kerala provides the frame for much of my work (Devika, 2007a; Devika, April 2002; Devika, 2007b; Devika, 2005c). Her exhaustive work on the reform period in Kerala examines discourses around education,

³⁵ SNDP was founded by Padmanabhan Palpu (1863-1950) for the emancipation of the Ezhava caste in 1903. The first attempt of the organization was to remove the obstacles to the admission of Ezhavas to government jobs and government-aided schools.

³⁶ SJPS was established by Ayyankali (1863-1941) in 1907 to work towards the upliftment of the Pulaya community. Traditionally Pulayas formed the dominant slave caste in Travancore.

reformism, the construction of ‘womanliness’ in the works of early 20th century writers of fiction, of tracts and magazines, and legislative assembly proceedings. She postulates that in this period individualism was bound to a certain structuring of society based on gender difference. Thus, the individual though seen as free was already implicated in social domains – the public and the domestic – which required capacities specific to each sex. Since this work provides an overarching theory for the entire social reform period, it is also not able to provide the contradictions and micro picture within the macro frame. My work uses her theory of gender difference as being the basic principle of structuring society and tries to see how this complicates and fits the discussions on education. While Devika’s work has portrayed the role of education in the social reform movement and sees it as shaping new hierarchies (Devika, 2007b), my work takes a different route or standpoint on women’s education. My focus has been on the discussions on *sthreedharmam* and how this concept and the ideology that surrounds it shape the discourse on education within the magazines, fictional materials and government policies. The public/domestic divide that she advances for the social sphere in Kerala has been more useful than the public/private dichotomy advanced by Partha Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 1993; Chatterjee, 1989b) because Devika’s formulation sees gender as preceding the public/domestic divide which helps to explain the trajectories taken by women’s education in Kerala (explained in chapter 3). I also show in the following chapters how I have taken some of her other formulations, for example the one on *sthreeswaathandryam*, and extend the argument.

Critics and social scientists read most of the novels I have used in this thesis, particularly *Indulekha*, as taking a critical stand on the matrilineal system, joint family system, the power of the male head of the family, the position enjoyed by Namboothiris in society, the nature of Nair-Namboothiri marriages and the influence

of education on the development of the self (Devika, 1999; Gopalakrishnan, 1982; Menon, 2004; Pillai, 1998). *Parangodiparinayam* has mostly been seen as a satire on *Indulekha* and other early novels (Irumbayam, 1985), though Devika reads this novel as marking an important moment in the social sphere: the registering of a breakdown of the sense of self in the established order, and a perception of this lack (Devika, 2007a). *Sukumari* has been discussed as a lower-caste novel which traces the development of the self and the community by critics (Menon, 2004). *Apbhande Makal* is considered the next greatest social novel³⁷ after *Indulekha* that problematizes the position of Namboothiri women within the illam (Namboothiri joint family household headed by the oldest male relative) by Malayalam critics (Pillai, 1998; Pillai, 2005). My work acknowledges these frames as being useful but does a different reading of the characters and the unfolding of the plot by positioning gender as the main focus of my arguments for the different characters/works.

Some of the materials I have used are completely new and therefore have not been reviewed by the critics and social scientists working on Kerala history, culture and literature. The four textbooks I have analysed in the third chapter, the two short stories by women in the fourth chapter, the autobiography by Gowriyamma are texts which I bring to the field of women's studies. Even the autobiography of B. Kalyani Amma though known among critics has been largely ignored by the canon. The magazines have been used in some works, particularly by J. Devika, K. Saradamoni and Toshie Awaya (Awaya, 2003; Devika, 2007b; Saradamoni, 1999b). Devika's work is not a specific analysis of the magazines, but fit her larger project on the social

³⁷ In literary criticism a social novel is a work of fiction that dramatizes a prevailing social problem such as gender, class, race, etc. through the characters. The social novel emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on shaping characters and determining events; often it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform. From: M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009).

reform period. Saradmoni's work focuses on the proto-feminist leanings of the writers in the period and Awaya's work is confined to just three of the magazines – *Mahila*, *Sharada* and *Lakshmibai*. These limit the range and nuances of the arguments made by many of the early women magazine writers and also do not actually look at the nature and status of education in women's lives in the early 20th century.

CHAPTER 2: Malayalam magazines and the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam*

The early 19th century was the period of reform all over India. There were debates around sati, raising the age of consent, widow remarriage and women's education in the public sphere.³⁸ Education in the colonial period focused on basic learning, refinement of domestic skills, moral education, and study of religious texts. Education was also the means of setting the middle classes apart from the lower castes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, various castes and communities were in the process of self-transformation as a result of social and political movements taking place throughout Malayalam-speaking regions³⁹ and in India. One of the urgent and compelling issues being debated in print media and the social sphere was that of the role of the woman in the changing milieu. Different communities had different agendas for their women. A cursory look at some of the novels and magazines of the 19th and early 20th centuries reveals that education – modern English or Sanskrit – was seen as a necessary quality for women by then. Education was also being used as a tool for the construction of the new woman. This was done in many ways: by providing certain kinds of role models through texts – fictional and non-fictional; by role models provided by older women in the form of teachers and wardens; by putting in place customs and rules for conduct, behaviour and dressing; by policy decisions that made certain options (un)available to women in terms of subjects/trades/professions etc. Moreover, by the early 20th century, syllabus throughout Kerala (Travancore, Cochin and Malabar) had been brought under the purview of the respective government

³⁸ Here the term is used in the loose sense of public spaces, as opposed to private spaces like the family.

³⁹ I use the term Malayalam-speaking regions in the first and second chapters whenever I indicate the differences between the regions. The differences were important for the government documents. It is not so evident in the other kinds of literary materials.

educational authorities through various grants and rules. Since Travancore and Cochin generally followed the same syllabus that was being prescribed by the Madras Education Department, there were not major differences in the formal educational structures in these places.

Education involves policy, administration and dissemination of knowledge and culture. Literacy is the ability to read and write, as distinct from education. Schooling is the act of going to school, and may provide literacy and education. High rates of literacy need not translate automatically into education. In the case of Kerala, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the percentage of school-going children, both male and female went up. The increase in literacy was the result of the large number of educational institutions that had come up during the same period. The Christian missionaries started schools in the early part of the 19th century. By the second half of the century there were a good number of schools for girls run by the missionaries and the government in both Travancore and Cochin.⁴⁰ There was also an increase in the number of printing presses and publication of literary works – novels, magazines, newspapers, etc. which contributed to the increase and sustenance of literacy levels. These works also contributed towards the education of the population by dissemination of knowledge and culture. Many of the literary works were prescribed as textbooks/reading materials in the schools from the period. Thus, literacy and education were closely connected to formal structures of schooling in Kerala. Acculturation of the Malayali woman started with modern schooling and the advent of

⁴⁰ The actual female literacy rates for Travancore and Cochin were 0.5% and 0.4% respectively of the total female population according to the 1875 Census. This was high compared to 0.2% female literates in Madras Presidency. Malabar had the third highest female literacy rates among the districts of Madras Presidency. For details see: D. Duncan, "Proceedings of the Director of Public Instruction: State and Progress of Education in the Malabar District for 1895-96," (Madras: Government Press, 1897).

printing as both these brought together women from various class/caste/religious backgrounds which were not possible in an earlier century.

In this chapter I show how the concept of *sthreedharmam* (woman's duty) is deployed by the magazine writers in imagining a new and modern Malayali woman. I demonstrate the relation between *sthreedharmam* and education in the debates and show that the caste/religion/class of the writers is important in the kind of positions they take regarding *sthreedharmam*. In 20th century Kerala the term *sthreedharmam* came to mean a variety of things as I will prove in the subsequent sections.

Scholarship on women's magazines in India focuses on the opportunities they provided for women writers and readers: the magazines tried to create a social, moral and cultural space for women. In her work on women's journals in Hindi, Francesca Orsini periodizes them into two phases: the first from 1890s to World War I, and the second from 1920s to 1940s. In the first period the focus was on reforming women into more appropriate forms of domesticity. The second period, she calls, a "radical-critical phase" (Orsini, 1999: 137). This periodization can be extended to Malayalam magazines too. The first section of this chapter tries to lay out how the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam* happened through the medium of magazines in the two periods. Re-fashioning happens in the sense that the category called Woman did exist in the period before the 1880s. However with the advent of printing, access to modern education, changes in the caste structures, changes in ideology about the space of the domestic, etc. the category called Woman and her duties changes. This re-fashioning is consciously done by the different agents – writers, government agents, women themselves. The second section compares and contrasts the women's issues discussed in magazines from Kerala and other parts of India.

Section I

Printing took off in Malayalam-speaking regions in the second half of the 19th century, around the same time that the literacy rates increased.

Circulation figures for select magazines (no. of copies) with the year in brackets⁴¹

Name of magazine	1900-20	1921-30	1931-40	1941-50
<i>Bashaposhini</i>	700 (1906)	1850 (1923)	900 (1940)	
<i>Gurunathan</i>		800 (1930)	350 (1940)	
<i>Lakshmibai</i>	1500 (1917)	600 (1923)	600 (1931)	
<i>M. N. Nair Masika</i>			800 (1940)	
<i>Mahila</i>		500 (1930)	400 (1940)	
<i>Mahilamandiram</i>		1400 (1930)		
<i>Mangalodhayam</i>	650 (1917)	500 (1923)	600 (1931)	500 (1945)
<i>Paurasthyadoothan</i>			300 (1931)	
<i>Rajarshi</i>				500 (1945)
<i>Sadhguru</i>		375 (1923)	300 (1931)	
<i>Sharada</i>		750 (1923)		
<i>Shrimathi</i>		700 (1930)		
<i>The Unninambudiri</i>			700 (1931)	
<i>Vanitha Kusumam</i>		2000 (1930)		

There were 30 periodicals being published in Kerala before the turn of the century.⁴² From the beginning the popular magazines of the time, particularly the

⁴¹ Compiled from: J.W. Bhore, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1092 M.E." (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1917), Menon, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1098 M.E.", "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1115 M.E." (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1941), "The Statistics of Travancore: 21st Issue: 1115 M.E.: 1939-1940 A.D.", "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D.", "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105 M.E. 1929-1930 A.D."

women's magazines, were interested in the education of Malayali women. The debates on whether women need education started in the 19th century. Until the 1920s the arguments were more on the need for women's education. There were only 2-4 women's magazines being published specifically for women during this period. After the 1920s to the 1940s the arguments move towards the kind of education women need and the number of women's magazines increase to 12 or more at this time. The general and women's magazines were for a pan-Kerala audience, even if they were published from different regions. This did not mean that the writers themselves were always writing for a pan Kerala readership. Some writers do specifically address people from Travancore, Cochin, or Malabar depending on where the magazine was published from. For instance, in the article by Tharavath Ammalu Amma⁴³ in *Vanitha Kusumam*, she valorises the educational efforts by the ruling family in Cochin and the article is meant for people from the region. The rest of the article is about the need for improving the curriculum in the state especially for woman (Amma, 1927). Another article by Konniyoor K. Meenakshi Amma is about Nair women and home:

In home management, women should concentrate on helping men rebuild the community, the economic foundations of which have fallen to pathetic depths. Some allege that Nair women are lacking in frugality and order. And this is more or less true. We must speedily remedy this defect. It can hardly be concealed that now Nair women who have gained a modicum of sophistication revile housework as beneath their dignity. Therefore in most

⁴² The first Malayalam journal *Vijnana Nikshepam* was published from Kottayam (A town south of Kochi) by the Church Missionary Society in 1840. However, most records place *Rajya Samacharam* brought out by Hermen Gundert from Tellicherry (A town in north Malabar known as Thalassery nowadays) in 1847 as the first Malayalam journal. The first women's journal *Keraliya Suguna Bodhini* was published from Thiruvananthapuram in 1884.

⁴³ She was a noted Sanskrit scholar and dramatist.

Nair homes which are fairly prosperous, cooks are indispensable (Devika, 2005c: 90).⁴⁴

Though the magazines did state in their editorials that they were for all women, the articles were often (not always) addressed to a Hindu reader and most often to a Nair woman. But the magazines were read not just by Nair woman. The *Mahila* was subscribed in government girls' schools in Travancore as a result of a government order from 1924. Therefore it is safe to assume that the *Mahila* at least was read by a wider set of people. Most of the writers for *Sharada*, *Lakshmibai*, *Mahilamandiram*, *M.N. Nair Masika* and *Mahila* were upper and middle caste⁴⁵ Hindus. However other magazines like *Vanitha Kusumam*, *Bashaposhini*, *Sadhguru*, *Gurunathan*, *Maryrani*, *Mathrubhumi*, etc. had Christian writers too.⁴⁶ *Vanitha Kusumam* was the only women's magazine with pictures/photographs in every issue. It was an editorial policy to include pictures, which were of contributors, famous people, events like the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) meetings and even dances from London. This magazine was also radical in its views when compared to magazines that had exclusively Hindu writers. Social scientists like J. Devika and Toshie Awaya who have done work on the social reform period in Kerala mention that most of the magazines of

⁴⁴ The translation of this work is from J.Devika's book. J. Devika, ed., *Her-Self: Early Writings of Malayalee Women on Gender 1898-1938*. (Kolkata: Stree, 2005c). In the rest of the thesis, I have done the translations unless mentioned otherwise.

⁴⁵ The Varna system worked in a complex pattern in Kerala. The Nairs and the Syrian Christians were considered equivalent to the Sudras. They also acted as the warrior castes on occasion. They sometimes had better access to education and material goods than many other castes including Brahmins. Therefore, I prefer to use the term middle caste to refer to Nair and equivalent castes. Ezhavas were lower in the social rung and were considered polluting castes by the Nairs and Namboothiris. Ezhavas and other untouchable castes are referred to as lower castes in this thesis.

⁴⁶ None of the 465 articles I have collected from various magazines have Muslim writers. This is not to say that Muslim women did not write in the magazines. There was only one Muslim women's magazine listed in the administrative reports. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a copy of the same.

the period address a Nair woman (Awaya, 2003; Devika, April 2002; Devika, 2007b). The Nair women appear to assume a position of leadership amongst the Malayali woman. In their articles, the Nair writers refer to themselves as Malayali women; and women from other caste/religious groups are addressed or tagged using their religion or caste. The magazine writers accept the equation between Nair and Malayali women as non-problematic. This has led many of the social scientists to argue that the modernity of the Malayali women is often based on 'a Nair modernity.' Udaya Kumar mentions how the term Nair came to refer – in the Nair reform language – to a site of shared memory and possible collective initiatives (Kumar, 2007). Caste came to be rearticulated as community in the caste reform movements of the time. The Nair reform initiatives of the turn of the century, he says, gave a specific inflection to this trend by proposing a close identification between the newly emerging Malayali identity and the Nair identity being forged by the reformers (Kumar, 2007). Travancore was dedicated to the Hindu deity of Sri Padmanabha and the Travancore ruler was known as *Sree Padmanabha Dasa* (servant of the Lord Padmanabha). The state of Travancore was considered the seat of Hinduism and was highly orthodox in its ideas of caste pollution, and caste-related customs and practices.⁴⁷ The highly priced jobs close to the royal family were held by the Nairs (except the top positions in the government departments which were usually filled by Tamil Brahmins) (Tharakan, 1984a). Many of the aristocratic Nair families were settled in Travancore. The Christians were spread in the rural and hilly regions of the state and the Muslims were only a small percentage of the population in the early 20th century (Ouwkerk and Kooiman, 1994). The

⁴⁷ The Rajas of Cochin were also Hindu rulers and considered themselves as keepers of Hindu religious practices. However Cochin had a stronger presence of people belonging to other religious communities than Travancore. A part of Cochin was under the Portuguese, later the Dutch and then the British. These must have influenced the religious character of the state. Today Kochi is considered the most modern and fashionable city in Kerala.

relationship between Nairs and those of other castes/religions were tense and the elections to the representative government aggravated the caste and religious differences.⁴⁸ One can only tentatively put forward that there must have been a convergence of religious identity with regional affiliation/identity happening within the Nair community. Certain groups of Christians, Muslims and the Brahmins had ancestors from outside Malayalam-speaking regions. These groups had also imbibed customs and traditions which to outward appearances would seem 'foreign' and not 'native'. Numerically the Nairs and the Ezhavas were the largest groups in the whole of Kerala. But as a result of the continuing caste pollution rules, the Ezhavas were not in a position of hegemony. They also gained access to education and other modern institutions in large numbers only towards the middle of the 20th century. All of the above mentioned causes could have been the reason for the Nair women writers to present themselves as 'the Malayali women.' A reading of the magazines that includes *Vanitha Kusumam* provides a different picture. The large number of Christian writers in the magazine provides a broader definition to the term 'Malayali woman.' The articles were also addressed to a wider variety of middle class readers. There is less mention of matters pertaining to only a Hindu reader. The examples and references include characters and incidents from the Bible, and mentions Arab, Egyptian, Roman and Israelite customs. For instance a writer (probably Christian) in an article on "Greatness of Hair," mentions the biblical character, Samson and how his strength was located in his hair. (S)he mentions that ancient Egyptians used to cut their hair for special occasions and this custom was later copied by the Romans (K.M., 1927).

⁴⁸ The Sri Mulam Praja Sabha was the legislative assembly to which members were mostly elected. The Nairs were only 16% of the population, but held the majority of the elected seats. The different Christian communities were around 31% and the Muslims were around 7% of the population. For more details see: Dick Kooiman, "Communalism and Indian Princely States: A Comparison with British India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 34 (1995).

Vanitha Kusumam also had the largest circulation figures among the women's magazines (2000-3000 copies compared to 1400 for the next most popular women's magazine).

Many of the male contributors to the magazines are known even today, but not the women contributors as I have mentioned in the previous chapter. The men were well known poets, novelists and essayists of the time. Of the women writers, some were doctors, some had a BA degree, some teachers and school inspectress, and a few identified themselves as married women, using the prefix "Mrs". The women of the matrilineal communities were not used to identifying themselves with their husband's family. This use of their husbands' name was a new trend, and many of the writers themselves spoke up against it. However, more and more women were adopting this style. B. Bhageerathamma (1890-1938), the editor of *Mahila* wrote, "The mark "Mrs." is nothing but a sign of enslavement" (Bhageerathamma, 1929).

The women's magazines had contributors from other parts of India. Muthulakshmi Reddy a contributor to *Vanitha Kusumam* was a doctor, social reformer and the first woman legislator in India. There were a few articles published in English and often contributed by writers from other states in these magazines, and there were also excerpts from other language newspapers/magazines.

Education and chastity

Women's education was a topic that had been in public debates from the 19th century in India. In Malayalam-speaking regions as far back as 1891, there was an article in *Vidyavinodhini*, a general magazine, on the need to have education for

women ("*Sthreevidyabhyasam*", 1891b).⁴⁹ The author(s) addresses some of the concerns expressed by the general public regarding women's education.⁵⁰ The chief concern of the general public according to the article was the fear that women would no longer be chaste if they were educated. The article argues strongly that this was a wrong assumption and that it was not women alone who were responsible for their chastity, but the men were equally responsible; and equal partners in cases of adultery. The author(s) equates women's subordination with the unequal caste/class relations in society. This article was written around the time that caste movements were becoming strong in Malayalam-speaking regions. The author(s) also mention some learned men giving a public speech in Thrissur against women's education. Thus it is clear that the issue of women's education was receiving attention in the public sphere and not all of it was positive.

Chastity is a quality that is evoked in many of the articles, and even in textbooks from the period. A few essayists even went on to say that one way to make sure that women and men were not tempted to commit adultery was to make arrangements for the husbands and wives to stay together disregarding the current customs of many matrilineal groups (Parameshwaramenon, 1901). Around the time the various *Marumakkathayam* laws⁵¹ were being discussed and put into place. The

⁴⁹ There are probably articles on women's education from before this time. This is the oldest one I found in my archival search.

⁵⁰ The name of the author(s) is not given. The article is written using the first-person plural pronoun.

⁵¹ These were matrilineal laws. The Nairs and other sub-castes, the Ambalavasies, the Ezhavas and equivalent castes, and some Muslim groups followed the matrilineal system of succession. The Namboothiris, the Christians and other lower castes followed the patrilineal system of succession. Travancore, Cochin and Malabar witnessed a wave of social change in the early 20th century. The high and middle castes were devoting their time and attention towards transformation of family systems and matrilineal inheritance of property in the early 20th century. The matrilineal joint family system was slowly giving way to the nuclear family system. The Travancore Act of 1925 allowed men to transfer property to their wife and children. Similar acts, later on, like the Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act and

“Sambandham”⁵² itself was under scrutiny and being touted as indecent in different quarters and by different people (Arunima, 2003; Kodoth, 2002; Kodoth, 2001). One could even argue that chastity was being enforced in a subtle manner by these frequent allusions to it. Moreover, chastity did not necessarily mean that the figure of the husband was central to the wife; rather the emphasis was on the effect of the quality upon the woman. A chaste wife was imagined as endowed with the power of redemption – of the husband, the family and the nation. Historical and mythical figures like Sita, Savithri, Damayanthi, etc. were put forth as model women to be emulated, as was Queen Victoria. Their love, steadfastness and loyalty to their respective husbands and their chastity were the qualities that were fore-grounded in the articles. The revering of these demi-goddess and ideal female figures was also used to portray the exalted position enjoyed by Indian woman in ancient times. However a few of the writers also cautioned against placing too much importance on the presence of these goddess/ideal women figures and it did not mean that real women were treated in the same manner in their homes (Kuttannair, 1929).

Education and *sthreeswaathandryam*

When arguing for the need for women’s education, in the early decades of the 20th century, the writers had to state that it would not lead woman astray, that they would not misuse *sthreeswaathandryam*. The term *swaathandryam* originated from the

Moplah Marumakkathayam Act in 1933, forced the rest of the Malayalam-speaking regions to legally transform from the matrilineal form of succession to patriliney.

⁵² Sambandham was a contractual agreement between a man and woman that was not a sacred ritual like a Brahmin or Christian marriage. The Nair and various other sub-castes followed the Sambandham system of marriage. Among the Namboothiris only the older son was allowed to marry from within the community and he could have upto four wives at the same time. The younger sons had Sambandham with Nair women.

Smritis, and meant taking responsibility for one's actions.⁵³ The term came to acquire the meaning of independence as opposed to *parathandryam* (loss of independence). In the early 20th century the concept could mean various things. It was used in the sense of arbitrary power, or not bowing down to somebody else. It could also mean coming into one's own (Gundert, 1992; Pillai, 1987). It was also used to mean women's independence from external constraints of culture.

The magazine writers refer to a common fear of the Malayali woman turning into a replica of the tennis-playing, dancing, restaurant-going Western woman as a result of modern education:

When speaking about giving women freedom for the betterment of society, most people imagine western women who play tennis in the tennis court with men; and women who dance in the arms of men, inebriated by alcohol. Not only that, it appears that as a result of this imagination, people fear that by allowing freedom to their sisters and wives they will have to search for them in "tennis courts" and rest-houses (Panikkar, 1917: 399).

The writer recognizes that it is only a stereotype, but feels the need to dispel this possibility and state that Western and Indian cultures were very different. Since education was connected to *sthreeswaathandryam*, education could not be seen as leading women to extreme Westernisation.

The women's movements happening around the world after World War I found resonances in Malayalam-speaking regions too. A few of the radical thinkers were hoping for the same kind of freedom for Malayali woman as her Western counterpart.

⁵³ There has been no scholarly work done on etymology in Malayalam language. The etymology of the words *sthreedharmam*, *sthreeswaathandryam* and *parishkaaram* were provided by Prof. T.B. Venugopala Panicker. He was the Head of the Department of Malayalam, Calicut University and has published several works on Malayalam language, linguistics and phonology.

This was couched in the language of utility: women needed education to be capable, to take over the reins if the need ever arose.

Who took care of their responsibilities when the men, intoxicated by war, were in the battlefield? Women! If Kerala had to face such a situation! God! Let it not happen! Imagine? Are our women of any use? ... They have been brought up in the kitchen, which has made them useless. ... Why (say) more, it is important that women be allowed rightful *swaathandryam* (Pachiamma, 1921: 110-1).

The concept of *sthreeswaathandryam* appears to be a melange of myth, common sense and utilitarianism. The concept seeks to find its roots in Hindu texts and Malayali culture particularly the upper class position of the Hindu writers. Mythological figures like Sita, Damayanthi, and Savithri, who purportedly enjoyed *swaathandryam*, were invoked to show the historical roots of this concept. The writers do not seem to question whether some of these women were indeed real life women or just literary characters. These women are given authenticity because they have been handed down by tradition. *Sthreeswaathandryam* gets inseparably linked to chastity, bravery, love and, above all, duty when figures from the past are invoked. The writers discussing the pros and cons of women's freedom bring up the laws of Manu. The male writers were the strongest critics of his dictate *na sthree swaathandryam arhati*: it was seen as hypocritical to deny freedom to one section of the society and explained as an outcome of man's selfishness and fear of change (Balakrishnamenon, 1915; Narayanamenon, 1939b; Panikkar, 1917). It could well be that some of these champions of women's freedom and right were pseudonyms for women writers. For the radical thinkers, the sanction/restriction placed by the puranas/smritis on freedom was good enough reason to give up their (puranas/smritis) authority as legitimate codes of conduct for Malayali women. These radical writers stated that society had changed

much from ancient times that the older rules/customs/traditions had no relevance in modern times.

Sthreeswaathandryam included in its ambit elements of modernity. Modernity in the context of Malayalam-speaking regions was different from the Western variant as mentioned in the previous chapter [footnote 13]. Sometimes called *adhunikatha*, modernity signified a time of ever-changing progress, endlessly urged by *parishkaaram* (Awaya, 2003). The writers regarded modernity as coming from the West through contact with the coloniser and modern education. It includes institutions like schools, hospitals, law courts, administrative system, revenue system, public works department, etc. brought in by the British. What the writers considered as problematic was not modernity itself but certain elements associated with it. Customs inherited from the coloniser through education, changes in lifestyle and the education system itself were being critiqued during this period. If education was leading people to be unrestrained, to be selfishness, to blatantly disregard customs/rituals, etc. then education was neither necessary nor desirable according to orthodox thinkers/writers:

Swaathandryam means freedom, i.e., unrestrained individualism. Unrestrained individualism is not allowed for women; or for men. If so, there would have been no need for law or *dharmashastras* (religious texts on conduct). Therefore it is clear that nobody should have *swaathandryam* beyond their rights. When looked at like this, we will be forced to say that women have *swaathandryam* within the limits of their *dharmam*. Now if education leads to unrestrained freedom, that would affect men too, and so men too should not be educated (Parameshwaramenon, 1901: pg. 297).

The crux of the diatribe against *sthreeswaathandryam* and education was development of individualism.⁵⁴ This individualism could develop into egoism, where the women or the man would place their interests and desires above that of the community. The individual is placed in a position where their desires and conduct cannot be contained by the caste/religious groups and this was not acceptable to the orthodox thinkers/writers. The woman and the man should/could not also transgress the perceived boundaries (in terms of actions/comportment/dress/speech/etc.) put in place for each gender. The purpose of modern education was the development of a self with a focus on interiority:

Both in the sense of a supposed inner-space that pre-exists any education, and in the sense of the act of looking inwards. By *swaathandryam* was meant not just the removal of external forms of constraint on a person but also their replacement by internal means of regulation. More importantly, the ability to conform to ideal gendered subjectivities – the ability to be ‘Man’ or ‘Woman’, to be comfortable in the domains specified as proper to them – was crucial in *swaathandryam* (Devika, 2002: 10).

She goes on to say that prior to attaining this state, one was to undergo a training process through which capacities inherent to human beings, determined by sexual endowment of the body, as well as the ability to regulate oneself were to be developed. *Swaathandryam* in this formulation was pitched against *tantonnitam* (doing-as-one-pleased). *Swaathandryam* could not transgress the separate domains of ‘Man’ or ‘Woman’. Devika defines the notion of *swaathandryam* related to women to mean “self-means for survival.” My reading of the magazines suggests that terms like

⁵⁴ Individualism is used in the sense of a moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that makes the individual its focus. For a detailed analysis of individualism see: Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

swaathandryam were not fixed in their meaning. They evolved and changed over time. I would like to extend this argument to say that *swaathandryam* was problematic because it was also seen as developing a self/individual opposed to her/his community and caste identities; and the problem with education was that critics believed it would lead women to ask for *swaathandryam* from lifestyles/dressing styles, etc. connected to their caste positions.

Swaathandryam was simultaneously used to refer to financial security and absence of authority figures. It entailed duties and responsibilities that one had to take up to be eligible for it. For example a magazine writer mentions how women in Russia work alongside their husbands and have financial security, and so have a certain amount of freedom. Russian women also served in the army. Malayali women who asked for freedom should be ready to serve their nation and also to serve in the army as this was an important duty of the citizen (K.L.P., 1933). *Sthreeswaathandryam* is also used to develop a sense of nationalism that does not seem at odds with the regional identity of the writers (Editorial, 1928a; Ramanmenon, 1929; Reddy, 1927). These kinds of outwardly non-problematic double moves have been found in other parts of India (Chandra, 1982). The term is used in so many ways that it is difficult to pin down one particular strand.

Education and dress reforms

Throughout India various assumptions and expectations on/of/about women were debated upon and put in place through women's education. An article in *Vidyavinodhini* from the same period argues that women will not become less womanly because of their education ("Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891a). There is a description of a hand wearing bangles and rings inscribing in a good handwriting; of

educated women with curly hair; of sensual women with earrings and nose rings. The author mentions that none of this will disappear with education. The fear of the public/the critic was that the image/appearance of the woman will change due to education. Dress/clothing became a site through which Indian/western was defined throughout India, be it Kerala in the 19th century or Gandhi and Khadi in the early 20th century. It further became a way to sartorially mark the boundaries of work, education and home. In Bengal, the debates around the appropriate dress for the middle class were also tied within debates of community, and anticolonial Indian nationalism (Lukose, 2008). Travancore had witnessed the “Breast-cloth movement” in the 19th century when women from the Shanar community asked for the right to wear an upper cloth.⁵⁵ The lower caste women started wearing their clothes/accessories imitating the styles of the upper caste women under the influence of the missionaries and this caused a furore among the upper and middle castes. In 19th century Malayalam-speaking regions, dress was a marker of social difference and deference (Devika, 2005a). Different styles of dressing distinguished various castes and religion. Especially the manner of wearing the waist cloth and the hair distinguished the Pulaya, Muslim, Syrian Christian, Nair, Brahmin, Ezhava and other groups from each other. Ornamentation was also an important way of marking the hierarchical divisions in society. These signs had to be maintained strictly. These differentiating functions continued in to the 20th century too. The new mode of dressing marked the modern educated Malayali from the traditionally educated and illiterate Malayali. Clothes were

⁵⁵ For more details see: V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol. II, Part 2 (Travancore: Government Press, 1906), J. Devika, "En-Gendering Individuals: A Study of Gender and Individualisation in Reform-Language in Modern Keralam, 1880's-1950's" (Mahatma Gandhi University, 1999), J. Devika, *Imagining Women's Social Space in Early Modern Keralam* [Working Paper 329] (Thiruvananthapuram: Centre For Development Studies, April 2002 [cited 28 March 2007]); available from http://cds.edu/download_files/329.pdf.

increasingly acquiring the qualities of civilization, modesty, decency, and culture. Even the education codes by the government mentioned that pupils should wear clean and respectable dress. As per the government code, respectable dress in the early 20th century meant “a decent and tidy garment covering the upper part of the body, say an Indian shirt with a second cloth” (Matthai and others, 1921). The writers mention the changes in women’s clothing and use of jewellery. Plain white clothes were the traditional dress of the Christian communities (who were a major group statistically in Travancore and Cochin areas). The upper and middle class/caste Hindu communities were used to wearing plain white clothes with gold/coloured border. The Muslim women also wore white, cream or light coloured blouses/jackets with their *mundu* (a piece of cloth worn at the waist like a *dhoti*).⁵⁶ Hence simplicity/plainness in dress would have been familiar or the norm for most Malayali women. With access to the new schools and jobs, many of these groups were switching over to the Brahmo/Parsi sari which was more colourful. Items of clothing brought in by contact with the West/other Indian communities like boots, skirts, etc. were noted by the writers (Parameshwaramenon, 1901). The changes were often mentioned in a negative vein – as being an expensive taste and overtly imitative of the West and other groups in India. Interestingly, the sari is never mentioned in the writings.⁵⁷ However the use of the upper cloth/blouse/jacket does appear in a few articles. Hindu traditionalists still considered wearing a jacket/blouse as arrogance and impropriety on the part of the younger generation. The younger generation, especially the writers, had to prove that

⁵⁶ This information was provided by friends (and their grandmothers) belonging to various religious communities in Kerala. In her autobiography Devaki Nilayangodu also mentions that the Namboothiris and the Nairs generally wore plain clothes. For details see: Devaki Nilayangodu, *Kalappakarchakal* (Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi Books, 2008).

⁵⁷ Since this work cannot claim to be exhaustive in any sense, this is a tentative claim made from a reading of around 465 articles published in Malayalam magazines from the period.

wearing the new dress was neither a sign of dissolution nor immorality. They give examples of members of the Brahmin community and people outside Kerala wearing blouses/jackets to substantiate the point/necessity (Lakshmiamma, 1906). The writers supporting the new dress reform resort to using arguments couched in utilitarianism, custom and propriety. *Sthreeswaathandryam*, to its critics, also included the freedom/ability of educated women to adopt the dressing styles of other communities. And since dress was a marker of caste, by extension *sthreeswaathandryam* also challenged certain aspects of caste.

Jewellery was another important marker of caste/community during this period. The arguments to and fro about the use of jewellery was such that an essayist writing under the pseudonym Sthree was forced to state, “Some say that we are crazy about jewellery, and some point out that we will not conceive if we do not wear jewellery!” (Sthree, 1933). It was not just imitation of the West that was under the scanner but any kind of fashion – Tamil, Parsi, and Bengali – that was seen as imitative was criticised. Bengali and Parsi women were mentioned by so many writers that a woman writer of the period mentions that though people do speak about Parsi styles, most Malayalis have not seen Parsi women to actually imitate their styles (Kalyaniamma, 1915). So where did the image of the Parsi woman come from in the discussions? The Parsi community was one of the most westernized and successful communities in colonial India. Their customs, dressing and other attributes were considered progressive throughout India (Luhmann, 1996). There was a very small percentage of Parsis in Kerala at the time. They had settled in different parts of the state, particularly Malabar, for trade (Chandrasahsan, 2005; Menon, 1944). Their high percentage of literacy (96.6%) was noted but not elaborated upon since the population was not significant enough to be mentioned in major statistical charts. there must have been places with

enough Parsi population that their presence, customs, and lifestyles were noted by some of the writers. It was not just Parsis from Kerala who were mentioned but those in Bombay were also the subject of an article (Amma, 1906).

Culture, virtue, caste and education

The magazines often took a didactic tone in their articles and sometimes they exhorted, bullied or cajoled their readers to do their bidding on the various issues discussed. *Vanitha Kusumam* appears to have had competitions/interactive games/feedback forms for its readers. There was a feedback form published in 1927 to find out the qualities of a model woman ("*Mathreka Vanitha Malthsara Pareeksha*", 1927). The write up on the results of the competition mentioned that it was disappointing that only 482 people had taken part in the competition which was less than half its subscribers. The majority of readers had mentioned faith in God and patience as the most desirable womanly virtues. The most undesirable qualities were craze for money, worthless entertainment, and extravaganza. The need for religious teaching in schools was repeated by many writers of the time. The schools run by Missionaries had scriptural teaching/catechism. Since there was protest against this and the native governments came to see this as a tool for proselytization, they started to control religious teaching in schools receiving grant-in-aid (Gladston, 2006; Kawashima, 1998). The native governments decided to follow a policy of secularism. However, the Christian schools were later given permission to teach catechism to Christian students after school hours (Banerji, 1914b). It was following this period that the need for moral education was raised by many of the writers in the magazines. The need to curb ostentatiousness in daily life was repeated by many writers and it seems the readers had imbibed this when they list it as a negative quality. The nationalists

were questioning the necessity of jewellery and the silk clothing favoured by members of the upper class and upper caste all over India. Gandhian ideals of economic self-sufficiency and limited consumption were at the heart of these suggestions.

Since aspects of culture were an important bone of contention, music – another marker of culture – was a topic that was discussed often. The music of Thyagaraja Dikshitar is mentioned by a few writers, some with awe, and some as a usurper of Malayali music culture.⁵⁸ This kind of music was new. Music was also part of the school curriculum in many of the schools and considered a skill women needed to have. The central administration followed by the British was instrumental in bringing about an exchange of art and culture within India that was rapid and reached large sections of Malayali society than it did under the various native kings. From the writings it is clear that it was not just the British and/or Western influence that was receiving attention and/or disapproval, but also cultural practices from other parts of India. Not all the practices were looked down upon with disapproval and not at all times. By the time the magazines were being published on a wide scale certain practices like drinking tea/coffee were accepted as indigenous practices. What some of the writers do question is not the consumption of the beverages, but the manner of consumption [and it was considered a luxury]. A woman sitting on the veranda, drinking coffee and reading a newspaper in the morning without taking part in the

⁵⁸ Music was taking on an institutional character during this period. All-India music conferences started to be held from 1916. The Madras Music Academy was established in 1929. Even before that in the 19th century, efforts were being made to retrieve, preserve and transmit Indian music by Indian literati. Schools were put in place for teaching music to students and musical soirees were being organised in the late 19th century. The Music academy in Madras was sponsoring competitions and performances to sustain growing amateur interest in classical music. By 1931, University of Madras had music courses, and undertook teacher training courses for those teaching music in various places. For details see: Lakshmi Subramanian, "The Reinvention of a Tradition: Nationalism, Carnatic Music and the Madras Music Academy, 1900-1947," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36, no. 2 (1999).

domestic chores was an image that was ridiculed time and again by the essayists and the novelists of the period (Amma, 1930d; Menon, 1985). It is surprising that most of the writers do not question the English medical practitioners and other science related aspects of daily living. These were welcomed and accepted as necessary for a good life. The writers were only a small percentage of the population and it is difficult to ascertain the attitudes of the general population to science, technology and medicine at that point in time.

Other than a handful of writers, not many speak about the growing menace of dowry (Eshwarapilla, 1927; Ramanmenon, 1915; Subbarayan(Mrs.)). Even then it did not engage with the issue, but rather mentioned that the custom was present in India as in the West; that the practice was probably becoming deeply rooted. The practice of dowry was prevalent among the Christians, the Brahmins, the Nadars and the Ezhava community and it was slowly spreading among the matrilineal communities with the changes taking place in their succession laws (Amma, 1940). Mrs. Subbarayan mentions in her article about a bill introduced in the legislative assembly to use girls' dowry for education. What this brings to light is that the issue was being discussed elsewhere, but the writers did not take it up strongly.

Another curious fact is the lack of female Malayali figures as role models in either the magazines or the textbooks from the period. Queen Rani Lakshmbai⁵⁹ and Manorama Thampurati⁶⁰ are the select few mentioned. One possible reason is that some of the figures like Unniarcha who were lauded in textbooks from a later period were fighters. The other female role models introduced in the magazines (and

⁵⁹ Rani Lakshmbai was the Regent of Travancore from 1924 to 1931.

⁶⁰ Manorama Thampuratti was a Sanskrit scholar who lived in the 18th century. She belonged to Kizhakke Kovilakam of Kottakkal, a branch of the Zamorin dynasty in Kozhikode. She was well known in Kerala as a gifted poet.

textbooks) were usually from a distant Indian past (with a few exceptions like Sarojini Naidu), and a handful of English women like Florence Nightingale.⁶¹ It must not have been a sound editorial decision to mention figures from a very recent past, especially those with a history of violence against the British. Also, the qualities that were appreciated were the softer qualities of compassion, generosity, chastity, kindness, spirituality, etc. Figures like Unniarcha would not fit in with the soft qualities that were seen as feminine, natural and needed for the then modern Malayali woman.

The early decades of the 20th century were rife with conflicts over caste and community differences in Kerala (Ouwkerk and Kooiman, 1994). The writers in magazines like *Lakshmibai*, *M.N. Nair Masika*, *Unninambudiri*, and *Mahila* exhort the readers to forgo sub-caste differences and think of a unified Nair/Namboothiri community in the 1920s and 1930s. The Nair writers sometimes also presented the Christians as models to be emulated because of their well organized community structure with a spiritual head, Sunday Catechism for the young and organizations for women (Anandavalliamma, 1939; Eshwarapilla, 1927; Narayanakurukkal, 1927). Women from an earlier generation of writers spoke scathingly of the proselytization zeal of the missionaries and felt that Hindu women needed separate educational institutions (Amma, 1917). The Nair writers contrasted themselves with women from other communities also: the Namboothiris and the Pulayas were mentioned time and again; and when mentioned were shown up as being 'backwards' and needing help to change. The spirit of competitiveness among the different caste groups in other locations emerges in the articles too.

⁶¹ Women like Christabel Harriette Pankhurst (1880–1958) were also mentioned to show the contrast between radical English women and Malayali women. She was a suffragette born in Manchester, England and a co-founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

Socio-cultural movements and the magazines

The writers of the women's magazines mostly kept to topics/issues that were safe from British scrutiny. There would be passing mention of living a frugal life, of making khadi clothes, and even mention of the Home rule movement. The census and administrative departments kept a careful watch on the content of the publications.⁶² In 1921 Kerala saw one of its first tragic episodes in the freedom struggle, the Mappilla/Malabar rebellion.⁶³ Following this most newspapers were circumspect about printing material that overtly supported the national movement or were critical of the British administration (*History of Press in Kerala*, 2002). One is also led to wonder if this circumspection shown by the magazine writers and publishers had not affected the content of women's magazines in present day Kerala, where it is assumed that politics and caste-related subjects, which in some ways are present in the daily life of people, are not suitable subjects for women.

However when there were social movements that were creating a huge impact on the social and political arena, they found mention in the magazines. For instance, when the Temple Entry Proclamation⁶⁴ happened in Travancore, *Mahila* had an article not just supporting it, but also stating that Travancore women were acting upon it.

⁶² Travancore passed a Newspaper Regulation Act in 1926. The Madras government also followed a policy of strict control over newspapers. For details see: Menon, P.K.K. *The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala*. Vol. II. Trivandrum: The Regional Records Survey Committee, 1970.

⁶³ Mappilla revolt refers to a series of riots by the Mappillas (Muslims) of Malabar in the 19th century and the early 20th century (1836–1921) against the (Hindu) landlords and the state. The Malabar Rebellion of 1921 is often considered as the culmination of the Mappilla riots. The Mappillas committed several atrocities against Hindus during the outbreak.

⁶⁴ The government-controlled temples were not open to the lower castes. The roads around the Siva temple at Vaikom in north Travancore were closed to them, as were the roads near most other temples. In 1923, to appeal to a broad a section of Hindus the demand at first at Vaikom was not for temple entry, but for the right of avarna Hindus to use the roads near the temple. The roads were not opened to them, but diversionary roads were built that the lower castes could use without polluting the temple. After

The woman of Travancore can at all times say with feelings of the utmost pride that she has most fervently and with an innate sense of responsibility done her part in carrying out the purport of the proclamation to the very letter. Till a short time ago, there were in a few quarters certain misapprehensions as to the way in which the Travancore woman viewed the Temple Entry Proclamation; and a few Sanatanist papers outside the country made no delay in representing that the average Travancore woman is dead against such temple entry. Such statements were completely unfounded and false, and were the results of mean and ignoble tactics of certain narrow-minded bigots who had their own axes to grind (Amma, 1937: 151).⁶⁵

Apart from being a sign of support for the Temple Entry movement the article was also a reaction to accusations of antagonism towards the movement. When meetings were being held to unite members of the Ezhava (who were the prominent activists in the movement) and the Nair community, the aristocratic Nair families of south Travancore, who held positions of power in the government and was close to the palace, stayed away from the movement (Jeffrey, 1978). The 1930s was a period of intense class and caste politics. This was different from the early decades of the 20th century when the caste groups were immersed in building up a ‘community consciousness’. Now the caste groups were better organised and competition was fierce amongst the different groups. The writers of *Mahila* were mostly from the Nair community. As mentioned before, the Nair writers often spoke of themselves as

about 15 years of agitation and political wrangling, the Temple Entry Proclamation was made in 1936. All the temples in Travancore state were opened to all Hindus irrespective of caste. In Cochin, it took another decade for the Maharaja to open the temples to all Hindus. The Temple Entry Authorisation Proclamation was made in 1947-1948. The Madras Temple Entry Act of 1947 extended this reform to the Malabar area. For more detail see: Louise Ouwerkerk and Dick Kooiman, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in the Princely State of Travancore, (1921-1947)* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1994).

⁶⁵ This article was published in English and is not a translation.

Malayali women and consciously or unconsciously saw themselves as standing in for all women. The antipathy of certain caste Hindus to the movement could not be seen as shared by this group of writers who saw themselves as mostly progressive and devoid of caste discrimination. In one of the general magazines of the time, a writer also spoke about the need to give up on practices of caste pollution, untouchability (which was rarely mentioned or acknowledged as being present in the women's magazines) and the need to work towards the Temple Entry movement (before the proclamation was made). This writer also suggested that caste pollution was an important issue to be taken up by women because it was closely related to family practices (Narayanikuttyamma, 1932).⁶⁶ This was part of a larger movement/ideological shift happening in Kerala (and in India) to involve women in the nationalistic movement and towards social service.

Sthreethwam and sthreedharmam

The duties of women were another aspect that was important to the writers in the magazines. The duties were termed under *sthreedharmam*. The concept is reconstituted through the debates on education. What exactly is *sthreedharmam*? The word is from the Sanskrit term *dharma*, and was used to mean 'that which holds' for a social group. It was used to refer to the function of each person in the caste system. It could also mean justice, law, custom, behaviour, alms, duties, piety, spirit, virtue, Upanishads and *yagas* sanctioned by the Vedas. *Sthreedharmam* could mean menstrual blood, duties (particularly towards husband), and laws pertaining to women (Gundert, 1992; Pillai, 1987). In the magazines various writers include a range of duties/activities/chores/qualities under this umbrella term. It involved duties towards

⁶⁶ In her autobiography K.R. Gowriyamma mentions the custom as being prevalent in many places in Kerala in the 1930s.

husband, children, parents, relatives and home. It would include taking care of the elderly and the sick. It meant being compassionate, generous, humble, capable, and loving. It constituted having knowledge of money management, good conversation skills, cooking, childcare, gardening, etc. It also embodied one's *sthreethwam* (state of being a woman (Pillai, 1987)) or femininity (Achuthamenon, 1907a; Ambhadevithampuratti, 1927; Amma, 1919; Amminiamma, 1933; Chinnamma, 1909; Kalyaniamma, 1905; Parvathiamma, 1918).

Upfront *sthreedharmam* seems to be a wider and more encompassing concept than *sthreethwam*. *Sthreedharmam* was action-oriented and not an innate quality. It would appear from the way the concepts were used in the magazines that *sthreethwam* had more to do with qualities that were understood to be inherent in women; feminine qualities like love, patience, kindness, spirituality, compassion, chastity, humility, etc. *Sthreethwam* could not be taught, but the right kind of education would enhance and bring out the *sthreethwam* of women. *Sthreethwam* distinguished women from men. *Sthreethwam* was a quality that all women had. The requirement of the time was to bring it to the forefront so that women remain women and did not metamorphose into men or acquire masculine qualities. *Sthreedharmam* included nurturing *sthreethwam* in oneself.

Shinnamallukovilama in her article on *sthreethwam* says that women need education and work; and they can work with men and still protect their *sthreethwam* (Shinnamallukovilamma, 1931a). Women were required to maintain certain 'Womanly' qualities even when they were allowed to work. Reading from a different standpoint it meant women could work if they were careful about retaining and/or acquiring qualities deemed 'Womanly'. According to Shinnamallukovilama, sympathy, patience, kindness, love, affection were all inherent in a woman and a

woman's *sthreethwam* showed itself in how she conducted herself as a wife and mother. A woman fulfils her wifely *dharmam* when she becomes equally involved with and helps her husband in his work and they develop a bond. But helping the man did not mean that the woman had the choice of distancing herself from the domestic sphere:

Do not misunderstand me, this does not mean that I support women leaving their homes, acting all masculine, like men. Western women may say that Indian women are unlucky because they cannot play cricket and tennis with men. Similarly, men may also be ridiculed. But, we need not bother. This is not our ideal (Shinnamallukovilamma, 1931b: 243).

There was a demarcation of women's sphere/capabilities/duties and men's sphere/capabilities/duties in a majority of the articles. This demarcation was not unique to Kerala, but is found in nationalist discourse of the 19th and 20th centuries from other parts of India too (Chatterjee, 1989a; Chatterjee, 1989b). Women's duties were tied up to activities in and around the home. To many writers this was also a way to differentiate themselves from Western women. In the early 20th century, the reading public together with sites like the reading clubs, debating society, the modern novel, drama, essay and poetry were all involved in the fashioning of a new middle class. These sites of formation of public space formed a nascent public sphere (Devika, 2002). The women's magazines and women's groups called "*Sthreesamajams*" addressed a population that supposedly already possessed a specific set of capacities deemed "Womanly". Discussions within these arenas were focussed on how to benefit modern society. Women were a prominent part of public debates that focused on the domestic domain. The question of the condition of women was subsumed in the question of defining modern domesticity (Devika, 2002). The *sthreedharmam* of the woman becomes more important her, her aspirations and her rights. Women and men

could not transgress the spheres/activities that were deemed 'Womanly' and 'Manly' without incurring the wrath of the traditional and orthodox writers.

Sthreethwam and *sthreedharmam* were also presented as subsets of each other i.e. actions (*sthreedharmam*) moulded/shaped femininity (*sthreethwam*). Women attain *sthreethwam* when they fulfil the duties of wifedom and motherhood. However a woman could become a great mother only if she excelled as a virtuous wife according to most writers. The nationalist movement had used the image of the mother to represent the nationalist aspiration. In Bengal the image of motherhood was associated with the goddess figure of Durga. This was later developed into the image of Bharat Mata (Sunder Rajan, 1998). Prior to this move of 'goddess-ification', the mother figure was validated through her duty to her sons, and was empowered through him (Bagchi, 1990). In Malayalam-speaking regions, the safety of a child, the future citizen of the nation, was placed in the hands of the mother. The child (usually gendered male) would go out into the world and help with the construction of the nation (Govindhamenon, 1927; Kochukuttyamma, 1935; Kunjikaavamma, 1927). Motherhood was not placed on the same pedestal as wifedom, but it was an important aspect of *sthreedharmam*. Education was put forward as being necessary for fulfilling the maternal role:

Mental refinement should be the aim of education. A child brought up by a mother devoid of mental refinement will take after her. All the people in the world grow up under the guidance of their mothers. If one takes the case of extraordinarily gifted persons, it could be seen that the base for their accomplishments were laid by their mother. Even if the father is an idiot, if the mother is smart the children may grow up all right. Therefore parents should take extreme care that girls are brought up properly. Their education should be

given more importance than their marriage. A virtuous woman is an asset to her home, whether she is married or not (Devakiamma, 1924: 55).

In this formulation a girl child is important for the future role that she would play in the smooth running of the home. This could also be read as a round about way to create a need for the girl child to be educated.

In the early 20th century, *sthreedharmam* included education in its ambit, which was not earlier seen as a part of dharmam. Modern education for woman was itself a new phenomenon. Of the many proposals for the kind of education that women needed this one would capture the essence of the arguments:

It would be ideal if the following curriculum could be implemented in women's educational institutions –

1. The medium of instruction for women should be their mother tongue. Then knowledge can be gained without difficulty.
2. Women should have some knowledge of English and Sanskrit.
3. All women should definitely learn Hindi because the mother tongue of Bharat [India] is really Hindi.
4. Women should become experts in *sthreedharmam*, politics, home management, health science, cooking science, needle work, music, and painting.

If women are given training in the above subjects, their health and intellect will increase and they will become true *bharatheeyagrehadharmini* (Indian housewife) (Anandavalliamma, 1927: 360-1).

As can be seen from this quote, education for women included a mix of achievements and skills, accomplishments and functionality. Women were not expected to laze away their time, gossiping. The writers repeatedly ask women to spend their afternoon reading or learning useful skills. This was not just a way of regulating their leisure hours but also a way of regulating social interaction among

women. The act of 'gossiping' itself came to be seen as non-constructive activity detrimental to the morality of women.

Nationalism and other women in Malayali imagination

There was a sense of being part of the larger nation of India in these writings. The nationalist movement happening elsewhere in India had its resonances in Malayalam-speaking regions too. Many of the writers in the magazines were relatives of political activists and activists themselves. The famous poets of the time produced/wrote works that added to the feeling of being part of the larger nation (Sreedhara Menon, 1967). Moreover, with direct British rule in Malabar, and Travancore and Cochin being under indirect British rule, there was a sense of unity among the people.⁶⁷ Other than education a new aspect of *sthreedharmam* was the woman's role in nation-building. She was expected to do this through the rearing of her progeny in a manner that would ensure that the child would become the perfect citizen. She was also expected to help the nation in little ways that she could. Some writers suggested starting small scale industries like weaving; others suggested teaching their less fortunate sisters in rural areas. These small scale industries were attached to the home, and would not have physically taken her far from home. Thus, women's right to work was also being linked to the larger project of nation-building. Articles written after 1920s show the influence of Gandhi and the nationalist movement. A large number of articles on untouchability, need to abstain from sex, simplicity in clothes, Gandhian ideals, etc. are found in the years immediately after he visited Kerala [1925 and 1927] (Ammukuttyamma,

⁶⁷ Kerala did not experience a vigorous nationalist movement like other parts of India. In the early 20th century the focus was on caste and (religious) community movements, which then gave way to leftist/Marxist/Communist movements.

1928; Bose, 1929; Krishnabhai, 1928; Kuttannair, 1929; Ramamenon, 1929a; Ramanmenon, 1929; Sharada, 1927-28).

The writers were constantly comparing Malayali women with Western women. Descriptions of women from different countries in the West (England, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Australia, and USA) were given in many of the magazines. There were also articles on women from Asian countries like Japan, China, Burma, etc. Japan and the West were two frequent points of reference for the magazine writers. Japanese women were almost always positive ideals to be emulated. Japan being one of the few 'developed' countries in Asia could have been the reason for its complete acceptability to Malayali writers. Japanese women were also presented as being softer and less competitive in nature compared to Western women (Aandipilla, 1909; Bhageerathamma, 1932; Manjja, 1928). Western women were portrayed as negative or positive role models depending on whether the writer was espousing a traditional or a modern position/role for women. Thus, the women reader of the period was aware of not just the Western women, but of the larger world through the magazines.

Women's education and curriculum

Until the 1920s most of the articles on women's education was about the need for educating women. The writers argued that modern lifestyle required women to be proficient in a variety of chores and tasks previously not taken up by an earlier generation. This required that the woman be a companion to her husband, and be able to converse with him on an equal footing. She was expected to help him in his work in the public sphere. This did not take her away from household duties – her primary duty. After 1920, the arguments move towards the kind of

education that women need. It would appear that by the 1920s it had become generally accepted that women needed education. By the 1930s, women were also thinking of education as a stepping stone to enter a profession/learn a useful skill (Amma, 1936a; Amminiamma, 1936; Sthree, 1934; , "*Sthreekallum Sarkarudyogavum*", 1930; Thankamma, 1932). But according to the writers, there were shortcomings with the kind of education/schooling women were receiving. Women were entering government and private service as doctors, nurses, teachers, advocates, school inspectors, etc. They were entering jobs previously reserved for men. The magazines, the administrative reports and even the census reports mention a prevailing belief that women were competing with men (Karthyanikutty, 1926; Veerarayanraja). Women were also seen as moving away from the space of the domestic, some even preferring to remain unmarried. The status quo could not continue; some felt that education had to address this issue.

So, writers asked for separate schools for girls: "After the initial schooling girls should be sent to special Girls' Schools", says B. Kalyani Amma⁶⁸ (Amma, 1930a; Amma, 1930c). "At this age they realize that they are different from their brothers, and they start feeling naturally that they have a different *dharmam* to fulfil." She adds:

Girls' schools can be divided into two kinds: Primary schools which provide general education for girls between 8 and 14 years and high schools that impart higher education. After girls have completed their education in these high schools they can either opt to get married, find work, or join a college for higher education (Amma, 1930b: 41).

The so called natural differences in the nature/aptitude of girls and boys were the focal point on which the detractors of co-education located their arguments. The inherent differences between boys and girls, many writers felt, meant that the kind of education

⁶⁸ She was a teacher.

imparted to them should also be different. Some felt that this difference would be addressed by including subjects like music, arts and painting. Others did not feel a need to differentiate between boys' and girls' education and some even scoffed at the inclusion of subjects which they thought were useless (Rukmaniamma, 1922; Subramanyayan, 1897). It was not that writers who considered music and sewing as useless subjects also supported a non-differentiated curriculum for the two genders. Even towards the end of the 1930s, after many women had successfully been part of the new professions there were arguments against the suitability of certain professions for women. Many writers firmly believed that women could not physically stand the rigours of a professional life and manage the domestic space simultaneously (Narayanamenon, 1939b).

It was felt that many women were moving towards a western style of living. They were spending their time reading novels, entrusting the running of the household to servants, not giving enough attention to their children, showing aversion to Indian arts, wanting to play English sports, not getting up early in the morning, not spending time in the kitchen, not reading the *Bhagavat Geeta*, not visiting the Temple and even not getting married. So writers give a list of things women/girls should not be doing. The following quote would be something that is universally told to Indian girls even today:

Girls should not argue about unnecessary topics; should not go alone to strange houses or amusement/picnic areas; wish for clothes and jewellery worn by other girls; postpone tasks allotted to them; talk in excess and/or loudly; and on growing up engage in activities that would irritate their husbands and sons (Ambhadevithampuratti, 1927: 24).

This literally limits the mobility of girls (in the same way starting a small scale industry would). Not only are her duties or *dharmam* different from that of men but

she is also placed in a subservient position to men when she is expected to place their needs above her own. Inherent in this formulation was a sense of disciplining – her actions, speech, clothes she wears – that had to be imparted via education.

Parishkaaram

Sthreedharmam and *sthreethwam* were frequently presented as changing due to *parishkaaram*. What was *parishkaaram*? *Parishkaaram* could mean different things – change (positive and negative), development, progress, reform, sophistication, culture. It also meant decoration (appearance), ornament, civilization, cleansing, or even fixing defects (Gundert, 1992; Namboothiri, 1972; Pillai, 1987). *Aadhunikatha* (modernity; something that has come into existence recently (Namboothiri, 1972)) was seen as ushering in *parishkaaram*; education had ushered in *parishkaaram*; imitation had ushered in *parishkaaram*. The term also included the sense of civilisation/progress/reform in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1905, an article published on women's education mentioned that women's education is not a new *parishkaaram*. Here it is used in the sense of innovation. The concept of tradition/modernity was implicit in the idea of *parishkaaram*.

In the 19th and 20th centuries India was 'rediscovering' her traditions, both under the British – in the guise of Indic studies – and by her own scholars (Veer and Lehmann, 1999). In the Malayalam-speaking regions while countering what was observed as change, the idea of a homogenised 'tradition' was being formulated. The writers and intellectuals of the time were aware of the difficulty of this proposition and were drawing on various sources to put together a tradition. So, sources like the puranas, Mahabharata, Vedas and even figures from Indian history were used to this effect. Simultaneously, modern or Western culture and manners were inculcated into

this tradition. This was occurring in some measure as a consequence of the new formal education that was in place. The British education system with its schools, colleges and universities disseminated western science and technology, law and culture. It restated and reorganised forms of Indian knowledge. The British system also acquired the status of 'being modern' and desirable and necessary for upward social mobility. Those who had undergone English education were faulted with imitating the English in manners, dressing and lifestyle. This imitation of the English came under fire from various quarters and *parishkaaram* took on the meaning of 'change by imitation' in this context. Education was alluded to as one of the harbingers of change. So, *parishkaaram* was directly related to education, though education was only one of the causes.

The term tradition is used by the writers in the early 20th century to refer to Malayali culture, rituals and lifestyle before the advent of colonialism. With the coming of the British and the institution of the British system of education, they sense a change in traditional structures of kinship, caste, community, family, lifestyles, food habits, dressing styles, customs and even within individuals. During the turn of the century there was a perceived rupture within traditional structures of society. Whether this rupture could be articulated or not it implied a notion of crisis. The question of whether change was for better or worse began to be asked during this period. Tradition had to be kept extant in some way and the burden fell upon the newly imagined figure of the Malayali woman. One way of doing this was to delineate *parishkaaram* [taken to mean change] as intellectual, physical and moral. Intellectual *parishkaaram* was seen as needed, but not physical or external *parishkaaram* [culture, customs, dressing]. The following quotation uses the term in the sense of influence, trappings/appearance, culture, change, transformation, progress:

It has to be agreed that because of Western *parishkaaram* there has been huge progress in the condition of women. But, often we follow the external *parishkaaram* of Western culture instead of understanding the remarkable qualities of that culture. As a result of this imitation of Western culture we forget the Indian ideal of womanhood, scorn our ancient culture which has at many times astonished other nations, sneer at our life styles and customs. It is thought to be Western *parishkaaram* when we make changes in our dressing styles, manners and bearing, and look down upon rural people...Hindu society needs to undergo *parishkaaram*. But this need not be a blind imitation of the West. *Parishkaaram* should not be a boycotting of traditional culture (Anandavalliamma, 1939: 131-2).

Here *parishkaaram* takes on various meaning. *Parishkaaram* used in the sense of culture/influence was acceptable to some extent as long as it did not bring about any drastic changes to outward markers of culture. Malayali society, especially the matrilineal communities, was going through changes, and the question was how much change was needed, how much was acceptable, where to draw the line, and so on.

While physical *parishkaaram* was not desirable, intellectual and moral/spiritual *parishkaaram* were. This dichotomy of the spiritual East and material West in public discourse in colonial India has been mentioned by other scholars (Chatterjee, 1989b; Veer, 2001). In Malayalam-speaking regions people were advised to embrace literary and scientific aspects of *parishkaaram*. Morality and/or spirituality were proffered as the fort of Indian culture as opposed to the worldliness of Western culture.

The various disturbances happening in the world today is the effect of *parishkaaram*. India moved away from spiritual *parishkaaram* a long time ago. One wonders if western *parishkaaram* has caused the West to deteriorate too. Intellectual development brings with it increased negative consequences. So then where does progress lead us? What about *parishkaaram*? To rectify

the problems of Western material *parishkaaram*, there is need for Eastern spiritual *parishkaaram*. Progress can happen only when both [spirit and intellect] develop simultaneously (Kunjukuttyamma, 1927: 67).

Parishkaaram used in the sense of material progress was a negative force according to this writer. Spiritual reform or progress was then needed to counter the relentless forward march of material culture.⁶⁹

A problematic issue connected to *parishkaaram* was the increasing dependence on the servant class (Amma, 1936c; Kannanmenon, 1916; Kavamma, 1913; Narayananambi, 1917; Ramamenon, 1918; Ramanpilla(Mrs.), 1927-28; Subramanyayan, 1897; Velupilla, 1930). A large number of writers complained that the young wife/mother was relying too much on the servants for the running of the home:

As a consequence of this affinity for *parishkaaram* there is no dearth of harmful activities that take place in our homes. Certain women who act as *parishkaarikal* (women with *parishkaaram*) are disinclined to do household chores owing to the mistaken belief that it is contemptuous. Is it a feature of inner *parishkaaram* to think of virtuous household duties as contemptuous? It will not be wrong to say that in many homes there are more servants than family members. Some women will not be capable of running their homes, and some will not have the need to do so. I am not saying that women should do all the household chores. Depending on their financial situation and needs they can appoint servants, but do not make them responsible for everything ... There have been many problems with the raising of children, as in the case of the running of the household, because of this affinity for *parishkaaram*. Our children have become weak

⁶⁹ It should be noted here that writings in the magazine *Lakshmibai* appear to use the term in the negative sense more often than other magazines. This magazine had a male editor and was published from Thrissur, often called the seat of culture/literature in Kerala.

mentally and physically on account of our custom of giving over the children to the care of untrained servants following the Western custom of leaving the children in the care of a nanny (Kavamma, 1913: 43-4).

One of the reasons for this paranoia of dependence on servants could have been that many of the younger women were moving away from the natal families and starting smaller family units with their husbands as a result of the availability of new jobs, break up of the joint family systems, and new rules regarding inheritance and marriage that were being put in place. The younger women did not have family members for help with household chores and taking care of the children. Most joint families had servants who had been with the family for generations, and the nuclear families could not expect to have such loyal servants.⁷⁰ The servants did not have the necessary training, education, or loyalty to take care of the children, cook a nutritious meal or manage the household supplies. Cleanliness, hygiene, health, and proper management of money were qualities that were associated with modern education. Therefore, the servants were not considered efficient as they were not educated. Another reason was that since the younger women were taking up the new jobs available to them outside the space of the home they had to depend upon others for help with the household chores. Yet another reason could be that caste pollution and other caste-related regulations were becoming lax as a result of the work of the missionaries and the caste groups themselves. Intermingling and inter-dining among

⁷⁰ Devaki Nilayangodu mentions that in her ancestral home there were Nair women to take care of the children and generally help the antarjanams (Namboothiri women). If a man had more than one wife, each wife was assigned a separate servant to take care of her needs and her children, irrespective of their numbers. There were even women to wet-nurse infants who needed it, though they would usually be from among the Namboothiri sub-castes. Thus, the use of servants was not a new phenomenon (at least among the upper caste/class families) as many of the writers made it out to be. For details see: Nilayangodu, *Kalappakarchakal*.

the upper and lower castes were not prohibited by law, as it was a century ago.⁷¹ Lower caste people were not allowed inside the houses of the upper and middle caste people in the 18th and 19th centuries (Amma, 1964; Arunima, 2002; Menon, 2006; Radhakrishnan, April 1986). In the 20th century they were forced to sit together and mingle with each other in the modern classrooms and other public spaces. Some of the educated young people were probably not as rigid about prohibiting the lower caste/class servants from entering their homes. I would like to suggest that, in the magazines, the lowering of the caste boundaries was probably the stronger reason for the paranoia about the so called over dependence on servants than anything else since most of the writers who speak about it were Nairs.

The woman was expected to take up complete responsibility for the household and its inmates. Her position was to be that of a manager of the domestic realm. The so called inherent qualities that a woman possessed like compassion, purity, chastity, attention to detail etc. were supposed to make her the right person for this. However, in the new nuclear households (and in some joint families) women were moving away from the roles and duties assigned to them. What was to become of these new women who were refusing to take up their place in the domestic realm? Blatant imitation of Western customs was held as responsible for this state of affairs. These women had to be brought back to the protective space of domesticity. The writers use a mix of pedagogic tone and commonsense to advice woman on their duties – *sthreedharmam* –

⁷¹ A couple of my interviewees, Draupathamma and C.K. Sarojinamma, mentioned that the Nair and Namboothiri students had to take a bath after coming back from school. The upper caste Draupathamma was not allowed to bring her lower caste friends even to the veranda of her house. She herself would be served her afternoon lunch on a side veranda on days she had classes. Another lower caste interviewee, K. Ammukutty spoke about having to sit on a grass mat and not a normal woven mat when she went for tuitions to the house of her Nair teacher. This was because the normal mat would have been considered polluted if she, a lower caste, had sat on it.

and the proper running of the household. Since this alone was not enough they proposed that women's education be revamped to instil these qualities in women.

The writers blamed the incomplete education women received for these state of affairs: late rising, apathy regarding domestic chores, etc. They defend the need for education, but emphasised that education needed to cater to the needs of women. A few of them also mentioned that not all women were meant for marriage though *grihastashramam* (state of being a householder) was their primary duty. The magazine writers even suggested a separate curriculum for women who wanted to get married and those who wanted to take up jobs. By the 1930s, however, most of the writers seem to suggest that household tasks and jobs can go hand in hand (Anandavalliamma, 1939; Thulasthar, 1918).

There was a sense that women and men were competing for the same resources/jobs/ positions in the family and society as mentioned before. The blame was laid at the feet of *parishkaaram* and modern education. When used in connection with Western culture *parishkaaram* was seen as being instrumental in bringing about a rift:

The kind of *parishkaaram* among our Western sisters is not at all worth imitating. There women and men have become two opposing communities. Sometimes it even takes the form of a duel. Each side takes responsibility for their own happiness and works towards their own advancement (Kochukrishnapilla, 1918: 270).

So the Malayali women were not to compete with men for the same kind of jobs, especially government jobs (Ammukuttyamma, 1927; Eshwarapilla; Govindhankartha, 1925; Rukmaniamma; Shankunnimenon, 1909; Sharada, 1927). Many of the government jobs reserved for particular castes were opened up to women by the 1920s and 1930s. However there was a popular consensus being developed that certain kinds of jobs were more suited to the temperament of women like teaching, or

the medical profession. This ensured that women and men were subtly directed towards different career choices.

The debates for and against *parishkaaram* lasted for nearly three decades. It had become so important that a Malayalam textbook used in Malabar from 1937 had an essay on *parishkaaram*. Through its inclusion in a textbook the students were also being exhorted not to blindly imitate what was seen as Western culture. The students were asked to accept *parishkaaram* discerningly.

Look at the Westerners themselves. Though they take their *parishkaaram* wherever they go they do not seem to imbibe foreign *parishkaaram*. So contemplate at length before deciding to give up our ancient culture. There are many things that we need to learn from the West. These are appropriate and necessary for increasing our knowledge. But, forgetting our lifestyles, national character and ancient culture by imitating their vices and digressions is not seemly. We will suffer spiritual loss more than worldly gain by doing so (Eshwarapilla, 1936: 64).⁷²

Parishkaaram is used synonymous with culture here. There is also the exaltation of ancient Indian culture and emphasis on the spiritual nature of Indian culture, which was considered superior to material culture; and at the same time there is no complete rejection of Western culture. At another point in the same essay there is mention of Indians having taken to smoking, drugs, tea drinking, using processed food and so on as a result of the influence of the West. What he finds problematic is not the foreign nature of these customs but their detrimental effect on the health of Indians and the expense they incur on an average Indian.

⁷² This essay had been published in *Lakshmibai* in 1927. It was later incorporated into a Malayalam textbook in 1937. *Lakshmibai* was published from the princely state of Cochin, while the textbook was published from Calicut for the Madras University. This again proves the fact that printed material crossed political borders in Malayalam-speaking regions.

The writers who were pro women's education had to defend themselves against allegations of modern education leading women astray. These writers nearly always put forward *parishkaaram* as being positive. *Parishkaaram*, for them, was always towards a better future, away from a stifling past. The writers make an argument for education being necessary for this future to happen. Progress/reform/mental upliftment was highlighted as the direct result of the right kind of education.

There are some *parishkaarikal* (reformers – used in a negative sense), who are afraid that women will become *tantonnikal* (those doing as they pleased)⁷³ as a result of education. Before deciding whether education brings out women's good or bad qualities, they should be given the chance to refine their intellect by appropriate education. Isn't it piteous that there is an outcry on account of the wrong impression that all literate women are learned? The actions of the former are collated to that of a *parishkaaramathy* (a woman who has *parishkaaram* – used in a positive sense) and it is said that women should not be educated; that they will become of loose morals; that they will long for unearned *swaathandryam*; will not enter the kitchen; and there will be no more cooking. The real function of education is mental *parishkaaram* (Kavamma, 1915: 463).

The right kind of *parishkaaram* was seen as coming about from the right kind of education. The writer differentiates between women who were merely literate and women who were knowledgeable and wise. The right kind of education would place the woman within the domestic ideal. It was not as if one group was for *parishkaaram* and another was against. The 'right kind' of *parishkaaram* was acknowledged as useful; and it was also put forward as being necessary for society. The 'right kind' of

⁷³ The translation of *tantonnikal* is from Devika's translation of the word *tantonnittam* (doing-as-one-pleased). From: Devika, *Imagining Women's Social Space in Early Modern Keralam* ([cited]).

parishkaaram was what made a Sheelavathy⁷⁴ or a Sita different from an Annie Besant or a Sarojini Naidu.

There is evidence that in olden times women had talent for arts, and also that they were not without *parishkaaram*. Like in the 20th century there were music experts, writers, fighters, experts in rulership at various stages of our history. But, these women were not idealized as model women. Women like Sheelavathy, Satyavathy, Damayanthy and Sita were neither literati nor famous for their ability to rule. Mrs. Annie Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Miss. Sathyabala Devi, and Miss. Tarabai are known today not only in India, but all over the *parishkrithalokham* (civilized world). Some people will oppose the fact that these women are ideals worth emulating and that their biographies illustrate how women too can attain fame in all avenues open to human intellect (Kochukrishnapilla, 1918: 269).

In the above formulation the ‘right kind’ of *parishkaaram* was responsible for a Sita or a Sheelavathy being endowed with the necessary womanly virtues. These model women had a certain inherent *sthreethwam*. The author mentions that some people do not think of Annie Besant etc. as being model women. The reason for this was that these modern women had moved away from the domestic realm. Moving away from the domestic was equated with losing *sthreethwam*.

Health, conjugality, sexuality

Quote from an article on the special subjects to be taught to girls in *Malayalamasika*:

Health Science – This should be compulsory in girls’ schools. It is the responsibility of a homemaker to take care of the health of the members of the household and herself. This subject should be taught in the lower classes in the

⁷⁴ She is a character from Indian mythology. She was so chaste and devoted to her old and inebriated husband that at his command she agreed to carry him on her shoulders to a courtesan.

primary section and should be over by the time they reach the higher classes. Girls should gain complete knowledge of the shape and nature of our organs; respiration; circulation; care for organs; gains of exercise; need for rest, etc. from school. As a home maker, mother and nurse she will need to know these. Home management – This should be taught in connection with health science. Cooking, nursing the sick, baby care, honouring guests, cleanliness, economy etc. are part of this. It is important to teach the girls to live according to the social, communal and financial situation of our country.

Another subject that needs to be taught in the upper primary classes in conjunction with home management is conjugal science. Majority of the women in our country think that the aim of marriage is just attending to the needs of the husband, childbearing, and childcare. There is no doubt that these are the main responsibilities in a marriage. But, these alone will not bring a completion to life. They also need to do political and communal activities. Most women do not have time to even think about these. They complain that even before a child is weaned another is conceived. The solution to reducing the number of maternal deaths on childbirth resulting from weakened health of women, to reducing the number of sickly, weak and malnourished babies, to preventing poverty and hunger is by creating awareness among our young women and men through schools. Therefore it would be good for the future of our country if we could include lessons on conjugality in the school syllabus (Amma, 1930c: 68-70)

The term Home Science came to be used in the 1920s (in India). It was an amalgamation of Home Economics (taught in USA), Domestic Science (taught in England and British India), and recombined both to include elements of a nationalist pedagogy (Hancock, 2001). The idea of teaching women Domestic Science existed before this period among the elite Indians in urban areas of Bombay, Madras and

Bengal, and in princely states like Mysore, Baroda, Travancore and Cochin. As far back as 1897 (and possibly even before that), Malayalam magazines argued for women's education so that women could have knowledge of matters related to health, nutrition, childcare, etc. (Subramanyayan, 1897). The colonial administration hoped that women's education would dampen political activism by extending Western modernity into Indian homes. Domestic Science, it was believed, was not only apolitical, but would instil scientific outlook in Indians (Hancock, 2001).

In Madras Presidency, Home Science was a term applied to food and nutrition, home management, maternity and child welfare, clothing, and hygiene and preventive medicine. In Travancore and Cochin, Home Science included all these sub categories. In Kalyani Amma's description (quote at the beginning of this section) of the subjects to be taught a new category is added: conjugal science (*Dampathyashaasthram*). Though she does not explain what she means by conjugal science, it should not be difficult to re-construct the meaning. She says women do not have time or energy for social and political activities as a result of continuous childbearing and related chores. Women and children were also becoming unhealthy and malnourished as a result of poverty. So women and men need to be taught conjugal science to decrease the population growth. From this one can make the logical jump that she was implicitly referring to teaching birth control and/or sex education.

The institution of special subjects for women, especially Home Science implied that both the woman and the home could be modernized using natural scientific principles (Hancock, 2001). The modernization involved knowledge of hygiene, nutrition, health and ultimately the health and well being of the nation. It also asserted that the domestic sphere was female. But by stating that women needed to study these subjects to be better mothers/wives/hostesses, Home Science denaturalized the link

between women and domesticity; domesticity was no longer an inherent talent/skill of women. In Kerala, the government records after 1930s lamented that there were very few takers for the optional subjects instituted for girls, and girls generally preferred to take up the same subjects that boys did. The Travancore Education Reforms Committee states:

While the authorities on the one hand, have apparently not encouraged differentiated course for girls, the few experiments that have been tried, in the girls' high schools, have shown that the pupils themselves or their parents are not anxious to take advantage of separate and special courses of study, unless those courses can be made use of, ultimately, with the same advantages as the present courses, terminating in recognised certificates. The experiment was recently tried of introducing alternative courses in domestic science in three girls' high schools; but it was found that few girls were willing to undergo the course; and, in all three cases, the alternative courses were eventually given up. (Statham *et al.*, 1933: 262-3)

In spite of the large number of writings on the need to learn Home Science/Domestic Science, to take up fine arts, music etc. Malayali society did not show an interest in these subjects. The majority of the population who were opting to send their girls to schools expected them to study the same subjects that the boys did. Education or knowledge itself began to be seen as gender neutral in the 1930s. The gender differentiation morphs into other areas like the kind of jobs/courses considered suitable for women.

The turn of century saw a move towards recognising public health as being important in Malayalam-speaking regions and throughout India. The print media showed an increase in writings on health and illness. Hygienic practices were related to being modern. There were many debates on child-bearing practices, midwives, health

of mothers, etc. (Amrith, 2007). European techniques of medicine were not a completely new innovation. The rulers of Travancore promoted Western medicine. The ruling family in Travancore had availed of the small pox vaccination as far back as 1865. The upper, middle and certain lower castes (Ezhava) had access to and were practitioners of Ayurveda. The Cochin Maharaja Kerala Varma (1864-1943) was a reputed physician (Jeffrey, 1992). Western medicine and medical practices gained acceptance in Kerala in a much easier manner than other cultural practices probably because of this history. Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* was published in 1927 and this had heightened the Indian awareness of scientific and hygienic medical practices. Malayalam magazines from 1927 and beyond have references to Mayo and her work (Cousins, 1928; Editorial, 1928a; Ramamenon, 1929a; Thomas, 1928). Child health and maternal health were matters of utmost public concern. Individual health was routinely connected to national progress. Malayalam writers were giving advice on the importance of cooking food properly so that the body had the needed nutrition. Dire warnings were given if this was not done properly including impending widowhood if the husband was not given proper food (Achuthamenon, 1907b).

The period saw discussions about the increasing population growth, women taking control of their body and planning the family (Kurup; Parameshwaranpilla, 1935; Sangar, 1934). Contraception and birth control were being discussed at various locations not just in Kerala, but other parts of India too. Though there were discussions at the government level, the states were reluctant to push for a strong birth-control agenda in colonial India. In Cochin legislative assembly when a member tried to propose a resolution to start birth control clinics in association with government hospitals, the resolution was not passed for religious and moral reasons (Ayyappan, 1931). The need for birth control was couched in terms of (a) economy – financial

resources of individual families and drain on national resources; (b) medical - health of the mother and the infant; (c) moral/religious – uncontrolled sexual activity and break down of family; and (d) culture/civilization – as acceptable practice in the West and a sign of modernity. There was a distinction made between birth control and abortion in many of the writings and the writers often had to state that both were not the same. In fact, it was said that non-availability of proper birth control methods were responsible for many women having to depend on quacks (Kurup, year unavailable). However many people found that there was scant difference between preventing a life from coming into existence and cutting off a life that is in existence (Ayyappan, 1931). The manner in which it was discussed in the legislative council, birth control was not a matter of choice for the woman. Even for those who supported the resolution it was something a husband granted to his wife to keep her healthy; it was seen as giving the man better control over the family's finances. Moreover, the Census report for 1931 had shown a high rate of increase in population leading to high rates of unemployment among the youth (Statham et al., 1933). Mrs. Swaris, the only woman to speak during the question and answer session in the legislative assembly, opposed it. She considered it “immoral” and “indecent” to openly discuss the matter in the council and considered the whole matter to be the [negative] outcome of modern education. Mrs. Swaris confessed that she had exited the council on the previous day to preserve her self-respect. She had been part of the AIWC discussions on birth control and had opposed the move there too. The AIWC had discussed the topic in 1931. In Cochin Legislative assembly the issue was discussed 4 times between 1931 and 1934, and in Travancore legislative council it was discussed once in 1936.⁷⁵ In both the councils the resolution was not passed. In the debate in AIWC in 1936, Miss. Rosemeyer, Miss. Watts, and

⁷⁵ These are the only records I found. The issue could have been discussed at other times.

Miss. Ouwerkerk, all Christian women, from Travancore opposed the resolution (Ahluwalia, 2008). These women were all single and opposed it on religious grounds.

In the magazines, the discussion on contraception and birth control came up as early as 1929 (after the publishing of *Mother India*). The discussions in Malayalam magazines were related to women's sexuality, her nature/instincts, her *sthreethwam*, etc. The following passage is a summary of an article by one of the traditionalists among the writers.

There are many examples of the kind of people Miss Mayo speaks about in her book. Just look at the examples of Mumtaz begum and the Maharaja of Indore.⁷⁶ Indian women are not like Western women. They do not take legal action against men who mistreat them. Rather, they try to change them with their exemplary deed, words, etc. Women should not be given freedom as this will lead to them losing their *sthreethwam*. Women should not travel with men as this will lead them to losing their chastity. Students should be taught to be self-efficient. They should have proper exercise and religious education. They should keep good company and read good books. They should give up meat and other food that stimulates the sex drive. People should have sex only for reproductive purposes. Having excessive sex will adversely affect one's health and decrease longevity. One should not read porn or use stimulants like alcohol and drugs. One should not use artificial birth control, but use abstinence to control one's sex drive. Mahatma Gandhi's life is a good

⁷⁶ There was a scandal involving the then Maharaja of Indore and a dancer in his court by the name of Mumtaz begum. For more details see: "Kidnapped for Romance," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 6 January 1946. Available from: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1368&dat=19460106&id=qFFQAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=Dw4EAAAIAIBAJ&pg=6088,5251164>

example of how sexual drive is kept in check by masculine power
(Ramamenon, 1929b: 323-30).⁷⁷

There are contradictory threads in this article. Contradictions were frequent in the writings from the period as the writers seem to be trying to find a middle path between cultural reform and cultural revival, between what was perceived as tradition and modernity, between the Occident and the Orient, between the writers' own sense of their culture and the colonialist's sense of Malayali/Indian culture. Eastern women were said to be pacifists, patient and loving while simultaneously giving the example of somebody like Mumtaz begum. The article was also trying to contain sexuality through restrictions on mobility, food and inter-personal contact. The woman's sexuality was imagined to be easily out of control. Women and men were not segregated into a strict purdah/zenana in Kerala, except among the Namboothiris and a few Muslim communities. However the mingling of the sexes in the modern school and at the workplace was looked at with suspicion/anxiety as both the women's and the men's sexuality could easily transgress into immorality. The detractors of birth control were championing for natural methods including abstinence. Gandhi himself was against the use of chemical or mechanical contraceptives (Ahluwalia, 2008).

Even the act of reading was linked to sexuality. Books were seen as double-edged swords. Many families prohibited their daughters from reading novels⁷⁸ However with careful supervision they could:

After the age of sixteen there is no objection to reading works like *Shakuntala*,
Naiśhadham, and others which have the quality of *sringara* (romantic/erotic

⁷⁷ This is not an exact translation of the text, but a gist of the arguments.

⁷⁸ K.R. Gowriamma mentions a similar restriction in her autobiography. This information was volunteered by one of interviewees, K. Ammukutty too. She remembered that her family considered novels as vulgar and restricted her from reading them. However, another interviewee Chinnamma Cherian said that she had read a number of novels and even been to see plays.

love), in the company of one's husband or women friends. In fact, it is necessary to read them to develop one's ability to carry out one's duties and to develop the strength of character to protect one's chastity (Warrier, 1931: 226).

Sexuality of the young women/girl could not be allowed to grow unchecked, but kept within the bounds of propriety and chastity. The more radical thinkers of the time were for including aspects of conjugality, sexuality and birth control practices in their writings and even in school curricula as can be seen from the quote at the beginning of this section. There were articles cautioning women from engaging in sex during pregnancy (Ramamenon, 1916), about the care needed when a woman was menstruating (Narayanamenon), precautions needed during pregnancy and other women's health related topics (Kochaachiyamma, 1928; Mathew, 1929). It is worth noting here that a number of articles on marriages and divorces started appearing in magazines around this period (Abraham(Mrs.), 1928; Kalyanikuttyamma, 1928; Krishnanthampi, 1924; Manjja(Mrs.), 1928; Mary, 1928; Ramamenon, 1929a; Stoker, 1932; Thomas, 1928; V.C.A., 1928). This was mirrored/paralleled by a wide range of legislations/bills on child marriage, civil marriage, absence of marriage, property rights under marriage, dissolution of marriage, etc. presented in the Travancore and Cochin legislative assemblies from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Instilling discipline to the body and mind of the young girl/woman was an important aspect of re-fashioning her *sthreedharmam*. This was also true for boys/men and not exclusively related to women. The model individual was one who was seen as having control over one's body, thoughts and words. The injunction against reading novels (the romantic and erotic kind, this was not so strictly enforced against reading historical novels) was also an aspect of disciplining of the mind from falling into excessive sexuality. The inclusion of drill and directives to include exercise into the

daily regime of women was part of disciplining the body (Bose, 1929; Ramamenon, 1929a; Shankunninair, 1921). Education was proposed as providing the necessary training to discipline the mind and to inculcate good habits.

Some of the women's magazines mention the increasing number of female suicides that were taking place in Kerala at the time (Amma, 1936b; Reddy, 1927). They do not glorify women's work/chores and perceive the gap between what women expected and what their reality was. They present the increased rates of suicides among women as a result of the bad treatment many women received at home. To these writers education was making women aware of the unjust treatment within marriage. One of the writers also mentioned that women in bad marriages had no legal recourse to end their marriages (Reddy, 1927). The so called increase in suicides could have been the result of better reporting because of the increase in print media during the period. However it could well have been the beginning of a trend – according to current socio-economic reports Kerala is one among the states with the highest rate for crimes committed against women and has increased cases of depression among educated women (Mungekar *et al.*, 2008).

Some of these ideas that emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Malayalam magazines were carried forward into the 21st century. The “Kerala Development Report” published in 2008 notes that the unemployment rates for urban educated women in Kerala was 34.9% while for all India it was 18.2%; and for rural women in Kerala it was 32.3% while for all India it was 15% (Mungekar *et al.*, 2008). The reasons cited for the high rates of unemployment is that (a) women are unable to procure jobs commensurate with their skills, (b) women prefer to remain in the educational stream in the absence of ‘desired’ employment, (c) as families move up the social ladder women are withdrawn from the work sector to take care of the home and

children, (d) women prefer to work near their homes, and (e) women are far less than men in the technical/professional education except nursing.

Reading from a modern position in time, what is missing in these descriptions (from the early 20th century) of the woman and her duties is the absence of an individualistic self: a woman was always a wife and a mother first, then a daughter and sister and sometimes a hostess, a medic, a caregiver and a home manager. Her agency or sense of self was directed towards the needs of the family and the nation. The development of self in the Western narratives of womanhood, which was demonstrated by the protests the Western woman led against the authorities for temperance, wage parity, the Suffragette movement etc. was looked at with fear and suspicion because these were seen as disruptive. These would have taken the Malayali woman out of her home. The Hindu writers (from matrilineal communities) of these magazines also had the added task of trying to come to terms with a new conjugal unit, where the woman and man had moved out of their natal families. The children were taking the names of their father; the wives were taking the names of their husbands – both new and different from custom. The nuclear family was too new and tenuous, and at that juncture in history it would have been seen as a double betrayal by the woman if she had asked for the recognition of a self that placed itself above the needs of the family. The first betrayal would have been the woman moving away from what was seen as her traditional roles/duties in the joint family. For the patrilineal families too, the nuclear family was a new phenomenon and the energy and time of the woman was absolutely necessary to run the household smoothly.

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Section II

Issues: Indian magazines and Malayalam magazines

This section analyses women's issues discussed in magazines from other Indian states during the colonial period. I have further narrowed it down to two South Indian states (Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh) and two North Indian states (Gujarat and Bengal). Critical and scholarly work on women's history and print culture, particularly on magazines from the colonial period, are available for these states. It was especially important to include work on Tamil journals because not only does Tamilnadu border Kerala, but Malabar was directly under the Madras presidency. There was an exchange of ideas happening in the form of students from Malayalam-speaking regions going to Madras for higher education, and the native states patterning their syllabus on the one followed in Madras University. The women's groups in both the states also had contacts with each other. Tamil journals were published in Kerala.⁷⁹ Bengal is important because not only was it frequently mentioned by the writers, it was alternatively a place to look up to; an often the 'other' to Malayali women in the same way Western women were.

Some of the Malayalam women's magazines had news articles which reported the meetings of the Women's Indian Association (founded in 1917) and the All India Women's Conference (founded in 1927) and the resolutions passed in these meetings/conferences. Sometimes the reporting was done by a delegate who had herself attended the meeting. This brought to the reader a sense of what was happening at the national level regarding the "woman question". Therefore the issues discussed in Malayalam magazines were not always Kerala-specific.

⁷⁹ There were 5 Tamil and 35 quasi-Tamil journals being published in Travancore in 1940. From: A. Narayanan Thampi, "Census of India, 1941: Travancore. Volume XXV," (Travancore: Government Press, 1942).

Mytheli Sreenivas's work on Tamil magazines maps a movement from reformist emphasis on domesticity at the turn of 20th century toward a moral radical critique of gender relations within the family by the 1920s and 1930s (Sreenivas, 2003). Rise in female literacy was the catalyst for the growth of women's publications from the turn of 20th century in Tamilnadu. This growth in female literacy prompted a debate on whether boys and girls should have the same curriculum, or whether the latter required to be taught different subjects (similar to discussions in Malayalam magazines). The perceived gap in girls' education was filled by creating a body of writing which included general and women-specific topics. Consequently, household hints for women were published alongside articles on science, medicine, geography and history. Motherhood and wifhood was the focus of education debates in Tamilnadu. Like in Malayalam magazines, Tamil magazines of the time also had articles on childcare, hygiene, household management and even on home life in England. Images of an ideal domesticity from ancient India and from England were juxtaposed in the magazines. Tamilnadu witnessed the emergence of a new elite in the 1890s. These men had obtained modern Western education and served the colonial state, and there was a group of professional elite who were also Western educated but were not as closely bound with the state machinery. Sreenivas points out that the wives of these elite men could have been the target of the new domestic ideal in Tamilnadu. These women had moved to Madras and other urban areas, creating households apart from mothers-in-laws and other senior relatives. These young women assumed sole responsibility for the care and education of the children.

Early Telugu journals for women concentrated on the education of women (Ramakrishna, 1991). Attempts were made to educate women on elementary science, health science, upbringing of children etc. There were articles pertaining to "good

conduct” of women. In Telugu journals of the period, “good conduct” was not a moral or ethical question, but taken broadly to mean the spirit of adjustment and accommodation in living with other members of the family and especially with their spouses. The writers were often part of the larger social reform movements and the journals were a medium to disseminate their ideas. Later Telugu journals, (from the 1920s) in addition to social reform and needs of women, discussed issues concerning freedom of women and political developments in the country. As mentioned before Malayalam women’s magazines were reluctant to discuss overtly political matters. Ramakrishna also mentions differences between male and female edited journals:

Instructional and sermonising tone could be noticed in the male-edited journals whereas the journals edited by women were more positive in their expression of support to women's rightful place, though appeared to be less assertive in their views. Further, it is observed, that journals edited by men were writing less about the problems confronting women. Their main emphasis appears to be on topics such as 'Chastity', 'House-keeping', 'Frugality', etc. On the other hand, women-edited journals discussed the issues like infant marriages, condition of widows, need for women teachers to teach children, child birth and child care etc. (Ramakrishna, 1991: 85)

In Malayalam magazines the difference seems to be with individual writers and the decade in which they were writing. Ramakrishna notes that early women journalists/writers were not so assertive in their writings. In Kerala too, this seems to hold true. Journals like *Shrimathi* and *Vanitha Kusumam* which were late entrants into the field were more assertive, radical and confident in their writings. In its twelfth issue, the editor of *Vanitha Kusumam* proudly wrote:

We are the only magazine to fight for women’s political freedom. Many people have advised and threatened us against taking such a stance; so we

have stopped listening to them and gone ahead with our agenda (Editorial, 1928b: 426).

In Gujarat, the early women's journals were addressed to women undergoing modernisation whose husbands were part of the colonial, British way of life (Shukla, 1991). These women could not be educated by mothers and mothers-in-law, since these would recreate the older models. The men needed companions in the British model. Education of middle/upper class mothers and wives was the aim of the journals. They introduced instructional material in skills such as sewing, knitting, 'chikkan' embroidery, sketching, and drawing, and other appropriate skills – for rich women to spend their leisure hours and poor women to earn a living. Malayalam writers also saw these activities as being useful for the same reasons. However, lace making, sewing and knitting were the preferred activities for women. The early Malayalam magazines were also not particularly addressed to the colonial elite; probably because Travancore and Cochin, being native states, did not have the same kind of contact with the British as Gujarat. Most of the early writers in the Gujarathi magazines were Parsi and Hindu business men and professionals. There were articles asking women to learn to mingle with men of their own social standing, to be receptive to change in dress, housekeeping, and marital relationships. This is in complete contrast to what the Malayali writers were asking of their readers – to stop imitating other cultures, to not mingle with people from the opposite sex, etc. There were articles in the Gujarathi journals asking women to give up complicated and superstitious rituals and ceremonies. Malayalam women's magazines do not generally mention these aspects of culture as the caste organizations had already taken it upon themselves to deal with customs and practices seen as superstitious, useless and extravagant.

Education and motherhood

Education was an important issue discussed in Bengali magazines from the turn of the century (Bannerji, 1991). The stress was on home based education to meet the social need of creating appropriate character traits, familial-social relations/households, and offering a moral basis for daily life. Malayalam journals/magazines when speaking about education always associated it with schools and formal structures. The qualities needed for an educated Malayali woman were discussed through the deployment of the concept of *sthreedharmam/ sthreethwam*. The Bengali woman in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was portrayed as being the centre of the family consisting of the father, mother and the child. The entire childcare and related activity was invested with this mother figure. Bannerji mentions that in reality there would have been other female figures like the grandmothers, aunts, older female siblings, cousins, and male and female servants who would be part of taking care of a child. The argument moved from the self-improvement of the mother to the improvement of the home, and then to the nation. The mother helped to educate the son, who then went on to serve the nation. Though Bannerji does not explicitly say so, the emphasis on the male child should be noted here. Because interestingly, when Hindu Malayali writers made the same connection through mother to the nation, the child who was seen as profiting from her education was always male. This is not to say that suddenly there was a preference for male children within the Malayali community, but it could well have been to do with the semiotics of the language.

In Bengal, mothering was combined with ‘teaching’ in this period. The woman was seen as a natural teacher, but as needing instruction in moral philosophy and practical sciences for this. Combining mothering with teaching reworked a service ideology into a gendered form (Bannerji, 1991). The role of the teacher is that of a

moral disciplinarian, while that of the mother is of loving nurture. The mother-child relation encompassed all women and men and the woman was conferred an adulthood and the man was infantilised. However this was not an actual figure of empowerment for the women, because though she had an agency – a socially regulatory role – she was also governed by the needs of the child to be educated, forced to be heroic to nurture the future citizens of the nation. There was ambivalence about women, her innate nature, instincts, and feelings. Women were portrayed as both strong and weak at the same time, as creatures of instinct, emotions, intuitions, rather than rationality. Both the pro and anti-reform groups supported this view of the woman. Arguments for education presupposed the potential for reason and the notion of an instinctual feminine (Bannerji, 1991: WS 57). Similar to the arguments used in Kerala on the need for education, in Bengal too, it was put forth that education would finely hone and correct the faults in the femininity of women. Career development and economic viability were seen as linking to better motherhood and home. Whereas, Malayalam writers till the 1920s saw career women and married women as having separate aims in life. Victorian and American women were the images used by the Bengali educationists as reference points, inspiring anecdotes of freedom of ‘another woman’; as a venue of expression of their own freedom and desire as women, and as a subtle acknowledgement of the inferiority of the Indian women. Though the Malayali writers used Western women as models, they were never completely acceptable to some of the traditionalists. Malayali writers were proud of their high literacy rates (and their superiority resulting from that) when compared to other women of India. Malayalam magazines also looked to a wider range of nations for the ideal qualities of the model women and this did not mean they considered themselves inferior to any other women.

Education and culture

Tanika Sarkar in speaking about the image of the 19th century Bengali woman in literature refers to a particular caricature that is an expression of the nostalgia for a lost tradition:

The woman, however, was the metaphor for both the unviolated, chaste, inner space and the possible consequences of its surrender. There is something like an obsession with the signs of that final surrender, the fatal invasion of that sacred space: giving up of sindur, betelnut, deference towards husbands and in-laws, religious faith; aping of foreign fashions and insistence on a greater leisure time for herself which might be misspent in reading novels and developing a discordant individuality. There is a tie-up with a whole range of themes made popular in pulp literature and bazaar paintings from the 19th century – the westernised, tea-drinking, novel-reading, mother-in-law baiting wife as a kind of a folk devil on whom are displaced all the anxieties and fears generated by a rapidly changing, increasingly alien social order (Sarkar, 2000: 172).

This description of the westernised woman who takes the brunt of the anxiety generated by a changing social order is present in the writings on women and *parishkaaram*. The Malayali woman who imbibes only the physical aspect of *parishkaaram* is the equivalent of the folk devil in Bengali print media. In the 20th century Kerala, the writers realise the futility of denying or trying to change reform/progress/cultural changes. So the image of the ideal Malayali woman is entrusted with the task of keeping in check undesirable aspects of *parishkaaram*. The elements that were undesirable were subjective.

An aspect of the duties of the Gujarathi and Bengali woman was her ability to play a musical instrument to entertain family members. Though many Malayali writers

do mention music as essential to a girl's education, some of the male writers from an earlier generation find music and sewing as useless (Subramanyayan, 1897). When a writer mentioned that women needed to have different kind of education from men, and learn more of arts and music, another writer replied sarcastically that they might as well change all universities to music universities and teach all children only fine arts (Rukmaniamma, 1922). The original article was published in a Bengali magazine, and Rukminiamma scathingly added that it was not surprising that the article was published in Bengal, the only state in India to not accept women's voting right. She saw the publishing of such an article in Malayalam as further proof of the selfishness of men. Music, sewing and fine arts do not attain the importance of a Science, Social Sciences and Arts education in the Malayali psyche in the early 20th century.

Like in Kerala, magazines from other parts of India also showed a change in their print culture post 1920s. Tamilnadu saw a boom in the publishing industry with an increase in the number of women writers and editors. During this period, for some writers, from transforming the wife the focus moved to transforming the family/society. The question of dowry was a rallying point for the transformation of society (Sreenivas, 2003). Since nearly half the population in Malayalam-speaking regions were matrilineal, dowry was probably not as wide spread in Kerala as it was in Tamilnadu. This could also explain the under representation of the issue in Malayalam magazines.

Conjugality

In her article Sreenivas mentions a number of instances when marriage was discussed by the Tamil writers. During the turn of the 20th century the prominent idea was that the woman had to/would model herself to be the perfect partner to the man.

The belief of conjugality as central to the family emerged during this period. Later articles mentioned marriage as an inegalitarian market exchange that included practices that were not exclusively monetary (Sreenivas, 2003). The texts wanted to replace the market-like quality of customary marriage practice with an emotional bond between the couple. Child marriage was another spin off of the same theme, whereby the practice was seen as preventing couples from developing a close emotional bond since marriages were fixed by the parents. Child marriages were also seen as adding to the problem of dowry. It put pressure on the brides' parents and amplified the image of the girls as being a burden on the family. Bengali magazines of the time also spoke about the evil of child marriages (Bannerji, 1991). In the late 1920s, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy had moved the Madras Legislative Council to accept the minimum marriage age of girls as 16 and that of boys as 24 (Chattopadhyaya *et al.*, 1939). Throughout India there were campaigns to mobilize public opinion and garner support for raising the Age of Consent and Minimum Marriage Age. A Malayalam writer in an article (which was the summary of a Hindi article) mentioned that child marriage was one of the reasons women's education was not progressing in India (Anandavalliamma, 1927). However, a year later another writer mentioned that child marriages were not common except among the lower classes. She also mentions that older men marrying younger women/girls had been common among some communities in Travancore (Thomas, 1928). There is an article by Margaret Cousins⁸⁰ where she mentions that Indian woman do not have protracted childhood. They had to stay at their husband's place and take on responsibilities at a young age. Then she goes on to mention, rather

⁸⁰ Margaret Cousins (1878-1954) was an activist and a freedom fighter. In 1908 she played an active role in the Women's Suffragette Movement in Ireland and England. Later, in 1917 she established the first Women's organization in India, the Women's Indian Association in Madras Presidency. She used this organization very effectively to exert pressure on the government to grant voting rights to Indian women. Mrs. Margaret Cousins became the President of AIWC in 1938.

contradictorily, that only Brahmins get their daughters married off before the age of 14 (Cousins, 1928). The general opinion seemed to be that child marriages were not as prevalent among Malayalis as it was in other parts of India. Girls after the age of 14 were not considered children. So very few writers take up the issue except around the time the Sarada Act⁸¹ was being discussed at the national level.

Widow re-marriage was another issue that was discussed in the print media of the period. Certain Tamil writers took a radical position with regard to the issue. Containment of the widow's desires was at the root of the social restrictions placed upon upper caste widows. Tamilnadu also saw a move among the lower castes to control the sexuality of the widow as a marker of social prestige. Some of the writers developed the idea of the interiorized desire of the widow, and produced her as a desiring subject. Sreenivas argues that this depiction complicated representations of widows as passive objects of reform (Sreenivas, 2003). However, the narratives were not able to show the widow as being able to remarry, though she came close to doing so. What these few radical articles did was to set the stage for possible social change.

In *Streebodh*, a popular Gujarathi women's journal of the time there were poems/articles on the condition of widows, but it was never suggested that the taboo against widow remarriage should be removed (Shukla, 1991). There were no discussions on the aftermath of the movement for widow remarriage. Social movements against female infanticide, the case of Rakmabai vs. Dadaji in the matter of restitution of conjugal rights, or the movements to raise the age of consent for consummation of marriage were not covered by the journal. But the magazine did discuss the issue of child marriage at length. Shukla mentions that one reason could have been that the editors and publishers wanted to keep the journal out of

⁸¹ The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 was known as the Sarada Act, which fixed the age of marriage of girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years.

controversies, but it could well have been a way of limiting the sphere of women to home and family and keeping their interests out of larger issues.

Malayalam magazines do not have too many references to widow remarriage. The few times that the topic came up were in relation to education, in the sense that education would equip widows to support themselves financially. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his social reforms were venerated in connection with this. The reference to widows occur more in articles from before 1920, and even then it was usually in adjunct to women's issues like child marriage and sati, which were not really issues in Malayalam-speaking regions according to the writers. However, the Census reports for Travancore and Cochin did mention the presence of child wives among Malayalis (Aiya, 1894). For the Nairs especially, these were not serious concerns (Balakrishnamenon, 1915). A few of the writers glorify the image of the widow and widowhood. This was an extension of the exaltation of chastity:

The main characteristics of *sthreedharmam* are obedience to the husband and maintaining physical and mental purity. Once the husband is no more, the wife should live like a widow till the end of her life for the salvation of her husband's soul (Amma, 1919: 194).

Chastity and monogamy were qualities that were emphasised in relation to the transformation to patriliney. Figures like Sati and Savithri were used to accentuate monogamy. The paradox is that while in other parts of India the reform movement was trying to better the conditions of widows, in Kerala the writers were espousing widowhood as part of *sthreedharmam*. There were mixed reactions to widow remarriage. "If widowers remarry, why cannot widows?" asks a writer in an article on "*Purushadharmam*" (men's duties) (Lakshmiamma, 1907). Another author mentions a letter (reprinted from an English paper) written by a widow asking whom she should marry – a relatively rich man, or a virtuous poor man. The Malayali author approves of

the reply which says that ideally the woman should not marry as she had a fourteen year old daughter, but if she had to marry she should choose the virtuous man and make him wealthy (with her money). The widow is asked to take care of the daughter's needs instead of thinking of herself (Appunnimenon, 1907). It would appear that widow remarriage was not prohibited, but not easy in the Malayalam milieu. Her role as mother was more important than her aspirations for herself. And her education was important so that she could support herself.

Education for material benefits versus education for moral, spiritual and social enlightenment was a constant bone of contention for some of the writers and the government. The high ideals for education envisioned by the former and the latter do not seem to have been shared by the general population. The University Committee of Travancore states:

A girls' collegiate career is directed to qualify for a post with a high salary, and is regarded as a financial speculation on the part of her family, and that it has not yet come home to parents that the education of girls is as much an incident of family self-respect as the education of the boys (Aiyangar *et al.*, 1925: 56).

The overarching ideology about women as mothers and wives which was circulating in Bengal, Tamilnadu and other parts of India is replicated in the Malayalam magazines too. The differences among the different regions in customs and culture were the differences that showed up in the magazines. In Kerala, print media was targeting not just an urban elite, but people in rural areas too. Getting an education and a middle class job in Travancore did not involve the break with one's relatives and locality that it often did in Bengal (Jeffrey, 1978). In Kerala, the ideas and interests circulating in the towns soon reached the countryside. In some cases this also acted in reverse: some of the customs and traditions of the countryside are/were present in the

urban areas of Kerala. So, while the Gujarathi writers asked readers to shed some of their inhibitions and mingle with men from their own social standing, Malayali writers ask their readers to be more circumspect in their behaviour towards members of the opposite sex.

It is difficult to argue for a single position regarding many of the issues discussed in the magazines as very often there are writers who expressed contradictory opinion to what was generally proposed. The analysis of the materials can be summarised thus:

- The magazines from the different areas seem to enter the same issues from different entry points. The cultural differences in the different areas also changed the issues in subtle ways.
- In early 20th century woman's *sthreedharmam* and *sthreethwam* began to be imagined differently from how they had been done previously. Education, especially modern education became an important aspect of *sthreedharmam*. Education was seen as taking women away from their *sthreedharmam* and *sthreethwam* and paradoxically it was suggested that education be re-vamped to address this issue.
- Though the woman's duty to her children was important, the role of the wife was seen as being slightly more important. Conjuality was seen as the state to aspire to and the education of girls was to be directed towards this with lessons in hygiene, domestic science, household accounts etc.
- A few of the writers did mention that women who planned to go for higher education did not need the same kind of education as those planning to get married. It is almost as if these two kinds of women could not be one and the same in the early decades of the 20th century. This attitude changed towards the 1930s when it came to be accepted that the working woman could also take care of the home, husband and

children. So the space of the domestic was still seen as being part of the woman's *dharma*.

- The change in the lifestyles of the modern educated woman who was also living away from the joint family was subject to criticism, especially her so called 'complete reliance' on servants. Since servants had been part of the older joint family system, this might have been a problem because the new women were not as insistent about maintaining caste/class distance with other people. And this was also connected to new notions of health, hygiene and economy.

- Concepts like *sthreeswaathandryam* were deployed in relation to *sthreedharma* and the term could mean a variety of things in the early 20th century: individualism, self-reliance, right to education, breaking away from caste/community rules, breaking away from cultural codes of conduct, etc.

- The writers constantly compared Malayali women with women from other parts of India, and the World (and not just the West). Bengal was a frequent point of reference for women within India. England, America and Japan were other countries that were seen as positive or negative role models depending upon the ideological position taken up by the writer(s).

- Many of the issues discussed in the magazines like contraception, marriage etc. closely followed legislations and discussions happening in Kerala and in India. Contraception generally seems to be acceptable (though there were a few detractors) to the writers.

- The matrilineal and middle caste position of the writers also colour the way the writers approach certain issues and they also assume to speak for other women when in reality some of the issues under discussion were related only to women from their

caste/class positions. The differences are obvious when one analyses magazines owned and run by writers belonging to other class/caste/religious groups.

- Education for developing necessary life skills versus education for cultural attainments was an issue that was being discussed at this period.
- Education for the woman was proposed, not exactly for her sake, but for the sake of her family, the community and the nation. Since education was not universally acceptable or accessible to all Malayalis at this period, it was also the only way the argument could be made. Towards the end of the 1930s there was a change in this trend with a few writers advocating education as being necessary for the self-development of the woman.

I have tried to show through this discussion of the education debates in the Malayalam magazines that women's education was not an easy process/achievement for women – the writers had to prove education was necessary while stating that it would not bring about drastic changes in the social and gender structures. Women were more closely bound to domestic structures than before and education was seen as essential to this process. The kind of employment/industry that was put forward as being suitable for women were the ones that utilized their 'womanly' qualities and/or kept them closely connected to their domestic duties, their *sthreedharmam*.

Many of the concepts closely related to education like *sthreeswaathandryam*, *parishkaaram*, *sthreedharmam*, and *sthreethwam* changed during this period. Changes in cultural and caste practices were also seen as being connected to educational structures. The concept of *sthreedharmam* was crucial to imagining the new and modern Malayali woman. *Sthreedharmam* was imagined as changing due to the advent of education and *parishkaaram* and paradoxically education was then postulated as being necessary to teach women their *sthreedharmam*. The caste, religious, community

affiliations of the writers were important in the kind of positions taken up by the writers regarding *sthreedharmam*. However in spite of the differences there were commonalities in how *sthreedharmam* was conceptualised.

The articles in women's magazines are useful in tracking the changes taking place in the social and cultural milieu of nineteenth and early 20th century Kerala. The subtle shifts in the nature of the arguments, the references to happenings, meetings, conferences, etc. capture a history for posterity that is not available in standard history books. Women's magazines are also the only way in which women's history in Kerala can be tracked to some extent. Unfortunately the well-preserved and popular magazines from the 19th and early 20th century are mostly written for and by the hegemonic caste/class groups, and history that is available through them is also about this group. There are certain qualities that are common to the model women put up for the readers: chastity, obedience, education, domestic capabilities, modesty, altruism, courage when required, prudence, self-effacement and beauty. These qualities are represented as being present in women from various locations, time, class, caste, community, and stages of life. This representation of the figure of woman gains hegemony over time and becomes ensconced as the image of the ideal Malayali woman. What is interesting is that the current image of a Kerala woman as expressed in magazines, newspapers, television, the Internet, etc. is also similar or derived from the image of the woman that is put together in the early women's magazines.

This chapter delineates the nuances of the education debates in Malayalam magazines. It illustrates how the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam* was an important aspect of the education debates and how the ideal Malayali woman was imagined by the writers through the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam*. The magazines were just one of the sites where women's education was discussed. The following chapters analyses

the education debates in government policies, curricula, and fictional materials. Through these chapters I try to prove that *sthreedharmam* was an important aspect of the education debates in not just the magazines, but also in other sites.

CHAPTER 3: Ideas and practices in formal education

A question often-asked about the high literacy rate in Kerala is regarding the different factors that played a role in creating this literacy. Many scholars ascribe it to the matrilineal system that prevailed here. Christian scholars prefer to present the missionaries who started the first modern schools as the harbingers of change. A few scholars also point to the benevolent rulers as another factor. Most histories of education concentrate on either the role of the missionaries, the matrilineal system or that of the government, but not all of them taken together. The cultural factors that played a role in the rise of literacy are often overlooked except by a handful of social scientists like Robin Jeffrey, Michael Tharakan and J. Devika. This chapter through an analysis of the history of missionary and government education and the curriculum in place in both systems in Malayalam-speaking regions in the 19th and early 20th centuries, shows how these concretised certain ways of thinking about women's education and their social/cultural status. In the previous chapter, I have mentioned how literacy and education were related to formal structures of schooling in Kerala. This chapter delineates how formal schooling was constantly fraught with the tensions of female individuation as opposed to situating the body of the woman within the domestic ideal. This chapter also attempts to unearth ideas and practices that went into the making of a tradition for the 20th century and 21st century Malayali woman (in the sense of looking back from the present and seeing ideas being formulated in the past that then gets defined as tradition). The thesis and this chapter in particular try to capture the cultural history of women's education.⁸²

⁸² This work does not claim to be an exhaustive study of all the aspects of women's education because not only is the archives too vast to be included in a mere chapter, but also not all the materials are available for perusal. I have included and/or looked at some of the major policy documents related to

The first section of this chapter deals with the history of general education in Kerala in the 19th and 20th centuries since women's education cannot be separated from general education. There were commonalities in the problems faced by Malayali girls and boys just as there were differences. Initially the hurdles that faced women's education were the same for Malayalam-speaking regions and other parts of India. However, the particular nature of caste relations, matriliney, presence of large number of native Christians, interest shown by the ruling families, availability of relatively large number of reading materials (newspapers/magazines/books), etc. all worked towards making education easily accessible to a wider set of communities and groups.

The second section of this chapter analyses some of the textbooks that were in use in the early 20th century. The texts provide insight into the kind of women that were presented to Malayali students as being ideals worth emulating. These texts were taught not just to the girls, but also to the boys. This section attempts to demonstrate that most of the textbooks while seemingly about strong women (from mythology, history and literary fiction), many of whom played significant roles in the public sphere, also manages to contain their *sthreethwam* within the domestic space.

Section I

Missionaries and the beginning of modern education

In 1813, when the Charter of the English East India Company was revised, official sanction was given to British missionaries to carry out mission work. The East India Company had come under pressure in England for monopolizing the Indian

formal education like the Education Codes for Travancore and Cochin (from 1910 to 1941), some of the administrative reports of the education departments of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar (from 1874 to 1952), the various Education Committee reports (from 1875 to 1946) and the census reports for Travancore, Cochin and Malabar (from 1874 to 1944).

market and for keeping it underdeveloped. The company was forced to take on the role of custodian of English trading interests. Thus a commercial interest was turned into a form of colonial governance. The colonial state then had to include service to the colony, which implied the creation of a new order in India, and a civil society among the natives. The violence with which the British Empire was built could not continue and coercion had to be replaced by socialisation. This was where education had a role to play (Kumar, 1991).

The Protestant Christian missionaries started work in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar along with the expansion of the British supremacy in these states. In October 1810, John Munroe was appointed as the Resident of Travancore and Cochin. Colonel Munroe's interest in education cannot be explained away by the utilitarian doctrine of creating a class of clerks or as a step to strengthen the imperial rule. He was keen on supporting the work of the Christian missionaries. He believed that Christianity would help the progress of the people, and also that religion would stabilize and consolidate British political power in India (Gladston, 2006). He also needed educated persons to man the newly expanded administrative system during his reign (Tharakan, 1984b).

The London Missionary Society (LMS) had started work in Travancore in 1806, before the Charter was revised and before John Munroe's appointment. The basic facilities of reading and writing were required for the missionaries to start their proselytization work among the natives.⁸³ There was a system of education (in single teacher schools called *Ezhuthupallis*) in place in Malayalam-speaking regions that provided basic literacy and a smattering of arithmetic and astrology. However this system was not widespread, nor was it accessible to all castes/classes. The first English

⁸³ For a short history of education in Kerala before the advent of missionaries see Appendix I.

school for mass education was opened in Mylaudy⁸⁴ in 1809 by a German Lutheran missionary, William T. Ringeltaube. Free instruction was given in reading, writing and arithmetic to poor children (Thomas, 1993). Colonel Munroe framed a series of questions and sent it to Ringeltaube, in order to understand the exact history, the present condition, and the requirements of the Mylaudy Protestant mission in 1813. One of the questions was specifically regarding the state of education:

Query No. 6. What arrangements subsist for the education of the clergy, what schools for the youth are maintained, what instruction given in those schools, how are books and teachers supplied, are the natives disposed to send their children to school, and what additional sums would be required to provide an adequate system of education (Agur, 1990: 595).

Ringeltaube's reply:

No arrangements for educating the clergy. Six schools for the Laity as per query. The instructions that are given consist in lessons, of reading, writing, Arithmetic, as also to Christian children, the catechism and reading in the New Testament or other religious books. The natives are not much disposed to send their children to school. The reason is, it is more profitable to have them instructed in the various exercises by which they must gain their livelihood hereafter. Girls never come to school in Travancore which is a great loss. Books are supplied by presents from the Reverend Missionaries at Tranquebar, but not in sufficient number. For school masters, I choose such out of the congregation that can read and pray fluently which is an incitement to others to come on well...An adequate system requires a printing office, with solid buildings, workmen for printing and binding materials & c., without such an institution a Mission is helpless and hopeless abortive production. It is also necessary that new converts and children should be boarded for sometime,

⁸⁴ In present day Tamilnadu

which again requires buildings and *batta* also for several married Missionaries.

I have hitherto struggled with the bitterest want (Agur, 1990: 595-6).

By 1815, there were six schools with 188 students in Travancore. However, girls were not yet attending schools, as Ringeltaube had mentioned. When Ringeltaube started the first Protestant mission in Travancore, not many parents were willing to send their children to school. This could have been because the schools set up by him were of an unfamiliar kind, and there was also the fear of proselytization. Moreover, for the mainly agricultural labourers and the people of other lower castes in the area, there was not much of an incentive to go to school, since it did not provide any visible gains. The working conditions of the missionaries were difficult, and the Hindu rulers and Diwans in Travancore were not sympathetic to their activities.

Beginning of girls' schools in Malayalam-speaking regions

From missionary records of a slightly later time, it would appear that people, albeit a small percentage of the total population, were asking for schools and churches to be built in Travancore. In 1819, Charles Mead opened a seminary in Nagercoil.⁸⁵ His wife, Johanna Mead, started a school for girls at the same time, which marked the first attempt in the field of women's education in Travancore. It was a boarding school and the missionaries found it difficult to get girls to join these institutions. Mead's letter of April 24, 1818 describes the general state of the Mission.

The South Travancore Mission is assuming a pleasing aspect. Many are applying continually for instruction and baptism. The former Christians feel their drooping courage revived, while others, undecided before, have come to the determination of declaring on the side of truth. In several villages, persons

⁸⁵ Nagercoil, ten kilometres west of Mylaudy, was part of Travancore until the formation of the state of Kerala in 1957.

have applied for schools to be established, and a Christian Church to be built in their neighbourhood (Agur, 1990: 683).

These missionaries thought that female education was important for the progress of India. Christianity was seen as the true religion and native practices were seen by them as being superstitious. The objective of the early missionaries was to bring salvation to the souls of the [what they believed] heathens. Culture⁸⁶ and civilization, they believed resided with the Christian faith. Their sense of morality was deeply rooted in the Protestant Christian ideals of the early 19th century.

Johanna Mead was joined by Martha Mault, the wife of another missionary. About one-third of the first batch of students belonged to the slave castes.⁸⁷ Mead's primary objective was to impart plain education with religious instruction (Gladston, 2006). Boarding schools were important because they helped to reduce the drop-out rates, and as Mrs. Mault reported the missionaries found it far preferable to have the students entirely away from their homes to secure them from the influence of the non-Christians, who were considered to be a bad influence on the new converts (Haggis, 2000). Classroom teaching was combined with vocational training: the girls were taught reading and writing in the morning, and spinning cotton, knitting, sewing, and

⁸⁶ Here culture is used in the sense of cultivating the mind. Culture used in a wider sense refers to behaviour patterns acquired socially and transmitted by symbols. It includes language, tradition, customs and institutions. For more details see: Thapar, "Tradition."

⁸⁷ All castes from the Brahmins to the Ezhavas possessed slaves. The Pulayas, Cherumas and the Kanakkars formed the main slave castes in Malayalam-speaking regions. They were lower than the Ezhavas in the caste hierarchy and worked in the fields. They were paid paddy as wages, were provided housing and had no holidays to speak of. They were considered the property of the landlord, who could sell them, mortgage them and punish them (sometimes in inhuman ways). The Parayas were a slave caste even lower in the caste hierarchy than the Pulayas. The above mentioned castes with the hill tribes were called the backward classes in official reports. For details see: Francis Day, *The Land of the Permauls, or Cochin, Its Past and Its Present* (Madras: Adelphi Press, 1863), Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore* (London: W.H. Allen & co., 1883), T.K. Gopal Panikkar, *Malabar and Its Folks* (Madras: G.A. Natesan and Co., 1900).

embroidery in the afternoon. In 1820, a lace industry was started in the Girls' Boarding school at Nagercoil. Thus, from the very beginning, missionary education gave equal importance to practical skills. This kind of education was very different from the one given in the *Ezhuthupallis*.

The beginning of modern education in Travancore can be traced to the issue of a Royal Rescript by the Regent Rani Gouri Parvathi Bai (1815-1829) in 1817:

The state should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the state might be advanced there by (Thampi, 1942: 155).

The village school teachers⁸⁸ were not being paid sufficiently by the villagers, and this rescript was issued to resolve this. Many scholars regard this as the first formal recognition of education as part of the public administration system by the state (Tharakan, 1984b; Thomas, 1993). This early attempt by the state did not produce any tangible results, as the state-run schools were few and were not in any way superior to the indigenous and missionary schools in terms of subjects of study, methods of teaching, or the qualification of the teachers. But it marked a new beginning in terms of the government showing an interest in primary education and instituting agents to inspect the schools, there by bringing in the concept of inspection, order and discipline to education. Scholars are also divided as to whether this Royal Rescript was solely the contribution of a 15 year old queen. Some scholars believe the decision was influenced by Colonel Munroe (Tharakan, 1984b; Thomas, 1993). The later missionaries' work

⁸⁸ When the Travancore government started to take a renewed interest in education in the late 19th century, some of the teachers were absorbed from the old *Ezhuthupallis*. From: Robin Jeffrey, "Governments and Culture: How Women Made Kerala Literate," *Pacific Affairs* 60, no. 3 (1987).

among the natives was facilitated by the supportive attitude of the ruling family and the Resident. The rulers in Travancore and Cochin, before Rani Lakshmi Bai (1810-1815), were not as supportive of the missionaries.⁸⁹ Under the rule of Rani Lakshmi Bai, the College started by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Kottayam was presented with Rs. 20,000.⁹⁰ Emulating the Rani's generosity, the Raja of Cochin presented Rs. 5,000 for the benefit of the Protestant Mission in Travancore (Agur, 1990). The initial interest taken up by these governments in starting a few schools and encouraging missionary activities by grants was similar to that followed in British India at the time (Tharakan, 1984b). Thus, the native rulers supported the missionary schools under the direct or indirect influence of the British.

Problems faced by the missionaries in the early years

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) started a girl's school in Kottayam in 1820, which was the first of its kind in North Travancore. Amelia Baker, wife of the missionary Henry Baker, started this school. It was difficult for the missionaries to secure regular attendance, so she made arrangements for the girls to stay with her. Irregular attendance was a constant grievance as indicated by the following extract from a letter sent by a missionary, Mrs. Chapman, to the CMS secretary, dated March 2, 1849:

⁸⁹ When the Diwan of Travancore, Velu Thampi, and the Diwan of Cochin, Palliyath Achen openly revolted against the British in 1808-1809, native Christians bore the brunt of their fury. A series of atrocities were unleashed against them. Over 3000 men, women, and children were maimed, tortured, and butchered, and thrown in the backwaters and the sea in both Travancore and Cochin.

⁹⁰ This was laid out in land. Earlier the Rani had gifted Rs.1000 for erecting a Chapel and furnishing the buildings of the College. She also annexed a tract of land to this in the neighbourhood of Kollam (a town north of Thiruvananthapuram), with several subsidiary grants in order to render it productive, and appointed a monthly allowance of Rs.70 from the state funds in 1818 for the support of a hospital. Later rulers of Travancore were also supportive of modern education and Western medical practices/medicines.

I have reason to think that my dear school-girls are going on well. Two have left me lately at a very early age to be married. And I regret, that during the few years they had been learning here, their parents kept them at home for so many months at a time, that they have left me with a very small amount of knowledge. One of them, however, is a very nice good girl: and both can read very well, and are, I know, in the habit of reading the Word of God at their own homes. If the Lord will grant the dew of his blessing, the seed sown will spring up and bring forth fruit into eternal life. Some of the girls now with me have been under instruction for three, some for four years. They are still young; I hope therefore to keep them longer still, if spared (Chapman, 1849).

Early withdrawal of girls from schools and the early age of marriage were some of the problems that the missionary wives constantly struggled with. For the missionary wives, running these schools was a fruitful way to spend time. The schools run by the male missionaries often employed other teachers to teach the various subjects, and so they could take in more students than the female schools (which were usually run by the missionary wife on her own). Chapman wrote further:

I am glad and thankful to tell you, that my weak health does not interrupt my attention to my little school. I should feel quite sorry to be without it.

I think it better not to increase the number as I have not room for more, and I feel sure too, that I have as many as I have strength properly to attend to.

I have sometimes been much pleased, with the serious inquires – which the women, who occasionally come to see me, make. Piety and intelligence are I am sure gradually on the increase among our native females. This is evident in the improved manner in which they train up their children;

and in their desire to bring them as early as possible to our schools (Chapman, 1849).

Reading the scripture was an important aspect of missionary education. Being able to read the Bible and keeping at it punctually were seen as indications of piety. Piety was also equated with morality. Contact with the missionaries was already making small changes in the way people thought about education. The first Protestant converts were ready to send their children to schools. They also began to follow a new system of worship and several new customs and traditions, following the Protestant missionaries. Scripture reading was not part of the Syrian Christian⁹¹ lifestyle, and there were no Bibles available in Malayalam in the early 19th century. Therefore, the Protestant missionaries had to undertake the translation and printing of the Bible.

When more missionaries arrived, similar schools were started in Alleppey, Cochin, and other places by Mrs. Bailey, Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Ridsdale. The earliest CMS girl students were children of Syrian Christians or high caste Hindus. At Cochin, the early pupils were Jews. The major missionary work in Malabar was done by the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society based in Germany. Julie Gundert, wife of Hermann Gundert, started a school for girls in 1839 in Tellicherry (in Malabar).⁹² Some of the first students to go to schools in Malabar were children of Christians who had moved from Tamilnadu (Gladston, 2006).

⁹¹ According to tradition the Syrian Christians were indigenous Christians converted by St. Thomas in the 1st century A.D. When the Protestant missionaries came to Kerala this community of Christians was already present here. While they were concentrated in Cochin and North Travancore, the Muslims were concentrated in Malabar in the north.

⁹² At the time she started the school in Tellicherry, there were already 144 boys and 13 girls studying in CMS schools. From: Hepsi Gladston, "History of Development of Education of Women in Kerala (1819-1947)," *Samyukta: A Journal of Women's Studies* VI, no. 1 (2006)..

Malabar area lagged behind Travancore and Cochin with regard to modern English education.⁹³ Scholars cite a number of factors for this lag. The Mappillas (the term used for Muslims from this region) perceived the British as oppressors due to the violent history of the region.⁹⁴ This led to hatred of English language and Western education. Misapprehension about religion and superstitious beliefs caused many people to believe that Christian missionaries would weaken the faith of young girls and boys, and that they would propagate Christianity (Ali, 1994; Gladston, 2006).⁹⁵ This belief was strong because Catechism was taught to students belonging to all religions till the early 20th century, until an order was passed by the governments putting a stop to the practice. When the missionaries introduced the use of slates in 1856 in some of their schools, the parents interpreted it as a plan devised for conversion (Gladston, 2006). The orthodox *Ulamas* (theologians) who wielded great influence over the Muslim population denounced education as anathema and they interdicted the education of girls. English language was dubbed as the language of hell and Western education was considered a passport to hell (Ali, 1994). The Namboothiris in the region also considered English language as contemptible. Together with this, there was the British policy of indifference towards the development of primary education (Nair, 1989).

⁹³Malabar had a large number of indigenous educational institutions including *madrassas* (Muslim schools of learning) and a College for Vedic learning. In fact it is believed that Malabar probably had more indigenous schools than Travancore and Cochin. From: P.K. Michael Tharakan, *Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Development: The Case of 19th Century Travancore* [Working Paper No. 190] (Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Developmental Studies, 1984b [cited 28 March 2007]); available from http://cds.edu/pub_wp8185.htm.

⁹⁴ The 19th century saw a large number of peasant revolts against the landlords or *janmis* and their supporters.

⁹⁵ I am not sure if this can be read as misapprehension or was in fact a reality considering that missionaries were using the schools as sites for religious conversion.

The religious constituency of the north Travancore and the Cochin missions were different from that of the south Travancore missions. In south Travancore, mainly recent converts from the lower and polluting castes sent their children to schools. Due to this difference, the problems that beset the two missions were different. The lower caste converts came under attack from the upper castes in south Travancore missions when they started to adopt some of the customs and the dressing styles of the upper castes under the guidance of the missionaries. The earliest stirrings against caste pollution and restrictions started in south Travancore. In north Travancore, the missionaries had to face stiff opposition from the Syrian priests at a later date over the differences in religious dogmas between the two Churches. The Syrians were banned from attending the Protestant mission schools after 1837 (Aiya, 1906). The missionaries had to confront caste-related hurdles in both Travancore and Cochin. The upper caste members were unwilling to allow their children to sit with lower caste children. In Baker's letters to the missionary centre in London, he writes of having had to rebuke, and even excommunicate some of his upper and middle caste converts, because they refused to inter-dine with lower caste converts.

Kinds of schools

There were different kinds of schools established by the missionaries: seminaries (for theological studies and for supplying the mission with teachers and catechists), normal schools (for teacher training), preparatory or middle schools (for preparing students for high school), boarding schools, day schools, parochial schools (run by Christian parishes where religious education was given with conventional education), high schools, Anglo-vernacular schools, Franco-vernacular schools, and infant schools (Gladston, 2006; Thomas, 1993).

Curriculum and objectives

The missionaries followed a curriculum adapted from what was taught in England in the first half of the 19th century. According to a government report on the differentiation of curriculum for girls and boys in England (Hadow *et al.*, 1923), public schools and other proprietary schools were started in large numbers from the 1820s in England. This was around the same time that the missionaries started to come to Kerala in large numbers. These new English schools had a wider curriculum than the older Grammar schools. The girls' schools of the time taught English, reading, writing, keeping accounts, drawing, plain and fine needlework, dancing and French. Music and Italian were added in the more ambitious schools. The education of women, in general, was scanty, superficial, and incoherent. Traditional education for girls up to about 1845 accentuated the differences between the sexes (Hadow *et al.*, 1923). The early missionary wives were all products of this traditional education. Therefore, the courses offered in their schools were based on the curriculum they had studied, with some modifications. The primary/basic schools run in Malayalam-speaking regions did not have dancing, accounting, foreign languages [except English] or geography and history in the early decades of the 19th century.

In Victorian England, the husband or the father was the head of the household and the moral leader of the family. The role of the wife, though secondary was not unimportant: she had duties towards the husband and had to raise the children properly. These ideas were later taken up by the nationalists and other educationists in the early 20th century as one of the main arguments to push for women's education. A native pastor, Thomas, commented on the Baker school in *CMS Proceedings* in 1881 that the girls formerly taught in their school, unlike the other women in the country, had become real help-mates to their husbands by being qualified to help them in keeping

household accounts, paying the labourers in the paddy fields, teaching the young children and so on according to their circumstances and positions in life (Gladston, 2006). A Victorian wife was expected to track payments to household servants, grocery store, baker, butcher etc. These ideas were impressed upon the young students in the missionary schools. It was not possible to have enough missionaries sent from England, given that India was a large country. The missionaries planned to train local converts to take up some of the outreach work. The first schools established near the mission centres had local teachers, some of whom were recent Christian converts. One of the aims of the boarding schools was to have suitably educated wives for the young Indian missionaries. The importance given to attendance and proper deportment was part of the missionary and Victorian ideal of the ordering and disciplining of the body and the mind. [This was taken up in the early 20th century by the government policy makers, though by then the focus of the need for discipline changed as I will show later.]

The missionaries felt that no community could make real progress unless the position of the women was improved. The traditions and customs of a society were believed to be perpetuated through the mothers. The connection between women's education and motherhood was made as early as mid 19th century. This was also connected to their belief in the civilizing power of the West and the cultural backwardness of the Indians. The teaching in Baker as well as similar boarding schools managed by wives of missionaries in central Kerala was first planned chiefly to give the pupils necessary domestic training (Hunt, 1920). Domestic training mainly comprised of needlework – embroidery, knitting, spinning, crochet, lacework, and sewing. Training in needlework provided income; this kind of manual work was not regarded as menial by the girls. The girls were taught to stitch their own as well as

their families' clothes. They were trained in pounding rice, and assisted in cleaning the school's living quarters. The girls were instructed in reading and writing the vernacular language, with special training in English for the more talented students. The lady missionaries believed in developing the overall qualities of the girls based on Christian principles, which they brought to effect through reading and writing portions of the Bible and the liturgy. In later years history, geography, arithmetic, and elements of natural philosophy were taught in the higher classes (Haggis, 2000; Jacob, 2005). The missionaries were making their students self-sufficient financially while also grounding them in a domesticity that was home-based. Missionary education was slowly delegitimizing certain kinds of traditional jobs, customs, lifestyles, etc. The training in skills given by the missionary wives, for example crochet, lace-making etc. gained prestige over time. The students were also learning about the larger world, beyond the boundaries of their own caste communities and locality through history, geography and natural philosophy. The missionary-educated girls were from different communities (upper, middle and lower castes) and intermingled in their daily lives. This then would have influenced their perceptions regarding their own communities and caste practices, and differentiated them from girls educated in indigenous schools.

Changes wrought by missionary education

Though the first girls to be educated were meant to be trained to be good mothers and housewives, the European teachers consciously or unconsciously introduced new role models as teachers and leaders – persons with interests outside the family. To the Malayali girl student the figure of the missionary woman, who had moved away from the space of the joint family and had interests/work outside the family/caste occupation, would have been a revolutionary image. Even among the

matrilineal families women would not have had many opportunities to be academicians/teachers in the manner of the European teachers. A large number of the second generation missionaries were single women (Haggis, 2000). These women again would have provided a different kind of role model to the students. They were away from the folds of their immediate families (while the missionary wives were away only from the joint family). These single women were not starting schools as secondary institutions to boys' schools, but running them separately and were giving their time and energy to a cause that was not related to their family/caste occupation. Many of them were proto-feminists, who not only taught their charges, but also provided medical advice and help to Indian women (Forbes, 2005). The missionary women were thus directly responsible for getting Indian women interested in Western medicine and related practices. Personal hygiene was another important aspect of missionary training. The students in boarding schools were also living away from homes in community living, thereby breaking certain traditional customs and superstitions. Community eating was not part of Malayali culture even in the early 20th century. However, the missionaries insisted on erasing caste-related biases in their institutions. Autonomy and dignity of the individual was at the heart of Protestant thought. Most of the basic tenets of missionary education were cemented in the later education system. The gender bias in the domestic training courses and the emphasis given to hygiene and science by the missionaries were taken up by educators in the first half of the 20th century. The inclusion of subjects like history, geography and natural philosophy would have widened the knowledge base of the students in ways different from the indigenous system of education.

The missionaries started girls' schools at a time when the general public did not perceive any need for such institutions. However, over a period of time, there was a

change in attitude towards girls' education. Mrs. Norton wrote in *The Missionary Register*, in 1851 that the girls brought up in their school were anxiously sought for marriage by young men of the congregation and that the men appeared to be quite aware of the advantages to be expected from a union with women whose minds had been subjected to some degree of cultivation (Gladston, 2006). Thus, the missionaries were also creating a need for a particular kind of woman, who did not exist before the advent of modern education, who was moulded in a kind of Victorian womanhood. From the 1920s, the debates on women's education in magazines and elsewhere centred around defining the fine line between Malayali traditions and the English culture brought in by missionary education and other kinds of contact with the West (in the form of literature, assimilation of lifestyles, food habits etc. from the British and so on).

By the latter half of the 19th century, the missionaries started to insist on public education for Shanar⁹⁶ girls outside the home, in part to delay marriage.⁹⁷ By the 1890s, the rule was that the girls in boarding school could not get married until the age of 17 (Haggis, 2000). Thus, missionary education was directly responsible for raising the age of marriage among their converts. Part of the LMS agenda was that these girls would take up the 'Christian duties' of conversion and upliftment of their non-Christian neighbours. The missionaries wanted teachers and Bible women, who took outreach work to high-caste Hindu women and Muslim women, who were in the

⁹⁶ The Shanars were one of the lower castes and faced oppression from the upper castes. The Shanar women were the first group to protest against some of the caste practices imposed upon them, including the famous "breast-cloth" or "upper-cloth" controversy. For details see: Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, J. Devika, "The Aesthetic Woman: Re-Forming Bodies and Minds in Early Twentieth Century Kerala," *Modern Asian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2005b).

⁹⁷ The Basel missionaries also introduced compulsory education among the children in their congregation - Christian children were supposed to study in schools till they were 14 years old. This was to put a stop to the early marriage of girls.

zenana (Haggis, 2000). The girls were being prepared for the Matriculation examination of Madras University by 1898 in the Nagercoil boarding school, but the training was still within the rhetoric of domesticity; this revealed the contradiction of training women to be teachers in mission schools and for zenana work, while the primary aim was to equip them to be good wives and mothers. This contradiction was reconciled by bracketing the teaching as being God's work (spiritual and moral) and work that was directed towards other women (Haggis, 2000). Though some of these women were physically far from their respective homes, the work was seen as falling within the bounds of 'women's work' since they were teaching other women which the missionary men could not do at that point in time. This was the same argument that was extended to other kinds of work that women were aspiring towards in the early 20th century. Certain kinds of 'women's work' then began to be seen as needing qualities inherent to women and started gaining respectability more than others. Teaching and medicine which were the occupations practised by the lady missionaries are still considered the perfect jobs for women in 21st century Kerala.

The missionary wives drew on the conventions of evangelical womanhood that was taking shape in Britain around the notion of a female sphere that was subordinate yet influential in moral and spiritual matters. The early missionary wives assumed responsibility for the moral upliftment and spiritual education of the women and children, like their counterparts at home were doing. However, mainstream missionary organizations did not support these women's work financially or institutionally. The first formal recognition of women's work came from LMS in 1875, with the establishment of a Ladies Committee to oversee the appointment of single women missionaries (Haggis, 2000). Thus, women's work began to be integrated in the organizational and policy structures of missionary organizations, and it continued till

the second decade of the 20th century. Until then, women's work was usually self-supporting. This would also explain why the early missionary girls' schools needed to start lace and other industries – these schools were not only training the girls to be self-sufficient, but the sales from the products were a means of subsistence for the schools.

The lower caste women in Travancore were involved in agrarian labour in the 19th century. Lace-making was considered to be more respectable than the traditional occupations of making jaggery or trading oil and other products from the palms that the men tapped. It also removed these women from the influence of their Hindu overlords, thereby giving them lesser opportunities to re-convert to Hinduism. The sale of the items manufactured by the new converts was done through the missionary wife (Haggis, 2000). Mass conversions were the norm during this period, when entire villages would convert to Christianity. Given the nominal nature of these conversions, relapse into older rituals and customs were frequent. The missionaries had to constantly visit such areas to retain the faith of the converts (Haggis, 2000). The training in useful skills meant that mission educated women were not only being taught cultural accomplishments but they were also being given the opportunity to be financially independent. This was different from the earlier dependency on caste occupations and caste hierarchy (in the sense of overlords, land leased from overlords, etc.) for food and other necessities. Thus, training in these new skills helped to keep the newly converted Christians in closer contact with the missionaries than literary education (as opposed to an education that trained them in useful skills) alone would have done.

Modern education in Kerala and India: initial hurdles

As many scholars and social scientists have stated, matriliney did not mean greater autonomy for the (middle caste) women. Access to schools was difficult for most girls in the 19th century as it was in other parts of India. Some of the problems that hindered the education of Malayali women in the 19th century were: a) early marriage; b) indifference and resistance to education; c) the issue of fees (A considerable amount of money had to be given as dowry in certain communities like the Syrian Christians; therefore, spending money for school education was an extra expense. All the early mission boarding schools provided free lodging, food, and clothes to the students. In certain cases, the missionaries also promised to help with the dowry.); d) prejudice towards sending girls to co-education schools; e) non-existence of secondary schools in many areas; and f) caste prejudices (Banerji, 1914b; Gladston, 2006; Jacob, 2005). Separate schools were established for the backward classes and most schools admitted Ezhavas boys in the early 20th century, but the girls of these communities were not admitted to any of the schools. Caste prejudice was more apparent in the education of girls than of boys. As far back as 1813, missionaries had to face opposition from the upper castes when schools were opened for slave girls.

Elsewhere in India, the obstacles in the way of women's education were not very different. The Calcutta University Commission, in 1917, pointed out that in Bengal, the early marriage of girls was a serious hindrance to the development of women's education. Promising young girls were removed from school at the time when their mental development was only beginning. Parents did not want to spend money for education that might be needed for paying dowry. The purdah system was another hurdle that women had to overcome. [In Malayalam-speaking regions, only Namboothiris, Brahmins, and a few high class Muslim families practised the purdah or

the zenana. Therefore, it was a problem only with a small percentage of the population in the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, it would appear caste pollution was a strong obstacle to women's education only in Travancore, Cochin and, Malabar.] The few women who had come out of the purdah were considered denationalised/breaking community norms by the others. The rending of the purdah was strongly opposed by older women and by men, some of whom had passed through the western system of education. The next problem highlighted by the Calcutta Commission was the belief of orthodox women/men that women should not come under any influence outside their own family as it was so enjoined in the Hindu texts. These women/men believed that no agency could provide any kind of education superior to the moral and practical training given at home. Western education was felt to be an unsettling influence on women and men. The orthodoxy feared that the women's emancipation and Suffragette movements in the West would be assimilated and followed by the Indian woman.⁹⁸ These were very similar to the arguments against women's education in Malayalam-speaking regions too.

Government(s) and education

The Educational Despatch of Sir Charles Wood in 1854 laid out the blueprint of the modern system of public education (George, 2009). The Despatch noted that there was evidence of desire on the part of many Indians to give a good education to their daughters. The despatch also noted that by this interest an educational and moral tone would be added to the education of men.⁹⁹ Thus from the beginning government

⁹⁸ From the "Calcutta University Commission, 1917 - 19: Report - Volume II, Part I: Analysis of Present Conditions," (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1919).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

interest in women's education was connected to spirituality, morality and the home because women's education was supposed to aid men.

Education, particularly women's education, came to be connected to progress, change and social reform in Kerala in the second half of the 19th century. In his administrative report of 1862-1863, Sir Madhava Rao, Diwan of Travancore, stated that very little had been done for female education and that the subject called for prompt attention, since education among other advantages was the foundation of social reforms (Jacob, 2005). Until this, only the missionaries had shown serious interest in girls' education.

By the second half of the 19th century, schooling for girls became fairly acceptable throughout India. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, there were more than 300 schools for girls. The British government took an interest in girls' education around this time. However, in times of financial difficulties, the first casualty used to be female education. The reasons given were many: setting up a girls' school was considered more expensive than setting up a boys' school, as the entire expense had to be borne by the government, and parents were unwilling to spend money on girls' schooling. In Oudh, another reason given by the government was that women had nothing whatsoever to do with the progress of trade, or in fact, with any other pursuits except what was purely domestic and secluded (Menon, 2003). This was in sharp contrast to the encouragement given to women's education in the south, particularly in Travancore and Cochin.

The progress in education attained by Travancore took place during the boom in the economy created by the commercialisation of agriculture and the modernisation programmes initiated in the 1860s. The market relations that emerged from commercial cultivation required the peasants as well as those associated with the

processing and marketing of these crops to acquire essential skills, not only in arithmetic but also in reading and writing. Besides, the expansion of trade and the increase in the area under cultivation sharply raised the Government's revenue that from the early 1860s till 1904-05, Travancore experienced surplus budgets. This facilitated the Travancore Government to allocate an increasing proportion of its expenditure on social services, especially education and health care.¹⁰⁰

The Government saw education as a vehicle to bring about change. The content of the change was what differentiated the different players. The idea of training the native to be a dutiful citizen was shared by the missionary, the British and the native governments. There was also a sense of social equality implicit in the teachings of the missionaries and in the later policies of the government. A number of government schools were started, sometimes near mission schools. It would appear that the government was also trying to break the near monopoly of Christian missionaries in the field of education. Many parents preferred to send their girls to government schools, where there was no Bible teaching.

While the missionaries concentrated their efforts on teaching the lower castes and the Christian children, the Travancore state concentrated on the education of the higher caste children at first. In 1864, a school was started in Travancore for higher caste girls with support from the Maharaja and the Diwan Madhava Rao. Before that another vernacular school was started by the government in 1859 (Tharakan, 1984b). The backward classes were demanding entry to the government schools. Since this was

¹⁰⁰ In 1862-63, Travancore's budgetary allocations for education were 0.58%. By 1899-1900, the figures rose to 5.34%. The educational achievements of the state were important to the successive rulers and the Department of education had become one of the major departments by 1940. By 1941 nearly 24% of the government revenue was being spent on education. From: Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, CDS, "Human Development Report 2005: Kerala," (Thiruvananthapuram: State Planning Board, Government of Kerala, 2006), Thampi, "Census of India, 1941: Travancore. Volume XXV."

not possible 30 schools were started for the Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, Marakkan, Muslims, etc. from 1894 to 1896. Caste prejudice was markedly more in the case of girls than boys and they were not allowed at all to attend ordinary government schools.

It might or might not be a coincidence that the Travancore government started to take an interest in vernacular language education from 1859 (with the establishment of the first girls' school and later in 1866 with Taluq and *Proverty* schools) after the Shanar agitation. The Royal Proclamation of 1859 abolished all restrictions in the matter of covering of upper parts of the body by Shanar women (though there was the stipulation that they should not imitate the dress of the upper castes) (Aiya, 1906). Earlier in 1855, the Travancore had abolished all kinds of slavery in the state. In 1859 the government had been sent a letter by the Madras government on "the manifold abuses then prevalent in Travancore and advising him to avert the impending calamity by an enlightened policy and timely and judicious reforms" (Aiya, 1906: 513). This letter was in response to a number of petitions received from the natives of Travancore, the missionaries and a series of articles that appeared in the newspaper *Athenaeum* criticising the administration. It would appear that missionary activities (and initiatives from among the natives) were leading to changes in existing caste structures with the spread of education among the lower castes. Though there were some Hindu students in missionary schools, from the Census figures of 1875 and 1891, it is clear that the Nair and Kshatriya castes were the ones to benefit most from the government schools. Caste feelings were running high during the time, and the government could not take any 'precipitate action' by throwing open its schools to all classes/castes/creeds. Diwan P.Rajagopalachari stated in 1908 that the government was not prepared to force matters in that direction. He hoped there would be a time when it would be possible for Brahmin, Nair and Ezhava girls to sit together in all rural places, as the boys of those

communities were doing (Kawashima, 1998). The reason behind this prejudice towards lower caste girls cannot be easily explained. The women from various lower caste communities in Travancore were undergoing changes which were conspicuous, precipitous and also objectionable to the upper castes. The lower caste women's aspirations for better conditions were viewed with anger and trepidation. If education became freely available to all castes, the differences between the castes would have further reduced. Moreover, the presence of lower caste students in schools was barely tolerated by the upper castes. The former had to sit in separate benches away from the other students in many government schools. Education for the lower caste male students could have been tolerated to some extent by reasoning that they needed to get educated to be bread-winners/ to get a job/ to better the conditions of their families. During the turn of the century women were primarily seen as care-givers and not bread-winners. Moreover, the percentage and presence of upper caste girls in schools were tenuous. Girls were withdrawn from schools earlier than boys. The government prioritized the education of the upper caste children and it might have seemed prudent to wait to push the cause of the lower castes.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ In Cochin, the first government school for the education of higher caste girls was opened at Thrissur in 1887. A few years later similar schools were opened at Ernakulam and one by the Sisters of Carmelite in Ernakulam. Girls of all castes were allowed admission into the lower secondary department of the school in Thrissur and in 1911, the restriction regarding admission to primary department was also removed. Travancore was considered the seat of Hinduism and was highly orthodox in its ideas of caste pollution, and caste-related customs and practices as mentioned in the previous chapter. The Cochin rulers were more open to English education and Christian influences. However, this did not mean that the general population were ready to accept drastic changes in caste-related rules. The administrative report for the year 1921 stated that there were individual instances of beating up of lower caste students by upper castes. In a couple of government schools, the Nair students were withdrawn on account of the admission of Pulaya students. However, there was a positive note that in spite of the opposition to admissions of lower castes to schools, the people were slowly reconciling to the idea.

Malabar was slightly less rigid when compared to Travancore in the matter of caste and pollution. The Maharaja Zamorin of Calicut had started a school for young Rajas in 1877 called Kerala Vidyasala. This

Ideas and practices in education

For the different players in the field – the missionaries, the government, private individuals, the people – the reasons for providing and gaining education were different. There were several facets to the colonial enterprise. The colonizer took on the position of the adult and the native became the child. This adult-child relationship entailed an educational task. The native had to be initiated into new ways of thinking and acting (Kumar, 1991). This idea is repeatedly confirmed in the letters by the missionaries and by the British civil servants. In the case of John Munroe it seems to have been a complex mix of paternalism, evangelism and a political and economic enterprise. The British administrative officers in Travancore and Cochin were hoping to proselytize the population. They believed that Christianity was conducive to progress, and the sharing of a common religion would stabilize British rule. The underlying hope was that if the ruler and the ruled shared a religion, then the latter would naturally follow the traditions and customs of the former and over the years would accept British rule instead of seeing them as a foreign power.

The missionary wives thought it important that women be educated for the progress of the nation. The first attempt was to teach them the basics of literacy with a smattering of domestic training. This was coupled with their desire to spread the teachings of Christianity and their wish to impart ‘culture’ to the native. However they realised that people were not ready to send their girls to school for learning to read and

became a second grade college in 1880 and was open to all classes. However, from the report it is not clear if lower/backward classes had access to education in this institution in actual practice. By 1902, Malabar had 1,094 recognised schools catering to 71,677 pupils under the control of the education department. In addition, there were 613 indigenous schools with 22,410 pupils. From: Rao Bahadur K.A. Krishna Aiyangar et al., "Report of the University Committee Travancore 1923- 1924," (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1925), CDS, "Human Development Report 2005: Kerala.", F.S. Davies, "Report on the Administration of the Education Department in the Cochin State for 1095 M.E.," (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1921).

write alone. The missionaries started teaching the girls to stitch, embroider, make laces, etc. so that they could learn something useful as well as have a means of subsistence. Simultaneously, the girls were being trained to be good wives and teachers.

The idea of industrial training for woman was present in the official discourse on education too:

The Darbar's wish to popularise the purely feminine side of the education of the girls has succeeded in its aim,... for not only do most of the School final pupils take Needlework and Embroidery instead of History or Mathematics or Science, but there is a great rush to get admission to the purely Industrial side of the school (Banerji, 1914a: 15).

This "rush" to the industrial education could have been because these would have provided immediate job opportunities. The other subjects would have required further education/training if they were to lead to paying jobs/skills since in the 1910s not all jobs were open to women in Travancore and Cochin.

Education: hygiene

Towards the first half of the 20th century, when girls from middle class and caste families started attending school, the government believed that the focus of the classes had to change. The curricula for girls across Malayalam-speaking regions were to include domestic sciences and hygiene, thought to be the domain of women. In the previous chapter I have mentioned how the term Home Science/Domestic Science came into use in the 1920s in India. Hygiene was an extension of the argument for including Home Science in girls' curriculum. The course on hygiene was open to both girls and boys in class 5 and was an optional subject during this time. Hygiene was an amalgamation of scientific principles and native customs with topics as varied as an oil

bath and communicable diseases. The subject was divided into personal hygiene, domestic hygiene, town and village hygiene and general hygiene in Travancore (Hodgson, 1908).¹⁰² Teaching hygiene was a necessity for the government. Schools had to be closed down for short periods in different places as a result of the spread of various communicable diseases among the population (Matthai and others, 1921). Not only was it causing problems to the school authorities, there was the wider issue of making the general population aware of ways to combat these diseases. There were also discussions happening in other locations within India of the necessity of including Hygiene as a topic in school education (Matthai and others, 1921). Even though aspects of health and hygiene were seen as important topics to be taught to girls, in practice it was made available to both girls and boys. The differentiation in the curriculum of girls' and boys' was being eroded in small ways by the government through these measures and it then came to mean that men were also responsible for health and hygienic practices and it was not the sole responsibility of the woman. While there were many factors that affected the (positive) general health conditions of women in the late 20th century (and in the present day), the inclusion of health and hygiene-related practices in the curriculum in the early 20th century and access to such information would have been equally important in bringing about these positive changes.

¹⁰² Hygiene for class 5 included Personal hygiene (1.The bath 2.The oil bath 3.The morning meal 4.The mid-day meal 5.Exercise 6.Supper 7.Sleep 8.Clothing). Domestic hygiene (1.The house 2.Water supply and drainage), Town and Village hygiene (1.Housing 2.Water supply 3.Drainage.), and General hygiene (Common diseases and their prevention: (a) Malaria, (b) Cholera, (c) Dysentery, (d) Plague.) was meant for classes 6 and 7.

Education: music

Music was another subject that the policy-makers deemed important enough to be included in the curriculum. Music was originally part of girls' schools, but many schools were including them for boys as an optional subject. In the case of the girls, music was a skill she had to acquire to entertain and soothe her family members (Matthai and others, 1921). Music was considered to have elements that not only gave joy and enjoyment, but later was also seen as having a refining and elevating potential. Music was seen as related to culture and civilization. It could also foster nationalist sentiments. All the government schools in Travancore and Cochin started the day with a prayer invoking the native ruler.¹⁰³ When music took on elements of nationalism¹⁰⁴ it could not remain a mere cultural accomplishment relegated to women. It was then taken out of the domain of the domestic sphere and made available to both women and men in the public sphere. Hygiene and music came to be included in boys' curriculum for different reasons – knowledge, awareness, civilization, fostering feelings of nationalism. While hygiene and music were not considered completely gender neutral subjects in actual practice (in the sense of not being popular or acceptable courses for boys to take up), they were no longer relegated to the women's domain.

Integration of missionary education to government rules

By the second half of the 19th century in Malabar, the missionaries had to follow the curriculum prescribed by the Madras government. The children had to learn two or three languages in the elementary schools, though the missionaries disapproved

¹⁰³ All of my interviewees mentioned a song “Vancheenadu...” eulogizing the King being sung in their schools. One of the interviewees, Mr. A.M. Mathew, also mentioned that Civics was an important and interesting subject in his school days. It included lessons on how to conduct oneself, hygiene and so on.

¹⁰⁴ Though Travancore and Cochin were not nations in the modern sense of the term, here it is used in the sense of developing feelings of loyalty, trust, reverence, etc. towards the rulers in the princely states.

of the system. The report of the Basel Evangelical Mission in 1894 stated that though they entirely disapproved of the system, they were obliged to conform to it, because schools that did not conform to the rules were not acknowledged by the Government, and their pupils were not admitted to Government Examinations (Gladston, 2006). So even though the Basel Mission started schools to enable their members to read, to write and to lead a Christian life, it had moved beyond these simple aims. It was important for the missionaries that the children in their congregation were trained to take the 'Government Examinations' so that they could move on to an advanced level of learning, and partake of the new opportunities available to the educated. This change in objective of missionary education influenced the girls' education too. Women were being trained to become not just good Christian wives and Bible women, but they were also being trained to take up the new jobs available to those with access to higher education [This would also be because by the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, with increasing numbers of upper and middle caste/class groups entering the field of education, the caste/class constituency of the school-going girls had changed.]. The jobs available to girls with higher educational qualifications were different from lace-making, sewing, and other skill based work. High schools were started in Malabar region by the mission in the first decades of the 20th century. There were no separate colleges/intermediate schools for girls, but they were admitted to the boys' colleges and schools.

A large number of missionary and government-aided schools was started in Travancore and the number of school-going children also went up between 1859 to 1866 (Gladston, 2006).¹⁰⁵ As education became popular, the Travancore and Cochin governments decided to assimilate the course of instruction in the private schools with

¹⁰⁵ In 1865 there were 47 schools for girls in South Travancore. From: Gladston, "History of Development of Education of Women in Kerala (1819-1947)."

that of the Government schools by putting in place various grants-in-aid codes from 1869.¹⁰⁶ This strengthened government control over education. Due to various reasons the LMS, CMS and Basel Missions handed over their schools to the government and other agencies by the early 20th century. With the government taking over education some of the differences that existed between girls' and boys' education began to be done away with as I will show in the subsequent sections.

Women's education in the early 20th century

The British government was making plans for the expansion of girls' education in the first decades of 20th century. The government defined its policy in the famous Resolution of 1913:

- (a) The education of girls should have a practical bias with reference to the position which they will fill in social life.
- (b) It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys, nor should it be dominated by examinations.
- (c) Special attention should be paid to hygiene and the surroundings of school life.
- (d) The services of women should be more freely enlisted for instruction and inspection; and

¹⁰⁶ One of the conditions to obtain the grant-in-aid was that the course of instruction and the books used in the vernacular schools had to be the same as that used in government schools (Aiya, 1906). The Madras government was urging the Travancore state to establish more educational institutions. In 1875, a new grant-in-aid system was introduced and a large number of aided schools were started. However no new government schools started. The first government school for girls in Cochin State was started at Thrissur in 1889. The system of grant-in-aid to private schools was also started around this time in Cochin. Travancore began efforts to bring in educational reforms with a new grant-in-aid code in 1894. Attempts were made to control curricula, qualification of teachers, state of buildings, and accommodation and sanitation conditions in aided schools.

(e) continuity in inspection and control should be specially aimed at.

(Mathur, 1973: 56-7)

Most of the policies adopted by the Travancore and Cochin government regarding women's education were directly based on this policy. Repeated moves to bring in separation of curriculum for girls and boys, the importance given to hygiene, the utilisation of women teachers and inspectors, were all meticulously followed by the native governments.

Re-organisation of women's education started with the appointment of a Female Inspectress of schools in 1908 (Aiyangar et al., 1925).¹⁰⁷ The government was thinking of providing separate curriculum for girls and boys even before this, but there was not much demand for the same among the public: parents were insisting on the same kind of education for their daughters as was being given to their sons. There were not many takers for the domestic science courses because these courses did not have a final examination or provide a recognised certificate at the end of the course (Aiyangar et al., 1925).¹⁰⁸ These courses did not lead to any form of employment. However the government policy-makers were insistent that these courses were essential. Even among the policy-makers, there were differences as to what had to be included in girl's curriculum. For instance in 1905, the Diwan had recommended that there be instructors

¹⁰⁷ The appointment of inspectresses was not unique to the princely states. British India also had inspectresses for supervision of female students. To popularise primary and secondary education the grant-in-aid system was generous in girls' schools. Girls were also permitted to compete for scholarships which were open to boys. From: Y.B. Mathur, *Women's Education in India. 1813-1966* (Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1973).

¹⁰⁸ *The Quinquennial Review of Education in India, 1917-22*, noted that in Bengal too, the experiment of introducing domestic science course failed because the girls were more interested in courses that provided a matriculation certificate than courses that the government authorities considered practical. In Madras, Punjab and other provinces subjects like physiology, hygiene and domestic economy were included in the curriculum as optional subjects for the SSLC examination. For details see: Ibid.

in *kaikottikali* (an indigenous dance form),¹⁰⁹ singing and needlework for girls. But when the order was finally passed in 1908, it was decided that it would be sufficient if all the primary schools for boys had a drill instructor and the girl's schools a music teacher and sewing mistress (Banerji, 1914c). This could be interpreted in two ways: (1) that dance had not yet acquired a respectability to be considered as a cultural subject in school and (2) it was a dance form practiced and performed in Hindu households, and therefore would not have been seen as a secular art form. Moreover, girls were not to have a drill instructor. Their education was to include only courses that were termed "feminine".

The governments of Travancore and Cochin were very proud of the educational status of the women in their respective dominions:

The Travancorean is most zealous in the education of his sisters and nieces. No Travancore girl is permitted to grow up to womanhood without a fair knowledge of reading and writing. These are considered the *sine qua non* in every household. In the case of the well-to-do families, the curriculum of the girl's studies goes beyond the proverbial three Rs. A knowledge of Sanscrit so as to read and understand the Kavyas, the Natakas and the Puranas is a common qualification. Vocal music and sometimes practice on musical instruments are considered desirable accomplishments in a young lady... To these may now be added some knowledge of needlework and the playing upon English musical instruments taught by our European sisters (Aiya, 1894: 485-6).

Note that the terms 'sisters' and 'nieces' are used instead of daughters or wives. In a matrilineal system, sisters and their progeny inherited property while wives usually

¹⁰⁹ This dance was traditionally taught to Namboothiri and Nair girls after they had learned their alphabet. In the case of rich households women used to be employed to come and teach the girls. From: Nilayangodu, *Kalappakarchakal*.

stayed in their maternal homes. The idea of what constituted a woman's education had already changed by 1891. The mastery of English musical instruments and needlework was additional accomplishments to a basic education involving knowledge of the three Rs, Sanskrit and the Puranas. This image of the Malayali woman is also not a pan Kerala image, but specifically refers to a Nair and, (in some instances a Brahmin) woman. Thus "Travancore girl" comes to be equated with Hindu/Nair girl in the official language.

The government and the people were also aware that the status of women in India was seen as deplorable by the coloniser.

In one side of our humanity, particularly the status of the gentler sex, we are undoubtedly below the English model. Our women are inferior to English women in nearly all the many-sided beauties and charms of woman's life, whether natural or acquired; and this must be so, so long as our women are regarded as fit only to subserve the interests of man, not as having a destiny of their own to fulfil as his companion and counterpart (Aiya, 1894: 486).

A decade earlier, the missionaries had expressed quite the opposite sentiment while speaking about educated women as having become "real help-mates" to their husbands. They were speaking in particular about the mission educated women, while the government report is speaking of "Hindu women" in general. The "Hindu women" had not yet attained the companionate position within marriage which was espoused in other locations. In this formulation the government was also thinking of women as adding to the grace and beauty of the home, rather than as individuals with duties and interests outside the domestic sphere. Her education was not seen as training her to be independent, but as training her in cultural accomplishments so that she becomes a bearer of culture. [During the turn of the century, the hegemonic image of the woman was that of her role as a wife, and not that of a mother or a daughter. Women were not

on an equal footing with men, and even when they were to be treated as equal to men it was to be within the space of conjugality. The centrality of conjugality was enmeshed in the idea of the woman.]

Problems that beset women's education

By the early 20th century the problems that beset women's higher education in Kerala were slightly different from those of the rest of India. The report of the Travancore University Committee which came out in 1925, eight years after the Calcutta Commission, gives a different set of reasons for the backwardness of women's education as compared to that of men's education (Aiyangar et al., 1925):

(a) Families were thinking of girls' collegiate career as directed to qualify for a post with a high salary [This then meant that if the family did not want the woman to work, then she would not have been given the opportunity to continue her education. The Census report of 1931 stated that women were being given higher salaries than men as an incentive to continue higher education].

(b) Slowness in replacing men teachers with women teachers in educational institutions for women.

(c) The unattractiveness of subjects offered to women in colleges. Women were not being offered subjects useful to them in later life, especially those not desiring employment. In other Indian universities like the Mysore University there were discussions on creating degree courses in Domestic Science and similar subjects following the example of American universities. The Committee opined that it was doubtful whether such courses could be regarded as equally valuable as the usual university courses. It was necessary to make provisions for the special needs of women in the courses of study. But, the Committee continued, it did not follow that the

intellectual needs of women and men were so totally different as to necessitate an entirely new set of subjects of study for the latter. The Committee went on to mention that no such demand had been made by any of the ladies who were consulted by them (Aiyangar et al., 1925). [There was a great deal of confusion as to the special subjects to be instituted for women. On the one hand, the Committee knew that special subjects might be needed for women. On the other hand, instituting such subjects had not been a persistent or active request by either women students or fellow women educationists in Kerala. Domestic Sciences and related subjects would not have been considered on par with Science and Social Science courses. So it was doubtful whether there would have been takers for these subjects. Also, there was a sense that in a state where women were thought to be on nearly equal footing with men intellectually/educationally, providing special subjects for women would be creating a differentiation between the two sexes that did not exist previously.¹¹⁰ Underlying this was also the idea of equal treatment of women and men, but the Committee also did not imagine equal treatment as entailing identical courses of study or treatment in education. There was also a divide being made between women who wanted to continue their education and enter a profession and women who wanted only to get married after schooling. The special subjects were for the latter women.]

(d) The absence of proper residential facilities in colleges for women.

(e) Failure to provide for religious and moral training equivalent to that the women would receive at home. This particular reason is tentatively put forward as a possible

¹¹⁰ This is another instance of the counter currents within formal educational structures. In 1894, Nagam Aiya, spoke of women as being considered subservient to men, while in 1925, the Aiyangar Committee saw Malayali women as being on a nearly equal footing with men. In the span of 25 years the social, cultural and educational status of women had changed or perceived to have been changed. However, the later Committee is also speaking about women who were already educated or in the process of getting higher education. So the Committee is speaking of/for a particular caste/class constituency of women.

explanation by the Committee. It could refer to the Muslim and Brahmin women who were statistically backward with regards to modern education. The Committee was aware of the prevailing notion that moral education was more important for women than for men. But the report sets down that there was no validity to such a differentiation and also that it was not practical to give religious instruction in a university setting.

(f) Women were often forced to study in colleges for men: in small classes (Post-graduate and Honours classes) where women received individual attention from the staff, they were not as reluctant. This last problem brings to light the fact that women were not entirely comfortable in a co-educational institution. In the 1920s these women would also have been the first and second generations to have passed through the school system to enter the university.¹¹¹ Women were not yet independent or sure about themselves to feel secure in large groups of mixed gender. The Travancore University Committee devotes a few pages to the issue of co-education:

The practice of co-education is fairly common in Kerala... The absence of a *pardah* system in Malabar¹¹² and the existence of natural and unhampered relations between the sexes are both advantages in facilitating co-education.

Co-education may diminish some of the unhealthy attractions of the sexes

¹¹¹ In her autobiography, B. Kalyani Amma mentioned studying in a co-educational college for her teacher training course. She states that though it had felt strange at first she slowly got used to the male students and in later days the female and male students even developed a rapport with each other. From: B. Kalyani Amma, *Ormayil Ninnu*, ed. K. Gomathy Amma (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 1964).

In another such anecdote, Samuel Nellimukal mentions that when women were first admitted to CMS college in 1913, the male students used to compete with each other to get money from them for the collection box during mass, until the novelty of having women in college wore off. Samuel Nellimukal, *C.M.S. Colleginte Charithram: 1816-1996* (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1997).

¹¹² The term Malabar being used as a synonym for Malayalam-speaking regions in this report from Travancore further substantiates the idea that there was a sense of unity among the different political regions.

which may arise from keeping them apart in separate institutions. Our girls have proved their equality to their brothers intellectually and have shown that they could profit by the same courses of study. There is no evidence that their health as a rule suffers owing to competition with boys and increased effort demanded by such emulation...The practice of co-education has had no appreciable bad effect on the age of marriage, and has undoubtedly not been responsible for any suspicion of a reduction of the morale of students of either sex. The objection that co-education would force girls to take up studies uncongenial to them or unattractive to them, is much diminished by the fact that most of the girls voluntarily prefer to submit themselves to the same courses of training and examination...Thus it is difficult to understand why, despite its apparent success co-education is still unacceptable to many of our educationists. In colleges for men, particularly, there is even more reluctance to admit women students than there is a hesitation on the part of the women students to seek admission in them (Aiyangar et al., 1925: 325-7).

The issue of co-education was tricky. The Committee supported co-education as it was already in place in Kerala. From the report it appears that most of the critics of co-education were from outside the state. There were discussions on the (in)advisability of co-education in the magazines from the period. However the government report has not taken that into consideration here. The report considered objections raised by educationists from other Indian states and abroad, but the Committee did not think of these objections as being applicable to Malayalis. Around the same time in British India co-education had to be encouraged by offering special grants to girls studying in boys' schools (Mathur, 1973). Within the state co-education was read as mostly being a problem of administration – of having to provide for “the convenience of the two sexes in a common institution”. Separate institutions for girls were generally requested in the intermediate and degree classes. These would be the

mid to late teenage groups. So the difficulty with co-education for this age group was probably less to do with the intrinsic evils of co-education and more to do with the issues related to teenage. The report, in general, supported many practices that would have been considered progressive. It refuted most of the arguments against co-education by pointing out that there was no proof to support the arguments of the detractors. It would not have been possible for the members of the Committee or the government to implement the suggestions regarding co-education, religious instruction, special subjects for women, etc. unless the social climate of the state was also favourable.

The government was facing problems with regards to grant-in-aid rules for primary schools. The grant-in-aid rules were different for boys' and girls' schools. During certain years, some girls' schools would move from the list of girls' schools to the list of boys' schools and vice versa, depending on the number of girls in the school in that particular year. In addition, grants were withheld from aided schools when they had a larger number of girls or boys than the education department thought fit.¹¹³ By 1933, it was proposed that primary schools should be classified as primary schools instead of as boys' or girls' schools (Statham et al., 1933). The result of these policies related to co-education was that Malayali women were entering or being coerced into entering public spaces which were previously mostly male spaces. Not all women were happy to enter that space, as is clear from the reports and many of the magazine

¹¹³ The inspection work was also done separately by the female and male inspectors in the different schools. It was found that the men were inspecting only the education of the boys in the boys' schools and the women were inspecting only the education of the girls in the girls' schools. The girls residing in the area of a boys' school were not considered the concern of the men's branch and the boys in the area of a girls' school were not considered the concern of the women's branch. Moreover, in terms of actual educational progress, the women's branch was not concerned about the boys in girls' schools and about the large number of girls in boys' schools. Thus, it was proposed that the distinction between boys' and girls' school at primary level should be abolished.

articles. With the institution of the new educational institutions and the opening up of many new jobs which resulted from that, women were entering these spaces tentatively, but with increasing confidence.¹¹⁴

Professional/vocational training and women's curriculum

The need for instituting technical and science-based education at school level worked in unexpected ways in the individuation process of women. In the 19th century the government needed educated people to man the various new posts created as a result of the changes wrought in the administrative structure as mentioned before. Later the government recognised the need to co-ordinate education with the means to earn a livelihood especially for the backward groups. The idea of training the lower classes in technical subjects was a continuation of the training given to them by the missionaries. The government had utilitarian considerations in giving an impetus to technical training: it would improve the material condition of the people and the resources of the State. The State was also following the developments in other places like America, Europe and Japan (Aiya, 1906; Matthai and others, 1921). For the native governments, aspirations to being characterized as a 'modern state' and maintaining that position

¹¹⁴ One of the magazine writers mentioned that women's groups were laughed at by people at one point and when women were invited to speak in public meetings the response from the crowd was hostile. She intoned that it was considered shameful to talk to men or attend public gatherings and co-education was considered bad/improper/wicked. For details see: B. Anandavalliamma, "*Sthreekallude Samuhyajeevithathinte Naveekaranathilantheerbhavikkunna Prashnangal*," *Mahila* 1939.

Akkamma Cherian (1909-1982) was a freedom fighter who gave up her position as headmistress in a school to lead the Travancore State Congress in its historic fight for responsible government. Her biographer mentions that she was allowed to serve tea and betel leaf to visitors and permitted to stay and listen to the guests who came to visit her parents. This was at a time when in most households girls were not allowed to enter the drawing room, or even venture outside the house except to attend church. Girls were also not allowed to laugh or talk aloud in the house. For details see: R. Parvathy Devi, *Akkamma Cherian* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2007).

involved having an economy that was highly productive and based on the adoption of scientific technology in industry, agriculture, fishery, dairy-farming, etc. The training of the artisans, farmers, etc. in the technical schools was seen as part of this modernizing effort. The government was also worried about the adverse effect of spreading purely literary education since many of the students were turning away from their hereditary occupations. Educated youth were unwilling to settle down as agriculturists, many were aspiring for professional and clerical jobs, and were unwilling to accept manual labour as being suitably remunerative or fitting. Malayalam-speaking regions were also hit by the global depression during the War years (Statham et al., 1933). So, it was hoped that these problems could be addressed by instituting schools and courses in technical education. The Report of the Travancore Education Re-organisation Committee in 1946 emphasised that basic education was designed to give boys and girls sufficient knowledge and training to make them good citizens and to fit them for a very large number of avocations in life (Papworth, 1946) The term “boys and girls” were used instead of a gender neutral term. This was part of a larger ideology of seeing gender as the main principle of ordering human beings as opposed to their class/caste status.

It was proposed that training be provided in the following subjects to cater to students in the age group of 10+ who wished to leave after primary education:

- (a) Gardening, Tailoring,¹¹⁵ Spinning, Weaving, Coir work, Basket making, Mat making, Shoe making and repairing.

¹¹⁵ Tailoring which involved the use of the sewing machine is included in general education, thereby marking it as a masculine occupation. While, sewing, embroidery etc. were appropriated by upper and middle class women as being respectable occupations, tailoring (for men) did not quite make it as a completely upper/middle class occupation until recently with globalization/liberalization and the growth of the fashion industry in India. Even then, it was not tailoring so much as (fashion) designing that was appropriated by the upper and middle class.

- (b) Book-binding, Commercial lettering and posters.
- (c) Brick work, Masonry, Motor repairs, Wood work, Metal work, Leather work, Carpentry, Tidsmithery, Blacksmithery, Ivory carving, Clay and Pottery.
- (d) Agriculture, (arable farming and animal husbandry), Poultry keeping and Bee keeping, Sericulture and Horticulture.
- (e) For girls:- Home-craft, Sewing, Embroidery, Screwpine and Lace-making (Papworth, 1946: 23-4)¹¹⁶

Of the total number of girls in primary schools in Travancore, 93% were studying in boys' school. This meant that most of these girls were not taught special subjects thought to be an integral part of their education. However the idea of differences in the capabilities, talents and duties of girls and boys and the need to incorporate this difference in formal education continued towards the middle of the 20th century. A large number of girls were not allowed to continue their studies beyond primary schooling. So the Committee thought it prudent to teach them the basics of 'domestic life' at school.¹¹⁷ The Papworth Committee recommended that at the middle school level there should be arrangements for special training in music, sewing, home-craft and dancing for girl pupils, and to provide them with special facilities for games

¹¹⁶ Different provinces under British rule had different curricula, though generally girls' schools and boys' schools within the province had the same curriculum. Many elementary schools made arrangements for vocational instruction for their students. Carpet and tape-weaving, spinning, basket-making, lace-making, embroidery, needlework, housework, crop cultivation, cooking, health and sanitation, household accounting etc. were some of the subjects termed as special subjects for girls. For details see: Mathur, *Women's Education in India. 1813-1966*.

¹¹⁷ Around this time music, needlework, painting and domestic science were being taught in many secondary schools in Bombay, Bengal, Delhi and other provinces of India. From: *Ibid*.

(Papworth, 1946). Dancing was thus introduced for the first time.¹¹⁸ Dancing was earlier an art associated with the courtesans and the devadasis. By the 1940s the dance form was 'sanitised' and was even being endorsed by people like the Diwan of Travancore (Devika, 2007a).

High schools were to be re-organized as two main types: (a) Academic High schools and (b) Technical High Schools (Papworth, 1946). The Committee suggested that the academic high schools were to work out a detailed curriculum and syllabus from among the following subjects: mother tongue (Malayalam and Tamil), English, classical languages, modern languages, History (Indian and World), Geography (Indian and World),¹¹⁹ Mathematics, Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Physiology and Hygiene), Economics, Agriculture, Civics, art, music, needle-work and embroidery, Domestic Science and Physical Training. And the technical schools were to include

¹¹⁸ However it is difficult to ascertain if this was taken up by school authorities in earnest as the period in which this recommendation would have been put in practice is outside the time frame/scope of this thesis.

¹¹⁹ Geography and history were other subjects that were related to fostering a feeling of nationality among the citizens. History became an important subject in modern schools in India in the early 20th century. History and Geography were relatively new subjects, and not part of the *Ezhuthupallis*. These subjects would have instilled a sense of the nation and of citizenship in the students. Geography was also seen as a subject that would inculcate a sense of scientific rationality in the students. The princely states included British history in their syllabus because (1) History and Geography were linked together in the Madras School final system and (2) knowledge of the history of the British Empire was considered to be essential to educated citizens. Inclusion of British history in the syllabus was also to appease the vanity of the coloniser and part of a complex negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized where the latter identified (partially) with the culture and civilization of the former. Constructions of histories were also morale boosters. History as a subject linked up present aspirations with more or less imagined pasts in an effort to move towards specific kinds of future. The history books in use in the princely states in the 1930s implicitly approved change – highlighting the triumphs of English parliament and the people from the 17th to 19th centuries. These subjects were important in carving citizens out of the students. For details see: Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being: How Kerala Became 'A Model'* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992). C. Matthai and others, "Report of the Committee for the Revision of the Cochin Education Code," (Trichur: 1921).

Home Science as one of the subjects. Thus, the difference in the duties and the station of the girl child was to be instilled and reinforced from primary level to high school. Lace-making, Domestic Science, etc. were not part of the earlier mode of learning with the *Asan*. It was brought in with missionary education. The government takes up these subjects as being integral to the process of training women to be women. The so called special subjects for girls were not a comprehensive curriculum, but rather a few subjects which were identified as being feminine and therefore to be taught to girls. Though the government speaks about the need for differential training for boys and girls at school level, in actual practice there was not much being done to take it forward. The government was able to influence only certain aspects of the girls' training as opposed to the missionary wives: the government schools were giving training in certain tasks/pursuits/occupations that were seen as part of women's sphere. Some of these were useful skills; some were (cultural) accomplishments. Some were related to the domestic sphere and some would have required the girls/women to move out into the public sphere. There were other influences on the girls in the form of teachers, mode of conduct expected of them at school, etc., but these were not officially part of the curriculum. In the missionary education/boarding schools, even these were more or less under the control of the missionaries. However, it is doubtful whether the parents or girl students themselves were interested in taking up these subjects seriously. As the reports show, a large number of the girls were studying in boys' schools, which did not offer instruction in the "domestic subjects". So having access to education specifically tailored to the needs of women was not a necessity as far as the majority of the population was concerned. This state of affairs could also be read in a slightly different way: since there were not enough girls' school with special subjects, the female students were forced to take up the same courses as boys, and over

the years the existence of a common curriculum for girls and boys at the school level came to be the norm. Moreover, for the native governments it was not advisable to spend too much money and effort on a venture which would not provide measurable and visible returns. So though the various committees did recommend starting new and varied courses for women/girls, in actual practice these recommendations were not taken up aggressively.

Women's education was initially an issue of prestige for the government. The first census in 1875 showed a high percentage of women literates in Malayalam-speaking regions compared to other parts of India. The subsequent efforts consciously or unconsciously were to keep this up. There was also a vague sense of what constituted as women's duties and sphere of work which permeated the policies on women. The Education department did not make it mandatory that women opt for the special subjects, but it was put in place for those who needed it – the women who could not continue on to collegiate level. The Papworth Committee report of 1946 is different from the Travancore University Committee report of 1925, where differentiation of subjects for the two sexes at the higher education level was not considered very necessary. There is a definite proposal for differentiation of the curriculum for the two sexes in later reports. It should be noted that the differentiation is proposed at the school level in the later reports. It must have been because at that point in time women who went for higher education also opted to work after the completion of their education [and the differentiation in curriculum was for women who planned to stay at home]. The domestic sciences course was supposed to help the women improve the conditions of their home and introduce modern methods of household management. The implicit understanding was that the Indian households needed better management. There also seems to be a wide gap between what the

government thought women's education should be and what the women themselves were expecting to gain from education. The government hoped that education would broaden the outlook, bring new contacts and create "new impulses" in the women (Statham *et al.*, 1933). But the policy-makers were also aware of the fact that most educational institutions were so dominated by class work and examinations that there was no room for inculcating a broader perspective on life.

Discipline through education

It was not just the households that needed management, but the character and the comportment of the student that were seen as needing discipline and direction. In the missionary education this was done through the regulation of daily life, particularly in the boarding school with the strict regimen for waking up, play time, study, learning useful skills, prayer, washing up and so on. In the government reports too discipline was an important sub-section. In the Travancore Education Reform Committee of 1941, for instance, under the heading of Discipline it was stipulated that:

1. Every pupil shall wear clean clothes.
2. Every pupil shall salute the teachers on the occasion of his first meeting them for the day within the school precincts.
3. On the teacher entering his class room, pupils shall rise and remain standing till they are desired to sit or till the teacher takes his seat.
4. No pupil shall be allowed to leave the classroom without permission of the teacher or until the class is dismissed.
5. Pupils are forbidden to organise or attend any meetings in the school or to collect money for any purpose without the express permission of the Headmaster (*The Travancore Education Code*, 1941: 40-1).

Discipline was implemented by controlling not just the student's behaviour, but also through their clothes, their body language, whom they were allowed to meet, their activities, etc. Discipline was also seen as being maintained through examinations and attendance. The Report went on to say how to punish misconduct, and when corporal punishment had to be resorted to:

Corporal punishment shall be administered rarely; this form of punishment shall be resorted to only in case of boys and in the following cases –

- (i) continued repetition of minor offenses which minor punishments have failed to check
- (ii) moral delinquencies which are not serious enough to merit expulsion, such as deliberate lying, cheating, making false excuses, bearing false excuses, bearing false tales about others, obscenity of words, insubordination, etc.

When this form punishment is resorted to, it should be limited to six cuts on the palm of the hand and administered only by the Headmaster of the school in such a way as to inflict pain without bodily injury (*The Travancore Education Code*, 1941: 42).

Discipline was one way in which the so called inherent differences between girls and boys were reinforced. The female student was not to be subjected to corporal punishment, only the male student. Here there is even a clear description as to exactly how the punishment is to be carried out. The school was not just a place for learning skills and to acquire literary and mathematical skills, it was also where the character of the student was to be moulded to enable them to perform their duties in a manner appropriate to the future citizen; and this entailed training them in self-control. In the

previous chapter, it was this same self-control that was put forward as being lacking in the modern educated women with their late rising, tea-drinking habits.¹²⁰

Women's capabilities and employment

Women began to be seen as intelligent and as capable as men in the field of education and other professions around this time. The policies taken by the government gave more stress to the teaching profession with recommendations to start teacher training colleges in conjugation with women's colleges (Aiyangar et al., 1925). The Papworth Committee recommended that women teachers be recruited to teach the first three classes of primary schools as women were better in taking charge of small children and better caregivers. The recruitment of women teachers was to result in all schools being able to provide instruction in sewing, elementary homecraft, music and singing for girl pupils because the large majority of girls in boys' school had no separate subjects (Papworth, 1946).

The private/public, the East/West, the spiritual/materialistic dichotomy that Partha Chatterjee argues emerged in Bengal during the social reform movement (Chatterjee, 1993; Chatterjee, 1989b), manifested differently in the reform movement in Kerala. J. Devika mentions that gender difference was the fundamental principle of ordering human beings, as the alternative to established social order that privileged birth and inherited status in Kerala (Devika, 2008). The public sphere came to be conceived of differently in the early 20th century, and Devika mentions how the school, the hospital and the ideal modern community were all envisaged as working best

¹²⁰ The 1930s saw a number of political movements and processions in Travancore taken up against the administration by students, teachers and other groups. Though, the protests were not directed towards the Maharaja, the cry for responsible government was strong in Travancore at that time. So 'discipline' was not just about morality, capability and comportment, but also about carving out the right kind of citizen.

through the powers of words, persuasion, discretionary sense and patience – precisely the qualities attributed to women. Women’s natural capacities were being used to justify their entry into these new institutions. Women could be part of the public domain as long as it required her ‘gentle powers’. Women, she says, were able to move out of the domestic domain only after making sure of not losing her gender identity. This is different from Partha Chatterjee’s argument where he says that women could move out of the inner/private space once her essential femininity was fixed in terms of certain “culturally visible spiritual qualities” (Chatterjee, 1993: 130). In Devika’s formulation not only is the woman’s gender identity fixed, but certain jobs were then seen as needing the feminine touch. This argument helps to explain how certain jobs/professions were becoming dubbed as women’s work and/or as being more suited to women. Jobs like teaching, nursing, etc. came into existence as a direct result of modern education (put in place by the missionaries and the government) and were considered befitting a woman’s abilities. Entering such jobs would not then cause her to lose her *sthreethwam*. I would add a further note to this and say that in early twentieth century Kerala, even if women had to move out of the physical space of the home, it was acceptable as long as they did not abandon the duties expected of them at home and simultaneously conducted themselves in the public space in a manner that did not conflict with their inherent *sthreethwam*. This *sthreethwam* included virtues such as chastity, self-sacrifice, devotion, religiosity, kindness, patience and love. With the advent of education certain new virtues were added to this list: sense of discipline, hygiene, thrift, sense of responsibility, literacy, ability to do household accounts, etc.¹²¹

¹²¹ This was not confined to Kerala. Partha Chatterjee speaks about discussions on how education was meant to inculcate bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social forms of disciplining: or orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility, literacy and so on in 19th century Bengal. Simultaneously there were discussions about women having to develop womanly virtues such as

The kind of subjects proposed suitable for women were also those that would keep them tethered to their *sthreethwam* – domestic science, sewing, lace-making – because these were by then seen as feminine subjects. The duty towards the home – the domestic sphere – was strongly enmeshed in the *sthreedharamam* of the Malayali woman. The woman had to be careful that neither her *sthreethwam*, nor her *sthreedharamam* were compromised in order to move away from the physical space of the home. So even when it seemed she had moved away from the domestic domain, in reality she was still connected to it by her *sthreedharamam*.¹²²

The employment of married women was under discussion in various sites.¹²³ The Committee for Educational reforms in 1933 suggested that it would be advantageous in recruiting and retaining married women as teachers in Departmental primary schools, but not secondary schools.

There are obvious difficulties in the way of a married woman, particularly a married woman with a family, doing inspecting work or doing teaching work in higher grade institutions. Apart from these difficulties, however, we feel that the large unemployment amongst educated young men and women should

chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, etc. For details see: Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989a). He develops this argument in a later work where he goes on to say that women could move out of the physical space of the home as long as it did not threaten their femininity. Women were still part of the inner/spiritual/private domain in this reading. From: Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹²² As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, this *sthreedharamam* is not the same as the private/inner/spiritual that Partha Chatterjee speaks about.

¹²³ There were discussions in the legislative council on the rules prohibiting nurses from marrying during the bond period (first five years of compulsory service). Some members questioned the logic behind the ruling, and asked why the ban was not extended to midwives and doctors and if there were similar prohibitions in other public departments. For details see: "Travancore Legislative Council: Second Council: Second Session, 1101," (Thiruvananthapuram: Travancore Legislative Council, 1926). The proceedings are available from: http://klaproceedings.niyamasabha.org/index.php?pg=search_result

by itself, necessitate the withdrawal from employment of a woman, working in the Education Department, who desires to get married (Statham et al., 1933: 69).

Married women, it was believed, would not be able to put in as much effort into their careers as unmarried women.¹²⁴ When there was a problem with high rates of unemployment, the first casualties were to be married women. The needs and/or aspirations of married women were considered secondary to that of men and of unemployed unmarried women. The right of the married woman to work and to be financially independent was considered secondary to her primary duties towards the home and the hearth. I would read this as further confirmation of the proposition that women could move out of the domestic domain provided she did not compromise her *streedharmam* towards the home. The policy makers were reluctant to burden married women with, what they believed, was additional work. What was also inherent in this formulation was the idea that married women would be taken care of by their husbands; that the Malayali family had become patrilocal. Married women were considered more experienced, patient, kind and nurturing than unmarried women (whatever the ground realities). According to the committee, the younger students needed a softer touch which could be given by the married women. But these same women were not considered dedicated enough to teach in higher classes or work in the department. The other underlying assumption in this statement was the differences in the degree of work involved in teaching primary schools and secondary schools and the preferential treatment meted out to higher education by the government agents. Though

¹²⁴ British India had difficulty in training school mistresses for primary schools because the latter kept themselves so busy in domestic work that they did not attend to their work carefully. The husbands of married women teachers interfered in their work sometimes by instigating the teachers to make petitions and neglect their duties. From: Mathur, *Women's Education in India. 1813-1966*.

most of the students in schools were in the primary classes, the government insisted on trained and dedicated teachers only in the higher classes.

The Census report of 1931 stated that the unemployment of educated women and men was a serious issue and educated married women seeking employment were classified under the category of unemployed. This portrays the change in the way women's status was perceived by the government. Almost a decade before that, a literate housewife would not have been classified as unemployed. Gainful employment of women outside the physical space of the domestic sphere was increasingly becoming acceptable. From 1925 there were a large number of educated unemployed women and the government was not in a position to provide employment for all. Providing basic training for later self-employment (for women) at school level was one way of addressing the unemployment problem.

High rates of literacy and education

I had illustrated the relationship between literacy levels and education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the previous chapter. This section shows that it was not just matriliney, missionary education and/or government interest, but other factors also played an important role in increasing the literacy levels of women in Kerala.

By the middle of the 20th century, it became possible for all those who had the ability and desire to be educated to benefit by that facility. Education was also equalizing opportunities by creating a social environment inside the schools and outside it which was conducive to development of inter-caste and inter-religious solidarities which were not possible a century ago. The content of education was pitched as one that promoted the development of scientific and rational thinking. High levels of literacy in Malayalam-speaking regions can be attributed to the activity of

Protestant missionaries. The first schools were started by them and the first groups to go to school were the converted Christians and the Syrian Christians.

The high percentage of native Christians in the population was another factor that aided literacy in Travancore and Cochin. According to the 1891 Census, 36,652 females were under instruction in Travancore.¹²⁵ Of the population of school-going age, Christians took the lead with 20.6%, followed by Hindus (10.3%), and Muslims (7.5%). Malabar district was in third place in point of female literacy in the whole of Madras Presidency (Duncan, 1897). Among Christians, the proportion of illiterate women and men was higher among the Roman Christians (the Roman Catholics and the Syrian Catholics¹²⁶) than among the Syrians or the Protestants. The chief reason for this state of affairs seemed to be that modern English education was never undertaken in earnest by the Roman Catholic clergy in Malayalam-speaking regions in the early 19th century. The Catholic clergy were mostly Italians, Spaniards, and men of other nationalities, who found it difficult to take an active part in English education, and to realize its usefulness or importance (Tharakan, 1984a).¹²⁷ Another reason for the backwardness of the Syrian Catholics, according to the Census report, was that the

¹²⁵ In the academic year 1887-8, there were totally 2,14,206 girl students in Bombay, Madras, Bengal and Assam. The number of schools for girls was largest in Bombay and Madras and smallest in Bengal and Assam. For details see: Ibid.

¹²⁶ These were the Syrians who had joined the Roman Church.

¹²⁷ The Catholic priests in India in the early 19th century were often Italians, French, etc. Places like Bengal, which were under British rule, requested for English-speaking priests to be sent to India. Some religious orders like the Jesuits (a catholic order based in Rome) then send English-speaking personnel to these areas. The Jesuits started a vernacular Parish school in Malabar in the 1850s, and in 1862 the parish priest handed over the management of the school to Christian Brothers, who introduced English in the syllabus. There were very few English schools under the Catholic Church in Kerala and they were introduced only when there was demand for such schools in this period. From: *About School*. (St. Michael's Anglo-Indian Higher Secondary School, Kannur, [cited 28 February 2013]); available from http://stmichaelskannur.com/about_school.html, John Felix Raj, *Jesuits Education*. (St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, [cited 28 February 2013]); available from <http://www.sxccal.edu/jesuitsEdu.htm>.

converts were mostly high caste (Molony, 1912). This affected the percentage of female literates among them. In Malayalam-speaking regions it was the middle caste women who had easier access to schools than the upper caste women. Since Syrian Catholic families tended to follow the upper castes in their caste pollution rules it is safe to assume that in the matter of education too, they would have followed the Malayali Brahmin custom of restricting women's access to modern education. Thus, even within Christians the percentages varied among the various sects. But to outward appearances, it appeared as if they were moving towards modern education and material progress as a united group (Jeffrey, 1992). This added to the competitiveness among the various caste/religious groups that I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

The presence of Christians alone does not explain the relatively high number of literates in Malayalam-speaking regions, because there were areas like Goa with a huge Catholic Christian population in the 19th and 20th centuries who did not have the same high levels of literacy.¹²⁸ As I have mentioned before Catholic priests (especially in Portuguese Goa) were often from non-English speaking places. They did not have the means or inclination to invest in the British system of education. Protestant missionaries always started schools near their missions and they undertook translation of the Bible and other texts into the native languages as part of their larger aim of proselytization and education. For the native Christians in Kerala it was culturally and socially easier to send their children to schools run by people professing the same faith.

¹²⁸ In Goa in the early 20th century parents were sometimes reluctant to send their children to schools because of factors like the medium of instruction, inclusion of Portuguese history and literature in schools, etc. In 1920, of the total number of children of school going age only 7% were enrolled in schools. Goa had a literacy rate of 31.23 % in 1961 while Kerala had a higher rate of 46.85%. From: Ricardo Cabral, *The Development of Teacher Education in Portuguese Goa, 1841-1961* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co, 2009), V.L. Chopra et al., "Goa Development Report," (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 2011), Bhalchandra Mungekar et al., "Kerala Development Report," (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 2008).

Tamilnadu had regions of high Protestant missionary activity with schools attached to each mission – English and Tamil schools – in the 19th century (Frykenberg, 2008). However the percentage of literates in the Presidency never equalled that of Travancore or Cochin.¹²⁹ While the rate of female literacy tripled for Madras in 1891 from 1875, for Travancore and Cochin it increased five to nine times. The matrilineal system prevalent among many of the communities is often cited as one reason. The first groups that send their children to schools were not the matrilineal communities. However towards the end of 19th century the number of Nair children in school outnumbered the Christian children.¹³⁰ Other than these the highest percentage of school-going children was among the Kshatrias (or the ruling families), and the Ezhavas – both of whom were mostly matrilineal. The missionaries had started separate schools for Nairs and Brahmins in Travancore. The number of literates among the Ezhavas and the Brahmins were high.¹³¹ Even though the percentage of educated Brahmins was higher than the other communities, in terms of sheer numbers, Nairs, Christians and Ezhavas outnumbered the former. This in turn, provided these

¹²⁹ The percentage of educated men in Travancore, Cochin and Madras was 19.11, 23.82 and 11.43 respectively and the corresponding percentages for women were 2.69, 3.76 and 0.66 respectively in 1891. The Census report of India for 1901 pointed out that education of those in Malabar seemed to be superior to that of Tamils and Telugus. The educational status of the Malayali Brahmin, the Nair and the Tiyya/Ezhava were better than their corresponding castes in Tamil-speaking regions and Telugu-speaking regions. From: W. Francis, "Census of India, 1901. Volume XV. Madras. Part I. Report," (Madras: Government Press, 1902).

¹³⁰ There were 90,542 educated males (37%) among the Nairs and 56,537 educated males (21.29%) among the Christians. From: V. Nagam Aiya, "Report on the Census of Travancore, Taken by Command of His Highness the Maharajah on the 26th February 1891 - 16th Masy 1066 M.E., Along with the Imperial Census of India," (Madras: Addison & co., 1894).

¹³¹ There were 24,996 (12.10%) educated males among the Ezhavas and 11,925 (51.72%) males among the Brahmins.

communities with the numerical strength to take positive action. Among the females, the number of educated Nair women outnumbered the native Christian women.¹³²

The interest taken by the rulers of Travancore and Cochin in the matter of education cannot be discounted. By the second half of the 19th century, a number of new schools were opened for the high caste students, older indigenous schools were incorporated into the government system and grant-in-aid scheme was instituted for existing private schools. The Diwans from 1857 were products of the Presidency College (Madras), and the Raja's Free School (Travancore) and they were desirous of spreading English education in the state (Aiyangar et al., 1925). The institution of English schools in the native states also helped the native rulers to depend less on Madras presidency for trained officers in administrative positions. By the turn of the century the government had opened other schools for the lower castes. They were equally interested in the education of women. The women and men of the ruling families in Travancore and Cochin were highly educated. The various Census reports, administration reports, reports of the Education Committees have separate sections for female education and education of backward communities. Girls in government schools were paying only half the rates prescribed for boys till 1932 in Travancore. Without the special interest shown by the governments, women and backward classes would not have had easy access to schooling and literacy. The policies of the Travancore and Cochin governments were not taken in isolation, but as is clear from the various reports mentioned in this chapter were influenced by activities and movements taking place elsewhere in India, Asia, Europe and America.

¹³² There were 16,673 literate Nair women and 8,454 literate Christian women. The Brahmins had 1,469 and the Ezhavas had 1,089 women literates among them. From: Aiya, "Report on the Census of Travancore, Taken by Command of His Highness the Maharajah on the 26th February 1891 - 16th Masy 1066 M.E., Along with the Imperial Census of India."

The various caste/religious organisations that came up in the early 20th century were deeply interested in raising the standard of their fellow caste women and men. A common characteristic of all these movements was their emphasis on education.¹³³ For the economically dispossessed lower castes and outcastes, education was the route to liberation. For the others it was a method to stabilise or improve their social position.

¹³³ Under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru, the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham) was founded in 1903 by Dr. P. Palpu for the Ezhavas. The government schools of Travancore were opened to the Ezhavas only by 1910. In practice, entry to schools were difficult even after this and in a petition submitted to the Maharaja in 1917, the SNDP complained that they still had no admission to schools, particularly in girls' schools. Sree Narayana Guru started a school at Aruvippuram and another at Varkala (both in Travancore), in which the medium of instruction was English. From his point of view education offered a means to improve the position of the group, to transform irrational social customs, to fight against *avidya* (ignorance) and superstitions and to thus achieve *mokhsa* (deliverance).

Ayyankali, the leader of the Pulayas was fighting for the cause of the depressed castes. In 1907, Ayyankali established the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) to fight for the cause of the depressed castes. Like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali viewed education as the most important means for the liberation of the lower castes. The Sangham demanded admission of outcastes into schools and for the removal of the social disabilities arising from caste. The lower castes were also working towards the abolition of social distance among the various caste groups. This movement started in the 19th century when the lower caste women started wearing their clothes/accessories imitating the styles of the upper caste women. It took other forms in the later decades. The Temple Entry movement was one such. The *Sahodara Sangham* (brotherhood) founded by the Ezhava leader, K. Ayyappan in 1917 worked towards eradicating the evils of caste and popularising the idea of inter-dining among the Ezhavas and other castes considered inferior to them in the social scale such as the Arayas, the Pulayas, etc.

The NSS (Nair Service Society) was founded in 1914 with the motto of service to the community in general and the Nairs in particular. It provided effective leadership to movements towards the eradication of sub-caste, abolition of decadent and wasteful practices like *talikettukalyanam* (ritual marriage of young girls before puberty to a Brahmin), *tirandukuli* (celebration of start of puberty), etc. The NSS also started schools from 1915 for its members. Similarly, Abdul Khader Moulavi established the Muslim Mahajana Sabha to propagate reforms within the Muslim community and to promote education. Even before embarking on an organisational mode, Moulavi had started to use publications and journalism as methods to bring in social reform among the Muslims.

From: Francois Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier, "Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production: Part One," *Social Scientist* 6, no. 11 (1978). P.R.

Gopinathan Nair, "Universalisation of Primary Education in Kerala," in *Studies in Educational Reform in India, Volume 2*, ed. P.R. Panchamukhi (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1989). CDS, "Human Development Report 2005: Kerala."

Apart from placing their demands before the State, each community addressed the question of education by opening their own institutions with resources raised from within the community. The SJPS raised resources from the poor agricultural labourers to start its own school for the Pulaya children. Later the Nair Service Society (NSS), the SNDP and Muslim organisations like the Lajmathul Islam Sabha collected funds from their members to establish schools of their own (CDS, 2006). The most important contribution of these organisations was their efforts to create awareness among the members of their own communities about the need for education. The caste groups were also fighting for freedom – freedom from hereditary constraints on their status and freedom to compete for betterment of their status. This betterment could be effected through individual effort and hard work. The individual effort could work only in an environment of equal opportunity – opportunity to rise in social and economic status. Thus, these groups had a high stake in education.

The different kinds of school management in existence in Kerala in the early 20th century were the Bible Faith Mission, the Mar Thoma mission, the Salvation Army, the NSS, the SNDP, the Muslim educational society, the Roman Catholic mission, the CMS including the Zenana Mission, the Basel Evangelical Mission, the Lutheran Mission, the LMS Mission, the Jacobite mission, the Brother mission, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Arya Samajam and also over 900 schools run by private individuals (Statham et al., 1933). Some of the above groups were Christian denominations and a few like the Arya Samajam were part of the larger Arya Samaj in north India. The government was urging these and other caste/religious groups to arrange for the education of the adult members in their communities (Menon, 1932). With the high competition among the different caste and community groups it was possible that the women of the groups found it easier to go to schools and continue

their education as is clear from the educational statistics. What this also meant was that some of these women's access to literacy and education was mediated through and influenced by their caste/community groups. This then would have developed a new sense of caste/community affiliation different from the earlier unorganized caste/community structures. So while schools were bringing together women from different caste/community backgrounds, paradoxically some of the schools were also creating a new sense of caste/community awareness among the students [the sense of community among the magazine writers peak around the time the caste/community groups were being formed].

The impact of the social reforms was felt immediately on educational enrolment and literacy in Travancore. The removal of certain caste barriers on school admissions during the second decade of the 19th century led to a sharp increase in literacy rates. Similarly there was an increase in literacy in the 1930s, which is attributed to the removal of all barriers on the access of lower castes and outcastes to public places (CDS, 2006). The progress in literacy was very slow during the first three decades of the 20th century in Malabar. It suddenly picked up during the next two decades, due to social reforms among the Muslims, the nationalist movement, and movements of peasants and teachers. There were enthusiastic attempts to bring children to schools, to organise libraries and reading rooms in rural areas, and to spread the spirit of education among the ordinary masses (CDS, 2006). It can be further proved that the cultural climate of Malayalam-speaking regions was favourable to education through the example of Baroda. When the Diwan of Travancore, Madhava Rao left Travancore, he became the Diwan of the princely state of Baroda in 1875. There he duplicated the education system he set up in Travancore. The literacy in Baroda was always above the all-India average, but female literacy was only 0.8%,

while in Kerala it was between 3% - 4.5% in the different regions in 1901. In 1941, total literacy of Baroda was 23%, which was only slightly more than half that of Travancore and Cochin (Jeffrey, 1987).

Another factor that played a big role in furthering the cause of literacy and education was the existence and dissemination of relatively large numbers of printed materials – books, magazines and newspapers. The newspapers and magazines of the time dealt with political, social and literary matters. There were 28 private presses in Travancore in 1905 which increased to 166 by 1937. There were 89 newspapers and periodicals being printed in Travancore and 40 in Cochin in 1937. The highest circulation rates were around 7000 for the newspaper *Deepika* in 1940. At the beginning of 20th century, there were 21 libraries which increased to 136 by 1941 in the state (Aiya, 1906; Thampi, 1942). The corresponding figures for Madras Presidency were higher during 1940. The number of newspapers and periodicals published in the Presidency were 917.¹³⁴ There were 1151 libraries in the Presidency.¹³⁵ However, Madras Presidency included not just parts of Tamilnadu, but also Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Many local associations emerged for the promotion of the regional language and literature throughout Malayalam-speaking regions as it did in Madras presidency.

This compilation of statistical data on literacy and printing from various sources has been done to show that the high literacy rates in Kerala were the result of a number of factors. Literacy, schooling and education were inter-related in Kerala from the 19th century as I have mentioned before. Women's education and access to schools were therefore influenced by these various factors. The education debates in the

¹³⁴ 253 in English, 210 in Tamil, 184 in Telugu, 26 in Kanarese, 24 in Malayalam, and 19 in other languages.

¹³⁵ "Madras Administration Report 1940-41," (Madras: Government Press, 1942).

magazines and formal structures of education were in turn influenced and shaped by the first groups with access to literacy, education and printing. Since these groups were mostly the middle castes (including the Christians) the debates were then mostly about issues that concerned them, at least in the early decades of the 20th century.

The details available about the history of education in the 19th century and early 20th century are sketchy and piece-meal. The social history of education, particularly women's history is put together from disparate accounts and the opinions expressed by the policy-makers might not have been shared by the majority of the people. Based on the reports/records perused here certain aspects can be summarized:

- The levels of literacy in different areas of Kerala were influenced by the caste and religious affiliations of the groups residing there, the presence of missionaries, access to further reading (newspapers, books, magazines), and the presence of overlords/authorities who were sympathetic and interested in the education of the people.
- Access to education was unequal in the case of various castes. It was influenced by their proximity to various missionary agencies. Even the government was initially interested only in the education of the upper and middle caste groups. It was only by the middle of the 20th century that education became truly accessible to all irrespective of class, caste and sex.
- Current discourse and discussions on education in Kerala do not address the underlying tensions, especially those related to caste. The numerous rules related to caste, like pollution by sight and distance, prohibition of inter-dining, etc. have remoulded itself in other ways, like competition for resources, job opportunities, reluctance to inter-marry, etc. Some of the ways caste difference manifests in the 21st century can be traced back to the early 20th century caste

movements, with the formation of official and legal caste groups.

- The missionaries being the first group to enter the field of women's education, had problems with attendance, caste differences and relapse of students into older ways of living, faith, and customs.
- The missionary wife was training her students in a late Victorian model of womanhood, some aspects of which persisted in later systems of schooling.
- The obstacles faced by the different missions were different and depended on the part of Kerala in which they had established themselves in, and the caste constituency of the area.
- In official discourse, school was seen as a place where the student was given some literary and cultural training, while not alienating most of them from their hereditary occupations.
- The Travancore and Cochin rulers had multiple reasons to start educational institutions – enlightenment of the population, moulding citizens faithful to the native rulers, pressure from Madras Presidency, need to retain the image of a 'model state' and thereby to stop the British from taking over the helm, demand from the population (especially the lower castes during the closing years of the 19th century), need to counter the proselytization activities of the missionaries, to make provisions for the education of the upper castes, to bring in modernization, increase revenue, to have citizens with the necessary qualifications to help the government with the newly formed departments, to train women to be better mothers, homemakers and caretakers, etc. Education of the subjects became a necessity for the native governments after the advent of the missionaries and the British.
- At the school level, the authorities were certain that Domestic Science, moral

education and hygiene were subjects that had to be included in the curriculum, even if they were only to be optional subjects. However, at the university level, though the authorities were aware that the subjects on offer were not suitable for or interesting to the women students; they were not agreeable to thinking of Domestic Sciences as an alternative. Domestic Science was not recognized as equivalent to other subjects. The authorities were ambivalent as to what might address this issue.

- The policy-makers were also making a distinction between married women and unmarried women. There were distinctions being drawn as to the capabilities of each group. Single women were given a chance to work outside the house and recognized as having a right to earn a living. It was assumed that men would earn for themselves and their wives. The family itself began to be imagined as patrilocal.
- Though special subjects were being instituted for girls, a large number of girls were studying in boys' schools/colleges and studying the same subjects as boys did. Some of these girls were also aspiring for the same kinds of jobs as the boys. Though the government instituted a few subjects for the perusal of girls, there was no aggressive follow up to get girls to join these subjects/courses, nor did the government come up with a comprehensive curriculum to differentiate and/or develop the so called differentiated capabilities/capacities and roles of girls and boys. Thus, the separation of male and female spheres of activities was not entirely successful.
- Disciplining the body of the student was an important aspect of school education. This was done by controlling their dress, comportment and meting out punishment. Physical punishment was reserved as a last resort and meted

out only to boys. This differentiation of boys and girls was another way in which gendering took place at schools.

The history of education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the 19th and early 20th centuries may not be unique. However, certain trajectories taken by the different communities in the region as a result of access to education lead to a higher literacy rate in the mid 20th century when compared to the rest of India. This was accompanied by better health conditions, lower infant mortality rates and lower growth rates. Though, women in the region were better educated than their counter parts in other parts of India, this did not translate into increased autonomy or control over their own lives. The government and the missionaries re-introduced the idea of the separate spheres/roles of girls and boys. Some of the ideas connected to the separate spheres/roles were taken from the traditional roles of women and men, but there were also new ideas being introduced. These ideas and practices were a result of the amalgamation of ideas happening in the colonial period with elements from Victorian England, missionary ideals, government policies, community needs, etc. Though the government tried to introduce courses/subjects to develop what they understood as the inherent/innate qualities of girls/women the policies were not aggressive enough or interesting enough for the women to demand for more such courses. It became increasingly easier for women to seek employment outside the space of the home. However they had to do this in a manner that did not threaten their *sthreethwam* or disrupt the space of the domestic. This led to a different kind of individuation of the Malayali women, who were simultaneously being placed within the space of the domestic. The space of the domestic was also reconfigured during this time, which was shaped in middle class and caste notions influenced by Victorian, Protestant missionary and nationalistic ideals.

In the policy decisions the government agents tended to vacillate between imagining women's education as an extension of teaching them domestic duties and providing them with the same opportunities open to men, training them to be self sufficient and thereby providing them with a chance at individuation. The tensions that accrued with imagining women's duties as being related to the home and the public was negotiated partly by the gendering of the public sphere. This was not a sharp/clear cut division. Thus married women could teach/work as long as it did not interfere with their domestic duties/obligations. Work itself was being gendered by associating certain "feminine" or "masculine" qualities with certain kinds of work. With each generation of women entering the workforce, the demarcation of "feminine" and "masculine" work became less rigid, which explains how women came to be in a wider range of jobs/professions in each decade in the early 20th century. But in the process of women encroaching on jobs traditionally thought to be masculine and thereby pushing certain boundaries, their *sthreethwam*/femininity was placed more rigidly on them. The constitutive elements of *sthreethwam* and *sthreedharmam* had changed as I have shown in the preceding chapter. So even when Malayali women appeared to have more education and opportunities than earlier generations they were also more firmly ensconced within a (hegemonic) frame that dictated their actions, thoughts and autonomy.

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Section II

Model women: through the textbooks

This section analyses a few textbooks that were in use during the first half of the 20th century: three novels and a collection of biographical essays. The

fictional works are not original: the novels and the play are free translations of English and Sanskrit works. It was serendipitous that of the dozens of dilapidated and moth eaten books pulled out of various libraries, five turned out to be texts used in schools in various years. Therefore this section cannot claim to be a comprehensive study of the syllabus of the period, but rather a study of whatever was available. In the three fictional works analysed in this section, the writers have paid more attention to the content and to translating the language/culture of the original works (so that the Malayali reader might understand it) than to the form of the prose/genre. There is no data available about the authors of the novels and essays used in this section. The fictional narratives are written by men from the Nair caste (deduced from the surname). Some of the issues and ideas that are discussed in the fictional material had direct relevance to matrilineal communities. I am not doing a detailed criticism of the materials but pointing to some of the important aspects that are relevant to the issues of gender, female individuation, culture and caste in the early 20th century.

The novel *Chaaritraraksha* (Protecting Chastity) is a free translation from *Ramayana* (Nair, 1931/2). This particular text was approved by the Madras and Cochin Text Book Committee and prescribed as a Malayalam non-detailed text for the S.S.L.C. Examination of 1933. It falls in the category of mythological prose. Throughout India, the mythological literature has derived its plot from Sanskrit epics, puranas, and even Buddhist lore. Mythological literature has created a structure of perceptions on which are created new allegories, fables, parables and archetypes. In India, mythological themes are usually found in the genres of poetry and drama. It is rarely found in prose form. The novels accommodate the mythological theme when it

is worked out allegorically (Das, 2006).¹³⁶ *Chaaritraraksha* is written in the form of a novel with conversations set out separately, like in the structure of a drama. There are vivid descriptions about the characters, the expressions on their faces, their internal monologues and Nature. There are no scenes or acts, but chapters. It is an allegorical prose about protecting the chastity of the woman.

Writers from different parts of India writing in different times and using different genres have focused on four important episodes in *Ramayana*: the marriage of Sita, the incident of the golden deer, the abduction of Sita, and the banishment of Sita (Das, 2006). This particular text contains incidents from the time Sita was kidnapped by Ravana and her purification by fire episode at Lanka. Sita has always been the model/ideal woman in Hindu culture/religion. She treads a fine line between a flesh and blood woman and a minor goddess in the Indian psyche. In speaking about the formation of goddesses, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan mentions that they were often an embodiment of attributes like justice, wealth, learning, etc. in the female figure/body. Indices of the status of women like female sex-ratios, life expectancy, literacy, income, subjection to violence, equality of opportunity, income, legal equality, etc. show up poorly in societies that have goddesses (Sunder Rajan, 1998). And Sita, the minor goddess, is re-introduced to Malayali students at the time that some of these indices were changing (some for the better).¹³⁷

Sita has been the epitome of a woman who is in sync with her *sthreedharmam* among the reformers. Paradoxically she has been used by proto Indian feminists as an

¹³⁶ Allegory is a narrative strategy. It is a device in which characters or events represent or symbolize ideas, concepts, modes of life, and/or types. For details see: Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

¹³⁷ Though there are strong regional Goddess figures, they are not worshipped throughout Kerala in the same way Durga is worshipped in Bengal and other places.

example of the emancipation of “modern Indian woman.”¹³⁸ Sita following her husband into the forest was often read by the proto feminists as an example of women’s partnership with men in ancient India. Women were seen as the symbol of India’s glorious past, where they also bore the burden of saving the nation. In this mode it was women’s duties that were more important than their rights. Sita was mostly used as a submissive heroine to perpetuate the subordinate and dependant role of women in textbooks and as a role model in the socialisation of girls (Pauwels, 2008; Sunder Rajan, 1998). The figure of Sita was invoked time and again by the Malayalam magazine writers, fictional and non-fictional alike, as an ideal.

The reworking of this episode in the *Ramayana* emphasised certain religious and ethical value system. And this reworking was not simply a search for religious meaning, but it was also a reworking of the past. While one part of the intended reader was unquestionably Hindu, the novel was also meant for a secular and general reader. Sita’s steadfastness, chastity, purity, obedience and love for her husband and faith in him are the qualities that are focused on in this novel. The other characters are also endowed with imitable qualities: Lakshmanan’s loyalty and love, Hanuman’s loyalty, Mandhodari’s love and chastity. Raman’s character is firmly rooted in patience, understanding, generosity, and a sense of duty.

Desire is one important theme which is interwoven into the idea of chastity. In this version of the epic, Sita is shown as not just chaste, but also someone who is in control of her desire. At one point, Shoorpanaka asks Lakshmanan how they could be leading the life of ascetics when Raman is with Sita. Lakshmanan replies that they live like siblings, (implying that bodily desire has no place in their lives) until they return to

¹³⁸ Sarojini Naidu had used the figure of Sita with selective reinterpretation as an example for the ‘modern Indian woman’ in the early 20th century. See: Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels, *The Goddess as Role Model: Sita and Radha in Scripture and on the Screen* (New York: Oxford, 2008).

Ayodhya. On hearing Raman's cries for help (false cries as it turns out later) Lakshmanan is reluctant to leave Sita unprotected at their forest abode. Sita insinuates that Lakshmanan is doing so under the dictates of his (unholy) desire for her. She pays for this transgression when she is abducted by Ravana and feels remorse for doubting Lakshmanan. Desire outside the space of the conjugal unit also brings with it dire consequences. It is Ravana's desire for Sita that leads to his downfall. Ravana is aggressive and guided by *kama*, desire that is not based on love. Soorpanaka too, pays for desiring first Raman and then later Lakshmanan, who are described as desirable: ideal men with strong and well proportioned bodies, wide chest, strong and long arms and masculine eyes. Desire has no legitimate space in this series of episodes (and this version of) of *Ramayana*. At Lanka, when Raman sees Sita after a long time, she appears all decked out in jewellery/finery to him (which the reader is told was the effect of a boon Sita had received). She appears desirable to Raman, and it is her desirability that causes him to doubt her for a moment. The representation of desire and sex was not a new phenomenon in Indian literature. Pre-colonial and 19th century literature had strong erotic elements. But from late 19th century sex/desire/eroticism became a controversial subject in Indian literature (Das, 2000). In Malayalam literature for young readers desire is not just taboo, but also becomes antagonistic to the virtue of chastity.

This particular text should be read in the background of the existence of matrilineal and patrilineal joint families in Malayalam-speaking regions where the husband and wife were slowly becoming a separate unit from the joint family. The primary duty of the woman and the man until then would have been towards taking care of the needs of the extended family which included older women, men and children. When Sita and Raman are posited as the ideal couple, it is not just the idea of

chastity and loyalty to each other that is being lauded, but also the concept of the new conjugal unit. Though Sita is not portrayed as being mired in everyday domesticity, she is also not a person in her own right. She has no completion as a person when she is away from Raman.

Sankunnimenon's *Aranyapremam* (Pastoral Love) is the translation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Sankunnimenon, 1931). The author wanted to familiarise Malayali students with great works from English. However, he set the story in Kerala, with Malayali characters, local dialects and some of the incidents have also been made to relate to Malayali customs in order to make it more realistic to a Malayali reader. The story is told in fourteen chapters, which also differs from the structure of the original play. There are descriptions of nature, descriptions of the internal thought processes of the characters and so on, different from a typical dramatic structure. This work is meant to be read rather than staged like *Chaaritraraksha*. Thus, even though the storyline is borrowed from the West, it is neither merely imitative nor derivative, but acquires a unique flavour of its own. Sankunnimenon chose the title of the play following the tradition of Rabindranath Tagore and others who according to him were attracted to the theme of pastoral love in this play.¹³⁹ This play was prescribed as a textbook for the SSLC examination by the Madras Textbook Committee in 1932. The novel draws from the English/European traditions of Romance¹⁴⁰ and Tragicomedy¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Tagore had written an essay in Bengali in 1907, comparing *The Tempest* with Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. According to contemporary critics, Tagore actually read *The Tempest* as a story of power and domination at a time when most other critics were reading it as an epitome of pastoral romance. For details see: Paul Skrebels and Sieta Van Der Hoeven, eds., *For All Time?: Critical Issues in Teaching Shakespeare* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁰ Romance is a style of prose/verse that was in vogue in early modern Europe. They were fantastic stories with adventures, often with a knight portrayed as having heroic qualities who goes on a quest. For details see: Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

like its original *The Tempest*. The marriage of Prabhavati is the main theme of the play. She is the ideal woman brought up in seclusion. The prince, Marthandavarman, considers her the finest woman he has met. Her education and comportment set her apart. She is innocent, forgiving, kind, and pleasant.

Marthandavarman is enslaved by Prabhavati's father to facilitate love between the two. When Baskaravarman, her father, frees the prince, he entrusts the latter with Prabhavati. However, he tells the prince that if he takes her without the sanction of the sacred ritual of marriage conducted around the fire amidst the holy chanting of the priests, their relationship will never be happy and may cause peril. Baskaravarman does not want her to become the prince's concubine. This emphasis on virginity, chastity etc. of the woman in a textbook for 15 year olds is repeatedly seen in other textbooks from the same period. This is an extension of similar discussions in the social sphere on the attributes of the modern Malayali woman, her character, her qualities, her education, her dressing, and also her place within the family. The marriage practice among the matrilineal groups did not involve a ceremony around the fire. This play was written around the time the various Marumakkathayam laws were being discussed and put into place. The "Sambandham" itself was under scrutiny and being touted as indecent as mentioned before (Arunima, 2003; Kodoth, 2002; Kodoth, 2001). In other spaces there were discussions taking place on the pros and cons of love marriages and arranged marriages (Editorial, 1928a; Kalyanikuttyamma, 1928; Karott, 1928; V.C.A., 1928). Here the text seems to suggest that love becomes legitimate only when it culminates in a lawfully sanctioned Sanskritic marriage ritual.

¹⁴¹ Tragicomedy is a genre that blends the characteristics of both tragic and comic forms. It is often used to describe a serious play with a happy ending or a tragic play with comic elements to lighten the mood. The important agents in a tragicomedy included people from the higher classes and lower classes. For details see: Ibid.

Another major theme is that of ownership of land, about colonialism: who is the rightful ruler, who is allowed to rule, who is civilized, and what are the markers of civilization. A gandharvan,¹⁴² Gaganacharan, helps Baskaravarman with keeping the other occupants of the island in line. He is grateful to Baskaravarman for freeing him from imprisonment inside a rock, but he is also impatient to finish his bondage to the latter. As a spirit, Gaganacharan has no rights to the island though he lives there. The island belonged to the human servant of Baskaravarman, Khalabadan. When Baskaravarman is stranded on the island, he becomes the owner of the island. His mystical powers, learning and knowledge give him the authority to rule over the other inhabitants: Khalabadan and Gaganacharan.

The domestic help cum native of the island, Khalabadan, speaks a particular northern Muslim dialect in the play. The father and the daughter speak a semi-literary upper caste Hindu language, to show their refinement. The upper class characters all speak a variant of this language. There could be two reasons for the particular Muslim dialect attributed to Khalabadan: Lakshadweep where the play was set had a predominantly Muslim population, and in Malabar (where the book was published) the lower classes were mostly Muslims. Baskaravarman reminds Khalabadan how he had taught him language, and tried to make him civilised. But Khalabadan had shown no improvement and tried to violate his daughter's modesty. Ideally, he should have kept Khalabadan in chains since that was what he deserved, instead had allowed him to live on the other side of the island. The idea of colonialism is tied to the chastity/virginity of the woman. The native is under chains to preserve the modesty of the daughter of

¹⁴² In Indian mythology, gandharvas are male nature spirits. They have superb musical skills. From: Monier Monier-Williams, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymological and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999).

the coloniser. Like in *Chaaritraraksha*, desire has no place outside the conjugal space. And love is allowed only between intellectual and social equals [The marriage between socially equal caste members was an issue of debate and discussion among the Hindu communities and will be explored in detail in the next chapter.]. Khalabadan has no right to desire Prabhavati because he is not educated or refined in a manner acceptable to Baskaravarman and cannot speak the language of the upper caste. There was a valorising of upper caste Hindu customs in this text. The differences between the utterances of characters indicate differentiated access to power and resources.

This text, like the others, had specific traits attributed to the male and female characters. Even the language used by the male and female characters is very different. The daughter is soft and feminine in her utterances, the father and the prince use a more masculine and harsh language. For instance, the father says to Khalabadan:

Why are you nodding your head? Sourhead! I will break your bones if you refuse to comply or show reluctance in carrying out my orders; your screams will draw out the wild beasts (Sankunnimenon, 1931: 29).

Prabhavati is submissive and obedient to her father. She does not rebel or raise her voice even when he gives her orders that appear unjust. The same is true for Sita too. The one instance when Sita resorts to harsh language and disobeys Lakshmanan, she pays the price in the form of her abduction.

Sateeratnam (Sati) by N. Sankaran Nair was used as a textbook by the Madras and Cochin Textbook Committee in 1931 (Nair, 1930). The author says in the preface that it was a free translation of a Sanskrit play. This could be *Charudatta* by Bhasa,¹⁴³ which was later adapted by Shudraka in 6 Century A.D. as *Mrichakatika* about the life of a courtesan. Like the other two textbooks mentioned before, this work was written

¹⁴³ Bhasa was a celebrated Sanskrit playwright who was supposed to have lived either in the 2nd century B.C. or in the 5th century B.C.

in a format that was a mix of drama and novel. *Sateeratnam* is written in 26 chapters while the original Sanskrit play combines a political and love intrigue in ten acts. The main theme of *Sateeratnam* is about a devadasi, Vaasanthasena, falling in love with an impoverished Brahmin, Chaarudhathan.¹⁴⁴

The choice of the title (probably chosen by the author since the original title was different) illustrates the importance given to the figure of Sati: in this story it could be either Vaasanthasena or Dootha, Chaarudhathan's wife,¹⁴⁵ who gets ready to enter the pyre on hearing about the judicial order to execute Chaarudhathan. Sati in the novel is a reference to the goddess than the practice of sati. The goddess Sati was the first wife of Lord Shiva. Her devotion and asceticism attracts Shiva's attention. She lures him into marriage so that he could be incorporated into the world and enters the role of the householder to utilize his energies in a positive manner (Kinsley, 1986). Later she commits suicide when her husband is insulted by her father. Her act is that of a faithful wife who cannot endure the insults to her husband. It is this act of faith, love and devotion, (which paradoxically in the myth brings grief to the husband and breaks that relationship) that had been taken up by the practitioners of the sati and by the novelist.

The focus of the novel is on the character and aspirations of Vaasanthasena. She is steadfast in her love. She is also generous: when she hears that Chaarudhathan's

¹⁴⁴ At the end, overcoming several obstacles she becomes his wife. The moral of the story, according to the author, is the destruction of an Indian King as a result of his shortcomings in upholding the ideals of Truth, propriety, charity, piety, chastity, etc. However the king does not appear in any of the scenes. The larger issue is the breakdown of law and order: an innocent man is accused of a crime that was never committed, a city where women were not safe, where thieves abound and so on. Towards the end of the novel, a fugitive overthrows the king and becomes the new ruler.

¹⁴⁵ Dootha is also a virtuous and chaste woman. When Vaasanthasena's pearl jewels left with Chaarudhathan are stolen, she immediately gives her priceless gem necklace to him to replace Vaasanthasena's stolen one. Her love for her husband is self-effacing: when he marries Vaasanthasena, she accepts the decision without dissent.

son wants a gold cart to play with, she gives them her ornaments to buy the toy. She is kind: when her maid and friend falls in love with a Brahmin, who had taken to thievery to earn money to buy the girl's freedom, Vaasanthasena lets her leave without any fuss. Born into a devadasi community, her salvation is her chastity and devotion to Chaarudhathan. Another character Vidan asks her why she does not want to follow her hereditary profession:

Vidan: Hey Vaasanthasena! Why are you opposed to following your caste occupation?

Vaasanthasena: There is nothing called a caste occupation. There is only eternal dharma. For a woman it is truth, propriety, faith in god, chastity, etc.

(Nair, 1930: 5).

This play becomes a text in Malayalam-speaking regions at a time the figure of the devadasi was being discussed in the public sphere.¹⁴⁶ The abolition of the devadasi system was part of the larger reform movement related to women. It was not only seen as being detrimental to women, but also as a threat to the institution of marriage. In this novel, Vaasanthasena escapes the devadasi system, not through education, but by marriage. It should be remembered that the earliest supporters of modern education for Malayali women had staunchly argued that education/schooling would not make the woman fall into prostitution.¹⁴⁷ From the devadasi known as a vessel of culture – of music, dancing and entertainment – the then modern woman took up the mantle of

¹⁴⁶ In 1926 the devadasi system was abolished by the Travancore Maharani. The government had pensioned off devadasis supported by it in spite of their protests in 1930. In Cochin a bill was presented and passed for the prevention of the devadasi system in 1931. The Madras Legislative Council had passed the Hindu Religious Endowment Act of 1929 to initiate a ban on the devadasi system.

¹⁴⁷ The politically correct term to use would be sex work, but since this text is from the early 20th century I use a term that was in common use then.

being the bearer of culture.¹⁴⁸

Desire or illegitimate desire is the cause of the downfall of the villain in this play. The king's brother-in-law, Shakaaran, desires Vaasanthasena. She does not reciprocate this desire. His downfall is the result of his illegitimate desire for Vaasanthasena and the other vices which follow from this: anger, murder, slander, and selfishness.¹⁴⁹ At the same time that Shakaaran is exposed as being guilty, the king of the country is overthrown and the former loses his position in court. Thus, the narrative is also about the triumph of good over evil. In this play, the focus is not on the education of the characters, but rather on their virtue.

This play is also about the fashioning of the self and the formation of the family. Vaasanthasena is able to escape the boundaries of her caste and find a place within a family. Once she falls in love with Chaarudhathan, she is chaste and her focus is only on him. The same cannot be said for Chaarudhathan: he falls in love with her while already married and the father of a child. But his love for her is an affection that is not mere desire: his love for her arises out of his realization of her nobility of character, her generosity and intelligence. Though polygamy was outlawed in Kerala by 1920, since this novel was set in an earlier time when it was the customary practice, his actions do not stand out and are not presented as being a moral transgression. If one looks at most of the early novels and plays set within the Nair-Namboothiri homestead, there is a clear pattern that emerges: it is the woman who has to decide between a lover

¹⁴⁸ When the devadasi was taken out of the picture, dance was removed of the stigma of sexual immorality and could be added to the canon of legitimate art. The Papworth Committee had suggested (in 1946) dance as an optional subject that girls could take up. The different kinds/sub-genres of dance became acceptable artform in later years. For details on the devadasis and the legitimisation of dance see: Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-Forming in Twentieth Century Keralam*.

¹⁴⁹ Shakaaran kidnaps Vaasanthasena and tries to kill her. He then falsely accuses Chaarudhathan of her murder. She appears at the place where Chaarudhathan is to be executed and saves him.

of her choice and one chosen by the family.¹⁵⁰ There is usually no such choice given to the man. It is the woman's chastity, steadfastness and freedom of choice that is highlighted. The narratives often hinge on this one focal point.

Since this section cannot claim to be a comprehensive study of all the textbooks in use in the early 20th century, it would be presumptuous to claim that it seems as if polygamy was more acceptable than polyandry. Certain studies on the matrilineal families did claim that polyandry was present in Malayalam-speaking regions (Mateer, 1871). The nature of polyandrous relationships and their existence was a highly contested issue: some scholars termed it a different kind of non-marital sexual relationship. The nature/kind of sexual relationship among the matrilineal communities was under scrutiny (Arunima, 2003; Mann, 1996). In the light of such a situation it becomes interesting to see how other kinds of marriages/sexual liaisons were put out in the public sphere, especially through reading materials for young students.

Sanskrit literature had a venerated position in Indian history. Malayalam literature used to borrow heavily from Sanskrit language/ literature. The use of translations from Sanskrit was an extension of this history. Elsewhere in India as part of a scholarly strategy of assertion against rapid Westernization and as part of dissemination of Brahmanical learning and Indian classical heritage many works from Sanskrit were being translated into native languages. These texts were used as chains to link the literature of the past with the present (Das, 2006). An important event with relation to Sanskrit scholarship was the discovery of the plays of Bhasa in Travancore in 1912. Thereafter a large number of writers translated his work into other languages including Malayalam (Das, 2006). Thus *Sateeratnam* could have been chosen as a text in the background of these incidents/movements.

¹⁵⁰ *Indulekha*, *Sharada*, *Parangodiparinayam*, and *Lakshmikesavam* are examples of popular Malayalam novels that follow this pattern.

A collection of essays called *Mahathikal* (Great Women) was a textbook used in Malabar in 1922 and in 1940. It contains short biographical accounts of Queen Victoria, Chand Bibi, Tarabai, Florence Nightingale, Queen Alexandra, Krishna Kumari, Sarah Martin, Rani Padmini, Bharati, Yohanna (Joan of Arc), Maharani Swarnamayi, and Rani Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi. Biographies were considered important by the Travancore Maharaja himself, who translated some life sketches from Samuel Maunders' *The Biographical Treasury: a Dictionary of Universal Biography* (1851) in the late 19th century (Pillai, 1998). With the advent of the textbook committee set up in Travancore in 1866, biographies were a part of the school curriculum (Kumar, 2008). Biographies in Kerala generally dealt with people in the fields of literature-art, politics, social service, and religious-spiritual spheres. Women who worked in all the fields – Indian and British royalty, a few British philanthropists, and Indian intelligentsia – are included in this collection. The focus is on these women's virtue. Since the text is meant for a young teenage reader, some of the indiscretions of the characters are not mentioned and sometimes the exact opposite is portrayed as the truth.

The Victorianisation of Malayali women is evident in that the first essay in the text is on Queen Victoria. Queen Victoria represented a femininity centred on family, motherhood and respectability. She was also considered the epitome of marital stability and domestic virtue. The chapter gives a concise sketch of her life with focus on her different roles as wife, mother and queen. A salient feature of her childhood, according to the text, was that she was brought up in a normal and decent family. She was taught the value of money and to use it economically. The young princess was not allowed to attend the coronation of her uncle (she was his heir presumptive), and according to the chapter, this was done in accordance with the idea of inculcating

humility and modesty. Other biographers of Queen Victoria's life comment on the strained relationship between her mother and the King. The King had a number of illegitimate children by his mistress, who were allowed in court, and the Countess did not approve of them.¹⁵¹ One instance in the new queen's life (Queen Victoria) that is highlighted is from her coronation ceremony when she helps an old duke who stumbles in the middle the ceremony. She gets up to catch him, and this is portrayed as part of the womanly anxiety that is integral to her character, that is also praiseworthy. As the Queen her life was seen as a good example for other women. She refuses to make public appearances after Prince Albert dies. The narration implicitly approves of this withdrawal from public life.

There is a romancing of the domestic life especially in the descriptions of Queen Victoria's life in the country, her daughters' cooking and keeping house for their parents, their stitching clothes for soldiers taking part in the Crimean war and so on. The public aspects of her life are glossed over or omitted to give prominence to the domestic aspects of her life. This could have been because (a) the author could have been highlighting aspects of her life and English culture that would be comprehensible to 15 year old Malayali students or (b) part of the larger project of gendering women and imagining the space of the domestic as being an extension of their womanly capacities.

The latter argument seems to hold true for how the textbooks generally present the women characters. Women were portrayed as being feminine instinctually and it is their femininity that makes them do certain things or show interest in certain activities. So even when a warrior like Yohanna takes to the battle field it is because faith and

¹⁵¹ For more details read, Roger Fulford, *The Wicked Uncles; the Father of Queen Victoria and His Brothers* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1968). Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

religion were read as part of women's duties. For most of these women, the student is told, the nation and its people were more important than their personal needs. Like in the magazines, catering to the needs of the nation was seen as being part of a woman's duties since natural capacities/qualities make social activities possible. It is their instinctual nature that makes a Florence Nightingale or a Sarah Martin¹⁵² take to social work in this text. Sati, a practice not commonly found in Kerala, is valorised in the stories of Tarabai¹⁵³ and Rani Padmini.¹⁵⁴ Death was seen as being better than losing one's chastity. The author was probably not trying to sanctify Sati, but rather the emotion behind the action: the image of the obedient and adoring wives, devoting their lives, subsuming their comforts, and modulating their desires to that of their spouses. The author even mentions that satis (women who commit sati) could not imagine living without their husbands, since they considered death without their husbands painful. In truth, in the case of Rani Padmini, it could well have been the fear of having to submit to/raped by/taken prisoner by the conquering army.

Marriage and chastity were themes the writer invokes over and over again – themes and qualities thought to belong to women and the domestic realm. The domestic realm itself was reorganized to include certain qualities and activities that were at odds with the submissive and retiring nature of women. In the essay on Rani Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi the author mentions that Malayali women should

¹⁵² Sarah Martin was a British philanthropist; she earned her living by dressmaking, and devoted much of her time amongst criminals in the Tollhouse Gaol in Great Yarmouth.

¹⁵³ She was the wife of Prithviraj, Prince of Mewar. She fought alongside him in the battle of Toda and committed sati on his death.

¹⁵⁴ Rani Padmini (Padmavati in the essay) was the queen of Chittoor and the wife of King Rawal Ratan Singh. She steps into a pyre to save her honour from the covetous Sultan Alauddin.

emulate the bravery she displayed on behalf of her husband¹⁵⁵ (Narayanamenon, 1939a). It was not so much the bravery, but the fact she stood up for her husband that made the action a virtue. The main feature of the women portrayed in the text is their selflessness. These women had set aside and/or given up their life for something they believed in. Courage is made feminine or part of *sthreethwam* by connecting it to the *sthreedharmam* of love towards family and nation. Women depicted as working towards the larger ideal of the nation/state in the texts usually sacrificed themselves for the greater good in the narratives.

When women were shown as having qualities that were inherent, there was also the argument put forth that these qualities were latent and often had to be developed. One such quality was that of empathy and kindness. For example, the essayist laments that Malayali women were not well known in other parts of India because they had not developed their altruistic qualities. Figures like Rani Lakshmi Bayi were the exceptions that proved the rule. This was also the reason that education was seen as necessary: to develop the inherent qualities in women. Rani Lakshmi Bayi was taught Malayalam and Sanskrit by her mother and after her adoption into the royal

¹⁵⁵ The Rani's consort was the famous poet and writer, called the father of Malayalam literature, Sri Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran. In 1860, the Rani's adoptive uncle, Maharajah Ayilyam Thirunal succeeded to the throne. Both Ayilyam Thirunal and his brother Visakham Thirunal were initially close to Kerala Varma. However in the 1870s there occurred a palace conspiracy, involving Visakham Thirunal, Kerala Varma and the Diwan T. Madhava Rao and the three got alienated from the Maharajah. Matters took a turn for the worse when Kerala Varma was arrested by the Maharajah in 1875 and imprisoned at Alapuzha (north Travancore). The Rani's entreaties to the Maharajah to forgive her husband were met with no sympathy and so she proposed to go with him. But the Maharajah refused to permit this and constrained her in her palace. At the same time from all quarters she was pressurized to leave Kerala Varma and accept a new consort. The Rani refused and to force her, her allowances were cut off by the Maharajah. She managed her affairs with loans taken from influential people. For detail see: Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, T. K. Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol. II (Thiruvananthapuram: 1940)..

family she learned drawing, painting, etc. from trained tutors in the palace.¹⁵⁶ The Rani was an expert on music as well as literature. There was reference to the educational levels (or lack) of the women in most of the essays. Other than Bharati and Rani Lakshmi Bayi, none of the other women were learned. And their learning was not for self-advancement, but for the good of those they loved or for the society. For those without a formal education, some skill was substituted that was again utilised towards the good of society. Altruism was another quality that was desirable and bracketed inherently feminine.

Another textbook of the period *Aadarsharathnangal* (Ideal People) was a collection of essays for Class V (Achutavarier, 1939). It had short excerpts from the lives of 21 women and men from history. The historical figures are Gette, William Tell, Padmini, Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, Bertrand, Julius Caesar, Columbus, Akbar, Shivaji, Champlain, Buddha, David Livingstone, Mungo Park, Noorjahan, and others. The figure of Padmini is repeated in two textbooks written and edited by two different authors for different levels of students and published in the same year. This could well be a coincidence. In this text for 9-10 year olds, the main focus is on the qualities of bravery and courage. The chapter on Padmini ends thus:

After several days of intense battle, the Rajputs started losing. Seeing this, the women in the kingdom, made a huge pyre inside the palace and gave up their lives in the fire. Simultaneously, the men went out, fought bravely and manfully and attained salvation (Achutavarier, 1939: 14).

These texts show the process of gendering of the male and the female students in formal education. There were qualities that were assigned as specifically female and

¹⁵⁶ Rani Lakshmi Bayi and her cousin Parvathi Bayi were adopted by the Travancore Royal family when there was a succession crisis in 1857. Rani Lakshmi Bayi held the position of the Senior Rani till her death in 1901.

male. Women were exhorted to keep to altruistic activities – to become little Florence Nightingales. This was one of the legitimate public activities that seemed to be allowed to them. Of the entire list of historical women, Bharati is the one who is learned and intelligent. However it is not her intelligence that is fore-grounded, instead it is her sense of fairness, and self-effacing quality. And she is venerable not on her own merit, but because Sankaracharya was impressed by her knowledge. Some of the women display characteristics gendered ‘male’ like bravery and skill in warfare, but they are contained by obedience, modesty, love and chastity. Their courage is needed only when the occasion demands it. This is different from a mode of invoking the image of the militant goddess/heroic woman towards propagandist and reformist end to mobilise women to participate in the nationalist struggle and to provide an inspirational symbolic focus the way it was done by Hindu nationalist in the 19th century and in the decades leading up to the freedom movement (Sunder Rajan, 1998). The goddess figure is often deployed as Prakriti, nature as feminine principle and as Shakti, the autonomous force of the destructive goddess. Here the potential Shakti figure is taken up and toned down to fit the Prakriti principle.

There are certain points that can be drawn from the analysis of the novels/plays and essays in this section:

- The novels and the plays were about the fashioning of the self, within the frame of the family and the larger frame of the community/nation.
- In the textbooks a demi-goddess, a naïve young girl, a devadasi, and queens have certain qualities that were common: chastity, obedience, education, domestic capabilities, modesty, altruism, courage when required, prudence, and beauty. These qualities were portrayed as being present in women from various locations, time, class, caste, community, and stages of life. This representation

was mostly based on the figure of the modern educated Nair woman, but certain aspects of the Victorian ideal of the woman, the nationalist ideal of the woman and the missionary idea of the Christian woman was also present.

- In the case of the imagined women, bodily beauty was framed within the colour and shape of the body, shape of the eyes, and length of hair, kind of clothes worn and use of ornaments. In the case of the men the descriptions were about their strength, the firmness of the body, their courage and valour in battle. Thus, the textbooks took up and disseminated the gendering of qualities termed feminine and masculine.
- Desire was one axis along which the story moved in the fiction. In the textbooks, both fictional and non-fictional, the presence of desire was negated and/or cleansed.
- The position of the woman within the family changed with the move to patriliney and the move away from the joint family. For the Nair woman this move ensconced her firmly within domesticity. Representations of other “real” women imitated this move, by selective highlighting and glorification.
- The narratives were usually about/ based on middle class and upper class women. Thus, the models provided to the young students in print were also about the values/traditions/customs/culture of this group.

It is the “feminine” qualities of the women that move forward the narratives, whether fictional or non-fictional. What the narratives also simultaneously do is to bracket certain qualities as being specifically “feminine”. These narratives about women seem to be conflicted: tensions between conceptualising women as being instinctual and attributing reason to them (they are shown as being capable of discerning between right/wrong, good/bad, and of having self-control once they have

developed their *sthreethwam* through appropriate education), tension between *sthreedharmam* (or women's duties) towards the public and *sthreedharmam* towards the home and finally indecision as to whether education should lead to female individuation or merely adequate exposure to modern domestic ideologies. The few teaching materials that have been analysed here seem to suggest that women were mostly seen as having only three duties, towards the husband, the children and society (and other relatives). Even when attributing women with reason, the reason was expected to lead them towards the space of the domestic or towards protecting the space of the domestic.

The previous chapter brings into focus predominantly women's voices in the debates pertaining to women's education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the 19th and 20th centuries. This chapter focuses on the voice of the policy-makers in the debates on women's education. However, due to the vastness of the area it cannot claim to be an exhaustive study of all the nuances and counter currents in the ideology on women's education. The focus has been on the history of modern education and writings around curricular material to throw some light on how women's education was perceived by policy-makers. Though the two sections of this chapter deal with different genres of writing, they are very similar in how they imagine the figure of the woman, her capabilities, talents and duties. Women were taken from the folds of their communities/caste groups and placed within the category 'Woman' for policy purposes. The category 'Woman' that the policy-makers imagine does not belong to any particular community. While the matrilineal origins of some of the government agents are clear in their writings, the policy-makers (who were from different communities and not just matrilineal communities) in general take a secular middle class position. Both policy decisions and curricular material imagined the 'Woman' as

being irrevocably connected to the domestic realm. They saw women as having certain qualities that were universal like the ability to love, nurture, patience, chastity, love of beauty (not just physical beauty, but appreciation of beautiful things like laces, embroidery etc.), generosity, altruism, humility, etc.

The few textbooks analysed here mirror the concerns/interests/themes taken up by the policy-makers even when the writers might not have been part of the larger policy making bodies. Subjects like music, hygiene and domestic economy that were included in the curriculum is shown as talents and as being intrinsic to the female characters in fictional and non-fictional material. Issues like matrilineal laws, devadasi system, polygamy which were being discussed in the public sphere found their way into the textbooks.

In the beginning stages of modern education, Malayali women had no agential role in developing the curriculum being taught to them. In the 20th century the government agents mention that women educators were consulted in the process. So, the decisions were not always taken by male agents. The decisions on the direction female education should take was influenced by policies followed in British India, Britain, America, Japan and other parts of the world. It was also influenced by social and political movements in Malayalam-speaking regions. While the government does not use the term per se, *sthreedharmam* of the woman was an important aspect of the discussions on women's formal educational structures. The government policies show that there was an all pervading sense that certain qualities and roles were intrinsic to women. Education could not be seen as taking women away from her *sthreedharmam*.

From the beginning the space of the domestic was linked to the feminine (that did not mean that there were no opposing impulses, ideas and practices in this overarching ideology). The government does try to take this into account while

formulating special courses/subjects for women. But the government could also not afford to spend too much effort and money on the special needs of women. Moreover, there was no clarity among the government agents as to whether women needed only useful skills (vocational training and/or domestic science) or they needed (arts & culture education) accomplishments. The debates/discussions on women's education was thus about imagining or putting together the *sthreedharmam* of the woman. The system of co-education (by choice or necessity) meant that special subjects could not be implemented successfully. In addition, the students/parents were not particularly insistent about having special subjects for girls/women in Malayalam-speaking regions. So in the 20th century the first and second generation of educated women were part of a formal educational structure that was not radically different from that given to men. Yet the sense of difference persisted in the way the textbooks were put together; the way certain jobs/professions were marked out as being masculine/feminine or the way the role models were presented to girls. Through the curriculum, gender difference became an important marker of the self for the girls/boys, more so than their caste/community affiliations. If one takes the idea of gender as being the principal of differentiating human beings in early 20th century Kerala, then it helps to understand why this difference was played up in the textbooks. When there was a simultaneous move taking place to differentiate purely academic education with practical education, the gender difference was taken into account in this too.

The policies taken up by the government or the missionaries in the early 20th century were not really geared towards the individuation of the female subject. However the government (and the missionaries) was also not aiming to produce women whose only ambition was the care and nurturing of the domestic. Malayali women/girls were presented with role models (missionary women, teachers, and

historical, literary and mythological women) who were different from the traditional women in their communities. Women/girls were expected to have knowledge of a wider range of subjects/skills than an earlier generation of women. All of these meant that the interest of the educated women was not limited to traditional domesticity. The space of the domestic itself gets reconfigured with the emergence of the modern educated Malayali women. When the space of the domestic is reconfigured *sthreedharmam* also gets re-fashioned. Thus, from the beginning female individuation in Malayalam-speaking regions was different from that happening in other regions of India as a result of the particular trajectories taken by educationists and the people/communities themselves in Malayalam-speaking regions. Further studies of the way communities/caste groups put together their educational policies will add additional dimensions to this formulation.

CHAPTER 4: Malayali women: Imagined and real

The previous two chapters track the re-fashioning of the concept *sthreedharmam* that happened in the public sphere, particularly in the magazines and in the space of formal education in Kerala in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Is there a homogenous figure of the Malayali woman in the 19th and early 20th century? On the outset taking into considerations the arguments advanced in the previous chapters it looks like there was a category ‘Woman’ that emerges in 20th century Kerala. This chapter tries to figure out how this ‘Woman’ was imagined in the fictional narratives of the time. It depicts how education was an important aspect of the imagined figure of the woman. The chapter analyses four novels: *Indulekha*, *Sukumari*, *Parangodiparinayam* and *Apbhande Makal*. *Indulekha* portrays an image of the progressive middle caste/class Nair woman, while *Parangodiparinayam* portrays the counter-image of a traditional Nair woman in the late 19th century. *Sukumari* represents the newly converted Christian woman and *Apbhande Makal* represents the upper caste Namboothiri woman. The first three novels imagine a social milieu where the figure of the woman had already undergone changes as a result of modern education and social movements in the late 19th century. *Apbhande Makal* is set in the 20th century after most of the other communities had already started their internal reform processes, while the Namboothiri community was still debating on many internal matters including dress reform, education (for women and men), inheritance rules, marriage rules and so on. I have included two short-stories “Oru Yadhaartha Barya” and “Thalachorillatha Sthreekal” written by the earliest women writers. These stories provide a different take on the subjective position of women within the fictional narrative. I would have liked to include a novel written by a woman, but could not do

so due to non-availability of fictional materials written by women writers from the period. This chapter also analyses a play *Pennarashunadu* set in the 1930s, after the first and second generation of women had already been through modern education and were working in the public sphere. The play provides a satirical image of a proto-feminist. It shows how a woman who had moved away from her *sthreedharmam* is made to adhere to the space of the domestic. In the last section of this chapter, I have included two autobiographies – by Gowriyamma, a veteran politician and B. Kalyani Amma, a writer. It illustrates how education changed the lives of real women in the early 20th century. It also tries to see the role of *sthreedharmam* (used in the broad sense of the term) played in their lives. This section is treated as being separate from the main section of the chapter, as it has been given the position of an extended endnote than as a part of the main chapter. The analysis of materials used in this chapter is not extensive or in-depth since it had to necessarily include a variety of materials. Each of these fictional materials is important not because of its genre, but because they provide differing standpoints on what were the constituent elements of the model woman and her *sthreedharmam* in late 19th century and early 20th century Kerala. There are similarities in these materials written by male and female writers from different caste/religious affiliations at different times. Since the fictional materials were written long ago there might be discrepancies in the way I read them from the present. I am not sure how much I have resolved this issue, and it is a constant problem that most of us who use archival material constantly struggle with. The non-fictional materials are used to provide the counterpoint to the fictional material. They provide a counter in the sense of real women narrating their lives from their own point of view and also women who were writing of their lives looking back at the past. Autobiographies have been analysed keeping in mind that they cannot be made to

stand for the 'objective truth' as one needs to take into account the problem of verifiability, the self-interest of the author, and the problem of intentional or non-intentional elisions.

Section I

Representations of Malayali women in fictional material

The development of printing in the 19th century played a major role in disseminating the cultural content of the new literacy all over India. By providing access to literary products, printing contributed to the making of a new cultural taste, sensibility and a new cultural personality. The spread of English literacy had a spill over effect on the vernacular reader with the cultural essence finding its way into Indian languages and through that into a larger audience (Panikkar, 2002). With the advent of printing, reading became an individual and private activity. There was a change in the attitude towards leisure itself. Women and men could read the printed material at their convenience. In fact, the very act of reading was criticized by many traditionalists.¹⁵⁷ The educated middle class found reading as a new and innovative way of spending their leisure time. Leisure activity became increasingly personal. Reading became a means by which the cultural world of the West came within the grasp of the Indian reader. New literary genres like the novel were a product of this process and emerged in concurrence with the educated middle classes being drawn into the colonial cultural world (Panikkar, 2002). The novel was also rooted in the intellectual needs and aesthetic sensibilities of the middle classes. The early novelists were neither entirely won over by the colonial ideals nor confined within a traditional outlook, but often took a middle position.

¹⁵⁷ A good example would be in the novel *Parangodiparinayam*, when the novelist makes fun of the new generation of novel reading women epitomized by Parangodi.

Different women, different locations – role of education in fictional imaginings

The novel as a genre entered the Malayalam literary field in the late 19th century. North Kerala, which under the British had a history of strife and violence among the different classes/communities in the early 19th century, was where most of the early social reform novels appeared. Travancore, where social movements were tending towards revivalism with the different caste groups demanding representation in the government and for rights in the public sphere, was where the historical novels appeared (Irumbayam, 1985). The early social reform novels, according to Shivarama Padikkal, could be classified thus: (a) those that speak of an ideal yet to be realized; (b) those which want to revive an ideal; (c) those that spoke nostalgically of an ideal that was being destroyed (Padikkal, 1993). The early social novels that came out of Kerala mostly fall within the first category. The historical novels, from south Travancore, fall within the third category.

The style of writing in the social reform novel was strongly influenced by the English novelists. This is not to say that they were imitative of the British novels. The writers were borrowing a new form and animating it with a culture and language that was situated in 19th century colonial Kerala. British India was debating and discussing women's roles, constructing myths and counter-myths through their writings. A Victorianisation of the Indian woman was happening simultaneously with this as has been mentioned in the previous chapters. The Victorian doctrine of separate spheres located domesticity and the home as the woman's realm where she would be protected from the dangers of the outside world. Not only would the women be protected in this space, but it would also be a space that would contain her sexuality (Sen, 2002). Since British writings were widely read in Kerala the Victorianisation of Indian woman had

resonances in the Malayalam novels.¹⁵⁸ For instance, Kundalatha, the heroine of *Kundalatha* (1887),¹⁵⁹ is educated away from civilization, in a forest by her adoptive father (Appunedungadi, 2004). She has the qualities of an ideal woman like naivety, kindness, love, humility and fear of *adharmā*. The author mentions that because she has not had occasion to be in contact with ignorant and wicked people, she was free from bad habits, cunning and frivolity associated with normal women. The author also makes a statement that she was not taught music, or poetry as her adoptive father did not think that these made one a morally upright person. This should be read in conjugation with debates in Malayalam magazines in the late 19th century where essayists were debating on the usefulness (or not) of certain subjects taught to girls ("Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891a; , "Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891b; Subramanyayan, 1897) and on the connection between certain art forms like dance and sexual licentiousness. Kundalatha was taught laws of nature (science, particularly biology), reason and religion. Again this was in keeping with the importance given to Science, Hygiene etc. in Britain, British India and Kerala at the time. *Kundalatha* was used as a textbook in schools in Travancore, Cochin and Madras till the second decades of 20th century.

Kundalatha has also been mentioned here to show the links between fictional material and social, educational and caste movements in Kerala. Early novels in India often addressed a troubled present in which questions of self, community and society

¹⁵⁸ O. Chandumenon and Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon specifically mention reading English novels in the introductions to their novels.

¹⁵⁹ This novel is often considered the first novel to be written in Malayalam by a Malayali writer. It was inspired by the Waverley novels of Sir Walter Scott. The first novel to be written in Malayalam is considered on the one hand to be the translation of *The Slayer Slain* (1878) called *Ghathaka Vadam* written by Mrs. and Mr. Collins, and on the other hand to be *Pullerykunju* (1882) written by Archdeacon Koshy.

were posed afresh (Menon, 2004). The discussions on social issues particularly those relating to the status of women in the novels suggest a close affinity with ongoing debates in the social sphere. This does not mean that these texts are being read as representing reality, rather that they are being read as archival material that engage with the larger universe of meaning and dialogue that they occupy and interact with. Dilip M. Menon mentions that the early Indian was concerned with the question of fashioning the self and new forms of community, and that these themes were often thought through the idiom of religion. I would like to extend this argument and say that early Malayalam novels also included the theme of gender as an important aspect of the newly fashioned self in varying degrees. The fashioning of the self with gender as an important constitutive element was also central to the play and the short-stories analysed in this chapter.

The early novels in India located in the then present shows the engagement of the native intellectual with aspects of modernity. A thorough reform of existing customs and traditions was not possible under colonialism, given British hesitations on taking drastic measures in matters of law and religion after the Revolt of 1857. Novels located themselves within this dilemma where they imagined their world. The novel became a means of reform through other means (Menon, 2006). This is particularly true of the novels *Indulekha*, *Sukumari* and *Apbhande Makal*.

Modern educated Nair woman in fiction

The first perfect novel to be written in Malayalam according to Malayalam scholars and critics was *Indulekha* in 1889 (Chandumenon, 1995).¹⁶⁰ It had all the qualities of a classic novel: well-developed and believable characters, a unified and

¹⁶⁰ Chandumenon was a head clerk and later Sub-judge in the Calicut Civil Court. He was also a writer and an essayist.

plausible plot structure and a pervasive illusion of reality. This novel was so popular that it was sold out in three months (Irumbayam, 1985; Panikkar, 2002). It was also translated into English within a year. *Indulekha* was so important in the canon of Malayalam literature that it was a prescribed textbook at school level till 1998. Written in the third-person, the novel occasionally has the voice of the author speaking in the first-person.¹⁶¹

Indulekha was mostly read as a critical take on the matrilineal system, joint family system, the power of the karanavar (the eldest male member of the family in charge of the day-to-day running of the house and holdings), the position enjoyed by Namboothiris in society, the nature of Nair-Namboothiri Sambandhams and the influence of education on the development of the self (Devika, 1999; Gopalakrishnan, 1982; Menon, 2004; Pillai, 1998). *Indulekha* is important in this thesis not just because it was the first perfect novel, but also because it set up a kind of gender stereotype for later novels.¹⁶² This novel upheld a new social morality and promoted the rights of individuals to choose their own life-partners as opposed to the arrangements made by elders. In this chapter I focus on the aspects related to development of the self and gender stereotyping in *Indulekha*.

Indulekha and Madhavan are both educated in the modern style. In fact her accomplishments are so varied and numerous that the author himself states that Indulekha was more an ideal of what a Nair woman could be than any real woman at

¹⁶¹ The plot is about the love between Indulekha and Madhavan. Her grandfather, Panchu Menon, and another Namboothiri, Surinamboothiripad, come between the young lovers. A dejected Madhavan leaves the place as a result of certain misunderstandings, but comes back and marries her at the end.

¹⁶² *Indumathiswayamvaram* (1890), *Meenakshi* (1890), *Lakshmikesavam* (1892), *Saraswathivijayam* (1892), etc. were some of the novels that imitated *Indulekha* in more or less degrees with regards to plot, themes, and characterization in the 19th century. Countless other novels followed the themes in *Indulekha* in the 20th century also. From: P.V. George Irumbayam, "Nalu Novalukal - Oru Padanam," in *Nalu Novalukal*, ed. P.V. George Irumbayam (Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1985).

that period. She is well read on English classics; proficient in playing both Indian and Western musical instruments, and knows sewing and painting. Though Chandumenon states at the outset that dark and fair women can be equally beautiful if they are graceful and lustrous, Indulekha is described as fair, has a perfect body, red lips, dark hair, and ample breasts. Though, well educated, confident and smart, she stays well within the limits of modesty, refinement and the decorum expected of a Nair woman according to the author. She dresses in the traditional attire [but without too many ornaments: similar to the exhortations of the magazine writers], while Madhavan is allowed to dress in English-style clothes. She wears an upper cloth, deviating from tradition, where Nair women did not normally cover the upper part of the body. Yet, this is not exactly an imitation of the West, but an imbibing of a certain kind of modesty [probably the influence of missionary/Christian education]. She also follows the rituals and customs of the *tharavad* (family home). The only time she consciously makes a break with tradition is when she decides to marry Madhavan and refuses to consider Surinamboodiripad's proposal though her grandfather wants her to do so. She does not rebel, but through wit and self-assertion keeps the Namboothiripad away. Indulekha's progressive ideas are depicted as the positive results of her education. Though Madhavan too is educated, he is not portrayed as strong-willed or as prudent as Indulekha. Within the relationship she is the one who guides him. This feature which was categorized as essential to being a woman was taken up in later writings, where the woman was the one who was supposed to direct the man when he made wrong decisions. She needed to be educated to be capable of this charge, which in this instance Indulekha was. Thus, education becomes necessary not just for the acquisition of culture and refinement of the woman, but also to enable her to guide her spouse.

The idea of masculine and feminine qualities and the expected behaviour for

the modern man and woman were put in place through the new genre of the novel. Indulekha's femininity or *sthreethwam* is portrayed as connected to her body, her comportment, her education, her musical talents, her morality, her faith, etc. Madhavan's masculinity is also connected to his body, his education, his morality, etc.¹⁶³ Both Indulekha and Madhavan are shown as having traditional Sanskrit learning. *Indulekha* is written in relatively simple Malayalam with a few Sanskrit verses added here and there. By the time this novel was being written, English had slowly begun to replace Sanskrit as the language of learning and culture. However the author does not make his protagonists completely modern. Both the main characters are a blend of modern and traditional learning. When Surinamboothiripad tries to recite Sanskrit slokas, he makes mistakes, which provide a comic effect. His lack of knowledge and culture is explained as a result of his lack of education. Some of the subjects or skills Indulekha has learned would not have been available in the schools of the period. So Chandumenon explains that she had had private tutors instituted by her uncle, a Diwan.

Marriage and conjugality are important themes in the novel. Madhavan and Indulekha move away from an older system where the needs of the individuals were secondary to the needs of the family. Their decision to join in marriage is their individual choice and not that of the families. Indulekha even has a lengthy discussion with Madhavan about the freedom enjoyed by Nair women with regards to marriage. Madhavan believes that the nature of Sambandham makes Malayali women (Nair/Namboothiri is equated with Malayali women throughout the novel) less chaste.

¹⁶³ He is portrayed as being fair, having a well-proportioned body and long hair reaching till his knees. He is intelligent, smart, and humble. He excelled in a number of English sports, was interested in hunting, and had a few revolvers, pistols and guns. Madhavan is also fearless, as the incident where he uses his gun to kill a wayward cheetah at the Calcutta zoo shows.

They also have other kinds of freedom which makes them arrogant, he states. Indulekha argues that not all women misuse their right to break a Sambandham. She sees the right to break an abusive relationship as a positive aspect of Sambandham. She does not see this as a problem with Malayali women's freedom, but believes it is an empowering aspect. [In this text *swaathandryam* is used by Chandumenon to refer to Nair women's freedom to start or break a relationship. It also refers to their ability to mingle with those of the opposite sex, to converse with them, to be able to showcase their musical abilities, etc. Being uneducated and confined to the home was seen as being antithetical to *swaathandryam*]. Chastity and marital fidelity begins to be seen as an important aspect of marriage in this novel.¹⁶⁴ The development of their individuality, in Madhavan and Indulekha, is fulfilled through the attainment of the state of conjugality. However, both Indulekha and Madhavan are still part of the joint family system in a different manner. They do not make a complete break with the system; when they finally marry, his parents shift with him to Madras. This shift to Madras can be read as a move from the space of the village or tradition, to the space of urbanity or of opportunity, and material progress (and provides a break from the stifling caste rules in the village).

Desire and love were themes related to conjugality. Love is an emotion that is acceptable, especially when it is mutual. Madhavan's and Indulekha's desire for each other is legitimate because it stems from their mutual love which will lead to a monogamous and lasting marriage (as opposed to a Sambandham, which is considered contractual and temporary). Indulekha considers Madhavan as her husband from the beginning of the novel and there are various references throughout the novel when she calls him so, especially when she falls sick after his departure. She accepts him as her

¹⁶⁴ Indulekha's mother was a widow who had re-married at the time of the story and she portrayed as being faithful to her husband.

husband defying social position and wealth. This is in direct opposition to her grandmother's position when the older woman urges her to accept Surinamboothiripad as he is wealthy and would bring prosperity and status to the *tharavad*. Indulekha refuses to think of marriage as an economic transaction, which it often was in the 19th century, but as individual choice. Surinamboothiripad is a comic figure in the novel, not just because he is vain, lacking in education and intellect, but also because of his voracious sexual appetite and exploits.¹⁶⁵ In a discussion with his confidante/friend Cherussery, the latter tells him that if a man and a woman desire each other following from their mutual love, then it is meaningful desire. However, if the desire is not reciprocated then it becomes a mistaken or a meaningless desire.¹⁶⁶ But Surinamboothiripad is not able to comprehend the concept. Cherussery explains to him that love is the basis of providing sexual pleasure. Sexual act without love, he says, takes a man down to the level of an animal [This is also the reason Khalabadan's desire for Prabhavati is illegitimate in the previous chapter]. Thus in the novel, love, particularly romantic love, is seen as the basis of desire, and desire becomes legitimate only when it leads to marriage. And it is love that causes Indulekha to make a break with tradition.

Modernity, desire and gender are connected to material possessions in *Indulekha*. Surinamboothiripad is interested in expensive and flashy items and clothing. He imagines that his desirability is linked to the several gold and silver ornaments – a gold mirror, a gold betel carrier, a gold clock, etc. – that he carries about his person. Yet, these items and his obsession with them make Surinamboothiripad

¹⁶⁵ He has a number of temporary alliances, and is also shows interest in Indulekha's mother, her maid and her young cousin.

¹⁶⁶ Desire between a man and a woman (heterosexual desire) is the only one considered in all of these novels/play/short-stories

effeminate (in spite of his sexual prowess) and show him up to be a vainglorious simpleton. Indulekha and Madhavan also possess material items like Indulekha's piano, books, the divan in her room, and Madhavan's collection of pistols and guns. But in their case these are items that enhance their modernity because these items are also subtly connected to their education. Usage of large number of gold and silver materials seems to have been considered old-fashioned by then. This would also explain why Indulekha wears minimum required jewellery; she even refuses to wear a necklace which her grandmother insists she wear for Surinamboothiripad's first visit. While Surinamboothiripad's use of gold embodies wealth, Indulekha's minimal jewellery indicates, rather than embody, wealth and value (Menon, 2004).

Education was an important aspect of this imagined social world in *Indulekha*. Madhavan is engaged in a serious discussion by his father, Govindapanicker and cousin, Govindhankutty Menon, on the effects of modern education at one point. Their discussion happens in Bombay away from the women and also away from the domestic spaces occupied by the women. They discuss aspects of religion, spirituality and education. It was as if discussions of marriage, marital fidelity and the home were relegated to women while religion and politics were seen as male domains. Govindapanicker says that the modern generation who had been through the English system of education did not believe in God, religion and morality and gradually lost their faith, love and respect towards their elders and other relatives. This was a serious argument against sending children to school at the time repeated by many of the magazine writers/novelists of the time. However, Chandumenon, through Madhavan, counters this argument.¹⁶⁷ The early Indian novels in general, says Shivarama

¹⁶⁷ Govindhankutty Menon takes the radical position of the English educated liberal reformist who thinks anything to do with Sanskrit texts and knowledge is useless and outdated. Madhavan takes a

Padikkal, had the purpose of inculcating morality. “It often speaks of how children should behave, how they should obey their elders, what kind of education they should acquire, and other matters” (Shivarama Padikkal, 1993). Through Madhavan, Chandumenon also makes a case for morality or spirituality, without the confines of religion. The lack of moral education in government schools was an issue of debate and discussion among the Intelligentsia during the period which went on till the 1940s as I have mentioned in the earlier chapters. The Christian schools had catechism and though some of the other schools did try to introduce moral science they were not successful (Banerji, 1914c; ,*The Travancore Education Code*, 1941). Chandumenon counters the claims made by the British and others that knowledge was available only with the West. He invokes the rich cultural history of India, with her ancient learning and schools of thought to refute the image of a prototypical Oriental – a biological inferior that is culturally backward, peculiar, and unchanging – depicted in many of the writings on India during the period.

Madhavan (and Chandumenon) considers that with increased levels of literacy and awareness, many superstitions could be abolished. This was the crux of Chandumenon’s argument for English education: education creates awareness and knowledge; only with knowledge could the average Indian combat superstition and better the lot of their fellow Indians. Modern education was not an aping of the cultural markers of the West, but stood for much more. *Indulekha* captures the historical process whereby British rule was accepted together with the emergence of a national consciousness; where tradition and modernity were seamlessly woven into the characters of Indulekha and Madhavan; and where education was leading to the development of a self grounded within the confines of gender.

middle position and believes that one should not dismiss ancient Indian knowledge without understanding the context in which the different texts were written.

The novel as a genre caught the popular imagination in the late 19th century. The early novels were different from the other literary genres which took inspiration from Sanskrit. *Indumathiswayamvaram*(1890), *Meenakshi* (1890), *Lakshmikesavam* (1892) and *Saraswathy Vijayam* (1892) were some of the popular novels that followed *Indulekha*. Most of them took up contemporary problems and presented them in the style of the English novels, without the aesthetic value of *Indulekha*. The traditionalists believed that this new genre was unnatural and thought of it as a dangerous change brought about by the young generation [Even Gowriyamma, whose autobiography is discussed in the last section of this chapter, mentions that reading novels that dealt with adventure and romance was looked down upon by elders in her family. She used to hide the novels within her textbooks to read them. When her eldest brother discovered this, she was instructed to read only history books and historical novels. However, this happens much later in the 1920s and 1930s and was a part of the disavowal of the sensuous eroticism in literature within the SNDP movement.]. The novels were perceived as attacking hereditary beliefs and customs. This popular literary genre was mostly written by those belonging to the Nair and equivalent castes and the protagonists belonged to these castes. They portrayed an existing middle class and middle castes. The main protagonists in most of the early novels were educated to some level. Though fictional, these characters have been taken up for analysis as they portray the ideal women and men who were put up for consumption by the reading public.

Modern Nair woman represented by a traditionalist

Parangodiparinayam (1892) falls into the second category of novels that Shivarama Padikkal mentions: those which want to revive an ideal (Padikkal, 1993).

Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon,¹⁶⁸ the author, could be read as the mouth piece of the traditionalists. *Parangodiparinayam* (Parangodi's Marriage), is a burlesque on *Indulekha* and the number of similar and imitative novels that followed the publication of *Indulekha* in 1889. This novel represents the anxiety and complex negotiations involved in the acceptance of English language and modern education by Malayali society at large.

Parangodiparinayam was the first satirical novel to be published in Malayalam.¹⁶⁹ This work also attains historical significance because it was able to put a stop to literary productions in the form of novels for a time.¹⁷⁰ The first edition of the novel (1000 copies) was sold out in the first three months. Contemporary writers of Ramankutty Menon usually read it as a satire and many expressed displeasure of the gross misrepresentations of English educated students by him ("*Parangodiparinayam*", 1893). This novel marks an important moment in the social sphere: the registering of a breakdown of the sense of self in the established order, and a perception of this lack

¹⁶⁸ He was a well-known writer and essayist with a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit and Malayalam. He was well-versed in English too. He was the son of a famous Sub-judge, Kizhakkepattu Krishnamenon.

¹⁶⁹ The story is not similar to *Indulekha*, though there other kinds of similarities. Parangodi and Parangodan, both of the Nair caste, are in love with each other. They decide to marry. The karanavar of Parangodi's house decide to get her married to his son, Pangashamenon, the inmate of another Nair household in the neighbourhood. However Pangashamenon declines the offer since he does not find her suitable. Meanwhile, Parangodi informs Parangodan, now a lawyer working in Madras, of the marriage proposal. He returns to Kerala and realises that the marriage is not to take place. He then tells Parangodi that they will court each other for some more time in the manner of the English. Parangodi is still single at the end of the novel, the irony being that the title of the novel is 'Marriage of Parangodi'.

¹⁷⁰ A prominent writer and critic of the time, Vengayil Kunjiraman Nayanar, had mocked the process of novel writing in the magazine, *Vidyavinodhini*. He suggested around nine nonsensical titles and added the title "Parangodi Parinayam" and said that anyone could write a novel in this manner. Ramankutty Menon was captivated by this article and undertook to write a satire and used the titles suggested by Vengayil. For details see: Irumbayam, "Nalu Novalukal - Oru Padanam.", Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon, *Parangodi Parinayam* (Samyukta, 1892 [cited 10 September 2011]); available from http://www.samyukta.info/archives/vol_4_1/fiction/kizhakkeppattu%20ramankutty%20menon/parangodi%20parinayam.htm.

(Devika, 2007a). Following this breakdown of the self is an effort to re-create a stronger self and Ramankutty Menon accomplishes this through a selective rejection of Western education (not all aspects of Western education is rejected) and revivalism of Sanskrit education.

In the preface, Ramankutty Menon says that he had intended to satirize the *Indulekha* imitations. However, a close reading of the novel brings out the not so subtle criticism of Chandumenon's novel. The description of the heroine Parangodi is a good illustration of this:

Now she has completed eighteen years. As people differ in their concept of beauty, if I describe her looks in the way one group sees her, the others may not appreciate it. So I shall just say that she pleased each and every eye that fell on her. Let the readers contemplate on how this comes about, according to their sensibilities. I have stated earlier of her great intelligence. If she hears something once, it is retained as if etched in stone. She had learnt to read and write English very well. She had also studied the mechanics of trains, steamships, telegraph etc. She was adept at needlework. When our Parangoda Marar became a lawyer, she had stitched a most singular cap for him and sent it to him as a gift. All around it was embroidered 'Parangodan' in English letters with glittering thread which at first glance looked like creepers. Parangodan's English friends on seeing this fine craftsmanship was amazed that there were such gifted needlewomen among the Nairs. Parangodi was not enamoured of the typical Kerala ornaments. She was usually dressed in a skirt and a jacket (Menon, 1892: 238).

Ramankutty Menon refrains from giving a detailed physical description of Parangodi as a protest against the often excessive narration of the facial features and physical attributes of the female protagonist in other novels including *Indulekha*. He makes fun of *Indulekha's* learning by stressing Parangodi's knowledge about the

mechanics of modern scientific inventions.¹⁷¹ In *Indulekha*, there is a scene where she stitches a cap for Madhavan and gives it to him. So Parangodi is also made to stitch a cap for Parangodan. Parangodi is more westernised than Indulekha; she even wears western clothes. Clothes as I have mentioned before was an issue of contention in the 19th century. Parangodi being made to wear western clothes by the author marks her rejection of custom and tradition. The work is interspersed with high sounding Sanskrit terms and quotations that bear no resemblance to the theme which add to the humour. The names of the main characters are in themselves humorous with a local flavour to them. The writer chose them because these names were far removed from the Sanskritic names used by the other novelists of the time. It could even be a tongue-in-cheek rejoinder to Chandumenon's preface in which he explains why he chose the name Indulekha for his protagonist.

The protagonists in *Parangodiparinayam* are portrayed as being completely spoilt because of their English education. They have lost touch with their ethnic identity and roots, developed contempt for their mother tongue, and are vain, arrogant and ignorant. The other characters that have had no English education are firmly rooted in their culture and are successful in life. Chandumenon entered the literary scene as a supporter of English education and as a champion of concepts such as individual thoughts and rights for women and men. For Ramankutty Menon, those who had traditional education were the ones with the discerning power. The English educated Parangodi has a well developed (though flawed) sense of individuality, but in the end she is not able to exercise her choice in that she is made to court Parangodan forever. In this novel too, like in *Indulekha*, conjugality is seen as the desired state to be achieved for both the English educated and traditionally educated characters.

¹⁷¹ In the novel *Indulekha* is not awed by anything because she can even explain the principles on which the railway train is driven.

Malayalam literature came under massive Western influence from the 1880s. Previously, to be an educated person in Kerala meant to have knowledge of the Sanskrit classics and *Sastras* (George, 1972). The term acquired a new meaning, and an individual who knew English was considered educated after the 1880s. The 10th chapter in *Parangodiparinayam* is titled “A Conversation or the Eighteenth Chapter”. It was the 18th chapter of *Indulekha* that had won acclaim for its discussion on education, religion, spirituality, politics, and the Congress and the British Rule. In the 10th chapter in *Parangodiparinayam*, the longest in the novel, the author counters the arguments forwarded by Chandumenon. As opposed to Madhavan’s argument in *Indulekha*, Pangashamenon is of the opinion that English language education was not particularly useful to people who had no contact with the British. He believed that the time utilised to learn English could be used to learn something more useful:

Learning English will not make one more intelligent or knowledgeable... For that one needs education. Education cannot be equated with language learning... Education is acquired through teachers (guru), self-effort, from *sabrahmachari*, and through experience (Menon, 1985: 246).

From Pangashamenon’s remarks the reader gets the sense that the ruling class was far removed from the daily lives of the Malayali although Malabar (where the novel is set) was under Madras Presidency. Education per se, especially scientific education was considered valuable. Pangashamenon has knowledge of Sanskrit, is educated (the reader does not know what kind of education), but he has had no English education. He represents the ideal and desirable model of manhood. He is aware that education has to provide a person a chance to develop mentally, morally and intellectually. He himself is shown as being intelligent and as having the ability to manage his family and further wealth by means of his agricultural activity.

The author through Pangashamenon manages to capture most of the complaints against the modern (English) educated Malayali. This complaint was prevalent all over India during that time. In a report compiled by the Christian Vernacular Education Society at Madras quoted in the *Diocesan Gazette*, vernacular education was considered beneficial, but the same was not the case for English education:

Rudeness and self-conceit are first noticed; the utterances of the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, the Indian Mirror and of H. H. the Maharaja of Travancore are cited, to show that rudeness is becoming in many cases a marked characteristic of educated men in India.

The last named remarks,

“I am here led to observe that our contact with European civilization has not resulted in unqualified success so far as our manners are concerned. Perhaps you know the story current among us of the crow that attempted to study the swan’s gait but lost its own and did not secure that of its model. I am afraid that the comportment of not a few of our educated youths would strongly suggest comparison with this crow” (“Education in India: A Review”, 1881: 170).

Like in the quotation, Parangodan represents the English educated man whose insufficient training has left him pompous and has alienated him from the established social order. The women writers in the Malayalam magazines from the early 20th century often refer to similar kinds of arguments made by people in other spaces. They were constantly trying to find justification for modern education. The discontent of some groups with English education was not extended to formal education, but with the contents of education or the way in which education was being imparted. Pangashamenon is all praise for the Boarding school education given to English

children in England. But he perceives the differences in Malayali culture and believes that the kind of education required in Kerala is different.

While the modern educated male was criticised, Ramankutty Menon through Pangashamenon, has even more to say about the English education given to Malayali women and particularly sewing. According to him, not everyone needed to be trained in tailoring, since the kinds of clothes Malayalis wore did not need elaborate sewing/stitching. The tea drinking, newspaper reading, and late rising habits, which Parangodi acquired through her education, has made her a useless member of the *tharavad*. She has also not been instructed in *sadvidyabyasam* (moral and gainful education), which English women gain from their education. In the late 19th and early 20th century, government education was criticised for not being sufficiently disciplinary, for not having moral education and for not providing girls with the opportunity/option to develop the feminine qualities inherent in them. Parangodi then epitomises these shortcomings. She was also a failure in the sense that she was not an able manager of the domestic realm, since education was expected to equip women to take over the domestic realm [and this was one of the main arguments put forward to support women's education]. Her education consisted of merely 'accomplishments' as opposed to 'useful' knowledge and/or training [In this sense Indulekha also only had 'accomplishments' and not 'useful' knowledge]. She spends her time reading and playing the piano and other musical instruments. She cannot help with the daily running of the household. She is arrogant and haughty, with no time for local traditions like the *kaikottikalli*.¹⁷² This dance was performed by women on special occasions like the Onam festival. She looks down on such performances and at one point equates *kaikottikali* to the devil dance of the Africans. Africa is for Parangodi, the 'other' [used

¹⁷² A traditional dance form that the Diwan of Cochin had suggested could be included in girl's curriculum, mentioned in chapter 3.

in the sense of the ‘Other’ in Orientalist discourse], which is not desirable. She is representative of the Indian Intelligentsia exposed to Western ways and Western learning and to whom Malayali culture was anathema. And her rejection of *kaikottikali* is inappropriate because it was a legitimate dance form and was not termed immoral like some of the other dance forms of the time (or other customs like covering the breast). Her rejection of the dance then is the depiction of a flawed feeling of cultural and intellectual superiority. This development of ‘flawed feeling’ is precisely the problem with her education. For Pangashamenon the West is the ‘other’. Western culture was acceptable in piecemeal fashion – their system of education or the formal structures of schooling, and Western Science and rationalism. He is a colonial subject who has internalized scientific rationalism, but there is the simultaneous rejection of what was perceived as Western cultural markers.

Modern educated Christian woman in fiction

In *Sukumari* (1897) the protagonists are Christian converts from the lower caste (Moolliyil, 1985). The author, Joseph Moolliyil,¹⁷³ mentions that most of the events in this novel are incidents that happened at various places and times, and it was not written with the idea of establishing an ideal community. The novel is written in the third-person with occasional comments by the author like in *Indulekha* and *Parangodiparinayam*. The objective of the novel, according to Moolliyil, was to write a history of the Christian community, as it existed for the then Christian women and Christian youth, and for posterity (Moolliyil, 1985). It tries to narrate the enclosed

¹⁷³ He was a Tiyya (equivalent to Ezhavas) who had converted to Christianity and was a member of the Basel Missionary Society in Malabar. He was a teacher in the Madras Christian College and later became the principal. He taught both Malayalam and English in the college and had written a number of textbooks.

world of Christians trying to negotiate new forms of self, community and family. The novel is set around the time slavery was abolished in India. Dilip M. Menon mentions that the major themes in lower-caste Malayalam novels confirm the universal experience of slavery: experience of loss, homelessness, and sudden, violent death (Menon, 2004). In *Sukumari* the spiritual life of the main protagonist starts from the time her aunt and later her grandmother (whom she believes to be her sister and mother respectively and realises the truth only much later) dies. By baptism she becomes Sukumari (a Sanskrit name) from Chirutha (a lower caste name). The novel is about the coming of age of Sukumari; and her movement from spiritual darkness to Christianity; from being an orphan to being a wife. This novel provides the cultural historian insight into what was expected of a mission educated Christian woman in the late 19th century.

Towards the end of the 19th century the British government had started to take an interest in women's education and had also started imposing rules regarding curriculum on the missionaries (Gladston, 2006). Being a member of the Basel Evangelical mission, Moolliyil reproduces the missionary disapproval of government education. Through Satyadasan, Joseph Moolliyil also voices the fear among the Christians on the increasing influence and control over women's education by the British government:

Gradually the government will start schools for girls. There will be no religious training there. In our educational institutions we teach our girls to take on their responsibilities and be self-reliant. In government schools they will teach them to cater to their lazy husbands or train them to think individualistically. My mother believes that they will not be capable wives or mothers (Moolliyil, 1985: 330).

Here the term individualistic is a translation of the term *tandedam*. It means self-servingly brash. Missionary education trained women to be modest and humble, loyal to the church, steeped in the spiritual teachings of Protestant Christianity, capable proselytizers and Bible women, and part of the family. Sukumari, a brash and independent child, is trained to be a humble and self-effacing Christian and develops the homemaker instincts (in the way she shows an interest in cleaning up and tidying the space of the domestic). Women were expected to be financially self-reliant in missionary ideology. All the women in the novel are trained in some skill/handicraft or the other. However this did not mean that they could be independent from the space of the family or the Christian community.

The line between being a Christian and not being one seems to hang on education for the newly converted Christian woman. The hierarchical ordering of society based on caste is rejected in the novel and the new criterion for social ordering is that of gender (Devika, 2007a). Joseph Moolliyil goes into detail on the subjects that the girls had to study. Girls above 14 years would have finished their education and were trained in cooking and sewing, and in *grihabaranam* (household management) and *dhanasamrakshana vidya* (saving money/maintaining accounts), thrice a week. He gives a detailed account of what was taught in the five forms (where girls studied until they were 14).

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Catechism | Bible and history of Christianity |
| 2. Reading Malayalam | Poetry: Panchathantram |
| | Prose: A book called |
| | <i>Sanchariyude Prayanam</i> |
| | (Traveller's journey) |
| 3. Mathematics | Weight and Measurements and arithmetic |

4. Handwriting	This was an important lesson, and it was necessary to pass this exam for moving up a form like in the case of Catechism
5. Reading English	Second textbook
6. Geography	Briefly about earth, and in detail about Madras state.
7. History	Kerala history and India history in brief
8. <i>Shareerasukhashastram</i> (Health science)	
9. Sewing	Stitching of all kinds and normal embroidery
10. Music	English songs

Married women had childcare and *grihanayashastram* (home craft) lessons twice a week (Moolliyil, 1985: 311-2).

This curriculum is an almost exact replica of the curriculum in place in missionary and government schools in Kerala in the 19th century. While English customs and practices might not have been completely acceptable, education of the modern kind was valued by the author. In this Moolliyil takes a similar stand to Ramankutty Menon. While Ramankutty Menon is against women learning sewing and English music, Moolliyil does not see any problem with his women characters learning both and this detailing of the curriculum is given only for Sukumari and not for Satyadasan.¹⁷⁴ The inclusion of the curriculum reveals the importance of education in the process of development of the self and community among the newly converted

¹⁷⁴ He is Sukumari's friend and later becomes her husband.

Christians. It underlines that for the converted Christians too fashioning the *sthreedharmam* of the woman was done through education. Like in the magazines, homecraft, health science, childcare etc. are included in their curriculum as part of the larger project of situating the woman in the domestic space.

Evangelical Christianity saw inequality and superstition as the defining features of Malayali society. The missionary rhetoric related the lower castes to (lack of) hygiene (Menon, 2006). Sukumari, after she is adopted by Tejopalan, sets about cleaning the house, removing the cobwebs, setting the table right, covering the bed with a blanket, tidying the kitchen and so on. The missionaries emphasised cleanliness and tidiness as markers of the new self. Sometimes it was even defined as the marker of modernity itself (Mohan, 1994). By the late 19th century this emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene had been taken up by educators throughout India as I have mentioned in the previous two chapters. In upper caste novels like *Indulekha* the interior of the home and the artefacts in it were the markers of civilization and modernity. In missionary education cleanliness, tidiness, and comfort were important, but aesthetics and affectation were not encouraged. In *Sukumari* though there are references to commodities/new household items, they are kept to a minimum. Satyadasan speaks disparagingly of Indians who have developed tastes for “jelly, jam and cheese”, about people who do not want fresh sardines for 1 ps. but would happily spend 25 ps. on 12 sardines in a tin. This could also be read as the cultural differences and political tension between the German missionaries and the British because some of these customs were brought about by contact with the British.

Another concern related to culture which is mentioned in the novel is that of clothes. At various occasions the characters in the novel speak disapprovingly of men who imitate the dressing styles of *vilathiyar* or foreigners (especially the British).

Satyadasan mentions coffee plantations in Wayanad where they employed men only if they wear English-style clothes. Moolliyil, through, Satyadasan denigrates the craze of imitating the British in dressing styles, and also considers it absurd that a person had to be dressed in a particular (and foreign!) manner to be employed by the British, though he does not explicitly state that the plantation managers were British. Yet another matter that is mentioned related to this craze of imitation is people changing their surnames to sound English.¹⁷⁵ The problem with the change to English names, according to Moolliyil, was that the men who changed their names had not converted to Christianity. Changing one's name was related to the experience of the spiritual/religious and not something to be done for fashion or expediency. It would also appear that name-changing was considered to be a rejection of one's culture and roots that was different from when it was related to the spiritual/religious as it was for the newly converted Christians.

Use of English language in daily life was another matter of contention. Satyadasan mentions men who intersperse their conversation with English words. He himself had been taught English by an elderly Portuguese man. However he does not incorporate English words in his speech in the same manner an acquaintance of his does.¹⁷⁶ Changes in culture, lifestyles, and dressing imitating the British does not appear to be acceptable practice even for a Christian convert who had himself (or herself) changed many of the practices related to their daily life. The changes they (Christians) had adopted were termed under 'necessity', while the changes imitating

¹⁷⁵ For example, Karuna (who adopts Sukumari when Tejopalan dies) mentions that Hindus who went to work in places like Belgaum (where her family stayed for a brief period) changed their names: Vasu to D'Vaz, Raman to Raymond, Achutan to Atchinson and so on. The newly converted protagonists in the novels too had changed their names, but these were more Indian sounding names like Sukumari, Jnanabharanam, Satyadasan, etc.

¹⁷⁶ This was another Christian convert, who had changed his name from Devadasan to D. Watson

the British came to be seen as being affected or flashy – a direct contradiction of the Protestant missionary ideals of humility and economy. The changes brought about in dressing, language, and name as a result of modern education is taken up in the magazines too.

In 19th century Kerala caste defined the organisation of the community and the subordination of the individual within it. Christianity began to be seen as the way out of the oppressive caste system by many of the lower castes. Missionary discourse posited the choosing, reflective person as the premise of this new community of equality (Menon, 2006). The reflective newly converted Christian protagonists in *Sukumari* were different from the Nair protagonists of the other novels. The Christian characters were constantly looking inward and imagine a lack, defect or short coming within themselves, especially the older converts Mata and Manickam (Sukumari's grandmother and aunt). Their sense of self is related to a sense of being a sinner. They believe (or are led to believe by the missionaries) that this state of sin is something that they are born with – the Original Sin inherited from Adam and Eve in Christian theology – in the same manner that the sexual endowment of the body is something that they are born with. Training at the religious school was supposed to give them the necessary knowledge for constant self-correction and keeping their souls in a state of readiness for the other-world. Training at the missionary schools while giving the necessary self-control and discipline also trained them to be ideal women and men. Since sexual endowment of the body was deemed natural it was considered natural to inculcate skills appropriate to the sex and education came to be gendered for boys and girls. Sukumari and Satyadasan, the protagonists, are constantly trying to grapple with the new Christian ideology and identity that they have acquired. The Christian doctrine of “salvation of the soul” is the motto that dictates their actions. Even the discussions

and debates among the characters are about the ways to lead a Christian life, about the *dharmam* of a Christian individual, etc.

The creation of a secure family is an important feature of the early social novels. In the Nair imagination this family is nuclear, modern and patrilocal. Falling in love and the consent of the individuals was an important aspect of the new Nair identity. The ambiguities, tensions and delays in the consummation of desire were as much a part of the narrative technique as about the constitution of the new self (Menon, 2006). The notion of family is structurally different in *Sukumari*. Tejopalan, having lost his wife and child, looks after Sukumari and her mother, and adopts her after the mother's death. In this case, the family is born out of paternal love and compassion rather than blood ties and love. There are no joint-families and all the families mentioned have members who are missing or dead.¹⁷⁷ Bodily desire is peripheral in *Sukumari*. The movement of the story is not based on desire or love as it is in *Indulekha* or *Parangodiparinayam*. It is only at the end, when all the other characters have died that Sukumari and Satyadasan come together as a family unit based on conjugal love.

This novel marks the movement of a lower caste community from a hierarchical space to a place of freedom; from a religion that sanctions subordination (in the form of caste) to one that promises equality. The character of Sukumari is different from Indulekha and Parangodi, in the sense that she moves from one subjective location to another. Her character is transformed – through education and through religion. Indulekha and Parangodi have already reached a position of subjective development. Both Indulekha and Parangodi have more or less received the

¹⁷⁷ Sukumari's grandfather and mother are not alive at the time of the story, Satyadasan's mother and grandmother are widows, and Karuna's father is a widower.

same kind of education as Sukumari, and it leads to different kinds of subjective development in all of them, depending on their religion and caste positions.

Namboothiri woman and education in fiction

Apbhande Makal (1932) (Daughter of Apbhan¹⁷⁸) by Moothiringottu Bhavatran Namboothiri¹⁷⁹ is often described as a political novel. This novel is considered the next greatest social novel after *Indulekha* by Malayalam critics (Pillai, 1998; Pillai, 2005). In terms of technique, this novel (or novella as it is quite short) has well-developed characters, a compact plot and realistic rendering of the social conditions in early 20th century Kerala. Like the other three novels, the novelist has used a third-person narrative in *Apbhande Makal*.¹⁸⁰ This novel created and provoked discussions in the social sphere; it brought to light the plight of Namboothiri women in the ancestral

¹⁷⁸ Apbhan was the term for the younger sons in the Namboothiri household who were not allowed to marry from the same caste. For more details on Namboothiri kinship and relations see: J. Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-Forming in Twentieth Century Kerala*, Lewis Moore and Herbert Wigram, *Malabar Law and Custom* (Madras: Higginbotham, 1905), K Saradmoni, *Matriliny Transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999a), David Murray Schneider and Kathleen Gough, *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

¹⁷⁹ The writer was an active member of the Yogakshemam Sabha, which worked towards the upliftment of the Namboothiri community. His speeches and written works were about intra-caste marriage, women's education, and equal share in ancestral property for the Namboothiris.

¹⁸⁰ This novel is about the daughter of an apbhan Namboothiri belonging to Edakattumana. Sulochana, the daughter, has a Nair mother, so she is herself a Nair and middle caste. The apbhan is the current karanavar of the upper caste aristocratic household. Ittichiri is a young female member of Edakattumana. Madhu is another Namboothiri from a lower sub-caste and a dependent of Edakattumana. The basic plot is about the love of Sulochana and Ittichiri for Madhu. Madhu loves Ittichiri, but cannot take the relationship forward since he is a dependent. Ittichiri tries to commit suicide when her marriage is fixed to somebody else [The marriage is fixed without her consent and knowledge. Hence the usage of 'fixed to' to denote her lack of subjective status.]. Sulochana saves her. Since Sulochana loves Madhu, but also realises that he does not reciprocate her love, she consumes poison. On her deathbed, she implores her father to get Ittichiri married to Madhu.

home, the need for modern education among the Namboothiris, about the double-standards that existed in the treatment meted out to their progeny by Nair women, and about the need for intra-caste marriages. *Apbhande Makal* provides the Namboothiri idea of the modern woman, different from the Nair and Christian protagonists in *Indulekha*, *Parangodiparinayam* and *Sukumari*.

Access to modern education was not easy for the male and female members of the Namboothiri community even in the early 20th century, while other middle caste members were already sending their children to school.¹⁸¹ English education was equated with a lowering of caste status in the orthodox Namboothiri psyche. By the time this novel was published there were already proposals to allow Namboothiri boys to acquire certain skills through English education. There were discussions happening around setting right what were perceived as certain imbalances within the community: dowry, intra-caste marriages, control over property, female education, etc. Moothiringottu Bhavatran Namboothiri gives English education a superior moral position in relation to Sanskrit in the novel.¹⁸² English education is equated with

¹⁸¹ Devaki Nilayangodu mentions in her autobiography that this was true even in the late 1930s and 1940s. From: Nilayangodu, *Kalappakarchakal*.

¹⁸² In this novel while Sulochana, the Nair progeny, was allowed to go to school Madhu's father was not sure if the karanavar would approve of a young Namboothiri boy being sent to school. So, he asks the apbhan for permission and the permission is given because the apbhan Namboothiri regards Madhu as the perfect travel companion for Sulochana. Moreover, Madhu belonged to a sub-caste not associated with learning mantras and scriptures. In the early 20th century, the female members and progenies of Namboothiri households were not sent alone to any place. Sulochana would have had to be accompanied by servants. Madhu being upper caste passes the karanavar's scrutiny because he is thought to be more responsible and capable than a servant. Sulochana is not considered a part of the Namboothiri household. Though her father wants her to go to school, this benefit is not extended to the other members of his household, including the younger male members. The male members were given a traditional Sanskrit education till the age of *Upanayanam*. When Ittichiri's brother Kunju had wanted to go to school the karanavar refused to even think about a high-caste Namboothiri, who had to learn and recite the Scriptures and Mantras, studying English.

progress, modernity and material benefits like in the earlier novels (except *Parangodiparinayam*). Sulochana and Madhu, the protagonists are discerning and moralistic individuals as a result of their education. However Kunju, another young Namboothiri strays from the virtuous path because there is no figure of authority to monitor him. The problem with Kunju's (Sanskrit) education is the manner in which it is imparted: all he did was learn things by rote without understanding any of it. His high caste status or his scripture and mantra recital privileges do not insulate him from immorality in the same manner that Surinamboothiripad in *Indulekha* is not insulated from being immoral. Another writer from the period, V.T. Bhattathiripad, mentions that while matrilineal communities took *Indulekha* to heart, the Namboothiris were angrily aware of their grandfather's – the Surinamboothiripad's – idiocy and lecherous nature (Devika, 2007a). Kunju is a young version of the Surinamboothiripad caricature or what would become of the younger Namboothiris if they were not given proper guidance.

By the 1920s and 1930s a large number of Nair women and men had been educated in the modern schools. There were strong caste based movements from among them to change the matrilineal system of inheritance and marriages. Sulochana, the Nair progeny of the Apbhan is shown as being able to partake of the progressive ideas and chart her life in an independent manner. She has financial autonomy, because she is not part of a larger Nair household (she and her mother stay in an independent house near Edakattumana). Madhu, Ittichiri and Kunju are all bound by the laws of the Namboothiri community. The younger Namboothiris are ineffectual figures and the antarjanams¹⁸³ are passive and suffering. *The Unninambudiri*, a magazine that specifically dealt with Namboothiri reform, makes similar comments on

¹⁸³ Female Namboothiri women were called so.

the passive and suffering figure of the Antarjanams (Antharjanam, 1929; Bhageerathamma, 1922; Namboothiri, 1930; Savithri, 1930; Sridevi, 1930). General consensus among the reformers (and the novelist) was that they had to be brought to self-awareness through reform. The essayists exhorted the young Namboothiri men to take steps to bring about changes in their community. In the novel, Ittichiri is a naive, innocent, chaste and sensitive soul as opposed to the bold Sulochana. Sulochana's boldness is partially due to her education, partially due to her financial independence, and also due to her spatial separation from the (confining) space of the Namboothiri household. Her boldness also reads as an essential aspect of her modernity while Ittichiri's timidity marks her as Sulochana's counterpart. Since Ittichiri had not been sent to school, she and the other young female members of the household were taught in secret by the progressive Sulochana, a bit like the historical unfolding of events where Nair reform led to awakening among the Namboothiris in Kerala. Like *Indulekha* this novel too imagines an ideal that is yet to be achieved with regard to the Namboothiri community.

Like in *Indulekha* and *Parangodiparinayam*, love and conjugality are powerful themes that move the plot forward and important aspects of the new identity imagined for the Namboothiri characters. It is her love for Madhu and despair over the non-fulfilment of that love that makes Ittichiri to try to commit suicide. It is his desire to be deserving of Ittichiri that drives Madhu forward in life. It is Sulochana's love for Madhu that leads her to consume poison and thus pay the way for the other two to unite. The educated Sulochana and Madhu would have been the ideal conjugal couple, but Madhu is made to pair with Ittichiri. Sulochana's love for Madhu remains unfulfilled. Moothiringottu advocates an intra-caste marriage rather than an inter-caste marriage. At that point in history, the younger sons of a Namboothiri household were

not allowed to marry within the community. The Namboothiri Family Regulation Committee was discussing the issues of marriage within the community for younger brothers and the issue of polygamy (Menon, 1970). For Madhu, being of a lower sub-caste, it was even more difficult to marry Ittichiri. However, the match between him and Ittichiri would not be unequal because he is educated (and a doctor by the end of the novel) and Ittichiri has also been home schooled by Sulochana. In that sense the novel is also not advocating a total rejection of the Nair-Namboothiri social ties. Simultaneously, in this formulation Ittichiri can finally be saved from her misery only by another Namboothiri.

Fictional rendering of educated women and conjugal life

The earliest short stories in Malayalam were imitative of American and English authors. Though a few Malayalam short stories were published in the first half of the 19th century these were usually connected to the proselytization activities of the missionaries (Pillai, 1998). According to Malayalam literary critics most of the short story writers of the period concentrated on elements of adventure, comedy, fantasy and surprise than on unity and structure of the plot necessary for the short story (Pillai, 1998). This could also be because the novel, essay, drama and poetry were the popular literary forms. By the beginning of 20th century there was a demand for short pieces of literature and this coincided with the publishing of a large number of periodicals, which catered to them (George, 1972). The periodicals also provided an avenue for a number of women writers to publish their short works. M.M. Basheer, who has compiled a set of short stories by women in the early 20th century, remarks that Malayali women's literary efforts seem to be concentrated in the genre of short story

than any other form (Basheer, 2004). Susie Tharu and K. Lalita write of women writers:

Women articulate and respond to ideologies from complexly constituted and decentred positions within them. Familial ideologies, for instance, clearly constitute male and female subjectivities in different way, as do ideologies of nation or of empire. Further, ideologies are not experienced – or contested – in the same way from different subject positions. What may appear just and rational from a male or upper-class point of view may seem exploitative and contradictory from a working-class woman’s point of view. If we restrain ourselves from enthusiastically recovering women’s writing to perform the same services to society and to nation that mainstream literature over the last hundred years has been called upon to do, we might learn to read compositions that emerge from these eccentric locations in a new way; we might indeed learn to read them not for the moments in which they collude with or reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class, nation, or empire, but for the gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them (Tharu and Lalita, 1991: 38-9).

There are two kinds of women writers in Kerala – the feminine and the feminist. The works of the category dubbed feminist, in Malayalam often called *pennezhuthu* (a term coined in the 1980s), were criticised for its explicit political stance (Arunima, 2010; Devika and Sukumar, 2006). Many of early writers fall within the feminine. These writers were careful to keep the subversions in their works subtle, so as to not bring on the ire of the conventionalists (Kochukuttyamma, 1938). Most of the early women fiction writers did not question the so called natural divisions of gender and the associated set of qualities, preferences, duties, and characteristics deemed inherent to each gender. Instead in their writing they often blur the boundaries between the public and the domestic and carve out a space for women in the public

where womanly qualities were deemed necessary and acceptable. The two short stories have been analysed not just because they have been written by women, but also because the stories revolve around issues that were being discussed in the magazines of the time. On the outset, the main themes and resolution of the themes collude with hegemonic ideologies on gender and class. However there are also moments of subversion, where the narrative differs from the mainstream or canonical literature in Malayalam. For instance, the short stories (in this thesis) posit married women as the main protagonists. They narrate the women's life after marriage, while in the early novels, the women are usually (not always) single and then moving towards conjugality or wish to move towards conjugality.¹⁸⁴ In this chapter, I have used two stories with married women as protagonists, which then complicate the expectations of/about women and their *streedharmam* to provide a counterpoint to the single woman protagonists of the novels. They were published in *Lakshmibai* and *Bashaposhini* in the 1910s, hardly a decade after the first short stories by women started appearing in print.¹⁸⁵ Since the nature of the genre calls for brevity, there is no in-depth analysis of the protagonists and the plot revolves around one single moment of revelation in their life.

“Thalachorillatha Sthreekal” (Brainless Women) by M. Saraswathibai (*Bashaposhini* 15 (8-9), 1911) is the story of an astute woman, who makes her husband realize that it is absurd to think of women as being simpletons without any literary ability.¹⁸⁶ The story is written in simple Malayalam in the third-person and mostly narrated through the eyes of the male character. The husband, Govindhannair

¹⁸⁴ Other women short story writers have used single women as their protagonists.

¹⁸⁵ The first short story by a woman was published in 1904. For details see: M. M. Basheer, ed., *Aadhyakaala Sthreekathakal* (Kozhikode: Lipi Publications, 2004).

¹⁸⁶ There is no information available about the author.

has pretensions to being a great writer and does not accept his wife's suggestions regarding his work.¹⁸⁷ Govindhannair stands for the modern man, who aspires to be the sole provider for his family. For this reason he marries from an insolvent Nair family, but his literary efforts do not bring in enough money to meet the needs of the growing family. When Kalyannamma, his wife, offers to teach a few children in their neighbourhood to bring in extra cash, he refuses:

It is not befitting a woman's femininity or her husband's masculinity if she has to earn money for her upkeep. I know men who utilise their wives' money as their own. I am not like that. I will not use money earned by my wife. A woman loses her *sthreethwam* and dignity when she starts to work for money. I do not need a wife like that (Saraswathibai, 2004: 35).

He represents the new man, who takes an extreme stand against the traditional matrilineal practices. His masculinity is dependent on his ability to earn and provide for his family. When Govindhannair closets, giving up his regular literary efforts and distancing himself from the daily running of the household to write a novel [much like it would have been in the then modern nuclear families]. Kalyannamma manages to make ends meet, pay the bills, do the cooking, mind the children, make sure that they do not disturb him, all by herself. It is only at the end that the reader realises that she was also writing a novel and sending off her regular essays and stories to the magazines simultaneously. The author manages to capture the multi-tasking that the early generation of female wage earners from the middle class had to contend with in

¹⁸⁷ In a literary competition conducted by a magazine, he loses out to somebody called Balakrishnan Nair and realises that it was his wife's penname. Govindhannair has always been jealous of Balakrishnan Nair since the latter's stories and essays were constantly being published in journals and magazines. When he comes to know that his literary opponent is his own wife, Govindhannair's pride takes a beating and he decides to leave his wife and children. In the end though, husband and wife decide to spend the rest of their lives supporting their mutual literary efforts.

the absence of any outside help. This is different from the depiction of the female protagonist in the novels, who are shown as having servants to take care of their needs.

The resolution of the story is similar to that of the novels with the man and the woman moving towards a companionate marriage. However there are phrases or terms which appear in the narrative that reminds one of the subversions that Tharu and Lalita mention. For instance, when Govindhannair refuses to consider Kalyanniamma's request to go out and work, he sends her off with a hug and a kiss. The author mentions her irritation that lasts for a few seconds, but which she suppresses because she loves her husband. The reader glimpses the interiority of a character forced to live with a patronising husband in those few sentences. Even the description of the household chores does not feature in the novels – paying bills to the milkman, butcher, baker, ghee seller, provision store, and washer man – which in the short story are important aspects of the duties of the (married) woman. This story was written in 1911 at a time when many critics were discussing the merits and de-merits of education, about the position of women in journalism, about women's duties, and so on (Achuthamenon, 1907b; Ramakrishnapilla, 1906; Rukminiamma, 1907). The story serves as a reminder/avowal that women could be educated, knowledgeable and still carry on their duties that many traditionalists were sure could not be simultaneously done. It also makes fun of the so called male writers and intellectuals with their head in the clouds. Govindhannair is not interested in knowing how Kalyanniamma finds the money for food and other necessities, since his literary efforts were usually returned and what little he earned was not enough for his own expenses. What is not being said but glaringly obvious to the reader is that Kalyanniamma, the meek housewife, is the one who actually needs the money. The meek housewife, who is the traditional and

passive woman in the novels, is subverted in the story. Kalyanniamma emerges as a modern and capable woman who is also intelligent and witty.

“Oru Yadhaartha Barya” (A Real Wife) by Thachatt Devaki Nethyaramma¹⁸⁸ (*Lakshmibai* 14(10), 1919) is probably one of the earliest fictional accounts of domestic violence by a woman. This story is narrated in the third-person in simple Malayalam. The protagonist, Janakiamma, unable to stand the abusive relationship with her husband, Raghavakaimal, decides to elope with a childhood sweetheart, Balakrishna Menon.

Balakrishna Menon is a loving friend, financially well-off and works far away in Burma, so she will be away from censure even if she goes away from her marital household. She is bothered by her decision to elope, but reminds herself of Kaimal’s evil nature. There are two important things that this story brings to one’s notice: (a) physical abuse of wives by husbands was occurring even in matrilineal communities; (b) women thought it was their *dharmam* to stay in such marriages no matter what. In *Indulekha*, Indulekha mentions how the freedom to choose a partner and to break a relationship has always worked well for the Malayali woman. In this instance, protagonist decides on a traditionally acceptable custom of breaking the Sambandham, and then moves towards modernity, paradoxically by deciding to stay back in the abusive relationship.¹⁸⁹ It is a paradox because with Malayali modernity, the nature of marriages changes among matrilineal groups and the concept of conjugality and the woman’s *dharmam* towards her husband began to be posited as the most important one; the earlier freedom to disengage from a non-viable/unsuitable relationship is taken away. The decision to stay in the marriage is the woman’s in this depiction of the

¹⁸⁸ No information is available about this author.

¹⁸⁹ On the way to the railway station, Janakiamma sees that her husband had been involved in a serious accident and decides to stay with him.

modern family. No one (physically) forces Janakiamma to stay. Janakiamma's return to her husband could alternatively be read as masochistic, or as the writer's ironic take on how patriarchy/modernity has shaped women's will in such a manner that she finds herself worthy/useful/credible only when she stays within a monogamous conjugal space.

This move, while it may appear regressive in the post-feminist era, in the context of the early 20th century was being debated among the reading public. There were articles in the magazines of the period about a literary character, Sheelavathy. She was mostly depicted as an ideal wife, chaste and forever obedient to her husband. The husband becomes a drunkard and asks her to carry him on her shoulders to the house of a courtesan. She does so without any complaint. When he dies, her devotion, prayer and chastity bring him back to life. The discussions were centred on whether Sheelavathy could be considered a model woman or not. Some considered her action of taking her husband to a courtesan shocking. She should have been guiding his steps on the path of righteousness instead of giving in to his unreasonable demands. Some others applauded her devotion and obedience (B.G., 1919; Lakshmikuttyamma, 1920; Narayanamenon, 1905). Janakiamma would then seem to be like Sheelavathy in that she decides to stay on in an unequal relationship. This story appeared in *Lakshmi Bai* the same year as these discussions on women/men placed within the frame of the family. In the story nobody realizes that Janakiamma is being abused by her husband. The solitariness and loneliness of the woman in the new nuclear family is clear in the way the story is narrated. Janakiamma has no support system to fall back on financially and emotionally. Moreover, since she had chosen her husband on her own (despite her father's objections), she probably does not feel that she can enlist any of her relatives' help. Within the modern marriage, the woman loses some of the earlier

rights. Janakiamma and the other protagonists (from matrilineal communities) enter/chose to remain in the newly patrilocal family on their own initiative. The authors do not present this move as being forced upon them by other members of their family, particularly the men. What this foregrounds is the emergence of an overarching ideology that posited the patrilocal family as the norm to adhere to. This story in particular seems to be a forerunner to some of the movies in the late 20th century and early 21st century, where a battered and wronged wife goes back to her husband because her 'rightful place' is by his side (*Anubhavangal Paalichakal*, 1971; *Bharya*, 1962; *Ozhimuri*, 2012; *Snehadeepam*, 1962; *Sthree*, 1950). Matriliney did not guarantee that the position of the women in the household was better than that of women in patrilineal households. A missionary record from the period gives a not so rosy picture of the reality of matrilineal households, where the women moved to the husband's house:

The system of inheritance through the female line which is not found anywhere else in India gave the women a certain amount of freedom and importance. But, it cannot be said, nevertheless, that they enjoyed a really enviable position. The majority of them were illiterate. Girls were given in marriage at the age of six or seven or at any rate before ten. The wife was not much better than the head-servant. The sole occupation of her life was to please her husband and his parents. The mother-in-law difficulty was the curse of the country. She was to revere her husband as her god and to serve him was to be her religion. She was incapable of participating in the larger interests of his life as she moved in a plane far below him. An exalted position was given to one sex at the expense of the other (Thomas, 1913: 106).

Since this was written by a missionary who also had the agenda of justifying the presence of missionaries in Kerala and the need for resources, it is a possibility that

there is some amount of exaggeration and elision in the account. Yet, it provides a completely different view of the educational condition of women in the matrilineal household from that of the census reports where the writer claims that most women in Kerala were taught the three R's.¹⁹⁰

About the story, the argument is not on the existence or nonexistence of domestic violence, but rather that the depiction of the same is what differentiates this story from other narratives. In *Sukumari* one of the characters Vasanthi tells Sukumari about being in an abusive relationship. But in *Sukumari*, the abusive husband turns a new leaf as a result of his self-realization, shame, guilt and the Christian influence of Vasanthi. There is no detailing of Vasanthi's life and the incident is merely re-told by Vasanthi. Thachatt Devaki Nethyamma manages to capture small details about Janakiamma after she had been hit by her husband in the beginning of the story. For example, she looks in the mirror, ties up the loose strands of her hair and tries to remove the traces of her crying. Both she and Kalyanniamma, from the previous story, are aware of possible scrutiny by other people. While talking to Balakrishna Menon at a party Janakiamma makes certain they do it in a manner that they are not noticed. None of the other female characters in the other fictional work (written before and after these short stories) are self-aware to the same level that Janakiamma and Kalyanniamma are. The latter live their lives as if they are under constant surveillance. Janakiamma's anxiety about people's reaction (if she leaves with Balakrishna Menon) is caused by this feeling of being under surveillance. The single women in the novels are not as bothered about their interactions with the opposite sex or as aware of their surroundings and the people that populate them in the same manner that Janakiamma and Kalyanniamma are. Women were learning to negotiate the new public spaces and

¹⁹⁰ Aiya, "Report on the Census of Travancore, Taken by Command of His Highness the Maharajah on the 26th February 1891 - 16th Masy 1066 M.E., Along with the Imperial Census of India."

the new spaces of the nuclear family in the early 20th century. And it fell upon the progressive writers of the period to show that women could successfully negotiate these spaces. Both Janakiamma and Kalyanniamma thus make a success of their lives in different ways by taking an active part in the decisions that lead to the final resolutions.

Critique of a proto-feminist

In Kerala, the drama entered the literary scene quite late. The first plays in Malayalam were published in the 1880s, same decades as the first novels were being published.¹⁹¹ Plays took on a proper literary form in Kerala during the 1920s to 1940s according to literary critics (Chaitanya, 1995; Pillai, 2005). The literary scene in Kerala moved towards a Socialist realist phase in the 1930s (George, 1972). Many playwrights started to use comedy to deal with serious issues. E.V. Krishnapilla started writing satires in dramatic form during this period.

E.V. Krishnapilla's¹⁹² play *Pennarashunadu* (The land where women rule) is the story of a woman who dominates her husband in the name of *sthreeswaathandryam* (roughly translated as women's freedom here) (Krishnapilla,

¹⁹¹ The first plays were translations from Sanskrit. In addition to renderings of Sanskrit dramatists, several writers attempted original plays on the Sanskrit model. In many of the plays, in spite of prose dialogues the highlight was on poetic sequences. These plays were far removed from the then contemporary reality by their themes and styles. Later there emerged a number of plays based on English plays. The first play in Malayalam was *Keraleeya Bhashashakuntalam* (1882) by Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran. These plays were written to be enacted on stage. Other kinds of plays had been enacted on the stage long before this. These were usually religious plays that emerged from contact with the Portuguese. The first social drama in Kerala with a completely indigenous theme was *Mariyamma* (1897) by Kocheepan Tharakan. For details see, Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai, *Malayala Sahithyam Kalakhattangaliloote* (Mavelikara: Prathibha Books, 1998).

¹⁹² E.V. Krishnapilla was a lawyer and the editor of the newspaper *Malayalam*. He was also a member of the Travancore Legislative assembly. He was the most popular writer of farce in Malayalam. His plays were very popular and he used to write historical and social dramas with strong comic elements.

1935). This play was taken up for analysis because it was one of the few fictional works that had a depiction (albeit comical) of the proto-feminists in Malayalam-speaking regions. It was published a few years after the other works analysed in this chapter and at a time when the younger generation of male writers were in the process of constructing a masculine identity which they positioned in opposition to their perceived emasculation in matrilineal households (Arunima, 2010). This masculinity was constructed not in opposition to that of the traditional woman, but the modern educated woman and the traditional man. The first and second generation of women had already been through the modern education system and working in the modern institutions at this period. There were a number of women's organizations and groups working for the betterment of women's conditions in Kerala and in India in the 1930s as mentioned in the preceding chapters. The early women's writings and activities in the public sphere clearly threatened many men, who either offered paternalist advice on safeguarding women's voice and/or subverted their activities by lampooning them like E.V. Krishnapilla does in this play. This work was strongly criticised by the magazine *Shrimathi* for its rhetoric against women (working and taking part in activities) in the public sphere. The protagonist Bhageerathamma wants a reversal of gender roles and authority to reside with women.¹⁹³ She calls Unnikorakaimal, 'husband,' and he does the cooking, cleaning and serving in their house.¹⁹⁴ The use of

¹⁹³ One is led to wonder if it is a coincidence that the name is very similar to two prominent women writers of the time. Both these women used to write on women's education in the magazines in the early 20th century.

¹⁹⁴ They speak in Malayalam and whenever Bhageerathamma calls/addresses her husband, she uses the English word 'husband'. Her husband, Unnikorakaimal, does the household chores, while she runs an organization that works for the freedom of women. The sub-plots deal with that of M.S. Nair, Bhageerathamma's secretary, and his relationship with his wife, and the love between Vasanthi and Shekharapilla, two other characters known to Bhageerathamma. The only followers Bhageerathamma gets are 2-3 women of the servant class. They neither understand what she wants them to do, nor do they

the term 'husband' satirizes those modern educated women and men who had taken to interspersing their conversation with English terms to appear more modern.

E. V. does advocate a clear demarcation between the public and the domestic domain. Bhageerathamma is a failure because she has distanced herself from the domestic domain. This again presupposes a solidity of the "natural" divide between women and men that assigns to them specific sets of qualities, dispositions and preferences like the other writers do. The idea of the new Man is inherent in this play; a Man not dependent on the *tharavad* or the modern woman. Though Unnikorakaimal acts subservient to his wife, at one point he tells Shekharapilla that the household runs smoothly because there is ample property/agricultural land which provides a means for sustenance (as she does not contribute anything financially). Their household is not part of a large joint family, which in turn allows Unnikorakaimal to be independent of his wife or her family. At the end he asserts his masculinity by exerting his control over his wife: he takes her hand forcefully and sends her off to the kitchen to cook, clean and to take care of the children. The narrative seems to suggest that the masculinity of the man is authenticated and brought in to being in opposition to the radical and modern womanhood presented by Bhageerathamma. Madhavan in *Indulekha* and Madhu in *Apbhande Makal* also stand for this new masculinity. Madhu is shown in contrast to the older and traditional Karanavar and Kunju, who though young is part of the traditional masculinity. Satyadasan and Pangashamenon are not conceptualized in the same manner as the other characters in this chapter. Satyadasan is not pitted against a karanavar or any other older man standing in the stead of the

have any stake in the organisation. Bhageerathamma's husband humours her bossy behaviour and goes along with her to see how far she will go. She is the only one who believes that she holds the cards in her marital relationship. The ending of Bhageerathamma's story is in direct contrast to that of M.S. Nair's story, where his wife becomes the dominant partner in the relationship.

traditional Man like in the other novels. His sense of self is not as caught up in the intricacies of being seen as a Man like the other Hindu characters. This could also be because the patrilineal groups in Kerala in the 19th century were not as invested in the notion of masculinity as were the matrilineal communities. This emergence of the discourse on masculinity was linked to the critique of matriliney and aided and abetted by the growing national and communist movement (Arunima, 2010; Sreekumar and Radhakrishnan, 2007). Pangashamenon is also different from the other characters by virtue of his traditional education. He is not a modern man, but he is representative of Man. The new Man was usually educated, like the modern Woman, and was given the task of providing for the financial needs of the family. He was sometimes part of other social movements like Shekharapilla is in the play and had interests outside the family. At one point the de-masculinised Unnikorakaimal is asked by Shekharapilla:

Who is this? Man or Woman? Why brother! Now you should wear a sari and blouse and become a woman (Krishnapilla, 1935: 23).

The concept of the man and that of masculinity was rooted in his dressing, his control over his wife and family, the kind of duties that were expected of him. Unnikorakaimal does the cooking, cleaning, feeding the children, bringing refreshments to guests, etc, and thereby strongly marks these activities as being part of woman's domain. The humour or the satire is in knowing what the expected behaviour was for women and men in the context of Kerala, and then when the characters do not conform to the norm or when the norms are reversed.¹⁹⁵ Thus in this play more than in

¹⁹⁵ Bhageerathamma asks Unnikorakaimal to leave the veranda of the house when other women arrive. In another instance, an MLA, Purushothamanpilla is forced by Bhageerathamma to marry Chirutha; Chirutha gives a piece of cloth to Purushothamanpilla (usually given by the man to the woman in a Sambandham) and M.S. Nair makes a musical hooting sound (traditionally made by women during marriages).

others, gender (and not class or caste) gains prominence and is the principle that differentiates human beings.

The modernity of Man is linked to urban spaces and travel in the novels. Madhavan, Madhu, Parangodan, and Satyadasan have all either studied in Madras/Bombay/Calcutta or have had to travel to other places as part of their moving on/growing up in life. The urban space is seen as necessary to make them modern or progressive. Pangashamenon, being a representative of the traditional Man does not make this journey. Even in the short story, “Oru Yadhaartha Barya”, the character of Balakrishna Menon is working in Burma. Janakiamma is plotting her escape to an urban space which would also provide her anonymity.

In the play, E.V. Krishnapilla lampoons the stereotype of the man-hating radical feminist. Critics like J. Devika also read the play as vocalising ire against women’s aspirations towards a public life (Devika, 2007a). On a close reading of the play one realises that it is not against women’s empowerment or education, though in the beginning one is led to think so. The reader/audience is aware from the beginning that Bhageerathiamma’s character is all fury without efficiency, without the strength of character or understanding to bring about real changes in the lives of women. The flaws in her character bring about her downfall. The entire play is a satire on women’s groups, and their cries for *sthreeswaathandryam*. The play ridicules the more radical notions of *sthreeswaathandryam*. In this play *sthreeswaathandryam* means a lot more than simple freedom: it means breaking gender moulds/roles, taking on the mantle of authority, not shirking responsibilities linked to one’s gender, remaining within a monogamous conjugality and so on. When Unnikorakaimal speaks to Shekharapilla about Vasanthi (Shekharapilla’s love interest) the question of transgressing gender moulds/roles comes up:

Shekharapilla: Brother! Don't make her a Man by teaching *sthreeswaathandryam* to her too.

Unnikorakaimal: She has spunk. Fear not.

Shekharapilla: It is tolerable now. Hope it doesn't increase. (Krishnapilla, 1935: 25)

This is a concept that is very similar to what is called “being over-smart” in common parlance in current Malayalam. “Being over-smart” is when a woman transgresses certain limits of freedom, outsmarts a man, acts superior and know-all. *Sthreeswaathandryam* in this particular instance is used to connote a state of mind where a woman considers her self to be superior to men and does not keep to expected gender/domestic roles. The character of Vasanthi is that of a strong woman, who does not fall within the expected gender norms. Though she is obedient to her father (a landlord), she is no doormat. Vasanthi is a champion of women's rights. But she neither joins any organisation nor advocates the radical position taken up by Bhageerathamma, and thus she is not a part of the public sphere in the same way that Bhageerathamma is. Vasanthi is educated and believes that women have as much of a right as men to chart a life for themselves, though this is not at the expense of family life.

E.V. Krishnapilla, like the other writers of the period, posits the role of the woman as being that of a mentor and a moral force within the man-woman relationship. While the man was imagined as the chief provider for the family, the woman was moral force that held the structure together. Her natural affinities or inherent qualities make her capable of this. In the play M.S. Nair while pretending to support Bhageerathamma's cause, ill treats his wife Meenakshi. Vasanthi plays a pivotal role in making M.S. Nair's wife realise that she can take her life in her own hands and need not be a victim of abuse:

Women should be aware of their position. And not just resort to prayers and tears. It is a wife's *dharma* to guide her husband when he takes unwise decisions. You were born in a good family; but your husband has become wicked as a result of the weakness of your character; because you did not do your duty. If you continue like this, he will become even worse. You will have to take responsibility for this before Man and God." (Krishnapilla, 1935: 95)

In this formulation the place of the woman is within the family, but she has to be strong, educated, and capable of guiding her spouse almost in the same manner Indulekha guides Madhavan in their relationship. Bhageerathamma, however, is an object of ridicule because she is neither diplomatic nor astute and tries to bring about sudden changes in the existing social structure. Published two decades after the story by Thachatt Devaki Nethyaramma, in this sub-plot we see a different kind of depiction of domestic violence or resolution to domestic violence. By then nuclear families had become the norm. In this play the character stays within the marriage and changes the equation of power within the relationship with outside help. Vasanthi's relationship to Shekharapilla, the reader is led to believe, will be a more companionate kind of marriage than the other two relationships.

Vasanthi works within the structure of the family. However she is also seen as being able to travel alone to the houses of Bhageerathamma and M.S. Nair without anyone accompanying her; though a woman, she is not curtailed by immobility. Rather, she is allowed to go to these places, because she is working towards keeping these families safe and fit the norm. Social scientists and cultural historians have pointed out that Nair and other lower caste women had certain freedom of movement within their villages, compared to Namboothiri women (Arunima, 2003; Schneider and Gough, 1961). However, this freedom of movement, in the play, is allowed when it is done quietly and without attracting attention. Bhageerathamma is ridiculed when she

transgresses by becoming part of an organisation that is also 'public'. When women's efforts were towards a re-affirmation of their *sthreethwam*, *sthreedharmam* and the domestic space, their movement into the public space was not read as a transgression. Though *Pennarashunadu* may be written in a comic vein it provides the modern reader insight into norms of behaviour for women and men belonging to the middle class/caste in the third decade of the 20th century.

The one consistent fact in all these novels/stories/play is the invisibility/vagueness of the figure of the mother, which could well be a problem with the text selection done for this thesis. Most of the female protagonists have mothers, some have children, but the relationship between the mother and child is never portrayed even in the sub-plots and episodes. The incidents and dialogues are usually among the female and male protagonists, the karanavar of the family, and the father of the male or female protagonist (in some cases). This is puzzling when one looks at the non-fictional writings from the same period. There were a number of articles on the duties of a mother and on childcare. Most of these articles were also written by women for women, while the fictional works were usually written by men. There are no strong bonds among the women in the fictional narratives. They may have a maid or a relative in subordinate positions, but never equals, except in *Sukumari*. (Sukumari and Karuna are friends and confidants, but in *Sukumari* the nature of relationships are different as I have shown before). The women protagonists are always alone and in some cases lonely. This could even be read as a feature of Malayali modernity where the woman is now severed from her ties with the joint family, is spatially and emotionally removed from this space which is perceived as being orthodox and traditional. The figure of the mother, sister and friend are eroded to give prominence to the male protagonist, who would then become friend, confidante and lover. The

conjugal relationship attains prominence in all of the fictional narratives. The figure of the woman seems to attain completion only when she is married, and once she has attained marriage, only if it is a companionate marriage. To be able to attain the state of marriage, women were expected to be educated and to stay within the norms of respectable behaviour. The companionate marriage had clear divisions of roles, labour, duties and tasks. The man was envisaged as the primary provider in that space, though the women writers do question this notion. The women were the ones entrusted with the care of the young – their physical, mental and moral nourishment. The daily running of the household was also the task of the woman. The only women who were not shown as being mired in household tasks were the characters from financially well-off families like Indulekha, Sulochana, Parangodi and Vasanthi.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the novels, short stories and the play:

- There was a definite sense of a traditional woman and a modern woman in all the works analysed here: being traditional or modern hinged on the education of the woman.
- Most of the works depicted the traditional woman as being passive, naïve, not very capable of taking charge of their lives or the space of the domestic and in most cases as being not educated in the modern educational institutions.
- The modern woman had differing qualities and accomplishments depending upon the class, caste and religious position of the character. However education of some kind began to be universally accepted as a given for the modern woman.

- Conjugalinity was seen as the desired state for women in all of the fictional works. Love and/or bodily desire were an important aspect of conjugalinity in most of the novels. The object of affection of the protagonist was exclusively the spouse/lover and there was no space or place for other figures/relationships within the narratives due to the importance given to the state of conjugalinity. It was often the steadfastness of the heroine's love that held the romance/relationship together. In the short stories and the play, where most of the protagonists were married, desire was not as important as the conjugal relationship itself.
- Modernity in some sense seems to isolate the female protagonists, especially the radical ones.
- For the relationship to move forward, it required the woman (not the man) to be humble, moralistic, and domestically inclined; to not transgress a perceived invisible divide between gender roles.
- The family itself began to be imagined as patrilocal and nuclear. The ideal family was also the union of individuals from within the same community.
- The short stories depicted an internal-looking subject, more so than the other works. The protagonists in the short-stories were constantly aware of external scrutiny, which dictated their actions.

I started writing this chapter with the question whether there is a homogenous figure of the Malayali woman in the fictional narratives. While there are aspects of *sthreethwam* and *sthreedharmam* that are common to all of the characters, there are also differences in their development or where they have arrived at in relation to

modernity. The ideal to be achieved for different women varies with respect to the class, caste, religious and ideological position espoused by the writers. What Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon imagines as the model woman is different from what Joseph Moolliyil or E.V. Krishnapilla imagines. Conjugal and the domestic sphere were seen as aspects of *sthreedharmam* (together with education) for all the women. Even the characters with well-developed sense of self and individuality are finally pulled back into the conjugal relationship. A sense of self is not allowed to be able to exist in isolation: Janakiamma who tries to break out of the oppressive relationship needs the external help of Balakrishnan Menon, Indulekha who is well provided for and living in comfort cannot live without Madhavan, Kalyanniamma requires Govindhannair by her side, even Sukumari is only happy with the presence of Satyadasan in her life. Bhageerathiamma who is a ‘hard individual’ as opposed to the other softer feminine characters is alone, as is Parangodi who has lost some of her *sthreethwam* (according to the author). It is almost as if a happy ending is possible for the female characters only if they fall within the prescribed gender roles assigned to them by their authors.

The characters need education so that they are trained in their *sthreedharmam* – towards their families and society. Education also played an important role in the depiction of the development of the self of the fictional characters. Their educational status (or lack) is what makes these women take the steps/actions that they do and move the narrative forward. Even Vasanthi and Bhageerathiamma whose educational qualifications are not mentioned are not the stereotypical traditional and passive women. Their lack of passivity itself points to some kind of education. Education itself is shown as being possible in the case of the female characters (specifically from matrilineal communities) when a male member of the family provides the money and

the opportunity. The women do not have access to education on their own initiative. In *Apbhande Makal*, Sulochana requires her father's permission while Ittichiri and others are in turn taught by her in secret. The other women require the permission of the Apbhan Namboothiri to start formal education. Thus in the fictional narratives access to modern education itself was mediated through the male authority in their lives – for both matrilineal and patrilineal communities.

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Section II

Two Lives: real women

The first autobiography in Malayalam came out in the 19th century written by Pachumuthathu (1814-1883). His autobiography was a recording of certain incidents in his life. The genre became popular in the 20th century. The majority of autobiographies in the Indian context are reticent about the private self. But the mode of writing is in the first-person voice and is about a lived history. Indians were also occupied with the experience of historical change in their narratives (Kumar, 2008). This is true of novels and other kinds of fiction as shown in the earlier section. The claims made in the autobiographies were historical and personal at the same time (Kumar, 2008). This is particularly true of the autobiographies by Malayali women writers. B. Kalyani Amma's *Ormayil Ninnu* (1964) (From Memory) is a strong and passionate narrative of her life and society.¹⁹⁶ K. R. Gowriamma's *Aatmakatha*

¹⁹⁶ B. Kalyani Amma (1884-1959) was one of the writers and editors of *Sharada*. She was married to the writer and political activist Swadeshbhimani Ramakrishna Pillai. She worked as a teacher and Headmistress in Malabar and Mangalore until she retired in 1937. Some of her literary works were used as textbooks in schools. Parts of the text book *Mahathikal* analysed in the previous chapter were probably written by her because she mentions writing a collection of biographies by that name in her

(2010) (Autobiography) is not just the narrative of her life, but also the history of her village, of its customs, its people and the history of the beginnings of the communist movement.¹⁹⁷ Her childhood was spent in a period that is marked in public memory as the advent of Kerala's modernity. The social and political processes of the time that changed not just individual lives, but the dressing styles, the social relationships between different castes, relationships and customs within families, etc. are discussed in the early parts of the narrative.

It was not just awareness of the changes happening in the public sphere that were important to many of the autobiographers, but Udaya Kumar states that the early autobiographers felt the burden of associating the exemplary with the enterprise of writing (Kumar, 2008). Life stories were important in the era of social and caste reform in Kerala. The Maharaja of Travancore himself asked Valia Koil Thampuran¹⁹⁸ to compile a biography – *Mahacharitha Samgraham* – published in 1895 (Pillai, 1998). Biographies were an important part of the school curriculum from 1866 and were included in the magazines of the period as mentioned in the previous chapters. The early autobiographers were not just writing about their lives, but also writing/changing the history of the nation; and they were recording the latter through their writing. When Gowriyamma first started to write her autobiography in the magazine *Deshabhimani*, she appeared infrequently in the history (of the people who were instrumental in bringing about socio-political changes in her Taluk, of the

autobiography. She was also a close family friend of Tharavath Ammalu Amma (mentioned in chapter 2).

¹⁹⁷ K.R. Gowriyamma (1919-) was a well known activist in the SNDP in the 1930s and later became a member of the Communist Party of India. She was a minister in the Kerala Legislative Assembly in various years and in 1994 established a new political party named Janathipathiya Samrakshana Samithy (JSS). When she was re-elected in 2004, at 85 years she was the oldest and longest serving legislator in Kerala history. Currently she has retired from active political life.

¹⁹⁸ The consort of Rani Lakshmi Bayi mentioned in the previous chapter.

beginnings of labour movement, of the socio-political milieu of Travancore, about the life of ordinary people, of the peculiarities of her Taluk, and the role played by her family members in the changing socio-political milieu, and so on) that was foregrounded (Gowriyamma, 2010). So, when the autobiography was to be published in a book form, she consciously rewrote it with more of her personal life included in the narrative. Since this book is about her life till the time she joined the Communist Party in 1947, it does not exactly present herself as being the ideal individual in the narrative, as the political activist and the efficient administrator in her were yet to emerge. Her work is more a slice of Kerala from before 1947 as seen through the eyes of the young Gowriyamma. Contrarily, Kalyani Amma did see her life as being kind of exemplary: in the preface to her autobiography she mentions that she wrote her memoirs and left it with her friend Tharavath Ammini Amma¹⁹⁹ because she did not want journalists to pester her daughter or her friend after her death. She realises her life was different and it would generate curiosity once she was no more.

For both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma childhood was an era of spectacle, of remembered pleasures and awe: the *taliketukalyanam*, the temple festivals, the viewing of Kathakalli performance, etc. Yet, Kalyani Amma sees some of these as being superstitious and outdated cultural practices. She speaks of the custom of caste pollution as one such outdated practice, while presenting herself as being outside the system or not imbibing the system. Her rejection of what she reads as out-dated practices is also the development of a self that sees itself as being different from others around her. She describes one incident when she wanted a kind of glass bead necklace worn by the Pulaya women working in her ancestral home. She was given permission to get it from them, but the necklace had to be broken, the thread removed from it, the

¹⁹⁹ She was another writer of the period and the daughter of Tharavath Ammalu Amma.

beads washed and put inside a leaf and put down on the ground (as she belonged to one of the Nair sub-caste who was not allowed to be near Pulaya women and collect anything from their hand). In exchange for the glass beads she was to give the woman a small *mundu*. In her excitement she placed the *mundu* directly in the Pulaya woman's hand. Her uncle, who saw the exchange, was shocked and angry; and her aunt was sent to fetch her. Kalyani Amma was forcefully given a bath in a nearby pond, which was by no means clean. Her aunt also took a bath in the same pond to remove the pollution she herself accrued by contact with Kalyani Amma. The young Kalyani Amma could not accept this practice of pollution and she used to climb trees, exchange fruits and touch the Pulaya children who came to play in the family orchard in the afternoons, while the adults were busy. Her awareness and understanding of caste pollution as an out-dated practice develops after she starts her education.

Gowriamma's sense of her caste identity does not develop in a similar manner. Since she was born later, her childhood memories of caste pollution were located in a time when the SNDP had become a strong organization working towards eradicating many of the social evils associated with caste. Gowriamma's sense of caste pollution and other socio-political movements originate from the strong ties her family, particularly her father had with the SNDP movement. She, though from the Ezhava community, was part of a rich middle-class family. There were very few upper caste families in her village/locality. She is aware of her caste position and mentions that she is from the Ezhava caste in the beginning of her autobiography. Kalyani Amma, however, does not feel the need to state her caste in the narrative. To her, it would appear her caste was a given or something she takes for granted that other people would recognize. She does mention that her father was a Brahmin, and for this

reason as a child, before the glass bead incident, she had to be careful of where she ate, from whom she accepted food and so on.

Kalyani Amma is also aware of the contradiction of being made to take a bath in a dirty pond to get rid of the caste pollution she accrued in the glass bead incident. She sees this move or development of her self as not just from superstitions and other social evils, but also as a movement towards rational thinking and Science. She mentions that the building housing the Zenana mission school, where she studied, was reputed to be haunted by a ghost. Students used to faint and unusual noises used to emanate from the top floor of the building. Kalyani Amma herself believed that there must have been a ghost there, while her friend did not believe in there being any such object/being called a ghost. The study of science and scientific principles changed their beliefs:

The top floor of the building was made entirely of wood – floor and walls.

The sounds produced by the seasonal shrinking and expansion of the wooden boards were responsible for the eerie bumps and knocks. We tried to convince some of the students and teachers who believed in ghosts and spirits (Amma, 1964: 49).

Kalyani Amma and her friend were not able to convince others in the school as to the non-existence of the ghost/spirit. This incident also marked for her that not everybody was ready to give up on traditional beliefs/customs when confronted with the rationality inherent in modern education and Science. Kalyani Amma's rejection of some of the caste-practices should not be read as a rejection of caste/religion. There are certain aspects of caste which she rejects consciously and certain aspects which she is not aware of as being a caste/religious practice. For example, in one footnote she mentions that she was born under the Malayalam astrological star of *mulam*. She reads her school days as being auspicious since that particular period in her life was under

the influence of *shukra* (Venus, which in astrology meant a period of luxury, fortune and comfort).

In the case of Gowriyamma, member of a progressive Ezhava family (and born nearly 35 years after Kalyani Amma), negotiations with caste/religious practices were through the new structures and customs put in place by SNDP. She mentions that temple related activities were not a major aspect of their daily life and that lower caste people were not allowed in most of the temples during her childhood. So the visits to temples would be to pay tribute or pay the land tax (*Kannam*) since the land held by her father had been taken on contract from the temple. Gowriyamma could attend the village school and later a Devasom school (Temple authority owned school) in town without any problems even though she was from the Ezhava caste. There were a few caste practices/restrictions she had to adhere to, but they were not as oppressive to someone from her financial and social background. There was a man from the Potti caste (a high caste) to make drinking water (water boiled with herbs) for the high caste students so that they did not 'lose caste'. The school wall bordered a temple and on certain days the members of the royal family used to bathe in the temple pond. So, students belonging to the lower castes were not allowed to be near that particular wall. She also mentions a male teacher who used to speak badly of the lower caste students in class, but would visit her home for food and often take loans of money. When she complained about him at home, he was stopped from visiting them again. Thus, ideas related to caste pollution were changing, and like in the case of the teacher, was expressed not so much in outright acts of physical aggression as being present in the common psyche. These narratives also highlight how caste was indeed a part of these writers' lives.

For both the women, school was also a place where they learned facets of culture and gendered behaviour. This was not through the curriculum, but through other aspects of teaching/disciplining. Kalyani Amma mentions that when repeated admonishment had not put a stop to their habit of shaking their legs, their teacher changed their regular benches to shorter benches. The (male) teacher thought it important that these girl students learn to sit and conduct themselves in a manner expected of girls and made changes to the physical arrangement of the classroom towards that end. When Gowriamma joined the High school in Chertala she found that the students were from a different social background than one she was used to:

Around half the students in Chertala High School were children of government officers, business men and landlords. Their behaviour and dressing styles were different. As a result the atmosphere and discipline in this school was also different. It was compulsory to wear clean clothes, to plait or brush one's hair, and to learn one's daily lessons (Gowriamma, 2010: 102).

It was not just at school, but by the time she entered puberty she was restricted from “talking aloud, running, going to places where adults were talking, conversing with men and laughing with them” at home too (Gowriamma, 2010).

Education was an important achievement for both Kalyani Amma and Gowriamma. Going to school was not a chore; at that point getting educated was a matter of pride and a privilege for the common man, but unaffordable. Government schools were free for the lower castes, but many of the students had other chores to do at home, and their income was needed to put food on the table. Gowriamma remembers being excited about going to school, especially when she had to join the English school after her primary education. Her village did not have complete schools, so she did her primary, lower secondary and high school education in different institutions. She was the first woman in her family to study past high school. After her

matriculation, the entire family was discussing which college she should join. Her father wanted her to become a lawyer, and she did become the first Ezhava lawyer to pass her examination from the state of Cochin. Her educational status was important to the entire family.

Education did not always mean the academic kind at the period. Her elder sisters, who were not as brilliant academically, were trained in vocal music, fiddle, veena and harmonium. Her description of her eldest sister's lifestyle is very similar to that of Indulekha's life in *Indulekha*. This sister's husband was in Iraq. So she stayed with them. Her child was taken care of by the servants and other members of the family. The sister would wake up in the morning and after her morning ablutions start her music training. Gowriamma remembers acquaintances coming to the house to listen to her musical performances. This sister, she says was not interested in the daily running of the household or in anything else. Gowriamma foregrounding this sister and her lifestyle meant that it was significant to her understanding of how women led their lives. This particular sister also learned to ride a motorcycle (with a side car), and used to take Gowriamma and the child on rides to the town. Cars, buses, and even bicycles were rare in those times, and so people used to come out and watch her ride the motorcycle. They used to whistle and shout which would anger her sister, but did not make her stop. Gowriamma mentions that their father made her stop riding the motorcycle when he heard about people's reaction. He felt the time was not right for her to continue her passion/hobby. There is regret and reluctant admiration in the way she mentions her sister. Here was a woman who was not interested in the domestic aspects of everyday life, accomplished in the finer areas or accomplishments of education, but also bold and courageous enough to experiment with a new technology. The reader is given a glimpse of a new kind of woman in the figure of the sister. This

figure also embodies the kind of woman the readers were exhorted not to become by many of the magazine writers of the period. Gowriamma herself, does not act out of place or make a move that compromised her position as a 'good woman' through out her educational phase. Here again is the perception of the external scrutiny like in the short stories and women having to abide by certain invisible rules. Gowriamma did give speeches and helped out with the various charitable activities carried out by her family and attended a few SNDP meetings. Though these do place her as being different from the average student from that period, she herself does not see these as being very unusual since it was done with the implicit approval of her father and her brother.²⁰⁰

For Kalyani Amma, going to school was not as easy as it was for Gowriamma. Her family could not afford to send her to school. However by then education for women was becoming acceptable among the Nairs and even began to be seen as a necessity. She managed to study till her matriculation because the mission school provided books and other stationeries and also paid her a monthly stipend. Kalyani Amma joined school around the turn of the century. But once she finished her middle school (there was a public examination in the 3rd Form, equivalent to the 7th class today, at that point), her family did not want her to continue, and the head of the school, who was a foreign lady managed to find more funding for Kalyani Amma and her friends. Thus, though education was seen as necessary, it was not important for her family to send her for higher education. Kalyani Amma does not provide reasons for this reluctance on her family's part. One of the reasons was the inability of the family to financially support her, the second could have been that in the late 19th century

²⁰⁰ The brother immediately elder to her was also politically active and went on to become a lawyer. Both of them sat for their matriculation together, but he failed and later continued his education in a different college.

though learning to read and write were beginning to be seen as important, women were not expected to train in ‘useful skills.’ Kalyani Amma finished her high school education as a private student of the school, since the school did not officially have a high school section. The school authorities had engaged tutors to teach the 3 girls who had shown interest in continuing their education. This marks the shift in the attitude of the missionaries towards girls’ education – education was no longer merely about training girls to be good wives, Bible women, etc. but was also about a sense of achievement and further opportunities for girls. Kalyani Amma was married off before she passed her F.A. (equivalent to the current pre-degree course). However her husband encouraged her to continue her education and also helped her pursue her writing career.

An autobiography can have the elements of a romance: both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma met their future husbands outside the space of the traditional structures of marriage. In the period described in Gowriyamma’s narrative, T.V. Thomas was still an acquaintance.²⁰¹ But she mentions a few incidents where she met him, or almost met him. Her justification, she states, is that there were stories going around that she was in love with T.V. Thomas much before she actually met him. Her narrative also ends with a scene describing her being taken to the Kerala Central jail. T.V. Thomas was already there for another political offence. There is a dramatic post-script that says:

This does not end here. The rest is being written. It will soon reach the reader
(Gowriyamma, 2010: 383).

²⁰¹ They married in 1957, the same year both of them became ministers in the first Communist ministry in Kerala. The couple later separated.

It is as if she sees her life as taking a major turn with her imprisonment and with T.V. Thomas waiting for her in jail. Kalyani Amma's narrative is not so dramatic but it is nonetheless a bit like the novels of the time:

This young man's clothes were not at all ostentatious. He was wearing a white dress, a black coat and a shawl. His hair was cropped. In one hand he held an umbrella and in the other he held some books. I was attracted by his overall nobility and good manners, his face blazing masculinity, and the kindness and sincerity within his eyes. His lean body proclaimed his good health (Amma, 1997: 43).

Other than the obvious romantic way in which she has described Ramakrishna Pillai, what attracts her to him is also what was considered the correct mode of style and mannerisms: he is dressed in simple clothes – much like the writers advocated in the early magazines. He had also cut his hair and was wearing a coat, the signs of the modern educated man in Kalyani Amma's time.

Desire and consent were important aspects of the modern marriage. Kalyani Amma's married life was unusual in the strong bond she shared with her husband. The marriage itself was unusual in that they knew each other before the marriage proposal was brought to her family and Ramakrishna Pillai had to woo her to get her to agree to marry him (by words and letters). After the marriage was fixed, it was found that their horoscopes did not match. But they decided to go ahead with the ceremony in spite of the objections of both their families. Their decision thus breaks the ascriptive caste and family control over the institution of marriage. When Ramakrishna Pillai was arrested and banished from Travancore for his political beliefs and journalistic activities, she decided to join him taking their two young children with her and leaving her teaching job. Her decision was considered unexpected and bold in those times. It was also a re-affirming of the centrality of conjugality in her life. She spent just 12 years with her

husband, but sees those 12 years as the crucial period in her life. The rest of her life was spent working to make ends meet and educate her children. Her break with/rebellion against traditional practices end with her move into conjugality. Her subsequent life, in her own reading, falls well within the expected behaviour for a woman.

Gowriamma's narrative does the opposite: though she does introduce T.V. Thomas in her story, he is not central to her sense of self. She describes an incident that happened after she had passed the 10th class. An acquaintance fell in love with her and approached her with a letter while she was home. He approached her again when she was in college. She felt some kind of affection for him, but later realised that it was merely sympathy for him and not really love. She felt at that point that marriage had to be based on affection and love. However, she mentions that on hindsight she realised that it was a misconception that love was central to marriage. She does not present herself as being rebellious, though she does see herself as being strong and bold. For her, the break with tradition had already occurred by the actions of other members of the family. She sees herself as moving away from the life expected of her only when she joins the Communist party.

The two incidents that marked important moments in Gowriamma's life in the narrative were her brother's move towards Communist ideas which then took him away from the family and her father's death. She realizes she needs to support herself at that point. Though she had been working before her father's death and supporting a large number of family members, she had had financial help from her father. She becomes an individual on her own right after her father's death. In that sense both Kalyani Amma and Gowriamma view death (of spouse/father) as an important moment that mark beginning of their transformation into autonomous individuals. This

did not mean that they believed that they had no freedom before that, but in the sense of learning to be responsible for themselves without a safety net to fall back on. Gowriamma's initiation into the workings of the Communist party began after her father's death, since he had objections to her following in her brother's footsteps.

Both Kalyani Amma and Gowriamma were/are not women typical to their times, but rather the exceptions. They were/are also women who were/are in the public sphere. These women were negotiating a self between earlier and newer forms of subjectivity. I have mapped out certain aspects of their narratives to show how these two women negotiated some of the themes and issues discussed in the earlier sections/chapters. They occupy two different positions in terms of time, location and development of the self.

In the case of Gowriamma there is a marking of the different stages that led to the development of her self. She also gives thick descriptions of the other characters that inhabit her world. She sees her life as moving from childhood to puberty and related issues/changes and then to her professional and political career. It is surprising that for a woman from the lower caste, caste-related issues were not as problematic as it was for the middle caste Kalyani Amma.

In Kalyani Amma's narrative she has described the early years of her life in detail, but the other characters in the narrative are not as well-developed, except perhaps that of her friend Chinnamma.²⁰² Kalyani Amma sets aside separate chapters to describe her literary accomplishments, her childhood, married life and professional life. Thus, she considers her life as being held together within these frames. There is not much description/explanations about her children other than passing mention. Kalyani Amma traces the development of her self from a position of traditional caste

²⁰² She was one of the other magazine writers of the period.

based subjectivity to acceptance of science/rationality/education, and then to a position of conjugal dependency and finally to financial autonomy. But she also presents the last place as one of loneliness in spite of the presence of other family members, friends and well-wishers. She describes her thoughts with a certain amount of depth only about the last period of her life.

The two autobiographies have been used to show the differences in the way real women charted their subjective selves through the changing social and political milieu in the early 20th century. It would be difficult to draw parallels between their lives and that of the fictional characters in the previous section of this chapter. There are obvious similarities in the way some of the themes related to women's lives in the different kinds of narratives are developed and discussed, especially education, conjugality, love, desire, gender roles, and so on. Kalyani Amma and Gowriamma were constantly aware of their gender positions and the difficulties that this posed them in their daily lives. Gowriamma's life has been read by Robin Jeffrey as a failed promise of literacy in Kerala (Jeffrey, 1992). Though an efficient administrator, she was always sidelined in Kerala politics and within the Communist Party as she says in her foreword to *Aatmakatha*. She was considered for the position of Chief Minister several times, but was sidelined for political and personal reasons. It is said that T.V. Thomas threatened to resign from the ministry (in the 1967-69 period) if she were made Chief Minister (Lukose, 2008). Kalyani Amma, a noted writer and teacher, has also been forgotten by history, except perhaps in occasional references to her husband. Their lives also underline the fact that female individuation for Malayali women could only happen within certain invisible boundaries set within the frames of family and community. Their lives show how education (formal and informal) was an integral part of their gendering process. Education brought about other changes in their lives: like in

the case of Kalyani Amma, her acceptance of Science/rationality that mark her as different from many others and in Gowriamma's move to a political/public life. While education then changed their perception of their *sthreedharmam*, it did not take them away from the space of the domestic and/or *sthreethwam*.

CHAPTER 5: From the past to the present

Representations of women in the present: making the connection

I had stated in the previous chapters that some of the ideas about women that got entrenched in the early 20th century discourse were carried forward to the 21st century. In the following section of this chapter I illustrate this primarily through a brief analysis of a popular magazine, *Vanitha* and by presenting some of the statistics related to Malayali women.

Vanitha is the best-selling magazine in Kerala with an average readership of 23.53 lakhs (in 2012). It is a subsidiary publication of the Malayala Manorama group and was started in 1975. It is published bimonthly from Kottayam and edited by Prema Mammen Mathew. As the magazine describes itself, it “mixed tradition with modernity” (*Feminine Grace & Substance*, 2012). The early women’s magazines dealt with topics related to women, literature, science & health, art & history, general (lifestyle, astrology, *parishkaaram*, national news, theology, general knowledge, ethics, economics, behaviour, and spirituality). *Vanitha* does not deal with the same range of subjects as the earlier magazines. An analysis of the magazine from the period 2007-2008 shows that it has articles on etiquette, grooming/fashion, actors, health (sexual & general), childcare, contraception, pregnancy and care, women achievers (academic and professional), cooking tips and recipes, housing and related issues, a serialized novel, two cartoons and a couple of pages for young children. Though *Vanitha* started out as a women’s magazine, it has almost as much male readership as female readership and so the articles are meant for the middle class family than for women alone. Take a look at figures 1 to 11 given in the following pages.

Figure 1

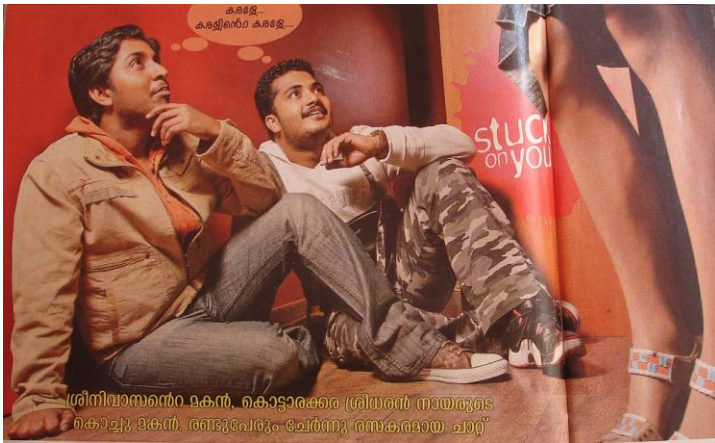


Figure 2



Figure 3

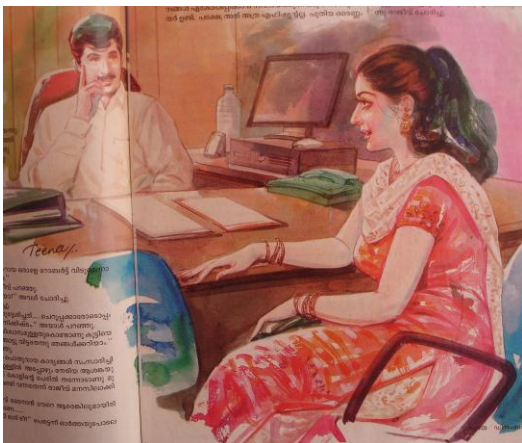


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figures 1-8 (except figure 6) have been taken from the August (2008) and December (2007) issues of *Vanitha*. Figure 6 is taken from the website of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.²⁰³ Figure 9 is of a church procession in Kerala.²⁰⁴ Figure 10 is from a temple procession in Kerala²⁰⁵ and Figure 11 is a photo from a polling booth in Kerala.²⁰⁶

The first article in *Vanitha* (for the period mentioned above) is usually about a woman who has made her mark in some field – cinema, social work, overcoming a personal disability, teaching, or business. Other than that, there would be another article on an ordinary woman, not so well known, but who is financially independent. These women would normally be shown in an accompanying picture (sometimes family members are present in the picture). There would be another page listing out the women who had passed exams with first ranks or been awarded a Doctorate in their respective fields. Though all the topics mentioned previously are included, in most issues the focus is usually on the celebrity section, health related articles and fashion. The visual aspect of the article is as important as the written part in these modern women's magazines, which started with *Vanitha Kusumam* in 1927. In *Vanitha* there would be a picture in at least every second page, though mostly both pages would carry one (one of the pictures would usually be an advertisement).

Figure 1 and figure 2 are from the December (1-14), 2007 issue of *Vanitha*. The picture accompanies an article about Vineeth Srinivasan and Vinu Mohan, two young

²⁰³ Available from: <http://www.keralatourism.org/images/downloadHRI/ayurveda/big/1.jpg>

²⁰⁴ Vijay Almeida, *125th Diocesan Jubilee Cross Welcoming Programme* [Photo] (Churchnewssite, 2011 [cited 7 January 2012]); available from <http://www.churchnewssite.com/portal/?p=48978>.

²⁰⁵ Shareef, *The Temple Procession: Kanhangad, Kerala* (Yahoo! India, 2011 [cited 8 January 2013]); available from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/46721134@N04/5640158602/>.

²⁰⁶ *Polling Gets Underway for by-Election in Kerala* (Sevensisters Post, [cited 7 Jan 2013]); available from <http://sevensisterspost.com/polling-gets-underway-for-by-election-in-kerala/>.

actors and their experiences while shooting for a film and the issues that these two men from actor-families face in the film industry (Renjith, 2007). The bubble in Figure 1 says: “My heart!” [A literal translation of the line means “the liver of my liver” – the lines of a popular song from a movie directed by Vineeth Srinivasan’s father.] The picture shows them looking at a model’s face with her legs foregrounded in the picture. The picture is not in anyway connected to the article, and then the reader turns the page and comes across figure 2. The reader realises that the young men were actually looking at a mannequin in this page. The bubble says: “Fooled you!” These two pictures are included in this chapter to show how the urban youth views sexual taboos and rules regarding gender roles. The fun and camaraderie the men show in the picture would not have been possible either in the early 20th century or even later. However, the men are also not looking at the legs, but are made to look up, probably at the face, the reader is not sure. So, even while the legs have been foregrounded, the men cannot directly look at them. Moreover, in Kerala, beauty of a woman is generally defined by her hair (long and thick hair), eyes (big and wide eyes), colour (fair) and body type (well rounded). The shape/length of the legs as being a marker of beauty is a Western concept that the photographer and the men are probably aware about.²⁰⁷ The clothes the mannequin wears are also indicative of the changes that have come about in the public sphere in Kerala. These might not be clothes an average Malayali woman wears, but they signify modernity, which these young men also stand for. *Vanitha* takes its subject matter seriously, but lately there would be one or two article in a lighter vein like this story mentioned here. However, the passion that one associates with the early women’s magazines is absent in *Vanitha*. This could also be because the writers in the

²⁰⁷ For details on Western concepts of beauty see: Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West, Women and Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

early magazines were women and men who were part of the larger social and political movements happening in Kerala at the time and most of them were also academicians and/or related to the literary circles while the writers in *Vanitha* are mostly new age professionals – journalists/doctors/psychologists who are not part of the socio-political movements. Though there are changes in lifestyles, dressing styles, food habits, and family structures in the 21st century these are not considered as radical and are not accompanied by caste/community movements like in the 20th century.

The dress of the woman has always been a mark of tradition/modernity in Kerala's history. *Vanitha* usually carries an article whenever there is some news/legislation involving clothes in the news media. In July 2007, the Guruvayoor Temple authorities decided to permit women wearing the churidar (as a Salwar Kameez is called in Malayalam) to enter the temple. But within a few months, in an astrological reading it was discovered that the presiding deity of the Temple was angry over this decision. Though the order was not revoked it was given wide publicity that the women devotees switched to the sari voluntarily. *Vanitha* carried an article on the issue where many women devotees were interviewed and most of them agreed with the decision to not wear the churidar (Sreelekha, 2007).²⁰⁸ The writer evokes the breast-cloth movement and the beginning of the dress reform in Kerala before asking if it was necessary to ban a dress that had provided comfort and safety to women in public places in the name of custom and tradition. Here the writer is surprised that many of

²⁰⁸ Guruvayoor Temple has always been associated with tradition and orthodoxy. The Temple has been in the limelight before for conducting purification/cleansing ceremonies when non-Hindu dignitaries visited the Temple by mistake and for refusing outright entry to them (like Rajiv Gandhi because he was only half-Hindu). These examples have been given to show that in spite of the nearly universal literacy rates and outwardly peaceful religious co-existence, there are still pockets within Kerala where traditional caste/religious distinctions and the idea of caste/religious pollution still hold sway.

the interviewees were of the opinion that churidar was not the right dress to wear to a temple. She has to remind the readers of the fairly recent tradition of wearing a sari.

However, wearing a churidar does not always signify modernity nor does wearing a sari signify tradition as I show below. In the serialised novel section of *Vanitha* there would always be a sketch of the characters in the plot. Figure 3 is one such image from the December (1-14), 2007 issue of the magazine. She is not exactly the modern woman as exemplified by the sari clad young girl next to her in figure 4. The body language of the woman, the way she drapes her clothes, the length and style of the hair, the ornaments used and the body type all play an important role in defining the modernity of the Malayali woman. The woman in the sketch is not thin (thinness being another marker of modernity in recent times). Thus the woman in figure 3 would not fall in to the category of the modern woman. Both the women also do not have overt markers of either their Hindu-ness or Christian-ness, but they are not Muslim since representations of Muslims always depict them with a veil over their head.

Government representation of the Kerala woman would be very different from how *Vanitha* projects the Malayali woman. In government representations Malayali woman would be someone wearing the *mundum neriyathum* (a two piece off-white sari with a colour/golden border) and usually it would be a Hindu woman. The sixth image is also used in relation to the Ayurvedic treatments that Kerala is known for. Figure 6 taken from the Kerala Tourism website is meant to sell the idea of health and Ayurveda to the presumably foreign tourist. Though Ayurvedic and other natural health practitioners do not exclusively belong to the Hindu community there is a superimposing of the Hindu image on the generic figure of the Malayali woman. The Hindu-ness of the masseuse is indicated by the flowers in her hair and the *chandan* on

her forehead. Though the white/off-white sari is worn by women from other communities too, it is usually indicative of a Hindu Malayali woman.

The differences between the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians are particularly highlighted in advertisements for weddings – wedding saris, ornaments, etc. This is true not just of *Vanitha* but is the norm for any wedding related advertisements in magazines, newspapers and on roadside hoardings. The kind of clothes worn everyday in Kerala might not always indicate the differences between women from the different communities, but the clothes worn during weddings can differentiate which particular caste/group the woman belongs to. The pictures in Fig 5, 7, and 8 are taken from the August (15-31), 2008 issue of *Vanitha*. Figure 5 is that of a Hindu bride, Figure 7 that of a Muslim bride and Figure 8 that of two Christian brides. Though Muslim women did not always wear the veil/burkha in Kerala, with the revival in Islamic studies and the various political and cultural movements happening on the international scene, many Muslim women are now opting to wear the burkha and/or a dupatta over their heads. Here the Muslim bride is distinguished through the placement of the coloured veil over the head. Since *Vanitha* is owned by a Christian group, the picture of the Christian bride shows the dressing styles of two different groups from among the Christians. The Syrian Christians generally prefer the sari and (the newer converts compared to the Syrians) the Latin Catholics and a few other Protestant groups prefer the gown. However in the last few decades the progressive and modern families among the Syrian Christians have also been opting for the gown. The inclusion of the picture in the inset is also indicative of the change happening among Malayalis as a result of wide scale exposure to Western movies and culture through the internet and the cable television. This is also linked to larger trends in the economy like globalisation and liberalisation of the economy since the 1990s.

The relationship between clothes, the body of the woman and modesty is something even the actresses have to be careful about. The older stereotype of the Vamp has been taken over by the “glamorous” heroine. The term “glamour” has become synonymous with “sexy”, both of which are not positive traits to be associated with a woman in common parlance in Kerala. The term is applied to a woman who wears skimpy/sexually explicit clothes in the movie. In an interview with the actress Lakshmi Rai²⁰⁹ in *Vanitha*, the interviewer asks her:

Q: You did some glamorous roles?

A: I did not know how to filter out bad projects at first. So I made some mistakes. I have decided not to act in bad cinemas or do glamour dances. I am trying to change my bad reputation. I have signed contracts for some good Tamil and Malayalam movies. I don't mind being glamorous, if the plot requires it (Nair, 2008: 14).

This interview appeared a few days before the scheduled release of one of her Malayalam films. Earlier she had done the Tamil film *Nenjai Thodu* (2007), in which she appeared in short outfits and sexually explicit scenes. Tamil movies have viewership in Kerala. The actress has to shed her “glamorous” image to become acceptable to the family audience in Kerala.

I started the thesis with an anecdote from my life and some questions. I have still not been able to answer those questions to my satisfaction though the complex relation between clothes and the Malayali identity is clear from the countless times the issue has come up in the print media and the public sphere. Dress is an important aspect of the idea of a Malayali woman. Transgressing sartorial codes is considered equivalent to a moral transgression. In 2008, the government passed a rule allowing

²⁰⁹ She is a well-known actress in Tamil and Malayalam language cinema. She has done a few critically acclaimed movies since her debut in 2005.

teachers in government schools to wear the churidar instead of the sari.²¹⁰ This came about after two teachers decided to wear churidars to school since they considered it easier to wear than a sari. This caused discussions among the public at the end of which the government passed the order. Many teachers of the old school believed that discipline could be maintained and respect garnered from the students only if the sari was worn. Many could not understand why a garment that had been worn for ages had to be suddenly replaced by a style from another part of the country. Yet another pro-sari group maintained that the sari was needed to differentiate between teachers and students in higher classes. The supporters of the pro-churidar move argued that the churidar was easier to wear, provided ease of movement, and covered the body better than a sari. If in the early 19th century dress was a marker of caste difference, in the late 19th century it had become a site of contestation and one of the ways to negate the hierarchical positions within the caste structure. The lower caste groups also used the argument of modesty in relation to clothes. In the early 20th century dress became a mark of one's modernity and signified hygiene, correct training and discipline (in the project of making one an ideal citizen as is evident in the policy documents from the third chapter). It also became a way to signify one's Malayali-ness (opposed to Parsis, Bengalis, Western women etc.). In the 21st century it reverts to one of the earlier signifiers – morality, modesty and tradition. In the 21st century, as the government teachers' issue shows, ease of use is another factor that enters the discussions on clothes.

Reverting to the questions I had raised right at the beginning, it is easy to answer the last one where I ask why the issue was important enough to upset me.

²¹⁰ For details see the article that appeared in *The Hindu* titled "Teachers hail new clothes norm" on 7 February 2008. Available from: <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/07/stories/2008020750060200.htm> [cited 17 December 2012]

Growing up in urban Kerala in the late 1980s and 1990s, clothes were a constant site of contestation – any kind of minor change/alteration to the skirt, churidar, frock (which children and teenagers wore at that period) was commented upon by not just family members, but passers-by on the road and other public places; and the comments were usually harsh and negative. In the 21st century the earlier strictures regarding clothes have eased up, but when some incident like this happens, it reminds one of a Kerala from an earlier period. The other questions I had asked were about why the student recounted/remembered only the dress in relation to the wedding and the strong reaction of her brother to the dress. One obvious reason is the newness of the short kurta. Another reason probably has to do with the fact that the other girl came from a town to the village wearing clothes signifying modernity; and modernity is not always a quality that is acceptable [The episode in the Guruvayoor temple regarding the dress code is another example of tradition being proposed as the right path to take. Though the churidar is widely used, particularly by the younger generation, it is not completely accepted as Malayali attire in all locations. In the earlier example (figure 3) where the churidar signified tradition, it was facilitated in conjugation with other markers of tradition]. It could also be the way in which class and urban-rural resentments are focused on the female body. Clothes are strongly connected to modernity/tradition, modesty, decorum, caste, culture, and religion in Malayali consciousness as I have shown in previous chapters. Fashion is seen as replacing the ascriptive role of clothing styles as part of the larger move towards individuation. Any kind of transgression connected to dress is then read as a transgression against culture and gender codes; more so in Kerala as a result of the particular history of the region. While in many Indian states language, ethnicity and religion are sites of contestation, in Kerala with its

nearly homogenous language/ethnic groups,²¹¹ gender seems to have become a major site of contestation/strife. In her work on gender, youth and consumer citizenship in India set in the late 1980s and 1990s Kerala, Ritty Lukose speaks about clothing styles structuring the way young women are enabled and constrained in their negotiation of public spaces (Lukose, 2008). The comportment of the female body (demure and modest), in some sense, was seen as resolving the tension between an indigenous tradition and a predatory modernity. A female body that was marked as modern was seen as propelling into a dangerous “West” out there in the city (Lukose, 2008). In the case of Kerala, I would extend this argument to say that it is not just the West, but any fashion perceived as non-Malayali is seen as a threat to indigenous tradition. While the churidar has become acceptable as a modest and easy-to-use garment, it has not yet been absorbed into the fold of tradition as the sari which has been in use for nearly a century. And probably for this reason in many educational institutions in Kerala when wearing a churidar there are strict guidelines as to the kind of material that can be worn, the length of the sleeves, the length of the slit, the length of the kurta, and so on.²¹² This is a different manner of policing the modernity of the Malayali women in public spaces into acceptable qualities of modesty and demureness.

Another article in *Vanitha* in September (1-14), 2007 was about the problems faced by women drivers as a result of the attitude of aggressive male drivers (Sreerekha, 2007). While some of the incidents mentioned in the article could be read

²¹¹ According to the 2001 census, Malayalam was spoken by 33 million people as their mother tongue, while the total population of the state was only 31 million and the percentage of Malayalam speakers in the state was 99.54. From: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Language/Statement2.html [cited 01 February 2013]

²¹² Vimala College, Thrissur is a good example of this. The website of the college instructs the students to wear plain sari/blouse and plain churidar/shawl. For details see: <http://vimalacollege.edu.in/index/dresscode/> [cited 05 February 2013]

as cases of eve teasing, many of the women interviewed complained that even the more serious incidents are not taken cognizance by the traffic police. What this points to is a mindset that tends to sexually objectify women. Yet another understanding of such incidents is related to the early 20th century ideology of separate spheres of the public and the domestic and the location of the woman within the domestic. An extension of this argument was the gendering of certain professions/tasks as female and male. And when certain tasks are seen as male/masculine then it becomes problematic when women take up these tasks [In the previous chapter I had mentioned how Gowriamma's sister was shouted and whistled at by people when she started to ride the motorcycle]. Another reading of these incidents is that masculinity/maleness is validated in competition with *sthreethwam*/femaleness [This is particularly true of the play by E.V. Krishnapilla in the previous chapter, where the masculinity of the male characters is validated by subjugating Bhageerathamma]. Present day Kerala seems to have based her traditions and culture in the early to mid 20th century in terms of dressing styles, gender roles, and conjugality. This is also because until then there was no uniformity among the various castes/communities as to these as I have shown in the previous chapters.

Gender difference is so deeply engraved in Malayali culture it does not often allow women and men to mingle freely in public spaces.²¹³ This often extends to religious places too. In most churches in Kerala (including Catholic churches), there are separate pews/sides for women and men, while women and men often attend mass together in other parts of India. Take a look at the figures 9 – 11 taken from various

²¹³ One of my interviewees, Dr. Santhakumari, said that even towards her retirement when she had to attend official meetings, if she sat in the area marked out for men, people used to stare. She said that she could understand the need for different seating arrangements for women and men at school/college levels, but could not understand the need for the same in professional life.

internet sites. In the pictures of the church and temple processions (figures 9 and 10) from Kerala, one can see the separate queues for women and men. This separation between the sexes can be taken to extremes. In the 1970s in one of the colleges situated around 5 km from Kochi²¹⁴ the college bus plying students had a vertical divider running from head to tail down the middle of the bus, to keep the boys away from the girls (Varma, 2012). The same college had separate verandas on both sides of the building; the front veranda was meant for the boys and the back veranda was for the girls until the late 1990s. The boys were not expected to use the veranda meant for the girls and vice-versa. In figure 11, a picture of a polling booth, one can see the separate queues for women. There is a separation of female/male roles and spaces even within public spaces in spite of high levels of education and entry of women in jobs previously reserved for men since the last century.

I had mentioned before how certain professions were seen as being more suitable for women. This has been clearly carried forward into later years: current statistics for gender differentiation in higher education states that women exceed men in graduate and post-graduate courses in the Arts & Science courses and in non-technical diplomas. However when it comes to professional/technical education including accounting (B.Com) (except in nursing and teaching), women are less than one third of the total intake (Mungekar et al., 2008). In low level technical education women were found more in stenography, dress-making, cutting and tailoring, secretarial practices and data preparation. Thus women are clearly found in occupations that have been termed feminine, some from the time of the missionaries. The issue of education, which to the early writers was a serious bone of contention, is not discussed at all in *Vanitha* because in the current social setup, it is assumed that

²¹⁴ Kochi is considered the fashion capital of Kerala. It has a mostly floating population and is a major business hub.

women have access to schooling/higher education. The percentage of women in decision making positions like managerial positions in urban Kerala is lower than for all-India (Mungekar et al., 2008). Women generally occupy low level positions (like stenographers, typists, computer operators) which provide few chances of career advancement. In spite of the high levels of literacy and educational qualifications, like in other parts of India, women are largely involved in unpaid work in the household premises and they often direct their skills towards invisible, home-bound services (Mungekar et al., 2008). *Vanitha* addresses the problem of unemployment of educated women at a superficial level. In *Vanitha*, one of the articles in every issue would be about 'housewives' making money through home-bound work like medical transcription, handicraft, food preservation, jewellery making, embroidery and related services. A small sub-column or title within the picture of the woman would list out her monthly income and the job she does in brief. These women would also be from respectable middle class families and put forward as role models for the other housewives.

The assumption is that most Malayalis are housewives and opt to remain so. Conjuality is seen as the norm and put forth as the desirable state for women in the magazine. Health and sexual health are read as important aspects of conjuality like it was in the early magazines. During the period under review, there were two separate sections where readers could write to doctors – one general medic and another sexual health medic. There were also articles on caring for children and dealing with childhood problems. Even the recipe section would sporadically have recipes for healthy foods/snacks that can be packed for children's lunch boxes. Awareness about health, childcare and cooking are still thought to be part of the domestic realm and therefore relegated to women. The articles are meant not for the benefit of the woman

in her own right, but for the benefit of the family and society. The advertisements in *Vanitha* are also targeted at a married woman or a woman who is young and will soon be getting married. Other than the advertisement for undergarments (not lingerie, since it is a family magazine now), the others are usually for household utensils and appliances, heavy sequin worked party wear for women, especially the kind worn by young brides. There would be a feature on a dress pattern for a young girl child. This again is an extension of the missionary education curricula wherein sewing/embroidery/lace-work etc. were part of the girls' education. In *Vanitha* the pattern and the cutting of the dress are shown for the women, who (it is assumed) have the training and skill to make a dress. *Vanitha* is also published from Kottayam, a strong hold of missionary education in the 19th and 20th centuries. The sexual health feature is addressed to married couples, young and old. Even the housing section assumes that the buyer(s) would be married couples with children. A different reading of the inclusion of house plans and advertisements for switches/bathroom fittings could be that (1) since men also read the magazine, it is targeted at them, (2) the domestic duties of the educated women have been expanded to include even more details of the arrangement of the domestic space. This again can be explained in two ways that (a) since the woman is in charge of the space of the domestic she is expected to know this and (b) it is the choice of the woman as she is the one making the decisions regarding the house. In the first instance it is the duty of a woman and in the second instance it is right of a woman. In either case, the woman is still seen as intrinsically linked to the domestic space.

Crimes against women have been on the rise in Kerala, though sometimes this is explained as a result of better reporting. The Human Development Report for 2008 ranks Kerala as one of the states with continuous increase in the rates of cruelty at

home. Violence against women is perceived to be on the rise in the state and in a study on psychiatric patients it was stressed that the common cause of stress among educated women was lack of employment and the roles that they were expected to assume after marriage (Mungekar et al., 2008). This trend had started in the 1930s when some of the magazine writers pointed to the increasing cases of suicides among women and suggested that many of these were the result of the gap between reality and expectations within marriages and the case of employment after marriage. *Vanitha* carries a section on domestic violence, psychological and health related problems and sometimes even cases from the family court. The incidence of girls and young women going missing from some of the villages in Kerala was the subject matter of an article from the same period (Jyothish, 2007a). Yet another article was on the cases of missing girls from all over Kerala (Gopinath, 2008). The cases are not reported so much as put out as examples of how people should behave, advice to parents/young girls on how to live their lives, bring up their children and even to show the problems people face in a changing society.

In the December 2007 issue of *Vanitha* one of the articles was about a Muslim, Fasiluddin, married to a Christian, Agnus (Jyothish, 2007b). The article was about how they came to meet, fell in love and married in spite of protests from both families and the subsequent pressures on them to convert Agnus to Islam. Fasiluddin named his first son Casteless and next son Junior Casteless to show their severance from religion and caste structures. The article has been mentioned here to underline that caste and religious differences are still issues in Kerala society though they are not often mentioned as serious social problems. The second is the act of naming of the children by Fasiluddin. I have mentioned in the previous chapter how the naming of a person was important in colonial Kerala. The new converts used to change their names to

show their break with the older hierarchical position within the caste system and acceptance of the new religion and its egalitarian structure. The article in *Vanitha* is more a reporting of the novelty of the names of the sons than an enquiry into the reasons for Fasiluddin having to choose such unusual names.

While caste differences and related issues are acknowledged as being present they are not considered a matter for serious discussion in a women's magazine like in the early Malayalam magazines. None of the issues from the period 2007-2008 carried articles that could be termed political because in some sense politics is still not considered something women will be interested in. The early magazines carried short stories, literary reviews and biographies. *Vanitha* does have short stories and sometimes a serialized novel (and the popular novels are sometimes adapted for television serials), but the literary reviews and biographies have disappeared from the magazine. This has been taken over by the interviews with famous personalities and women who do social service, which would also give a small life sketch of the interviewee. Thus, there is no looking back to a past in the form of mythological figures or figures from a recent history like in the early magazines.

Vanitha is not concerned about the education of the modern Malayali woman because in terms of literacy and access to higher education, women have attained high levels of literacy and education compared to other parts of India.²¹⁵ While caste/religious differences are acknowledged as being present and there is a Christian flavour to some of the articles, the articles are generally not addressed to any specific group. *Vanitha* does take into account that women work outside the space of the home,

²¹⁵ Literacy rates for (7+ years) women in Kerala were at 91.98 % in the 2011 census.

At all India level the share of girl's enrolment at primary and upper primary levels of education are 47.2% and 44.2% respectively, while for Kerala the shares are higher at 49.2% and 48% . From: Mungekar et al., "Kerala Development Report."

but it does not imagine them as being outside the frame of the domestic sphere. This section is not an analysis of education, but show how ideas about women that were entrenched through the debates on education in the early 20th century are carried forward to the late 20th century and 21st century. The *sthreedharmam* of the woman is not very different though there are minor differences as to how the figure of the Malayali woman is imagined in the 21st century.

* * * * *

In Conclusion

In the first chapter I introduce the archives and the materials used in this thesis. I also set out the work already done in the field of women's education in Kerala and how my work differs from them. In the next chapter I set out how the concept of *sthreedharmam* is re-fashioned with the advent of education. Education itself comes to be seen as an important aspect of women's *sthreedharmam*. Concepts related to it like *sthreeswaathandryam* were frequently invoked and the writers were trying to define the limits of *sthreeswaathandryam*. Defining and discussing these concepts were one way of assimilating the changes that had come in the lifestyles, food habits, dressing styles, family relationships, financial positions, etc. of the woman and generally in society. I have also tried to show how the class/caste/religious positions of the writers colour and define these discussions on the *sthreedharmam* and education of the woman.

In the third chapter I have mapped how certain aspects or ideas about *sthreedharmam* are further concretised through formal educational structures in Kerala. This is done not just through the curriculum, but also through how the various agents imagine the role of education in women's lives. Though the government and

missionary agents were certain that women and men have different roles/duties to fulfil in life, after a certain point it was not possible for the government to separate the curriculum in place for girls and boys other than to suggest/make available certain optional subjects for girls. The general population was also not particular about having separate education for girls and boys. By the 1930s girls were aspiring towards the same kinds of returns from education as boys. There was tension between imagining woman's *dharma* as being towards the home and towards the society/nation. There was also the tension between training them in skills useful to them and giving training that would make them receptacles of culture. To a certain extent this tension was resolved by imagining that certain jobs were more suitable for women because of their intrinsic feminine qualities that were needed for those jobs (like teaching, nursing etc.). The textbooks also show how the domestic ideology and *streeethwam* were reinforced through other means.

In the fourth chapter I show how in the fictional and non-fictional material education was put forth as the defining factor in imagining the figure of the woman (and man) as being modern. In the fictional materials conjugality and the domestic sphere were the desired state and the desired space for the woman, but the women writers also question this formulation in subtle ways. The fictional and the non-fictional materials portray the different ways in which gendering of the woman/man was done in the period. Though, there are similarities in the figure of the modern woman imagined by the different writers, the caste/religious/temporal/ideological positions of the writers result in differences in the portrayal of the development of the self in both the real and imagined women.

The previous section of this chapter is not a critical analysis of the magazine or the social conditions of women in present day Kerala. It is more an indication of how

the entrenched notions about the figure of the Malayali woman from the early 20th century are carried forward into the 21st century in popular imagination through a study of the popular magazine *Vanitha*. In 21st century Kerala magazines are not the site where women's issues are debated seriously; this task has been taken over or handed over to the women's groups and the committees instituted by the government. It is also because to some degree *sthreedharmam* and *sthreethwam* are seen as being resolved.

The high levels of literacy, women's education, general health indicators, life expectancy, male-female ratio in favour of women, and the matrilineal history of the region has meant that women in Kerala have been presented as having achieved a status and progress unavailable to women from other locations. While studies in recent times (Devika and Kodoth, 2001; Mungekar et al., 2008; Sreekumar, 2001; Varma, 2012) have questioned this notion, the celebratory mood is still present in many kinds of popular discourses as I have mentioned at the beginning of this thesis. I have tried to indicate that high levels of education and access to education did not necessarily translate into autonomy for women. This is not to say that women in Kerala experienced a fall from grace in a Biblical sense. While access to formal structures of education, co-education, training in useful skills in the form of vocational training (sewing, lace-making, etc.) and so on was easier for Malayali women compared to other Indian women, these also worked in other ways to place the idea of *sthreethwam* more firmly on her. The opening up of many new professions to women in the early 20th century and the subsequent feeling among the critics/public that women were moving away from the space of the domestic and competing with men meant that women had to be careful to prove that both these charges were not true. Women were enmeshed in the space of the domestic in new ways and had to show that they had not

moved away from their *sthreedharmam*. The individuation of the Malayali woman was directed consciously or unconsciously by the different agents away from a Western understanding of the term while contradictorily being influenced by Western notions, ideas and practices in education. The tension in the writings was between imagining women's *sthreedharmam* as being related to the home/domestic space and as being towards the public/community/nation. There was also tension as to whether education should lead to female individuation or merely equip women to be capable managers of the domestic space. Yet another tension was whether women needed to be trained in useful skills or whether they needed only cultural accomplishments. There were so many different influences on Malayali women belonging to diverse communities both internal and external (other communities within Kerala, within India, and from other countries) that the *sthreedharmam* and the *sthreethwam* of the woman changed in subtle ways. Conjuality and motherhood began to be important aspects of the new woman. In the earlier joint families, the relationship between the spouses, and the duties of the mother to the child were not as important or placed solely on the shoulders of the woman. Paradoxically the woman was characterized as needing the right kind of education to take up/learn her *sthreedharmam*.

I started out with a working hypothesis that the concept *sthreedharmam* was used to construct the image of the Malayali woman and in the process *sthreedharmam* gets reconstituted. I prove this through the various chapters: the debates in the magazines, the government policies, and even the fictional materials used in this thesis show how the writers posit education as being important to equip women to take up their duties towards the family, community and the nation. *Sthreedharmam* used in the wider sense of the term encompasses these duties. The hypothesis also stated that through the debates on women's education a category called a modern Malayali

woman was constructed, which did not exist before. While I have been able to show that the idea of a modern woman is constructed through the education discourse, I have not been able to demonstrate that a homogenous category was constructed. Although the government policies and documents imagine a homogenous figure of the modern Malayali woman by eliding the communal/religious/caste differences, the writers and authors do not really make a similar move. The different writers/essayists/authors speak from their particular spatial and temporal positions. One of the difficulties of archival studies based on Kerala is that the preponderance of data on matrilineal communities and the Hindu state of Travancore tends to overshadow other communities and histories. While Robin Jeffrey's account states that nearly 51% of Malayalis were from matrilineal communities in the early 20th century, later studies have challenged this statistics (CDS, 2006). What this then means is that the history of Kerala cannot be just about the matrilineal communities and this work has tried to be as inclusive as possible treading a fine line between the matrilineal and patrilineal women's histories of education, though it has not been possible to include all the different communities and their differential access to education. However, as is clear from the census data/historical records from the 19th century (mentioned in the previous chapters), whenever Malayali women are mentioned the language used tends to see the whole of Malayalam-speaking regions as being matrilineal and this has continued to some extent in to the 21st century. A cursory look at present day government websites and the widely read magazine, *Vanitha* shows that the appearance of the generic Malayali woman is different in both the sites. While the government site superimposes a Nair image on the generic Malayali image, the image of the Malayali woman in *Vanitha* is not overtly caste or religion marked. However, there are similarities to the woman imagined by the different agents (in the 20th and

21st centuries) – their *sthreedharmam* is always directed towards the space of the domestic. When the matrilineal communities moved towards a patrilocal family set up, with importance given to the conjugal unit, the resultant idea/figure of the woman was neither entirely based on a Nair woman nor a woman from a patrilineal community. In that sense there is homogeneity to the figure of the imagined Malayali woman. I can only tentatively put forward that in official discourses there was a hegemonic image (in terms of appearance) of the Nair woman, but this hegemony did not extend into lifestyles, inheritance practices, food habits or even education.

This work contextualises the ideas and practices related to the education of Malayali woman within regional and national histories. It tracks the ways women's education was structured and transformed by indigenous, national and colonial traditions/ideas/values. Well known works by other scholars on education and women's education do not focus on the cultural trajectory of women's education. Works on the social reform period do consider and analyse the debates on women's education, but they do not focus exclusively on education and therefore do not provide the micro picture or the implications of these micro pictures for 21st century Kerala. What I hope this work has done is to provide insight into a part of women's history by capturing some of the nuances of what it meant for a Malayali woman to get educated in the early 20th century and that it was not just matriliney, missionary education and the native governments alone that made literacy and education possible for the Malayali women. The next step would be to further research the current common sense that fuels the idea of the Malayali woman and the entrenched notions regarding her *sthreedharmam* used in the wider sense of what she is supposed to be, her duties, her character, her comportment, the limits of her *swaathandryam*, etc. and to see if these can be/need to be contested.

APPENDIX I

A concise history of formal education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the 18th and 19th centuries before the advent of the missionaries

When British rule was consolidated in India in the 19th century, social, political, and religious life in India was impacted by the spread of English language. Until 1829, Persian languages were used in the courts of law in Northern India. After 1813, when funds were set aside for public education, there were arguments as to how it should be expended: classical education in Sanskrit, Persian, or Arabic, or modern Western education in English was the choices before the educationists. The prevailing opinion until 1830 was in favour of the old classical learning. However, there were some who argued that classical learning was outdated and unsuitable for the modern age. As a result, in 1817 in Calcutta, when some Indian and European Anglicists opened a school (which later came to be known as the Hindu College), the teachers were learned in the rationalist, atheistic philosophy of eighteenth century Europe. Down in the South, in Mylaudy, missionaries had started English schools for mass education by 1809.

The early system of education for Namboothiris, which existed before the advent of missionaries in Malayalam-speaking regions, was similar to that in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. This system was three fold: a) *Vidyarambham* (initiation into education), when boys and girls were given basic vernacular education; girls stopped their studies once they learned the basics of arithmetic and obtained satisfactory achievement in reading and writing; b) *Upanayanam* (leading to the master) at the age of eight, when a boy becomes *dwija* or twice born; and c) *Samavartanam* (termination of scholasticate) when the habits of a student get superseded and a person becomes ready for *grihastashrama* (position of householder).

Brahmanic/Namboothiri agencies that imparted education were *Salas*, *Mathoms*, and *Ghatikas*. In the medieval periods, *Salas* located in various places offered free lodging and boarding for Brahman students. The subjects taught included Vedas, Upanishadic philosophy, Sanskrit grammar, Hindu law, etc. *Mathoms* were the temple universities of Kerala, supported by the monarchs, which offered free education to Namboothiri youth in Vedas, philosophy, grammar, and so on. *Ghatikas* were temple centred institutions that provided Vedic and martial arts learning.

Non-brahmanic education was given in *Ezhuthupallis*, *Pallikutams*, or *Pyall* schools, which were parallel to Brahmin schooling systems. The students were taught by an *Asan* (teacher)/*ezhuthachan*/*vadhyar*. He was either an Ambalavasi, or a Sudra, or even an Ezhava. The school was owned either by him or the *kara* (the local community). The *Ezhuthupallis* were open only to caste Hindus and Christians. The subjects taught in these schools were arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division), puranas, Ayurveda, Sanskrit (lexicography, grammar, and ethical principals), mathematics (astronomy), literature and music (especially for girls). Sanskrit and higher studies in puranas were generally forbidden to non-Brahmins unless they belonged to special communities or castes like the Ganikas, who needed some knowledge of Sanskrit to decipher the ancient texts related to their caste occupations. The options open to a student after the *Ezhuthupalli* were to a) continue studentship, b) help his/her parents in business/agriculture, or 3) enrol in a *Kalari* (a martial arts training centre). Generally every *kara* or village had its *Kalari* attached to a temple. The instructors belonged to the Kurup, Panikar, or Kaniyan sub-castes. The *Kalaris* in the north were of a purely military nature, while those in the south had more of an athletic nature. Nairs, Tiyyas, Christians, and Muslims were trained in these institutions. The training given to boys was thorough and complete, while that given to

girls was limited, and was often intended to build a healthy body. However, these *Ezhuthupallis* were not widespread, and more often than not, the students did not continue for long with the *Asan*. When the government started to develop its own education system, the local teachers were co-opted by appointing them to posts in government-approved schools and letting them teach subjects like astrology, vocal singing and poetry, didactic and religious subjects.

The Portuguese missionaries started a few seminaries and other educational institutions in Kollam (near Thiruvananthapuram), Vypeen (near Kochi), Varapuzha (near Kochi), and Angamaly (north of Kochi). The Dutch, who replaced the Portuguese, did not start any seminaries/colleges, but did make their contribution to Indological studies. They compiled the *Hortus Malabaricus*, a work on the medicinal properties of Indian plants.

The state did not aid or maintain any schools until the early 19th century. In spite of the educational efforts of the Portuguese, and the Dutch, together with the indigenous system, most of the people had not attended any formal educational institution and the women were mostly illiterate during the first half of the 19th century.(Aiya, 1906; George, 2009; Gurukul, 1999; Jeffrey, 1987; Tharakan, 1984b; Thomas, 1993; Thottupuram, 1981)

APPENDIX II

Observations on Education

Summary section of the letter sent by Maharaja Rama Varma on 10 April 1882 to the British Government

To summarise the above observations:-

- I. There is a widespread impression that the Government intends to withdraw its connection with higher education.
- II. That this impression will continue until it is authoritatively denied.
- III. That it is to be regretted that a discussion had been going on for the last forty years on the comparative importance of higher and lower education, as if an antagonism existed.
- IV. That theoretically no Government is bound to educate its subject population.
- V. That if, in practice, such considerations as expediency, humanity, and the demands of civilisation make it a duty, there is no reason why the primary education of the masses form a part of that duty and the higher education of the few should not.
- VI. That the case of England where higher education is almost self-supporting cannot be applied to India owing to the obviously great difference of circumstances.
- VII. That there is not, at present, any indigenous agency competent to take up the work of higher education, if relinquished by Government.
- VIII. That to entrust it to Missionary agencies will be objectionable: - 1. The people will view it with distrust, attributing to Government a wish to thrust its religion upon

them; 2. The higher classes of natives and the non-Hindu populations are sure to keep out; 3. There is no guarantee that higher education under Missionary agencies will maintain the present high standard when the model Government colleges no longer exist.

IX. That while it may be regretted that a greater religious tone is not given to Government education, the Government will be ill-advised to take any action with a view to rectify it.

X. That it is false to say that educated natives are atheists. Education must sweep away all absurd notions, but at the same time leave the mind with a keener desire to search for the truth. And religious teaching is ready to hand to those who seek it.

XI. That primary education needs much further development is true. The Local Funds and Grant-in-Aid arrangements have already done appreciable good and are capable of extension, and ought it to be supplemented by a share of the savings effected by a wise and economical financial management.

XII. That as yet Government has not done all that could be done, especially in the Madras Presidency, to educate the nobility of the land, who in their turn may be expected to promote the education of their tenantry largely.

XIII. That the higher education in the Government Institutions has produced no good is gross calumny. In British India and out of it, educated natives are doing important public service, and each educated native exercises enlightened influence around him.

XIV. That the present plan of higher education is susceptible of great improvement so as to follow a healthier development of the faculties of the recipients is true, but that object will be least attained by the withdrawal of Government connection.

XV. That the natives that have received higher education, far from being impediments to the cause of primary education, have been valuable aids to it, is shewn by men most competent to speak on it.

XVI. That the argument of political danger to Government from the spread of higher education is too ridiculous to need any serious refutation.

That the increased expenditure on primary education should not be met by a curtailment of that on higher education, which, considering the resources of the Empire, is very moderate, and that the time is not come for carrying out of the policy contemplated by the Despatch of 1854 (Varma, 1882).

APPENDIX III

Pictures from the internet archives of the Basel missionary society housed in the University of Southern California and my personal archives

Figure 12 is the picture of a Syrian Catholic woman in her 90s.

Figure 13 is titled “Syrian Christian girls in Malabar” from 1912 (From the archives of the Basel mission).²¹⁶ Note that in the missionary pictures the girls are almost completely covered up to their elbows. These girls were probably students studying in their institution and therefore having to abide by the rules of modesty and decorum expected of missionary students.

Figure 14 is titled "Muslims women (Maplas) in Malabar" taken either in 1901 or 1912. (From the archives of Basel mission) Older Muslim women in Kerala still wear this kind of clothes, though the sleeve might not always be this long.

Figure 15 is titled “Malabar family” taken around 1926. (From the archives of the Basel mission) The members of this family are obviously modern with the father wearing pants and the mother wearing a sari.

Figure 16 is titled “Brahmin family in Malabar” in 1902. (From the archives of the Basel mission) The younger members of the family are wearing clothes in the Western style. The women on both sides could be the man’s wives.

Figure 17 is the cover page of *Vanitha Kusumam*. It also shows the writer, politician and activist Muthulakshmi Reddy.

Figure 18 is the cover page of *Bashaposhini*.

Figure 19 is titled “Nayer girls from Malabar” taken around 1914. Some of the girls have not worn the blouse under their mundu, but they have all covered their bosom.

²¹⁶ From: <http://bmpix.usc.edu/bmpix/controller/index.htm> [cited 22 December 2012].

Figure 20 is the cover page of *Indulekha* published by Oxford Paperbacks Publishing. In this depiction of a Nair woman she is wearing an upper-cloth, and minimal jewellery, much like Chandumenon's description but every different from the Nair women in the photograph.

Figure 21 is a picture from *Vanitha Kusumam* (1927) titled "English Dance". The subtitle says that though the magazine is for women's freedom it does not condone the kind of freedom that allows this kind of singing and dancing.

Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

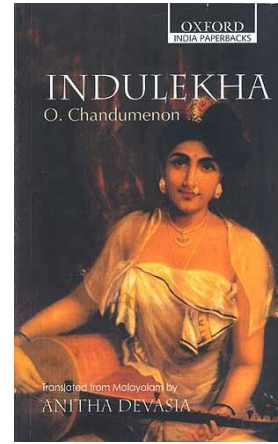
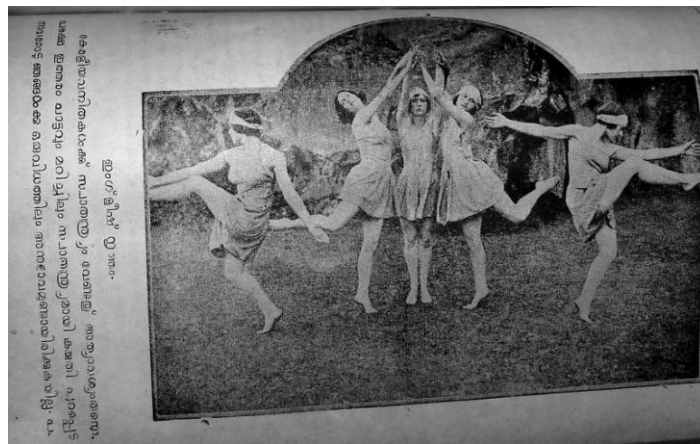


Figure 21



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