Socio Political Development of Travancore in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Introduction

First half of the twentieth century witnessed major socio-political changes both in Travancore and other parts of India, leading to democratic governance and the formation of a civil society. The position of women in the civil society was entirely different from that of the caste society, having the right of the citizens. Both Travancore and Cochin having similar geographical and social environment, were among the most advanced kingdoms in India in literacy, college education and freedom of women. Both had its place in history as a state where Christians, Jews and Muslims were welcomed and various communities existed without much conflict for centuries, obeying the rules and regulations of a caste society, for each religious group had its caste positions in the social formation and unbreakable religious practices and norms which continued for centuries. K.M. Panikkar describes Kerala as a "social system of parallel societies". In towns each religious groups had its own location, the Christians mainly concentrated around the church. In villages (the villages in Keralam is different from the rest of India due to the lack of tight village

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groupings, each extended family living in its own land generally consisting of paddy fields and land for other cultivation with sufficient water. Each unit was self sufficient.) There was no such demarcation, various religious groups lived interspread with each other. Each extended family living on its own land, rather independently. Louise Ouwerkerk pointed out that the geography of the region breaking the cultivable land into relatively small units, with some wetland for rice cultivation and some dry land for other crops necessary for each homestead with sufficient water supply, made each extended family self sufficient. She describes the people here possessing a high level of culture (for the leisure time available due to less effort needed for good harvest), “distinguished by a great liveliness of intelligence, a keen interest in religion, politics and literary pursuits”\textsuperscript{407}.

In the beginning of the twentieth century the census report shows general increase in Syrian Christian population, the number of Syrians 672124 out of 891767 Christians\textsuperscript{408}. They were concentrated mostly in the northern region and were generally agriculturalists, found in larger numbers in rural areas rather than in urban areas. A number of them were engaged in trade and industry. A very low percentage of them were in the

\textsuperscript{407} Louise Ouwerkerk served the Travancore government as a lecturer in Maharajas Women’s College in Trivandrum from 1929 onwards, appointed as professor of History and Economics in the university of Travancore in 1937. She was an independent observer of the events and her manuscript for a book, ‘No Elephants for the Maharaja’, later edited by Dick Kooiman, expresses her views. She associated with native students and politicians, founder of a branch of the International Fellowship in 1930.

\textsuperscript{408} Based on the census data of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar p 237-238, 288 At the beginning of 19\textsuperscript{th} century they were a small community of about 1 lakh people in the Census report of 1991 the number of Syrians 7920799 out of 5620666 Christians.
public administration during this period. Economic census though not completely reliable due to the attitude of people to give correct information, the Syrian Christians (26.3%) came next to that of Nairs (51.2%) in the ownership of wet land to the total areas\textsuperscript{409}.

In Travancore consideration of caste seemed to fix the economic status of individuals much more than Cochin and Malabar. Yet the people here, irrespective of religious or caste barriers, made use of the educational facilities provided initially by the British Missionaries from 1806 onwards, and by the government agencies from 1834. The last quarter of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of an epoch of remarkable intellectual progress, which synchronized with the rapid spread of English education. The new generation under the impact of western civilization came to have a broad social and political outlook. The people became independent in spirit and critical of their attitude\textsuperscript{410}. Individuation process initiated by education may have been the root cause of these changes. Education aroused a civic consciousness of the people in general, resulting in the social and political awakening of the people. This is visible by the

\textsuperscript{409} Ibid. The median figure (1-10 acres) Syrian Christians came next to that of Brahmins, below 1 acre, Iavas more than 10%, Syrian Christians less than 50%, and of the group 10 acres and above Syrian Christians had the highest proportion. The distribution of the dry land, the percentage was the highest among the Nairs (73.4%), next to that Syrian Christians (67.6%). Namputhiri Brahmins were the highest land owners, showing highest average per owner, corresponding areas for Christians was nearly 4 acres and over 2.5 acres.

rise of a number of newspapers, majority of which had no politics at all. Some among them voiced for the cause of the depressed classes. The newspapers reached the majority of population. (Surveys show that every newspaper was read by or read to an average of 10 persons).

**Changes in the caste space**

Perhaps the most important impact of education was the creation of a social consciousness, making the people aware of the inequalities of caste space. P.K. K. Menon points out that social consciousness was aroused early enough and the struggle for the recognition of social equality started. These struggles were aimed in the first phase to remove the caste disabilities within the caste space by reform activities and then to demand for more participation in the political field, which also was intended to improve their position in the caste space.

The system of caste and exclusive restriction of labour to particular caste was the basis of caste society and the great impediment in the way of social progress and advancement. Some people other than Brahmins and Nairs, got job in the administrative service. A large number of people got employment as teachers in government and private schools. Employment opportunities were available as writers and labours in Rubber and tea plantations, first established by European entrepreneurs in the second half

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of nineteenth century itself\textsuperscript{412}. This paved the way to overcome the caste habitus gradually.

By the second half of nineteenth century itself, the depressed classes became aware of their caste disabilities and there were isolated resistances to the caste practices like the fight for the upper cloth struggle, first by the Nadar women, and then for the Ezhava women in 1859, and the right to wear gold ornaments by the Avarna castes, and the struggle of the agriculture labourers\textsuperscript{1866}, struggle for the right of women to wear proper dress lead by Velayudha Panikkar belonging to Ezhava community\textsuperscript{413}. But it was by the early decades of the twentieth century the organized form of resistance in the social as well as political level gained momentum. Special mention was given in the census report of 1931\textsuperscript{414} about the social reform movements. It was reported that the social reform movement was a common feature of all the castes and communities. Fusion of several caste subdivisions and corresponding changes in the social customs was a noted feature of this period. In Travancore most of them have organized

\textsuperscript{412} Travancore Cochin Diocesan Records, June 1907, No 3, p 34 "Rubber is steadily pushing its way forward in the neighbourhood of Mundakayam. There are now 10 or 12 European managing estates employing several writers and a large number of coolies, of which a considerable proportion are Christians. Diocesan records 1911-15, p 20. Coffee cultivation in Nelliampathy from 1866 onwards, 20-30 plantations. Rubber and tea plantations of Europeans in Peermedu progressing, writers and coolies increased, both Malayali and Tamil.


\textsuperscript{414} The census report of the 1931 summed up the reform movements "most of them (the communities) have organized association on caste or communal lines for the betterment of their social, economic religious or political conditions. At present there is hardly any caste or community in the state without an association of its own for self advancement in the social and political spheres".
association on caste or communal basis and carried on vigorous propaganda for the betterment of their social religious, economic and political conditions. A general desire to rise in the social ladder by all caste and communities was a noteworthy feature of this period. According to the census report of 1931, the Nairs were the first to organize a caste association followed by the Namputhiris, Kshatriyas, Ilavas (Ezhavas), Pulayas and other castes and communities including the Christians and the Muslims.

These community organizations were able to bring about major changes in the customs and norms related to caste. In these caste organizations the notion of individual membership, instead of the corporate membership of the traditional society, first came into practice. This was the first visible expression of the individuation process in which the right and the social responsibility of individuals were recognized.

The educated sections in Travancore irrespective of caste considerations became conscious of their rights and privileges. The highly educated members of the middle class were the backbone of the freedom movement. They demanded progressive association with the administration, in order to remove the social, political and economic inequalities. A systematic political campaigning involving the participation of almost all communities started by the end of nineteenth century. The nature of this is

summarized in the report, "each caste wanted a separate unit of the body politics so that its interest may not suffer from want of advocacy, natural instinct for self preservation and self advancement and collective forms." The Syrian Christian community was one of the progressive communities of Kerala and the educated section of this community was active participants in the freedom movement. At political level this polarization on the basis of communities in the beginning sharpened the division and Kerala was not able to overcome that problem in later periods also.

Early decades of twentieth century was a period of major social and political changes. Louis Ouwerkerk took Travancore as an example to show the regeneration of local events into popular movements, which in turn merged into national movement. The up rise for political democracy and national independence were closely associated with the struggles to change the caste related disabilities such as untouchability, and lack of opportunities for the lower castes. awareness of the inequality of women in various communities. It was a period of social reforms, carried out by numerous community organizations, for each caste group had its own problems of harmful social customs and practices.
Constitutional development and the struggle for responsible government-
Civil Society formation

Travancore was the pioneer in constitutional developments among the Indian states, but any major break with traditional practices took place only after independence, for the absolute power was vested in the Maharaja, who ruled through a Dewan, who was the head of the administration. It was considered as a Hindu state for the ruling family and great majority of the population, especially who yield power were Hindus. One of the reasons for this was that the deaswom department was combined with the land Revenue department and only caste Hindus were appointed from the top to the bottom level. So other caste and communities had to struggle to obtain government posts. It is a formidable task to include all the events, role of the communities and individuals, political and non-political organizations involved in the process of transformation from the caste space to that of civil society. The noteworthy feature is that, before independence representative institutions, developed here. In 1881 a legislative council, consisting of 8 nominated members (later raised to 15), 6 officials and 2 non-officials (including one Christian,) was instituted. Actually this was the first step that paved the way to the development of full responsible government based on adult franchise. (In 1891 a ‘Memorial’ was presented to the Maharaja by all communities together, (except the lower castes, and later known as the Malayali Memorial) for
proper representation in the government service ("the denial to the Malayalees a proper share in the government of the country and their systematic exclusion from the higher grades of service"). In 1896 the Ezhavas presented a memorial, signed by more than 13,000 for their rights.) In 1921, Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims together submitted a Memorial to the maharaja, put forward their claims for a reasonable share of government posts.

In 1904, Sree Mulam Popular assembly consisting of 100 members, nominated by government and various bodies, heads of districts and certain representative associations, presided by the Dewan a ministry. But it was only a body without any power, had only the right to represent the grievances of the people to the notice of the government. This later became an elected body, chosen from and responsible to the legislature. First franchise was restricted to property owners, mainly high caste Hindus. In 1911, the Christians had only one representative and Ezhavas and other communities were not represented at all. Even in the legislative assembly of 1921 Nairs held more than half of the elected seats, the Christians about a fifth, the Ezhavas, Muslims and other communities were not represented at all. By the constitution of October, 1932 the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly was replaced by the Sri Mulam Assembly, consisting of 72 members of whom 48 would be elected on a wide franchise, 14 government nominees to represent various minority interests and 10
officials, and Sri Chitra State Council, consisting of 37 members of whom 27 would be elected on a higher franchise. The Dewan was the president of both houses and the deputy president of the assembly was elected. The Maharaja retained the power of legislation by proclamation and all bills must have his consent after going through the Assembly and Council. Dewan-President had the power to overrule any motion. Christian Organizations, The S.N.D.P. Yogam and the Muslim League protested but in vain.\footnote{P. K. K. Menon, *The History...* passim, P. J. Cherian, "Radical movements in 20th century" Perspectives of Kerala History, the second Millennium, Kerala State Gazetteer, Vol. 2, part 2. 1999, p. 511. passim}

The formation of All Travancore Joint Political Congress in December 1932, can be cited as the first step towards the formation of a civil society, three communities coming together to demand their political rights. In this organization all the three communities had equal participation without any hierarchical order with a Syrian Christian (Jacobite) president, a Syrian Christian (Catholic) secretary, and two joint secretaries an Ezhava and a Muslim. Louis Ouwerkirk affirms that the formation of the Joint Political Conference was the real turning point in the process of political change. The reasons she put forward to support this argument was that for the first time in the history of Travancore, the unquestioned political dominance of the Nair community for centuries (except by the Tamil Brahmins invited by the Maharajas from time to time
to occupy the key positions) was challenged by the joint action of the Syrian Christians, Ezhavas and the Muslims and they were able to treat them on equal terms. They became aware of the benefits of mass agitation and the ways to carry it successfully even in the face of strong government oppression (perhaps inspired by Gandhian methods). The most important factor, that helped them even in their later agitations, was to work together beyond communal boundaries (to certain extent only), even though the prime aim was the promotion of their own communal interests. They submitted a petition requesting fair representation for all communities, which was also ignored by the Dewan. This resulted in the ‘abstention movement’ by which these three communities resolved to abstain from all electoral process. So in Travancore the struggle in the initial stages was to obtain proper representation in the legislative body, and the main opponent was the then legal and constitutional adviser and the later Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar.

One of the important events during this period was that, the Travancore government appointed a public service commission by this time, the superior services to be selected by competitive examination and lower services according to the numerical strength of the communities. The competence of individuals as the qualification for at least the superior posts.

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in the government irrespective of caste considerations can be considered as a major shift in the civil society. In August 1935, new electoral rules were set up by which all persons owning land and giving a tax of one rupee or more and all those live in the Municipal area were enfranchised. Even then the percentage of people having the right to vote was raised only 10 to 12% from 3%. After the elections of 1937, 12 Nairs, 12 Syrian Christians, 1 protestant Christian, 8 Ezhavas, 3 Muslims and 1 Latin Christian were elected to the assembly.

The people’s movement in Travancore, from the beginning itself, was for the civil rights of the people as well as the constitutional reform. The formation of the Joint Political Conference was in fact the starting point of major political change breaking the supremacy of high caste Hindus in the government. Later the conference changed its name to “Samyuktha Party” and the State National Congress originated, as a result of the negative attitude of the government to the demand for responsible government, in February 1938, with the participation of almost all the communities here. It’s president was a popular leader from the Nair community, Mr. Pattom Thanu Pillai, deputy president, Mr. T.M. Varghese, a Syrian Christian and two joint secretaries, one Nair and one Christian with an elected working committee which included Mr. C. Kesavan and Mr. V.K. Velayudhan from the Ezhava community, two
leading Muslims, few more protestant and catholic Christians including one woman who was a Latin catholic lawyer.

The State Congress eventually became instrumental in bringing democracy for Travancore. In May 1938 the State congress presented a memorandum to the Maharaja, signed by the 21 members of the working committee, requesting a cabinet of ministers responsible to the legislature, adult franchise, a declaration of fundamental civil rights, freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of religious worship, freedom from arbitrary arrest or imprisonment, a guarantee of a living wage, the restoration of the independence of the judiciary and finally the dismissal of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar from the service of the state and an independent enquiry into his acts as Dewan. The after effect of this was the politically maneuvered failure of National Quilon bank, founded by two major Syrian Christian families; since one of the directors, Mr. K.C. Mamman Mappilai had an active involvement in the process, and was one of the prominent member of the community. The Syrian Christian community saw this as an anti Christian move of the Dewan, and they became the staunch supporters of the State Congress. Sir C.P. from time to time spread out false and malicious propaganda against Travancore State Congress, especially against its Christian members to foment discord, among the various communities. E. John Kuruvilla draw up another memorandum and presented to the maharaja which was never heard of
again. The second civil disobedience movement was thwarted again by the intervention of Gandhiji. Gandhiji as well as British authority failed to recognise the need for a fair and open inquiry into the charges against the Dewan. Many were indignant about the humiliating condition of nonintervention imposed on the State Congress.

In earlier decades of twentieth century, people of various underprivileged communities were clamoring for proper share in the administration and for educational facilities. From the beginning in 1927 the demands of the peoples movement was the grant of the responsible government within the existing political frame work and the guarantee of fundamental civil rights. 1938 onwards, their civil liberties were extensively undermined. The state congress was banned by a proclamation of the maharaja and the leaders were in and out of the jail frequently. Public meetings were banned. By this time Indian National Congress was also active in Travancore. The youth league had separated from the state congress and formed the socialist party. The outbreak of world war and famine minimized the momentum of the agitation for some time, even though protest marches and meetings were going on. Right through the war years and beyond Sir C.P. was in power. The election of the assembly was postponed due to political and economic reasons, till 1944. In the 1944 election a small group of 11 Congress men were elected to the assembly and three to the state council, despite the government’s interference and
manipulation. Pattom Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, E. John Philippose and R. Sankar were the main leaders of the state congress during this election.

Proceedings of the Sri Mulam Assembly and Sri Chitra State Council reveals the fact that the small group of congressmen were able to exert ceaseless pressure on the government, even though the Dewan with his huge majority of official and nominated members and sycophantic elected members, was always able to get his own way. This was true of the educational policy of 1945 also. The government’s proposal to control primary education acted as a catalyst to rekindle the agitation, for 70% of the primary schools and nearly half of the middle schools were under Christian management. The constitutional reform suggested by Sir C.P. ‘the American model’ in which the executive power and the appointment of judiciary was vested with the Maharaja through the Dewan, further ignited the agitation, supported by all the political parties, religious and social organizations and the public at large. Further Sir C.P’s attempt to establish an “independent Travancore” without joining the Indian Union”

419 Louis Ouwerkirk, No elephants... Op. cit., p 231. The government had limited control over the schools. Government school inspectors examined schools and small grant in aid was allotted for teacher salary payments. Government’s attempt to appoint headmasters in 1943 was thwarted by Christian management, especially by Catholics.

420 By ‘American Model’ the legislature was to consist of two chambers. The first a legislative assembly popularly elected, the second a facultative body, comprised of representatives of various bodies, interests and professions, and an executive body of higher officials, appointed through a public service commission with the Dewan as its head, nominated by the Maharaja with the power to veto. The judiciary was supposed to be independent, but the Judges of the high court was to be nominated by Maharaja and the subordinate judiciary by the executive. The universal suffrage was the only good aspect of the suggested model, for the model was intended to protect the rights and privileges and the power of the Maharaja. Naturally the people rejected this. Demonstrations and processions were going on. The popular slogan during this time was “American model arabikadalil”.
accelerated the struggle for the freedom movement was gaining strength in the all India scenario. Many Malayalees were part of the movement. Mr. V.P. Menon and John Mathai (Secretary and finance minister of the interim ministry led by Jawaharlal Nehru), Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon were prominent among them. Mr. T.M. Varghese, the deputy president of the Travancore State Congress was one of the general secretaries of the All-India States Peoples’ Conference (A.I.S.P.C.). The state congress committee at a meeting held on twentieth July 1947 demanded the immediate dismissal of the dewan, the introduction of responsible government to be set up, a popularly elected constituent assembly to frame the constitution of Travancore and the annex of Travancore in the Indian Union and constituent assembly. The state congress appealed to all communities to take part in the last fight to remove the despotic government and misrule, with special emphasis given to stick on to non-violence. The Dewan continued his campaign of intense repression, resulting in a bodily attack on the dewan himself on twentyfifth of July 1947. In fact this culminated in his immediate exit and maharajas accession to the Indian Union. The state congress continued its agitation supported by various bodies such as Travancore Students Congress, the State Muslim League, the Kerala Catholic Congress, till the royal proclamation on fourth of September.

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421 Louis Ouwerkirk, No elephants... Op, cit, p 269.
granting full responsible government. The elections on the representative body, based on adult franchise were held in February 1948. Travancore state congress won with a huge majority, A. J. John was elected unanimously as president. Pattom Thanu Pillai was the Prime minister, T.M. Varghese and C. Kesavan cabinet ministers. Cochin Congress got the majority in Cochin. Travancore was the first state the in Indian History to have responsible government and the first to introduce universal suffrage. In 1951 Travancore and Cochin were merged into one state in the Indian Union, and in 1956, with the recognition of India into linguistic states, Travancore- Cochin and Malabar was joined together to form the state of Kerala, the southern Tamil speaking areas of Travancore joined to Tamil Nadu.

**Organizations that helped the formation of civil society**

**Political movements**

The activities of the Travancore State congress are already mentioned. The minimum age for membership of the State Congress was 18 years, and many students especially those in and around the colleges of Trivandrum became its active members. There were several forms of other youth movements in Travancore during this period, all of them activated by intense nationalistic spirit and in initial stages linked to Travancore State Congress. The transformation to adult membership beyond caste considerations materialised first in these youth organizations and

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422 ibid. p 275.
movements. The educated youth recognised equal rights of all individuals and the struggle towards the formation of a civil society commenced on this basis.

The Youth League⁴²³, the most important among them, was founded by 1931, the leader of which was K. C. George, one Syrian Christian Lawyer, (started his political activity as a Congress man, but later became an active communist). It was not purely congress but socialist. The Youth League first made its presence when the State congress leaders who presented the memorial were arrested, and Gandhiji intervened for the withdrawal of the memorial. They decided to read the memorial in public and break the law. An action council was formed with K.C. George as secretary. The youth league of Travancore was in close association with its counter parts of Cochin and Malabar and they succeeded in getting support for the civil disobedience movement of 1938 (volunteers came from Cochin under the leadership of K.K. Varrier, from Malabar under A.K. Gopalan, from southern Karnataka under Ganapathy Kammath, and from southern Tamil Nadu under Pandyan). This association contributed an active part in formalising the united Kerala later. Gradually the youth League got separated from the radical congress party⁴²⁴.

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⁴²³ P. J. Cherian, "Radical..., Op. cit p 528-530
Labour movements

Labour movements also took active part in the civil disobedience. They had strong links with their counterparts in British India, especially with that of Cochin and British Malabar. Trade unionism was well established in the coastal towns by the early thirties. T.V. Thomas was pioneer in this field, involved with the struggle for social justice in 1920s itself. He was the president of the Travancore coir workers union in 1930s). Labour association in Alappuzha had its beginning as a reading room (1923), with a small newspaper ‘Thozhilali’ and a co-operative society. P.N. Krishnapilla was the representative of labours in State Council and C.O. Pant in the assembly. In 19th July 1935, 4 bills were presented in the Sree Mulam Assembly, the Trade Union Bill, Trade Dispute Bill, Factories Dispute Bill, and Workman’s Compensation Bill. In 1936, Travancore witnessed the first political agitation by the coir workers and in 1937 the first organized struggle by the agriculture labours. In 1937 it self the trade union association had the red flag with the arrival and chuttika. All Kerala Congress Socialist Party took an active interest in labour movements and when the Travancore communist party was formed in December 1938 the trade unions became part of that, although in the beginning it was with the State Congress. The trade unions were declared as unlawful and public meetings were banned in 1946. The unprecedented events followed after the

general strike declared on the maharajas birthday on October 1946, was a black day in the history of Travancore culminating in the death of hundreds of people. The uprise generally known as the ‘Punnapra-Vyalar’ struggle was against the rule of the Dewan as well as against the exploitation of landowners, supported by the trade unions and communist party.

Non-Political Youth movements

Some of the youth of the Syrian Christian community, moved by intense Christian piety had grouped together in early decades of twentieth century through various Christian movements, clamored for social action based on Christian principles. Several other young people, moved by the spirit of nationalism entered into the political struggle. One non-political youth movement participated in the civil disobedience movement was the Young Kerala Society, founded on an inter-religious basis, most of its members, named Fellowship of the Friends of Truth. The Christian organizations were well organized and working among the university students for a long time, were also moved by the nationalistic spirit. The most important among these was the Student Christian Movement (S.C.M.) of India, which was particularly strong in Kerala because of the large number of Syrian Christian student members, acted as a means to bring Christian students into the mainstream of national awakening all over India. So the relevance of Student Christian movement, and other such organizations to overcome

426 Louis Ouwerkirk, No Elephants ... Op. cit., p 167
such narrow communal interests confined to the church by the Christian youth is considerable. There were a number of young leaders from the Syrian Christian community who understood the relevance of Christian principles in social action. They rose to the occasion to give a proper leadership although most of them were forgotten afterwards. K.A. Mathew, the secretary of Kerala S.C.M during this period was one of them. He had great influence on Syrian Christian youth, especially the university students for his headquarters was in Trivandrum. Though he was non-political in the beginning, he took keen interest in the national movement. M.A. Thomas, the general secretary of the Student Inter-religious Fellowship was another such leader. M.A. Thomas, together with M.M. Thomas run the Waifs and Strays Home in the slums of Trivandrum and the students of all religions had a common platform for discussion and social action here. These two leaders were able to organize the youth around Trivandrum for International Fellowship conference, to build roads, to conduct a village survey for Y.M.C.A., and organize students’ demonstration in 1938. Louis Ouwerkirk commented about this group, “some became communists, some dedicated Gandhian workers, some Christian social workers; few remain unchanged”, indicating the role they played to provide wide range leadership in bringing about socio-political changes\(^{127}\).
Another group which is to be mentioned, is the Society of St. Thomas, which comprised of men, women and married couple belonging to Syrian Christian community. This society had its origin as the Christian Institute by K.I. Mathai (later sadhu Mathaiachan), aimed at the evangelization among non-Christians. Soon after M.P. Job (later Rev. J.P. Muthedathu) and K.K. Chandy (later Acharya K.K. Chandy joined him, followed by many Christian youth resigning government jobs. A general revival is observed among the youth, especially Christian youth for social action. A reading room was started in 1916 in Mullackal, Alappuzha, which became a meeting place of peoples of all religion. In addition to the Karappuram mission, there was a home for destitute children. Later in 1938 the center was shifted to Manganam near Kottayam known as the Christavashram. The Thomases and Mr. and Mrs. K.A. Mathew were prominent among them. The members of the advisory board of the Christavashram from the initial stages itself were from all Christian denominations, including the bishops of Anglican church and Mar Thoma church, priests, social workers and some women\textsuperscript{428} (Miss) Rachel Cherian, a government school-teacher, later became a full member of the Ashram even before retirement receiving sisterhood. Many more women from the Syrian Christian community

\textsuperscript{428} K. M. Mammen & M. Kurien: Christavashramvathile Jobachan, Christavashram, Manganam, 1984. The members of the first advisory board of Christavashram were Bishop H. Panchanham Walsh, Yuhanon Mar Themothios, Bishop B.C. Corfield, Rev. C.C. Thonmen, Fr. K. David, R.R. Kaitan, Rev. R.S. Macnicket, Rachel Joseph, Saramma Mathew, Dr. M.P. Chacko, P.O. Philip, T. Joseph, T.T. Tharu, KI Mathai (convener) and M.P. Job (secretary); p 61-62.
were associated with the activities of Christavashram. Miss Anna Punnen (later Mrs. K. C. Joseph), Rachel Joseph and Saramma Mathew as advisory board members, Mariamma Thomas, headmistress of Karappuram mission school (p 50), were some of them. A small journal ‘Arunodayam’ was published from Christavashram, (1937) dealing mainly with social and religious problems (The publication of which was banned by Sir. C.P. later in 1943). The ashram had close links with progressive minded Christians of all denominations, and organizations such as S.C.M., International Fellowship, Y.M.C.A, and Y.C.C.A. (The Youth Christian Council of Action (Y.C.C.A), had its origin in the S.C.M. camp of 1938, with K.A. Mathew as president, K.K. Chandy as vice president and M. M. Thomas as secretary. Y.C.C.A organized vocational study classes for youth in Christavashram to keep abreast with the prevailing socio political conditions of India as a whole formulation proper direction in thinking and action. The discussions here covered a wide range of subjects such as history of Indian nationalism, Marxism, Gandhism, Democratic Socialism, Christian heritage harmful Social practices. Gradually the attitude of the youth for social action reached out to the rest of the community. A number of young priests from various Christian denominations were active participants in the activities of

429 Ibid, pp 74, 80, 50, 61
Y.C.C.A. Relief work was carried by the members and associates of Christavashram in the famine hit areas and a survey was done to bring about the intensity of the famine, the extent of poverty, starvation and famine deaths and the inadequacy of government measures to cope with the crisis and these reports reached the public through ‘Arunodayam’. The Y.C.C.A. had an active role in the political agitation. They protested the lathi charge of the students by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, the Dewan, and requested the church authorities to intervene and participate in the civil disobedience movement. Many Y.C.C.A. members were arrested. They resisted the attempt of few Christian leaders to erect a statue of Sir. C.P., on behalf of the Syrian Christians. A statement in this regard was formulated at a meeting held in Christavashram and printed at Cochin and duly signed by 83 Christian leaders. This was distributed during Sunday service of a number of churches by Y.C.C.A. members and published in the ‘Arunodayam’. Church had no direct involvement in the civil disobedience movement. In fact the churches as such never participated in the civil disobedience movement directly although the Kerala Catholic Congress and the Council of the Mar Thoma Church condemned “independent Travancore”. The individuals of the Syrian Christian community like almost all other communities of Kerala were in the forefront of the political agitation. Although the reformed party became

432 ibid p 80.
433 Louis Ouwerkirk, No Elephants op. cit. p 204-06
separated from the orthodox group, the orthodox section was also
influenced by the reformist ideas.

Conclusion
Combined action of all these movements and individuals were instrumental
in making the princely state of Travancore a part of Indian union, negating
Sir C.P.'s attempts to make it an independent state. In 1951 Travancore and
Cochin were merged into one state of the Indian union, Tiru-Cochi. In
1956 with the re organisation of India into linguistic states, Travancore,
Cochin and Malabar were joined together to form the state of Kerala.

In the social field though conceptually a civil society was formed, it
did not dismantle the traditional habitus (institutions, practices, symbolic
system and discourses). Traditional habitus continued to reproduce.
Though educational merit was considered as a norm for social placement, it
would not bring many changes in the social status of the 'lower caste
people'. Bourdieu Points out that while variations in educational capital are
always very closely related to variation in competence, at equivalent levels
of educational capital, differences in social origin (whose effects are
already expressed in difference in educational capital) are associated with
important difference in competence.\footnote{Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, p 63}
Social space of women in the First Half of Twentieth Century

Introduction

As mentioned earlier, the earlier decades of twentieth century was a period of major socio-political changes in Travancore as well as the rest of India. It was also a period of transformation from traditional caste practices to a more secular way of thinking. Many historians are of opinion that in Kerala as well as the rest of India religious reformation in the second part of eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the forerunner of the renaissance. A number of enlightened men from every caste and community gave leadership to eradicate many superstitious practices during this period especially those caste-oriented customs which discriminate women. They recognized the role of education of both boys and girls in improving their position, in the caste space in the initial stages and in the changing social space followed. As mentioned above various political as well as non-political institutions, organizations and movements gradually constituted a secular space in the place of caste space. All these activities helped to form a different "self" in the place of traditional, communal one.
Amir Ali states that public sphere evolved in India under the colonial rule and during the National Movement. Colonial rule created a sharp distinction between the public sphere and private sphere, the public sphere governed by British Laws pertaining to areas of life like land relation, criminal law, laws of contract and evidence. They were reluctant to encroach upon the private sphere of the two major religious communities. Its policy was to allow the private sphere to be governed by Hindu and Muslim laws that were defined as personal laws and dealt with areas of life that were more intimate like family relationships, family property and religious life. Tamir is of opinion that the present configuration of the Indian Public Sphere acquired by the national movement in response to colonial rule- the right to national self determination- the right of ones own private sphere in which the latter is defined by certain desirable cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices. Religious authorities content with the creation of a private sphere in which religious observances and practices could be carried out, where eager for the continual maintenance of this sphere under their control. This fact helped the continuous perpetuation of patriarchy in Indian society. More
and more religions asserted their influence and enunciating their interest in secular affairs.

In Travancore the educational institutions were started and continued by religious authorities, especially British missionaries for boys and girls. This paved the way for the expansion of Private sphere. The inter-institutional relationship between family and religion are strong, qualitatively different from other institutional relationships.

For Syrian Christians the contact with the Anglican missionaries paved the way for the religious reformation. The availability of Bible and other religious books in Malayalam and widespread education accelerated this process. Girls were considered as destined for family life and an identity of their own, other than related to family was never thought of. Even after the lapse of almost a century, traditional customary practices relating to the domesticity of women such as child marriage and dowry system continued. It was the process of schooling and the propagation of modern ideas that helped to form a dent in the customary practices and implant new notions of individual dignity. As a result the attitude of the women and towards women changed considerably. The domestic space itself was undergoing transformation due to the individuation process created by education. The educated men and women began to raise their

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438 Casanova 1994
439 Berger 1967.
voices against child marriage and unjust demand for dowry. They realised the need for proper legislation for the inheritance, for The Syrian Christian community was governed by the canon laws which was ambiguous regarding the rights of widows.

**Development of female education in the first half of twentieth century**

It was education that helped to make a quantum shift in the social position of women. This process started in the nineteenth century, however the educational facilities were available only to a small segment of the population. By early twentieth century the attitude of people changed considerably towards education. More and more educational institutions were started in the public as well as in the private sector. Almost all communities actively involved in this process. Education became easily accessible to all.

An increasing awareness among the general public about the necessity of educating the girls was noticed during the beginning of twentieth century. A rapid increase in the number of girls attending the school was noticed in the end of the nineteenth century itself. In 1894-95 it was 28,933, 1896-97 it was 36,652, and in 1898-99 the number increased to 40,823. This upward trend continued during early decades of twentieth century. The number of girls attending the school was 44,974 and 46037 in 1901-01 and 1901-02 respectively. The census statistics in 1901 shows that in point of view of female education, 31 out of every 1000 females were
literate in Travancore\textsuperscript{440}. The students under instruction in 290 CMS Schools of Travancore and Cochin in 1904 were – 9098 boys and 4050 girls. Out of 655 agents, there were 93 females, indicating an increase in the number of female teachers\textsuperscript{441}. A missionary report of 1905, during the opening of an English Medium School at Mavelikkara mentioned, “a new spirit has taken hold of the general public, the people of Mavelikkara have read at least one important sign of the times. Boys and girls without caste or creed were daily sent to the school. Consequently the classes are overcrowded and in the primary department there are divisions for almost all classes”\textsuperscript{442}. It was also noted in the same report that, seeing the rapid progress of the school the leading men of the place with the support of some missionaries have decided to raise it to the high school standard and a few candidates were sent for Madras lower Secondary examination. This phenomenon was not confined to Travancore alone. It is given in Diocesan Record of September 1905 that the craving for higher education have become so general through out the length and breadth of ancient and intellectual India.

The attitude of people towards female education is well evident in a letter of a ‘loyalist’, headed ‘Her Highness the senior Rani’s studies’\textsuperscript{443}, in which the writer says, “I am much concerned to learn that Her Highness

\textsuperscript{440} Ibid, p 477.
\textsuperscript{441} Travancore Cochin Diocesan Record, March, 1905, p 36.
\textsuperscript{442} Diocesan Records, July 1905, p 5.
\textsuperscript{443} People’s weekly of Trivandrum and reproduced in the diocesan Record, June 1912, p 70.
the senior Rani has put a stop to her studies. I do not know what made her highness to take this extra ordinary course when the public of Travancore were expecting that she become could become one of the most educated and accomplished ladies in the realm. I hope ant trust Her Highness will reconsider the matter and resume her studies for the great satisfaction of her subjects”.

It is reported in 1905 that the leading Hindu and Mohammedan gentle men in Guruvayoor were trying to open a high school of their own and started a school with forth and fifth forms. The forth form consisted of 31 and the fifth form of 9 pupils including two Nair girls of respected families and 6 Mohammedan youths. A girl school of primary standard was carried on here for 5 years\(^{444}\). The record of the English school started by Rev. Peet in Mavelikkara show a total of 306 scholars of which 275 were boys and 31 girls. This included 104 Syrian Christians, 100 Anglicans and 42 Hindus\(^{445}\). A steady increase in the number of scholars, both boys and girls of Christian as well as non-Christian was evident from the detailed report of the schools and scholars of various districts of Travancore diocese of CMS. In 1906 the number of schools were 208, the number of Christian boys 3711, Christian girls 2028 and non-Christian boys 1569 and girls 287

\(^{444}\) Diocesan Records., September 1905, p 76
\(^{445}\) Diocesan Records., July 1906 p 60
and in 1908 the number of schools increased to 235, Christian boys 4743, girls 2265 and non-Christian boys 2040 and girls 346.446

Generally the people, especially in higher classes did not appreciate co-education. There was a prejudice against this in the tradition bound society. So the female boarding schools and girl’s schools played a very important role in advancing female education overcoming all these prejudices. It was reported in 1905, “the necessity of a girl’s school was brought into the notice of higher authorities. “now 45 girls are reading in the school. Many will not allow their girls especially when grown up, to attend the school because they have to sit with the boys. What ever may be the opinion of the Europeans regarding mixed schools, it is against all the prejudices of the natives. It is therefore better to have separate institutions for girls so that they may take full advantage of the opportunities of education.”447 As per C.M.S. records of 1913 female education was rapidly progressing in Travancore. The girl’s schools were separated from the boy’s schools. There was a steady progress in the field of female education in the state and many schools were started both by the government and in private sector. Travancore government supported the female education by their grant-in-aid policy to support private, (at that time mainly Christian) enterprises in education and sanctioning female education free in the state.

446 Table 6 A.
447 Diocesan Records, July 1905, p 63.
Many girl's schools were started by the government, staffed by teachers from the missionary schools. The Travancore government was determined to push forward female education. However it appears that the new girl's schools opened in the public sector were in places where there were schools for girl already. The missionaries viewed this as an act of competition as they were genuine well-wishers for many years. They had advocated and striven to provide female education. They felt that there was ample scope for the government departments and private effort in this important work of imparting education to the girls of Travancore. There is room for as many girls schools (especially elementary girl's schools) as the government and missionaries can start and staff. The missionaries appreciated the sudden zeal for female education, but they cannot justify the supplying facilities for female school where sufficient facilities already exist, when there were districts quite unsupplied.448

There were 267 girl's schools in 1912, of which 166 were departmental and the rest under private management. 72 aided and 29 un-aided.449 Almost all communities began to send girls to the schools. There were 16 Hindu and one Mohammedan girl among the day's scholars in Baker school in 1911.450

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448 Diocesan Records, June 1912, p 69.
450 Diocesan Records February 1911, p 59.
The census report of 1911, gave the total number of literate males as 23% and they fall under the age of 20 years while 42% of the literate females are below the age of 20, showing considerable progress of education in the early ages of females compared to that of males. Between 1901 and 1911 the increase in the total number of females was 88% while that of men was 34%. Among Christians there were 128 female literates and 278 male literates per 1000 of each sex at the age period of 10 to 20. The Hindu proportion for the same being 7 and 224 respectively. With regard to English education there were 10 females and 27 males in a 1000 of Christian population as against 1 and 12 in 1000 Hindu population in the same period. The increase in the percentage of Christian population is undoubtedly due to the missionary endeavour in the educational field. The Roman Catholics also began to show interest in the female education during this period, establishing several girls schools. The St. Joseph’s girl college teaching up to F.A. standard, attached to the convent of Holy Angels was started by the Carmelite missionaries. Boarding schools also progressed rapidly. Mrs. Baker’s school at Kottayam and Mrs. Bishops school at Trichur increased their standards and started to sent candidates for the madras Lower Secondary examinations, some of them were trained.

in Buchanan Institution in 1905 and one girl passed the Matriculation examination of Madras university\textsuperscript{453}.

Soon after these schools were raised to high school. Hunt stated that scores of pupils from the Baker Memorial high school (B.M.G.H.S) had passed on to the Maharajas college for girls in Trivandrum and the Women’s Christian college at Madras established in 1915. Number of old pupils have returned to the school as teachers, or were teachers elsewhere. Others were serving in their generation as daughters, nurses, college professors etc\textsuperscript{454}. The history of the B.M.G.H.S. was typical of the rapid advance in the progress of womanhood in Travancore. Mrs. Mary Punnen the first woman from the Syrian Christian community who passed the matriculation examination in 1905, obtained B.A. Degree of Madras University from the Maharajas college, studied medicine at the London School of medicine for women, where her name was on honour’s list board in school lobby and later she took charge of the government hospital for women and children\textsuperscript{455}. The diocesan record of August 1912, gave the achievements of the girls of B.M.H.S. All the 3 students appeared for the S.S.L.C. examination obtained certificate of higher order, qualifying for admissions to the public service, securing the 14\textsuperscript{th}, 39\textsuperscript{th} and 93\textsuperscript{rd} position in the state out of 710 candidates, both male and female. Of the 15 girls

\textsuperscript{453} Diocesan Records, January 1905, p 4.
\textsuperscript{454} Hunt, vol. 2 p 253.
\textsuperscript{455} Ibid.
appeared for the E.S.I.C., 10 got qualifying certificates from the Buchanan Institution and one girl stood first in the state out of 1260 candidates and secured the 13th, 21st, 39th and 56th position also. In 1913, out of 1260 recipients, male and female, of E.S.I.C., one girl stood first and 6 others were in the first 100.

Several missionaries served the boarding schools in the states and many young students were influenced by their self-abnegating work and efficiency resulted in the awakening of womanhood in Travancore. Convent education was considered superior, had an added advantage even in matrimony. Side by side with the progress of the boarding schools the female education advanced rapidly in the state in the beginning of twentieth century. This Zenana Mission opened school in Olessha (Kottayam), Ernakulam and Trichur. They also started a number of primary schools and about 300 children of all castes were admitted. The teachers were the former students of these schools who got their training in the Buchanan Institution. Mrs. Bower’s school had form 2 and Mrs. Calley’s school commenced upper primary classes, had a special regard for the girls of the poorer classes, who otherwise could not get any education at all (ibid). More new girl’s schools were opened up and these with the already existing ones had greatly improved in efficiency. Through liberal grants

456 Diocesan Records, August 1912, p 94
457 Diocesan Records, April 1913 p 28, June 1913, p 66
459 Diocesan Records, July, 1912, p 65
given by the government had been able to continue the good work in spite of their limited resources. The Marthoma church started a boarding school for girls at Thiruvalla in 1910, The Nicholson school, which contributed to the education of girls in and around this place.

The progress of female education is visible from the census report of 1931. In places were Syrian Christians preponderate as in Thiruvalla, Changanacherry, Kottayam and Minachil, literacy rate among males as well as females is greater in other localities. Of the three main religious communities the Christians took the lead in point of literacy. And of the Christians Mar Thoma Syrians were more advanced. Among the other communities, Brahmins were leading in the male literacy while the number of female literates among Kshatriyas was the highest in the state (665/ 1000) Taking all ages together, the proportion of literates among males and females is 100 to 41. Considerable variation in the proportion in different age group is a significant factor. At the ages of 20 and above there were only 32 females for 100 male literates. The proportion was 54 to 100 in the age group of 15-20, and in the age group 10-15 it was 62 and in the age group 5-10 it was 66, indicating a more rapid spread of female education.

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460 See Table 6 B
461 See Table 6. C
462 See Table 6. D
The advancement of teachers training in the state

In the early decades of twentieth century a number of women, especially from Syrian Christian community had entered the teaching profession. A school in Alleppy was staffed entirely by women teachers, trained from the Buchanan Institute. The progress of teachers training in the state was invariably connected with the Buchanan Institution, established in 1893 for the training of female teachers. For a number of decades this was the only institution for the training of lady teachers. By 1898 itself a day school at Alleppey had entire lady teachers trained from Buchanan Institution. Many CMS schools had on their staff graduates of this institution by early twentieth century. At first the progress was slow owing to the backward state of female education in this country, but at the close of 1909, the institution consisted of Normal, Training and practicing. and School departments, all recognized by government with a role of pupils including 100 boarders and 14 training students463. It was at that time the only institution in North Travancore for the training of female teachers, and at the examination held at Kottayam for teachers certificate its candidates were the only females at that center. By 1909 nearly 150 students have been sent from the institution to take up work in the schools under CMS and CEFMS.(ibid). The diocesan reports of the following years showed a steady progress of the Buchanan Institution, several students passing the

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463 Diocesan records. 1905. p 5
written as well as practical examinations and securing certificates of Madras government, and some others the Lower vernacular certificates of the Travancore government. In 1905 all the 9 candidates from the institution were successful and one student, Miss V.M. Mariam secured 68% of the total marks with only another student in the presidency. Meanwhile the model school attached to the institution was also progressing, six out of twelve from Form 3 passed Madras Lower Secondary examinations, nine from the Vernacular classes, the Madras Fifth Standard examinations and four from the Upper Primary the corresponding examinations of Madras. The government changed the medium of instruction in the lower classes up to 3 to vernacular languages by 1913. By 1913 the government discontinued the lower grade secondary department in training schools.

Side by side with the training school there were a number of branch schools under the direct control of the institution. There were 11 branch schools with 41 teachers and 608 students in 1905. There were 10 branch schools in 1906, with a staff of 10 masters and 21 mistresses and a role of 575 students. Two schools were handed over to other managements.

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464 Diocesan Records, March 1905, p 35.
465 Diocesan Records, July 1906
466 Ibid.
467 Diocesan Records, April 1913, p 28
468 Ibid.
due to financial difficulties. In 1906 of the 575 students 100 were Hindu students and in 1912 out of 252 students 25 girls were from Hindu community. This benefit of education was extended to the girls of the poor classes also.

**Role of Buchanan Institution in facilitating a public space for women**

Till that time, in the history of Travancore and Cochin (and also Malabar) the employment of women and for a salary was unheard of. So the establishment of such an institution paved the way for opening new space for women and the Syrian Christian women were the pioneers in the teaching profession. This was the only profession allowed for women in the early decades of twentieth century.

As observed by the missionaries, the girls were intelligent and efficient and they required an opening to express their inborn talents. The Buchanan Institution provided this opportunity. They quoted some examples of girls from Buchanan Institution who were competing with even boys in Peter Cator scripture examinations and securing prices for examinations. They believed that, “slowly but surely, all prejudices are giving way and that soon we shall see female teachers, natives of Travancore teaching in lower Secondary schools” and A Sixth form at the Buchanan Institution made necessary by the increased demand for higher

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469 Diocesan Records. March 1906, p 29
education." It is reported in 1913 that training classes for female teachers were opened in 1904 and it was the only college for women and three girls from B.M.H.S. were admitted to the Junior Intermediate class in the C.M.S. College in 1913.471

These women teachers set an example for women of other communities also. They reported in 1905, "much now depends on the way in which others follow the example set by a few leading men in Kottayam and the neighbourhood and if the girls are only given a chance, they will, we feel, justify the new privilege accorded to them". The facilities were availed by girls of other communities.

The CMS mission started a girl's school of lower grade for poor girls with boarding facilities. In 1912 there were about 127 students of whom 20 were boarders473. The policy of the training course was "to supply trained teachers who will also be good Christian women, to give an elementary education and some knowledge in English and the boarding school influence to Christian girls especially the poor ones." A number of girls, especially from poor families got opportunity to get trained as lower secondary grade teachers till it was discontinued by the government in 1913. By enhancing the minimum qualification requirement of teachers

470 ibid.
471 Diocesan Records, October 1913, p 107
473 Diocesan Records 1905, p 5.
474 Diocesan Records, June 1912, p 54.
475 Diocesan Records, April 1913, p 28.
the students had to continue two to three years more which became a hurdle for poor students to obtain jobs as teachers, the lone opportunity of the girls during that period. It seems that the training school was more beneficial to Christian girls belonging to poor families for the education and boarding was free, and most of these girls from the economically backward families were sent as teachers. They got opportunities to earn a salaried job, changing substantially their status also. It was also stated by the missionaries that: "it must make a life long difference to the girls to have spent a few impressionable years in the school atmosphere and under their influence".

The Buchanan Institution provided an opening for the girls of the depressed classes to enter the teaching profession for the first time in the history of Travancore. Pupils from the depressed classes were admitted in 1910 and by 1916, 200 women had gone out from this institution. This action of the missionaries initiated the entry of depressed class women into the new profession based on individual merit devoid of caste considerations.

A new leadership of women based on Christian principles in the public as well as domestic sphere was provided through these girls studied in these institutions in early twentieth century. The missionaries regarded the intellectual achievement of the girls not the only ideal to be reached but

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475 Ibid.
476 Diocesan Records, June 1913, p 66.
as a means to spread the gospel truth among the people, “to increase women’s influence for Christ amongst educated as well as the humble classes”. It is reported in 1909 that, “it was intended for the training of Christian female teachers and for the promotion of female education on a Christian basis in Travancore and Cochin”. It was stated, “from year to year, a number of students trained in these institutions find employment in mission schools and out of over hundred thus sent forth, 75 were last year at work in CMS and other schools and some after 10 or 12 years service, are still doing credit to the early training. Others are wives of pastors, school masters and government officials and their influence in home life must tell upon the generation to come.

By the second decade of twentieth century, the number of female teachers increased considerably in the mission schools. In the branch schools of Buchanan Institution there were 25 teachers and in 5 in Baker school, only unmarried teachers were allowed this school. In the schools and institutions under CMS mission there were 3354 boys, and 1923 girls with 159 masters and 79 mistresses of which 45 were non-Christians.

When the government started girl’s schools, it was the girls trained from the Buchanan Institution who were appointed, as evident from the

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478 Diocesan Records, 1905, p 5
479 Diocesan Records, 1909, p 57
480 Diocesan Records, March 1906, p 29
481 Diocesan Records, February 1911, p 59
missionary report, "if it is embarrassing for missionary managers for girls school to have their teachers called away, to open for the government they have the satisfaction of knowing that the Christian teachers, the product of their institutions are appreciated and will have opportunities of doing good work for their masters little ones in diverse places."482.

The men had more possibilities of securing job as writers in plantations and commercial establishments. Due to the sudden enthusiasm of the government in the field of female education in second decade of twentieth century, the lady teachers were in great demand while the scope of male teachers were decreasing. Even though there were few doctors trained outside Travancore, and there were two school inspectresses, the lone profession of females in the state was teaching. Mr. Thomas, headmaster of B.M.H.S. of that period commented that, "the one profession that is fully open to women is that of teaching in girls schools where they can be better grant than the male teachers" and stated that for the next 10 years or so there will be a great demand for female teachers483. As years elapsed, the word ‘teacher’ became the synonym for female teachers.

For the schools like B.M.H.S., in addition to their goals in educational field, evangelization was also of much importance. They adopted a small village at Vaikom (Thrinayamkudam) as their mission

482 Diocesan Records, 1912, p 69.
483 Diocesan Records, October 1913, p 110
field. Christian boarders, nursery-training students and teachers went there frequently and public meetings were conducted in the early twentieth century. Poor girls from that region were given free boarding and education. The students collected money for missionary fund by conducting sales. This practice was continued even to the latter half of twentieth century. Miss Isabel Baker was a prominent participant of the activities of Alappuzha Christian Institute (later Christavashram), the members of which were involved in social activities and also in the struggle against sir C.P. Gleaner's union in Buchanan Institute, union of the girls intended for charitable purposes was carrying on in the Institution for a number of years. They met every Saturday mornings, raised funds by conducting sales of articles made and collected by the members. Part of this was used to support poor girls and a considerable amount was contributed to the funds of branch schools.

Another contribution of the Buchanan Institution was in developing the organizational capacity of women. This institution was the pioneer in arranging girl’s camps, there by creating a space for the girls to interact outside their family, especially for married women. This was the first opportunity of the married girls to spend some time for themselves, away

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485 Diocesan Records, July 1906, p 63
from the responsibility of their families. Prior to that the only relief they got was from the occasional visits to their parental home. Although the primary intention of arranging such camps was to re-establish the educated girls in their religious activities, it may have encouraged social commitment and to be active in the social space. The first camp held in the institution from 8th to 15th September 1914, under the leadership of missionaries, Miss Neve, Miss Davis and Miss Kendall. Notices were sent to old students of B.M.H.S. and Buchanan Institution including those studying in colleges at Kottayam and Trivandrum, and training schools. 37 girls, some married, of age ranging from 16-21 attended the first camp. Recreation was provided with music and games. Another such camp was held at Attingal near Trivandrum in the same year. Diocesan reports following years up to 1927 showed the continuation of such camps. Mr. Richards reported about a conference for married women for 6 days in which women were instructed to come out without their babies and children. A conference for women teachers was conducted in 1920 in the Buchanan Institution. All these activities might have helped to create an interactive space for women outside their families and an awareness of the possibility for the women to have some interest in their lives other than that

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486 Diocesan Records, August 1914, p 103
487 Diocesan Records, March 1921, p 47.
of the family. Those belonged to the affluent families regarded education as a means to get educated husbands and to raise their social status\textsuperscript{488}

**Women in Medical Services**

Kerala has the distinction of the first entry of women in the medical and health care. Koji Kawashima\textsuperscript{489} observes that medicine played a major role in the missionary work in Travancore. Both government and missionaries co-operated in this field to provide medical facilities for people, the intention of both the agencies was charity. He is opinion that the positive attitude of Travancore government towards medicine, western or indigenous, contributed considerably to the higher standard of health in Kerala. Statistics show that unlike education government medical institutions were frequent, even the institutions run by the missionaries was supported by the government. The missionary influence provided the initial impetus for the development of modern medicine, first introduced in 1811. In the initial stages it was confined to the royal family and Europeans and later it was extended to the general public. Col. Munro introduced modern medical facilities through vaccination, rather forcefully here during the outbreak of small pox and cholera in early nineteenth century. In 1863-64 there were 9 government medical institutions in Travancore\textsuperscript{490}.

\textsuperscript{488} Diocesan Records 1913, p 66.
\textsuperscript{490} ibid. p 117
The missionaries used to give medicines to the needy from the beginning of their activities here. For them treating the sick was part of their proselytizing work. So the Syrian Christians were attracted to this field due to religious zeal. In early nineteenth century, a European medical officer called the durbar physician was in charge of the medical department. Many native medical officers such as surgeons, assistant surgeons, apothecaries, assistant apothecaries and hospital assistants served under him. A substantial majority of these were Syrian Christians. In 1908, out of 87 officers in medical department, there were 53 Christians, 23 Sudras, 8 Brahmans, 2 Mahomedans and 1 Ezhava. Many a time government met the expense of the education of medical students. A number of institutions were started by the government, a medical school in 1869 and in 1887 the Victoria medical school and Hospital for women to train midwives and nurses. The L.M.S, the C.M.S, and the Salvation Army were active in this field. They also started medical schools. In many ways the Syrian Christians acted as a media for the diffusion of western ideology due to their close contact with missionaries.

The first report of the practice of women in modern medicine is that of Zenana Mission in Trichur, in 1881. Miss Coleman was successful in

491 ibid. Travancore Almanac 1904. cited by Kojikawashima also
492 ibid p 119
practicing in Homeopathy and many people came for treatment. The Travancore government in 1891-92 employed a female vaccinator. Several medical missionaries were working in other parts of India attached to some missions. Dr. John Scudder Sr. came to South India in 1819, together with three of his brothers formed the Arcot Mission. Dr. Ida Scudder, his daughter was the first lady medical missionary. She started a small hospital in Vellore (Madras) in 1901. In 1907 a nursing school for women was opened which developed into a medical school in 1980. The progress of this institution is invariably connected with the entry of Syrian Christian women in medical profession. From the beginning itself, a number of women from this community were trained in the nursing school as well as in the medical school and later in the medical college. The missionaries also helped some men and women to secure degrees in medicine from foreign universities. Dr. E. Punnen (1859-1916) studied medicine in Aberdeen in 1870s and was the head of the medical department of Travancore government. His daughter was the first woman in Kerala who got a degree in medicine in 1915. She was in charge of women's and children's hospital in Trivandrum, opened in 1917. She became the durbar physician, head of Travancore medical department, the first women in India to head a major department.

The first public institution for the welfare of disabled women in the state was the Women's Asylum at Alleppey. It was started with one inmate in August 1903, under the charge of CMS missionaries and 28 women have been added later on. It is reported that 15 left for various reasons, five died and 8 were present at 1906. Churches and charitable institutions started hospitals and dispensaries with the intention of service rather than profit. Hence the pioneers attracted to this field were service-minded people with religious dedication.

**Changing patterns of Family**

**Traditional patterns**

As far as the women were concerned, the family was the most important institution in their life in traditional communities. Women had no identity outside the family. Social roles were accepted uncritically. In traditional societies people identified themselves with the social roles and accepted it as their destiny. The hold of tradition in Syrian Christian families as in any other communities of Keralam was very strong. They were very reluctant to part with the traditional practices. Most of the women, especially those in the rural areas, confined to the domestic space, even in the first half of the twentieth century.

The old traditional houses were structures in such way as to prevent the entry of women in men's quarters. The women were not allowed to

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come to the front verandah of the house, which was mainly the scene of
transactions and considered as men’s quarters. The central part of the main
building of a middle class traditional Syrian Christian house (still present)
is the granary (‘ara’ for the storage of grains). Below this is a cellar
(‘nilavara’) used to store vessels and other utensils. Two main rooms are
on either side of the granary. The verandah was in front of the two main
rooms. In most such houses, there is a corridor running along the back of
the main rooms, most probably for the women to move silently, without
coming into the presence of men. The kitchen and the adjoining buildings
were separated from the main building connected by a corridor. This was
meant for women, children and servants.

The men were served the meals first and sometimes children, then
only women used to take food. From the conversation with old people, it
appears that the responsibility of the household affairs about the amount of
grains used and the management of servants etc were the responsibility of
the elder woman of the house. Men never interfered in these domestic
matters generally. Conversation with people of some families who were
among the pioneers of wet land cultivation revealed that the whole
responsibility of managing the affairs of the home, rearing children,
managing the servants and so on was on women’s shoulders while the men
were busily engaged in the process of cultivation. In the case of inland
cultivation (many middle class Syrian Christian families acquired small
land holdings and started cultivation by nineteenth century itself), women also participated in the agricultural processes.

As mentioned earlier, the Syrian Christian families were patriarchal. Most of these patriarchal families were extended consisting of the father and mother, his brothers, sons and daughters, unmarried sisters (sometimes widowed sisters), all under the paternal care and guidance of the elders. The eldest male member of the family was the decision-making authority, so even the married sons were dependents. He often consulted his sons about the affairs of the family and generally the property was divided only after his death. The married sons stay with the parents, shifted to another residence near by, in some cases, when a younger brother got married. Daughters were given dowry. The respect given to the elders was one of their characteristic feature which was observed during the first half of the twentieth century also. In most cases mothers were the mediators between father and children, especially daughters, and young sons. It appears that in the past as well as in the present, the girls were not discriminated when they were children, in most of the families.

In the structure and practices of family, women were not allowed active participation in the decision making process. In family discussion they never came to the presence of men, hearing the procedure, if necessary in the inside room and answer only when asked. Women.
especially young brides were unaware of the business transactions of men. Their knowledge about the wider social world was through the conversations of men, which they overhear, for men rarely discussed these matters with women.\(^{496}\) (In early times, women were not allowed in the church assemblies.) Usually the requests of young children, both boys and girls were presented to the father through mother, they never directly address their father. This was the situation in the early half of twentieth century in most families, as revealed from the interviews with elderly people of the community.

**Changes in the Domestic space**

The domestic space was undergoing changes, due to the spread of modern ideologies initially in urban areas. The educated class started to build modern bungalow type houses surrounded by a garden. These houses were properly furnished with proper dining rooms, separate bedrooms and guest rooms. The kitchen was also a part of the same building, not separated as in traditional houses.\(^ {497}\) In educated families the family started to dine together, although the women were reluctant to change from the long established habits in the beginning.\(^ {498}\) This resulted in creating more interactive space between the family members. The trend set by the educated class was slowly followed by others. The results of western

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\(^{498}\) Vidya Samraham *The Slayer's Slain*, p 186.
education, mainly the individuation process diffused into the general population only very slowly. The major reason for this was that the main occupation of the Syrian Christian community continued to be agriculture and most of them were residing in rural areas. The hold of tradition was strong especially in agricultural families. In the individuation process of modernity, the positive valuation of private life, that is, the importance granted to family relationships, to the forms of domestic activity and the domain of patrimonial interests, is involved\footnote{Michel Foucault, \textit{The Care of The Self: The History of Sexuality}, Vol. 3, Penguin, 1984, p 42}. Industrialisation and urbanisation initiated the shift to nuclear family, when the people employed outside their home-town or village started to take their wives and children with them, but they usually returned to their parental family for religious and social functions. The family connections were not severed, for most of them, especially those belonged to the rich and middle class families had their share in the parental property. The elder educated sons (some times daughters also, in lower middle class families) helped for the education of the younger ones. So the family cohesion continued.

**Religious space of women**

**Religion and family**

Religion and family were the two institutions thought to be weakened or eliminated in the course of rapid modernisation and rational thinking by social scientists. The modernisation theories of eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries relegated family and religion to the 'private sphere’, set apart from the broader social processes. Economic modernisation also thought to have negative consequences for extended kinship systems and lead to extensive family dis-organisation accompanied by the breakdown of traditional patterns. Both these institutions though undergoing significant transformations, are well rooted in the modern age also. Now various social scientists consider religions as an influence on and an effect of numerous social, political and economic variables. During the struggle towards the formation of a civil society, religious space was pushed back to the private sphere with that of the family. The private sphere itself was expanding. The religious space also was undergoing transformation.

Many argue that in spite of its changing forms of functions, the family as institution remains crucially central to social processes and to the patterns of change that determine the future of human societies. In pre-modern societies kinship was permeated with religious meaning, in modern societies religion remains closely connected to the family. Both institutions characterized by cultural interests. Both family and religions are devoted to organizing primary group relations. Both deal with the person as a

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501 Ibid, Moore 1962 "Family, Religion and Social change in diverse societies”
503 Ibid, Cherlin 1996.
505 Ibid, Mac Iver 1970: 45.
whole. The inter relationship between the institutions of religion and family are reciprocal\textsuperscript{506}. Religion provides the symbolic legitimation for family patterns\textsuperscript{507} and the family is a requisite for a vigorous religious system because it produces members and instills them with religious values. Numerous functional events, such as weddings, funerals etc, are marked in religious contexts and many religious observances such as family prayer takes place within the familial settings. Religious factors shape family dynamics, specifically power. Religion provides ritual support for family and kinship structures, ancestral rites, memoriaion etc. Such practices support family life and at the same time fulfill a central function for religion. Religion inculcates moral values in education. Religion is considered as an influence on and an effect of numerous social, political and economic variables. The institutional relationship between family and religion are strong, qualitatively different, from other institutional relationships. Both institutions are characterized by cultural interests\textsuperscript{508}. Religion provides the symbolic legitimation for family patterns.

The family is a requisite for rigorous religious system because it produces members and instills them with religious values. Numerous familial events such as weddings, funerals are marked by religious contexts, and many religious observances such as prayers, birthday celebrations take

\textsuperscript{506} ibid, Thomas and Henry, 1985, Thronton, 1985
\textsuperscript{507} ibid, Burger 1969.
\textsuperscript{508} ibid, Mac Iver, 1970, 45
place with in the family settings. Religion provides natural support for family and kinship structures as ancestor rites, memoration etc. Such practices support family life and at the same time fulfill a central function for religion. This is very true in the case of Syrian Christians. Their religious setup helped the continuation of the family structure. All the functions of the family were accompanied by religious functions like baptism, marriage, death and commemoration of the dead. The religious festivals, whether it is the patron’s day celebration or festivals, the participation of all family members were expected and was an occasion of family reunion. Moreover in many cases the family tradition was linked with that of the origin of local church. For in olden days the churches were established and managed by people themselves rather by the ecclesiastical authority.

Divorce and Syrian Christian women

For Christians marriage was the most important institution in their life. Marriage for most of the denominations of the Syrian Christian community is not a contract, but a ‘sacrament’. From theological point of view, a sacrament is based on the faith that it was instituted by God and entrusted to the church for the purpose of contributing to the manifestation of ecclesiastical communion with God. So marriage was considered as one of the ‘Kudassa’ or sacrament that should not be broken under any
circumstances, for the husband and wife were united by the God. Divorce was never heard off among Syrian Christians in the traditional period. There was no place for separated women in the community.

In Europe through Queen Victoria Proclamation, the struggle between the state and religious authorities over the supreme jurisdiction over the institution of marriage came to an end by the enactment of obligatory civil marriage (1791) and the introduction of divorce (1792) expanded the terrain of individual liberty and enhanced the power of state. Marriage became essentially a civil contract subjected to the same rules as all other contractual exchanges between free and equal individuals under the private law in the domain of private freedom, the public power intervene only to reinforce the formal conditions of valid contractual arrangements. But the freedom of contract and choices was not extended to the internal space of marriage, that is the relationship between the husband and wife, for the contract took place in the existing hierarchical structure which were predetermined by the state. The presence of legal mechanism for divorce and the rapid increase in the rate of divorce represented a fundamental change in the character of the family as a social institution in the European societies. More over in late capitalism, the moral and religious control seized to have an economic base in the family and production.
The reassertion of the sacramental nature of marriage prevented the establishment of the legacies of enlightenment, rationalism and individualism which invoke marriage to the level of civil contract. It is only with the understanding of marriage as an institution which will help to break the notion of incommensurability of the marriage and introduce the norms of individual autonomy, formal equality of men and women and contractual obligation bringing this in the domain of private law and special legal norms.

Women and Reformation

Like all other communities of Kerala a reformation took place with in the Syrian church, mainly due to the contact with Anglican missionaries and education. All religions were gender biased and gave only an inferior position to women, reasserted by stories and legends, norms and practices. Christianity was not an exception. In the traditional church, more importance was given to the rituals. Religion was mainly a matter of external worship in a foreign tongue, the meaning of which was not known either to the congregation or to many of the priests themselves. Elaborate rituals were associated with the commemoration days of the saints and ancestors. The reform movement, gained strength in the latter part of the nineteenth century and culminated in the formation of the Mar Thoma church in 1889. They rejected the mediation of saints and denounced many superstitious practices connected with that such as commemoration days
and prayers for the dead. In Jacobite church these practices continued. Availability of the Bible and the books of worship in Malayalam and the education of the clergy as well as the laity changed the situation mainly in reformed churches and to some extent in traditional churches.

A personal religion was evolved. E.M. Philip, the severest critic of the missionaries stated that, "two material advantages the Syrians have received through the labours of the missionaries, these we acknowledge with gratitude. They are the spread of English education and the publication of the Bible in the vernacular." M.M. Thomas and C.P. Mathew were of opinion that, "but the more important service they did was to place emphasis on the centrality of the scriptures in the lives of the Christians and the church. They further pointed out that, "but the idea that the church must preach the word and that the scriptures should be the authoritative criterion for testing the tradition of faith and order have gained wide spread acceptance in the Syrian Christian community largely as a result of the currents of thought initiated by the mission. This, to say the least, was a necessary corrective to the concept of the church laid by the Syrians at that time."

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510 (This church was later separated into orthodox Syrians and Jacobite Syrians. They were culturally and ecclesiastically similar except for their allegiance to the patriarch of Antioch. These internal dissensions took most of the time of these churches, mainly the priests and bishops and a small group of men associated with them.)

511 Hunt the Anglican.... Op. cit. p 298

512 The Indian.... Op. cit. p 68
This changes in the concept had wider implications in the lives of the Syrian women also, for it was the missionaries who laid the foundation of women’s education based on Christian principles in this region. The importance given to the study of scriptures and personal development changed the attitude of women. The knowledge of prayer and prayer songs were a must for girls. They also became aware of a personal religion, able to express themselves. Accounts of ‘revival’ in the girls’ schools was given, “it is a remarkable fact in a land where women are commonly despised, the blessing of revival has in many instance come to the girls boarding schools and through the ministry of girls and women, it has passed on to the church”\textsuperscript{513}. This revival of women may have been an outward expression of newly acquired freedom.

Family prayer with Bible reading and songs in mornings and evenings became a common practice. It was women who took initiative for this family prayer. Small prayer groups were formed by women here and there and they met at regular intervals\textsuperscript{514}. Two C.M.S. missionaries, Mrs. Nicholson and Miss Macabian gave leadership for the women of Mar Thoma Church.

During the Sunday services the position of women were behind that of men in the church. More over they were not allowed to enter the

\textsuperscript{513} Diocesan Records. July 1906, p 56.
\textsuperscript{514} Mar Thoma... Op. cit. p 12.
‘Madbaha’ the most holy place of the church. This practice was discontinued in the Anglican and Marthoma churches, where they were seated side by side with men from nineteenth century onwards. This was the first visible expression of the changing space of women. However it took several decades in the traditional churches to change this practice.

Attention of the reformative group fell on the discrimination suffered by women in social as well as religious practices. History of Syrian Christians after the ‘Coonen Cross oath’ is the history of religious conflict between various denominations. Women were not involved in these struggles. Their world view was that of the men of the family. Their role in the church was only a passive one limited to occasional attendance to church services, mainly on important festival days, without any role in the decision making process of the church as well. A more democratic set up was adopted for the reformed churches, which had considerable, liberating effect on women. In Marthoma church and Anglican Church representation of women is given in the committees of the local churches and in sabha council and general assemblies. Some participation was allotted to women in the church services like reading of the Bible portion and in special Sundays year-marked for women. But the situation was different in the orthodox and Jacobite churches. They continued to insist the traditional practices. For example, the women used to cover their head when they were in church in all Syrian churches. But this is insisted
forcefully by the clergy in Orthodox and Jacobite Churches. They had no role in the decision making process of the church in the past and even today. They had not yet obtained the voting right. Even now in many orthodox churches there are very little representation of women in the governing bodies. Marriages between the two fractions of Orthodox Church, and the Marthomites and the Anglican Syrians were common in the twentieth century, for more than the ecclesiastical division, the social status of the families, the dowry and educational qualifications were the primary considerations. So the effects of reformation diffused in the Syrian Christian community as a whole. Moreover all denominations of Syrian Christians admitted their children in the schools conducted by the missionaries without any denominational prejudices.

It was the Anglican Church that took the initiation and actively supported women’s entry in the religious space. A separate section for women in the first time in history was included in the Diocesan council of 1911\textsuperscript{515}. Ladies got the opportunity to address the conference. A paper written by an Indian lady, Mrs. Zachariah was read. The chairman remarked that women holds the key in the matter of religion and cannot dare to ignore her influence as the ruler of the home. Rev. K.P.Varkey gave emphasis to women’s co-operation in the church activities, pointing out that Christianity unlike any other religion ascribes equal status to women.

\textsuperscript{515} Diocesan Records, October 1912, section 2 of the diocesan conference, p 101-102
The lack of co-operation, according to him was due to the lack of leisure time from household duties, expect the men to attend to the weightier matters of life, not encouraged to go beyond the domestic sphere, and were not sought by the church for such purposes. Some of the suggested measures to overcome were, by making the men and women aware of this by sermons directed to this end, by Y.W.C.A. and Mother's union meetings, by encouraging visit to the sick, the ministry of Bible Women and missionary ladies, requesting women to attend annual meetings and conferences, participating in activities for some special objectives and so on.

In her paper Mrs. Neve pointed to the need of voluntary women workers and requested the participation of husbands to make it easy for their wives to attend the church service and meetings, especially prayer meetings in the houses. She urged that the interest aroused in boarding schools ought to be kept aglow and the prevalent feeling that women should not take any active part in church activities must be broken down. She suggested that women should take active part in prayer meetings, Sunday school teaching, helping poor and ignorant members, doing needlework and such activities for some special object and speaking about Christianity to non-Christian women. Mrs. Zachariah's paper was read in her absence in which she advocated the organizing unions such as the mother's union and women's working meetings according to the condition of each church, to be held in turn in the houses of members, selling articles.
made by the members for charitable purposes, missionary and social
instructions to be given, organising visiting band to minister the sick and
poor and collection of funds. She also asked the Sunday schools to engage
more and more young women. Formation of a league of worshipping
children, Bible circles and Y.W.C.A., all these activities were suggested for
the stimulation of women to participate in church activities. The
conservative attitude of the elders of the church was criticized by Miss
Anne Baker in this conference. She stated that when she tried for 18
months, to stimulate women to start Bible classes, she received little or no
help from the pastors. A former Baker school student and her mother-in-
law did offer to conduct a Sunday school class for poor women, the pastor
vetoed it, even when he was told that the bishop wished women to teach
women. She added that it was still considered that it was enough for
Christian women if they cooked food and waited on men, eating what was
left and not showing themselves at the prayer meetings.

The first step towards equal participation of women in decision-
making bodies of the church was taken up by Mar Thoma Syrian Church.
A committee was formed C. P. Mathew as convenor, in this church as early
in 1933 (1108 M. E.) (at a time when the struggle for adult franchise was
going on) to take decision about the membership of women in parish and
church assemblies. Many prominent members supported women’s participation and membership in these bodies\(^{516}\).

But the membership in the church assemblies alone was not sufficient to change the habitus of women, because of their over-consciousness and embedded nature of their inferior status. This was created by traditional beliefs and reestablished by certain rituals in worship and the marriage service, upholding obedience, submissiveness, tolerance etc as the qualities of good women. The menstruation time was considered as impure and women generally were reluctant to attend church services during this time even in the second half of twentieth century. Similarly several days after childbirth (7 days for boy child and 21 days for girl-child) were also considered as impure. So they never dared to enter the ‘madbaha’, the holiest place of the church even accidentally, even though there were no written rules for the same.

**The role of Women’s organizations in the individuation process**

One important event in the lives of Syrian Christian women was the formation of women’s organizations, with individual membership. By this the individual identity of women apart from that of the family was initiated which in turn helped the creation of a new habitus. Although it began among the educated women in the urban Anglican churches, it gradually spread to other churches in various places. In the D. R. of 1906 the

\(^{516}\) Malankara Sabha Taraka, B 40- 1108. (1933) no. 1 Makaram
activities of the mothers union is mentioned. The first mother's union in Travancore was formed in 1909 in the pro cathedral of Kottayam. Hunt stated that, "a powerful factor in the lives of the women of the diocese during the later years has been the starting of a branch of Mother’s Union in 1909 in the pro cathedral. Besides upholding the object of the union and keeping the women of the diocese in mind of the Christian ideal of family life and the responsibility to help the neighbours". These Mother’s Union was instrumental in expanding the horizon of women, at least to some extent by bringing in contact with women of far away countries, as evident from the report of Hunt, "whether Christian or non-Christian, it has been one of the influence which during the years have taken the Syrian Christian women of Travancore into a larger world, for each branch of the mother’s union in the diocese was linked up with a branch in England or some other parts of the world".

The equivalent of Mother’s Union in the Mar Thoma church, ‘Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sankham’ was formed in 1919, by the initiative of Abraham Mar Thoma, the then Metropolitan, overruling the opinion of the conservative people against it. The main aim of this was the spread of gospel. It is noted in the same report that the conservative attitude of the community in general prevented the activities of women in the public

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space. They regarded the coming together of women as a waste of time and stamped these women as irresponsible busybodies. Some priests of the orthodox churches even now insist that wives should not take an active role in the conversation of men even in home, although this attitude was ridiculed. Some women in the Mar Thoma church are trained for full time evangelization work. There are only a small number of celebrate sisters in Marthoma, C.S. I., Orhtodox and Jacobite Churches, unlike the Catholic Church. The number of sisters and priests is considered as an added symbolic value to the families, especially in Catholic Church. The Orthodox Churches started its women's organisation, Martha Mariam Samajam, several decades later.

There were a few organizations for women outside the church such as the Y.W.C.A. during this period. The first report of Y.W.C.A. is from Cochin, that the mother's union and also the Y.W.C.A. seems to be working in vigorous order there. However the Y.W.C.A. were mainly in the town areas and its members were the educated upper class women. It was reported in 1912 that Miss Coleman trained Bible women, either from among her own converts or Syrian women, to visit houses and hospitals and to tell about the gospel truth. There were 9 Bible women at that time, 8 at Trichur, one at Irinjalakuda. They all went together to the hospitals once

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519 Diocesan Records, March 1906, p 29
in a week and in a group of two to houses\textsuperscript{520}. The women's organizations in the early nineteenth century were not confined to those affiliated to religious segments alone. The activities of Streesamajam at various places like Thiruananthapuram, Attingal and Guruvayoor were reported by the daily Malayala Manorama in early twentieth century\textsuperscript{521}. 'Mahila Samjams' constituted on secular basis were a common feature even in the villages of Kerala, immediately after independence. These associations gradually disappeared.

**Social Practices that uphold the Institution of the family / patriarchal structure**

**Marriage practices**

Family is the basic unit of any society and the continuation of which depends on the stability and moral cohesion of this basic unit. Marriage is the foundation of the family and the whole social order. Marriage practices of all societies from the traditional period onwards were intended for the stability and moral cohesion of society as a whole. Ursula Vogel points out that more than the physical continuation of the species the process of procreation or power relations of the society is involved. What is reproduced in each generation is not life itself, but the legal organisation of life. Many ideological beliefs, to ensure the sanctity of marriage and thereby the family were transcended from generation to generation. In all of

\textsuperscript{520} Diocesan Records. June 1912. p 65.

\textsuperscript{521} Malayala Manorama 13 Oct., 18 Sept 1909, 19 Dec 1908
these political order and the order of the gender were linked together as an inseparable entity. The notion of essential difference and complementarities of male and female nature, ideals of sentimental love and the cult of domesticity, the elevation of motherhood into a quasi political office, are some of these ideologies that ensured the subordinate nature of women in the family. She is of opinion that the main beneficiary of reinvigourated family appears to be the stability and moral cohesion of society as a whole and public perception of family are shot through with the assumption about the gender roles. The common belief is that the change in human history was the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society and from pre-capitalist modes of production to the capitalist mode of production.

It is also accepted that the great transformation of human history took place between 1789 and 1848 when the French revolution and Industrial revolution unleashed the demographic transition, urbanism, the technical and social division of labour, political democracy, the modern state and global Capitalism. The French revolution and industrialisation succeeded in bringing about massive structural and cultural changes in European societies and its satellites. These powerful social processes had an effect on the social relations as well. The unreflective social relationships of the traditional society transformed into the scientific consciousness of the

522 Ursula Vogel 1998, “The state and the making of gender, some historical legacies”, in Gender, Politics and State p 20
523 Kumar 1978.
modern world exposing the constructed aspect of all interactions. Feminists theorists always hold that gender is a constructive element of social relationships based on perceived difference between the sexes and as a primary way of signifying relationships of power. At the level of political organisation, the patrimonial and patriarchal systems based on charisma and tradition was replaced by the legal rationality of bureaucratic apparatus. Marx and Weber accept the role of families in the historical transition between societies dominated by the feudal mode of production and the capitalistic mode of production.

The natural biological process of propagating offspring is transformed into an artificial order, which will identify parents legitimate children and heirs and thus rightful heirs to property and family lineages. What is reproduced in each generation is not life itself, but the legal organisation of life. Marriage thus become the central or core institution of any society and its laws, for the transmission of cultural and material goods by creating stable links between successful generations. “It is through rules and the ways those rules are applied that human societies control their future, even those societies that claims and claims to be the freest”.

In Travancore the transformation from traditional practices was marked by a

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524 Jean Scott 1986, Gender, Feminism and State. Georgina Waylen 1998, p 4
525 Ursula Vogel: The state... Op cit. p 32
shift to patriarchy by almost all communities. As a result all the power relations involved in the patriarchy had its influence in this society also.

**Arranged marriages**

Arranged marriages and early marriages were the practice in the early decades of twentieth century in Travancore and Cochin for all communities. Parents generally arranged the marriage of their daughters and sons without their consultation, even if they were educated\(^526\), not giving the freedom to select their spouses. This practice continued even in the latter part of the century indicating the continued authority of parents over their children and the perpetuation of patriarchy. Arranged marriages as well as child marriage is contradictory to the individuation process. In this process the importance is given to the alliance between two families rather than two individuals.

*Acquisition of symbolic capital and social capital is involved in marriage practices. According to Bourdieu, the political dimension of the matrimonial transaction, a symbolic power relation aimed at conserving or expanding symbolic power. "When the acquisition of symbolic capital and social capital is more or less the only possible form of accumulation, women are assets which must be protected from offence and suspicion and by which when invested in exchanges, can produce alliances, in other words social capital and prestigious allies, symbolic capital. To the extent*
that the value of these alliances, and therefore the symbolic profit they can yield, partly depends on the symbolic value of the women available for exchange, that is to say, on their reputation and especially their chastity—constitutes as a fetishized measure of masculine reputation, and therefore of the symbolic capital of the whole lineage – the honour of the brothers or fathers, which induces a vigilance as attentive and even paranoid, as that of the husbands is a form of enlightened self-interest\(^{527}\). The continued practice of early arranged marriages can be seen in this background.

In earlier days, since the bride came to her husband's house at an early age she was under the care, control and supervision of the mother-in-law. Obedience to the rules was expected of her and she most probably was trained to fit the needs of the family, rather than developing a personality of her own. Their whole interest in life is confined to the care, guidance and organization of children, and caring of the old. The world of women revolved around the household affairs like the day to day preparation of food, child rearing and so on. Through some norms and practices, her connection with her parental family was not severed and her father or brother's intervened should such occasion warrants to protect her interests. However her freedom was contained. She had no existence of her own outside the family. In an extended family the daughters-in-law had to obey their mother-in-law and they had no freedom at all in most cases. It is

considered as an oppressive factor of women of that period. The headmaster of Baker Memorial High School in 1913, Thomas pointed out that "the mother-in-law difficulty was a curse of the country". The only exception was in the cases of girls who were the legal inheritors of the parents in the absence of sons. They were free to live in their own houses and had the freedom to take their own decision in the family matters. The son-in-law was adopted to the girl's family. But this condition was considered as a deviation from the normal norms of the society.

Ananthakrishna Ayyar observed 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 10 or 12 and girls at 6 or 7. He reported that they were seldom or never known to violate the law of chastity, even when they had the freedom of communication with their neighbours and presumes that the early marriage as the reason for the integrity of character. But this practice was deep rooted in the society as a whole as evident from the common saying, 'young men whatever may be their age, can find a wife when they will, but if girls are not married young, suitable husbands will not be found'. Many persons belonging to the older generation of the community who is around 75 years of age remember that their grand parents were married at the age of 12 for boys and 8 for girls. Probably the marriage of their grand parents may have been by the end of

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528 Ananthakrishna Ayyar. An Anthro... Op. cit., p 244
nineteenth century. The girls were carried to the church by the uncles. Sometimes the girls return to their parental home till they attain the age of 12.

Child marriage resulted in the premature death of women, the main factor of the lower sex ratio. In earlier decades of twentieth century, till 1941 the sex ratio in regions where Syrian Christians predominated such as Kottayam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta was much lesser than the state average. The least was in Kottayam, while the state average was 1004 in 1901 while it was only 965 in Kottayam. The following decades also did not show any improvement. In 1911 the state average was 1008. Kottayam 969, in 1921 state average was 1011, Kottayam it was only 947. In 1931 the sex ratio for Travancore was 987 for 1000 male, for Hindus it was 999 and for Christians it was 969. Census data of Travancore and Cochin reported that child marriage was more common among the Syrian Christians than among the Hindus, though pre-puberty marriage was not compulsory among them and there was no religious obligation on them to resort to child marriage. Census data of Travancore and Cochin states in the early decades of twentieth century reveals the fact that the number of females was less than that of the males till 1941 in districts were Syrian Christians were prominent like Kottayam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta. Special mention was given by the census commission about the consistent deficiency of women among Syrian Christians. "the deficiency of women

529 Census Report of 1931, p 189
among the Christians and Muslims cannot be due to migration, because the large majority of the migrants are Hindus. The explanation must therefore, be looked for in the higher female mortality among them. Among Christians and particularly the Syrian Christians, child marriage is more prevalent than among the Hindus. Premature maternity may, therefore, be the primary cause of higher female mortality among the Syrian Christians. The circumstances may have contributed to the highest sex ratio (females per males) among the Hindus, a lower ratio among the Christians and the lowest among the Muslims\textsuperscript{530}.

Even the influence of education was little on early marriage to overcome the social and religious customs of various communities, especially Syrian Christians, who had the most opportunities for education in nineteenth as well as early decades of twentieth century. The census report of 1931 showed that, the early marriage of boys between the ages 7-13 is negligible compared to the girls married of the same age. Marriage in large number commences only at the age period of 14-16 in the case of girls, 17-23 in the case of boys. In regard to the marriage of boys between the age of 17-23, the Syrian Christians top the list. With 523 married per 1000 boys, followed by Malayali Brahmins, the non Christians last in the list. At the age period of 14-16 non Malayali Brahmins 842/ 1000, then the Malayali Brahmins, then the Syrian Christians, lastly the non Syrian

\textsuperscript{530} Travancore Census report of 1931 p 131.
Christians. With regard to the marriage of girls between the age of 17-23 the non malayali Brahmins were leading. Early marriage of boys is most common among Syrian Christians and that of girls among Brahmins. Both the communities are educationally more advanced than the others and yet, it is among them that early marriage is more prevalent. It is therefore the social or religious customs, more than education that influences a community, to decide whether the marriage of their boys and girls should take place early or should be postponed. Education no doubt, does exercise some influence but it has not succeeded so far in eliminating the force of customs altogether. It was only in 1981 the sex ratio of Kottayam, equated (1001), even though much less than the state average (1032) while Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta achieved this in 1941 and 1961 respectively.

In 1931 the sex ratio for Travancore was 987 for 1000 male, for Hindus it was 999 and for Christians it was 969. Child marriage was more common among the Syrian Christians than among the Hindus, though pre-puberty marriage was not compulsory among them and there was no religious obligation on them to resort to child marriage. The number of women compared to that of men were less in the areas where Syrian Christians predominate, like Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha etc.

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531 Census of India 1931, Volume XXVIII, Travancore Part 1 By Kunjan Pillai, p 192
532 Ibid. p 189. A comparative account of the age of marriage of Syrian Christians and other Christians is given in Table 6 E
even in the beginning of 20th century. The constant struggle of the reformists, the Christian missionaries and wide spread of education and women entering salaried jobs from early twentieth century onwards, and all such factors helped to change the practice of child marriage. Anantha Krishna Aiyar stated that around 1920s, owing to the spread of education and the efforts of the ecclesiastical heads, the marriageable age of the boys and girls was raised to 16 and 14 respectively.

**Widow marriages**

Marriage of widows and widowers was allowed by all sects of Syrian Christians, but it is reported that very seldom those of any respectable family their lives always adjusted for the welfare of their family with children think of a second marriage. The amount of dowry was returned to the widows, if they choose to return to her natal home. Usually widows with children, specially, boys remained in her husband’s house, for the hereditary right of their sons. Younger widows without children sometimes remarried. The ceremonies connected with second marriage were not so grant as the first marriage. Usually wedding blessings were not conferred upon the party or parties of the second marriage. Widows were considered as a bad omen and were excluded from auspicious functions in the

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533 Sex ratio in 1901: the state sex ratio was 1004, while in Kottayam it was 965 and in Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta it was 986. The condition changed only after 1941 for Alappuzha and 1961 for Pathanamthitta while in Kottayam the sex ratio improved only in 1981 census report. See Table 6 e

534 Anantha Krishna Ayyar. An Anthro... Op. cit. p 74

535 Ibid. p 118.
traditional period. There were no written hard and fast rules for the same, but they excluded themselves from such occasions. But the situation has changed considerably now a days.

Even though it is not reported anywhere, it seems from the conversation of the older people that widowers seldom remained single and it was easier for a widower to get an alliance. This was due to the reason that much dowry was not demanded for a second marriage and poor parents and parents with a number of daughters agree to a second marriage, rather keeping their daughters unmarried, which was considered as a disgrace to the family. Generally the children of the first marriage inherited half of the property of the father and those of the second marriage were entitled to the rest only. For various reasons the second wife and her children were looked down by others.

Marriage practices based on religion
As far as women were concerned, family was the most important institution in their life, around which all their activities revolved. During the colonial period, public system of organised religion was pushed back to the private space, giving more importance to the private individual. All communities have their own practices and ceremonies connected with matrimony, carried on from the traditional period onwards. Matrimonial service helps to perpetuate the patriarchal religious structure, which in turn is reflected in the family.
The marriage service of the Marthoma Christians<sup>536</sup> (Orthodox Jacobite and Jacobite Orthodox churches have similar practices) starts with the statement ‘Christian marriage is instituted by god and therefore it is holy and sacramental’. Through out the service, the emphasis is on the sacramental character of God bringing together man and woman as husband and wife. The prayers and chants are rooted in Bible, accompanied by biblical references and examples. They underline the significance of the family in God’s plan. They set the particular wedding with in the framework of tradition and teaching of the Bible. The order of service is rich in symbolism. The most persistent symbol is that of Christ as the divine bridegroom whose bride is the church. It is this model of mutual commitment and total faithfulness that is commanded to the couple.

These customs “which have received from our holy fathers and entrusted by our elders” is a means to perpetuate the religious hierarchy and patriarchal structures. In the prayer of blessing, “as Abraham Rejoiced in Isaac, Isaac in Jacob and Jacob in Joseph, may the Lord bless you with righteous children so that you may rejoice in them”. By this the underlying emphasis is on the importance of male child for the continuity of generation, typical of patriarchal culture and underrate female offspring.

A portion of St. Paul’s letter to Ephesians (chapter 5, verses 20-28) is also included in the marriage service in which he order the wives to submit
to their husbands as to the Lord, for husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church. This supremacy of husbands over their wives with religious sanction reassert the patriarchal values.

The matrimonial service of the Church of South India, the marriage is a contract between the bride and the bridegroom before God. In the marriage service, before the pledge between the bride and the groom, the minister asks, “who give this women to be married to this man”. The parent or guardian puts women’s right hand in the right hand of man. This custom indirectly refers to dependence of women on parent before and husband after marriage (Incase the parent or guardian absent the bride and groom give each other the right hand, the former is the common practice). The pledge of the groom is to protect and the bride is to obey the husband till death. The pledge of the bride is a binding factor to be submissive always. The married life is considered as the medium to experience the love and fellowship of God. So divorce was strictly forbidden.

The practice of Dowry and women

Women’s right to inherit, own and control property is determined primarily by the socially acceptable values and norms, prevalent in the social
formation of different periods. In Kerala the practice of dowry was prevalent only in the Christian community before independence, for other major communities other than Brahmins followed matriliney. It had its origin in the excellent conception that the daughter had a real share in the estate of her father. It was returned if the bride or groom dies soon after the marriage. Yuhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1976) emphasised the fact that the ‘streedhanam’ of the Syrian Christians is the share of the father’s wealth given to the daughter, though received by the father-in-law. The custom came into practice due to child marriage in the olden time. He pointed out that “the money is given at the time when the daughter leaves the home for another home—her husband’s, she does not go empty-handed, but she enters the new home with dignity with the share of her father’s property”539. He strongly suggested that the daughters should get equal share of their fathers’ property and the money should be deposited in the bank in the girl’s name.

The dowry was managed by the father-in-law as the girl was a minor and child marriage was in practice even in the early decades of twentieth century. Custom has made it appear that the ‘streedhanam’ belongs to the father of the bridegroom and seems that it is the sale money received for marrying the girl. This paved the way for the unhealthy

bargaining for dowry. In majority of cases, dowry is settled at the time of her marriage, depending on the wealth of her father and the demand of the bridegroom’s relatives. In most cases it is equal to or more than half of the value of son’s share, but in rich families below a third or fourth of the value of the son’s share540. In traditional agricultural society, the land was the only means of livelihood, the division of which was disastrous for the family. In patrilocal community, the married daughter becomes the member of her husband’s family. More than the immovable asset, the dowry will be more useful to her, in the new place of residence. Since the cultivation of the land was a joint venture, and in most cases the families were extended, women were provided within the new family. The practice of giving dowry to daughters, secured the landed property to male offspring. The dowry mainly given in cash, entrusted to the father-in-law in turn may have used as the capital for further investment, either in the expansion of agriculture or business or furtherance of education.

The practice of dowry became a social evil when the parents of the bridegroom regarded this as an easy means to attain economic capital. It seems that this bargaining attitude became prominent by the beginning of twentieth century, for a Christian Committee was appointed by the government to report about the practice of inheritance among Syrian Christians and the importance given to the issue in the first and second

540 Report of the Christian Committee , p 21
meetings of Travancore State congress held in 1902 and 1911 respectively.

E. Punnen, president of the Travancore Cochin State Congress in 1902, remarked that there can be nothing objectionable in this practice if the giving and taking of the dowry is confined to the settlement of the value of the bride’s share in her parent’s estate. Again he reported in 1911, “the original conception (of the dowry) has been entirely lost sight off. The dowry that is now been demanded by the bridegroom is out of all proportion to the value of the estate of the bride’s father, or the share of his son, if he has any. The measure of the dowry is the merit of the bargaining power of the bridegroom and not the means of the bride’s parents. This often spells ruin to the bride’s family and the male members of it”. He further added that even the conception of the marriage itself is lowered to pure mercantile transaction rather than one of love or of choice. He remarked about the worsened situation of the time, “the amount of dowry settles the marriage. A girl however eligible has not the ghost of chance of winning a husband unless a handsome dowry is paid down. No marriage is celebrated without payment of dowry. The fourth session of the Travancore and Cochin Christian Congress held at Kottayam in June 1915, the evil consequences of the dowry system was emphasised in the paper

541 Presidential address in 1902. The report of the Christian committee Travancore, p 23
written by Mrs. Ittyerah and presented by K.C. Mammen Mappila in the first session.\(^{543}\)

In the Diocesan conference in 1912 Miss Anne Baker urged strongly the discontinuance of Dowry system, which was the cause of debt and financial ruin to many and cause of the backwardness of female education and of disrespect for women and their inability and unwillingness to co-operate effectively in the work of the church.\(^{544}\) It also stated that, "several beautiful girls of good families now remain unmarried due to the fact that their parents are not able to meet the dowry". Education instead of giving an awareness of dowry as a social evil enhanced the process for. a huge amount of dowry was demanded by the parents of educated employed boys.

Rev. Kovoor, Vicar General of Marthoma Church and K. C. Mammen Mappilai. chief editor of the Daily ‘Malayala Manorama’. P. Cherian judge were the members of the Christian Commission. The commission uphold the right of the dowry of unmarried daughter and widow over the parental property. The son had neither the right of denying the dowry or selling the property without giving dowry. However there was a dissent regarding the yardstick for the rate of dowry. Majority of them opined that the dowry shall be 1/3rd of that of the share of the brother. The value of the property

\(^{543}\) Diocesan Records. June 1915, p 39-40

\(^{544}\) Diocesan Records. October 1912, p 102
shall be 18 times of the income from the land after all taxes and other expenditures, with the suggestion that she shall not demand it as landed property. According to this valuation she will get only $\frac{1}{4}$th or $\frac{1}{5}$th of the Brother’s property, as in actual practice in middle class families the rate of dowry is higher than that of the rate prescribed by the commission (other than the rich). A provision that ‘the dowry shall not exceed Rs. 5000’ was included by the commission. These two provisions were vehemently opposed by Rev. Kovoor. A large number of Marthomites including the Metropolitan and a number of priests were signatories to this.

The amount of dowry demanded by the bridegroom’s family depended on their social status also. In the novel ‘parishkarapathi’, the details of the practice in early twentieth century are given. According to this, usually alliances are arranged between the boys and girls of equal family status, and if the girl had suitable qualifications such as education, beauty etc. the groom’s relatives may not be particular about the amount of dowry. To discard a suitable alliance between families of equal status where the bride and the bridegroom was matching in all respects, only for dowry were looked down. If the girl had some drawbacks, to get an alliance of similar background, the parents had to give a larger amount of dowry. Similarly if the boy had some drawbacks, his parents had to be

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546 Kochu Thommen Apothecary, Parishkara pathi 1892 (1062 M.E.) p 69, 70, p 13
lenient. In the passing of time the amount of dowry received by the family of the bridegroom became one of the criteria of family status. The novelist commented about the persons who regard dowry as the only criterion of an alliance, "they falsely think that they have a higher social status because of the higher amount of dowry, but actually they are ridiculed by the society." Thus the dowry became a means to attain upward social mobility.

The main cause for this may be the lack of proper laws of inheritance. During the dialogues in the early decades of twentieth century itself, it was suggested that equal right should be given to daughters as well as sons, to overcome the social problem of dowry. In traditional Syrian Christian community the girls were only ‘provided for’ and generally the boys were the legal heirs.

It had a religious dimension as well. Dowry system flourished and carried over through ages with the ecclesiastical support. The monetary benefit of the churches was also involved in the perpetuation of the dowry system. A part of the dowry, about 1 to 3% was given to the church and this was the main income of the church and the priests in the past. So the church never attempted to change this practice even when it became the cause of ruin to many families. Yuhanon Mar Thoma Metropolita (1976)

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547 ibid, p13, 69
remarked, "interference with the dowry system was objected by the church because the parishes get a good amount from the present dowry system".549

**Canon Law and women**

Canon laws were favourable for the continuous perpetuation of the patriarchal norms of the community. According to these the sons were the legal heirs and daughters were provided for, and in this sense discriminatory to women. The right to ownership to personal wealth was denied to women, for they had no free access to the dowry. The Malayalam book of Canon, which was published during 1850s by Mar Mathew Athanasius, by compiling the ancient writings and jottings in terms with the ancient usages of the community550. Even after a few years of independence, the Syrian Christian community (non-catholic) of Travancore followed these canon laws, in the absence of any other rules and regulations. The law was accepted as given by the God and had got religious sanction and all the attempts to amend this or to introduce new laws were strongly resisted by the religious authority as well as the community. The strong anti-divorce attitude of ecclesiastical authority is based on the sacramental nature of matrimony. The marriage was equated with the union of Christ with the church hence the union of the husband with the wife was considered as indissoluble under any circumstances.

550 Mar Thoma Sleehaude Idavakayakunna Malankara Sabhayude Canon 1855
Separation was possible in extreme cases, but both parties were not allowed to marry during the lifetime of other.

It has been given in the Canon law that ‘God has instructed through Moses that a person has to divide his property among his successors’. According to the canon law, a person’s ‘legal successors’ were his sons from a legal marriage, and daughters in the absence of sons, and relatives can inherit the property only if there were no daughters. The fourth law states that the sons shall inherit the parental property and the daughters are entitled to a dowry, equivalent to half of the share of the son. The only daughter of the first marriage is entitled a share equivalent to the sons of the second marriage. The 9th law allows the parents who had only daughters either to divide the property equally among their daughters or give all the other daughters dowry and keep one daughter as their successor. Again the law permits the parent having one daughter and one son to give equal share to both children if they wish, but insist that the house and the inherited property should be given to the son. Provisions are made in the 23rd statement of the canon law for a person’s disabled children, “if a person have any disabled son or daughter, who is deformed or insane, or suffering from any severe disease, they should be given a

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551: Ibid Statement 8, p 29
552: Ibid statement 13, p 29
share in the property. The canon law insisted that, the dowry cannot be spend without the consent of the wife, and she cannot spent it as she wishes, unless it was willed likewise. In the report of the Christian committee, Travancore, it was stated that a daughter to whom a dowry has been paid by her father should according to the customary law, be considered to have received her share in the estate. The daughters of a diseased person are to be provided with a reasonable dowry and normally the brothers regard it as their responsibility to get their sisters suitably married. But actually they are at the mercy of their brothers, since their rights are not clear legally.

Provisions were ensured for the widows in the canon law. If the husband dies without children, according to the law 18, the widow will inherit the husband’s property and after her death the property is entitled to her husbands relatives. According to 15th statement, husband’s father, if he is alive, will have the controlling power, the widow entitled only maintenance for life. The 34th statement insists that the dowry with ornaments should be returned to the childless widow, who wishes to remarry. If she chooses to remain, in her husband’s house without remarriage, she is entitled to maintenance for life. If the property was divided, before her husband’s death, she can manage that share but has no

553 Ibid. 23rd statement; p 29
554 Ibid. 27th statement
555 Report of the Christian committee; p26. 27
right to sell it. It is clearly given in the 22\textsuperscript{nd} statement that the husband’s brothers should give the widow her dowry, and a share in her husband’s property if she continues to live with his family. Again the 35\textsuperscript{th} statement provides the widow half of the jointly acquired wealth with her dowry and ornaments, if she chooses to remarry. 75\% of the dowry of a child less widow should be returned to her relatives (36\textsuperscript{th} statement). According to these canon laws, the widow had only life interest on the property and was not free to will it as she wishes. The widows rights are vague and indefinite. She is entitled to a reasonable maintenance only. In most cases the mother lives with the sons after the death of the father, usually with the younger son who inherits the house. In the absence of sons, the husband of the younger daughter is adopted and stays in the house and the mother lives with them. Usually, a provision is made for her maintenance by her husband before his death. In some families property may be set apart for her maintenance for life and very rarely only the property is set apart absolutely for her\textsuperscript{356}. In lower middle class and poor families she is entirely dependent on her sons or daughters for her maintenance. Even if her children do not treat her well, usually the widowed mother remain silent, to safeguard the reputation of her children. In extreme cases only, she seeks the aid of the court or the public for her maintenance. In most cases, the child less widows are accepted by her parents or brothers. The

\textsuperscript{356}Canon laws 1855, p 28-32
order of succession among Syrian Christians is – first sons; failing these, daughters; failing these, brothers and their children; and lastly sisters and children. The widow has no claim on her husband’s property. Some judicial decisions in favour of the widow, prescribed by the Indian succession act was recognized in 1081ME, but in a full bench decision in 1912 of the Travancore high court held that the widow of a childless person was entitled only to maintenance. All these provisions were in fact restrict the women either to her or to her husband’s family, limiting her freedom.

Political space
Women and freedom movement

The position of women in India is closely connected with freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in mobilizing women in large number for satyagraha and civil disobedience movements. His primary concern was the strengthening of the national struggle and his attention fell on social reformation also. His strong statements were aimed against such crippling institutions as child marriage, sati, purdah etc. To start with, Gandhi did acknowledge that customary laws and practices were detrimental to women. He was of opinion that, “legislation has been mostly the handiwork of men; he has not been always been fair and discriminating

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557 Ibid. p 32
in performing this self appointed task". Gandhi's only clear objective was the transfer of power from the British into the Indian hands. His concept of 'swaraj' implied decentralisation, grass root democracy and autonomy at village level, village industries, self-administration etc. He envisaged no specific role for women in this and he was against the public activity of women at the earlier stages.

It seems that Gandhi was overtly concerned about the institution of family. He saw man, of a married couple, as supreme in the outward activities with greater knowledge in the field and women more knowledgeable in the domestic space, the women's space involving the upbringing and education of children. He clearly stated that he did not believe women working for a living or undertaking commercial enterprises. "equality of sexes does not mean equality of occupation. Nature has created sexes as complement of each other, their functions are defined as are their forms". He mentally supported the 'varnashrama dharma' and believed in the division of labour of men and women. He accepted equal mental capacities for men and women but emphasised that women and men are not identical but complementary. "Women the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacities". She has the right to participate in every minute detail in activities of man and she has an equal right of

559 M K, Gandhi, India of my dreams, Navijvan Publishing House, Ahmedabad-14, 1947, p 226
freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his. This ought to be the natural condition of things.\textsuperscript{560} According to him ‘the natural condition of things’ is the domestic space of women. He clearly demarked men’s and women’s space. “true, they are equals in life. but their functions differ. It is women’s right to rule the home, man is master outside it”\textsuperscript{561}.

Here Gandhi gives emphasis to the biological factor responsible for the division of labor rather than the cultural. In 1940 he argued for women’s liberation from domestic slavery, “to me the domestic slavery of women is a symbol of barbarism. It is high time that womankind was free from this incubus. Domestic work should not take up the whole of women’s time”, but never thought of any participation of men in the domestic work. His reassertion of women’s domesticity and the chastity and purity of women had wider implications in the reorganisation of the space of Indian women. He pointed out the fact that, “by sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women, which they do not deserve and not aught not have”\textsuperscript{562}, but he had no suggestions to remove these customs.

At the early stage, Gandhi also did not believe in extending property rights to women, because “property is rooted in greed and lust and so

\textsuperscript{560} ibid. p 425
\textsuperscript{562} Speeches ...., Op. cit. p 425
women should not hanker about it\textsuperscript{563}. He also condemned the practice of dowry and insisted that, ‘young men who soil their hands with such ill-gotten gold should be ex-communicated from the society\textsuperscript{564}. In 1940, however he rejected the argument that the economic independence in women will spread immorality and disrupt domestic life and stated that property should be accessible to both men and women equally.

His statement, “no woman could be raped against her will”\textsuperscript{565} had a negative impression in the legislature of rape. However he supported the women who were the victims of atrocities during the partition and campaigned for their reacceptance in their families through his prayer speeches in 1947 and 1948\textsuperscript{566}.

He was able to mobilise women for the freedom struggle, creating a new space in the public sphere. But for him woman was the embodiment of selfless suffering, “woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity of suffering”\textsuperscript{567}. The strong idealistic nature of the freedom struggle, symbolic representation of the nation as ‘Mother India’, the objective of the national struggle represented as to protect her from the atrocities of the foreign invaders and

women as embodiment of self less suffering, all placed women in a pedestal, to be worshipped.

In later period he considered their involvement in the public space to some extent and considered it as important as of their duty in domestic space, insisting that women’s housework should not be taken for granted. He suggested more freedom in the domestic space and the right of the women to decide about their fertility. He was against coercion and forced sexual intercourse. He also called women for civil rebellion against unworthy and undesirable restraints. His statement, “today few women take part in politics and most of these do not do independent thinking. They are content to carry out their parents’ or husbands’ behest. Realising their dependence, they cry out for women’s rights. Instead of doing this however women workers should enroll women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them which will compel men to realise women’s strength and capacity for sacrifice and give her place of honour.” It appears that Gandhi never analysed patriarchy as a power relationship that subordinate women. His highly idealistic nature failed to recognize the difficulty in changing the age-old practices and norms in a patriarchal society. His statements direct

569 M.K. Gandhi, Delhi. Op cit. p 238
women as responsible for their inferior position and it is their duty to change the situation. M. N. Sreenivas used the word ‘immurement’ to describe the imprisonment and enclosure of women in an idealistic but abstract world of spirituality through elaborate rituals to uphold the purity of a higher caste and to protect the status from the pollution of outcastes\textsuperscript{570}.

It was on communal basis that all communities in Kerala organised themselves even in the political field. These communal groups were trying to better their position individually from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, clamouring for their rights. This communal polarisation had its impact in the later Kerala politics. This in turn had affected women also. They were not able to organize beyond the communal lines, as each community had its own women’s organizations, mainly based on religious segments, even though there were women’s wings for every political parties.

This communal polarisation acted as a hurdle for the entry of women into politics, especially for Christian women for their organisations were mainly church oriented, controlled indirectly by ecclesiastical power, which was mainly against women’s political activities. It was observed that women had no active part in the ongoing ecclesiastical struggle among the non catholic Syrians, their information about which was from the narratives of the male members of the family and their opinion about such

incidents correlated with that of the members of the family, either to her
father and brothers or to her husband’s. In political field also, the wives
and sometimes sisters of those who were involved in the active politics
participated in their activities, the women themselves had no independent
opinion. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century many
women, especially from the Syrian Christian community entered the
teaching profession and a few in medical profession and other salaried
jobs. This entry of women in the public sphere was accepted by the
community mainly because most of the schools were under private
management in the beginning, mainly that of the church. Almost all
communities participated in the civil disobedience movement of 1938. The
Syrians had additional grievances mainly against the autocratic rule of Sir C.P.
for many of his policies were against their interest. So many women, through
active discussions of this in homes were aware of the fact and participated in
the disobedience movement with men’s support. Ms Accamma Cherian
Varkey (1909-1982) was one such woman, who was thrown into political
leadership in this exceptional circumstance. Accamma was lucky to be
born of parents having progressive attitude and she was proud of the
influence of her educated grand mother. Her upbringing in such a
background and the support of her father and brothers was the main factor
that helped her entry in the political space. In her opinion, at least a

segment of the community recognised the public involvement of women after Gandhiji’s initiation of women in freedom struggle\(^{572}\). She became the 12\(^{th}\) president of the State Congress when most of the congress leaders were arrested. She led the procession to the gate of the old palace in Trivandrum on 23\(^{rd}\) October 1938 and demanded the release of imprisoned State Congress men. The exemplary courage showed by her in asking the policemen to shoot her first before shooting the people became legendary. She was one of the three women elected (unopposed) to the 120 member assembly in 1948.

**Disposition of women**

By the middle of twentieth century the individuation process was well advanced among women. In many instances the church assisted women in this process, through the membership of women’s organisations and prayer groups, youth league, Sunday-schools and church assemblies, thereby creating a space within the religious space. Books were specially selected for women in the libraries and reading rooms of the churches to distribute in the prayer groups, promoting their reading habits\(^{573}\). During this period many articles appeared in the Malankara Sabha Taraka and the Social Review about the freedom of women, their right to appear and talk in

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\(^{572}\) Accamma Cherian. *The story of 114, 1977*, p 130

public meetings, their membership in church bodies, about dowry and the inheritance and reluctance of educated girls to marry indicating an awareness of women as an individual with rights and responsibilities. These articles were written both by men and women. The women got membership in church committees of Mar Thoma Church both at parish level and sabha council in 1933, by amending the constitution of the church, using the inclusive language, that is changing ‘man’ to a ‘person’, above the age of 21 years. By 1945, official representatives of Sevika Sankham were invited to Sabha council (executive council) and Sabha mandalam (general council). Women were included in several committees of the church.

Conclusion

In the political field, the participation of women were accepted, in the first half of nineteenth century itself, in the struggle against caste disabilities by the reformers and during the struggle for responsible government. The girl students also participated in the discussions and boycotting classes, indicating a political awareness. Due to educational process, changing patterns of family life (extended family to nuclear family), membership in political as well as non-political organisations, including in the church assemblies and governing bodies (at least for some denominations), salaried job opportunities etc created a consciousness about individual

574 Participatory role of women in the Mar Thoma Church, prepared by Rachel Mathew Mar Thoma Suvisheshtha Sevika Sankham, Tiruvalla.
rights and responsibilities. At the same time traditional practices such as arranged marriages, early marriages, the practice of dowry, absence of proper inheritance laws for women, lack of economic freedom and absence of divorce continued without much change. Thus patriarchal structure continued without much interruption.