Chapter 3

Women in Portuguese Period (1498-1663)

Introduction

Portuguese intervention left its mark on the life of Syrian Christian women. The Synod of Udayamperoor, through some acts and decrees attempted to curb child marriage and several superstitious practices. The socio-political events in the wider social formation during the Portuguese intervention, its impact on the Syrian Christian community as a whole and the women in particular is described in this chapter.

The major socio-political change brought about with this interaction was the enhancement of centralisation of power to a few principalities (Natturajayams), which was suitable for their commercial interests. The caste hierarchy and the caste related customary practices among Syrian Christians were first challenged by certain decrees of the synod of Udayamperoor. The interaction of the native Christians with the Portuguese resulted in the formation of an identity different from the caste hierarchy. It is observed that, “Christianity, especially the synod of Diamper was the pioneer in the field of many reform activities relating to the prohibition of untouchability, child marriage, polygamy, polyandry, and similar other social evils”\(^\text{10}\). Till that time caste practices were

accepted as the natural order (symbolic violence) mainly because the division was according to one's origin and privileges were considered as the birth right of certain communities. These practices were supported by myths and legends of metaphysical backing. For example, the creation story as propagated by Brahmins, pictures themselves as created from the mouth of the God, hence superior to all others, allotting graded position to other communities, the Kshatriyas (warriors from the hands), Vysyas (traders) from the thighs, and Sudras from the legs. The indigenous people became out castes, having no position in the body of the God. The logic of caste was first challenged by the Portuguese. But they failed to erect social and political institutions to do away with the caste practices. They introduced modern ideology relating to the power of the individual. As Rajan Gurukkal observes, "the missionary activities marked the beginnings of the organized distribution of individualizing power, the shaping of an individuality which submitted to a pattern utterly different from that of commonality."  

It was the native Syrian Christians who were much affected by the contact with the Portuguese. A form of western Christianity was introduced with new power relations and hierarchical organizational structure and strategies of domination, hitherto unknown here. It also affected the

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institutional structure of the churches where the laity had the freedom to take independent decisions of the church affairs. The coercive measures adopted by the Portuguese to bring the Syrians under their ecclesiastical fold, in fact destroyed the unity of the community and their relation with other communities of the region.

Social space
At the time of Portuguese arrival, the caste system was well developed in the social formation of traditional Malabar, based on hereditary rights. Brahmins occupied the uppermost strata, the dominant hegemonic group, and carriers of symbolic capital as legitimisers of the religious, as well as social practices ('maryada') and as the land-owners. There were powerful temple oriented agrarian communities headed by Brahmins known as the 'sankethams'. The ruling aristocracy (indebted to the Brahmins for their Kshatriya status obtained by performing certain religious functions) occupied the next position in the social hierarchy followed by warriors, mainly the Nairs, who were responsible for the up keeping of the customary practices of all castes. The soldiers or 'lokar' consisted mainly of Nairs were the protective force of each nadu or 'desam' of the region.

They had their own association known as the 'tharakuttam' (thara- residing place of the lokar), the elder most male member of each family. the 'karanavar' decided the main issues the 'thara' and the representatives of the tharakuttam. assembled as the 'nattukuttam' and had immense power in
deciding the matters of each nadu\textsuperscript{112}. The incomplete varna-jati (caste) system in the absence of a vysya community was a specific feature of the traditional system of this region. Earlier, the Jews, Syrian Christians and later Muslims shared this space. Actually this was a cast neutral space, for the concerned communities were outside the ritualistic space of the developing Hindu religion. The artisan communities had a lower social position and the cultivators the Parayas and the Pulayas were at the lowest strata, without any caste status.

This division according to the birth was visibly established by strict regulations on spatial distance each caste had to maintain and by the practices of pollution. Each community had its hereditary right over the produce of the land and hence it was a collective ownership rather than the absolute ownership of the individuals. Similarly the caste specific and hereditary division of labour, in the traditional system decided the functional space of the various castes and communities. So there was no space available for caste mobility. It was the duty of the elders of various communities to impart the functional skills and knowledge and the elders were respected and obeyed. So the customary practices were passed invariably from generation to generation. Violation of caste customs and practices were the most heinous crime of the traditional period, for it was

\textsuperscript{112} K.P. Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala (2 vol.). Cochin Government Press 1924, p 21. William Logan also mentions about this. See ref. 117.
against the community as a whole and punished severely. The state so jealously guarded these customs that when the community was unable to proceed against the offender, the state stepped on behalf of the community.

There were some major changes in the land relations in Kerala from twelfth to fifteenth century AD. Such as an increase in the intermediaries as temporary land holders, development of those land rights which helped the extension cultivable land as well as the enhancement of income from the land, the emergence of cash money in obtaining land rights, the efforts of ‘jennum’ land right over the land by the traditional land owners and new development in pledging land for debts or interests\textsuperscript{113}. The agrarian expansion also initiated the spread of local bazaars.

**Political space**

The polity of Malabar during this period, revealed through various historic accounts\textsuperscript{114} consisted of several independent principalities or ‘natturajyams’. Intense political conflict between these natturajyams was the characteristic feature from sixteenth to eighteenth centuries\textsuperscript{115}. The social formation of the region was going through a transitional period towards the establishment of centralized monarchic system. The traditional 18 nadus were under the supremacy of three swaroopams or principalities, namely, Kozhikode.


(‘nediyiruppu’), Cochin (‘Perumpaddappu’), and Travancore (‘Trippappi’) during this period. There were several land holding aristocracy (swaroopis), consisting of petty kings and feudal lords known as ‘desavazhis’ and ‘naduvazhis’ ‘madampis’, who ruled their territories rather independently. The rise of these desavazhis was due to expansion, turning the major portion of the indigenous population into peasants increasing the social stratification. There was continuous conflict between these petty kings. ‘Nediyiruppu Swaroopam, ruled by the Samuthiris, was the most significant one, due to the addition of two important port towns by invasion, Kozhikode and Ponnani, frequented by Arabs. Territorial expansion as well as the economic prosperity made Samuthiri unmatched in political power. The Raja of Cochin, claiming higher ritual status controlled central Kerala and this naturajyam was the seat of Nampoothiri orthodoxy and Nair aristocracy, hence never encouraged Arab traders. Here the Nampoothiri and Nair vassals were powerful. Venadu enjoyed slightly superior position as evident from Syrian Christian copperplates. Kollam an important trade center was in this naturajyam, which later emerged as the strongest. Kollathunadu retained its power and position of the past in the southern region but there was cut throat competition between Samuthiris and Kolathiris. The trade alliance between the west Asian Muslim sea-fearers and Samuthiris from the end of fourteenth

century onwards made them the most powerful. The Samuthiri made his
kingdom one of the major principality with the help of the Portuguese by
the end of sixteenth century itself, turning the lesser principalities of the
locality its tributaries. It is observed by some historians that the conflict
between the Raja of Cochin and the Samuthiri of Kozhikode paved the way
for the Dutch to enter Kerala as an ally of the raja of Cochin. The internal
rivalry between the members of the ‘Perumpadapu Swaroopam’
accelerated this process\textsuperscript{117}. This centralisation process was enhanced by the
Portuguese to suit their commercial interests. The Rajas enjoyed only very
limited authority over the petty kings and chieftains. William Logan’s
observation about the Raja of Travancore at the time of British settlement
supports this fact\textsuperscript{118}.

\textbf{Social Space of the Syrian Christians}

\textbf{Geographical distribution}

Syrian Christians in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Portuguese
arrival, were spread over the seventeen kingdoms of Keralam, Cannanur,
Calicut, Travancore, Cochin, Kodungalore, Mangat and Kollam. There
were number of churches, 50 settlements and about one hundred thousand

\textsuperscript{118} William Logan: Malabar Manual. Vol 1, p 350 The Rajas of Travancore at the time of
English settlement were as a rule mere puppets in the hands of certain Brahmins of the
Travancore temples and of certain petty chieftains of the Nayar caste, who were styled
the Ettuveetti Pillamar or the Pillais of the eight houses. The latter appear to have been
the local heads of the “tara” organizations which was charged with the maintenance
of the rights of all classes, and the preventing of any such from falling into disuse. The
country was therefore broken up, as was also the case with Kollathunadu, into an
immense number of petty chieftainships, over which the Rajas had very limited and
precarious authority".
Christians\textsuperscript{119}. With the agrarian expansion in the coastal region as well as the interior, they had migrated and settled around the Bazaars in these regions\textsuperscript{120}. T.K. Joseph also was of this view. He stated that, like Ceraman Perumal, Kuttuvan and other kings of pre-Muslim period and later kings and kinglets of Keralam, specially invited Syrian Christians to their capital, gave land tax-free and allowed to build their shops and churches\textsuperscript{121}. Conversations with old people belonging to some old Christian families reveal that their ancestors were brought by certain Kings or Chieftains to conduct business and trade by sanctioning land and other facilities. K. N. Ganesh also supports this view. He is of opinion that in addition to the trade and commerce they were involved in cash crop cultivation also\textsuperscript{122}.

**Disposition**

Many Portuguese historians were of the opinion that he Christians were similar to that of Nairs in general appearance, dress and habits\textsuperscript{125}. This is highly probable for they had been occupying same position in the caste based social space of traditional period. Syrian Christians according the


\textsuperscript{122} K.N. Ganesh: “Agrarian Society in Kerala” (1500-1800): Perspectives on Kerala History, 1999, p History, p 123-179. He is of opinion that the Christians with Muslims played a major role in the procurement of agricultural products and carrying them to coastal areas and towns.

\textsuperscript{123} Scaria Zacharia, *The Acts ..., pp 51-53, decree XV11 of session 1X ‘... there is no distinction either in their habits or in their heir or in anything else, betwixt the Christians of this diocese and the Nairs’. Gouvea’s description is also given; ‘the dress is same as that of Malabar people’.
report of George Mark Moraes\textsuperscript{124}, were the most cultivated among the people of Malabar. They were generally proportionate and well built, their complexion little dark, much higher than that of the other people, mentally alert, sententious, illustrate their points with apt proverbs and incidents drawn from history and fables, formed elaborate rules of etiquettes and punctilious in their observance. From the description of Gouvea, the dress of the Syrian males were the same as that of the Malabar people.

The most distinguishing feature noted by La Croze\textsuperscript{125} was the respect given to the elders, in the family and in the community as a whole, “in the presence of their elders and the priests they would keep standing until bidden to sit. In their assemblies only the eldest and most venerable among them could participate in discussions, the others would not venture to speak till they were questioned. When parents spoke to the children and teachers to the pupils, the youngsters kept their left hand on their mouth, a gesture which among them be a token of respect”. He also reported that they were frugal in their ways and abstinence in their food habits. Their meals consist of a little rice boiled in water and salt, with a little ginger, buttermilk or curry. A little jaggery, butter and salt fish is also used as a repast and they rarely eat meat. They never taste drinks, especially those who were concerned about their reputation. Many of them live to a ripe old age.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, La Croze cited by T. K. Joseph, p 96.
Social position

Portuguese historians affirm a higher social position for the Syrians. They recorded that the Syrians were known among the Hindus as ‘Nazaranis’, carved for themselves an important place in the Hindu hierarchy of castes and kept ‘untouchability’. La Croze\textsuperscript{126} mentioned about the social privileges of the St. Thomas Christians, “they were not answerable to any governor but to the king and the chief minister. They could ride on an elephant, a privilege reserved for the princess of royal blood and they could also sit in the presence of the king, a privilege permitted to ambassadors, they jealously guard this privileges” (it is also noted by him that when the king of Parur tried to admit some other community latter privilege, the Christians declared war on him in protest and compelled him to restore the status quo ante). Law recognized the patronage to several lower castes as gold smith, smelters, carpenters and black smiths. They were permitted to have the front of their house closed. The bridal couple was allowed to bedeck their hair with flowers of gold, which was a privilege of the higher castes. Susan Bayly\textsuperscript{127} opines that the high status of the Syrians in the Hindu society continued to be reflected in their right to access to Hindu shrines and sacred space indicating a complete integration of the St. Thomas Christians with the local culture. Moreover their active presence in

\textsuperscript{126} ibid.
the local politics is revealed by their participation in the wars between the local rulers. They had a comparatively secure position as traders and warriors\textsuperscript{128}.

**Religious practices**

From various Portuguese chronicles and other available historical data, the emerging picture of the St. Thomas Christians is that of a close knit community under the leadership of their Archdeacon. Church had the full social control over its members for it was reported by La Croze\textsuperscript{129} that, "the Church punished the lawbreakers with excommunication from which not even at the time of death could a delinquent be absolved". The most significant fact is that the St. Thomas Christians religious life had developed with that of the regional cultural development, hence all their practices, social as well as religious were closely related to other communities, especially to that of Nairs. They were identified as a ritually pure community, neither their shrines nor sacred places were polluting to the higher caste Hindus\textsuperscript{130}.

They depended on east Syrian Church for ecclesiastic leadership, may be a visible expression of their ancestry of their St. Thomas origin and hence a part of their identity which they repeatedly use to establish their


exclusiveness, against Portuguese attempts to make them a part of the Holy Roman Sea. At the time of the Portuguese arrival they were in communion with west Asian church and 6 prelates were staying with them, and 9 foreign prelates reached Malabar between 1503 and 1583. More over their relationships with the foreign Christians, mainly from west Asia was cordial and harmonious.

The existence of the Christian community as a compact body for many centuries among powerful non-Christian communities of the region without any ecclesiastical leadership and proper written doctrines and creeds of worship, was always a baffling matter for the historians. According to their St. Thomas tradition, they claimed the practice of Christianity from first century onwards.

William Logan sums up the law of the country as it stood before the Mohammedan invasion (1766 AD) and British occupation as ‘custom’ or ‘maryada’ or ‘margam’ or ‘acharam’, signifying established rules and customs and comments about the strong hold of old observances and custom upon the people. Syrian Christians were also particular in keeping their social and religious norms and customs. Jacob Kollaparampil is of


132 Malabar..., Op. cit., p110. “People must be law abiding and docile race if such simple formation of to be sufficient to govern them. Custom, when once it has become law, arrange the whole community in union against the law breakers is perhaps, the safest form of law for a semi-civilized state” p 172.
opinion that, 'it was through the Institute of archdeaconate that the church of India, as well as the community, kept its individuality and autonomy, at least to a certain extent. for this church preserved no liturgy of her own, but had only the typical organization and discipline built up through and preserved in social customs and environments'.

Leslie Brown thinks otherwise that, "the Christian faith of the Indian church has been conveyed from generation to generation through public worship, not through any organized doctrinal instruction, nor even through the Bible, as this was not accessible in Malayalam in earlier centuries". As mentioned earlier, the language that the St. Thomas Christians used in sacred books and in worship was Chaldean Syriac or Aramian. They used to sing psalms in their worship. All participated in the service, reciting the part meant for the congregation. (The priests may have explained the meaning to the congregation and these may have passed from generation to generation orally). Ritual supplies evidence of shared cultural community and participation represents something of a public commitment. Brown noted that the Syrian Christians were living in two worlds, the social and the religious.

Bishop Chrisostom Mar Thoma Metropolita points out that no religion was cut off from the prevailing cultural situation of the region in

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traditional period (pre-reformation period). Christians were part of the mainline community and Christian culture (rather than Christian identity for values then were not shaped by Christian ideals but by the prevalent value system of the period) became one with the mainline culture of the society. He is of opinion that, it was through liturgy and practices that the community kept its identity\textsuperscript{136}.

In traditional cultures rituals and collective memory play an important role to ensure the social solidarity. Giddens\textsuperscript{137} is of opinion that “Tradition is the glue that holds pre-modern social orders together” and emphasizes the involvement of ritual in tradition. Ritual, according to him, is integral to the social framework that confers integrity upon tradition and a practical means of ensuring preservation. He also shows the connection between collective memory, social practice and rituals. He argues that collective memory is geared to social practices and it is ritual that firmly connects the continual reconstruction of the past with practical enactment and enmeshes tradition in practice. He gives importance to the interpretation of rituals in tradition by the ‘guardians’ of tradition, namely the formulaic truth involved in it. Status rather than competence is the prime characteristic of the guardian in traditional societies. It is the normative or moral content, which gives the binding character to the

\textsuperscript{136} Metropolitan Chrysostum, Mission In... , Op. cit., p 34.

traditions, invariably connected to the interpretative processes by means of which the past and the present are aligned. For Syrian Christians, the priests authorized by the archdeacon and perhaps the foreign prelates (whom they considered as their religious leaders) may have acted as the ‘guardians of tradition’. The existence as religious community with rituals, sacred language used in worship and hereditary leadership and as social community at the same time, with distinct caste position interacting with other communities of the region, may be the reason for their continuity through centuries. This position was disturbed with the interaction with the Portuguese.

**Interaction of the Portuguese and the Local Christians**

Europe was undergoing a transition in late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, emerging from the middle ages characterized by universalism and clericalism to a modern world influenced by the renaissance ideas of nationalism and individualism. The Portuguese as a mercantile and maritime empire was cast in a military and ecclesiastical mould 138. For them religious vision was never separate from mercantilism, conversion from commerce. They had a mixed motivation involving religious, political and economic aspects. Vasco da Gama came in search of Christians and

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spices. As privileged trading power they strengthened their position by establishing religious affiliation and patronage with local rulers and warrior groups. They applied same tactics with Syrian Christians also. The colonial mentality of the Europeans of the 16th century was to look down upon the natives and their customs. They divided the world into two halves, the Christians and the pagans. Religious intolerance of the Portuguese, especially their clergy led them to consider their theology, Latin rite, Liturgy, hierarchical structure, canonical discipline as the only form of Christianity and all others for them were schematics and heretics. The methods adapted by the Portuguese to convert the natives were often destructive, violent and forceful, intended to create a body of social allies.

Their evangelical work in Malabar was mainly among the lower castes, particularly the fishermen community of the coastal region, whom they converted to Christianity. Their interests in the converted Christians was then limited to certain catechism classes only, not in the overall development of the community. The traditional Christians, who enjoyed a higher caste status refused to accept the newly converted Christians.

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139 Boxer, 1969, 13. When Vasco Da Gama reached Calicut in 1498 AD he expected to find Christians and was eager to discover the relics of St. Thomas as seen in various historical records, indicating a prior knowledge of the presence of Christians in Malabar Coast.


141 Subramaniam: Sanjay: Political economy of southern India, 1500-1650

Francis Houtart and Genevieve Lemercier. The Great Asiatic Religions and the Social Functions. Centre De Etudes Socio Religieuses, Louvain-la-nauve, 1985
limiting their chances of caste mobility. So the Portuguese was not able to initiate any major change in the caste system here.

The increasing power of the Mohammedans in the area of trade and commerce, especially in Kozhikode, the growing Brahmin influence on kings, thereby loosing their direct access to the kings which they formerly enjoyed, may have been the reasons to seek alliance with the Portuguese, whom they considered as their coreligionists. Moreover their past experience with east Syrian church was cordial, the prelates never interfered with their social life or their hereditary leadership.

A Syrian Christian delegation visited Vasco Da Gama in November 1502 AD\textsuperscript{142}, when the Portuguese started to be recognized as a formidable power in the Malabar coast (it was during his second visit, when the Portuguese had defeated Samutiri and his Mohammedan associates and the Raja of Cochin and the Rani of Quilon had made trade treaties with them). The socio-political background of the St. Thomas Christians was that they had lost their monopoly of trade to the Mohammedans\textsuperscript{143}, and migrated to Cochin, which was known for ‘Brahmin supremacy and Nair aristocracy’. In 1503, the Syrian Christians of Quilon received Albuquerque cordially in their church\textsuperscript{144}. One of the clauses of the treaty of Quilon Christians with

\textsuperscript{142} This was described in all Portuguese chronicles (Thomas Lopes, Barros, Goes, Couto etc, cited in Mundaden, History..., Op. cit., pp 265-274), Nagam Aiya, Op. cit., p 159.

\textsuperscript{143} Paoli, cited by P. Cherian, 1935: 42.

\textsuperscript{144} Mundaden, History..., Op. cit, 275-76.
Albuquerque was that the civil and criminal jurisdiction should be in the hands of the Christians of the place as it had been previously\textsuperscript{145}. It appears that the St. Thomas Christians approached Vasco Da Gama and Albuquerque to restore their rights and privileges\textsuperscript{146}. This can be considered as a strategic move to secure their position in the social, political and economic field rather than religious affiliation.

For the Portuguese the association with the Syrians was mainly to familiarize themselves with the new land and the people to ensure their commercial potentials. As a privileged group with skilled warriors and trading potentials, the alliance became all the more desirable\textsuperscript{147}. Biju Mathew observes, “the actions of the St Thomas Christians to seek alliance with the Portuguese were stimulated by the notion of power by association and the ensuring privileges and status to be acquired in the heavily stratified society of Kerala. Though the element which confers them identity is chiefly drawn from a discourse of faith, it is grounded in the network of power relations that existed at that particular moment in Kerala Society”\textsuperscript{148}. On the part of the Portuguese also, the greater part of the questions and debates they had to raise with the local Christians did not

\textsuperscript{146}Mundadan, History,..., Op. cit., p 278.
concern with the faith and law but rather their spiritual and temporal
government and also their trade interest.

The relationship of the St, Thomas Christians with the Portuguese
remained cordial only for about 15 years. Discord started when the
Portuguese priests started interfering with the affairs of the local churches,
disregarding the clergy and the elders. The history of St. Thomas
Christians during the Portuguese period is a constant struggle to resist the
Portuguese attempts of domination, moving away and avoiding the
Portuguese as far as possible. In the same time it seems that they tried to
safeguard their trade interests, for it was their livelihood. The local
kings, being afraid of the Portuguese, with their power and wealth, failed to
support the Christians. The well organized strategies of the Archbishop
Menezes to diminish the power of the Archdeacon and support of a portion
of the local Christians, especially the priests ordained by the Portuguese
and their families in addition to the lack of support of the local kings led
to the surrender of the Thomas Christians, at least for a short period at the
synod of Udayamperoor. The archdeacon yielded to the will of the
archbishop to prevent a division among his people, for the archbishop had

151 The report of Archbishop Ros in 1604 cited by Thomas Thayyil, The Latin Christians of
Kerala, p 158
threatened him of excommunication and replace him with another nephew of the former archdeacon\textsuperscript{155}.

**Impact of Portuguese intervention on the religious and social space**

The Portuguese invasion drastically affected the St. Thomas Christians, changing the autonomous nature and unity of the community, changing their traditional social and religious practices. The St. Thomas Christians received the Portuguese as guests and tallies into their community as followers of same religion and faith but their mentality was that of masters to bring these people into the Roman fold, completely changing their traditional customs and practices. The Portuguese attempted to improve the religious as well as the social the practices of the native Christians (which they call heresy). This reflects the colonial mentality to degrade the indigenous practices to establish their supremacy. They were assimilated in the Portuguese religion for about 55 years.

A review of the history of these native Christians prior to the synod of Udayamperoor reveals the fact that, for them Christianity was a way of life, as the expression of their religious life denoted as ‘mathomayude margavum vazhipadum’ or the way and lineage of St. Thomas, not a set of well defined dogmas and rituals. Scaria Zachariah is of opinion that the solid foundation of the St Thomas Christian church was spirituality and

\textsuperscript{155} Jacob Kollaparambil, p 107, Jonas Thaliyathu, p 25.
the most visible superstructure was the social organization or ecclesiastical discipline\textsuperscript{156}. Actually the stability of the community over the centuries may be due to the fact that they were part and parcel of the existing social formation with distinct caste status even though outside the caste system, their religious and social practices are in harmony with the regional cultural development.

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. They express the view that the decisions taken by the synod of Udayamperoor and Angamaly, though attended by the representatives of the local Christians, were not the genuine opinion of the community for there was no scope for prior consultation\textsuperscript{157}. Portuguese authorities tried to replace the customs and practices of the native Christians and to bring these people under their domain in the name of Christianity \textsuperscript{158}. The Portuguese used various strategies to assimilate the local Christians into their fold, to control their leaders,\textsuperscript{159} starting seminaries to train

\textsuperscript{156} Scaria Zachanah: The Act..., op. cit., p 43.
\textsuperscript{157} Joseph Thekkedathu, p 71.
\textsuperscript{158} Hough: Vol. 2 op1-7.
\textsuperscript{159} ibid. p 327. They tried to change the allegiance of the local Christians to the chaledian prelates by obstructing their passage. Then by giving presents or monthly allowance to the prelates tried to make them loyal to the Portuguese. They used various methods to curtail the power of the Archdeacon also.
priests, replacing their sacred language Syria with that of Latin, starting new cult centers etc, there by gaining supremacy over them.

The religious practices of the native Christians were replaced by that of the Roman Catholic Church through several Decrees. Some of them were related to their social life. For instance the clergy who denoted by the term ‘desathu Pattakkar i an’ were part and parcel of the community giving leadership not only in ecclesiastical life but also in social life. They were selected from the community. This practice was changed and the marriage of the clergy was denied; in the hierarchical order of the Roman Catholic Church they are made subordinates by giving them salary. By introducing auricular confession, held the people in bondage to the mercy of the priesthood. Before the synod they administrated the Holy Communion with cakes mixing the meal with a little oil and salt which was a part of the native produce.

Another major change introduced was the placement of the Malabar church as one of the diocese of the Church of Rome. It was divided into parishes and clergy was appointed for each parish by the bishops (Decree of session 8), there by destroying the people oriented set up of the

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160 They started a seminary in 1541 at Cranganore by Fr. Vincent de Lagos with a royal subsidy. But the St. Thomas Christians refused to accept them, who were westernized completely in mind and attitude. Munadaden. History..., Op. cit., p 328., Nagam Aiya. Travan..., Op. cit., p156. Another seminary was started in Vaipincotta, Cochin, probably around 1584, where Syriac also was taught along with Latin.


church. More than the masses and prayer for the dead the ‘cattam festival’ or the commemoration day were important for them (like that of other native communities). The most important aspect of their faith was that they admitted to communion the members of other churches, (perhaps other religions also for they had peaceful co-existence with other native communities) for they believed that every faithful disciple of Christ would be saved to whatever communion they belonged.

Several social customs and practices that made them a part of the social formation were banned by several decrees. It is mentioned in the decrees itself that ‘there was no distinction either in their habits or in their hair or in anything else betwixt the Christians of the diocese and the heathen Nairs’. Among the Christian men also, the ears were pierced to wear ornaments and elongated ear lobes were considered as a sign of dignity as the Nairs, this was forbidden in the synod to distinguish them from the Nairs.

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163 From earlier descriptions it is clear that before the synod the native Christians never had an institutionalized religious set up. The church was owned by the community and the priests were selected from and for the community each church being independent without any hierarchical order. The community was responsible for the maintenance of the priests, in the form of fees for administration of the sacraments (the Portuguese call it Simony).


165 ”the dress is the same as that of the Malabar people. They are bare from the waist upwards, and on their upper arms, they wear gold or silver armlets. From waist down to the knees they were a cloth of silk ornamented: some clothes are very rich, and tied up with silk ribbons or chains of wrought gold and silver all go about with swords and shields, and some with guns and lances, which they leave when going to church. ......they let their hair grow like others of Malabar, and gather it on the crown or behind with a coloured silk ribbon, to which most Christians add rosaries or a gold or silver cross. The ears of the men also were pierced and they wore ornaments made of gold and precious stones and many ear rings together, whereby the ears were elongated, a sign among them of great dignity”: Gouvea, 1606, quoted by Scaria Zachariah, The acts..., op. cit., p 52, and also in 1976, p 206-207.
By Decrees 12 and 13 of session 3 forbids sending the Christian children to heathen schools where the masters instruct to pay homage to the idols and Christian teachers to keep idols for their heathen children. Several customs and practices related to marriage, childbirth, church and temple festivals, were forbidden by some decrees. Decree 4 forbids attendance and participation in local festivals like Onam.

A new dress code was suggested for the Christians to distinguish them from the Nairs by the 17th Decree of 9th session. All these reforms may have caused the alienation of the Christian community in the social process of that period. But it appears that they never completely obeyed these new ordinances introduced by the Portuguese. Moreover several churches in the hilly region, from the beginning itself resisted the Portuguese endeavours to bring them to their fold. The imposition of a series of restrictions on the native Christians in the name of christianization rather forced a construction of differences and the unconscious acceptance of a new subjectivity, which they resisted.

One of the major impacts of the synod of Udayamperoor on the social configuration of the region was that of the position of slaves. For the first time in the history they were considered as part of the church rather

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166 Scaria Zachariah points out that the decisions of the synod regarding dress and manners segregated Thomas Christians from their fellow communities: p 53.
167 Fr. Thomas Paremmakkal in 'Varthamanam pusthakam' stated that not all the churches of Malabar accepted the decrees of the synod of Udayamperoor synod, and the churches of north Malankara refused to accept it from the beginning itself: p 278.
168 Biju Mathew, Strategies... pp. cit.
than outcastes, as individuals capable of having a Christian identity, which was hitherto considered as exclusive right of the Syrian Christians, for special instructions were given for the baptism of slaves and slave children in Decrees 1X & X of Session 1V. The ritual of purification was condemned by the decree 3 of session 9 and untouchability and the corresponding purification rituals were forbidden by Decree 2 of session 9.

The people converted from the lower castes remained as a separate group, not accepted by the traditional Christians. Perhaps the most intolerable reform was that affected their caste position, allowing the entrance of lower caste people to their faith. The Portuguese intervention in the form of certain laws and regulations without any supporting institutions was not sufficient to bring about major structural changes in the social formation of the period. The seminaries and theological institutions started by the Portuguese were not intended for mass education, but were training centers for priests.

Although the Portuguese were able to bring the natives Christians under their fold for a short period, they strongly resisted the foreign

170 Jacob Kollaparampil, The Arch..., op. cit., p 118.
171 Adrian Moens, the then Dutch governor in Cochin observed in 1781 that, the pupils in the Veroply Seminary were only taught ordinary church Latin and church usages rather than the dogmatic part of the religion. Usage of natural theology, ecclesiastical or profane history, and geography, physics and metaphysics were very less. quoted by J. Ferrell (1951), vol.2 p 232.
dominance from the beginning itself\textsuperscript{172}. On most occasions they had the support of the local rulers\textsuperscript{173} and people. The Portuguese were never able to bring the local Christians under their complete domain since they were primarily the subjects of the local rulers. Many kings and the major part of the St. Thomas Christians and priests and even people belonging to other communities supported the Archdeacon George of the cross and he was able to carry on the rebellion until his death in 1640\textsuperscript{174}. His successor Thomas, nephew of the former archdeacon carried on the resistance and tried hard to get a west Asian bishop.\textsuperscript{175}

**Conditions of Syrian Christians at the close of Portuguese connection**

The anti-Jesuit feeling aggravated when the Jesuits (whom they call as the fathers of St. Paul) intercepted the coming of the Syrian bishop named Ahatalla or Ignatius sent by the Jacobite Patriarch and a rumour was spread that he was thrown overboard and drowned. As a result, the Christians gathered in a large crowd outside the church at Mattancherry in Cochin on 3\textsuperscript{rd} Jan.1653 and took an oath at the stone cross there to expel Jesuits and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{172} Hough reported about a farce performed in the Palayur church in which the characters were St. Thomas, St. Peter and St. Cyriac who acted as the umpire, deciding the jurisdiction of Malabar church in favour of St. Thomas. pp 190-193. Brown also stated that the archbishop was apprehensive of the results of such propaganda and tried to exorcize the actors. p 38.
\item \textsuperscript{173} The inquisition ordered by the Portuguese king through the viceroy, having informed of the archdeacons rebellion had no effect on him when he had the strong support of the king of Cochin. But in 1612 the same king expelled him from his domain when the king required the help of the Portuguese against the Samuthiri. When the battle was over the king continued to support the archdeacon. Nagam Aiya. p 181, Brown. p 98, Thekkedathu. P 82,83, Kollaparampil, p 125-128.
\item \textsuperscript{174} The whole tenure of his office was a continuous struggle to keep the rite, individuality and the freedom of his church and also to defend his authority.
\item \textsuperscript{175} He wrote to the Nestorian Patriarch and also to the Coptic Patriarch and to the Jacobite Patriarch in Syria asking for a bishop sent to Malabar.
\end{itemize}
submit no ecclesiastical authority except that of Archdeacon, until they get a bishop from the eastern church. In May of the same year the revolted Christians held a council at Alengad. 12 priests laid their hands on the head of the archdeacon Thomas and consecrated him as their bishop, later known as Mar Thoma I. This was a landmark in the history of St. Thomas Christians, although the community was vertically into two groups, one in communion with Rome (Pazhayakuru or old party) and other establishing a new allegiance to the Jacobite church of Antioch (Puthencuru or new party)

The Puthencuru or Syrian fraction got a bishop sent by the Jacobite Patriarch- Mar Gregorios (Before the advent of the Portuguese they recognized the leadership of Nestorian bishops). From this period onwards this fraction is known as the Syrian Christians or Jacobite Syrians, mainly due to the continued usage of Syriac as their sacred language.

**Puthencure Syrians or Jacobite Syrians**

Archdeacon George of the Cross and his successor Archdeacon Thomas (Mar Thoma I) tried to reintroduce oriental customs such as eastern liturgical vestments, leavened bread in the Eucharist and clerical marriage. His attempt to obtain a new bishop was an attempt to create a new tradition from the old, to offer an effective resistance to the Portuguese and to

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176 At the time of the revolt, of the whole number of Syrian Christians, computed to amount to 200,000 persons, only 200 remained under arch bishop Garcia. G.T. Mackenzie Christianity in Travancore, p 27: But appointing another Archdeacon related to the former archdeacon George of the cross, one named Parampil Chandy (Alexander de Campo) and questioning the authenticity of the newly consecrated bishop Mar Thoma I. bishop Garcia was able to win back a vast majority of churches- 84 churches out of about 116.
ensure the solidarity and unity of his people. For the native Christians there tradition is invariably connected with the ecclesiastical leadership of west Asian bishop in addition to the local leadership in the form of the Archdeacon. The condition of the community during this period is well evident from William Logan’s words, “they were tormented, victimized, and disorganized by so many ceaseless troubles from friend and foe alike” and anarchy reigned in the church. Most grievous split arouse in the church. Logan denotes their resistance, “bold and stout hearts were however not wanting to declare their independence and a large number at a public assembly, resolved upon applying to Babylon, Antioch, Alexandria and Egypt for a bishop”\textsuperscript{177}. The Archdeacon was trying to bring order in to the church and the community as a whole, by creating a new tradition based on the traditional practices. In fact, the creation of new tradition from the old, usually done by the ‘guardians’ is the basic strategy of the survival of a group or community in the changing social configurations. All these developments in the social configuration naturally affected women also.

Eric Hobsbawn points out that new traditions are created when the older forms of community and authority structure and the tradition associated with them were un-adaptable and became rapidly unviable. Adaptation took place for old uses in new conditions and by using old models for new purposes, as old institutions with established function. 

\textsuperscript{177} William Logan. p 199
references to the past and ritual idioms and practices. Ancient materials, from the large store of materials accumulated in the past by any society and elaborate language of symbolic practices and communication are used for the construction of invented traditions. He further argues that sometimes historic continuity had to be invented, by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity, either by semi fiction or by forgery. All invented tradition use frequently history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion, to become the actual symbol of struggle. The creation of family associations (Kudumba yogams) and history by establishing relation with the families of St. Thomas origin for improving their social capital, is a new trend observed in Travancore.

**Position of Syrian Christian women, at the time of Portuguese arrival**

As mentioned in the last chapter there was no such category, ‘the women’ in caste oriented social configuration. There were no common customs or laws for women of the region separately for the women’s position in the caste space was that of the caste or community to which they belong. Women had to obey the distinct norms and practices in the customary laws of different castes and communities. The Syrian Christian women first came into history through the account of Portuguese historians. The Syrian Christians, as mentioned earlier, occupied a space as a separate entity,

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179 Ibid.
having its own customary practices, most of which based on religion, performing the role of a merchant caste. They enjoyed upper caste status, observing untouchability and distant pollution. The customary practices of the community alone were applicable to the women, for their only social function was restricted to the Sunday services and festivals of the church. Here they seldom come into contact with the members of the other caste. The slave caste was not allowed to enter into their houses. As any upper caste women of the period the Syrian Christian women were also confined to their home as in the traditional period.

**Disposition of Syrian Christian women**

La Croze, recorded about their general nature that they were very graceful in their deportment and modest and retiring in their general conduct. Gouvea also reported that the Christian women were exceedingly modest both in life and dress and they were as a rule good looking and fairer than the eastern people. While the attire of Syrian Christian men was similar to that of the Nair community, with the dignity of the shoulder cloth and umbrella, considerable difference is observed in the dress of women. They used to wear a long sleeved ‘kuppayam’ and the lower cloth was tucked in at the back with a distinctive fan shaped pleat, unlike the Nair women. When they go to church, they cover themselves with another white cloth.

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covering the head also. ‘They wear white cloaks or cloaks dyed in indigo which make them blue; these cloaks cover their whole body and are wound round the face and fall from the head to the feet, which is a mark of great modesty. Vincent Maria’s reported (1728) about the dress of Christian women ‘the cloth which they use to cover themselves reaches midway down their legs, and their breast is covered with a bodice of linen. In church, however, and paying visit to the Bishop they wrap themselves in white clothes which falling from the head down to the ground, leave only the face uncovered’. It is also reported that men used to wear some type of cloak on special occasions. This indicates a special dress code for social occasions, both for men and women. It is observed that the caste identity is inscribed in the attire of women rather than that of men from traditional period onwards.

They used to wear various gold ornaments, at that time a privilege of higher castes. The amount of ornaments given to the bride declared at the time of marriage. They wore large gold rings on the upper part of their ear. The ear piercing ceremony was important for girls in the past conducted at the age of six or seven. It was compulsory for married women to wear a golden chain (a thread in the case of those who cannot afford gold) to tie the ‘minnu’ or thali which was tied at the time of marriage

\[^{182}\text{ibid.}\]
\[^{183}\text{ibid, p 52.}\]
ceremony in the church for Christians till their death and at the time of death the minnu was donated to the church, symbolizing the unbreakable sanctity of marriage.

It was through some decrees of the synod of Udayamperoor that we get first hand information about the position of women in the Syrian Christian community till that period. The picture revealed is that of highly patriarchal, patrilineal community, allowing little freedom for women. Usually the education of children starts at about the age of 4. The 'Kaniyan' of the village or a teacher of the community is invited for the initiation of education known as 'ezuthiruthu'. The synod of Udayamperoor by Decrees 12 and 13 of Session 3, forbid the practice of sending Christian children to non-Christian teachers and teaching of non-Christian children by Christian teachers and recommended earnestly to all in towns and villages. “to do all that in their power to have their children educated by Christian masters and as for reading and writing, to have the parish priests to teach them to do that in their houses”. It is not clear whether girls were also taught the alphabets during that period.

**Place of women in religious practices**

It seems that some space was available for women in the religious activities. For it was reported by Gouvea, "if the bishop enters the church

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184 A tiny gold ornament, a symbol of marital status of women, a cross engraved on it.
185 The ceremony is described by Ananthakrishna Ayyar, anthropology... Op. cit., p.109.
they all go one by one to kiss his hand with great propriety. first of all kneeling down and bowing the head to the ground and then raising they received the blessing with much reverence, so that they all look like well behaved religious sisters. The same they do to children, even those that are carried in arms, whom they lay at the feet of the prelate". At the same time it appears that they strictly followed the rules of purity. “On days when they have their usual flow they do not rise or make any courtesy, however important the occasion which looks like an allusion to the story of Rachel and her Father"187.

**Marriage practices**

The marriage was insoluble and no divorce was heard of in the traditional Christian community because in Christianity marriage symbolizes the mystic union of Christ with the church. Separation except with mutual consent and for valid reasons was not consented by the church, for it is believed that the marriage bond was sacred and the couple joined by God cannot be separated by men. The separated persons were not allowed to remarry again during the lifetime of the spouse. The marriage alliances were arranged between the families, rather than between the individuals. It may have been an alliance between families of equal social position, for this alliance was intended also for the mutual co-operation between the families. for trade and agriculture up to this period required joint action. So

187 ibid.
arranged marriages, and that too at an early age, were the practice of the time. The ownership of the land was mainly vested on the Brahmins and the king. Syrian Christians as well as other people had no permanent right on the land. Male members were entitled to the family wealth while the girls were given dowry at the time of marriage. It seems that the practice of giving dowry to the girl child was to ensure her right in the family. She was not cut out entirely from the parental home, for she returns in case of contingencies.

Measures taken at the Udayamperoor synod to improve the position of women
The condition of Syrian Christian women was in no way appreciable at the time of the Portuguese. It seems that the religious authorities as well as the community as a whole were totally unaware of the plight of women. It was the foreigners who noticed this fact and took an initiative to improve the condition of women here. The major improvement was that connected with the property right of women. The synod took an advanced step, to ensure the right of daughters to inherit, their father’s property, in the absence of sons. "Where as an unreasonable custom has obtained in this diocese, viz. that males only inherit their fathers goods the females have no share at all there of and that not only where there are sons. but when there are daughters only and they unmarried and many time infants, by which means a great number of them perish and others ruin themselves for want of
necessaries, the fathers goods falling to the males, that are next in blood though never so remote or collateral, there being no regard had to daughters any more than if their parents were under no obligation to provide for them, all being very unreasonable and contrary to the natural right that sons and daughters had to succeed to the good of their parents, the kindred who have thus possessed themselves of such goods, are bound to restore them to the daughters as the lawful heiresses to them”. Further more the synod does decree and declare this custom to be unjust and insist that the next of kin has no right when there are daughters to inherit their father’s estate and it is not lawful for the males to divide the estate among them without giving equal portions to the female. The synod commanded to accept the decree as law.

Another significant decree of Synod was that concerning the age of marriage. Decree 10 of Session 7, fixes the age of marriage as 14 for boys and 12 for girls, “whereas in this diocese there has hitherto been no respect had in the celebration of matrimony to the age of the parties that the law appoints. Therefore the synod doth command, that no man shall be married hereafter, until he has attained the age of 14 at least, nor any woman at least she is full 12….”. As far as women were concerned this was an advanced step, for the rate of mortality among child brides at the

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time of delivery was highly probable. Child marriage was the custom of the region for Christians as well as for other communities. The child marriage continued among the Jacobite Syrians even up to 18th century and earlier part of 19th century also as evident from the C.M.S. missionary records. It is reported as late as 1926 that among the Syrian Jacobites of Cochin, early marriages were looked upon with favour as preventing sexual irregularities, and boys were married at the age of ten or twelve and girls at six or seven’ and infant marriages have not even now quite disappeared among them190. However among the Romo-Syrians the marriage was celebrated ‘according to the rules of the catholic church, (introduced by the synod) when boys and girls are at least 14 and 12 respectively’191.

The Udayamperoor Synod took several measures to prevent the irregularities in marriage. For Syrian Christians the marriage was unbreakable due to its sacramental nature. However it is mentioned in one of the Decrees of the Synod that, women were forsaken by their husbands for various reasons, one of these reasons being the non-payment of the promised dowry. The Synod strictly prohibited such practice192. (It seems that the practice of dowry was the means of harassment of women in the

191 ibid. p 70.
192 ibid. 177: Decree 11of session 7. “the synod being informed, that great number of married people in this diocese do, without any sentence of the church, forsake their wives and to the great offense of God absent themselves from them for a long time together, doth command that there be no such separation made with out the order of the church. The synod doth furthermore declare that, the nonpayment of the portion that may have been promised is no just cause to leave their wives, which they might have been careful to have secured before they were married to them".
earlier centuries itself). The Synod also supported the practice of dowry, which was an essential part of the deal of a marriage by decree 14 of session 9, mostly because it is the means for an income of the church. It appears that polygamy and concubinage was in vogue in former times among the Syrian Christians, for it was strictly forbidden by decree 13 of session 7 and decree 11 of session 9. Various reports of earlier 20th century indicate the absence or very rare occurrence of polygamy among the Christians.

The Udayamperoor Synod took several measures way ahead of their times. Several superstitious customs connected with the caste practices of purity and pollution were rebuked by the synod. Women were considered unclean after childbirth (40 days for boy child and 80 days for girl child).

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193 “The synod approves, the laudable custom of this diocese of men’s giving the 10th part of their wives’ portion when they are married to the church and commands to introduce this system to where ever it has not practiced yet”. Scaria Zachariah: p 179, Hough: p 675.

194 Ibid. p 178. “The synod being informed that some of the Christians of the mountains have been married to several women, in defiance of the Church, their first wife still alive, to the great affront and injury of the holy sacrament of matrimony; doth command all vicars and curates at their first institution, into their churches, immediately to make strict inquiry into this matter, and to force all such to live with their first wives; and in case they refuse, to declare them excommunicate, until such time as they comply, and to turn away all other wives, removing them from the place where they live, which shall be done to all, who during the life of their first wife have presumed to take others, until they shall be brought to live only with the first, and besides, they shall be punished with other punishment at the pleasure of the prelate, or of the holy office of inquisition to which this doth belong”: Also cited by Hough, History..., Op. Cit., Vol. 2 p 675.

195 “Whereas there are great numbers of Christians who for want of having the fear of God and the church before their eyes, do cohabit publicly with concubines, to the great scandal of Christianity; the vicars shall therefore with great charity admonish all such offenders, three times declaring to them, that if they do not reform, they must declare them ex-communicants, and if after so many admonitions they do not turn away their concubines, they must be excommunicated, until they are effectually parted, and be punished with other penalties at the pleasure of the prelate, according to the time they have lived in that sin, and when it shall so happen that their concubines are their slaves, they shall constrain them not only to turn them out of their houses, but to send them out of the country where they live, that there may be no more danger of their relapsing, which shall be likewise observed as to all other women where there is the same danger”: Ibid.
The birth of a girl child was considered doubly polluting, indicating the inferior position attributed to women. Some regulations were introduced during the synod to abolish this practice;\textsuperscript{196} “the synod, though it doth very much command the holy custom of carrying children to church forty days after they are born, to offer them to the Lord, in imitation and praise of what was done by our Lady the most holy Virgin; nevertheless it condemns the separation of women for the said forty days after the birth of a male, as if they were unclean so as not to suffer them to enter into the church, imagining they would sin in doing it, and eighty days after the birth of a female; both of which are Jewish ceremonies that are now abrogated, and not only useless and prejudicial; as such the synod doth totally prohibit the observance of them; declaring that if women have health and strength sooner they shall be obliged to go to church to hear mass on Sundays and holidays and after forty days they may according to their custom, carry their sons to church with devotion, understanding that there is no precept of the church for it”. It seems that there was some relaxation in the customs of purity and pollution for women due to this order. Romo Syrians obeyed the regulation of the synod and observed no pollution after child- birth while among the Jacobite Syrians mother is said to be unclean for 15 days and does not go on with her usual routine until after 90 days\textsuperscript{197}. This restriction


\textsuperscript{197} ibid, p 103.
may be intended for the health and well being of the mother and the child for child marriage was the practice in the past.

There were many instances in the synod of Udayamperoor when women were treated on par with men. Along with godfather, the godmother is also entrusted with the bringing up of children in Christian principles (Decree 111 of session IV, Scaria 124). All above the age of 14 years are instructed to take the sacrament at least once a year (Decree 11 of session V). Special consideration was given to women to avail the sacrament before child-birth, foreseeing the danger involved in the process; "where as women are many times in danger of death in child-bed, a great many dying therein, the synod doth therefore declare that all women with child ought about the time when they reckon they are to be delivered, to confess themselves and receive the holy sacrament, but especially before the birth of their first child, in which the danger is greatest, recommending it to them to be careful to it in time, that they may not be prevented by their labour from going to church" Decree V1, 128).

Arranged marriages were the practice as evident from the account. "Among Syrian Christians as among the Hindus, parents generally marry their daughters without their being consulted. Frequently also they arrange the marriage of their sons, even though they be grown up, according to their taste: and custom may require that they shall comply with their
wishes... Among the Syrian Christians (as in the case of Hindus also) daughters and most of the time sons are never consulted about their marriage. The decision was taken by the parents for the young man had no means to support a wife, being dependent on the parents. Explicit obedience to rules of the family may have been expected of girls (and even the sons) who reached their husband’s family at a very young age. Practically they were at the mercy of the in-laws. Without participation in the decision making process, the position of women in the family would have been subservient in nature.

Conclusion

The institutional practice of traditional caste society was partly disrupted by the arrival of the Portuguese with modern ideology. This opened a new space for Syrian Christians other than that of the caste hierarchy. Then they began to search for a differentiated identity based on religion from the hitherto existed caste identity. The Synod of Udayamperoor took some emancipatory measures for Christian women. The Decree concerning the inheritance of daughters in the absence of son diluted the patriarchal structure. Similarly the removal of the stigma related to the caste practices, the notion of uncleanness and impurity in certain periods of the life cycle of women, challenged the caste practices (even though the practice of pollution and the restriction to go to the church after childbirth for a short

198 Ananthakrishna Ayyar, p 70.
period continued among Syrian Christians of some places). It was not possible to bring about immediate changes in the age-old patriarchal and caste practices of the community with some rules and regulations, introduced by a foreign agency whose intervention was strongly resisted by the community. For 'gender differences were deeply enshrined in tradition and resonant with concealed power'\(^ {199} \). However some of the suggestions of the synod slowly diffused in the community in the course of time. Some were incorporated in the canon laws of even the non-catholic Syrian Christians. These innovations were the steppingstone for a new identity formation for women.