

**Women's Education in a Princely State:
A Case Study of Travancore, 1900-1947**

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Award of the
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "***Women's Education in a Princely State: A Case Study of Travancore, 1900-1947***" submitted by **Burton Cleetus** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of ***Master of Philosophy***, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge, this is a bonafide work.

We recommend that this Dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational progress achieved by the women in the context of social change in Travancore between the period 1900-1947 forms the central focus of study. The sharp advancement in terms of literacy achieved by women in Travancore, compared to the National average has always been a matter of analysis and deep interest. The attempt made here, agrees in principle with the arguments made in support of the role of those institutions like the Christian missionaries, the role of the socio-reform movements, and that of the Native State, in playing a lead role towards the numerical expansion of literacy for women.¹

The study is an attempt at understanding the dynamics of the spread of women's education. Education for women not only meant the numerical expansion of the

¹ Major arguments in Support of the Role Played by the missionaries, the Socio-reform movement and that of the princely state has been highlighted by Robin Jeffery, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*. (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976), by Richard W. Franke, *Kerala : Development Through Radical Reform*, Promila & Co. Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, P. 105, R. N. Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education in Kerala*, (South Indian Social Centre, Trivandrum, 1988), p. 30., Kathleen Gough, *Implication of Literacy in Traditional China and India*; Jack Goody (ed) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1968), p.63, by Amarthya Sen and Jean Dreze. (ed) *Indian Development : Selected Regional Perspectives*, OUP, 1996, Delhi. P. 143.

women's capability to read and write but it was also a process by which power relations on gender lines were re-negotiated. The need for the women's education in Travancore emanated from the transformation in the perception of women's identity in the society. This transformation was the result of the permeation of external influence as a result of Western presence in the traditional society, which brought to focus the need for a rapid transformation in the structure and method of the cultural practices and behaviour of the natives. The base of these cultural practices was identified to be the gender relations and practices that were in prevalence among the native elite, which were identified as areas that need rapid and fundamental transformation, both by the westerners and by that of the natives. The newly introduced schools for girls were perceived as a means towards this end. The syllabi of what was to be taught emanated from the dominant perception the society had towards women's identity and the changes in the course content of women's education resulted from the changes in the perception of women's identity among the dominant elites.

Women's education in the Travancore society meant a restructuring of the behaviours and practices within family, but not the power relations that existed between man and women. The whole debates and discourses that centered around women's education that would, provide education for women, but at the same time strengthen, preserve and lead to the continuance of the institutions of patriarchy both within the family and in society. Placing women's education as a focal point of the functioning of the gender relations, an attempt is made to understand the gender relations and the response of various caste and communities in Travancore to the issue of women's education.

Women's education in Travancore in the modern sense of the term was the result of the impact of western ideas on the native society.² This led to an interaction, which secured for the west a hegemonic position in terms of a 'superior knowledge'. This in effect meant a thorough critiquing of things native. Traditional beliefs, practices,

² T. K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore state Manual*, Government of Travancore, 1940. Thiruvananthapuram, P. 539, R.N. Yesudas, *A History of women's Education in Kerala*, South India Social Centre, Trivandrum, 1988, A .Mathew, *A History of Educational growth in Kerala*, (New Delhi, NIEPA 1988), p. 25.

manners, customs etc., were brought into question. Relations both within the family as well as in the society were brought to the test of European reasoning. It was the rights and role of women, as individuals both within the family, and in the society in general formed the centre of the discourse during the period. The European presence provided an alternate mode of women's identity, which was western in character and spirit. The new schools that were started by the missionaries and the government articulated and disseminated the emerging perception on women.³

Gender relations in Travancore society varied from community to community. The Brahmins formed the major caste group and it was within them that the women's rights and mobility was most curtailed. It was only the elder male member of the Brahmin household was allowed to marry within the same caste group while the younger male members entered into temporary alliance with the Nair women, the caste below the Brahmins in terms of social position and hierarchy. Brahmin women were bound to

³ David W. Savage, "Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India", (Gender and History, Vol. 9, No. 2, August 1997), p. 212.

their household, denied social mobility and access to public places. As only the elder male member had the right to marry from the same caste, most of the Brahmin women lived and died as spinsters. They were however taught the Vedas and Puranic literature.⁴ The *Nairs* did not have a formal marriage system. They followed the practice of temporary alliance or *Sambandham* and practiced the matrilineal form of succession. It was the peculiar nature of *Sambandham* relationship that formed the core of the discourse on Gender relations and that of the position of women in Travancore. The need for educating women was however highlighted as a means towards the transformation of women's position in the family as well as to give away with this form of marriage practice.

“Various explanations of this curious system have been suggested. The traditional Brahman account is that it was ordained by Parasurama, who bade the women of the Samantan, and Sudra classes “putt off chastity and the cloth that covered their breasts; and declared that the duty of such women and the object for

⁴ Robin Jeffery, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*. Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976. P. 128.

which they were created was to satisfy the desires of the Brahmans. It is no doubt an exceedingly convenient arrangement for the cadets of the Naboodri families whom it relieves from the lifelong bachelorhood to which they are supposed to devote themselves, without entitling any corresponding burden, whether in the form of more months to feed, or of more claimants to their ancestral property; and combined with a rule of hypergramy, it of course ensures the higher race against contamination by the blood of the lower.... Mr. Warden, collector of Malabar from 1804-1816 considers that “the profession of arms by birth, subjecting the males of a whole race to military service from the earliest youth to the declined of manhood, was a system of polity utterly incompatible with the existence among them of the marriage state” and that it was obvious that, from the nature of their professional duties, their sexual intercourse could only have been fugitive and promiscuous, and their progeny could never under such circumstances have depended upon them for support.”

This contemporary European description (1908) commented critically as follows:

“Whatever the true explanation may be, there seems little doubt that the *Sambandham* was,

in its origins at all events, the simplest and loosest form of sexual union between man and woman. It depended for any permanence it might possess entirely on the free-will of the parties, either of which was at liberty at any moment and for any cause to terminate it by the simple expedient of discontinuing it, no sort of ceremony resembling divorce, whether legal or religious, being requisite for that purpose. The woman was at liberty to entertain in turn any number of lovers, and the latter was at liberty to share the favours of any number of women.”⁵

Major understandings and the subsequent critiques on the socio-cultural practices among the natives by the westerners was derived from the marriage practices and sexual practices that were in existence among the *Nairs*. Though the practice of *Sambandham* was part of the whole cultural logic of the social system as a whole, Western influence treated this practice to be morally perverse and ethically degrading. This moral critique on the cultural practice directed against the social elite made them to search for an identity for their women. And the new

⁵ C.A. Innes, *Madras District Gazetteers, Malabar*, (Government Press, Madras, 1908, reprinted 1950. P. 98.

identity that they sought to create was aimed at providing an opposition to such a critique. They intended to transform woman from the image of a wife, without a permanent marriage relation to that of the centre of the house who were considered to be an all compassionate and ideal women.

Given the social hierarchy, their economic position and the genuine need for an identity re-construction, the discourse on women's identity and education was mostly undertaken by the *Nairs*. The *Ezhavas* who were below the *Nairs* in terms of socio-economic position followed the patrilineal form of succession. They were mainly toddy tappers by profession, were socially excluded by marks of pollution by touch, sight etc... The socio-economic changes that occurred in Travancore in the nineteenth century benefited largely the *Ezhavas*. Though small in number a powerful elite emerged among this community during this period, which argued for a due share in the socio-political processes of the state. Among *Ezhavas* or the caste below them, the issue of gender relations was hardly questioned or raised. Instead they used the new forms of education as

a means towards their social advancement. They criticized the *Sambandham* relationship of the *Nairs*, but accepted the newly emerging concept of 'mother' within the family.

The *Pulayas*, *Parayas* etc, constituted the lowest in the caste hierarchy. They were subjected to the worst forms of oppression. During the missionary interference on Travancore society, large-scale conversion occurred from these castes to Christianity, and the missionaries provided special schools to educate them.⁶ The low literacy rate among them well compounded their socio-economic position. Denied access to government schools, the missionaries provided them the elementary forms of knowledge through special schools. The missionary initiative among these sections was closely related to the project of conversion and it was from among these sections that they found their largest number of adherents.⁷ Nothing much could be discerned as far as the gender relations among these sections of the society was

⁶ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, CMS College Library, Kottayam, 1908), vol. X, P.5.

⁷ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, CMS College Library, Kottayam, 1908, vol. X.

concerned. The low literacy rate among them well compounded their socio-economic position. However demand for women's education as a focal point did not develop among the castes below the *Nairs*, the need was felt more among the upper strata of the society. Thus the major focus of this study of women's education among the Hindus of Travancore would be therefore mainly centered the upper strata of the society i.e., among the *Brahmins* and *Nairs*.

As far as the Muslims were concerned, they lived in a more insular world within the framework of the Muslim religions structure, posing a cultural and religious opposition to western education. Women's education progressed only at a limited pace among the Muslims.

Among the Christians, there were the Syrian Catholics, who were higher in social position in Travancore, while the Latin Catholics constituted the fishermen community on the coastline. Also there were the Protestants whose association with the missionaries helped them in improving the women's education. All the three major sections among the Christians appreciated the need

of women's education, and education for women meant a measure at forming a new Christian identity for their women and the differences in the rate of improvement in women's education depended on their socio-economic condition.

Commenting on the high literacy achievement of women in Travancore, Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin argue that the literacy advancement achieved can be traced to the sum total of the factors such as the role of the missionaries, the economic changes that had set in from the late nineteenth century, prevalence of a

“progressive monarchical government, the role of the socio-reform movements, the struggle for administrative reforms in the 30's of the 20th century, and ultimately to the struggles waged by the left.”⁸

Kathleen Gough is of the view that the geographical conditions of Travancore lead to a high agricultural production.

“high agricultural production gave enough time for leisure activity. This led to a high increase in

⁸ Richard W. Franke, Barbara H. Chasin, *Kerala : Development Through Radical Reform*, Promila & Co. Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, P. 105.

literacy. She argues that societies that are situated near the coastline always had a much higher literacy rates than that of the inland region.”⁹

Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze argues that

“the social consciousness and successful collective bargaining led to an increase in education and general condition of women at emancipation.”¹⁰

Robin Jeffery is of the view that

“the matrilineal system prevalent among the *Nairs* gave greater freedom for women, which helped to increase their literacy.”¹¹

R.N. Yesudas writing on the women’s education in Kerala argues that

“the attempt at changing the status of women came from Missionary initiative.”¹²

These analysis on the question of women’s education in Travancore suffer from some limitations. Some of them

⁹ Kathleen Gough; *Implication of Literacy in Traditional China and India*; Jack Goody (ed) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1968), p.63.

¹⁰ Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, (ed) *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, OUP, 1996, Delhi, P.143.

¹¹ Robin Jeffery, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*.Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976.

¹² R. N. Yesudas, *A History of Women’s Education in Kerala*, South Indian Social Centre, Trivandrum, 1988, P. 30.

attribute the increase in women's education as the result of general socio-economic change, failed to bring to the fore the shifts in the specific gender relations that occurred within each religions and caste communities and the women's gender relations that occurred within each religions and casts communities and the women's education; i.e. they failed to examine the specificities of gender relations within different caste groups and religious communities.

Thus the major analysis on women's education centered around a cause-effect relationship. That the social, economical or religions causes collectively or in their individual capacities brought about fundamental transformation in the society, that had the effect of bringing about changes in the literacy rates in Travancore, where women's education too formed a part.

The study that is attempted here intends to differ from these arguments on three grounds. Firstly even while agreeing that missionaries had an important role in generating a consent towards the need of education as a means of social advancement; the point that is more

relevant on an analysis on education is the content and the type of knowledge that these agents of education tried, to develop and impart; than the whole idea of education itself. Secondly even if the princely state and the socio-reform movement accepted, endorsed and popularised the new logic of missionary education, the issue that is addressed here is the agency of native social institutions and of new community initiatives in the field of education.

Finally the idea of Women's education underlined the relevance of the two issues mentioned above; for the content of a new form of knowledge and the permeation of western ideas in the native society was dictated and negotiated on the basis of strong gender preferences and perception. Thus women's education in Travancore does not only mean a numerical expansion of the literacy rates for women; instead the expansion in literacy meant a widening, strengthening and the sustenance of the patriarchal norms within family as well as in the project of constructing new identities of certain communities.

The study attempts of keeping the pedagogical action at the center of analysis and to trace the discourse that led

to the formation of perceptions of women's identity from the period 1900-1947.

The first chapter attempts at dealing with the discourses in which the missionaries, the colonial ideas and the traditional native state interact. The cultural conflict between traditional society and the western ideas over the perceptions on gender relations thus makes women's education a field of contesting hegemonies. The role of colonialism as an institution that pursued an alien ideology on female education, and identity was not direct, as an official policy of the State, instead their views on women, gender and education operated through the presence of those British individuals who had manned all major higher offices in Travancore. The chapter sets to unveil how the colonial policy on women's education which the British authorities pursued elsewhere, in other parts of India, functioned in Travancore.

The major role played by the missionaries as far as women's education is concerned stemmed from their desire towards religions conversion. The princely state as a preserver of Native interests was struck in between an

ideology that was deemed to be the path of 'progress' and its role as the preserver of the interest the native elites, bringing to the fore the conflicts of interests between these major institutions in the state. The discourses that were involved, and the policies and actions that were taken strengthened traditional patriarchy and placed the role of women within the norms set by them in the new environment.

The second chapter deals with the intricacies involved in the course and syllabi in molding women's identity and the necessity of considering the evolving women identity. It was a means through which traditional understanding of society and women got redefined. The content of the syllabi and its transformation was decided by the shifts in the perception of women's identity. Hence an attempt is made to trace the transformation in the structure of syllabi in relation to the representation and perceptions of women over the period of time under study.

The third chapter discusses the formation of the different community identities on the basis of the newly constituted women's identity with the spread of education.

In their attempt at retaining their hegemonic position in the new environment, the traditional elites used the newly introduced schools both the missionaries, as well as the state run, in constructing a new identity for women. The new identity, which they sought to construct, was not entirely western in character; instead the perceptions of women emanated from the cultural opposition of the native society to the western intervention through the schooling system. This new identity which these communities sought to create was aimed at redrawing the Gender relations within family as well as aimed at redrawing the wider character of their communities. The identity formation among each community was constituted from that transformation in their perception on women during the period under study. The whole debate and discourse as far as women's identity was concerned centered on the marriage and sexual life of the *Nairs*. The practice of *Sambandham* became the nodal point where the question of women's identity was discussed. The criticism against such a cultural practice, and the attempts at defending and transforming the identity of women was most visible

among the *Nairs*. Women's position was transformed by a new emphasis on the norms of "woman's chastity" and woman as The morals were a mother figure. The morals which were underlined included the women's unquestioned obedience towards her husband, thereby defining patriarchal norms. In different ways different communities tried to reorient their family and community on these lines. As a mark of 'social advancement' most sections accepted the mode of dress, behaviour and practices of the *Nairs*; who constituted the elite.

Primary Sources

The study is an attempt to trace the discourses on gender relations that centered around the idea of women's education. Hence the sources that are use to trace these discourses are the Census data, Government records and official correspondence on education regional journals and newspapers published during the period. To the extent available, the records of religious and social organizations, private papers, biographies, and annual records of girls' schools are used for the study. Data were collected from the following sources in the National Archives of India (New

Delhi), Private papers of Dr. Palpu from The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi. Census report of the Govt. of Travancore from the Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi. Kerala State Archives (Trivandrum): (a) Collection of the Education files of the Government of Tranvancore from 1908-1948. (b) Collection of the Regional Journals published during the period from the Library of the University of Kerala, Trivandrum. (c) Diocesan Records of the Church Mission society from the Archives of the CMS College Library, Kottayam. (d) The Church record of the Dioceses of Kollam during the period 1903-1958. (e) The Annual report the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) and Nair Service Society (NSS) and other social organization also were consulted.

CHAPTER I

Colonialism, Missionaries and the Princely State 1900-1947

The Chapter discusses the role and functions of three powerful institutions at play in the social system of Travancore-the Princely State, the missionary projects and the colonial agenda. They had the capability of altering the power structures within the state. The very meaning of the sovereign 'Princely State' had undergone rapid and fundamental changes by the dawn of the twentieth century.¹³ The conviction that the government alone could protect the life and property of the people made the state to actively respond to the demands that were generating in the society. As the opposition to the nature and practice of the missionary and western education developed, the state actively engaged itself in its attempt to protect native interest. The power structures attached to the idea of Colonialism and the missionary ideals were both in

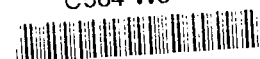
¹³ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Thiruvananthapuram, Government of Travancore, 1940, P.532 "The short reign of Lakshmi Bhai and the efforts made by Munro to strengthen the powers of Government and to broaden its ambit encouraged the conviction that government and government alone could protect life and property."

themselves transformed. The early interventions of the missionaries in the society were bounded with the idea of social upliftment. Their intentions behind the whole project were largely questioned by the beginning of the century. The alterations of power and functioning of the above three institutions were closely related to the rapid changes that occurred in the functioning of the state, society and religion. This was in turn defined by the shifts in the dimensions and definition of gender perceptions and relations. The transformation of gender perceptions and its definition by the native elites was the attempt of the dominant sections to search for the strength of their culture and society as an opposition to Western interference. The Princely State had to respond to their needs, missionaries had to curtail their influence and the colonial authorities had to follow a policy of non-interference.

From the early eighteenth century, the Travancore state was in a formal way, perceived as a Hindu State; the king being called 'Padmanabhadasa or the tutelary of Sri

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Padmanabha or Vishnu'¹⁴. Thus the role of the king meant the protection of Hinduism, which was a conglomeration of castes based on a rigid social hierarchy¹⁵. The institutionalisation of this rigid societal dictum in the cultural practices at the primary level in the family was manifested in the peculiar characteristics of gender relations within and between the different castes. The practice of *Sambandham* as a form of marriage relation practiced by Nair women brought within its ambit the socio-cultural relations of both the Nairs and the Brahmins. Thus criticisms against the practice of *sambandham* meant a direct attack on the identity of the dominant sections of the Travancore society

The onset of Colonialism brought about a cultural interaction between the native society and that of the West. This cultural exchange demanded an internal critique of the cultural practices and a redefinition of the social order in general by the natives who sought to bring about certain

¹⁴ Vikram Menon, *Princes Amidst Dissent: The Growth of Political Consciousness in the Princely states of Cochin and Travancore 1920 – 1938*, JNU, (M.Phil unpublished Dissertation), 1993 P.4.

¹⁵ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State, Travancore 1858-1936*, Delhi, OUP, 1998, P. 82.

amount of change within the family in particular. The attempt at altering the position of women emanated from the desires of the native society in providing an opposition to the criticism leveled against the native practice. The cultural contradictions expressed itself in a variety of ways as the Western influence raised the issues of individual behaviour within the family, the gender relations, the nature of the sexual practices, the role of the family, etc.. This critique was expressed, defined and articulated through the educational institutions, which were created by the missionaries, in their project of the “Civilizing Mission”.

“Students could not avoid hearing open attacks on Nayar marriage and morals. Augusta M. Blandford, who spend forty years evangelizing among Nayars around Trivandrum and whose Fort Girl’s school produced the first Nayar woman matriculate, described ‘the customs of their caste with regard to marriage as very revolting’. Rev. A.F. Painter, who moved freely among Nayars in north Travancore for more than twenty years, wrote of ‘a system so horrible so that even its defenders are ashamed of it as it stands. What was worse for Nayars,

however, were the jibes of other Hindus. Nagam Aiya in his 1875 census report felt obliged to make a brief apology for the looseness of the prevailing morals and the unbinding nature of the marriage tie which possesses such fascinations for the majority of our population.”¹⁶

One area where this cultural critique manifests itself was in the sphere of women’s education. The idea of formal education for girls was mooted as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Protestant Missionaries;¹⁷ they were the earliest to provide a cultural critique on the social practices that were prevalent in Travancore society¹⁸. In fact it was analysed threadbare by the missionaries so as to provide an alternative model for gender relations. It was a model designed to suit and

¹⁶Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1976. P. 150.

¹⁷ R. N. Yesudas, *A History of Women’s Education in Kerala*, Trivandrum, South Indian Social Centre, 1988, P. 28. “Mrs. Mead, the wife of Rev. Charles Mead, a missionary of the LMS, immediately after her arrival, started a boarding school for girls at Nagarcoil in 1819, and that was the first female school in the Southern parts of Kerala.”

¹⁸ R.N. Yesudas, *A History of Women’s Education in Kerala*, Trivandrum, South Indian Social Centre, 1988, P.29. Digby Macworth a field officer of Cavalry, who visited the Southern parts of Kerala writes, ‘A girls school has been commenced under the superintendence of the missionary wives but with little success at present. In fact the morals of the natives are so depraved that they suspect even the missionaries of improper motives in desiring to reform them; and it will be only a long sentence among them that can ever humanly speaking remove the prejudice.’

sustain their wider project of religious conversion¹⁹. Education was a visible manifestation of the missionary endeavour in the native society. The project of emancipation enunciated by them was inextricably linked to the education of its adherents²⁰. The missionaries did not aim at altering the social position enjoyed by the high castes. Instead, they aimed at bringing to their fold the traditional elites within the Native society. Hence they had a pedagogical structure that was designed for the need of the girl children of the traditional elites²¹. There can be no doubt that the missionaries provided education to all the new converts who were mostly from the lowest castes-the Pulayas, Parayas, etc.

“as late as 1860’s the lowest classes are without the means for obtaining instructions except in mission schools... refused admission to all respectable native schools and with rare and recent examples to all government schools.”²²

¹⁹ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op cit. P.150.

²⁰ Ibid. P.164

²¹ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1858-1936*. Op. cit. P. 95

²² Vikram Menon, *Princes Amidst Dissent: The Growth of Political Consciousness in the Princely states of Cochin and Travancore 1920 – 1938*, JNU, (unpublished M.Phil Dissertation), 1993 P.9

But these schools were nothing but the vehicles of dissemination of elementary knowledge in Christian verses and did not advance far beyond²³.

The project of Women's education was not isolated in itself. Instead, the whole structure and body of the pedagogy for women was pregnant with ideas that had the capability of bringing about fissures in the traditional society, which otherwise existed on the basis of religiously sanctioned rules that were rigid and hierarchical.

Protestant Missionaries

The Protestant missionaries were able to convince the traditional state and society that education formed the base for social advancement.

“His Highness (Sree Mulam Thirunal) realized from the beginning that education was the key to self help and that successful government of the country was not possible without associating the people in the work of Legislation and administration. The strengthening of the educational agencies was, therefore, considered the first condition for the realisation of His

²³ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, CMS College Library, Kottayam, 1908, Vol. X. P.3.

Highness's hopes in amplifying the public life of the country and inspiring the people with patriotic hopes."²⁴

The princely state thus viewed the education of its subjects towards a process of social reconstructions and the restructuring of the administration and all offices of the state. This was a process of acquiring willing obedience of its subjects, which emanated from the nature of the relationship between the Travancore state and that of the colonial authorities and the power relations that existed between them. The relationship between these two major institution in the early stage of their interaction its evident from the public speech made by Rani Gauri Lakshmi Bai in 1811.

"The Rani frankly acknowledged in her installation speech that 'being a young female quite unprepared and unqualified for such a high and responsible position, she could not do better than place herself under the guidance and support of the Honourable East India Company whose bosom had been an asylum for the protection of an infant like Travancore.' 'To

²⁴ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Thiruvananthapuram, Government of Travancore, 1940, P.672

you Colonel' she said 'I entrust everything connected with my country.'" ²⁵

It was the conviction regarding the importance of education in social advancement that emerged from this relationship that made the Rani (Queen) of Travancore, Sethu Lakshmi bai to declare in 1813 in her Royal Rescript that ;

"the state would defray the entire cost of education of its people, that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion they might become better subjects and better public servants and that the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby." ²⁶

Though the proclamation was only nominal and much advancement could not be made in this regard, it was nevertheless significant. Though the Travancore Government started a number of schools during the early 19th century, these schools lost their importance and were closed down by the 1830s for lack of students.²⁷ The

²⁵ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Government of Travancore, 1940 Thiruvananthapuram, p.503

²⁶ *Travancore Administrative Report*, 1939-40, 84th Annual Report, Thiruvananthapuram, Government of Travancore, 1940.

²⁷ A. Mathew, *A History of Educational Growth in Kerala*, New Delhi, NIEPA 1988, P.31 "These Schools could not be sustained and were abandoned during the 1830s."

reasons behind the failure of this early initiatives cannot be however ascertained, it may either be due to a lack of sustained interest on the part of the government or the need for schooling may not have been felt by the people. Nevertheless, the importance of such a declaration lay in the fact that it reflected the attitude of the ruling elite to the new forms of education; and more importantly, the attitude of the ruling elite to the whole idea of change.

The missionary activities were ultimately aimed at the conversion of the natives. Its educational package for women was aimed at the creation of the 'true Christian wife' and 'true Christian mother'. Subsequently, the missionaries defined the habits, manners, customs and practices of women in the native society. These ideas were derived from the cultural experiences of the West and the perceptions the Western society had towards the natives.

“In seeking a rationale for their educational mission among women in India, these educational pioneers naturally drew upon ideological formations of gender then current in Britain. But they were working in a colonial

context, and the females they sought educate were 'different from British females'²⁸.

This was the result of the Indological discourses that were current in Britain during the period. Perceptions of the degrading character and perverse morality of the "Orient" was parallel to the accumulation of a vast corpus of information on the natives by the Europeans.²⁹ This perception of the native society is well encapsulated by Edward. W. Said, when he discusses the idea of Orientalism. He writes,

"The eccentricities of Orient life, with its odd calendars, its exotic spatial configuration, its hopelessly strange languages, its seemingly perverse morality were seemingly reduced considerably when they appeared as a series of detailed items presented in a normative European prose style.... In most cases, the Orient seemed to have offended sexual propriety, everything about the Orient exuded dangerous sex, threatened hygiene and

²⁸ David W. Savage, "Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India", *Gender and History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, August 1997, p. 201.

²⁹ Ibid. p.202. "Missionaries were sending back reports to Britain of the abject condition of Indian Females thus participating in what might be considered the last stage of a well established manners, customs and ceremony literature, in which the condition of females was used as a touchstone of the colonial evaluation of indigenous culture."

domestic seemliness with an excessive freedom of intercourse”³⁰.

William Logan, who served for years as district collector of Malabar and the author of the Malabar Manual writes

“The younger cadres of the Namboodiri live with Nair Women, merely reproduces in English, the Malayali mode of describing the married life of these people and of the Nairs. It is part of the theory that the women they live with are not wives, that they part at will, that they form new connections. The fact that at any rate of recent years is that, although the theory of the land sanctions freedom in these relations, conjugal fidelity is very general. No where is the marriage tie more rigidly observed or respected, no where it is more jealously guarded, or its neglect more savagely avenged.”³¹

Thus there is considerable doubt regarding the theory and actual practice of the institution of *Sambandham*. The point made by Henry Baker Junior further justifies this

³⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, New York, Penguin, 1978, p. 167

³¹ *Census of India*, Government of Madras, Madras, Government Press, 1911, vol. XV, part A, P. 106

fact. Nevertheless the missionaries launched a scathing attack on such practice.

“Henry Baker, Jr, suggested that in many respectable families there was not that state of profligacy the want of a legal marriage tie would imply. Baker knew of Nayar couples who had been faithful to each other for 17 years... However even if such examples of lasting marriage were the rule, there were enough examples of the old laxity to embarrass educated Nairs. Newspapers inveighed against the repudiation of wives by their husbands and husbands by their wives, which was so reprehensibly practiced among Sudras. Missionaries like Samuel Mateer were ready to give a twist to the knife or stir to the pot. Mateer gave wide circulation to the charge that within the *tarvad* incest was common. By 1891 he was proclaiming that educated Nayars were ashamed... and the ridicule being given to their customs naturally mortify them.”³²

It was the presence of the Native Syrian Christian that gave the missionaries an opportunity to penetrate into the social fabric of the state. The London Mission

³² Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance : Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi 1976. P.151.

Society(LMS) and the Church Mission Society(CMS) established themselves in central Travancore and other areas of Syrian dominance. The missionaries extended much help towards the native Christian population, through their association with their colonial administration they sought to improve the position of the native Christians.

“While public attention was thus directed to Travancore and the abuses in its administration were exposed in the newspaper articles, the workers of the London Missionary society presented memorial after memorial to the Madras Government on behalf of the native Christian population, who they said, had of late suffered heavily and failed to get any redress to their legitimate grievances.”³³

The Princely state, which was under the protection of the Colonial authorities under the force of circumstances in most cases, at least in the initial stages succumbed to missionary pressure and granted their demands. Colonial

³³ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Government of Travancore, 1940 Thiruvananthapuram, P.572.

Munro who was the resident of Travancore addressed the Madras Government as follows

“The temporal situation of the Syrians has also been materially improved. I have frequently taken occasion to bring them to the notice of her Highness the Ranee of Travancore; and her intelligent, liberal and ingenuous mind has always appeared to feel a deep interest in their history, misfortunes and character. She is aware of the attention excited to their situation in Europe, and her excitement to manifest, the sincerity of her attachment to the British nation has formed, I believe, an additional motive for the kindness and generosity she has uniformly displayed towards the Syrians. She has appointed a considerable number of them to public office and lately presented the sum of Rs. 20,000 to the college at Kottayam, as an endorsement for its support. The Syrians are cherish in no ordinary degree the sentiments of affection and respect towards her person that are entertained by every class of her subjects.”³⁴

In their relationship with the native Syrian Christian, they propagated the concept of a ‘true Christian’. In an attempt at closer understanding of the Bible, they sought

³⁴ *Ibid.* P.539

to redefine the Christian faith and practices.³⁵ In the spread of their notions of women and gender relations, they were guided by notions of the 'Christian Woman' and the schools which they started articulated and aided the spread of these notions. These schools defined and articulated superiority of Christianity over native beliefs and practices and hence understood the importance of the schooling system. The pedagogical content and the environment that developed around schools was understood to be the most successful means towards religious conversion, which prompted Father Emmanuel Nidhiri, a Protestant Missionary to declare that

“a missionary school is more prized than the gold crosses of Kuruvilangad and Athirampuzha, which might be stolen”³⁶.

Fr. Nidhiri's statement underlines how the proponents of the missionary ideology of education understood the importance and the superiority of the school system as a dynamic force of social intervention

³⁵ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, CMS College Library, Kottayam. 1908, vol. X, P. 5

³⁶ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op. cit. P.143.

above their greatest religious symbol; namely the cross. By the articulation of such superiority in the educational system of the state over indigenous knowledge systems, the missionaries were creating definite divisions in the sphere of education in terms of power relations between those that imparted knowledge and those that received it. Here the missionaries became the pedagogical authority that did the pedagogical action. This separation in terms of power created definite features of masculine and feminine character in the sphere of education, leading to the feminisation of the whole project of education in Travancore. The clear visible manifestation of such a project was witnessed in the whole logic of women's education.

This critique of the cultural practices meant a critique of the Hindu religion. Here, culture and religion were inseparable and the degradation of one meant the degradation of the other too.

The educational system of the LMS missionaries was hierarchically divided into three levels; the Seminary at Nagercoil as the highest institution, the boarding schools

and Anglo Vernacular schools as secondary schools and the village schools as primary schools. They also had boarding schools at the head of each station of the mission.³⁷

Mrs Mead, the wife of Rev. Charles Mead, a missionary of the LMS started a boarding school for girls at Nagercoil in 1819. It was the first Girls school in the southern part of Travancore.³⁸ The missionaries also established the Zenana mission for the education of high caste girls. It was opened in 1864 at an unused palace within the fort in the precincts of Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple, considered to be the most sacred enclosure in Thiruvananthapuram.³⁹ A.M. Blandford's initiative in starting the Zenana Education was part of the attempt of the missionaries to reach the upper sections of the Hindu Society. The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Report of 1913 in an obituary to Ms Blandford writes.

“At first the progress was very slow. Miss Blandford began with only four pupils on 3rd

³⁷ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1998*, OUP, Delhi, P.85.

³⁸ *Ibid.* op.cit. p. 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.* op.cit. p. 86.

November 1864. They were the daughter and niece of the Dewan and two Malayali girls of the Nayar Caste. They were her only scholars for the first six months and this in spite of the Dewan having advertised the school in the Government Gazette and having strongly advised Hindus to avail themselves of the advantages offered. In after years Miss Blandford often humorously referred to this small class as four (Students) in the widest of the lofty and spacious room, 45 ft long and broad in size, which has always been the big school room for the institution... But small beginnings often have great endings and in spite of the many obstacles with which Miss Blandford had to contend at first, the school became one of the most influential centres of female education in the state".⁴⁰

In the early stages of their activities in Travancore, the missionaries received genuine help from the colonial authorities in Madras. Colonel Munro and other European residents at Travancore genuinely helped missionary activities.⁴¹ Also, there was a close relationship between

⁴⁰ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, CMS College Library, Kottayam, 1908, Vol. XIV, P.6.

⁴¹ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Government of Travancore, 1940 Thiruvananthapuram, p.539.

the Princely State and the missionaries as far as women's education were concerned. The native rulers allotted land and provided help for the missionaries at least in the initial stages of their activities.⁴² The process of modernisation of the Travancore administration in effect led to the adoption of the colonial characteristics in the governance of Travancore. It can be said that colonialism in Travancore flourished through the institutions of administration created by the Princely State. In fact, colonialism as a body that had the ability to implement and further the modernist policy operated in a disguised manner within the structure of the Princely State. Since the ideas of the Colonial authorities as well as that of the missionaries emerged from the same cultural experience and understanding of the West, their perceptions towards gender and women were similar.

“By the middle of the nineteenth century the argument that the education of the female was essential for the purpose of transforming national character because women for good or for ill, were the source of a culture's morality

⁴² Ibid, P.528.

was common to religious and secular advocates alike.”⁴³

Hence, in principle, the administrative presence of Colonialism in broader terms clearly defined and expressed their commitment towards the colonial ideology of women’s education, and in the period during the early nineteenth century they supported the missionaries in their endeavour in women’s education.

Colonial Authorities

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Colonial authorities (through their presence in the administration) were increasingly following a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the Socio-religious system of the state. In fact, they were interested in preserving the existing social structure. This was based on the belief that such non-interventionist policies would prevent any form of opposition from the indigenous society. Nevertheless, the ideological apparatus through which the British presence perceived its socio-cultural role in Travancore made such

⁴³ David W. Savage, *Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India*, *Gender and History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, August 1997, p. 212.

an intervention inevitable. The Colonial administration did not intend to destroy the old rules and an intervention to be made possible. Instead, it carved out definite spaces within the prerogatives set aside by the existing socio-religious order.

“in reply to a complaint made by the local Nairs of Pudukkovil in the Parur Taluk, to prevent the Ezhava girls from attending the lower Grade Elementary School as it would lead to pollution, as the Local temple was situated near the school, the Director of Public Instruction was of the view that the Ezhava boys are freely admitted to the Local boy’s school, which is in close proximity to the Girls school and hence the apprehensions of the local Nair’s need little mention and the above school be declared opened to the Ezhavas”⁴⁴

Thus decisions regarding ritual pollution were often superceded and the lower castes were brought to the ambit of education. This carving out of spaces helped the marginal sections of the society to ascertain their rights and in the long run to permeate the ‘imaginary’ line of

⁴⁴ Education files, *Government of Travancore*, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, File no. 427 of 1914, P.2.

social demarcation. As new administrative, judicial and other institutions came into practice, the old caste rules and other privileges became technically irrelevant and lost its importance. The older rights of caste were replaced by new rules and the practice of *sambandam* were giving way to new forms of marriage rights.

Vidhyavinodhini, a journal expressed the apprehension towards regulating the marriage system of the Nairs by the state.

“It is not advisable that the husband and wife soon after marriage goes to the Government office to register themselves, and this practice has met with disfavour with the people.”⁴⁵

The newly introduced education system was not uniform nor did it produce a unilinear pattern of progress as was widely expected. This was the result of the gap between the idea and practice of the project for the amelioration of the condition of women. Education for women was desired to drastically alter her social position, altering the social position of women without altering the

⁴⁵ *Vidhyavinodhini* (bimonthly), Thrissur, 1897, Vol. VII, No. 8.

structure of the society itself was impossible. The new pedagogical action was filled with ideas that had the capability of churning out contending forces within the society; forces that questioned the cultural logic of the traditional society and forces that tried to preserve its status quo. The attempt at changing the status quo as well as the attempt of preserving it found the most visible expressions in the opposition to and support to the newly introduced forms of education.

The period from 1900-1947, saw a decrease in the socio-cultural space of the three institutions- the missionaries, the colonial apparatus and finally the Princely State. The Missionaries were the first to bear the brunt of the changed situation followed by colonialism and ultimately the Princely State itself.

“But one missionary concluded perhaps with greater candour, for Shanars were hitherto dependent on Mission Schools, and missionaries, in many ways, on Shanar converts-that Sarkar schools for low castes ‘would be decidedly taken advantage of.’ Satisfied perhaps that the missionaries saw low-caste schools as potentially harmful to

themselves, Madhav Rao (Dewan) suggested the establishment of such schools in his administration report. At that stage, however, the Resident and the Madras Government stepped into veto the scheme 'as tending to sanction the continuance of distinctions which are most injurious to the People of Travancore'".

46

It was the demand made by the native elites that forced the king to intervene and curtail the missionary influence in later stages the social mobilisation coupled with the reorienting and the redefining of the gender relation made the natives to demand for their rights forcing the princely state to concede their demands. People showed courage to criticize the king when they felt that their demand was not met.

"*Sahodharan*, a journal of the Ezhavas openly criticized the decision of the Raja of Cochin, urging the Ezhava children to leave the Thripunithura School so as to prevent the Royal prince who had taken admission in this school from pollution." ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op, cit. P. 81.

⁴⁷ *Sahodharan*, (bimonthly), Kodungallor, V-I, No. 10, P,156.

Subsequently, there was a strengthening of the ideas of the individual, family and also that of the norms of patriarchy within the society. The reason for women's education was mostly pointed out as a measure of bringing up the family supportive of her husband and children.⁴⁸ The new ideas on society and women were not completely Western in character; instead the widening of the ideas on gender, society and women was derived from the revival of the traditional society and its synthesis to the ideas on women from the West. The rise of indigenous social movements like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam(SNDP) and other lower caste mobilisation and the rise of social consciousness among all sections of the society made the Travancore state conscious of its roles as the pre-severers of the social order, as well as the initiator of social progress.⁴⁹ Colonialism on its part strengthened its policy of non-interference in the internal matters of the state so as to avoid social unrest. Subsequently the

⁴⁸ *Vidhyavinodhini* (bimonthly), Thrissur, 1897, Vol. I, No. 1.

⁴⁹ Vikram Menon, *Princes Amidst Dissent: The Growth of Political Consciousness in the Princely states of Cochin and Travancore 1920 – 1938*, JNU, (M.Phil Dissertation), 1993 p.5. The Dharma upheld the notion that the welfare of the king was rooted in the well being of the people and though autocratic, the king had to conform to the canons of 'Dharma' and earn the goodwill of the subjects by beneficent rule".

Colonial administrative activity engaged in bringing down the influence of missionary zeal and intervention in society. The idea of non-intervention or least interference arose out of the apprehensions that an interventionist policy could generate tensions and discord.

The initiatives of the Princely State in the sphere of female education in effect drastically reduced the influence of the missionaries, and hence undertook a series of measures towards this end.⁵⁰ The native society was increasingly separating or distinguishing between the 'secular' and 'religious' aspects of missionary educational project. The reason for this was manifold. Firstly the state, though opposed to the policy of religious conversion and to the social turbulence that the missionary interference brought about in the social scenario of Travancore,

“the activities of the missionaries were naturally considered as being by nature harmful to the state. The missionaries not only criticized existing social and religious customs but also tried to convert as many Hindus as possible to Christianity. In fact, they acquired a huge

⁵⁰ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore, 1858-1936*, 1998. OUP, Delhi, P. 68.

number of converts in Travancore. Hence the Hindu state and the Christian missionaries potentially have a very strained relationship.”⁵¹

The princely state was nevertheless convinced by the logic of progress attached to the idea of female education. Secondly, the British government in Madras, constantly embarked on the idea of good modern governance on the part of the Princely State. The administrative modernization that occurred in Travancore in the late 19th century, provided an official cover for the process of this desired cultural transformation. All important offices of the Department of Education were manned by the Europeans and hence the character of education had strong western presence and influence in the making of the state policy with regard to education. A report on education state that

“what is really needed, is the moral training that such as it exists in an English school and for this we must look into the improvement in

⁵¹ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1858-1836*, OUP, 1998, Delhi.P.81

the character of the training agency rather than the rules or books”⁵² and

“lessons inculcating industry, truthfulness, honesty, gentleness, modesty, respect and authority, justice regard for the feeling of others loyalty to conviction and loyalty to the government should form the core of the curriculum.”⁵³

The European presence in the administrative structure provided a cultural atmosphere conducive for the spread of western education. The spread of education is, observed Mr. Hodson, the Director of Public Instruction, in 1921 was the duty of the Department. But he was under the impression that this was accomplished by bringing home to the people the advantages of education and by stirring up in them a genuine enthusiasm for the cause of education.⁵⁴ The fact that the Princely State endorsed this view meant that in its cultural interaction with European ideologies it failed in protecting the interests of the native

⁵² *Home Department Files*, Educational Files, National Archives of India, file no. 35-55, 1901, New Delhi.

⁵³ *Home Department Files*, Education; 1899, National Archives of India, New Delhi. Letter from M. Hammick, Secretary to the Government of Madras, to the Educational Secretary, Government of India,

⁵⁴ *Education Files*, Government of Travancore, 22nd July, 1916, File No. 231/1916. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

elites, instead, it aided and strengthened the process of cultural transformation. This was possible because the state of Travancore was under the control of the native monarchy and the colonial ideas of female education prospered through the schools started by its government.

The important aspect of the functioning of colonialism through the institutions of the Princely State was that the newly perceived 'Colonial enemy' was invisible, for colonialism as a set of ideas operated through the institutions of administration created by the Princely state, thereby making the pursuance of such ideas as a state policy, rather the visible enemy was the Christian missionaries, whose interference in the society, most of the time centered around religious themes. Thus the immediate and most visible enemy was missionaries. Even while providing a consistent opposition to missionary intervention in native culture and religion, the traditional elite accepted the cultural logic provided by colonialism

and the opposition of the native elites to western cultural interference was only religious in character.”⁵⁵

The native elites constantly raised their objection to the teaching of the Bible, and religious versus in the missionary schools, and often withdrew their girls children from the schools when the government took initiatives in providing education to its female population; the upper castes sent their children to government schools.

“Mrs Martha Mault describes her first experiences in the following words ‘...though their board and clothing was provided, an inducement of no small amount in this country, where poverty among the lower class is so general; yet so great was the prejudice of their parents against the school, that those who were collected one week were drawn away the next, so that we could induce non to continue for any length of time, but the children of persons dependent on the Missions, and even those were no sooner brought under the discipline that they ran away, and in some instances were encouraged to do so by their parents.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op.cit. p.185

⁵⁶ R. N. Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education in Kerala*, South Indian Social Centre, Trivandrum, 1988, p. 30.

By nineteen hundred the government of Travancore had stepped in to start a large number of schools for women's education. This was primarily the result of the clash of interest between the missionaries and that of the Princely State.

The widespread interference of the missionaries in the traditional society and the redefinition of gender relations did not provide a sufficient inducement for religious conversions among the traditional elites. In principle they agreed that socio-cultural transformation should occur and that women should be educated. They provided a cultural opposition to the Western interference in traditional beliefs and practices. The colonial government on the presumption that this opposition would adversely affect the sustenance of its sovereignty in India, tried to curtail missionary interference in society. A letter written by the Madras government to the central government reads,

“The missionaries of South India seems to have a sort of political organisation (with agents at home) whose object is to push the case of

missionary schools, they are not bound by educational principles and would, rather have the country overrun with inefficient missionary schools than with good government schools”⁵⁷.

The correspondence between the provincial government of Madras and that of the government of India speaks volumes on the conflict that existed between the missionaries and the government.

“Their (missionaries) attitude is to the affect that they have vested rights in Indian education and the position is the same in a smaller scale as it was in England at the time government stepped in and insisted on the efficiency in schools they are trying to get a definite declaration that will tie the hands of the government and what they propose is practically that their societies will have the monopoly of education.”⁵⁸

It is not that the government tried to prevent the missionaries from pursuing their vested interest; in fact it was the clash of those vested interests of the government and that of the missionaries that led to the conflict. This

⁵⁷ *Home Department Files: Education, Government of India*, , Nos. 8-21, August, 1912.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Nos. 8-21, August, 1921

conflict of interest was witnessed thorough out the history of the relationship of all the three institutions at work.

The administration had categorically stated that the traditional form of social system should go and that it would aid and strengthen the process of cultural transformation that was taking place. In response to the representation made by the Brahmin member in the tenth and twelfth sessions of the Travancore assembly for further concessions in regard to the Brahman community and to treat traditional learning equivalent to modern education, the government refuted the petition stating that,

“the rules of the code were expressly framed to discourage private study as far as possible and that there is no reason to treat the members of the Malayala Brahmin Community different from others in matters of administration to schools”.⁵⁹

As far as the alien nature of the British presence was concerned, it would be too naive to argue that the

⁵⁹ Education Files: Government of Travancore, 24 March 1914 the remarks made by the Director of Public instruction in response to the representation made by the Jenmi member at the Xth and XII sessions of the Assembly for the further concessions in regard to the Education of Women of the Malayala Brahmin community.

initiatives that were adhered to in the field of education was to recruit Indians for the administrative machinery alone. Western ideas of

“morality, truthfulness, industry etc. would confer on them a paternal relationship that would make the colonial presence justifiable and the newly educated class would support their presence as the proprietors of social reform.”⁶⁰

The Westerners had a perception on women, which went well with their ‘civilizing mission’. What they sought to create was an identity that was definite, distinct and separate from the society at large and distinguished the characteristics as masculine and feminine. The government was of the view that girls should be given education that was separate from the boys. The government followed a policy of replacing male teachers in girl’s school with female teachers. In the government order reviewing the Annual Report of 1090; the government ordered that,

⁶⁰ *Home Department File*, Education Department National Archives of India, New Delhi.355\1899;Letter from M. Hammick, Esq. Secretary to the Govt. of Madras..

“the policy of replacing male teachers in girl’s school should be vigorously followed and the Additional Directors will in future reports, state the progress made in transferring male teachers from girl’s schoolsand that over 40 male teachers employed in Departmental Girls’ school were transferred to the boys school during the said year”⁶¹.

The Missionary’s Attitude

The missionary educational package tended to glorify the feminine characters in women, they treated the education of girls to be different and distinct from that of the boys and hence, the missionary and other Christian schools restrained from admitting girls into boys school. The complaint registered by Mr. K.R. Krishna Pillai, the Tahsildar of Alengad brings to the fore the discriminations that the missionaries had towards the education for girls and boys and how the entire colonial ideology on female education was reflected in the missionary schools. Krishna Pillai applied to the manager of the Alwaye St. Mary’s Higher Grade English School for the admission of his

⁶¹ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, file no. 306 of 1917, p.4.

daughter. Mr. Pillai got no reply and therefore addressed the inspector of English schools stating that he understood that the manager was unwilling to admit girls into his school. The Inspector directed the head-master to admit the girl. The headmaster in his reply stated that

“the Bishop of Ernakulam, the proprietor of the school, has decided that the school being a Catholic school for boys, girls cannot be admitted. He was of the view that the Delegate Apostolate of East India’s communicated to the Bishop in September 1916, the command of the Cardinal of the propaganda in Rome that it was decided at the congregation of their eminences the cardinal of the Holy See, that girls should not be admitted into boy’s school. The inspector forwarded to the Director the files of papers for orders remarking that at the time the school was permitted to start, the management made no mention in their application that the school was intended for boys only... and that the sanction given to it was based solely the question of efficiency”⁶².

⁶² *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, File No. 203 of 1919, letter no. 1239/366, Dated 18th September 1919, Letter addressed from the DPI to the Chief Secretary regarding the admission of girls in the English school for boys.

The contradictions within the attitude of the missionaries to the native society as far as their logic of civilizing mission and crusade against caste and gender differentiations is concerned, it becomes clearly evident, when one sees that no Ezhava student was admitted to the St. Berchmans High School for boys until 1908; instead the missionaries admitted children belonging to the lower castes in the St. Berchman's seminary at Tiruvella. The difference between both these institutions were that, the former was an aided institution, which was supposedly meant to address the educational needs of the society at large, while the latter was a seminary intended for the training of pastors for evangelical activities. Those children who were admitted to the seminary were trained to become pastors in the evangelical activities; and the St. Berchmans High School for boys was an aided institution which was supposed to be open to all, however only students of high castes were admitted there.⁶³ The missionaries did not intend to do anything that would bring the wrath of the

⁶³ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, File No. 139/1908, Response of the Government to petition submitted by Krishnan Velayuthan and others regarding the admission of Ezhavas into the Changanachery English Middle School.

higher castes and hence avoided admitting the children of the lower caste to their aided institutions.

Given the influence of the missionaries in the field of education and in the society at large the Travancore government stepped in to start schools

“the Sirkar’s enthusiastic support of education broke the missionary monopoly and destroyed any chance of high castes being forced to attend mission schools in large numbers. The Sirkar both stimulated and satisfied their education needs.”⁶⁴

It enforced strict rules from December 1896. The number of aided schools which were 1265 in 1895-96, was reduced to 472 in the next year; almost two-third of the former aided schools were deprived of Grants-in-Aid after the enforcement of the new rules.

“the educational institutions of the missionaries were greatly affected by changes in the rules. T. W. Bach an LMS missionary in charge of the Trivandrum Mission wrote in 1898 that several of the older schools had to be closed, and others continued entirely at Mission expense’. A CMS

⁶⁴ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op.cit. p. 82.

missionary also wrote in 1897 that they were facing financial difficulties owing to the operation of the new grant-in-aid code.”⁶⁵

This was precisely a method to control the proselytizing activities of the missionaries. As W.J. Richards, a CMS missionary wrote in 1899,

“Wherever a school is aggressive as Hinduism, it is very difficult to get grant in aid”⁶⁶

Education Code (1909)- Effect Of Missionary Activities

The introduction of the Travancore educational rules was perhaps the most important reform of 1894. Through these strict rules, the Travancore government attempted to control the curricula, qualifications of teachers, state of buildings, accommodation and sanitation of aided schools. The Education code introduced by the government in the year 1909-10, was more clear and comprehensive. It defined more clearly the conditions of the grant in-aid, reclassified the school into elementary and secondary: introduced a system of licensing of teachers; modernised

⁶⁵ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1858-1836*, OUP, 1998, Delhi, p. 105

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 105

the curriculum; and introduced the school leaving certificate. The education code of 1910 was aimed at the then tightening the hold of the state over the missionaries. More importantly, the government opened up its school to all castes irrespective of caste or creed. It can be argued that this was a success for the missionaries as it was successful in forcing the Travancore state to open up the school for the deprived sections of the society.

The Travancore government started to specifically build schools for the backward classes. In the area of women's education also the government made new and unprecedented efforts. In some places it established schools as the parents preferred that their children should attend a school where there is no Bible teaching⁶⁷. The missionary apprehensions at government initiatives in the field of female education were evident in the annual report of the CMS published in 1911,

“...In this important work of imparting education to the girls of Travancore there is ample scope for departmental and for private

⁶⁷ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1858-1836*. OUP, 1998, Delhi, P.86

effort. There is room for as many girls' schools (and especially of course, elementary girls' school) as the government and the missionaries can start and staff. It is the government's avowed policy to encourage private enterprise; it has shown this by giving grants, in-aid to such private schools as comply with its requirements. There being so large and scantily supplied a field and such being the government avowed policy, we are surprised to hear that the government, in its zeal for female education, is proposing to open schools so near to existing private school as probably to affect the strength (and so the grants) of those private schools. In one case this has already been done, a Government girl's school having just been opened near to an old-established Aided Mission girl's school. While we regard with genuine pleasure the governments zeal for female education, we cannot see justification for supplying facilities for it where sufficient facilities already exists when there are districts quite unsupplied" ⁶⁸

The education code of 1909-10, was significant from the point that it made the tussle between the government

⁶⁸ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, CMS College Library, Kottayam, Vol. XXI, February, 1911, No.1, P.69

and the missionaries more clear. What was different from the previous reforms (1894) which was the introduction of the system of recognition in 1909. This was introduced to control unaided schools, many of which were indigenous schools. A large number of unaided schools were closed down. In 1910-11 there were 1491 unrecognized schools in Travancore but the number was down to 933 in 1920-21 and 376 in 1926-27.⁶⁹

To conclude, Women's education in Travancore in the modern sense of the term was the product of the western influence on Travancore society. The missionaries were the pioneers to take up the cause of female education. This project was the visible manifestation of their idea of the 'Civilizing Mission'. Education for women was a means of providing an alternative paradigm of identity for women, thereby making a conducive atmosphere for conversion. Women's education meant a creation of a whole lot of cultural practises, and methods that were essential to the creation of the characteristic traits perceived as essential in

⁶⁹ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore 1858-1836*, OUP, 1998, Delhi, P.88

Christian women. The paradigm on with which colonialism perceived women was in the early stage was similar to the perception that the missionaries had about women. Hence, in the earlier stages of their engagement with women's education, both the colonial presence in the administration and that of the missionaries helped each other in their objectives. In course of time however by the beginning of the twentieth century the differences between the missionaries and the colonial authorities became more visible and defined. This was primarily the result of the broader objective of colonialism and that of the missionaries. The needs of the native elites in preserving their religious identity forced the Travancore state to bring restrictions on missionary activities in successive stages.. The subsequent opposition to and defining of women's identity by the indigenous elites, led to a prolonged conflict between the missionaries and the governmental institutions.

CHAPTER II

Pedagogy and Women's Education

This chapter attempts to bring to light, how the schooling system, its pedagogical content and the discourses that revolved around the idea of education for women, structured and defined the identity for women. The question “Why women need to be educated”? is pertinent in this context. An attempt has been made to understand the intricacies attached in contemporary discourse to women's education. The study focuses on the curricula (pedagogical action) and the institutions that imparted knowledge (pedagogical authority)⁷⁰. The type of education that was to be imparted to Women was determined by the nature and character of the authority that imparted it. In Travancore, the initiative for educating Women emerged from the part of the missionaries.⁷¹ It was the British presence in the

⁷⁰Pierre Bourdieu & Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London, Sage Publishers, 1970.P.22 'The terms 'pedagogical authority' and 'pedagogical action' is taken from the analysis made by the authors mentioned above to denote the institutions that imparted education and pedagogical action, to mean the methods adopted by these authorities.

⁷¹ David W. Savage, “Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India”, *Gender and History*, vol. IX, No.2, August 1997, p.202 “Schooling was part of missionary practice from the beginning of the missionary enterprise.”

administrative structure of Travancore and the attempts in an organized manner towards state intervention in education made possible the permeation of Gender notions and ideas that were prevalent in the Western Societies. Though there were marked differences as far as the nature of the intervention and the primary aims of these two institutions were concerned, their common understanding of Women and her identity were similar and hence the attempt at transforming her social position as well as the methods to be used for it were also identical.

“by the middle of the nineteenth century the argument that the education of the female was essential for the purpose of transforming national character because Women, for good or for ill, were the source of a culture’s morality was common to religious and secular advocates alike.”⁷²

This common understanding towards women’s identity and her position in society made those involved in the formulation of policies regarding women’s education to arrive at a consensus towards

⁷²David W. Savage, “Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India”, *Gender and History*, vol. IX, No.2, August 1997, P.212.

the nature of pedagogy; both in the course content as well as the means at its imparting.

It was this common understanding that made the government of India to declare in its draft resolution of 1912, that;

“the education of girls should be practical with reference to the position which they fill in social life, and that it should in no way seek to imitate the education suitable for boys.”⁷³

The Church Mission Societies (CMS) Diocesan record too point out that;

“in the girl’s school, we teach the children not only the three ‘R’s’ but aim at training them to live true Christian lives. Also we have an industrial class in which they are taught needlework and washing. They also assist in the household work of the school; cooking, sweeping and drawing water from the well, all with a view to fitting them for their future lives as wives and mothers.”⁷⁴

Towards the pursuance of this end, the missionaries imparted a whole lot of cultural practices for the creation of

⁷³*Home Department files, Education, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi, October 1912, File No, 17-22, 1912.*

⁷⁴ *Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record, August 1909, Vol XIX, No. 4, CMS College Library, Kottayam, P. 55.*

different gendered versions in education, the Travancore and Cochin Diocesan record writes;

“What would the Alleppy missionary do without the valuable supply of dolls and workbags for the girls, knives and kerchief for the boys, pencils and paint boxes for both.”⁷⁵

While the Western presence in the administration pursued their aims regarding women’s education and their perception towards which the character of the women was to be moulded, the missionaries through a more intimate relationship through the functioning of their schools, through less of formal literary education and more of ‘practical methods’ like that of ‘cooking, sweeping ...etc. aimed at making them ‘future wives and mothers’.

The missionaries as well as the European presence designed and pursued their policies with a set of formulations, with the idea that the criticisms on the practice of *Sambandham* and other cultural practices would rescue the Travancore society from its ‘inferior’

⁷⁵ Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record , Vol XIX, August 1909, No. 4, CMS College Library, Kottayam, P. 55.

position as well as act as a justification for their alien presence but

“education implied more than rescue from poverty and if pursued beyond the simplest basic literacy, was always in danger of challenging the social order”⁷⁶

The challenging of social order deeply and drastically as well as in the long run demanded for alterations in the content and method of the pedagogy, this alteration in the pedagogical action and content was tantamount to the emergence of new ideas and perception, resulting in the same methods of education that made possible the education for women.

The new system of education imparted by the missionaries had the capability of challenging not only the socio-cultural practices of the native society, but in the long run questioned their own presence and even their system and methods of learning.

The transformation of the cultural practices, from the traditional to the modern was marked by the influence and

⁷⁶ David W. Sange, “Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India”, *Gender and History*, vol. IX, No.2, August 1997, p. 204.

permeation of cultural values, which while transforming or replacing older values, strengthened patriarchal norms and defined the role of women in the private space of family and in the societal sphere. This strengthening of Patriarchal norms and the defining of women's position based on the new logic that man is the head of the household and the strength of a society depends on the extent to which the society and individual protects and regulates the sexual life of women. In effect the native society was searching for a masculinity as a counter to the criticism that the women in the society were promiscuous and engaged in incest. The native elite while accepting the idea and role of education as an arbitrator of change, was conscious of the pedagogical content and the impact that such a curricula was likely to bring about in the gender relations both in society and in the character of the family.⁷⁷ They needed to retain the patriarchal norms even while conceding and accepting the idea of women's education. They had their reservations as far as its logic was concerned and this was primarily a debate internal to the pedagogy for women that

⁷⁷ *Vidhyavinodhini* (bimonthly), Thrissur, 1897, Vol. VII, No. 8, P.4.

had come into practice because all section of the society were however committed to the need of education in the process of social change. Women's education thus becomes a reflective space for various contesting ideologies in this regard.

The New Pedagogical System

The structure and content of the education imparted to women during the period was determined by the dominant perception and hegemony, which the institutions of colonialism, missionaries of the Princely State, had towards the identity of women. During the period under study the romanticism attached to the educational enterprise of the missionaries began to fade out and the opposition from the native society towards Western ideas became more defined. This was mainly due to the religious content in the education that the missionaries pushed forward through their schools, and about the tumult that such an information could create in the socio-religious spectrum of the Hindu social order. The missionary critique on the native cultural practices forced the indigenous elite into an introspection that led to the rise of

new ideas and perceptions on women. This shift in the perceptions over time was a reflection of the changes that were made in the Syllabi. Women's education here becomes a point of convergence of different perceptions on the identity of women and the nature in which the character of different communities was intended to be constructed. An attempt is made to understand women's education as a cultural negotiation reestablishing definite views on gender and women that the dominant groups had within Travancore society. These institutions like the missionaries and the Princely State with its strong colonial presence, within the administration attempted and aided the permanence of their views on gender through those educational establishments that were started for women.⁷⁸

In this chapter three major issues are mainly dealt with; the role of these institutions in sustaining their views on the new curricula; the shifts in the curricula that

⁷⁸ Education files, *Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram*, Kerala State Archives, file no 989 of 1921, 'As late as 1921, the top rungs of the administrative machinery were dominated by Westerners. Those present in the meeting to review the curricula on 5th February 1921, include, Rao T. Bahadur. T. Raghaviah Esq Dewan, N Rajaram Rao. Esq Chief Secretary to the govt., L.G. Hodson, Esq, Director of Public Instruction, D.H. Watts, Principal, H.H., The Maharajas College for girls' Thiruvananthapuram, Miss Carapiett, Inspectress of Girl's School, Miss Holmes, Thirumullavaram Balikamadam, Tiruvella, Rev. Mother Superior. Holy Angles, Thiruvananthapuram, and S. Parameshwara Iyer, Secretary to the Govt.

occurred over the period of time; and finally the discourses both indigenous and Western that revolved around the idea of women's education.

The new Pedagogical system brought the girl child to school, wherein the gestures and methods of arranging and organising the character of women on disciplined lines were formulated.⁷⁹ The new schools demanded and underlined that these new Pedagogical methods was a process of socio-cultural transformation. As it has been said,

“education acts as a medium in ensuring the transmission of cultural capital across generations and to stamp pre-existing differences in inherited cultural capital with a meritocratic seal of academic consecration by virtue of the special symbolic potency of the title (credential). Functioning in a manner of huge classificatory machine which inscribes changes within the purview of the structure, the schools help to make and to impose the legitimate

⁷⁹ A. Mathew, *A History of Educational Growth in Kerala*, New Delhi : NIEPA 1988, P. 21.

exclusions and inclusions which form the basis of the social order”⁸⁰.

Women’s Education in Travancore, though was an attempt towards the transformation of the position that the women had acquired in Travancore. These discourses at transforming women’s position emerged among the men, towards retaining the patriarchal norms in Travancore.

Women’s Education in Travancore may be viewed as;

“a process of maintaining the homoeostasis as an instrument of the ideologisation and of transmitting and controlling knowledge in a manner consistent with the maintenance and preservation of the socio-political order.”⁸¹

In its attempt at preserving the socio-political order;

“the ideological apparatus of the state played a crucial role by actively intervening to reorder the intellectual and cultural domain of the natives.”⁸²

The reordering of the intellectual and cultural domain of the natives mainly occurred among the upper strata of

⁸⁰ Pierre Bourdieu & Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London, Sage Publishers, 1970, P.9.

⁸¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Development Of Women’s Education in India, A collection of Documents*, Kanishka publishers, New Delhi, 2001, P. XXIII

⁸² K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony; Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, Tulika, 1995, P.123.

the society and this reordering helped the Nair men rearrange the gender relations tantamount to sustaining their superior position in the society.

Early Missionary Strategy

The pioneers of women's education in Travancore were the missionaries. The London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Mission Society (CMS) started schools meant for girls as early as the beginning of the 19th. Century. The mission schools were primarily aimed at the spread of Christianity and to provide education to the new Christian converts.⁸³ Here education was imbued with the idea of "the social upliftment" or that of the "Civilizing mission" for its adherents. But there were certain contradictions as far as the class of people the missionaries tried to address and those that formed their followers. The Missionaries aimed at converting the elites within the Native society i.e., the Nairs and other dominant sections of the society.⁸⁴ However given the influence in terms of wealth and power, these sections used the

⁸³ *Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, Vol XIX, August 1909, No. 4, P. 55
CMS College Library, Kottayam, P.85.

⁸⁴ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore. 1847-1908*, op.cit, P.208.

education provided by the missionaries, not its religious aspects but to retain their social position within the society. In this peculiar social condition with which the missionaries were confronted with, they had to formulate different modes of teaching for addressing the various sections of the society.⁸⁵

The Zenana Mission started by Mrs. Blandford of the Church Mission Society; was a way to reach women of the upper strata of the Hindu society.⁸⁶ Here the mission ladies entered the houses of high castes Hindus as home tutors. They taught sewing, drawing and singing apart from the English language. These initiatives were often encouraged by the elites of the Native Society.

“At first the progress was very slow. Mrs. Blandford began with only four pupils on 1904. They were the daughter and niece of the Dewan and two little Malayali girls of the Nayar caste”⁸⁷.

⁸⁵ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, Vol XIX, August 1909, No. 4, CMS College Library, Kottayam, P. 55.

⁸⁶ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op.cit, P.168.

⁸⁷ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, Vol XV, March 1905, No. 2, CMS College Library, Kottayam, P.95.

As far as the lower castes were concerned they started special schools for them, This was done with the objective of preventing social interaction between these castes. Elementary knowledge in Bible and Christian classes were provided in these schools, the idea was purely conversion. This variance in the methods and content of women's education bring to the fore the various intricacies attached to missionary aims and enterprise. It has to be noted that Biblical education did not form the major part of the missionary education in these institutions because of the fear of inviting the displeasure of the traditional elites. Instead the missionaries used the opportunity of access to those places to propagate the Biblical knowledge. In this context, *Aftab-I-Dhakkam* complained that

“verses in praise of Jesus Christ are hung up on the walls of each room of the mission Mohammedan Girls school, the Missionaries have created a Zenana Mission for educating purdha Ladies, without being asked and teach sewing and needlework, and when their

intimacy increases, they give up teaching and commence their real work”⁸⁸.

The protestant missionaries had a network of educational institutions, where Bible education was an important part of the curriculum. The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan report of 1907 points this out;

“A CMS high school in its infancy so far, for it is but two years old, but it has already proved a light in the dark place. The Bible is taught daily in schools. The number of Bibles which has been purchased by Hindus of the place speaks volumes. A flow of light has now been let into one of the darkest and strongest citadels of Hinduism on this coast. It is impossible to say how beneficial and far reaching the results may be.”⁸⁹

Here it is obvious that the schools transmitted a ‘gender code’ with a strong classification which reproduced the power relations of the male-female hierarchy and a strong framework where teachers play a large part in determining gender definitions and control. Thus, the

⁸⁸ *Aftab-i-Dhakkamm*, Selections from the Native Press, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi 1901, p. 75

⁸⁹ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan record*, February 1907, Vol. XVII. No. 1, CMS College Library, Kottayam, P. 4.

whole logic of missionary education was to bring about gendered versions on education.

However, missionary education in the early stages was not organised. Instead, it sought to provide only alternative cultural practices for the women of Travancore. The courses of drawing, singing or even the use of English as a medium of instruction was seen by the native elites as a means of becoming 'Modern'. The late 18th Century novel *Indulekha* written by O. Chandu Menon is a classical example in this regard. Menon urges his audience to learn English to enlighten their minds; he writes,

“my beloved countryman, are you not ashamed of this? Some of you have studied Sanskrit, and some music, but these attainments are not enough. If you wish to really enlighten your minds, you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn may thing which you ought to know in these days and by such knowledge alone can you grasp the truth that you are free agents as men, that women are not slaves of men.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality; The Novel and Society in India*, 1994, OUP, Delhi, P. 8.

Responsible Government And Its Policy

The Western influence in education became more concrete and evident when the Princely State decided to intervene in education and to take up the role of a 'responsible' government. This was by and large the result of the spread of consciousness generated by missionary influence. Most of the higher institutions of the administration were manned by Europeans and they professed to pursue the Western notions on gender.

“the beginnings of English Education were laid in 1009 M.E. (1834) by opening a school at Trivandrum. District schools were also established a committee of Europeans which was appointed to examine and report on the progress of the school, expressed its satisfaction with the institution and suggested to the Government the desirability of holding out some prospects of future employment in the Public service to the boys who might distinguish themselves by their progress”⁹¹

The most important aspect of the intervention of the Princely State in women's education was that the Western

⁹¹ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Thiruvananthapuram, Government of Travancore, 1940, P.552.

notions on women's education supposedly became an official policy.

The curriculum of the indigenous schools consisted of Astronomy, lessons in casting horoscopes and compiling a calendar, the chief precepts for daily conduct, known as *Neethi Shastram*, the thousand names of Vishnu, a section of the Sanskrit dictionary, a few lessons on medicine, general poetry and the three R's.⁹² The structure of these schools or their extent cannot however be ascertained. But the attitude of such a schooling system is well encapsulated in the statement made by the Dewan Madhav Rao. He observes that the education in the native system is based on a system which does not attempt the development of the mental powers beyond burdening the memory, and falls far short of the requirement of the present age.⁹³ The state undertook to transform the education system.

This can indeed be seen as a direct result of the cultural hegemony that the missionaries and Western ideas

⁹² Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State, Travancore 1858-1936*, Delhi. OUP, 1998, P.83.

⁹³ *ibid*, P.95

had acquired in Travancore society. The administrative report for 1889-90 further endorses and strengthens this view. In quotes,

“The instruction thus imparted is entirely superficial and defective and ill adapted towards improving the mind.”⁹⁴

Thus the development of the ‘mental powers’ or improving the mind was certainly one of the concerns of the state”. This ‘development’ of the mental powers was necessarily a process that was geared up to initiate the process of change, and to bring in ‘modernity’.

The Colonial policy on women’s education included:

The expansion of girls education by means of the allocation of educational funds, whether intended for the maintenance of board schools or as subsidies to aided schools, the improvement of facilities for the training of teachers and the amelioration of the conditions of service in the case of mistresses and members of the inspecting staff such as the granting of free quarters of a suitable board, of carriage allowances, and of special facilities

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, P.95

during journeys etc...⁹⁵, the administration also introduced the practice of giving scholarship.

These measures were however not peculiar to Travancore and the methods so adopted were common to that was practiced elsewhere by the British administration. The practice of providing a unified method as far as the policies towards the improvement of women's education was concerned was not suited to its progress. The intention behind this practice often sought to destroy the very spirit of giving scholarships. The Scholarships were intended to bring the various sections of the Travancore society within its fold. There were 'open' scholarship and 'closed' scholarships. While all sections of the pupil could complete for open scholarships, the close scholarships were restricted to pupils belonging to the backward communities. Both the 'open' and 'close' scholarships were tenable only in English high schools and merit was the only criteria for awarding them.⁹⁶ On the one hand such a process brings to the fore the intentions of the Colonial

⁹⁵ *Home Department Files, Education, National Archives of India, Department of Education, July 1913, File No 76-82.*

⁹⁶ *Government of Travancore, Administrative Report of the Education Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1117. M.E. (1943), Govt. Press, Kerala State Archives, P.80.*

administration that the desired medium of communication is English and that it is the right means of acquiring knowledge. Keeping merit as the only means of acquiring scholarships, in effect distorts the very purpose of helping the weaker sections in the society. The idea of competition and merit was thus ill suited for wider spread of women's education. This primarily resulted from a colonial bureaucratic experience in an alien setting.

Syllabi of 1867 and 1923

Eventually with a whole network of educational institutions getting established throughout the state and a proper system of management of these institutions getting into places a unified syllabus was put forward. In the Central (Vernacular) school, the following subjects were taught in 1867-68⁹⁷:

1. The whole of a work on moral and social duties.
2. Practices on health and how to preserve it.
3. Practices on giving truthful evidence.
4. Arithmetic

⁹⁷ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State, Travancore 1858-1936*, Delhi, OUP, 1998, P.88.

5. Geometry
6. Geography of Europe, Asia and America.
7. Duncan's Geography of India.
8. Lessons in Sanskrit

Thus on broader lines, the new syllabus tended to classify the whole course content into two, firstly, it gave stress on the idea of morality, health etc. and secondly, it tended to develop and did the study of Travancore on the basis of time and space in a measurable unit.

The study of the geography of Europe and the world broke the cultural isolation of Travancore. It created a particular space within which ideas and cultures could be situated and compared. In the revised syllabi of 1875 for the aided schools, the Travancore government suggested that the geography of Travancore be included along with the general geography. This change was the emergence of the consciousness of the geographical space of Travancore in relation with the world. This made the native elite to think themselves in terms of a geographical space rather than just as a cultural space.

History as a discipline was included in the revised curricular of 1875. History, though mainly centered around the chronology of the ruling dynasty, gave a measurable time, the chronology in which events occurred. This onus on geography and history situated Travancore as a concrete socio-political entity in space and time. Interestingly, in the whole curricula, the study of natural or physical sciences was absent.

The princely state increasingly tended to monitor and control educational practices of the missionaries, it was during the same period that the opposition of the native elites to the religious instruction in the missionary schools became more visible. The introduction of the Grant in Aid code of 1894 was aimed at reducing the influence of missionaries in the sphere of education.

“the new grant-in-aid code introduced in 1894 with little warning. Basically, it was a move towards some centralized control of the aided schools which were expanding rapidly and haphazardly. The code aimed to improve standards by demanding better facilities and more highly qualified staff, and by setting out the curricula and, in some cases, the textbooks

to be used in aided schools. But more important for Christians and missionaries was the provision that pupils could receive religious instruction only with the consent of their parents.”⁹⁸

Though the government tried to curtail the missionary influence, as a matter of fact, they accepted its educational agenda and was convinced of the logic and method associated with the instruction for Women and hence, the pedagogy for women continued without much alteration until the government came up with the revised curricula of 1923.

Till then it is clear that subjects such as drawing, needlework and ‘practical training’ dominated the course and Syllabi for women.

The letter addressed to the Chief Secretary by the Inspector of Schools on the 20th April 1908, makes clear how the Government tried to take forward the curricula of women’s education.

“There is no girl’s school of middle grade where needle work is not taught although many of

⁹⁸ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, Op.cit. P. 195.

them are not provided with separate sewing mistresses. Drawing is not taught in any schools except at the Girls High School at Thiruvananthapuram and perhaps some aided school under mission agents. While it is desirable that drawing and needlework should be taught as compulsory subjects in all girls' schools, it is hardly necessary that there should be a separate full time mistress for the two subjects, if it is possible to procure the success of female teachers that should teach both sewing and drawing"⁹⁹.

Thus the practical training in domestic work dominated in the pedagogy for women both in missionary as well as in the Government schools, and that the government pursued measures towards the sustenance and development of such an system of education.

About the enhancement of the pay of teachers qualifying themselves in drawing and kindergarten, The Director suggests that "such teachers in Departmental Schools should be paid an additional sum of Rs. 2 for classes I and III and Rs 3 per class IV". Sewing however

⁹⁹ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, file no 331 of 1908, Letter written from The Office of the Inspector of Schools, on 20th April 1908, to the Chief Secretary to the Government.

formed a major and compulsory part of the curriculum; Mr. Hodson, the Director of public instruction suggests that

“the arrangement by which each class teacher should teach sewing might be gradually worked up to”.¹⁰⁰

In 1923, the government drastically changed the curricular for girls. As per the revised curricula, the subjects that were taught in the schools included:

1. Language (Malayalam and Tamil) for all the four classes
2. Arithmetic for all the four classes.
3. Nature study for all the four classes.
4. Geography for all the four classes.
5. Hygiene for classes III and IV
6. Needlework for all four classes.
7. Games and Physical culture for all four classes.
8. Singing-as in the curriculum

Optional

1. Drawing

¹⁰⁰ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, file no 989 of 1923.

2. Kindergarten

Thus practical training lost much of their importance in the syllabi and as per the new revised syllabus, the subjects of drawing and kindergarten were decided to be optional.

The introduction of the study of the languages of Tamil and Malayalam helped in strengthening the views of the natives in education. This led to demand for the inculcation of native cultural practices in education, and also for the study of Sanskrit. Low castes such as the Ezhavas demanded for the inculcation of Sanskrit as a compulsory subject in the Curricula. It was the changing understanding on society as well as the demand for a transformation in the curricula that made prominent social reformer and the noted poet of the Ezhava caste, Kumaran Asan to argue that

“ ‘... it would be better if one acquires the basic knowledge in a classical language like Sanskrit, for the soul of India lies in the Sanskrit literature’, he argued in the Assembly debates, he mooted the idea of the compulsory education of Sanskrit and the pursuance of such

disciplines as *Ayurveda*, *Jyotisha*, Malayalam literature etc.”¹⁰¹

It is clear that the revised curricular of 1923, marked a major shift in the subjects taught in the girls schools. As can be seen, the emphasis was more of literary subjects where subjects like drawing and other practical classes took a back seat. Though science as a subject did not become part of the curricular, “nature study” was included.

The Director, Mr. Hodson was of the opinion that the principle on which the revised curriculum was based, was

“the development of the child’s intelligence and natural ability and the adaptation of the child to its natural environment, human and material.”¹⁰²

Such a shift in the courses taught in girl’s school received strong opposition, both from within the committee as well as by the missionaries Miss Watts and Miss Carapiet, who were part of the committee that revised the curricula were opposed to the idea of replacing subjects

¹⁰¹ Enaadu Annual Publication – 1986, Thiruvananthapuram, - “Asan’s Educational Thoughts” p. 181

¹⁰² *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, File No 989 of 1923.

those specially suitable for girls with that of the literary subjects.¹⁰³

The missionaries were the staunchest opponents of the new curricula. They argued

“that education in schools and colleges should not be exclusively “literary”. It has now for a long time been almost universally recognised.... That the future hand workers and brain workers have a right to that education which will best fit them for their work in life. Each unit of the community ought to be so molded during the plastic period that he will afterwards fall readily into his proper place in the social organism where he can work with the greatest advantage for himself”¹⁰⁴.

The indigenous demand for women’s education stems from the belief that education would create a proper atmosphere, conducive for the preservation and the sustenance of established patriarchal norms in the society. *Vidyavinodhini* argued;

¹⁰³ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Archives, File no 989 of 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, February 1907, Vol. XVII. No. 1, CMS College Library, Kottayam, P.4.

“Though women are unable to undertake professions alike men, Education is certainly necessary for them to perform their functions as proper wives and ‘good mothers’.”¹⁰⁵

This was the central objective in the discourse; the indigenous elites desired to reconstitute the education for women, and to impart such knowledge that would prepare them for their roles within the family. Thus

“contrary to the usual stereotyped description privileging and highlighting the colonial governments initiative, it can be argued that this institutional structure was shaped by the negotiation and interaction between the indigenous intelligentsia and the British Indian Government.”¹⁰⁶

The Native elites were successful in forcing the Travancore state to curtail the missionary presence in women’s education as well as to initiate its own investments in this regard.

Thus women’s education was a product of the acceptance of low position of women by all major sections

¹⁰⁵ *Vidhyavinodhini* (bimonthly), Thrissur, 1897, Vol. VII, No. 8. P.2.

¹⁰⁶ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Development of Women's Education in India, A collection of Documents*, New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers, 2001, P.IX.

of the Travancore society. This low position was articulated by the missionaries to be a result of the low morals in terms of sexual relations that the social elite held. The pedagogical system which the missionaries practiced in their schools as well as the government inculcated were similar, the only exception being the form had a religious content in it. This similarity in the course and method was the result of the similarity in the views held by the missionaries as well as the colonial authorities, as both of these institutions emerged from the same cultural experience of the West. The opposition towards the pedagogy resulted in the criticism at the religious instruction in the mission schools, which the state tried to bring down through series of measures. In the later stage, not only the religious aspect of the mission schools but the methodology of the schooling system with regard to the 'Special Subject' aimed at making the true mother and true wife with 'practical benefit for them in future life' itself was criticized and were forced to change. These changes in the pedagogical content and environment was reflected in the changes in the equations of the social relations that were

occurring in Travancore over the period of time. Not only was the religious themes questioned, in the long run, the whole logic of its pedagogy was monitored and were subjected to change.

CHAPTER III

Women's Education and the Development of Community Consciousness

The chapter attempts to bring to fore the various discourses centering on the need for women's education, the female identity, the schooling system and the resultant emergence of a wider community consciousness among different castes and religious groups in Travancore. There was a marked difference in the perceptions of the different communities as to the ideal type, which they sought to create. The need for educating the women of all communities was in fact a need that was perceived as a method of 'social advancement.' Which was to be dictated by the strengthening of the old Patriarchal norms as well as the creation of new norms both within family and in society. Women's education in Travancore thus becomes a means of re-negotiating the gender relations and the resultant moulding of the emerging characteristics of different communities.

Female literacy rates in Travancore increased from 3.5% in 1891 to 37.7% in 1931, compared to an all India

average of 0.5%to 12.9%.¹⁰⁷ This sharp increase in women's education was not only due to state initiative or missionary efforts but also due to the perceived needs of the various sections of the society to redefine their gender roles and to reconstitute their families. Here the idea and role of education as a means to bring about social advancement was established by the activities of the Protestant Missionaries and the indirect impact of Western ideas in Travancore. Hence much of their desire to initiate a process of reconstituting the wider character of their communities and of gender relations within the family and the role of the individual was expressed through the negotiations with the Western ideas on the native society.

The societal interaction and discourse was not uniform among different communities. Given their social position and their dominant roles, the Nairs and the Brahmins were more prone to these western influences. It was these communities that had sought a new identity for their Women, as it was the cultural practices that were

¹⁰⁷ Census of Travancore, Thiruvananthapuram, Govt. of Travancore, Part I, Literacy Tables, 1901-1951.

prevalent among them that bore the brunt of the new ideas and norms. The peculiarities of the *Sambandham* relationship; of high caste Brahmin men having temporary sexual relationship with Nair women, were highly criticized. This cultural practice came to be equated with prostitution in the new logic and environment.

“Your sons are bastards and your wives prostitutes,”¹⁰⁸

was the insult that was thrown at Pattom Thanu Pillai, a Nair representative in the Madras Legislative Assembly. The Nair men who traveled outside the state for higher education and employment found in other societies, what was perceived as the ‘proper’ marriage system. They understood the need for the regulation of the family, which they perceived, as that which needed rapid and fundamental changes so as to meet the challenges of the new environment. Madhavikutty, a noted Malayalam Poetess writes in her memoris;

“Once when my father came from Calcutta he cut of the trees and bushes of the *Sarppakkavu*

¹⁰⁸ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1976, P. 148.

(family temple surrounded with trees and bushes, generally snakes are worshipped in these temples) and made it a place where children could play, bringing distrust to the old people. They (the old people) said to themselves, that this would bring the wrath of the Gods.”¹⁰⁹

He felled the old beliefs to pay way for the new, the distrust attach to the process of change could not be avoided but certainly they had to pay way for new ideas and practices. These convictions towards the need for change marked the cultural transformation among the Nairs. They responded with enthusiasm towards change. This was the result of the functioning of the Western ideas in the Indian setting.

This internalisation of the cultural logic thrown up by the colonial authorities forced the native elite into introspection. which were powerful enough to understand that the traditional social structures needed rapid and fundamental changes. The reason for such introspection was that the missionaries and the representatives of colonial ideology equated the gender relations and the

¹⁰⁹ Madhavikutti, *Balyakalasaranaikal*, Kottayam, D.C. Books, 1986, P. 12.

forms of marriage that were in existence among the Nairs with the evils of the society as a whole. The insult that the Nair member had to face in the Madras Legislative Assembly was the replica of the general feeling that was emerging as far as gender relations within the Nair's were concerned. To counter this, they needed an ideology for an identity construct and this ideology was garnered from the new forms of education that was introduced. It was in this context that the discourses on Women's education became concrete and relevant.

An analysis of the literacy rates among the different regions and communities points out that it was in the regions of central Travancore, the taluks of Tiruvella, Chengannur, Changanacherri and Meenachil, where the influence and the activities of the Protestant missions were in dominance, that literacy rates reached its peak¹¹⁰.

The Ezhava Experience

Thus, it was among the Syrian Christians, Protestant Christians, the Brahmins and the Nairs that literacy rates

¹¹⁰ *Census of Travancore*, Thiruvananthapuram, Govt. of Travancore, Part I, Literacy Tables, 1901-1951.

reached the highest. While the Brahmins and the Nairs enjoyed a higher ritual status in the Hindu socio-religious hierarchy, the Syrians and the Protestants were well off in terms of their economic conditions. The Ezhavas were mainly toddy tappers and the Latin Catholics who mainly constituted the fishermen community and were far behind in terms of their literacy. The Pulayas, Parayas and other untouchable slave castes had a literacy rate which was the lowest among all. The expansion of their literacy rate was linked to their relationship with Christian missions. The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Records reports;

“The ‘poor Christians’ are those who are heather belonged to the *Pulaya* or slave caste and who some fifty years ago, were brought and sold in Public markets. Some thirty thousand of these ‘Pulayas’ have now joined our church, and forms three fourth of the whole membership of our Church in Travancore.”¹¹¹

Sahodharan, a monthly Journal Reported that

¹¹¹ *The Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Records, Kottayam*, CMS College Library, February 1997, Vol XVII, No. 1.

“Mulavukkattu *Pulaya Samajam* Secretary Krishnethi along with hundreds of men from his caste have joined Christianity.”¹¹²

Thus the low literacy rates among these communities well compounded their class position.

The Protestant Christians, given their association with the missionaries found it easy to advance their position in terms of literacy. It was from among them that the demand for schools and favors from the Governments was most heard. A memorial was submitted before the Government, demanding the opening up of a secondary school for Girls at Mavelikkara.¹¹³ Initiatives regarding education for girls was in most circumstances treated favourably. The inspectors of girls' school, to whom they presented their grievances gave them a hopeful reply and called upon them to send a list of girls that would seek admission and assured them that a new secondary school would be opened there. A similar representation was made by K. M. Mammen Mappila, member of the Travancore

¹¹² *Sahodharan* (monthly), Kodungalloor, 1918, V. 1, No. 2.

¹¹³ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthpuram, File no. 25 of 1915, dated 17th April 1915, Memorial submitted by the residents of Mavelikkara for the opening of a Girl School for secondary education.

Legislative Council from *Tiruvella*, for the opening up of a Lower Grade Secondary School for Girls at *Tiruvella*, which was conceded by the Director of Public Instruction. In his letter 5054/1402 dated 30th May, the Director referring to the representation, recommended for the opening of the Lower Grade Secondary School for Girls at *Tiruvella* and *Alleppy* said that As no Sircar building was available at *Tiruvella* to locate the school, the Director requested sanction for a building belonging to the purpose on a rent at Rs. 20 per mensem.¹¹⁴

As the consciousness for education spread, each section of the society started demanding their due share in the educational processes of the state. Pointing towards the disabilities of the *Kaniyan* community Mr. Padmanabha Kaniyan, nominated member stated that;

“among the *Kaniyas*, only seven had knowledge of English, that the community was comparatively poor both in number and in wealth had not yet obtained any assistance from the Government in matter of English education or in political preference and that the

¹¹⁴ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, File no. 34 of 1913.

community could not progress without substantial help from the Government.”¹¹⁵

However, the Director of Public Instruction in his reply stated that the community was not so backward as the *Pulayas* and *Parayas* or even Muslim. As ordinarily no special scholarships are awarded to pupils of backward communities for secondary education, the Director was of the opinion that no special concessions could be granted. Similar petitions for opening up of girls' schools were given to the Government by the members of *Ezhavas*, *Nairs* and all other major sections of Travancore. A petition to start schools was filed by Gopala Pillai and others of Oachira for opening up of higher class in the Krishnan Nair Memorial Girls school¹¹⁶.

It was among the *Ezhavas*, from among the lower castes that the demand for Girl's school reached its zenith;

“as early as 1887, the *Travancore Times* reported the formation of an *Ezhava* association

¹¹⁵ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, File no. 24 of 1915, Representation made at the XIth session by Mr. M.K. Kaniyan, member nominated highlighting the disabilities of the Kaniya community in the matter of education.

¹¹⁶ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, File No. 128 of 1916, regarding the opening of class v in the Krishnan Nair Memorial Girls School, in Puthupally, in Karunagapally Taluk.

in Vaikom and and in North Travancore. It levied a tiny monthly subscription from every *Ezhava* family in the neighbourhood and a few schools are being conducted... for their children who have no access to sirkar schools. In 1882, an LMS agent wrote that an *Ezhava* organization at Paravur in Quilon district was holding regular monthly meetings to promote local education and was pressing him to start an English school”¹¹⁷

They often defied the rules set aside by the Government as far as the sanctions of schools were concerned. The opening of an English Middle School at *Neeravil* on 12th June 1922 reflects the tenacity with which the *Ezhavas* as a community responded to education. Mr. K. Kumaran, the General Secretary of the *Yogam* submitted a petition asking for permission to open an English middle school at *Neeravil*. He was of the opinion that;

“the school in question is the first of a series of English schools which the *SNDP Yogas* intended to open in various parts of the country where the *Ezhavas* live in large numbers....and the

¹¹⁷ Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance; Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, op. cit., P 212

school in question was formally opened by Sree Narayana Guru, the President of the Yogam.”¹¹⁸

though the Government did not give the approval to start the school; it nevertheless signified that attitude and urge at which the *Ezhavas* understood the need for education as a means of social advancement. Dr. Palpu, a doctor by profession and one of the earliest leaders of the *SNDP* movement has opined as follows in his memoirs

“..... As part of our endeavours to promote female education I had to organise a festival on one of our temples dedicated to *Sarada* – the goddess of learning. It was in a village called *Varkala* in Travancore. It had nevertheless, brought in over a lakh of our people and the offerings received in money alone amounted to over Thirteen thousand and over a thousand women of our community attended a special Ladies gathering, I arranged with my old mother as President”¹¹⁹

The introduction of the schooling system expanded the space for public activity among the lower castes. In the

¹¹⁸ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, File No.721/3218, dated 12th June 1922, regarding the opening of an English School at Neeravil

¹¹⁹ *Dr Palpu Papers*, Subject File No.21, Subject File No.21, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. P.8

nearby state of Cochin, when the children of the Royal family came to the *Tripunithura* school for education, the *Ezhavas* and the Christian were told to leave the school so as to protect the children of the ruling family from ritual pollution. While the *Ezhavas* complied with the Government order and withdrew their children from the school, the Christians decided not to pull out their children and instead decided to stay.¹²⁰ The duality of the attitude with which both these communities responded to the said order may have emanated from the peculiar characters of these two communities. But this was nevertheless an eye opener for the *Ezhavas*, to argue for their rights both in the sphere of education as well as for their due share in the social polemic of the state. In Travancore these debates that generated as a result of the introduction of the schooling system and that of the ritual pollution, in the long run widened the sphere of public activity of the lower castes. The issue of the admission of *Ezhava* Girls to the Lower Grade Elementary Schools at *Pudukovil* in the *Parur* Taluk is in fact an example of this expansion. The *Nairs* at

¹²⁰ *Sahodharan* (monthly), Kodungalloor, 1918, V. 1, No. 10, 11, 1918.

Pudukovil raised the complaint, that the admission of *Ezhava* girls, would pollute the temple, which was in close proximity to the school. Dr. Bishop, the Director of Public Instruction was of the opinion that these apprehensions should not be looked upon as sufficient reason to inhibit the admission of *Ezhavas* into the school and hence recommended that the *Pudukkoil* Lower Grade Elementary School be formally declared opened to *Ezhavas* and that the telegram (complaint) desired little mention.¹²¹ The more important aspect in this regard was the discourse between the logic of ritual status and that of the new systems of logic. The DPI reported that;

“the Departmental Lower Grade Elementary school for girls at *Pudukkovil* in the *Parur* Taluk is situated away from the pollution limit of the Local temple, that the *Ezhavas* are freely admitted into the local boy’s school, which is in close proximity to the Girl’s school, and the apprehensions of the local *Nairs* that the *Ezhava* Girls might transmit this limit and pollute the temple is hypothetical and

¹²¹ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, File No.8/824, dated 4th August 1914, letter written from Director of Public Instruction to the Chief Secretary.

groundless. He therefore declared the school be open to *Ezhavas*"¹²².

These attitudes of the Government expanded the space of activity of the lower castes. As far as women's education was concerned the *Ezhavas* and other Lower castes treated it as a means towards social acceleration.

Nair and Brahmin Response

Unlike the lower castes, it was the *Nairs* and the Brahmins, who made an introspection as far as Women's position was concerned. Given their socio-economic supremacy in the Travancore society, it was these sections that predominantly faced the new forms of change; whether it is the identity of their women in their society or that of their society in general. Hence, it was these sections of the Hindu society that took to the new forms of education.

"No class of the community is availing itself of the benefits of modern education as the *Nayars*, who are fast becoming conspicuous in every literate walk of life. In every department of the state and in all the learned professions, they

¹²² *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthpuram, File No.8/824, dated 4th August 1914, letter written from Director of Public Instruction to the Chief Secretary.

form a respectable majority and the only people who successfully compete with them in this respect are the Brahman immigrants from the other coast. While a large number of the *Nayars* have thus exchanged the sword for the pen, a still larger number have exchanged it for the plough. Excepting Government service and the learned professions, agriculture and domestic sources are almost the only pursuits in which they are largely engaged. Among them there are extensive land holders and substantial farmers, but a large body of them are comparatively poor and are either petty farmers or agricultural labourers.”¹²³

The socio-cultural practices and gender relations that were prevalent among them was brought to the test of reason and subsequently critiqued. In fact, the *Sambandam* relationship or the practice of having temporary relations with *Nair* women was widely criticised. They now understood the need for a “proper” marriage system, without altering the patriarchal norms in the society. The practice of *Sambandham* did not in any way mean that women had the right to take decisions regarding

¹²³ *Census of Cochin, 1901, Volume XX, Part I, P. 150*

their marriage. In fact, these sexual relations and practices were done according to the wishes of the *Karanavar*, or the head of the household. The Criticism of these cultural practices was countered by an attempt at redrawing a new identity for the women using the newly introduced education. The *Nairs* attempted to point out that the position of women was a gradual evolution according to the natural law of the land. This justification in finding a natural cause for the women's position was an attempt at searching a cause for the degraded position of their women that was articulated by the new norms; *Vidhya Vinodhini*, a journal published from Thrissur argued; that,

“man and women should undertake their responsibilities according to that sanctioned by the scriptures”¹²⁴

It further points out that during the past,

“there are many aims at which the education and other activities that men regulated according to the needs of the time and women too followed their responsibilities in the right earnest”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *Vidhya Vinodhini*, (bimonthly) V. XII, No 7, Thrissur, 1901, P. 294-

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, P. 295.

They were attempting to find a natural cause for their present condition. Even the changes that occurred in the society were deemed to be a natural process. The advocates of women's education was an attempt to find a justification for educating the women they argued

“if man is to alter his position within the traditional society, then the woman is also likely to follow his path, and if that is the case, how can she be blamed.¹²⁶

Attempts were made to justify their demands for education by the reformers engaged in the education for women,

“As man altered his social behaviour, his wife too attempted at altering her social position, her dress code, her behaviour and practices; changes were not limited to men alone, rather it extended to women”¹²⁷

The major discourse on women's education tended to argue that,

“woman need not go out of their homes to do job alike men or like their counterparts of the West. They are to stay at home and hence need

¹²⁶ Ibid, P. 298.

¹²⁷ Ibid, V. XII. No 7. P. 312.

not be educated. The major argument was that woman are unable to engage themselves in professions like Agriculture and trade and that she has to engage herself with the domestic services at home and hence does not need education”¹²⁸

Sarada, a magazine which was exclusively meant for the Nair women was of the view that

“Unlike men, women is unable to take up jobs like that of the legal profession and other similar jobs and given the present situation, it is not desirous of them to take such jobs. Education for them is needed to uplift them from their social backwardness and to strengthen their roles as responsible mothers and wives”.¹²⁹

Given the understanding that women’s education should be meted out only to the extent that the traditional patriarchal norms within the family do not get disturbed, the advocates of women’s education attempted at drawing out sufficient reasons for educating the women within the paradigms set up by the traditional society. They attempted

¹²⁸ Ibid, P. 320.

¹²⁹ *Sarada*, (bimonthly) V. I, No. 2, 1905, Punalur, P. 5.

to reformulate women's role as a mother and that the new education would enrich her activities in the domestic sphere.

“To bring up her child properly, to utilize the money rationally that her husband brings for the family.. and to engage herself in the household activities in the right manner.”¹³⁰

The advocates of women's education argued that,

“freedom for women does not mean that they enjoy the right to do whatever they please, but the ability to do things rationally according to the scriptures.”¹³¹

They further stated that ,

“as men have understood and transformed many of his characters, he has also structurally altered his method of education, on the understanding that it is a must for the human kind, and that all sections irrespective of their social position have took to education.”¹³²

¹³⁰ *Vidhya Vinodhini*, (bimonthly) V. XII, No 7, Thrissur, 1901, P. 298.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, P. 307.

¹³² *Ibid*, P. 308.

The traditional *Nair* society understood that the core of the cultural critique directed against the social order was due to the lack of a “proper marriage system.”

“The reason why others insult us is because we do not have a proper marriage system. If women are not given the right to choose their husbands then it is a great injustice”.¹³³

Under such a condition where women of the traditional elite were criticized to be lacking in morality, a counter critique was needed to create the perceptions of an ideal mother and wife. Education in this context was treated as a means towards this end. In fact, this mother and wife image gained predominance in the need to counter the attack centered on individual identity and morality.

“For a women, her husband is equivalent to god and she who does her responsibilities in the right earnest does not need anything else for *moksha*.”¹³⁴

The emerging views on women’s education were well encapsulated by *Saradha*, in 1901. They did not demand a

¹³³ *Sarada*, (bimonthly) V. I, No. 7, 1905, Punalur, P. 162.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, V. I. No. 9, 1906, P. 258.

radical transformation in women's social position. Instead, they sought to glorify women's responsibility in the domestic sphere. They quoted enmass from tradition to glorify and to justify the position of women in the family. Thus a revivalism and glorification of women's condition was an attempt at providing an opposition to the cultural critique. The education that they envisaged was towards this aim.

The proponents of women's education were conscious of the type of education that was intended for women. Ironically, even they were arguing for the restoration of the norms of patriarchy within the family. They argued that

“women need not engage herself in economic activity along with her husband, instead she should stay at home look after her husband and become proper wives.”¹³⁵

They further put forward the idea that

“Whatever be the type of education that be imparted to women in schools, the real education of the child starts at home.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *Lakshmibhai*, (bimonthly) V. XVIII, No. 7, Thrissur, 1922, P. 109.

¹³⁶ *Mahila*, (bimonthly) Vol. VI, No. 5, 1925, P.136

The Westerners working in the native society further strengthened this emerging view on the women's position. Their views were evident in the speeches made by Annie Besant. She glorified the ancient Indian women to be "chaste and faithful to her husband"¹³⁷ Besant was of the view that the education that is to be imparted to her should be aimed at "the development of her inherent mental qualities"¹³⁸ Here the mental qualities were aimed at the generation and sustenance of 'womanly' characters in her. She further argued "like the ancient Hindu women, the education that is intended for women should be aimed at making her an "ideal mother and wife".¹³⁹ Such attitudes, though they helped the women to pursue their education also helped in strengthening gendered versions on education.

Given their economic and social supremacy, it was the higher castes that were able to make use of the opportunities thrown up by missionary education. Prior to the missionary and other western interventions, the

¹³⁷ Ibid, P.136.

¹³⁸ *Vidhya Vinodhini*, (bimonthly) V. XIII, No 6, Thrissur, 1902, P. 321.

¹³⁹ Ibid, V. 1, No. 1, 1901, P. 2.

Brahmins treated the study of English as a sin; even if death were to befall, an alien language would not be studied. But in the changed context it was among them that the progress in English language was at its peak.¹⁴⁰ The *Nairs* were able to use the education provided by the missionaries through a network of educational institutions created throughout the state. The critique of the cultural practices prevalent among the traditional elite was both disguised and deliberate. While the critiquing was an inevitable consequence of the interaction of the western culture on the native society, it was also a deliberate intervention, made by the missionaries aimed at bringing to their fold the dominant sections of Travancore. They reasoned that a critique on the cultural practices of the *Nairs* would make them accept the superiority of missionary logic, culture, religion and eventually accept the colonial supremacy. The missionary endeavours were all done with a view to create a new model and an identity for the Nair women so as to enable the process of religious conversion. Though the Nairs and the others in the upper

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1901, P. 2.

strata of the Hindu society used education as a means to acquire the new opportunities in the new era of change, they did not encourage the idea of conversion to Christianity. This was because they had less to gain in terms of social respectability nor did the idea of equality sound good to their ears. Also, the fear of getting ostracised in a highly ritualised society was not something that the high caste Hindus wished for. The *Nair* community in the long run got rid of the practices of *Sambandham*, of joint family system, etc., and increasingly used education as a means to create a new identity. On the one hand it intended to create “the good mothers” and “good wives”; on the other hand such perceptions strengthened patriarchal norms within the community.

The new educational system provided by the missionaries helped the dominant elites in redefining their gender norms that were in existence in the Traditional social system. Western education in Travancore may be viewed

“as a social process of maintaining the homeostasis as an instrument of the

ideologisation and of transmitting and controlling knowledge in a manner consistent with the maintenance of the Socio-political order.”¹⁴¹

In its attempt at preserving the socio political order “the ideological apparatus of the state played a crucial role by actively intervening to reorder the natives. The re-ordering of the intellectual and cultural domain of the natives mainly occurred among the upper states of the society.¹⁴² This redefining underlined the cultural hegemony which the western knowledge acquired in the traditional society.

The cultural critique was received differently by different communities. The Muslims were more specific in their opposition towards the western intervention. The bounds of their religious structure were strong; when missionary criticism arose, they posed a strong opposition to it. The Kerala Muslim Directory quotes.

¹⁴¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Development of Women's Education in India: A collection of Documents*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, P. XXIII.

¹⁴² Pierre Bourdieu & Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London: Sage Publishers, 1970. “In any given social formation the cultural arbitrary which the power relations between the groups or classes making up the social formations put into the dominant position within the system of cultural arbitraries is the one which most fully, though always indirectly express the objective interests of the dominant groups or classes.”

“During those times, the missionaries in Kerala had unleashed thorough criticism against Islam and the prophet. This organized attack occurred during the late nineteenth century, when Makthi Thangal through speeches, pamphlets and articles opposed the missionary criticism.”¹⁴³

The bitter experiences of missionaries in their encounter with the Muslims in the realm of educational intervention are well evident from the article that appeared in the *Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record* dated March 1905, The Missionary quotes

“.....Mr. Bowles was kind enough to send from Kunnamangalam, the evangelist Mr. C. A. John and the writer of this article to open the school in January 1900... with a sum of Rs. 40, locally subscribed. Kunhenmayan, a rich Musalman merchant of the place and a well wisher of the school, undertook the task of putting up the shed... The first girls who joined were the three children of the aforementioned Mussalman. The Mohammedans or *Mappillas* of Malabar are opposed to educating their children especially to girls, and are generally suspicious of Mission

¹⁴³ C.K. Kareem, *Kerala Muslim Charithram – (Directory)*, Edappally, Chaithram Publications, 1997, P.57.

work. He was greatly laughed at by their own people for sending his daughter to the school. He wife, when ill, used to say that her illness was owing to the wrath of the *Nebi*, on account of her children being sent to a *Padri* School.. *The Madras Christian Patriot* of the 28th November, 1903 remarked that this was the first instance of Mohammedan Girls appearing for a public examination from a mission school in Malabar, Travancore and Cochin. It is a matter of great encouragement to the well wishers of mission schools to hear that these non-Christian girls met in the school an hour before the examination and asked their teachers for god's blessings for them. This clearly shows what impression are made in the young hearts by the lessons taught about prayer in mission school; 'Cast they bread upon the waters; for thought shall find it after many days'."144

The Muslims were quite suspicious of Missionary education *Aftab-i-Dhakamm* wrote that

"Versus in praise of Jesus Christ are hung up on the walls of each room of the Mission Mohammedan Girl's School. The missionaries have created a *Zenana* Mission for educating

¹⁴⁴ *Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, Vol. XV, No. 2, March 1905. P. 55.

Pardha Ladies, without being asked and teach sewing and needle work, and when their intimacy increases, they give up teaching and commence their real work.”¹⁴⁵

The new form of education did not spread rapidly among the Muslims. *Mahilaratnam*, a Women’s Journal Wrote in 1916.

“Mohammedan Usman from *Varkala* has written in the *Malayala Manorama* daily, that among Muslim women, the proportion of whom, who can read and write is less than one by thousand... among the total of one Lakh Muslim women in the State, it is the girl from *Amaravila*, who is presently studying in the Vth standard in the Vernacular Schools, is the person who has acquired the highest education.”¹⁴⁶

The re-formation of the native Christian religious structure with the onslaught of Western ideas and institutions of education provided a picture of rapid transformation and increasing affinity with the west. The Missionaries entered Travancore society through their

¹⁴⁵ *Aftab-I-Dhakkam*, Selections from the Native Press, January, 1901, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

¹⁴⁶ *Mahilaratnam* (bimonthly) Chengannur, 1916, Vol. 1, No. 1. P. 4.

interaction with the native Christians. Much of their activities were confined to the areas of Syrian Christian dominance. As in their relationship with the higher castes of the Hindu society, the Missionaries tried to bring to their fold the traditional elites within the Christians. Through their interactions with the native Christians, they created the idea of what constituted the “true Christian” and an attempt was made at redefining the Bible. The Syrian Christians were perturbed by the criticisms leveled against their faith and so as to prevent an erosion of the faith, started their own schools and urged the Syrians to send their children to them.

“The Roman Catholics who had hitherto been watching the progress of the Mission School became envious and tried to dissuade the people from either sending their pupils to the Mission school or from helping the Mission in any way. When this attempt of them having failed they too started the same standard class and prevented the boys of the board primary school, which was located in a building belonging to their church, from joining the Mission school.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ *Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, Vol. XV, No. 2, March 1905. P. 55.

The Conflict between the Missionaries and that of the Syrians deepened when the Protestant Missionaries tried to bring the Syrians within its fold. The conflict of interests between the Protestants and the Syrian Catholics is evident and clear from the petition filed by the *Vicar* of Mar Thoma Church, *Kothamangalam* stating that,

“the inhabitants of the place except its *Roman Catholics* are against the conversion of the Local Lower Grade English School as a Grant-in-Aid School. The *Roman Catholics* who are never anxious to convert the school into an aided institution, will as things at present stand get complete control over the management and will introduce “their own views in the conduct of the school without any voice to the public. The Public in general have contributed generously for the construction of the school building and a local *Namboodiri* has given a site on the understanding that it will be a purely Government institution. He thus prays on behalf of the Church (Jacobite) that the school be conducted as a government school.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ *Education files*, Government of Travancore, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthpuram, File No. 1734 of 1921. B-120, Petition submitted by the Vicar of Marthoma Church of Kothamangalam against the Handling over of the local school to the Roman Catholic Management.

This conflict of interests as far as education was concerned was not limited to the missionaries and the Syrian Christians alone. In fact, the conflict was evident between the various denominations of the Christian faith. This conflict and mobilisation was aimed at keeping together the adherents of each of these sections. And this was perceived as the means towards this end. Dr. Jerome, the Bishop of *Quilon* reminded the parish priests of the Diocese that,

“the Catholic schools should take care of the education of the Catholic children. Without the written permission of the Bishop, no Catholic student should be allowed to take admission in non-catholic schools or be allowed to stay in non-catholic boardings. Those children who study in non catholic schools and their parents who do not abide by the words of the Parish priest or the church would be prevented from receiving the holy Sacraments.”¹⁴⁹

The Christians, irrespective of their denominations, saw education as a natural right and deemed that the coherence of their community was possible only by

¹⁴⁹ *Records of the Dioceses of Quilon*, Curriilar Orders, Letter written by the Bishop of Quilon various parishes on 12th September, 1945.

bringing the students within the paradigms of its religious instruction. The letter further quotes;

“they (Catholic students) should not limit their studies in worldly knowledge instead, they should concentrate on Catechism or religious instruction.”¹⁵⁰

In an earlier instance, on 4th January 1913, a confidential letter was addressed by the Bishop of Quilon to various Parishes,

“(1) to look into the number of children (Catholic boys and girl) attending non-catholic schools (2) How many of them attend (a) Government schools (b) Pagan Schools (3) How many of them did this without permission and whether in each case, the Rev Vicar had thrice administered the parents of the said order”.¹⁵¹

This was an attempt at bringing to their fold the catholic children and to educate them as ‘true Christians’. The church declared unequivocally that

“the Church and the Catholic parents have the right and duty to see the Catholic education of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, P. 1-9.

¹⁵¹ *Records of the Diocese of Quilon*, Currillar Orders, File No. 6515/ 45, dated 4th January 1913, letter written from Dr.. Alosyious Maria Benziger, Bishop of Quilon to various parish priests.”

children and Youth and no power on earth may deprive the church or the parents, of their inalienable and essential right and duty. Therefore, that even at a great sacrifice on your part and our own, our parish schools are opened, conducted and maintained. It is not for the vain prestige of having schools under Catholic management that we struggle so hard to have our own schools where ever possible, but our children from their early infancy may be taught catechism and be brought up, as far as it is allowed to us, under catholic influence and atmosphere.”¹⁵²

As a part of this programe, the education for Christian women was an attempt at the creation of a definite gender differentiation within the family. Mary the mother of Christ became the model for Christian women to follow; modesty chastity, piety, obedience etc., were enunciated to be the qualities of Christian women.

Dress codes, behavioural practices and manners that were put forward by the missionaries were enshrined as a universal code for all Christian women to follow. This

¹⁵² *Ibid*, Circular addressed by the Bishop of Quilon to various Parish priests on 28th August 1941.

concept of the 'Christian wife' and 'Christian mother' was constituted through the imparting of the new knowledge through the network of schools under their control. All denominations among the Christians started their own schools much in tune with that of the missionaries. Schools for them meant centers for the creation of the Christian family and the community,

“A wife is supposed to voice her husband’s opinion at all times, and it is a sure sign of strength of the conjugal bond, a woman argues to strengthen her husband’s sentiments even under dispute.”¹⁵³

The Syrian Christians who were following the same socio-cultural practices as that of the native elites in the society were perturbed at the critique of their faith.

They started their own schools as a means for giving an identity to their adherents. They were of the view that the highest knowledge that a Christian woman needed to acquire was the edicts of Christian learning. Simoni Syriac, the president of the women’s wing of the *All Kerala Catholic Association*, argues that

¹⁵³ Malayala Manorama Daily, dated 2nd July, 1948.

“higher education for women is futile, they are unable to study alike men based on a fixed syllabi. Hence there is a need to bring changes in the Syllabi of the high schools...to her, schools should be opened that gives importance to family values...though a women is unable to do hard jobs, like participating in the political process, etc., she can do lighter jobs such as weaving and also household jobs. Above all women can guide her husband in his daily affairs.”¹⁵⁴

They closely guarded their right to education as the protection of their faith. Also Christian education meant the creation and reorientation of the gender relations.

“If a child does not understand his/her creator and is not aware of the responsibilities towards him and the way to lead a truthful life, then what does it matter even if he has vast knowledge of worldly matters”.¹⁵⁵

stated Justice Joseph Thaliath, the president of The *All Kerala Catholic Congress (AKCC)*. Attempts were consistently made to prevent the adherents from joining schools run by the government, private schools or even

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 30th June 1948.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, dated 30th June, 1948.

that of the Protestant missions or other Christian denominations. Punishments were meted out to those parishioners who had joined schools that belonged to other denominations.

A letter written by Fr. Benedict, Administrator General of the Bishop's House to the Rev. Fr of Kallada Parish on the 30th July 1933 reveals this strict antipathy:

“...We regret to know that the said Domic is attending the protestant residential school at Shasthamkotta; to stay in a Protestant school is not only regrettable, but also a very wrong thing, which we cannot allow, or tolerate.”¹⁵⁶

Reconstituting the Christian women's identity meant reconstituting Christian identity, which became increasingly separated from the traditional society and culture. Creating a Christian woman on the model of the mother of Christ in effect meant the development of the ideas of patriarchy both in family and in society. A consistent attempt was made by the authorities of the church to regulate the life and character of its women folk.

¹⁵⁶ *Circular addressed by the Bishop of Quilon to the Parish Priest of Kallada, on 28th August 1941.*

“Amongst the great scandals of our age that causes great harm to the souls, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, immodesty in feminine dress certainly holds a prominent place. Though the Christian virtues of modesty is an ornament to both men and women, yet in a special manner it is a characteristic feature of the womanhood.”¹⁵⁷

in enforcing its perceptions on women and in strengthening the institutions of patriarchy, the church defined morality, manners and behaviour of the women and enunciated their perceptions through the network of educational institutions which they had in their command. Through a series of punishments such as the denial, postponements of the sacraments etc; the church controlled the ‘erring folk’. There were sharp differences as far as the punishments meted out to men and women for similar crimes. This was the result of the gendered versions that the church had internalised within their structure. The correspondence that took place between the Vicar

¹⁵⁷ *Circular addressed by the Bishop of Quilon to the Parish Priest of various Churches on 5-12-58, titled, Mary like Fashions or Christian Modesty in feminine dress. “A dress cannot be called ‘decent’, which is cut deeper than two fingers beneath under the pit of the throat; which does not cover the arms at least to the elbows and scarcely reaches a bit beyond the knees”.*

General of the Diocese of Quilon and the parish priest of the church of Kallada (mentioned earlier) is a testimony to this fact.¹⁵⁸

Women's education thus was a means for each of the religious and caste communities towards the process of community building. Each community vied with each other to glorify the role of their women within the household, subservient to her husband. This was a period when this consciousness manifested itself in creating their identity as different from other communities. The colonial administration's policy of non-interference and their attempt at supporting each of these communities strengthened these communal consciousnesses. As religious instruction was a cardinal aspect of missionary education, the dominant sections of the Hindu society withdrew their children from these schools. The attempt of

¹⁵⁸ *Circular addressed by the Bishop of Quilon to the Parish Priest of Kallada,* regarding love and elopement of a girl in the Parish, the circular quotes. "As Elia admits of having done wrong thing and being carrying since four months, she deserves a public punishment in reparation of the scandal she has given, being the case quite public. Your Rev. will therefore inform Elia that according to our regulation she has to carry the cross for one Sunday and after having fulfilled the penance we shall then examine the case here.

the colonial administration to bring Muslim women to new forms of education was faced with much resistance.

The reason cited by the residents of *Alleppey* for the opening of a Lower grade Secondary School for girls at *Alleppey* denotes the strength of the consciousness of individual communities as well the fact that these identities were separated from the idea of the society as a whole. The Director of Public institution of Travancore wrote thus to the Chief Secretary

“...it may be well argued that the present aided lower grade secondary school for girls which is managed by the Catholics, is open to Hindus and is closer to them than the site now under consideration, but the fact remains that they ask for a school of their own and are adverse from sending their girls to the existing schools alleging that the girls will have to pass through Mohammedan quarters etc., I think we should comply with their request, especially as their admission in any number to be existing aided school would necessitate a large extension if not

the complete rebuilding of that school which would have to be met from government funds”¹⁵⁹.

The history of women’s education is the history of social acceleration and consolidation; the lower castes in their process of social formation while accepting the the practices of the elites in terms of dress, manners, customs and in internalizing the newly emerging ideal of Women, were however critical of the ‘loose morals’ of the Nairs¹⁶⁰

Thus the strength of each community was perceived to be one in which, they were the protector of the feminine identity of their women.

The literary activities of these times also had expressions of these perceptions on women. *Indulekha*, named after the central Character and one of the oldest novels in Malayalam written by O. Chandhumenon and Bhavathrathan Namboodiri’s “*Aphantae Maghal*” (daughter

¹⁵⁹ Letter written from the DPI to the Chief Secretary regarding the opening of a lower Grade Secondary School for Girls at Alleppy on 13th March 1915.

¹⁶⁰ *Sahodharan* (monthly), Kodungalloor, 1918, V. 1, No. 2.

of Aphan) depicts the cultural transformation that was occurring in *Namboodiri* and *Nair* households.¹⁶¹ These novels published in the late nineteenth and in the early twentieth century respectively, brings to light the ideological transformations that were occurring in the upper strata of Travancore society. It expresses the concerns as well as the tensions that the social transformations gave rise to.¹⁶² Both the central characters of these novels *Indulekha* and *Ittichiri* are educated women who had internalized the new process of cultural transformation. They gained strength from the new form of education. While *Indulekha* symbolises the hegemony of the emerging culture over the traditional system¹⁶³, *Ittichiri's* love with *Madhu* depicts the fragility of the traditional system within the Brahmin household. Love and the individual decision as far as marriage was concerned points out the dynamics of social change through education Chandhu Menon's account reflects how a new

¹⁶¹ Leela Kumari, M. '*Sthree Sankalpam Malayala Novelil*', Kottayam, DC Books, 2000, P. 72,

¹⁶² K.N. Panikkar, *Culture Ideology and Hegemony : Intellectual and social consciousness in colonial India*, New Delhi, Tulika, 1996, P.. 123.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, P. 124.

literary taste and through that a new cultural taste was developing among the native intelligentsia. The love story of the novel is only the skeleton. The flesh is provided by the contending cultural sensibilities which were being brought into the colonial society of Malabar. Menon remarks regarding the object of writing the novel.

“One of my object in writing this book is to illustrate how a young *Malayali* woman, possessing, in addition to her natural charms and intellectual culture, a knowledge of the English language would conduct herself in matters of supreme interest to her, such as choosing of a partner in life, I had thought it necessary that my Indulekha should be conversant with the richest language of the world”.¹⁶⁴

Though the novel depicts the strength of education and the deep rooted changes that had occurred in the gender relations in the *Nair* household, it also signifies the fears about the changes that such an education was likely

¹⁶⁴ Meenakshi Mukherji, *Realism and Reality : Novel and society in India*, Delhi, OUP, 1994, P. 79.

to bring about in the household. The description of Chandu Menon goes as follows

“I am convinced now that women who have learnt English are beyond our comprehension altogether. There’s Panchu Menon, who isn’t afraid of anyone in the wide world, but he shivers and shakes before this chit of a grand daughter of his”¹⁶⁵.

This apprehension that Tradition and the associated institutions of Patriarchy would be completely subdued by the new wave of change was an attempt made to provide a cultural opportunity. *Indulekha* is not a realistic character by the novel’s own admission.

“my object is to write a novel after the English fashion, and it is evident that no *Malayalee* Lady can fill the role of the heroine of such a story. My *Indulekha* is not an ordinary Lady.”¹⁶⁶

To conclude, women’s education was a means through which all major sections of the Travancore society tried to redefine and reconstitute the identity of their women thereby constructing a new character for their

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, P. 79.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, P. 8.

society. This was a result of the thorough critiquing of the native cultural practices of the upper sections of the society. Also it was based on the belief that a criticism of the behaviours and manners prevalent among them would provide an alternative paradigm for women's identity from within a 'superior' western knowledge. While the press and other public platforms became means through which the new woman's identity could be imparted' the new curricula of girl's schools structured this new identity. The new identity which they sought to create emanated from the interaction of the traditional culture with the European one. Women's identity among the *Nairs* underwent a rapid transformation that is, from an object of sex, being part of a hierarchical social relationship to that of a motherly figure. The spread of women's education meant the spread of the newly constructed mother image. The responses of different communities were different to the new form of education. But the spread of education meant the spread and construction of community consciousness and identity among these sections.

CONCLUSION

Women's education in the formal sense of the term was inseparable from the Western presence in Travancore. It was the wide spread activities of missionaries that popularised the idea of education for women. The administrative modernization that occurred in Travancore led to a strong presence of British bureaucrats in the governance of the state that led to the organizing of the pedagogy for women on official lines. At the same time indigenous society, particularly the traditional elite took an active part in shaping the norms of women's education, since the role attributed to women in the established indigenous institutions, specially the family and the expectations from education of women were fundamentally shaped by the indigenous elite's mindset. Thus the history we have looked at is the story of the negotiation between these external and indigenous elements, which interacted in course of the emergence of women's education in Travancore in 'modern' times.

The first chapter sought to address how the question of education for women during the period under study led

to the negotiation between the Western ideas and that of the indigenous society on a discourse that centered around women's position. Education for women meant the redefining of the gender relations and cultural practices aimed at creating new identity for women. A critical discourse developed in the 19th century centering around the cultural practice of *Sambandham* prevalent among the Nairs. Irrespective of the nature and extent of such a practice the missionaries and the Westerners present in the society tended to emphasise the idea that the native society lacked in morality and led a promiscuous life.

As a byproduct of this criticism missionary education sought to change the role of women in the family and in the society, and to reorient her identity towards the 'ideal mother' and 'chaste wife'. While missionary education was aimed ultimately at conversion to Christianity, its method imparted a whole lot of gestures and behaviour intended to create an ideal separated from the stigma of the traditional society with "loose morals".

As the missionary and the European presence in the administration had shared a common cultural experience

of the West, the policies pursued by the state through its official machinery as well as the effective social intervention made by the missionaries through their schools, in some respects shared a perception as far as women and her position in Travancore was concerned. However, while the princely state and helped in aiding in the pursuance of women's education on "modern" lines through the official machinery, the religious aspect of the missionary education became increasingly a cause of conflict. Since the princely state deemed itself to be the protector of the interests of the native society as perceived by the indigenous elite, in course of time as the colonial administration distanced itself from the evangelical activities of the missionaries. The state engaged itself in reducing the missionarie's influence in the society as well as in the system of education.

The second chapter is an attempt to trace the shifts in power relations, the transformation of gender perceptions and the subsequent alterations that were witnessed in the pedagogy for women. An attempt is made in the chapter to trace the relationship between women's

education and transformation in the perceptions and identity for women during the period. The pedagogy reflected the attitude as far as the women's position is concerned: eg. the changing content of the course structure is reflective of the changing perception of women's position in society.. The revised curricula of 1923, questioned the nature and practice a women's education the missionaries tried to pursue. The practical training so as to make girl child proper wives and mothers was questioned. The government sought to replace those syllabus as drawing, sewing etc. with literary subjects. The attempt of the missionaries to be an authority that imparted knowledge and the natives as those who received it was widely questioned. Drastical shift in the syllabi marked the shifts in power relations and the reduction of the socio-cultural space of the missionaries and the hegemony of the Western ideas. As the cultural contradictions with the missionary objectives became clear, children were withdrawn from schools where Christian religious instruction became common. The government tried to curtail the religious instructions in the missions

schools through various restrictions associated with the system of grant-in-aid, as most of the mission schools were functioning with aid from the government.

The third chapter attempts to trace the identity formation among different caste and religious communities in Travancore. The chapter addresses the question how different sections of society attempted to reorient the character of the communities and from the new perception on women that was constituted. The new education imparted to women was part of an attempt by different sections of the society towards identity formation of their respective communities. The native elites, used the new educational system and the opportunities thrown open by it to create a new identity for their women. The practice of *Sambandham* was dislodged as it was so demanded by a new moral sense and norms of "family life". Education for women did not necessarily mean throwing out patriarchal norms. The Syrian Christian, the Latin Christians, the Ezhavas and many section of the society regulated the lives and identity of their women and also reinstated patriarchal norms within their respective communities. All sections

used the discourse that centred around women's education in strengthening patriarchal norms within family and to reinstate the norms of chastity for women. Thus the development of the mother image and that of a chaste wife, that developed in the critical discourse on *Sambandham*, was used by all communities in framing the perception and identity for the women. There were certain differences as far as identity formation among the lower communities in Travancore was concerned compared to elsewhere. In Travancore the lower castes even while accepting the practices of the elites in terms of dress, manners and customs and in internalizing the newly emerging ideal on women were however critical of the 'loose morals' of Nair women. The discourse on Women among these lower castes was part of the process of identity formation and social acceleration. Thus the entire discourse of women's education was central to the negotiations taking place between tradition and new norms and social aspirations in different communities.

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