

**NOTIONS OF WOMANHOOD, FAMILY, MARRIAGE  
AND MORALITY AMONG NAMBOOTHIRIS AND  
NAIRS IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND  
EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY MALABAR**

**Thesis  
submitted to the University of Calicut  
for the award of the degree,  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN HISTORY**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Mayadevi.M, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**Notions of Womanhood, Family, Marriage and Morality among Namboothiris and Nairs in late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth Century Malabar**' is a bona fide record of research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. K. Gopalankutty, Former Head of the Department, Department of History, University of Calicut, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History. I also declare that this thesis or part thereof has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this Thesis entitled '**Notions of Womanhood, Family, Marriage and Morality among Namboothiris and Nairs in late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth Century Malabar**' submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of the University of Calicut is a bona fide research carried out by **Mayadevi.M** under my supervision and that no part of this thesis has been presented before, for the award of any degree, diploma or other similar title.

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Date:

**Dr. K. GOPALANKUTTY**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

RAE	Regional Archives Ernakulum
ILR	Indian Law Report
K.P.C.C	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
LMS	London Missionary Society
MLJ	Madras Law Journal
NAI	National Archives of India
NFRCR	Namboothiri Family Regulation Committee Report and Draft Regulation
NNPR	Native Newspaper Report
NSS	Nair Service Society
PMLC	Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council
RAK	Regional Archives Kozhikode
RMMC	Report of Malabar Marriage Commission
RMTC	Report of Malabar Tenancy Committee
RNSC	Report of Namboothiri <i>Streevidyabyasa</i> Commission (Report of Namboothiri women's education commission)
SNDP	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam



## INTRODUCTION

The history of family is as old as the history of man on earth. The family was one of the archaic institutions developed by man during his struggle, for existence, with the nature. It was formed to meet his individual needs and to provide him with a space where he could dominate without fearing any sought of competition. However the family was always 'his' and the history was never ready to view it as 'her'. The family was forged for man's comfort, to ensure the paternity of children born to his wife. A woman was to function as the facilitator and provider of his pleasure. In short family can be regarded as the first gendered structure created by man. Later the term family became synonymous for a man's property, children and women. Even though there existed different patterns of family in the world, its primary task was the socialization of its members. The significance of family was evidently expressed as, "what was obviously true of the family, was believed to be true, first of the House, next of the Tribe and lastly of the State." <sup>1</sup>

The present study attempts to trace out the drastic transformations in the family organizations of the two upper caste communities - Namboothiris and Nairs of Malabar during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by the reformism of the then period. The study also analyzes the nature of the 'new womanhood' proposed for the women, when their families were getting reorganized. Discourses on marriage and morality of women are also to be ascertained. Moreover the outlook and approaches of colonial state, legal courts, reformers, women and the orthodox elements of the respective communities on the 'women question' are to be interpreted.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Summer Maine, *Ancient Law*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1906, (first published - 1861), pp. 124-125

## Family and Marriage

Family being a fundamental organization of humanity was exposed to numerous challenges over time. However with massive strength it could outlive all the confrontations and emerged as the most successful of all the structures developed by man. The history of family reveals that throughout its existence, it had catered the needs of society, religion and state, and these institutions in turn were highly vigilant in fortifying the family from the influences of the other external agents. Family was to be preserved as it was the space where a clans' culture was being finalized and transmitted down the generations. Moreover as the family was the possessive private sphere of man it was shielded in accordance with the rules and regulations of the religion and society.

Henry Maine regarded that the most primitive form of family was the patriarchal family, the family organization of the earliest society was based on the life-long authority of the father or other ancestor over the person and property of his descendants and the authority may be called as *Patria Potestas*.<sup>2</sup> He observed that women were in bondage with the family and the archaic jurisprudence retained her in a subjection to the 'family for life'.<sup>3</sup> He pointed towards her great transformation in the women's exposition that- the ancient law subordinated women to her blood relations and the modern jurisprudence demanded her subjugation to the husband. Lewis Henry Morgan proposed that the first form of family was the Consanguine family, which was founded upon the inter marriage of brothers and sisters in a group.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.130

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147

<sup>4</sup> Morgan has pointed out five stages of family the first being the Consanguine family, the second was the Punaluan family, which was based on inter marriage of several brothers to each other's wives in a group and of several sisters to each other's husbands in a group. The third was the Syndyasmin Family, syndasmos means joining together, it was founded upon the pairing of a male

He further added that the descent in the archaic period was in the female line, so the first kind of family existed was the matrilineal family. Morgan argued that a gens- in Latin it meant groups- in the archaic period consisted of a supposed female ancestor and her children together with the children of her daughters, and of her female descendants through females in perpetuity.<sup>5</sup> He maintained that the change of descent from the female line to the male line might have occurred very remotely in the historical period. When we go by Morgan's arguments we are made to accept that in the history of man, there was stage in which women enjoyed unlimited sexual freedom along with men.

Frederick Engels, disagreeing with Morgan, argued that the change from the descent in female line to that of in the male line among the civilized people, took place within the pre-historic period.<sup>6</sup> With the emergence of private property and accumulation of wealth the reckoning of descent in the female line and the matrilineal law of inheritance was overthrown and the male line of descent and the patrilineal law of inheritance were substituted for them. Engels observed that the overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took the command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.<sup>7</sup> Claude Levi Strauss analyzing the problem of incest, regarded that the advent of incest taboo denoted the transition of humanity from 'the laws of nature to the laws

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with a female and could be regarded as the germ of Monogamian family. The fourth kind of family was the patriarchal family in which a man married several women and the last was the Monogamian family in which a man married a woman with exclusive cohabitation. Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society*, Charles H.Kerr and Company, Chicago, 1877, p. 27

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 353

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State*, Penguin Books, London, 1972, (first published -1884), p.119

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 121

of culture' and it marks the beginning of a new order.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore he maintained that, the ways adopted by kinship systems, in moving women within them through the practice of marriage, differentiated the kinship systems from each other. The anthropological analysis made it clear beyond doubt that the patriarchy was not the order of the nature; it was later formulated by man for perpetuating his dominance in the public sphere and private sphere of life. Patriarchy evolved from human relations which had passed through several stages like that of primitive promiscuity, group marriages and descent in female line.

Relationships are of two kinds, one by consanguinity or blood, second by affinity or marriage.<sup>9</sup> Hence marriages contribute towards the genesis of a family. Marriage, one of the oldest institutions of the human civilization, throughout the history of man dictated the status and fortunes of women. Every society nurtures its own explicit pattern of marriage, safeguarded by their religious faith; consequently the status of women would be disparate in distinct social organizations. Exposition of a woman in the patriarchal family would be varied from that of in the matriarchal arrangement. Marriage is regarded as so auspicious that, it is the most celebrated event of an individual's life. Following marriage a new family is born and for a woman, she is being inducted to a totally new world. It leads to the development of a new relationship between woman and man. In the pre-modern societies marriage was a practice indispensably preserved by the society for its existence, whereas in modern world the individual element is given more importance than that of the goodwill of the society. Though being a pleasant stage of one's life, the burden of marriage falls heavily on women. As regarded by Simone De Beauvoir, "the normal destiny of women is marriage,

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<sup>8</sup> Claude Levi Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Beacon Press, Toronto, 1969, (first published -1949), p. 26

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1870, pp.17-18

which practically leads to their sub-ordination to man.”<sup>10</sup> Woman are made to accept that they are to be married off, which is conceived as the prime duty of a parent, hence right from their birth, the family longs for the early marriage of its daughters.

History of marriage reveals that it was always defended by the religion and state. To maintain the sanctity of marriage the assistance of the religion and the power of state were essential. Marriage legitimates sex, which outside the boundaries of marriage is deemed to be unlawful. The religion prescribes the rituals to be solemnized during the ceremony of marriage and in the absence of which marriages have no standing in the society. However marriage ceased to be an institution that conferred on its adherent’s equal status; men always had an upper hand in marriage relations and women were invariably positioned inferior to him. Such a domineering nature of marriage has been accepted without questions, on account of the paramount significance attached to it. Marriage was regarded as a bizarre contract, which denied equal rights for its parties and one mastering the other. Besides it is sustained as a medium through which the patriarchal right is created and upheld.<sup>11</sup>

### **Matriliny and Patriliney**

The very structure of family would be based upon the pattern of kinship adopted by the community. Kinship provides the principles that govern the distribution and control of resources, the formation of groups and the placement of individuals in them and the nature of group membership. Kinship must be distinguished from descent. Kinship defines a number of statuses and their inter relationships according to a variety of rules or

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<sup>10</sup> Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (translated by H.M.Parshley), Jonathan Cape, Berkshire, 1953, (first published-1949), p. 31

<sup>11</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1988, pp.187-188

principles and distinguishes from non-kin.<sup>12</sup> A descent unit has members affiliated according to a particular rule, systematically applied. When female sex is the distinguishing criterion the descent principle is called matrilineal. In a matrilineal descent group the inheritance of titles, property and territorial rights, were through the children of its females members.<sup>13</sup> A system of government or social organization which was based on matrilineal inheritance pattern was known as matriarchy. The existence of matriarchal societies have been largely discredited, but a major breakthrough was achieved by J.J.Bachofen, who argued that there existed a period in human history when 'the matriarchate was all powerful'. In matriarchal age woman's domination was well placed on all aspects of life.<sup>14</sup> He was of the opinion that all cultures of the modern period exhibit the vestiges of matriarchal age. According to him matriarchy was followed by patriarchy and preceded by unregulated hetaerism.

When male sex is the distinguishing criterion the descent principle is called patrilineal. The membership to a kinship group was determined only through male and the children of men would inherit the group's property. The system of government or social setting in which the eldest male member

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<sup>12</sup> David M.Schneider, Introduction: The Distinctive Features of matrilineal Descent Groups, in David M.Schneider and Kathleen Gough (ed), *Matrilineal Kinship*, A.H.Wheeler and Company, Allahabad, 1972, (first published -1961), p. 2

<sup>13</sup> Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, (first published- 1967),p. 43

<sup>14</sup> J.J.Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J.Bachofen*, Princeton University Press, 1992, (first published 1861), p.86. However in the light of modern researches Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson argued that the domestic authority of women in matrilocal societies did not produce the mirror image of the domestic authority of men in patrilocal societies, largely due to the absence of female control over the affairs outside the household. Staphanie Coontz and Peta Henderson, 'Property Forms, Political Power and Female Labour in the origins of Class and State Societies' in Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (ed), *Women's Work, Men's Property: The Origins of Gender and Class*, Verso, London, 1986, pp. 108-155

becomes the ruler, it was known as patriarchy. Gerda Lerner has defined patriarchy as the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally the deprived of rights, influence, and resources. She argued that even on the limited geographic terrain of Ancient Near East there must have been many different ways in which the transition to patriarchy took place.<sup>15</sup> So the transition was not unilateral, it depended upon a variety of social conditions. From the period when, there was a shift from descent traced in female to that traced in male line till the present period patriarchy has maintained its unquestioned dominance throughout the world, irrespective of religion or culture.

The intra familial relationships, responsibilities of parents and pattern of inheritance would be distinct in these two kinship organizations. In matrilineal families, affinity would be towards the matri kin, because they would be together throughout the lifetime. Relations with the members of father's clan would be strong in patrilineal families. However the bond among members of the family depended on the pattern of residence followed. In a duolocal residence there would be limited room for conjugal relations. When matrilocal households provides considerable freedom for women, the patrilocal residence patterns subjects women to the domination of husband's kin.

### **Family and Marriage in India**

India had a patriarchal joint family, which was the familial form

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<sup>15</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p.38

prescribed by Vedic tradition and this North Indian upper caste ideal of family was later promoted as all India Hindu family.<sup>16</sup> However whether the head of the Vedic Aryan family possessed wider power and authority as that of a Roman father was always debated. The relations between the head of the Aryan family and his descendants it was stated were marked by filial love and not by fear.<sup>17</sup> Although the nature of his authority is vague, the head of the family had absolute control over the property and family members, of three generations. However patriarchy was not the single system of kinship that had existed in India; the cultural and religious diversity was manifested in the kinship patterns also. Irawathi Karve's study of the Indian kinship systems based on linguistic territories has revealed the prevalence of various patterns of kinship and family organizations. She has noted the existence of unique kinship structures, for instance in the central zone, consisting of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, there were some castes, which though being patriarchal like the Northern region had adopted certain customs of the matrilineal castes.<sup>18</sup> Moreover in the Southern zone many castes and a group of Muslims had matrilineal matrilineal family; in eastern zone tribes like Khasi of Assam followed matrilineal kinship.<sup>19</sup>

Discrete kinship structures developed exclusive marriages patterns for its adherents. In India the status of women and notions regarding women's lives in the bygone ages have been determined and interpreted on the basis of the Vedic literature. Dharma sastras and Grihya Sastras are relied upon for

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<sup>16</sup> Tulasi Patel, *The Family in India: Structure and Practice*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 2005, p. 24

<sup>17</sup> K.M.Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1972, (first published -1966), p.217

<sup>18</sup> Castes like the Ahir, the Gadhava Charan and the Garasia in Kathiawad region adopted a custom by which a man of these castes married mother's brother's daughter. Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organization in India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, (first published -1953), p. 165

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.327



analyzing women's life in the ancient period. The colonial scholarship and the later nationalist historiography discussed and debated the conditions of women in India and this led to the development of 'history of women in India'. The feminist scholarship has coined a term 'Brahmanical Patriarchy' for analyzing the socio-economic and religious impositions laid by Hinduism on women's life. It is defined as a set of rules and institutions in which caste and gender are linked each other, each shaping the other and where women are crucial in maintaining the boundaries between the castes.<sup>20</sup> Under Brahmanical Patriarchy women of the upper castes are regarded as gateways - literally the points of entry into the caste system. In short it can be argued that the Brahmanical patriarchy made women a subordinate gender and relegated them into the status of 'Sudra' of the traditional Varna order.<sup>21</sup> Rigvedic society was never antagonistic towards women, but by the period of Sutras and Brahmanas women were put under severe restrictions by the Brahmanical patriarchy.

Nature of womanhood was designed to serve the needs of the patriarchy; hence throughout India different social structures and ideologies were constructed for exploiting women. The family was significant more for women; consequently this significance was converted to women's responsibility, which in turn led to her subordination.<sup>22</sup> Women were made the custodians of the tradition and to preserve the purity of the caste women were kept under strict seclusion. Status of women in the family and within the society started degrading with the increase in the rigidity of caste system.

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<sup>20</sup> Uma Chakravathi, *Gendering Caste Through Feminist Lens*, Stree, Calcutta, 2013 (first published -2003), p. 34

<sup>21</sup> "He shall avoid seeing women, sudras, dead bodies, black birds and dogs"- Paraskara 11.8.3, quoted in Nripendra Kumar Dutt, *Origin of Caste System in India*, vol 1, Firma KL Mukopadhyay, Calcutta, 1968, pp. 195-6

<sup>22</sup> Veena Das, 'Indian Women: Work, Power and Status' in B.R.Nanda (ed), *Indian Women*, Vikas Publishing House, 1976, p. 184

One of the most powerful patriarchies of the world, Hinduism cautiously framed its own institution of marriage. Marriage is regarded as vital to the maintenance of one's caste status, defined as one's standing among the smaller segmentary subdivisions within the caste. Marriage was constructed as a turning point of socio-ritual existence, and was the most significant rites of passage for men and possibly the most significant one for women.<sup>23</sup> Laws of marriage became stringent from the period of Brahmanas onwards. Attention was given to consanguinity, marriage within the family and that with kinsmen on father's side and mother's side was banned for four or five generations.<sup>24</sup> Restrictions were placed on widow remarriage and in the life of widows. In Rig Veda only negligible restrictions were placed on marriage and there was no aversion regarding widow marriage. The custom of widow remarrying husband's brother was quite general. Rules of sexual morality were not very high among the population at that time. Law givers of the time took a more lenient view of human weakness. Moreover it can be noted that an unlawful wife was not, therefore even excluded from the sacred roles by the side of her husband, the only injunction being a confession of her unlicensed amours.<sup>25</sup> In ancient India relations between sexes changed into 'social constructs' and gender became means for discrimination. Womanhood in patriarchy is an ascribed status, defined by certain norms which are indispensable for the continuance and furtherance of patriarchy. Indian womanhood is constituted by a multi layered accretion of myths, which were imagined, defined or invented as per the needs of the then society.<sup>26</sup> Consequently the paraphernalia of womanhood along with its definition were transformed with the changing circumstances of life.

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<sup>23</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2010, p. 225

<sup>24</sup> Nripendra Kumar Dutt, op.cit., p. 183

<sup>25</sup> ibid., pp . 94-95

<sup>26</sup> Jasodhara Bagchi (ed) *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Sangham Books, Hyderabad, 1995, introduction.

There was no gender differentiation of labour during the beginnings of human life on earth. But the circumstances in which the early humans lived were extremely dangerous; hence for the survival into adulthood of at least two children for each coupling pair, necessitated many pregnancies for each woman. Thus, we may assume that it was absolutely essential for group survival that most nubile women devote most of their adulthood to pregnancy, child-bearing, and nursing.<sup>27</sup> But with the discovery of agriculture on a large scale, women were confined to the household. In a predominantly agricultural country like India, women's labour was essential and inevitable as most part of the unskilled labour in this sector was done by them. Kumkum Roy argued that the control of women's procreative power provides access to the means of generating potential labourers. The control over the labour of women and channelizing it into specific forms of social reproduction located in the patrilineal system were probably integral to the development and maintenance of agrarian relation in general and agricultural labor force in particular.<sup>28</sup> Caste system led to the development of a social division of labour and a well defined sexual division of labour. For instance in agriculture women can engage themselves in water regulation, transplantation, weeding, but not in ploughing.<sup>29</sup> What women were to perform in house and out of the domains of house were determined by the patriarchal concerns of a society.

Moreover the traditional agrarian structure of India was constructed in accordance with the caste hierarchy. Hence the upper caste became the land owners and lower caste turned out to be tenants.<sup>30</sup> Women were also like the Sudras who had no permanent right on land. Women had no right to property,

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<sup>27</sup> Gerda Lerner, op.cit., pp. 40-41

<sup>28</sup> Kumkum Roy, op.cit., p. 55

<sup>29</sup> Neera Desai and Maitheryi Krishnaraj, *Women and Society in India*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 33

<sup>30</sup> Vinita Chandra, *Gender Relations in Early India*, Rawat Publications, Delhi, 2010, p. 159

to partition nor do they inherit naturally. Though women had no right over immovable property, in the case of movable property- ornaments, jewellery, dress- women's rights on their possession were recognized. Later this movable property came to known as *stridana*. But in course of time she lost her right over *stridana* and it became a property of the groom's household.

Marriage was recognized by legislators as taking the place of sacrament of initiation for women, as it was the only ritual in the life of a woman performed according to Vedas. Moreover there was no sacrifice, pious practice or fast which women concerns in particular; she must cherish and respect her husband and then she will be honored in heaven.<sup>31</sup> There has been a great dichotomy in the laws and rituals sanctioned by custom which are strongly tilted against women. Virginity at the time of marriage was compulsory for women and not for men.<sup>32</sup> The entire wedding ritual was oriented towards man's happiness and pleasure; the wife vowed to obey the husband's wish implicitly. Marriage was to ensure the continuity of man's lineage by begetting a male child, besides a father attains immortality only through his son.

The reconstruction of women's history on the basis of Brahmanical literature does not lead to a total history of Indian women as it dealt only with the women of upper caste and it reflected the ideas of privileged classes. However with the influx of colonialism and western ideological tracts historiography in India underwent considerable transformations. The colonial writers regarded the deteriorated condition of women in India as an indicator of the uncivilized nature of Indian society.<sup>33</sup> The condition of the familial

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<sup>31</sup> Clarisse Bader, *Women in Ancient India*, Routledge, Oxon, 1925, p. 17

<sup>32</sup> Andal.N, *Woman and Indian Society: Options and Constraints*, Rawatt Publications, New Delhi, 2002, p. 22

<sup>33</sup> James Mill argued that women's position could be used as an indicator of society's advancement. In his words, "Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted. As the societies

realm was used as yardstick by which backwardness of the colonized was measured and by which the imperial domination was legitimated. They interpreted Indian family system and sexual relations as archaic and uncivilized, and were projected as to be reformed. Colonized societies were characterized by ‘passionate unreason’ and ‘unruliness’ with regard to sexual behaviour, and it was common that native religious and other belief systems justified ‘loose’ sexual mores.<sup>34</sup>

In response the nationalist the historians carved out a ‘golden age’ for Indian women, which was to be the Rig Vedic period.<sup>35</sup> However Altaker’s reconstruction of Indian women’s history was criticized by historians, as he reflected the opinion of nationalist writers who wanted a blind denial of the image in European writings, along with a physical regeneration of Hindus.<sup>36</sup> The emergent new middle class was disturbed by the colonial portrayal of Indian social conditions and inaugurated an era of social reform programme,

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advanced the condition of the weaker sex is gradually improved, till they associate on equal terms with the men, and occupy the place of voluntary and useful coadjutors”. James Mill, *The History of British India*, 2 vols., Chelsea House, 1968,(first published – 1817), pp.309-310.

<sup>34</sup> Sanjay Srivastava, *Sexuality Studies*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 6-7

<sup>35</sup> A.S. Altaker, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1956 (first published - 1938). Muhammed Abdul Ghani wrote an article in which he argued that the image created and popularized by the colonial writers regarding Indian women was far from the reality. He noted that both the major religions of India duly respect their women. Reckoning the fact that Indian women were uneducated, he claimed that they were as moral as the women of Western countries. Muhammed Abdul Ghani, ‘Social Life and Morality in India’, *International Journal of Ethics*, vol.7, no.3, 1897, pp. 301-314

<sup>36</sup> Uma Chakravathi, Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History, *Social Scientist*, vol. 16, No. 8 (Aug., 1988), pp. 44-52. Romila Thapar also questioned the concept of golden age for Indian women. Romila Thapar, ‘Being A Woman In Earlier Times’, in Devaki Jain and C.P.Sujaya (ed) *Indian Women Revisited*, Publication Division Ministry of Information And Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 13-14

in which the women question loomed large. But how women were to be reformed and the extent to which they were to be exposed to the forces unleashed by colonialism were 'selected by the nationalist elite.' Hence the 'women question' was well placed in the home/world or ghar/bahar dichotomy of the western educated young Indians.<sup>37</sup> The amelioration of women's life was to be achieved by negating many of the customs to which the community had adhered for centuries, hence the reformers resorted to legislative interventions with the co-operation of the colonial state.<sup>38</sup> Consequently women's education and sartorial reforms were proposed, for the creation of 'well mannered middle class Indian women.'

Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid have made distinction between two categories of social movements that addressed the women question, and they were the 'modernizing' of patriarchal modes of regulating women and the

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<sup>37</sup> Women's reform was conceived to be realized within the limits sanctioned by traditional patriarchy, and they feared that if endowed with freedom women may go astray and may imitate the European women. Partha Chatterjee, Nation and its Fragments, in *Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, Oxford University press, 2004, (first published - 1999), pp. 120-121; Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp.32-33. Defending indigenous familial culture by redefining and restructuring, against the colonial interpretations was not confined to India; similar attempts took place in various places colonized by the imperial forces. Lisa Pollard's analysis of the familial reforms enunciated by the nationalists of Egypt reveals their desperate attempts to redefine the domesticity and maternalism, which were considered to be inevitable for the liberation of Egypt. The family was used as the arena through which nationalist discourse could be translated into concrete practice. Lisa Pollard, 'The Promise of Things to Come, The image of the Modern Family in State – Building, Colonial Occupation, and Revolution in Egypt, 1805-1922', in Lynne Haney and Lisa Pollard(ed), *Families of a New World: Gender, Politics and State Development in a Global Context*, Routledge, New York, 2003, pp. 17-39

<sup>38</sup> The colonial intervention in the social practices and customs began with the abolition of *sati* and the interpretations adopted by the state and reformers were analyzed by Lucy Carroll. Lucy Carroll, Law, 'Custom and Statutory Social Reform: the Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act of 1896', in J.Krishnamurthy(ed), *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and the State*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, pp. 1-26

‘democratizing’ of gender relations both in the home and the work place.<sup>39</sup> Social movements which try to change both the base and ideologies of a specific patriarchal formation may be termed as ‘democratizing’, for instance working class and peasant movements. On the other hand the social reform movements which provide a more ‘liberal space’ for middle class women comes under the category of modernizing movements. The historical role of the modernizing movements was that of ‘recasting’ women for companionate marital relationships and attendant familial duties.<sup>40</sup> When accepting this broad classification, the entire genre of reform programmes in colonial India, which were spearheaded by the caste organizations would fall into the label of ‘modernizing’ movements.

### **Focus of the Study**

The present study intends to delineate the trajectories of reform suggested for the women of the two communities - Namboothiris and Nairs- of Malabar, by the middle class. The study attempts to enquire into the ideologies that undermined the traditional notions and paved way for the resurgence of the communities. These two communities had developed a unique inter community relationship, and dominated the region for centuries. Paradoxically the kinship patterns adopted by Namboothiris and Nairs were absolutely dissimilar, as the Namboothiris followed patriarchy and Nairs embraced matriliney and the system was locally known as *marumakkathayam*.<sup>41</sup> Hence the lives of women in two kinship organization

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<sup>39</sup> Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid(ed), *Recasting Women*, Kali for Women In Association With The Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi, 1989, (Reprint), p.19

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.20

<sup>41</sup> The matrilineal system of Kerala was known as *marumakkathayam*, the term came from *marumakkal*- nephews or nieces. The word has been coined due to the unusual relationship between uncle and his nephews and nieces. Woman held the property and it was handed down to her children, ie. children of the male members of the family were denied succession to their father’s property.

are to be ascertained. Consequently the reformism evolved a ‘new womanhood’, which was dictated by the then middle class men of the region. The nature of this proposed ideal for women is to be analyzed for deducing the conception of women’s issues by the reformers. The suggested ‘new womanhood’ carried within its fold a definite standard of morality to be observed by women. Though the stimulus for such a morality came from the notions of Victorian morality, the indigenous circumstances and impulses that led to its development are to be evaluated.<sup>42</sup>

In the post independent years Kerala maintained admirably higher level of women’s education, both at the primary and university level. Furthermore women of Kerala became visible either as civil servants, artists and sports women at the national and international scenario. Presence of women in the public sphere of the state was far higher when compared with the women of other states. Even though inhibitions regarding women’s expositions prevailed in Kerala society, the social conditions were never antagonistic towards women. The reason for such a marked departure from the pan-Indian womanhood is to be analyzed. Moreover when matriliney ceased to exist even among the tribal people, many communities of Kerala followed this

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At the same time property management was done by the men of the family and a unique relation developed between uncles and nephews and nieces as they continue to live together in the same household throughout their life. See the writings of Moyarath Shankaran for details on the affinity between uncles and nephews. Shankaran, Moyarath *Ente Jeevitha Kadha*, Rachana Books, Kollam, 2006, (reprint ); Janardanan Moyarath, *Moyarath Shankaran Atmakadhayum Charithrasmaranakalum*, (in Malayalam) Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2013, (first published- 2012)

<sup>42</sup> George L. Mosse observed that, “what began as bourgeoisie morality in eighteenth century, in the end became everyone’s morality. The price of this morality depended upon how the conflict between society’s felt need for cohesion and tolerance of the outsider can be resolved.” George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1985, p.200



inheritance pattern in twentieth century. Even when the economic basis of matriliney disappeared, the vestiges of matriliney remained in Kerala among certain communities. The kinship system of matriliney cannot be studied in isolation as it is intricately historically interconnected with land relations, caste system and marriage. At the same time the matrilineal system followed by the Nair community and the resultant impact on women's fortune could be interpreted only when the familial organization of Namboothiris are scrutinized. This in turn unveils the life of another women community, the *antharjanams*, who were subjected to extreme repression by the application of Brahmanical patriarchy. These two groups of women were exposed to exclusive transmutation in twentieth century by the then reformism.

### **Territory and Period of Study**

The territorial extent of the study is confined to Malabar, which was one of the three political divisions of the present Kerala state in the colonial period. Though the social systems of the other two regions – Travancore and Cochin were almost similar, there existed definite disparities in the political organization, land relations and also in the customs and practices. Hence the two princely states of Travancore and Cochin are not included in the purview of the study, but parallels have drawn from those regions to substantiate the changes that took place in Malabar. The foreign travelers who visited the region have described Malabar as an 'exotic region'. This exoticism was created by an amalgamation of a unique culture, belief system, tradition, caste and community patterns and relationships. Malabar do not exist in the prevailing administrative divisions of Kerala state. It is just a cultural entity and nostalgia. The name Malabar was used to denote the strip of land between the South Canara on North and Cochin State on the South. On the Eastern side Malabar is guarded by its natural barrier, the Western Ghats. These mountains have played an important role in shaping the culture of the region.

All the external contacts of Malabar were mainly through the sea due to the existence of Ghats. Hence it was the landward isolation of the Malabar which has been responsible for the survival of the matrilineal system.<sup>43</sup>

Political history of Malabar provides diversified picture of struggles and resistances of her people. Finally at the end of all hostilities Malabar was virtually under the control of the British and the treaty of Srirangapattanam formally provided for its annexation to British Empire in 1792. Malabar district became a part of Madras Presidency on 21 May 1800. Malabar had a traditional division of North Malabar and South Malabar. North Malabar consisted of the Taluks of Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Calicut and Wayanad and South Malabar was comprised of the Taluks of Eranad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and Palakkad. This division was of great significance for the caste ridden traditional society of Malabar. Caste and community concerns were very strong in Malabar and it coloured all aspects of human life and its agrarian settlements and relations. The social conditions of Malabar made people believe that women enjoyed a peculiar social status hitherto unknown to the rest of the world. This is clearly evident from the words of Mrs. Cousins, 'Malabar was a heaven for wives.'<sup>44</sup> The characterization was prompted by the existence of matrilineal system, which provided women with inalienable property rights and a 'celebrated sense of freedom.'

The study would cover a time span ranging from the last decades of nineteenth century to the early decades of twentieth century. This was a period when the colonial ideologies profoundly influenced the economy and society of Malabar and the region witnessed the emergence of an

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<sup>43</sup> J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Functions and Origin*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1986, p.13

<sup>44</sup> Margret Cousins, Malabar Bharyamarude Swarghamanu, *Mathrubhumi*, 28/05/1929

intelligentsia, which was the result of the modern education. The emergent class interpreted the traditional customs and relationships on the basis of the new knowledge they acquired. Moreover it was in the same period that the tenurial system of Malabar was exposed to severe criticisms as it maintained feudal relations and repressed the servile class. Consequently the turmoil in agrarian system led to repercussions in the traditional family structure and marriage practices. The colonial state made several inroads into the social relations and customs of people by instituting commissions and through legislative interventions. The period of study is of great historic importance in the history of Malabar as it led to the collapse of the matrilineal system and inaugurated a new age for the women of Namboothiri and Nair communities.

## **Sources**

The cardinal concern of the present study is the analyzis of the changing notions of womanhood, family, marriage and morality, hence for accomplishing the objective, a wide range of sources are used and interpreted. The primary sources consulted for the study include archival records, reports of various commissions and Newspaper reports. Archival records consist of files and orders issued by various departments, bills presented by legislative members on matters related to the study and the Acts enunciated by the government. The opinion of general public on the bills and Acts, collected by the government also constitute one of the major sources as it reveals the general will of the population. Similarly the proceedings of the legislative assembly are of extreme importance as they directly disclosed the position taken by different agencies on the issue. The numerous commissions constituted by the Madras government to enquire the agrarian issues and revenue settlements provide valuable insights on the property holding of the joint families of Malabar. Census reports provide crucial statistics on the distribution of population, property ownership and civil condition of people.

The educational reports prepared by the government on the Western circle of Madras Presidency which included Malabar pointed towards the progress of education in the region. Native Newspaper Reports and back volumes of *Mathrubhumi* and *Yoghakshemam* Newspaper helped to analyze the views of the people of those periods.

The consolidations of indigenous castes by attributing them with certain characteristic features were first accomplished by the foreigners who visited this region as traders, explorers, pilgrims, missionaries and tourists. Totally new to the circumstances and prevailing social concepts, they described each and every minute details of Malabar. Travelogues of Durate Barbosa, Francis Buchanan, and Alexander Hamilton dealt extensively with the Namboothiris and Nairs, their customs and practices were analyzed from European point of view. Similarly they assigned certain hereditary professions for each caste through their writings. However these works were of utmost importance as they exposed the social life of Malabar during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The establishment of colonial jurisprudence led to the documentation of wide range of information. As the interpretations made by the colonial courts altered the traditional customs and practices of these communities, the judicial records are of vital significance in this study. There were innumerable cases regarding marriage, maintenance, adoption and partition of joint family property of both the communities before the courts. The cases cited in Indian Law Reports, Madras Law Journal and other publications containing High Court decisions were referred. Similarly the Thalassery Court Records of late nineteenth century, deposited with the Regional Archives, Kozhikode are also consulted as they dealt with the familial and tenurial issue of North Malabar.

The magazines of the then period provided primary information on the problem being analyzed. Magazines published by the caste organizations

promulgate their ideology and course of reform. When magazines like *Nairsamudayaparishkari*, *Nairsamudayaparishkarini*, *Nair* and *Service* propagated the community reform programmes of the Nair community, *Unninamboothiri*, *Mangalodayam*, *Sudarsanam* popularized the ideological background of Namboothiri reform movement. Similarly the women's magazines of the period like *Sarada*, *Lakshmibai*, *Vanithakusumam*, *Vanithamithram*, *Mahila* and many others discussed the issues relating to women of the period. Several matters were taken up by these magazines like that of the education of women, concern of her morality and women's freedom. At the same time women of Kerala were acquainted with the movements for women's liberation in other regions. These magazines are of extreme importance as the transforming notions of the society were evidently reflected through this medium. Similarly numerous literary works in the forms of novels, plays and short stories are analyzed in this study; beginning with *Indulekha* the nineteenth and twentieth century witnessed the emergence of 'reform literature'.

As the present study deals with the notions of society, field work is essential for the authenticity of the analysis. Accordingly several people in the districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad and Thrissur were consulted to collect information of the reform movement and the life of women in the then period. The oral evidence is of great importance as it forms the expression of their memories and experiences. Interviews allowed me to gain insights and gather information which I would not have received from archival and other published sources. Online resources were also utilized for the study, websites like JSTOR, academia, library genesis and shodganga were used for collecting information.

## Review of Literature

Systematic compilation of history started in India with colonial conquest of the region, as the conquerors were desperately in need of acquainting themselves with the culture and tradition of the land. As observed by Bernard S. Cohn, the knowledge of the history and the practices of Indian states were seen as the most valuable form of knowledge on which to build the colonial state.<sup>45</sup> The East India Company and later the British government in India promoted the collection and recording of India's early history. Similarly the South Indian historiography also developed out of the administrative needs of the colonial regime. Imperial rulers wanted to understand the people whom they govern, without which the continuance of hegemonic control over the colonies would be impossible. Consequently enormous volume of literature including dictionaries, commentaries on local customs and historical traditions were compiled on South India. In the elaboration of governmental apparatuses in late-eighteenth-century southern India, the compilation of colonial archives and collections represent the radical shifts entailed in the reorganization of knowledge that accompany the transition to colonialism.<sup>46</sup> Apart from the collection of information regarding the colonized, the interest shown in compilation of history was to present it as a justification for the establishment of colonial rule. Thus the corpus of knowledge about the subjugated nation were reconstructed and transformed by creating new categories as oppositions between the colonizer and colonized, European and Asian, traditional and modern and West and East.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p.5

<sup>46</sup> Rama Sundari Mantena, *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India Antiquarianism and Philology, 1780–1880*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012, pp. 9-10

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Driks, in Bernard S. Cohn, op.cit., p. ix

The Orient was described as ‘the other’ of the Occident; ie. when England was civilized and democratic, India was labeled as uncivilized and despotic.

Malabar being a commercial centre frequently visited by traders from different part of the world found way to the travelogues produced in various periods. Along with the geographical peculiarities, the social conditions of Malabar astonished the visitors and they wrote on it extensively. The travelogues expressed the amazement over the existence of matrilineal system and discussed about the polyandrous nature of marital relations followed by some communities.<sup>48</sup> Many of them analyzed the factors that led to the development of a Brahmin community, the Namboothiris, who were exclusive from the Brahmins found elsewhere. Unfortunately the stereotypical observations made by these travelers formed the basis for the colonial knowledge, upon which colonial administration was instituted. Similarly another body of knowledge was created in the form of reports published by numerous commissions founded by the colonial government for enquiring into the indigenous land system, revenue structure, social and health conditions. Documentation of local aspects was achieved through the census reports, settlement registers, Gazetteers, manuals and surveys. The ethnographic data provided by Frederick Fawcett and Edgar Thurston

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<sup>48</sup> The travelogues include the works like , Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, vol. II, T.Cadell and W.Davis, London, 1807, Francis Day, *The Land of Perumals or Cochin its past and its Present*, 1990, (first published-1863) , Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindosthan and the Adjacent Countries*, vol.II, John Murray, London, 1820, Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Oxford University press, Delhi, 1987, (first published - 1906), Durate Barbosa, *The Book of Durate Barbosa: An Account of Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and Their Inhabitants*, vol.2, Haklyut Society, London, 1921, (first published - 1812), Thomas and James Swords, *The Nayars*, in *The Newyork Magazine*, vol.II, 1791, Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, vol.I, Argonaut Press, 1930,(first published - 1727), George Sale, Archibald Bolwer, John Campbell and George Psalmanazzar, *An Universal History From the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time*, vol.VI, London, 1759

enriched the knowledge about the Namboothiris and Nairs, their sub castes, rituals and customs.<sup>49</sup>

The literature on the Namboothiris and the Nairs was augmented by the anthropological interpretations on the family structure, kinship patterns and inheritance. Edmund Leach argued that the Nairs traditionally had no marriage in the popular parlance of the term, but only a 'relationship of perpetual affinity.' He also regarded that the notion of fatherhood was lacking among Nairs.<sup>50</sup> Kathleen Gough rejected the observation of Leach on the concept of paternity and held that for a Nair child to become a member of the mother's clan, the paternity of the child must be vouched by a man of the same caste or of a caste higher than that of the mother. Gough's field work among Nairs delineated the customs of Nairs in North Kerala and Central Kerala. She analyzed the significance of *enangan* lineages in the marriage rituals of Nairs. Moreover she firmly believed that the Nair had a kind of group marriage.<sup>51</sup> Nur Yalman regarded that *thali* rite was to maintain the caste purity of women and in communities where the marital bond is weak and easily broken; there these kinds of mock-marriages would be associated with high ritual significance.<sup>52</sup> Louis Dumont, Melinda Moore and C.J.Fuller also analyzed the peculiarities of Nair marriages and family organization, but on the whole the anthropologists were eager to find parallels, from the

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<sup>49</sup> Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. V- M to P, Government Press Madras, 1909, Fred Fawcett, *Nambutiris-Notes on Some of the Peoples of Malabar*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2001(reprint), Frederick Fawcett, *Nayars of Malabar*, Madras Government Museum, Madras, 1901

<sup>50</sup> E.R.Leach, 'Polyandry, Inheritance and the Definition of Marriage', *Man*, 1955, vol. 55, pp. 182-186

<sup>51</sup> Kathleen Gough, 'Nayars and the Definition of Marriage', in Patricia Uberoi (ed) *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 237-256

<sup>52</sup> Nur Yalman, 'On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 93, no. 1 (Jan. - Jun., 1963), pp. 25-58



indigenous communities, either for fitting it within the anthropological theories or to disprove the existing ones. Joan P. Mencher argued that the primogeniture followed by Namboothiris along with their unique familial structure, the political position of the Namboothiris, more importantly their economic position prevented them from making any sort of gradual adaptation to the changed circumstances.<sup>53</sup> The absence of pre-puberty marriage and the rituals similar to *thalikettukalyanam* among the Namboothiris have been explained by Nur Yalman. He observed the purpose of pre-puberty marriage was to ensure the sexual purity of the women, whereas for the Namboothiris the women's purity was effectively guarded by the vigilant seclusion of women.<sup>54</sup>

The traditional society of Malabar with its caste system and ritualistic life was surveyed in the works of authors like K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Ellamkulam Kunjan Pillai, T.K.Velu Pillai and C.Achuta Menon. At the same time historians like M.G.S.Narayanan, M.R.Raghava Varrier, K.N.Ganesh and Kesavan Veluthat provided critical interpretations on several traditional notions of the society. T.C.Varghese, P.Radhakrishnan and V.V.Kunhikrishnan studied about the complex land relations that had prevailed in Malabar. These studies provide details on the *janmi-kudiyan* issues which in turn led to social upheavals and finally culminated in the breakdown of joint families. On the other hand K.N.Panikkar through his magnum opus, *Against Lord and State* and numerous articles examined the social changes experienced by Malabar. Moreover he analyzed the modern socio-economic forces that undermined the traditional marriage and family organization of Nair. As both the communities in the purview of the study were subjected to redefinitions by the colonial jurisprudence, the legal studies

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<sup>53</sup> Joan P.Mencher, 'Namboothiri Brahmins: An Analysis of a Traditional Elite in Kerala', *Journal of Asia and African Studies*, July 1966, vol.1, pp.183-196.

<sup>54</sup> Nur Yalman, op.cit.

undertaken by K.Sreedhara Varrier, P.V.Balakrishnan and C.Vasanthakumari are of utmost importance.<sup>55</sup> They studied about the process of legislation under the initiative of the colonial state and discussed on the matters related with the management of the tarawad properties. These works though detached from the socio-economic milieu of the then society, analyzed the development of a new code of customs for Namboothiris and Nairs, through the judgments made by English jurists.

Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad legitimized through his writings the Namboothiri dominance and the subordination of other communities in the then social structure. He was obsessed of the belief that it was Nairs who dragged Namboothiris into *sambandham* relations and thereby disturbing their pious life. However his study helps to reveal the power relations that had existed in *illoms* and the consequent subordination of women.<sup>56</sup> C.K.Namboothiri's articles on the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha exposed the tussle for power between the traditionalists and reformers that had existed within the organization. He observed that the modern ideologies imbibed by the Namboothiri youth led to the emancipation of *antharjanams*. I.V.Babu has made a pioneering approach in analyzing the modernization of the Namboothiri community following the reform of twentieth century. Though he touched upon women's issues, he failed to

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<sup>55</sup> K.Sreedhara Varrier, *Marumakkathayam and Allied Systems of Law*, Cochin, 1969, P.V.Balakrishnan, *Matrilineal System in Malabar*, Satyavani Prakasham, Kannur, 1981, C.Vasantha Kumari, *Judiciary and Social Change in British Malabar 1792-1940*, IRISH, Tellicherry, 2012

<sup>56</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad has written several books including his autobiography. Though his works were a legitimization of Namboothiri dominance, they are abundant with information on the Namboothiri community and daily life in *illoms*.

unveil the nature of reformism which was firmly grounded within the Brahmanical patriarchy.<sup>57</sup>

Marjatta Parpola through a field study among the Namboothiris in Panjal, tried to figure out the life of women in the most powerful patriarchy of Kerala. Her analysis was largely to delineate the religious roles of women and their contribution towards the domestic life of Namboothiris.<sup>58</sup> J.Devika observed that the reform programme of twentieth century Kerala was a gendered project, in which women were made the 'receivers of reform' and men were to assume the responsibility of emancipating women.<sup>59</sup> Studying the then writings on women she remarked that the entire discourses were for the creation of a new Namboothiri community, where women would be modernized according to the needs of the 'new patriarchy.' The work *Kulastreeyum Chanthapennum Udayathegane* of J.Devika, is a historical analysis of women's life in Kerala and about the patriarchal notions which prevented women from acquiring dominance in the society.<sup>60</sup>

Robin Jeffery's *Decline of Nair Dominance Society and Politics in Travancore, 1848-1908*, looked into the disintegration of Nairs' dominance in South Travancore, owing to the new forces unleashed by colonial agents. He argued that the contemporary transformations among other castes and communities along with political changes of the period led to a decline in the status of Nairs. He observed that the cash economy, western education and the

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<sup>57</sup> I.V.Babu, *Keraleeya Navodanavum Namboothirimarum*, (Mal) Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2001

<sup>58</sup> Marjatta Parpola, *Kerala Brahmins in Transition: A Study of a Namboothiri Family*, Finnish Oriental Society, Helsinki, 2000

<sup>59</sup> J.Devika, *Engendering Individuals: The language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2007

<sup>60</sup> J.Devika, *Kulastreeyum Chanthapennum Undaayathengine*, (Mal) CDS, Trivandrum, 2010

missionary activities contributed to the breakdown of Nairs' domination.<sup>61</sup> Saradmoni opened up new ground of enquiry with a wide range of materials including the analysis of legal documents, reports of law reform committees, materials generated in the wake of social reform programme. In the work *Matriliny Transformed*, she observed that the central feature of matriliney was that it conferred on women permanent right to maintenance by and residence in their natal home.<sup>62</sup> G.Arunima rejecting the anthropological studies tried to make a historical analysis of the traditional and colonial systems and its overall impact over the social history of Malabar in *There Comes Papa*. Considering the tarawad as the focus of the study she argued that the colonial interpretations altered the power relations within the tarawad in the favour of men.<sup>63</sup> Praveena Kodoth maintained that the colonial administrative and judicial machinery transformed the entire system of domestic and non-domestic arrangements sustaining a tarawad. She looked into the debates on women's property rights in Nair tarawads and also about the issue of women's sexuality included in the discourses on *sambandham* legislation.<sup>64</sup>

Many PhD thesis have been submitted on matriliney and property relations in Kerala. P.K.Jyothi analyzed the economic impacts of colonial rule and the resultant transformations leading to the final disintegration of the *marumakkathayam* system.<sup>65</sup> Susan Thomas argued that the change in the matrilineal households of Malabar during the twentieth century was due to the

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<sup>61</sup> Robin Jeferry, *Decline of Nair Dominance Society and Politics in Travancore, 1848-1908*, Sussex University Press, 1976

<sup>62</sup> K.Saradmoni, *Matriliny Transformed, Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth century Travancore*, Sage and Altamira, New Delhi, 1999

<sup>63</sup> G.Arunima, *There Comes Papa, Colonialism and The Transformation of Matriliny In Malabar c. 1850-1940*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2003

<sup>64</sup> Praveena Kodoth, 'Framing Custom, Directing Practices: Authority, Property and Matriliny under Colonial Law in Nineteenth Century Malabar', CDS Working Paper no.338, 2002

<sup>65</sup> P.K.Jyothi, *Marumakkathayam, Land Monopoly and British Policy in Malabar*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Calicut, 1993

economic forces rather than social. The concept of personal property emerged as an offshoot of colonial modernity undermined the traditional pattern of joint family.<sup>66</sup> T.K.Anandi through a field work conducted in Palakkad analyzed the life of Namboothiri women in relation with the land relations and observed that, only a few *illoms* had extensive landed property and among them deprivation of the women were far more than others.<sup>67</sup> The consolidation of Namboothiris as a major community of Malabar during various periods have been traced by GirishVishnu Namboothiri, and he observed that the Namboothiris were not non-respondent to the changing socio-political conditions; they developed strategies to cope up with challenges and strived to maintain their hegemony in the society. Janmi Sabha and the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha were tactics devised by the community to deal with the problems they encountered.<sup>68</sup>

Though there were numerous works on the social and political aspects of the two communities analyzed in this study, most of them only examined the legislative transformations. Consequently the notions of womanhood, family, marriage and morality were not addressed by earlier studies; hence this study is essential to discern the new concept of womanhood proposed for the women of both the communities under the influence of colonial modernity.

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<sup>66</sup> Susan Thomas, *Property Relations and Family forms in Colonial Keralam*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Mahatma Gandhi University, 2004

<sup>67</sup> T.K.Anandi, *The Impact of Changing Land Relations and Social and Political Movements of Namboothiri Women*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Kerala, 1999.

<sup>68</sup> Girish Vishnu Namboothiri, *Principles of Structuring Community: The Case of Namboothiris of Malabar*, Unpublished Thesis, Kannur University, 2014

## Methodology and Hypothesis

To reveal the social history of women, of the communities pertaining to the study, of colonial Malabar a descriptive, interpretative and analytical approach is adopted. However the thesis is not entirely based on the descriptive method, as the description is the outcome of systematic analysis of source materials. None of the sources were accepted uncritically; and they were interpreted on the basis of corroboration with other sources. Oral evidences have been collected to augment the data available in the printed forms. The study has drawn insights from various concepts and frameworks provided by eminent scholars, some of which are Uma Chakravathi's 'Brahmanical Patriarchy',<sup>69</sup> Partha Chatterjee's 'New Woman and New Patriarchy' and R.W.Connell's 'Hegemonic Masculinity'.

Partha Chatterjee argued that in the wake of social reform movement, the reformers developed the 'design' of a new woman, who would be modern in her dress, food, manners, education, in organizing home and in her expositions outside home. The new woman was quite reverse of the "common" woman, who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by the males.<sup>70</sup> New patriarchy was a model in which there was well defined separation of family and home from the public sphere that of a realm monopolized by men. Moreover the women to be reformed were maintained under the regulation of a new patriarchy or a modernized patriarchy. R.W.Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was explained as the design of the system that legitimizes men's dominant position in the world and validates women's subordination. It was argued that masculinity always endeavor's to sustain its dominance on the society by redefining and

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<sup>69</sup> Concept of Brahmanical patriarchy has been discussed earlier.

<sup>70</sup> Partha Chatterjee, Nation and Its Fragments, in *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.127

reemploying its power in gender relations. On the other hand the concept does not confine itself to the patriarchal overpowering of women, but it also deals with the relative masculinity and different types of masculinity.<sup>71</sup>

The twentieth century colonial Malabar manifested the characteristics of the above mentioned concepts and they worked as the basic ideologies that designed the reformism. Even though the women question was prevalent in all discourses, the amelioration of women was to be materialized within the tracts of patriarchy. The essentials of Brahmanical patriarchy were never rejected, and hence adhering to it they developed a 'new patriarchy' which would safeguard women's morality by confining them to a new womanhood, thereby reinforcing the domain of masculinity. The two communities taken for analysis in this study also experienced similar tendencies concerning their women and hence the present study proposes to delineate the nature of reform movement by interpreting various sources.

The present study is based on a working hypothesis that, the women question addressed by the reformism of the Namboothiri and Nair communities in twentieth century, developed a new womanhood, which would ensure the chastity of woman in the differentially structured family and also ensure a position which was not one of equality with men. So it did not 'democratize' gender relations.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, 'Womanhood and Marriage in Traditional Malabar', discusses the caste system of Malabar and how the Namboothiris acquired

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<sup>71</sup> R.W.Connell, *Masculinities*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2005 (first published -1993)

dominance in Malabar society. The agrarian system of Malabar, which was the manifestation of the caste system, is examined. The familial structures of Namboothiris and Nairs are subjected to detailed analysis, in order to determine the life of women. The chapter evaluates the marriage system followed by the two communities and interprets the observations of anthropological studies. The Namboothiri system of primogeniture within their patriarchal family and the Nair *sambandham* which flourished in matrilineal organization is analyzed. The ritual trial followed by the Namboothiri community to ascertain the chastity of an accused woman is also discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter, 'Impact of Colonialism', is about the influx of colonial agents into the social conditions of Malabar. Transformations brought in the traditional agrarian pattern as a result of the colonial economic interests are analyzed. Moreover the redefinitions put forward by the colonial jurisprudence regarding the customs and practices of the indigenous population are examined. Peasant movements in Malabar following the mounting exploitation of the *janmis* and the culmination of the tenorial tension with the Malabar Tenancy Act are also studied. The chapter reviews the institutionalization of Western education in Malabar and the reasons for a high percentage of education among girls are explored. An analysis of colonial modernity is made to discern how it operated in Malabar and what was its impact. The emergence of a new middle class in the Malabar society the members of whom nurtured different interests and expositions are analyzed, as they were the harbingers of reform.

The new world which opened before the young educated and employed Nair youth is discussed in the third chapter, 'Reframing the Marriage and Family of Nairs'. The resultant consequences on tarawad and familial relationship are analyzed. The administrative and judicial interpretations of



*sambandham*, leading to the constitution of Malabar Marriage Commission are examined. The enquiries made by the commission, responses of the people from various social strata and the final legislation of Malabar Marriage Act by the colonial state are studied. The chapter further moves on to examine the development of caste consciousness and movements for reforming the communities through caste organizations. The ideologies and propaganda adopted by the caste organizations like Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Nair Service Society and the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha are interpreted. How these organizations took up the women question is also addressed. The change in the reformers' focus from marriage to family organization and the partition of the joint family property are explored. Similarly numerous bills proposed in the legislative assembly regarding the *marumakkathayam* communities, which culminated in the Madras Marumakkathayam Act are assessed.

The fourth chapter, 'Redefining the Notions of Family and Marriage in Namboothiri Reform Movement', analyses the ideological impulses of the Namboothiri reform movement spearheaded by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and the Yuvajana Sangham. The development of a vibrant leadership among the Namboothiri youth who stood against orthodoxy and argued for reforms are examined. The legislative interventions made by the colonial state on the demand of the community to reorganize the Namboothiri *illom* and the peculiarities of The Madras Namboothiri Act are also interpreted. The propaganda undertaken by the reformers for transforming the traditional marriage practices of Namboothiris, which later led to widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages are investigated. The chapter analyses the formation of Antharjana Samajam for the amelioration of the *antharjanams* and the attempts made by the Antharjana Samajam to interfere the problems faced by *antharjanams*. Furthermore the establishment

and activities of Thozil Kendram with the participation of *antharjanams* are looked into.

The development of the concept of 'new womanhood' for the women of two communities is analyzed in the fifth chapter, 'Refashioning Womanhood'. The debates on women's education and the patriarchy's inhibition in universalizing education for women are studied; the report of Namboothiri Stree Vidyabhyasa Commission is also studied. The discussions on the morality of women, the patriarchal attempt to rebuild the Vedic concept of *pathivratha* and an analysis of the system of smarthavicharam is made in this chapter. The sartorial reforms proposed for Namboothiri women and thereby the image of a middle class woman that developed in the course of the reform movement are described. The chapter also makes a critique of the 'woman question' addressed by the two communities.

The conclusion at the end of the study sums up the major findings of the study. Moreover the scopes for going beyond the purview of the present study are also suggested.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The proposed study is carried out as per the requirements of a PhD thesis and is accomplished within the frame work prescribed for PhD. The study is not about women of colonial Malabar or about the gender relations of Malabar. The study is confined to the women of the two upper caste communities of Malabar. Hence the study does not claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of women's history in Malabar. One of the main shortcomings of the study is that, corroboration of archival sources with that of the oral evidence was limited due to the constraints of time. Moreover the period chosen usually regarded as the period of 'high modernity' doesn't enable us to take the full impact of the legislative measures, nor we have

undertaken a study of the changes resulting from the Second World War and in the decades following Indian independence. We intend to address these problems as part of a post doctoral study.

# CHAPTER I

## WOMANHOOD AND MARRIAGE IN TRADITIONAL MALABAR

Patriarchy and the caste system together forged deplorable life situations for the women of Malabar. Every patriarchy would devise its own strategies for suppressing women. The caste system possessed all potentialities for depriving women of a normal life. Indian caste system predominantly manifested six structures of patriarchy identified by Sylvia Walby in her analysis of patriarchy in Western Societies.<sup>1</sup> These structures meticulously maintained women in a subordinate position to men in the family and in public affairs and ensured that she could never overpower men. The caste system being a closed system of stratification, where birth determines caste, women suffered more than men. Women of all castes and classes were subjected to extreme exploitation. Whereas women of *savarna* castes were exposed to repression within the household, lower caste women were to face tortures both within the house and in work places.<sup>2</sup> Women of *savarna* caste were subjected to stringent social deprivation, many a time fiercer than that suffered by women of *avarna* caste groups. The women of *savarna* communities were to fulfill the household responsibilities; their religious roles were often subordinate to that of men and it was to be part of their household duties. As per Brahmanical tradition women were regarded as

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Walby recognized six structures which formulates patriarchy- patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p. 20

<sup>2</sup> Women of lower castes are exposed to repression from several dimensions. Life of lower caste women of the region are not analyzed here as the study is about women of two communities- Namboothiris and Nairs.

impure and subsequently they were never entrusted with key roles in religious rituals.<sup>3</sup> They never had a life outside the domains of home as they were denied access to 'public' sphere and remained a group without 'public appearance', in order to preserve the 'purity' of the 'caste'. Traditional Malabar society was built up on caste system which was distinct from its North Indian version and was structured by incorporating the indigenous peculiarities that had existed in the region. The social stratification was not a conscious project of the Brahmanas, it was a historically and culturally contingent effect rather than the result of conspiratorial scheming.<sup>4</sup> The life of women in each caste was determined by the position of their caste in the hierarchical social system. Hence to historically analyze the notions of womanhood and projects and proposals for transforming womanhood, it would be essential to understand the pattern of social relations that had existed in Malabar in the pre-colonial period.

### **Social Relations and Caste Heirarchy in Malabar**

The caste system created highly exclusive groups in society which considered each other as pollutants. The notion of pure self and the impure other, which originally constituted the basis of *jati*, was tribal and a part of the horizontal social division of the primeval kind. The formation of *jatis* along with the domestic groups of hereditary occupation was also not Brahmanical, in short, what is Brahmanical was not *jati* but the notion of hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> The system was hierarchically graded and it was based on social and legal inequalities. Besides, hierarchical relations were linked to production and

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<sup>3</sup> Samjukta Gombrich Gupta, 'The Goddess, Women, and Their Rituals in Hinduism', in, Mantakranta Bose (ed.), *Faces of The Feminine in Ancient Medieval and Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, pp.113-115

<sup>4</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, *Social Formations of Early South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012, (first published-2010), p. 218

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 218-219

distribution patterns prevalent in the society. The Indian caste system was born and brought up within the tracts of Hinduism which was one of the most powerful patriarchal institutions in the world. No other patriarchal system was so possessive and skeptical about its women, which led to a structured set of restrictions in the form of caste system for regulating their own women. A marked feature of Hindu society is its legal sanction for an extreme expression of social stratification in which women and the lower castes have been subjected to humiliating conditions of existence.<sup>6</sup>

The *varna* order inherent in Hinduism reached Malabar with the migration of Brahmins to South India. When and where the Aryan migration to South India started is shrouded in mystery. However, from their arrival onwards they perpetuated their dominance over all other groups of Malabar. The Parasurama tradition is adopted by all Brahmins in the west coast. The tradition originated in Saurashtra region and moved down South.<sup>7</sup> The process of Brahmin migration and settlement began in Kerala during the Sangam age. They settled in thirty two villages from Kasargode in the North to Travancore in the South of Kerala. Every Namboothiri *illom* even now claim their ancestry to any one of the above 32 villages. During the *Cera* period and particularly after its decline the Brahmins of Kerala, the Namboothiris became the most exclusive and powerful caste of the region.<sup>8</sup> The temple-centered social system organized by them helped to sustain their dominance

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<sup>6</sup> Uma Chakravarti, 'Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India, Gender, Caste, Class and State', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.28, issue. 14, April 3, 1993, pp. 579-585

<sup>7</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2013, (first published -1978), p. 36

<sup>8</sup> Brahmins in Malabar belonged to four linguistic categories- 1. Namboothiris who spoke Malayalam, 2. Potti or Embranthiri who used Tulu, 3. Konginis who spoke in Kannada or Kongini languages and 4. Aiyer or Pattar whose mother tongue was Tamil. These Brahmins migrated to Malabar from their native places, during various periods and settled in different regions. K.V.Krishna Aiyer, 'Keralathile Brahmananmar,' *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 25/02/1962, pp. 18-21

over other castes. Logan wrote about the Namboothiris that “his person is holy, his directions are commands, his movements are processions, he is the holiest of human beings, and he is the representative of the God on earth.<sup>9</sup> Being the custodians of the *Brahmaswam* and *Devaswam* land, they became the owners of the majority of landed properties in Malabar; moreover their lands were exempted from taxation. They introduced a temple centered socio-economic system which was new to this region. These temple-centered villages were governed by Brahmin oligarchy-Sabha<sup>10</sup>; such temples in course of time turned out to be the largest land owners in Malabar.

Below the Namboothiri came the royal matrilineages of several kingdoms who claimed to belong to the *Kshatriya varna*, and longed to establish that the *Kshatriya* of Kerala was created by Parasurama.<sup>11</sup> At the same time the Namboothiris never accepted the royal families’ claim of *Kshatriya* status.<sup>12</sup> Besides, there was a long debate, that the so called *Kshatriyas* of Kerala were equivalent to *Kshatriyas* of North India or not.<sup>13</sup> A significant group among royal families is the *Samantha* - they are not real *Kshatriya*, but they were born for a *Kshatriya* male in a *Sudra* woman.

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<sup>9</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, vol. I, Charitram Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1981, (first published-1887 ) p. 127

<sup>10</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala Brahmin Oligarchy and Ritual Monarchy- Political and Social Conditions of Kerala Under the Cera Perumals of Makotai (c.AD 800-AD 1124)* Cosmo Books, Calicut, 2013,(first - published 1996) pp. 90-91

<sup>11</sup> C.A.Innes, *Malabar Gazateer*, vol. I, Kerala Gazeteer, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997 (first published -1907) p. 113

<sup>12</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad was of the opinion that there were no *Kshatriyas* in Kerala during the early period; Brahmins were the rulers and later under the initiative of Brahmins the Perumals accepted matriliney, but they were not *Kshatriyas*. Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Aryanmarude Kudiyettam Keralathil*,(Mal), vol.4, Panchangam Pushthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2014, (first published1967) p.81

<sup>13</sup> P.Bhaskaranunni, *Pathompatham Nootadile Keralam*,(Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2012, (first published- 1988),p. 309

Zamorin's families belong to this *Samantha* identity. *Ambalavasis*<sup>14</sup> or temple servants formed the next prominent division in the caste ladder. All these castes had hereditary relations with the temple and their remuneration was given as land grants. Numerically they formed very small caste groups and their caste status was in between that of Namboothiri and Nair and they were the followers of *marumakkathayam*.

Nairs, numerically a large group, occupied the next place in the social ladder. The term Nair and Nayak came from the same Sanskrit origin which means leader.<sup>15</sup> By designating Nairs as '*Malayala Sudra*' by Namboothiri, Nairs were reduced to the status of servants.<sup>16</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan has argued that the Nair community was not a separate tribe or race but a section of the native Dravidian people who were transformed by a combination of two factors – military profession and Namboothiri matrimonial alliance.<sup>17</sup> Nairs were organized according to *tara* which in turn were the units of a '*nad*', country.<sup>18</sup> Nair *taras* were originally not mere revenue or administrative divisions, but were organization to which was entrusted the management of local concerns.<sup>19</sup> Like any other caste, Nairs also had several subdivisions, which were prohibited from taking food prepared by each other.<sup>20</sup> Inter-marriages between these castes were also not permitted. The status of these castes was not permanent or unilateral; it varied from place to place.

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<sup>14</sup> Varrier, Poduval, Chakiyar, Marrar, Adikal, Nambidi are some of the *ambalavasi* castes. They were also known as *antaralar* caste. V.Nagam Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, vol.1, Travancore Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, 1906, p. 329

<sup>15</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p.27

<sup>16</sup> P.Bhaskaranunni, op.cit., p. 313

<sup>17</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan, op.cit., pp. 273-275

<sup>18</sup> William Logan, op.cit., p. 160

<sup>19</sup> K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.3, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1982, p. 261

<sup>20</sup> Subdivisions of Nair caste are- Nair, Menon, Menoki, Muppil Nair, Pada Nair, Kuruppu, Keimal, Panikkar, Kiriyyatta, Myttar, Ore, Kidavu, Kartavu, Pilla, Nedugandi, Mannadiyar, Manavalan. P.Bhaskaranunni, op.cit., p.323



Tiya or Ezhava were the next in order in the caste pyramid and formed a major portion of all the Hindu castes. As per tradition, Tiya was a polluting caste, with toddy tapping as their hereditary profession. A legend of migration comes here also, as these were the people who migrated from Srilanka. Tiyas of North Malabar followed *marumakkathayam* system of inheritance. At Thaliparamba in Kannur, there existed a Tiya family, Moothedath Aramana, the head of which was known a *Mannanar*. It was attested that they enjoyed some territorial rights, like that of a European Baron, and had extensive landed property.<sup>21</sup> By another interpretation, rights possessed by the family were equated with that of a local ruler and was considered as equivalent to that of Chirakkal Raja.<sup>22</sup> Panan, the bard, was the next in the order followed by the Cheruman, the agrestic slave, who were the real tillers of soil.

Distribution of population among the major castes of Hindu religion in 1891.<sup>23</sup>

<b>Castes</b>	<b>Population</b>
Namboothiri	9953
Kshatriya	912
Ambalavasi	15668
Nair	393748
Tiya	512060
Cheruman	258390

Source: Census report of India, Madras, 1891, vol. XIV

<sup>21</sup> William Logan, op.cit., p.153.

<sup>22</sup> Mannanar was considered as the only Tiya ruler of Kerala, moreover he was the protector of excommunicated *antharjanams*, after *smarthavicharam*, who came to live in the Moothedath Aramana. Kambil Ananthan, *Kerala Charitra Niroopanam Adava Thiyarude Pouranikathwam*, (Mal), Published by T.Achuthan, Dharmadam, 1935, p. 40; See also P. Bhaskaranunni, op.cit., p.449

<sup>23</sup> The Ambalavasi castes include various sub castes like Varrier, Poduval, Chakiyar, Marrar, Adikal, Nambidi, Pishradi, etc. Census Report of India, Madras, 1891, vol. XIV, p. 382

The table shows that the ritually and politically dominant castes of Malabar were numerically very weak, whereas the depressed castes formed the majority of the population. The ideology of the caste system that prevailed in Malabar along with the traditional land ownership patterns enabled the *savarna* castes to exploit the *avarna* castes. The caste system of Malabar instituted several restrictions on the life of the depressed class people and they were made to accept it as ordained by the god. Traditionally women of Kerala were devoid of the right to cover the upper part of the body. Only Christian, Muslim and *attakarikal*, dancers, covered their upper body even in the late nineteenth century. Uncovered breast was a symbol of caste identity for Hindu women.<sup>24</sup> Women who covered their breasts were considered as prostitutes because only they used upper clothes. Moreover Hindu women were very particular that they never covered their breasts, since doing so was not part of their tradition and was not an act of dignity.<sup>25</sup> Kannipayyur wrote that, “in his childhood he never saw women covering their breasts, besides, when in temple or in front of elderly men, women removed their upper cloth. Nair women - both servants and visitors-never came to *illoms* covering their upper part of the body, because using *melmundu* was like insulting men.”<sup>26</sup>

In short, the structure of caste system that had existed in Malabar exhibited considerable differences from the traditional *Varna* system of North India. Each caste and sub-caste was exclusive entities among whom even the mere sight of a person belonging to depressed caste could pollute a *savarna*.

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<sup>24</sup> J.Devika, ‘The Aesthetic Women-Reforming the Female Bodies and Minds in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Keralam’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 39(2), 2005,pp.461-487. C.Kesavan has narrated a strange story of his mother-in-law, who started wearing blouse at night in the bedroom, because her mother-in-law did not permit her to wear it in the morning! C.Kesavan, *Jeevitha Samaram*, (Mal) Prabatham Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, (first published-1968), pp. 81-82

<sup>25</sup> K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p.201

<sup>26</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, (Mal), vol.3, Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnankulam, 2007, (reprint)pp. 313-316

Untouchability in Kerala was a social epidemic of numerous ramifications which engulfed the entire population.<sup>27</sup> It prescribed a social distance for each caste with Namboothiris at the focal point. The distance to be maintained by a caste while approaching another varied from place to place and consequently a heterogeneous description followed. However by popular parlance, a ruler was to maintain a distance of four feet, Ambalavasi six feet, Nair 13-14 feet, Ezhava or Tiya 24 feet, Mukuvan 40 to 60 feet, Pulaya 60 feet, and Nayadi 100 feet from Namboothiri; Ezhava must be at a distance of twelve steps and Pulaya 96 steps from the Nair.<sup>28</sup>

Paradoxically, in spite of such extreme observances there existed deep interdependence among many castes. Namboothiris being a non-cultivating caste by themselves had to depend upon the familial labour of the neighbouring clans for the cultivation of their land. Brahman households were converted into units of production and distribution and several lower castes were inextricably attached to those households. For instance *mattu* was a ritual observed by all castes.<sup>29</sup> After the pollution caused by birth, death or for women after menstruation, purification by '*mattu*' was required. Without *mattu* one cannot end pollution and hence all castes including Namboothiri were dependent on Mannan. *Mattu mudakkal* was a kind of punishment inflicted by village council on families, by which the Mannan caste would be prohibited from providing the family with *mattu* when they disrespected the customs of the region.<sup>30</sup> Similarly for women of *savarna* caste, assistance of lower caste women were needed during delivery and for post delivery rituals.

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<sup>27</sup> S.N.Sivadasan, *A Social History of India*, A.P.H.Publishing, New Delhi, 2000, p.380

<sup>28</sup> Hobart Caunter, *The Oriental Annual or Scenes in India*, Charles Tilt, London, 1838, p. 159

<sup>29</sup> *Mattu* means the washed cloth brought by the Mannan caste.

<sup>30</sup> P.Bhaskaranunni, op.cit., p. 302

In pre-colonial Malabar villages, dominant power was not always vested with a distinct caste, it varied from caste to caste and region to region. M.N.Sreenivas considered numerical strength, economic position and political power as the primary factors for deciding dominance.<sup>31</sup> Whereas S.C.Dube viewed caste dominance as an unreal proposition in terms of its group character and distribution of power and dominance. According to him, it was individuals or families that were dominant and not the castes.<sup>32</sup> K.L.Sharma regarded that the idea of dominant caste is based on certain assumptions and these are not found valid, moreover elites were never unified and hence an idea of corporate dominance was wrong.<sup>33</sup> Louis Dumont observed that regarding the caste system the ‘power’ was dominant in political sphere whereas ‘status’ maintained its dominance in the religious sphere.<sup>34</sup> In Malabar, though Namboothiris had ritual superiority, they could not claim complete dominance throughout. In a rural society property ownership and financial power were significant in determining dominance. All *illoms* were not rich or wealthy, there were many economically poor *illoms*, whose women served as wet nurses in other *illoms* and their men worked as assistants of elite Namboothiris.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, in villages where there were households of royal lineages they asserted more dominance than Namboothiris or Nairs. In North Malabar, though there were Namboothiri *illoms* in certain villages, not many could profess dominance. It can be seen

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<sup>31</sup> M.N.Sreenivas, ‘The Dominant Caste in Rampura’, *American Anthropologist*, 1959, 61(1), pp. 1-16

<sup>32</sup> S.C.Dube, ‘Caste Dominance and Factionalism’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, 2, quoted in K.L.Sharma,(ed) *Social Inequality In India, Profiles of Caste, Class, Power and Social Mobility*, Rawatt Publications, Jaipur, 1995, pp. 369-387

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2009, (first published - 1966), pp. 391-393

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Perighitillom Narayanan Namboothiri, 71 years, Payyannur on 02/04/2016.

that various Nair sub-castes were more dominant in North Malabar villages. In the social conditions of Malabar, dominance was largely centered on families more than on castes.

Taluks	Number of families settled in each Taluks
<b>Chirakkal</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Kottayam</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Kurumbranad</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Wynad</b>	<b>--</b>
<b>Calicut</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Ernad</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Valluvanad</b>	<b>277</b>
<b>Palghat</b>	<b>--</b>
<b>Ponnani</b>	<b>289</b>

The table shows the distribution of illoms in taluks of Malabar in 1887.<sup>36</sup>

### **Patriarchal *Illom* of Namboothiris**

The Namboothiris settled here as a part of the migration of Aryans to South India. Aryanisation of Kerala was a very slow process, Brahmins having reached this region during various periods. The thirty two villages where the Brahmin settlements sprang up were in regions suitable for wet land cultivation. So the Aryan migration helped in the emergence of new agricultural patterns and also in the expansion of wet paddy cultivation. Brahmins with their knowledge of seasons and new and improved techniques

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<sup>36</sup> William Logan, op.cit., p. 146

of cultivation acquired monopoly in the field of agriculture.<sup>37</sup> Unlike many of the historical conquests and migrations, the Aryanisation of Kerala was done not by the use of force but in a peaceful manner.<sup>38</sup>

As the divine right theory of medieval Europe, in Kerala, Namboothiris were the ‘people who were most close to gods’ and they possessed the monopoly right of consecration. It was argued that the *acharams* enabled Namboothiris to claim a higher status over other communities; *acharam*, can be understood as the performance of ritual actions and also as the customary law that ordered the action of all caste communities.<sup>39</sup> Existence of a loose, feudalistic type of political organization, permitting considerable local autonomy and the system of primogeniture found in South India only among the Brahmins of Kerala enabled Namboothiris to consolidate and maintain power in individual families.<sup>40</sup>

The Namboothiris are different from the Brahmins elsewhere; as they follow *Sankarasmrithi*.<sup>41</sup> *Sankarasmrithi* provides details of laws concerning

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<sup>37</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, op.cit., p.27

<sup>38</sup> Raghava Varrier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kerala Charitram*, (Mal) Vallathol Vidya Peedam, Sukapuram, 1991, p.110. Some of the historical records like the Sagaragramarekha and Thiruppuliyur Granthavari, provide evidences regarding the settlement of Namboothiris in various regions other than thirty two villages. These migrations took place in different time span and were forced by multiple causes. See N.M.Namboothiri and P.K.Sivadas (ed), *Keralacharithrathinte Nattuvazhikal*, (Mal) D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2015, (first published-2009), pp. 105-107

<sup>39</sup> Sunandan K.N, ‘From *Acharam* to Knowledge: Claims of Caste Dominance in Twentieth-century Malabar’, *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 2015, 9(2), pp. 174–192 In this article it was argued that with the influx of colonialism the Namboothiris were forced to seek new knowledge when they realized that their *acharams* were being undermined.

<sup>40</sup> Joan P.Mencher, op.cit.

<sup>41</sup> Namboothiri followed sixty four rules of conduct prescribed by *Sankarasmrithi*, which was compiled by Sankara in 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was also regarded as a part of *Bharghava Smrithi*, which has not yet been discovered. However there exists controversy regarding its author and period of composition, which has

the life of Namboothiri, which includes laws regarding their daily activities, rituals, worship of gods, purity and marriage. A list of sixty four *anacharams* was prescribed by *Sankarasmrithi* to be observed by the Namboothiris and they were known as *anacharams* because they were not practiced by Brahmins elsewhere. These *anacharams* were the result of acceptance of many of the tribal and local practices that may have existed here at the time of their migration. Namboothiri residences were known as *illoms* and those of higher status were *Mana*. Usually these would be in an isolated extensive plot of land. Invariably all *illoms* had their own temple. Namboothiris were totally dependent on the other castes and they made their servants settle in places not far from the *illom*. Every Namboothiri family had a particular family name, which they prefixed with their individual name. Families belong to different *gothram*, which shows the families traditional branch of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> Namboothiri *illoms* were built in typical architectural pattern of Kerala. *Illoms* provided well defined and mutually segregated spaces for men and women. The construction was so particular that *antharjanams* could not meet male members of the family except their husband and father. They were to remain confined to the kitchen, dining hall and bedroom. Moreover most of the *illoms* had separate water tanks for women, which they could access from the rear side of the *illom*. They were not supposed to come to places used by men. In short, the very construction of the households ensured the seclusion of women from strangers' gazes. *Illoms* housed several people in the patrilineal line; *kanishtans* or the younger members of the *illom* were to live in *pathayapura mallika*, the outhouse, which was separate from the main building.<sup>43</sup> Apart

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not resolved. V.Rajeev, *Aryadhiniveshavum Namboothirisamskaravum*, (Mal) Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2015, p. 38

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Chempakasseri Vasudevan Namboothiri, 74 years, Peringhalem, 18/01/2016

<sup>43</sup> Henri Schildt, *The Traditional Kerala Manor: Architecture of a South Indian catushala House*, French Institute, Pondicherry, 2012, p. 79

from the members of the *illom* there would be several servants - both men and women – who were needed for the daily chores.

Namboothiris constituted a very small faction of the population of Malabar. As per the census of 1921 their population was 25830.<sup>44</sup> However they did not constitute a homogenous group as they were divided among themselves into eight sub-castes – *Thambrakkal*, *Adyan*, *Visishtan*, *Samanyan*, *Jathimathrakan*, *Sagethikan*, *Sapthan*, *Papishtanmar*.<sup>45</sup> Sub-castes were exclusive groups among whom inter marriage or inter dining were to be avoided. The social exclusiveness was more keenly observed by *antharjanams* than Namboothiri men. If an *antharjanam* from an *illom* of high social status was married to another with comparatively low status, which was known as *thathikodukkal*, whenever she comes to her natal home she was treated like that of a lower caste.<sup>46</sup>

Vedic ideology and practices formed the basis for the religious practices of Namboothiris. They belong to the so-called *Smartha* Brahmins who worshiped Vishnu and Siva equally.<sup>47</sup> They held the monopoly of Vedic sacrifices prescribed by the Vedic tradition. In Kerala they held the exclusive

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<sup>44</sup> Census of India, 1921, vol. XIII, Madras Part II. Whereas the Nair population in the same year was 489563.

<sup>45</sup> *Thambrakkal* was considered to be higher than all sub-divisions of Namboothiri and two *Thambrakkal* families in South Malabar were Kalpakancheri and Azhavancheri. There were eight *Adyan* families- Ashtadhyans- ; they were strict in religious observances and functioned as Tantris in Temples. *Visishitans* were of two kinds Agnihotris and Bhattaris, they performed Vedic sacrifices and were religious teachers. *Samanyans* were ‘ordinary’ Namboothiris who were employed in temples, or worked as astrologers. Last three were of lower social status, Papishtans became as he performed ‘papa karma’. Edgar Thurston, op.cit., pp. 165-166; P.Bhaskaraunni, op.cit., pp. 293-294

<sup>46</sup> P.Bhaskaraunni, op.cit., p.28. Isolation suffered by an *antharjanam* in her natal *illom* after being married to a Namboothiri of lower status was depicted in the short story, *Kudiveppu*. Devasena, ‘Kudiveppu’, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 29/03/1959, pp. 13-16

<sup>47</sup> Henri Schildt, op.cit., p. 18



right of learning Vedas, which was due to the insistence of *Sankarasmrithi*.<sup>48</sup> Namboothiris have the most powerful *srauta* tradition in India and it still continues as they perform *srauta* sacrifices.<sup>49</sup> *Aupasanam* was the fire ritual daily performed by Namboothiri couples early in the morning. There were many *illoms* which kept *agni*, fire, indorsed. In many families, after the death of a member, son or a near relative observed *deeksha*, ie he lived like a *brahmachari* for a year.

Concepts of purity and impurity- *sudham* and *ashudam*- were inherent in all activities of the Namboothiris. The body of a Namboothiri is believed to be highly pure, but it could be made impure by some external agents. Hence contacts with these agents are to be avoided. Untouchability, *ayitham*, has been explained and institutionalized on the basis of this ‘conferred impurity’. Robin Jeffery noticed that when in the rest of India ‘pollution’ was transmitted only by touch, in Kerala it was transmitted over distance.<sup>50</sup> The entire caste groups of Kerala were victims of the concept of purity of the Namboothiris. The only way to get purified was to take bath, preferably in a river. The most important pollutions were related to menstruation, child birth and death. So if one is defiled with any one of these, the person should take bath and change dress, this cloth was known as *mattu*, which was one of the major reasons for their dependence on Mannan, the washer man caste. Every month after menstruation women can be purified only when *mattu* is worn after bath.

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<sup>48</sup> According to *Manusmrithi* Kshetriyas had the right to learn Vedas; in Kerala some of the *Kshetriyas* and *Antharalajathi* had the ritual of *upanayanam*. They could not learn Vedas. Varanakode Govindan Namboothiri, *Keraleeya Vaidika Parambaryam*, (Mal), State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 2013, p. 39

<sup>49</sup> P.P.Narayanan Namboothiri, *Aryans in South India*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p. 131

<sup>50</sup> Robin Jeffery, op.cit., p.15

## **Matrilineal *Tarawads* of Nairs**

Nairs who formed the militia of the medieval period were of high status in the then society. According to Brahmin tradition, the Nair caste was the result of the union between the Namboodhiri with *Deva*, *Gandharva* and *Rakshasa* women introduced by Parasurama.<sup>51</sup> Foreign accounts about Nairs are exhaustive, because they were astonished by the customs and traditions of Nairs. Francis Buchanan remarked that, “the whole of these Nairs formed the militia of Malayala, directed by the Namboothiri and governed by the Rajas.”<sup>52</sup> Francis Day observed that “Nairs were originally formed of the aborigines and of those Hindus who lost their caste. None of them were permitted to wear the sacred thread.”<sup>53</sup> Walter Hamilton pointed out that, “the Nairs are the pure Sudras of Malabar, they pretend to be born soldiers, but they are of various ranks and professions.”<sup>54</sup>

Indigenous scholars also expressed different opinions regarding Nairs. K.N.Ganesh argued that *Nuttuvar Kuttangal* were the earlier forms of Nairs.<sup>55</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan has identified *Lokar* in inscriptions as Nairs. He adds that *Janmi* system was maintained in medieval Kerala by these Nairs; even the rulers were very particular to see that Nairs were not alienated.<sup>56</sup>

Nairs became popular due their adherence to a pattern of matrilineal inheritance known as *marumakkathayam*. However the system was followed

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<sup>51</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 284

<sup>52</sup> Francis Buchanan, op.cit., p. 410

<sup>53</sup> Francis Day, *The Land of Perumals or Cochin its past and its Present*, 1990, (first published-1863) p.314

<sup>54</sup> Walter Hamilton, op.cit., p. 281

<sup>55</sup> *Nuttuvar Kuttanghal* was the traditional militia of medieval Kerala during the period when Brahmin Oligarchy was established here. K.N.Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innelakkal*,(Mal), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, p. 161

<sup>56</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan, *Kozhikode-Charithrathilninnu Chila Edukkal*, (Mal), Pratheeksha, Calicut, 2011, pp. 28-29

by many other communities like *Namboothiris* of Payyannur, *Kshetriya*, *Ambalavasi*, and *Tiyya* of North Malabar. Regarding the origin of *marumakkathayam* system scholars have controversial view points. K.P.Padmanabha Menon argues that the system originated in Kerala only in the recent times, because none of the foreign travelers who visited Kerala prior to the fourteenth century refers to it. Friar Jordanus who lived in Kollam early in the fourteenth century was the first foreigner to record the existence of this particular system.<sup>57</sup> Elam Kulam Kunhan Pillai formulated a theory according to which, *Cera-Chola* war during the *Perumals* was an important reason for the emergence of the system.<sup>58</sup> The members of the military squad could not form permanent family and marital relationship; hence the management of the *tarawads* became the responsibility of women. K.N.Panikkar regards the ideological dominance of Namboothiri as having led to the emergence and continuance of the system.<sup>59</sup>

Many postulations of scholars cannot be accepted when analyzed on the basis of anthropological evidence. For instance, the argument of Padmanabha Menon and Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai that the *marumakkathayam* suddenly originated in Kerala during tenth or fourteenth century appears unrealistic, because nowhere in the world has such a change happened, ie. a patrilineal community passively accepting matrilineal inheritance. The *Cera-Chola war*, was not such a ‘massive war’ as celebrated

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<sup>57</sup> K.P.Padmanabha Menon, op.cit., p. 183

<sup>58</sup> Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Trivandrum, 1970, p. 323. A.K.B.Pillai also has the same view that the military occupation was the original factor that led to the emergence of *marumakkathayam* and resulted in the bifurcation of Nair marriage into the *thali* tying ceremony and *sambandham*. A.K.B.Pillai, *The Culture of Social Stratification/Sexism in the Nayars*, Coopley Publishing, New York, 1987, p.14

<sup>59</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony, Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995, p. 183

by Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, to induce drastic changes in the society.<sup>60</sup> Among the tribal inhabitants in Kerala matrilineal inheritance had existed and this may have continued and got more structured with Aryan migration and even more during the medieval period. *Mushakavamsa Kavya* contains indications to show that matrilineal system had existed during that period.<sup>61</sup> Hence a continued existence of matriliney could be traced in this region through various references. With the coming of Brahmins, the continuation of matriliney became inevitable as the Namboothiri took up primogeniture, where only the eldest son married within the community. Impossibility of further south ward migration must have compelled the last wave of Brahmins to insist upon such a condition, to prevent the division of property.<sup>62</sup> As this arrangement was beneficial for both the communities it continued under the peculiar social setting. According to M.G.S.Narayanan, the tendency to practice *sambandham* could have been prevalent even during the Cera times, even though it was condemned outright in all law codes.<sup>63</sup> During the medieval period, *Karaima* of *Brahmaswam* and *Devaswam* lands were given only to those families where Namboothiris had *sambandham* relations.<sup>64</sup>

The matrilineal households of Nairs were popularly known as *tarawads*. Etymologically *tarawads* came from *tara* which means a village or

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<sup>60</sup> K.N.Ganesh, op.cit., p.186; M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, op.cit., p. 115

<sup>61</sup> *Mushakavamsa Kavyam* was a historical narrative of the *Mushakavamsam*, a royal lineage of the Tamil Sangam period in the present Kerala, written by Atulan in 10<sup>th</sup> century. Somasekharan, *Keralapazhama*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 2010,p. 71

<sup>62</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, op.cit., p. 270

<sup>63</sup> When a Brahmin *Uralar* of a *Gramam* was granted with guardianship over a *Cherikkal* or non-Brahmin village, as per the Avittattur inscription of Kota Ravi of 903 AD, he was prohibited from entering into concubinage or *kattil erutal*. The term *kattil erutal* was employed in several South Indian records to signify marriage. *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan, *Kozhikode Charithrathil Ninnu Chila Edukkal*, op.cit., p. 35

part of it and *vad* from a corrupt form of *pad* ‘meaning rank or authority.’<sup>65</sup> *Tara avakasam* was the right that had existed in the medieval period. *Tara* organization was not a development of the medieval period; it contained several characteristics of tribal social structure.<sup>66</sup> Tribal organizations in course of time gave way to definite inheritance patterns which created *tarawads*.<sup>67</sup> Melinda Moore using the term matrilineage for *marumakkathayam* and matrilineality for *marumakkathayam tarawads* argued that the genealogical aspect is virtually lacking in Nair *tarawads* and Namboothiri *illoms*, rather the genealogical lines are tied to locality and property unit.<sup>68</sup> Every Nair *tarawad* had a set of rituals which was bound to be performed. The purpose of rituals within the households was twofold - to maintain its status and prestige in the village and caste hierarchy, and to protect the family from various dangers of uncleanness, which would threaten the household from both inside and outside.<sup>69</sup>

Nair *tarawads* consisted of several members belonging to different generations. Mostly they trace their origin to an ancient ancestress. A *tarawad* does not mean a single huge building, it may have several *nalukettu*, the traditional architectural style of Kerala houses, in a compound or there may be residential units in different places but not too far, as the concept of territoriality is linked with the rights and powers of *tarawads*. There may be six to ten Nair *tarawads* in a *tara*. A *tarawad* may contain several *tavazhis*,

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<sup>65</sup> Govindanunni, *Kinship, Systems in South and South East Asia- A study*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994, p. 97

<sup>66</sup> With the establishment of colonial rule, the English for facilitating revenue collection reorganized the administration; one of the territorial units thus constituted was *amsam*. Three or four *taras* were incorporated to form an *amsam*, however with the emergence of *amsam*, *taras* lost their traditional significance. K.Madhavan Nair, *Nairpazhama*, (Mal), Current Books Thrissur, 2011, p. 57

<sup>67</sup> K.N.Ganesh, op.cit., pp. 36-37

<sup>68</sup> Melinda Moore, ‘A New Look at Nayar *Tarawad*’, *Man*, vol. 20, 1985, pp. 523-540

<sup>69</sup> Henri Schildt, op.cit., p. 28

which can be understood as branches of *tarawads*. *Tavazhi* possessed its own property while retaining the rights over the property of the main *tarawad*. Members of a *tarawad*, including members of different *tavazhis*, observed *pula*, held common property and had a common *karanavan*. When a *tarawad* possessed enormous landed property in distant places, its management was facilitated by moving *tavazhis* of the *tarawad* to the respective regions and this practice also helped in the territorial expansion of *tarawad*.<sup>70</sup>

*Nallukettu* was a building combining all the four *diksalas*, each placed at their respective cardinal position around the *ankanam*, courtyard. Unlike *illoms*, in *tarawads* the population continuously multiplied and the existing building was rendered unfit to house all its members. Hence the *tarawads* were regularly subjected to reconstruction or more houses were constructed in the same compounds or in other lands of the *tarawad* property. *Tarawad* had separate spaces to be used by men and women, but there was no segregation as in *illoms*. In most of the *tarawads* there were separate rooms or special building to be used by the *karanavan*. In *tarawads*, the courtyard was the nerve centre of activities involving the lady members of the family. Apart from family meal times, men tended to remain in the southern half of the house and women in the northern. Separate northern and southern staircases were provided for males and females to reach the upper storey without leaving their respective halves.<sup>71</sup> However the change in the status of women could be seen in the construction of *nallukettu* from 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as from then onwards more prominence was given to the space used by *karanavan* and many of them often avoided the request of the family

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<sup>70</sup> M. R. Raghava Warriar, *Ammavazhi Keralam*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 2006, p. 12

<sup>71</sup> Melinda Moore, 'The Kerala House as a Hindu Cosmos', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1989, vol. 23, issue. 1, pp. 169-202

members for renovation of the *tarawad* house when it faced over population.<sup>72</sup>

*Tarawad* was a joint family with a large number of people belonging to several generations. The members of *tarawads* were the co-partners of the family property whether inherited or acquired by the efforts of the individual members.<sup>73</sup> The property of the *tarawads* was held in common and partition was not allowed. In some cases when the population in a *tarawad* increased, the *tarawads* may divide into several branches, *tavazhi*. If a branch of a *tarawad* became extinct, its property lapsed equally to the other branches.<sup>74</sup> Splitting of *tarawads* led to the emergence of *tavazhi*, usually it is formed when a brother moved out of his *tarawad* with his two or three sisters and their children or when woman with her children moved out. The outer boundary of *tarawads* seems to have been defined by relations of pollution (*pula sambandham*), whereby a wider matrilineal kin group was knit by symbolic ties - prominently in sharing birth and death pollution and a memory of common descent.<sup>75</sup>

In *marumakkathayam tarawads* the administration of *tarawad's* property was done by the eldest male member of the family, *karanavan*. He

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<sup>72</sup> Ashalatha Thampuran, *Traditional Architectural forms of Malabar Coast*, Vasuvidyapratisthanam Academic Centre, Kozhikode, 2001, p. 209. G.Arunima also proposed that with the colonial interpretation of indigenous customs karanavans acquired monopolistic dominance on tarawad management. Arunima, G., *There Comes Papa, Colonialism and The Transformation of Matriliney In Malabar c. 1850-1940*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2003

<sup>73</sup> C.Achuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Superintendent of Census Operations, Cochin, 1911, p. 246

<sup>74</sup> Koodali Granthavri shows that women had the right to move away from the *tarawad* and form another *tavazhi*. K.K.N.Kurup narrates the instance of a women having shifted from the *tarawad* to *tavazhi* where they enjoyed the privilege of controlling local Kalari. K.K.N.Kurup, *Koodali Granthavari*, (Mal), Department of History, University of Calicut, 1995, p.x

<sup>75</sup> Praveena Kodoth, *Framing Custom, Directing Practices: Authority, Property and Matriliney under Colonial Law in Nineteenth Century Malabar*, CDS Working Paper no.338, 2002

was the authority for economic affairs of the *tarawads*. All other members enjoyed the right of maintenance from the *tarawad*. By traditional law, a *karanavan* appears to have had complete right of life and death over his property group's serfs. Kathleen Gough says that whatever his de jure authority, *karanavan*'s de facto authority was greater over women and children than over junior men, who were often absent on military service.<sup>76</sup> The *karanavan*'s paramount duty was to provide for the maintenance of entire members of the *tarawad*.<sup>77</sup> The *karanavan* was bounded by tradition; he was not the owner of the *tarawad* property, theoretically he was just like a manager. Even if a *karanavan* refrained from the administration of *tarawad* he could not evade the execution of religious rituals of the family, to which he was bound.<sup>78</sup> Nair *karanavans* have been portrayed by several Malayalam writers in their creations which was one of the favorite topics of writers.<sup>79</sup> Customs and practices of Nairs were not similar throughout Malabar. Considerable differences existed among Nairs in North Malabar and those in South Malabar. Korapuzha River was supposed to be the boundary between North Malabar and South Malabar. Though Nairs in both regions followed

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<sup>76</sup> Kathleen Gough, Nayar : Cental Kerala, in David M Schneider, and Kathleen Gough (ed), op.cit., p. 340. Seniority of birth was the test applied in the selection of *karanavan* and not nearness by descent to the common ancestress. The uncle would be superseded by a nephew, who was senior by age. Modayil Pothen Joseph, *The Principles of Marumakkathayam Law: With A Commentary on the Nair Regulation I of 1088*, Church Missionary Society's Press, Kottayam, 1918, pp. 30-31

<sup>77</sup> K.Sreedhara Varrier, *Marumakkathayam and Allied Systems of Law*, Cochin, 1969, pp. 45-46

<sup>78</sup> T.Sanghunny, 'Malabar Tarawadukallile Karanavanmar', Kozhikode, 1924, in M.G.S.Narayanan (ed), *Malabar*, Malabar Mahotsav Souvenir, 1993, p. 347

<sup>79</sup> Novels like *Indulekha*, *Sarada*, *Nallukettu*, *Kayar*, *Asuravithu*, and several others depicts *karanavans* of varied behaviour. O.Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, (Mal), Poorna Publications, Kozhikode, 2016, (first Published-1889), O.Chandu Menon, *Sarada*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2015, (first published- 1892), M.T.Vasudevan Nair, *Nallukettu*, (Mal), Current Books, Thrissur, 2000, (first published-1958), M.T.Vasudevan Nair, *Asuravithu*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2016, (first published -1962), Thakazhi Sivasankaran Pillai, *Kayar*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2006, (first published -1978)



*marumakkathayam*, significant disparities existed in marriage relations, residence patterns, practices and rituals. The influence of Namboothiri community and Nair-Namboothiri relations were rare in North Malabar, where as in South Malabar a unique alliance between the two communities ruled the region. Such a regional variation in inter community affiliation could be due to the fact that there were only two Brahmin settlements in North Malabar- Payyannur and Peruncellur.<sup>80</sup> Moreover the Namboothiri *illoms* in North Malabar were not rich or wealthy like those in South Malabar. In this region the real power were in the hands of Nambiyars, a sub-caste of Nairs. All the local rulers of Malabar were highly conscious of winning the support of the Nair *tarawads* not only for procuring army, but also for acquiring more wealth through trade and commerce, as *tarawads* played a major role in the collection and marketing of agricultural and forest produce from the peripheral parts of the kingdom.<sup>81</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries several Nair chieftains arose in North Malabar on the basis of European support and gained partially autonomous sway over small groups of villages. Political and social mobility of Nair aristocrats was thus more marked in North Kerala than in the more stable central kingdoms.<sup>82</sup> Most of the Nair aristocrats and commoner Nairs had *janmam* rights over land and they also leased land from chiefs or Namboothiris.

In North Malabar, settlements were centered on Nair *tarawads* which controlled waste lands and forests and had a monopoly over wetland. According to Dilip Menon a negotiated 'community of subsistence' had

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<sup>80</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, op.cit., pp.44-45

<sup>81</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *Malayaliyude Desakalangal*, (Mal), Raspberry Books, Calicut, 2016, p.63

<sup>82</sup> Kathleen Gough, Nayar: North Kerala, in David M.Schneider and Kathleen Gough, op.cit., p. 386.

existed between landowner and cultivator.<sup>83</sup> The production of subsistence crops like paddy came to be concentrated in the hands of a few landowning *tarawads*. Apart from being *kanakkars* Nairs had hereditary judicial and administrative rights. The structure of the Nair community satisfied the characteristics laid down by M.N.Sreenivas to be a dominant caste.<sup>84</sup> Nairs, due to their economic and political status - which was the result of their unique relation with Namboothiris - acquired a dominant role in the agrarian structure of Kerala and also due to their status in the caste social ladder because of which they could easily wield power.

### **Namboothiri - Nair Alliance**

Namboothiris having migrated to this region, entered into a relation with the Nairs. Though designated as sudras, Nairs, were made to associate with the entire activities of the Namboothiris. Among the non-Brahmins of the region, Nairs were more closely linked to the Namboothiri community. Every Namboothiri *illom* would have three or four Nair *tarawads* as their dependants. Both these were *savarna* castes, attributed dominant and privileged status in the society. Together they maintained a religious, political, social and economic dominant status up to the early decades of the twentieth century. A unique relationship emerged among these castes even though one was subordinate to the other. As the exclusive holders of *janmam* rights, the Namboothiris were the largest landlords of Malabar. But unlike other Brahmins of the Madras Presidency they remained totally aloof from rest of the world. They were not engaged in government jobs, business, and

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<sup>83</sup> Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 4

<sup>84</sup> M.N.Sreenivas considered the land owning capacity as a prerequisite for dominance. In the case of Nairs this criterion is also satisfied, as the Nairs enjoyed direct control over landed properties of Malabar, both in the capacities of *janmis* and *kanakkars*. M.N.Sreenivas, *Dominant Caste and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 4-8

agriculture or in any other profitable profession.<sup>85</sup> They retained their sacerdotal position in society and as a rule led an extremely simple lifestyle and seldom went out of their house.<sup>86</sup> They officiated as priests in temples but even this was considered to be a shame. The Namboothiris were supposed to be life-long students of Vedas, but teaching Vedas was never seen as a means of livelihood.<sup>87</sup> The Namboothiris being ideologically and economically the most supreme of all the castes in Malabar, were dependent on Nairs, the *kanakkaran*, for income.<sup>88</sup>

The Namboothiri had a patriarchally organized family and followed it in the strict sense of the term.<sup>89</sup> Namboothiris had accepted primogeniture according to which only the eldest son- *ghrihasthan*- of the family could marry within the community.<sup>90</sup> Other male members of the family went for loose relationships, called *sambandham* with women of royal families, or with women of Nair caste. The adherence to primogeniture was to prevent the partition of property; it was also argued that when Namboothiri's migrated to

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<sup>85</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., pp. 156-157

<sup>86</sup> Fred Fawcett, *Namboothiris-Notes on Some of the Peoples of Malabar*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2001,p.33

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Periyamana Vishnu Namboothiri, Kozhikode, on 13/02/2015.

<sup>88</sup> However Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad and Parayil Raman Namboothiri depicted an antagonistic relation between the two communities and claimed that by custom Nairs were to serve Namboothiris. For details see Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Nayanmarude Poorvacharithram*, (Mal), vol.1, Panchagam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2007, (first published - 1962). Parayil Raman Namboothiri(ed), *Namboothirimar*, (Mal), Mangalodayam, Thrissur, 1918

<sup>89</sup> In Kerala some Namboothiri families of the Payyannur gramam followed matrilineal system of inheritance.

<sup>90</sup> Endogamous marriage of the eldest son in the family was known as *veli*. Namboothiris gave utmost importance to primogeniture in order to maintain impartible estates. As a result of this system the Namboothiris became a minority community because only the children of the eldest son, ie. children of *veli*, became the members of the *illom*.

South India, there were only a few numbers of girls in the community, which forced them to adopt exogamous marriage relations.<sup>91</sup>

In the *sambandham* relationships husband had no obligation to protect his wife and children or provide for them. They were denied a share in his property. Although younger Brahmin men bore children with Nair women, this arrangement did not lead to extended ties between the communities, and the *illoms* remained a distant, monastery-like place where the unmarried youth were busy with religious and domestic duties.<sup>92</sup> The fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteen centuries in Kerala have been regarded as the orgiastic season of Namboothiris, for their sexual exploits described in *Unniyatcharitam* and *Unnichiruthevicharitam*.<sup>93</sup> As an aftermath of the agrarian structure that had existed in Malabar, Namboothiri claimed sexual access to Nair women and they perpetuated it till twentieth century by manipulating the power of *janmis*.<sup>94</sup>

Sthani Nair *tarawads* like Kavalapara Nair, Kuthiravattath Nair, Mannarghat Nair and many others invariably selected Namboothiri partners for their women. It was a prestigious issue for the aristocratic Nair families to have Namboothiris as the *sambandham* partners. For Namboothiri men these relationships were comfortable as they could enjoy marital life without any responsibilities; besides many of them were financially benefited from such

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<sup>91</sup> Kavil Avinjikattu Bhavadasan Namboothiripad, 'Namboothirimarude Jeevithasambradayam', in Parayil Raman Namboothiri (ed), op.cit., p.78

<sup>92</sup> Heike Moser and Paul Younger, 'Kerala : Plurality and Consensus', in Peter Berger and Frank Heidmann (ed), *The Modern Anthropology of India*, Routledge, New York, 2013, pp. 286-301

<sup>93</sup> *Unniyatcharitham, Unnichiruthevicharitham* discussed about the prostitutes of the then period, but the descriptions never ridiculed them, and regarded them as highly respectable women. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Annathe Keralam*, (Mal), Sahitya Pravarthaka Saghakarana Sangham, Kottayam, 1970, pp. 157-158

<sup>94</sup> Praveena Kodoth, 'Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, *Sambandham*, and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Malabar', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, May 2001, pp. 349-384

alliances, as they were given money from Nair *tarawads*. They were provided with all basic necessities; separate arrangement was made for their food, during their stay in the Nair *tarawad*, as they would not take food cooked by Nairs. Hence a separate kitchen with Namboothiri or Tamil Brahmin cooks was maintained by *tarawads*. It can be assumed that vegetarianism was accepted among many Nair *tarawads* due to these relationships. Relation with royal families facilitated Namboothiris to be the ‘fathers’ of the entire rulers of Kerala. Royal families always wanted Namboothiris as partners for their women and they were not in need of Namboothiri husbands’ property. They were given regular remuneration for being husband, besides, they were provided with splendid food and clothes, which most of them were denied at *illoms* being *kanishtans*.<sup>95</sup> Thus through this arrangement they could maintain their dominance in the political affairs of Malabar. The Nair liaisons were useful to Namboothiris in two ways: most obviously, to provide sexual partners for their younger sons, and just as important to create useful connections with important families.<sup>96</sup>

The Namboothiris followed the typical patriarchal system of inheritance, but as an exception sixteen Namboothiri families of Payannur, their male members were known as Thirumumpu, were the followers of *marumakkathayam*.<sup>97</sup> The Namboothiris considered Thirumumpus as impure with Kshatriya blood in their veins and consequently neither dined with nor

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<sup>95</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, (Mal), vol. I , Panchangham Press, Kunnamkulam, 2007, (first published -1964), pp. 273-275

<sup>96</sup> Joan P.Mencher and Helen Goldberg, ‘Kinship and Marriage Regulations Among the Namboothiri Brahmins of Kerala’, *Man*, vol.2, no.1, 1967,pp.87-106

<sup>97</sup> The reason for adopting a matrilineal system by Namboothiris is debated; it was argued that they accepted the custom prevailing among the local people at the behest of Parasurama. They traced descent along the female line, but children belonged to father’s *gotram*. J.Puthenkalam, *Marriage and Family in Kerala*, University of Calgary, Canada, 1977, p. 190. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala District Gazetteers: Malappuram*, Superintendent of presses, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972, p. 217

had marriage relations with them.<sup>98</sup> Married and unmarried women amongst Payyannur Namboothiris observed *ghosha*. Their women were married by Namboothiri men, but the Namboothiri girl was never married by Thirumumpus. The wife and children had no right in husband's or father's property, and they lived in their mother's house. However there were considerable difference from the *marumakkathayam* followed by the other matrilineal communities of Kerala as they don't celebrate *thalikettukalyanam* and *thirandukuli*. Polyandry was prohibited among them and adultery was strictly punished after conducting *smarthavicharam*.<sup>99</sup>

The Brahmin households were dependant on non-Brahmin groups for their daily activities and for the functioning of the production and distribution structures. The Nairs were the main assistants and helpers of Namboothiri community. Nair men served Namboothiris in various capacities like domestic servants, soldiers, accountants and *karyasthans*. In an *illom* Namboothiri men would be engaged in their household and religious duties and landed property and rent collection would be under the control of *karyasthans*. Many Namboothiris were not aware of the extent of land possessed by the *illom* or regarding the rent collected, as accounts were maintained and interactions with *kudiyans* were made by *karyasthans*. Consequently Namboothiris were dependent on *karyasthans* for money and paddy.<sup>100</sup> Paradoxically, in most *illoms*, the post of *karyasthan* was hereditary, which made them far more influential than Namboothiri men of the respective *illom*. Nair women were required for the day to day activities of *illoms*; they worked as *irikanamma*, Nair maid who looked after the children of *illom*,

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<sup>98</sup> Fred Fawcett, *Namboothiris*, op.cit., p. 47

<sup>99</sup> Namboothiris of Payyannur ended up the system of matrilineal inheritance and became *makkathayis* ie. patrilineal by performing several rituals in 2011.

<sup>100</sup> M.T.Vasudevan Nair's novel *Kalam* depicts a poor *illom*, which was dependant on tenants and *karyasthan* for life. M.T.Vasudevan Nair, *Kalam*, (Mal), Current Books, Thrissur, 2015, (first published - 1969).

domestic servants and as *dasis* of *antharjanams*. The social status of Nair women who worked in different capacities within the *illom* were different, among them *irrikanamma* was far more important than who worked as domestic servants. In *illoms* children were the responsibility of *irrikanamma*; in wealthy *illoms* for each child there would be separate *irrikanamma*. However, Namboothiris were not at the mercy of Nairs. The possession of *janmam* rights enabled them to maintain superiority in all their relations and over the communal holdings and the clan families of the locality.<sup>101</sup> The Namboothiri led a completely traditional life and were not accustomed to changes. In the caste ridden society they claimed hegemony over other people and they strived to sustain it even in the twenty first century. They believed that their dominant status as not created by themselves, but naturally ordained by god. Hence they never found any fault in their expositions and in their attitude towards other communities.

The power centers of Malabar from the medieval period even up to twentieth century were Namboothiri *illoms* and Nair *tarawads*. As they had a dominant position in the agrarian structure of the region, *illoms* and *tarawads* became the centre for the collection and distribution of agricultural production. These two were the politico-juridical centers of traditional Malabar and perpetuated a semi-feudal political system. Their unusual inter-community organization was used to exploit all the servile classes under them in every way.

### **Traditional Agrarian Structure of Malabar**

The intricacies of the caste system crept into the agrarian conditions of Malabar. The ownership of land and the patterns of land usage were in accordance with the caste system. Being an agricultural society, every caste

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<sup>101</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, op.cit., pp. 131-132

had a role in agriculture, where the *savarnas* were the owners and *avarnas* were the tillers of land. The land was regarded as the most important means of wealth and source of power, and rights in land were hereditary. In the three political divisions of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, Malabar had the highest percentage of tenancy, the most complex land system and worst form of landlordism.<sup>102</sup>

A hierarchy of rights on lands existed in Malabar; they were *Janmam*, *Kanam*, *Kuzhikanam*, and *Verumpattam*. The rights of *janmi* over land and the obligations of tenants were determined by local customs, *maryadai*, which had no standardized forms and its application was localized. Disputes regarding the application of custom, or land transactions on the basis of *maryadai* were solved by local eminent persons called *Natuvar*.<sup>103</sup> However the two major interests in lands were embodied in *janmam* and *kanam* tenurial rights.<sup>104</sup> *Janmam* was considered to be the highest of all rights, its possessor was called *janmi*. Second to it was *kanam* and possessor was *kanakkaran*, an intermediary in agrarian relations. *Kuzhikanam* was a right over the freshly reclaimed land and the holder was exempted from all taxation for a brief period of time, mostly for a period of twelve years. Next in order was *verumpattam*, the holder being the actual cultivator of land. Namboothiris emerged as chief possessors of the *janmam* right and Nairs were the holders of *kanam* rights, at the same time some of them had *janmam* rights. In most of

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<sup>102</sup> P.Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change-Malabar 1836-1982*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p.5. In 1856 the Sadar Adalat in Madras stated that there were no less than 24 different kinds of land lease in Malabar. Margret Frenz, *From Contact to Conquest, Transition to British Rule in Malabar, 1790-1805*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 16

<sup>103</sup> K.N.Ganesh, 'Ownership and Control of Land in Medieval Kerala: Janmam-Kanam Relations during the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1991, 28, 3, pp. 299-321

<sup>104</sup> K.T.Thomas, 'The British Official Perception and Land Relations in Malabar and the Impact of Colonial Policy 1792-1812', in *Keralam- International Congress on Kerala Studies*, Abstract vol.3, Thiruvananthapuram, 1994, p. 47



the cases *verumpattam* holders were lower caste Nairs, Tiyas and Muslims. Colonial administrators held varied views regarding the tenurial practices of Malabar. Logan was not ready to accept *janmam* as a complete birthright over land.<sup>105</sup> C.A.Innes recorded that almost the whole of land in Malabar-cultivated and uncultivated - is private property and held by *janmam* rights, which conveys the absolute property rights in soil.<sup>106</sup> But by the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century many of the Nair families started asserting the *janmi* title with regard to their family properties and by late 19<sup>th</sup> century 40% of the principal *janmis* were high caste Nairs.<sup>107</sup> Logan argued that in Malabar the hereditary property was freely bought and sold long before Mysorean invasion took place. The practice of transaction of land misled the administrators and caused them to form controversial views on tenures. It can be accepted that *janmam* was largely an exclusive right enjoyed by Namboothiri and temple; here temple was significant as its administration was also carried by *yogam*, a body of Namboothiris.

Another significant tenurial right in Malabar was the *kanam*. This was a lease and mortgage tenure, in North Malabar it was known as *otti*.<sup>108</sup> *Kanam* was the right to supervise or protect all the inhabitants of the particular land. The *kanam* holder – *kanakkaran* enjoyed a fixed share of net produce of soil equal to that enjoyed by the *janmi*.<sup>109</sup> Malabar had a customary and hereditarily ordained agrarian system, which in turn was guarded by the caste system. Specification of the caste was manifested within the tenurial patterns. Namboothiri being the ideological head of the religion and *janmi* of the

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<sup>105</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Special Commission Report 1881-1882*, vol.1, Madras 1896, paragraph 66-67.

<sup>106</sup> C.A.Innes, op.cit., p. 307

<sup>107</sup> T.C.Varghese, *Agrarian Changes and Economic Consequences Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960*, Allied publishers, 1970, p.18

<sup>108</sup> K.N.Ganesh, 'Agrarian Society in Kerala 1500-1800', in P.J.Chcrian (ed), *Perspectives in Kerala History*, p. 142

<sup>109</sup> P.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p. 28

landed property successfully veiled the authority over the subordinate castes. As the Namboothiris were detached from the cultivating castes, the *kanakkar* being the intermediary group exercised complete physical control over the society. Agrarian system evidently manifested the Namboothiri hegemony and Nair manipulation of the then existing social settings. The two systems - caste and tenurial- together created an atmosphere which favoured the development of a peculiar inter-caste relationships and familial organization in Malabar.

### **Womanhood, Marriage and Conjugalilty - Namboothiris**

In every society marriage is an expression of its prevalent economic and agrarian structures. Traditional land relations and caste system together fashioned a bizarre marriage relation in Malabar. The status of women and pattern of marriage are inextricably linked. Conventionally all societies use marriage and marriage rules for creating a 'desired womanhood'. Marriage was considered as the ultimate objective of women's life and for accomplishing a satisfactory womanhood she was to get married and give birth to children. Hence a family's prime concern was to get daughters married off at an early age. The existence of unmarried daughters in the households was considered as a malediction by the patriarchal families.

The women of the Namboothiri community were known as *antharjanams*, it literally meant women of inner quarters. For the community women were a burden, for the family birth of a girl was an evil omen and it was believed to be a great misfortune.<sup>110</sup> As Namboothiris followed patriarchy,

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<sup>110</sup> When a girl is born in an *illom*, the midwife just knocks the door and if a boy is born, joy would be expressed loudly – *kuravayidum*. Devaki Nilayangode, *Antarjanam Memories of a Namboothiri Woman* (Translated from Malayalam by Indira Menon and Radhika Menon) Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 9. Lalithambika *Antharjanam*, wrote that when she was born, her father who was an educated and progressive person said that he won't continue in that

the male child was essential for the continuation of the family and every one longed to have boys. A Namboothiri girl was made to accept from an early age that she was not equivalent to the boys of the *illom*, *unninamboothirimar*. The community never had an egalitarian outlook towards boys and girls, boys always had a privileged life whereas girls grew up in an atmosphere of drudgery. Disparity between girls and boys was shown in the food given, costumes used, jewels worn and in education provided.<sup>111</sup>

Among the sixty four *anacharams* prescribed for Namboothiris, *anacharams* from forty four to forty eight were directly related to women.<sup>112</sup> Following the *anacharams*, whenever an *antharjanams* went out of the *illom*, she covered herself from head to toe with a *puthapu*, cloak, and was to carry a *marakuda*, cadjan umbrella. In addition to all these when they went out they must be accompanied by a maid, *dasi*, most probably a Nair woman. *Puthapu* and *marakuda* together formed the *ghosha* of an *antharjanam*, which was a symbol of extreme seclusion inflicted on women. Ghosha amounted to be a prison for *antharjanam*, it was made strict by the patriarchy to ensure that

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house, he would go to Madras and marry an European lady after converting to Christianity, so that if a girl child was born he could educate her and make her live as a human being; and could get her married to a good man. Lalithambika *Antharjanam, Athmakadaku Oru Amukham*, (Mal), Calicut University edition, 1997, Calicut, (first published -1979), p. 16. O.M.C.Narayanan Namboothiripad observed that for an *illom* the only pleasant fact associated with an *antharjanam* was her death, as her birth entailed heavy financial pressure on the family. O.M.C.Narayanan Namboothiripad, 'Bhooloka Narakam Namboothirikalude Jeevitham', *Unninamboothiri*, August 9, 1929, in Palakeezh Narayanan, *Devaki Narikkattiri Navodana Nayika*, (Mal), Samatha, Thrissur, 2014, pp. 78-84

<sup>111</sup> In most of the *illoms* boys were adorned with gold ornaments whereas girls were to be satisfied with silver or bronze. Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, vol.1, op.cit., p. 4

<sup>112</sup> *Anacharam* no.44. Brahman women must not look at any other besides their own husband. 45. Brahmin women must not go out, unless accompanied by a women servant. 46. They should wear only white clothing. 47. Noses should not be pierced. 48. Brahmans should forfeit their caste if they have intercourse with other Brahman women besides their wives. Quoted in Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 188

*antharjanam* never went astray.<sup>113</sup> Whenever an *antharjanam* falls sick a physician was not allowed to see her, diagnosis and treatment were all made through maid.<sup>114</sup> The confinement of *antharjanams* within the *illoms* was to make them immobile, to control their sexuality. Women's sexuality was a concern for both the family and the community as it was to be guarded for maintaining the purity of the race. Hence maintaining the purity of caste or sub caste for evading *varnasamkara*, became a task to be fulfilled by women and women's sexuality was put under strict surveillance by the patriarchy.<sup>115</sup>

However, within the *illom*, they moved in a half-naked fashion, they were not to cover the upper part of the body and used only a *mundu*. Regarding the dressing style of the Namboothiri it can be said that they continued the primitive habits even in the twentieth century. As per tradition *antharjanams* were not to cover the upper part of their body. They never used coloured clothes and were dependent on washerwomen to maintain the whiteness of their clothes.<sup>116</sup> *Antharjanams* though belonging to the wealthiest community of Malabar used only very limited jewellery. They were not permitted to use gold bangle; women of *adhyan* Namboothiri used brass bangle and women of *asyan* Namboothiri used bronze bangle.<sup>117</sup> Thus in the case of usage of jewellery gender subordination existed as Namboothiri men were allowed to use gold bangle.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Nellikal Muralidharan, *Kerala Jathi Vivaranam*, (Mal), Rainbow Book Publishers, Chengannur, 2008,p.46

<sup>114</sup> Elam Kulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, op.cit., p. 199

<sup>115</sup> Julius Lipner, *Hindus Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 108-111

<sup>116</sup> B.Bhageerathi Amma, 'Antharjanaghal', *Unninamboothiri*, 1922, book. 3, issue. 5, pp.193-200

<sup>117</sup> There were regional variations in the number and design of the bangles worn. Fred Fawcett regarded that bangles were often worn to cover the forearm. Fred Fawcett, op.cit., p. 43

<sup>118</sup> Appukuttan Vallikunnu, *Ariyapedatha E.M.S.*, (Mal), Sakthi Publication, Perinthalmanna, 1987, p.25

*Antharjanams* like any Indian women were not free from unending domestic chores. In some *illoms grihasthans* remarried to get woman for doing domestic works.<sup>119</sup> Even if Tamil Brahmin cooks were appointed in *illoms* for cooking, it was meant for visitors of *illom*. However in ordinary *illoms* the entire work was to be done by women. Meanwhile, they were also required to arrange for daily religious rituals to be performed by the men of the family. In most of the *illoms* there would be female servants, *irikannamma*, Nair women; sometimes there would be seven or eight in an *illom*. Girls of the *illom* were under the guidance of the *irikannamma* till the pre-puberty ritual of *kathu kuthi uduthu thudanghal*, usually done at the age of six or seven.<sup>120</sup> But Nair domestic maids were not permitted to cook food as Namboothiris won't consume food touched by Nairs and they were to do only the menial work. At the same time in rich *illoms* there would be some *antharjanams* from poor families who would help in cooking and some were employed as wet nurses.<sup>121</sup>

Namboothiri being a part of the Vedic tradition had to fulfill several religious daily rites and sacrifices. Though most of the rituals and sacrifices were centered in *illoms*, and not temples, women were not granted independent right in performing ritual, as religiosity is gendered.<sup>122</sup> Though sacrifices are done by men, wife or *veli*, was inevitable in most of their rituals; *upasanam* was the daily ritual to be performed by the couples together,

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with Kaniyampatta Devaki Antharjanam, 70 years, Calicut, 18/04/2016

<sup>120</sup> Till seven years of age children wore the leaf loin cloth. This was due to the fact that the touch of Nair women who served as *irikannamma* polluted the dress made of cloth. Interview with Thanikadu Uma Antharjanam, 76 years, Kunnamanagalam, 26/02/2016

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Edakattu Sreedevi Antharjanam, 74 years, Peringalam, 26/02/2016

<sup>122</sup> T.K.Anandi, 'Home as the Sacred Space- The Household rituals and the Namboothiri Women of Kerala', in K.N.Ganesh (ed), *Culture and Modernity: Historical Explorations*, Publication Division , University of Calicut, 2004, p. 141

moreover it was the duty of women to maintain *kedavilaku*.<sup>123</sup> While performing *yaga* like *somayagham* and *athirathram* the presence of wife along with the *yajamanan* of the *yagham* was inevitable. Nevertheless a Namboothiri attains higher titles of Adithiri, Somayaji and Akkithiri after performing *adhanam*, *somayagham* and *athirathram* respectively, whereas there was no titular change for the *antharjanam* who accompanied her husband in all these *yagas*. The *antharjanam* continued to remain as *pathanadi* irrespective of her husband's titular status, which can be regarded as a clear instance of gender discrimination on women.<sup>124</sup> The Namboothiri patriarchy was not ready to confer women with higher ritual status.

While Hindu women are largely disenfranchised from priestly rites, they persistently maintained their own traditions of religious observances, performing rites which have been handed down from mother to daughter for many generations.<sup>125</sup> *Antharjanams* themselves had to do certain rituals to the deity in their shrine, usually located close to the kitchen, including *puja*, *nivedhyam*. But as noticed by Marjatta Parpola rituals done by *antharjanams* were less formal to that of men and had its own characteristics.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, one of the major religious observations of *antharjanams* was votive rites known as *vratas*.<sup>127</sup> *Vratas* are domestic rites which Hindu women perform in the fulfillment of specific desires and were a part of the wife's duties. These

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<sup>123</sup> The denial of rights to do rituals and sacrifices might be a later addition, because there are *slokas* in Rigveda which prove that women had alone performed *yagas*. V.K.Narayana Bhattathiri, *Yaghnja Samskaram*, (Mal), Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 1989, p. 9

<sup>124</sup> Rajan Chungath, *Athirathram Vaidika Samskrithiyude Perumakal*, (Mal), Green Books, Thrissur, 2012, p. 35

<sup>125</sup> Sandra P. Robinson, 'Hindu Paradigms of Women: Images and Values', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (ed), *Women, Religion, and Social Change*, University of New York press, Albany, 1985, p. 181

<sup>126</sup> Marjatta Parpola, op.cit., pp. 217-218.

<sup>127</sup> They observed fasting on various auspicious days like *Ekadasi*, Thiruvathira, *Sivarathri*, on birthdays of husband and children etc. almost ten days a month went on fasting.

rites are consistent with traditions of sacrifice, asceticism and penance pervasive in Hinduism more generally.<sup>128</sup> Moreover *Dharmasatra* stated that religious women should not do any ritual or observance alone, ie. without the participation of husband.<sup>129</sup> The temple visits of *antharjanams* were confined to those in their own *illom* compound, and they rarely went to distant temples. Bathing was a significant routine and ritual for the Namboothiri community- both for men and women. It was believed that bathing was the only way to ensure purity. For *antharjanams* there were separate ponds, known as *vatakke kulam*, which they could access from the backside of the *illom*.<sup>130</sup>

Namboothiri community never felt that *antharjanams* were to be educated, but unlike the women of other communities *antharjanams* were not illiterate. At the age of four or five *vidyarambham* was performed, ie. they were initiated into reading and writing after a formal ceremony. *Antharjanams* were taught by *Brahminniamma* who familiarized them with Malayalam alphabets and were also trained in reading *Ramayana*, which lasted only for a few months. *Antharjanams* could read only the religious texts like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Silabathi*; all other secular texts were forbidden.<sup>131</sup> As women don't have the right to perform sacrifices on their own, they were denied Vedic education.<sup>132</sup> Restrictions were laid not only on education for girls but also on what they should read with their limited literacy. They were supposed to be 'moral' in what they read.<sup>133</sup> Such selections were obvious in a male dominated society, which always tries to

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<sup>128</sup> Sandra P. Robinson, op.cit., p. 198

<sup>129</sup> T.K.Anandi, op.cit., p. 142

<sup>130</sup> Henri Schildt, op.cit., p.77

<sup>131</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, op.cit., p. 30

<sup>132</sup> Varanakode Govindan Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 27

<sup>133</sup> In the drama '*Marakudakulile Mahanarakam*' when Ettipathi, protagonist of the play, reads a new poem, mothers thwart her and demand her to chant prayers. M.R.Bhattathiripad, *Marakudakulile Mahanarakam*, (Mal), Current Books, Thrissur, 1985, (first published -1930)

regulate the intellectual capacity of women. The orthodoxy considered the reading of religious texts as quite safe, as the scarcely literate women dare not interpret the sacred texts.<sup>134</sup>

A Namboothiri passes through sixteen rituals, *shodasa kriyakal*, during his life ie. from mother's womb to funerary rituals. But for an *antharjanam* there was only one Vedic ritual, marriage. The ceremony of marriage came to be recognized by legislators like Manu, as taking the place of the *upanayana* for women.<sup>135</sup> Normally pre-puberty marriages were not practiced by Namboothiris. This was also an exception as pre-puberty marriages were insisted by all other Brahmin communities in India. Cross-cousin marriage was not permitted for Namboothiris and they generally preferred marriage with distant *illoms* in order to break off all ties with bride's natal home and to facilitate her absorption into her husband's *illom*.<sup>136</sup> Marriage was fixed after matching the horoscope of girl and boy and an auspicious day was confirmed for the ceremony. Even often the marriage was decided, the girl may not have any information about it. No one in the *illom* would tell her nor there be any discussion about it in her presence. Mostly the girl comes to know about her marriage through servants. In arranging *veli* Namboothiris strictly observed community endogamy and *gothra* exogamy, bride and bride groom must not be related to each other through father or mother and the bridegroom must be the eldest son of the family.<sup>137</sup> However dowry to be given was the main consideration, as it was one of the chief

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<sup>134</sup> Devaki Nilayamkode has written how her sisters managed to get books from their brothers, as the books were forbidden. Brothers brought books concealing in their clothes they left books under the *aavanipalaka*. Sisters read the book secretly as the girls were not permitted to read and if the hidden books were found the punishment was certain. Devaki Nilayamkode, op.cit., p.32

<sup>135</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 'Gargi at the King's Court: Women and Philosophic Innovation in Ancient India Marriage', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (ed), op.cit., p. 41

<sup>136</sup> Joan P. Mencher and Helen Goldberg, op.cit.

<sup>137</sup> Fred Fawcett, Namboothiris, op.cit., p. 60



intentions of the bridegroom in marrying. *Veli* was an elaborate ceremony; it was a *Vedic* ritual and included various minor rites. Marriage was solemnized at the bride's house, in the presence of a sacred fire, *aupasana agni*, which was to be kept burning and was preserved till the death of the future husband and wife.<sup>138</sup> Throughout the ceremony the bride's face was not to be exposed; she was to cover herself from head to toe with a pure white cloth. *Thalikettu* ceremony was performed before the beginning of the proper marriage without *Vedic* recitations and *thali* was tied by the bride's father and not by the bridegroom.<sup>139</sup> After the rituals of the first day the bride and groom were to remain separate for the next three days and on the fourth day they performed certain ceremonies. At night they were taken to the bridal chamber for the ceremony of *sekam* or *velisesham*, at which they were made to cohabit.<sup>140</sup> On an auspicious day the bride was taken to the husband's house, where a ceremony called *kudiveppu* was observed, which symbolically proclaimed that she was a member of the husband's *illom* with all natural rights.

*Antharjanams* were like any other women community of India suppressed and exploited within the household and the only difference was that they were denied the basic right of mobility. Throughout India, even in the twentieth century, the practices of infant marriage and child marriage was prevalent, both of these were absent among Namboothiris. Still the root cause for all the sufferings of *antharjanams* was the system of marriage followed by the community, according to which only the eldest son was to marry within the community, *veli*. All other male members, *aphans*, established liaisons with women of matrilineal caste. Though Namboothiri men could marry from

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<sup>138</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 198

<sup>139</sup> T.K.Vellu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, vol.1, Government of Travancore, Travancore, 1940, p. 414

<sup>140</sup> Sumangala, *Antherjananghalum Acharangalum*, (Mal), Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnankulam, 2008, p. 25

other castes this privilege was not extended to Namboothiri women.<sup>141</sup> But women as the preservers of the purity of caste were to be married only to Namboothiri men. The strange marriage system led to the development of a peculiar social condition in which the number of Namboothiri men who could enter into *veli* was severely reduced. Consequently polygamy, *adhivedhanam*, became a common practice among the Namboothiri community. Sixty or seventy year old men married very young girls and most of the *grihasthans* had four or five *veli*. *Grihasthans* remarried for various reasons for paying off debt by accepting dowry, for marrying off their daughter or sister or if they had no issue by one wife or to have a son he may remarry.<sup>142</sup>

However by custom a Namboothiri was permitted to have four wives at a time.<sup>143</sup> Polygamy naturally led to a very dreadful condition in the life of women, where they had to exist with other co-wives. Rivalry among co-wives was a quite natural incident in *illoms*. The senior wife or the eldest one would

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<sup>141</sup> This led to an increase in the number of unmarried women in *illoms*. A 'well wisher' wrote that there would be three or four unmarried girls over thirty and thirty five years in *illoms*. A well wisher of the community, 'Kanishtavivahamkondulla Chila Gunaghal', *Unninamboothiri*, 120, book.1, issue. 1, pp. 9-12

<sup>142</sup> A son was essential for perpetuating the family; otherwise the *illom* may become extinct. In the *shodasa kriyakal* one ritual was *pumsavanam*, this was done during the third month of pregnancy, for begetting a boy. P.Bhaskaranunni, *Smarthavicharam- Oru Padanam*, (Mal), Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham, Kottayam, 1978, p. 18. A peculiar kind of marriage, *Sarvasvadanam* marriage, not sanctioned by Mitakshara, had existed among Namboothiris, in which when there was no male member to produce progeny, and in such case a man of another family was brought into the family and married to a daughter of it. The man was made a member of the family and was to perform the funerary rites of the members of that family. Children born to that couple were the inheritors of the *illom*. K.Ramavarma Raja, The Brahmins of Malabar, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, July 1910, p. 532, see also Fred Fawcett, op.cit., p. 47

<sup>143</sup> V.Nagam Aiya, op.cit., p.258. *Adhivedhanam* can be regarded as a 'system' devised to reduce the number of unmarried girls within the community. P.V.Krishna Varrier, 'Namboothiri Samudayam- Avarenghine Adhapadhichu', *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 18/01/1948, pp. 6-7

be most powerful in *illoms* and she ruled others. The most dominant *antharjanam* would be one who was the favourite of the *grihasthan*. Even though married, many of them were deprived of a conjugal life, and only one or two of the wives had proper marital life. Domestic work would be divided among them and was supervised by the eldest wife.

*Antharjanams* were exposed to brutal violence within *illoms* and severe punishments, including physical assault, were inflicted on laxity of work. Violence against women was inherent in patriarchy and was extensively used to suppress women beyond any resistance. Women were often beaten to death inside *illoms*. Historically, domestic violence was treated as a private affair, an extension of the husband's right to control the behavior of his wife, to be handled within the confines of the home.<sup>144</sup> Domestic violence against women was widely prevalent in Namboothiri families; it was adopted not only by men but also by women who did the same against young co-wives. Every *illom* would have a story of a member who died as a victim of domestic violence several years back. Young brides were the victims of these violent attacks largely due to the jealousy of senior wives.

The marriage of daughters was the most important issue of all discussions in *illoms*, as unmarried girls were considered to be a curse. Girls were supposed to pray for getting good husbands, and this was an inevitable part of their daily routine. The community never wanted a woman to die as a spinster, hence once dead she was tied with a *thali*, by a Namboothiri, to escape from the blight of dying unmarried.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Leigh Goodmark, *A Troubled Marriage - Domestic Violence and the Legal System*, New York University Press, New York, 2012, p. 2

<sup>145</sup> *Thali* was tied around the neck, to symbolize that the dead woman is married, however old she may be this ritual was performed. The *thali* was tied not by the father but by any distant relative. P.Bhaskaranunni, *Pathompatham Nootadile Keralam*, op.cit., p. 174 and Fred Fawcett, op.cit., p. 61.

One of the main issues involved in marriage was the ever increasing demand for dowry, which aggravated the number of unmarried girls. Girls were destined to remain unmarried due to the inability of the family to meet the dowry demands. Logan observed that a Namboothiri must be very rich to pay the heavy dowry asked for, resulting in the economic decline of *illoms*.<sup>146</sup> To get rid of the demand for dowry, a system of exchange marriage developed in *illoms*. *Grihasthans* married several times and in exchange their sisters or daughters would be married by the relatives of *grihasthans* new wife.<sup>147</sup> Marriage was conceived as a solution to pay off debts by accepting dowry. These created a deplorable situation in the *illom* and *antharjanams* and their parents continuously prayed for the marriage of their daughters and lamented about their fate. In these marriages girls got partners who were older than their father.<sup>148</sup> Namboothiri girls were to be married soon after they attained puberty. The only qualification expected of the groom was that he must be a Namboothiri. For girls of poor *illoms* even these seemed to be impossible, as dowry was an inevitable element for Namboothiri marriages. Marriage was simply a ritual to satisfy the religious needs of the community and family. Women never expected any change in their life from marriage, but they just wanted to attain the status of being married.

Married life for an *antharjanam* was not always a pleasant one. Women were married only for begetting son, which was a chief concern of the community. She became a member of a new *illom* and was to live there

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<sup>146</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, op.cit., pp. 127-129

<sup>147</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad's father was forced to a second marriage in order to get his sister married, who was married by his new wife's father. Appukuttan Vallikunnu, op.cit., p. 147.

<sup>148</sup> A.M.N.Chakiyar refers to an incident he heard according to which the bride ran away during the wedding ceremony, when she saw her groom who was an old man through her *mudupadam*, veil. A.M.N.Chakiyar, *Avasanathe Smarthavicharam*, (Mal), Department of Cultural Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001, p. 19

till her death. The newly wedded girl was to do all work demanded by religion and customs of the household. She lived among a group of people who never accepted her wholeheartedly. They were not to come to the outer quarters of the *illom*. A married women was to be seen only by her husband, even the brother-in-law could never see her face.<sup>149</sup> An *antharjanam* was not to be called by her name by a male other than her husband, if it happens her chastity would be doubted.<sup>150</sup> Power relations in *illoms* were hierarchically ordained and all interactions were decided on the basis of these considerations. Gender differentiation for all age groups was strictly maintained in *illoms*; moreover junior-senior segregation was also powerful. Among women, senior *antharjanams* were more dominant, seniority was determined according to the date of marriage and not on the basis of *antharjanams*' age. For an *antharjanam* there was only one marriage in her lifetime; divorce and remarriage were not permitted.

The marriage of young girls to old men increased the possibility of early widowhood. Even though child marriage was not in vogue among Namboothiris the number of young widows was considerably higher. Widow remarriage was prohibited among Namboothiris. After the death of the husband they were to continue in the husband's *illom* where they were to work as domestic maids. As a general feature of Brahmanical patriarchy, widows were exposed to severe hardships. At the same time, unlike other Brahmin communities tonsure of widows was not practiced among Namboothiris.<sup>151</sup> Widows with sons were in a better condition than those with girls or with no children. For a widow it was very difficult to get her

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<sup>149</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Agnisakshi*, Current Books, (Mal), Thrissur, 1985, (first published - 1976),p. 58

<sup>150</sup> Madamppu Kunhju Kuttan, *Bhrasht*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 1973, p. 98

<sup>151</sup> P.P.Narayanan Namboothiri, op.cit., p.131-132. A widow was regarded as an 'ill omen', and was to live as invisible for the male of the *illom*. See M.R.Bhattathiripad, 'Marikkatha Ormakal', *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 21/08/1955, pp. 26-28

daughters married as she and her children may be at the mercy of the *aphan* of the *illom* or somebody else.<sup>152</sup> Widows were not supposed to participate in any functions in *illoms* and were to do all the domestic work.

### **Womanhood, Marriage and Conjuality - Nairs**

When marriage was a Vedic ceremony of high sanctity for the Namboothiri community, Nairs had a bizarre matrimonial system of *sambandham*. Nair was one of the exotic castes of Malabar as their relationship with Namboothiris entitled them to claim a dominant status in the then circumstances. Nairs have been a topic of interest among the anthropologists and sociologists all over the world due to the system of marriage and family existing among them. Matriliney or *marumakkathayam* was the pattern of inheritance adopted by Nairs and this system created an image of Nair women which can be juxtaposed with that of *antharjanams*. Foreign travelers and colonial historians created lustrous image of Nair women. Western European writers were perplexed with the marriage relations that had existed here.

Nair *tarawads* were the politico-juridical centers of pre-colonial Kerala, which wielded enormous power on the then social setting. Nair *tarawads* were structured on the matrilineal line with uncles and nephews forming a unique relationship, combined with the absence of father-son relation. Women occupied a central position in the Nair community and property was inherited by women and their children. Property was transmitted in *tarawads* down the generation in the female line. A Nair woman throughout her life would be a member of her *tarawad*, ie. her *tarawad* does not change after marriage. Nair women continued to live in her *tarawad* with her children till her death. She was responsible for the development of her

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with Thanikadu Maya *Antharjanam*, 71 years, Kunnamangalam, 26/02/2016

children as the husband had no such legal obligation. In the Nair community there was no recognition for the relationship of husband and wife and of father and child.

Management of the *tarawads* was done by male members of the family, in a few *tarawads* a custom existed by which the management is vested in the senior female in preference to the senior male member of the family.<sup>153</sup> In many of the *sthani* Nair *tarawads* some property was allocated for the maintenance of women and children.<sup>154</sup> On the death of the *karanavan*, if the male member of the *tarawad* happens to be minor, the management of the *tarawad* devolved on the senior female. The general presumption in favour of management by the senior male was all too often turned into an exclusion of women from managerial roles or used to exhaust women's claims. *Karanavan* was responsible to provide for all the members of the *tarawad*. During that period as the needs of individuals were limited, everyone was comfortable with the maintenance provided by the *tarawad*.

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<sup>153</sup> Lewis Moore, *Malabar Law and Custom*, Higginbotham and Company, Madras, 1905, p. 120

<sup>154</sup> Praveena Kodoth, op.cit. *Arthasasthra* contains the reference of a land known as *Vrithi*, which was handed over to the bride by her parents as dowry. Husband may use this only at time of emergency situation and he can't misappropriate it. On the death of the woman the property devolved to her daughters, in their absence to the sons. If there were no children for the couples the property devolved to the husband. N.S.Mannadiar, *Kautilyante Arthasasthram Anthardharayum Samakalikaprasakthiyum*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2015, pp. 36-37. Flavia Agnes argued that among some communities there was the practice of conferring property ownership on women, and by convention this was observed down the generations. A custom of handing over a piece of land to the daughter at the time of marriage prevailed in some regions of Tamil Nadu. The income from this land was meant for the women's exclusive use. This was the part of her dowry and devolved on the female heirs and passed from mother to daughter and was known as *Manjal Kani*, the land was perhaps to provide for her personal expenses. Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, (first published -1999), pp. 18-19

While the *karanavan* cared for the economic expositions of the *tarawad*, the internal affairs of the *tarawad* were under the control of eldest female member. In *tarawads* there would be a large number of women of different ages and generations. Women who were the direct kin members of the *karanavan* dominated over others. Domestic work was divided among all members and in well to do *tarawads* there would be servants for cooking and household work.<sup>155</sup> Unlike *antharjanams* they had the right to move out; they frequently visited temples and houses of relatives. Logan observed that, “the women in particular enjoy a large measure of liberty and mixed freely in public assemblies.”<sup>156</sup> They had not many daily religious duties apart from lighting lamps in the *tarawad* shrine. At the age of three or four a ceremony of *vidyarambham* was conducted, through which children were initiated into learning and later they were sent to traditional schools, *ezhtupalli*, where they were taught various subjects. There was no aversion in educating the girls and wealthy households appointed tutors who visited or stayed in *tarawads* for teaching children. Nair women were not to cover their bosom; they used a white cloth which covered the lower part of the body. No one used upper garments as it indicated lower caste. Occasionally while abroad, they throw over the shoulders and bosom a similar cloth,<sup>157</sup> but in front of elders, Namboothiris and while visiting temple they were to expose their chest. Nair women used various types of gold ornaments, some of them were very heavy and many *tarawads* had enormous quantity of gold jewellery, which was inherited by the members.

The status of Nair women was not the same throughout Malabar, as it varied according to the status of their *tarawads*. Women of sthani Nair

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<sup>155</sup> The novel *Kayar*, depicts the life of Nair women in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thakazhi Sivasanaran Pillai, op.cit.

<sup>156</sup> William Logan, op.cit., p. 163

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p. 162



*tarawads* lived like women of royal households.<sup>158</sup> These women accepted only Namboothiris as their marriage partners. The women of the middle class Nair *tarawads* led a normal life as any other women in Kerala society. Moreover there were a large number of Nair women who worked as maid servants in Namboothiri *illoms*, royal households and in Nair *tarawads*. So it is not easy to generalize Nair women's status into a single category.<sup>159</sup>

The Nairs of Malabar preferred to have hypergamous marriage relations with the Namboothiri, Thampurans and with high caste Nairs. The concept of *anuloma - prathiloma* was well maintained in the marriage relations of Nairs.<sup>160</sup> Moreover irrespective of the caste of the father, which is higher than her, children born to a Nair woman, would be of her caste. Nair women could have marriage relations with men of the same caste or with higher caste men; at the same time she was not to have any relation with lower caste men. If a woman was reported to have such a relation with a lower caste man she was excommunicated.

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<sup>158</sup> In reality every *sthani* Nair *tarawads* wanted royal family members as their partners but everyone could not get *Thampurans* for *sambandham* so they preferred to have Namboothiri partners. Interview with Kannambra Kunjukutty Neithyar, 88 years, Thrissur, 02/09/2015

<sup>159</sup> M.G.S.Narayanan discusses about *Puthurakonte Ayiram Pennughal* who were women of reputed families some of whom still exist. Nair women undertook cleaning in *Kovilakams*, and male members from these families were soldiers of Zamorins army. Moreover many Thampurans of Zamorins' Kovilakam had *sambandham* relations in these Nair *tarawads*. Though they were doing cleaning works in Kovilakam no shame was attached to that, because it was honour, for the family and for the woman, to be a part of the group. Details regarding the Nair families, name of women, the remuneration they were given are all mentioned in Kozhikoden Granthavari. M.G.S.Narayanan, *Kozhikode Charithrathil Ninnu Chila Edukkal*, op.cit., p. 150

<sup>160</sup> A woman could marry a man of her own caste or from that of a caste higher than her, such marriages would be *anuloma* but she was prevented from marrying a person who belonged to caste lower than her if such a relationship happened it would be *prathiloma*. Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishna Raj, op.cit., p.30.

The Nairs of North Malabar were held to be superior all along the line to those of South Malabar, so that a woman of North Malabar would not unite herself to a man of her own clan name of South Malabar.<sup>161</sup> Women of North Malabar were not to move southwards crossing the Korapuzha River; if they did so they were made outcaste.<sup>162</sup> The restrictions on movement of women have been explained on the basis that every month after menstruation, women have to be purified, which was possible only with the *mattu* brought by Mannan caste.<sup>163</sup> As the Mannan caste was peculiar to Malabar, women were compelled to remain in Malabar. But the real reason for this movement restriction needs to be sought elsewhere. It could have been an attempt by the local chieftains to control the sexuality of the women in their region. Moreover there was a general belief that women of South Malabar were of loose morals and so on visiting that region ‘our women would also become immoral’. This was explicit in a popular song among North Malabar Nair women that,

*Thekkan dikil povale kama*  
*thekathikkal chatikuve kama*<sup>164</sup>

The *marumakkathayam* and the system of visiting husbands that had existed in South Malabar became the ‘classical *marumakkathayam*’ as popularized by the foreign travelers and colonial administrators. The colonial prejudices of non European civilizations, their incapability in accepting matrilineal

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<sup>161</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p.303

<sup>162</sup> The first woman to cross Korapuzha was Mathamma, wife of Cheruvalathu Chathu Nair. In 1891 she came to Calicut with her husband, for which they were excommunicated by the caste council. V.P.Muhammed, ‘Meenakshiyum Grandhakaranaya Cheruvalathu Chathu Nayarum’, in Cheruvalathu Chathu Nair, *Meenakshi*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 1990,(first published - 1890), pp. 6-7

<sup>163</sup> Edgar Thurston , op.cit., p. 304

<sup>164</sup> Poem points towards the sexual laxity of South Malabar women, that they won’t be satisfied even with Kamadevan, Hindu God of human love, sexuality and desire.

inheritance patterns were all reflected in their descriptions of *marumakkathayam* and Nair women. Western Europeans couldn't accept the existence of a marriage system where children were not entitled to the property of the father. All the travelers who visited Malabar wrote more about Nairs than any other castes, as they were astonished not only by the joint family system but also by the peculiar marriage relations. Durate Barbosa provides details of the Nair marriage system and Nair women, by contrasting the practices here with what existed in Europe. So from the very description it was made to feel that Nair customs were 'immoral and barbaric.'<sup>165</sup> Francis Buchanan discusses about the character of Nair women in this manner, "she cohabits with any person that she chooses of an equal or higher rank than her own. If detected bestowing her favours on any low caste man, she becomes an outcaste. It is no kind of reflection on a women's character to say, that she has formed closest intimacy with many person; on the contrary, the Nair women are proud of reckoning among their favoured lovers many Brahmanas, Rajas or other persons of high birth"<sup>166</sup>

A Nair girl of Malabar passed through three stages of marriage - *thalikettukalyanam*, *thirandukuli* and *sambandham*.<sup>167</sup> Except for Namboothiri Brahmins, the lowest castes, and the aboriginal tribes, among all other Hindu communities of the Malabar Coast, girls have to undergo an elaborate *thali* rite before attaining puberty.<sup>168</sup> *Thalikettukalyanam* was the pre-puberty marriage, it was also known as *panthalmangalam* and *manjakulikalyanam*.

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<sup>165</sup> Durate Barbosa observed that, "these men are not married, their nephews are their heirs. Nair women of good birth are very independent and dispose off themselves with Brahmins and they do not sleep with men of lower caste under pain of death." Durate Barbosa, op.cit., p. 40

<sup>166</sup> Francis Buchanan, op.cit., p. 411

<sup>167</sup> *Sambandham* was also known as *pudamuri*, *kidakkora kalyanam* and *uzhamporukkal*. In North Malabar the term *sambandham* was not used instead they were familiar with *pudamuri*.

<sup>168</sup> A.Aiyappan, 'The Meaning of the *Thali* Rite', *Bulletin of Rama Varma Research Institute*, vol. IX, part II, 1941, pp. 68-91

The concept of *thalikettukalyanam*, the pre-puberty marriage was the same in North and South Malabar, but more significance was attached to it in the South. The *tarawad* must arrange the *thalikettukalyanam* before the girl attains puberty; otherwise it was a matter of shame for that property group. The ceremony was performed simultaneously for all immature girls in a family, whatever their age.<sup>169</sup> An auspicious day was fixed by the *karanavan* in consultation with the astrologer, and the *enangar* were invited.<sup>170</sup> In upper class *tarawads* even Kings were invited and a feast was arranged for several thousands of people; in such *tarawads* *thali* was tied by Namboothiris. It was an occasion to show the pomp and glory of the *tarawads*.

Anthropologists throughout the world studied the marriage system of Nairs, as a specimen structure for analyzing the matrilineal marriage practices. They often tried to search for parallels in the Nair marriage to fit it within the structure already created for matrilineal societies. Kathleen Gough observed that *enangan* lineage played an important role in the *thalikettukalyanam* of Nair girls. She regarded that each lineage was linked by hereditary ties of ceremonial co-operation with two or three lineages of the neighbourhood. She considered that the *thali* rite was a form of group

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<sup>169</sup> C.A.Innes, op.cit., p.170

<sup>170</sup> Enangar had an important place in Nair *tarawads* of South Malabar. Enangar means 'linked lineages'. *Enangars* were Nairs of the same caste-subdivision within the same villages. A *tarawads* may have two or three *enangar tarawads*. They have peculiar responsibility during *thalikettukalyanam* and funerary rites. Moreover if a *tarawad* goes against the tradition and accepted rules of the land it was the duty of the *enangar* to intimate it to higher authorities of the village. So *enangar* were a check on the activities of the *tarawads*. *Enangar* families also had *sambandham* right over *tarawads*, ie. if an *enangan* shows interest to marry a Nair woman (she may be married or unmarried) usually her *karanavan* permits even though he may not be completely in favour of that relation. Village assemblies (*tarakutttaghal*) had the power to decide upon disputed marriage relations and in some cases they even ordered women to end their relation with certain person. K.T.Ravivarma, *Marumakkathayam Lakshadweepum Thekkan Sambradayaghalum*, (Mal), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, pp. 168- 170; Interview with Eaghadathil Narayani Amma, Ottapalam, 79 years, 5/3/2016.

marriage where a girl was married to a collectivity of men of appropriate caste, *enangan*, by which she gains a general right to bear children.<sup>171</sup> Moreover she added that Nair unions are marriages as they included the concept of legal paternity, ie. paternity of each child born to a Nair girl must be legitimated by a person of the appropriate caste. Louis Dumont applying the theory of primary and secondary marriages suggested that *thali*-rite was a woman's primary marriage and *sambandham* unions were secondary. He observed that when other Indian groups treat the primary marriage rites as significant, Nairs relegated this to a "mere ritual formality" and as a result the real unions fall into the category of secondary marriages.<sup>172</sup> C.J.Fuller maintained that *thali* rite and *sambandham* fulfills two separate functions when the first transforms the status of the girl, the second elevates her sexuality to a new mode linking it with one or more men, which was essential for legitimizing her children.<sup>173</sup> Melinda Moore observed that *thali* rite contained a number of elements associated with fertility and with the state of auspicious marriedness called *mangalyam*. She noted that it was a way for a family to manifest its status in the feudal hierarchy and to show that the *thali*-tiers, young men who hold higher status in the hierarchy, were related to the house in the hierarchical feudal order.<sup>174</sup>

While analyzing the process of the ceremony it can be seen that *thalikettukalyanam* was a ceremony of four days and the *thali* was tied on the

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<sup>171</sup> Kathleen Gough, 'Nayars and the Definition of Marriage', in Patricia Uberoi (ed) *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 237-256

<sup>172</sup> Louis Dumont, *Affinity as a Value: Marriage Alliance in South India, with Comparative Essays on Australia*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1983, pp. 135-136

<sup>173</sup> C.J.Fuller, *Nayars Today*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, pp.104-105

<sup>174</sup> Melinda Moore, 'Symbol and Meaning in Nayar Marriage Ritual', *American Ethnologist*, 15(2), 1988, pp. 254-273; K.M.Kapadia has observed that, in a community where the marriage tie was loose, publicity was an essential element of marriage. K.M.Kapadia, op.cit., p. 81

fourth day.<sup>175</sup> For upper class Nairs *thali* was tied by Namboothiri men; but the girl was not to observe death pollution of the *thali* tier. In the case of commoner Nairs *thali* was tied by *enangan*, mother or uncle or aunt in the presence of deity of their local temple. There was no insistence on it being done by a man. In North Malabar *thalikettukalyanam* was the responsibility of the girl's *tarawad* and it was done in her maternal uncle's house.<sup>176</sup> The *thali* tier, *manavalan*, was brought to the bride's house by a procession and was welcomed by the *karanavan* and other male members. The bride was adorned with gold jewellery and new clothes. The *thali* was tied at the auspicious moment in front of all invitees. After the *thali* tying ceremony the bride and groom were taken inside the house, where they were to remain till the fourth day. Though by term the custom denoted a marriage the bride and groom never cohabited.<sup>177</sup> At the end of the ceremony, on the fourth day the groom and the girl were given lunch together and after that a cloth was served into two parts and each part was given to the groom and bride in the presence of *enangan* and relatives. The serving of the cloth was supposed to constitute a divorce and in spite of the divorce the girl was to observe pollution on the death of the groom.<sup>178</sup> In some parts of Malabar the *thali* tier had claims on the girl for entering into *sambandham* relation with her. A custom was in

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<sup>175</sup> There was regional variation in ceremony, in some places the *thali* was tied on the third day.

<sup>176</sup> In North Malabar a Nair girl lived in her father's matrilineal house, but her *thalikettukalyanam* was to be organized at her maternal uncle's house. Her father's *tarawads* also had certain responsibilities during *thalikettukalyanam*. In well to do *tarawads* father's relatives brought golden bangles for the girl. However as per the explanation provided by Moyarath Shankaran when the father of a Nair girl was alive, her *thalikettukalyanam* was to be organized at her father's house and not in her *tarawad*. Hence within North Malabar there were differences in the conduct of the ritual. Moyarath Shankaran, *Ente Jeevitha Kadha*, (Mal), Rachana Books, Kollam, 2006, (reprint), pp. 13-14

<sup>177</sup> However during the sixteenth century a system called *nishkam* had existed in south Malabar by which the girl was initiated to a sexual relation by the *thali* tier. K.T.Ravi Varma, op.cit., pp. 202-203

<sup>178</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 315

prevalence that the girl's *tarawads* must enquire at *enangan tarawads* before fixing the *sambandham* of the girl.<sup>179</sup> It can be inferred that this tradition existed among commoner Nairs than that of upper classes, where the *thali* tiers were from Namboothiri community.

The occasion of *thalikettukalyanam* was used by communities to overcome certain restrictions laid on them by the caste system. For instance Ezhavas incorporated *kalaripayattu* during the procession before *thalikettukalyanam*; *kalaripayattu* was supposed to be a martial art form of Nairs. On the other hand the Nairs during the ceremony used *pallaku*, elephant, decorated umbrella; all these materials were the monopoly of royalty. The ruling classes of Kerala adopted Vedic rituals for *thalikettukalyanam*, which were the sole possession of Namboothiris.<sup>180</sup>

*Thirandukalyanam* or *thirandukuli* was performed when a girl had attained maturity; on the fourth day the girl was taken for a ritual bath and was adorned with golden jewellery. It was a celebration for women of the property group; relatives visited the girl and presented her with gifts. The girl was isolated in a room for four days and on the fourth day she was given a ritual bath and a feast was provided. *Thirandukuli* was a celebration of woman's sexuality and it announced that she has come of age. Puberty rituals are observed for socializing girls into sexual life of the culture. When she passes through the initiation ritual she is transformed from childhood to the world of adults and was made capable of sexual life as a heterosexual.<sup>181</sup>

Even though etymologically *thalikettukalyanam* was a marriage it was an empty marriage, as there was no union between woman and man. Besides,

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with Kolayikkal Meenakshi Amma, 83 years, Palakkad, 16/11/2016

<sup>180</sup> K.T.Ravi Varma, op.cit., p. 228

<sup>181</sup> Michael S.Kimmel, Introduction, in Michael S.Kimmel, Amy Aronson, Amy Kaler (ed), *The Gendered Society Reader*, Oxford University Press, Ontario, 2008, p.45

it could also be assumed that the term *kalyanam* connotes an auspicious occasion, and its mistranslation as marriage might have led to obnoxious interpretations by foreign travelers. However it was compulsory that every girl must go through these two processes as a prerequisite for becoming eligible for marriage. In North Malabar there were two kinds of marriage- *pudamuri* and *uzhamporukka*. *Pudamuri* was supposed to be the perfect marriage, it was decided by the *karanavan* of the bride and groom when their horoscopes matched.<sup>182</sup> The ceremony at which the date and time of marriage was fixed was known as *pudamurikurrikkal*. Marriage was solemnized at night, the groom entered the bride's house (girl's maternal uncle house, ie. her *tarawad*) accompanied by his friends and the bride was given clothes- *pudava*. Presenting *pudava* was the only ritual associated with marriage. Next day a feast was arranged and the women of the groom's family took the bride with them. After *pudamuri* the woman lived with her husband in his matrilineal *tarawad*. The second type of marriage was *uzhamporuka* or was also called as *vidaram kayaral* and was devoid of any specific ritual. No *pudava* was given by the groom to bride and no feast was arranged on the next day, consequently in this type of marriage woman cannot go to husband's house.<sup>183</sup> In South Malabar *sambandham* was decided by mutual consultations of *karanavans* of bride's family and bride groom's family and a date was fixed for the ceremony. The bride groom accompanied by his friends, visited the bride's house at night and the bride was given two clothes, *pudava*. *Dakshina* was also given to the Brahmins Pattars present there. After the feast the bride groom was taken to the bridal chamber and in the morning he left the house with his party, leaving under his pillow 8, 16, 32 or 64

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<sup>182</sup> Matching of horoscope was regarded as an important criterion for marriage among Nairs in North Malabar but in South Malabar the practice was of a later origin.

<sup>183</sup> K.T.Ravi Varma, *Marumakkathayam Gothra Marumakkathayavum Vadakkan Sambradayaghalum*, (Mal), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2004, pp. 279-280



rupees, according to his means, which was intended to cover the expense of the wife's household in connection with the ceremonies of marriage.<sup>184</sup> This was the end of the *sambandham* ceremony and the girl remained in her house and the groom departs. The husband visits the wife occasionally, coming in the night and leaving next morning.

The absence of elaborate rituals for solemnizing marriage might have led the observers to regard *Sambandham* as not a 'marriage'. Like marriage, divorce was also a comparatively easeful procedure among Nairs and was achieved without elaborate rituals. No reason was needed; mere dislike was enough to separate. *Sambandham* was dissoluble at will and often it happens that due to misunderstanding or quarrels either of the partners may break off the relation. A woman, if she wished, could terminate the *sambandham* as the community has given her the right to do so. No sort of formality was necessary to dissolve the *sambandham*. The non-acceptance of usual presents on the occasion of *Onam*, *Vishu* and *Thiruvathira* on the part of the woman or the non-sending same on the part of the man was considered as a justifiable ground for the dissolution. *Sambandham* relation depended on the will of either parties for its permanence, both partners were at liberty at any moment and for any cause to terminate it by the simple expedient of discontinuing it, without any ceremony sanctioning divorce.<sup>185</sup>

Within matriline women had the right to remain unmarried, and though every *tarawad* wanted its women to be married in a befitting manner, there was no aversion for the society towards the women who preferred to remain single. The number of wives was always lowest in Malabar, within the

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<sup>184</sup> Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 334

<sup>185</sup> P.V. Balakrishnan, op.cit., pp.102-103. Though divorce was freely allowed, it was rarely that the parties to the *sambandham* separate. Modayil Pothen Joseph, op.cit., p. 14

Madras Presidency.<sup>186</sup> Similarly Malabar had the highest number of unmarried women. The reason for this unusual statistics was explained on the basis of the system of marriage and divorce that existed in this region. Moreover the late marriage of girls followed by the matrilineal inheritance significantly contributed to these statistics.

Sl. No.	Age Group	No. of unmarried women in Malabar	District with second highest number of unmarried women in the presidency	
			District	No. of unmarried women
1	10-14	85705	Tanjore	80213
2	15-19	35737	Madura	34524
3	20-24	15416	Madura	7215
4	25-29	10761	Madura	2459
5	30-34	9136	Bellary	1851
6	35-39	6662	South Canara	1055
7	40-44	6516	South Canara	1150
8	45-49	3975	South Canara	629
9	50-54	4317	South Canara	671
10	55-59	1904	South Canara	250
11	60 and above	5240	South Canara	631

Source: Census of India, 1891

<sup>186</sup> Table made from the statistics on civil condition of Hindus given in the Census of India, 1891. As per the table Malabar, in all age groups, always had highest number of unmarried women in the Madras Presidency. Whereas the difference between, the number of unmarried women in Malabar and that of in the district which occupied second position was always higher. The reason for higher number of unmarried women in South Canara may be due to the existence of *Aliyasantham* system of inheritance, which was similar to *marumakkathayam*. Census of India, 1891, vol. XIV, Madras, p. 58.

Most of the foreign travelers regarded that Nair women were polyandrous, and that it was a customary practice among them.<sup>187</sup> The number of husbands for a Nair woman was one of the main concerns of the travelers and strange descriptions were provided by them. John Neiuhoff, who visited Malabar in seventeenth century, maintained that a Nair man was not allowed to have more than one wife at a time. “However a Nair woman was at the liberty to have three husbands, but she was not permitted to maintain relation with more than one Namboothiri at a time.”<sup>188</sup> It was observed that “Nair ladies could have many husbands, every one being allowed four; their houses have as many doors as the lady has husbands, every husband enters the house through the door assigned to him. One day in every week all the four doors are opened and all her husbands visit her and dine together with her. Each of them gives her a sum of money.”<sup>189</sup> The description creates an impression that Nair ladies were prostitutes and the authors made it clear that Nairs ‘don’t have family’, and these relations were just for sexual pleasure but such women were not attached with any dishonor.

Sheik Zainuddin, observed that, each woman had two or four men who cohabited with her, and the men seldom quarreled, the woman distributed her time among her husbands just as a Muhammedan distributes his time among his wives.<sup>190</sup> Logan added that, “Nair women are as chaste and faithful as their

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<sup>187</sup> Durate Barbosa, op.cit., pp. 46-47, Francis Buchanan, op.cit., p. 172, Walter Hamilton, op.cit., p. 293

<sup>188</sup> John Neiuhoff, *John Nieuhoff's Voyages and Travels to the East Indies - 1662*, vol. II, London, 1703, p. 236. Alexander Hamilton observed that Nair ladies were allowed to have twelve husbands. Alexander Hamilton, op.cit., p. 310

<sup>189</sup> Thomas and James Swords, op.cit., p. 275. Jonathan Duncan remarked that Nair women were attached to two or four males and nights were equally distributed among them, and the Nairs were totally indifferent towards the “matrimonial contract.” Jonathan Duncan, *Historical Remarks of the Coast of Malabar with some description of the manners of its inhabitants, Asiatic Researches*, London, 1799, pp. 1-35

<sup>190</sup> Sheikh Zainuddin Al Makhdoom, *Tuhafat ul Mujahideen*, National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi, 2014(first published -1583), p. 30

neighbours, although their costumes do not include some of the details required by conventional notions of modesty.”<sup>191</sup> Another foreign account goes as, “the Malabar princes, the Namboothiri and also the chief Nairs commonly have one wife; whom they endeavor by the most obliging means to dissuade from taking another husband, for they cannot compel them to refrain, as they are allowed by law of the country to marry as many husbands as they please.”<sup>192</sup>

However polyandry had existed among Nair women as far back as eighty or ninety years. As observed by K.M.Panikkar, “though strict polyandry does not seem to have existed at any time, traces of a system of supplementary spouses, exists even now.”<sup>193</sup> Quoting K.Kannan Nair and several other writers of the contemporary period and drawing evidence from traditional literary works like *Keralolpathi*, anthropologist A.Aiyappan argued that, “polyandry had existed among Nairs, which has now become an obsolete custom.”<sup>194</sup> Father J.Puthenkalam remarked that both fraternal and non-fraternal polyandry had existed among Nairs.<sup>195</sup> Maintaining marital relations with more than one husband was prevalent among the community and it was not attached with any remorse nor was there a hard and fast rule that everyone should have such relations. However it was not with eight or twelve men as reported by travelers. Under various circumstances married women were forced to accept more husbands, may be due to the insistence of the *karanavan*.<sup>196</sup> Sexual freedom enjoyed by the women along with men surprised every visitor to Malabar; they all invariably noted the absence of

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<sup>191</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, op.cit, p.165

<sup>192</sup> George Sale, Archibald Bolwer, John Campbell and George Psalmanazzar, op.cit., p.544

<sup>193</sup> K.M.Panikkar, ‘Some Aspects of Nair Life’, *Man*, vol. 48, 1918, pp. 254–293.

<sup>194</sup> A. Aiyappan, ‘Nayar Polyandry’, *Man*, vol. 32, 1932, pp. 78-79

<sup>195</sup> J.Puthenkalam, op.cit., pp. 84-85

<sup>196</sup> Interviews with Kurupath Janaki Amma, 78 years, Palakkad on 18/11/2015 and Kannambra Kunjukutty Neithyar, 88 years, Thrissur, on 5/09/2015

jealousy among the women's husbands.<sup>197</sup> But the question whether Nair women had sexual freedom has to be analyzed as the contemporary sources and the later practices - in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - compels us to accept that sexuality of Nair woman was not under her own volition, rather her 'self' and her 'sexuality' were under the strict surveillance of the *tarawads*. The *Karanavan*, other men of the *tarawad*, the girl's mother, all had concern about her sexuality and it was not left to her whims and fancy.<sup>198</sup>

Generally it was believed that in marumakkathayam *tarawads* women continued to live in their own *tarawads*, but there were regional differences in the residence patterns followed by Nair community in Malabar. In North Malabar residence pattern was avunculocal; after marriage the wife lived with the husband in his matrilineal household.<sup>199</sup> In North Malabar women's *tarawad* does not change even after her marriage, she continues to have right over the property of *tarawad*. At the same she was protected by her husband and enjoys husband's property as long as he was alive. In short during the life time a Nair women lives in three households- first with her father and mother in father's household, second in her maternal uncle's house when she was grown up and third in her husband's household after marriage. As long as the marital relation continued, the wife lived with the husband but after the death

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<sup>197</sup> C.J.Fuller, op.cit., p. 4

<sup>198</sup> Cherukad's novel *Muthassi* depicted several attempts made by a grandmother for exploiting a Nair women's sexuality for the general will of the *tarawad*. But in the then social conditions there was no wrong in marrying off a girl to a man who was older than her father, which the grandmother planned to do but failed miserably. Similarly no fault could be found with the grandmother when she made, Nani, protagonist of the novel, to satisfy the *karyasthan* of the *illom* through a sexual relation. The *karyasthan* of the *illom* was threatening Nani's *tarawad* by demanding them to pay unlawful rent, so the grandmother made Nani to appease him, but she was not ready for such an illicit relation. Cherukad, *Muthassi*, (Mal), Chinta Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2016, first published 1957, see also M.Leelavathi, *Streelanghalpam Cherukadinte Novellukalil*, (Mal), Prabhat Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, pp. 2-5

<sup>199</sup> Kathleen Gough, Nayar: North Kerala, op.cit., p. 390

of the husband, the wife and children went back to her maternal uncle's house and not to her father's house. Father, mother and children lived together in the father's matrilineal household and when the children were grown up they were taken to their maternal uncle's house.

The marriage of girls was the joint responsibility of the father and the girls' maternal uncle. If a girl's marriage was delayed she was taken to her uncle's house. A North Malabar Nair *tarawad* was thus comprised of brothers related through mother, their wives and immature children, their adult sister's sons and their wives and children and women and children who came back from their husband's house.<sup>200</sup> In *tarawads* the wife of the eldest person was the dominant woman. Kitchen and internal affairs were controlled by her, but if an elderly woman of that property group comes to stay in the household all other women would submit to her. The woman's maternal *tarawad* regularly provided rice, dress and other provisions for her, even though she lives with her husband in his *tarawad*. This was done by the *karanavan* without any failure as it was a question of honour. When a woman became pregnant she was taken to her maternal uncle's house for delivery and the expense of delivery was met by her husband.<sup>201</sup> Though there was no polyandry, polygamy was common. Separate houses were given to wives in well to do families. If the couples lived in the wife's house, the maintenance of the wife and children should be done by him and not by her *tarawad*; if she was given separate property from her *tarawad* it was the husband's responsibility to look after it.

Husband-wife relation was very strong among the Nairs of North Malabar when compared with South Malabar. The wife and children were the

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<sup>200</sup> K.T.Ravi Varma, *Marumakkathayam: Gothramarumakkathayavum Vadakan Sambradayaghalum*, op.cit., p. 269

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Vadakumbad Yasodhara Amma, Payyangadi, Kannur, 15/09/2011

responsibility of the husband and he fulfilled his obligation. The husband and wife did not observe death pollution and did not take part in each other's funeral rites.<sup>202</sup> Father-children relations was also quite natural among them, they educated their children, gave them separate property and married off their daughters with the support and co-operation of wife's *tarawad*. Many married men and women continue to have sexual relations with cross-cousins, but this was not considered as an offence.<sup>203</sup>

In South Malabar even after marriage women continued to live in her own *tarawad*. As the husband and wife lived in their own separate *tarawads*, the residence pattern was duolocal.<sup>204</sup> The existence of duolocal pattern of residence naturally led to the system of visiting husbands, which was dominant in South Malabar. Woman and her children lived in their natal *tarawad* and they were provided by the *tarawad* and the husband was not expected to. Women rarely visited husband's house, except on festive occasions; such visits were possible only if husband and wife belonged to the same sub-caste. In this family organization the husband-wife relation would not be same as the modern notions of conjugality. So was the familial ties between father and children, as the father was not a member of the children's family; he was just like a guest and had no responsibility over his children. Ironically a Namboothiri father was not to touch his own Nair children,

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<sup>202</sup> Kathleen Gough, Nayar: North Kerala, op.cit., p. 400

<sup>203</sup> K.T.Ravi Varma, *Marumakkathayam: Gothramarumakkathayavum Vadakan Sambradayaghalum*, op.cit., p. 277, Kathleen Gough argued that after marriage husband had exclusive rights over wife's sexuality. So if any adultery was noticed he could kill the lover and send her home after divorce. Kathleen Gough, Nayar: North Kerala, op.cit., p. 398. Interview with Kavayil Padmakshi Amma, 81, Payyannur, 21/6/2014.

<sup>204</sup> Marion.H.G.den Uyl, 'Some Notes on Marumakkathayam in Kerala', in Monika Bock and Aparna Rao(ed) *Culture, Creation and Procreation: Concepts of Kinship in South Asian Practices*, Berghabn Books, 2001, pp. 178-187

because the touch may pollute him. There was no space for affinal relationship with the father's *tarawad* members.<sup>205</sup>

Moreover it was in South Malabar that the alleged Namboothiri -Nair *sambandham* relations took place. When the *sambandham* partner was a Namboothiri there was no chance for any sort of inter familial relations. In well to do Nair *tarawads* separate arrangements were made for Namboothiri *sambandham* partners of their women. In middle class and lower class Nair *tarawads* the Namboothiri husband was merely a visitor who came at night and left in the morning. On the other hand some of the Namboothiris when they become the *karanavan* of the *illom* took their Nair wives with them. As the wife and children could not live in the main building of *illom*, they were provided with a separate residence, may be within the *illom* premises or outside. Most often they continued to live in the house provided by the Namboothiri till his death after they returned to their own *tarawads*. However their status, while in the *illom*, depended on the power of the husband in the internal affairs of *illoms*. Quite often they were ill treated by the inmates of the *illom* as the Namboothiri community never considered Nair partners as wives and regarded them as parasites on *illom* properties.<sup>206</sup> In some cases when the husband assumes the post of the *karanavan* of the *illom* the wife was asked to move out as he was forced to marry an *antharjanam*.<sup>207</sup> The duration of marital relation between Nair women and Namboothiri husband

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<sup>205</sup> Thakazhi Sivasankaran Pilla provides description of relation between *sambandham* partners, about the visits of husband to wife's *tarawad* and about the customary hansel given to the wife. Thakazhi Sivasankaran Pilla, *Atmakadha*, (Mal), Green Books, Thrissur, 2007(reprint), p. 16

<sup>206</sup> Novels like *Agnisakshi* and *Aphante Makal* depicts the lives of Nair women as wives in *sambandham* relations, in *illoms*.

<sup>207</sup> Kuridithil Devaki's mother was married to a Namboothiri and was living with him in a house closer to his *illom*, but when he became senior most of his *illom* he was to marry an *antharjanam* and Devaki's mother and children were asked to move into another house provided by the *illom*. Interview with Kuridithil Devaki, 82 years, Tanur, on 11/04/2016



cannot be generalized, some relations lasted a lifetime, whereas some were for few months or years. Nevertheless the number of Namboothiri *sambandham* would be negligibly small when studied in relation with the population of the two communities. The crux of the issue was, when the *sambandham* denigrated to a mere relation for the sexual satisfaction of Namboothiris. Some even maintained several *sambandham* relations simultaneously, along with two or three *velis* in the *illom*, and many of them were not even ready to pay the customary hansom to the women and children. Even though there were several adverse outcomes for *sambandham* relations, in Malabar even in the twentieth century Nair *tarawads* longed to have Namboothiri partners for their women.<sup>208</sup> In short *sambandham* was quite moral and normal as any other marriage relations that had existed in other regions.

### **Adultery and Punishment**

In the patriarchal societies wife's sexuality was exclusively owned by husband, which he was to guard vigorously so that she may never give birth to other's child in his family. Sex was regarded as a threat for human dignity which would be remedied by marriage, instituting judicial rights.<sup>209</sup> Women are regarded as gateways into the caste system, the lower caste men whose sexuality was a threat to upper caste purity has to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of higher caste, so women must be

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<sup>208</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Namboothirimarum Marumakkathayavum*, (Mal), Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnankulam, 1961, p. 80

<sup>209</sup> For Immanuel Kant, sex outside legal marriage is morally impermissible because both parties wrongly allow themselves to be used as mere means, whereas humanity should always be treated as an end. Unmarried sex violates the dignity of the human person by treating him or her as a mere object for use. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, quoted in Elizabeth Brake, *Minimizing Marriage- Marriage, Morality, and the Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p.65.

carefully guarded.<sup>210</sup> Women's sexuality was always equated with her reproductive power and linked to this was the notion that a 'women's purity' is fragile. The pollution she incurs through sexual intercourse is internal, whereas that incurred by men external.<sup>211</sup> In order to control women's sexuality stringent restrictions were placed on her mobility and to invigorate a fear among women which would refrain them from committing adultery, adulteresses were subjected to harsh punishments. Down the generations adultery had been viewed from a double standard; an asymmetrical defining and problematizing adultery was adopted by patriarchal societies.<sup>212</sup>

In the Namboothiri community where the women's sexuality was robustly protected and where women were supposed to live as asexual beings, severe punishment was instituted for adulteresses. The most scrupulous system that prevailed in Namboothiri community was *smarthavicharam*, the ritual trial. The history of sexuality in Kerala would be incomplete without a discussion on *smarthavicharam*. Infidelity was viewed as a crime by all communities throughout the world; but that done by women was considered as a heinous crime in a patriarchal society. If marriage has been contended as a divine institution not merely a civil contract the adultery assumes the character of a sin, and is the violation of duty which is due to god.<sup>213</sup>

The ritual trial was done to ascertain the chastity of an *antharjanam* when suspected. Chastity was considered to be the most important of all virtues which was to be guarded at any expense. So when an adultery, *adukaladosham*, was noted the head of the household was to intimate it to the

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<sup>210</sup> Uma Chakravarti, 'Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India, Gender, Caste, Class and State', op.cit.

<sup>211</sup> Leela Dube, *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspective on Gender in South and South - East Asia*, Vistar Publications, New Delhi, 1997, p. 50

<sup>212</sup> Gerda Lerner, op.cit., p.115

<sup>213</sup> Hector Davies Morgan, *The Doctrine and Law of Marriage, Adultery and Divorce*, vol. I, Oxford, 1826, p. 431

community- most probably to the neighbors belonging to the Namboothiri caste. The trial was a fairly expensive procedure, as all the members involved in it were to be provided with food and accommodation, besides for the conduct of the trial a stipulated amount was to be remitted to the state. Moreover if the adultery committed by women was proved, her husband would be excommunicated, if he had sexual relation with his wife after she had 'fallen'. Similarly her children born after her adulterous act would also be met with the same fate. Hence, most often rather than opting for a trial, many tried to conceal the issue either by silencing the witnesses, or by quietly assassinating the women. Despite the economic and social scorn inflicted by *smarthavicharam* several trials took place in nineteenth century.<sup>214</sup> The opulence of *smarthavicharam* cases indicate the existence of various undesirable tendencies in *illoms*.

The fundamental objective of the institution of *smarthavicharam* was to instill a sense of fear among women and to prevent the birth of illegitimate children in *illoms*. But it was manipulated by the family members and even by *dasis* to expel an unwanted *antharjanam* from *illom*. Sometimes rumors may lead to the victimization of women and consequently they were ousted. Plots

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<sup>214</sup> Details regarding these trials are reported in the records of Zamorin, which mentions about a trial conducted in 1870 at Puramedakkadu *illom* and about several such similar cases. Numerous documents in *Kozhikoden Granthavari* furnishes information on the procedure of *smarthavicharam*, involvement of the state and also about the 'immoral' life within the *illoms*. N.M.Namboothiri, *Samuthiri Chartrathile Kannapuranghal*, (Mal), Vallathol Vidyapeedom, Sukapuram, 1987, pp. 17-18. Kavalappara *tarawad* being a regional ruling family had the right to organize *smarthavicharam*, when the chastity of an *antharjanam* was suspected and the *Kavalappara Papers* provides testimonials. One of the cases cited in record was about an enquiry instituted in Alampilli Mana, on the complaint of Viroopakshan Namboothiri against the unchaste conduct of his wife. K.K.N.Kurup (ed), *Kavalappara Papers*, Dept. of History, University of Calicut, Calicut, 1984, p. 94. Another instance of trial in the Kavalappara region was in Cheruvathoor Mana where Parameswaran Namboothiri's unmarried daughter gave birth to a child; accordingly *smarthavicharam* was held. *ibid.*, p. 128

were laid not only against women but also men of the community; accused woman was forced to name people who were innocent of the incident.

Once the adultery was informed no affection or personal consideration matters, soon the *antharjanam* suspected was moved out of the *nallukettu* and she was made to live in the *anchampura*.<sup>215</sup> This was done in order to isolate her from the rest of the family as she had become impure to live in the *nallukettu*. The suspected *antharjanam* was to be mentioned as ‘*sadhanam*’- an object. ‘*Sadhanam*’- the very word used for the woman suspected, clearly shows the anti-woman attitude of a patriarchal community. She was conceived as an asexual being, which was to be condemned.

As a preliminary step of the enquiry the *dasi*, maid servant, of the *antharjanam* was interrogated and this was known as *dasivicharam*. If the adultery was proved through this process the King of the respective region would be informed, as his permission was essential for conducting *smarthavicharam*. Being the protector of Brahmins, the King informs Smartan and orders him to conduct *smarthavicharam*. A committee consisting of a *Vaidikan*, a *Smarthan*, two *Mimamsakar*, one *Akkakoyima* and one *Purakoyima* was created for the same.<sup>216</sup> *Sankarasmrithi* provided legal and procedural description for conducting *smarthavicharam*. The trial was to be conducted by the Smarthan by hearing all the witnesses and the accused women impartially; he could ask for clarifications and his was the ultimate

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<sup>215</sup> *Anchampura*, was a room outside the main *nallukettu*, and it was in this room that the accused woman was housed during the trial.

<sup>216</sup> The committee members were learned men in law, they were to help *smartan* in conducting the trial, *Akkakoyima* ensured that everything was done in accordance with the law and *Purakoyima* was king’s representative. V.Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, vol. II, Kerala Gazetteers Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1911, p. 273.

decision in the trial. As per tradition the decision once made by Smarthan could not be questioned.<sup>217</sup>

On the day fixed for beginning the enquiry, the trial begins by a *puja* for the local diety. On the next morning the committee assembles in front of the *anchampura* and calls the *dasi*. Hereafter all questions are asked to the *sadhanam* through the *dasi*. The trial may continue for months or years. The entire expense of the trial was to be met by the suspected women's *illom*, hence as long as the trial continues financial burden on the *illom* went on increasing. Various methods of torture were resorted to by her family members to force her to confess as they were being ruined. Once she confess that she had committed adultery, the details of the offence like - date , time, place and details of the people involved were enquired. It is to be noted the name of the adulterer was not publicized till the end of the trial. The names of men involved were made public only after consultation with the king.

After the completion of the enquiry, all the details are conveyed to the king and final verdict was made. Namboothiri do not condemn their own caste, hence they won't read the verdict. So this task, known as *swaroopamcholal*, was given to a Tamil Brahmin, who stands over a raised platform and read the name of the woman and all men mentioned by her as excommunicated from their caste.<sup>218</sup> At the end the family members of the woman performs all the funeral ceremonies of the woman, *udkavichedam*, and she was considered as dead for the family and for the community. For a caste Hindu excommunication was equivalent to death, the women and all the men involved with her were expelled from the community. Expelled women were

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<sup>217</sup> Interview with Pattachomayarath Krishnan Namboothiri, 79 years, Thrissur, 31/12/2015

<sup>218</sup> Once she was declared to be excommunicated the servants deprive her of the cloth with which her upper part of the body was covered, and the umbrella with which she had been concealing her face. L.K.Anatha Krishna Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes*, vol. II, Higginbotham and Company, Madras, 1912, p.213

kept under the protection of the king, and were given a house in an isolated place by the banks of a river and made to live there. Some are provided by their seducers, some became prostitutes, and not a few were taken as wives by the Chettis of Calicut.<sup>219</sup>

In case after the trial if the suspected woman was proved to be innocent, then the Smarthan and entire members of the committee and her husband apologize before her, *kshama namaskaram* for the humiliation she was made to endure.<sup>220</sup> She was respectfully taken back to her *illom* as an *antharjanams* and the whole procedure was known as *azhivuchollal*.<sup>221</sup>

The *smarthavicharam* was an open declaration of Namboothiri community's anti-women conviction. While men were free to enter into an endless sexual relationship, irrespective of the caste of the woman, *antharjanams* were always suspected for their sexual behavior.<sup>222</sup> In twentieth century *smarthavicharam* received intense contestations from the modern socio-religious milieu. Most well known *smarthavicharam* was that of Kuriyedath Thatri in Cochin State during 1905. The woman accused was Kuriyedath Tathri, and sixty four men from all the major castes of the period, belonging to high social status were excommunicated. This was most widely

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<sup>219</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, op.cit., p. 153

<sup>220</sup> C.Achuta Menon, op.cit., p. 342

<sup>221</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, op.cit., p. 129

<sup>222</sup> A similar system of punishing adulteresses was prevalent in eighteenth century Maharashtra, where the Peshwa state was very keen in safeguarding the moral order. Through a system of surveillance and punishment including enslavement and imprisonment the state tried to ensure the compliance of women. Here too the adulteresses were severely punished whereas adulterers were pardoned on doing *prayaschitha*. Uma Chakravarthi, 'Wifhood, Widowhood and Adultery: Female Sexuality, Surveillance and the State in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra', in Patricia Uberoi (ed), *Social Reform, Sexuality and State*, Sage Publications, 1996, pp.3-22

discussed of all the *smarthavicharam*; it may be due to the number of men- some of them well known- involved.<sup>223</sup>

Due to the unique relation that had existed among the Namboothiris and Nairs, the *smarthavicharam* trial adversely affected the Nairs also. As Nairs were closer to *illoms* in various capacities, the verdict of the trial went against the Nair community, as in most cases the woman might be accused for indulging in illicit relation with Nair men. Hence when the involvement of Nair was proved beyond doubt, he and his family would be ostracized. The absence of cross examination in the trial and the hegemonic power Namboothiris had exercised in the then social conditions led to the victimization of several Nairs.<sup>224</sup> Consequently Nairs regarded *Smarthavicharam* as an institution devised by Namboothiris to punish the Nair community.<sup>225</sup> *Smarthavicharam* adversely affected not only the Nair

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<sup>223</sup> Thatthri Kutty's *smarthavicharam* has been a subject that enriched Malayalam literature over the years. She was cursed, glorified and valorized by the writers. Some tried to find out the real incidents involved through the *smarthavicharam* records in the Ernakulam Regional Archives, as it was the first *smarthavicharam* which was systematically recorded. One of the first works was Oduvil Kunhi Krishna Menon's *Aparathiniyaya Antharjanam*, in this he convicted her for having trapped several people. *Amrithamadanam* of Unnikrishnan Puthur, which borrowed a plot from this incident, *Brasht* of Madampu Kunhu Kuttan where he legitimized the heroine, Nandan, in *Kuriyedath Thatri* valorized her revenge against the repression of the community, *Thatrikuttiyude Smarthavicharam* of Allangode Leelakrishnan in which she was considered as a revolutionary who revolted with her body, and *Thatrivicharathinte Kanapuranghal* of Biju Kaipanplakkal in which he analyzed the entire process of trail as a conspiracy are some of the works. Unnikrishnan Puthur, *Amrithamadanam*, (Mal) *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 1981; Madampu Kunhukuttan, op.cit., Nandan, *Kuriyedath Thatri*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2001, Allangode Leelakrishnan, *Thatrikuttiyude Smarthavicharam*, (Mal), *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 2004, Biju Kaipanplakkal, *Kuriyedathu Thathree Vicharathinte Kannapurangal*, (Mal), *Mathrubhumi*, Kozhikode, 2015

<sup>224</sup> P.Bhaskaranunni, *Smarthavicharam-Oru Padanam*, op.cit., pp.117-118. A.M.N. Chakkyar laments about the lack of natural justice in *smarthavicharam*. A.M.N.Chakkyar, op.cit., p. 102

<sup>225</sup> P.K.Parameshwaran Nair, *Sahityapanchanan*, (Mal), Sreeramavilasam Press, Kollam, 1945, p. 248

men but the Nair women also, if the *dasi* of the accused women was found to help the *antharjanam* in maintaining the illicit relations, the *dasi* was also excommunicated<sup>226</sup> and were prohibited from using public tanks and wells and were not accepted in other illoms as servants.

The traditional Malabar society exhibited discrete patterns of family organization from other parts of the country. Both the communities under analysis manifested marked deviation from the stereotypical norms laid down for patriarchal and matrilineal communities. The Namboothiri community though being a part of the Vedic tradition followed distinct structures of marriage and family. Similarly Nairs' marriage system and family organizations were not in accordance with the matrilineal theoretical perceptions. Highly complex caste system and agrarian relations prevalent here might have led to the development of peculiar familial arrangements. However the patriarchal and matrilineal communities of Malabar unanimously restricted women's life by hampering her sexuality. Though the modalities adopted by the two castes were distinct in oppressing women, the effects were quite similar, which was to be worsened with the colonial interpretation of indigenous customs.

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<sup>226</sup> P.Bhaskaranunni, *Keralam Irupatham Nuttantide Arambathil*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2005, pp. 310-311



## CHAPTER II

### IMPACT OF COLONIALISM

Colonialism affects a subject country's political, economic, cultural and social aspects and is an exploitative project. The inherent agenda of colonialism redesigns all aspects of the life of the colonized. Here society, religion, family, social customs, moral concerns and inter-personal relationships are restructured. The reorganization of society is usually done in accordance with the needs of European capitalism. These political and economic interests could be satisfied only when the social conditions are considerably altered. This is done to privilege western social norms. The indigenous traditions are undermined and condemned, either as retrogressive or as stumbling blocks in a country's progress.<sup>1</sup>

Malabar had a long history of European contact from early times itself. This part of the world was one of the most important trading destinations for European countries due to the availability of spices. Thus, following the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British landed here. With all their industrial and military superiority they claimed and acquired a dominant possession of Malabar. Arms always followed trade. Malabar was taken over by the English East India Company in 1792 as a part of the Sreerangapattanam treaty. First the region was under the Bombay Presidency and in 1800 it became a part of the Madras Presidency. With the emergence of British power, the traditional caste based landlord system with its feature of exploitation and discrimination was in a way altered but also strengthened in

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<sup>1</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol.I, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, London, 1817 and the writings of the evangelical historians on India.

Malabar.<sup>2</sup> The power of the *Swaroopams* was suddenly brought to an end and the Rajas were reduced to the status of landlords, and their ritual social and military privileges were eliminated.<sup>3</sup>

The colonial rule introduced drastic changes in the political structures. The agrarian system in pre-Colonial Kerala was one in which customs and practices, rather than defined laws were dominant. This changed because for a colonial state definite laws are necessary for regular collection of revenue, which forced them to make their own interpretations regarding the practices that prevailed here. The British legal system undermined several age old practices of Malabar which led to the establishing of a new set of practices unfamiliar in this land. Subsequently the agrarian relations that had existed here became stained and altered the human inter-relationships based on land. Inter caste relations were also to change. To build the colonial state and thereby establish the rule of law and forms of knowledge regarding India were seen as of great importance.<sup>4</sup> A project of collecting information was on. Gazetters, Census reports, surveys of social groups and the like provided such colonial knowledge. This in turn exerted a tremendous influence on the minds of the Indian people in general and on the intelligentsia in particular and that contributed effectively in directing various socio-economic and political developments which occurred during the colonial period.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Under the Mysorean rule for a brief period of time there were considerable changes in the socio-economic patterns of Malabar, as the traditional “lords” of the land fled to Travancore and in their absence, with the support of the Mysorean rulers, the lower caste people and Muslims occupied the land. It is however difficult to quantify this.

<sup>3</sup> K.N.Ganesh, ‘Political Transformation of Kerala’, E.M.S.birth Centenary Seminar, 2009 Janasanskriti, p. 3 .

<sup>4</sup> Bernard S.Cohn, op.cit., p. 5

<sup>5</sup> G.Ramdhan, ‘Colonialism and Knowledge System: Construction of Caste Identity in Modern India’, *Journal of South Indian History*, vol.1, issue 1 September 2003, Publication Division University of Calicut, pp.73-82.

## Theoretical Analysis of the Emergence of Modernity

In the European context the beginning of modernity is always viewed in association with the emergence of capitalism and colonialism. For a common man modernity is industrialization and its related changes and in the case of colonies modernity was fortune (can be misfortune also) brought in by the onslaught of European colonialism. Traditions gradually got weakened at the hands of modernity and this can be seen in all spheres of life – religious, political, cultural and social. Modernity usually brings in considerable changes in transport and communication, land relations and settlement pattern and in this sense it can be assumed that modernization denotes progressive evolution.<sup>6</sup> According to Karl Marx, modernity is commodification; Marx Weber defined modernity as rationality; Durkheim concluded that where there is more differentiation there is more modernity and for George Simmel modernity consists of city life and the diffusion of money.<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas maintained that modernity was as old as reason itself. For Habermas the central ideal of modernity was the exercise of reason for the attainment of emancipation from the natural and social constraints.<sup>8</sup> He further argued that the project of modernity was formulated in order to focus on the development of “objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to the inner logic.”<sup>9</sup> Condorcet in his book, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, defined modernity in terms of triumph of reason that was formed by “the natural

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<sup>6</sup> S.L.Doshi, *Modernity, Post modernity and Neo-Sociological Theories*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p 17

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p .28

<sup>8</sup> Kalidas Misra, ‘The Road to Auschwitz, Foucault and Modernity’, in Sudha P. Pandya and P.C. Kar, (ed) *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modernity*, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001, p.55

<sup>9</sup> Pramod Kumar Pandey, *The Project of Modernity and Generative Linguistics*, in Sudha P. Pandya and P.C. Kar, (ed) *op.cit.*, p. 101

progress of civilization.”<sup>10</sup> Antony Giddens in his *The Constitution of Society* has characterized modernity on the basis of capitalism, industrialism, surveillance, and political power.<sup>11</sup> For him capitalism is an exploitative system and industrialism refers to the transformation of nature and use of inanimate sources of power. By surveillance he means the supervision of the subject population in the political sphere and he regarded political power as a feature of traditional society.<sup>12</sup> In the book *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Ulrich Beck has linked modernity to the genesis of risks in society.<sup>13</sup>

Dipanker Gupta argued that India has its own variant of modernity distinct from Western modernity. As there are several ethnicities in the country the modernity of the country has to be defined in terms of the social historical and cultural conditions of different regions and social segments of the nation. He exposed the pretensions to modernity of the Indian ‘Westoxicated elite’, who find solace in the rising consumerism in India as a symbol of modernity.<sup>14</sup> On the whole Indian sociologists are of the opinion that modernity came to India in a totally different situation i.e., here it developed along with feudalism and colonialism. The peculiarity of Indian modernity is that with the development of new agencies of modernization, many of the traditional structures - like caste system, patriarchy - got

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<sup>10</sup> Kalidas Misra, op.cit., p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Lars Bo Kaspersen, *Anthony Giddens- An Introduction to a Social Theorist*, Blackwell Publishers, Denmark, 2000, p.85

<sup>12</sup> S.L.Doshi, op.cit., p. 3

<sup>13</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications, London, 1992 Quoted in Darry S.L.Jarvis, *Theorizing Risk: Ulrich Beck, Modernization and the Rise of the Risk Society*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Research paper Number: LKYSPP08-003, 2008, [www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg](http://www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg)

<sup>14</sup> Dipanker Gupta, *Mistaken Modernity India between Worlds*, Harper Collins Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 14-15

strengthened. Moreover the boundaries of modernity in India were determined by Indian tradition.

Ashis Nandy, in his *Intimate Enemy*, has analyzed colonialism as a moral and psychological sentiment rather than a political policy. A colonial system establishes itself by employing its own socio-economic, cultural, moral and psychological values on the colonized and by influencing their mental capacities.<sup>15</sup>

According to Yogendra Singh the impact of modernized west induced a heterogenic process of change because the source of change is located outside the Indian society.<sup>16</sup> The nature of contact between pre-modern Indian system and modern west was asymmetrical as the British tradition was dominant and the Indian tradition was forced to change towards the modernity of the west. As the background for this modernization was created by colonialism, the development was lopsided. The colonial modernity operated as a new world view effecting an ontological transformation of the indigenous way of life.<sup>17</sup>

Analysis of the indigenous literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries makes us accept that modernity is different for various groups of people. We experience the onset of modernity at varied stages of progress. So it is possible that even within given group the familiarity with modernity may be in a contrasting manner. This is the real nature of nineteenth and twentieth century “modernity” in India and it appears at best a

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<sup>15</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, p.3

<sup>16</sup> Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1972, Reprint, 1994, p.85

<sup>17</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, ‘Development Experience of Colonial Keralam’, in M.A.Oommen (ed), *Rethinking Development - Kerala’s Development Experience* vol.1, Institute of Social Sciences, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1999, p.73

forged one rather than a genuine one. Since modernity in India was induced by European colonialism, it has its own limitations. Manu Goswami has used the word 'colonial state space' denoting the complex ensemble of projects that underpinned the restructuring of the institutional and spatio-temporal matrices of colonial power and everyday life.<sup>18</sup> The colonial state space was contradictory and it was not homogeneous. There was a consolidation of colonial India as a hierarchically subordinate space within the British centered globally organized imperial economy. This subordinate development created new forms of socio-economic inequality and widening of rural - urban differentiation. Modernity in India had several inherent contradictions even while functioning within the prescribed parameters. Every aspect of modernity had a specific history or geography and built new forms of identity that were formally inconsistent with the general concept of modernity. Rooted in religion, language or regional specificities, these particular expressions represent visions of 'imagined communities' oppressed by the 'modern' state.<sup>19</sup>

According to Sanjay Joshi modernity was a contradictory conception. It brought with it new anxieties about self, health, sexuality, family, work, and social order; it was fractured by traditional values and by economic realities.<sup>20</sup> He further observed that modernity in India refers to the new models of organizing social, political and economic relations which draw their inspiration from the ideas of Enlightenment and material circumstances

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<sup>18</sup> Manu Goswami, *Producing India from Colonial Economy to National Space*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2004, p. 8

<sup>19</sup> Nimmi Rangaswamy, 'Modernity and the Ethnic Discourse', in Sudha P. Pandya and P.C. Kar, (ed) op.cit., p. 155

<sup>20</sup> Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 12-14

following from the triumph of industrial capitalism.<sup>21</sup> The modernity which the middle classes constructed in colonial India looked ahead as well as back. Modernity in India was built on the tradition and coexisted with it, belying neat dichotomies between the modern and the traditional, the religious and the secular. Modernity is not only an idea, ideal or ideology; it is simultaneously the articulation of distinct historical processes. Hence as history the modernity is not singular, it is enacted instead in its plural representations.<sup>22</sup>

The cultural homogeneity or ethnic cohesion which underpinned the nationalist movements of Europe were conspicuously absent in India.<sup>23</sup> Partha chatterjee offers an explanation for the emergence of a characterization of culture and tradition as located in a timeless apolitical space within colonized societies. Under colonialism Indians were subjects not citizens. The possibility of their acting as political agents was curtailed by restrictions on the freedom of speech, assembly and representation. Deprived of agency in the political and material realism, native intellectuals turned towards the construction of an inner space of culture ostensibly uncorrupted by colonial modernity and the politics of subjection. If the west was politically superior, then Indians were culturally and spiritually superior.<sup>24</sup> Modernization of the West involved disinheritting the pre-modern and temporal ordering of the traditional and the modern. It was ruthlessly implemented through the programmes of industrialization, nationalism and secularism, though India did not merely follow the western model or experienced a sequential ordering of

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<sup>21</sup> Sanjay Joshi, 'Re-publicizing religiosity Modernity, Religion and the Middle Class,' in Sanjay Joshy (ed)*The Middle Class in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, 2010, New Delhi, p. 202

<sup>22</sup> Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time Colonial Textures and Post Colonial Tangles*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 8-9

<sup>23</sup> Ravinder Kumar, *Essays in the Social History of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. 3

<sup>24</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*, op.cit., p. 6

the society.<sup>25</sup> Indian modernity was forcibly brought to stay or it was a product of imitation.

Exploring the complexities of modernism in India, Dipesh Chakrabarty argued that for many historians modernity in India was grievously incomplete. Many were prone to think that what India possessed as a result of colonial modernization, was only a bad version of something that, in itself, was an unmixed good. The blame, it was decided, lay with colonialism, which stopped us from being fully modern.<sup>26</sup> In reality the problems with Indian modernity was in our understanding and practicing of Western modernity. The desire for an alternative modernity, a desire made possible by the contingencies of British rule, impossible of realization under the conditions of capitalism led to the emergence of a unique modernity in India.<sup>27</sup> At the same time Indians did not blindly accept modernity nor our intellectuals lose their critical orientation towards modernity. Gandhiji's Hind Swaraj was perhaps the brightest illustration of this criticality.<sup>28</sup> Modernity was seen as something 'alien' that might destroy our cultural identity, hence it was welcomed cautiously; besides the legitimacy of modernity as an emancipatory civilizational project was reduced due to the emergent sociological discourses on Western modernity.<sup>29</sup>

In the traditional Indian system an individual's life was determined by his caste, family and other such institutions; there was no significance for his ability or creativity. Individualism was not a part of Indian tradition; it started

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<sup>25</sup> A.Raghuramraju, *Modernity in Indian Social Theory*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, Introduction

<sup>26</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2006, (first published - 2002), pp. 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p 64

<sup>28</sup> Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1998,p. 169

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32



developing only by the late colonial period. The Indian middle class exhibited an urge to transform the age old customs, where an individual is credited only by his birth, which was to be replaced by a new system where the merits of an individual would count for. However many of the English educated being deeply rooted in their tradition, struggled to choose between modernity and tradition, when drastic changes in several customs were demanded by the new system. Modernity created its own conditions for new enchanted identities and new loyalties, based on pre-modern affiliations such as caste, sect, tribe and race. The notion of modernity came to depend on these seemingly contradictory identities for its own functioning.<sup>30</sup> O.Chandu Menon who brought modernity into the Malayali thinking process through his writings, but who adopted a very conservative approach regarding the Malabar Marriage Bill, could be regarded as a representative of this group.

One of the outstanding features of the British society in the nineteenth century was its provinciality. This characteristic was applicable to Kerala. Education in the most general sense was indeed one of the greatest achievements of provincial culture.<sup>31</sup> Introduction of modern education led to the spread of ideas of individualism which gave a new vigor to the society. Education helped people to acquire new jobs and they began to earn money. This relieved them from dependence on *tarawads*. Such employed people got a new recognition in both family and society. Moreover, education created a new locus of power for these people, by belittling the traditional power structures. As a result the *janmis*' economic power got weakened and thereby they were taken off their age-long political and ritual powers also. British introduced modern transportation and communication networks and new

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<sup>30</sup> Nimmi Rangaswamy, op.cit., p. 156

<sup>31</sup> T.P.Sankarankutty Nair, Modern history of Kerala: Democratic and sub national efforts, in J.V.Vilaniyam, Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke (ed), *Introduction to Kerala Studies*, vol. I, International Institute for Scientific and academic collaboration, New Jersey, 2012 , p.153

industrial firms. These changes resulted in the growth of new social classes and the release of new social forces. Modernization of Kerala is closely connected with the growth of a unified national economy. This unification took place as a result of the destruction of the former pre-capitalist form of production prevailing in Kerala and the substitution of the modern capitalistic economic form.<sup>32</sup> A cash economy was created in Kerala where the access to money was limited to a very few people and this in turn loaded pressure on the already strained family relations. Cash became the mode of payment and the market economy replaced the subsistence economy and ruined the joint family system. Thus it could be seen that modernity emerged as an impact of colonialism.

### **Colonial Legal System**

Laws made by a patriarchal society, in general, would be against the interests of women. Indian legal system as pronounced by Smrithi and Sathras can also be included in this category and the existing anti-women attitude was aggravated by the colonial interpretation of these scriptures. Varsha Chhitnis and Dayana Wright have argued that the custom of adopting English laws to deal with the unique Indian situation, without understanding the different culture and history meant that many of the reforms within India either promoted British interests or frustrated the interests of Indian women.<sup>33</sup> The administrative necessity made British to interpret the laws of the land and the peculiarity of India in the pre-colonial period was that there no uniform code of law and laws were different for different religions and regions. Thus the colonial reading of Indian laws resulted in the formation of a new body of laws in the place of traditions and customs and these new codified laws was

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<sup>32</sup> Jeevan.S, 'Elements of Tradition and Modernity in Kerala Society', in, J.Vilanilam (ed), op.cit., p. 201

<sup>33</sup> Varsha Chhitnis and Dayana Wright, 'The Legacy of Colonialism: Law and Women's Rights in India', 64 Wash. & Lee L. Rev. 1315 (2007), p.1315

an amalgam of Indian traditions, customs and English legal tradition. As Sudhir Chandra pointed out the transformative capabilities of colonialism was very weak and the attempts to interfere in the society in order to bring out alterations for the progress of colonialism was often restrained by the fear of provoking resistance.<sup>34</sup>

The British Government took to its civilizing mission on the pretext of rescuing India from the depressed state of social conditions. The civilizing mission was deemed a way of emasculating Indian men by asserting that they were not capable of taking care of their own women.<sup>35</sup> Tussle over legal and political power between the native elites and the colonialists was fought on the backs of Indian women because it was the alleged degraded position of Indian women and the barbaric actions of Indian men that justified the colonial mission in the first place.<sup>36</sup>

The British courts accepted the interpretations based on *Sastras* and *Smritis* which were far detached from the daily practices of common people. Hence the judgments based on these interpretations disturbed the normal life of the people. British jurists sought the help of Brahman pundits for interpreting the traditional scriptures and the commentaries were under the influence of the patriarchal system from which women had hardly anything to expect. Nathaniel Halhed, in 'A code of Gentoo Laws' identified that the some of the percepts in Vedic scripture were against the emerging bourgeoisie ideals of women as companion.

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<sup>34</sup> Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters Colonialism, Law and Women's Rights*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, Introduction.

<sup>35</sup> Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India A social History*, Kali for Women in collaboration with the National Law School of India University, 1996, p. 35

<sup>36</sup> Varsha Chhitnis and Dayana Wright, op.cit., p.1318

In Malabar the colonial judicial administration became visible with The Civil and Criminal Regulation of 1793, which was to revise and regulate the judicial practices of the region ‘where people had experienced only custom-ridden arbitrary laws and irregular courts’.<sup>37</sup> A hierarchy of courts was established in Malabar and large number of natives was taken as subordinate officers into the department. After a brief period of time the people of Malabar approached colonial courts with an array of issues. Most of the issues were connected to land tenure, revenue, inheritance and succession of property. All these issues demanded the interpretation of the customs that prevailed here and this posed a challenge for the colonial authorities and they sought the help of native pundits and law givers. K.A.Manikumar has made an observation that the increasing number of litigation on succession and inheritance ruined the families, because whether successful or not these litigations were very expensive during that period.<sup>38</sup> The colonial law was institutionalized through a series of continuities and discontinuities of the ancient regime.<sup>39</sup>

There was an attempt to institutionalize the Brahmanical patriarchal form of family and as a result practices of pre-colonial societies like the matriarchal families of Kerala and South Canara or the Devadasi system in south India became ‘aberrations’ of un-Hindu practices.<sup>40</sup> The British law courts created a code for *marumakkathayam* system through its judgments.

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<sup>37</sup> Santhosh Abraham, ‘Colonial Law In Early British Malabar: Transparent Colonial State and Formality of Practices’, *South Asia Research*, vol. 31(3), 2011, pp.249-264

<sup>38</sup> K.A.Manikumar, ‘Impact of British colonialism In Nineteenth century Madras’, *Social Scientist*, vol.42/Nos.5-6/May-June 2014, pp. 19-42. Manikumar has quoted the Raja of Bobbili’s ‘Advice to Indian Aristocracy’ in this. He remarked that, ‘instead of resolving conflicts, lawyers manipulated the ambiguities of legislation and encouraged the parties to enter into suits.’ This is true in the case of Malabar also as it was one of the most litigious districts of Madras Presidency.

<sup>39</sup> Santhosh Abraham, op.cit., p. 260

<sup>40</sup> Janaki Nair, op.cit., p. 37

Within *marumakkathayam*, marriage was never a 'serious issue' and with this relationship there was no obligation for the husband towards wife or children. As per the British legal system such a relationship between man and woman could never be considered as equivalent to a marriage. Though it was a legal marriage for the followers of '*sambandham*' colonial judiciary was not ready to recognize it as a valid marriage.<sup>41</sup> For English jurists this was merely a sexual relationship which could be terminated at the will of any one of the parties. Perhaps the absence of the inheritance rights of children to their father's property in such relations, aggravated the notion that it was not a marriage in the western sense of the term. But the colonial legal system took a position against this law of the region and the Madras High Court decreed in 1869 that "the relation is in truth not marriage, but a state of concubinage into which a woman enters of her own choice and is at liberty to change when and as often as she pleases."<sup>42</sup> In this court direction women who enter into the *sambandham* have been criticized, even though it was sanctioned by the society.

Like any other marriage it was initiated and organized by the family and there was no secrecy involved in this relation. But these were not taken into consideration by the courts and it was declared that women in *sambandham* relation are not wives but concubines. At the same time as in any other society prostitution had existed in the then society and the women in *sambandham* relations were not concubines. According to Moore the *sambandham* should be looked on, not as concubinage, but rather as a quasi-marriage contract based on mutual consent and dissoluble at will.<sup>43</sup> Certainly the *sambandham* was not concubinage for the people of Malabar; it was a real marriage, and it was never 'immoral' and no sense of shame was attached to

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<sup>41</sup> Lewis Moore, op.cit.,p.69

<sup>42</sup> Madras High Court Report, 1868-1869, vol. IV, pp. 196-203.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis Moore, op.cit., p.70

it. One of the main reasons for such a conclusion by the colonial courts can be the characterization of this relationship by foreign travelers as free love and loose marriage. However the new interpretations provided by the English courts disturbed the practices in the society and it induced several discussions on the indigenous system. Many judgments made by colonial courts altered the customs of Malabar. For instance as per *marumakkathayam* law a women's property would be inherited only by the members of her *tarawad*. However in a decision made by the government in the case of the property left by Chelikka Lakshmi Amma in Wayanad, who died without legal heirs, the property was handed over to her husband in 1881.<sup>44</sup> These decisions further make it clear that the colonial government had an ambivalent nature towards the customs and laws of the land. In 1869 the Madras High Court decreed that the *sambandham* relations cannot be regarded as true marriage but the government in 1881 considered the husband of a Nair woman as a valid heir to her property. So in this case the government accepted the validity of *sambandham* and the partner as husband.

The British government in Malabar, with the aid of colonial bureaucracy and judiciary, redefined the agrarian structure of the land. The prime objective of British imperialism was to acquire monopoly trading privileges in India. Every activity of the British in India was guided by their economic interests and to suit this they attempted to reorganize the traditional customs and practices that had existed in the agrarian sector. Colonial interference in agrarian relations led to the transformation of the age old practices and land based relationships. In Malabar, the colonial interpretations of agrarian relations produced far reaching effects on the life of the people

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<sup>44</sup> Chelikka Lakshmi Amma's property was claimed by her distant claimants, but this was over ruled by the government; several such cases can be seen where the government decided to hand over the property that comes under *marumakkathayam* law against the popular usage of traditional law. Revenue department file folder, dated 10/10/1885, bundle no. 34, serial no. 1, RAK.

due largely to the fact that in this region earlier, family ownership of property existed rather than individual owners. Besides, this colonial redefinition strained the relations between Namboothiris, most of whom were *janmis*, and Nairs, many of whom were *kanakkar*. Similarly the education system implemented by the British colonial rule in India made profound impact on the society. Western education opened up new arenas of knowledge system before Indians which were hitherto unknown. Equipped with education Indians sought to question and redress every aspect of life; they even approached colonial administrative machinery to legislate for the rectification of some of the obsolete practices. In the case of Malabar, education was one of the main forces that led to changes in the social fabric of the land. To analyze the forces that led to the redefinition of conjugality, family and women's life it is necessary to ascertain the transition that took place in the fields of education and agriculture under colonial occupation.

### **Changes in Agrarian Structure**

In agrarian societies, land is the most important source of wealth and power. Hence changes in agricultural patterns, ownership and hereditary issues, the state control of the traditional privileges can lead to far reaching changes on the land based social setup and family fortunes. So when the changes were brought as a part of colonialism, the results would be drastic on the society. Colonial administration and interpretation redefined the traditional agrarian relations and practices in Malabar. Reports of various colonial officers and rulings of the law courts increased the complexities of agrarian practices of the land. The British assumed power when the political and agrarian systems were facing challenges due to Mysorean onslaught and the resultant reforms instituted by them. As elsewhere the British agrarian policies in Malabar were to serve the interests of Raj. The colonial interpretation of *janmam* and *kanam* laid the basis for all the land related

issues in Malabar and it multiplied the existing complexities. The agrarian system of Malabar was a great panacea for British administrators as they could not conceive of the rights of several people on the same land and also the absence of ownership of state on land.

The first attempts at land reforms in Malabar were initiated by the Mysorean rulers. The Mysorean domination was not limited to political affairs. As it compelled the traditional rulers and lords to flee, a new administrative system was instituted here. The revenue demand made the Mysorean administrators to make settlements with the tenants and cultivators of the land in the absence of the landlords.

When the British took up the administration they were perplexed by the revenue system that had existed here. The officials concluded that when there is no state ownership on land, the existing rights on land must be private ownership. The joint commissioners who enquired the agrarian patterns found that the land relations of Malabar were similar to the Roman Dominium and they noticed that the Namboothiri Brahmins and Nairs were the primary land holders of Malabar.<sup>45</sup> In Malabar the hereditary property was freely bought and sold long before the Mysorean invasion and it was this buying and selling, especially the wordings in these deeds that misled the British administrators.<sup>46</sup> This opinion of the commissioners, accepted by the judiciary on all land related issues, led to a breach in the customs of Malabar.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *The Joint Commissioners Report on Malabar 1792-93*, Kerala State Archives, Government of Kerala, 2010,(reprint), p. 185

<sup>46</sup> William Logan stated that, the western idea of property in the soil was evidently not the idea in the minds of the people who executed this deed. The Europe looks to the soil and only the soil, but the Malayali on the contrary looks chiefly to the people who have relation to the soil. William Logan, *Malabar*, op.cit., p. 675

<sup>47</sup> C.Vasantha Kumari, op.cit., p.101



As in other parts of India, the British in Malabar accepted the suzerainty of Brahmins in social affairs and considered their writings and interpretations as the basis for customs and practices in prevalence. So, in Malabar the company officials accepted the *Keralopathi* tradition and thereby the *janmam* as the sole, inalienable right of Namboothiris. The British officials were interested in characterizing *janmam* as proprietary rights as it was necessary to meet the revenue demands of the company. Regarding *janmam* right Major Walker opined that “no earthly authority can with justice deprive him of it.”<sup>48</sup> Warden concluded that *jenmakar* were vested with absolute proprietary rights in land and this right was an undisputed right on the soil.<sup>49</sup> Sullivan also held that the land in Malabar was private property which can be bought or sold at the will of the owner.<sup>50</sup> The approaches of British officials made it clear that they were anxious to keep the Brahmins satisfied.<sup>51</sup> The government steadily reinstated the returned Namboothiris and Nairs with all their previous privileges. Graeme advocated the creation of a new class of men as supporters of British rule and for him the independence of property, independence of mind and honest means of livelihood other than manual labour were the pre-conditions for the emergence of such a class.<sup>52</sup>

*Janmam* was characterized as private ownership and *kanam* was designated as mortgage. Major Walker treated *kanam* as a lease for a period

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<sup>48</sup> Major Walker, Report on the Land Tenures of Malabar 1801, quoted in T.C.Varghese, op.cit., p.23

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Warden, Report on Land Assessment in Malabar, 20/05/1815, Calicut, section -1, p.19

<sup>50</sup> Sullivan, Report on the Provinces of Malabar and Canara dated 29/01/1841, Calicut Collectorate Press, 1916, p. 5, he found out that lands in Malabar were sold at high prices as can be obtained for lands in England.

<sup>51</sup> V.V.Kunhikrishnan, ‘Changing dimensions of British Land Policy in Malabar (1800-1930)’ in E.K.G.Nambiyar (ed), *Agrarian India, Problems and Prospects*, Association for Peasant Studies, Calicut, 1999, pp. 90-104

<sup>52</sup> Graeme. H.S., Graeme’s Report of the Revenue Administration of Malabar, dated 14 January 1822, Kerala State Archives, p.22.

of three to six years.<sup>53</sup> Warden reported that a mortgagee acquires all the proprietary rights except that of alienating the land by sale.<sup>54</sup> Graeme in his report recorded that the tenants should give a year's rent in advance to the proprietor as a necessary security for payment and the interest of the mortgagee becomes stronger than that of the proprietor on soil. From the investigations he made Graeme accorded much significance to the power of the *kanakaran* by establishing that, "if the mortgagor refuses payment upon demand, the mortgagee has the right to keep the whole of the *pattom* yield until his demand has been satisfied."<sup>55</sup> According to William Logan it was equally inaccurate, on the other hand, to say of the *kanakkar* or the supervisors that they were the real proprietors of the soil.<sup>56</sup> In practice the *kanam* advance was not a loan but a token of fealty and there is no evidence that the *janmi* could return the advance and resume the land. However the British courts converted *kanam* tenure into practically a usufructuary mortgage.<sup>57</sup>

The British policy embittered the age old land relations in Malabar. When conferred with absolute proprietary rights the landlords started evicting tenants for want of more *pattom*. Logan in his report in 1882 indicted the British authorities for jeopardizing the customary land tenure of Malabar. The British authorities and courts never properly understood the original state of relations between *janmis* and the other classes interested in the soil.<sup>58</sup> Land in Malabar was never an individual property, several people had varying rights

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<sup>53</sup> Herbert Wigam, *A Commentary on Malabar Law and Custom*, Graves Cookson and Company, Madras, 1882, p. 103

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Warden, *op.cit.*, p.48

<sup>55</sup> Greame.H.S, *op.cit.*, p. 25

<sup>56</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, *op.cit.*, p. 678

<sup>57</sup> K.K.N.Kurup, *William Logan A study in the Agrarian Relations of Malabar*, Sandhya publications, Calicut, 1981, p.8

<sup>58</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Special Commission, 1881-1882, Malabar land Tenures*, vol.1, Government of Madras, p.49

on it and extent of these rights was regulated by the custom. The peculiarity of these rights was that it was inalienable. Distribution of resources was done through a unique system of sharing guided by the customary practice. The system was devised to maintain an exquisite binding between various classes of people. The British administrators could not even differentiate between the nature of *kanam* in North Malabar and in South Malabar. In North Malabar *kanam* was a mortgage made when *janmi* was in need of money, whereas in South Malabar it was tenure.<sup>59</sup>

The revenue demand of the colonial rulers together with the onslaught of the money economy made land a precious possession. The *janmi* with the support of the British courts now started evicting the tenants for want of more *pattom*. This adversely affected the interests of *kanakkars* and *verumpattakars*. As *kanam* had been designated as tenure for a period of twelve years, the *janmis* started demanding the return of the land on the completion of the term. The *janmi* soon became powerful like the European landlord and he was no more dependent on *kanakkar*.<sup>60</sup> Hard terms were imposed upon the *kanakkaran* and he in turn exploited the *verumpattakaran*. The condition of the actual cultivator and those of *kanakkar* with small land holdings became deplorable.

Company officials of the early period were very anxious to keep the Brahmins satisfied and to help the Hindu Rulers.<sup>61</sup> However after the initial stage of colonial rule the social conditions changed in Malabar and a new class developed from the *kanakkars*. This dominant class was the creation of the colonial education system which enabled them to acquire most of the positions in the government sector. The colonial authorities were not able to

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<sup>59</sup> In North Malabar there was no concept of renewal of *kanam*, K.Uppi Sahib, PMLC, vol.4, 24/9/1929-17/10/1929, p.75

<sup>60</sup> P.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.44

<sup>61</sup> V.V.Kunhikrishnan, op.cit.

neglect the aspirations of this new class and their interest in land and the emerging middle class could make the government authorities to legislate in their favour.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover the *kanakkar*, most of them being from the Nair community, were *janmis* also ie. they held both *janmam* and *kanam* lands. The highest percentage of yield from agriculture was appropriated by *kanakkaran* and the rent extracted from the cultivator was approximately 15 to 20 times the land revenue assessment.<sup>63</sup> In short the *kanakkar* became an economically and socially privileged class under the colonial rule with much more accessibility to colonial governmental machinery than the Namboothiri community.

Recurrent agrarian distress in Malabar made the colonial authorities enquire into the land relations and tenurial practices. The peasant uprisings during the nineteenth century affected life in Malabar and the revenue administration. Many reasons can be attributed to the peasant uprisings the major forces being poverty of the actual cultivator, exorbitant rent extracted by the intermediary *kanakkaran* and the *janmi* and eviction from land and religious aspirations. The Sadar Court's decision of 1854 that the *kanam* was terminable at the expiry of the 12 years was effectively used by *janmis* to evict the tenants.<sup>64</sup> The court decision went against the interest of the *kanakkar* and they asked government to legislate providing security of tenures. The High Court of Madras made it clear that there is no obligation on either part to renew the *kanam*, unless the *kanam* mortgager and *kanam* mortgagee were desirous of doing so.<sup>65</sup> This again affected the customary

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<sup>62</sup> K.N.Panikkar, 'Agrarian Legislation and Social Classes', in K.N.Panikkar, *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 205-226

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 208

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p.210

<sup>65</sup> Cuddalore Ramachandra Iyer, *A Manual of Malabar Law- As Administered by the Courts*, Vest and Company, Madras, 1883, chapter IV , paragraph.92

nature of *kanam*, as the renewal of *kanam* was not strictly observed in Malabar. Traditionally the relation of *kanakkaran* with the *janmi* was liable to be re-adjusted and re-considered only on succession. The automatic terminability of the *kanam* tenure was not in conformity with the past practices.<sup>66</sup>

Many of the government officials were not ready to regard the peasant revolts as an outcome of the tenurial problem. It was only William Logan who explained the peasant issues as an outcome of the prevalent land relations and due to the colonial misinterpretation of customary practices. The British government appointed numerous commissions for studying the agrarian problems and for suggesting remedies. Reports of Commissions varied in their interpretations of the agrarian relations and solutions suggested by them.

Only Logan proposed the granting of occupancy rights to the actual cultivator.<sup>67</sup> Majority of other commissions proposed in favour of *kanakkars* as they were too bestowed upon with permanency of tenures. Logan identified the problems of the actual cultivator who were at the mercy of *janmi* and *kanakkar* and which were often neglected by the government officials. Actual cultivator when compared to the *kanakkaran*, the intermediary, was financially and educationally backward, and could not approach the colonial judiciary. Logan developed a theory that *janmam* and *kanam* were originally political offices, conveying each a right to definite customary share of the produce; and that rights of property in the soil were imperfectly developed even at the time of the Mysorean invasion.<sup>68</sup> According to William Logan, the only class which had direct interest on land was the *verumpattakaran*, the

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<sup>66</sup> K.N.Panikkar, Peasant Resistance and Revolts in Malabar, in *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, op.cit., p. 230

<sup>67</sup> Sir Charles Turner in 1883-84 proposed that actual cultivator for a holding of certain size was to be invested with occupancy rights. RMTTC, 1927-1928, p. 19

<sup>68</sup> C.A.Innes, op.cit., p. 308

actual cultivator, and so the fixity of tenure must be granted on him.<sup>69</sup> Herbert Wigram was not ready to accept the proposals of Logan. He was of the opinion that it was not possible to make changes in the nature of *kanam* as, “for the last thirty years courts treated it as usufructuary mortgage and the people have acted according to the court decisions, so now those rulings cannot be treated as wrong.” Wigram could differentiate the nature of *kanam* in North Malabar and in South Malabar.<sup>70</sup>

Exploitation of tenants by *janmis* increased and they resorted to extreme means to extract maximum profit. Newspapers of the period reported the inhuman activities of the land lords on their tenants.<sup>71</sup> Such reports in newspapers and the discussions they enunciated brought the hardships of the tenants and forced the government to legislate. The Government accepted the compensation bill submitted by the Master Commission to secure to tenants the full value of their improvements on eviction and passed the Tenants Improvement Act in 1887.<sup>72</sup> The *janmis* were opposed to the bill and claimed that compensation was an immemorial custom in Malabar and so the legislation was unnecessary. The *janmis* organized themselves under Kerala Janmi Sabha, Dharmachara Sabha, Uttara Kerala Sabha to safe guard their interests.<sup>73</sup> From 1904 they published a monthly *Janmi* and they decided to remain united irrespective of their castes and all other differences.<sup>74</sup> Though the act fell short of the major recommendations made by Logan, it was significant as the first land reforms measure which the government was forced to legislate as a result of the Mappila outbreaks. But the act was not capable

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<sup>69</sup> William Logan, Malabar Special Commission, op.cit., paragraph. 122-124

<sup>70</sup> Herbert Wigram, op.cit., p.100

<sup>71</sup> *Kerala Chandrika*, 30/03/1896, NNPR, p.86; *Kerala Patrika*, 21/03/1896, NNPR, p. 85

<sup>72</sup> Government appointed a commission, to enquire into the agrarian issues, with C.G.Master as the President in September 1885, P.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p. 70

<sup>73</sup> K.N.Panikkar, ‘Agrarian Legislation and Social Classes’, op.cit., p.214

<sup>74</sup> P.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.81

of checking the forceful eviction of the tenants. Though the act was amended in 1900 the demands of the tenants at will went unfulfilled.<sup>75</sup> The amended Act could not console the grievances of the tenants as the *janmis* found out loopholes in all the laws against tenants who were totally powerless.<sup>76</sup> This was the beginning of the several land reforms to be introduced in Malabar. As the Government always maintained a pro-*janmi* attitude and was very cautious to continue an amicable relation with the *janmi*, the tenants found it very difficult to represent their grievances and make themselves heard. Such circumstances forced tenants to form Malabar Tenancy Association in 1915, to lead the struggles of Malabar tenants, however soon after its formation it came under the control of superior tenants, the *kanakkaran* and hence the interests of *verumpattakaran* were overlooked.

Evictions increased throughout Malabar and the number of eviction suits in courts in 1919, 1920, 1921 was 5074, 5142, 4490 respectively.<sup>77</sup> The full and unlimited power of eviction thus given to the *janmis* by the courts was freely and capriciously used by them; moreover the tenants were pushed into indebtedness.<sup>78</sup> Another evil that crept into the Malabar agrarian system was the *melcharth*, which was skillfully used by *janmis* to evict tenants and acquire more rent.<sup>79</sup> These agrarian disenchantments led to a violent outburst in 1921, the Malabar revolt, which was portrayed as a *mappila* revolt by the

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<sup>75</sup> P. Eashvaraiah, *The Communist Parties In Power and Agrarian Reforms in India*, Academic Foundation, Delhi, 1993, p.116

<sup>76</sup> A.K.Gopalan, *Manninnuvedi*, (Mal), Chintha publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011, (first published-1975), p.11

<sup>77</sup> RMTTC, vol. 1 chapter 2

<sup>78</sup> M.Krishnan Nair, PMLC, March-April 1924, vol. XVIII, p.276

<sup>79</sup> *Melcharth* was also called *melkanam*, was an over lease given by a *janmi* to a third party with the power of redeeming an outstanding *kanam* RMTTC pp. 68-70

colonial authorities, who were not ready to accept the social tensions that had existed.<sup>80</sup>

The first phase of the peasant movement in Malabar came to an end by the revolt of 1921.<sup>81</sup> The second phase of the movement was organized by the *kanam* tenants who were largely Nairs.<sup>82</sup> By the time the *kanakkar* had become a dominant group in the then social conditions of Malabar. During this period both the *janmis* and *kanakkar* assumed an organizational character. The Malabar District Congress from 1916 onwards addressed the tenancy issues in Malabar but it was only in 1920 they could pass a proposal regarding the need of tenancy legislation.<sup>83</sup> To represent the interest of the tenants the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham was formed at Pattambi in 1922, with T.Rama Kurup as President and other activists like Mannath Krishnan Nair and G.Sankaran Nair providing leadership.<sup>84</sup> Mannath Krishnan Nair was elected to the Madras Legislative council in 1922, he represented the interests of the

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<sup>80</sup> The revolt occurred during the Khilafat agitation organized by the Indian National Congress. The Khilafat agitation attained much popularity in Malabar, following governmental political repression and the unresolved tenancy issues, the *mappila* tenants started the revolt. For details of the revolt see K.Madhavan Nair, *Malabar Kalapam*, (Mal), Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2016, (first published -1971) ; K.N.Panikkar, Against Lord and State, *Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar 1836-1921*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989

<sup>81</sup> In the first phase of the movement the main participants were Muslim tenants who were largely unorganized, and they could not achieve any significant change in their life patterns.

<sup>82</sup> The earliest attempt by the *kanam* tenants to protect their interest was in 1912, when T.M.Nair, a member of Madras Legislative Council, submitted a bill to confer the fixity of tenure to *kanam* and *verumpattam* tenants. But with his resignation in 1913 from the council the bill met with premature death of the proposal. P.Radhakrishnan ,op.cit., p.77

<sup>83</sup> In 1920 the conference was held at Manjeri where a proposal regarding tenancy issue was moved by K.P.Raman Menon. *Janmi* delegates were against the proposal and they presented a letter signed by twenty one prominent *janmis* of Malabar denouncing the then ongoing arguments for conferring the *kanam* tenants with permanent occupancy rights. C.K.Moosad, *K.Madhavan Nair*, (Mal), (biography), Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 1987, pp.174-175

<sup>84</sup> Both were members of the Justice party.



*kanam* tenants in the council. In 1922 he introduced a tenancy bill in the council, but it went unnoticed, again in 1924 he moved a revised bill for conferring occupancy rights on *kanakkar* and cultivating tenant.<sup>85</sup> The government failed to decide upon the tenancy bill and due to the mounting pressure the governor appointed a committee in September 1927 with Diwan Bhadur T.Raghavaih Pantalu as President. Based on the recommendations of the Committee, The Malabar Tenancy Act XIV of 1930 was passed by conceding most of the demands of the *kanakkar*.

### **Colonial Reinterpretation of Nair *Tarawads***

The Nair joint families known as *tarawads* were a significant aspect of the social conditions of Malabar under colonial occupation. Upper class Nairs of *tarawads* were *desavazhis*, who possessed considerable power. The British government conferred the official responsibility in villages - ie. the government offices like that of *adhikari*, *mukhyasthan* - to certain Nair *tarawads* in the respective region. In course of time, these offices became hereditary and this multiplied the power of *tarawads*. This was done to ensure regular revenue collection and to maintain power, by exploiting the traditional dominance of the *tarawads* in their own locality. Thus, under the company rule *tarawads* acquired political importance and at the same time they lost many of their earlier rights like that of the right of the *tarawad* to receive gifts from the cultivators on the occasion of *Onam* and *Vishu*. This right was stopped by the Joint Commissioners on the ground that it is the exploitation of the inhabitants.<sup>86</sup> During 1792-1805 the company granted *sanad-e-missihat-e-isthimhar* to landlords and they submitted *kabooliath* to the

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<sup>85</sup> RMTTC, chapter III paragraph.51

<sup>86</sup> Letter from the Joint commissioners to The Zamorin, dated 09/01/1793, in William Logan, *A Collection of Treatises, Engagements and other Papers of Importance Related to British Affairs in Malabar, Madras*, (first published - 1951), Deed No. XXV, p. 173

company<sup>87</sup> and Malabar *tarawads* under its male head reinforced their control over lands and its occupants. With this the customary relations on land that had existed in Malabar came to an end and in its place written contracts and new relations came into being. Thus the co-operative nature of ownership on land was replaced by absolute individual private ownership. Under this redefinition the major joint families of Malabar- both Illoms and *Tarawads* became the regional centers of power for colonialism.

According to G.Arunima the internal relations within the *tarawads* were also subjected to drastic changes ie. the *karanavan* suddenly assumed importance and he was vested with all the responsibility for all the transactions made by the family.<sup>88</sup> As per the customary tradition *karanavan* was just one of the owners of the family property and he had no special rights. But if this argument is accepted, we have to suppose that in the pre-colonial period women enjoyed significant powers and decision making capacity in these *tarawads*, which was altered by the colonialism. The colonial search for a male head of the joint family undermined the authoritative power of women. Unfortunately, for want of sources, we can't categorically assert that women enjoyed considerable power in pre-colonial Malabar. Throughout Kerala all the royal households in the pre-colonial and in the colonial period followed *marumakkathayam* system of inheritance. Still we can't point out a single woman ruler in the history of Kerala.<sup>89</sup> None of the record names a woman as Naduvazhi or Desavazhi, as they were all invariably men. It is true that the

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<sup>87</sup> K.K.N.Kurup, op.cit., p. 7

<sup>88</sup> G.Arunima, *There Comes Papa, Colonialism and The Transformation of Matriliney in Malabar c. 1850-1940*, op.cit., p. 91. See also, G.Arunima, 'Multiple meanings: Changing conceptions of matrilineal kinship in nineteenth – and twentieth – century Malabar', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 33, 3 (1996), pp. 283-307

<sup>89</sup> Ummayamma Rani of Attinghal Swaroopam and Arakkal Beevi were exceptions and all other names of women as rulers were only as regents of little princes. J.Devika, *Kulasthreeyum Chandapennughalum Undaayathengine*, op.cit., p.56

eldest woman in the royal households had certain rights in family and her position was hereditarily authenticated as in the Zamorin's family where 'Ambadi Kovilakam Valiya Thampurati' was the honorific title of the eldest woman member.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless the argument that it was the colonial interpretation that undermined the superior political and familial power of women in Malabar seems very difficult to accept.

### **Dissemination of Colonial Education**

The general impact of western education was undeniably strong. The colonial education implemented in India undermined the country's existing social, economic and political structures. India had a rich tradition of indigenous education in the pre-colonial period. For the colonialist this traditional education was not sufficient for their administration and thus they sought to introduce western system of education through which they hoped to bring out a cultural change in Indians. In the initial years of rule in India the East India Company was not interested in promoting the education of Indians. Being a colonial commercial enterprise they tried to maintain aloofness from the social aspects of the colonized. However after the inception of the administration they were forced to start certain educational institutions in India to satisfy their own bureaucratic necessities, the Calcutta *Madrassa* founded by Warren Hastings and the Sanskrit College founded by Jonathan Duncan being examples of such efforts, but these institutions were for the English and not intended for indigenous population. As years passed by some of the English felt that their dominion in India would not last long unless the education, especially western, was diffused among the inhabitants of the

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<sup>90</sup> K.V.Krishna Iyer, *Zamorins of Calicut: From the earliest times down to A.D. 1806*, Publication Division University of Calicut, Calicut, 1999, (first published -1938), p. 20

land.<sup>91</sup> In 1792 Wilberforce proposed two clauses regarding education to be added in the charter Act of the same year. The clauses were proposals to send schoolmasters to India but the proposal was vehemently opposed by the Court of Proprietors of the company.<sup>92</sup> A major initiative for educating the natives was done only in 1813 when the British Parliament passed the charter Act in 1813 by which the company was forced to accept the responsibility of educating the Indians.<sup>93</sup> A.D.Campbell, the Collector of Bellary once wrote to the Court of Directors that, "I am ashamed to report that in this district there are 533 educational institutions and none of them are receiving any aid from the state, but in early period under the Hindoo Governments large aids were set apart for learning."<sup>94</sup> Even the British officials admitted that with the destruction of village communities under the Company administration the educational institutions of traditional India started declining and there was no attempt to revamp them.

The educational system instituted by the British in India was to serve their colonial needs and hence it never promoted the technical education, science education or an education demanded by the diverse conditions of India.<sup>95</sup> This was the reason why the British resorted to the policy of educating only a selected few rather than the Indian masses. Liberalists, evangelists and utilitarians all supported the western system of education to be introduced in India. The Orientalist-Anglicist debate on the nature of education and on the

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<sup>91</sup> Baman Das Basu, *History of Education in India under the rule of East India Company*, Modern Review office, 1867, p.4

<sup>92</sup> Many of the Englishmen were of the opinion that they lost America due to the establishment of schools and colleges there and hence they were not ready to repeat the same folly in India. *ibid.*, pp. 5-6

<sup>93</sup> A motion by R.P.Smith for setting apart one lakh rupees every year for the revival of literature and for the encouragement of learned natives was accepted by the Court of Directors. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8

<sup>94</sup> Extract from the reports of A.D.Campbell, The Collector of Bellary, August 17 1823, quoted in Baman Das Basu, *op.cit.*, p.15

<sup>95</sup> Universalisation of primary education was to remain a project of independent India.

medium of language in which education was to be imparted and how the debate was resolved, all demonstrates imperialist interests. English education was conceived as a means to induce western lifestyle in India and thereby create an ever developing market for British industries. In the process of subjectification, education played the most important role. The school, an institution where the power relations, activities and system of communication converged, was a wonderful site where the people as colonial citizens were moulded.<sup>96</sup>

The Christian missionaries were the pioneers in spreading education in India. Missionaries, by addressing the local social issues and disabilities, interfered among the indigenous population, as their main purpose was to spread Christianity among the local people. The main issue was about the role of Christian Mission schools in a country where there was a Hindu-Muslim majority, in the presence of a government which claimed to be totally neutral in all religious matters. Many charity schools were started with grants from the company. In England, William Wilberforce, Charles Grant and others lobbied for the revival of the missionary spirit and for missionaries to be sent out to India.<sup>97</sup> Clive Whitehead argued that even the Indian education commission of 1882-83 had its origin in the South Indian Missionary conference held at Bangalore in 1879.<sup>98</sup> Church Missionary Society and London Missionary Society were active in the field of education by establishing schools and colleges.

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<sup>96</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, *Development Experience of Colonial Keralam*, op.cit., p. 90

<sup>97</sup> Padma Ramachandran and Vasantha Ramkumar, *Education in India*, National Book trust, New Delhi, 2005, p.57

<sup>98</sup> At the conference the missionaries expressed their protest on the way in which grant-in-aid was administered by the government. Clive Whitehead, 'The Christian Missions and the origins of the Indian Education Commission 1882-83', *Education Research and Perspectives*, vol,31, no,2, 2004,pp. 120-136

Chamberlin credited the British administration in India with the calmness and deliberation shown by the rulers, amidst 'all fanaticism, ignorance and cruelty' of natives, for pursuing the policy of education by establishing schools and universities for 'civilizing' the indigenous population.<sup>99</sup> He observed that the unrest in India, during the early years of twentieth century, was largely due to the defects of the system of education instituted by the British government.

English education was received wholeheartedly by some caste groups in Malabar. Though the Namboothiris and Muslims turned away from it, considering English as *melechha* language, all others could reap the benefits of English education. The Nairs in South Malabar and Tiyas in North Malabar readily accepted English education and went through a social revolution. Nigel Crook says that the rich and powerful seek to reproduce their position by transmitting the knowledge of their stable power from class to class, from clan to clan and from generation to generation; subsequently class or lineage may continue its existent privileges unopposed.<sup>100</sup> This became true in the case of Nairs in Malabar as they sought to regain their ruined social privileges by acquiring English education. The Namboothiris failed to acquire English education when they vehemently tried to maintain their ritual superiority and it was only in the early years of twentieth century that they realized the significance of western education and urged the community members to accept that.

Western education contributed to the emergence of a new class in Malabar - this class was composed of lawyers, teachers, and government

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<sup>99</sup> Wm.I. Chamberlain, 'Educational Problems In India', *The Journal of Race Development*, vol. 1, no. 1 (July 1910), pp. 110-121

<sup>100</sup> Nigel Crook, *The Transmission of Knowledge in the South Asia- Essay on Education, Religion, History and Politics*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 2-3.

servants - and a salaried class was created in Malabar. In the case of Malabar this class was composed largely of Nairs. The members of this class played a significant role in questioning traditional notions of marriage and family and advocating reform.

### **Colonialism and Women's Education**

Education of women would always be determined by the needs and aspirations of patriarchy. In order to restrict her imagination, thinking and creativity she was maintained uneducated. Education may create a certain measure of independence of thought; a spirit of enquiry and of objectivity could threaten the well maintained difference between the sexes.<sup>101</sup> Denying basic education or basic literacy was one way of perpetuating their general inferiority. Patriarchal societies maintained a belief that education may liberate women and she may start neglecting her household duties and so she was to be kept uneducated.<sup>102</sup> The first step in achieving women's education was to do away with these pre conceived notions of patriarchy on education. R.G.Bhandarkar, in one of his speeches in 1891, observed that, "we don't propose to make our women learned and teach them to neglect their household duties and take to books. We intend to make them more fit to discharge those duties and to open a window in the prison-house of a social system through which they may look into the modern world."<sup>103</sup> The critics of female education always equated education with mounting immorality among caste women.

English education was introduced for boys rather than for girls' who studied the same curriculum. Many argued that girls' curriculum must be

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<sup>101</sup> Neera Desai and Maitreyi Krishna Raj, op.cit., p.152

<sup>102</sup> Meera Kosambi, *Crossing the Thresholds*, Feminist Essays in Social History, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p. 156

<sup>103</sup> R.G.Bandarkar, a speech delivered in 1891, quoted in Meera Kosambi, op.cit., p. 151

distinct from boys as the boys are studying to get jobs and girls' education does not have any such intentions. Hence the colonial officials were convinced that a curriculum suited to the feminine social role was more desirable. Thus certain subjects emerged as feminine subjects – hygiene, domestic science, needle work, music and home science.<sup>104</sup> Karuna Chanana observed that the writings on women's education during the pre-independence period and the emphasis on a relevant curriculum were directly linked to the conception of women's role as housewives and mothers.<sup>105</sup> Education was to be moulded along the requirements of their traditional role expectations. The demand for education arose as a concomitant of the social reform movement. The reformers argued that women's education improved the familial conditions and enriched the society. Educated men came to prefer educated girls as brides and this forced parent to send their daughters to school. The gap between an educated husband and uneducated wife was to be bridged.

From 1818 onwards missionary activities for promoting girls' education through the setting up of schools and Orphan Homes for them, and through giving instruction in their homes known as, zenana education, increased rapidly. The colonial government in its early years was not interested in educating the Indian women. But after some years they started girls' schools and tried to develop an education system for girls. Women's education in India was hampered due to the existence of several traditional customs. Girls' education developed largely due to the efforts of the Christian missionaries rather than through state's efforts. For a colonial government women's education was not at all a profitable investment hence they

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<sup>104</sup> Rajagopal.T, *Indian Women in the Ages*, Jaya Stores, Mysore, 1936, p. 198

<sup>105</sup> Karuna Chanana, 'The Education of Women in Pre-Independent India', in, A.M.Shah, B.S.Baviskar and E.A.Ramaswamy (ed) *Social Structure and Change*, vol. II- Women in Indian Society, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1996,p.114.



continuously blamed the tradition of India for the backwardness of women's education. For instance, the smallness of the number of secondary schools for Indian girls was explained as, chiefly due to the absence of demand. There has been considerable advance in the number of girls being sent to schools, but the return do not disclose any desire on the part of the parents to keep their daughters at school for longer periods.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the parents generally had a dislike to send their daughters to mixed schools and schools with male teachers. Less than 60% of the girls who were under instruction in India were attending institutions intended exclusively for females and more than 40% were in institutions for common sexes.<sup>107</sup> In the whole of Madras Presidency, Malabar contained the largest number of girls studying in boys' schools.<sup>108</sup> Girls' educational institutions were a great financial liability for the government as it demanded more infrastructural facilities and women teachers. The non-availability of women teachers was the crux of the whole issue. Till this problem was solved female education could make no real progress.<sup>109</sup> The duties of Inspectresses in girls' schools were not only to visit schools but also to use their influence in spreading the demand for female education.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Progress of Education in India 1902-1907, Fifth Quinquennial Review, vol. I, paragraph.778

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph. 773. The absence of women teachers was the main reason cited by the then school authorities for the drop out of girls at higher classes. This made school headmistress to continuously request government of the appointment of women teachers. As per a letter sent to the government by the authorities of the Government Girls School Puthur, Palghat the school had 40 girl students in first standard whereas in eighth standard there were only 14 girl students, hence they requested the government for the permanent retention of the temporary additional women teacher. G.O.475 dated 21/04/1920, Home Educational Department, RAK

<sup>108</sup> Report on Public Instruction in Madras presidency 1905-1906, published 1906, p. 24

<sup>109</sup> De La Fosse, Director of Public Instruction in United Province, in Progress of Education in India 1902-1907, *op.cit.*, paragraph. 827

<sup>110</sup> Progress of Education in India, 1907-1912, vol. I, 1913, paragraph. 830

In South India missionary activities were controlled by L.M.S and C.M.S. In Tinnelveli C.M.S. started a boarding school for girls in 1821 and the Scottish Church Society opened six schools for 200 Hindu girls in 1840. The Basel Evangelical mission was also very active in South and promoted education through several institutions. Charles's Woods education dispatch of 1854 provided a stimulus to women education and as per this governmental aid would be made available to private institutions wishing to extend girls' schools. The female education did not correspond with governments' education aim of promoting clerks for the imperial bureaucracy, also seems to have influenced government thinking on the lowly place of girls' education among its priorities.<sup>111</sup>The government's attitude towards women education was explicitly expressed, when they decided, "not to do anything more than establishing a Normal school for training female teachers."<sup>112</sup> A letter to the Board of Revenue showing the status of the schools in Malabar provides a description on the Malabar private tutors. These tutors taught theology, law astronomy, metaphysics, ethics and medical science as is clear from the following table.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Meredith Brothwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, University of Princeton Press, Princeton, p. 73

<sup>112</sup> During 1866-67, Mrs. Carpenter, whose philanthropic exertions in England to improve neglected sections of the community were well known, visited Madras Presidency and proposed several measures to improve the women education in the region. But in spite of her suggestions the government decided not to interfere too much in the women's education as the time for it had not arrived. Report on Public Instruction in Madras Presidency for 1866-67, published in 1867, p.41

<sup>113</sup> Table prepared from the letter from the collector, dated 08/05/1823, to the Board of Revenue showing the statement of the schools in Malabar provides a description on the Malabar private tutors. Outward letters in the Revenue Department from January to December 1823, RAK.

Caste	No.of female scholars in native schools	No.of male scholars in native schools
Brahmin	5	2230
Nair	13	84
Other castes	343	2756
Muhammedans	1122	3196

The above table helps us to ascertain the level of women education in Malabar in 1823. Interestingly the difference between the number of Muslim women scholars and Muslim male scholars attending the native schools is comparatively small.

No tuition fee was collected in girls' school under public management. The Madras Director remarked that parents would, in most cases, rather not have their girls educated at all than pay even a small fee. The girls' education would have improved in Malabar if the government had started more schools and a large sum was granted. Local boards and municipalities also could do much for girls' education.<sup>114</sup> However Madras was foremost in girls' education. The number of girls enrolled in all institutions in Madras presidency increased from 539351 in 1927 to 1435671 in 1947.<sup>115</sup>

Considering the number of girls' students in schools, in 1871-72, Malabar had third position in Madras presidency.<sup>116</sup> Regarding the status of education in Malabar, Innes observed that every five Malayali can read and write and six in every hundred were women.<sup>117</sup> In female education both

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<sup>114</sup> Report on Public Instruction in Madras Presidency for 1892-93, published in 1893, p.96

<sup>115</sup> Karuna Channana, op.cit., p. 128

<sup>116</sup> First in the list being Madras and Chingelpet and second was Tinnevely, Report on Public Instruction in Madras Presidency for 1871-72, published in 1872, p.74

<sup>117</sup> C.A.Innes, op.cit., p.295

elementary and secondary, Malabar hold the highest place, Madras and The Nilgiris being excluded from the calculation. After the Eurasians, Namboothiris and Nairs are the most enlightened caste in the matter of female education in the entire presidency. In Malabar District the number of girls attending schools was consistently higher in Calicut, second being Tellicherry, when compared to other districts.<sup>118</sup> Malabar had 566 elementary schools for girls, more than half of which were private aided schools. The Government realized that much of the money spent on women education was practically wasted due to the withdrawal of girls from schools at an early age. This can be attributed to the customary practice of child marriage.<sup>119</sup> In order to find a solution, the government took initiative to appoint caste widows and couples as teachers in schools, especially in mixed schools. However the number of girl students showed an increase as is clear from the table below.<sup>120</sup>

Municipalities	No. of girls at girls' school.		No. of girls at boys' school.		Total No. of girls		Percentage of girls	
	1890-1891	1891-1892	1890-1891	1891-1892	1890-1891	1891-1892	1890-1891	1891-1892
Tellichery	349	392	267	259	616	651	29.8	31.5
Cannanore	189	207	187	192	376	399	19	20.2
Palghat	362	406	72	102	434	508	14.2	16.6
Calicut	464	489	302	227	766	754	16.2	15.8

<sup>118</sup> Proceedings of the Director of public Instruction, Annual report on Female Education in the Western Circle for 1891-1892,p.4

<sup>119</sup> Report on Public Instruction, in Madras Presidency, 1889-1890, Madras, 1891, p. 138

<sup>120</sup> Reviewing report on female education in 1891-1892, dated 1/03/1893, File no. 2147, RAK.

Along with the government initiatives, missionaries also contributed to the development of women education. First B.E.M school in Malabar was established by Julie Gundert in 1839 at Tellicherry.<sup>121</sup> Atma Vidya Sangham established a school called Saraswathi Vilasam Vidyapeetham at Thiruvangad, near Tellichery, to encourage education especially Sanskrit learning among women.<sup>122</sup> At Calicut, Margret Fritz opened a school for infants in 1842 which became a girls' school. By 1847 there were 27 girls studying in that school. The Basel Evangelical Missionaries started a school and a home for orphan girls at Chirakkal, Kannur, naturally inmates in the orphanage were Christian girls.<sup>123</sup> Girls in the orphanage were taught Bible, English, Malayalam, basic mathematics, history, and geography and were trained in stitching. Classes were organized for married women where they were acquainted with skills for proper management of house and kitchen and also about child care.<sup>124</sup>

One of the most important indigenous initiatives for women's education was undertaken by T.M.Appu Nedugadi. He recognized the fact that in missionary schools upper caste Hindu girls were not admitted. In 1906 Appu Nedugadi established a society known as 'Society for the Promotion of Education of Women' at Chalappuram for the promotion of education for

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<sup>121</sup> Chumar Choondal, 'The Basel Mission', in M.G.S.Narayanan (ed) *Malabar*, op.cit., p.140

<sup>122</sup> Praseetha.N.C, *Women's Education in Malabar*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Kerala, 2014, p. 72

<sup>123</sup> George Irumbayam, *Nallu Novelukkal*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 1985, p.44

<sup>124</sup> Joseph Mooliyil, *Sukumari*, (Mal), Haritham Books, Kozhikode, 2003, (first published -1897), pp. 51-52. Sukumari was a novel on the social conditions of Kannur and changes affected due to the impacts of the activities of the B.E.M. Sukumari was the daughter of a Thiyya youth who accepted Christianity and eloped from the region. She was admitted to the orphanage and educated in the institution.

non-Christian women and later a school was opened for girls of all castes and religions.<sup>125</sup>

By the last decades of nineteenth century many Nair *tarawads* made attempts to provide western education for their girls, either by sending them to schools or through private tuitions. Many families were against sending their girls to mission schools due to constraints of caste system and out of fear that girls might be converted to Christianity. Nair women had more access to modern education when compared to *antharjanams* who were out of the purview of the public education system. The reason cannot be solely the matrilineal system, as the other matrilineal castes in Kerala never promoted formal education for women.<sup>126</sup> Nairs were not hesitant in sending their girls to schools, hence several Nair girls passed school final exams- in the early years of twentieth century - and went to Madras for their higher studies.<sup>127</sup> However, it is true that the benefits of such an education was limited only to girls of well to do *tarawads*, others concluded their education at the elementary level itself. There were women from Nair *tarawads* studying in colleges of Madras during the 1920s though such an education was not accessible for all as it was highly expensive. In 1921, when 14% of the Nair women were literate, 22% among the *antharjanams* could read and write

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<sup>125</sup> Ulloor.S.Parameswara Aiyer, *Kerala Sahitya Charitram*, (Mal) vol. V, Department of Publication, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, (first published- 1955),p.278

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Gopala Menon, 86 years, Trissur, on 18/08/2013, Savithri Thampurati, 82 years, Mankada Kovilakam, on 05/04/2014.

<sup>127</sup> In the novel *Lakshmee Kesavam*, Lakshmi's father Kanmaran Nair, an advocate practicing in Madras, took her to Madras for providing her English education. K. Pandoo Menon, *Lakshmee Kesavam*, Kerala Mithram Press ,Cochin, 1892, in George Irumbayam, op.cit. p.136. Robin Jeffrey noted that under matriliney girls often attended local schools, even before the establishment of centralized education systems in 1860's. Robin Jeffrey, *Women, Politics and Well Being-How Kerala became 'A Model'*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, p.55

similarly, 0.4% of Nair women were literate in English and 0.37% among *antharjanams* had the knowledge of English language.<sup>128</sup>

### **Formation of Middle Class**

Indian middle class has been typically perceived to be an educated section of urban society employed in or seeking white collar jobs; they are usually placed in between the poor and the extremely rich and along with these, the comprised of a group of people with a peculiar consciousness.<sup>129</sup> The notion of middle class is synonymous with industrial development and capitalism. The idea of middle class has been used as a normative criterion of how much an economy has developed. The role of the middle class, the moral and ideological underpinnings of the idea of middle class as representing wider interest of the nation underwent several changes even in the British period.

According to B.B.Misra, pre-colonial India had the idea of economic development for the growth of the middle class but the immobility of the caste system and despotic bureaucracy prevented its formation. Under the British rule a new educational policy and westernized institutions and ideas were proliferated and these were favourable for the emergence of a middle class. He argued that the new middle class in India was implanted by the British and was not a product of indigenous changes.<sup>130</sup> Michelguglielmo Torri worked with the idea of there being a real middle class. Using Gramsci's concepts Tori defines the Indian middle class as those who quite independently from their class and caste origin were politically aware and active as theorists, strategists, organizers and spokesmen on behalf of existing

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<sup>128</sup> Census of India, 1921, vol. XIII, Madras, part. II.

<sup>129</sup> Lancy Lobo and Jayesh Shah, (ed), *Trajectory Of Indian Middle Class, Economy, Ethics and Etiquette*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK, 2015,p. 2

<sup>130</sup> B.B.Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes - Their Growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, Delhi,pp.10-11

or emerging autonomous social group.<sup>131</sup> The westernized Indians mostly hailed from a limited number of high ranking castes whose members traditionally served the ruling elites and often shared their privileges and were traditional intellectuals. In this case it is not possible for the intellectuals to be independent, autonomous, and endowed with their own character.

Sanjay Joshi was of the opinion that colonial history of India cannot be written without centrally engaging with the history of the middle class. According to him the creation of the middle class was a long historical process, predicated on the creation of new forms of social conduct and the construction of new values guiding domestic as well as public life. All these transformations whether political, social or cultural reflected the concerns and perhaps the contradictions, constitutive of the middle class.<sup>132</sup> The category of middle class refers to the people who belonged to the upper strata of society, without being at the very top, financially comfortable and people who did work to earn a living. They were economically, socially, culturally distanced from the lower classes. They had sufficient educational training and economic resources to shape and participate in the public debates that took place during the colonial period. It was by transforming traditional cultural values and the basis of social hierarchy that a distinctive middle class emerged. Joshi said that a public sphere may have been facilitated by the British in India but it was created by the educated Indians themselves who debated various issues and published their ideas in the press. The middle class always distanced themselves from the upper and lower classes and this distance was consciously reinforced.

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<sup>131</sup> Michelguglielmo Torri, 'The Myth of a Westernized Middle Class', in Sanjay Joshi (ed) *The Middle class in Colonial India*, op.cit., pp. 58-59

<sup>132</sup> Sanjay Joshi(ed), *The Middle class in Colonial India*, op.cit., p.xviii. Regarding the Calcutta middle class of the late nineteenth century, Partha Chatterjee observed that, the class was created in a relation of subordination to the British colonial elite. Partha Chatterji, *Nation and its Fragments*, op.cit., p.36.



The middle class, according to Joshi, can be better understood as the 'producers and products of new cultural polities in a transformed historical context.<sup>133</sup> This allowed them to articulate a new set of beliefs, values, aspirations and gender that distinguished them from other groups. They emerged as a distinct social group by actively engaging in the socio-political issues of the region in the wake of colonialism. The newly imbibed rational outlooks enabled them to question and reinterpret the indigenous practices and customs. For the redress of the issues identified - especially those concerning women - they sought the help of colonial government, and changes were instituted through legislations. A new public sphere was formed due to the interventions made by the middle class and their aspirations found expression through press and associations.

The new middle class of Malabar derived benefits from English education and demanded social justice and equality. The influence of western ideologies was manifested in the formation of several organizations both secular and communal.<sup>134</sup> According to K.N.Panikkar, Kerala's Middle class is not middle class per se; it has only donned the middle class exterior by adopting modern lifestyle.<sup>135</sup> Hence it has to be accepted that the middle class that was formed in Malabar was not a homogeneous one but was a combination of several class formations. Another significant aspect of the middle class was that its members largely came from the already privileged classes of the pre-modern period and those from other sections could form only a negligible number within it. In short colonialism in Malabar helped to perpetuate (or further to strengthen) the caste divide and caste consciousness among people. However middle class of Malabar emanated the most vibrant

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<sup>133</sup> Sanjay Joshi(ed), *The Middle class in Colonial India*, op.cit., p. xviii-xx

<sup>134</sup> Ezhava memorial, Malayali memorial, NSS, SNDP, to cite a few examples.

<sup>135</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *The Hindu*, 21, February, 2011, quoted in Jeevan.S, op.cit.

ideology of socialism. Under its influence cropped up several peasant movements which went against the interest of the state and the landlord.

The middle class of Malabar largely drew its members from the Nair community. When considering the employment adopted by the community, it can be seen that they were not a homogeneous group as members belonging to different sub castes went for various jobs. In the pre-modern period the main source of their income was the land rent.<sup>136</sup> Within the community there were big *janmis*, intermediary *kanakkar* and actual cultivators. Under the colonial domination the Nairs were the first to take up western education and could make use of the employment opportunities under the colonial state. The number of graduates, under graduates and matriculates in the Malabar District was about thousand and the majority of them were from the upper caste.<sup>137</sup> The Purbattis and Menons (village revenue officials) were drawn from the upper caste Hindus- Nair, Menon, Panikkar and Kurup and the officials of the colonial courts were also from these castes.<sup>138</sup> The number of officials from the district drawing a monthly salary of more than rupees 10, rupees 20 and rupees 50 were respectively 1063, 245 and 90.<sup>139</sup> Moreover many families were successful in securing hereditary posts from the government and could maintain this privilege for generations. People like C.Sankaran Nair could acquire the highest post under the British government. Continued association with the government gave several privileges to the community; they were exposed to new administrative procedures and judicial practices.

Under the impact of colonialism several traditional employments became unprofitable and people were forced to take up new arenas offered by the new economic forces unleashed by the colonial state. Thus people started

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<sup>136</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, op.cit., p.28

<sup>137</sup> The President's memorandum in Enclosures, RMMC, 1891, p.9

<sup>138</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, op.cit., p. 29

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9

accepting alternate professions like that of doctors, lawyers, teachers, government servants, clerks and lower paid jobs of office attendants and drivers.<sup>140</sup> For the Nairs, with government employment, a new source of steady income was opened up. *Tarawads* became more powerful when its members were employed under the state. At the same time participation of Nairs in industrial development and allied trade was comparatively low. Legal profession was one of the major sector that attracted Nair youth, many of them became advocates and judges in Malabar and Madras. Nairs were able to maintain their dominance in government service throughout the British rule.<sup>141</sup>

The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of an articulate class as a result of colonial transformation. This class which had received modern education that equipped them for employment in the state apparatus was called by Hamsa Alavi as the 'colonial salariat.'<sup>142</sup> The material interests of the colonial salariat had underpinned the emerging politicization of caste and ethnic groups in the sub-continent. This was due to the fact that salariat was much more powerful in societies where the bulk of the population and the production base were mainly rural and agricultural. The colonial salariat in Kerala was dominated by the *savarna* castes; to be precise, largely Nairs. Colonial modernity made basic transformations in the life and aspirations of its protagonists in their approach towards customs and practices.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Kathleen Gough, 'Changing Kinship Usages in the Setting of Political and economic Change among the Nairs of Malabar', *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol., 82(1), 1952, pp. 80-81.

<sup>141</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, op.cit., p.2

<sup>142</sup> Hamsa Alavi and John Harris, *Sociology of Developing Societies South Asia*, McMillan, London, 1989, p.225 quoted in D.Damodaran Namboothiri, *Caste and Social Change in Colonial Kerala*, in P.J.Cherien(ed), op.cit., p.44

<sup>143</sup> K.Sreejith argued that under the influence of the colonial modernity middle class in Malabar developed new notions regarding punctuality, thrift, hard work, hygiene and sanitation. K.Sreejith, 'Negotiating Traditions and

At the same time the traditionally dominant caste of Malabar Namboothiris failed to exploit the changed circumstances and remained totally aloof from modern education and government services. One of the first collective expressions of the aspirations and anxieties of the emerging middle class could be found in the Malayali Memorial of 1891. The main objective of Malayali Memorial was to impress on the maharaja the gross injustice involved in the denial to Travancoreans of a fair share in the administration.<sup>144</sup> Malayali Memorial was a product of the new middle class formed in Thiruvananthapuram, and it emerged out of the frustration among the unemployed educated sections of the society. They contended that they were being deprived of Government jobs due to the monopoly of the Tamil Brahmins. In Malabar the middle class first attempted to reform the marriage practices of the region, as ‘*sambandham*’ was judged by the colonial courts as ‘concubinage’.

The intelligentsia of Malabar concluded that their marriage practices were obsolete and needed to be refashioned. Concern regarding this issue could be seen in the contemporary novels of the period published from Malabar. Novels discussed the issues of public concern like marriage, women’s education and Malabar Marriage Act. These novels could bring out the social tension of the period. Through discussions it was made clear that indigenous customs were to be reframed in such a way that would enable the people of Malabar to live like other people of the Presidency.<sup>145</sup> The male intelligentsia of Malabar skillfully went around the social hierarchies which

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Modernity- Middle Class Dilemmas in Colonial Malabar’, *Social Scientist*, vol. 41, No. 3/4 (March-April 2013), pp. 35-48

<sup>144</sup> Vanaja N.B.(ed), *The History of Freedom Movement In Kerala* , vol. II, Department of Cultural Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972, p.10

<sup>145</sup> *Indulekha* and *Lakshmeekesavam* discussed issues which were to be reformed. O.Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, op.cit., K. Pandoo Menon, *Lakshmee Kesavam*, op.cit.,

hindered the formation of a public sphere through the literary discussions.<sup>146</sup> Conversations in the novels, in an imagined public sphere, helped to frame a public opinion regarding the necessity of change; besides it convinced the common population about the ideas of an educated class.<sup>147</sup>

The middle class gradually became the representatives of their community and were looked upon as harbingers of change. They were more closely associated with the administrators of the region and many of them held key positions in the government. Hence they could place demands for social transformation and get them materialized. At the same time they were not free from the influences of religion or caste, and hence moved very cautiously not wanting to offend caste rules. In a public sphere made by them, they debated on various issues; at times they went against orthodoxy to initiate changes.

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<sup>146</sup> Shiju Sam Varghese, 'Colonial Intellectuals, Public Sphere and the Promises of Modernity Reading Parangodeeparinayam', in Satheesh Chandra Bose and Shiju Sam Varghese (ed), *Kerala Modernity Ideas, Spaces and Practices in Transition*, Orient Black Swan, Hyderabad, 2015, p.45

<sup>147</sup> Such conversations could be seen in *Indulekha*- the much discussed eighteenth chapter- *Lakshmikesavam*, and in several contemporary novels.

## CHAPTER III

# REFRAMING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY OF NAIRS

Social change is the change in the web of social relationships or social structure. Social changes are alterations in the regular course of society; it can be caused by natural forces or it can be induced by human agency. In the words of Jones, “Social change is a term used to describe variations or modifications of any aspect of social processes, social pattern, social interactions or social organization.”<sup>1</sup> Social change is the product of either accident or a design of forces that in part can be controlled and in part follow a logic of its own. Whether referring to whole scale social transformations, broad social reforms, or modification in existing practices, change is in every instance regarded as healthy.<sup>2</sup> Several causes can be ascribed to social change and one of the most dominant among them is colonialism, which can initiate changes either rapidly or gradually. In ancient static societies, social changes materialized at a very slow pace; with the advent of industrialization and capitalism the societies throughout the world started experiencing rapid changes. Robert J.Havighurst argued that in a modern society social change is connected with vertical social mobility, ie. the desire to acquire a privileged socio-economic status.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Basic Sociological Principles*, Quoted in Rajendra.K.Sharma, *Social Change and Social Control*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2007, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Christopher.R.Williams and Bruce A,Arrigo, ‘Theory, Justice and Social Change’, *Theoretical Integrations and Critical Applications*, Springer Science +Business Media, New York, 2004, p.3

<sup>3</sup> Robert J.Havighurst, ‘Education, Social Mobility and Social Change in Four societies’, *International Review of Education*, 1958, (4), p.167.

Colonialism induced social change in colonized societies through administrative interference or coercive measures. Changes can also occur through the ideological influence of the colonizer, which may lead to the interpretation of the colonized civilization's culture and tradition both by colonizer and colonized. Changes have always been resisted by the conservative forces in all societies, but under colonialism the resistance against foreign occupation resulted in creatively transforming indigenous societies. Ideologies that developed during the resistance movements also aimed at the transformation of societies to confront the challenges posed by colonialism.

Sociologists have identified education as one of the most important instruments of social change, especially when the scope of education is opened up for a wider section of the society. The spread of education produces serious value conflicts in the system which results in powerful deliberations necessitating social transformations. Education uses its liberating and rebelating role, by examining and analyzing the existing social situation, by counter posing an alternative ideology to challenge the established ideology. In India the new Colonial English education actively collaborated in the establishment of the colonial socio-economic and political structure, while during the process of subjugation, it also played a kind of liberating role in breaking down traditional norms and values.<sup>4</sup> The liberating role of education led to the development of powerful socio-religious reforms and protest movements and along with it there was also a process of self-discovery and self-assertion.<sup>5</sup>

The English education opened before Indians the richest literature in the world, which enabled them to gain knowledge on the birth of a nation

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<sup>4</sup> A.R.Kamat, Education and Social Change, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31/07/1982, pp. 1237-1243

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

state by overthrowing medievalism. The educated Indian, imbibed its democratic principles, felt inspired to rebel against reactionary social institutions such as caste.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge from English literature and the facilities of communication provided by the English language enabled educated to critically analyze Indian social conditions and helped in forging themselves into a distinct 'middle class'. A.R.Desai argued that the emergence of new social classes in India was the direct consequence of the establishment of a new social economy, state system, administrative machinery and the spread of new education.<sup>7</sup> Thus came into existence, in steadily expanding number as this society developed, the modern professional classes in India, which contrasted sharply with the professional groups of pre-British India.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of Malabar, social changes were initiated by the newly emerged middle class. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the middle class of Malabar drew its members largely from the Nair community; who accepted western education and got employed under the colonial state.<sup>9</sup> This was comparatively a novel experience for the junior members of the *tarawads*, who were not accustomed to having their own money. Nairs could discern the changing circumstances and realized the significance of English education; this made many of the Nair youth to acquire the same. However in the nineteenth century it was an expensive affair to gain Western education, hence it led to conflicts in *tarawads*. The junior members of the *tarawad* started demanding English education, but it was up to the *karanavan* to decide whom to be educated or not. There would be several *anantharavans* in a

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<sup>6</sup> A.R.Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan Private Limited, Mumbai, 1998, (first published -1948), p.161

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 174

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.180

<sup>9</sup> Details have been discussed in the last chapter.



*tarawad* and hence impossible for the *karanavans* to get all of them educated. The *karanavan* was the manager of the *tarawads* and it was considered to be his responsibility to provide for the maintenance of the members. However this was not accepted by many and it led to conflicts, even court cases. In S.A.2007 of 1897, Krishnan v Govinda Menon, a junior member left the *tarawad* and went to Palakkad, without the consent of the *karanavan*, to pursue English education. But when the *karanavan* refused to pay the amount incurred on education, he sued the *Karanavan* for the same. But the court decreed that the *karanavan* was not bound to educate the members on western lines, and the claim of the junior member was rejected.<sup>10</sup> When the *karanavan* or *tarawad* declined to sponsor English education, many young Nairs approached their fathers. If the father was educated, employed, from an affluent *tarawad* or if he was the *karanavan* of his *tarawad*, he supported the son in pursuing his education. Such a help on the father's part was very crucial as it led to the development of certain novel tendencies in *tarawads* – both of the father and of the son who was educated. If a Nair male tends to educate his son it would be opposed by his own *tarawad* members, since he would be either using the *tarawad*'s property or his own self-acquired income for the purpose. Theoretically both the above were part of his *tarawad* in which his children had no rights.<sup>11</sup> When a father helps his son, which was

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Lewis Moore, op.cit., p.135. First typical novel of Malayalam literature begins with a quarrel between Madhavan and his *Karanavan* on the issue of educating Madhavan's cousin Chinnan. Madhavan wants his *Karnavan* to send Chinnan for English education but *Karanavan* is not ready to spent money on Chinnan. O.Chandu Menon, Indulekha, op.cit., p.17; the Kerala Patrika of December 1885, praised a junior member of a Nair *tarawad* for instituting a civil suit against the *karanavan* for the expenses of English education, Kerala Patrika, December 1885, NNPR, quoted in K.N.Panikkar, 'Land control, Ideology and Reform: A study of the Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala', *The Indian Historical Review*, 1977, vol. IV, no. I, pp. 30-46

<sup>11</sup> Cherukad, *Tharavaditham*, (Mal), Mangalodayam, Thrissur, 1954; in this play Cherukad picturised a *tarawad karanavan*, Sakthan Mooppil Nair of

hitherto not the tradition of *marumakkathayam*, a new bond is created among them, and leads to an obligation on the part of son towards his father.<sup>12</sup> Moreover when the father is supporting, assistance from the junior member's own *tarawad* would be reduced and he would become more confident to turn against his *karnavan*.<sup>13</sup>

As a part of the newfound professions many of English educated youth moved out of the *tarawads* to other parts of the district or Madras and were exposed to new life styles and ideologies. They started to live independently, freed from the control of the *tarawads* and of the *karanavan* in a totally new atmosphere. A new world was open to them where merit of the individual was more significant than his caste. The new world view and modern tendencies which the Nair youth imbibed was gradually diffused among his closest kin. In Madras the young Nair officials and students used to meet and they discussed several political and social issues. This enabled them to come in touch with pristine thoughts, which were hitherto unknown to them.<sup>14</sup> These gatherings provided a platform for discussions about the social conditions in Malabar, prevailing conditions of *tarawads* and it might be here that they first raised ideas of changing their family structure. Nair youth as students and officials were to be in close association with Europeans and men of other indigenous castes and this might have influenced their perception about family life. In Madras, Nairs had to work with Tamil Brahmins who had an

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Nedumpurathu Nair Veedu, who had used all the resources of his *tarawad* for the benefit of his wife and children and his niece was deprived of even food.

<sup>12</sup> "I have taken my father's house-name because he protected me and educated me". Koroth Kannan, witness number 4, RMMC, p.5. Koroth Kannan was not a Nair. He was a Tiyan who followed *marumakkathayam* he was against the proposed legislation for the regulation of marriage among *marumakkathayam* people.

<sup>13</sup> In *Indulekha* Madhavan was courageous to question his *karanavan*, as he was always helped by his father.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the contemporary novels depict this. V.K.N., *Pithamahan*, (Mal) D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2014(first Published-1976), Komattil Padoo Menon, *Lakshmikesavam*, 1892, in George Irumabayam(ed), op.cit.

upper hand in administration when compared to Nairs and they used to ridicule Nairs for the marriage relations they had. Reports and observations of the Christian Missionaries also offended the educated Nairs. Samuel Mateer remarked that within the *tarawad* incest was common; there was no atonement possible for them and 'such progeny are sacrilegious'. He wrote that the enlightened and educated Nairs were humiliated of the absence of the real marriage and were realizing their degradation.<sup>15</sup> Rev. A.F. Painter who moved among Nairs of North Travancore wrote of a system, 'so horrible that even its defenders are ashamed of it as it stands.'<sup>16</sup> M. Blandford, who spent forty years evangelizing among Nairs, described 'the customs of their caste with regard to marriage as "very revolting."<sup>17</sup>

The distribution of the salary of Nair youth within the *tarawad* now became an issue, on the difficult decision of whom it should be spent on. Many of them were not ready to merge their income with the *tarawad's* resource pool. Every *tarawad* would have several *tavazhis* and by the latter half of nineteenth century most of the *tarawads* had taken their property disputes to civil courts. There were several issues which took Nair *tarawads* to civil courts - mismanagement of *tarawad* property by the *karanavan*, misappropriation of the *tarawad* property by *karanavan*, disputes over *puthravakasam*, disputes among *tavazhis*, for the removal of *karanavan*, litigations related to land tenures and so on. RMMC observed the state of issues in *tarawads* and commented that, "a house divided against itself stand and most *tarawads* in Malabar are in this condition."<sup>18</sup> In such circumstances no one would be willing to contribute his earnings to the *tarawads*, so

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Mateer, 'Neoptism in Travancore', in *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute of Britian*, vol. XII, 1883, pp. 288-306

<sup>16</sup> Robin Jeferry, *Decline of Nair Dominance Society and Politics in Travancore, 1848-1908*, op.cit., p. 150

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> RMMC, p.31

naturally his *tavazhi* -immediate kin, his mother, sisters and brothers would become the first choice rather than other distant relatives in the *tarawads*. Consequently *tavazhis* with government officials and advocates as their members started becoming affluent. Educated and employed members took their kin to towns for modern education and such *tavazhis* and *tarawads* started prospering.

Difference in accessibility to English education, employment and modern life styles bred tension in *tarawads*. Those who could not afford such an education but were longing to have a new life style became intolerant. In short western education led to the creation of two kinds of individuals in the same *tarawads* and it added to the already existing disputes in the houses. Moreover education and employment became essential qualifications for *sambandham* relation in well- to- do *tarawads*.<sup>19</sup> Nair women preferred government employees over landed aristocrats largely due to the power they commanded, being part of the administrative machinery, and due to the new social status conferred on them by their official positions.<sup>20</sup>

Along with these there were changes that were taking place in Malabar *tarawads* which are to be seen in relation to the changes that took place in the economic sector. Under colonialism, especially after 1860's the subsistence economy of most villages was undermined and drastic change was visible in occupation and production.<sup>21</sup> With the increase in trading activities in Malabar the usage of money also developed. The monetization of the economy made profound changes in the life patterns of the people. Those who had money became self-reliant and were freed from dependence on the *karanavan*. As the

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Parol Padmavathi Amma, Calicut, 84 years, 5/04/2014

<sup>20</sup> In V.K.N's novel *Manjal*, Kunhimalu was not ready to marry the Namboothiripad, a landlord and decides to marry a Sirasdhar. V.K.N. *Manjal*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Gough, 'The Modern Disintegration of Matrilineal Descent Groups', in David M.Schneider and Kathleen Gough (ed) op.cit., pp. 641-662

participation of Nairs in trade and industrial activities was meager and the income from the landed properties was managed by the *karanavan*, the source of money (for Nair youth) was highly limited; either they must be employed or their father must provide. Influx of several goods from other places affected the life style and needs of the people. In the pre-colonial period the needs of the people in Malabar were limited to basic needs, which were satisfied by the *tarawads*.<sup>22</sup> Industrialization and the resulting upward mobility created inequality; thus disparity in income or absence of income augmented tensions within the *tarawads*.

Similarly women in *tarawads* were also under pressure and various levels of hostility existed among them because, changes in the life of men were reflected on women. The status of the husband became crucial for women, as it would increase their own status within the *tavazhi* or *tarawad*. In the same household there may be women whose husbands were from different backgrounds - some may be from royal households, some may be upper class Namboothiris, high government officials or ordinary farmers. Women whose husbands were employed were in a comparatively better off position than the others. In earlier times while the *tarawad* of the husband was a significant distinguishing factor, from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, his profession became important. An employed man could take care of his wife and children and provide for them without depending on his *karanavan*, whereas the wife was also relieved from depending on the *karanavan* or brothers. It can be argued that the emergence of salaried jobs and professions other than agriculture led to the strengthening of conjugal relations among Nair couples, owing to the relative economic independence they enjoyed. She

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<sup>22</sup> Basic needs of members were met by the *tarawad*, each *tavazhi* would be given its fixed share of supplies for daily use, all were given clothes during festivals, and a fixed amount of money was given for aged members and for married men. K.P.Kesava Menon, *Kazhinjaalam* (autobiography), (Mal), Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2012 (first Published- 1957), p.22.

could meet the needs of her children and get them educated with the support of her husband. At the same time there would be women without such privileges, being the wife of an ordinary farmer, who could not provide for wife and children. Such women would be completely dependent on the *karanavan* or her brothers.<sup>23</sup> When women with different destiny live together in the same house it leads to hatred. Under these circumstances women and their children would be longing to get themselves separated from others.

While affluence acted as catalyst for change, inadequacy of resources also became an equally important factor in the dissolution of *tarawads*.<sup>24</sup> People with separate income sought to build up their own family. Composition of this new proposed family was also problematic as many wanted to take their wife and children, which would be against the interest of their mother and siblings, by separating themselves from the core *tarawad*. On the other hand Nair men who were not able to earn and faced discrimination from the *karanavan* also opted to move out of the *tarawad*. However for him, it was not viable, either without the support of the *karanavan* or partition of the property of the *tarawad*.<sup>25</sup> Here it can be said

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<sup>23</sup> M.T.Vasudevan Nair's novels like *Kalam*, *Nalukettu* and *Asuravithu* depict many such helpless women. M.T.Vasudevan Nair, *Kalam*, op.cit., M.T.Vasudevan, *Nalukettu*, op.cit., M.T.Vasudevan Nair, *Asuravithu*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2016, (first published -1962)

<sup>24</sup> K.N.Panikkar, 'Land Control Ideology and Reform: A study of the Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala', op.cit., p. 41. By 1890's stories were circulating about the state of poverty to which some families had been reduced either through litigations or haphazard management. Some tarawads were forcing their young girls into sambandham with old Brahmins-both Malayali and non-Malayali – who could afford to pay a price. Robin Jeffrey, 'The Decline of Nair Tarawads' in N.Jayaram and Satish Saberwal (ed), *Social Conflict*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, (first published -1996), pp. 63-78

<sup>25</sup> "The *karanavans* and *anadharavans* in all the important *tarawads* are in a state of hatred and dissension. The *karanavan* treats the joint property as his own property and tries to benefit his wife and children". RMMC, p.30

that even the ideology of joint family property was questioned and pressure was building up on Malabar *tarawads*.

The economic transformations which coincided with the imbibing of new ideologies by the Nair youth led to changes in the notions regarding family, conjugal relations, 'wife and children' and female sexuality. The colonial interpretation of '*sambandham*' as unnatural, and criticisms on the polyandrous unions created discomfort among the educated class. British courts made varied comments and observations on the system and made it appear a 'non-hindu custom'. As Janaki Nair argued the search for a unified "Hindu code of law", disempowered those spheres of Indian society where limited forms of female power and rights reigned so that a Pan-Indian Hindu Law could be defined as one that uniformly conceded no rights to women. This was done by classifying such matrilineal tradition as anomalies within the Hindu law.<sup>26</sup> Several aberrations from the 'accepted Hindu tradition' were noted by the RMMC regarding *sambandham* - the absence of an officiating priest during *sambandham*, lack of elaborate rituals, and non-recognition of it as a marriage by a Namboothiri, when he becomes partner. Moreover, the law of inheritance in *marumakkathayam* law was independent of marriage and even though Nairs had funeral and annual offerings to the dead it was not dependent on sons but on nephews, and hence all these practices were judged to be non-Hindu.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Janaki Nair, op.cit., p. 145-146; In the words of C.Sankaran Nair, "on account of our law of marriage, it has been doubted whether we were Hindus", M.P.Sreekumaran Nair (ed), *Autobiography of C.Sankaran Nair*, Chettur Sankaran Nair Foundation, Ottapalam, 1998, (first published- 1966), p. 3

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum of the President, RMMC, p. 8. The colonial courts observed that the specific relationship/exchange of obedience and protection arising from marriage was absent in the colonial reading of *sambandham*. Praveena Kodoth, 'Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, *Sambandham*, and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Malabar', op.cit.

British courts were not ready to accept *sambandham* as marriage and they judged that it was absolutely impossible for a man or a woman who followed the *marumakkathayam* law to contract a valid marriage, using the word marriage in its ordinary popular signification.<sup>28</sup> Though it was a perfect marriage for the followers of *marumakkathayam* law, the courts were not ready to accept its validity.<sup>29</sup> Hence as *sambandham* was not a legal marriage in the eyes of colonial law, women in the said union became concubines rather than wives. Moore was of the opinion that besides accepting the customs and tradition of the land, lawyers and judges believed the stories of *Keralamahatmyam* and *Keralolpathi*, according to which Parasurama ordered Nair women to consort with Namboothiri men and they need not have chastity.<sup>30</sup> Educated Nairs were disturbed by these characterizations of *sambandham* which regarded wives as concubines. They longed for a significant change in the system of marriage whereby women's sexuality could be safely restricted within a monogamous relation.

Naturally the courts refused to accept many traditions in Malabar which had been followed by the people for centuries. One such interpretation was in the case of *puthravaksam*, where the courts refused to recognize it as a normal practice and negated the claims of children on the property given to them by their father.<sup>31</sup> Many Nairs had given some kind of property to their children, but on their death their own *tarawad* members used to file case against this and in many such issues the courts decreed that there was no evidence to show that the children (to whom the property was given by the

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<sup>28</sup> Lewis Moore, op.cit., p. 69

<sup>29</sup> I.L.R. XV,M, 75, quoted in Vasanthakumari, op.cit., p.156; I.L.R. 24 M. ; M.L.J. vol XI, 1901

<sup>30</sup> Lewis Moore, op.cit., pp.87-88

<sup>31</sup> *Puthravakasam* can be explained as, "In North Malabar the property given to a person by his father was known as *puthravakasam* and in South Malabar it was called '*achan koduthathu*,'" RMMC, Answers to Interrogatories, Chirakkal Kovilakath Kerala Varma Valiya Rajah, p.2



father) were the legitimate offspring of the father.<sup>32</sup> To be judged as an illegitimate son was a great insult for a Nair in late nineteenth century. Moreover the courts held that maintenance from *tarawad* could be claimed only when the member is residing in the *tarawad* household. The *tarawad* was not responsible for providing maintenance if the member was living outside.<sup>33</sup> Such judgments were a blanket denial of the rights of members and went against the tradition of the land. So when a member of the *tarawad* was to live outside the household for education or for employment his claims on the *tarawad* were nullified by the *karanavan*, with the support of the British courts.

From the Western rationalistic perspective, *sambandham* lacked two essential elements of marriage - legal and religious sanction. As *sambandham* marriages did not create any correlative rights and duties they were not considered as legal. Besides there was no agreement between the contracting parties and adultery was no offence within the community.<sup>34</sup> The ceremony of *sambandham* was very simple as it was accomplished by presenting two pieces of cloth to the bride. Hence Nair marriage was to be restructured so

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<sup>32</sup> A.S. 470/95 – O.S.406 of 1894, A.S. 371/94 – O.S. 60 of 1894, Selection from the Thalassery court records, RAK. The principal legal difference between a legitimate and an illegitimate child is that, in general, only the former is capable of inheriting either from an intestate father or through a father deceased. If, therefore, his father leaves legacies to each of his children merely describing them as such, and does not specially describe the illegitimate, the latter would not receive it under the designation "child," even though the parentage was well known and acknowledged by the father. Joseph Cullen Ayer, 'Legitimacy and Marriage', *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Nov., 1902), pp. 22-42.

<sup>33</sup> S.A. 780 of 1921, Special Appeal no. 202 of 1862, Madras High Court Decisions 1864-1865, p. 11-12; 2 Madras 12, quoted in B.D.Bose (ed), *A digest of Indian Law Cases containing High Court Reports 1862-1909 and Privy Council Reports of Appeals from India 1896-1909*, vol. III, Superintendent, Government, Calcutta, 1912, p.8084

<sup>34</sup> T.K.Gopala Panikkar, op.cit., p.47

that there is an officiating priest, and some sort of Vedic ritual is adopted during the ceremony.<sup>35</sup>

One of the potent factors that demanded reform was the analysis and recommendations of British officials like William Logan. He proposed to bring reforms within the *marumakkathayam* system so that one third of a man's self-acquired property must be for his wife and children, in case of him dying intestate.<sup>36</sup> He was of the opinion that Malabar *tarawads* were not promoting wealth producing activities, due to the corporate control over land, labour and production. Such situation would be fatal for the country and for Nairs themselves; hence reforms are crucial as it can also benefit the government.<sup>37</sup> The capitalist intentions of the British in Malabar prompted them to undertake legislative reforms leading to social transformation and this can be the reason that all officials unanimously supported Logan's recommendation regarding the necessity of statutory reforms of *marumakkathayam*.<sup>38</sup>

Life outside Malabar and the contact with Europeans made subtle changes in the notions of Nair men regarding their family. Under the influence of English literature they realized that their family life was not suitable for a modern life pattern. Conjuality was conspicuously absent in the husband-wife relationship of Nairs, because in a matrilineal joint family organization there was no importance for such liaisons. As Mytheli Srinivas observed, these educated men - though never entirely rejecting- the joint family relations attempted to fashion a new logic of conjuality that gave greater priority to a man's relation to his wife and children.<sup>39</sup> Nair men began

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.48

<sup>36</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Special Commission*, op.cit., p. 136

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 56

<sup>39</sup> Mytheli Srinivas in her study about families in Colonial Tamilnadu noted that the propertied men tried to frame out a new conjugal family, along with already

to feel that when they became successful in carving out a dominant “outer” world for themselves, they failed to possess an “inner” world.<sup>40</sup>

Conjugal family and companionate wife were the ideologies that developed in Europe among the newly formed middle class after industrial revolution. In England from late eighteenth century onwards the nature of marriage and family started changing. Marriage became the economic and social building block for the middle class; it was the basis of a new family unit. Marriage changed the status of men and women, after which they were to perform certain definite functions- husband was given jural and economic responsibility for wife and children while the woman was to be a helpmate and dependent of husband.<sup>41</sup> It has been observed that rather than a young, dependent and almost childlike wife was portrayed as ideal to an elder women with property and skill and in such case man became the ‘protector’ of woman. The new concept of warm husband- wife relations, with a husband who partakes in the management of the home, and a highly religious wife nurturing her children and taking care of her husband with extreme domesticity was fashioned.<sup>42</sup> Hence a similar small family was considered to be the ideal and these ideals reached India through the Western system of education, which might have influenced the younger generation here. There was a growing realization that companionate marriages were absent in India,

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existing strong patrilineal relationships. She has developed a new analytical category for studying these changes and it was termed as “conjugal family ideal”. Mytheli Srinivas, *Wives, Widows and Concubines, The Conjugal Family Ideal In Colonial India*, Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2009, p. 7

<sup>40</sup> Partha Chatterjee argued that under colonialism Bengali men lost their dominance over the material outer world, and they sought to retain their power in the spiritual or inner world- the family. Consequently family and naturally women was isolated from the rest of the world and was asked to maintain Indian tradition. Partha Chatterjee, ‘Nationalist Resolution of Women’s Question’ in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed), op.cit., p. 239

<sup>41</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, p. 322

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 329-338

and joint families in India- both patrilineal and matrilineal families never felt it as essential. Meredith Borthwick observed that the idea of companionate marriages and the idea of wife who could share her husband's interests and understand the pressure of his work was one of the main ideas behind all discourses on women's education in Bengal.<sup>43</sup>

To establish a conjugal relation in Malabar was a more tedious task than in Bengal or in Tamilnadu. These places had a strong patrilineal organization where husband and wife used to live together in a household, so only a new feeling was to be inculcated. But in the case of Nairs in Malabar the creation of a companionate relation would be hard to carve out. By tradition there was no practice of husband and wife living together in South Malabar, both of them even after marriage continued to remain in their own *tarawads*. So the first step would be to make husband and wife live together, but this went against the custom of land. Several legal issues crippled such a possibility, to cite an example once the woman moves out of her *tarawad* she ceases her claim on maintenance from the *tarawad*.<sup>44</sup> As a matter of pride, many aristocratic Nair *tarawads* never sent their women with their husbands.<sup>45</sup> Nair men employed in distant places were not able to take their wives with them due to the opposition of the wives' *tarawad* members. Husband and wife living together was a practice totally alien to Malabar, it can be developed only by going against the laws of the land. But the change had already started and even in south Malabar women started to move out of their *tarawad* with their husbands.<sup>46</sup> K.P.Kesava Menon wrote in his

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<sup>43</sup> Meredith Borthwick, op.cit., pp. 122-124

<sup>44</sup> S.A. 780 of 1921; 2 Madras 12, quoted in B.D.Bose (ed), op.cit., p.8084. Whereas The Madras High Court had recognized that in North Malabar where Nair women lived with their husband in his *tarawad* during his life time was to be maintained by the husband's *tarawad*. S.A.774 of 1881, quoted in Cuddalore Ramachandra Iyer, op.cit., p. xvii

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kurupath Komalam Amma, 91 years, Palakkad, on 26/12/2015.

<sup>46</sup> Cuddalore Ramachandra Iyer, op.cit., p. xvii

autobiography that, he lived with his father and mother in a new house built by his father.<sup>47</sup> Hence the change was already set in, now it was to be made universal or a custom.

Western literature led to the proliferation of a new concept of fatherhood among educated Nairs. Earlier for a Nair family, the father had an absentee relation with his children. To be specific the father was not a family member for the Nair community. But the contact with other forces inculcated a feeling among Nairs that they should provide for their children and that their children were their responsibility. Every parent is keen on a successful life for their children. However in Malabar, parents were not under any such obligation, here children were the responsibility of the uncles – mother's brother- who was to provide for all children of the *tarawads*. With the emergence of salary for the employed people their attitude towards children started changing. Moreover there were conscious efforts to situate the 'father' in the Nair families, by ascribing certain duties and responsibilities for Nair fathers towards their children.<sup>48</sup> Attempts to restructure Nair *tarawads* by replacing *karanavan* from the headship of the *tarawads* with that of father was developing. For this new head of the family, responsibilities towards wife and children were made a moral obligation.<sup>49</sup> A nuclear family headed by a patriarch who protects the wife and children was envisaged by the newly emerging middle class of Malabar.

The necessity of a reform in the customs was first discussed and debated among a small group of educated Nair youth. An urge among Nair youth to reframe the customs of the community could be sensed through the

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<sup>47</sup> K.P.Kesava Menon was born in 1886; this shows that in 1880's Nair women had started living with their husbands. K.P.Kesava Menon, op.cit., p. 18

<sup>48</sup> K.Madhavi Amma, 'Nair vivaham enna Sambandhamkriya', *Sarada*, 1906, vol. 2, book. 9, pp.203-206

<sup>49</sup> Vallathol Narayana Menon, 'Grihasthashramam', *Rasikaranjini*, 1904, book. 2, vol. 11, pp.551-553

then literature. Print media - both fictional and non-fictional- were used to popularize the ideology against the existing practices of *marumakkathayam* and to convince people of the need for a change. Journals in Malayalam language were the main medium for all discussions related with *marumakkathayam*. Though the accessibility of journals was limited to a very small literate population, the ideas which the journals conveyed had a wide reach.<sup>50</sup>

Repeated assertions were made regarding *marumakkathayam* as designed by Namboothiris due to their unbounded sexual desires.<sup>51</sup> Every aspect of Nair marriage relation had been subjected to criticism, by comparing it with marriage and family organization in other parts of South India. When *thali* tying lead to actual marriage among other communities of South India, for Nairs *thalikettukalyanam* did not make the girl, a wife. Even *sambandham* could make the ‘partners’ proper husband and wife, they continued as partners without any mutual responsibility. Hence, “the system of *sambandham* was to be stopped and the practice of *thalikettukalyanam* must be continued but it has to be restructured so as to constitute a real marriage.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover a deliberate attempt was made to institutionalize the ‘husband’ and ‘father’ in the *marumakkathayam* families. “Every type of family in the world gives utmost importance to the husband and father, but for Nairs these two relationships were not virtually valued. The development of children must be under the guidance and affection of the father, whose absence among Nairs would affect

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<sup>50</sup> In 1871 only 5.9% of the Hindus in Malabar were able to read and write. *Census of Madras Presidency*, 1871, vol. II, p. 148

<sup>51</sup> Karimpatta Krishna Menon, ‘*Marumakkathayam*’, *Vidyavinodhini*, 1895, vol. 6, book. 8, pp.203-206; P.Narayana Menon, ‘*Marumakkathayam II*’, *Vidyavinodhini*, 1895, vol. 6, book. 3, pp. 94-104; P.Kunhjabu Nair, *Vidyavinodhini*, 1895, vol. 6, book. 6, pp. 234-239.

<sup>52</sup> K.Kannan Nair, ‘Keraleeya Samajam, IV, Sambandham’, *Vidyavinodhini*, 1896, vol.7, book no. 5, pp. 28-38. Nairs were criticized for having no conjugal relationship or parental considerations. Karimpatta Krishna Menon, op.cit.

the community in the coming generations.”<sup>53</sup> Nair men were ridiculed for not supporting the education of their children, and were asked to take active interest in the life of their children.

Most of the nineteenth century social realist novels were published from Malabar. These early novels portrayed the social world of the Nair community that their male author belonged to. In Malabar, novels played a dominant role in creating a ‘nascent regional public sphere’ in the last quarter of nineteenth century, in sharp contrast to newspapers and magazines in Cochin and Travancore, a key factor that indicates that the engagement with modernity was heterogeneous in its manifestations across Kerala. The novels adopted a dialogic mode to propose a viewpoint. This indicates the ‘aspiration of the intelligentsia to create a public sphere among equals to rationally negotiate an argument.’<sup>54</sup>

Fictions popularized new concepts of love among couples within the Nair community. In a traditional society ‘pre-marital love’ was a sin and as per the unwritten laws ‘love’ was to be avoided. Among Nairs such an intimacy was not promoted, though there were couples who continued their *sambandham* till death, but the affection was not universal.<sup>55</sup> The then Malayalam novels from *Indulekha* onwards were built upon the theme of love as in English novels. *Indulekha* envisions a new social system by criticizing *marumakkathayam* and Namboothiri *sambandham*, and exalting English education and customs. At the same time *Indulekha* legitimizes *sambandham* by interpreting it as a system which recognizes women’s authority in the selection of husband.<sup>56</sup> O.Chandu Menon characterized *Indulekha* as an ‘ideal

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<sup>53</sup> Karimpatta Krishna Menon, op.cit.

<sup>54</sup> Shiju Sam Varghese, Colonial Intellectuals, ‘Public Sphere and the Promises of Modernity Reading *Parangodeeparinayam*’, in Satheesh Chandra Bose and Shiju Sam Varghese (ed), op.cit., p.42

<sup>55</sup> K.Kannan Nair, ‘Keraleeya Samajam, IV, Sambandham’, op.cit.

<sup>56</sup> O.Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, op.cit., p. 59

modern Nair woman' with English education but deeply rooted in tradition; Madhavan represents the Nair youth of the nineteenth century who took keen interest in the education of his cousin, and was aware of contemporary events. Along with the romance between Indulekha and Madhavan, the novel criticizes Namboothiri *sambandham* and asserts the necessity of family reconstitution.<sup>57</sup> *Lakshmee Kesavam*, of K.Pandoo Menon, was about the love between Lakshmee and Kesavan, both being English educated, Kesavan was very particular that he would marry an educated girl and he was critical of the marital life of Nairs.<sup>58</sup>

New notions regarding father and husband were articulated by the intelligentsia. This was accomplished by condemning the existing system, which was explained as uncivilized. The family of Nair male never included his wife and children; for him the family was his matri kin. In the case of a Nair woman, her family was made of her matrilineal kin, and husband was a mere partner. Changes in basic structure of the family were quite hard in Malabar due to the fact that *marumakkathayam* was located within the complex of interrelated land relations. For the institutionalization of new notions of family, traditional conceptions of society were to be reframed through propaganda, by convincing the people of the inevitability of reforms. The middle class of Malabar sought to remodel their customs in order to get rid of the scorn they faced from other middle class groups. A common middle class culture was produced as part of the new economic market relations and the erosion of discrete caste cultures in the face of urbanization.<sup>59</sup> Educated and employed Nairs might have desired to make themselves a part of the common middle class culture of South India.

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<sup>57</sup> S.S.Sreekumar, 'Oru Prathyasasthra Vayana', in, E.P.Rajagopalan (ed) *Indulekha Vayanayude Disakal*, Kerala Sahitya academy, Thrissur, 2000, pp. 48-54

<sup>58</sup> K.Pandoo Menon, op.cit., p. 144

<sup>59</sup> Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed), op.cit., p. 11



## Reform Attempts

By the last decades of the nineteenth century the ‘educated minority’ among the Nairs were convinced about the need for a thorough reorganization of their family and marriage structures. As the need for transformation was felt by only a ‘minority’ it would require great effort to realize their demands. In the wake of legislative interventions of the colonial government in Bengal for accomplishing changes in the age- old social practices, the middle class of Malabar also approached the state. By that time *sambandham* was characterized as ‘illegal’ through judicial discourses and solution could be sought only by means of legislative measures. In short the colonial state was called upon to legislate to transform ‘concubine’ and ‘mistress’ into wife and to release Nair men from the epithet of being sons of ‘concubines.’<sup>60</sup>

The first attempt to reform the system of marriage in Malabar was in 1869 when a memorandum was submitted to the government, stressing the need for changes in the existing practices of *marumakkathayam*.<sup>61</sup> The memorandum attained wide publicity and was discussed in press, proposing reforms. In 1878 a society called the Malayala Sudrachara Parishodana Sabha was formed at Calicut to bring about a marriage law among *marumakkathayam* Hindus.<sup>62</sup> Malabar Marriage Association was founded in 1879 and a bill was presented to the government seeking legal sanction for Nair marriages, but the Government did not take any action on this.<sup>63</sup> Later the recommendations of Logan in the Malabar special commission report expedited the demand for reforms. Hence the government in 1884 appointed a

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<sup>60</sup> Nair women were called as concubines and mistresses by the Madras High Court. RMMC, p. 11

<sup>61</sup> Susan Thomas, *Property Relations and Family forms in Kerala*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Mahatma Gandhi University, 2004, p.128

<sup>62</sup> Janaki Nair, *op.cit.*, p.154

<sup>63</sup> O.Othena Menon, Remarks on C.Karunakara Menon’s Observation on the Malabar Marriage Bill, Madras, 1890 quoted in K.N.Panikkar, ‘Agrarian Changes and Social Classes’, *op.cit.*, p. 43

special commission under Sir T.Madhava Rao to consider and advise the lines along which legislative action should proceed. The members of the commission were William Logan, Herbert Wigram, C.Sankaran Nair and P.Karunakara Menon.<sup>64</sup> The commission unanimously proposed a marriage law to be introduced among the *marumakkathayam* people and they prepared the Malabar Marriage Bill. The High Court held that, 'the self acquisitions of an individual member of a Malabar joint family were at his absolute disposal during his life-time, but at his demise they passed to the family of which he was a member.'<sup>65</sup> Naturally this stance of the court was not welcomed by the aspiring salaried class within the community. The Commission proposed that if the husband or wife died intestate the self acquired property which he or she left was to devolve on the survivor and the children, furthermore the wife and children were to pass from the guardianship of the *karanavan* to the guardianship of the husband. Unfortunately this bill was not taken up further and so it couldn't make any change.

A significant initiative towards legislative intervention was made by C.Sankaran Nair when he introduced the Malabar Marriage Bill, in the Madras legislature in 1890. Sankaran Nair, in his speech in the Legislative Council, made it clear that there were no real marriages among Hindus in Malabar following the *marumakkathayam* law and hence the bill won't affect the religious rites of the people. The bill intended to legalize marriage, make bigamy an offence, provide for dissolution of marriage and allow for the restitution of conjugal rights in Malabar.<sup>66</sup> The Bill also proposed to transfer the guardianship of the wife from the *karanavan* to her husband; additionally,

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<sup>64</sup> K.K.N.Kurup, *William Logan, A Study in the Agrarian relations of Malabar*, op.cit., p. 63

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 73

<sup>66</sup> Janaki Nair, op.cit., p. 154

the children were to be made the responsibility of their father.<sup>67</sup> The greatest change envisaged by the bill was that, with regard to property man or woman would have the same power over his or her separate property to devise by will and if the power was not exercised, such separate property would be divided among survivor of the marriage and the children.<sup>68</sup> Such devolution of property would drastically alter the inheritance patterns of the *marumakkathayam* families, which was not welcomed by the conservatives of the community. C.Karunakara Menon, sub-editor of *The Hindu*, vehemently criticized Sankaran Nair for drafting a bill that went against the interest of majority of the community and he also questioned the Government for making an intervention into the religious life of Nairs. He argued that Nair marriage practice was along the lines of that of the Namboothiri marriage and hence it was religious and as like marriages in other parts of India, in *marumakkathayam* also married couples had mutual duties and obligations.<sup>69</sup>

For the restitution of conjugal relations among husband and wife of the Nair community, Sankaran Nair proposed to confer the right on the husband to compel wife and children to live with him when she refuses to do so without lawful excuse.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately during that period the number of Nair husbands who could take care of their wife and children out of their own income was considerably low. In the case of members who did not have separate property or income it would be impossible to support the wife and children. Hence the right of the husband, where he could demand the wife and children to live with him, was to be limited to those who possessed self acquired property or separate income. One of the most important grounds for

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<sup>67</sup> K.Menon, Observations on Sankaran Nair's Bill to provide a form of marriage for Hindus following *Marumakkathayam* Law, Home Judicial Department, 1890, 202 to 269, NAI

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> C.Karunakara Menon, *Observations on the Malabar Marriage Bill*, Madras, 1890, pp. 43-44

<sup>70</sup> President's memorandum, RMMC, pp. 70-71

objection for the bill was the proposal regarding an elaborate system of judicial divorce devised to support a high standard of matrimonial sanctity. For a community which was accustomed to a system of free divorce, the complex judicial procedures proposed by the bill were not at all acceptable. The provisions of the Bill were quite ahead of the time, as it invited objections even from the educated members of the community. They tried to establish that *sambandham* was very much a legal marriage and legislative interventions might result in the collapse of the whole community. Due to the difference of opinion even among the educated classes the government was not ready to approve the Bill.

### **Malabar Marriage Commission**

Reports of William Logan and T.Madhav Rao Commission and the popular interest aroused among the middle class following Sankaran Nair's Bill prompted the Madras Government to appoint Malabar Marriage commission 'to provide a form of marriage for Hindus following the *marumakkathayam* law.'<sup>71</sup> T.Muthuswami Aiyer was appointed as the President of the Commission and other members of the commission were Rama Varma Thampuran of Parappanad, Mundapa Bengara, C.Sankaran Nair, W.M.Winterbotham, O.Chandu Menon.<sup>72</sup> The Commission was to inquire, 'whether the marriage legislation was expedient and if so what form it should take.'<sup>73</sup> In order to fulfill the objectives the commission was to

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<sup>71</sup> RMMC, p. 1

<sup>72</sup> G.O. dated 4/5/1891, Legislative No. 25, quoted in RMMC, p. 1

<sup>73</sup> Objectives of the Commission were to provide evidence – (a) as to the customs connected with Hindu marriages in Malabar; (b) as to whether the proposed changes are desired by the majority of the classes subject to the *Marumakkathayam* law; (c) or are essential for the protection of the minority; (d) whether the legislation is expedient; (e) and if so what form it should take; (f) whether the measure would affect the religion or the religious rites and usages of the *Marumakkathayam* classes; (g) what would be its effect upon the people of the neighbouring states of Cochin and Travancore; (h) and upon the

collect a wide range of public opinion concerning the problem and adopt diverse strategies to realize it.

A set of questions was framed and replies were invited from representatives belonging to different social conditions- members of influential families, members of the Bar in the district, government officials, educated members, Dewans of Travancore and Cochin and members of the ancient ruling Kovilakams. Interrogatories were sent to 474 persons, of whom 322 sent in replies.<sup>74</sup> The Commission also held sittings in every Taluk to collect information from a few men regarding the marriage customs of the people concerned and expediency of the proposed legislation. Witness examination was undertaken to obtain knowledge on special local practices, to supplement and elucidate the written answers and to directly ascertain the impulse of the common people pertaining to the changes demanded by the 'minority classes.'<sup>75</sup> Apart from these information, the Commission received representations from the Travancore Malayali Association, from twelve meetings held in different parts of the district and thirty eight petitions of which thirteen signed by 2723 persons were in favour of the legislation and twenty five signed by 2131 persons were against it.<sup>76</sup> Out of 121 witnesses examined by the commission 79 were in favour of marriage legislation; of the 322 persons who sent in answers to interrogatories 178 were in favour of changes and 105 were of the opinion that a man's whole self-acquired

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people governed by the *Aliyasanthanam* law. G.O. 07/04/1891 No. 13 Legislative, quoted in RMMC, p. 1

<sup>74</sup> This amounted to only 0.04% of Hindu *Marumakkathayam* population (696414). Calculated from the data given in RMMC, p. 1

<sup>75</sup> "In none of the stations where the Commission examined the witness the attendance was so large as to suggest the necessity of substituting a general conference for individual examination. On the other hand the attendance on some days was so meager that the examination of witnesses was over early in the afternoon." RMMC, p. 2

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2

property should be given to his wife and children.<sup>77</sup> This statistical data reflects the attitude of the educated minority section of the community; hence it can't be conceived as the general inclination among the population.

The perspective of women regarding the proposed legislation could not be ascertained for want of sources, and also due to the fact that a 'middle class' did not emerge among women during that period. At the same time, women who were daughters or wives of the so called 'middle class' were aware of the movements made by men. However towards the end of the Commission's analysis, they received four petitions from ladies, three signed by 245 stating that the legislation was necessary and the fourth signed by 387 objecting to any change in the existing system.<sup>78</sup> Despite the fact that the proposed legislation was to affect women more than men, as the object of reforms was to 'transform concubines to wives', the participation of women was noticeably minimal. The Commission observed that they failed to collect the insight of respectable Nair women who were competent to form and express their opinion regarding the necessity of marriage law. This can be due to the fact that in 'North Malabar Nair women lived in the privacy of their homes like that of the Namboothiri women, whereas women of South Malabar were allowed greater freedom, in spite of which they could not express their opinion otherwise than through their *karanavans* and husbands.'<sup>79</sup>

As it is evident from the Commission's report, only an insignificant percentage of the *marumakkathayam* population was directly or indirectly involved in the Commission's activities. However the information provided by this 'trivial representative population' expressed a wide range of ideas regarding marriage, divorce, family, inheritance and maintenance. Royal

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2

family members like The Zamorin Raja of Calicut, Eralpad Raja, Raja of Chirakkal, Ettan Thampuran of Padinjare Kovilakam, Porlathiri Raja, were all against the proposed law for legalizing *sambandham*.<sup>80</sup> They unanimously stated that there was no need for marriage reform for *marumakkathayam* Hindus as the then existing system of marriage, *sambandham*, was legal.

The provision of registration of marriages in the report necessitates the bride and the groom to approach a public office soon after marriage. This had been rejected by a large majority and it was also pointed out that the bill promotes incest relations within the *tarawad*.<sup>81</sup> Many respondents were of the opinion that the whole of self-acquired property was not to be given to children because as per *marumakkathayam* law nephews were the natural and legal inheritors of that property. Moreover they argued that according to the *marumakkathayam* practice the funerary rites must be performed by the nephews and not by the son. If the self-acquired property was given to children, the nephews would become hesitant to perform the funerary rites and this would be against the religious sentiments of a *marumakkathayam* Hindu.<sup>82</sup>

Three divergent positions towards marriage reforms developed during the period of the Commission's analysis.<sup>83</sup> One group stood against all attempts for registration of marriage and legalization of *sambandham*. This conservative class was comprised of traditional rulers of Malabar, *Sthani* Nairs and members of the Namboothiri community. They found fault with the proposed changes as it might lead to the breakup of *tarawads* and also argued

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<sup>80</sup> Answers to interrogatories, Appendix, RMMC

<sup>81</sup> Editorial, 'Malayala Vivaha Bill', *Vidyavinodhini*, 1895, vol. 6, book. 9, pp.236-241

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum by C.Trivuvengkatachiar, Dewan of the State of Cochin, Appendix, RMMC, p. 2; Ettan Thampuran, Padinjare Kovilakam, Answers to interrogatories, Appendix, RMMC, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> G.Arunima, op.cit., p.132

that the system was instituted by Parasurama, the alteration of which would affect the religious life of Hindus.<sup>84</sup> The second group supported the legislation stating that the proposed changes would increase the status of the *marumakkathayam* communities and that registration of marriages was necessary for the maintenance of a high degree of sexual morality.<sup>85</sup> The reformers also supported the devolution of the self-acquired property to wife and children. Finally there were people who advocated an intermediary stand whereby certain reorganization was needed in the community, but it was not to be as radical as that proposed by Sankaran Nair. They wanted changes in the system of marriage, at the same time it should not affect the *tarawad* and its traditional practices.<sup>86</sup>

The Malabar Marriage Commission came to a conclusion regarding the vitality of a marriage law for *marumakkathayam* Hindus. Though aware of the fact that majority of the population were against a legislative intervention, the commission decided to proceed with the framing of a new law.<sup>87</sup> The Commission admitted that, “we do not dispute the view that the proposed legislation is not at present desired by the majority, but we believe that the uninstructed majority will rapidly follow the lead of the enlightened classes, and that there need be no apprehension that if the law be framed it will remain a dead letter.”<sup>88</sup> From this statement it can be ascertained that the Colonial government adopted marriage legislation to cater to the needs and aspirations

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<sup>84</sup> Ukadanuuni Muppil Variyar, Answers to the interrogatories, Appendix, RMMC, p.4; Vallapuzha Manakkal Astamoorthi Namboothiripad, Answers to the interrogatories, Appendix, RMMC, p. 4

<sup>85</sup> Karimpetta Krishna Menon, Answers to the interrogatories, Appendix, RMMC, p.5

<sup>86</sup> K.V.Chappunni Nair, Answers to the interrogatories, Appendix, RMMC, p. 4; E.K.Krishnan, Answers to the interrogatories Appendix, RMMC, p. 3

<sup>87</sup> It was clearly stated in the report that, “majority of the people of North Malabar do not desire a law to regulate their marriage. They believe that already have a legal marriage.” RMMC, paragraph. 59, p. 35.

<sup>88</sup> RMMC, paragraph. 59, p. 34



of the educated class. Legislation was justified on the grounds that, a marriage was an important aid to national progress and good morals. The report claimed that being a permissive law it will not force a legal marriage on those who are unwilling to contract it.<sup>89</sup>

Concern for women's morality dominated the discussion on the marriage reforms from the very beginning. The issue of morality naturally led to a debate on polyandry that had existed in Malabar, but which had become extinct in the Nair community several years ago.<sup>90</sup> Attempts to trace out the meaning of various terms used for *sambandham* in different regions of Malabar were also to highlight the fact that the community lacked sexual morality.<sup>91</sup> The Commission claimed that they would be helping the 'injured husbands', and by legalizing and registering marriage they could prevent the 'husbands from taking law into their own hands.' O.Chandu Menon, in his dissenting note, stated that, he who committed adultery forfeited his life, that is, the Nair husband had the customary right to kill the adulterer or adulteress.<sup>92</sup> Commissioners and witnesses were of the opinion that the marriage legislation and registration of marriage would lead to the development of morality among Nair women. A conscious effort to make a chaste wife according to the pan Indian norms was evident in the negotiations of the Commission.

At the end of all deliberations the Commission submitted a detailed report proposing marriage legislation for the *marumakkathayam* communities. Following the report, C.Sankaran Nair withdrew his original bill and a revised

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph. 60, p. 36

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>91</sup> There was regional variation in the words used to denote *Sambandham- guna dosham* was the term used in South and North Malabar, *Pudamuri, Uzhamporukkuka, Vidaram Kayarukka, Kidaka kalyanam*, were some of them. The words were interpreted in such a way that it made an impression that women involved in such customs were immoral.

<sup>92</sup> O.Chandu Menon, Memorandum, RMMC, p. 9

bill as per the recommendations of the commission was submitted.<sup>93</sup> The Madras Government passed The Malabar Marriage Act, The Madras Act IV of 1896.<sup>94</sup> Conditions for registering *sambandham* were stipulated by the act. All the traditional and customary laws related to *sambandham* that had existed in Malabar were incorporated into the Act. The marriage between two parties who were subject to a personal law which debar such a relation, cannot validly contract a marriage; besides neither of the party should have a spouse at the time when the notice was given for registration of the marriage.<sup>95</sup> Moreover the consent of the guardian was essential to the registration of *sambandham* in the case of minors.<sup>96</sup> The Government envisaged the development of monogamous relations among the *marumakkathayam* communities which was deemed to be essential to ensure the morality of women.

Imbibing the demand of the educated minority, the Act made the husband or father the legal guardian of wife or children and the wife and children were entitled to be maintained by the husband or father, retaining the right of maintenance from the *tarawad*.<sup>97</sup> For the dissolution of the marriage a complex procedure was outlined in the Act and was to be realized from the court of the District Munsif.<sup>98</sup> From the very outset of the deliberations on marriage legislation the most disputed issue was that of the inheritance of the self - acquired property. If a man following *marumakkathayam* law died

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<sup>93</sup> T.K.Gopala Panikkar, op.cit., p.25

<sup>94</sup> The Act was applicable to the followers of Aliyasanthanam Law also. The Act accepted the *sambandhams* when they were registered under the provisions of the Act, in short as per the Act '*sambandham*' became a 'valid marriage' when it was registered. The Section 2 . Malabar Marriage Act, Act IV of 1896.

<sup>95</sup> Section 3 (a and c), Malabar Marriage Act, Act IV of 1896

<sup>96</sup> Section 3 (f) Malabar Marriage Act, Act IV of 1896

<sup>97</sup> Section 16 (1), (2) section 17, Malabar Marriage Act, Act IV of 1896

<sup>98</sup> Section 18, Malabar Marriage Act, Act IV of 1896, the procedure for divorce was highly objectionable even for those who welcomed legislation, because for a community which was accustomed with a simple procedure of divorce found that the provisions of the act were hard to be realized.

intestate his self acquired property was to be divided equally among his wife and children and his *tarawad*. In the absence of his *tarawad* members the whole of the property would devolve to his wife and children.<sup>99</sup> With the enactment the concern of the emerging middle class regarding their self acquired property was solved by making the wife and children as the legal inheritors. Thus inheritance of property was made an essential attribute of the marriage relations in Malabar, the absence of which had made the colonial jurists characterize *sambandham* relations as concubinage. The act also paved the way for the emergence of conjugal nuclear families under the control of ‘husband’ or ‘father.’

Contrary to the expectations of the colonial government and the Nair middle class, the Act failed to generate any impact upon *marumakkathayam* Hindus. The number of *sambandhams* registered following the enactment evidently reflects the attitude of the people towards the change envisaged by the reformers. The number of marriages registered was not comparatively small but absolutely insignificant.<sup>100</sup> During the entire period of operation of the Act, (ten years) only 90 *sambandhams* were registered, more than 2/3 of the number was registered in two years immediately following the year of introduction of the Act.<sup>101</sup> Majority of *sambandham* registrations were from South Malabar and it seems that the *marumakkathayam* Hindus completely discarded the new legislation. Moreover, people who registered their *sambandham* largely belonged to the educated class and most of them were Government employees or advocates.<sup>102</sup> The Government on its part made several attempts to increase the registration of *sambandhams*, by directing the *adhikaris* and *thahasildars* to simplify the procedures for registration and

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<sup>99</sup> Section 22, Malabar Marriage Act, Act IV of 1896

<sup>100</sup> Letter from F.B.Evans, Collector of Malabar, to the Secretary to Government, in Home (miscellaneous) no. D. 1724/P,1917, RAK.

<sup>101</sup> G.O. No. 495, Public Department, 21/6/1907

<sup>102</sup> G.O. No. 458, Public Department, 27/5/1918

cooperate with the people. The Collector of Malabar was asked to report on the desirability of reducing the marriage fees, so that the provision of the Act might be more largely availed by the poorer classes.<sup>103</sup> Besides, it was suggested that if popular and influential non-official gentlemen who were in sympathy with the custom of the country were appointed as marriage registrars and permitted to collect appropriate fees, they would encourage registration and the provision of the act would be better availed.<sup>104</sup>

Several reasons were identified by Government officials and reformers regarding the absence of popular interest towards registering *sambandham*. One of the main causes was the unjust and obscure nature of the provision of the act which dealt with the personal law. The necessity of sending notice to managing members of the *tarawad* was a main obstacle, as in most of the *tarawads* the relation between the *karanavan* and junior members were in an extremely strained condition. Besides, after the implementation of the act the number of litigations regarding the *tarawad* property and maintenance had increased and most of such suits were against *karanavans*. The application for registering a marriage turned out to be an application for a ‘passport’ to go to civil court and hence no one would consent the application for registering marriage.<sup>105</sup> The most important factor that prevented people from registering the *sambandham* was the lack of facilities for registration; people were reluctant to approach a government office for the purpose of ‘marriage’, which was a religious custom.<sup>106</sup> F.B.Evans, the Collector of Malabar, pointed out that there was no demand among the people for registering the *sambandham*; even the educated minority rejected the act because, the act was based on the principle that an ordinary *sambandham* was not a legal marriage

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Mannarghat Muppil Nair, to Chief Secretary to Government, 22/09/1917, Public (miscellaneous) C/ 337, 1917, RAK

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

and the children of such relations were illegitimate. He reported to the Government that 90% of the population of Malabar did not know anything about the law and were totally ignorant of the need to register the marriages.<sup>107</sup> F.B.Evans was of the opinion that the legislation failed because it ignored the real facts of the situation and attempted a compromise providing that persons subject to the laws of a matriarchal family system should by an artificial system of registration be entitled to subject themselves simultaneously in certain respects to the laws and customs of a patriarchal family system.<sup>108</sup> The colonial government had proposed *sambandham* legislation in order to facilitate indigenous population to move towards a 'civilized' life without affecting the religious sentiments of the concerned people. However they failed to realize that for Malabar, *sambandham* was not just confined to conjugal relations of two partners, besides it was a conglomeration of property rights, customs and traditions. The enactment was proposed by the Malabar marriage Commission by accepting the fact that the majority of the population were against the projected changes; naturally an unwanted legislative intervention was rejected.

However the most important reason for the failure of the Malabar Marriage Act was the enactment of the Malabar Wills Act in 1898. William Logan recommended, in 1881, that all adults- males or females - must be conferred with the right to dispose their self-acquired property through will.<sup>109</sup> The question of the self -acquisition was gradually becoming a problem when *marumakkathayam* followers started earning their own income from government employment or other enterprises. Many of them were against the devolution of their property to their own *tarawad* and preferred to have power regarding their inheritance. If a person died intestate, his property, as per

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<sup>107</sup> Letter from F.B.Evans, Collector of Malabar, to the Secretary to Government, in Home (miscellaneous) no. D. 1724/P, 1917, RAK.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> William Logan, Malabar Special Commission, *op.cit.*, p. 136

*marumakkathayam* law, became a part of his *tarawad*'s property. British Judges had no conformity regarding the succession of self-acquisitions, while a section of judges including the Chief Justice answered that the separate property of a member of a *tarawad* lapses on his death, to the *tarawad*, others opined that the separate property of a member of a *tarawad* was inherited by his *tavazhi*.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, *karanavans* were of the opinion that there was no concept of self acquired property, as the education was fairly expensive during that period, a *tarawad* was to spend huge amount of money for educating its members. If such a member after education was employed his income was to be a part of the *tarawad* property.<sup>111</sup> Even though if a *marumakkathayam* Hindu gifted a portion of his self-acquired property to his wife and children, after his death, his *tarawad* members sued against the gift, claiming that as per *marumakkathayam* law the property's 'natural' successor was his *tarawad*. Colonial courts decreed in favour of the *tarawad*, whereby the wife and children or it could be the *tavazhi* of the person, lose their inheritance to the property gifted to them.<sup>112</sup> Moreover the court in a judgment made it clear that the acquirer could not dispose off his self-acquisition by will.<sup>113</sup> Many argued that testamentary power must not be restricted to those who had registered their *sambandham*, but the same right was to be extended to all adults.<sup>114</sup> Hence it was proposed by the Commissioners that a separate Act was to be framed like that of the Hindu Wills Act of 1870. Accordingly, a bill was drafted by Justice Parker.<sup>115</sup> Consequently in 1898 the Malabar Wills Act came into force which conferred testamentary power on persons following *marumakkathayam* and *Aliyasanthanam* Law of inheritance and to

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<sup>110</sup> C.Vasantha Kumari, op.cit., pp. 184-185

<sup>111</sup> Kannambra Ramanunni Nair, Answers to interrogatories, RMMC, p. 5

<sup>112</sup> I L R 4 Madras 150, 1881

<sup>113</sup> S.A. 534 of 1878, quoted in P.R.Sundara Aiyar, *Treatise on Malabar and Aliyasanthanam Law*, Madras Law Journal Office, Madras, 1922, p. 187

<sup>114</sup> P.Govinda Menon, Answers to interrogatories, RMMC, p. 15

<sup>115</sup> C.Vasantha Kumari, op.cit., p. 280

provide rules for the “execution, attestation, revocation and revival of the wills of such persons.”<sup>116</sup> The Act solved the issue regarding the succession of the self acquired property of a *marumakkathayam* Hindu, whereby he could execute will in favour of his *tavazhi* or his wife and children or to anybody else as he pleased.

The colonial legislative intervention resulted in a convulsion in the basic tenets of *marumakkathayam*. With these enactments *marumakkathayam* and *sambandham* were brought within the frame work of laws and several characteristics were attributed. Colonial jurisprudence dictated terms for the marriage and life of indigenous matrilineal individuals. Nair women were made ‘concubines’ by the colonial interpretation and the same agency was called to convert Nair women into ‘wives’, but all these interventions were rejected by the common people of Malabar. Act of 1896 brought the concept of registered marriage to the *marumakkathayam* communities, which was differentiated from *sambandham*. Whereas the Act of 1898 completely altered the rights regarding property ownership and succession, wife and children were converted to the legal inheritors of a man’s property. Both these acts together paved a legal way for the beginning of conjugal family life for the followers of *marumakkathayam*, but on the other hand, the acts increased the litigations on property.

### **Socio-Religious Reform Movements and Caste Associations**

Nineteenth century in India was a period of socio-religious reform movements, attempting to reorganize the traditional society. These movements affected almost all the religions and castes of India; it was so robust that none could escape from its sway. Indian traditional society was

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<sup>116</sup> Preamble of the Malabar Wills Act, in The Malabar Wills Act, Act V of 1898, [http://www.lawsofindia.org/pdf/tamil\\_nadu/1898/1898TN5.pdf](http://www.lawsofindia.org/pdf/tamil_nadu/1898/1898TN5.pdf) downloaded on 01/02/2017

never static or immobile as it was once imagined to be.<sup>117</sup> Indian society was very much vibrant and had the inherent potential for bringing up reforms and initiated movements in the pre-colonial periods itself. But the colonial dominance and the dissemination of western liberal philosophy hastened the necessity for reform attempts. Reform programmes were mediated by the colonial presence and not created by the same. The British conquest and the consequent dissemination of colonial culture and ideology had led to an inevitable introspection about the strength and weakness of indigenous culture and institutions.<sup>118</sup> The response indeed was varied but the need to reform social and religious life was a commonly shared conviction. The new intelligentsia which had been formed revolted against the feudal elements perpetuated by the caste system, superstitions and archaic rituals. In the light of newly acquired education the “middle class” sought to reinterpret the indigenous custom and practices.

The credit for the social reform of the nineteenth century cannot be conferred solely on the western educated middle class. The indigenous intellectuals also played a major role in the rearrangement of the traditional society. K.N.Panikkar has argued that eighteenth century witnessed several movements and protests before the intervention of British.<sup>119</sup> The indigenous movements of the pre-colonial era did not play a socially transformative role but confined their activities to a number of self-contained sects without much communication or interaction with one another.<sup>120</sup> The intellectuals of nineteenth century traced the source of all ills in Indian society to the

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<sup>117</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Bibliographical Survey of Social Reform Movements in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ICHR 1975, New Delhi, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Bipan Chandra, et.al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988, p.82

<sup>119</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony Intellectual and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, Delhi, 1995, p.4

<sup>120</sup> K.N.Panikkar, 'Was There A Renaissance?', *Frontline*, vol. 2, issue 05, February 26- March 11,2011



religious superstition and social obscurantism, and therefore this occupied a central place in their reform programme. While the pre-colonial movements were trapped in feudal ethics, the nineteenth century regeneration occurred in the context of an emerging middle class which mainly developed its social vision, political beliefs and cultural ethos from the Western societies, received through the medium of the ideological apparatuses of the colonial state.<sup>121</sup>

The intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the newly formed intelligentsia together created a social and cultural resurgence in India. Though the characters of the two movements were totally different in their ideology and practice, both of them could lead to a social awakening in India. The urge to reform reached the nook and corner of Indian provinces especially among the British governed regions. The constant attack of colonial writers on Indian customs and traditions and the Hindu religion was hard to be defended. There was an increasing realization that the Indian social conditions needed to be addressed and reframed for its sustenance.

Although religious reformation was a major concern of these movements, none of them were exclusively religious in character; reformers used religion and spirituality to take cognizance of the material conditions of human existence.<sup>122</sup> Rational and secular considerations were adopted by the reformers for questioning depressed social institutions. At the same time reform of social conditions was not possible in India without addressing religion and caste based structures. For instance Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts towards prohibiting *sati* and Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar's 'revolution' for legalizing widow remarriage were movements against social institutions which had the sanction of Hindu Scriptures. Hence quite naturally their efforts were met with staunch opposition from religious reactionaries and the

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<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Bipan Chandra, et.al., *op.cit.*, p.83.

reformers were forced to establish their standpoints through the interpretation of Hindu Scriptures.

Caste system and religious superstitions were the main social evils that dominated Indian society during the nineteenth century. The condition of depressed classes and that of women - of all caste and religion- were equally deprived; the lives of upper caste were embedded in superstitions. Women of all the religions and castes formed a 'gendered depressed class.' In short the Indian social reform movements were to focus on three streams of social issues - the upper castes, the depressed classes and the women. These three realms became the site where the orthodox and radical forces fought with each other.

The efforts to improve the conditions of women were not totally genuine; it was out of a realization that the society cannot be changed unless the domestic dilemma was transformed. One of the significant aspects of the reform concerning women was that in most of the issues the colonial state was called on to legislate.<sup>123</sup> Regarding the role of colonial state in the issues related to women, Tanika Sarkar observed that, 'it was usually seen as an agency of modernization, trying to acquire cultural hegemony by outlawing the culture of the colonized.'<sup>124</sup> Thus we can see that the role of the colonial government in improving the condition of women is disputed. It can be ascertained that the colonial state was very cautious in interfering with the social and cultural realm, especially in certain spheres which have been demarcated by themselves as 'spheres of personal laws', and colonial courts and lawmakers were instructed to proceed only on the basis of such personal

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<sup>123</sup> Prohibition of Sati was achieved through the Regulation XVII in 1829, Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, The Child Marriage Restraint Act are some among them.

<sup>124</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001,p. 230

laws specific to each religion. This explains why Ram Mohan Roy and Iswarachandra Vidyasagar scoured ancient scripture to locate citations for their views.<sup>125</sup>

### **Social Reform in Kerala**

Late nineteenth century and early years of twentieth century witnessed a powerful wave of socio-religious reform movements in Kerala, which swept across almost all religions and castes of Kerala. Some of the attempts gained the support of political authority of the state, which resulted in legislation and administrative action and finally, as a stated or implied premise of all nationalist thought, it succeeded in producing general Indian acceptance of the social ideals of the rebels- ideals which are in ascendancy in the later period.<sup>126</sup>

Reform movements in Kerala were known for the concern towards the upliftment of the lower castes, who were subjected to centuries long oppression by the landlordism with the aid of caste system. Hence the social fabric of Kerala was to be restructured by reforming every community in the lines of a modern society. Conscious attempts were made to reorganize the social fabric of Kerala in accordance with the colonial induced lifestyle. Hence the movement was not only to fish out the society from its age old lethargy and superstitions but also to revamp it as per the needs of the emergent middle class. The reform movement attributed extreme significance to caste identity rather than sub-caste identity or class identity within the caste and *tarawad* identities. At the same time how far the 'women question' was addressed in the reform programme of Kerala is debated, because women issues were not the factor that led to the emergence of such a movement.

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<sup>125</sup> Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar,(ed), *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, Volume I, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 3-4

<sup>126</sup> Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1964, p.10

Besides issues related to women were taken up only when the reformers realized that the general tendency of the community cannot be reorganized without changing the life patterns of women.

Colonial reign brought significant changes in Kerala society by redefining the land relations and ownership patterns; along with this emergence of new employment opportunities transformed the socio-economic fabric of Kerala. In the case of Kerala the extensive presence of Christian missionaries and the influence they exerted on the social life of the people aggravated the antagonism towards Brahmanical domination of the society. Proliferation of education under colonial government undermined the ideological hegemony of Namboothiris and the monopoly of knowledge they possessed.

Christian missionaries played a significant role in the transformation of the social life of Kerala. Though proselytization was the major concern of the missionaries their attempts in the field of education and health made profound influence among the indigenous population especially the lower castes. Christian missionaries were the greatest critics of the Indian caste system and they identified it as the sole cause for oppression of the depressed classes. Social reform movements of the lower castes against upper caste domination were supported by the Christian Missionaries.

The historiography of women's reform in Kerala begins with the *melmundu kalapam* or *melsila kalapam* conducted by the Channars of Travancore during the early decades of nineteenth century. As a consequence of the missionary activities large number of Channars was converted to Christianity, but the upper castes Hindus were not ready to relieve them from the controls of the caste system. Channar women being a lower caste were not by custom allowed to cover the upper part of their body, and there was no relaxation in the custom for the converted Channar women also. The L.M.S.

missionaries in Travancore region persuaded Christian Channar women to cover their upper body and distributed clothes among them.<sup>127</sup> When the Christian Channar started using upper clothes, the upper caste Hindus considered it as an insult and vehemently opposed it. In 1822 at Kalkullam in South Travancore, when a group of converted Channar women came to the market, wearing upper cloth, they were attacked by higher caste men who tore off their jackets.<sup>128</sup> This incident led to a rebellion and finally in 1829 Col. Munroe issued orders as per which converted Channar women were permitted to wear jackets. In 1859 the rebellion again started when jackets of Channar women were torn off by the caste Hindus at Neyattinkara. Channars decided to retaliate, started the rebellion, and it soon spread to many places of South Travancore. At the end of the movement, in 1859 the government issued orders permitting the Channar women to wear jacket and pinafore.<sup>129</sup> Here women were the victims of the caste exploitation, and their men were not in a relative position to offer resistance. Breast cloth movement was often recorded as a resistance organized by the lower caste against caste system, but at the same time the movement had the active support of the Christians. The involvement of Christian missionaries in the issue made the Travancore Government to legislate in favour of the Channars.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> T.B.Premjith Kumar, *Keralathile Sthree Shaktheekaranavum London Missionary Prasthanavum*, (Mal), Raven Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2014, pp. 54-55

<sup>128</sup> P.K.Balakrishnan, *Jathivyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2012, p.275. Later in 1828 when the Christian Channars decided not to work on Sundays on *Uzhiyam*, the Savarnars attacked them. R.Radhakrishnan, *Keralathile Navodanasamaraghal*, (Mal), Maluben Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010, p. 54

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*,p.277

<sup>130</sup> P.K.Balakrishnan, *Narayana Guru*, (Mal), D.C.Books, 2015, (first published-1954), p.40. Robert L. Hardgrave observed that the breast-cloth controversy served as the initial catalyst of increasing community self-consciousness. As the first movement for social uplift, it brought to the Channars the awareness and solidarity of an emerging integrated culture. Robert L. Hardgrave, 'The Breast-

Like the restrictions on clothes, caste system had specified the kind of ornaments to be used by men and women belonging to different castes. In Travancore the depressed castes were prohibited from using gold and silver ornaments. In 1818 Rani Parvathy Bai, the Queen of Travancore, made a declaration that the lower caste could use gold and silver ornaments.<sup>131</sup> Pulaya women being a lower caste, according to custom, were to wear heavy chain of stone beads, which was a symbol of slavery and of their inferior social position. Gopaldas a social reformer from the Pulaya community urged Pulaya women to stop wearing this kind of chain and he convened meetings against this practice. Under his influence several women stopped wearing stone chains.<sup>132</sup> Nair men were enraged at the act of 'disrespect' and this culminated in a clash between Nairs and Pulayas. The movement acquired popular interest and the Pulaya social reformer Ayyankali asked Pulaya women to discard their ornaments of glass and stone. In 1915 a meeting was organised in Kollam and here several thousands of Pulaya women casted off their stone chains. The 'Breast Cloth Movement' and the *Kallumala* agitation were outward expression of the resistance of the lower caste against the impositions of the upper caste and both of them did not intend at the improvement of the whole lot of their women. The movements had only 'symbolic' relation with women as the basic issue for the movements was provided by them.

Reformers of Kerala belonged to two broad categories. The first believed that changes in beliefs and behavior are to be affected through the influence of religion. The genesis and growth of Sree Narayana Dharma

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Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore' *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 1968, vol. 5, 2: pp. 171-187.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37

<sup>132</sup> E.Rajan, *Guruvayur Sathyagraham*, (Mal), Mathrubhumi Books, Calicut, 2015, p.49

Paripalana Yogam, Sree Narayan Dharma Sangham and Atmavidya Sangham indicate the belief in the need of religious revitalization prevalent among the backward classes.<sup>133</sup> The second group of reformers organized themselves under non-religious leadership and gained their ends through constitutional means. The movement of Nair Service Society, Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sabha and Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha comes under the second category. Many reformers believed that caste system could be overthrown only by questioning the Namboothiri supremacy in religious life; hence they adopted religion as an instrument to bring about social transformation.<sup>134</sup>

An era of reforms in Kerala was inaugurated by Sree Narayana Guru in 1888, with his historic Aruvippuram consecration. He led a symbolic battle against Namboothiri dominance by consecrating a Siva idol, because as per Hindu tradition consecration was a Brahmin monopoly.<sup>135</sup> Sree Narayana Guru and Dr. Palpu realized the essentiality of an organization for Ezhava community for popularizing modern education and for liberating the community from hoary traditions. As a result Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam was registered as a Joint Stock company in 1903, with Kumaran Asan as its first General Secretary.<sup>136</sup> From 1904 onwards S.N.D.P. under the guidance of Sree Narayana Guru initiated programmes to end the obsolete practices within the community like *thalikettukalyanam*, *thirandukuli*, *pulikudi* which were causing extreme financial pressure on the

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<sup>133</sup> P.Chandra Mohan, 'The Growth of Social Reform Movements in Kerala', in P.J.Cherian (ed), *Perspectives on Kerala History*, vol. II, part II, Kerala State Gazetter, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 459. He has elaborated his findings in a recent study. P. Chandra Mohan, *Developmental Modernity in Kerala, Narayana Guru, SNDP Yogam and Social Reform*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2016

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Kumaran Asan, *Brahmasree Narayanaguru Swamikalude Jeevacharitra Sangraham*, (Mal), Kumaran Asan National Institute of Culture, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010, p. 20

<sup>136</sup> M.K.Sano, *Narayanaguruswami*, (Mal), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 1986, (first published -1976), p. 168

families. Dr.Palpu, Sree Narayan Guru, C.V.Kunhuraman, Kunhi Amma and leaders of S.N.D.P., criticized these customs from the platform of S.N.D.P. and demanded the community members to stop observing them. Rather than speeches, Guru made direct interventions into the customs and practices and created profound impact on the people.<sup>137</sup> Another major concern of Guru was regarding the reform of the marriage practices observed by Ezhavas and he prescribed new rituals to be observed during marriage. As per the new rituals the marriage must be officiated by a priest, along with that the objects like *ashtamangalayam* and *nilavilaku* were to be used. In short Guru recommended a marriage ceremony like that of the Namboothiri community; in other words he was promoting a sanskritisation of the rituals.<sup>138</sup> Such changes were proposed out of the realization that the customs of the community were outdated, but at the same time these new rituals increased the pride and confidence of the community members.

Nairs though being a dominant caste of Kerala lacked unity, as the community was split into several sub-castes. Within the community there were mutually polluting sub-castes among whom marriage relation and inter dining were prohibited. Colonial contacts and missionary activities transformed the social fabric of Travancore by widening educational facilities and employment prospects. For the Nairs of the Travancore region the most important threat was from the Tamil Brahmins who monopolized all administrative offices. Even though educated, members of the Nair

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<sup>137</sup> Once in Neyattinkara a wealthy Ezhava family made all arrangements for the *thalikettukalyanam* of their daughter, on the day of the function Guru came there and asked girl's father to stop the ceremony, and he being a disciple of Guru readily obeyed. Guru asked the people assembled there to give publicity regarding this incident as it may prevent others from organizing *thalikettukalyanam*. P.K.Balakrishnan, *Narayana Guru*, op.cit., pp.160-161

<sup>138</sup> Editorial, *Vivekodayam*, 1904, book-1, no.2, p. 83; Name of people who got married in this new scheme was published in magazine in a separate column 'Puthiya Reethiyil Nattathapetta Vivaham' or "Vivaha Register".



community failed to acquire significant posts in Government as the royalty preferred Brahmins. It was in these circumstances that Malayali Memorial was submitted to the King in 1891. Over importance given by the Nair community for government jobs and their aversion for commercial enterprises was pointed out as the major reason that led to their decline.<sup>139</sup>

Nair *tarawads* were passing through a hard time, as the family litigations were mounting and family feuds disturbed the normal life in *tarawads*. Educated Nairs wanted thorough reforms in community as they interpreted many customs and practices as superstitious. K.Ramakrishnapilla, in a speech, criticized the attitude of Nairs, “as they are not interested in the progress of the community, Nairs do not recognize the declination of their community; even the members of the lower caste are forming associations and trying to cast cohesion among their members. Only a few *tarawads* are now in well to do position all others, almost 95%, are struggling for life and the main reason for the financial depletion of the community was the extravagance shown in the celebration of various superstitious rituals.”<sup>140</sup>

Krishna Pilla was one of the early leaders who advocated reform among Nairs and proposed the establishment of an organization. In 1877 a Malayali Social Union was formed in Thiruvananthapuram, which was later renamed as Malayali Sabha.<sup>141</sup> But the organization could hardly initiate any significant transformation in the community and it remained a gathering of the ‘elite Nair class.’ Nairs of poor *tarawads* or uneducated young men of the

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<sup>139</sup> Rama Krishna Pilla, ‘Nayanmarude Sthidi’, read in the Cherthala Nair Samajam in 1904.

<sup>140</sup> From the speech of K.Ramakrishna Pilla at Cherthala Nair Samajam, on 19/12/1903 given in Harindranatha Kurup, *NSS Charitram*, (Mal), NSS Publication, Chaganassery, 1994, p. 118

<sup>141</sup> Mannath Padmanabhan, Ente Jeevitha Smaranakkal, in Kidaghoor A.N.Gopalakrishnan (ed), *Mannathinte Sampoorana Krithikkal*, (Mal), Vidyarthimithram Press, Kottayam, 1978,pp. 16-18

community were not even aware of the activities of the Nair Samajams.<sup>142</sup> C.Krishna Pillai and some other community leaders together founded Keraleeya Nair Samajam in 1906 by incorporating several regional Nair associations that had existed in different places of Thiruvananthapuram.<sup>143</sup> Along with the attempts to provide an organizational structure for materializing reform, a popular demand for reform was created through utilizing magazines. *Nair*, *Nairasamudayaparishkarini*, *Nairsamudaya parishkari* were some of the magazines which published articles regarding the Nair community and the strategies that were to be adopted for reforms. Many Nairs sought to form organizations in order to forge unity among the community.<sup>144</sup>

Articles that appeared in magazines regarding Nair community can be broadly classified into three categories. In the first group there were articles which dealt with various aspects of *Marumakkathayam* which tried to establish that Nairs were not to remain submissive to Brahmins- Namboothiris and Tamil Brahmins. K.Kannan Nair wrote extensively in these magazines, he rejected the Parasurama legend and the argument that *marumakkathayam* was instituted by Parasurama.<sup>145</sup> Historical analysis of Nair community was done by tracing, the factors which resulted in the economic decline of the Nair *tarawads*.<sup>146</sup> In the second category there were articles which proposed

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<sup>142</sup> K.Kannan Nair, 'Nairsamajakrithyaghal', *Nairasamudayaparishkarini*, 1905, book. 1, vol. 3, pp. 81-86

<sup>143</sup> S.Achuta Variyar, *Kerala Samskaram*, (Mal), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003, p.216

<sup>144</sup> K.Kannan Nair, 'Nair Samudayaudharana Margham', *Nair*, 1904, book. 1, vol.3, pp. 4-11; K.Kannan Nair, 'Thiruvithamkurile Nairsamajaghal', *Nair*, 1904, book.1, vol. 4, pp. 14-19 ; M.Madhavan Nair, 'Nair Samudayam', *Sudarshanam*, 1912, book.1, vol. 1, pp. 101-114; Evoor, S.Gopalan Nair, 'Kazhinja Kala Samaranghal', in *NSS Diamond Jubille Souvenir*, (Mal), Chaganassery, 1974, pp. 81-83

<sup>145</sup> K.Kannan Nair, '*Marumakkathayam*', *Nairsamudayaparishkarini*, 1905, book.1, vol.4, pp. 97-108

<sup>146</sup> K.Kannan Nair, 'Nair Samudayodharana Margham', op.cit.

reforms in the traditional customs and practices; they criticized *thalikettukalyanam* and *thirandukuli* as archaic. Young men of the community were asked to acquire English education and to accept modern professions.<sup>147</sup> Nairs were exhorted to adopt modern life style by abandoning ancient customs and at the same time blind imitation of European customs, done by educated class were also denounced.<sup>148</sup> The third category of articles dealt with women of the community, their status, privileges, and regarding their sufferings under *karnavans*.<sup>149</sup> Women's life in *marumakkathayam* families in earlier period was described to be far better than that of in patrilineal families, but it deteriorated with the changes in modern period.

By the early decades of twentieth century a group of liberal minded Nair youth, eager to reform the community, assembled in Changanassery. They discussed about the deplorable conditions of the Nair community and realized the need for an organization. Kannan Menon suggested forming an association like that of the Servants of India Society, to work for progress among Nairs.<sup>150</sup> As a result *Nair Brithya Jana Sangham* was formed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1914 in Changanassery under the leadership of Mannathu Padmanabhan and K.Kelappan Nair. After some years the *sangham* was renamed as Nair Service Society. One of the main tasks adopted by the society was to promote educational facilities for its members. The main issues which made Nairs to gather round NSS were: first, to defend the exploitation of Nairs by Brahmins, second: their own decadent system of inheritance and expensive anachronistic social customs like *thalikettukalyanm*, *thirandukuli*,

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<sup>147</sup> P.G.Rama Iyer, 'Nayanmarodu chila gunadhoshaghal', *Nairsamudayaparishkari*, 1916, book.1, vol.3, pp. 9-16

<sup>148</sup> K.T.Balakrishnan Nambiyar, 'Nayanmarum Parishkaravum', *Nairsamudayaparishkari*, 1916, book.1, vol. 5, pp. 31-36

<sup>149</sup> K.Chinnamma, 'Samudayaparishkaram', *Lakshmibai*, 1911, book- 6, No. 10, pp. 353-360

<sup>150</sup> Kainikkara M.Kumara Pillai, *Avismaraneeyar*, (Mal), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 1984, p.24

untouchability and the third need for educational and economic renaissance of the community in order to complete with other rising communities.<sup>151</sup> Objectives of NSS were to promote the progress of the Nair community, fight against caste prejudices, abolish the sub-caste issues within the community, defend the exploitation faced by Nairs from Brahmins and make the community realize the meaninglessness of practices like *thalikettukalyam* and *thirandukuli*. Mannathu Padmanabhan gave leadership in organizing *misrabhojanam* (inter-dinning), which belittled caste restrictions.<sup>152</sup>

One of the main intentions of NSS was to reform the marriage practices and the decadent matrilineal system. Prior to the birth of NSS acceding to the demand of the Nairs, the Travancore government had constituted a *Marumakkathayam* Committee with Diwan M.Govinda Pillai as the President in 1908. The committee was divided among itself as many of the members were against the partition of *tarawads*. A Bill recommending *tavazhi* partition was submitted in the assembly and in 1912 Government consent the Bill which came to be known as the First Nair Act. As the act permitted only *tavazhi* partition it could not appease the community.<sup>153</sup> After the foundation of NSS they could create a public opinion among Nairs regarding the need of a transformation in the matrilineal system. Later in 1925 through legislation individual partition of *tarawads* was permitted and husbands were made the protectors and guardians of women. In

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<sup>151</sup> Santhi Jose, 'Mannath Padmanabham: The Meliorist of Kerala', in P.F.Gopakumar, (ed), *Faces of Social reform in Kerala*, Published by P.F.Gopakumar, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 129

<sup>152</sup> Inter-dining was not permitted among Nairs belonging to different sub-caste, so to do so went against the orthodoxy and challenged caste based customs.

<sup>153</sup> Mannathu Padmanabhan, op.cit., pp. 78-79

Thiruvananthapuram the Regulations were followed by large scale division and transfer of property.<sup>154</sup>

In the early years of NSS they had no specific programme regarding women's life. But they tried to organize women by forming women's wing of NSS with every regional unit. These Vanithasamajams ensured women's participation in the activities of NSS, and provided a platform for middle class Nair women to come together. Under the auspices of the Vanithasamajam a women's home and an orphanage was founded at Perunna by Thottekadu Madhavi Amma.<sup>155</sup>

However within a short period of time NSS could achieve the support of the community members, and through participation in Vaikom Satyagraha and Guruvayur Satyagraha the society acclaimed wide recognition. At the same time Nairs of Cochin and Malabar were not as organized as that of Travancore. Mannath Padmanbhan was of the opinion that Nairs of Cochin and Malabar were against forming associations and rejected all such attempts.<sup>156</sup> From the inception of the society Mannath Padmanabhan and other leaders tried to spread the activities of NSS to Malabar region. Though K.Kelappan was a founding member of NSS and was also responsible for drafting the bye law of the organization, in Malabar he was known more as a freedom fighter than as a NSS activist.<sup>157</sup> In North Malabar an organization known as Uthara Keraleeya Nair Samajam was established by Rairu Nambiyar, but this failed to produce any momentous results.<sup>158</sup> NSS' failure

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<sup>154</sup> K.Saradmoni, *Matriliny Transformed, Family, Law and Ideology In twentieth century Travancore*, Sage and Altamira, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 108-109

<sup>155</sup> *NSS Suvarna Jubilee Grantham*, (Mal), NSS Publication, Chaganassery, 1964, pp.56-57

<sup>156</sup> Mannath Padmanbhan, op.cit., p. 169

<sup>157</sup> Caroline.F, 'K.Kelappan: The Kerala Gandhi', in P.F.Gopakumar, (ed), op.cit., p.178

<sup>158</sup> *Nair Service Society Suvarna Grandham*, (Mal), NSS Publication, Chaganassery, 1964, p.22. In North Malabar, Rairu Nambiyar started a

to obtain a strong foothold in Malabar during the colonial period, could be due to the fact that people gave more importance to political activities than caste based ones.

Namboothiris also embarked on the task of forging an organization as an ultimate attempt to revamp their eroding privileges in the society. The Mysorean attacks and the establishment of colonialism undermined their traditional monopolistic social and political status, but they maintained their ritual status. Namboothiri were late to realize the necessity of organizing themselves into an association, when compared to other communities. With the advent of the English education Namboothiris lost their monopoly of 'knowledge'. Besides, agrarian tensions and the governmental intervention forced the Namboothiris to organize themselves against the emerging tenants' solidarity. Movements organized by the newly emerged middle class of the Nair community for marriage reforms also alarmed the Namboothiri community, especially when they saw that the government conceded to the demand of a minority and legislated in their favor.

Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was founded on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1908 at Aluva Cherumukku Vaidikan's *Illom* in the presence of dominant representatives of the community.<sup>159</sup> Unlike other caste organizations Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was formed not to initiate reforms within the community, but to reinstate their privileges, which were being challenged

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newspaper, '*Samudayadeepika*', for promoting caste consciousness among Nairs. Pattom.B.Ramachandran Nair, *Nair Samudayathinte Ethihassam*, (Mal), Sahityavedi, Palkulangara, 1987, p. 80

<sup>159</sup> Meeting at Cherumukku Vaidikan's *illom* was attended by several leaders of the community including- Kurur Unninamboothiripad, Thirunavaya Vadyan, Varikasserri Namboothiripad, Kaplighand Vaidikanmar, members of Desamangalam, Kanipayyur and Olapammanna *Illoms*, Poomulli Namboothiripad, Azvancheri Thamprakkal, Mathoor Vasudevan Namboothiripad among others. P.K. Aryan Namboothiri, *Nallukettil Ninnu Nattileku*, (Mal), Mangalodayam, Thrissur, 1969, pp. 34-36.

under the wake of colonialism. Paradoxically it was decided by the founding members that nothing should be discussed or initiated by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha which went against the traditions and beliefs of the community.<sup>160</sup>

From a historical analysis of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha's activities it can be seen that it never adhered to a single policy; concerns and ideologies of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha changed from time to time. History of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha can be divided into three stages based on their 'prime objectives'. First stage was from Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha's inception to 1919, during which period they attempted to make the members of the community realize the need of an organization and also to achieve unity within the community.<sup>161</sup> In this stage Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was under the control of *janmis* and major concern of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was to safeguard their rights as *janmis*, which was being challenged in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar and a committee was formed to deal with the *janmi-kudiyan* issues.<sup>162</sup>

In the early years of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, stray attempts were made by some of the members for institutionalizing English education among Namboothiris. At the second annual conference of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha Vemancheri Bhaskaran Namboothiripad presented a paper on the inevitability of accepting English education by the

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<sup>160</sup> Section. 5, Laws of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1909, p. 30; (proceedings of the Sabha's annual sessions were published under the title of Poorna Brahmaniyam)

<sup>161</sup> *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1909, p. 18

<sup>162</sup> Kurur Unninamboothiripad was a member of this committee. *ibid.* p. 23; Kesavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, 'An interview with V.T. Bhattathiripad' in Mini Krishnan (ed) *My Tears, My Dreams* (Translation of V.T. Bhattathiripad's *Kaneerum Kinavum*.) Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013

community. But the paper didn't make an impact on the members present.<sup>163</sup> The fourth annual session of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha witnessed discussions on English education for Namboothiris following the Presidential address by Edappali Sankara Raja.<sup>164</sup>

However in the same year an institution for educating Namboothiri youth was founded in Mannadi known as the 'Kulakada Special school'.<sup>165</sup> From 1916 onwards Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha took active interest in promoting English education and consequently in the eighth annual session a decision was made to organize a school under the leadership of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and a committee was appointed with C.S.Subhramaniyan Potti as the President.<sup>166</sup>

The formation of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and its activities were criticized by an orthodox section among Namboothiris. A notice signed

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<sup>163</sup> *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1910, p. 18; Editorial, *Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, Mangalodayam*, 1910, book, no. 2, vol. 1, pp. 9-13

<sup>164</sup> In the Presidential address Edappali Sankara raja commented that Namboothiri were the only community which never undertook any physical activity, and this had led to the deterioration of the Namboothiris. He further added that as per the 1901 Census only 44 Namboothiri, in Travancore and Cochin together, were literate in English. Knowledge of English language was essential for the upward progress of the community and members were asked to accept Government jobs and to adopt new methods for acquiring money, rather than depending on agriculture. Presidential Address, Fourth Annual Conference of Sabha, in *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1912, p. 14; In the same session Vellimana Subhramaniyan Potti, a B.A.Degree holder, presented a paper on 'The reasons for the decline of Kerala Brahmins and proposals for development'. He too stressed the necessity of English education for Namboothiris, *ibid.*, p.61

<sup>165</sup> C.K.Namboothiri, 'Namboothiri Yoghakeshmasabhayude Munbum Pinbum', in C.K.Namboothiri, *C.K.Namboothiriyude Lekhanaghal*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 2012, p. 70

<sup>166</sup> Eighth annual conference of the Sabha was convened at Vellinezhi and in this session several Namboothiris offered financial assistance for the educational development of Namboothiris. Hence the eighth annual session was characterized as 'Vellimazha Peytha Vellinezhi Sabha' (silver rains at Vellinezhi) *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1916, p. 33, see also C.K.Namboothiri, *op.cit.*, p. 71



by 112 Namboothiris against the reform programme initiated by the Vellinezhi Sabha was published. But the mediation of Kurur Unni Namboothiripad was successful in resolving the difference between orthodoxy and reformists for the time being.<sup>167</sup> In course of time several schools were started for Namboothiris in places like Edappali, Peringottukara, Panjal, Killikurissimangalam and Venmeni.

From the third annual session onwards Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha discussed about the difficulties faced by community due to their 'dependency' on other castes, for the fulfillment of rituals. Seeravalli V Narayanan Namboothiri commenting on the issue said that many castes like Seethikan, Mannan were reluctant to perform their traditional duties towards Namboothiri, hence it affects the daily life in *illoms*.<sup>168</sup> Edappalli Sankara Raja in his Presidential address at the fourth annual session observed that for Namboothiris in order to get purified after pollution the co-operation of Mannan, Maran etc. were necessary. In the earlier period these communities were proud to be associated with Namboothiris, but now they consider it as a shame to do such jobs and were demanding more money for their services. Hence he recommended that changes were to be made in the customs and rituals which have become difficult to observe and were 'outdated.' Accordingly the sessions proposed the formation of a committee to discuss the issue with the religious leaders of the community and to frame alternatives and were asked to submit the report in the next session.<sup>169</sup> Formation of a

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<sup>167</sup> Mullanezhi Sivadasan Namboothiri, *Nambudiriyogakshemasabha-Charithrangaliloode*, (Mal), Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnankulam, 2011, p. 33

<sup>168</sup> *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1911, p. 22

<sup>169</sup> The committee consisted of twelve members some among them were Kaplighant Vaidikan Vasudevan Namboothiripad, Cherumukku Vaidikan Narayana Namboothiripad, Panthal Vaidikan Krishnan Namboothiripad, (President), Thirunavaya Vadyan Aphan Namboothiripad and Pattachomayarath

committee for reframing the rituals was a significant incident in the history of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, as it remarked a momentous change in the said ideology of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha accepted during its inception. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha which had in its rules asserted that nothing that went against the tradition of the community was to be discussed in the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, under the impact of the changed circumstances compelled Namboothiris to initiate reforms in the rituals which were the part of medieval feudal society.

Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was an upper class Namboothiri male dominated organization, which was reluctant to take up women issues as a problem of the community. From the second annual session onwards issue of *kanyadanam* was addressed in all almost all conferences of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, but apart from presentation of the topic by a representative, no serious discussion was mediated. Cherukunnathu Narayanan Namboothiri invited the attention of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha to the problems involved in the marriage of *antharjanams*; in many *illoms* there were several elderly unmarried women and their number was increasing due to shortage of marriageable Namboothiri boys. Hence he proposed that for the time being the order of primogeniture must be kept aside, so that the unmarried *antharjanams* could be married off.<sup>170</sup> Cherukunnathu Neelakandan Namboothiri said that marrying within the community might solve the problems faced in *kanyadanam*, but the reversal of the custom would lead the community to utter poverty and result in the complete decline of Namboothiris.<sup>171</sup> Majority of the representatives were of the opinion that no change was to be made in practices of

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Smarthan Jathavedan Namboothiripad. Presidential Address, Fourth Annual Conference of Sabha, in *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1912, pp. 56-58

<sup>170</sup> Cherukunnathu Narayanan Namboothiri's speech, in *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1910, p.15

<sup>171</sup> Cherukunnathu Neelakandan Namboothiri, *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1911, p. 20

*kanyadanam*, later a committee was made with Cherukunathu Neelakandan Namboothiri as the President to make enquiries and submit report by consulting with the prominent members of the community.<sup>172</sup>

Vellimana Subhramaniyan Potti speaking on the general condition of Namboothiri community remarked that, “in the near future expenses on *sambandham* would increase as Namboothiri men would be under legal obligation to protect wife and children. Besides as per the new law wife and children would be entitled for the self acquired property of the Namboothiri husband. These circumstances would lead to the transfer of property from Namboothiri community to other communities. Hence Namboothiri men must start marrying from the community and should refrain from *sambandham*.”<sup>173</sup> In the eighth annual session of the Sabha Poomuli Thuppan Namboothiripad in his Presidential address observed that the Namboothiri community was declining day by day due to the curse of the unmarried girls of the community.<sup>174</sup>

Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in its early years initiated discussions on several issues pertaining to the community, but as it lacked a creative outlook to the issues faced by the community. Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha dominated by a landed gentry, strove to protect the tradition of the Namboothiris, hence women question never received proper consideration. Even when they discussed about the issues of *kanyadanam*, it was due to the fact that unmarried girls were a curse for the family and community.<sup>175</sup> However the major achievement of Sabha was that it could make the community realize the importance of English education, without which survival would be difficult.

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<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>173</sup> Vellimana Subhramaniyan Potti, *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1912, p. 84

<sup>174</sup> Presidential address, *Poorna Brahmaniyam*, 1916, p. 29

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

The second stage of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was from 1919 to 1944, ie. from the formation of *Yuvajana Sangham* in 1919 to the Ongallur Sabha in 1944. This period witnessed the emergence of a middle class from the Namboothiri community, who were committed to bring about radical changes in the community. The entire political atmosphere of the period also contributed to the emergence of a Namboothiri middle class. Moreover a few numbers of educated Namboothiris realized the short comings of the early leadership of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and proposed reforms in the activities and approaches. This stage witnessed the participation of Namboothiris in anti-colonial movements, the formation of *Yuvajana Sangham*, emergence of *Antharjana Samajam* and radical social reforms activities under the leadership of the middle class. *Yuvajana Sangham* started publishing a magazine, '*Unninamboothiri*', which later became the voice of the Namboothiri youth. Articles written in *Unninamboothiri* by V.T.Bhattathiripad, E.M.S. Namboothiripad, Muthiringode Bhavatrathan Namboothiripad and M.P.Bhattathiripad inspired Namboothiri youth and ignited revolutionary urge among them.

Namboothiri community and Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha started to indulge in worldly affairs and decided to shed their isolated existence. Namboothiris got involved in national movement and as early as in 1917 representatives of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha participated in District Political Conference of Congress, convened at Kozhikode. Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha submitted a memorandum to the constitutional reforms commission of 1917 headed by Montague-Chelmsford, demanding the introduction of administrative reforms in India.<sup>176</sup> Kurur Neelakanadan Namboothiripad and Muzhikunnam Brahmadhathan Namboothiripad participated in the national movement, Kurur Neelakanadan

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<sup>176</sup> P.K.Aryan Namboothiri, op.cit., pp. 56-57

Namboothiripad was a member of the untouchability eradication committee formed by K.P.C.C during the Vaikom Satyagraha.<sup>177</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad attended the Ahmadabad session of Indian National Congress 1921, while he was a student of Edakunni Namboothiri school.<sup>178</sup> Yuvajana Sangham supported the untouchability eradication programme, and observed that, “our rituals and customs should not deny basic rights to common people irrespective of their caste.”<sup>179</sup> The seventh annual session of Yuvajana Sangham passed a resolution recognizing the rights of lower castes people to use the public roads and criticized the orthodox community members who were adamant in retaining the feudal customs.<sup>180</sup>

Women question was taken up by the Namboothiri community in the second stage of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha’s activities. They identified that the *sambandham* and *adhivedanam* were the reasons for the plight of *antharjanams*. *Unninamboothiri* and *Yoghakeshmam* popularized *sajathivivaham* and asked Namboothiri youth to refrain from accepting *sambandham* relations in royal households and aristocratic Nair *tarawads*. Various strategies were adopted by the reformers for achieving revolutionary changes in the ritualistic customs. They wrote stories and poems, staged dramas, organized picketing and distributed notices and pamphlets among *antharjanams*. These activities finally culminated in the formation of Antharjana Samajam in 1934 under the leadership of Parvathi Nenmenimangalam. *Antharjanams* became ready to remove *ghosha* and the

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<sup>177</sup> C.K.Moosad, op.cit., p.162

<sup>178</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, *Dakshinayanam*, in V.T. Bhattathiripad, *V.T. yude Sampoorna Krithikal*, (Mal), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2015, (first published-2007), p. 252.

<sup>179</sup> Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham Secretary, ‘Yuvajana Sangham’, *Unninamboothiri*, 1921, book. 2, vol. 4, p. 179

<sup>180</sup> Kodanat Narayanan Namboothiripad, ‘Presidential address at the seventh annual session of Yuvajana Sangham’, *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, book. 7, vol. 4, pp.246-247

first woman to do so was Parvathy Manezhi, when she attended the Edakunni session of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in 1929. The same Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha witnessed the staging of the historic play written by V.T.Bhattathiripad, *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghatheku*, which created a furor in the Namboothiri community.

The third stage of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was from 1944 with the Ongallur session of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha. After the era of radical social reform movements, the activities of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha received a setback, may be due to the fact that they achieved their demands like that of the legalization of *parivedanam* and partition of the *illom* property and possibly because of the vibrant leaders getting involved in the nationalist movement either on the platform of Congress or through CSP. At Ongallur E.M.S.Namboothiripad in his momentous Presidential address, *Namboothiriye Manushyanakuvan*, observed that the community could not achieve any significant reform from the movement of the last decades, Namboothiris were still far behind other communities, hence unless Namboothiris accept non-traditional jobs and modern education they would continue to decline. Namboothiris were asked to abandon Namboothiri identity by merging themselves in a *Malayalee* identity.<sup>181</sup>

The twentieth century reform programme of Kerala was successful in disseminating the progressive democratic ideologies among the population. Both the lower caste associations and the upper caste associations could effectively undermine the obsolete traditional caste system. Aspirations of the middle class combined with the forces unleashed by colonialism, led to the

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<sup>181</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, *Namboothiriye Manushyanakan*' Presidential Address at Ongallur Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1944, published in T.A.Ushakumari (ed), *ThozhilKendrathileku Natakam Charithra Rekha Padanam*, (Mal), Samatha, Thrissur, 2014, pp.338-388

realization that the caste ridden social system was a stumbling block for social and economic progress. Accordingly they organized associations for achieving desired transformations. The ethic of social reform movement of twentieth century Kerala was diligence, modesty, prudence, reason and thrift.<sup>182</sup> Caste associations provided a platform for consolidating the rationalistic ideologies of the middle class and consequently in diffusing anti-colonial dogmas. However it has to be accepted that the caste association was a social adapter, improvised to connect two sets of social and political forms. It helped to reconcile the values of traditional society with those of the new order by continuing to use caste as the basis for social organization.<sup>183</sup>

### **Legalization of *Tavazhi* Partition and the Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1933**

With the dawn of twentieth century the joint families became inconsistent for a modern world and for a community aspiring new, to be precise a Western lifestyle. Consequently families became the target of all discourses and the resultant identification of joint families as the source of all incongruousness within the family and society led to its decline. The issues concerning joint family came to be known as the popular ‘joint family controversy’, among Indian family sociologists and this aspect owes its origin to the writings of western family sociologists.<sup>184</sup> Analyzing the influence of industrialization and urbanization on family throughout the world, William J Goode concluded that, there is a movement from extended family towards a conjugal or companionate family and that Northern Europe exported the idea of conjugal family to other parts of the world. He believed that conjugal

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<sup>182</sup> P.Chandramohan, ‘The Growth of Social Reform Movements in Kerala’, op.cit., p. 485

<sup>183</sup> David Arnold, Robin Jeffrey and James Manor, Caste Associations in South India, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XIII, no. 3, 1976, pp.353-373

<sup>184</sup> Krishna Chakraborty, *Family in India*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2002, p.24

couple helped to create and serve the industrial order and argued that the newly emerging family patterns offered people with new potentialities.<sup>185</sup>

The discourse on new family was concerned with an abstracted, popular notion of the joint family which was found to be inadequate because of absence of individual identity, restriction of women in the household, heterogeneous influences on children, irrational imposition of authority, hierarchical arrangement of power and privileges sanctioned by customs but not validated by reason and lack of intimacy, informality and equality.<sup>186</sup> In short all the basic tenets of joint family, which were exalted by the Hindu tradition, were subjected to criticism by the emergent western educated middle class. However in India, late nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed organized movements against the demolition of joint families and restitution of conjugal nuclear families.<sup>187</sup> Main issues that disrupted the peaceful life of joint families included discord over property rights, conflict due to financial indigence, disorder arising out of children of various kins, over and above women, who were confined to inner quarters of house, quarreled on trivial issues.<sup>188</sup>

The urge to replace joint families with nuclear families set in motion in Malabar during the last decades of nineteenth century and early years of twentieth century. There was a growing realization about the hollowness of the joint families, which obstructed the development of individuality and so

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<sup>185</sup> William J Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, The Free Press of Glencoe, London 1964, p. 380

<sup>186</sup> Pradip Kumar Bose, 'Reconstituting Private Life', in Ghanshyam Shah(ed) *Social Transformation In India*, vol. II, Rawat Publicaions, Jaipur, 1997, p. 512

<sup>187</sup> Bengal being the first region exposed to colonial influences was the pioneer in staging oppositions for joint families. Similar tendencies could be seen in Bombay and Madras in later periods. Meredith Borthwick, op.cit., Mytheli Srinivas, op.cit.

<sup>188</sup> Pradip Kumar Bose, op.cit., p. 515.



opposed by the middle class. Mounting feuds in *tarawads* made people to long for its demise. Increase in basic necessities, change in the pattern of life, absence of tolerance, disparity in income of different members, irresponsible *karanavan* were some of the reasons that sparked off discord in *tarawads*. *Tarawads* were property holding lineage institutions, where no one had individual access to property but at the same time each member possessed right to maintenance from the *tarawad*. Hence to constitute a conjugal nuclear family without the support of *tarawad* or properties from the *tarawad* was impossible. Naturally the discourses on familial transition in Malabar culminated in the formulation of proposals for partition of the *tarawad*. Transition to nuclear family was comparatively easier for lower caste like Ezhavas, as there were no issues related to the partition of extensive land holdings as among the upper castes.<sup>189</sup>

Social reform movement among both Nairs and Namboothiris focusing on the institutionalization of a conjugal family could be explained as an attempt to provide 'intimate conjugal family' for men of both the communities. As men of these two communities, except *grihasthans* of Namboothiri families never had a 'family', in the present understanding of the term. *Kanishtans* of Namboothiri community, due to the existence primogeniture, could never enter into proper marital relations and were to content with *sambandham* relations, which couldn't fetch them 'wife or children'. On the other hand for Nair men, though they were married, wife and children were out of their hegemonic territory. Therefore both the partilineal and matrilineal families of Malabar wanted a reorganization of their familial tradition in order to establish 'patriarchal conjugal family'.

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<sup>189</sup> T.C.Varghese, op.cit., p. 102

Attempts made by the middle class Nairs of Malabar in the last years of nineteenth century to refashion their marriage customs through legislative intervention had ended in failure. Their efforts to transform ‘concubines’ into ‘legal wives’ through registering marriages were rejected by the community. Moreover it was clear by twentieth century that the type or form of marriage was not the issue in the community, but the *tarawad* was to be addressed and reconditioned in accordance with the changed circumstances. Events that took place in the first two decades of twentieth century also contributed towards the formation of a public opinion which went against the institution of *tarawad*.

Social reform ideology and teachings of reformers like Chattampi Swamikal, Brahmananda Sivayogi and others also coincided with the interests of junior members of *tarawads*. Chattampi Swamikkal was an advocate of women’s equality. He was a critic of Brahmin dominated social conditions that had prevailed in Kerala during his life time, and he argued that Brahmins were migrants to Kerala and they could not claim *janmam* rights on lands. Swamikal asserted that Brahmins, subordinated the indigenous population and considered Nairs as Sudras, to humiliate Nairs and maintain them as a servile class.<sup>190</sup> For him the development of Nair community was of prime importance, to improve the whole lot of the caste he asked people to stop observing irrational rituals like *thalikettukalyanam* and *thirandukuli* which impoverished many middle class and upper class Nair *tarawads*.<sup>191</sup> Change in *marumakkathayam* system of inheritance was vigorously proposed by

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<sup>190</sup> Thottappalli Ravindranath, *Sreesankaran Muthal Sreenarayanan Varae*, (Mal), D C Books, Kottayam, 2012, p. 54

<sup>191</sup> P.F.Gopakumar, ‘Chattampi Swamikkal: ‘Architect of the new world of indigenous resistance’, P.F.Gopakumar (ed), op.cit., p.50

Brahmananda Sivayogi, who held that *marumakkathayam* was unfit for the modern period.<sup>192</sup>

Transformation in familial relationship was the most important factor that went against the matrilineal *tarawads*. Educated and employed Nair youth were relieved from the dependence on *tarawad* and from the control of *karanavan*. They were no more ready to remain under the atrocious rule of *karanavan* and started demanding money or their share of property for education or to move out of the main residence of the *tarawad* either with mother and siblings or with wife. Such claims of the junior members were turned down by the heads of the *tarawad*. But in the changed circumstances they became bold enough to sue *karanavan* in court and most of the cases in the early years of twentieth century were those filed against the authority of *karanavan*.<sup>193</sup> V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar observed that, “there is hardly a *tarawad* of substance in Malabar that is not in courts.”<sup>194</sup> Misappropriation of *tarawad* property by *karanavan* for the benefit of wife and children was one of the main charges laid against him. Legislative interference in Malabar *tarawads* was a very urgent necessity, from the economic point of view, unless otherwise the *tarawads* would collapse. In the then existing system of management no one was interested in the property of *tarawad*, the *karanavan* would grab as much as he could for his wife and children. He was not at all interested in the improvement of the *tarawad* property. Likewise junior

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<sup>192</sup> Brahmananda Sivayogi rejected *thalikettukalyanam* and *thirandukuli* as obsolete customs. M.Sahadevan, *From Brahminism to Liberalism*, Payyoli, 2008, p.144; A.K.Nair, *Brahmanandaswami Sivayogi*, (Mal),Published by P.V.Balakrishnan, Cannanore, 1971, p. 145

<sup>193</sup> C.Vasantha Kumari, op.cit., p. 191; Thalassery court records also show that litigations on *tarawad* properties were increasing in North Malabar.

<sup>194</sup> V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar, PMLC, vol. LVII, 31/1/1931, p. 305

members of the *tarawads* were also least bothered by the improvement of the property, they were satisfied if the maintenance was adequately provided.<sup>195</sup>

Increase in the difference of opinion and litigations between *tavazhi* and parent *tarawad* hastened the partition of matrilineal joint families. *Tavazhis* started fighting among each other on manifold issues including the possession of tenancy rights on land, movable properties of the *tarawad*, and affairs in connection with the marriages of the members.<sup>196</sup> Appointment of *karanavan* was one of the main reasons that affected the mutual relation of *tavazhis*. Every *tavazhi* wanted their member to become the *karanavan* of the *tarawad*, though the appointment was done on the basis of seniority, it led to contentions. *Tavazhis* when they have members employed in government services or when they have income from other sources, tried to act as autonomous units out of the control of *tarawad* and *karanavan*. The quarrel among family members in some *tarawads* resulted in criminal offences.<sup>197</sup>

Development of a group of young professionals with considerable number of law graduates also contributed in strengthening the movement to end *marumakkathayam*. Such professional groups, eager to reframe the social fabric, came into being in Madras, Calicut and Palakkad.<sup>198</sup> They were active in anti-colonial movement along with their efforts to restructure the social conditions of their community. They published articles and reports in leading newspapers and magazines on the inevitability of transformation in the matrilineal system of inheritance and also the necessity to introduce tenancy reforms. K.P.Kesava Menon participated in an essay competition organized by the Madras Malayali Club on ‘whether Malayala *tarawads* need partition’,

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<sup>195</sup> U.C.Subramaniya Bhatt, PMLC, vol. LVII, 31/1/1931, p. 306

<sup>196</sup> Three *tavazhis* of Kuruppath *tarawad* of Palakkad embittered their relation due to the irregularity in the division of gold ornaments of the *tarawad* among *tavazhis*. Interview with Kuruppath Komalam Amma, Palakkad, on 24/12/2015

<sup>197</sup> V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar, PMLC, vol. LVII. 31/1/1931, p. 305

<sup>198</sup> C.K.Moosad, op.cit., p. 46

and he won the first prize.<sup>199</sup> Such efforts played a major role in generating a move against matrilineal system and the joint family.

Propaganda for partition of *tarawads* was made through magazines by the activists of the Nair community. Short stories, plays, articles, poems and individual experiences were used to popularize the need for reform. Many articles were about the increasing feuds between *karanavans* and *anantharavans* in *tarawads* and most of the upper class and middle class *tarawads*, throughout Kerala, were engaged in litigations. Huge amount of money was being spent on advocates and this created much financial burden on *tarawads*.<sup>200</sup> Litigations among the *tarawad* members made life miserable in Nair houses; moreover many *tarawads* were like 'refugee camps', with large number of mutually fighting members and no one to manage.<sup>201</sup> It was contended that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Nair *karanavans* were very keen in increasing the property of *tarawad*, whereas in twentieth century most of the *karanavans* were ruthlessly destroying the family possessions. The property which was to be used for the benefit of the *tarawad* members were manipulated by *karanavans*, for the sake of their wives and children.<sup>202</sup> K.Kannan Nair proposed the adoption of patriarchy by the community as the only solution for the progress of Nair from the then social catastrophe.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> The competition was the idea of Kesari Kunhiraman Nair and K.P.Kesava Menon wrote in favour of partition. K.P.Kesava Menon, op.cit., p. 33

<sup>200</sup> P.G.Govinda Pillai, 'Bhaganiyamavasyakatha', *Sudrasanam*, 1909, book. 1, vol. 2, pp. 44-49

<sup>201</sup> Editorial, 'Nairsamudayathil Pithrdayasthapana Margham', *Nairsamudaya Parishkarini*, 1905, book. 1, vol. 12, pp. 310-312

<sup>202</sup> R.P., 'Tarawadyogham', *Lakshmibai*, 1921, book. 17, vol. 4, pp. 122-127; P.N.Vasudevan Nair, 'Taravattumahima' (story), *Nairsamudaya Parishkari*, 1916, book. 2, vol. 4, pp. 96-99

<sup>203</sup> K.Kannan Nair, 'Nairsamudayathil Pithrdayasthapana Margham', *Lakshmibai*, 1919, book. 14, vol. 10, pp. 337-350

In order to materialize reform in the *marumakkathayam* system, a consensus must be formulated against it and hence the objective was achieved by portraying *marumakkathayam* as an archaic inheritance pattern. Anthropological details of the matrilineal system were presented by quoting Lewis Morgan and Frederick Engels. Customs of Nairs were described to be the vestiges of ancient period when men lived in a stage of primitive promiscuity.<sup>204</sup> Likewise historical facts of other matrilineal communities in other parts of the world were explained in order to establish that *marumakkathayam* had several inherent complexities which would lead to its decline.<sup>205</sup> Authors invariably argued that most of the matrilineal societies that had existed in the world perished in course of time, as they could not cope with the modernization and capitalism. Henceforth *marumakkathayam* which was an outdated practice of an uncivilized world was to be replaced by the patriarchal system. Such a transformation would relieve Nairs from the scorn, which they were facing, at the hand of Europeans and Brahmins.<sup>206</sup> Writings in magazines along with the teachings of reform leaders created an atmosphere conducive for changes in the community. Court interpretations of natural rights of *marumakkathayam* individuals and the urge to end up the matrilineal inheritance altogether forged the death knell for the system.

When there were attempts to raise public opinion in favour of partition the orthodoxy especially the members of *sthani tarawads* and landlords made their desperate attempt to prevent the impending danger of partition. They found fault with the younger generation of Nair community who were

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<sup>204</sup> R. Eshwara Pillai, 'Thalikettukalyanam', *Lakshmibai*, 1909, book. 5, vol. 4, pp. 143-149

<sup>205</sup> K.Kannan Nair, 'Nayanmarude Purathana Dambatya Acharaghal', *Nairsamudayaparishkaraini*, 1905, book. 1, vol. 7, pp. 195-201

<sup>206</sup> P.K.Narayana Pilla, 'Achara Parishkaram', *Atmaposhini*, 1915, book. 6, vol. 3, pp. 112-115.

influenced by modern education and western customs and practices.<sup>207</sup> Some tried to argue that there was no ‘uncertainty’ in *tarawads*, the concept of uncertainty was popularized by a few advocates and government officials. Hence there was no need of a legislation enabling partition in *tarawads*; the existing problems could be solved by appropriate management of the properties together by *karanavans* and *anantharavans*.<sup>208</sup>

An article written by K.N. Nair expressed strong apprehensions on the fate of Nair women if the proposed abolition of *marumakkathayam* was legalized. In 1923 he wrote that a Nair woman had inalienable rights on the *tarawad* property and she was entitled to maintenance from *tarawad* till her death. No *karanavan* could turn her out from the *tarawad*, but after the legislation and the breakup of *tarawads* women were placed under the control of husband whom she was to depend for her life. A husband being the sole head of the family could ignore her or send her away when it pleased him. He asked whether any of the persons who were striving for legislative reforms ever thought of the fate that was awaiting women when the legislations were through. He wanted women to have assured security and husband’s responsibility towards wife must be made more binding on men.<sup>209</sup>

Though not many there were articles which criticized the entire attempts of middle class to achieve transformation in *marumakkathayam* practices. Legislative attempts to legalize marriages and to materialize the partition of *tarawads* were regarded as action that would adversely affect women of Malabar. Provisions to legalize marriage by means of registration

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<sup>207</sup> K.C.Manavikrama Raja, ‘*Tarawadu Bharanathile Aparayphatha*’, *Janmi*, 1914, book. 6, vol. 1, pp. 36-40

<sup>208</sup> *ibid.* Also see T.Anandan Nair, ‘*Tarawad*’, *Sudarsanam*, 1909, book. 1, vol.3, pp. 101-104

<sup>209</sup> K.N.Nair, in *Service*, 1923, p.342-344, quoted in K.Saradmoni, *op.cit.*, pp. 96-97

were condemned as it would make marital relations like that of contracts.<sup>210</sup> K.Chinnamma was of the opinion that *marumakkathayam* was on the verge of decline, and the transformation from which cannot be prolonged. She requested the reformers to ensure safeguards for women in the proposed legislation, which would take Nair community to patriarchy.<sup>211</sup> Partition of *tarawads* resulted in the decline of economic power of Nair community and Nair women with small amount of money or with a minute piece of land they obtained following the partition were struggling for life. She criticizes the 'selfish reformers' for destabilizing the life of Nair women, who were comfortable in their *tarawads*.<sup>212</sup> Articles critically evaluating the process of transformation of *marumakkathayam* were very few; this can be due to the fact that, many women hoped that the proposed legislation would end the uncertainties of their life in the troublesome atmosphere of *tarawads*.

Travancore was ahead of other regions in curbing *marumakkathayam* legally. Following the report of the Travancore *marumakkathayam* Committee the First Nair Act was enacted by the government legalizing *sambandham*. Besides husband was made the legal guardian of wife and 'non-adulterous wife' and children were entitled to half of husband's or father's property.<sup>213</sup> The Act recognized *tavazhi* partition of Nair *tarawads* and was not ready to initiate individual partition due to the fact that individual partition was opposed to the sentiments of the present community.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> K.Padmavathi Amma, 'Parishkrithareethiyilula Malayalivivaham', *Lakshmibai*, 1913, book 8, vol.7, pp.237-247

<sup>211</sup> K.Chinnamma, 'Samudaya Parishkaram', *Lakshmibai*, 1911, book 6, vol. 10 , pp. 343-360

<sup>212</sup> From the Presidential address of Mrs.Krishna Thampi at the Women's conference of NSS, reported in *Mahila*, 1940, book. 20, vol. 4&5 , pp. 117-119

<sup>213</sup> K.Saradmoni, op.cit., p. 92

<sup>214</sup> Report of Travancore Marumakkathayam Committee, 1908, paragraph. 125



Though the committee was aware of the fact that *tavazhi* partition was not a sufficient solution for the problems faced by Nair *tarawads*, in the words of K.P.Padmanabha Menon, “Legislation cannot of course, generate or enforce a feeling of union, amity and concord among the various members of the *tarawad* whose relationship to each other is of the most attenuated kind, almost nominal; but it can minimize considerably the opportunities of quarrel between the *karanavan* and junior members and consequent litigation and ruin of the *tarawad* property, so long as the present unnatural system in suffered to remain.”<sup>215</sup> In 1925 the Government came up with the Travancore Nair Regulation Amendment Act (Regulation II of 1925), which conceded the right for individual partition of *tarawad*. The act paved way for the institutionalization of patriarchy among the Nairs of Travancore, by making husband as the legal guardian of the wife.<sup>216</sup>

In Cochin the demand for reforms resulted in the formation of the First Nair Regulation Act in 1920, which legalized traditional marriages and also placed several controls on the power of *karanavan*. Cochin government ensured the total demise of *marumakkathayam* with the Cochin Nair Act of 1938 by permitting individual partition of *tarawad* property.<sup>217</sup> Conjugal relations among Nair couples were promoted by making husband as the legal guardian of wife and she was also entitled to half of the intestate property of the husband. With these two Acts *marumakkathayam* families entered into an era of patriarchal relationships.

### **Changes in Land Relations**

Land and *kanam* were important constituents of *marumakkathayam*

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<sup>215</sup> K.P.Padmanabha Menon, Memorandum in Report of Travancore *Marumakkathayam* Committee, 1908, paragraph. 124

<sup>216</sup> Saradmoni, op.cit., p. 96

<sup>217</sup> S.Ramachandran Nair, *Social and Cultural History of Colonial Kerala*, Nalanda Publishers, Kalady, 1999, p. 14

apart from *thalikettukalyanam* and *sambandham*. Change in land relations and land holding patterns resulted in wide reaching effects on the matrilineal households of Malabar. G.Arunima observed that the colonial state through the process of land survey and resettlement reduced *tarawads* to the status of a revenue paying intermediary, by abandoning the state's own stand that the *tarawad* had immemorial rights that provided it immunity from taxation.<sup>218</sup> The tenants improvement act of 1900, elevated the junior members who were cultivators in their own *tarawad* property to the status of 'tenants', ie. those who were the legal share holders in property were made equivalent to that of other tenants.<sup>219</sup> Change in the status of junior members in relation to the landed property made them more confident and subsequently led to the multiplication of litigations between *karanavans* and *anantharavans*.<sup>220</sup> The disaffected younger members of the households, often holding *kanam* tenures lent their support to the other group of *kanakkar*, both for securing the abolition of the matrilineal households and also for protecting their own interests of *kanam* holders.<sup>221</sup>

*Janmi-kudiyan* contentions that started in 19<sup>th</sup> century were not settled with the enactment of Tenants Improvement Act of 1887.<sup>222</sup> Consequently in 1930 the Malabar Tenancy Act was executed by the British Government

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<sup>218</sup> The land settlement resulted in a sizable transformation of *tarawads* and *janmis* from their earlier autonomous existence, which was the imposition of the colonial interpretation of the indigenous land relations, to that of ordinary households in other parts of South India. G.Arunima, op.cit., p. 158.

<sup>219</sup> The Malabar Compensation of tenants Improvement Act, 1900, clause-3, section 1 and 6. [http://www.lawsofindia.org/pdf/tamil\\_nadu/1900/1900TN1.pdf](http://www.lawsofindia.org/pdf/tamil_nadu/1900/1900TN1.pdf)

<sup>220</sup> *Karanavans* denied occupancy rights to junior members and to *tavazhis* who had beencultivating in the *tarawad* property and demanded the return of land to the *tarawad*. Kuttasseri Eriat Govindan Nair v Kuttasseri Eriat Sankaran Nair, ILR (M), XXXII, 1905, p.331

<sup>221</sup> G.Arunima, op.cit., p. 178

<sup>222</sup> Details regarding the tenancy movements during the period following the enactment of Tenants improvement act in 1887 and the amendment of the act in 1900 are discussed in the chapter II.

conferring security of tenures for tenants. Moreover evictions were also made illegal. *Kanakkars* were the real beneficiaries of the act, as they were assured the fixity of tenure and the right to get the renewal of *kanam* by paying the renewal fee which was also fixed.<sup>223</sup> As the major demand of the *kanakkars*, security of tenure, was accepted by the act, they were relieved of the danger of eviction by *janmis*. Subsequently they became more convinced to achieve the dissolution of *tarawads* and *marumakkathayam*.

### **Legislative Attempts against Marumakkathayam**

By the second decade of twentieth century reformers of the community came to the conclusion that the disintegration of the *tarawad* was the only remedy to the problems faced by Nairs. Quite naturally the governmental legislative apparatus was sought to enunciate the longed changes within the community by abolishing the *marumakkathayam* inheritance. After the enactment of the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896, a major attempt to initiate changes in the community's inheritance patterns was made by the Raja of Kollengode by introducing the Malabar Inheritance Bill in 1910, in the Madras legislature.<sup>224</sup> However the government concluded that people were

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<sup>223</sup> The Malabar Tenancy Act, 1929, clause- 11 and 17(a). *Janmis* from the very outset of the Tenancy legislation observed that the entire process was done in favour of *kanakkars* and on passing the Act great majority of *janmis* of Malabar would be soon reduced to unexpected suffering and penury. Vasumathi, 02/08/1929, NNPR July-August 1929.

<sup>224</sup> The bill proposed to provide the inheritance of the intestate property to the *tavazhi* rather than to the *tarawad*. The self acquired or separate property of a person with respect to which such person dies intestate shall devolve ; devolution of the property of a male (a) 1. On his mother her sons and daughters, 2. In the default of the above to his mother's mother, her sons and daughters, 3. In the default of the above, successively to his other female ancestors on the female line and to their sons and daughters. Devolution of the property of a female (b) 1. On her sons and daughters, 2. In the default of the above on the person who will succeed to the property under clause (a) if such a person were a male. Malabar Inheritance Bill, Bill no.1 of 1910, clause- 2 section a, subsection 1,2 and 3 and section b, subsection 1 and 2. Fort St.George Gazette, Supplement to Part IV, no. 4(1), 10/05/1910. When the opinions of 60

not clear about the changes that must be brought within the inheritance patterns of the *marumakkathayam tarawads*.<sup>225</sup>

The first proposal for partition of *tarawads* was made by Krishnan Nair by introducing The Malabar Partition Bill, 1910, in the Madras Legislature. Partition envisaged by the bill was the *tavazhi* partition and not individual partition.<sup>226</sup> Bill also proposed to regulate the power of *karanavans* of the *tarawad* and conferred equal power to the *karanavans* of *tavazhis*.<sup>227</sup> In 1913 K.P.Raman Menon introduced The Malabar Marriage and Inheritance Bill and the Malabar Partition and Succession Bill. Malabar marriage Bill was to provide legal sanction to all *sambandhams* and also to reduce the difficulties involved in obtaining divorce.<sup>228</sup> The bill proposed to provide the right of partition to all *tarawads*, by giving *tarawads* an option according to which, they could decide whether the *tarawad* was to be partitioned or to be maintained as joint property.<sup>229</sup> However after discussions the bill failed in legislature and could not form into an act.<sup>230</sup>

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people were sought on the bill, 52 supported the bill. Susan Thomas, op.cit., p. 150.

<sup>225</sup> G.O. No. 91, Legislative Department, 20/7/1910

<sup>226</sup> The Malabar Partition Bill, (Bill No. 2 of 1910) clause 7 (1&2), in Fort St. George Gazette, Supplement to Part IV, no. 4(1), 10/05/1910

<sup>227</sup> The Malabar Partition Bill, Legislative Department proceedings, 1910, no. 30-34

<sup>228</sup> The procedure of divorce according to the Malabar Marriage Act was extremely tedious; Raman Menon proposed to rectify these disabilities through his bill. The Malabar Marriage and Inheritance Bill, Bill No. 5 of 1913, Fort St. George Gazette, no. 13(1), 9/9/1913.

<sup>229</sup> *Tarawads* could decide with two third majorities if they wanted to remain as impartible, and the decision was to be informed the District Collector, within six months from the enactment of the bill, who would register the *tarawad* as impartible. The Malabar Partition and Succession Bill, Bill No.6 of 1913, Fort St. George Gazette, No. 13(1), 9/9/1913

<sup>230</sup> Susan Thomas, op.cit., p. 155; In the meanwhile several other bills were also introduced in the Madras legislature regarding the partition of joint families of the entire Madras Presidency, one such bill was presented by M.Ramachandra Rao, The Hindu Co-parceners Partition Bill of 1915. The bill proposed to

Mounting litigations regarding the mismanagement of *tarawad* property by the *karanavan* and suits for removing the *karanavan* from the designation made Prabhakaran Thampan, to introduce, The *Tarawad* Management Bill for the proper management of the *tarawad* property.<sup>231</sup> The bill proposed stringent restrictions on the activities of the *karanavan* by making him answerable to *anantharavans* in the management of the *tarawad* properties.<sup>232</sup> Besides *karanavan* was entitled to appropriate as emoluments, along with his maintenance, an amount not exceeding 5% of the net income of *tarawad* during that year and the amount was to be considered as his self-acquisition.<sup>233</sup> *Anantharavans* were made entitled to maintenance proportionate to the income of the *tarawad*, whether he lived within the *tarawad* or outside.<sup>234</sup> The bill failed in legislature as the members out rightly rejected it due to its unworkable provisions. Parbhakaran Thampan could not realize that the *tarawads* of Malabar were in utter confusion and nothing less than partition was the solution. However, the right to demand the removal of *Karanavan* marked a significant change in the customs of *tarawad* as it was maintained by the colonial courts that, “the *tarawad* cannot itself remove

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confer the right of partition on members of Hindu joint family; they could demand partition and the property thus acquired must be considered as his self-acquired property, which he could dispose at his will. The Hindu Co-parceners Partition Bill of 1915, clause 2 & 3, Malabar District Gazette Supplement, April 1915

<sup>231</sup> Suits demanding the removal of *karanavan* were filed by junior members throughout Malabar. ILR, MLJ and the Tellicherry court records points towards this aspect. To cite a few such cases- Chindan Nambiyar v Kunhi Raman Nambiyar, MLJ, part II, vol. XXXV, 1918

<sup>232</sup> *Karanavan* was made liable for all economic transactions of the *tarawad*, he was to maintain account of all the income and expenditure of the *tarawad* and the accounts should be made available for the inspection of *anthanravans*. Junior members of the *tarawad* were given right to file suit for the removal of *karanavan* if he does not abide by the provisions of the proposed act. The *Tarawad* Management Bill, clause 11, 13 and 24 in GO no. 1804, 21/07/1923, Law General Department.

<sup>233</sup> *ibid.*, clause. 14

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*, Clause 20.

*karanavan* from the post even by the unanimous vote of the members, because his position comes to him by nature like that of a guardian and in this case he cannot be deprived of it except through the instrumentality of the court of justice.”<sup>235</sup>

Madras Government delayed the process of legislation on the issue of *marumakkathayam*, as they could not come to an agreement on a decision regarding the pattern of change that could be instituted. Just like the tenancy legislation Government was not ready to alienate the relationship with *janmis*, but the ‘middle class’ determined to restructure the social conditions, introduced various bills in the Madras legislature proposing changes in the marriage, inheritance and demanding partition of the *tarawads*. K.R.Karant introduced The *Marumakkathayam* and *Aliyasantham* Branch Partition Bill in 1929<sup>236</sup> arguing that *tarawad* system could not co-exist with modern ideology; hence it was to be broken up for the progress of the community. The bill entitled all branches of the *tarawads* to claim separation and allotment of share; partition was to be on the basis of per-capita share of all living members of the *tarawad*.<sup>237</sup> In the same year K.Madhavan Nair introduced a *Marumakkathayam* Bill, proposing *tavazhi* partition of *tarawads*, which totally repudiated any scope of individual partition.<sup>238</sup> However these two bills failed to get converted into act.

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<sup>235</sup> Topics of Malabar Law, The *Karanavar*- His Removal, *Madras Law Journal*, vol. XI, 1901, p. 1

<sup>236</sup> Karant’s Bill seems to have been prepared in 1927, but it was introduced in the assembly only in 1929. PMLC, second session vol. XLII, 12/3/1928 to 27/3/1928, p.448

<sup>237</sup> The *Marumakkathayam* and *Aliyasantham* Branch Partition Bill, Chapter II, clause- 3&4, in Fort St George Gazette, 15(2), 25/6/1929

<sup>238</sup> The *Marumakkathayam* Bill, 1929, chapter VII, clause 39 (a), (b), 41, G.O. no. 264, 8/6/1929, Law department. It was observed that by permitting *tavazhi* partition as per the bill, there would be an increase in the number of *karanavans* in *marumakkathayam* families and so would be the number of suits for maintenance. *Malayala Manorama*, 02/11/1929, NNPR July-August 1929.

Final in the list of *marumakkathayam* bills were those of V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar and R.M.Palat in 1931, which were considered for the enactment of *Marumakkathayam* Act.<sup>239</sup> V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar moving The *Marumakkathayam* Bill, said that, “the Malabar Marriage Act did not legalize *sambandham* but provided for the optional registration of *sambandham*. The bill seeks to invest *sambandham* with all the incidents of a legal marriage. Apart from marriage and inheritance the need for partition of *tarawad* was long felt. The Malabar *tarawads* have expanded beyond all natural limits, so that it has become difficult to trace the exact relationship of members composing them.”<sup>240</sup> Regarding marriages the bill observed that the conjugal union of *marumakkathayam* females with men, with whom conjugal union was sanctioned by the community, when solemnized openly in accordance with customs of the community were deemed to be valid marriages.<sup>241</sup> The bill legalized ‘all kinds’ marriages of *marumakkathayam* females without the option of registration. Along with retaining the restriction of *anuloma* concept, made provision for continuing hypergamous marriage relations for Nair women. R.M.Palat’s bill demanded *tavazhi* partition, but excluded the *Sthani* families and Malikhana holders from the purview of the bill. The reason for exempting such families explained by R.M.Palat was that, in their *tarawads* ladies lived in *tarawad* houses and were visited by their husbands and they had not begun to live with their husbands and were not accustomed to visit husband’s *tarawads*. Therefore since the idea of paternal family was underdeveloped among them, there was neither so much

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<sup>239</sup> V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar’s bill was The *Marumakkathayam* Bill, bill no. 13 of 1931 and R.M.Palat’s Bill was The *Marumakkathayam* bill, bill no. 20 of 1931

<sup>240</sup> PMLC, Second session of the fourth legislative council, 1931, vol.LVIII, part II, p.304-305.V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar’s bill included a schedule of 17 Kovilakam’s which were to be excluded from the purview of the Bill. G.O. 423, 17/11/1932, Law (Legislative) Department

<sup>241</sup> The *Marumakkathayam* Bill, 1931, chapter II, clause 3 (a)&(b), G.O. 292-294, 21/08/1931, Law Legislative Department

discontent nor demand for reform among them as the general body of the followers of *marumakkathayam* law.<sup>242</sup>

After discussions in the council both bills were referred to a select committee on the request of its presenters.<sup>243</sup> Most of the people, both inside the council and outside, favoured Narayanan Nambiyar's bill<sup>244</sup> and the most important defect of R.M.Palat's bill was that it excluded *sthani* families from the operation of the bill.<sup>245</sup> Nevertheless a significant divergent opinion regarding the life of *sthani* Nair women could be seen in the article of G.M.Ammuvaikkara Amma. Being members of *sthani* Nair *tarawads*, they were not permitted to attend schools, hence unlike other Nair women they were not exposed to the benefits of education. She portrayed the miserable

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<sup>242</sup> R.M.Palat, PMLC, 1931, vol. LVIII, no. 3, p.405

<sup>243</sup> G.O.no. 31-33, 2/2/1932, Law (Legislative Department) and G.O.no. 412-414, 11/09/1931, Law (Legislative) department. At the instance of the committee bill was circulated for opinion among the classes affected by this bill. Among 185 persons to which the bill was sent, 114 replies were obtained and only 17 of the replies were against all these measures. R.M.Palat provided the details of replies to the bill in the council as per his words, "among the 17 replies ten were from South Kanara and out the remaining seven two were Tamil Brahmins who were not affected by the bill, one is a Mappila following the *Marumakkathayam* system who again is not affected by the bill and the other is Collector of Malabar an English man. Therefore only three *Marumakkathayam* Malayali Hindus who in any way are said to be opposed to this bill. All these three were from North Malabar and not a single one from south Malabar were against the bill." PMLC, vol.LIX, no.2, 27/01/1932,pp.199-200

<sup>244</sup> *Marumakkathayam* conferences were held throughout Malabar for raising public opinion regarding the bills. One such conference was convened on 26/01/1932 at Kozhikode, K.Madhavan Nair, Moorkoth Kumaran, P.Narayanan Nambiyar, E.S.Unni, K.Devaki Amma were some of the prominent members who attended the meeting. The conference supported Narayanan Nambiyar's bill largely due to the fact that R.M.Palatt's bill was silent about reforming the marriage practices of the community. *Mathrubhumi*, 27/01/1932.

<sup>245</sup> R.M.Palat explained in the council that as their women would never live with usband in his house, it would not be fair to throw them out into the world. If partition is allowed the men folk would divide the property and these women, most of them having Namboothiri husbands would be in a condition with nowhere to go. G.O. 409-411, 11/11/1931, Law (Legislative) Department; PMLC, vol.LIX, no.2, 27/01/1932, p. 201.



life of *sthani* Nair women under irresponsible *karanavans* and brothers and their husbands, mostly Namboothiris, were under no obligation to maintain wife or children. Unfortunately *karanavans* would never permit to marry men from within the community. She expressed her anxiety on the marriage reforms that were taking place among Namboothiris and Nair, and requested the reformers to consider them also in the reform agenda.<sup>246</sup>

The select committee observed that the bulk of the public opinion was in favour of a comprehensive measure dealing with marriage, inheritance and partition. Hence the select committee adopted Nambiyar's bill as the basis for all discussions, by incorporating a few provisions from Palat's Bill.<sup>247</sup> The committee after considerations redrafted a bill which was passed by the council into The Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act.

The Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act was the result of legislative attempts made by the middle class of Nair community for about 50 years. The Act provided terms and conditions in regularizing marriage, inheritance, *tarawad* management and partition.<sup>248</sup> The term *sambandham* was omitted in

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<sup>246</sup> G.M.Ammuvaikkara Amma, 'Sthani Nair Streekal', *Lakshmibai*, 1917, book. 12, no. 9, pp. 409-412

<sup>247</sup> Narayanan Nambiyar's bill dealt with all these subjects whereas R.M.Palat's Bill dealt only with partition and inheritance. G.O.349-350, 14/09/1932, Law (legislative) Department Narayanan Nambiyar's Bill proposed that on dissolution of marriage wife was to be given compensation as decided by the courts, but not exceeding an amount of Rs. 3000. However the select committee in the view of facilities that had existed for obtaining dissolution of *marumakkathayam* marriage, they found it unnecessary to insist on the payment of compensation to wife and the clause was removed from the bill. The *Marumakkathayam* Bill, bill no. 13 of 1931, chapter II, clause 7, in G.O. 423, 17/11/1932, Law (Legislative) Department; G.O. 349-350, 14/09/1932, Law (legislative) Department.

<sup>248</sup> The objective of the Act was declared as, "to define and amend in certain aspects the law relating to marriage, guardianship, intestate succession, family management and partition applicable to persons governed by *marumakkathayam* law of inheritance. G.O. 161-162, 28/3/1933, Law (Legislative) Department. When the bill was proposed, people who followed Aliyasanthanam system of inheritance were also brought under its purview, but

the Act and was replaced by marriage and the Act legalized marriages openly solemnized in accordance with customary ceremonies and of those between among whom conjugal union was not prohibited by any custom of the community.<sup>249</sup> The community was taken to follow monogamous marriages, even if the personal law permits polygamous relationships.<sup>250</sup> Dissolution of marriage was made possible only with the mediation of court of justice, where application for dissolution of marriage could be given both by husband and wife. The Act successfully instituted patriarchal relations into a matrilineal community, by investing the guardianship of wife and children on husband and father respectively. He was made the guardian of her person, children and property. Moreover women were made to live with the husband, unless otherwise she would be denied maintenance.<sup>251</sup> Wife and children were entitled to the half of the intestate property of the husband/father no matter he being a *marumakkathayi* or non-*marumakkathayi*.<sup>252</sup>

Authority of the *karanavan* in the management of the *tarawad* was recognized by the Act, provided he maintained all accounts of the *tarawad*.<sup>253</sup> *Tavazhi* partition was allowed which was to be affected with the consent of majority members of the *tavazhi*. Management of the *tavazhi* after partition was to be in terms with the rules laid down for the management of *tarawad* by

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later as per their demand they were excluded from operation of the Act and separate Act was drafted for them. Besides, The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 was repealed by the act.

<sup>249</sup> The Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act, chapter II, clause 2 (i)&(ii), in G.O. 161-162, 28/3/1933, Law (Legislative) Department

<sup>250</sup> *ibid.*, chapter II, clause 5 (i)&(ii); In Travancore, S.J.Nair submitted a bill, which proposed to permit polygamy within the community. Editorial, 'S.J.Nairude Nair Regulation Bedhaghadhi Bill', *Mahila*, 1934, book. 14, vol. 2, pp.3-5

<sup>251</sup> Chapter III clause 13(1) of The Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act stated that, "Provided that the wife shall not be entitled to maintenance from the husband if she refuses to live with him without just cause."

<sup>252</sup> The Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act, chapter VI, clause 19,20,21,22, 30, 31, in G.O. 266-264, 28/3/1933, Law (Legislative) Department

<sup>253</sup> *ibid.*, chapter V, clause 32.

the Act.<sup>254</sup> *Tarawads* were given the option to register as impartible with Collector by presenting a petition signed by 2/3 major members of the *tarawad*.<sup>255</sup>

In Malabar the Nair reform movement of the twentieth century was virtually reduced to an ‘anti-*marumakkathayam*’ movement, which strenuously revolted against the matrilineal system. The need to transform *marumakkathayam* was felt by the men of the community to cope up with the changed socio-economic scenario of the society and hence the movement turned out to be totally a male dominated movement. In 1890s the concern of the reformers was legalization of *sambandham*, but by 1920s and 1930s the issue changed to *tarawad* and property. Marriage was no more an issue among the followers of *marumakkathayam* but the property involved in the marriage relations became prominent. Consequently wife and children were entitled to the half of the property of the husband or father irrespective of the fact that he belonged to *marumakkathayam* community or not. With this provision Nair women and children obtained legal claim to the property of Namboothiri husband and father. Moreover though the marriage of Nair women with lower caste men was prohibited, the act generously placed all provisions for continuing the benefits of hypergamous marriage. However women were taken out of the security of the matrilineal *tarawads* and were inducted into the newly forged patriarchal families.<sup>256</sup>

Legalization of *sambandham* relations along with entitling the wife and children to the half of the husbands’ property adversely affected the interest of the Namboothiri community. The act put an end to a system of marital relation

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<sup>254</sup> *ibid.*, chapter VI, clause 38,41

<sup>255</sup> An impartible *tarawad* could be divided if 2/3 members of the *tarawad* desired it and petitioned the collector. *ibid.*, chapter VII, clause 44 (1), (2)

<sup>256</sup> B.B.Amma, ‘Streekalum Upajeevanamarghagalum’, *Mahila*, 1940, book 20, vol.2, pp.25-27

which was devoid of mutual property rights and was criticized for being merely a sexual relation. Orthodox factions of the Namboothiri community denounced the act as a negation of their personal laws. *Marumakkathayam* act in effect put an end to the abuses of the Namboothiri primogeniture, namely the irregular unions in which the Namboothiris had used to indulge in without any obligation on their part.<sup>257</sup> The younger generation of the Namboothiri community welcomed the act as it would strengthen their demands for institutionalizing *sajathivivaham*.<sup>258</sup> Nevertheless it was noted that in Travancore after the enactment of the Nair Regulation, Namboothiri youth were trying to establish *sambandham* relations with royal families.<sup>259</sup>

In the process of legislation women's voices were rarely heard. Neither the Government nor the reformers ever felt it necessary to ascertain the opinion of women regarding the changes proposed. Government appointed P.Appu Nair as a special member in the council while dealing with *Marumakkathayam* Bill and Namboothiri Bill, but Government was not ready to appoint a woman representative for the same purpose. However we have to realize the fact that women of Malabar were aware of what was going on in the council. By 1920s and 1930s there were quite a good number of educated women in Malabar who were capable of analyzing the procedures and prospects of reform. The only woman voice heard in the council during the discussions was that of K.Alamelumangatharayamma MLC. She observed that, "though the two bills have passed through all stages, it must be

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<sup>257</sup> Chandra Mohan, 'The Growth of Social Reform Movements in Kerala', op.cit., p. 469

<sup>258</sup> Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad expressed his gratitude towards the Nair community by making certain provisions which would abstain the Namboothiri youth from entering in *sambandham* relation with Nair women. Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, 'Nammude Abhivridhi Marghahal', *Bhoosurakesari*, 1926, book. 1, vol. 1, pp. 3-9

<sup>259</sup> M.Ramavarma Thampan, 'Namboothirimarum Sambandhavum', *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, vol. 7, issue. 10, pp. 562-566

confessed that the wishes and desires of educated women of Malabar had not been fully met by these measures. Still something is better than nothing hence these deserved to be welcomed. I feel gratified particularly at the fact that the amendment for the retention of polygamy has been rejected by the Council.”<sup>260</sup> But she didn’t make it clear what were the ‘wishes and desires’ of the educated women of Malabar.

*Marumakkathayam* in Malabar received first major setback in 1933 when the partition of *tarawads* was legalized. However this does not mean that all the Nair *tarawads* were at once partitioned. The pace of partition was higher in Travancore may be due to the fact that there disintegration of *tarawads* had already set in and ideologically there were more consensuses against *marumakkathayam* than in Malabar. But in due course of time every *tarawad* accepted partition - *tavazhi* partition- as the only solution for the problems faced by them. By 1947 very few descent groups remained which had not divided their property according to the provisions of the Act, or whose property was not in process of partition by the courts.<sup>261</sup> Several reasons have been put forward by scholars for the decline of mother- right inheritance systems.

The matrilineal family organization ceased to exist under economic changes brought about by contact with Western industrial nations. The root cause for the modern kinship change appears to be the gradual incorporation of the society in a unitary market system, in which markets cease to be isolated and are linked in a common standard of value and land and other natural resources become privately owned and potentially marketable commodities.<sup>262</sup> C.J.Fuller disputes Gough’s argument that the entry of land

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<sup>260</sup> PMLC, vol. LXIII, No.4, 03/11/1932, p.567

<sup>261</sup> Kathleen Gough, ‘Modern Disintegration of Matrilineal Descent groups’, in David M.Schneider and Kathleen Gough (ed), p.647

<sup>262</sup> *ibid.*, p. 640

into the market was the root cause for disintegration. If the entry of land into market was the cause, he argues, why did *tarawads* in Malabar persisted as property holders for so much longer than in those in Travancore, when land entered the market in Malabar seventy years before it did in Travancore. He regarded that the prosperity of Syrian Christians made profound influence upon Nair reformers for the development of an ideology in favour of change.<sup>263</sup> Von Ehrenfels observed that joint family and *marumakkathayam* were incompatible with modernity, hence the Nair reformers decided that both must vanish and was to be replaced by patrilineal elementary families.<sup>264</sup>

Criticizing the male bias entrenched in the discipline of anthropology, Saradmoni argued that changes in land relations and the character of land very largely contributed to the erosion of matriliney in Travancore. She observed when *tarawads* were partitioned women failed to get sufficient land or property to ensure economic security.<sup>265</sup> But Saradmoni's argument cannot be accepted that while partitioning as far as Malabar was considered partition was done on per capita basis as per the provisions of the act. K.N.Panikkar maintains that the rejection of dominant ideology and related institutions were due to the expansion of money economies in the post-fifteenth century period and intensified under British rule, and the policy of colonial rulers of creating an English educated middle class for administrative purposes.<sup>266</sup> G.Arunima maintained that the changing structure of the matrilineal family in Malabar was, the product of its engagement with the colonial state, whose attempts at codification of *marumakkathayam* laws resulted in utter confusion. Moreover the Nair reformers tried to migrate

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<sup>263</sup> C.J.Fuller, op.cit., pp. 146-148.

<sup>264</sup> U.R.Von Ehrenfels, 'Matrilineal joint Family Patterns In India' in George Kurian (ed) *The Family in India – a Regional View*, Mouton, Paris, 1974, p.94

<sup>265</sup> Saradmoni, op.cit., pp. 157-158

<sup>266</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, op.cit., p. 198

themselves into the image of ‘Indian.’<sup>267</sup> However it has to be admitted that the colonial presence and its resultant formation of middle class, which languished to carve their families into a pan-Indian model became the death kennel of matriliney. Moreover the *janmi-kudiyam* issues of twentieth century also undermined the existence of tarawads.

The transition from joint family to elementary family was not effortless for large landowning *tarawads*. Many of them had to approach courts for a fair decision. Until 1976, all legislation was simply permissive; people could claim their shares from their matrilineal joint families. Finally matriliney completely ended on 1 December 1976 when the Kerala government promulgated the Kerala Joint Hindu Family System Abolition Act.<sup>268</sup> The Act withdrew recognition of the ‘corporateness’ of such families, thereafter the law deemed them to have been partitioned.

The legislation went against the existence of *tarawads* and also alienated the natural rights of women over *tarawad*. She was asked to be a chaste wife in a patrilineal family. The process of legislation constitutes a milestone in the transformation of female sexuality within the family.<sup>269</sup> Here wife’s sexuality was bought under the direct surveillance of the husband, which was inevitable for a patriarchal family. Without belittling the dilemmas and disputes that existed in matrilineal family, no doubt women had enjoyed several rights, which the women of patriarchal families could never aspire. As noted by Robin Jeffery, “matriliney did not make women rulers of their families, but it did allow some of them remarkable latitude unknown elsewhere.”<sup>270</sup> But the urge to get rid of *marumakkathayam* and

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<sup>267</sup> G.Arunima, *There Comes Papa, Colonialism and The Transformation of Matriliney In Malabar c. 1850-1940*, op.cit.,pp. 193-195

<sup>268</sup> Robin Jeffery, *Media and Modernity*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2010, p.94

<sup>269</sup> Janaki Nair, op.cit., p. 163

<sup>270</sup> Robin Jeffery, *Media and Modernity*, op.cit., p. 105

homogenization of the family led to the ruination of women's privileges. On the other hand the collapse of marumakkathayam could be explained as the empowerment of masculine power structure, ie. by framing a new familial pattern with husband as the provider, and wife and children as his dependants enabled the masculinization of the Nair community.



CHAPTER IV

**REDEFINING THE NOTIONS OF FAMILY  
AND MARRIAGE IN NAMBOOTHIRI  
REFORM MOVEMENT**

Colonialism influenced not only the Nair matrilineal family system of Malabar, but the patriarchal Namboothiri family system also. Being the most prominent patriarchal community of Malabar, it also underwent far reaching changes. The twentieth century witnessed the Namboothiri community yearning for transformation in their traditional family and marriage patterns. Unlike the Nair reform movement, which attempted the transformation of a whole system of inheritance, the Namboothiri community demanded the reform of certain practices related to family, maintenance of property, marriage and women's life only. Namboothiri women, the *antharjanams*, were the real victims of Brahmanical patriarchy. For centuries they were confined to the inner quarters of the *illoms*, without any contact with the outer world. Their existence in *illoms* were not felt, they lived like inanimate objects. Right from childhood they grow with the feeling that getting married is the only aim of their life.

Namboothiri reform movement, unlike the Nair reform programme, had a definite organizational framework, candid and creative leadership and explicit aims. The Namboothiri reform movement has been characterized by an urge of the community to acquire the privileges of the under privileged castes. Among the lower castes of Kerala, some practices like divorce, widow remarriage, and economic independence for women were common. At the same time the Namboothiri community was devoid of these privileges, so

their desire to institutionalize these rights resulted in a movement.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the internal dissensions among leaders, ideological struggles and constant threat from the orthodoxy, the reform agenda was progressive, as far as the Namboothiri community was concerned. From the second stage of its activities they debated on women of the community, their suffering and how they could be ameliorated. Whereas, in the reform programme of the Nair community, the improvement of women's life was not on the agenda at all. Except for very few articles, the entire literature equivocally disseminated the notion of well to do, self-assertive Nair women. So quite naturally, such a group of women would never need 'reform'. Nairs wanted the transformation of the system of *marumakkathayam*; the Namboothiris on the other hand intended the abolition certain practices within the familial organization. In the course of the reform movement, though with certain reservations, women's issues and their emancipation emerged as the prime concern for the reformers.

The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and the Namboothiri Yuvajana Yuvajana Sangham spearheaded the Namboothiri reform movement. Typically, like any other caste organization the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and the Yuvajana Sangham were predominantly male dominated associations. In 1908 the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was formed to protect the community's privileges threatened in the wake of colonialism.<sup>2</sup> The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha from its second annual conference, had expressed concern about the life of women in the community, but it was confined to certain proposals raised by members and most of the time the discussions on women didn't proceed further.<sup>3</sup> In the third annual conference

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<sup>1</sup> K.E.N., 'Navodanathinte Prasakthi', in I.V.Babu, op.cit., pp. 9-15

<sup>2</sup> Details regarding the foundation of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, its ideology and areas of focus were having been discussed in the second chapter, are not repeated here, as the chapter focuses on the women's transformation.

<sup>3</sup> At the second annual conference Cherukunnath Neelakandan Namboothirpad discussed about the issues involved in the marriage of Namboothiri girls and as

also the same topic was taken up for consideration, but the fate of the discussion was the same.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the concern shown by the members about the marriage of Namboothiri girls was not out of genuine desire to improve the whole lot of their life; it was the superstitious belief that had existed in the community that, unmarried matured girls was a curse on the family and community that prompted them to raise the issue.<sup>5</sup>

The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, in its second stage, from 1914 to 1944, made serious inroads into the general condition of the society. During this period the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and the Yuvajana Sangham were under the leadership of young vibrant *unninamboothirimar*, the youth of the community, most of whom were *aphans* in their *illoms*. By the 1920s many of the leaders identified that the development of the community would be impossible without a significant change in the life of the women folk of the community. Consequently, the male dominated reform programme, like all other reform movements witnessed by colonial India, at a particular juncture, took up the issue of women's emancipation. Thus *antharjanams* became objects of reform and not its agent and they figured in the discourses of male reformers as one to be 'rescued', 'led out' and

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a solution proposed that the system of primogeniture must be modified immediately. But the general opinion of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was that being a ritualistic issue it cannot be decided without discussions in *upa Sahbas*, hence any resolution on the subject was postponed. *Poornabrahmaniyam*, 1910, pp. 15-16

<sup>4</sup> Periyamana Vishnu Namboothiri in the third annual conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha invited the attention of the members on the problem of *kanyadanam*, marriage of girls, and the need to stabilize the mounting demand of dowry. But his proposal of own community marriage of all Namboothiri men was rejected by several representatives. *Poornabrahmaniyam*, 1911, pp.19-20

<sup>5</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p. 32

‘liberated.’<sup>6</sup> It was an accepted fact among the reformers that the *antharjanams* who had no knowledge of the world were not capable of modernizing themselves; so the young reformer with his acquired experience should enable them to lead a befitting life in the modern world. However, the extent of reform to be achieved by *antharjanams* was debated throughout the process. Many suggested remolding them by providing ‘necessary domestic education’ and ‘a refashioning of their self’. Kannipayur Sankaran Namboothiripad argued that *antharjanams* were to be educated but at the same time their peculiarities as *antharjanams* must be retained, hence the education must be so framed that the ‘exclusiveness’ of *antharjanams* was not tampered with.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, a radical change in life and ‘existence as *antharjanams*’ in *illoms* was promoted by V.T.Bhattathiripad, who asked them to empower themselves by reading and demand their rights through Antharjana Samajams.<sup>8</sup>

The reform movement led by Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham had a multi-faceted agenda, ie. in order to modernize the community they proposed changes in family organization, marriage patterns and womanhood. All these were entangled issues and were held in high esteem by the traditional patriarchal community; hence the reformation of one cannot be attempted without changing the other. It was widely observed that Chandu Menon’s *Indulekha*, Kuriyedath Thatri’s *smarthavicharam* and the *janmi-kudiyam conflicts* together led to the creation of reformism among Namboothiris. There was an increasing realization that the then existing system of management of *illom* properties, whereby a majority of the

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<sup>6</sup> J.Devika , *Engendering Individuals*, op.cit., p.161; Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, ‘Poovacharam Adava Keezhnadappu II’, *Unnninamboothiri*, 1926, vol. 7, issue. 11,pp. 647-654.

<sup>7</sup> Kannipayur Sankaran Namboothiripad, ‘Streevidyabhyasam’, *Unninamboothiri*, 1929, vol. 9, issue 12, pp. 718-726

<sup>8</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad, ‘Namboothiri Pennkidaghalku Oru Ezhuthu’, in *V.T yude Sampoorana Krithikal*, op.cit., pp.605-616.

members were living with mere subsistence must be transformed.<sup>9</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam has written about the radical ideology of the Yuvajana Sangham and how it started affecting the daily life in *illoms* during 1920s.<sup>10</sup> In 1927 E.M.S.Namboothiripad wrote that a social revolution in the community to end superstitions was to be achieved through the young members.<sup>11</sup> Further, E.M.S. Namboothiripad regarded that the community urgently needed the transformation of *antharjanams* from their age old slumber, which could be achieved by the progressive interference of *grihasthans*, or *moos* of *illoms*.<sup>12</sup>

When compared with the reform programmes undertaken by the other caste organizations of Kerala, the Namboothiri reform movement produced rich reform literature. It appears ironical that a community which had to stage a battle with the orthodoxy for acquiring modern education could successfully reflect their social conditions through the medium of letters. A rich literature was created during the reform movement and most of them were written with women as the central characters. Such a trend in literature was set forth by V.T.Bhattathiripad and later continued by Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, M.P.Bhattathiripad, M.R.Bhattathiripad and Lalithambika Antharjanam. A community which had a legendary tradition of classical literature, in the wake of reformism, adopted new literary forms like novels and short stories along with poems and plays which portrayed the pathetic life of *antharjanams* in *illoms*. In the foreword to *Rajanirangam*, V.T. Bhattathiripad wrote that his stories may lead to change in the conception of the community regarding the outdated marriage practices. The first story of

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<sup>9</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad , op.cit., pp. 67-68

<sup>10</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Atmakathacku Oramukham*, op.cit., pp. 43-46

<sup>11</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, 'Samudayika Viplavum Namboothiri Samudayavum', *Yogakshemam*, 22/07/1927

<sup>12</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Grihasthanmarude Chumathala', *Yogakshemam*, 10/03/1928

*Rajanirangam* depicted the love between a Namboothiri boy and girl and *Athikadinam* discussed the sufferings of women as co-wives. M.R.Bhattathiripad's *Valkanadi*, Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad's *Poomkula*, *Vidavayude Vidhi*, Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Prathikaradevatha*, *Moodupadathil* were a few stories which exposed the sufferings of *antharjanams* due to the intricacies in the marriage system, *smarthavicharam* and dowry. Theatre was also widely popular in the course of reform and within the organizational structure of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, they were effectively staged. V.T. Bhattathiripad's *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghatheku*, (From Kitchen to the Stage) discussed issues like *sambandham*, *adhivedanam*, dowry and marriage to old men, and the influences of modernity on the community. The play had a revolutionary effect on the community as it portrayed the love of a Namboothiri girl for a Namboothiri boy, who being a younger member of his illom was not to marry an *antharjanam*, and marriage between them through the interference of the state. By staging a love marriage, V.T. Bhattathiripad advocated a change in conjugal relations among Namboothiri couples.<sup>13</sup> *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghatheku* was first staged at the Edakunni conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1929 despite stiff resistance from many orthodox leaders. The play could make a profound impact on the perceptions of the community and V.T. Bhattathiripad assumed the stature of 'liberator' of *antharjanams*.<sup>14</sup>

M.R.Bhattathiripad's Marakudakulile *Mahanarakam*, (The Hell in Veil Umbrella) M.P.Bhattathiripad's *Rhitumati*, Lalithambika Antharjanam's

<sup>13</sup> The interference of the state was legitimized by V.T. Bhattathiripad by arguing that the parents of brides could be convinced to back off only with the help of a state law. Kesavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, op.cit., p.98

<sup>14</sup> I.C.P. Namboothiri took his wife to the play, *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghatheku*, and she was so much inspired by the play that she decided not to remove her blouse after reaching illom as was the custom. I.C.P. Namboothiri, op.cit., p.34

Savithrikutty were all about the decadent condition of the community. Reform literature strongly advocated the introduction of modernity, transformation of family life, necessity of educating *antharjanams* and staunchly criticized patriarchy for exploiting women. The development of first generation of feminist thoughts in the Namboothiri community could be seen evidently in these works of Namboothiri men.

### **Family Reforms**

Modernizing the community by the introduction of Western education for the young generation and thereby enabling the members to face the new socio-economic challenges was the fundamental objective of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha. In course of time issues related with family, management of *illom* properties and marriage were also addressed and the increasing concern of the members forced the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha to devote attention to restructuring family organizations. Many felt that the archaic and traditionalistic family organization which inhibited the development of individuality prevented the community from progressing. In accordance with the general inclination of the then society many Namboothiri youth found fault with the joint family. Mismanagement and monopolistic control of the *illom* properties by the *karanavan* were resisted by the junior members, who were denied maintenance from the *illom*.<sup>15</sup> Similar movements on the part of other communities also prompted Namboothiris to clamor for reorganization of power structure in *illoms*.<sup>16</sup>

The traditional family structure of the Namboothiris was considered as a hindrance to progress. Due to the rule of primogeniture in Namboothiri families, only the eldest son could marry, *veli*, from the community, and

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<sup>15</sup> Editorial, *Unninamboothiri*, 1927, vol.7, issue. 12, pp. 665-670

<sup>16</sup> N.K.Krishna Pilla, asked Namboothiri youth to end up the joint families by accepting *sajathivivaham*. N.K.Krishna Pilla, 'Mattathinte Avasyakatha', *Unninamboothiri*, 1925, vol. 6, issue. 1, pp. 81-85

junior members made relations with women of matrilineal communities. Wives and children of *grihasthan* lived in the *illom* and the management of the *illom* properties was done by him. *Aphans*, junior members, practically had no rights in *illoms*, and devoid of social status, they lived as a neglected group. The life of *aphans* and *antharjanams* were almost similar - *aphans* were not expected to interfere in the domestic affairs of the *illoms* and were in reality deposed from *illoms*, whereas *antharjanams* were to remain confined to the darkness of *illoms*, as domestic servants without any knowledge of the world. K.C. Narayanan has designated both these exploited groups as the 'internal proletariat' of the community and the identification of each other's sufferings and their coming together resulted in the modernization of the community in the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> The family could be restructured only by transforming the nature of marriage that had existed in the community. Hence various practices like *adhivedhanam*, *sambandham* and young girls' marriage to old men were to be rejected and *parivedanam* was to be popularized. The steady fall in the population of the community was regarded as an after effect of *sambandham* which could be overcome by *sajathivivaham*. Along with reforming the marriage and conjugal relations, members of the Yuvajana Sangham earnestly encouraged the thorough reorganization of the property management of *illoms*.

There was a growing realization among the young members regarding the need for a legislation that would regulate the problems faced by the community in familial matters. From the eleventh session onwards the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha made attempts to materialize a governmental interference in the domestic affairs of the community.<sup>18</sup> *Unninamboothiri* relentlessly wrote on the need for a family regulation and

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<sup>17</sup> K.C. Narayanan, 'Verunaghatha Vakku', (forward), in V.T. Bhattathiripad, *V.T yude Sampoorana Krithikal*, op.cit., p.18

<sup>18</sup> C.K.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 77



the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in all its consecutive sessions witnessed recommendations from representatives for the same.<sup>19</sup> These resulted in the forging of a consensus among the youth regarding transforming the family and under popular pressure, the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, in the sixteenth annual session, formed the Namboothiri Family Regulation Committee.<sup>20</sup> Desamangalath Guptan Namboothiripad presided over the committee and Kumaramanghalas K.N.Kuttan Namboothiripad was its secretary. The Committee collected evidence from more than five hundred members of the community regarding family regulation and the majority of them supported the legislation. Furthermore some even vehemently argued for per capita partition of *illom* properties.<sup>21</sup>

After enquiry the Committee stated that most of the community members favoured a legislation permitting *sajathivivaham* and conferring the right of partition.<sup>22</sup> They observed that the decline of the community was not due to any external factor, but it was caused by the archaic and traditionalistic family order; which was to be inevitably transformed to avoid a complete collapse of the community. Namboothiri families had ceased to be a place where members could live peacefully; internal disputes and conflicts among *karanavan* and junior members have made life in *illoms* deplorable. Economically and numerically the *illoms* were declining and many *illoms*

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<sup>19</sup> Editorial, 'Kudumbabharanam', *Unninamboothiri*, 1922, book.8, vol. 6, pp.245-246

<sup>20</sup> NFRRCR, Mangalodayam Press, Thrissur, 1925, p.1; Earlier in 1920 Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha had constituted a Committee for the same purpose, after deliberations they prepared a draft bill, submitted a report, but it didn't proceed further. Kaplighat Sankaran Namboothiri, 'Namboothiri Kudumba Regulation', *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, vol.7, issue. 7, pp. 392-408

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> NFRRCR, p. 1

have become extinct. The only solution suggested for these dilemmas was a family regulation.<sup>23</sup>

The Report criticized the practice of polygamy and *sambandham* and strongly recommended *sajathivivaham*. They observed that due to the monopolistic control of property junior members were not provided with lawful maintenance due to which they were not able to maintain their wife and children from other communities. The financial downfall of Namboothiri men forced the matrilineal communities to reject the *sambandham* relations with their women.<sup>24</sup> One of the most important observations of the report was about the life of *aphans* in *illoms*, where they were unwanted members, especially in old age when they became helpless with no one to care for. Hence the proposed changes would enable the *aphans* to have their own family; here the empowering of Namboothiri masculinity seems to be one of the prime concerns of the committee.

The partition of *illom* property was a major concern of the committee, many argued that partition was not permitted by *Sastras* hence could not be accepted. But some others held that *grihasthans* must be allowed partition if they wished to live separately from the *illom*.<sup>25</sup> However by the 1920's the opinion was in favour of per capita partition. One of the main objections to *kanishtavivaham* was that it would lead to partition of *illom*. The Namboothiri orthodoxy was not ready to accept partition as it would end their monopolistic control over property and they argued that other communities respect Namboothiris due to their ritualistic and economic status. With the partition of *illom* properties, Namboothiris would lose their prominence in the society and

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<sup>23</sup> Kavil Avihikattu Bhavadasan Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Kudumba Regulation', *Yogakshemam*, 08/12/1920

<sup>24</sup> NFRCR, p.16

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71

be reduced to the status of other communities.<sup>26</sup> Another argument raised was that the junior members of the *illoms* when entrusted with property after partition would not be capable of managing it as they were not accustomed to any kind of responsibility. Under such a condition there would be large scale transfer of property to other communities.<sup>27</sup> The Committee proposed that the right to claim partition of *illom* property must be conferred on men who have a Namboothiri wife. Further, in future when there must be a need to partition the property on per capita basis, the right to possess the property must be given only to those who have *veli*.<sup>28</sup>

The committee after consultation with eminent personalities and drawing suggestions from the community members prepared a draft bill for Namboothiri regulation. As per the bill *sajathivivaham* was permitted for a Namboothiri who has completed 21 years of age irrespective of the marital status of his brother. Moreover a *sambandham* relation committed after the enactment of this bill would become invalid.<sup>29</sup> Management of the property was vested with the eldest male member who must ensure the co-operation of all men of the family in the administration of the property. All Namboothiri men having Namboothiri wives were provided the right to partition from the *illom*. But though the report discussed about the property rights of women, and expressed their concern on the issue, the bill was silent about the woman's rights on partition. The orthodox section of the community, like M.S.Kesavan Potti, believed that on bestowing property rights to women they would become uncontrollable and seductresses.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.89

<sup>29</sup> Namboothiri Kudumba Regulation, chapter 2, clause 8 and 9, *ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.

The greatest resistance to the Namboothiri family regulation was from the orthodox section of the community. They argued that *sajathivivaham* of all Namboothiri men would increase the population of the community and *illoms* would be forced to split apart. Moreover the total denial of traditions and customs of the community which they claimed as prescribed by the archaic scriptures were not welcomed by the conventionalists, hence they completely rejected the proposal of *kanishtavivaham*.<sup>31</sup> Opponents held that with the stoppage of *vijatheeyavivaham*, Namboothiris would lose the relationship with royal families and it might adversely affect their power and privileges. It was also pointed out that the proposed legislation may lead to a population rise in the community and, as the financial decline of Namboothiris had already set in with many *illoms* struggling for subsistence, the community would plunge into utter poverty.<sup>32</sup>

The Committee claimed that the draft bill would be an ultimate solution for the sufferings of *antharjanams*, but how women of the community conceived the proposed changes could not be ascertained. It was doubtful whether the women were aware of the processes that were going on, however one article published in *Yogakshemam* analyzed the regulation from women's point of view.<sup>33</sup> Attempts for regulation were regarded as a solution to the problems of junior members by safeguarding their interests. Besides the main concern behind these regulations, especially the insistence on *sajathivivaham* was held to be due to the apprehension of the community about the drain of the community's wealth to other communities.<sup>34</sup> Provisions

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<sup>31</sup> Paschiman Raman Namboothiri, 'Kudumaba Regulation', *Yogakshemam*, 23/04/1924

<sup>32</sup> Churakootu Meikattu Narayanan Namboothiri, 'Kudumba Regulation', *Yogakshemam*, 10/12/1920

<sup>33</sup> Pennmakalulla Oru Munnam Antharjanam, (The author gives her name thus-literally it means the third *antharjanam* or wife who has daughters) 'Njanghalum Regulationum I', *Yogakshemam*, 21/1/1921

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

regarding partition of property were also rejected as the bill denied property rights to women. The bill was ridiculed as it was not ready to grant women a lawful share in the husband's property on which they had traditional rights.<sup>35</sup> It was recommended that provision must be made in the bill for the natural devolution of a man's property to his wife and children, rather than to his son or in the absence of son to his patrilineal kin.<sup>36</sup> Moreover the article condemned the draft bill for maintaining provisions for the continuation of the system of dowry; they argued that dowry was actually the money given by bride's parents for helping the new couples and it was not the sole property of husband. But during partition of husband's properties women were not entitled to a reasonable share.<sup>37</sup>

The report submitted by the commission was discussed in the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and was published in popular journals; excepting the objections from the orthodoxy, the proposals were welcomed. The report and the recommendations suggested by the commission were accepted by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, mainly due to the efforts of Kariyannur Vasudeven Namboothiri and Pakaravoor Neelakanadan Namboothiri.<sup>38</sup> However changes in customs and practices would not be effected by a new law made by the community; hence to enforce the desired changes the state initiated social legislation was inevitable. Consequently the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha took up the challenge of acquiring a legal sanction for reforming the community in all the three political divisions of

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<sup>35</sup> Comparing with the property rights granted to women as per the Cochin Nair Regulation, the article criticized Namboothiri men for their egotistic attitude. Pennmakalulla Oru Munnam Antharjanam , 'Njanghalum Regulationum IV', *Yogakshemam*, 25/2/1921

<sup>36</sup> Pennmakalulla Oru Munnam Antharjanam , 'Njanghalum Regulationum II', *Yogakshemam*, 4/2/1921

<sup>37</sup> Pennmakalulla Oru Munnam Antharjanam, 'Njanghalum Regulationum V', *Yogakshemam*, 11/3/1921

<sup>38</sup> Editorial, *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, vol.7, issue.3, pp. 159-162

Kerala. Similar movements by other communities for achieving social legislation inspired Namboothiris to approach the state legislative machinery. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha decided to frame separate draft bills for Malabar, Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram, based on the socio-economic peculiarities of the respective regions.<sup>39</sup> The community was successful in achieving the representations of their members in all the three provincial legislatures of the then Kerala, besides they could also win the support of other community members in the legislatures.

The first attempt to materialize a legislative intervention in the social conditions of the Namboothiri community was made by O.M.Narayanan Namboothiripad when he drafted the Namboothiri Bill in 1927.<sup>40</sup> The bill proposed to legalize marriage of all Namboothiri men irrespective of the marital status of their brothers. Moreover *sambandham* and polygamous relations of a Namboothiri male during the lifetime of his wife were deemed to be void by the bill.<sup>41</sup> The bill was in favour of granting property rights to women and she was also made legal inheritor of her husband's self acquired property. However the bill was not introduced in the council and O.M.Narayanan Namboothiri was criticized for his laziness regarding the bill.<sup>42</sup>

With the radicalization of socio-reform movements in the 1920's and 1930's the Namboothiri community's demands for family regulation was intensified. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha entrusted Madhusodhanan Thanghal to submit a bill in the Madras legislature for acquiring desired transformations in the community through legal mediation. Moving the Bill in

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Editorial, *Unninamboothiri*, 1927, vol.8, issue.10, pp. 551-554

<sup>41</sup> The Namboothiri Bill, chapter IV, clause 10, 11 and 12 in G.O.400, Law (legal) Department, 30/10/1927

<sup>42</sup> Editorial, *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, vol. 5, issue 1, pp. 123-124

the council Madhusodhanan Thangal stated that the bill does not propose to introduce any revolutionary change. The whole bill centered around one question, ie. whether all Namboothiri males should be allowed to marry within the caste.<sup>43</sup> Subsequently he submitted the bill in the legislative council which permitted *parivedhanam* and prohibited *adhivedanam*.<sup>44</sup> The bill entitled every member of the *illom* to demand a per capita partition of the *illom* properties. It was decided to circulate the bill for eliciting public opinion and it was also submitted to a select committee as per the request of its presenter.<sup>45</sup> After detailed analysis the bill was redrafted by the committee after introducing numerous amendments and the redrafted bill was accepted for the process of legislation.<sup>46</sup>

While discussing the Namboothiri bill in the legislative council the most heated debates was regarding the issue of enforcing monogamy. The provision which sought to impose monogamy was deleted by the committee, as it went against the Marumakkathayam Act. The committee decided that the rule of polygamy which was allowed by the Hindu law and followed by the community at present should not be disturbed.<sup>47</sup> Regarding the provision to enforce monogamy there were differences of opinion among the committee members. P.Subharayan stated that the provision in the bill intended to prevent polygamy should not have been deleted by the committee, when the members of the community desired to have it. V.P.Narayanan Nambiyar

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<sup>43</sup> Madhusodhanan Thanghal, in PMLC, vol. LVIII, No.2, 31/10/1931, p. 309

<sup>44</sup> The Madras Namboothiri Bill, (Bill no. 14 of 1931), chapter V, clause 6&7, in G.O. 295-297, Law (legal) Department, 25/08/1931

<sup>45</sup> G.O.421-423, Law (legislative) Department, 12/11/1933

<sup>46</sup> P.Madhusoodhanan Thangal, in PMLC, vol. LXIII, No.4, 3/11/1932, p. 476

<sup>47</sup> The Madras Marumakkathayam Act prevented polygamy by stating that any marriage contracted by a male with a *marumakkathayi* female, during the continuance of a prior marriage of such male, shall be void, notwithstanding that his personal law permits of polygamy. The Madras Marumakkathayam Act, chapter II, clause V, in G.O.161-162, Law (legislative) Department, 28/03/1933

maintained that the enforcement of monogamy was essential but it was to be done only according to the provisions of The Madras Marumakkathayam Bill.<sup>48</sup>

By tradition polygamy was permitted to Namboothiri men in order to maintain the caste privileges of the community. It seems intriguing that, whatever be the reasons, many of the members were very particular to maintain the privilege of Namboothiri men in continuing polygamy. Alamelumangatharayamma, the only woman to speak on the bill, expressed her deep regard for women of the community and stated that for the happiness of women monogamy was to be made a rule. She read out a telegram from Srimathi Purakundigath Neeli Antharjanam of Trichur which was “Pray, remove polygamy by Namboothiri Bill.”<sup>49</sup> The Yuvajana Sangham and the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha sent copies of their resolution advocating the abolition of polygamy. A manifesto signed by many prominent Namboothiri ladies was as follows - “we the Namboothiri women of Malabar are disappointed to note that the Select Committee Report on the Namboothiri Bill does not in any way help to check polygamy in our community. This is the evil custom we are a prey to. All other evils follow as a matter of course. All our domestic happiness is wrecked on account of this monstrous custom. Neglect in this matter is suicidal to the future of our community. So we beg of you to take all necessary steps to provide for the complete prohibition of this iniquitous practice in our society.”<sup>50</sup>

The bill was criticized for its insistence on intra community marriages when the entire caste organizations in India were promoting inter - caste marriages. The provision which seeks to make the relation between a

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<sup>48</sup> Report of the Select Committee, in G.O.347-348, Law (legislative) Department, 14/09/1932.

<sup>49</sup> Alamelumangatharayamma, in PMLC, vol. LXIII, No.4, 3/11/1932, p.486

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 485-486



Namboothiri male and a Nair female was considered to be highly revolting against the notions of civil marriages.<sup>51</sup> Provisions were laid down in the bill for curbing the power of *karanavans* and to end the mismanagement of *illom* properties. It was pointed out that there were several contradictions between the Marumakkathayam bill submitted by Narayanan Nambiyar and the Namboothiri Bill submitted by Madhusoodhanan Thangal, ie. while Nambiyar's bill intended to legalize *sambandham*, Thangal's bill regarded *sambandhams* as void.<sup>52</sup> As per the select committee the seniority of a female member in an *illom* was to be determined by the date of her marriage rather than by the status of her husband in the *illom* as held by the original bill.

Finally, as per the desire of the members of the Namboothiri community the bill was passed into an act by the Legislative council on 7/11/1932. The primary objective of the Act was to validate the intra community marriage of junior members and to facilitate the partition of *illom* property and thereby equip the community to advance in the new socio-economic milieu. The Act envisaged a fair management of the *illom* property, by making the *karanavan* more accountable to the other members, at the same time his absolute power was maintained. The right to claim the per capita partition of the *illom* property was conferred on all males and females of the community.<sup>53</sup> Widow and children were entitled to the intestate succession of the self-acquired property of a Namboothiri male.<sup>54</sup> One of the most important demands of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham, to legalize *parivedanam* was sanctioned by the Act by which the every major male member was at liberty to marry within his community. No Namboothiri who has a Namboothiri wife living could remarry another Namboothiri

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<sup>51</sup> V.T.Arasu, in PMLC, vol. LIX, No.2, 27/01/1932, p.224

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 227

<sup>53</sup> The Madras Namboothiri Act, chapter VI, clause 21, sub section 1 & 2 in G.O. 163-164, Law (Legislative) department, 28/3/1933

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, chapter V, clause 16,17,18

woman expect n the following cases - (a) Where the wife is inflicted with incurable disease for the last five years, (b) where the wife has not borne him any child ten years since marriage, (c) where the wife has become an outcaste. Any Namboothiri male who contracts a marriage against the conditions prescribed would be made to pay a fine of thousand rupees, but at the same time that marriage would not be deemed invalid.<sup>55</sup> The Act recognized the right of an unmarried woman to claim dowry from the *illom* property, if her marriage was consented by father or other male members of the *illom* besides, the dowry given to a Namboothiri woman was decided to be her separate property.<sup>56</sup>

The Madras Namboothiri Act was the culmination of the long drawn demand of the community and its representative organization for a family regulation. Progressive minded people of the community envisaged that the Act would pave way for the further advancement of the community, from a stagnant state. However it has to be accepted that the Act was a typical patriarchal document, which addressed only the issues of the male folk of the community. The grave problems felt by women were left untouched, under the expectation that the sanction to *parivedanam* would be the solution. Nevertheless the provision regarding polygamy was well maintained and they could freely remarry within the community by accepting dowry of three thousand or four thousand out of which, if compelled, he could pay the penalty of thousand rupees. Moreover regarding the issues of Namboothiri widows the Act maintained perfect silence.

### **Marriage Reforms**

The pattern of marriage followed by the Namboothiris was different from other Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities due to their insistence on

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, chapter III, clause-10,11 and 12

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, chapter III, clause-10 and 13

primogeniture. Consequently only the eldest son of the family was entitled to have 'veli' while all others went for *sambandham* with women of matrilineal castes. On the other hand, for Namboothiri women, marriages must be strictly endogamous. Hence naturally women were forced to become co-wives or die as spinsters. Marrying off girls to very old men, sometime older than that of the bride's father, was also very common, but even for such marriages a huge amount was to be given as dowry. Quite often marriage to aged men increased the number of child widows in the community, and many lived for fifty or sixty years in the husband's *illom* without children.<sup>57</sup> The Namboothiri women led a hard life within the *illoms*. Right from childhood till death they lived truly as *antharjanams*, women of inner quarters, who were deprived of all contacts with the outer world. Marriage aggravated their hardships as most of the girls were married to be one among many co-wives, who quarreled with each other on trivial issues. Along with three or four *veli* at *illoms* many *moos* had several *sambandhams* also. *Aivedhanam* and *sambandham* were pointed out as the most atrocious practices which were responsible for the miserable life of *antharjanams*.<sup>58</sup>

*Illoms* were the most secluded households of Kerala, with limited accessibility for an outsider. Except for a few *antharjanams*, Nair maids, children and *grihasthan* no one could know what was happening within *illoms*. Long life as spinsters, existence of polygamy and young widows often lead to illicit sexual relations inside *illoms*. Such relationships developed either with servants or with distant relatives, and most often may be with the aid and support of maids.<sup>59</sup> The emergence of the institution of *smarthavicharam* could be seen as an indication of the existence of sexual immorality. Morality is only an ideal concept and deviation from this ideal

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<sup>57</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p. 28

<sup>58</sup> Virupakshan, 'Kanishtavivaham Oru Vimarshanam', *Unninamboothiri*, 1922, book. 3, issue. 7, pp. 302-312

<sup>59</sup> A.M.N.Chakyar, op.cit., pp.27-29

notion could be seen in all communities, especially, when a community nurtures a double standard of morality for men and women. V.T.Bhattathiripad had written about a sexual assault made by a brother on his sister and how the *illom* got rid of her when she became pregnant from her brother.<sup>60</sup> The *Illom* stood along with the brother and protected him, though he was the culprit, and excommunicated the sister. However it does not mean that Namboothiri women were immoral, but it could be their circumstances, deprived state of life without any hope and constant contempt from others which had made some of them seek solace in such relations.

Polygamy, *adhivedanam*, of Namboothiri *grihasthans* was also opposed during the reformist discourses. By tradition *adhivedhanam* was permitted for a Namboothiri in the following situations - when wife was a drunkard, suffering from serious illness was of a bad character, infertile and if she gave birth only to girls.<sup>61</sup> Polygamy inevitably led women to the sufferings of being co-wives.<sup>62</sup> There was no social stigma attached to marrying off a girl as the third or fourth wife of an old man, because to get daughters married was important for the parents. Namboothiri Family Regulation Committee report staunchly criticized the polygamy of *grihasthans*, which has made *illoms* a battleground for the co-wives.<sup>63</sup> In course of time a strange practice of exchange marriages, *mattom*, developed in the community, which was adopted to avoid the difficulties involved in the payment of huge dowry. Brothers married several times for marrying off their sisters and by twentieth century it became a custom in which fathers

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<sup>60</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, Karmavipakam, in *V.T yude Sampoorana Krithikal*, pp. 335-336

<sup>61</sup> NFRCR, p.8

<sup>62</sup> M.R.Bhattathiripad's play *Marakudakulile Mahanarakam* exposed the life of a young bride among elder co-wives, tortures she had to undergo and her final escape, by killing herself. M.R.Bhattathiripad, *Marakudakulile Mahanarakam*, op.cit.

<sup>63</sup> NFRCR, p.6

exchanged their daughters in marriage.<sup>64</sup> The entire practices related with the system of marriage among Namboothiris were detrimental to the peaceful existence of women.

From the inception of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha there was a growing contempt against the *sambandham* relations of young Namboothiri men. At the fourth annual conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, Vellimana Subhramaniyan Potti presented a paper in which he argued that the population of the Namboothiri community is dangerously diminishing, due to the practices of *sambandham* with women of other caste. Pointing towards the threats from *sambandham* he suggested that all Namboothiri must start marrying within the community.<sup>65</sup> However at the same conference, it was rejected by many representatives arguing that such a move would lead to poverty and impoverishment in the community. In course of time several articles were written in *Unninamboothiri* which ridiculed *sambandham* and promoted *parivedanam*. At the eighth annual conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha a resolution against *sambandham* marriages was ratified and in 1918 at the tenth annual conference the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha made, it was made clear that in order to solve the issues of marriage of Namboothiri girls every Namboothiri must marry within the community.<sup>66</sup> Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, at the twelfth annual conference, decided to stop the practice of *adhivedanam* and launched mass propaganda against the system.<sup>67</sup> The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha entrusted a committee to make a list of *grihasthans* who continued to maintain *sambandham* relation along with *veli*.

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<sup>64</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p.29

<sup>65</sup> *Poornabrahmaniyam*, 1912, pp. 83-84

<sup>66</sup> *Poornabrahmaniyam*, 1916, pp. 28-29 and *Poornabrahmaniyam*, 1918, pp. 31-33. The proposal of *snathakavivaham*, marriage of junior members of the illom, introduced by M.S.Kesavan Potti was passed by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha without much resistance.

<sup>67</sup> C.K.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 74

Popularization of '*kanishtavivaham*' was suggested on the grounds that it would rescue *antharjanams* from their sufferings of being co-wives or dying as spinsters, ie. when all Namboothiri men start to marry within the community the problems faced by Namboothiri women – polygamy and being lifelong spinsters- could be resolved. Moreover it was expected to develop a sense of responsibility among Namboothiri men because as per tradition, those who had *sambandham* relations were under no obligation to provide for wife and children. Besides a major section of Namboothiri men were not contributing to the progress of the community. Hence if they also marry within the community, they would be obliged to protect wife and children and so would become responsible.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless the defendants of *kanishtavivaham* and opponents of *sambandham* repeatedly asserted that they were not actually against the tradition and as per ancient religious scriptures, Brahmins were prohibited from marrying women of lower castes. They argued that *sambandham* relations might have emerged due to the peculiar socio-economic conditions of Kerala, and in the modern period there was no need for such relations.<sup>69</sup> The reformers, in the early stage of the reform movement, were always conscious of the need to maintain cordial relation

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<sup>68</sup> A well wisher of the community, 'Kanishtavivaham Kondula Gunnaghal', *Unninamboothiri*, 1920, book. 1, vol.2, pp. 50-54

<sup>69</sup> Several articles were written on *kanishtavivaham* in *Yogakshemam* and *Unninamboothiri*; most of them lamented on the drain of wealth from the community due to *sambandham* relations. K.P.Narayanan Bhattathiripad, argued that the inter caste marriages of Namboothiris were to be stopped immediately for the sake of peaceful existence of the Namboothiris. *Kanishtavivaham*, *Yogakshemam*, 1/10/1921. Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad wrote that in early periods Namboothiris did not establish relations with matrilineal women as they were prohibited by Smrithis for doing so. The matrilineal communities that had existed here dragged Namboothiri men into such heinous associations, for the fulfillment of their selfish interests. Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Namboothirimarum Marumakkathayavum*, op.cit., pp. 3-5

with the orthodoxy and hence they gleaned citations from scriptures, to legitimize their contentions.<sup>70</sup>

The insistence on own community marriage by the Yuvajana Sangham was not due to their concern for women. By that time many of the young members felt that *sambandham* was ridiculous; besides the writings of Nair reformers who stood against Brahmin *sambandham*, also made the Namboothiri youth oppose it. The contemporary social transformations influenced them also and made them realize their secondary social status within the *illoms* and among the general public.<sup>71</sup> By the 1920's a consensus regarding marriage was arrived among the members of the Yuvajana Sangham and they decided to accept own community marriages. At the initial stage they opposed *sambandham* relations of *grihasthans*, which was regarded as the most heinous action and same was held as the fundamental cause for the sufferings of *antharjanams*. Moreover, *sambandham* of managers of *illom* was also severely criticized, because they had access to all the properties of *illom* and they could also acquire private property, hence through *sambandham* relations there was a flow of wealth to other communities. So *Yogakshemam* recommended for a legal restriction on *sambandham* of *grihasthans*.<sup>72</sup> So it was the concern on the depletion of

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<sup>70</sup> This was the case in other parts of the country. See Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar,(ed),op.cit., pp.1-14

<sup>71</sup> *Unninamboothiri* observed that two main reforms were essential in the community- 1. To solve the problems related to family property, which meant that *illom* property was the monopoly of Namboothiri *grihasthan*, all other members were entitles only to maintenance, this was to be changed. 2. Reforms in marriage, ie. they proposed institutionalization of own community marriages. The same article asked parents to treat all sons as equal, usually all consideration was given only for the eldest one and others were denied basic essentials. Editorial, *Unninamboothiri*, 1923, book. 4, issue. 11, pp.571-572

<sup>72</sup> Grihasthanmarude Parasthreegamanam, *Yogakshemam*, 24/9/1920. It was also argued that when the *sambandham* relations benefitted the matrilineal communities of Malabar, the same adversely affected the social status of Namboothiris, and were exposed to extreme contempt for sexually exploiting

property rather than the sufferings of women which prompted them to restrict *sambandham*.

Proposals for transforming the pattern of marriage created much furore within the community. If *sajathivivaham* acquired popularity among the youth of the community it may endanger the joint family organization structured on the order of primogeniture.<sup>73</sup> Besides, the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha consented *parivedanam* in its fourteenth annual session, by which a Namboothiri man could have a *veli*, even when his elder brother was unmarried.<sup>74</sup> However though the repeated assertions by Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham could make profound influence on the community at the ideological level, it failed to create any change in the practices of Namboothiris. When the parents of young girls and the *Unninamboothirimar*, the junior members of *illoms*, wanted *sajathivivaham* and *parivedanam*, at the opposition created by orthodoxy many dared to accept it. *Unninamboothirimar*, devoid of any income and control over *illom* property, were hesitant to *sajathivivaham*. The greatest resistance was from *grihasthans* of *illoms*, who had controlled the *illom* property, and who feared that if the younger members also started marrying from the community it would affect their autonomy.<sup>75</sup> Even the members of the Yuvajana Sangham, fearing the hostility of elders in the *illom*, *desa uparodham* and *mattu vilaku* imposed by local chieftains, entered into *sambandham* relations rather than marrying a Namboothiri girl. *Unninamboothiri* severely criticized the double stand taken by the members of the Yuvajana Sangham, and demanded them to

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the women of lower castes. Hence the *sambandham* was never advantageous for Namboothiris, and it perpetuated due to the material interests of the other communities. Koramangalam Narayanan Namboothiri, *V.T Jeevithavum Krithikalum Oru Samskara Padanam*, (Mal), Samayam Publications, Kozhikode, 2012, p. 23

<sup>73</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p. 68

<sup>74</sup> C.K.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 74

<sup>75</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, *Rajanirangam*, in V.T.Bhattathiripad, op.cit., pp.119-128



practice what they preached, by stopping *sambandham* with women of other caste.<sup>76</sup>

The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham decided to take strict action on those who commit *sambandham* and *adhivedanam*. They adopted more radical forms of protest like picketing and non-cooperation to achieve the desired ends. They even sought the co-operation of the Nair women while organizing picketing of Namboothiri men, who come to Nair tarawads to start *sambandham* relation.<sup>77</sup> According to E.M.S. Namboothiripad, the agenda of transforming marriage practices of the community turned out to be a 'marriage revolution' which brought far reaching changes in women's life.<sup>78</sup> Volunteers would lie down where the wedding they opposed was to take place. If someone had to go they could only do so by stepping on the volunteers.<sup>79</sup> Thus when Kurur Neelakandan Namboothiripad, a prominent leader of the community who participated in anti-colonial movement, set out to marry a woman of other caste, he was thwarted by the volunteers of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>80</sup> Similarly when a young educated Namboothiri was to begin a *sambandham* relation in Kavalappara tarawad, he was picketed by the volunteers, but Kavalappara Moopil Nair retaliated by attacking the volunteers.<sup>81</sup> In the same way Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha volunteers organized the picketing of *adhivedanam* and marriage of old men at several places including Peruvanam, Thrissur, Ongallur and Veghanellur. Picketing was organized by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha under the leadership of P.S.Kesavan Namboothiri, V.T.Bhattathiripad, C.K.Namboothiri, Chitoor Kunhan

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<sup>76</sup> Editorial, *Unninamboothiri*, 1923, book.4, issue.11, pp. 570-571

<sup>77</sup> *Yogakshemam*, 3/01/1921.

<sup>78</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p.112

<sup>79</sup> Keasavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 96

<sup>80</sup> P.K.Aryan Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 118

<sup>81</sup> C.K.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 75

Namboothiripad and many others. Unfortunately, the picketing failed as the orthodoxy strived to successfully organize such marriages and, when the volunteers blocked the path, they broke down the fence and went in stealthily.<sup>82</sup> Though the direct result of picketing and protest organized by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was negligible, it led to widespread discussions within the community and helped in the dissemination a new and progressive ideology against these practices. As a result of these activities a sense of guilt was attached to such marriage practices and many tried to avoid similar situations.

A complete negation of *sambandham* could not be steadily achieved, because to a large extent many Namboothiri families were economically dependent on such marriages.<sup>83</sup> Namboothiris were the fathers of all traditional rulers of Kerala, because the royal lineages invariably selected Namboothiri men as husbands for their women. Moreover women of *sthani* Nair *tarawads* also had *sambandham* relations with Namboothiri men. It was not easy to end *sambandham* relations with these families which had been continuing for centuries, and also due to the fact that these families were the prominent support for Namboothiri orthodoxy.<sup>84</sup> Most important were the relations of the Cochin royal family and Namboothiri *illoms*. Princesses of Thripunithara could marry only Namboothiri men, hence to arrange such relations agents of royal families visited the Namboothiri Vidyalayam with exciting offers for attracting Namboothiri boys. However boys from poor *illoms* accepted these offers and became 'husbands of princesses,' who fetched them a regular income. Now, under the influence of reformism, the young leaders of the community stood against marriage relations with the

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<sup>82</sup> Keasavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 96; E.M.S. *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p.115

<sup>83</sup> Madampu Kunhuttan, op.cit., pp.34-35

<sup>84</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., pp.116-117.

royal families, and resisted the pressure from royal agents and from their own *illoms*.

However, even among the reformers difference of opinions existed on marriage reforms. One group suggested the acceptance of *sajathivivaham* as remedy for a short span of time, till the then existing problems are solved. Another group demanded inter-caste marriage and widow remarriages for ending all exclusiveness of the Namboothiri community.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile the Yuvajana Sangham formed a marriage sub-committee, Vaivahiha Sangham, under the leadership of V.T.Bhattathiripad, E.M.S.Namboothiripad and Pandam Namboothiri which was to organize *sajathivivaham* by selecting suitable partners.<sup>86</sup> In 1929 at the Edakunni session a proposal was introduced in favour of divorce and remarriage of *sapathnis*. The radical reformers present at the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha argued for remarriage of *sapathnis*. But the elder leaders of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, in spite of support by many for widow remarriage, vehemently opposed remarriage of *sapathnis* as they were wives and their husbands were alive.<sup>87</sup> The successful interference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham resulted in several *sajathivivaham* like that of V.T.Bhattathiripad, E.M.S Namboothiripad and many others.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 119. In 1928 at the twentieth annual conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, Kodanad Narayanan Namboothiri moved a proposal for permitting *antharjanams* to marry from other communities, which led to heated debate and was defeated. Anil Kumar.A.V, *Charitrathinoppam Natanna Oral*, (Mal), Mulberry publications, Kozhikode, 2002, p. 54

<sup>86</sup> *Yogakshema*, 18/07/1930

<sup>87</sup> Editorial, 'Edakunni Samelenam', *Unninamboothiri*, 1929, vol. 5, issue. 9, pp. 261-264.

<sup>88</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad had a *sambandham* relation with a Varassiyar, woman of Varrier caste. When I.C.P. Namboothiri came to know that his sister's marriage was fixed with an old man, he wanted to stop that marriage with the interference of Yuvajana Sangham and V.T. Bhattathiripad married her. I.C.P. Namboothiri, *op.cit.*, p. 36

The Madras Namboothiri Act of 1933, enforced monogamy by abolishing *adhivedanam* and caste endogamy. The Act also legalized *sajathivivaham* of all major Namboothiri males, and prohibited him from entering into *sambandham* relations.<sup>89</sup> Even after the legislative revolutionary changes in marriage continued under the leadership of V.T. Bhattathiripad. The greatest achievement of the Namboothiri reform movement was in 1934, when the community witnessed the first widow remarriage. Widow remarriage was arranged under the leadership of V.T. Bhattathiripad and was solemnized at his house. The first widow from the Namboothiri community to show courage to get remarried was Uma Antharjanam, V.T. Bhattathiripad's sister-in-law and I.C.P.Namboothiri's sister. She married M.R.Bhattathiripad, a young reformer and a popular figure among the then Namboothiri reform activists. The marriage was given wide publicity. Parvathy Nenmenimangalam invited all *antharjanams* in Kerala for the marriage through *Mathrubhumi*.<sup>90</sup> In 1940 the Namboothiri community witnessed the first inter-caste marriage of an *antharjanam* when V.T.Parvathy married P.K.Raghava Panikkar, a Nair.<sup>91</sup> Inter-caste marriages were permitted for Namboothiri men but *antharjanams* could marry only Namboothiri men. V.T.Parvathy was V.T.Bhattathiripad's step sister and the marriage was first proposed by N.P.Damodaran, co-worker of V.T.Bhattathiripad. V.T. Bhattathiripad's father, though not in favour of inter-caste marriage, never

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<sup>89</sup> The Madras Namboothiri Act, Act XXI of 1933, chapter III, clause 9 to 13, in G.O.163-164, 28/03/1933, Law (Legislative) department.

<sup>90</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 4 September 1934; Parvathy Nenmenimangalam while addressing a conference of Yuvajana Yuvajana Sangham at Parappanagadi in 1932, questioned the Yuvajana Sangham volunteers as they were not fulfilling the ideology of Yuvajana Sangham. She asked if anyone of them would be ready to marry a widow and M.R.Bhattathiripad expressed his willingness to marry a widow and accordingly he became the first Namboothiri to remarry a widow *antharjanam*. K.M.Raghavan Nambiyar, *M.R.B.*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 2012, p. 32

<sup>91</sup> Vayala Vasudevan Pilla, *V.T.Bhattathiripad*, (Mal), Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy, Thrissur, 1998, p. 42

resented it and blessed the couple.<sup>92</sup> The marriage took place despite severe resistance from the orthodox factions of the community. Revolutionary changes in marriage continued further within the community when Priyadatta, I.C.P.Namboothiri's sister, married Kallat Krishnan, an Ezhava by caste. Both of them were active in the theatre movement, and in 1952 they got married. At that time she was employed in the Kozhikode District Co-operative Bank.<sup>93</sup>

The propaganda by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and the Yuvajana Sangham, along with legal mediation, resulted in the negation of orthodox marriage practices. Within a short period of time several widow remarriages took place in the community, and the social stigma attached to widow remarriage ceased to exist. However there was no significant change in the dowry demand, which went on increasing. So was the superstitious belief of the community that, girls were to be married off under any circumstances. Consequently a new tendency emerged in the community by which girls were married to or sold to Brahmins in Sirsi or Mangalore.<sup>94</sup> The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, Yuvajana Sangham and the Antharjana Samajam together fought against the new development in the community. Unfortunately it was not easy, because the economic backwardness of many illoms prompted them to accept such marriage proposals. Similarly even after the enactment many Namboothiri men continued to marry women of matrilineal castes, which was also the result of fiscal problems. Hence it was suggested that economic prosperity of the community by adopting modern education and employment was the only solution for the complete elimination

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<sup>92</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad, op.cit.,p.349

<sup>93</sup> I.C.P. Namboothiri, op.cit., pp. 48-49, T.K.Anandi, *Janakeeya Samarangalil Malabarinte Penpathakal*, (Mal), Eureka, 2006, p. 122.

<sup>94</sup> *Yogakshemam*, 26 Meenam, 1122(1947), quoted in Usha Kumari(ed), op.cit., pp. 190-191, E.M.S.Namboothiripad, *Namboothiriye Manushyanakan'* op.cit., pp.338-388

of illicit marriage practices.<sup>95</sup> Moreover through marriage reforms, patriarchy in the community was strengthened further by creating a space for the development of ‘masculinity.’

### **Antharjana Samajam – Women Initiative for Reform**

Namboothiri reform movement was distinctive from other reform programmes owing to the active participation of women - *antharjanams*. Though the concept of reformism was first adopted by the men of the community, later it attracted women and they realized the urgency for transforming themselves. Soon the most powerful patriarchal community of Kerala witnessed extensive contributions by women in the reform movement. The fervor of reform and modernization gradually spread among *antharjanams* and they started exhibiting an urge to free themselves from the shackles of patriarchy. The women questioned Brahmanical patriarchy and religious scriptures for their anti-women prescriptions. In a community where femininity was equivalent to extreme domesticity, the involvement of women in public discourses was highly revolting. It was thought that reforming women’s life would amount to the negation of traditional customs and practices, which the orthodoxy claimed was ordained by ancient *Smrithis* and *Sruthis*.

The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was formed to defend the traditional privileges enjoyed by the community and for equipping themselves for sustenance in the then society. Hence they showed an aversion towards women’s issues in its initial stage; they were not ready to identify with women’s problems. By the 1920’s and 1930’s there was a radicalization of reform movement and women’s emancipation got momentum in the reformist circles. The pathetic condition of *antharjanams* was raised in the Namboothiri

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<sup>95</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, ‘Namboothiriye Manushyanakan’, op.cit.

Yoghakshema Sabha by the younger generation of the community. The concern for women's life was out of the realization that the community would remain stagnant unless women were taken out of their wretched circumstances.<sup>96</sup> The emergence of an educated - modern systematic education - class was responsible for initiating such discourses on women. This class recasted its women and its gender practices to align itself more closely with the domesticity of the colonial masters and the ways of modern capitalists. A new form of patriarchy thus evolved which provided the rationale for reforms, not seriously questioning, but merely recasting, male domination.<sup>97</sup> The youth of the community, especially the Yuvajana Sangham emerged as the rescuers of *antharjanams*. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was a typical male dominated organization, which was never expected to accommodate women in the institutional frame work. However, showing independence there were women who came forward to assume membership. Astonishing the orthodoxy, Savithri Antharjanam became the first woman member of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>98</sup>

Reformers identified several practices in the community like - *ghosha*, *sambandham*, *adhivedanam*, lack of education, marriage to old men, early widowhood - as responsible for the poignant life of women. The first expression of apprehension about women was in the form of rich literature, which exposed the life of *antharjanams*, and this was significant in arousing the women, for their liberation.<sup>99</sup> The first of this kind was *Rajanirangam* written by V.T.Bhattathiripad, which depicted the deplorable life of *antharjanams* through short stories. Subsequently, in twentieth century,

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<sup>96</sup> B.Bhageerathamma, 'Antharjanaghal', *Unninamboothiri*, 1922, book.3, vol. 5, pp. 193-200

<sup>97</sup> This was the case also in other parts of the country. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar,(ed), *op.cit.*, pp. 1-13

<sup>98</sup> *Yogakshemam*, 14/01/1928

<sup>99</sup> Details regarding the literature on women's issues have been discussed earlier in this chapter.

several literary creations were published with *antharjanams* as characters. Many reformers like V.T.Bhattathiripad, Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, E.M.S. Namboothiripad, M.P. Bhattathiripad, M.R. Bhattathiripad and many others relentlessly wrote on women's issues. Many proposed that *sajathivivaham* of all Namboothiri men and providing systematic education to *antharjanams* would solve the troubles faced by women. However the initial attempts to reform women were not successful owing to the stiff opposition from orthodoxy. This stagnancy in the reform programme was evident in the writings of V.T.Bhatathiripad when he requested *antharjanams* to co-operate with the agenda of reformism. He made it clear that *sajathivivaham*, denial of *adhivedhanam* and per capita partition of the *illom* properties would not materialize without the active involvement of women. V.T.Bhattathiripad insisted on the necessity of the emergence of social reformers from among *antharjanams* who could stand along with men in the fight against orthodoxy.<sup>100</sup> Moreover he advocated a '*anthapura viplavam*', revolution in the inner quarters of *illom* ie. revolution spearheaded by women, for reforming the malicious practices within the community. It was argued that for the progress of the community *antharjanams* must be granted more 'freedom'.<sup>101</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad regarded that *antharjanams* were unaware of freedom and they did not realize the significance of modernization. They do not exhibit any desire to get out of the kitchen and due to this indifference from the *antharjanams* was responsible for their subdued existence.<sup>102</sup> Besides he asserted that women were used to the restriction laid on them by the patriarchy; hence for the sake of community's prosperity women must be convinced of the necessity of

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<sup>100</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Pennkidaghalku Oru Ezhuthu', op.cit., pp. 606-616

<sup>101</sup> Kurur Nayarayanan Bhattathiripad, 'Samudayika Swathantryam', *Unninamboothiri*, 1928, vol. 9, issue.1, pp.18-22

<sup>102</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Streekal', *Unninamboothiri*, 1928, vol.9, issue. 2, pp. 150-182



transformation by the reformers. The freedom envisaged by the reformers was not the liberation of women from the hold of patriarchal hegemony.

Theatre was used as a major medium for achieving women's emancipation by the reformers; this was partly because of the lack of literacy among the women folk.<sup>103</sup> The most celebrated play on the community *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghatheku*, of V.T.Bhattathiripad brought unexpected changes in the status of *antharjanams*. Within a short period of time the play was staged in various places like Chittoor, Muthiringode, Panjal etc. After each performance the number of women in the audience steadily increased; *antharjanams* and children from distant *illoms* came to watch the performance.<sup>104</sup> The play made *antharjanams* realize that there were alternatives in life, that it was possible to repudiate orthodoxy and select unconventional course of life. Articles written by reformers in *Yoghakshemam*, *Unninamboothiri* and *Pashupatham* on the dismal life of *antharjanams* and their concern and commitment for the upliftment of women, gradually made considerable impact on *antharjanams*. The Yuvajana Sangham members attempted to communicate with *antharjanams* when they used to gather for marriage, *varam* or *pooram* and pamphlets discussing the need for reform were distributed among women.<sup>105</sup> As a result of the multi-faceted propaganda of the Yuvajana Sangham, a revolutionary transformation ensued among *antharjanams*; notions of family and marriage began to change.

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<sup>103</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, in an interview, stated that a drama could be more effective than a novel. See Kesavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, op.cit.

<sup>104</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad wrote about the resistance and non co-operation of his brother when it was decided to stage the play in his *illom*. But his old widow aunt supported V.T. Bhattathiripad and stated that changes were inevitable for *antharjanams*. V.T. Bhattathiripad, Karmavipakam, op.cit., pp. 300-301

<sup>105</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, op.cit.

*Ghosha* observed by or inflicted on *antharjanams* was seen as the main impediment in their life. It was a traditional symbol of their seclusion which made them distinct from other women in society. The first *antharjanam* to boycott *ghosha* was Parvathi Manezhi, who attended the Edakunni session of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in 1929 without *ghosha*.<sup>106</sup> Parvathy Manezhi was inspired by her husband and the members of Yuvajana Sangham to attend the session by discarding *ghosha*.<sup>107</sup> She, along with Parvathy Iyakutty, wife of Sahodaran Ayyappan, participated in the inter-dining organized by the Yuvajana Sangham. The orthodoxy was shocked by her public presence. In fact, one of the then reformers Pathiriseeri Namboothiri warned her husband that discarding *ghosha* was too revolutionary for the times; besides, even her close relatives present there walked out of the venue in protest.<sup>108</sup> The orthodoxy publicized several fictitious stories about Parvathy. That she was not an *antharjanam*, was one of them. Later, through an article in *Unninamboothiri*, such claims were falsified. Following the incident, members of Manezhi *illom* were ostracized – *brasht* - and Parvathy

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<sup>106</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., p.122; V.T. Bhattathiripad observed that until then no one had seen an *antharjanam* without *ghosha* in public, and wearing sari and blouse. V.T. Bhattathiripad, *Karmavipakam*, op.cit., p. 285. Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, who wrote a series of articles on the pitiable life of *antharjanams*, argued about the need of reforming *ghosha* system and not about abandoning it. Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namppothiripad, 'Poovacharam Adhava Keezhnatappu', *Unninamboothiri*, 1927, vol. 7, issue. 12, pp. 647-654. The first woman to attend the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha conference was Kottaram Parvathi Antharjanam, who participated in the sixth annual conference in 1914 held at Ramamangalam in Ernakulam. Kottaram Illom was located in Ramamangalam, where the meeting was organized. Though she took part in the conference she didn't discard *ghosha*. Mullanezhi Sivadasan Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> Sumathi. M, 'Martyrs of a Social Revolution In Modern Kerala- A Retrospect and Tribute to Unnoticed and uncared Great men of Kerala', in Charles Dias (ed), *Kerala Spectrum Aspects of Cultural Inheritance*, Indo-Portuguese cultural institute, Cochin, 2006, pp. 375-388

<sup>108</sup> Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, 'Parvathy Manezhi', *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1937.

Manezhi was considered as a *sadhanam*.<sup>109</sup> Due to the pressure of the family members they - Parvathi and her husband - consented to perform *prayaschitham*, but could not execute it. Later the orthodoxy decided to ignore what happened in Edakunni as if it did not occur at all. However the couple struggled hard in the following years and Parvathy Manezhi passed away in 1936. Unfortunately her name was not heard after the event; her courage was not even reckoned by the community or among the reformers.

The concept of an organization for *antharjanams* was mooted by several reformers during the late 1920's and 1930's. V.T. Bhattathiripad proposed the formation of an 'Antharjana Mahayogham' to materialize the revolutionary ideology popularized by the reformers for the past two decades. He stated that emancipation of *antharjanams* would not be possible without their active involvement. They must take part in all reform programmes, by discarding *ghosha*.<sup>110</sup> For the formation of the Antharjana Samajam he suggested that young reformers must organize small gatherings, to which they must take their wives, and separate meetings of women and men must be conducted and husband and wife must later share the ideas discussed in the meetings they attended. This would enable men and women to understand each other's opinions on community reforms and in due course there would not be any need for gender separation in such meetings.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, in a letter sent to *Mathrubhumi*, Kurur Damodaran Namboothiripad's two daughters asked the *antharjanams* to come out of the *illoms*, attend meetings, start studying and to stop observing *ghosha*.<sup>112</sup> Revolutionary ideals let loose by *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghatheku* slowly reached the inner quarters of the

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<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Manushyanayi Marnamekkil', *op.cit.*, pp. 616-636

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 21 April 1932.

*illoms* and many of the *antharjanams* started realizing the exigency of mutating themselves.

*Yachanayathra* organized by the Yuvajana Sangham under the initiative of Pandam Vasudevan Namboothiri and V.T.Bhattathiripad was an important event in the history of the community contributing to the awakening of *antharjanams*.<sup>113</sup> Along the course of the procession they met several *antharjanams* who had assembled eagerly to see the *yachanayathra* as the community was not accustomed to such social upheavals. Many of them wholeheartedly supported this venture, and contributed their jewels towards the fund. As the *yachanayathra* visited most of the *illoms* in Malabar, it turned out to be the first instance where women were exposed to a direct contact with reformist ideology.

In 1930 a meeting of *antharjanams* was convened by Parvathi Nenmenimangalam at her *illom*. It was attended by nearly twelve *antharjanams* and the 'Antharjana Samajam' was formed in this meeting. A proposal was drafted by the *antharjanams* which was sent to the secretary of the Yuvajana Sangham, requesting their help and support in the programmes of the Antharjana Samajam. When the secretary read the proposal at the conference of the Yuvajana Sangham, it was welcomed with great applause, as the formation of the Antharjana Samajam was largely due to the revolutionary ideals let loose by the Yuvajana Sangham.<sup>114</sup> The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha's annual conference at Guruvayur in 1931 made a historic proposal regarding the formation of Antharjana Samajams, in order to provide them with a common platform.<sup>115</sup> The second meeting was held at

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<sup>113</sup> *Yachanyathra* was organized for fund raising to help the Namboothiri Vidyalayam which was on the verge of closure. V.T.Bhattathiripad, Karmavipakam, op.cit., p.306. Many such *yathras* were organized later.

<sup>114</sup> Premji, Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, *Unninamboothiri*, 1947, book 1, no.2, pp. 63-78

<sup>115</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 7 January 1931

Mullamangalath mana, M.P.Bhattathiripad making all arrangements for the meeting. His mother, though not in favour of such an organization, cooperated with it.<sup>116</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad's house was the venue for the third meeting of Antharjana Samajam, which was organized under the leadership of Parvathy Nenmeniengalam and Arya Pallam. They made a resolution to discard *ghosha*, which they adopted at once and from V.T.'s house they, including V.T.'s wife, went to a nearby school without *ghosha*, where V.T. was attending a public function.<sup>117</sup> They declared that chastity of a woman was not in *ghosha*, and broke their *marakuda*. The incident was revolutionary and created much furore in the community. Women who discarded *ghosha* were ostracized and their *illoms* were denied any ritual help by other Namboothiri *illoms*. However these *antharjanams* were not demoralized by the ostracism imposed by the orthodoxy. With the help of the Yuvajana Sangham they organized several meetings of Antharjana Samajams in various Namboothiri *illoms*. By propagating the reform ideology they tried to reach out to more *antharjanams* and were successful in developing confidence among hapless women. The Antharjana Samajam workers visited several *illoms* to enlist *antharjanams* in the organization; at some *illoms* they were not even permitted to enter the house and in some places elderly *antharjanams* forcibly expelled them.<sup>118</sup> Besides, they participated in the conferences of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, upasbhas and Yuvajana Sangham. Though they were not widely welcomed by an orthodox community they emerged successful in disseminating an alternative ideology.

The formation of the Antharjana Samajam was not widely appreciated within the community. There were arguments that, as the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha represents the entire community there was no need for a

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<sup>116</sup> N.P.Viyayakrishnan, *Premji*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 2002, p. 23

<sup>117</sup> Premji, op.cit.

<sup>118</sup> T.K.Anandi, *Janakeeya Samarangalil Malabarinte Penpathakal*, op.cit., p. 115

separate organization for women. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha with its declared objective of reforming the community was promoting changes in *antharjanams*' lives. Moreover it wouldn't be virtuous for *antharjanams* to roam around attending meetings and conferences. They argued in favour of reforms initiated by men, where women were at the receiving end, hence the participation of women in public platform was totally rejected. It was pointed out that excess freedom granted to women would lead to war between sexes in the community.<sup>119</sup>

Struggling hard against orthodoxy, the Antharjana Samajam gradually gained momentum among *antharjanams*. Antharjana Samajams were formed in different places like Guruvayur, Cherpulassery, Peramangalam and Thrissur. The Antharjana Samajam stood for the comprehensive emancipation of Namboothiri women, aimed at rescuing them from the darkness of *illoms* and from their cursed life. In the small gatherings organized by the Antharjana Samajam in various *illoms*, women were introduced to the changes that were taking place in Malabar and within the community, regarding the necessity of systematic education for women, the reform programmes of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham and about the strategies to be accepted for ameliorating themselves. The women discussed *sajathivivaham*, their sufferings as *sapathnis* and made future plans of action. They discussed boycotting the *ghosha* and suggested changing their physical appearance. Women were asked to shun their half-naked attire and adopt sari and blouse. Leaders of the Antharjana Samajam, Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, Arya Pallam and many others had already abandoned traditional dress and had accepted sari. Another transformation advocated was cutting the long ear lobes, elongated by wearing heavy studs

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<sup>119</sup> Kannipayur Sankaran Namboothiri, 'Dambathya Bandham', *Unninamboothiri*, 1927, vol. 7. issue.7. pp. 425-430; Kannipayur Sankaran Namboothiri, 'Dambathya Bandham', *Unninamboothiri*, 1927, vol.7, issue.11, pp. 636-641

from girlhood days and wearing smaller earrings, which became popular as *kathu murikkal prasthanam*; along with this they were asked to throw away their brass and copper bangles and to use gold bangles.<sup>120</sup> These reforms were projected by the Antharjana Samajam workers as inevitable for the time, and these small changes were symbolic of their desire to get out of the shackles of tradition. They identified women's freedom with economic independence which could be realized only through systematic education and employment. The Antharjana Samajam questioned male domination in family relations, property management and marriage. The Antharjana Samajam members asked women to reject marriage proposals for *adhivedhanam* and exhorted widows to be courageous and get married again. In 1933, the Peramangalam session of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha under the presidentship of D.M.Namboothiri, accepted the historic resolution of widow remarriage, and this was largely due to the pressure exerted by the Antharjana Samajam members on the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>121</sup>

The Namboothiri reform movement, in every stage of its progress, had definite leaders who guided the movement to success; similarly the Antharjana Samajam functioned under the charismatic command of leaders. Foremost among the Antharjana Samajam workers were Parvathy Nenmenimangalam in Cochin, Arya Pallam in Malabar and Lalithambika Antharjanam in Travancore.<sup>122</sup> The strenuous propagation initiated by them resulted in attracting *antharjanams* to the activities of the Antharjana Samajam. Apart from conferences convened by the Antharjana Samajam, *antharjanams* were encouraged to participate in the programmes of

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<sup>120</sup> Premji, op.cit. Devaki Nilayamgode has written about the 'great happiness' she felt after undergoing the plastic surgery. Devaki Nilayamgode, op.cit., p. 109

<sup>121</sup> Namboothiri Websites Trust, [http://www.namboothiri.com/articles/yoga\\_kshemasabha .htm](http://www.namboothiri.com/articles/yoga_kshemasabha.htm), downloaded on 24/11/2016

<sup>122</sup> C.S.Chandrika, *Keralathile Stree Munnettaghalude Charitram*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 1998, p. 15

Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham. Consequently the number of *antharjanams* participating in the silver jubilee conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha held at Karalmanna, was more than a hundred.<sup>123</sup>

The birth of Antharjana Samajam was predominantly due the valour of Parvathi Nenmenimangalam, who had imbibed the ideology of reform.<sup>124</sup> After marriage she was exposed to progressive reform ideology that was developing among the Namboothiri community during that period. She developed deep concern for the misfortunes of *antharjanams* and made innovative programmes for their rescue. The spirit of reformism in her made her organize the Antharjana Samajam for furnishing a unique pulpit to fight against patriarchy.<sup>125</sup> Quite naturally she was the guiding spirit in the development of the Antharjana Samajam and in the programmes they conducted. She became a popular figure among the reformers of the community and the *antharjanams* and demonstrated great organizational capacity. Parvathy Nenmenimangalam delivered several speeches on *antharjanams* in various conferences and she relentlessly wrote in the then current magazines.

In 1932 she presided over the annual conference of the Yuvajana Sangham held at Thaliparamba, which was a great achievement for the entire

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<sup>123</sup> Premji, op.cit.

<sup>124</sup> Parvathi Nenmenimangalam, was born in a highly orthodox Namboothiri *illom*, Nallur Mana and at the age of fourteen was married by Nenmenimangalam Vasudevan Namboothiri. Nenmenimangalam *Illom* was a progressive *illom* and many of its members were active participants of the reform movement and was a venue for several meetings of the young reformers. Interview with Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, (junior) she is the wife of Vasudevan Namboothiri's brother, at Thrissur, on 30/12/2015

<sup>125</sup> Parvathy Nenmenimangalam was just 20 year old when she founded the Antharjana Samajam.



Namboothiri women community.<sup>126</sup> Later she was nominated by the government as the special representative to the Cochin Legislative Assembly on the Cochin Namboothiri Bill.<sup>127</sup> When the bill was going through third reading, Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, supporting the bill, made a powerful speech elaborating on the miserable conditions of *antharjanams*. She observed that the archaic traditions and customs of marriage along with a declining economic system of the community were responsible for the sufferings of *antharjanams*. The proposed bill, she argued, was capable of ameliorating *antharjanams*' lives, by legalizing *sajathivivaham* and prohibiting *adhivedanam*.<sup>128</sup> After her speech, the assembly unanimously consented to the bill, which later became Cochin Namboothiri Act.<sup>129</sup> After the enactment of the Madras Namboothiri Act, the Yuvajana Sangham activities faced a setback, as many of the young activists having accomplished their immediate objectives moved on from community reform. This in turn strengthened the moderate faction of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha which was becoming more orthodox in its expositions. In such a troubled atmosphere Parvathy Nenmenimagalam was selected as the President of the annual conference of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in 1936.<sup>130</sup> At that session a resolution to provide Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha's membership to V.K.Narayana Bhattahiri, who had been excommunicated,

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<sup>126</sup> S.Manjuladevi, *Women's Movements in Kerala Challenges and Prospects*, Betsy Institute of Non violence and Women Studies, Madurai, 2002,p.103

<sup>127</sup> In the Cochin legislative assembly several bills on the Namboothiri community were introduced. But due to the stiff opposition of the royal family members and that of the orthodox faction within the community, the assembly rejected all those bills and once when a bill was passed by the assembly the King refused to sign it. V.T. Bhattathiripad, *Dhakshinayanam*, in V.T.Bhattathiripad, op.cit.,p.279 ; E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Atmakadha*, op.cit., pp. 122-123

<sup>128</sup> From the speech of Parvathy Nenmenimagalam, in Cochin Legislative Assembly, *Mathrubhumi*, 19/03/1932

<sup>129</sup> Premji, op.cit.

<sup>130</sup> She became the President of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha in 1936 and also in 1946.

was passed with huge majority. On this issue there was a heated debate between moderates and young members of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha; moderates were against co-operating with those who were excommunicated from the community.<sup>131</sup> By 1937 she withdrew from active community reform programmes, which was in the grip of moderates, and she passed away in 1947 at the age of 36. Though her region of activity was Cochin, she could exert considerable influence on the *antharjanams* of Malabar and she never delineated *antharjanams* of the three political divisions of Kerala as they were all oppressed by the practices of Brahmanical patriarchy.

The most prominent *antharjanam* activist in Malabar region was Arya Pallom, born in a highly orthodox *illom*, and married to Pallom Krishnan Namboothiri, a revolutionary social reformer. She boycotted *ghosha* in 1932 and accepted sari and blouse. Being a founding member of the Antharjana Samajam, she visited numerous *illoms* to propagate the ideology of the Antharjana Samajam and to enlist *antharjanams* to the organization. She questioned and criticized the patriarchy for keeping *antharjanams* in utter ignorance and for exploiting them for the selfish interests of men.<sup>132</sup> Arya Pallom was an ardent supporter of widow remarriage, organized *misrabhojanam* at her *illom* and worked among the Dalit community. Her activities were not confined to the Antharjana Samajam or the Namboothiri community. She was elected as the member of the Malabar District Board. Arya Pallom participated in Guruvayur temple satyagraha and was a speaker on the tenth day of the satyagraha. Moreover, she expressed her willingness to undertake fasting for the cause of the movement.<sup>133</sup> Later she was attracted to

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<sup>131</sup> V.K.Narayana Bhattathiri was excommunicated, *brashtan*, following the Kuriyedath Tathri's *smarthavicharam* in 1905.

<sup>132</sup> C.S.Chandrika, *op.cit.*, p. 14

<sup>133</sup> Payapilli Balan, 'Arya Pallam', in Ushakumari (ed), *op.cit.*, pp. 166-170

socialist ideology and participated in several movements organized by the socialist party.

With the withdrawal of Parvathy Nenmenimanagalam and Yuvajana Sangham from the community reforms, the Antharjana Samajam experienced retardation in its activities and ideology. An impediment to the programmes of the Antharjana Samajam was not the fact that all its objectives were realized, but that they had no vision about what to achieve and also who should lead them. The Ongallur Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha of 1944 under the presidentship of E.M.S.Namboothiripad resolved the dilemma of the Antharjana Samajam.<sup>134</sup> He regarded that the most important issue which was to be addressed by the community was that of '*pennkoda*', marrying off girls. With statistical evidence he showed that the number of unmarried girls was increasing in *illoms*, which was largely due to the dowry system and *sambandham* relations of Namboothiri men. Financial insecurity of Namboothiri men forced them to demand dowry, in the absence of which they accepted *sambandham* proposals from *kovilakams* and Nair *tarawads*. Hence he argued that for facilitating the marriage of Namboothiri women, the community must accept modern education and, following the example of other communities, should exploit the new employment opportunities and start new industries and commercial enterprises. Finally he asked the Namboothiris to shun their superiority feeling and start working in their soil; else the Namboothiri would be overrun by other communities and in the near future they would be at the mercy of other lower caste groups. He asked the community to educate their girls and make them capable of accepting jobs

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<sup>134</sup> E.M.S.Namboothiripad made an elaborate speech, 'Namboothiriye Manushyanakkan', at the Ongallur Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha. In his historic speech he detailed the activities and ideology of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha from its inception, its leaders and conflicts that had hampered the progress of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha. He proposed several activities to be undertaken by the Antharjana Samajam in the near future. E.M.S.Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiriye Manushyanakkan' op.cit.

and also to allow women to select their own marriage partners. E.M.S.Namboothiripad proposed a novel concept of beginning training centers for women where they could be trained in various activities like weaving, stitching, basket making and embroidery through which they could earn a living.<sup>135</sup> The community was requested to cast off their prejudices regarding male-female relations and was to allow *antharjanams* to freely mingle with men, thereby to build up healthy inter-sex relations within the community.

The Antharjana Samajam was invigorated at Ongallur and provided with definite objectives and they started functioning once again to achieve the total liberation of *antharjanams* from Brahmanical patriarchy. At Ongallur, the Antharjana Samajam convened a conference of *antharjanams* and several members of the Antharjana Samajam served as volunteers in organizing the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>136</sup> After Ongallur, the Antharjana Samajam conducted meetings at regular intervals and elected their office bearers and in all the consecutive sessions they discussed the formation of a training centre for *antharjanams*. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha accepted the proposal for a Thozil Kendram which could function as a training centre and as an asylum for deserted *antharjanams*.<sup>137</sup> The Thozil Kendram was conceived as a training centre which could enable *antharjanams* to be self-sufficient and economically independent. Nevertheless, the chief intention towards its establishment was to rescue women from being married to Brahmins from Sirsi or Mangalore. Moreover it

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<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, (junior), Thrissur, on 30/12/2015. Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, (junior) was one of the volunteer in the Ongallur session, she addressed the gathering of *antharjanams*.

<sup>137</sup> *Yoghakshemam*, 2/8/1946

was to house destitute *antharjanams* deserted by husbands, rehabilitate child widows and also to liberate *antharjanams* from the sufferings of *sapathnis*.<sup>138</sup>

Capital investment for Thozil Kendram posed a challenge for Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha; hence they decided to organize a *yachanayathra* for fund raising towards the establishment of the training centre.<sup>139</sup> The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha arranged a one week *yachanayathra* to be conducted in Valluvanad, Ponnani, Eranad and Thalappalli Taluks. Participants in the *yachanayathra* were divided into nine batches; for each taluk there would be a captain, a pilot and around 12 members of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha or Antharjana Samajam. I.C.P.Namboothiri was designated as the organizer of the *yachanayathra*. However, though the *yachanayathra* was being organized for women of the community, none of the captains and pilots was women.<sup>140</sup> The *Yachanayathra* was widely welcomed by the community, especially by *antharjanams* who contributed to the fund as they could. Some of them donated their small savings and others contributed their jewels.<sup>141</sup> Members of the Antharjana Samajam including Arya Pallam, I.C.Priyadatta, Kanjoor Gouri Antharjanam, Kanjoor Kali Antharjanam, Pathiyil Priyadatta were some of the participants of *yachanayathra*.<sup>142</sup> The second *yachanayathra* in the history of Namboothiri community was significant in the emancipation of women. The *yachanayathra* proved to be an efficient propaganda for the ideologies of the Antharjana Samajam. While visiting *illoms*, they stated the need for education of women and how they could become economically self-sufficient. Many women expressed their desire to co-operate with the

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<sup>138</sup> *Yoghakshemam*, 12/4/1947

<sup>139</sup> *Yoghakshemam*, 1122 Meenam 12 (1947), reprinted in Ushakumari(ed), op.cit., pp. 187-189

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Yoghakshemam*, 26/04/1944, reprinted in Ushakumari(ed), op.cit., pp. 198-206

<sup>142</sup> T.K.Anandi, *Janakeeya Samarangalil Malabarinte Penpathakal*, op.cit., p. 112

Antharjana Samajam and to be an inmate of the proposed Thozil Kendram. The *yachanayathra* turned out to be an exposure both for Antharjana Samajam workers and *antharjanams* confined in *illoms*.

The Pazhur session of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha presided by V.T.Bhattathiripad was significant in the history of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and that of Antharjana Samajam. In the presidential address it was categorically stated that the immediate challenge of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was to propose and finalize a definite programme for the liberation of *antharjanams* which would result in a comprehensive transmutation of their life.<sup>143</sup> For such a transformation V.T.Bhattathiripad recommended the establishment of Thozil Kendram. He requested generous financial assistance from the community members for the training centre and responding favourably many *antharjanams* contributed their jewels, which were auctioned for a high amount.<sup>144</sup> In the memory of Parvathy Nenmenimangalam, the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha decided to name Thozil Kendram as Parvathy Memorial Thozil Kendram. The Pazhur session was a momentous one for the Antharjana Samajam, as it witnessed high participation of women and most of the issues discussed were regarding *antharjanams*.<sup>145</sup> Arya Pallom, presenting a resolution requesting an enquiry into the domestic violence against women, *anthapuramardhana anweshanam*, said that even after three decades of reform activities, there was no change in the violence inflicted on women within *illoms*. Hence she demanded an

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<sup>143</sup> Ollapamanna, 'Pazhuril', *Unninamboothiri*, 1947, vol. 1, issue. 2, pp. 113-117.

<sup>144</sup> Muthatte Devaki Antharjanam contributed her *nedumangalyam*, the symbol of being married, which a married woman was by tradition to wear till her widowhood. Hence, the action was regarded as a symbolic rejection of a superstitious tradition. *ibid*.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid*. In the literary conference organized at the session *antharjanams* also participated, N.Sarojini and K.N.Savithri recited a rebellious poem which proclaimed that *antharjanams* were not destitutes; they possessed courage to quit their kitchen and could transform the community.

enquiry by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and accordingly a standing committee was formed by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha to investigate and report on issues related to violence against women and children.<sup>146</sup>

Arya Pallam presided over the conference of the Antharjana Samajam convened at the session where *antharjanams* shared their experience of the *yachanayathra*. K.N.Savithri observed that in many *illoms antharjanams* were being oppressed and the reform activities so far undertaken didn't reach the inner quarters of *illoms*. She asked *antharjanams* not to wait for their husband or brother to liberate them; instead they were to come out of their *illoms* and win their freedom.<sup>147</sup> In the presidential address Arya Pallam demanded *antharjanams* to be self-sufficient by accepting employment and requested Namboothiri men to arrange a conducive environment for *antharjanams* to work outside *illoms*. However, the most rebellious observation came from V.T.Bhattathiripad when he stated that Kuriyedath Tathri was not to be blamed for her activities and that she had only boldly expressed her contempt against male domination and sexual laxity of Namboothiri men. Though there were differences of opinion on her approach, her intentions were revolutionary and laudable. V.T.Bhattathiripad's argument pointed towards the radical change in the attitude of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, because it may be for the first time that the issue of Kuriyedath Tathri was discussed openly from the platform of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, *Yoghakshemam*, 26/04/1944, *op.cit.* Members of the committee were P.K.P.Namboothiri, O.M.V.Namboothiripad, Secretary of Antharjana Samajam, V.N.Namboothiri and I.C.P.Namboothiri.

<sup>147</sup> Ollapamanna, 'Pazhuril', *op.cit.*

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.* Also, Kesavan Veluthat, K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri, *op.cit.*

The venue for the establishment of Thozil Kendram was a challenge for the Antharjana Samajam, but it was resolved when C.M.C.Narayanan Namboothiripad donated his Mangalath Mana at Lakkidi for the initiative. The Thozil Kendram was inaugurated by C.M.C.Narayanan Namboothiripad's wife Sreedevi Antharjanam on 26/06/1947 at Lakkidi.<sup>149</sup> Presiding over the inaugural session, V.T.Bhattathiripad said that the training centre may inaugurate a new chapter in the life of *antharjanams* by liberating them from patriarchal domination. From the applications received sixteen students were selected to the first batch to be trained in the Thozil Kendram.<sup>150</sup> A two year training programme was to be given to the students and they would be taught geography, history, mathematics, general knowledge, stitching, embroidery, weaving, midwifery, home science, agriculture and domestication of animals. The scheme of study proposed was in tune with the needs of patriarchy and was not to promote a natural development of *antharjanams*. P.Nethran Bhattathiripad was appointed as the manager and P.Priyadatta as the warden of the Thozil Kendram. A seven member working committee was constituted with Arya Pallam as the only *antharjanams* representative.<sup>151</sup> The inmates of the Thozil Kendram were divided into three or four groups and each group was assigned a definite job. Nethran Bhattathiripad taught different subjects and he arranged a library. When in the training centre they were to wear *mundu* and blouse and while going out they used sari.<sup>152</sup> The Thozil Kendram was widely discussed within the community and many who had opposed it, soon started supporting it. The

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<sup>149</sup> Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha had decided that Ollapamanna Umadevi would inaugurate but due to certain issues she could not.

<sup>150</sup> At first the intention of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha was to admit 25 students, out of which 10 elderly *antharjanams* and five girls would be given training free of cost, and another ten who could pay a prescribed amount would also be admitted. *Yoghakshemam*, 21/05/1947

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Geetha, *Pennkalaghal*, (Mal), Current Books, Kozhikode, 2012, p.148



publicity it received was the reason which prompted many Namboothiri Yoghakshema Upa sabhas to start similar organizations in their region.<sup>153</sup>

The Antharjana Samajam and the committee members of the Thozil Kendram decided to stage a drama on the objectives and expected results of the Thozil Kendram. As theatre was a widely used medium in the Namboothiri reform movement, the drama *Thozil Kendrathileku* was well received by the inmates. The play which centered on the life of a Namboothiri girl, was written and staged by *antharjanams*.<sup>154</sup> The play in its content was extremely powerful; it criticized the superstitions followed by a 'reformed' community and the condition of *antharjanams* in *illom* even after the reforms. The play was first staged during the first annual day celebration of the Thozil Kendram, later it was staged at Cherppu upa Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha annual conference, following which the *antharjanams* were invited to various places for performance, and it was staged nine times. However the play was not widely accepted as *Adukkalayil ninnu Araghthekku* or *Marakudakulile Mahanarakam*.

Unfortunately the much discussed and expected Thozil Kendram ceased to function after two years. Due to stiff resistance and criticisms the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha decided to stop the functioning of the Thozil Kendram. Devaki Narikatiri observed that only a few members of the Antharjana Samajam and that of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha were aware of the objectives of the Thozil Kendram, others supported it merely as a new initiative. Even many of the inmates didn't realize what they were actually doing. Hence the powerful revolutionary zeal of the Thozil Kendram

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<sup>153</sup> Alathiyur Namboothiri Yoghakshema Upasabha decided to establish a Thozil Kendram in their region and Antharjana Samajam also proposed a Thozil Kendram at Pattambi. However these were not established, due to various reasons. *Yoghakshemam*, 18/6/1948

<sup>154</sup> M.P.Bhattathiripad, M.R.Bhattathiripad helped *antharjanams* in drafting the script. Geetha, op.cit., p.149

was not properly recognized. Consequently it could not withstand the severe criticism unleashed by the orthodoxy.<sup>155</sup> However, the significant achievement of the Thozil Kendram was not in the moulding of its inmates alone, but in the impact it made on the entire *antharjanam* community. It familiarized them with alternatives in life, enabled them to shun dependence on marriage and conscientized them about the importance of labour.

The Thozil Kendram was a genuine initiative to rehabilitate the distressed *antharjanams* but this conviction was not acceptable to the traditional orthodoxy. They started a counter propaganda through a weekly named *Pathaka*, which published a series of articles against the Thozil Kendram and labeled its inmates as prostitutes.<sup>156</sup> As the Thozil Kendram promoted healthy relation between the sexes it was scorned as '*lajja nasikara kendram*', centre for the destruction of shame.<sup>157</sup> The Thozil Kendram was regarded as an institute for spreading communist ideology; they were of the opinion that the inmates of the Thozil Kendram were forced to participate in communist movements. It was also seen as a financial burden which wasted the community's resources. The *pathakakar* opposed Namboothiri girls being sent to school and criticized the Antharjana Samajam's propaganda that *antharjanams* must accept new employment opportunities.<sup>158</sup>

For the Namboothiri community Thozil Kendram was a novel experience, they never expected their women to live outside the 'secure

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<sup>155</sup> T.K.Anandi, *Keraleeya Samarangalil Malabarinte Penpathakal*, op.cit., pp. 48-49

<sup>156</sup> Kurumapalli Purushothaman Namboothiri, Njanghal Kanda Thozil Kendram, *Pathaka*, 27/03/1948, p. 4. *Pathaka* was a Weekly published by the extreme orthodox faction of the community, who rejected all reform initiatives and their key target was the then Communist Party of Kerala. As the Communist ideology was becoming popular among Namboothiris, they dismissed the entire new developments in the community as created by Communists.

<sup>157</sup> P.S.Arya Devi, Parishkaramennalendu, *Pathaka*, 21/08/1948, p.5

<sup>158</sup> Bharghavan, 'Kettilyo Kinjana', *Pathaka*, 27/08/1948, p.3

prison' of *illom*. By tradition an *antharjanam* who went out of the *illom* without the company of Nair maid could be excommunicated. It was in such circumstances that several women boldly chose to become a part of the Thozil Kendram. The criticisms of *Pathaka* were definitely against the growing influence of communist ideology in the community as the leaders of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Antharjana Samajam were active members of the communist party. It was out of anger at being sidelined in community politics that they unleashed severe criticisms. The Antharjana Samajam was successful in achieving explicit transformations in the lives of the *antharjanams*. It made them bold enough to question injustice and confident enough to assert their rights.

The self-critique reform movement among the Namboothiris successfully disseminated modern notions of family and marriage within the community. The reformers identified that their traditional system of marriage and family was the cardinal reason for most of the issues they faced. Consequently the alternative suggested was the acceptance of the 'ideal pan-Indian monogamous family structure', based on strictly endogamous marriages. Community experienced a 'marriage revolution' by denouncing the archaic practices. Moreover unlike any other communities of Kerala, Namboothiris addressed the issues of women and set out to resolve it, within the limits dictated by patriarchy. Proposed changes for restructuring family and marriage were institutionalized by the enactment of Madras Namboothiri Act, which took the community along a progressive course.

## CHAPTER V

### RE-FASHIONING WOMANHOOD

For the Indian middle class women's reform became mandatory for their further progress in the twentieth century. The history of reform was conveyed down the generations as extremely progressive with an overwhelming commitment towards women's emancipation. A close reading of social reform debates reveal that things are not exactly as they seem; or rather, the supposedly philanthropic concern for the condition of women has not been entirely motivated by abstract principles of humanitarianism.<sup>1</sup> The propaganda for women's reform was tied up with their self-definition of the class, with a new division of the public from the private sphere and aligned with 'cultural nationalism'.<sup>2</sup> The history of women's reform in India, which usually begins with Raja Ram Mohan Roy exhibited several contradictions and also compromises both with modernity and tradition.

The image of women popularized by the reform movement was that of a traditionally educated, moral and highly 'domestic Indian woman'. Such an image of women was the product of the Western liberal bourgeoisie philosophies imbibed by the Indian middle class, which wanted to relegate women to the inner quarters of house. The domain where the new idea of womanhood was sought to be actualized was the home, the private sphere of life.<sup>3</sup> From the second half of nineteenth century Indian womanhood and the home which was seen as one of the most important sites where the essential

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Uberoi (ed), *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State*, op.cit., p. xi

<sup>2</sup> Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid(ed), op.cit., p. 9

<sup>3</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', op.cit., p. 250.

marks of cultural identity were located and reproduced.<sup>4</sup> Middle class ideologies regarding women exhibited conflicting tendencies as the men wanted women to assimilate new culture and lifestyle, as well as maintain traditional values and domesticity without fail.

Reform agenda and Nationalist movement together formulated new notions of womanhood, family, marriage and morality. Kerala also witnessed the emergence of similar notions concerning women, but these were totally distinct from those developed in other parts of India. Concepts that emanated in Kerala gave prime concern to carve out a new womanhood free from the influences of matriliney. Ideals of womanhood are divergent within patriarchy and matriliney. Reducing the matrilineal impact and induction of *malayali* woman to a 'pan Indian *sthreedharma*' was the task taken up by the reformers of Kerala. In other words the movement can also be viewed as an attempt to institutionalize masculinity over and above femininity. Similarly the concept of empowering masculinity was far more evident in the reform programme of Malabar as both the communities studied here had a group of 'deprived men'. Within the Namboothiri community as a result of the primogeniture majority of the male members were denied of a regular family life and property rights. On the other hand among the Nairs, though every member had property rights, in effect those rights were negated as the *tarawad* property was under the monopolistic control of the *karanavan*. Moreover Nair men wanted to forge a family for themselves in the pan-Indian model, where there would be a redefinition of masculinity different from that of matrilineal organization.

Educating women was conceived as the chief means to inculcate the desired qualities. When it comes to the education of women, in a traditional caste ridden society several issues were confronted with, such as, whether

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<sup>4</sup> Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p. 135

women were to be educated or not, how to educate and what to teach them? A conflict may arise between the ideals of womanhood and the ideals of education. As education may create a certain measure of independence of thought, a spirit of inquiry and of objectivity, it could threaten the well maintained differences between sexes.<sup>5</sup> Debates on education for women continued for several decades, with both men and women as participants. In order to ascertain the development of notions regarding women, the debates that took place on women's education are to be analyzed.

### **Women's Education**

For ages women were maintained uneducated so as to cater to the requirements of patriarchy and to sustain their domestic status. Women were oblivious of the world of education and knowledge. The orthodox critics of women's education considered that women's intellectual desires would make women sexually immoral. When a girls' school was first started in Calcutta the editor of a Bengalee newspaper sarcastically offered his services to teach girls at night. The reformist leader Sibnath Shastri's mother was an educated woman. When his school teacher discovered this, he immediately sent her a letter through the little boy, asking her for a secret assignment.<sup>6</sup> Orthodox society thought that 'if a woman was educated she must be immoral'. "A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, that a girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage becomes a widow."<sup>7</sup> Forbes argues that it was women who enforced the prohibition against female education.

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<sup>5</sup> Neera Desai and Maiteryi Krishna Raj, *op.cit.*, p. 152

<sup>6</sup> Tanika Sarkar, 'A Book of Her own a Life of Her own', in Dilip.M.Menon (ed), *CulturalHistory of Modern India*, Social Science Press, New Delhi,2006, p.55.

<sup>7</sup> William Adams report on the state of education in India quoted in Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India-Women in India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p.53

However during the colonial period the system of formal schooling was opened up to women.<sup>8</sup> Middle class men began to feel that, their women were 'not suitable' to lead a life along with them. The wide gulf between the educated husband and the uneducated wife created difficulties in the social and family structures. The life of a government employee or an advocate or defense personnel were entirely different from that of the life of a common man from a rural background. Educated men were often not able to have a satisfactory relationship with their wives.<sup>9</sup> Hence to fulfill the needs of the middle class it was accepted that women must be educated. From here onwards education which was a monopoly of men was extended to women by the advocates of women's education. Thenceforth, the motive force behind educating women was not to develop her individuality or intellectual capacity, but for maintaining the house of a middle class Indian, attracted by Western culture and lifestyle. Women were asked to gain more knowledge to enable them to become more agreeable and suitable companions in the new homestead.<sup>10</sup>

Phyllis Stock asserted that whoever controls the image of "ideal woman" determines the education of women.<sup>11</sup> The creation of an ideal woman by polishing her natural tendencies and attitudes was the main purpose of women's education. Since women were regarded as central to the image of family status, their training was directed to that end. Home education was the most preferred since girls' moral and physical development

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<sup>8</sup> Details regarding Governmental interventions in women education and the role of missionaries in promoting women education have been given in the second chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Vir Bharati Talwar, 'Feminist Consciousness in Women's Journals in Hindi, 1910-1920', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed), op.cit.,p.220

<sup>10</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, op.cit., p. 289

<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Stock, *Better Than Rubies: A history of Women education*, Putnam, New York, 1978, quoted in Barbara J. Whitehead (ed), *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe A History, 1500-1800*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1999, p.xi

could be more closely supervised and the centrality of the family enhanced.<sup>12</sup> However in course of time educated men became ready to send their daughters and sisters to schools or arrange private English tuitions at home. In Bengal, as argued by Partha Chatterjee, formal education became not only acceptable, but in fact a requirement for the new *Bhadramahila*, when it was demonstrated that it was possible for a woman to acquire the cultural refinements afforded by modern education without jeopardizing her place at home.<sup>13</sup>

One of the slogans of the social reform movement, “educating a girl means educating a family”, signifies the importance given to women’s education by the social reformers during the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Reformers argued that educated women would enrich the family and society and promote the socialization of children, which resulted in a wide propaganda for women’s education. Social reformers of Kerala took up the issue of education in the course of their propaganda for emancipation of women. Naturally, like any other social issue, women’s education was also vehemently criticized by the orthodoxy. Education proposed for women was not free from gendering, as the education recommended by reformers was a gendered programme of instruction.

Print media became dominant in Kerala by the close of the nineteenth century and enabled the development of community identities.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of a nascent public sphere can also be regarded as one of the after-

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<sup>12</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 290

<sup>13</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p. 246

<sup>14</sup> Karuna Chanana, *op.cit.*, p.114.

<sup>15</sup> Every caste organization in Kerala had their own magazines, which was used to forge a unity among its members and also to develop an identity distinct from others.



effects of print culture.<sup>16</sup> Several debates concerning women and social reorganization of nineteenth and twentieth centuries were contested in this public sphere. In the debates that emerged in this public sphere, gender difference figured as the fundamental principle of ordering human beings, as the alternative to the established social order that privileged birth and inherited status.<sup>17</sup> Magazines and novels were the most important medium used by reformers from nineteenth century onwards. Magazines were an expression of the middle class aspirations, and served them in the dissemination of reform ideology. Through magazines they visualized a new social organization which was structured and configured through their contestations.

Both popular and women's magazines contained issues relating to women, family, marriage, education and health. *Keralee Suguna Bhodini* published in 1887 from Thiruvananthapuram was the first women's magazine of Kerala.<sup>18</sup> The editors, in the very first issue, categorically stated that being a woman's magazine, it was solely meant for the development and entertainment of women and political and religious issues would not be discussed.<sup>19</sup> In course of time several women's magazines were published in Malayalam like *Sarada*, *Mahila*, *Lakshmibai*, *Vanithamitram*, *Sreemathi*, *Vanithakusumam* and *Stree*. These women's magazines played an important role in creating a public sphere for women of Kerala, though the accessibility to such a sphere was highly limited to a few women. A new image of the

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<sup>16</sup> G.Arunima, 'Imaging Communities differently- Print, Language and the Public Sphere in Colonial Kerala', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 2006, 43, 1, pp. 63-76

<sup>17</sup> J.Devika, 'Re-inscribing 'Womanliness' Gendered Spaces and Public Debates in Early Modern Keralam', in Charu Gupta(ed), *Gendering Colonial India – Reforms, Print, Caste and Communalism*, Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2012, pp. 136-158

<sup>18</sup> *Maharani* was a Malayalam magazine but was published from Madras by Bhahadur Krishnamachariyar.

<sup>19</sup> Editorial, *Keralee Suguna Bhodini*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 1-2

*Malayali* woman, similar to a pan-Indian concept of womanhood that developed during this period, was disseminated through these magazines.<sup>20</sup> Though at this time 'English education' for women was clearly seen as an aberration or a novelty, or even as a sort of social affectation, this was expected to change within the next couple of decades or so. Yet, in the interim, a pretty grim battle raged in the pages of the journals and newspapers, mainly between men of different persuasions, about the necessity of educating women.<sup>21</sup>

### **Debates Regarding Women's Education**

Print media which became a part of Kerala's popular culture, from the very beginning promoted women's education. Both popular magazines and women's magazines advocated that the progress of the *Malayali* was possible only through educated women. Contemporary literary forms were extensively used for popularizing the views on women's education, both for and against. Men and women wrote on women's education, its necessity and debated on the probable merits and demerits that would come along with the modern system of education. Most of the women's magazines though addressed to the entire women of Kerala, in reality were limited to Nair women. Most of the writers, both men and women, were from Nair community and by the term '*Malayali* women' they meant Nair women.<sup>22</sup> Women's magazines paved way for the emergence of first generation of feminism in Kerala. However, they wrote within the framework of patriarchy, though there were isolated attempts to criticize the general notions regarding women, they maintained a 'safe'

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<sup>20</sup> Discussions on framing a new womanhood can be seen in Vir Bharati Talwar, op.cit., Meredith Borthwick, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> G.Arunima, 'Glimpses from a Writer's World: O. Chandu Menon, His Contemporaries, and Their Times', *Studies in History*, 2004, 20, 2, pp. 189 - 214

<sup>22</sup> *Sarada*, *Mahila*, *Lakshmibai* and *Rasikaranjini* generally wrote about Nair women, they reported the activities of Nair conferences, women organizations of the community.

position.<sup>23</sup> They reckoned that being women meant being inferior to men both in intellectual capacity and physical power and hence not to aspire equality with men. Women writers accepted the division between the public and private sphere pertaining to relations between men and women.<sup>24</sup>

One of the earliest articles on women's education was written by N.A.Amma, interrogating another article published in *Vidyavinodhini*, titled 'Streevidyabhyasam'. The latter argued that there was no need for women to learn letters – "it would be useless and also a source of much harm to them."<sup>25</sup> N.A.Amma tried to construct an argument in favour of an education system for women, which is unavoidable for developing innate intelligence, all these being fruitful only when women were given literacy. Education became inevitable for women in the changed socio-economic conditions created as a result of the collapse of matriliney. Women lost the security provided by *tarawad* and were pushed to severe economic crisis and were made dependant on the husband. The life of widows and divorced women were far more deplorable as they were struggling for existence. Hence women must be allowed to find their own livelihood by accepting work outside house, for which they were to be educated.<sup>26</sup> T.Ammukutty Amma wrote that education would enable women to be more efficient in housekeeping, serving her husband and in caring children. She rejected the argument that education could result in women losing their 'womanliness' and consequently be

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<sup>23</sup> J.Devika, *Her-Self Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*, Stree, Calcutta, 2005, introduction, p. xx

<sup>24</sup> V.Narayani Amma, 'Streekalku Vendathaya Vidyabyasam', *Sarada*, 1907, book.2, vol. 12, p. 271-273; Ammini Amma, 'Streekalum Samudayathinte Ulkarshavum', *Mahila*, 1934, book 14, vol. 7, pp. 228-235

<sup>25</sup> N.A.Amma, 'The Demerits of Female Education: A Refutation', Streevidyabhyasa Doshanishedam, *Vidyavinodhini*, 1897, vol.8, no.11 in J.Devika, (ed) *Her-Self, Early writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*, op.cit., p. 5

<sup>26</sup> B.B.Amma, 'Streekalum Upajeevanamarghagalum', *Mahila*, 1940, book 20, vol.2, pp. 25-27

rendered less considerate to their family. She pointed out that if education hasn't done such harm to men, it won't affect women adversely.<sup>27</sup>

R.Eshwara Pilla argued that education was an 'added adornment' for women, but it was not inevitable that all women must be sent to school. They can learn from home, from parents, educated male members of the family and by observing the world around them. The knowledge thus obtained through experience would be more valuable and beneficial for women's life.<sup>28</sup> Some authors regarded that education would not be beneficial for girls as it wouldn't help a *malayali* woman to manage her home.<sup>29</sup>

One of the major debates regarding education was on the syllabus of study. During that period along with textual education, girls were trained in stitching, embroidery, gardening and so on. V.K.Raman Menon observed that though women were taught stitching, they were not trained to stitch their own dress, except for doing embroidery which was of no use.<sup>30</sup> The then women's education was considered to be futile due to the fact that even after several years of schooling many girls did not know to read properly and there was no knowledge acquisition among girls.<sup>31</sup> Pointing towards the physical peculiarities of women, which were considered as hindrances, authors opined

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<sup>27</sup> T.Ammukutty Amma, *Streevidyabhyasam, Sarada*, book. 1, vol. 5, pp. 15-16. Vengayil KunhIRaman Nair held the view that when education leads to the self development of men and contributes to the progress of nation, the same when imparted to women would never produce inimical consequences. He also added that women must be educated in the same syllabus designed for men, and if this was not possible it would be better that women may remain uneducated. Vengayil KunhIRaman Nayanar, *Kesari Vengayil KunhIRaman Nayanar Sampoorna Krithikal*, (Mal), The State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 2012, p. 206

<sup>28</sup> R.Eshwara Pilla, 'Streekalum Swathandryavum', *Lakshmi Bai*, 1910, book, 5 no. 1, pp. 468-471

<sup>29</sup> V.K.Raman Menon, 'Nammude Vidyarthinikkal', *Lakshmi Bai*, 1918, book. 13, vol. 7, pp. 259-264

<sup>30</sup> V.K.Raman Menon, op.cit.

<sup>31</sup> Ammini Amma, op.cit.

that physically and mentally women were below men, hence there was no need to provide women with the same kind of education. Women are not capable of doing all work that men do and so they must be given jobs with less physical activity. Women's education should be designed in such a way that it must enable them to lead life as a good wife and mother. Moreover women being lower than men in physical and intellectual capacity, their higher education prospects were also rejected.<sup>32</sup> Tharavathu Ammalu Amma requested the state to devise and implement a separate and effective syllabus for educating women.<sup>33</sup> Most of the authors regarded that, education for woman was to boost her capacities as wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Some of them vehemently criticized the opponents of women's education on the ground that without educated mothers we would fail to develop a 'future generation of young men' essential for India. Women's education was meant for others - for husband and children - and development of women themselves was not conceived at all to be the aim of education. Women were not expected to improve her inherent qualities through the agency of education.

Co-education was rejected outright by several authors on account of the fact that it may adversely affect the cultural tradition of Kerala. Besides, as girls were to be imparted a system of education distinct from that of boys, co-education was to be avoided.<sup>34</sup> Western influences were held responsible for the continuance of co-education which was to be stopped instantly.<sup>35</sup> Co-education was regarded to do more harm than good, moreover its utility was questioned even in Western countries, hence it was to be made optional and

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<sup>32</sup> V. Narayana Menon, 'Ethanu Streekalku Uchitam', *Mahila*, 1939, book 19, vol. 4,5, pp. 93-99; V. Narayani Amma, op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> Tharavath Ammalu Amma, 'Aadhunika Sthreevidyabhyasam', *Vanitha Kusumam*, 1927, book 1, vol.3, pp. 95-96.

<sup>34</sup> V.K.Raman Menon, op.cit.

<sup>35</sup> B.Anandavalli Amma, 'Streekalude Samuhya Jeevithatinte Naveekaranathilatharbhavikunna Prasnaghal', *Mahila*, 1939, book. 19, vol. 4 & 5, pp. 124-136

not compulsory.<sup>36</sup> The medium of instruction for women recommended by many authors was Malayalam.<sup>37</sup> It was held that since women could not undertake any serious employment there was no need for them to learn English. Women, being intellectually and morally weak may be misguided by education, especially by western education.<sup>38</sup>

While most of the writers recognized the need for education for women, they expressed apprehension on the increasing fascination among educated girls for western lifestyle. Young girls' craze for fashion was staunchly criticized; parents were asked to prevent their daughters from imitating the dress patterns of foreign countries.<sup>39</sup> Educated girls were accused of being inconsiderate in household work; they were not fulfilling their duties towards husbands. Instead they appointed servants to do domestic chores and to look after children.<sup>40</sup> English education was held responsible for the misbehavior among girls. Women were accused of creating problems in houses and for quarrelling with husbands.<sup>41</sup> Playing tennis, reading novels, participating in women's organizations, using new colorful costumes were designated as 'misbehaviors'.

Lakshmi N. Menon rightly delineated the public-private dichotomy involved in the debates on women's education. When one group of

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<sup>36</sup> Swadeshabhmani, 28/06/1929, NNPR 1929 July-August

<sup>37</sup> Theruvathu Ammini Amma, 'Oru Prasangham,' *Lakshmibai*, 1917, book13, no. 2, pp. 53-63.

<sup>38</sup> V.Narayani Amma, op.cit. In order to overcome the cynical impacts of western education, it was proposed that Hindu women must be acquainted with the ideologies of Hinduism, which would help to inculcate morality among them. However the scope for such a religious education was limited within the then present curriculum, hence the reformers were advised to evolve an alternative educational system for Hindu women. Karayi Damayanthi, 'Nammude Streekalude Vidyabhyasam', *Mitavadi*, 1914, book. 2, vol. 7, pp. 17-20

<sup>39</sup> Paravoor K.Gopala Pilla , 'Naveena Bharatathile Vanithakal' , *Mahila*, 1939, book. 19, issue. 8&9, pp.311-316; B.Anandavalli Amma, op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> A woman, 'Streelokathodu', *Mahila*, 1938, book. 18, vol. 2, pp. 219-221

<sup>41</sup> Ammini Amma, op.cit.

supporters of women's education argued that women were to be educated for the progress of the nation, the other group vigorously asserted that as women's chief responsibility was towards their family, the education being imparted to them, must be designed to achieve this end. Traditionally, the nation constituted the public sphere which was reserved for men, whereas family was a private sphere where women were confined in. Hence the scheme of education proposed by the second group, which was widely accepted, would maintain women within the family ie. within the private sphere. Moreover women's entry to the public sphere could be restricted on account of her education being insufficient for that.<sup>42</sup> She suggested that first of all the attitude of Indian society towards women must change, without which the nature and scope of education defeats every attempt at modification. The intellectual needs of men and women are same hence the education proposed for both must be identical.

Women's magazines continuously published articles about women of other countries like England, Japan, Germany and Russia. Stories of Sati, Savithri, Draupadi, Seetha, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and Queen Victoria were presented as models for women. Similarly articles of prominent personalities like Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Muthulakshmi Reddy were published on a regular basis. These might have enabled the middle class women of Kerala to be familiar with the women's movement that took place in other parts of the country.<sup>43</sup> Such articles can be classified into two categories- one was the narration of women's life in various countries, their struggles, movements led by them, descriptions and pictures of their costumes and ornaments. The second category included articles which criticized the

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<sup>42</sup> Lakshmi N. Menon, 'Balikamarude Vidyabyasam', *M.N.Nair Masika*, 1938, book. 3, vol. 9&10, pp. 473-475

<sup>43</sup> One such articles was, Panditha Sasthri Harisharma, 'Pourasthya streekalum Paschatya Vidyabhyasavum', (originally published in a Bengali magazine), *Lakshmibai*, 1921, book 17, vol. 4, pp.115-120

habits of women in those countries, their familial relationships and chastity, and warned *malayali* women from imitating Western women and exhorted the natives to preserve their own cultural tradition.

Patriarchal concern for safeguarding women's chastity prompted the society to restrict women's education. Through the formal education implemented by the missionaries, indigenous women were exposed to a new world of experience and with a totally different culture, alien to that existed here. The authors feared that the loose familial relationships that were alleged to have existed in European countries may creep into our families as a result of women's education. However no such apprehensions were expressed when Indian men started accepting English education. Shefali Chandra observed that in North India a fear was prevalent that educated women would have the power to invoke legal procedures to shun their husbands' authority and initiate separation; educated women would repudiate the marital bond.<sup>44</sup> Such an anxiety was ubiquitous in Kerala that the educated women may trivialize the sanctity of marriage and family. In order to maintain morality among women it was suggested that like Christians, Hindus must also provide religious and moral education to girls.<sup>45</sup>

A society which maintained prejudices against women's education cannot be expected to have a lenient attitude towards women working outside homes - either in government or private firms. However by 1920s and 1930s several articles were written on the necessity of women accepting jobs, support for working women, though not by all, on the basis that they could help the husband economically in managing the family. At the same time chastity of women who worked outside home was discussed with much

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<sup>44</sup> Shefali Chandra, *Sexual Life of English: Language of Caste and Desire in Colonial India*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2013 (first published - 2012), p. 43

<sup>45</sup> B. Anandavalli Amma, op.cit.; G.Parukuttiyamma, 'Streekalude Vimochanam Sadacharabhyasam', *Sarada*, 1909, vol.4, no.2, pp. 96-102



distress. Women were held morally weak; hence circumstances where women come into contact with men were to be avoided. Naturally when women accept jobs, they would be in 'such immoral circumstances', so the society was to ensure the chastity of women by being vigilant and by restricting women's interactions.<sup>46</sup> Most of the authors, on account of physical peculiarities of women, recommended easy or simple jobs which did not demand much intellectual capacity. The medical profession, that too Ayurveda, and teaching were ideal professions proposed for women. Stitching, baby sitting, nursing patients, teaching music were the four suitable jobs recommended for women, because these works could be undertaken without involving men.<sup>47</sup> On the whole it could be seen that many of the writers were of the opinion that women could work outside home – provided they were widows and deserted or divorced women, ie. only those who were looked down upon might be employed. In other words there was no need for women who were under the protective care of husbands, to work for money. It was advised that married women must refrain from accepting employment, because their principal obligation was towards their husband and children. Consequently women, enlightened through education, were to serve her marital family.<sup>48</sup>

Mrs.C.Narayana Pillai wrote that within the last thirty years several women acquired education and some were fortunate to get higher education. However, only a very nominal number amongst them were working. All others were confined to their homes and continued their lives under the control of their husbands.<sup>49</sup> She questioned the entire process of social reform

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<sup>46</sup> B.B.Amma, op.cit.; V.Narayana Menon, op.cit.

<sup>47</sup> R.P, 'Streekalude Sreyas', *Lakshmibai*, 1921, book. 16, vol. 10, pp. 343-350

<sup>48</sup> Woman, 'Vivahithakalaya Sthreekalum Udyoaghavum', *Mahila*, 1934, book. 14, vol. 8, pp. 250-255

<sup>49</sup> Mrs.C.Narayana Pilla, 'Abhyasthavidyakalevide', *Sahodari*, 1945, book.3, vol.7, pp. 218-221

and the reformers who claimed to have achieved women's emancipation. Marriage was the limit of girls' education and their dreams; once married she was supposed to serve her husband and children.<sup>50</sup>

The development of individualism, independence and self-assertion impelled men to maintain women uneducated. The emergence of independent women, posed a serious threat to the very existence of patriarchy. The notion of freedom for women- *streeswathandryam*-is not static, it changes from time to time. Even the formal education being given to women was regarded as a great freedom granted to women and as a generosity of the society. Most of the writers maintained that unlimited independence bestowed on women would make them arrogant, similar to the women of European countries.<sup>51</sup> It may sound strange that the majority of the authors who demanded *streeswathandryam*, never attempted to propose equality of women and men. Thus they only envisaged a 'limited freedom' for women. Nevertheless authors like B.B.Amma, rejected the entire movements and arguments for women's freedom, by establishing the concept of *pennmalayalam*, ie. women of Kerala were entitled to complete freedom when compared with women of other places.<sup>52</sup>

R.Eshwara Pilla, writing on women's freedom, observed that, 'areas in which women were to be granted freedom was to be decided by repeated discussions in society'. The author totally rejected the then ongoing struggle for enfranchising women and all the European movements demanding equality for women. Moreover, women who make these demands and those who aspire to men in social status were regarded as women who had no

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<sup>50</sup> Pattathil Balakrishna Menon, 'Streekalude Aswathandratha', *Lakshmibai*, 1915, no.1, vol.2, pp. 88-96

<sup>51</sup> Panditha Sasthri Harisharma, op.cit.; R.P., op.cit.

<sup>52</sup> B.B.Amma, 'Swathantrayaya Kerala Stree', *Mahila*, book. 13, 1933, vol. 3, pp. 71-77

responsibilities towards their husband and children. Formal education being imparted to women was held responsible for the genesis of the idea of complete freedom.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the institutionalization of women's education was largely due to the interests of middle class men to have educated wives, who could share, understand and co-operate with husbands. Certainly after some years, many of the middle class men refused to marry girls with modern education as they were not fit to become good housewives. It was held that educated girls were interested only in reading novels, newspapers, and dressing up. They avoid all household work by appointing one or two servants, who would look after children also. Besides, a man with an average income failed to satisfy the demands of such wives, which led to serious issues within the family. Consequently, it was argued that, marriage of educated girls became a matter of concern for the community and the only probable solution was to bring out modification in the system of education imparted to girls.<sup>54</sup>

### **Women's Education and Malayalam Fiction**

Discussions on women's education were converted to major discourse with popular participation through the medium of novels, written during the last years of the nineteenth century. Starting with *Indulekha* and its several imitations, most works were all built upon the central theme of women's education.<sup>55</sup> *Indulekha* can be read as a plea for women's education and as the presentation of a new model of Nair woman.<sup>56</sup> *Indulekha* was presented by

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<sup>53</sup> R.Eshwara Pillai, 'Streekalum Swathantryavum', *Lakshmibai*, 1910, book.10, pp.421-428

<sup>54</sup> S.Nagamma, 'Streevidyabhyasathil Varutheda Chila Parishkaranghal', *Gurunathan*, 1933, book. 12, vol. 1, pp. 39-41

<sup>55</sup> Kizhakkappattu Ramankutty Menon, *Parangodi Parinayam*, in George Erumbayam (ed); Komattil Pandu Menon, op.cit. ; Cheruvalath Chattu Nair, op.cit.; Joseph Mooliyil, op.cit., were a few among them.

<sup>56</sup> G.Arunima, 'Glimpses from a Writer's World: O. Chandu Menon, His Contemporaries, and Their Times', op.cit.

O.Chandu Menon as a woman deeply rooted in tradition and simultaneously exhibited and entertained Western cultural tastes. Empowered by English education, Indulekha defended the status and morality of Nair women, when criticized by Madhavan.<sup>57</sup> She argued that when compared with the women of Europe and America Nair women enjoyed more freedom and liberty. Moreover she made it clear that the system of marriage among Nair women was not immoral. Educated Indulekha was successful in repudiating the pressure of *karanavan* to marry Suri Namboothiripad, where as her uneducated cousin, Kalyanikutty succumbed to the decisions made by elders, and was married to Suri Namboothiripad.

Cherualath Chattu Nair wrote a novel in 1890, *Meenakshi*, establishing the significance of modern education in the fashioning of a new Nair woman. Puruhuthan Namboothiripad, a character in the novel, vehemently criticized the new trend of providing English education to girls', which according to him was a sheer waste. "Gopala Menon, Meenakshi's uncle refutes the opinion of Puruhuthan Namboothiripad, saying that, education is very important for women, as it helps women to come out of ignorance, to build a good character, and to lead a happy married life."<sup>58</sup> In this novel, the author has made the Kanakamangalam female middle school as an important geographic entity and the centre of the locality. This shows the relative significance the novelist has given to women's education in the wake of newly emerging social changes.

'*Lakshmikesavam*' was a novel written by Komattil Pandu Menon in 1892. The plot of the story involved a relation between Lakshmi- an English educated Nair girl - and Kesavanunni Nair-a student of B.L in Madras. The novel contains a prolonged discussion among Advocate Kanmara Nair and

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<sup>57</sup> O.Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, op.cit., pp.57-59

<sup>58</sup> Cheruvalath Chattu Nair, op.cit., pp.150-151

Kesavanunni Nair on the merits and demerits of women's education.<sup>59</sup> Ettivasu Namboothiri, a character, is a staunch reactionary, totally against the girls being educated. He even admonishes the *Karanavan* by saying that the English education provided to Lakshmi was the reason for her elopement.<sup>60</sup> According to George Irumbayam, a literary critic, Ettivasu Namboothiri represents the general perception of the Namboothiri community regarding women's education.<sup>61</sup>

When an array of novels were written as a propaganda for institutionalizing modern education for women, a satirical novel '*Parangodi Parinayam*' was published by Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon, which was against the idea circulated in *Indulekha* and its imitations, that western education led to the creation of a new 'sophisticated and cultured' woman. English educated characters were portrayed as uncultured and ignorant, whereas people with traditional education were shown as embodiments of indigenous culture. The two main characters of the novel - Parangodi and Parangodan- both with English education have been ridiculed and also the life style of English educated Keralites was also criticized. Parangodi, was not ready to obey even her parents and was shown as an arrogant girl, and the explanation for her arrogance was western education.<sup>62</sup> So this novel holds English education, especially women's education, responsible for the social problems in the then society.

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<sup>59</sup> Komattil Pandu Menon, '*Lakshmikesavam*' op.cit., pp. 144-147

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 176-177

<sup>61</sup> George Irumbayam, op.cit., p. 26

<sup>62</sup> Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon, op.cit., p.239. According to Shiju Sam Varghese, '*Parangodi Parinayam*' flashed the possibility of another modernity which was different from the one portrayed by Chandu Menon. See Shiju Sam Varghese, '*Colonial Intellectuals, Public Sphere and the Promises of Modernity*', in Satheesh Chandra Bose and Shiju Sam Varghese (ed), op.cit., pp. 41-58.

*Aphante Makal* was a novel by Murtiringode Bhavatrathan Namboothiripad on the Namboothiri community, published during the early years of the twentieth century. *Aphante makal* is different from the early mentioned novels as by the time of its publication, the Nair community had accepted women's modern education, whereas Namboothiris had only started discussions on the necessity of educating their men. The novel discussed the life of *antharjanams*, their interactions with Nair women and strongly recommended modern education for *antharjanams*. A Nair girl Sulochana, with modern education taught Namboothiri girls secretly. Thus they were also acquainted with progressive ideas of the formal education system which enabled Ittichiri to muster courage to marry her lover Madhu. Sulochana has been depicted as a bold girl and *antharjanams* as timid and shy. The novel conveys a powerful message that Namboothiri girls also need modern education or else they would always lag behind women of other castes.<sup>63</sup>

However among a group of Nairs patriarchal notions, as they existed in many parts of India exerted a strong pressure and they wanted to refashion Nairs into single unit families, where the women would be confined to the inner quarters of the house and her education restricted. The education was to be designed to make her a better wife. But a good number of Nair girls were getting educated partly due to the legacy of *marumakkathayam*.<sup>64</sup> The reason cannot be solely matriliney as there were other matrilineal castes in Malabar among whom the system of formal education for female was not accepted.<sup>65</sup> Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar suggested women's education as the panacea for all the problems faced by the community. He recommended a total

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<sup>63</sup> Namboothiris called their father's brother as *Aphan*. Murtiringode Bhavatrathan Namboothiripad, *Aphante Makal*, (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 1989, (first published - 1932)

<sup>64</sup> Robin Jeffery, *Media and Modernity*, op.cit., p.57

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Gopala Menon, 86 years, Thrissur, on 18/08/2013, Savithri Thampurati, 82 years, Mankada Kovilakam, on 05/04/2014; G.M. Ammuvaikkara Amma, op.cit.

education programme for women, which does not stop merely by making women literate. He observed that, “though women’s education progressed in Malabar with several number of school finalists and B.A.holders, the presence of Nair women among them was considerably low. Many Nair *tarawads* were not sending their girls to schools, unlike the girls of Thiya *tarawads*”. He asked the members of Nair samajam, to open schools for girls with the support of local chieftains, and Nair *tarawads* to follow the example of Thiyas in educating girls.<sup>66</sup> However, many educated Nair men and quite a few Nair *tarawads* were not hesitant in sending their girls to schools, hence several Nair girls passed school final exams - in early years of twentieth century- and went to Madras for their higher studies. Unfortunately it is true that the benefits of such an education was limited only to girls of well to do *tarawads*, others ended their education at the elementary level itself. There were women from Nair *tarawads* studying in colleges of Madras during the 1930s but such an education was not accessible to all as it was highly expensive.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Antharjanams’ Education and Namboothiri Streevidyabhyasa Commission (Namboothiri Women’s Education Commission)***

Women of Namboothiri and Nair caste, though they belonged to the upper strata of Kerala society, their accessibility to education was highly different. For Nair women, despite the debates that had existed on how and why they were to be educated, the community was not against providing them with basic education. On the contrary, *antharjanams*, the most secluded women folk of Kerala, were devoid of the benefits of formal education even in the early years of the twentieth century. At the same, they were not

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<sup>66</sup> Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar, ‘Oru Prasangham’, *Lakshmibai*, 1913, book. 9, no. 3, pp. 97-108

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Kanambra Kunjukutty Neithyar, Thrissur, 02/09/2015; Interview with Narayanunni Perighotilam, Payyanur, 01/04/2016

illiterate, and were regarded as the most literate women's community in Malabar.<sup>68</sup> The *antharjanams*' education was composed of training in reading, writing and basic arithmetic while that of the boy child was an elaborate learning process throughout his life. *Antharjanams* were permitted to read only religious scriptures like Ramayanam, *Mahabharatham* and *Silabhathi*. They were not supposed to read other journals and newspapers.<sup>69</sup> By tradition, Namboothiri girls who have attained puberty should not study; they should not step out of the house, but they could manage to read Malayalam and a few words in Sanskrit.<sup>70</sup> When Nair and Thiya women were entitled to enjoy the benefits of modern education, *antharjanams* were struggling to read *Ramayanam* and *Mahabharatam*.

By the second decade of the twentieth century male reformers of the community proposed that *antharjanams* should be educated. Radical reformers of the period argued that the progress of the community could not be realized when the women members of the community are living in sheer ignorance. According to them the community could be transformed by extending the modern education to women also. The idea of educating Namboothiri women was not shared by all members of the Namboothiri community; many of them staunchly opposed it. They argued that *antharjanams* born and brought up in Vedic culture could not be taught anything more by the formal education system. *Antharjanams* were the personification of all womanly qualities unlike the educated members of other communities. Morally they excel all other women communities of Kerala.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Census of India, 1891, vol. XV, p. 26; Census of India, 1921, XII, Madras, part. II, p. 124

<sup>69</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Agnisakshi*, op.cit., p. 34

<sup>70</sup> Madambu Kunhukuttan, op.cit., p.55

<sup>71</sup> M.S.K.P., 'Atharjanghalude Arivu', *Unninamboothiri*, 1922, book.3, vol. 5, pp.212-221



The popular demand for reforming the deplorable condition of *antharjanams* compelled Yoghakshema Sabha, in its nineteenth session in 1927, to constitute an education commission to enquire into the women's education of Namboothiri community. Accordingly, Namboothiri Streevidyabyasa Commission was formed with A.K.T.K.M.Guptan Namboothiripad as The President and Moothiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad as the Secretary.<sup>72</sup> The commission examined mainly three issues related to women's education - 1. The existing system of education being imparted to Namboothiri women, 2. Whether any change was to be made to the existing system, 3. New curriculum for *antharjanams* and method in which it was to be imparted.<sup>73</sup> The commission drafted a proposal and opinion was sought from Namboothiris and members of other communities.<sup>74</sup> These opinions are significant as they reflect the concept of the then society regarding women's education.

The commission observed that *antharjanams* were the most backward of all women folk of Kerala, they were not aware of the world outside their kitchen, and the reason for such rearward condition was the lack of education. The community was not ready to educate women due to the superstitious belief that education would make them arrogant. Moreover Namboothiri men, even educated, never felt the need to have educated wives.<sup>75</sup> The most important hindrance to educating *antharjanams* was the *ghosha* system, which was a meaningless obsolete system.<sup>76</sup> When government and caste organizations were making attempts to achieve total education of Indian women, Namboothiri community could not remain aloof. Besides, as

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<sup>72</sup> RNSC, Mangoladayam, Thrissur, 1927, p.1

<sup>73</sup> Murthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Stree Vidyabyasam', *Yoghakshemam*- June 29- 1927

<sup>74</sup> Editorial, 'Streevidyabyasa Commission', *Unninamboothiri*, 1927, vol. 8, issue.9, pp. 606-608

<sup>75</sup> RNSC, p. 7

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8

Namboothiri men have started acquiring modern education, *antharjanams* had to be educated as it was inevitable for marital life.<sup>77</sup> M.P.Neelakandan Namboothiripad wrote that women were not aware of the benefits of the new education system and no one tried to convince them. The community accepted the significance of modern education for Namboothiri boys a few years ago, at the same time failed to consider women's education with the same interest.<sup>78</sup> As the community was obsessed with the concept that *antharjanams* were to remain confined to the kitchen they were not provided with any kind of formal education.

Commissions discussed profusely on the nature of education to be imparted to *antharjanams*. Quoting Annie Besant, the commission observed that the Western system of education was not suitable to the *antharjanams*. Respondents to the commission unanimously observed that there must be a progressive change in the education of *antharjanams*. But they varied on the kind of education to be instituted for Namboothiri women; when some of them argued for the necessity of English education, some others limited it to Malayalam and Sanskrit education.<sup>79</sup> The commission proposed that Namboothiri girls were to be educated from the age of 5 to 12, under the guidance of the *karanavan*.<sup>80</sup> They also suggested that *antharjanams* were to be taught subjects like Malayalam, English, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Music, History, Geography, childcare, postpartum recuperation, stitching and drawing.<sup>81</sup> Thotttekattu Madhavi Amma observed that the curriculum for *antharjanams* must be carefully framed so that it may not adversely affect

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>78</sup> M.P.Neelakandan Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Streevidyabyasa Commission' *Yoghakshemam*, August 10-1927

<sup>79</sup> M.P.Kausalya Amma, RNSC , p.21

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 13-15

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13; P.K.Kutty Thampurati, one of the respondent, was of the opinion that there was no need of teaching several subjects, *antharjanams* were to be taught only Sanskrit, which would enable them to read Puranas. *ibid.*, p. 24

their inherent qualities.<sup>82</sup> The inclusion of English in the curriculum for Namboothiri girls was rejected and implied that they were to be trained only in Malayalam and Sanskrit.<sup>83</sup> However there were also opinions that as men and women were physically and intellectually distinct and as women should always remain hierarchically below men, there was no need to provide them with similar education. Therefore women were to be taught only English, Malayalam, Sanskrit, Mathematics, cooking and music.<sup>84</sup> Regarding the education of married *antharjanams* it was advocated that Namboothiri men could educate their wives, without sending them to schools.<sup>85</sup>

One of the heated debates involved was on the nature of schools where *antharjanams* could be educated. While some of the respondents recommended separate schools,<sup>86</sup> others suggested that they must be sent to public girls' schools.<sup>87</sup> Chirakkal Rama Varma Maharaja was of the opinion that separate residential educational institutions like that of Christian convents must be started for *antharjanams*.<sup>88</sup> As separate schools were difficult to be realized, opening of hostels for Namboothiri girls near public schools was also put forward. Kurur Narayanan Bhattathiripad observed that separate curriculum and special school for *antharjanams* would end up in failure, and hence they should study in public school and become a 'woman'.<sup>89</sup> There was also the opinion that sending Namboothiri girls to public schools, would be

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<sup>82</sup> Thottekattu Madhavi Amma, *ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>83</sup> A.K.T.K.M.Astamurthi Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Streevidyabyasa Commission' *Yoghakshemam*, August 6 -1927

<sup>84</sup> T.E.Narayanan Thirumubu, RNSC, p. 64

<sup>85</sup> Kadambatta Neelakandan Namboothiripad, *ibid.*, p. 43

<sup>86</sup> Thottekattu Madhavi Amma, *ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>87</sup> M.P.Kausalya Amma, *ibid.*, p.22

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>89</sup> Kurur Narayanan Bhattathiripad , *ibid.*, p. 52

far better than these girls' association with 'immoral *irikkanamma*'.<sup>90</sup> Recommendations were made for the inception of Namboothiri schools at different places like Thalipparamba, Pozhayi, Valluvanad, Thirunavaya, Panjal, Thrissivaperur, Perumannam, Irinjalakuda, Parakadavu, Kottayam, Thiruvalla and Chegannur. Expenses of these schools must be shared by Namboothiris in the respective regions. Money can also be collected by reducing the expenses on rituals and age old practices.<sup>91</sup> The formation of a fund Streevidyabhyasa Nidhi for meeting the cost incurred for *antharjanams* education was also proposed.<sup>92</sup>

Many respondents stated that unlike women of other communities *antharjanams* do not have any leisure time in their daily life and as a result they do not know any art forms, except *kaikottikali*. So along with formal education, they must be trained in stitching, drawing, weaving, music, craft making, which would help them to be happy and provide relief from daily chores.<sup>93</sup> Opinions were also put forward for making *antharjanams* economically independent by training them in cooking and stitching, hence if needed they could start earning themselves from within their own *illoms*.<sup>94</sup>

However these proposals were not acceptable for the commission as they found that none of the *illoms* would send girls to hostels or public schools. The proposal for separate schools for Namboothiri girls was also not accepted, because the commission admitted that the community was

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<sup>90</sup> Madagarli Narayanan Namboothiri, *ibid.*, p. 61; this opinion can be seen as an anti-Nair women statement, because he expresses the opinion that most of the *irikkanamma* were immoral as they had sexual relations with many men.

<sup>91</sup> School proposed by the respondent was not actual schools, and they were vacant *illoms* which could be converted to schools, and old or middle aged widows could be made to live in these *illoms* for the guidance of Namboothiri girls. M.Ramavarma Thampan, *ibid.*, p. 36

<sup>92</sup> M.Lakshmi Kutty Amma, 'Namboothirimarude Vidyabhyasam', *Unninamboothiri*, 1928, vol.9, issue. 1, pp. 72-84

<sup>93</sup> Mullamangalath Neelan Bhattathiripad, *RNSC*, p. 60

<sup>94</sup> Madagarli Narayanan Namboothiri, *ibid.*, p. 61

struggling hard to maintain Namboothiri boys' schools itself. In such a situation separate school would be impractical.<sup>95</sup> Instead they proposed that a group of *illoms* in a locality could select one convenient *illom* where arrangements for educating Namboothiri girls could be made. The age of girls pursuing education was limited to twelve. Teachers must be women from other communities and the expense of education was to be met by the parents of students.<sup>96</sup> The report of the commission shows the desire of the community to preserve the domesticity and exclusiveness of *antharjanams*, by confining them to *illoms*.

While the commission's analysis was going on, newspapers of the period also expressed their opinions regarding the education of Namboothiri women. These opinions are significant as they unravel the views of general public on the issue. *Swarad* put forward the view that Namboothiri girls' education must be done only in *illoms* and that they were to be taught about *streedharmam* and *kuladharmam*. Moreover they must not be sent to public schools as the general education system being provided to women was creating adverse effects on family life.<sup>97</sup> *West Coast Spectator* expressed great surprise about the fact that Namboothiri girls' were not given any sort of education. The newspaper pointed out that as early marriage was not prevalent among Namboothiris, there was practically no excuse for the illiterate condition of the Namboothiri females unless it was the gross superstitions in many Namboothiri homes. They proposed the formation of special schools for Namboothiri girls and asked rich families to support women's education.<sup>98</sup> *Mitavadi* recommended for belittling the significance of Sanskrit education as it would reduce the mental development, and stressed

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>97</sup> *Swarad*, Appendix, *ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>98</sup> *West Coast Spectator*, *ibid.*, p. 83

upon the urgency of imparting English to *antharjanams*.<sup>99</sup> *Sahodaran* regarded that there was no need for caste distinction or gender distinction for education.<sup>100</sup> *K. Manorama* observed that there was no need for exam oriented modern education for Namboothiri women, though they must be acquainted with English and Malayalam.<sup>101</sup> *Abhyudayam* stated that the chief duty of women was to make husbands happy and to serve them wholeheartedly, so their education must be designed accordingly.<sup>102</sup> *Yoghakshemam* was of the opinion that education for Namboothiri women was inevitable, but it would take time to finalize a desirable pattern for their education. So, for the time being, the present system was to be continued. Moreover they declared that Namboothiri girls required only primary education and nothing beyond that was advisable.<sup>103</sup>

The constitution of Namboothiri Streevidyabhyasa Commission was a progressive approach of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha towards the issues involved in women's education. Though the procedure adopted by the commission was truly democratic, the report submitted by the commission could not satisfy the expectations of young reformers. *Unninamboothiri* staunchly criticized the members of the commission for limiting the eligible age of girls for education to twelve and for not allowing even these small girls to attend public schools.<sup>104</sup> Even after submitting the report the debates continued regarding women's education. Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad wrote that woman's character do not improve through reading books; on the other hand books can pervert woman's behavior. He remarked that *antharjanams* were different from other women; hence on

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<sup>99</sup> *Mitavadi*, *ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>100</sup> *Sahodaran*, *ibid.*, pp. 85-86

<sup>101</sup> *K.Manorama*, *ibid.*, p.87

<sup>102</sup> *Abhyudayam*, *ibid.*, p. 91

<sup>103</sup> *Yoghakshemam*, *ibid.*, p. 95

<sup>104</sup> Editorial, 'Namboothiri Streevidyabhyasa Commission', *Unninamboothiri*, 1928, vol. 9, issue.5, pp.406-412

joining in public schools they would lose all their exclusive qualities.<sup>105</sup>

In 1930 the Alathiyur Upasabha decided to send all Namboothiri boys and girls in that region to public schools.<sup>106</sup> Moreover the Alathiyur Upasabha's President was a progressive person and made his daughter study in a public school. So changes were imminent and well in place. In the same year Namboothiri girls were also admitted in Namboothiri Vidyalayam and government consented to establish a Namboothiri Balika Vidyalayam under Thalappali Upasabha.<sup>107</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad requested *antharjanams* to forcefully acquire English education by rebelling against the orthodoxy as a first step toward their emancipation.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile Namboothiri Balika Sadanam was established at Thrissur in 1935 for facilitating the education of small girls. Though hesitantly, several *illoms* started sending their girls to the Sadanam.<sup>109</sup> C.K.Namboothiri played an important role in the establishment of Sadanam, he stayed there along with his family and his wife was Sadanam's matron for a long time.<sup>110</sup>

M.P.Bhattathiripad's *Rhitumati* was a strong plea to the community for educating girls in the modern system. The play was about a Namboothiri girl Devaki, who wanted to study, but the orthodoxy was not ready to permit her. She was living with her Uncle who was in favour of educating her, at the same time her father's brother (*aphan*) was against it and her father's family

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<sup>105</sup> Kannipayur Sankaran Namboothiripad, 'Streevidyabhyasam', *Unninamboothiri*, 1929, vol. 9, issue 12, pp.718-726

<sup>106</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Manushanayi Maranamekil' in *V.T yude Sampoorana Krithikal*, op.cit., p.619

<sup>107</sup> C.K.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 73

<sup>108</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Pennkidaghalku Oru Ezhuthu', op.cit., pp.610-611

<sup>109</sup> Palakeezhu Narayanan, op.cit., p. 36; C.K.Namboothiri, op.cit., p. 73.

<sup>110</sup> A.C.Vasu, 'C.K.Namboothiriyum Yoghakshemasabhayum', in C.K.Namboothiri, *C.K.Namboothiriyude Lekhanaghal*, op.cit., p.17

members wanted to take her with them.<sup>111</sup> At her father's *illom* she was not permitted to wear blouse, *aphan* even tried to tear it off. The drama portrays a Namboothiri girl who was denied freedom to pursue education though she was longing for it.

The education of a Namboothiri girl after attaining puberty was a problem, because in 'Balika Sadanam' at Thrissur, where Namboothiri girls could stay for their education, after attaining puberty they were sent home. In that period only one Namboothiri girl was attending the school even after attaining puberty and she was M.P.Bhattathiripad's brother's daughter Priyadatta. She was studying in Kunnankulam Girls' High School.<sup>112</sup> M.P.Bhattathiripad wanted to make her join the V.G.School at Thrissur. He gave an application at the Namboothiri 'Balika Sadanam', so that she could stay there and learn. However the application was rejected by the authorities on the ground that mature girls could not be accommodated as there was no lady caretaker. M.P.Bhattathiripad wrote in the '*Yoghakshemam*', arguing that the education of girls should not be prevented in the name of absence of caretaker and someone should be appointed there. Following this Chettor Kunhan Namboothiri who was the then President of the Namboothiri Vidyalayam Committee appointed a lady teacher of the Cherppu School as the Warden in the Sadanam. Thus Priyadatta continued her education by staying in the Sadanam and became a model for girls. But the practice of discontinuing education after attaining puberty went on.<sup>113</sup> They were taken

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<sup>111</sup> M.P.Bhattathiripad, *Rhitumati*, (Mal), Current books, Thrissur, 1944, p.34

<sup>112</sup> N.P.Vijayakirshnan, op.cit., p.38

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38. Yoghakshemam silver jubilee special issue reported that in 1945, only 5% of the Namboothiri *illoms* were sending their girls to school, which means that the majority of the Namboothiri girls were deprived of the fruits of education. In short, the propaganda for women's education was futile, as the community was not ready to change their traditional attitudes. E.M.S.Namboothiripad, 'Namboothirimar Enghottu', *Yoghakshemam Silver Jubilee Special Issue*, (Mal), Mangalodayam, Thrissur, 1945, P.20-24



back to their old life style, in most of the cases the girls were not ready to go home but they were forcefully taken by their parents. Later several schools were started for Namboothiri girls like the one at Panjal and many girls were admitted to public schools also.

Debates on institutionalizing women's education must be analyzed from the broad aspects of 'women's question' in the social reform programme. When education for men provided them with knowledge, independence, financial security and an elevated social status, for women it was hope through which she may married by a respectable young man. Through education women were induced into a novel middle class domesticity, rather than liberating her. Though it was the nineteenth century reformism, aided by the colonial agents, that paved the way for women's education, it was not free from patriarchic inhibitions. Concern for women's morality and the cardinal requisite of shielding her sexuality loomed large in the discourses on women's education. An ultimate liberation of women from the century long repressions they were exposed to was not the objective of the education proposed for women. However the debates on women's education resulted in a general arousal of the society which led to emergence of a class of educated women in Malabar. Still the supporters of women's education were never free from an anxiety that whether education may desex and denationalize women.<sup>114</sup>

### **Discourses on Marriage and Morality in the Reformist Agenda**

Marriage was regarded as an institution which could make sex 'moral', on the other hand, sex outside the frame work of marriage was deemed to be 'immoral'. Roger Scruton considered marriage as providing a social shield for erotic love, carving out the private realm, love needs and prompting respect

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<sup>114</sup> Sanjay Seth, op.cit., p. 142

from third parties.<sup>115</sup> Sex is essential for human existence, but the crave for sex, ‘in a civilized world’, was to be confined within marriage. The sexual morals differ from community to community and time to time; it would be varied in a community with distinct meanings in polygamous and monogamous families. Sexuality emerged as a source of worry, needing solutions; women who crave sexual pleasure are specifically held as unnatural. Men, on the other hand, have traditionally been regarded – and only by themselves – as requiring sexual variety for their physical health.<sup>116</sup> Throughout the long standing discussion on morality, description of woman’s goodness is linked to their biological sex; that is, when compared with men, women were held to different moral standards.<sup>117</sup> The primary motive of sexual ethics as they have existed in Western civilizations since pre-Christian times has been to secure a high degree of female virtue this is because paternity is uncertain.<sup>118</sup> Morality was a gendered concept for all religions and civilizations of the world; consequently the punishment on adultery prescribed for men and women was also dissimilar.<sup>119</sup>

The discussions on morality in Malabar concerning the Namboothiris and Nairs must begin from the popular dictum believed to have promulgated by the mythical hero, Parasurama, who ordered that ‘Nair women need not be chaste.’<sup>120</sup> Down the generations this assertion which crept into *Keralolpathi*

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<sup>115</sup> Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, The Free Press, London, 1986, p. 326

<sup>116</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy, Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Polity, Cambridge, 1992, p. 23

<sup>117</sup> Annette Bourland Huizenga, has made a detailed analysis of the curriculum for the moral education of women explicit in Pythagorean and Pastoral women’s letters. Annette Bourland Huizenga, *Moral Education for Women in the Pastoral and Pythagorean Letters- Philosophers of the Household*, Brill, Boston, 2013, pp. 1-3

<sup>118</sup> Bertrand Russel, *Marriage and Morals*, Routledge, London, 1988, (first published- 1929), pp. 11-12

<sup>119</sup> Gerda Lerner, op.cit., p. 227

<sup>120</sup> V.Rajeev, *Keralamahatmyam* (Malayalam translation), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2012, p. 196

and *Kerala Mahatmyam* were used as the justification by Namboothiris for perpetuating the Namboothiri-Nair *sambandham* relation. The ‘unchaste Nair women’ was essential for the sexual gratification of Namboothiri men as they followed primogeniture. Consequently moralizing the unchaste Nair women became the agenda of social reform.

The double standards of morality, which was an offshoot of patriarchy, manifested in the twentieth century social reform movements. The reformism among Namboothiris and Nairs touched upon the issues of morality and sexuality in their march towards modernity. However the community’s morality was not questioned, but the morality of women of both the community were subjected to discussions and was sought to be reformed. The traditional customs and practices of Malabar turned out to be immoral for the Europeans when compared with their ‘Victorian ideals’ of marriage. They viewed matrilineal system as an aberration and augmenting their surprise were the *sambandham* relations and easy divorce. They judged the practice of polyandry among the indigenous people as a barbarous custom. The travel accounts of Europeans who visited Malabar, aggrandized the misconceptions on the customs and the indigenous male-female relations; their descriptions on the marriage rituals and sexual freedom enjoyed by both men and women were against the Western notions of marriage and sexuality.<sup>121</sup> The descriptions of Durate Barbosa, Francis Buchanan and Linshoten resulted in

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<sup>121</sup> In Western countries sex and sexual desire became sin with the inception of Christianity, which exhibited deep ambivalence with regard to sex. Early Christians valued celibacy as superior to marriage and feared that sexual desire may distract the believer from the god. Later they changed their attitude to celebrate marital sex. However the concept of sexuality changed in Europe with Industrial Revolution and the Victorian era had a repressed sexuality. A respectable Victorian man would try to hide his extra marital relations and if exposed it led to an embarrassment and was instantly forgotten, on the other hand if a respectable Victorian woman had sex outside her marriage her family would reject her. By European standards marriage was a sacrament that ritualized sex. Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality*, Routledge, New York, 2008, pp. 7-9

the development of a immoral image of the Nair community, whereby they were alleged to have a loose sexual relations.<sup>122</sup> Accordingly the indigenous matrilineal customs were redefined by the colonial patriarchal legal system.

The Western jurisprudence refused to accept the *sambandham* relations as legitimate marriages. Consequently a community which practiced its peculiar marriage system for centuries was suddenly dubbed to be immoral. In European context, when sex within marriage was validated, the sexuality of a Nair woman within *sambandham* relation was designated as sinful. It was a fallacy to judge the morality of a community by another who was totally pristine to the indigenous customs. A community would never follow an unethical system as an established form of practice; immorality was attributed by the onlooker. *Sambandham* system was not immoral for the community who followed, it can be regarded only as ‘marriage strategies’, as explained by Pierre Bourdieu, adopted by the community as a necessity for ensuring the reproduction of lineage.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> John Huyghen Van Linschoten described Malabar as the most unchaste region in the world; no other community, The Nairs, in the world would have granted so much importance to sex in life and no other people would have lived with any importance to chastity. Arthur Coke Burnell, *The Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, vol.I, The Hakluyt Society, London 1885, pp. 279-284; Durate Barbosa observed that Nair women of good birth are very independent and dispose of themselves with Brahmins and they do not sleep with men of lower caste under pain of death. Durate Barbosa, op.cit., p. 40; Francis Buchanan regarded that Nair women cohabits with any person that she chooses of an equal or higher rank than her own. It was no kind of reflection on a women’s character to say, that she had closest intimacy with many person. Francis Buchanan, op.cit., p.411

<sup>123</sup> Pierre Bourdieu formulated the concept of marriage strategies while his analysis of the Kabyle People of North Algeria, they followed a peculiar system of primogeniture and anthropologists who studied them, reported that they followed parallel cousins marriage, but Bourdieu proved that the parallel cousins marriage was a strategy envisaged by the community to meets its necessity. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 147-149

Accordingly the colonial courts concluded that the woman in *sambandham* relations were ‘concubines.’ The *sambandham* was interpreted as permitting a mode of sexuality that was clearly unacceptable within the moral-ideological framework of the colonial state.<sup>124</sup> Hence the first wave of social reform movement among the Nairs was to ‘moralize’ their ‘immoral women’. The newly emergent middle class was embarrassed by the verdict which made Nair women as paramours. Thus the late nineteenth century Malabar witnessed conflicting positions and discourses on the sexuality of Nair women, which dominated the anti-matrilineal debates of the period. One of the issues was regarding the polyandrous nature of relations that had existed here. The foreign notices on Nair women established beyond doubt that they had practiced polyandry, but in reality by the end of nineteenth century it ceased to exist except for certain regions. Moreover in Malabar Nair women were polyandrous and it was not attached to any thought of remorse and was not regarded by the society as prostitution.<sup>125</sup> The existence of polyandry nearly mortified the reformers and they started searching for a way out of it. They argued in favour of a conjugal unit, which would be treated as the primary socio-economic unit rather than the *tarawad*. While the arguments for biological families and the sanctity of the marital bond were couched in highly emotive language, their legal aspects revealed the strategy for enabling easy partitions.<sup>126</sup>

However it was not with the emergence of reformism that morality was discussed upon, but prior to that the *tarawads* and *karanavans* had used the ‘morality’ of women to negate their claim for maintenance or for their share

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<sup>124</sup> Praveena Kodoth, ‘Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, *Sambandham*, and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Malabar’, *op.cit.*

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Vadassery Ratnam Amma, 81 years, Palakkad, 16/04/2016; RMMC, para. 26, p. 12

<sup>126</sup> G.Arunima, ‘Writing Culture: Of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel’, *Studies in History*, 1997, 13, 2, pp. 271-290

of *tarawad* property. Nair women while living away from the *tarawad* household with her husband or lover, approached courts claiming their natural right on the *tarawad* property. In such cases women's assertions were invalidated by the *karanavan* by establishing that their relationship were 'promiscuous intercourse' or it was with a man of lower caste or the relation was done without the assent of the *tarawad*.<sup>127</sup> All these points towards the fact that women's sexuality was under the control of the *tarawad* and she was to maintain her sexuality within the prescribed boundaries unless of which her membership in *tarawad* and her property rights would be grabbed off.<sup>128</sup>

Generally through the writings of foreign travelers and colonial administrators it was believed that Nair women enjoyed and possessed uncontrolled sexuality. In other words she was the sole owner of her sexuality, neither her *tarawad* nor her husband or his kin tried to restrict it. But this was an aura created by the writer's fantasy. By tradition a Nair woman was not permitted to have a *pratiloma* relation, nor could she marry a man of other religion. Moreover *sambandham* relations were decided by the *karanavan*, the girl was seldom consulted with. If she enters into a relation without the consent of the *tarawad* she was not accepted by the *tarawad*, even if the partner belonged to same caste.<sup>129</sup> Women were often forced by

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<sup>127</sup> G.Arunima, 'Matriliny and its Discontents', *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 2/3 (Summer-Monsoon 1995), pp. 157-167

<sup>128</sup> Sally A. Livingston has shown how women's sexuality was used to remove her from the ownership of property in Medieval Europe. Especially when a widow has inherited her husband's property her remarriage was promoted so that her property could be used by another male. In the same way women were dubbed to be immoral so that her right to property was nullified, as an immoral woman by tradition was not permitted to own property. Furthermore if it was proved that a married woman had indulged in illegitimate sexual relation, the dowry given to her during her marriage naturally devolved to her husband, without granting any share of it to her. Sally A. Livingston, *Marriage, Property and Women's Narratives*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012, pp. 66-67

<sup>129</sup> For instance see O.Chandu Menon, *Sarada*, op.cit., M.T.Vasudevan Nair, *Nallukettu*, op.cit

*karanavan*, mother or brother to enter into a *sambandham* against her interest. Sexuality of a Nair woman was under the supervision of various agencies like that of the *tarawad*, *karanavan*, *enangar*, *tara* and the *tarakutttaghal*. Besides the medieval system of *mannapedi-pulapedi* was also functioned as a check on Nair women's sexuality.<sup>130</sup> *Marumakkathayam* could be interpreted as a system in which women were placed under the domination of uncle, brother and mother. Her life was determined by the goodwill of *karanavan* and the capacity of *sambandhakaran* to provide for the wife.<sup>131</sup>

Malabar Marriage Commission formed to fulfill the yearning of the emergent Nair middle class was to be regarded as a project to inculcate morality among the women of the community. The Commission reported that the Nair community followed a decadent and barbarous system of marriage, which was to be rectified by instituting laws. Each and every aspect of marriage system practiced in Malabar was analyzed by the commission. Through an etymological analysis of terms denoting marriage in Malabar, the commission opined that the sexual union of a *marumakkathayam* male and female was never termed as marriage; it was denoted as *sambandham*. Furthermore the regional usages for *sambandham* like *uzhamporukka*, *kidakkakalyanam*, *pudamuri* etc. made an impression that they denoted a sexual union rather than a conjugal relation. O.Chandu Menon maintained

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<sup>130</sup> *Mannapedi – pulapedi* was a custom that had existed in the medieval period, as per which, if a Pulaya met a Sudra woman or a stone or twig thrown by him hits her, she was defiled and the Pulaya could take her. It was practiced during the months of February-March and was a period of nightmare for high caste ladies. It was also argued that the custom was to generate a fear among Nair women, which would prevent them from going astray. See, Adoor K.K.Ramachandran Nair, *Slavery in Kerala*, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1986, p.26. Raghava Varrier and Rajan Gurukkal (ed), op.cit., p.156. Moreover strict restrictions were placed on the Nair women of aristocratic *tarawads*, in order to limit their manoeuvre, to prevent them from falling into illicit sexual relations. J.Devika, *Kulastreeyum Chanthapennum Udayathegine*, op.cit., p.45

<sup>131</sup> Omana.V.K., *Cherukad Oru Streepaksha Vayana*, (Mal), Chinta Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2014, p. 8

that *sambandham* conveys the same idea as denoted by the word ‘marriage’, ie. the union of male and female as husband and wife. He added that for Malayali, *sambandham* was like ‘*vivaham*’ in Sanskrit.<sup>132</sup>

For English law, marriage was a contract between those who enters into it, but in Malabar the sexual relation popularly denoted as marriage didn’t constitute any sort of contract. Hence the primary task of the commission was to discover any element of contract in *sambandham* relations.<sup>133</sup> By tradition the partners of *sambandham* relation were devoid of any mutual obligation, except of the customary gifts which the husband was to provide for the wife at festive occasions and also he was to meet her delivery expenses. But the commission didn’t recognize these as contracts or obligation. They observed that the institution of marriage was foreign to *marumakkathayam*; the sexual relation for its continuance depended on mutual consent.<sup>134</sup>

Discussion on *sambandham* was gradually converted into apprehension on the morality of Nair women. Though both men and women were partners to the alleged *sambandham* relation, concern was only on the morality of women; on the other hand men’s morality was not even touched upon. When polyandry was vehemently rejected, there was no such disenchantment against polygamy. The nineteenth century discussion on female sexuality was the product of discourse involving a section of elite Nair men. The female sexuality emerged as the ‘other’ of the new ‘masculine self’ which was constituted within an anti-matrilineal discourse.<sup>135</sup> The Nair elite who were a part of this process failed to make any attempts to refute the colonial interpretation of indigenous customs. The educated Nair men were influenced by the notions of Victorian morality and there was a growing realization

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<sup>132</sup> Memorandum of O.Chandu Menon, Appendix , RMMC, p.5

<sup>133</sup> RMMC, paragraph. 29

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph. 44

<sup>135</sup> G.Arunima, ‘Matriliny and its Discontents’, *op.cit.*



among them that their customs were aberrations of the pan Indian model. Paradoxically they became the architects of new morality that was to be instituted within the community, which would transform women from ‘concubines’ to wives. At the same time this has to be reckoned that the educated Nair men, who longed for a new morality, were a minority in the community. Besides even among the educated class there were differences of opinion, for instance men like O.Chandu Menon argued that the *sambandham* was very much moral and was a proper system of marriage. He regarded that it was the misinterpretation of *thalikettukalyanam* that led to portray it as a ceremony after passing through which a Nair girl could indulge in prostitution.<sup>136</sup> He admitted that there may be Nair women who were prostitutes, but due to existence of which the entire women of the community were not to be designated as prostitutes. The prevalence of prostitution did not weaken the traditional system of marriage, because prostitution existed in England, France and in many other countries but in all those places their traditional system of marriage continues, so was here. He concluded that there was no need for a law for *marumakkathayam* Hindus and vast majority of them vehemently opposed any sought of legal redefinition of their customs. Chandu Menon emphatically rejected the state intervention in the customary life of the native people. He exhibited dichotomous perspectives on the then society in his novel and in his dissenting note to the Malabar Marriage Commission. Through the novel *Indulekha* he exhorted that the *sambandham* with Namboothiris were to be discontinued whereas in his dissenting note he maintained that *sambandham* was a legal system which was not to be altered by the state agency. He represented the domesticity of the Nair community,

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<sup>136</sup> Memorandum of O.Chandu Menon, op.cit., p . 8

who delineated among the public and private sphere of life, naturally were not in favour of legalizing their traditional marriage practices.<sup>137</sup>

The participants of discourses on female morality were men; it was initiated, led and an alternative model was suggested by men. Contributions by women towards the morality – immorality discourses of nineteenth century cannot be ascertained for want of sources. The only woman who was supposed to have engaged in the discourses on morality along with Nair men of the period was Indulekha, central protagonist of O.Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*. Madhavan and Indulekha represented two conflicting notions on the morality of Nair women; through Madhavan-Indulekha conversation Chandu Menon deployed the then ongoing debate on the chastity of Nair women. Both Madhavan and Indulekha were English educated, but held contradictory conviction on the customs and practices of the land. Madhavan was of the opinion that Nair women do not observe *pathivratha dharma*, they were unchaste and were not at all hesitant to frequently change their husbands. As a result of this behaviour of women, men were plunged to distress, which was due to the unlimited freedom enjoyed by Nair women.<sup>138</sup> Madhavan overlooks the fact that the impermanence of Nair marriage was more due to the libertine male than the freedom loving woman.<sup>139</sup> Enraged by Madhavan's words Indulekha, out rightly rejecting his arguments, defended the Nair women. She regarded that Nair women were as chaste as any other women, only difference was that the community granted them freedom to get educated and to lead a liberal life. Indulekha contrasted the life of *antharjanams* with that of Nair women, by saying that to be chaste women need not be imprisoned within households as Namboothiri women. If Nair

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<sup>137</sup> P.K.Balakrishnan, *Chandu Menon- Oru Padanam*, (Mal), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2000, (first published – 1957), p. 62

<sup>138</sup> O. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, op.cit., p. 58

<sup>139</sup> K.N.Panikkar, 'Creating a New Cultural Taste', in *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, op.cit., pp. 151-167

women changed their husbands at their own will, then it was a laudable right, because even the women of European countries do not enjoy similar rights. Moreover she observed that women of Western countries were given equality with men, but they were not denigrated as immoral.<sup>140</sup>

Chandu Menon made Indulekha to voice his own views on *sambandham* and the celibacy of Nair women. Indulekha though being a young English educated girl, exhibiting keen interest in western ways of life, was deep rooted in her tradition. When Madhavan was advocating for the establishment of patriarchal restrictions on the life and marriage of matrilineal women, Indulekha shielded Nair women from the manifold criticisms on their chastity. Indulekha's arguments can be identified with the largely unstated opinion of women that did not altogether match the patriarchal urge to control women's sexuality and independence.<sup>141</sup> This conversation can also be regarded as a precursor of the debate on women's morality that ensued with the formation of Malabar Marriage Commission.

Most of the literary works of the period carried discussion on moral issues pertaining to various popular practices of daily life. *Saraswathivijayam* dealt with the various practices which were held to be immoral for the then standards. The novel analyzing the morality of bare breasted women stated that when uncovered breast was considered as immoral throughout the world, in Malabar woman who covered her breast was judged to be immoral. Author observed that people felt no guilt or embarrassment in bathing together - both men and women- in public places or rivers.<sup>142</sup> English educated Kesavanunni

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<sup>140</sup> O. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, op.cit., p. 59

<sup>141</sup> K.N.Panikkar, 'Creating a New Cultural Taste', op.cit.

<sup>142</sup> Such descriptions show that the concept of morality was different in Malabar from that of other parts of India. It was with the contacts with other cultures that our practices were subjected to criticism and reforms sought. Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswathivijayam*, (Mal), Edward Publishers, Kannur, 1937, in George Irumbayam (ed), op.cit., pp. 73-74

Nair, protagonist of the novel *Lakshmikesavam*, staunchly believed that the marriage system of the Nairs were to be reformed immediately. He observed that in the *sambandham* system there was no recognition of conjugal love or parental relations.<sup>143</sup> Author made Kesavan to analyze the necessity of Malabar Marriage Bill for the community to be respectable among others.<sup>144</sup> Kesavan and Madhavan, of *Indulekha*, both were in favour of reforms within the marriage system, but unlike Madhavan, Kesavan did not express concern on the chastity of Nair women. Furthermore when *Indulekha* defended the criticism leveled against Nair women, *Lakshmikesavam* stood for subtle changes in the system, ‘to civilize the community’. As opposed to the ideologies proposed by *Lakshmikesavam* regarding the morality of *sambandham* system, *Paragodiparinayam*, exhibiting acute resentment for English education, condemned the attempts for replacing *sambandham* with ‘marriage proper’.<sup>145</sup> *Meenakshi*, yet another contemporary novel also discussed the morality of Nair women; a woman who maintained sexual relation with several men was ridiculed. Through various conversation on the then reform issues the author contended that English education was essential for girls and proposed that the traditional system of *thalikettukalyanam* was to be ended. Nair girls were to be tied *thali* by the bridegroom during their marriage, which would enable Nair community to assume equivalent moral status with others.<sup>146</sup>

In the caste ridden traditional society of Malabar, ‘love marriages’ were always looked down, even when the couple belonged to same social and economic status. Marriages were to be arranged by *tarawads*, ie. by *karanavans* and by the elders of the community. But the nineteenth century

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<sup>143</sup> Komattil Pandu Menon, op.cit., pp. 144-145

<sup>144</sup> The entire recommendations of the bill were subjected to detailed analysis and this could be regarded as propaganda for change. *ibid.*, pp. 182-183

<sup>145</sup> Kizhakeppatu Raman Kutty Menon, op.cit., p. 263

<sup>146</sup> Cheruvalath Chathu Nair, op.cit., pp. 190-197

novels set in the colonial space of Malabar, starting from *Indulekha* invariably advocated love marriages as ideal, for the formation of a conjugal family. The Western romantic literature had a major impact on the English educated Nair youth. Their aesthetic sensibilities and expectations from life, especially the relationship between man and woman were transformed. Anthony Giddens analyzed that the rise of romantic love more or less coincided with the emergence of the novel; the connection was one of newly discovered narrative form.<sup>147</sup> As noted by Tapan Raychaudhuri, the yearning for romantic love apparently could not be satisfied within the frame work of traditional family structures.<sup>148</sup> *Indulekha*, *Sarada*, *Lakshmikesavam*, *Paragodiparinayam*, *Meenakshi* and several other contemporary literary works depicted pre-marital love as the central theme of the novel. Contrary to the accepted traditions of the region pre-marital love was represented as admissible in the community. At the same time the loving couples always maintained the concept of *anuloma*, ie. they belonged to same castes and preferably of the same social class. Moreover the groom would be well placed English educated man and bride would be well mannered highly moral English educated girl. These novels disseminated the need of love among couples for a stable family life and along with it they vehemently rejected hypergamous relations with Namboothiris. Sexuality has been represented as a triumph of monogamic love and marriage over polyandric practices; love marriage is constituted as an act of defiance against the customs that had existed in the community which forced women to accept immoral polyandrous relations.<sup>149</sup> However it was argued that the romantic ideals were simply a way to justify male

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<sup>147</sup> Anthony Giddens, op.cit., p. 40

<sup>148</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri analyzed how romantic love developed in Colonial Bengal. He observed that under the influence of European literature and contacts with English officials the Bengali bhadralok longed for a new conjugal family and intimate relation with wife. Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Love in a Colonial Climate: Marriage, Sex and Romance in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, 34, 2 (2000), pp. 349-378

<sup>149</sup> G.Arunima, 'Writing Culture: Of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel', op.cit.

dominance at a time when overt patriarchy and absolutism were no longer defensible.<sup>150</sup>

However the Commission, contrary to the verdicts made by the courts, accepted *sambandham* as marriage provided, they were to be registered with the government. As discussed earlier the Malabar marriage Act was a dead letter, the matrilineal population discarded the act and thereby they rejected the state's intervention into the private life of the people. However with the failure of the Act the official attempt to moralize Nair women also met with death. In the early decades of twentieth the anti-matrilineal movements were not to ensure the morality of Nair women, but they were to achieve the partition of *tarawads*. During this period marriage or morality did not figure in the debates against *marumakkathayam*, which can be due to the changed socio-economic conditions of Malabar. Moreover within a span of thirty years there were considerable transformations in the familial organization of Nairs. Educated and employed section of Nair middle class preferred the establishment of conjugal family instead of duolocal residence pattern. Europeans interpreted the native customs as immoral, when compared with Biblical notions and the knowledge system they developed influenced the western educated indigenous classes. The admiration of the Western values and the scorn faced at the hand of Europeans, the native elite demanded the reform of 'immoral' practices. Consequently an alternative family structure was framed, which would promote a desired morality that, the reformers expected, may upraise the community to a pan-Indian status.

The new familial pattern was proposed for the matrilineal population through the Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act of 1933. The Act made Nair women as the dependants of husbands, who were made to provide for the wife

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<sup>150</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, Penguin Books, New York, 2006, (first published - 2005), pp. 170-171

and children. The 'immoral' pattern of marriage which the Nairs were alleged to have followed was replaced with monogamous marriage, whereby the colonial state assuming the role of protector of morality. The most criticized system of easy divorce among Nairs was terminated by the Act, as per which court's mediation was made mandatory. In short the Act was successful in instituting patriarchal notions of guardianship on women's existence. Patriarchy seems to have an inherent belief that women's chastity could be effectively buffered only when she was subjected to the hegemonic control of husband or his kin. Hence woman was made to live with husband or with his relatives, rather than she being with her natal family. The reform ideology with the support of governmental machinery framed a brand new womanhood and family for Nair woman within which she was asked to be a *pathivratha* and thus an alternative morality was proposed.

Analysis of discussions on morality of the upper caste women of colonial Malabar would not be complete without an interpretation of the notions morality embedded in the institution of *smarthavicharam*. When Nair women were depicted as immoral who were to be moralized through the mediation of State and reformers, the Namboothiri women were held to be extremely chaste. The whole of corpus of the Namboothiri reform literature conceived *antharjanams* as extremely moral.<sup>151</sup> However the stories of *smarthavicharam* handed down the generations testify that, *illoms* were not so virtuous, as it were made to appear. The Namboothiri community always maintained a double standard on morality, ie. when men were permitted to enter into as many as sexual relation they please, women were to limit their sexuality within the marital relationship. It can also be regarded that the prevalence of *sambandham* may be a method developed to protect *antharjanams* from the sexual of excess of Namboothiri men.

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<sup>151</sup> Kannippayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Nayanmarude Poorva Charitram*, op.cit., p. 26

The construction of the *illom* and its customs and practices were so designed that it may prevent contacts between men and women. But it was not easy to restrain the sexuality of women through such physical controls. In an *illom* there would be several men as guests, servants, cooks and *karyasthan*s; though they had no access to main building of the *illom* their presence was significant. At nights in most *illoms* there would be only *antharjanams* and servants - male and female, the *grihasthan* may be at the *tarawad* where he had *sambandham*.<sup>152</sup> When Namboothiris were bred on sexual excess, *antharjanams* were sexually deprived. They were married at a later age, sometimes groom would be older than their own fathers, or they be married as third or fourth wife and many died as spinsters. Hence there were numerous situations for a secluded woman to come into contact with men other than her husband and due to various reasons they may slip into relation with other men. When women are confined from the outer world various immoralities are also concealed. It was an expectation of the Namboothiri men that there *illoms* were abode of morality, but in reality it was not so.<sup>153</sup> An *antharjanam* with the help of a *dasi* could do anything which was held impossible. However *antharjanams* manipulating the circumstances for fulfilling their desire would be rare, but it must be accepted that such cases cannot be avoided as non-existent. Institutional structures designed to prevent 'illicit' sexual relations did not however, eradicate sexual 'lapses' altogether.<sup>154</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad has written about the sexual anarchy among *antharjanams* and pointed out that after the issue of Kuriyedath Thatri, sexual laxity among

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<sup>152</sup> A.M.N.Chakkiyar, op.cit., p. 17

<sup>153</sup> B.Bhageerathi Amma, op.cit. Kuriyedath Thatri confessed of having physical relations with 64 persons.

<sup>154</sup> Uma Chakravathi, 'Wifehood, Widowhood and Adultery: Female Sexuality, Surveillance and the state in 18<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra', op.cit.



Namboothiri women was considerably reduced.<sup>155</sup>

Kuriyedath Thatri's *smarthavicharam* was not the first or last in the community, but the repercussions made by Thatri's trial was devastating. It was a major shock for the Namboothiri community and exploded the moral image they had attributed to their women.<sup>156</sup> In the twentieth century with Thatri's *smarthavicharam* the carnal issue of Namboothiri community, which was to be confined within the community discourses, was taken out to the public sphere of Cochin State. Following the trial Thatri and sixty four men, whose involvement in the case was proved beyond doubt, were excommunicated. Her selection of sexual partners negated the caste exclusivity of the region, as there were men from castes ranging from Namboothiri, Tamil Brahmin, Warriar, Poduval, Panikkar and Nair. Evidences provided by Thatri points towards the prevalence of incest within *illoms*.<sup>157</sup> Her exposition during trials contrasted to the image of *antharjanams* popularized through literature and it was not possible to find out a parallel for Thatri within the community. Thatri's testimony at the trial proves that she was not forced to make any sexual union nor she was the victim of a conspiracy.<sup>158</sup> She out of her own interest entered into sexual relations with different people and evidences produced demonstrated that she felt no indignity in publicly declaring the details of each sexual relation she had.

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<sup>155</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad described Thatri as the protagonist of renaissance among Namboothiris. V.T.Bhattathiripad, 'Kuriyedath Thatri Samskarika Navodana Nayika', in V.T.Bhattathiripad, op.cit., pp. 680-681

<sup>156</sup> Thatri was married to Chemanthitta Kuriyedath Raman Namboothiri and Kuriyedath *illom* was in Thallappali of Cochin state, hence it was not a part of British Malabar. Consequently the legal system there existed was traditional one presided by the King. Though the trial was geographically in Cochin its effects were felt throughout Kerala. Members from several prominent *illoms* of Malabar were ostracized following the trial.

<sup>157</sup> As per her testimonials she had sexual relation with her father, cousin, brother in law, uncle and several other close relatives. *Smarthavicharam* Records, RAE.

<sup>158</sup> *Smarthavicharam* Records, RAE.

Moreover she never expressed guilt for whatever happened in her life and on her activities.

The entire episode of Thatri's trial unveiled the moral lapses of the Namboothiri community. The claim that *antharjanams* were secluded and were confined within the four walls of the *illoms* was invalidated by Thatri's tour seducing several men. The Brahmin insistence on the virginity of bride during marriage was also discredited in the case of Thatri. Even after marriage her travels continued uninhibited. But the literature on Thatri portrayed her as a seductress, victim or as an avenger. A century after the trial Kerala has forgotten the sixty four men involved in the issue, but Thatri despite her notorious display of sexuality and the shock inflicted on the community is very well memorized. Thatri's case exhibited the role of the state in maintaining the morality of Namboothiri women.

Under the influence of the colonial legal system the validity of *smarthavicharam* was questioned. It was detrimental not only to women, but the men involved were also excommunicated. In the then social setting ostracizing was equivalent to death, since none could survive without caste identity. The demand for ending up *smarthavicharam*, which felt heavy on women, was largely due to the fact that as there was no scope of cross-examination of men, the system went against basic notions of justice. However the Namboothiri reform movement was totally silent on *smarthavicharam*, it was pretended that such a practice never took place. Even when the reformers wrote elaborately on the hardship of women in *illoms*, they never mentioned *smarthavicharam*. It may be due to the belief *smarthavicharam* was meant for immoral women, who would not come under the purview of reform. During the process of reform it was only in 1947, at the Pazhur session of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, V.T.Bhattathiripad made a public reference to Thatri, when he said that her

struggle was against the drudged atmosphere within the community.<sup>159</sup> Nevertheless *smarthavicharam* died out without the support of the reforms, though there were a few such trials after 1905.<sup>160</sup>

However as far as Malabar was concerned a landmark verdict regarding *smarthavicharam* was made by the Zillah Magistrate of South Malabar as early as 1815.<sup>161</sup> The verdict was occasioned by two petitions, one presented by a Brahmin woman Kunjukutty, and another by her mother. Kunjukutty complained that she had been in confinement for the past eight months pending the enquiry instituted against her by the caste council. She was convicted by the caste council for her improper connection with some persons of inferior caste, the truth of which she admitted. Kunjukutty requested the court that she must be released from the confinement. The second petition by her mother stated that in consequence of the misconduct of her daughter several members of their *illom* were considered as polluted and out caste by the community. The situation would continue until the caste council had made the decision. The petitioner demanded the court to direct the Namboothiri caste council to immediately stop the *smarthavicharam* and to publicize their decision and to release her daughter from the confinement. The court expressing deep concern for Kunjukutty decreed that the trial of the Brahmins must be stopped instantly. The court was of the opinion that the decision professed by the Brahmin assembly was null and invalid. Furthermore the court added that this verdict must be furnished to all courts in Malabar and it must be used as guidance for similar cases in future. Following the court order the committee instituted for conducting *smarthavicharam* gave

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<sup>159</sup> Ollapamanna, op.cit.

<sup>160</sup> The *smarthavicharam* didn't end with Thatri's issue, several cases were reported even after that. *Hitakairni* in 1922 reported that a Namboothiri woman of Malabar was excommunicated for having helped a Sudra servant to take down the burden upon his head. *Hitakairni* 18/12/1922, NNPR January-February 1923. See also A.M.N.Chakkiyar, op.cit.

<sup>161</sup> Madras Correspondence Files, vol.1, file no. 2283, RAK

their decision that Kunjukutty's adultery was proved beyond doubt and she was excommunicated. Later Kunjukutty appealed the Provincial Court of Circuit and the court considering the appeal, directed the petitioners to approach the head Brahmin who was competent to investigate the matter. Paradoxically the Provincial Court held that the Zillah magistrate had no authority to enquire into matter of the caste and prohibit those persons from instituting an enquiry. The colonial interpretation of *smarthavicharam* as an obsolete custom by pointing towards its irregular procedure led to an early demise of the trial in Malabar, but the colonial government definitely exhibited the inhibition to interfere with the issues of the caste in the early nineteenth century.

The Namboothiri obsession with the requirements of virginity and insistence that female sexuality find expression solely within monogamous, heterosexual marriage directly exerted control over and inhibited female sexuality.<sup>162</sup> The Namboothiri Family Regulation Committee observed that high injustice was meted out to *antharjanams* by maintaining them as asexual beings; ridiculed the community for neglecting the sexuality of *antharjanams*. The Committee reported that two third of married Namboothiri women were deprived of a sexual life and proposed that the sexual double standards of the Namboothiri community must be ended immediately.<sup>163</sup> A breach in the moral image of Namboothiri women was created by V.T.Bhattathiripad when he made a Namboothiri girl kiss her lover in his short story, *Vishukettam*.<sup>164</sup> He regularly wrote about women and through his writings he conversed with them. V.T.Bhattathiripad asked *antharjanams* to participate in public

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<sup>162</sup> K.M.Sheeba, 'Transgressions and Subversions: Situating Sexual Life of *Antharjanams* in 20<sup>th</sup> century Kerala', in M.P.Mujjebu Rahman and K.S.Madhavan(ed) *Explorations in South Indian History*, Sahitya Pravarhaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2014, pp. 334-343

<sup>163</sup> NFRCC, p. 12

<sup>164</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad, *Vishukettam*, in V.T.Bhattathiripad, op.cit., pp. 45-64

conferences and noted that women would not lose their chastity when they were allowed to mingle with men.<sup>165</sup> However the most important measure conceived by reformers for the emancipation of *antharjanams* was to marry them into a monogamous relation. When marriage is proposed as the solution the issues of guarding her sexuality and maintaining her as moral was satisfactorily addressed.

The Namboothiri reform programme, when compared to Nairs never took up the issue of women's morality as they felt that *antharjanams* were quite chaste than any other women in Malabar. But the entire reform agenda was so structured that it might not affect women's morality or any of the proposed changes would expose her to a world, which was out of the control of the Namboothiri men. When sartorial transformations were suggested for *antharjanams*, it was explained on the basis that reforms would make them 'more moral', ie. the reformers felt that their women were immoral to the then existing concept of morality. Women with uncovered breasts were judged to be against the accepted notions of rectitude, so women were exhorted to cover up themselves.<sup>166</sup> Similarly the Namboothiri Streevidyabhyasa Commission, celebrated as a highly progressive step by the community, exhibited keen concern on the protection of Namboothiri women's morality. Fear of the community on liberating women's sexuality was manifested in the debates of the commission and consequently they limited the age of girls eligible for education to twelve.<sup>167</sup> Moreover they were not ready to sent Namboothiri girls to public schools; the commission believed that it may demoralize them. Hence they were to be educated at *illoms* under the guidance of *karanavan*. Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha proposed two distinct pattern of education for men and women. Namboothiri youth were asked to get themselves

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<sup>165</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Pennkidaghalku Ezhuthu', op.cit.

<sup>166</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, 'Poorvacharam Adhava Keezhnadappu II', *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, vol. 7, issue. 11, pp.647-654

<sup>167</sup> RNSC, p. 13

educated in English which was conceived as inevitable for future, for dealing with the *janmi-kudiyar* issues and for begetting a respectable job.<sup>168</sup> On the other hand education for women was to make her an eligible wife for the educated Namboothiri man. This gender difference in the stated objectives of education was out the concern on the loss of women's morality.

By tradition if an *antharjanam* wanted to move out of the *illom*, either for visiting temple or to her natal, she was to be accompanied by a maid, *dasi*, unless of which she would be ostracized. In the Namboothiri community women never travelled with her husband and they were not supposed to do so. Sometimes along with *dasi* there would be a male servant also. Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad wrote that there must be an immediate transformation in the travel pattern of *antharjanams*. He condemned the orthodoxy for permitting 'women to roam around with a man' and he added that women usually visited Guruvayur or other distant temples in the sole company of a man. Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad was of the opinion that such journey of *antharjanams* must be stopped because there were chances that woman may go awry when let alone with a man. He recommended that the community must make it mandatory that an *antharjanam* was to move out and travel to distant places only with her husband.<sup>169</sup> This piece of reform literature can be regarded as a specimen for analyzing the concept of morality expressed in the reform programme. They firmly believed that women were to be guarded and when she is let alone she would become immoral by indulging in illicit sexual relations.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> K.N. 'Naveenavidyabhyasa Reethi', *Unninamboothiri*, 1923, vol.4, issue, 4, pp. 194-204.

<sup>169</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, 'Poorvacharam Adhava Keezhnadappu I', *Unninamboothiri*, 1926, vol., issue.10, pp.568-575

<sup>170</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad's article reminds of Manu's words- "Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; thinking it is enough that he is a man, they give themselves to the handsome and

The Antharjana Samajam, which was organized to provide women with a platform for reforming themselves, was always under the constant surveillance of Namboothiri men. None of the available evidence proves that they had undertaken any programme independently and it was maintained under the hegemonic control of Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha. *Antharjanams* were to fight with their own community for their freedom, which was equated with immorality. Though a few women came out discarding ghosha, the majority of *antharjanams* were confined in *illoms*, the restrictions imposed on the family by the caste council made them reluctant to enter the public sphere. Moreover women who discarded ghosha were reviled as *sadanam* and such disparagement was to pressurize women to remain abiding to the custom.<sup>171</sup> The early demise of Thozil Kendram was largely due to the sharp criticism inflicted on women who actively participated in it. Archaic notions of the orthodoxy about women's morality made them regard the inmates of Thozil Kendram as whores.

The reform literature addressed issues of women's morality and sexuality in their attempt to cast a new womanhood for *antharjanams*. The essentiality of love and intimacy for Namboothiri couples was demonstrated by V.T.Bhattathiripad through Thethi and Madhavan, protagonists of *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghathekkku*.<sup>172</sup> The correlation that had existed between women's sexuality and education was noted by M.P.Bhattathiripad in *Rhitumati*, whereby a girl after attaining puberty was confined within the *illom*. The community's earnest need to safe guard women's sexuality made them restrict her educational prospects. Devaki, resists the attempts made by

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ugly. Through their passion for men through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded." Manu Dharma Sasthra chapter IX.15 in George Buhler, *The Laws of Manu*, Forgotten Books, London, 2008, p. 189

<sup>171</sup> See, Payapilli Balan, op.cit., Sumathi.M, op.cit.,

<sup>172</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, *Adukalayil Ninnu Araghathekkku*, op.cit.

orthodoxy to restrict her studies. The play conveys a message that women's sexuality must not be a hindrance for their education.<sup>173</sup>

Lalithambika Antharjanam from the very beginning of her literary career condemned the community for repressing women's sexuality. She was of the opinion that repression of sexuality leads to subversions of wretched dogmas constructed by the patriarchy. In the novel *Agnisakshi* through Devaki, the chief character, the author exposed the repressions imposed upon a newly wedded wife. She had a strained conjugal life as her husband regarded that marital life was for the fulfillment of dharma and it was not to enjoy pleasures. Her husband was immersed in rituals and neglected his responsibilities towards his wife. Devaki represented the *antharjanams'* desire for freedom and was portrayed as a woman who was sexually deprived. Later she became a part of the anti-colonial movement and finally ended up in a Sanyasin's life.<sup>174</sup>

One of her most discussed story was *Prathikaradevatha*, in which she has regarded Kuriyedath Thatri's activities as sexual revolution and revenge against the exploitations that Thatri had to endure. Author expresses her concern for a woman who was ostracized by the community, when she questioned the very existence of Brahmanical patriarchy. Through this story the author criticized the community's double standards on morality and sexuality.<sup>175</sup> It was written during a time when no one dared to spell Thatri's name, there was an unwritten law in *illoms* that Thatri's issue was not to be discussed.<sup>176</sup> In *Kuttasamatham* Lalithambika Antharjanam portrayed the sexual repression faced by a child widow. She was married to an old man as

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<sup>173</sup> M.P.Bhattathiripad, *Rhitumati*, op.cit.

<sup>174</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Agnisakshi*, op.cit.

<sup>175</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Prathikaradevatha*, in Lalithambika Antharjanam , *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Kadakkal Sampooranam*, op.cit.

<sup>176</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Athmakadaku Oramukham*, op.cit., p. 96



his fourth *veli*, when she was only eleven and became widow at the age of fourteen. She was innocent of the sexual pleasure as she never indulged in it. Author portrays the discomfort felt by her when she saw the conjugal life of her brother. The story opens with a *smarthavicharam*, conducted when this widow became pregnant. She confesses that she has committed a mistake and it was due to the urge in her to know the sexual pleasure that prompted her.<sup>177</sup> *Kuttasamatham* can be regarded as the most powerful criticism laid against the Namboothiri community's notion of morality and sexuality.

The twentieth century social and community reforms had an inherent agenda of reframing morality of women. Men were distressed at women's sexuality, so were conscious to guard it with the changing circumstances. They feared that when women endowed with education and freedom may liberate themselves from the hegemony of men. But at the same time they were embarrassed with traditional ignorant women, so the prudent reformer designed a pattern of refashioning women which would maintain their domesticity. In short the ideal women articulated in twentieth century combined the qualities of a *kulina* and *veshya*. The woman is firmly installed within the patrilineal family and monogamous conjugality as the begetter of legitimate progeny, but at the same time takes over the functions of the *veshya* in a significantly different way by bringing the *veshya's* accomplishments into the modern home, to ensure the health and longevity of the modern monogamous conjugal unit.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Kuttasamatham*, in Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Kadakkal Sampoomam*, op.cit.

<sup>178</sup> J. Devika, 'The Malayali Sexual Revolution: Sex, 'Liberation' and Family Planning in Kerala', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 2005, vol. 39, issue.3, pp. 343-374

## Changing Notions of Womanhood

The male dominated reform movement in Kerala, which intended upon the transformation of women, envisaged a new womanhood for *malayali* woman. The new ideal womanhood was in cognizance with the pan -Indian model framed as part of the nationalist - reform discourses. In Kerala the process of structuring womanhood was distinct from other regions, as the key objective was the fashioning of a new woman out of the matrilineal tradition. Hence Nair women were to be made 'modern' suitable for the design laid down for womanhood. The re-articulation of middle-class Indian womanhood had become necessary for the emergence of a new middle-class public and private sphere in colonial India; this same ideal of womanhood also offered a space for the mobilization of middle class women themselves.<sup>179</sup> Similarly the Namboothiri reform movement also made a strong plea for women's transformation into a 'desired' pattern of womanhood and finally resulted in a mobilization of the *antharjanams*, which made them capable of participating in the peasant and anti- feudal resistance struggles.

The pattern of change in womanhood proposed for both the communities was different. *Antharjanams* were to undergo drastic changes that included refashioning of their costumes, jewels, along with their perception of family and marital life.<sup>180</sup> Whereas Nair women were appealed to imbibe the significance of *pathivratha* dharma and to constitute a middle class patriarchal family.<sup>181</sup> However when reformers demanded transformation, they were extremely cautious to maintain and reaffirm the

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<sup>179</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, 'Gender in the critiques of colonialism and nationalism: locating the Indian women' in Joan Wallach Scott, *Feminism and History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, pp. 481-482

<sup>180</sup> B.Bhageerati Amma, 'Antharjanaghal', *Unninamboothiri*, 1922, book- 3, vol. 5, pp. 193-200

<sup>181</sup> A respected Woman, 'Pathivrathadharmā', *Keralee Suguna Bodhini*, 1894, vol. 1, pp.30-32

domesticity of upper caste *malayali* women. The models of modernization finalized for women drew upon the notions of bourgeoisie domesticity and the ideals of Victorian womanhood, and it was particularly modified to suit the need of the nationalist bourgeoisie.<sup>182</sup> Reconstruction of womanhood was to mold women to suit the reformed ‘manhood’ and conferring women with equality to that of men was not in the agenda.

Literature of nineteenth century – stories, novels, and poems – popularized a brand new womanhood which was further debated and systematized through the platforms of *stree samajams*. There were several publications in this period which delineated the manner by which the women should live. These can be seen as domestic manuals. They are elaborate in their themes but unified in a single point of constructing womanhood and their status.<sup>183</sup> At the very outset a concept of ‘sacred home’ was created and wife was given the epithet of a homemaker who was to guard the ‘sacredness’ of home. She was to be the guiding light of the family and was held solely responsible for prosperity and happiness in the family.<sup>184</sup> European notion of ‘sweet home’ which was to be materialized through the efforts of women was also suggested by the authors.<sup>185</sup>

Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 was an attempt made by the middle class Nair men for Hinduisation of their marriage and conjugal relations. But, even though the government made several interventions, the Act turned out to

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<sup>182</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, op.cit., p. 482

<sup>183</sup> Balaji Ranganathan, ‘Nineteenth Century Social Reform and the Women’s Question’ , in Ranjana Harish and V.Bharathi Harishankar(ed) *Redefining Feminism*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2008, p. 171

<sup>184</sup> The development of the concept of sacred home was similar to the notion of *grihalakshmi* that developed in Bengal in the wake of reform movement in nineteenth century.

<sup>185</sup> One Hindu, ‘Hindu Streekalude Manyapadavi’, *Lakshmibai*, 1914, book.10, vol. 1, pp.28-36; Gopinathan, ‘Keralathile Purathanahindu Kudumbajeevitham’, *Vidyabhivardhini*, 1922, book. 2, vol. 8, pp. 281-286

be a failure as it could not make any change in the perceptions of the community. Reformers realized that a transformation of the customs and practices would not be achieved through legislations; hence a new model of family and marriage was proposed and popularized during the early years of twentieth century. Community organizations of the period and their publications also advocated the development of a patriarchal conjugal family.<sup>186</sup> G.Arunima observed that the paintings and photography of families produced during the colonial period depicted the marital unit as a 'shared relationship of work', besides the portrayal of the families disseminated the idea of heterosexual, conjugal couple as the fundamentals of the family.<sup>187</sup> In short under the influence of various concepts let lose by the colonialism, the notion of a conjugal family was becoming more and more acceptable for young reformers. The native male interest in education and social reform elevated conjugality as a mark of social progress.<sup>188</sup>

A patriarchal nuclear family was proposed as the ideal family for the Nair community, for the realization of which, basic reorganization was to be accomplished in the attitudes, customs and practices of women. Responsibilities of a woman in a patriarchal conjugal family were distinct from that of a matrilineal joint family. Hence woman must be trained to fulfill her tasks and the articles published in general and women's magazines could be seen as a part of such a training programme. Women were called upon to take up the entire responsibility of maintaining her house, for which she required formal education, skill in home management, knowledge about health, hygiene and childcare. Articles that discussed various issues related to

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<sup>186</sup> Mrs.Kannan Nair, 'Nair Streekal', *Nairsamudayaparishkarini*, 1904, book.1, vol.1, pp.23-27.

<sup>187</sup> G.Arunima, 'Bonds of love, ties of kinship? Or are there other ways of Imagining the Family', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2016, 53, 3, pp. 1-22

<sup>188</sup> Shefali Chandra, op.cit., p. 10

women in family where actually advices addressed to women, aimed at the creation of a new woman. The whole crux of the advices was like the 'instruction manuals' to women that proliferated in Bengal nineteenth century, especially like that of Satyacharan Mitra's *Strir Prathi Swamir Upadesh*.<sup>189</sup> Following the pan-Indian model of wife's image and duties, the role of the wife as *sahadharmini* was supplanted by that of the wife as *pathivratha*.<sup>190</sup> Both women and men authors took the role of advisors towards the creation of *pathivratha* women in Malabar.

Writers on women issues gave utmost prominence to '*pathivratha dharma*' as the chief duty to be observed by women. Stories of Savithri, Damayanthi, Seetha, legendary *pathivrathas*, were repeatedly mentioned and were held as models of Indian womanhood.<sup>191</sup> Malayali women were asked to follow the ideals of these women, in order to possess 'power' to protect their

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<sup>189</sup> Satyacharan Mitra wrote a highly popular advisory manual, *Strir Prathi Swamir Upadesh*, which demanded women to devote completely to husband irrespective of his illness and character. Satyacharan Mitra, *Strir Prathi Swamir Upadesh*, (Advice From a Husband to His Wife), Calcutta, 1884, quoted in Tapan Raychaudiri, op.cit., pp. 349-378. Charu Gupta observed that during the colonial period, a real battle for an ideal womanhood was waged within the home, by making women as the symbols for restoring the prestige of Hindu household and thereby of the Hindu nation. The construction of a new womanhood by controlling her sexuality and marriage was seen as inevitable for the progress of the country. Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001, pp. 123-124. Similar to *Strir Prathi Swamir Upadesh* an advisory manual, *Pathivrathyaganam*, was published in Malayalam in 1904. The work addressed to Nair women exhorted them to be *pathivrathas* by worshipping the husband and women were asked to develop self-control of their senses to be virtuous. K.C.Narayanan Nambiyar, *Pathivrathyaganam*, (Mal), Spectator Press, Calicut, 1904.

<sup>190</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 'Gargi at the King's Court: Women and Philosophic Innovation in Ancient India', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (ed), op.cit., p. 41

<sup>191</sup> Ayanattu.C.P.Gopalapilla, 'Pathivrathyavum Pathnivrathavum', *Mahila*, 1936, book. 16, vol. 9 and 10, pp.270-276

family.<sup>192</sup> Throughout India '*pathivratha dharma*' was held in high esteem and was suggested as the solution for all familial issues. But when the advice was addressed to Nair women, it was to be seen as a part of project of institutionalizing patriarchy within the community. The concept of *pathivratha* was a part of the Brahmanical patriarchy, but the same concept ceases to exist in a matrilineal community, where husband was only a visitor. As the reform propaganda was essentially a venture to forge family on the pan Indian lines, ie. to frame a patriarchal family, the concept of *pathivratha* seems to be inevitable. Nair women who were not observing *pathivratha dharma*, due to the system of marriage that had existed among them, were ridiculed.<sup>193</sup>

Magazines equivocally stated that the chief duty of woman was to serve her husband. Every article on women's education, *sthreedharmam* and family management asked women to assume the status of '*pathivratha*' by submitting themselves to husband. Women were to be devoted to their husband and during her lifetime she was to consider him as like a god.<sup>194</sup> When a woman fails to show total devotion to her husband she would become responsible for the collapse of the family. Under such circumstances men would be forced to find solace in other relationships, whereas wife might become helpless, without the support of husband. Wife was to love and render all services to the husband irrespective of his health or financial conditions. She was not to desert husband even if he was bed ridden or impotent.<sup>195</sup> Moreover she was to guide her husband when he deviates from virtuous path, with the help of the knowledge she acquired through education. Citing stories

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<sup>192</sup> Kannambra Kunhunni Nair, 'Grihanayika', *Lakshmibai*, 1934, book. 29, vol.10, pp. 311-327

<sup>193</sup> A Respected Woman, 'Pathivrathadharmam', op.cit.

<sup>194</sup> Vallathol Narayana Menon, 'Bharthrasusrusha', *Lakshmibai*, 1905, book. 1, vol. 2, pp.35-40; M.Meenakshi Amma, 'Yuvathidharmam', *Mahila*, 1925, book.5, vol.5, pp. 167-171

<sup>195</sup> T.B.Kalyani Amma, 'Sthreedharmam', *Sarada*, 1905, book. 1, vol. 3, pp.1-3

from *puranas*, authors pointed out that women were responsible for all success and failures of men.<sup>196</sup> Even the need of modern education for women was justified as essential in making women capable of helping and guiding husband.<sup>197</sup> Silent endurance to all atrocities done by husband was recommended for women, unless otherwise she would be rendered helpless in the absence of economic independence.<sup>198</sup>

Fragile marriage relations and the system of easy divorce among Nairs were criticized by the then contemporary writers. Nair women were asked to stop accepting husbands one after another, and to maintain a steady marital relation with one husband throughout life.<sup>199</sup> Some authors wrote, not directly, even against widow remarriage, by arguing that children of different fathers would be of different character and they could never live together peacefully. Moreover under such conditions none of the children would take up the responsibility of protecting mother. The problems would be intensified on the issue of inheriting the property, especially when the proposed legislative changes entitle wife and children to inherit husband/fathers' property.<sup>200</sup>

Abundance of articles stressing wives' devotion to husband as inevitable for family life reveals the intension of the writers to place 'husband' within a Nair family. A Nair *tarawad* was devoid of 'husband' for centuries, where he was only a visitor. Under the influence of changed circumstances and the urge to forge a patriarchal family along the pan-Indian lines, situating husband in the family became inexorable. Hence a new conjugal family was conceived with husband as the head of the family and

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<sup>196</sup> Padmavathi Amma, 'Bhartrasusrusha', *Sarada*, 1905, book. 1, vol. 8, pp. 2-5

<sup>197</sup> T.Ammukutty Amma, 'Streevidyabhyasam', *Sarada*, 1905, book.1, vol. 4, pp. 14-15

<sup>198</sup> Thelapurathu Narayanan Thampi, 'Anusaranam', *Lakshmibai*, 1906, book.1, vol. 5, pp. 194-198

<sup>199</sup> T.B.Kalyani Amma, 'Sthreedharmam', op.cit.

<sup>200</sup> A respected woman, 'Pathivrathadharmam', op.cit.

wife and children were made his dependants. By the early decades of twentieth century several Nair couples started living together, rejecting the matrilineal pattern of residence.<sup>201</sup> Employed men having their own income were privileged to set up their own marital family. But it was not a common practice and many Nair *tarawads* were against sending their girls with husbands.<sup>202</sup> Thus the concept of conjugal family was disseminated through magazines as the ideal form of family and the acceptance of which was stated as imperative for the progress of the community. Subsequently a different *streedharma* was formulated for Nair women, by which they were made to despise their matrilineal customs and traditions.

A change in pattern of family was also proposed during this period. An elementary family consisting of husband, wife and children were suggested to be the most suitable and peaceful. It was regarded that such nuclear families provided far more happiness than that of the joint families. There cannot be any internal rivalries among members and disputes among children of different parents in elementary families. Moreover these kind of families were held to be more safe and supportive for women, as they would be provided regularly by husband and there was no sought of uncertainty, which women had to face in *tarwad*s.<sup>203</sup> However though women started to move to husband's house, after marriage, the formation of elementary families were very rare, rather than women started living with husband's parents. But in the

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<sup>201</sup> T.K.Gopala Panikkar, op.cit., p.49

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Kannambra Narayanunni, 83 years, Thrissur on 26/10/2015

<sup>203</sup> Sarada, 'Kudumbhasougyam', *Sarada*, 1906, book.1, vol. 11, pp. 10-13; Analyzing the family values in colonial Bengal, Rochana Majumdar regarded that though the Victorian model of companionate marriages were promoted by the reformers, it was to be idealized within a patriarchal joint family and not by forging nuclear families. Hence in Bengal the reformers were not ready to do away with the Indian tradition for the sake of modern nuclear families, rather they sought to strengthen the affinity among couples that may help the sustenance of joint families. Rochana Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 127-128



case of employed men who worked in distant places such families were being realized.

Along with being highly devoted to husband, women were also asked to become his companion, a good friend with whom husband could share his life. Wife must be capable of understanding husband's desires, interests and state of mind.<sup>204</sup> An ideal wife must help him in fulfilling all his responsibilities. She was asked to be pleasant always; moreover she was not to question or complaint on any action done by husband. Men were held to be in need of console and they expect wife to pacify him like his mother. The ideal woman, thus, is expected to remain strictly domestic and maternal, but she was also to provide aesthetic pleasure to the husband, such pleasure being recognized as instrumental to marital stability.<sup>205</sup> A wife should possess an innate quality to lead husband in virtuous path, whenever he lose in his way or if he become detached to the family she with the knowledge acquired through education was to correct him without offending him.<sup>206</sup> Besides women were to be loyal and faithful to their in-laws and were to treat them as their own parents, such a consideration from the wife might help her to win husband's love.

A redefinition of womanhood took place in the Nair community along with successful placing of 'husband' in the family. When the then women's magazines in Hindi and Bengali wrote extensively on responsibility of women in the development of the children and in the upbringing of future generations, the Malayalam magazines wrote on the indispensable need of women's devotion to husband. As discussed earlier in this chapter that most

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<sup>204</sup> T.B.Kalyani Amma, 'Streedharmam', *Sarada*, 1905, book. 1, vol.3, pp.1-3

<sup>205</sup> J. Devika, 'Bodies Gone Awry: The Abjection of Sexuality in Development Discourse in Contemporary Kerala', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 16:1, 2009, pp. 21-46

<sup>206</sup> K.Padmavathi Amma, 'Bhartrasusrusha', op.cit.

of the women magazines addressed Nair women as their reader, the discussion on husband and service to husband was made to develop and inculcate the same among Nair women as it was conspicuously absent. The institutionalization of patriarchy by overthrowing *marumakkathayam* resulting in the conversion of Nair community to a proper Hindu caste was the intension of the reformers. The entire process of framing patriarchal families in the Nair community could be explained as anti-woman, ie. whatever special privileges Nair women had were overran by the formation of patriarchal families. The concept of new womanhood can also regarded as a gendered form of restriction on women's fortune. Women were usually portrayed as helpless, vulnerable, victim and sexual agents, always in need of protection from men. The epitome of womanhood proposed was a desexualized figure, ie. a woman free from all carnal impulses, alleged to be inherent in matrilineal organization.

At the same time there were a few articles which openly declared that Nair women must be given more freedom and should be treated as equivalent to men. They criticized the practice of the community whereby even educated women were also being confined to home. Society was to provide women with more opportunities so that they can serve the country and community with their intellectual and academic capacities.<sup>207</sup> Women's support was viewed as inevitable for men to be victorious in the anti-colonial movement. Hence it was argued that women were to be granted with more freedom and were to be acquainted with the necessity of the swadeshi movement.<sup>208</sup> Another article argued that Nair women were still suffering under husbands, and their life has not made any improvement from that of under the despotic rule of *karanavan*. In *marumakkathayam tarawads* they had inalienable

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<sup>207</sup> One Nair, 'Nair Samudaya Sanghatanam', *Mahila*, 1923, vol. 3, issue, 1, pp. 18-23

<sup>208</sup> P.Ummerkutty, 'Streeshwathantryam', *Vishwabhanu*, 1936, vol. 2, issue. 3, pp. 97-103

rights, but now they were being deprived of basic amenities of life. As a solution for women's misery authors suggested that they must be given economic independence. Women were requested to attain economic security rather than aspiring for equality with men.<sup>209</sup>

The newly proposed womanhood ascribed several duties to be fulfilled by woman. She was held responsible for the development of future generation which was essential for the progress of the country. The over importance given to women's role in budding a better generation could be an influence of the Victorian middle class ideology.<sup>210</sup> Womanhood was essentially equated with motherhood, these two identities were so created, that they were rendered inseparable. These discrete entities were interrelated to create specifically gendered form of regulation.<sup>211</sup> Traditionally in Nair *tarawads* children were the collective responsibility of all the members. They grew under the guidance of *karanavan*, who was to provide for, and were regularly attended by mother; moreover father was not under any obligation to contribute for the children. Similarly in a patrilineal family, where father was the only bread winner children became the prime responsibility of mother. The reformism invested motherhood with a new meaning, raised from a neutral function to a highly exalted duty; she was entrusted with a complex task that only an educated woman could fulfill.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> K.L.P., 'Streekalude Vimochanam', *Mahila*, 1933, vol.13, issue. 4-5, pp.146-148

<sup>210</sup> In Victorian England it was maternalism rather than paternalism that was invoked as protection; it was the female figure of justice that was responsible for the development of good children and also for defending them. Louise A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England*, Routledge, New York, 2000, pp. 2-5

<sup>211</sup> Carol Smart (ed) *Regulating Womanhood-Historical essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, Routledge, New York, 2002,p. 1

<sup>212</sup> Meredith Borthwick, op.cit., pp. 184-185

Women were asked to be good mother rather than aspiring to become government employees. P.Madhavi Amma stated that children of employed women suffer from loneliness and were likely to go astray, due to the negligence of mother.<sup>213</sup> Authors equivocally warned women against depending on servants for childcare, as this would make children detached from parents and become arrogant. Employing servants by the middle class women has been criticized as the orthodox elements had criticized modern education. English educated women were held to avoid all household work; because most of them believe that being educated they were not to do such domestic work.<sup>214</sup> Servants if employed in a family, women were asked to keep close watch on them, as they were likely to exert a negative influence on children.<sup>215</sup>

The women organizations, *stree samajams*, of the then period also contributed towards the framing of a new womanhood. Most of these organizations were formed as an offshoot of the caste organizations, which were aimed at mobilizing women for the propagation of caste reformist ideology. Formation and participation in women associations were considered as a symbol of accepting modernity and was explained to be inevitable to keep pace with other regions of India. *Stree samajams* indicated the emergence and expansion of gendered civic associations in Kerala, which were certainly not concerned with articulating the interests of women as equal citizens.<sup>216</sup> Associations addressed a population that was to possess certain specific set of ‘capacities’ deemed to be ‘womanly’, and discussions within

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<sup>213</sup> P.Madhavi Amma, ‘Ammayude Mahathaya Krithyam’, *Lakshmibai*, 1906, book. 1, vol. 9, pp.26-31

<sup>214</sup> Karat Achuta Menon, ‘Sthreedhramam’, *Lakshmibai*, 1907, book.2, vol. 8, pp. 291-296

<sup>215</sup> T.Ammukutty Amma, ‘Streevidyabhyasam’, op.cit.; Madhavdas, ‘Bhrtyanmar’, *Lakshmibai*, 1906, book. 1, vol. 8, pp. 311-315

<sup>216</sup> J.Devika, ‘Modernity with Democracy?: Gender and Governance in the People’s Planning Campaign, Kerala’, CDS WP 368, 2005, pp. 1-61

them was to foster these given qualities so as to benefit the modern society.<sup>217</sup> Quite naturally from the very outset they dealt with issues like that of women's education, family management, childcare and wifely and motherly duties.<sup>218</sup> They failed to confront with genuine gender issues developed under the influence of colonialism and those created by caste system. In 1920s and 1930s on the national level, the women organizations were demanding for reforming women's legal status particularly that connected with family law.<sup>219</sup> However such debates were not taken up by the *stree samajams* established in Kerala.

Women associations turned out to be a significant public platform, with considerable participation from elite women, particularly in Travancore regions. However in Malabar, as in the case of caste associations, *stree samajams* could never exert a convincing influence on women. In 1902 under the auspices of Mrs. Mackre a women's conference was convened at Kozhikode, which was attended by European ladies and several women of Kozhikode and at the conference they proclaimed the formation of Kozhikode Streejana Samajam.<sup>220</sup> Similarly in 1904 under the initiative of Mrs. Barlow, Streejana Samajam was established in Palakkad.<sup>221</sup> Both these early associations of women were to forge a solidarity between European women and 'indigenous elite' women. Later women organization were formed in different parts of Malabar, especially in Kozhikode and Kannur and whereby several 'privileged' women were provided with an opportunity to become a

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<sup>217</sup> J.Devika, 'Imagining Women's Space in Early Modern Keralam', CDS WP 329, 2002, pp. 1-56

<sup>218</sup> Mrs. Krishna Thampi speech at the women's conference of NSS, *Mahila*, 1940, book. 20, issue, 5&6, pp. 117-119

<sup>219</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India – Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, Chronicle Books, New Delhi, 2005, p. 23

<sup>220</sup> Editorial, 'Kozhikode Streejana Samajam', *Sarada*, 1906, book. 2, issue. 7, pp. 137-139

<sup>221</sup> Editorial, 'Palakkad Streejana Samajam', *Sarada*, 1906, book. 2, issue. 7, p. 139-141.

part of the public sphere. AIWC had several branches in Malabar, especially in Kozhikode, where several Nair women were associated with its activities. As a part of the anti-colonial movements numerous women alliances were formed, which could mobilize women to partake in political uprisings.<sup>222</sup>

In most of the then women associations Nair women played a significant role, being the wives of well placed educated Nair men, they had more accessibility to such civic social gatherings. NSS from their first annual conference, held at Karuvatta in 1929 onwards, organized exclusive women's sessions along with all annual meetings.<sup>223</sup> Women's associations were designed such that they could maintain the domesticity of its participants. Mulloth V Naryana Menon wrote series of articles on *stree samajams* arguing that they were inevitable for women's progress. He asked the community leaders to render all support for the functioning of women's associations, to conduct lectures and training programmes on women's health, education, childcare and house management.

*Stree samajams* were requested to assume the responsibility of proliferating literacy among women.<sup>224</sup> All these tasks assigned for associations were not to develop individuality among women nor were aimed at conferring women with equality. But to retain women in their own traditional social settings, at the same time they must be modernized to a level aspired by men. When women were given freedom to participate in civic associations, there were chances that they may go awry. Hence the

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<sup>222</sup> See V.Vasanthi, *Women in Public Life in Malabar, (1900-1957)*, Lipi Publications, Kozhikode, 2013 and Sreevidhya.V., *Women in Labour Process, production Relations and Social Change: A Study of North Malabar*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Calicut, 2006

<sup>223</sup> The first women's session was presided by Thottokattu Madhavi Amma, the convention discussed on various issues concerning women. S.Manjuladevi, op.cit., p. 105

<sup>224</sup> Mulloth V. Naryana Menon, 'Stree Samajaghalum Samudaya Unnamanavum', *Mahila*, 1942, book. 20, vol. 2, pp. 27-30

associations must be under the stringent surveillance of community leaders.<sup>225</sup> Moreover *stree samajams* were summoned to ensure the chastity of employed women.

The women's associations were to develop a generation of women who were modern in their tastes and expositions at the same time were to maintain the traditional domesticity ascribed for women. Writers expressed their concern on women's morality who co-operate with the activities of *samajams*, as there was chance of them being led on immoral path. Consequently many ridiculed the existence of *stree samajams*, which were just gatherings of women who were not ready to fulfill the household responsibilities. In short women's associations which opened a public sphere for women was forced to function within the limits prescribed by the patriarchy. The public sphere of twentieth century Malabar was an exclusively gendered public sphere and women were integrated into it largely as subjects of certain womanliness.<sup>226</sup>

### **Concept of a 'New Womanhood' for Namboothiri Women**

The Namboothiri reform movement in Malabar was a gendered project, since the pattern of reform conceived for the community was distinguished on gendered lines. The reformers in the radical phase of the movement realized that the reformism would not advance further unless women were taken out of the shackles of orthodoxy. Unlike the Nair reform movement the Namboothiris had definite agenda along which women were to be reformed. Though there numerous women's magazines addressed to Nair women, not even one was published for Namboothiri women; in spite of the fact that the reform movement had produced a rich literature for the

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<sup>225</sup> Paravoor Gopala Pilla, 'Naveena Bharathathile Streekal', *Mahila*, 1939, book. 19, vol. 8&9, pp. 311-316

<sup>226</sup> J.Devika, *Engendering Individuals*, op.cit., p. 11

community. But by 1923-24, *Yoghakshemam* and *Unninamboothiri* started publishing articles addressing *antharjanams* and exhorted them to shoulder the responsibility of equipping themselves to be part of the modern world. Moreover the trajectory of reform proposed for the women by the patriarchal elements of both communities were extremely different, ie. when Nair women were summoned to become chaste wives accepting the concept of *pathivratha*, Namboothiri women were to modernize themselves by re fashioning their attire and adopting new ways of middle class life.

Down the generation *antharjanams* were not regarded as a part of women community of Malabar; they were maintained under extreme seclusion. It was only in twentieth century they became a subject of popular discourses, especially after the notorious *smarthavicharam* trial of Kuriyedath Tathri. Though the problems of *antharjanams* were noted by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha from the period of its inception, it was only an expression of their anguish on the unmarried stature of Namboothiri girls. However with the radicalization of the movement, largely following the formation of Yuvajana Sangham, women's issues were taken up by the reformers. Paradoxically, in Kerala, the most popular and dynamic women's organization which could make its endurable mark on the reform history was that of the Antharjana Samajam.

The traditional system of marriage was identified by the reformers as the cradle of all sufferings of *antharjanams*; consequently they sought to reframe the marriage practices. However the rejection of traditional marriage was not completely out of a genuine concern for women, but stemmed from the recognition that the pattern of marriage they followed were detrimental to the progress of the community. At this point the interest of the reformers and



the fate of women coincided.<sup>227</sup> Young reformers revolted against the orthodoxy for ameliorating the marriages, as it economically deprived the community through the *sambandham* relations and denied the junior members from having a family. Thus the crusade against marriage was to strengthen their own position in the community and family or it can also be considered as an attempt to redefine the masculinity of Namboothiri caste. So the initial impulse to fight down the marriage was out of the dilemmas faced by the male reformers, but in course of time with the progress of the movement, marriage reforms were projected as inevitable for *antharjanams*' emancipation.

The new womanhood proposed for *antharjanams* in the wake of the reform movement was advocated by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham and not by the Antharjana Samajam. Unlike the Nair reform movement *antharjanams* were not asked to be *pathivratha*, may be due to the fact that, by tradition and by the male patriarchs they were regarded as *pathivrathas*.<sup>228</sup> The suggested womanhood attempted an overall transformation of *antharjanams*, which would affect upon their dress, jewellery, education and their practices. The dress reform was one of the main aspects of metamorphosis recommended for Namboothiri women.

One of the earliest articles discussing dress reform of *antharjanams* was that written by Bhageerathi Amma, who observed that the traditional attire of Namboothiri women was quiet barbaric. She regarded that the dress worn by them mortify the entire women folk of Malabar and she added that *antharjanams* never showed an urge to transform their outfit. She argued that

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<sup>227</sup> Pennmakalulla Oru Munnam Antharjanam, 'Njanghalum Regulationum I', op.cit.

<sup>228</sup> The details regarding *smarthavicharam*, conducted during eighteenth and nineteenth century, furnished by *Kozhikoden Granthavari*, *Mathilakam Granthavari* and *Kavallappara Papers* however points towards the infidelity of *antharjanams*.

all customs whether ordained by religious scriptures or not, were to be modified in accordance with changing social conditions. When Namboothiri men have changed the customary dress, this privilege was not extended to women and they were doomed to live as half-naked. Bhageerathi Amma declared that the chief enemies of *antharjanams* were the men of their own community, who were determined to maintain women within the *illom* shackled by rules of patriarchy. She was of the opinion that sartorial amelioration of *antharjanams* was the immediate step to be adopted by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>229</sup> Another significant proposal for refashioning *antharjanams* was from Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, a prominent social reformer, who regarded that *antharjanams* followed a dress pattern decreed by the community several centuries ago. He maintained that such an outfit was not used by any of the civilized population anywhere in the world. The conventional notion that women should not embellish their body was rejected by him. Muthiringode was of the opinion that as women of every community gave utmost care in dressing up themselves; *antharjanams* could not be spared from adopting it. Progress cannot be affected on the community by maintaining women entrenched in age old customs and sheer ignorance; both men and women must be led on a modern path. He pointed out women were expressing desire to modify their costume the younger generation of the community should support it; as it was essential for the struggle against *sambandham*.<sup>230</sup>

Reformers like V.T.Bhattathiripad requested women to get rid of their half naked attire, which was instilling contempt among Namboothiri men. V.T.Bhattathiripad being the prominent reformer who took up the women's issue, assumed the role of 'advisor' who advises *antharjanams*, so that they

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<sup>229</sup> B.Bhageerathi Amma, 'Antharjanaghal', op.cit.

<sup>230</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, 'Poorvacharam Adhava Keezhnadappu II', op.cit.

could be transformed to modern middle class *Malayali* women.<sup>231</sup> According to him even the old Namboothiri men preferred the company of Nair wives rather than *antharjanams*, which was due to the filthy appearance of *antharjanams*. The Namboothiri husbands were embarrassed and irritated by the disgusting presence of *antharjanams* in their pale clothes, wooden earrings and brass bangles.<sup>232</sup> The body of *antharjanam* has been objectified, by making it responsible for the sexual laxity of Namboothiri men. Because the women of other communities were more clean and fashionable in their appearance, which pleased the Namboothiri men; so as a solace from the uninviting conditions of *illom* they approached Nair *tarawads* and *Kovilakams*. In short even the spirit of reformism didn't relieve Namboothiri men from their archaic notion, where *antharjanams* were mere 'body' that negated the existence of women's individuality.

Throughout history dress distinctively denoted the roles, duties and gender of its user. The increased sexual stereotyping in dress defended the wearers from the fears about uncertain sexual identity, gender identity and changes in society.<sup>233</sup> Gender specific dresses were made to ensure the domesticity of women and it was developed as a symbol of true womanhood. In Indian condition women's dress was inextricably linked with ideal womanhood. Consequently the entire Brahmin community rigidly insisted on the dress to be worn by women, which must cover their whole body. Contrary to the pan-Indian tradition, in Kerala Brahmin women were maintained within

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<sup>231</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad's advices to women reminds one of the nineteenth and twentieth century advisory manuals written in Bengal addressing women, like the one composed by Dhirendranath Pal who promoted the development of a conjugal nuclear family in which women assumed the role of homemaker. Dhirendranath Pal, *The Hindu Wife*, Phanindra Nath Pal, Calcutta, 1911, quoted in Judith E. Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004

<sup>232</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Manushyanayi Marannamenkil', op.cit.

<sup>233</sup> Gayle V. Fischer, *Pantaloons and Power: A Nineteenth Century Dress Reform in United States*, The Kent State University Press, Kent, 2001, pp. 2-9

the *illoms* in a half naked fashion. This can be explained as an attempt to maintain women as submissive to the patriarchal notions. At the same time the whole women folk of Kerala even in the early years of twentieth century were bare breasted; in the matter of attire *antharjanams* were made equivalent to that of the indigenous women. Hence the traditionally prescribed dress of *antharjanams* continues as an unresolved mystery as its intention could not be determined appropriately.

The sartorial reforms for women in nineteenth and twentieth century was the result of the influence of European middle class culture on the Indian educated classes.<sup>234</sup> Under the influence of reformism, the male reformers sought to transform *antharjanams*' dress so they may appear appealing to their husbands. These sartorial experiments could be regarded as the expression of the middle class culture imbibed by Namboothiri men. Quite naturally the guiding principle of the dress reform movement, which sited the body of native women as its terrain, was a very Victorian concept of female modesty.<sup>235</sup>

*Antharjanams* were requested to adopt sari and blouse, instead of their customary attire. Sari was being symbolized as the national dress of Indian women and the concept was widely accepted and popularized through women associations and the anti-colonial movement.<sup>236</sup> Sartorial experiments

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<sup>234</sup> Himani Bannerji has made an analysis of the dress reforms undertaken by the middle class of Bengali elite, when they attempted to 'cloth' the 'Badramahila' in late nineteenth the century. Himani Bannerji, *Inventing Subjects- Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism*, Tulika Books, 2001, pp. 101-103

<sup>235</sup> Similar was the case in other parts of India. For details regarding the dress reform that took place in Bengal see, Indrani Sen, *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India, 1858-1900*, Orient Blackswan, 2002; Meredith Borthwick, op.cit.

<sup>236</sup> The colonial perceptions displayed both admiration and denigration of the native women's appearance; sari was described as a sensual mode of dress and it was denigrated for its transparency. In Bengal as a part of the dress reform the sari was also reformed by making women to wear a blouse, a petticoat under

advocated can be regarded as a project of morality, because the half naked women were against the twentieth century moral concepts. Though being an upper caste community of Malabar their women remained unclothed and the Namboothiri youth judged the condition to be sheer immorality. The spirit of reformism and social development achieved by the women of matrilineal communities made them realize the drudged state of *antharjanams*.<sup>237</sup> Hence by dressing them in modern attire, sari and blouse, the *antharjanams* could be made 'moral women' by the then standards set forth by patriarchy.

Besides the vestiarial reforms *antharjanams* were asked to replace their wooden earrings, *marakoradu*, with golden earrings. However this was not quite easy, due to the fact that most of them had long earlobes, often touching their shoulders, a result of wearing heavy *marakoradu* for several years. Hence a surgical makeover was essential for using small golden studs and this led to the emergence of *Kathu murikkal prasthanam*, ie. cutting earlobes.<sup>238</sup> Next in the agenda of reform was the abandoning of the brass bangles, which *antharjanams* were to wear as per the conventional dress code, and the adoption of golden bangles instead. The reformers wanted *antharjanams* to refine their habits; for instance women were asked to take oil bath every day and they were prompted to use toilet soaps for cleaning themselves. Similarly women were exhorted to carefully maintain hair, by regularly washing and drying it properly to get rid of the funky smell. All these transformations would amount to a comprehensive change in the physical appearance of Namboothiri women. Paradoxically the extensive changeover of

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sari along with shoes. These reforms were along the feminine model provided by the English women. Indrani Sen, op.cit., pp. 56-60

<sup>237</sup> Sulochana, the protagonist of the novel *Aphante Makal*, openly states that she longed to see Ittichiri, a Namboothiri girl, in sari and blouse instead of being covered in a dhoti and *melmundu*. Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, *Aphante Makal*, op.cit. Aphante Makal means father's brother's daughter.

<sup>238</sup> Premji, op.cit.

*antharjanams* were conceived and decided by men, which would furnish a modern middle class *antharjanam* who could be a companionate wife of educated Namboothiri men. The reform of *antharjanams* would not be completed unless they be educated, which ensued the debate on the nature of education to be imparted and was resolved in favour of an education which would inculcate the modern domesticity in them.<sup>239</sup>

The notions of sartorial reforms for *antharjanams* disseminated by male reformers were out rightly rejected by Parvathi Nenmenimangalam. She regarded that there must be a basic transformation in the traditional attire of women, but at the same time the exhortations to use costly dress materials and to adorn the body with ornaments were to be denounced.<sup>240</sup> She ridiculed the attempts of reformers like V.T.Bhattathiripad to carve out a sensual woman from the *antharjanam* so that she may appear pleasing for the husband. She said that there was no need to seduce men; mind was to be refashioned and not the body. Women do not need fraudulent decking up and there must not be any difference in the clothing of men and women. Generally the reformism proposed a desexualization of women, but they were asked to acquire a new sexual exposition for satisfying the desires of middle class men. Such criticisms were few and far between and so the sartorial reforms remained mostly a male desired reform and not one advocated by women themselves.<sup>241</sup>

Reformers attacked rituals observed by *antharjanams*. V.T. Bhattathiripad asked *antharjanams* to stop observing such rites, which had no

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<sup>239</sup> Details on education and Sthree Vidyabhyasa Commission have been discussed earlier in this chapter.

<sup>240</sup> Parvathi Nenmenimangalam, 'Streetvam', *Stree*, 1933, vol.1, issue.1, pp.15-16, in J.Devika, *Her-self*, op.cit.

<sup>241</sup> Years later V.T.Bhattathiripad was to lament that the reforms were peripheral and did not lead to a 'change of heart'. Keasavan Veluthat , K.Gopalankutty and D.D.Namboothiri , op.cit., p. 97

religious significance.<sup>242</sup> The proposal to terminate certain rituals, which were inexorable elements of women's household duties, was highly revolutionary as it over rid the laws set by the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha.<sup>243</sup> *Antharjanams* were advocated to discard the superstitions, handed down the generations, which ruled their life. The negligence of certain rituals by women were likely to lead to the displeasure of elders, but they were asked to avoid all condemnations. At the same time he didn't refer to the endless fasts, *vratas*, observed by women, which maintained them with very little food for about 14 to 16 days every month. Most of these were for the health and happiness of the men folk. Needless to say, there were no reciprocal rituals to be observed by men for the well being of women.

Like any other communities of the then period among the Namboothiris there was no space for conjugal love. Marriage was a ritual to be fulfilled for the familial and religious reasons. Even though arranged marriages were the order of the period, due to obvious reasons post marital love did not develop among the couples. The western influenced and educated men throughout India were enthusiastic about more intimate, dyadic relations between husband and wife.<sup>244</sup> Unfortunately in Indian familial structure conjugal relations were not promoted at the cost of the joint family. Introducing conjugality in Indian families was one of the aims of the social reform movement, for which women's conventional beliefs were to be modified. B.Kalyani Amma wrote that while designing syllabus for women's education '*dampathyasasthram*', conjugal science, must be included. Training in conjugal science was essential for leading a peaceful life with an educated

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<sup>242</sup> One of the rituals criticized by V.T.Bhattathiripad was *Thandazhiaduka*, which was one of the purification rituals after menstruation. V.T.Bhattathiripad, 'Namboothiri Manushyanayi Marannamekil', op.cit.

<sup>243</sup> The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha had decided that no attempts would be made to alter the religious rituals of the community. P.K.Aryan Namboothiri, op.cit., pp. 34-36.

<sup>244</sup> Judith E.Walsh, op.cit., p. 87

husband.<sup>245</sup> The Namboothiris who were the last to adopt familial reforms realized the need of connubial relations and consequently V.T. Bhattathiripad requested women to establish more cordial relations with their husbands. Since the educated Namboothiri men, who were influenced by the romantic English novels would not be satisfied with conventional practices of *antharjanams*.<sup>246</sup> A behavioural change among *antharjanams* was essential for fostering Namboothiri men to marry within the community. Instituting a new conjugality within the community was conceived as an essential goal to be fulfilled by the reform movement. The Namboothiri reform literature through stories and novels advocated the necessity of love among couples. V.T.Bhattathiripad's *Aduklayil Ninnu Araghatekku* portrayed the love between Thethi and Madhavan and their getting married struggling against the orthodoxy.<sup>247</sup> Similarly Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad's *Aphante Makal* was also about the successful love of Ittichiri and Madhu. Sulochana was an educated Nair girl, who loved Madhu, but he married Ittichiri, even though they belonged to *illoms* of different ritual and social status.<sup>248</sup> Educated Madhu and Sulochana would have been a better couple, but the author promoting *sajathivivaham* over *sambandham*, made Sulochana's love unfruitful. Both these literary works espoused intra community premarital love which became successful through marriage, against the customary practices.

Re-fashioning of *antharjanams* was proposed as an inevitable measure to materialize the long standing demand of the reformers for legalizing *sajathivivaham*. V.T.Bhattathiripad regarded that even if own

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<sup>245</sup> B.Kalyani Amma, 'Streevidyabhyasa Matrika', *Malayalamasika*, 1930, vol. 1, issue. 3, pp. 68-75

<sup>246</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, Namboothiri Manushyanayi Marannamekil, op.cit.

<sup>247</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad, *Aduklayil Ninnu Araghatekku*, op.cit.

<sup>248</sup> Muthiringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad, *Aphante Makal*, op.cit.



community marriage was institutionalized; Namboothiri youth would not be ready to marry *antharjanams* unless they were modernized. In short the impulse for reforming women by refashioning them was not out of the genuine concern, was to help the Namboothiri youth in realizing their demands. The metamorphosis in *antharjanams* would result in increasing the number of *sajathivivahams*, and thereby the younger members of *illoms* might assume power to reinforce their influence in the socio-economic affairs of the household.

The Namboothiri reform movement was a male dominated and male dictated movement, the objectives and course of the movement being decided by men. The initial benefits of reformism were reaped by men of the community. After exposure to modern education and anti-colonial movement they realized the 'backwardness' in which their women lived. As like any other reform programme which addressed women, Namboothiris also developed a notion of 'definite womanhood' which was to be achieved through the movement. Consequently they assumed the role of 'guardian angel' of *antharjanams*. It was through young generation of male reformers, that the world was unveiled for *antharjanams*. The alliance that developed between the rescuer male and *antharjanam* to be rescued, was that of a typical patriarchal inter- gender relationship; as a result *antharjanams* were relegated to the receiver's end.

Analyzing the nature of reform movement, J.Devika has argued that the image of suffering *antharjanams* was created by the reformers by attributing the qualities of innocence, piety, patience and chastity to them.<sup>249</sup> Numerous instances of *smarthavicharam* and several texts which depicted female figures as quarrelsome co-wives who dominated their husbands and oppressed

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<sup>249</sup> J.Devika, *Namboothiri, Antharjanam, Man, Woman*, Lateral Studies, M.G. University WP, 16462, 1991, pp. 1- 47

daughters-in-law was taken by J.Devika to establish that the portrait of 'miserable *antharjanams*' were far from reality. According to her this representation was made to legitimate the necessity of refashioning *antharjanams* to become a modern companionate wife. However an analysis of the available data does not support the argument. For instance woman's behavior leading to *smarthavicharam*, ie. sexual laxity, was regarded, by Devika, as acts of subversion adopted by *antharjanams* against the male domination and restrictions inflicted on them. It would be difficult to explain *smarthavicharam* as subversion. In the first place except that of Kuriyedath Tathri's trial, detailed records of conduct of other *smarthavicharams* are not available. J.Devika has used the literary works like that of Madamppu Kunhuttan's *Bhrasht* and Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Prathikaradevatha*, which defended Thatri's behaviour as planned revenge. Moreover there were innumerable instances, in which women were trapped into issues, either by the conspiracy hatched by co-wives or sisters-in-law or even by servants, leading to innocent women being expelled from the community following trial.<sup>250</sup> It was possible that some may have indulged in sexual relations with several men as revenge against their deplorable life, but to consider every case of infidelity as subversion is nothing other than fantasy. Generalization from such isolated cases, to demonstrate the boldness and outspoken character of *antharjanams* seems quite hard to accept, when corroborated with the ethnographic literature of the contemporary period and also with the data available from the then life memorized by people.

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<sup>250</sup> Interviews with Pattachomayarath Krishnan Namboothiri, 79 years, Thrissur, 31/12/2015, Narayanunni Peringhottalam, 70 years, Payyannur, 02/04/2016 and Mullasserri Anadhan Namboothiripad, Calicut, 27/01/2016. The novel *Saraswathivijayam* narrated the story of a pious *antharjanam*, Subhadra, who was excommunicated following *smarthavicharam* done on account of rumor spread by her servant that Subhadra was unchaste. Potheri Kunhambu, op.cit.

At the same time the rescuer/reformer always had an upper hand in the process of reform and throughout the movement there was a conscious attempt to safeguard the domesticity of *antharjanams*. Even the formation and programmes undertaken by Antharjana Samajam was with the approval and support of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham. The refashioning of women was along a path determined by ‘already reformed men’. *Antharjanams* wanted to come out of the restrictions imposed on them, but in the then prevailing circumstances it was not easy, a pathfinder was inevitable, which was provided by the reformers. Parvathy Manezhi, the first women to discard ghosha, was encouraged to attempt it by her husband. In short responding to the clarion call of the young reformers, *antharjanams* many of whom longing for a significant transformation, came out of the *illoms* to become a part of the public sphere.<sup>251</sup>

While the reform movement progressed criticisms were leveled against the intensions and attitudes of the reformers. Parvathy Nenmenimangalam openly questioned the reformers as they were not sincere to the ideology they preached.<sup>252</sup> Severe criticism was posed by Lalithambika Antharjanam on the reform agenda decided by men for women of the community. She regarded that sartorial reforms are very peripheral and women won’t be benefitted from it; such transformations were the manifestations of the fantasies of Namboothiri youth. Moreover physical makeovers cannot be regarded as conferring of freedom for *antharjanams*; freedom would be materialized when women were given equality with men, of which the reformers were silent. The emancipation of women required intellectual, economic and political freedom and they must be granted with the right to participate in public affairs like that of a man. However an ideology to maintain the

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<sup>251</sup> Vadakkumbadu Narayanan, *Akkitham Hridayathil Kannulla Kavi*, (Mal), Mathrubhumi, Calicut, 2016, p.57

<sup>252</sup> K.M.Raghavan Nambiyar, op.cit., pp. 32-33

domesticity of women could not conceive these issues.<sup>253</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam observed that the reformers always nurtured a dominant apprehension that it was they who reformed and rescued *antharjanams* from the darkness of *illoms*.<sup>254</sup> For reformers a woman was to be saved only through their mediation, and she herself was not capable of ameliorating her fate. Two short stories, *Prasadam* and *Ethu Asasyamanno*, written by Lalithambika Antharjanam explicitly express her views on the nature of the reform movement and the perspectives of male reformers regarding the women they ought to rescue. *Prasadam* was about a male reformer's expectation of gratitude from the woman who was rescued by him and certain behavior, for obvious reasons, was judged as the lack of appreciation for his sacrifices.<sup>255</sup> *Ethu Asasyamanno* was about the misconception of a reformer that his wife should always be inferior to him, though it was he who took her out of the traditional restrictions. He made his wife participate in the conferences of the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha and after the initial tide of reform; she was repressed within the *illom*. Even her reading of Yoghakshemam was ridiculed and was thwarted, by claiming that she was neglecting her household duties. The same idea is shared by the play *Thozil Kendrathilekku* in which an active member of Yoghakshema Sabha is portrayed, as a staunch conservative who was not permitting his wife to move out of the *illom*.

The Namboothiri men wanted *antharjanams* to be reformed and transformed into modern, adorable and sensible wives, who maintained the traditionally ascribed domesticity prescribed for women. The gendered

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<sup>253</sup> S.Shaji, *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Lekhanagal*, (Mal), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2011, p. 12.

<sup>254</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, 'Kerala Vanitha Prasthanathil Namboothiri Streekalude Nila', in S.Shaji, op.cit., pp. 51-55

<sup>255</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, 'Prasadam', in *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Kathakal Samboornam*, op.cit., pp.177-180

project of reform enunciated by the male reformers sought to confine *antharjanams* within a newly framed notion of 'womanhood', different from that of the traditional system. The proposed womanhood didn't confer freedom or individuality for women, but was to carve out a new generation of Namboothiri women who would suit the needs and aspirations of the reformed men. When they took women to the public sphere out of the boundaries of *illoms* the level of women's accessibility of the same was determined by them, and after a while women were asked to go back to *illoms*,<sup>256</sup> which was evident from the fact that the Antharjana Samajam was reduced to namesake organization. Even though many of them went back they were totally different individuals, ie. they returned with new knowledge and concepts of the world. Similarly when the Yuvajana Sangham strenuously propagated widow remarriage and exhorted youth to marry young widows, the woman who opted for remarriage was always looked down upon. The community and the reformers honoured men who remarried widows, but at the same time the widows, when they exhibited courage to ameliorate their life by getting married, were consciously avoided. They were not welcomed in their own *illoms* and the authorities of Namboothiri Balika Sadanam at Thrissur prohibited remarried *antharjanams* from entering the premises of the institution.<sup>257</sup> In short it can be ascertained that even after three decades of reform, the community was not relieved from its convictions regarding women.

The twentieth century reform programme with its paramount concern for women, expressed its desire to frame a new womanhood for the upper caste women of Malabar. In short it can be argued that the new womanhood

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<sup>256</sup> K.M.Sheeba, 'From Kitchen to the Stage and Back: Continuing Forms of Women's Exclusion in Keralam', *Journal of South Indian History*, vol.2, issue.2, March 2006, pp.55-71

<sup>257</sup> Devaki Narikkattiri, 'Antharjanaghal Unnarannam', in Palakeezh Narayanan, op.cit., pp. 73-77.

suggested was in cognizance with the concept of 'new woman' put forward by Partha Chatterjee. The analysis of the reform programme in Malabar testifies that the concept was true not only for the colonial Bengal but the impulsive force that led to an alternative womanhood for upper class Hindu women was similar throughout India. The proposed womanhood was not based on the freedom granted to women, but on the concessions conferred on woman for refashioning her to a middle class woman. The new design for womanhood was based on high domesticity and 'morality'. She was to fulfill her task as a noble wife and loving mother, moreover she must be a perfect home maker. As regarded by K.N.Panikkar the changes in the condition of women, which the reformers advocated did not transgress the patriarchal authority.<sup>258</sup> The educated middle class men wanted to reform their women from the drudged conditions of customary life, but this was done to remould her to a companionate wife within the private sphere of their life.

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<sup>258</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *History as a Site of Struggle: Essays of History, Culture and Politics*, Three Essays Collective, New Delhi, 2013, p. 283

## CONCLUSION

Institutions that originated along with the progress of humanity on earth were never static; they were exposed to multiple challenges. But the two institutions - family and marriage - survived all confrontations posed by various agencies and continue to exist, by exerting considerable influence on human life. Religions and political systems were for safeguarding the sanctity and exclusiveness of family as it was the first medium which realized the socialization of man. However from the time of its inception family and marriage failed to grant equality to its men and women. Both these institutions were so designed that they endorsed the contentment of men and women were designated to be facilitators for man's triumph.

Notions of family were never static; they underwent periodic changes. These changes were due to several factors – in the present case primarily from the changes induced by colonialism. In pre-colonial Malabar the marriage relations and family structure were closely linked to the complex tenurial patterns of the traditional society, which in turn was based on the caste system. The hierarchically ordained caste system along with the practice of untouchability created a gulf between castes and it dictated the lifestyle, food and dress patterns of the population. The intricacies in the land organizations crept into social relationships and familial structures. Namboothiris soon after their migration to this part of the region acquired dominance by the proliferation of the Vedic ideology. They became successful in converting themselves to the position of landlords and maintained this position through the control of temples. Nairs, most populous *savarna* caste of Malabar, were the chief assistants of Namboothiris. A unique relationship developed among Namboothiris and Nairs, a good number of the former being the landlords and

most of the latter the tenants, who monopolized the economic affairs of Malabar by controlling agriculture.

These communities followed exclusively distinct familial organizations, marriage practices and inheritance rules. While Nairs followed a matrilineal organization centered on their household, *tarawad*, the Namboothiris had the patriarchal family. But the patriarchally structured family of Namboothiris was quite different from elsewhere as they followed primogeniture. As a result only the eldest son and his children could inherit the family's properties. At the same time all evils of patriarchal Hindu family like that of seclusion of women, polygamy, dowry, domestic violence and early widowhood were prevalent among Namboothiris. They regarded marriage as a sacrament and unmarried women were believed to be a curse. *Antharjanams* were kept in sheer ignorance and they were denied basic human rights. When men were permitted to have numerous sexual partners, women were destined to live as one of the several co-wives or die as spinsters. Moreover women were severely punished and excommunicated for any sort of sexual 'misbehaviour', following the ritual trial of *smarthavicharam*. The double standard of morality instituted by the community for men and women was a result of their adherence to patriarchal principles.

Nairs on the other hand followed matrilineal inheritance and descent was traced along the female line. Women continued to live in their *tarawad* even after marriage and husband was not under the obligation to provide for his wife and children, as they were maintained by the natal household. However the Nair women were not 'matriarchs' as they were kept aloof from the management of the *tarawad*, which was regarded as the traditional right of the *karanavan*. At the same time the senior female member was consulted with in the internal affairs of the household. Nairs were to go through a pre-puberty marriage and later they were initiated to proper marriage on attaining



puberty. *Thalikettukalyanam* was of ritual significance and it was a prerequisite for becoming eligible for *sambandham*. When the primary marriage, *Thalikettukalyanam* was composed of elaborate rituals, *sambandham* was devoid of any religious rites; this in turn led to an impression that *sambandham* was an invalid marriage. But for its followers *sambandham* was a proper marriage and the marital relations were quite moral. These notions were not permanent, they underwent change. *Sambandham* was criticized as being devised by the Namboothiris for sexual exploitation of Nair women. However the customs of Nairs cannot be generalized into a single framework as there existed considerable differences between the Nairs of North Malabar and South Malabar.

Writings of foreign travelers gave the impression that the Nair system of marriage was different and that Nair women were polyandrous. But in reality Nair women never had the sexual freedom as celebrated in the travelogues and her sexuality was under the strict surveillance of various agencies. Like *sambandham*, divorce was also done without many formalities. Similarly polyandry was practiced by some Nair, but it cannot be equated with promiscuity.

The colonial state's interpretation of indigenous customs and practices made subtle transformation in the life of the people. They projected 'Western' systems as civilized and indigenous as obsolete. With the influx of colonial modernity through various agencies there was an undermining of the local traditions and customs. But India failed to develop a homogenous understanding of modernity, the diversified nature of the country, leading to varied conceptions of modernity. The middle class who became the harbingers of modernity in India tried to initiate changes largely by imitating the western lifestyles. However our understanding of modernity and the servile political condition of India resulted in a fictitious acquisition of

modernity. Moreover the emergent Indian middle class was never relieved completely from the traditions of caste and religion and hence their attempts to modernize Indian conditions were always to be achieved in the framework already laid down by caste and other institutions. In Malabar the middle class drew its members largely from the Nair community; consequently they could make use of the governmental machinery in their favour more efficiently than the Namboothiris.

The administrative decisions motivated by colonial interests disturbed the traditional agrarian practices; most important was the colonial acceptance of *janmam* right as absolute ownership, which went against the tradition of the land. Following this *janmis* resorted to ruthless evictions for facilitating over lease, which led to peasant upsurges. The colonial interventions and resultant changes in land relations affected not only the agricultural sector, but had repercussions in the relations between Namboothiris and Nairs and in their family life. With the establishment of colonial administration Nair *tarawads* and *tarakuttanghal* lost their traditional politico-judicial power, which were taken over by the governmental machinery. But Nairs managed to sustain their dominance on the society by accepting English education and acquiring key posts under the colonial government.

The agrarian tensions continued in Malabar for several decades which finally culminated in the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930, whereby tenants were conferred with the permanency of land tenure and were safeguarded from evictions. The Act actually benefitted the Nair community, who were mostly intermediary tenants and the actual cultivator was kept at mercy of the *kanakaran*.

Colonial jurisprudence which accepted the Brahmanic Sastras and Sruthis as the basis of judicial administration destabilized the customs of the region and went against the tradition of indigenous communities. Accordingly

*marumakkathayam* was considered as aberration and *sambandham* as invalid marriages, whereby women in *sambandham* marriages were dubbed as 'concubines' rather than wives. Moreover the inconsistency of the colonial courts in dealing with social issues aggravated the problems faced by the people. Some of these notions were internalized by the Nair middle class as is clear from the debate between Indulekha and Madhavan.

The colonial administrative measures led to the transformation of indigenous social fabric and the society and religions were exposed to challenges. Hence the traditional intellectuals and the emergent middle class embarked upon social reform programmes for the resurgence of the society. In Malabar, Namboothiris and Nairs realized the need for reforming their age old 'pre-modern' customs. Quite naturally Nairs were the first to adopt reformism for the transformation of their traditional customs. The spirit of reformism resulted in the formation of caste organizations, like that of the Nair Service Society and the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha. The caste organizations of Malabar were successful in utilizing the print media for their propagation in the form of magazines and dailies, the relatively high percentage of literacy greatly aiding this. When Nairs wanted subtle changes in the marital organizations and *tarawad* management, Namboothiris through the organization tried to revamp their privileges which were being threatened. Consequently the Nairs in Malabar approached the colonial machinery for legislative reforms. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha could exert substantial influence among the community and stood for the implementation of English education for Namboothiri youth. In course of time the Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha came under the control of young reform minded leaders and they aspired to bring about significant transformations in the family organizations and marriage practices. As a result of their strenuous propaganda within the frame work of the organization they could induce changes in the notions of the family within the community.

However social legislation and governmental acts should not be seen as 'gifts of an enlightened government'. Rather they were responses to social and political pressures which were exerted through various means. This is clear from the striking differences between the judicial pronouncements of the first half of the nineteenth century, which in effect were legislations and the judgments delivered in the twentieth century which never attained the status of legislations.

With the dissemination of Western education a whole new world view began to develop in Malabar. Nairs and Thiyas experienced a social revolution through the acceptance of English education. As modern education was essential in gaining employment under the government, Nair youth flocked to public schools. At the same time the Namboothiris remained aloof from the new education till the early years of twentieth century. The education and employment opportunities enabled Nairs to retain dominance on the social conditions of Malabar which was threatened with the onslaught of the imperialist forces. The emerging new middle class was composed mostly of the Nairs. However the urge to get educated in the modern system created tension within the households, as the *karanavans* were not ready to spend money on nephews. English education was quite expensive and the financial condition of *tarawads* was not favourable for the aspiring youth. But in some cases fathers began to educate their son which led to the development of an obligation towards the father, which was a novel development in the matrilineal familial structure. It also reflected the changing notions of family.

The educated and salaried Nair youth moved out of *tarawads* and Malabar and this enabled them to realize the culture of other communities. With the self acquired income they felt more confident to question the autocratic nature of *karanavans* and at the same time the difference in the accessibility of English education led to dissensions among *tavazhis*. Some of

them started setting up their own families either with their mother and sisters or with wife and children. Women began to prefer government employees as their *sambandham* partners. The status and salary of the husband became a significant factor and led to the development of hostility among women of the same *tarawad*. The life outside Malabar and association with Europeans and Tamil Brahmins, initiated the Nair youth to a new world build upon 'colonial modernity'. Moreover they began to develop a sense of guilt owing to the peculiarities of their marital relations. They felt humiliated by the absence of real marriage and conjugal relations. An impulse for a transformation was provided by the recommendations of William Logan, who was in favour of initiating changes in the *marumakkathayam* system. The decisions taken by the colonial courts in matters related to *sambandham* and *puthravakasam* intensified their urge for legal intervention in the age old system.

Aspirations of the 'minority middle class Nair men' prompted the government to institute a commission, Malabar Marriage commission, to provide a form of marriage for *marumakkathayee* Hindus. The commission recommended a marriage law for communities following *marumakkathayam*, even though only an insignificant percentage of population was involved with its enquiry. The commission hoped that the proposed legislation would be accepted by the entire community in due course of time. Accordingly Malabar Marriage Act was framed, which legalized *sambandhams* on registration with the government. The Act stood for the promotion of monogamous marriages along with conferring the guardianship of wife and children on the husband/father. The colonial state's concern for the morality of women was dominant throughout the discussions and they aspired that registration of marriages would lead to the development of 'morality' among Nair women. The Act categorically stated that 'an adulterous' woman would not be entitled to maintenance from husband. However the Act was a failure as it could not create any impact on the population and couples did not turn out to register

their marriage. The colonial government failed to realize the real nature of *sambandham*, which was not merely a matrimonial relation, but was composed of customs, traditions and property rights.

With the turn of twentieth century the Nair reformers shifted their focus from marriage to *tarawad* management. The Nair community was experiencing the development of new filial relationship between the wife and husband. The employed youth had begun to provide for their wives and children and many had taken wives along with them, by setting up new conjugal families. This growth of affinity among the couples and the salaried employment went against the interest of the matrilineal *tarawads*. The economic forces of the period along with the provisions of Malabar tenancy Act aggravated the demand for the partition of *tarawads*. After two decades of continuous attempts for legislative intervention for reforming the matrilineal Nair households, the Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act was passed in 1933. *Sambandham* relations were legalized by the Act and at the same time polygamous relations were deemed to be invalid. Moreover Nair women were placed under the guardianship of husband, thereby taking the community towards a patriarchal organization. One of the important transformations from the earlier matrilineal organization was the change in the status of husband/father. The ideologies of social reform and the Act together successfully placed husband in a dominant position in a Nair family, and thereby promoted the development of conjugal families in the pan – Indian model. The Madras *Marumakkathayam* Act paved way for the decline of *marumakkathayam tarawads* in Malabar and in 1976 joint family system was legally abolished.

Namboothiri reform movement progressed with definite agenda and achieved most revolutionary transformations. The Namboothiri Yoghakshema Sabha, under the leadership of young vibrant reformers in its second stage

identified the impediments which blocked the progress of the community. Consequently they propagated against *sambandham* relations of Namboothiri men, polygamy and stood for the amelioration of *antharjanams*. The spirit of reformism was popularized through the medium of numerous magazines started by various factions of the community and by several committees instituted for enquiring into the issues faced by the Namboothiris. 'Direct actions' like *jathas*, picketing and the staging of dramas and meetings were other means of propaganda. The reformers categorically stated that *sajathivivaham* was the only solution for the entire problems in the community. By 1930s they were convinced of the fact that traditions cannot be mended without the legislative interventions. The Madras Namboothiri Act was passed in 1933, which legalized the intra community marriages of all Namboothiri men. The Act promoted monogamous relations, ensured the fair management of illom properties and entitled every member to claim per capita share of illoms. The period after the enactment witnessed profound changes in the marriage tradition of the community beginning with widow remarriage and inter caste marriages of *antharjanams*. The Antharjana Samajam also played a prominent role in the amelioration of *antharjanams*; they could bring out *antharjanams* from the seclusion of the custom ridden illoms and expose them to a new world. But the Antharjana Samajam was not independent in all its expositions and programmes, as it was always under the close surveillance of male dominated community. However these celebrated reforms were confined only to a small number; a large number of *antharjanams* were immune from all the reform programmes and were suppressed within the darkness of illoms. The failure of Thozil Kendram, which was regarded as the most progressive initiative of the Namboothiri reform movement, unravels the discomfort of the male chauvinistic community to accept woman when she went out of the secluded space of illoms and tried to 'stand on her own legs'.

Apart from the Malabar Tenancy Act, Madras Marumakkathayam Act and the Madras Namboothiri Act, governmental intervention was not sought in the redefinition of marriage and family and in the refashioning of womanhood. This was carried out mostly by the male members of these communities. The reform experienced by both the upper caste communities of Malabar was according to the aspirations of the newly emergent middle class, who sought to frame a conjugal family, distinct from that of the joint family. The development of the concept of individualism, unleashed by the 'colonial modernity' forced them to move against joint family and to carve out their own family. The contemporary economic and political changes made them more confident to claim their share of property. Similarly the reform advocated for women were also out the needs of the 'middle class men'. Consequently a new womanhood was proposed for the formation of 'new woman', who would be modern and educated in her expositions but at the same time rooted in the patriarchal tradition. Hence women's education was designed in a way that it would maintain her meek and subservient position to man's interests. Education for women was not aimed at her individual development but was to make her 'good' wife and mother. The apprehension on women becoming more independent on gaining education and the concern of her chastity made patriarchy to restrict her education prospects to learning basic skills. The then debate on women's education which went on in magazines and in the contemporary novels, can be regarded as the expression of patriarchal anxiety. Some women had internalized these notions as their articles would testify. However Malabar had a fairly high percentage of women's education when compared with other districts of the presidency and this was a legacy of *marumakkathayam*. When Nair girls were fortunate enough to attend public schools, the Namboothiri Streevidyabhyasa Commission recommended a home education for Namboothiri girls. This was



due to the anguish of the community about girls going awry when mingled with women of other communities.

Women question addressed by the social reform programme of these two communities were not out the genuine concern to improve the whole lot of women. It was to replace the woman of 'medieval period' with one who would be suitable for a westernized 'modern' man. The Namboothiri reform movement had certain focus on the women issues and many of the leaders were committed to women's amelioration. The Antharjana Samajam provided women with a platform through which they could indulge and express their own concerns. Moreover the emergence of several women leaders during the course of the movement helped to develop a sense of confidence among the deprived *antharjanams*. On the other hand the reform movement among Nairs from the time of its inception had no definite programmes for improving women's lives. The entire movement was driven out of men's desire to acquire control over women's sexuality and there by converting her from 'concubine' to '*pathivratha*'. Consequently moralizing the 'immoral' Nair women became the dominant concern of the Nair reformers. Similarly there was no major women participation in the reform movement and it was a male dominated process throughout. It appears quite strange that when the highly patriarchal Namboothiri community witnessed the reform propaganda undertaken by women, the same was absent in the matrilineal Nair community. Part of the explanation lies in the relative freedom Nair women had and their access to education and public life. Reform movement in both these communities were designed and led by men as it was to cast out 'a new woman' and hence the sartorial reforms for women were proposed by men. The dress to be worn by women was decided by the male folk, and women's desires were not taken into account.

Changing notions of marriage and family exalted these as institutions that would lead to the development of the community and state. Moving against the tradition, marriage was subjected to legality of the state and divorce was made to be sanctioned by the governmental apparatuses. These were instituted to ensure the morality of women. The reform movement was always conscious to preserve the traditional double standards of morality, whereby women's chastity was regarded as highly vulnerable and hence it was to be vigorously safeguarded. But there was no concern for the society about man's morality which was deemed to be intact throughout. Nair women were asked to become *pathivrathas*, by ending the practice of serial monogamy; some of the then writers even discouraged widow remarriages. Development of conjugal love and love marriages were advocated so that women could defend the pressure of traditional customs like that of polyandry. However 'love marriages' never transgressed the customary rules of match making. Though Indulekha chose her own life partner, he (Madhavan) happened to be her relative.

Notions developed by the Brahmanical patriarchy, regarding women's existence and her morality were the guiding force that led the reformers in the process of women's amelioration. The colonial modernity and western education did not make fundamental transformations in the notions of society regarding women. Similarly the notion of modernity and reform imbibed by the Namboothiri community and Nair community were entirely different from each other. At the same time men of both communities were in need of empowering themselves and to escape from a 'strained masculinity'. The reform programme was so structured that, it resulted in the formation of an unfettered masculinity. The concept of new womanhood advocated would be completing to the masculinity desired by the middle class men.

It can be argued that the twentieth century reformism was successful in achieving the transformation of women's lives by opening a new world before them. But the amelioration proposed for women didn't expect the development of their individuality; rather it was only to fabricate certain superficial changes in women's exposition. Delineating the results of the reform programme on women of both these communities it becomes clear that, their experiences were varied. When Namboothiri women were refashioned as per the requirements of the modernity, Nair women were inducted to a new patriarchal family by making them '*pathivrathas*.' In short the patriarchal impulse was stronger in the reform programme than that of the urge to empower women. That is why Nair women were asked to liberate themselves from the inherent tendencies of marumakkathayam and to forge a new patriarchal household in the pan-Indian structure.

The present study on the two communities of Malabar reveal that women question addressed by the social reform movement of the twentieth century was intended towards the formation of a 'new womanhood' induced by colonial modernity. Middle class men's concern for women's reform was not genuine and was the outward expression of their anxiety at the new forces of westernization to which women were exposed. However the weakness of the middle class should not be seen as a failing. Largely a creation of the changed circumstances brought about by colonialism, it had to function well within the constraints of colonialism. Moreover the entire process of reform can also be interpreted as a movement for the construction of a 'new masculinity.' In short the social reform agenda undermined the traditional structure of family and inheritance patterns, by advocating modern forms in which the patriarchal notions would be upheld. The concept of individuality that proliferated along with the ideologies of twentieth century reformism went against the existence of the joint families.

The changes proposed for women by the twentieth century reformism were not confined to these two communities. Similar changes have occurred in other communities like that of the Thiyyas of North Malabar and Syrian Christians of Travancore region, as these two had experienced the influx of colonial modernity at a fairly earlier stage of colonialism. Moreover the fortunes of women of royal families Malabar during colonialism and in the wake of social reform movement is an unexplored part of history, which should be submitted to a similar study for framing a comprehensive history of women of Malabar. These and the larger questions concerning gender are however outside the purview of the present study.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Acharam</i>	:	Practices
<i>Adhanam</i>	:	A sacrifice
<i>Adhikari</i>	:	Revenue functionary
<i>Adhivedhanam</i>	:	System of polygamy followed by Namboothiri <i>grihasthans</i>
<i>Adhyan</i>	:	Namboothiri with higher social status
<i>Adithiri</i>	:	Title conferred on a Namboothiri for being the lord of <i>adhanam</i>
<i>Adukaladosham</i>	:	Literally unpleasant for kitchen; in this context it means the adultery done by a woman
<i>Agni</i>	:	Literally fire; here it denotes sacrificial altar
<i>Akakoyima</i>	:	A Namboothiri to ensure that the entire process of <i>smarthavicharam</i> was done in accordance with the law
<i>Akkithiri</i>	:	Title conferred on a Namboothiri for being the lord of <i>athirathram</i>
<i>Aliyasanthanam</i>	:	Matrilineal inheritance system that had prevailed in South Canara region
<i>Ambalavasi</i>	:	Castes which are traditionally temple functionaries
<i>Ammon</i>	:	Namboothiri of Payyannur <i>gramam</i>
<i>Anacharam</i>	:	Sixty four rules observed by Namboothiris which were not followed elsewhere
<i>Anantharavan</i>	:	Nephew
<i>Anchampura</i>	:	Traditionally a room where a woman lived during her menstruation period. Here, fifth

room outside the *nallukettu* where the woman accused of adultery was housed.

<i>Ankanam</i>	:	Courtyard
<i>Antharjanam</i>	:	Namboothiri women
<i>Anuloma</i>	:	Marriage of a woman with a man of her own caste or that of higher than her
<i>Aphan</i>	:	Father's younger brother
<i>Ashtamangalyam</i>	:	Eight auspicious materials
<i>Asudham</i>	:	Literally impure; denotes pollution
<i>Asyan</i>	:	Namboothiris with inferior social status
<i>Athirathram</i>	:	A fire sacrifice
<i>Attakarikal</i>	:	Dancers
<i>Aupasanam</i>	:	A fire ritual
<i>Avakasam</i>	:	Traditional right
<i>Avanipalaka</i>	:	Wooden plank used as the priest's seat during rituals
<i>Avarna</i>	:	A lower caste Hindu
<i>Ayitham</i>	:	Untouchability
<i>Azhivuchollal</i>	:	The ritual by which the accused woman was taken back to her <i>illom</i> , if she was found to be innocent after the trial
<i>Brahmachari</i>	:	Student stage in the lifespan of an upper caste Hindu
<i>Brahmaswom</i>	:	Land or property owned by Brahmins
<i>Brahminniamma</i>	:	Woman of Nambisan caste
<i>Brasht</i>	:	Ostracism

<i>Brashtan</i>	:	One who is ostracized
<i>Cera</i>	:	A ruling dynasty of ancient South India
<i>Chola</i>	:	A ruling dynasty of ancient and medieval South India
<i>Dakshina</i>	:	Donation or payment for the services of a priest, spiritual guide or teacher
<i>Dasi</i>	:	Maid
<i>Dasivicharam</i>	:	Interrogation of the <i>dasi</i>
<i>Deeksha</i>	:	Vow
<i>Desa uparodham</i>	:	A kind of punishment
<i>Desam</i>	:	A territorial division
<i>Desavazhi</i>	:	Chieftain of a <i>desam</i>
<i>Devadasi</i>	:	A woman dedicated to the temple
<i>Devaswom</i>	:	God's property
<i>Diksalas</i>	:	House in a cardinal direction
<i>Enangan</i>	:	Linked lineages among Nairs
<i>Ezhutupalli</i>	:	Traditional village school
<i>Ghosha</i>	:	A kind of veil to seclude <i>antharjanams</i> ; the use of a cadjan leaf umbrella and a cloak which covered the whole body when women went out
<i>Gotram</i>	:	Clan
<i>Grama</i>	:	Village
<i>Griasthan</i>	:	Eldest member of a Namboothiri <i>illom</i>
<i>Illom</i>	:	Namboothiri household
<i>Irikanamma</i>	:	Nair maids who looked after Namboothiri children

<i>Janmakar</i>	:	Those who possessed <i>janmam</i> rights
<i>Janmam</i>	:	Allodial property right claimed by the <i>janmi</i>
<i>Janmi</i>	:	Landlord, holder of <i>janmam</i>
<i>Jati</i>	:	Caste
<i>Kabooliyath</i>	:	Acceptance of terms and conditions
<i>Kalapam</i>	:	Riot
<i>Kalaripayattu</i>	:	Traditional martial art form of Kerala
<i>Kallumalla</i>	:	A necklace made of stones
<i>Kalyanam</i>	:	Marriage
<i>Kanakkar</i>	:	One who holds land on <i>kanam</i> tenure, a tenant
<i>Kanam</i>	:	A land tenure under which the tenant holds land by paying a fixed sum or grain in advance or acknowledges the overlordship of the <i>janmi</i> . Depending on the region it assume the character of lease or mortgage.
<i>Kanishtan</i>	:	Junior males of Namboothiri <i>illom</i>
<i>Kanishtavivaham</i>	:	Intra community marriage of younger sons of <i>illom</i>
<i>Kanyadanam</i>	:	Daughter's marriage
<i>Karaima</i>	:	Tenancy right
<i>Karanavan</i>	:	The male head of the joint family
<i>Karyasthan</i>	:	Manager
<i>Kedavilaku</i>	:	Literally a lamp which is never extinguished
<i>Kendram</i>	:	Centre
<i>Kovilakams</i>	:	Royal household



<i>Kshatriya</i>	:	Second of the four Hindu Varnas; traditionally constituting the warrior caste.
<i>Kshema namaskaram</i>	:	Kneeling to request pardon
<i>Kudiveppu</i>	:	Ritual observed at the arrival of the bride at the husband's <i>illom</i>
<i>Kudiyar</i>	:	Tenant
<i>Kuladharmam</i>	:	Traditionally accepted duties of the family
<i>Kulina</i>	:	Woman of noble birth
<i>Kuzhikanam</i>	:	Tenure on freshly reclaimed lands or land which could be improved
<i>Lokar</i>	:	People
<i>Mana</i>	:	Namboothiri household
<i>Manavalan</i>	:	Bride groom
<i>Manjalkulikalyanam</i>	:	Synonym of <i>thalikettukalyanam</i>
<i>Mannapedi- Pulapedi</i>	:	A custom of medieval Kerala
<i>Mappila</i>	:	Muslims of Malabar
<i>Marakoradu</i>	:	A piece of wood sometimes used instead of an earring
<i>Marakuda</i>	:	Cadjan leaf umbrella
<i>Marumakkathayam</i>	:	Matrilineal inheritance system of Kerala
<i>Marumakkathayi</i>	:	A follower of <i>marumakkathayam</i> inheritance
<i>Maryadai</i>	:	Custom/convention, obligation
<i>Mattu</i>	:	Cloth to be worn for purification after pollution
<i>Mattu mudakkal</i>	:	A punishment inflicted by the caste council on those who went against local customs
<i>Melcharth</i>	:	Lease secured by a third person, an overlease

<i>Melmundu</i>	:	Cloth covering the upper part of the body
<i>Melsila</i>	:	Cloth covering the upper part of the body
<i>Menon</i>	:	Village official/ a sub-caste of Nair
<i>Mimamsakar</i>	:	Learned men in Vedic scriptures
<i>Misrabhojanam</i>	:	Inter-dinning
<i>Mlechha</i>	:	Literally impure people; a term used to denote non-Hindus
<i>Mukhyasthan</i>	:	A village chief
<i>Mundu</i>	:	Garment worn around the waist in Kerala
<i>Nad</i>	:	Territory, a political unit in medieval Kerala
<i>Naduvazhi</i>	:	Ruler of a <i>nad</i>
<i>Nair</i>	:	Traditionally upper caste agriculturists some of whom acted as warriors in pre-British Malabar
<i>Nalukettu</i>	:	Traditional architectural style of Kerala
<i>Namboothiri</i>	:	Brahmin of Kerala
<i>Nilavilakku</i>	:	Oil lamp
<i>Nir-atiperu</i>	:	Gifted with libation of water
<i>Nivedhyam</i>	:	Food prepared for offering to god.
<i>Nuttuvar Kuttangal</i>	:	Literally groups of hundreds; denotes the traditional army of medieval Kerala
<i>Onam</i>	:	Harvest festival pertaining to the myth of Mahabali
<i>Otti</i>	:	Land tenure similar to <i>kanam</i> , prevalent in North Malabar; also a kind of mortgage
<i>Pad</i>	:	Rank or authority

<i>Pallaku</i>	:	Palaquin
<i>Panthalmangalam</i>	:	Synonym for <i>thalikettukalyanam</i>
<i>Parivedanam</i>	:	Intra community marriage of younger sons of <i>illoms</i>
<i>Pathanadi</i>	:	Title given to the <i>antharjanam</i> who was the wife of lord of the sacrifice
<i>Pathayapura mallika</i>	:	Out house
<i>Pattom</i>	:	Rent
<i>Pennkoda</i>	:	Marriage of a Namboothiri girl
<i>Perumal</i>	:	Cera ruler
<i>Pooram</i>	:	Temple festival
<i>Prathiloma</i>	:	Marriage of a woman with a man of lower caste
<i>Prayaschitham</i>	:	Atonement
<i>Purbattis</i>	:	A village official
<i>Pudamuri</i>	:	Literally cutting the cloth. Used as a synonym for <i>sambandham</i>
<i>Pudamurikurikkal</i>	:	Ceremony at which <i>pudamuri</i> is fixed
<i>Pudava</i>	:	Cloth handed to the bride during marriage
<i>Puja</i>	:	Worship
<i>Pula</i>	:	Pollution caused by the birth or death of a relative
<i>Pulikudi</i>	:	A ritual observed during pregnancy
<i>Purakoyima</i>	:	Representative of the king
<i>Puthapu</i>	:	Cloth used to cover the body
<i>Puthravakasam</i>	:	Son's right

<i>Sadanam</i>	:	House or abode
<i>Sadhanam</i>	:	Literally an object; here the term denotes an accused woman during <i>smarthavicharam</i>
<i>Sajathivivaham</i>	:	Marrying from one's own caste
<i>Samajam</i>	:	Association
<i>Samantha</i>	:	Chieftain
<i>Sambandham</i>	:	Literally union; denotes marriage alliance among Nairs
<i>Samskara</i>	:	A purificatory ceremony or rite marking a major event in one's life.
<i>Sapathnis</i>	:	Co-wives
<i>Satyagraha</i>	:	A particular form of non-violent movement or civil resistance
<i>Savarna</i>	:	A higher caste Hindu
<i>Sekam</i>	:	Deflowering ceremony of the girl after marriage
<i>Shodasa kriyakkal</i>	:	Sixteen rituals to be observed
<i>Smarthan</i>	:	A Vedic judge
<i>Smarthavicharam</i>	:	A ritual trial conducted by learned men in Vedas when the chastity of an antharjanam was suspected
<i>Somayagham</i>	:	A fire sacrifice
<i>Somayaji</i>	:	Title conferred on a Namboothiri for being the lord of <i>Somayagham</i>
<i>Srauta</i>	:	Belonging to <i>Sruthi</i> , anything based on Vedas.
<i>Sthani</i>	:	One who possess a title under local ruler
<i>Sudhabhojanam</i>	:	A purificatory meal

<i>Sudham</i>	:	Literally pure
<i>Sudra</i>	:	Fourth Varna; generally applied to non-Brahman castes other than Dalits
<i>Swaroopam</i>	:	Original seat of a royal lineage
<i>Swaroopamcholal</i>	:	Publicizing the verdict after <i>smarthavicharam</i>
<i>Tara</i>	:	A part of the village or unit of administrative organization for civil and military purposes among Nairs.
<i>Tarakuttanghal</i>	:	Councils composed of leaders of <i>tara</i>
<i>Tarawad</i>	:	A joint family unit
<i>Tavazhi</i>	:	Literally mother's way- generally used to refer to branches of the matrilineal household
<i>Thali</i>	:	An ornament tied as the symbol of being married and worn by women until widowhood
<i>Thalikettukalyanam</i>	:	Pre-puberty marriage
<i>Thirandukalyanam</i>	:	Ceremony observed after first menstruation
<i>Thirandukuli</i>	:	Ceremonial bath after first menstruation
<i>Thiruvathira</i>	:	A festival of women
<i>Udakavichedam</i>	:	Literally separation of the body; in this context funerary rite
<i>Unninamboothiri</i>	:	Namboothiri boy
<i>Upanayana</i>	:	Ritual at which the sacred thread is worn
<i>Uzhamporuka</i>	:	Synonym of <i>sambandham</i>
<i>Uzhiyam</i>	:	Forced unpaid labour
<i>Vaidikan</i>	:	One who is well versed in Vedas
<i>Varam</i>	:	Festival at temple

<i>Varnasamkara</i>	:	Inter-mixture of Varnas
<i>Vattake kulam</i>	:	Water tank at the northern side of the compound, usually used by women
<i>Veli</i>	:	Intra community marriage of Namboothiris
<i>Velishesham</i>	:	Synonym of <i>sekam</i>
<i>Verumpattam</i>	:	Lease held by tenants at will
<i>Veshya</i>	:	Harlot
<i>Vidaram kayaral</i>	:	Synonym of <i>sambandham</i>
<i>Vidyalayam</i>	:	School
<i>Vidyarambham</i>	:	Ritualistic initiation to learning
<i>Vijatheeyavivaham</i>	:	Inter community marriage
<i>Vishu</i>	:	Traditionally marking New Year of Hindus in Kerala
<i>Vrata</i>	:	Sanskrit word for vow/resolve, refers to pious observances like fasting
<i>Yachanayathra</i>	:	Literally hunger march
<i>Yaga</i>	:	Sacrifice
<i>Yajamanan</i>	:	Lord/owner. Also the person who conducts <i>Yaga</i>
<i>Yogam</i>	:	Namboothiri council for the administration of temples

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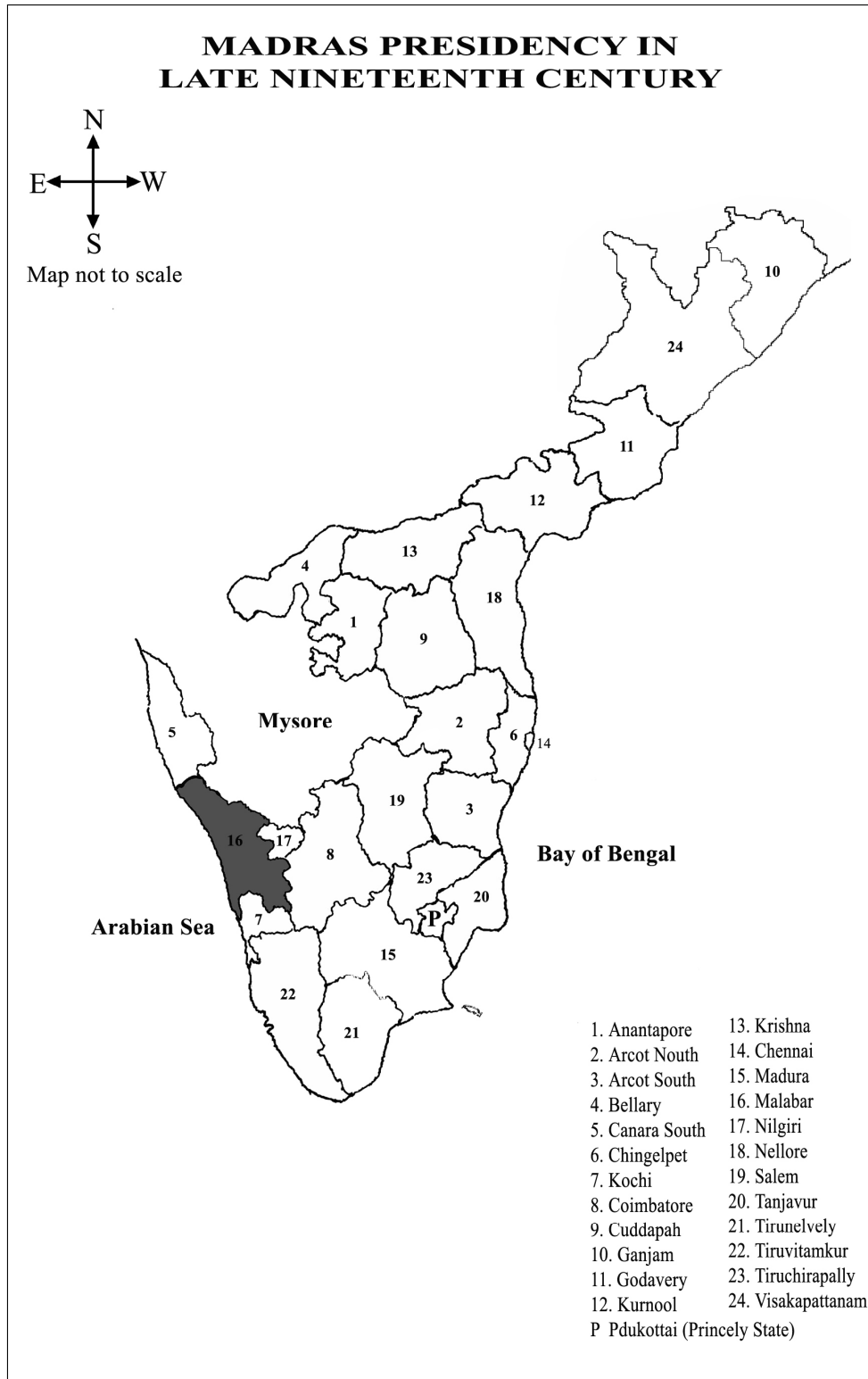
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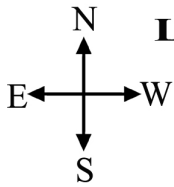
# MAPS



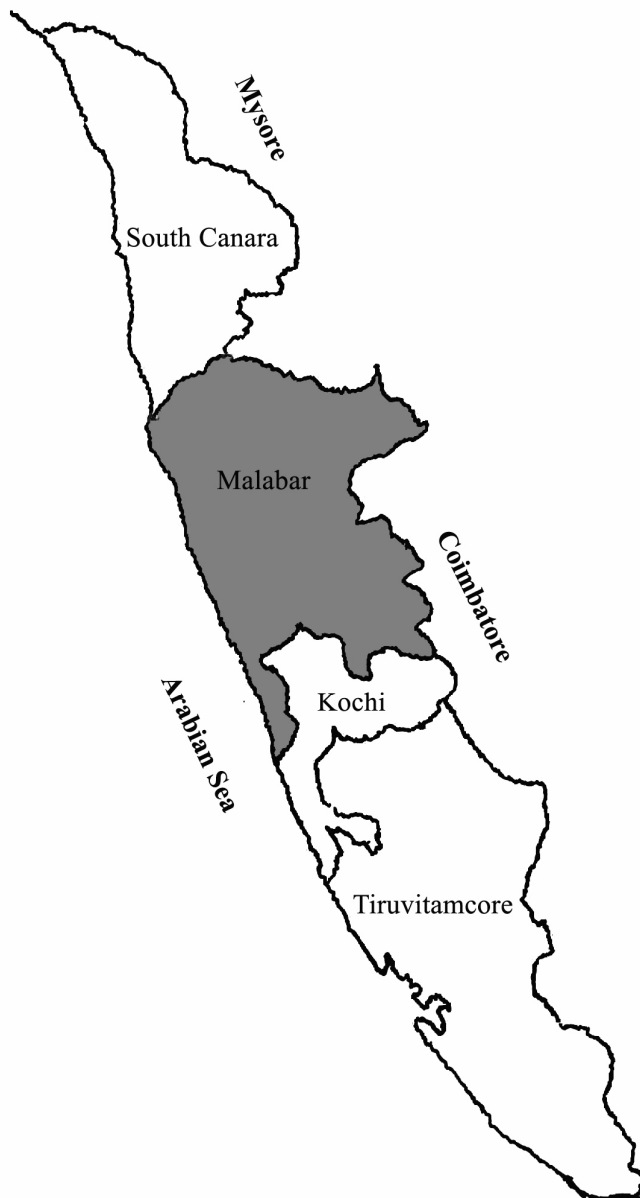
Source: Manual of the Administration, Madras Presidency, Records of Government and the Yearly Administration Report 1895, vol. 1, p. 187



# MALABAR IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

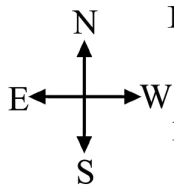


Map not to scale



Source: Manual of the Administration, Madras Presidency, Records of Government and the Yearly Administration Report 1895, vol. 1, p. 194

## TALUKS OF MALABAR DISTRICT IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY



Map not to scale



Source: Manual of the Administration, Madras Presidency, Records of Government and the Yearly Administration Report 1895, vol. 1, p. 196

## APPENDICES



**Namboothiri woman in traditional dress.**  
**(Second half of nineteenth century)** Source:  
Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, vol. 3, Panchangham Pusthakasala, Kunnankulam, 2007, (reprint)



Namboothiri Women in ghosha. (**Second half of nineteenth century**) **Source:** Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, vol. 3, Panchangham Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2007, (reprint)



**Namboothiri marriage ceremony. The bride is all covered up.**  
Source: Kannipayyur Sankaran Namboothiripad, *Ente Smaranakkal*, vol. 3, Panchangham Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2007, (reprint)



**Nair women in first half of twentieth century.**  
Source : <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nair>