Statistical index shows that the women of Kerala are distinct from that of other states in their outstanding gains in the fields of education and health. This is the one of the few states where mass literacy has been achieved for both men and women. Literacy among adolescent girls was almost universal from 1986-87\(^1\). The rate of literacy among persons in the state at the age level of 7 years and above is more than 90 per cent in the 1991 census report. Adult Literacy rate in 2001 among females is 87.9% and that of men 94.2 against the national average of 54.2 and 75.8\(^2\). Despite all these data in the development index, gender discrimination of women persists in almost all fields. Low rate of work participation among women, very high rate of unemployment, low representation of women in elected bodies both at the state level (public space) and at the community level (private, religious space) is noticed. Social practices such as dowry, that promote gender inequality still prevails. Dowry related deaths, sexual harassment and increased crimes against women are rampant. The situation


\(^2\) Census report of 2001, Series 33, Kerala, see chapter 7, Gender discrimination and women of Kerala for details.
of the Syrian Christian women who were the pioneers to improve their position in the social space is not different. This paradoxical situation needs detailed study.

It is well known fact that the role of women’s agency is crucial in the social and economic advancement of a society. Female literacy and education are important determinants of child survival, general health and hygiene. Female education determines further progress in other demographic and health indicators in life expectancy at birth, the birth and death rate, the infant mortality rate, and general morbidity. Kerala’s achievement in the field of health would have been impossible without female literacy and without an enlightened social attitude of both women and men towards the survival of girl children and women. Female literacy ensures next generations literacy, literate mothers generally have literate children.

Gender differences are located in a large socio-cultural whole and evolved through various historical processes over centuries. The identity and disposition of women as well as men is the sum total of all these

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3 In the Indian Censuses the Syrian Christians are defined as those who follow the ‘Syrian Rite’ in their religious services. At present the Syrian Christians of Kerala consists of a number of denominations: The Romo Syrians (those who became Roman Catholics under the Portuguese influence), the Jacobite Syrians, the Orthodox Syrians (who adhere to St. Thomas lineage) and the Syrian Orthodox who follow St. Peter’s lineage, the Mar Thoma Syrians and the Evangelical church (the group of Syrians who initiated reformation process under the influence of C.M.S. Missionaries), and Anglican Syrians (those belonging to the C.S.I and C.N.I). The Syrians who joined the Pentecostal churches do not deny their Syrian heritage. There are interdenominational marriages between these groups. In this work mainly the Syrians of St. Thomas lineage is taken into account. They are distributed mainly in central Travancore area, consisting of Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, and Pathanamthitta.
phenomena. This study is an attempt to trace the space accorded to women in various social formations in general and of Syrian Christian women in particular by analyzing the transition of the social space of women over centuries. This study also looks through whether the advancement in the educational and public services during modernization helped them to secure a position in the social space and able to induce changes in the social space.

**Historical Backdrop: A Brief Account**

Tracing the history right from the beginning, the study is divided into various periods of transition in the social structure.

**a. Traditional period**

In Traditional Period Malabar (Keralam, the Travancore Cochin and Malabar regions, as known in the past) was part of *Tamilakam*. Brahmin migration intensified to this part only after 438 AD. Before this period one can trace a tribal kind of confederation. Syrian Christians like Jews were merchant communities mainly settled in and around seaports of the region. Muziriz in Kodungaloor was one of the early settlements of the Syrian Christian community. The history of Ceraman Perumal shows that the tribal chieftain were open to all people and provided land for their settlement as well as for worshipping places. Syrian Christian community

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4 The period before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 is considered as the traditional period.
resided in the church premises. Men were engaged in trade matters as well as the matters of faith and practices of the community. It may be safely assumed that a joint family system was the norm among the Syrian Christians in those days\(^5\). Women were engaged in domestic affairs of the family.

After AD 438 Brahmin migration intensified to Keralam. This led to a process of Brahminization of Kerala society, first creating a temple centered agricultural society. This new social formation was hierarchical in nature by establishing caste laws for the governance of different communities in a hierarchical order. In the caste society Brahmins were at the top of the caste social body and Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Sudras at a lower social order and all others, adivasis and tribals outcastes. Though such strict division of labour did not exist here, in the process of Brahminization their hierarchical structure was imposed on Kerala society. Some local chieftains were promoted to Kshatriya status by the Brahmin priests. Syrian Christians and later Muslims played the role of traders and hence got the status of the Vysyas. In the evolving social formation, Brahmins possessed symbolic capital\(^6\) through cultural capital (as priests

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\(^6\) The term ‘capital’ was used by Pierre Bourdieu to express various resources in the social body that have an exchange value. For him economic capital was only one of the resources. He recognized cultural (form of acquired knowledge), symbolic (status, prestige etc.), social (institutionalized relations) capitals as resources having exchange value in the social formation. For elaboration of this concept see the section on Theoretical background below.
and legitimisers of rules and regulations in the caste body) and economic capital (as grants of landed property as reward for their services). The space brahminisation created was the caste social space and the practices were brahminical. In Kerala, the practices were distinct to avoid the partition of family property. The dispositions it allowed to communities and symbolic capital attributed to Brahmins with their cultural capital, created a rigid society restricting interaction within the caste body and prohibiting interaction between communities within the caste body and those who have excluded from that. Though the Syrian Christians were in with the caste hierarchy, with an implied status of the Vysyas due to their traditional occupation, they were not integrated into the caste society. Moreover the ritual status provided by different religious and communitarian practices and social privileges granted by previous rulers were able to retain their distinct position in the evolving space. Later when Muslims got upper hand in international trade, the Syrian Christians gradually turned their attention to agricultural activity, which was within the strongholds of caste hierarchy. This is due to the fact that even before the establishment of Brahmin supremacy, the Syrian Christians had land rights by the copper plate grants, and grants by the kings for their services, military, as well as trade. They were able to keep up their distinct disposition due to their different religious and communitarian practices in the caste society.
The rigid caste rules, practice of purity and pollution, the absence of women in the tantric priest craft almost imperceptibly enhanced the patriarchal values among Syrian Christians. Their own distinct practices strengthened the patriarchal structure of the community. The agricultural land came under the ownership of temples and Brahmins (called Devasvaoms and Brahmasvaoms). The Syrian Christians continued their trading activities, with the support of the local rulers. Some of them got cultivation right as 'kudiyans'. The trading as well as agricultural activity require masculine power and ritual status offered only to male child in religious activities gave much preference to male child in the Syrian Christian families also. At that time women were occupied with nurturing of children as well as household matters. The interknitted traditions and understanding of persons as interrelated entities negated the individuation process and constituted human as corporate entities of the caste where members belong. This was a society where autonomy - participation measures in terms of decision-making were absent. Thus with the social space of caste society creativity of women were thought only in terms of child care and domestic activities of family. They may have some role in the corporate worship, for their presence was noted by Portuguese historians.
The arrival of the Portuguese into the caste society opened a new phase to Syrian Christians. Though the Portuguese intended to use the native Syrians on the basis of same religion for their own trading interest by bringing the ‘nazrani Christians’ (as they were known before the arrival

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8 The synod in the strict sense was not a synod at all but a ‘potuyogam’ or general assembly of the St. Thomas Christians and it was the consolidation of the Portuguese attempts to bring the native Christians under their domination. Udayamperoor (renamed as ‘Diamper’ by the Portuguese) instead of Angamali, the headquarters of the diocese was selected because it was near to Cochin, Portuguese naval base and the people of this church supported the archdeacon.

of the Portuguese) in the fold of the Roman Catholic Church. A form of western Christianity was introduced with new power relations and hierarchical organizational structure and strategies of domination. The Synod of Udayamperoor in June 1599 was the culmination of their attempts to replace the customs and practices of the native Christians and to bring these people under their domain in the name of Christianity. The majority of the St. Thomas Christians, even those who belong to the Roman Catholic Church as well as many historians consider the synod of Udayamperoor as an encroachment by the western colonialists on the religious and social life of the native Christians. The Syrian Christians were part and parcel of the existing social formation with distinct caste status, their religious and social practices evolved within the caste space. Portuguese initiated the process of constituting an identity of the Nazrani Christian group differentiating it from the caste hierarchy. This was not merely as a reaction to Portuguese activity but as an awareness of an identity as Christians with distinct lineage – the St. Thomas tradition. The religious practices were replaced by that of the Roman Catholic Church through several decrees. Some of these acts and decrees were related to their social practices. A major section of the Syrian Christians were under the catholic fold for about 55 years, from 1599 to 1653. A portion of them resisted the Portuguese endeavour and retreated to the mountain regions. The resistance gained strength due to various atrocities of the Portuguese.
and resulted in the division of the Syrians into two groups with the Coonen Cross Oath in 1653. The Portuguese arrival sowed the seeds among the local Christians, especially who were not in the catholic fold to think in terms of an indigenous identity by emphasizing the existing St. Thomas tradition and by restructuring their churches. With the Coonen Cross oath the nazranis formally opened the throne of Mar Thoma, a succession genealogy tracing back to Apostle St. Thomas and connecting themselves with the near Eastern Syrian Christian center of Antioch by accepting St. James Liturgy for their communion services.

The arrival of Portuguese also caused some reforms in the Syrian Christian community as a whole. The introduction of individuation process by the Portuguese brought the women also to the forefront of attention. Attempts were made to curb the practice such as child marriage, which negate this process, through some decrees of synod of Udayamperoor. Similarly new regulations were introduced to ensure the right of girls in their parental property.

c. British Period

The arrival of East India Company in the seventeenth century and the later developments are significant for this study. The tenure of Marthanda Varma, the ruler of Venatu from 1729-1758) helped the formation of Travancore as a centralized monarchy. He entered into a pact with East India Company in 1723 and it was renewed by his successor in 1795.
These pacts were mainly to suppress the insurgence of Nair warriors and to resist the attack of Hyder Ali and later Tippu sultan, the rulers of Mysore Kingdom. These agreements paved the way for British interference in the internal administration of Travancore in 19th century. A British Resident was appointed from 1800 onwards. Col. Munro became the resident in 1810 and later the Diwan of Travancore and Cochin. He remodeled the administrative system largely on the British style of Secretarial system, bringing order and regularity in the administration. He established civil courts with district procedures, but following Brahminical laws in the beginning. Several vexatious taxes were abolished. The purchase and sales of slaves were banned by a Royal proclamation in 1812, although the total abolition of slavery and their enfranchisement was enforced in 1855, partly replacing the caste-oriented system. This process of change was initiated by the relentless work of the Christian missionaries.

Another major development was the introduction of English education. Missionaries started Malayalam as well as English schools with ample support from the government. Practice of modern medicine was initiated during this period with the support of the then Travancore government. The missionary societies who came to Travancore during this period were London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) and Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), both from England. Basal Mission from Germany and the Salvation Army. L.M.S. worked in the southern part, C.M.S. in central
region and Basal Mission in Malabar. These agencies concentrated on the struggles against caste atrocities. Basal Mission developed small-scale industries like tiles and wood articles in the Malabar area. Coffee cultivation was started during this time. The development of coffee, tea and rubber plantation providing jobs for many irrespective of castes breaking the division of labour according to the caste status. The educated youth also were able to find jobs in these plantations.

The take over of Indian administration by Queen Victoria in 1858 by assuring equal rights to all subjects gave the impetus to struggle towards a civil society in Travancore. Movements developed within almost all religious communities, the Namboothiris, Nairs, Christians, Ezhavas, and Pulayas, to reform themselves with organizations with membership rules and constitutional procedures of governance.

In place of the caste space there emerged a public social space disposing the caste hierarchy and regarding all fellow subjects as equals in regard to government jobs, plantation works, admission to schools etc. Some got opportunities to pursue university education at the newly established presidency colleges in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay.

In the socialization process there occurred an individuation process giving more responsibility and freedom to individuals, which gradually

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helped to strive towards civil society. The Syrian Christian community whose aspiration being different from that of the brahminized communities took lead in the formation of a civil society to break the caste obligation and Brahminic caste laws.

In this process there evolved a new social space with different dispositions and there by a new habitus and naturally the role of women in the space also had to undergo change. But the progress was not consistent in later years. This study explores the reason for the same.

Review of Literature
Syrian Christian history was a history of the ecclesiastical struggle of the Syrian Christian community. There was no place for women in this. There is a conspicuous absence of women in the local historical accounts. However there are a few studies and books that mention the position of Syrian Christian women. The Slayer Slain was the first of this kind, written by Mrs. Richard Collins and published after her death in ‘Vidyā Samgraham’; the Kottayam College quarterly magazine from July 1864- April ’66 (later translated to Malayalam, ‘Ghathaka Vadham’). The main theme revolves around the education and conversion of the slaves in the background of a rich Syrian Christian family. The novel portrays the changes in the relationship between Syrian Christians and the lower caste people by the introduction of modern education and protestant ideology. It was written in a period in which the effect modern education was still confined to a small
segment of the population. The author’s protest against caste practices, untouchability, arranged marriage of boys and girls at an early age, dowry etc is reflected in the story. But she fails to assess the strong hold of caste practices. In fact it took almost a century for the changes to be expressed in the society.

*Parishkarappathi,* published in 1892, vividly pictures the onset of changes in the social and religious customs and practices of Syrian Christians due to the spread of modern ideology mainly through education. It upholds patriarchal values of the family. Prejudices against women, who inherit parental property in the absence of brothers is well reflected in the story. *The Anthropology of Syrian Christians of Kerala,* by L.K. Ananthakrishna Ayyar, published in 1926, gives a detailed account of the customs and practices, social as well as religious, of all denominations of Syrian Christians.

*Saints, Goddesses and Kings* of Susan Bayly (1989) is a study of Muslims and Christians in South Indian society 1700-1900. Its theme is religion as a source of change and dynamics in complex societies of Tamilnadu and Kerala. Chapters 7 and 8 devoted to the Syrian Christians (St Thomas Christians), describing the social and religious practices and the changes brought out by Portuguese and British intervention. Women do not come into focus in these studies also. Further the role of universal
modern education in bringing about social change has not been taken into account.

Susan Visvanathan’s book (1999), *The Christianity of Kerala: History, belief and ritual among the Yakoba*, is an attempt to understand the practice of Christianity in a small neighbourhood in Kottayam. She explores how Syrian Christians perceive the past to which they are inextricably bound by their identity. She points out that people were involved in the life of the church as though it were a legacy they had to safeguard indicating the importance of ecclesiastical affairs in the life of Syrians. She took special interest to record the experiences of women in the ecclesiastical affairs that was hitherto an unattended area. She correctly observes that the ‘private’ world of Christianity in Kerala related to its ethic and world-view, its ritual and ecclesiastical life with the norms of endogamy determining the level of contact and intimacy between individuals. Its ‘public’ life related to its political affiliation to Hindu kings, its acquiescence to Hindu norms of purity and pollution, its own status and rank consciousness, and its adherence to customs linked with food, language and culture. A total picture of the changes due to the impact of modernization does not come under the purview of this book.

With the passing of time and with the origin of new ecclesiastical segments as a result of reformation, new traditions were invented based on
the St. Thomas tradition. There was a break in the traditional habitus of women and some changes in the patriarchal structure. Since interdenominational marriages were common, the effect of education and reformation gradually diffused to the community in general. The changing social space of women is sought to be analysed in the context of the social and political evolution of the wider community as the former is embedded in the latter. This study is an attempt to fill the gap in the literature in the studies relating to the changing social space and the formation of new dispositions breaking the traditional habitus and the agencies responsible for that. For this the study has the following objectives.

**The objectives**

1. This study attempts to analyse the nature of social space accorded to women in a historical perspective and social context by the Syrian Christian community during modernization, by examining whether the social space available was really an outcome of a structural change, or a mere opening with in the existing social structure cleared during the adaptation of the community to the changing scenario.

2. It also intends to examine whether the well known access of the Syrian Christian women to the so called human development indicators or cultural capital, such as education, does have a direct effect in carving out a space of their own.
3. To study the position of women in the religious space and the real nature of religion that helps women to get access to modern institutions, even while restraining them in their conventional roles.

4. To examine the space available for women in the family, in influencing and directing the consciousness of the community and

5. To understand the dynamics of the elasticity of the social structure that while overtly allowing the players to make new moves, covertly keeps them under its fold.

**Methodology**

The study is partly ethnographic, eliciting data mainly through historical documents and field interviews. As a member of the Syrian Christian community I was able to carry on informal conversations with peoples of all walks of life and of all age groups. Before marriage I was a member of the C.S.I. church (Anglican), and married into the Mar Thoma church, and having close relatives belonging to both Orthodox and Jacobite churches, I had ample opportunities to observe the practices of these various denominations. This immensely helped me to collect first hand information. For most part of my life I was living in Kerala and my own experiences helped the study. I attempted to objectify my experiences as a woman and to reflect upon these, trying in the meantime to avoid any bias.
as far as possible. Apart from organized interviews I relied on these informal conversations for the material of the study.

From 1995 onwards I was working as coordinator of church oriented programmes of Joint Women’s Programme. In connection with this I conducted a number of workshops, seminars and study conferences for women and teenage girls, in association with T.M. A. M. Research and orientation center, in different places dealing current women issues\textsuperscript{11}.

I was member of the diocesan council of Kottayam Cochi Diocese of Mar Thoma church and had occasion to visit few churches in the remote areas. I was able to collect valuable data from all these interactions.

**Theoretical Framework**

Of all the social theories, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) has a conceptual framework to help this study to analytically comprehend the changing space of women and the formation of their dispositions or ‘habitus’.

Generally one can classify the existing social theories in two modes, (a) substantialist and (b) structural or relational. The substantialist mode says, “the activities and preferences specific to certain individuals or groups in a society at a certain moment as if they were substantial properties inscribed once and for all in a sort of biological or cultural

\textsuperscript{11} See appendix for details
Essentialism (biological and psycho-analytical) comes under this concept, which upholds the view that the differences between the sexes are innate and natural. Simone De Beauvoir questioned this, distinguishing the biological sex and the social creation of the 'eternal feminine. Her position is opposed to the existentialist phenomenology by way of its position that there is more to social life than the subjective consciousness of the actors. There is an objective social reality beyond the immediate interactional sphere and self-conscious awareness of individuals.

The other mode is structural-relational. Marxism and structuralism come under this category. Structures refer to the field of relationships within a society. Bourdieu's theory is against the objective presuppositions of the structuralist approach. His work is a debate about the relationship between structure and action and an engagement between systemic empirical work and reflexive theorizing. To make the structural, relational analysis more meaningful, after severe criticism against modern conceptions of subjectivism, objectivism, autonomy of individual and ideas of reason and progress and to overcome the dichotomies and contradictions in these concepts, Pierre Bourdieu presents a new set of concepts such as 'Social Space', 'Field', 'Habitus' and categories like 'social capital', 'cultural capital', 'economic capital' and 'symbolic capital'.

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Human beings exist in time and space. The word ‘space’ implies all the socio-cultural structures, interactions, and relations of agents of any social formation at any one time. Till this period the space was considered as an inactive entity with out any influence on the social processes. Pierre Bourdieu speaks of the social world as ‘space’ to describe the relations of social world, which is constructed as a set of properties that are active at anyone time. Here ‘space’ is not a mere context or setting for interaction as passive dimension that is determinate and unchanging. It is the co-ordination of agents and institutions in time and space involving practice. The notion of space contains in itself the principle of a relational understanding of the social world. It affirms that every ‘reality’ it designates resides in mutual exteriority of its composite elements. Individuals or groups exist and subsist in and through difference that is they occupy relative positions in a space of relations, which although invisible and always difficult to show empirically, is the most real reality and real principle of behaviour of individuals and groups.

In social space agents or groups are distributed according to the forms of power or ‘capital’ they possess. To him the social world comprises of various fields, according to the type of capital that is at stake. By ‘capital’ Bourdieu means the resources distributed through the social


body that have an exchange value in one or more of the various fields, which comprises the social world\textsuperscript{15}. Social relations within the space are based on the various ‘capital’ one has. The interaction and intervention in a social space is not equally valid for all but it is according to the capital acquired by the agents or groups. It is also related to the value system of the social formation at that particular span of time. The field of power is a space of the relations of force between the different kinds of capital or between the agents who possess a sufficient amount of one of the different kinds of capital to be in a position to dominate the corresponding field\textsuperscript{16}. The unequal power between various groups of people is due to the unequal distribution of resources. So in social practices all are not equal citizens as modernity envisaged. Social space is constructed in such a way that agents or groups are distributed in it according to their position in statistical distributions based mainly on the two principles of differentiation, economic capital and cultural capital. It follows that all agents are located in the space in such a way that the closer they are to one another in those two dimensions, the more they have in common; and the more remote they are from one another the less they have in common. Spatial distances on paper are equivalent to social distances. Agents are distributed in the first dimension according to the overall volume of the different kinds of capital they possess and in the second dimension according to the structure of the

\textsuperscript{15} Nick Crossley, "Habit, Identity and Desire", in The Social Body Sage publications, 2001

\textsuperscript{16} ibid, p 34.
capital, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their capital\textsuperscript{17}.

The 'capital' may act singularly or in accord with each other. The overall social space is demarcated into various fields according to the nature of the capital at stake. Capital is represented in four basic forms, Economic, Cultural, Social and Symbolic. Economic capital entails all income, savings and assets that have a monetary value, precise numerical value and a reified and independent existence in the form of money. It is a highly rationalized form of capital. It tends to serve as a model against which other forms of capital are compared and conceived\textsuperscript{18}.

Bourdieu defines 'Cultural capital' as a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with everything towards appreciation for, or a competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts. Culture is defined as the corporate social heritage of a community - the total body of material and spiritual artifacts produced and used by a community, systems or symbols, ideas, rituals, beliefs, aesthetic perceptions, and expressions, including art, music, dance, poetry and literature, distinctive form of behaviour, and social exchange, modes of family and social organization, mores and ethical norms, institutions of political and organization and so on. Cultural capital

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} Bourdieu, Practical..., Op. cit., p 6.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} ibid.}
denotes the exchange value of accumulated forms of culture within the social world, and is less rationalized than the economic capital\textsuperscript{19}. For example in educational system (field), the qualifications (one of the institutionalized form of this capital), can be made use of or 'cashed in' for employment offering monetary rewards. Bourdieu argues that the acquisition of educational qualifications, to some extent, is a conversion of inherited cultural capital from within the family. The symbolic capital broadly amounts to status or recognition and may have an objectified or institutionalized form. Symbolic capital refers to degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honours and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition\textsuperscript{20}. Various awards and prizes are measures of symbolic capital.

By social capital Bourdieu means the connections and net works of an agent which can be used to raise his position in the social space. “Social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual and group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition”\textsuperscript{21}.

\textsuperscript{20} Bourdieu, \textit{In other words}, Polity Press, 1990, p 22, 111.
Bourdieu uses the term ‘habitus’\textsuperscript{22} to denote the habitual nature and dispositions individuals and groups as well. ‘Habitus’ is an acquired system of generative schemes, objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted. Individual habitus refers to an ensemble of schemata of perception, thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking and acting that structures all the expressive verbal and practical manifestation and utterances of a person\textsuperscript{23}. The dispositions and generative classificatory schemes which are the essence of the habitus are embodied in real human beings, the principle embodied in this way, in manners dress, bearings etc are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness\textsuperscript{24}. An agent’s habitus is an active residue or sediment of their past experiences which functions within their present, shaping their perception, thought and action and thereby shaping social practice in a regular way. It consist in dispositions, schemas, forms of know how, and competence, all of which functions below the threshold of consciousness, shaping it in particular ways\textsuperscript{25}. These dispositions and forms of competence are acquired in

\textsuperscript{22} Habitus, a Latin word, refers to habitual or typical condition, state or appearance particularly of the body. Bourdieu retains the concept’s original meaning in the relationship between the body and the habitus.

\textsuperscript{23} Bourdieu, An outline to the theory of Practice, Stanford university Press, Stanford, 1977, pp 94., 78 Habitus has to be thought of as a modus operandi, “generative principles of regulated improvisations” which are called practice, and incorporated structures formed by the objective conditions of genesis .

\textsuperscript{24} Richard Jenkins, Bourdieu, p 66-79.

structured social contexts. Their acquisition amounts to an incorporation of social structures and practices\textsuperscript{26}.

Although the habitus is embodied in the individual, it is a social phenomenon as well. Habitus is that form of social construction that makes up all members of the society and is formulated in the individual as well as in the members of the social order together - the collective. In Bourdieu's words, "To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective is social, collective. Habitus is socialized subjectivity"\textsuperscript{27}.

The habitus is a shared body of dispositions, classificatory categories and generative schemes, and the outcome of "collective history". The habitus, the product of history produces individual and collective practices. These practices are in accordance with the scheme generated by history, but at the same time, it is not a cumulative collective wisdom of the group. The objective world in which the group exists and the objective environment (other people and things s experienced from the point of view of the individual members of the group), are the products of the past practices of this generation and previous generation\textsuperscript{28}.

Bourdieu defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring


\textsuperscript{27} Bourdieu and Wacquant, An Invitation....Op, Cit., p 126.

structures". The dispositions represented by the habitus are durable in that they last through out an agent's lifetime. In the same time, it is not eternal or unchangeable. The action of an external agency or change of circumstances can influence the habitus. Introduction of modern ideology in the traditional social formation of Kerala by Western agency can be cited as an example. The habitus is 'transposable' in the sense that it is capable of producing practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity. They are 'structured structures' because it incorporates the objective social conditions of their inculcation and existence. The habitus is a structuring structure through its ability to generate practices adjusted to specific situations.

History is objectified in two forms, one form being objectification in the human organism, history turned into human nature, as habitus, the other being objectification as institutions, works and social structure and the logic of action works by activating these two objectifications of history. "The habitus is the product of history produces individual and collective practices, and hence more history; in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The habitus is the site of internalization of reality and the externalization of internality". In other words, objective conditions produce habitus and habitus is adjusted to objective conditions and reproduce these conditions through practice. At individual level.

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habitus consists of a set of historical relations deposited within the individual body in the form of mental or corporal schemata of perception, appreciation and action. This is formed by pedagogic action during the early years of life. Because of this they adjust to the objective conditions of existence unreflexively as the natural way of things.

The meaning objectified in institutions is reactivated by habitus. Habitus is "embodied history, internalized as second nature as the active presence of the whole past of which it is product". Practice manifest itself through the combination of structures and habitus, and has the potential of generating new habitus. Through practice, the social order is naturalized, internalized and reproduced. It is through pedagogic action, that the habitus and through which the social order is reproduced. Bourdieu argues that it was the dominant values that are perpetuated through pedagogic action.

Space and social order are mutually constitutive. It is through habitus that social structures are reproduced. The structure is changed by the action of the agency, in the same time the agents are constituted by the structure it self, hence the relevance of a socio historic study to analyze the gender differences, its evolution through different cultures and social formation and its influence on women.

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32 Bourdieu 1977: 161
Individuals or groups exist and subsist and occupy relative positions in a space of relations in and through difference. The social positions or dispositions of the agent affect his/her position taking in the social space. Accordingly ones own vision of the world, opinions, behaviour, tastes, gestures are acting as a second nature of the person unless one is able to overcome it reflexively and constitute new life practices through social transition. Habitus is established through the unequal relationships and refers to the internalization of structures of the social order during the process of socialization. Habitus is expressed in culture by translating structures of oppression into symbolic representations that mask their social origin. These oppressive relationships in symbolic form develop perceptions that nature and biology are responsible for unequal power relations instead of social practice. The dominated position of women and division of labour between genders can be analysed in this background. Habitus is also inscribed in their bodily hexis, in the way they carry themselves, in their mannerisms etc. The habitus acquired in the childhood conditions and is the basis for all subsequent learning and social experience. So to understand the position of a community or group at a particular period, a knowledge of their historic background, the struggles through which they have passed and their relationship to other communities and groups in the social formation is essential Women’s habitus is influenced by past experiences of women themselves and the
community or group to which they belong. These experiences are carried over to the present, unconsciously shaping their beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and actions - in short their dispositions and their world view. So they are not capable of escaping themselves for they internalize the gendered habitus in the socialization process. They are conditioned to that, accepting it as ‘the natural order of things’. A conscious effort and reflexive thinking are necessary to understand the underlying power struggle in a gendered social formation. This is the main reason that mere empowerment programmes for the emancipation of women or new laws to prevent atrocities against women are not sufficient to improve their position.

Social space is a gendered space. According to Bourdieu, “the divisions constitutive of the social order and, more precisely, the social relations of domination and exploitation that are instituted between the sexes thus progressively embedded themselves in two different classes of habitus, in the form of opposed and complimentary bodily hexis and principles of vision and division which lead to the classifying of all the things of the world, and all practices according to the distinctions that are reducible to the male / female opposition.” Bourdieu, Masculine..., Op. cit., p 30. Gender identity is deeply rooted, bodily anchored dimension of an agents habitus, concerned with the agents body, the vision of the body, the possibilities of sensual perception.

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of feeling and expressing pleasure and pain. In the socialization process every agent acquires a gendered habitus, an identity, which has incorporated the existing division of labour between the genders. Gender identities are also a product of labour differentiation and of distinction between the two genders. Certain qualities are attributed to each gender along a binary code. In the process of acquiring gender identity the ambiguities are suppressed with the result that both genders are restricted in their potentials. The life of men is a constant struggle to maintain their male identity or the “dominants are themselves dominated by their domination”.

According to Bourdieu the process of culture change results from groups of people gaining dominance or superiority over another. He refers ‘doxa’ to describe unmentioned, undisputed and tacit part of the social order (and the deep seated structures of embodied dispositions in the bodily hexis as well). Doxic beliefs are unquestioned beliefs, embodied in actions and feelings but seldom formulated in words. The process of “doing one’s duty as a man means conforming to the social order, and this is fundamentally a question of rhythms, keeping pace, not falling out of line” (calls to order). It is only when the doxa is discussed, disputed or challenged in some way, (implying awareness and recognition of the

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35 ibid. p 171.
possibility of different antagonistic beliefs, in certain cases introduced by some outsiders, it enters the realm of discourse, and requires the deliberation of the members of society who are affected by this dispute. This is the realm of orthodoxy, which is the process through which rules concerning the previously undisputed is managed within the realm of discourse. Any dissention in the discourse, Bourdieu refers to as heterodoxy, and remains in contention or conflict with the orthodoxy. It is through the conflict of orthodoxy and heterodoxy that practices can be altered to address new issues within a cultural setting. This is very relevant in the study of women’s issues. Women have to face strong resistance and opposition from the orthodox structures in bringing about changes in the gender discriminatory practices. Increasing violence against women can be seen in this background.

**Chapter layout**

The first chapter is the introduction. The second chapter traces the transition of the traditional social configuration from the tribal period to that of the Brahmin hegemony and the disposition of women during this transition. This chapter composes of two parts, the first dealing the traditional social space before Brahmin migration and the second the events during Brahminisation and the formation of caste hierarchy.

Third chapter accounts the socio-political configuration at the time of Portuguese arrival, position of Syrian Christians in the social space and
their religious practices. The impact of Portuguese intervention in the region and in the social and religious life of Syrian Christian community is dealt with in detail. Measures taken at the Udayamperoor synod to improve the position of women is highlighted.

The main concern of the fourth chapter is the changes in the Social space with the introduction of western ideology. A brief account is given about the changes in the Political space due to Marthanda Varma’s establishment of monarchic feudalism and the formation a ‘Hindu State’ with the religious support. Major phenomenon of nineteenth century was the interaction with the British and the development of modern institutions. Universal education initiated the individuation process. The formation of community organizations resulted in the emergence of public social space.

Chapter five deals with the position of Syrian Christian women during nineteenth century. The patriarchal nature of the community and the place of women in the domestic and religious space at the time of British arrival is drawn, mainly from missionary records. The introduction and spread of women’s education - a breakthrough in the traditional society in the formation of a new habitus is illustrated. Commencement of teacher’s training schools for girls opened up avenues for salaried employment. This facilitated an entry in the public space.
Sixth chapter is composed of two parts. The first part focuses upon the reform and political movements resulting in changes in the caste space due to the civic consciousness of the people in general. This resulted in the social and political awakening of the people. The struggles for constitutional development and responsible government, overcoming caste and communal considerations and the formation of organizations political as well as non-political, were the major events of the period. The progress of female education including teacher's training schools and medical schools providing job opportunities for women is the main topic of the second part. This resulted in bringing about changes in their disposition. Membership in religious and secular organizations accelerated the process. Changing patterns of family and changes in the domestic space and religious space, development of a personal religion are also described in this chapter.

Chapter seven portrays the Social space of women with special reference to Syrian Christian women in the second half of twentieth century (after independence). Their role in the freedom movement and their position in the political field are noted. Various social and religious practices such as arranged marriages and dowry system that endorse the patriarchal structure and Legislation related to Syrian Christian women are also dealt in detail.
Practices and new strategies that help to endorse masculine domination is discussed in the background of Bourdieu's concept of Social relation of domination and division of labour in the concluding chapter.