

## Chapter-6

### Reforming the Identity of Namboodiri Women

This chapter discusses the reformist discourses on the Namboodiri women who were objectified as a constituent of a stagnant community adhered to primitive form of life. Responding to it the reformist discourses on Namboodiri women that attained momentum in the 1920's and 1930's reached the level of demanding complete freedom of women in 1940's. The male centred women reformism later assumed autonomy and launched struggles to change their status from both inside and outside of the family. Namboodiri women emancipation movement gradually demanded complete freedom of women through changing the traditional concept of women to that of modern women who lived by their own work. A close look at the changes of the Namboodiri women would reflect the transformation of women from scripture education (learning in epics and Puranas) in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the reading of literature like '*Pavangal*', '*Chintavishtayaya Seetha*', '*Ramanan*' etc. by 1940's.<sup>689</sup>

The transformation of women has been differently interpreted by scholars. It is argued that reformers discussions and practices regarding women freedom was an indispensable part of the male oriented reform movement.<sup>690</sup> Partha Chatterjee has argued that the modernization of women started in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the penetration of the western ideas, but by the spread of nationalism there was clear retrogression in the women emancipation movement. The new politics of nationalism

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<sup>689</sup> See Devaki Nilayankode, *Yatra Kattilum Nattilum*, Mathrubhumi Books, 2006, p.32, It reflected the change of women from restrictions in their house to the freedom of women who lived according to their taste.

<sup>690</sup> T.K.Anandi, 'Home as the Sacred Space-The household Rituals and the Namputiri Women of Kerala', in Ganesh KN (ed), *Culture and Modernity Historical Explorations*, University of Calicut, 2004, pp.141-151, This reflects that the concept of modernity is changing according to the changes in the public sphere

“glorified” India’s past and tended to glorify everything in tradition.<sup>691</sup> This became a partial explanation to Namboodiri reformers silence on the women issues in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The third understanding on the reformist perception on women freedom is that Namboodiri reformers considered reform of women as their burden to reform their women folk. Women were the object of re-forming but not as its agents.<sup>692</sup> These three points of view by and large argued that emancipation of women was carried on by the male reformers.

Objectified Namboodiri women were presented in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. Awakening among the Namboodiris resulted in the conscious efforts to reform the life of the *Antherjanam*’s. This apprehension could be seen in the reformist policies, speeches and writings. One of the chief features of the reform movement was the enthusiasm shown by the male reformers to rescue their women folk from their deplorable conditions.<sup>693</sup> In the reformist discussions emancipation of the community was closely linked with emancipation of women.<sup>694</sup> These attempts created intense debates within the community when a group of conservatives strongly opposed attempts for women empowerments. Male reformers perception on women emancipation was influenced by the prevailing belief systems in the society. This created a dichotomy between belief and action. These arguments go in line with the view that palpable tension existed between liberating aspirations of the *Antherjanams* and interests of those who

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<sup>691</sup> Partha Chatterjee, ‘Nationalist Resolution on Women Question’, In *Recasting Women- Essays in Indian Colonial History*, (ed) by Kumkum Sangari and Sudheesh Vaid, Lali for Women, 1990,p.234

<sup>692</sup> J.Devika, *Engendering of Individuals-The language of Re-forming in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Keralam*, Orient Longman,2007, pp.159-166

<sup>693</sup> K.C.Narayanan, ‘Verunangatha Vakku’ in *Mathrubhumi weekly*, Vol5(11) january 1997

<sup>694</sup> Muthirangodu Bhavathrathan Namboodiri, ; ‘Abhivridhikkulla Eka Margam’ (Only One Way to Progress), *Unninamboodiri*, 1927 (ME.1102Meenam), Vol.8(8),p.3

aspired to build modern community.<sup>695</sup> The consciousness on grievances of women, though differed in its intensity, had given the movement continuity.

The observation on Bengali women that the changes inside home were the result of intellectual excitement of 19<sup>th</sup> century is true in the case of Namboodiri women of Kerala.<sup>696</sup> Meredith Borthwick remarked that Bengali Bhadramahilas were not in a position to transform their life according to their own needs and wishes.<sup>697</sup> The Namboodiri women were also not in a position to come out of the kitchen. Attempt to redefine the identity of Namboodiri women in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had produced an unusually enthusiastic lively discourse on the issue. The Namboodiri Female Education Commission Report of 1927 was the best example for the discourses existed within the community on women question.<sup>698</sup>

The reformist discourses regarding Namboodiri women were centred on diverse subjects like transformation of *Antherjanams* to human beings, the need of women *samajams* (associations), the concept of modernity etc. By 1940's discussions on Kuriyedathu Tathri,<sup>699</sup> which was absent during the earlier period once again became active.<sup>700</sup> This was a clear indication of the changed position of the reformers on women issue. These discussions projected Tathri as the initiator of the Namboodiri women emancipation movement and also reflected the arguments for and against women

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<sup>695</sup> Toshie Awaya, 'Women in the Nambutiri Caste Movement' in T.Mizushima and H. Yanagisawa (ed) *History and Society in South India*, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1996,pp.51-52

<sup>696</sup> Meredith Borthwick, *Changing role of Women in Bengal(1849-1905)*,Princeton University Press,1984,p.

<sup>697</sup> Bhadramahilas, Middle class women of Bengal

<sup>698</sup> *Namboodiri Female Education Commission*,p.2

<sup>699</sup> Kuriyedathu Tahtri was trialed through *Smarthavicharam* blaming illicit way of life in 1907. It created much criticism from the general public

<sup>700</sup> There is argument that Namboodiri reformers in the 1920's and 1930's were not ready to discuss on the case of Kuriyedathu Tathri. See K.M.Sheeba, 'Laingika Vicharanan Parisarantal, Chila Tathri paksha Chintakal' sambavichu' in Mathrubhumi weekly,March,2004, Vol.82(2),p.11

emancipation within the Namboodiri community.<sup>701</sup> Though reforming of *Antherjanam* was the theme of these debates, the reformers took different positions on the ways and means by which women could be reformed.<sup>702</sup> But majority of the reformers expressed their view that reform would be incomplete without bringing Antherjanam to the domain of modern life.<sup>703</sup>

### **Objectification of Namboodiri women**

The restrictions imposed on Namboodiri women by the 19<sup>th</sup> century degraded them to the status of victimised human beings. The plight of Namboodiri women was adjudicated by religious scriptures like Sankara Smrithi,<sup>704</sup> *sambandham* (exogamous marriage), *adhivedhanam* (polygamy), restrictions on travel, food and clothing. These objectifications of the women were represented in the colonial and native literature from 16<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>705</sup>

The status of the Namboodiri women of 19<sup>th</sup> century were more or less equal to the status of other Indian women, which considered women as completely inferior to men, having no freedom, no significance and no personality. Socially she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied of all rights and living under suppressed and oppressed conditions.<sup>706</sup> The rigid morality code imposed on women was part of the obvious

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<sup>701</sup> N.P.Vijaykrishnan, 'Anantharam Tathrikku entu sambavichu' in *Mathrubhumi weekly*, March, 2004, Vol.82(2), p.11

<sup>702</sup> For example see 'Stree Vidhyabhyasam' (women education), *Unninamboodiri*, 1928(ME.1103 Chingam), Vol.9(12), pp.724-725,

<sup>703</sup> V.T.Bhattathirippad, '*Karmavipakam*', D.C Books, Kottayam, 2007, p.339 from the speech 'Namboodiri Manushyanayi Maranamenkil' (If Namboodiri turn in to man) made in 1930

<sup>704</sup> *Sankara Smrithi*, the text that regulated the life of Namboodiris through instituting 64 laws (anacharams) for the observance of the Namboodiris

<sup>705</sup> The writings of Samuel Matteer, C.A.Innes etc. testifies this objectified nature of Namboodiri women, see, Samuel matter, *The Land of Charity, A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, Asian Educational service, New Delhi(reprint), 1991,p.30

<sup>706</sup> Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India*, Asia Book Corporation of Amer, 1971,p.27

attempt to regulate the purity of progeny.<sup>707</sup> The absence of free marriage and the right of divorce, the existence of polygamy and compulsory purdah, the lack of economic rights and backward economic and cultural standards- all disabilities of Hindu womanhood was same with the Namboodiri woman along with other women of Kerala.<sup>708</sup> Namboodiri women were not allowed to marry men of any other castes and all the women of the community had to be shared by the eldest male members, which led to the evils of unlimited polygamy (*adhivedhanam*) and trading in marriage. Every Namboodiri demanded exorbitant sums from his father in law for the 'trouble of marrying' his daughter.

In order to objectify the women folk traditionalists interpreted scriptures like *Sankara Smrithi* in their own ways. Up to the modern period the Namboodiri customs and manners were regulated by 64 '*anacharams*'<sup>709</sup> mentioned in Sankara Smriti. But ironically we could cite the instances of making alterations in the text by the orthodox. It was argued that laws on '*adhivedhanam*' (polygamy) were badly interpreted by the orthodox.<sup>710</sup> While Sankara Smrithi banned marriage of girls with old men,<sup>711</sup> it was frequent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the 64 '*Anacharams*' mentioned in the Sankara Smrithi the 44<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> instituted restrictions on women. The 44<sup>th</sup> *anacharam* prevented Brahmin women from looking at any other adult male except their own husbands. The 45<sup>th</sup> suggested the escort of a maid servant to Namboodiri women in their travells. The 46<sup>th</sup> imposed restriction on dress of women by asking women to avoid white

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<sup>707</sup> KN Ganesh, 'Polity and society in Medieval Kerala', in *New Dimensions in South Indian history*, Calicut, 1996, p.116

<sup>708</sup> EMS, '*Atmakadha*', Chinta Publishers Trivandrum, 2005

<sup>709</sup> *Sankara Smrithi* speaks on Namboodiri customs and practices, called 64 '*anacharams*', see K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, p

<sup>710</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, '*Stree Swatantram*' (Women Freedom), *Unninamboodiri*, 1926 (ME.1101 Makaram), Vol.7(4), pp.279-289

<sup>711</sup> *Sankara Smrithi*, 2-3-17-20

clothing. The 47<sup>th</sup> rule forbades Brahmin women from wearing nose ring. ‘A community by sacrificial tradition rise up to the level of god but by the greed to physical pleasure come down to the level of animals’, V.T.Bhattathirippad once commeted looking at the plight of women.<sup>712</sup>

In the injunction of *Sankara Smrithi* that the eldest son should marry from his own caste had not prevented the other male member’s from engaging in self-caste marriages. But Namboodiris of 19<sup>th</sup> century insisted that only eldest son could marry from his caste and younger ones were forced for other caste marriages (*sambandham* marriage). The elders marry many and in many cases by the force of circumstances than from personal inclination. *Sankara Smrithi* banned Namboodiris from consorting with Nayar women.<sup>713</sup> *Vyavahara Samudram*, a poetical treatise on Malabar prohibits Namboodiri Brahmin from having sexual relations with the Nayar families. Thus it is clear that the practice of Namboodiri sambandham relations with Nayar women has no basis of Hindu law nor it was allowed in the *Sankara Smrithi*.

Even in the private life, women were under strict religious laws. The rule of the age of the bride was thus set forth in the *Sankara Smrithi* “one may marry a Kanya, Rohini and Gouri, but not a Madhyama”. A Kanya was a girl of 10 years, Rohini of 9 years and Gouri of 8years of age. A Madhyama was one who attained puberty. The rule was that by whatever means the daughter should get married before puberty.<sup>714</sup> Otherwise one incurred ‘*brahmahatya papam*’ (sin of killing a Brahmin). In this conviction the majority of the Namboodiris of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was open to the charge of

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<sup>712</sup> VT, *Kannerum Kinavum*,p.10

<sup>713</sup> *Sankara Smrithi*,Chapter-2,Part.3, verse.1

<sup>714</sup> *Sankara Smrithi*,chapter-6, part.1,sloka.32

having committed the sin of *Brahmahatya*.<sup>715</sup> Submission of female members to males was fostered in illam (houses) by a number of means like preferential consideration towards boys.<sup>716</sup> Boys and girls were strictly segregated from an early age physically and different daily routine was prescribed for boys and girls.<sup>717</sup>

Namboodiri women were totally isolated within the community and from other castes. A variety of sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> century European travelogues to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Malayalam literature, testify that even if a Nayar woman was married to a Nayar man, she could in fact enter into relations with a Brahman man. A Nayar woman was expected to welcome the sexual advance of a Brahman out of respect of his spiritual authority and because such unions brought prestige to her family.<sup>718</sup> In marked contrast to the sexual freedom of the Nayar woman, the chastity of Namboodiri woman was intensely guarded. Because of the peculiar custom only the eldest son could marry woman of his community as a result of which, there was an excess of unmarried Namboodiri women.<sup>719</sup> This problem was pacified by the practice of polygamy of the Namboodiri elders, who married many, but only one or two such women actually lived with her husband and bore his legitimate heirs. Namboodiri women who voluntarily took lovers, or were sexually assaulted were punished by ostracism and death.

There was no social stigma even if a Namboodiri woman died unmarried. But there existed a singular custom whereby a girl died unmarried was invested with a

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<sup>715</sup> E.M.S.Namboodirippad also opined that a Namboodiri girl not get married after attained puberty was considered as great disgrace to the family and the number of namboodiri families which escaped from this disgrace was very few, EM Sankaran Namboodirippad, *How I became a Communist*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1970,p.25, see KPPadmanabhaMenon, *History of Kerala,Asian Educational Services, New Delhi,2001,Vol.3,p.51*

<sup>716</sup> Kanippayyur, *Ente Smaranakal*, Vol.1,Panchangam Books, Kunnamkulam,p.115

<sup>717</sup> Ibid, 'Antharjanangalude dinacharyam, Brahmacharyam, Vedadhyayanam', pp.160-200

<sup>718</sup> Eliza F Kent, *Converting women; Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India*, Oxford, 2004,p.

<sup>719</sup> RK.Pruthi, *Indian Caste System*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi,2004,pp.16-18

married status. Some acts of marriage were performed on her body. It was said that a 'tardy retribution' was made to the women who died unmarried by having the *tali* tied around the neck of the corpse while lying in the funeral pyre by a competent relative, for the body could not be burned without this mock ceremony.

This objectification of Namboodiri women could be traced in the writings of Abbe Dubois in his '*Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*' where it is stated that, "if a girl, who have arrived at an age when the signs of puberty were apparent, die before having had intercourse with a man, caste custom rigorously demanded that the inanimate corpse of the deceased should be subjected to a monstrous connection. For this purpose, the girl's parents were obliged to procure by a present of money some wretched fellow willing to consummate such a disgusting form of marriage; for, were the marriage not consummated, the family would consider itself dishonored".<sup>720</sup>

The evils related with marriage practices placed the Namboodiri women in a miserable condition. In order to keep the family property intact and there upon to maintain priesthood limited in the hands of a few, the eldest son alone in Namboodiri family was allowed to marry a Namboodiri girl. Other members of the family could enter marital relations with non-Brahmin women (females of other inferior savarna matrilineal Hindu communities such as the Nair, the Kshatriya, the Ambalavasi etc.) If a

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<sup>720</sup> Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Vol.1, Cosimo, New York, pp.17-18 The learned translator and editor of Abbey's work Mr. Beauchamp in his foot note, while asserting positively that the custom no longer existed, leave room for doubts as to whether it did not exist at the time of Abbe wrote, Mr. Logan simply remarked that Abbey's account of the strange funeral pile marriage requires confirmation. KPPadmanabha Menon, op.cit, p.84, Alngode Leelakrishnan, Tathrikuttiyude Smarthavicharam, Mathrubhumi, 2011 third edition, pp.10-11, Justice Narayana Marar with Kaimukk Vaidikan Krishnan Namboodiri, enquired it and opined that not only did the custom exist at the present slightest vestige of any tradition that it had existed among them at any time. Malabar Quarterly Review says that, "the above said was merely to illustrate the various wild, baseless and fanatic notions that were afloat concerning the people of Malabar". *Malabar Quarterly Review*, 1908, Vol.1, p.20

Namboodiri eldest son remained childless the second son might marry a Namboodiri woman and would beget children for his family.<sup>721</sup>

The matrilineal *tarawads* maintained the *sambhandham* wives and children, since Namboodiri father had practically little responsibilities in looking after their families. The system of polygamy (*adhivedanam*) was a product of *sambandham* system because only the eldest son (*Moos*) of a Namboodiri family was permitted to marry a Namboodiri girl, the eldest son in a family was allowed to have three wives at a time. As the younger ones (*Aphans*) in a family were forced to engage Sambandham marriage, the number of unmarried Namboodiri women got increased. So many Namboodiri women were forced to accept age old Moos as their husband. Many Namboodiri women became widows at younger age. The grievances of widows were worse among the Namboodiris than that of other related communities.<sup>722</sup> The elder Namboodiris skillfully converted his social privilege into an unfailing source of income since he was entitled to large sums as dowries on the performance of every separate marriage.<sup>723</sup> The consequence was that while the Namboodiri bachelors solaced themselves with their sudra lovers and Namboodiri spinsters secluded and vigilantly guarded in the privacy of their house and must live and die unmarried.<sup>724</sup> Being the byproduct of the evils of marriage, Namboodiri women fell into the three folded existence- unmarried, *sapatni* (co-wives), or widow.<sup>725</sup>

The Census Report of Native State of Cochin in 1875 observed the influence of *sambandham* by which *Antherjanams* often entered into wedlock at a very advanced age

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<sup>721</sup> This custom called as *Parivedhanam*. See David Muray and Cathleen Gough (ed), *Matrilineal Kinship*, p.320

<sup>722</sup> Kurur Damodaran Namboodiri, 'Kanyadanam', *Unninamboodiri*, 1924(ME.1099 Edavam), vol.5(9), p.409

<sup>723</sup> TKGopal Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2006, p.246

<sup>724</sup> K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.1, p.94

<sup>725</sup> N.P.Bhaskaranunni, '*Pathonpatham Noottandile Keralam*' (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trissur, 1988, p.296

or would die in a state of celibacy.<sup>726</sup> Similar type of opinion on *Antherjanam* was made by William Logan, who argued that many Namboodiri women necessarily never got a chance of marriage and in order to get their daughters married, a Namboodiri must be rich, so as he has to pay the bridegroom a heavy dowry, which resulted in the economic decline of many of the families.<sup>727</sup> *Travancore Census Report* also made a similar type of remark on Namboodiri women by commenting that unlike their Brahmin sisters in the other coast, many remain unmarried even after attaining the age of puberty, and there were many among them who died virgin at an advanced age. Among the Namboodiris, numerous daughters were considered as a misfortune because their dowry and other marriage expenses would impoverish the family. According to the Census Report though the birth of a girl was unwelcome to the Namboodiris, they did not kill their children on this account.<sup>728</sup>

The practice of *adhivedhanam* (polygamy) had created Antherjanam only a name sake wife and their doom to widowhood was scarcely different from the life condition of a child widow. In fact, polygamy, late age marriage of girls and the prevalence of numerous young widows had been factors encouraging adultery and immortality. Unmarried Namboodiri women continued to live in their ancestral home maintained by their fathers and brothers. These women faced many types of segregations in the family.<sup>729</sup> Many women faced evictions from their own illams (houses). All these customs aggravated the grievances of Namboodiri women.

Another specimen for the objectification of the Namboodiri women was the practice of *Smarthavicharam*, the practice by which Namboodiri women who were

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<sup>726</sup> Census report of native state of Cochin, 1875-76,p.58

<sup>727</sup> Willaim Logan, *Malabar Manual*,Asian Educational Services, New Delhi,2004,pp.127-128

<sup>728</sup> *Travancore Census Report*, 1874-75,pp.213-214

<sup>729</sup> Devaki Nilayankode,*Yatra Kattilum nattilum*, Mathrubhumi,2006,p.20

blamed for their illicit way of the life trialed by the caste council. Namboodiris orthodox were eager to guard their purity of race and least suspicious regarding the conduct of the Namboodiri women. The members of the council were known as '*smarthans*', who had the power to punish the accused. The entire course of trial was known as a *Smarthavicharam*.<sup>730</sup> *Smarthavicharam* resulted in the loss of caste identity and status and Namboodiri women's total separation from the family<sup>731</sup>. In fact *smarthavicharam* was an indicator to the grave anxiety that Namboodiri expressed towards regulating family charity as a means to maintain their purity. The '*smarthavicharam*' was followed by the excommunication of women from the society. Her funerals were then performed by those entitled to do it in token of her social death. She was thereafter an outcaste woman and then she was restricted to the places maintained by the rulers<sup>732</sup> for women who had been similarly excommunicated. The rest of their life was spent in these places under the strict supervision of the orthodoxy. But actually it was 'social death' since the long process of trial and psychological impact of the persecution involved in it destroyed her mental stature. It was also a clear message to other *Antarjanams* to be 'disciplined and to be good moral wives.'<sup>733</sup> The enquiry showed that the Namboodiri Brahmins depended solely upon the king for sanction in such cases, and that such an enquiry was essential to the Brahmanas for preserving the purity of their race.<sup>734</sup> The trial was

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<sup>730</sup> For details on the practice of SmarthaNicharam, Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, *Ente Smaranakal*, Panchangam Books, Vol.3, pp.115 -135

<sup>731</sup> The woman subjected to Smarthvicharam was called as '*Sadanam*' (an object).

<sup>732</sup> In the Cochin State and North Malabar there was two public places, maintained at the chieftains expense to feed them all through the rest of their lives provided they keep within moral bounds ever after, see Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, *Ente Smaranakal*

<sup>733</sup> Ganesh.K.N, *Keralathinte Innalekal*, Department of Cultural Publications, 1997, pp-At 226-229

<sup>734</sup> P.Shangoonny Memon, *History of Travancore*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1998, Vol.1, p.79

targeted the excommunication of women, where men who involved in it enjoyed chances of escape.<sup>735</sup>

The Namboodiri widows were subjected to many inhuman restrictions. The widows were strictly prohibited from making use of fashionable attire, ornaments or using of caste mark sandals. They were allowed to use only cow dung ashes. Widows had to perform sacrificial offering turning their face towards south and not to east like their more fortunate sisters, whose husbands are alive.<sup>736</sup> Married women were prohibited from uttering the names of their husbands and even the names of other men whose name coincided with those of their husbands.<sup>737</sup> Women forbade from touching iron when dressed in moist cloths and allowed to eat food cooked by east coast Brahmins(Pattars and Embranthiris), although men enjoyed freedom in this respect. If there were guests dining with the Namboodiris, the food should be served by the Pattar Brahmins or a younger male member of the family.<sup>738</sup> If there were no strangers, the wife could serve the meals to husbands.

'*Mattom Veli*' (exchange marriage) was common and in this practice Namboodiri men married the sister or daughter of bride groom for the marriage of their sisters or daughters. But later it degenerated into the exchange of daughters by the fathers. When Sankara Smrithi dealt with eight types of marriages there was no reference to dowry. But later in the marriage customs of the Namboodiris dowry became a part. It turned to be a severe problem for the poor Namboodiris. They were forced to sell their daughters in

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<sup>735</sup> Alangot Leelakrishnan, 'Oru smartha vicharathinte Nizhila vazhikalil', in *Mathrubhumi weekly*, 30<sup>th</sup> November, p.13

<sup>736</sup> TKGopalm Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi,2006,pp.238-23

<sup>737</sup> Ibid,p.239

<sup>738</sup> KP Padmanabha Menon,op.cit,p.55

Karnataka.<sup>739</sup> The elder Namboodiris skillfully converted his social privilege into an unfailing source of income since he was entitled to large sums as dowries on the performance of every separate marriage.<sup>740</sup>

The likes and dislikes of the couple were seldom consulted in the marriage. So in order to get rid of a girl with a cheap dowry induced the father to make rash decisions without much enquiries about bridegroom. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the native rulers interfered and fixed the dowry at a low rate, and the marriage of the Namboodiri girls was more general. But with the spread of colonial modernity the principle of individual liberty got prominence and Government intervention on the marriage affairs decreased. This situation was fully utilized by the orthodox Namboodiri elders by demanding high dowry for marriages.<sup>741</sup>

The Proclamation of Travancore Rajas on the age limit for the marriage of Namboodiri girls and dowry in 1823, observed that the high dowry demanded by the Namboodiris resulted in the marriage problems of Namboodiri girls and to their illicit way of life. The proclamation also fixed 700 ‘*Kaliyan*’ money as the maximum dowry to be claimed by Namboodiris for marrying a girl and any violation would be punished according to the laws of Dharmasatras.<sup>742</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Namboodiri women faced several types of restrictions in and out of her house. Her travels were limited to temples and

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<sup>739</sup> *VT Studies and Memoirs*, p.195, VT's Story ‘Uttaram kittatha chodyam’ mentions the plight of Namboodiri women, V.T. Bhattathirippad, ‘Uttaram kittatha chodyam’ (the question unanswered), *Unninamboodiri*, 1947(ME.1122 Karkkidakam), Vol.1(4), pp.210-217

<sup>740</sup> TKGopal Panikkar, op.cit,p,246

<sup>741</sup> KPPadmanabha Menon, op.cit,p.78 see *Cochin Census Report*, p.139

<sup>742</sup> S.Raimon (ed) ‘*Thiranjedutha Rajakeeya Vilambarangal*’ (Selecte Proclamations of the Sovereign), Act No 104, Fixing the age limit for marriage of Namboodiri girls and fixing their maximum dowry, Kerala State Archives, 2005, pp.175-176, see P.K.Balakrishnan, ‘*Jathivyavasthithiyum Kerala Charitram*’, p.365

houses of her close relatives. The rule was that they should not be exposed to public gaze. *Antharjanam* seldom move out of their house, and when they did, they invariably accompanied by a maid servant with cadjan umbrella.<sup>743</sup> Namboodiris were not allowed to wear silk cloth and white cloth, but white ones might be used provided they had a border of different colours. The construction of the house perfectly served to segregate the *Antherjanams*; the location and passage to the bedrooms, the position of the kitchen, the location of the well inside the kitchen and the proximity of the bathing tank close to it with separate arrangement for them to bathe in the tank, all alluded to this presumption.<sup>744</sup> The construction of Kulappura was such that women could not be seen or interacted with anybody outside the compound. *Antherjanam's* were allowed to worship in the illam temple alone which also restricted their scope for social interaction. It is pertinent to note that all the restrictions and caste taboos upon them were very strictly observed by the *Antherjanams*.<sup>745</sup> Namboodiri women observed pardah and strict segregation was maintained. The younger brothers were not supposed to talk or even see their eldest brother's wife or wives.<sup>746</sup>

Women enjoyed only second place in the home and society after their male partners. The Namboodiri orthodoxy laid down that their women folk's duty was to cook food, serve the husband and look after their children. The women who gave birth to son were appreciated but the childless women or those who gave birth only daughters

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<sup>743</sup> This practice known was as '*tunakkakkare ayakkuka*', T.K.Velupillai, Travancore State Manual, Kerala Gazetters Department, 1996, Vol.1,p.839, Kanippayyur sankaran Namboodiri, Nayanmarude Poorva Charithram, Panchangam Books, Third edition,2007, p.44

<sup>744</sup> TK Anandi, 'Namboodiri Women, Home as a sacred place', in KN Ganesh (ed) *Culture and modernity-Historical explorations*, p.117

<sup>745</sup> *Yogakshemam*, 18<sup>th</sup> Midhunam,1098

<sup>746</sup> P.Sankunni Menon, *Thiruvithamcore Charitram*(Mal), Kerala Basha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 1973, reprint1988,p.66, see also MSA Rao, *Social Change in Malabar*, The Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1957,p.82

were humiliated and degraded. The concept of freedom of women as stated in the *Manusmrithi* was proved to be true in the light of Namboodiri women of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Their caste council introduced strict rules for preserving caste rules and ordered their women folk to wear ‘*Ghosha*’ (veil) both at home and outside. Later the most important slogan of Namboodiri reform was boycott of the *ghosha*. Samuel Mateer, the Baptist Missionary noticed that Namboodiri women were carefully concealed from the public gaze by covering them in cloths (veil) or covering by an immense umbrella”.<sup>747</sup> By *ghosha*, they were prohibited from enjoying pleasant sights of the world and their condition was nothing better than house hold utensils. *Antherjanams* were under constant supervision and they were not permitted to breathe fresh air to see the world. Thus Devaki Antherjanam in her speech at Srimulam assembly stated openly, ‘*Antherjanam* born with cries, lives in tears, and dies in anguish’.<sup>748</sup>

The deteriorated condition of the *Antherjanam* was rightly observed in an article of Unninamboodiri which stated that when polygamy became a condemned institution in all the parts of the world, Namboodiris observed it.<sup>749</sup> One of the dreadful results of sambandam was that many Namboodiri women were not getting married even at the age of 40. The elders or Moos among the Namboodiris married three or four times and many women were married to age old Namboodiris that resulted in competition between wives and early widowhood.<sup>750</sup> All the social rules appeared to be stringently enforced on their

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<sup>747</sup> Mateer Samuel, *The land of charity, A descriptive Account of Travancore and its people*, Asian Educational Service, New Delhi (Reprint) 1991, p.30 I, see KP Padmanabha Menon, op.cit, p.48

<sup>748</sup> Speech by Devaki Antherjanam in Shree Mulam Assembly, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1937, *Proceedings of the Sree Mulam Assembly*, Vol.10, 1938, pp.214-15

<sup>749</sup> Kodanath Narayanan Namboodiri, Presidential address to the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Namboodiri Youth wing’, *Unninamboodiri*, 1925-26 (ME.1101 Dhanu), Vol.7(4), p.244

<sup>750</sup> Kaplingottu Sankaran Namboodiri, ‘Namboodiri Family Regulation’, *Unninamboodiri*, 1926 (ME.1101 Meenam), Vol.7(7), p.398

women with a view to imparting ugliness to their persons and preventing them from falling an easy prey to the immoral greed of those other than their own husbands.<sup>751</sup>

This discriminated position of women necessitated women emancipation movement within the community. Though differed in their position, attitude and argument Namboodiri reform movement had also addressed the question of the emancipation of women. Though silent in the early period, Namboodiri reformers gradually expressed their view that progress of the community depended on the emancipation of women

### **Yogakshema Sabha and the question of women**

Namboodiri reformers were silent on the women question up to mid-1920. It is interesting to note that they had already begun to demand modern way of life for the Namboodiri males, but but remained silent on the question of women emancipation. When other communities urged for women reform,<sup>752</sup> the Namboodiris raised the issue in a later stage. Early leaders of Yogakshema Sabha were not aware of the grievances of their women folk. The discussion on women question had been started within the Sabha only after 1920. The *sambandham* relations of the founding fathers of Yogakshema Sabha itself was a casue for them being silent on women issue earlier.<sup>753</sup> Though there was argument that the incidents of Kuriyedathu Thathri influenced the formation of Yogakshema Sabha, the silence of the Sabha on the issue of Thathri indicated its position on women issues.<sup>754</sup> This argument was supported by the fact that before women issues were in the forefront of reformist movement Tathri fought against male domination and

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<sup>751</sup> Kodanath Narayanan Namboodiri, op.cit, p.244

<sup>752</sup> for example among the Pulayas the works of Ayyankali

<sup>753</sup> C.K.Namboodiri, *Yogakshema Sabhayude Munpum Pinpum*, p.9

<sup>754</sup> Alangode Leelakrishnan, *Tathrikuttiyde Smarthavicharam*, Mathrubhumi, 2011 Third edition, p.51

demanded the freedom of *Antherjanams* from the hands of their own community men.<sup>755</sup>

As Sumit Sarkar rightly remarks 'the moderates were silent on the women issues'.<sup>756</sup>

With the spread of modern education and colonial modernity, changes were visible in the outlook of Namboodiri youths towards their women. Sabha started discussing the problem of Namboodiri women from 1927 onwards. The Namboodiri radical youths, who gradually took over the leadership of reforms, demanded changes in the condition of women. Along with the revolutionary activities of the Yogakshema Sabha, their women also came out of their traditional veils and began to cope with the social change, under the leadership of Parvathy Nenminimangalam, Parvathy Nilayangod, Parvathy Manazhi, Arya Pallam, Neeli Mangalass and Lalithambika Antharjanam.

The issues like female education, dress, monogamy, widow remarriage, intra-caste marriage and freedom of travel began to be voiced forcefully within Namboodiri reformist circles. An *Antherjanam* became a member of the Namboodiri Yuvajana Sangam in 1928.<sup>757</sup> Namboodiri women began to organize their own Samajams (associations).<sup>758</sup> The changing view resulted in the decision to admit Namboodiri girls in Namboodiri Vidyalaya at Edakkunni in 1929.

Yogakshema Sabha publically discussed the question of widow remarriage in its Edakkunni session. There was stiff opposition to the reformist programme of widow

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<sup>755</sup> N.P.Vijayakrishnan, 'Anantharam Tathrikku entu sambavichu' in *Mathrubhumi weekly*, March, 2004, Vol.82(2), p.11

<sup>756</sup> Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (ed) *Women and Social reform in modern India*, pp.1-13, The Namboodiri reformer's silence on the women question was striking because most of the reformers of North India like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eswara Chandra Vidhya Sagar etc. who took up woman issue, the early Namboodiri reformer's traditionalism and illiteracy in modern ways of life forbade them from taking woman question in their reformist agenda.

<sup>757</sup> *Malayala Manorama*, 12/12/1928

<sup>758</sup> MM. Editorial, 'Antharjanangalude unarcha', 08/06/1928, For example, a woman from Changanassery presided over Karunagappally Samajam

remarriage. The participants split into two groups with radicals like Pandam Vasudevan Namboodiri and P.M.Manazhi stood in favour of widow remarriage but others like P.S.Kesavan Namboodiri and G. Sankaran Potti strongly opposed it. A resolution was introduced for the right of *sapatnis* (co-wives) to divorce and remarriage.<sup>759</sup> V.T. Bhattathirippad and other youths strongly demanded for widow remarriage and they viewed widow remarriage in the light of the success of '*swvajathivivaham*' (self-caste marriage) against '*sambhandam*' (exogamy). The radical youths argued that the marriage reform would be complete only by the widow remarriage which was considered as the last 'defect' that continued to persist in the existing system. As a stop-gap arrangement, youths suggested remarriage of both widows and *sapatnis*, but in future the demand for remarriage of *sapatnis* would not occur at all since the elimination of polygamy. But the orthodox Namboodiris stood against the demand for *sapatni* (co-wives) remarriage as *sapatnis* were wives and hence guarded and they were not an object of moral panic.

Mrs.Parvathi Manzhi attended Edakkunni seession by boycotting *ghosha* (veil)<sup>760</sup> P.M.Manazhi thus inaugurated the movement of abandoning traditional symbols and rituals which restricted the freedom of Antherjanam. It symbolizes their march from kitchen to the stage which got momentum in the coming years. Mrs. Manazhi, not only entered the meeting hall with the women reformers of other castes like Parvathi Ayyappan, but participated in the programme of inter-dinning arranged with the meeting.

Theatre was used as a weapon for women emancipation in the 1930's. The dramas created awareness among the community on the grievances of Namboodiri women and the need to eliminate it. The drama written by V.T.Bhattathirippad,

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<sup>759</sup> Ibid,p.2

<sup>760</sup> MM, 'Edakkunniyile Namboodiri Sammelanangal' 15/01/1930, see also Vidwan V Krishnan Namboodiri(MRAI,Thiruvalla) , 'Namboodiri women' in *Mathrubhumi weekly*,1938 July25,p,27

‘*Adukkalayil Ninnum Arangathekku*’ (From Kitchen to the Stage) was the first attempt which portrayed the real condition of Namboodiri women and the urgency to release women from their deplorable conditions. It revealed the ugliness of the restrictions imposed on women and the performance resulted in great changes among the Namboodiri women.<sup>761</sup> The drama created a spirit against polygamy and old marriage, and supported to love marriage and widow remarriage.<sup>762</sup>

The theme of Mullamangalathu Raman Bhattathiri’s (M.R.B) ‘*Marakkudaykullile Maha Narakam*’ (Hell behind the Cadjan Umbrella) was sapatni (co-wife) conflict. It showed the intensity of polygamy in the Namboodiri houses. Drama emphasized the need of changing the way of life of the women by picturing the tragic life of the married women. ‘*Ritumathi*’ of Premji portrayed the restrictions faced by Namboodiri girl who attained puberty. The drama emphasised the right to wear modern dress and education for women. Like that of men selecting their life partner, the right of women to select their life partner was pictured in these dramatic representations. ‘*Aphante Makal*’ took up intra-caste marriage and polygamy as the theme.<sup>763</sup>

Namboodiri women convened meetings and processions to rethink their conditions and to solve their problems in the 1930’s. The meeting was in the house of Parvathi Nenmenimangalam in 1930 passed a resolution signed by 12 women which presented in the youth wing meeting of Yogakshema Sabha at Guruvayur in 1931.<sup>764</sup> It demanded reforms in dress, changes in ear rings, wearing of blouse and, withdrawal of

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<sup>761</sup> P.Narayanan Namboodiri, ‘Achara viplavavum acharyanaya V.Tum-I’ (Ritual revolution and the leader V.T), *Yogakshemam*, February 1985, Vol.6(2), p,3

<sup>762</sup> EM Sankaran Namboodirippad, *Atmakatha*, p,116

<sup>763</sup> It is surprising to note that two women centred dramas of Yogakshema Sabha- ‘*Savithri*’ or *Widow remarriage*’ and ‘*Tozhilkendrathilekku*’ did not received much popularity though the theme was widow remarriage. ‘*Savithri*’ or *Widow remarriage*’ represented Namboodiri women of 1930’s, who were moving towards modernity.

<sup>764</sup> Premji, ‘Parvathi Nenmenimangalam’, *Unninamboodiri*, 1947 (ME.1122 Edavam), Vol.1(2), p,65

*marakkuda* (cadjan umbrella). They considered these demands as ways for changing them in to human beings.<sup>765</sup>

*Yachanayatra* (hunger march) under the leadership of V.T.Bhattathirippad helped for redefining the status of Namboodiri women. Ghosha (veil) boycott became active among the Namboodiri women along with this movement. Participation of women like Kanjoor Gauri Antherjanam, Kanjoor Kali *Antherjanam* and Arya Pallam in some stages of *Yachanayatra* exhibited the urge of women to move from the kitchen to the public sphere. This positive vibe among Namboodiri women motivated them to the movement of stitching back (*kathu murikkukkal prasthanam*) their ears.

The programme of *ghosha* boycott gained momentum after the Guruvayur session of Yogakshema Sabha in 1930. The awareness and awakening among women helped for the success of *swajathivivaham* (self-caste marriage) and end of *sambandham* (exogamous marriage). The meeting held at the residence of V.T.Bhattathirippad passed the resolution of boycott *marakkuda* under the leadership of Parvathi Nemenimangalam and Arya Pallam. They conducted a procession without *marakkuda* and met V.T.Bhattathirippad after the meeting.<sup>766</sup> Though the movement invited protest from the orthodox especially the like priestly class, women were stern in their movement and participated in the meetings of Yogakshema Sabha.<sup>767</sup> It was repeated in the Taliparamba session wher, Parvathi Nememnimangalam, Aryapallam and Devaki Narikkattari boycotted Ghosha (veil) and declared that chastity was not in '*marakkuda*' (cadjan umbrella) and they broke it.<sup>768</sup> It was a rude shock to the orthodox group. They started to wear *sari* and other clothes like women of other castes. The radical reformers

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<sup>765</sup> Ibid,p.67

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.,p.66

<sup>767</sup> Ibid,p.67

<sup>768</sup> Premji, op.cit,p.67

V.T.Bhattathirippad, Mullamangalathu Raman Bhattathirippad and Premji opened Mahila Vayanasalas (reading rooms) in different parts of Malabar to persuade the women folk to come out of seclusion and enter public sphere.

The awakening among the Namboodiri women was attested by steady increase in number of women participants in the Yogakshema Sabha meetings. Parvathi Nemeniangalam became the first women president of Youth wing in Taliparamba session. More than 100 women participated in the jubilee of Sabha celebrated at Karalmanna.<sup>769</sup> The appointment of Parvathi Nemenimangalam and Arya Pallam in different Government assignments could be viewed as recognition to their work for women emancipation. Parvathi was nominated as select committee member of Cochin Namboodiri Bill.<sup>770</sup> Arya Pallam was elected as member of Malabar District Board. Kainikkara Devaki, another reformist leader was elected as member of Srimulam Assembly.<sup>771</sup>

The position of radicals on the question of women faced stiff opposition from the orthodoxy. The sessions of Yogakshema Sabha reflected these conflicting approaches towards women questions. The participants were virtually split in to two groups in the Mannarasala session of Yogakshema Sabha in 1932 on the issue of widow remarriage. When N.Subrahmanyam Potti, Narayana Mangalam and P.S.Kesavan Namboodiri opposed the move towards widow remarriage, Lalithambhika Antharjanam, Mozhikkunnam Brahmadduttan Namboodiri and K Krishnadas supported widow

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<sup>769</sup> Ibid,p.67

<sup>770</sup> Ibid,p.68, She in this capacity sought information from many Namboodiris and strongly advocated for the Bill though strong opposition came from the traditionalists. Even they admitted that Parvathi's speeches in Cochin legislature in support of Namboodiri Bill inspired not only women but the whole Namboodiri community.

<sup>771</sup> Speech in the Srimulam assembly demanded intervention of the Government and general public for improving the condition of Namboodiri women. She contributed for improving educational system of Travancore as a member of curriculum committee

remarriage and created a marriage fund for supporting widow remarriage. Yogakshema Sabha passed the historic resolution for widow remarriage in the Peramangalam session in 1933.

The first widow remarriage among the Namboodiris was a ritual revolution.<sup>772</sup> The general acceptance of the venture was well reflected by the presence of personalities like Nilambur Valiya Raja, E.M.Sankaran Namboodirippad, Mannath Padmanabhan, Nalappatt Narayana Menon, Arya Pallam, Kuttikrishna Marar and K.Ayyappan. The marriage was not accompanied by any of the customary religious rituals followed by the Namboodiris except using the '*tali*'. The marriage ceremony was followed by inter-dinning rejecting the rules of pollution.<sup>773</sup> The first widow remarriage was characterized as the first humanistic activity of the Namboodiris after establishing domination over Kerala.<sup>774</sup> Though radical reformer's inaugurated a new era of women emancipation through widow remarriage, there was also an argument that widow remarriage had not been deep rooted among the community in the 1930's and only a few cases of widow remarriage had been reported among the Namboodiris.<sup>775</sup>

When Parvathi Nenmenimangalam became the president of Yogakshema Sabha in its Trissur session, the radical decision of re-admitting the excommunicated Namboodiris like VK Narayanan Namboodiri, who was convicted in Thathri's case had

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<sup>772</sup> First widow remarriage of Namboodiri community was between Mullamnagalathu Raman Bhattathirippad (MRB) and Uma Andharjanam (V.T's Sister in-law) which took place on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1934 at Rasikabhavanam, V.T's residence at Tritala

<sup>773</sup> Narayanan, KC (ed), *VTyude Sampooram Krithikal*, DC Books, Kottayam, 1997, pp.290-300, It is said that participants hailed the venture, especially the role of V.T.Bhattathirippad in particular, for the extraordinary courage shown by him in executing the marriage. It revealed the sympathetic attitude of V.T towards widows in general which associated with his concern for the welfare of his own widowed sister in law.

<sup>774</sup> VT Bhattathirippad, 'Vidhavayude Jeevitham Taliraniyunnu', in A.V Sreekumar (ed), *VT Vellithuruthitazhathu Raman Bhattathirippad*, V.T.Centenary Celebration Committee, Mezhatthur, 1997, p,140

<sup>775</sup> Devaki Nilayankode, op.cit, pp.40-41

been taken. It was a radical shift because early leaders of Sabha were silent on issues related with Thathri. They became ready to acknowledge that Thathri started the struggle for emancipating Namboodiri women.

Antherjana Samajams were formed in places like Kidangur, Guruvayur and Changanassery in the 1930's. Though it lacked an all Kerala perspective, the issues raised by them had a common goal. Antherjana Samajam of Kidangur passed radical resolution demanding the Government to consider them with other caste women in government jobs and higher education.<sup>776</sup> These demands reflected the dissent voice of the Namboodiri women in the existing system. Thus with the onslaught of radical reformism within the Namboodiri reformist movement women question also got more attention. It is argued that during this stage in all these women emancipation programmes women were taken as an object of reform, not as its agent.<sup>777</sup> But the argument that militant nationalists showed more inclination on women question was factual when we analyse the Namboodiri reformism in the 1930's.<sup>778</sup> The divergent programmes organized by the reformers like *ghosha* boycott, abandoning of traditional symbols and rituals and widow remarriage created an atmosphere to come out of the kitchen and to appear in the public sphere.

Namboodiri women with a new awakening and outlook projected themselves in new form by 1940's. This new spirit was well displayed in their urge to become a labour force as well as to lead an independent life by earning themselves. They understood the importance of labour and there by individual freedom. Antherjana Samajam made the call to engage in any jobs and thereby lead an independent life. The changed outlook of

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<sup>776</sup> MM. February 15th 1930

<sup>777</sup> J.Devika, op.cit, p.

<sup>778</sup> Sumit Sarkar, op.cit, p.10

the Namboodiri women was found in their entry in politics and their participation in popular struggles like Paliyam Satyagraha. The new attitude could be understood properly in the backdrop of the new trend in the community, i.e. increase in dowry. This made the parents in doldrums, and they were ready to give girls in marriage to Embranthiri (Namboodiris from North Canara). Later Embranthiris started to offer money to girl's father to marry them and take them with them. What more to say there were even practices of selling girl's in open market at Sisri and Siddippur in Karnataka by their own parents. Namboodiri women raised opposition against these practices through their organization. '*Tozhilkendrathilekku*', the first drama written and acted solely by Namboodiri women was dealt with the theme.<sup>779</sup>

The Antharjana Samaajam got revitalized with the Ongallur session of Yogakshema Sabha under the leadership of E M S Namboodiripad in 1945. Many women leaders like Kali Antherjanam worked as organizers of the Ongallur meeting and the participation of women in the meeting was attested by the women camp at the residence of Kali Antherjanam, Kanjirangattu Mana, Pattambi.<sup>780</sup> Sabha supported the idea of job centres (*Tozhil Kendram*) for attaining self-sufficiency for Namboodiri women and decided to start a labour centre at Lakkidi.<sup>781</sup> The labour centre trained Namboodiri women in various skillful crafts which helped them to lead an independent life and thereby reforming their life. The employment centre became defunct when its members were sent to participate in the Paaliyam Sathyaagraha. Meetings of Antherjanan

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<sup>779</sup> '*Tozhilkendrathilekku*' was the first Malayalam drama written and acted by women. The drama portrayed the awakened antherjanam coming from kitchen to the stage, and earns their livelihood by their own work. The drama and displayed the grievances of Namboodiri women. The drama inspired Namboodiri women to start labour centres. It also motivated them to frame plan of rehabilitation of women who were ousted from the community. These transformations were a real shock to the traditionalists..

<sup>780</sup> The Hindu, 05-08-2009

<sup>781</sup> Editorial, '*Tozhil Pariseelana Kendram*' (Labour centre), *Unninamboodiri*, 1947 (ME.1122 Edavam), Vol.1(2) ,p.130, Labour centre was functioned at at Lakkidi Chiramangalathu Mana with Pathiyil Nethran Namboodiri as its manager and 16 women were employed there.

Samajam were become regular in 1940's. The meetings of Samjam were held Sukapuram, Pazhur and Cherppu. The changing attitude of the Namboodiri women,i.e. voluntary participation in the conferences was appreciated by the Sabha leaders.<sup>782</sup>

V.T.Bhattathirippad, in the Pazhoor session reminded that the major responsibilities of Namboodiris were to change the life of Antherjanam and utilize Employee Training Centre for their upliftment.<sup>783</sup> A literary meeting was also held at Pazhoor in which women participants like N Sarojini and KN Savithri, sang a song that explained the plight of women and also urged them to come forward to undertake adventurous situations.<sup>784</sup> The declaration of independence by women at Pazhoor also could be seen in the resolution introduced by Arya Pallam, namely '*anthapura mardananeshanam.*' (Stopping of oppressions inside the house).<sup>785</sup> The meeting at Pazhoor discussed the possibility of starting strikes and taking adventures for the progress of antherjanam.<sup>786</sup>

The changes in their attitude could also be seen in their discussion on Kuriyedathu Thathri. The Pazhur session, though expressed some disagreement on the activities of Tathri, applauded the aims raised by Tathri, and was judged as revolutionary. She expressed her anger with the activities of Namboodiri and made self-immolation.<sup>787</sup> The Pazhur session also requested Namboodiri women to come up with bold and adventurous steps for freedom. It was argued that so long as the custom of

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<sup>782</sup>KN Kuttan Namboodiri, who presided over the Pazhur session, noticed the changes among the Namboodiri women who participated in the meetings forcefully during 1930's to that of participation with an independent spirit by 1940's., Pazhuril' (At Pazhur), *Unninamboodiri*, 1947 (ME.1122 Edavam), Vol.1(2), p.114

<sup>783</sup> Ibid,p118

<sup>784</sup> Ibid,p.121

<sup>785</sup> Ibid,p.121

<sup>786</sup> Ibid,p,121, Leaders expressed their satisfaction in the changes of antherjanam from the boycott of purdah in 1930's to the complete removal of pardah and to the free life of antherjanam's in the present world

<sup>787</sup> Ibid,p,122

Sambandham continued, antherjanams would be restricted under umbrella and the struggles for women freedom should be continued.<sup>788</sup> In addition to create awareness among the Namboodiri women, Premji's play, '*Marakkudaykkullile Mahanarakam*' (The hell behind the Cadjan umbrella) was re-enacted.<sup>789</sup> An art form on the model of Kunjan Nambiar's Tullal was presented namely '*marakkuda kalanju*' was staged at Pazhoor.<sup>790</sup> A play written by Mulliyur Vinodam, '*Sthreedhanam*' (dowry) was also enacted. The poem composed during this period namely '*mushtichuruttanam*' (fist to protest) also reiterated the need of emancipating women.

The Pazhoor session decided to establish a job training centre which was boldly named as '*Parvathi*'. Training in weaving, and primary medical treatments and education up to third form were provided in this job training centre. There were suggestions for starting more house industries for ending the slavery of antherjanam.<sup>791</sup> But the spirit showed by women to become a labour force declined and later Namboodiri women not showed the bravery to engage in any jobs.<sup>792</sup>

The transformation of Namboodiri women from the status of Kuriyedathu Tathri to the status of self-empowered women was achieved partially towards the close of 1940's. By this period Namboodiri women were self-aware of their rights and needs. The meetings of Antherjana Samajam asserted their consciousness on the need to live

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<sup>788</sup> Ibid,p,122

<sup>789</sup> When Nangema broke the '*Nedumangalya charadu*' (*tali*) a revolutionary song was heard in the background "Look at this evil practice of the community, we should raise our hand against this custom." Marakkuda connoted Namboodiri women's slavery and at the same time acted as a weapon of the orthodox to restrict antherjanam's mobility.

<sup>790</sup> The story portrayed a Namboodiri who was a miser and a half reformer went to cinema with his wife. When the antherjanam held Marakkuda (cagjan umbrella) inside the theatre hall, people threw stone at her from all side as they could not see the cinema because Marakkuda was hiding the screen. When the Marakkuda was broken by the spectators, eventually the age old oppression of the antherjanam had been under threat and thus she had taken an oath not to carry Marakkuda anymore

<sup>791</sup> Ibid,p,130

<sup>792</sup> Chandrika C.S, *Keralathile sthree munnettangalude Charitram* (Mal), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trissur, 1998,p.63

independently. Thus during this period women became both the object of reform and the agents of reform.

### **Reformist Discourses**

The reformist discourses manifested itself the changes in Namboodiri reformism on women issue. This was centred on physical appearances, sex, exogamous marriage, widow remarriage and discourse on modernity. These discussions pointed to the existence of the dialectics on women in the reformist circle. The discussions in the 1940's on women likethe need of becoming a labour force, supporting Thathri as a revolutionary etc. highlighted awakened women.

Namboodiri reformers debated themselves on the question of what should be the essence of reform for their women. One argument was that the reform should be to transform *antherjanam* into woman who were capable of managing domestic affairs and efficient organisers of their specific domain. This argument of reformers was based on the assumption that Antherjanam in the pre-reform order lacked womanliness.<sup>793</sup> In the reformist discourse education was viewed as method for making *antherjanam* as ordinary woman or making her a human being. Reformers urged that only by this change progress of the community could be achieved.

In the reformist discussions a new concept on physical appearance had also idealized. It was assumed that changes in physique would lead to the liberation of *antherjanam* from their tradition. Changes in physique included changes in the dressing

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<sup>793</sup> Muthirangode Bhavathrathan Namboodiri, 'Namboodiri Streekal' (Namboodiri women), *Unninamboodiri*, 1927 (ME.1102 Thulam), Vol.9(2), p.157

style, wearing ornaments and removing of cadjan umbrella (Marakkuda).<sup>794</sup> Reformers were aware that removal of the backwardness of women and maidens by reforming the dress style and habits were essential prerequisites for removing the backwardness of Namboodiri community.

Reformers tried to provide an impression that the understanding between husband and wife as the essential component behind chastity. The reformers were projecting a new notion of chastity where *antherjanam* was asked to look at the face of others courageously. Reformers ridiculed the traditionalist concept of chastity even when *antherjanam*'s were banned to cover up their body completely.<sup>795</sup> The reformers pointed out that when Namboodiri men enjoyed much freedom in the subject of sex, they imposed restrictions on their women by interpreting caste rules.<sup>796</sup> So in the reformist discourse reformers stood for complete freedom of life for *antherjanam* and they held the view that if Namboodiri women were not given freedom their men would be blamed as selfish and autocrat.<sup>797</sup> Reformers argued that sexual freedom enjoyed by the men should be extended to their women also. They stood for extending all rights enjoyed by men to their women. Imparting education and freedom of mobility were viewed as steps for attaining worldly knowledge to *antherjanam*.<sup>798</sup>

In the reformist discourses there was argument that men and women were interdependent and hence no need of having separate samajams (associations) for men

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<sup>794</sup> Ramavarma Thampan, 'Unninamboodirimarodu Orulbodhanam' (Call to the Unninamboodiris), *Unninamboodiri*, 1926(ME.1102 Kanni), vol.8 (1),p.37

<sup>795</sup> Mozhikkunnam Brahmadattan Namboodirippad, 'Nammude Innathe Athyavasyam' (Our essentialities of Today), *Unninamboodiri*, 1925(ME.11101 Kanni),p.3

<sup>796</sup> NV Krishna Varier, 'VT oru Ithihasam', in Narayanan Palakeezh (ed), VT: Oru Ithihasam, Cherukad Smaraka Trust, Perinthalmanna, 2004,p,34

<sup>797</sup> RESwarapillai, 'Namboodirimarum Samudaya Parishkaravum; (Namboodiris and Community Reforms), *Unninamboodiri*, 1925-26(ME.1101 Dhanu), Vol.7(4),p,229

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid*,p,229

and women. These debates emphasized that the reform model for men should be decided by their women and for women by their men.<sup>799</sup> The families in which consensus existed became a model and was projected as leading a happy married life. They perceived that reform of men should be according to the taste and interest of their women.<sup>800</sup>

There was another argument that reform was needed for both men and women equally. The demand of self-caste marriage for all Namboodiris was viewed as the base of equality. The argument supported the extension that all worldly and political life enjoyed by Namboodiri men to be given to their women. Family life would be happy only by reforming both men women. They demanded that women should be permitted for interaction with others for ending their isolation. Furthermore reformers argued that women were not only characters in novels but they were real human beings. The traditionalist argument that changes in the way of life would destroy the chastity of women was totally rejected by the reformers.<sup>801</sup> Reformer's conviction was that both men and women had role in deciding the reforms of their partners.<sup>802</sup>

Exogamous marriages of Namboodiri men came into staunch criticism in the reformist discussions. The reformers argued that there was nothing more vulgar than the exogamous relations that the younger men had with Nayar women.<sup>803</sup> Therefore, while all other communities were perceived reform as improving themselves through self-help and generating their own wealth, accepting wives from their own caste and looking after their own families, the Namboodiris alone seemed to lead a lustful life by entering in to

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<sup>799</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, 'Dambathya Bandham; (Marriage Relations), *Unninamboodiri*, 1926 (ME.1101 Meenam), Vol.7(7),p,425

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid*,p,425

<sup>801</sup> Ramavarma Thampan, A Word to Malayala Brahmins, *Unninamboodiri*, 1925(ME.1100 Meenam), Vol.6(7),p,22

<sup>802</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, *Ente Smaranakal*, Vol.1,p,231

<sup>803</sup> V.K.Bhattathiri, The old man and the new educational system among the Namboodiris, *Unni Namboodiri*, Vol.4, No.5, 1923, pp.243-251

relation with women of other communities.<sup>804</sup> The Namboodiri reformers called these people as the enemies of the community and decided to destroy their activities.<sup>805</sup> Reformers advised young Namboodiris to stop the practice of sambandham in 'kovilakams' (royal palaces) and engage in self-caste marriage. The activities related with *sambandham* marriage were pictured as one which created problems to the community.<sup>806</sup> The reformers arguing on behalf of women, maintained that endogamous marriages were essential for the happiness of women as they had dire options of either leading unmarried lives or being married to an old man, who by caste rules, was entitled to at least three other wives.<sup>807</sup>

Within the arguments constructed in the *Unninamboodiri*, both exogamous *sambandham* and polygamous relations were seen as demeaning the status of women and such people were treated as "house hold chattel or animals".<sup>808</sup> They asserted that it was a crime against the community to enter into conjugal relation with women of other communities when their own women remain unhappy and unsatisfied. In a plea to strengthen the arguments for endogamy, the Namboodiri reformers pointed to the potential drain of wealth from their community to the Nayers, if *sambandham* with the Nayar women was legalized.<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>804</sup> Mathrubhumi, 18-12-1923

<sup>805</sup> VKBhattathiri, op.cit, pp.243-251

<sup>806</sup> Ibid, pp, 243-51

<sup>807</sup> Mahopadhyayan Ravivarma Thampan, 'Samathwavum sahodaryavum' (Equality and Fraternity), *Unninamboodiri*, 1926(ME.1102 Kanni), vol.8(1), p.15

<sup>808</sup> M Ramavarma Thampan, Namboodiri Youth Wing' *Unninamboodiri*, 1926 (ME.1101 Medam), Vol.7(8)

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<sup>809</sup> Ibid, p.477 Ramavarma Thampan thus wrote, "the wealth of the community was being destroyed in many way. Do we want the women of other castes and their children demanding maintenance from this mone? should Namboodiri women be left to suffer as co-wives? Not at all"

The discourse on marriage reforms continuously pointed on the failure of reformers to prevent polygamy and late marriage.<sup>810</sup> It was argued banning of *adhivedhanam* was the practical way to end intra-caste marriage. Reformers argued that while every modern society rejected *adhivedhanam*, Namboodiris went on with it. They expressed the hope that though there was strong oppositions from the traditionalists, modernized youths were ready for intra-caste marriage and there by emancipating *antherjanam*. So intra-caste marriage was viewed as the way for the partition of joint property, women emancipation and family reorganization.<sup>811</sup> The reformers even argued that it was from the pathetic condition of girls that the demand for self-caste marriage emerged.<sup>812</sup>

Many of the reformers complained that though progressive youths were labouring hard for community reform, they were silent on the freedom of *antherjanam*.<sup>813</sup> They debated that while the other communities called for more freedom and reforms, the Namboodiri community stood against the emancipation of women tacitly.

In their deliberations on women, reformers were agreed upon one thing- to uplift *antherjanam* from their deplorable conditions there was the need to generate knowledge on worldly affairs and community consciousness.<sup>814</sup> Women were treated equal with their men in developed communities. Men should take attention to participate women in all programmes. Reformers should convene assemblies of women and convince them on

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<sup>810</sup> P.N.Namboodirippad, *Veliyum Baghavum*, p.23

<sup>811</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, 'Adhivedhana Nirodhanam', in *Unni Namboodiri*, 1030(ME1105Edavam, Vol.6(8), p.156

<sup>812</sup> Mozhikunnam Brahmaddattan Namboodirippad, 'Penkidangakude Narakamochanam' (Saving girls from hell), *Unninamboodiri*, 1925(ME.1100 Medam), Vol.6(8), p.400

<sup>813</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, 'Stree samajam' (women organization), *Unninamboodiri*, 1926 (ME.1101 Kumbham), Vol.7(6), p.347

<sup>814</sup> Muthiringodu Bhavathathran Namboodiri, 'Abhivridhikkulla Eka Margam' (Only One Way to Progress), *Unninamboodiri*, 1927 (ME.1102Meenam), Vol.8(8), p.448

the need of reforms. Here reformers stood for forming '*samajam*' (associations) for *Antherjanam*'s.<sup>815</sup> Growth of community consciousness would lead to consciousness among women on their rights and needs and thereby to community development. Women were more powerful than men. Even wife's secret disclosures to their husband in their bed rooms ('*talayina mantras*') might lead to a rethinking on community development. Women could convince the importance of education of children to their husbands. Reformers expressed the hope that these changes could end the opposition from the orthodox and as a result they would realize the need of reform.<sup>816</sup>

Different opinion on the place where education should be given to Namboodiri women was found in the reformist discourses. They differed on the questions like place of education, age to start educating and the question of instituting public or special school. When the Education Commission expressed readiness to send girls up to the age of 12 to public schools, respondents to the questionnaire of the Commission lamented that the Education Commission should not be an obstacle to Namboodiri progress and sending of Namboodiri girls to public school would damage many of their special qualities.<sup>817</sup>

Community leaders also criticized the social evils encircled *antherjanam* like *gosha* (veil). In their writings and speeches the reformers argued that no other community so strictly observed *ghosha* than the Namboodiris. The movement for widow remarriage was also headed by male reformers. They took up the cause of the suffering widows and started vigorous and lively campaigns through direct struggles like picketing, publishing pamphlets and literary works. Different interpretations on the

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid,p.449

<sup>816</sup> Ibid,p.450

<sup>817</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodirippad, 'Stree Vidhyabhyasam' (women education), *Unninamboodiri*, 1928(ME.1103 Chingam), Vol.9(12),p.725

scriptures embittered the discourse on widow remarriage and made it a prominent issue of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There was even argument that reforming *Antherjanam* would remain incomplete until “they attain education and success in the examinations, employment and assets like the women of other communities, put an end to all sorts of restriction, and enrich the community inner and outer domains.”<sup>818</sup> Reforming *Antherjanam* was, however, always the center of debate, reformers differed very significantly in their conception of reforming that the *Antherjanams* were to undergo, the best means through which they could be reformed, the priorities were to be kept in mind in formulating the means of reforming etc.<sup>819</sup>

Some reformers argued that *antherjanam* was to be reformed without losing any of the special virtues that attributed in them. Others held the view that they should be reformed by removing all peculiarities that might be found in them.<sup>820</sup> Some felt that modern education that introduced *Antherjanams* to modern domestic life provided in the seclusion of illams was sufficient.<sup>821</sup> Others strongly argued against this, favouring greater exposure to the world outside.<sup>822</sup> There was also the argument that *Antherjanams* should voice their demands and opinion through *streesamajams* which did evoke alarmed responses that this went against the spirit of complementarity expected in

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<sup>818</sup> VT.Bhattathirippad, *Karmavipakam*,p.339, from the speech ‘Namboodiri Manushyanayi Maranamenkil, (if Namboodiri is turn in to man) made in 1930

<sup>819</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, op.cit,pp.724-25, see also M.Lakshmikutty Amma, ‘Namboodiri balikamarude Vidyabhyasam’ *Unninamboodiri*,Vol.9(1)1927,pp.76-78

<sup>820</sup> Kurur Narayanan Bhattathirippad, “Samudayika Swatantram’ (Community freedom), *Unninamboodiri* special edition, 1927 (ME.1102 Kumbham), Vol.8(6),P.88

<sup>821</sup> M.Ramavarma Thampan. ‘Namboodiri Balika Vidyabhyasam’ (Education of the Namboodiri girls), *Unninamboodiri*, 1927 (ME.1102 Makaram), Vol.8(2) ,pp.815-816 in which the recommendation of the Female Education Commission was defended.

<sup>822</sup> Editorial, ‘Ban on child marriage’, *Unninamboodiri*, 1928 (ME.1103 Kumbham), Vol.9(6),pp.406-409

modern family life.<sup>823</sup> Women's active participation in public life was interpreted as a way for attaining freedom.<sup>824</sup> But the traditionalists raised counter argument that granting freedom to women in all household affairs would result in conflict between men and women and that would ultimately damage the social life of the Namboodiris.<sup>825</sup>

But the orthodox fully rejected the scope of women participation in political affairs. They contended that women intervention in the affairs of men would result in destroying family life. They strongly stood against the attempt to form women organisations. When the newspapers and theatre had taken up the women issue, orthodox ridiculed them.<sup>826</sup>

At the same time, these reformist discourses projected women organizations as manifestation of immaturity and ignorance. They considered these attempts as divisive and destroying the community by undermining the ideal of family as a 'natural unit' (ie. one comprising of a man, his 'wife', and children).<sup>827</sup> Additionally they argued that men and women had separate and unique, yet complimentary functions to perform within the community. Consequently, this perception had given different rights and duties to men and women. Besides, it was assumed that any political activity undertaken by the Namboodiris would naturally include the interest of women in public affairs and reform organizations were considered entirely as superfluous. The younger men, within reform movement though supportive of some of the issues raised by women, like those of

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<sup>823</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, 'Stree Samajam', *Unninamboodiri*, Vol.7(6)1926, pp.347-357 also see the presidential speech at Edakkunni meeting of Namboodiri Youth Wing in 1930, reported in Malayala Manorama, Vanita Pankti (women Column) titled, 'Antherjanamgalum Parishkaravum' (Antherjanams and Reform) 06/02/1930, in which stree samajams are recommended.

<sup>824</sup> VT.Bhattathirippad, *Karmavipakam*, p.339

<sup>825</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri, 'Dambathya Bandham; (Marriage Relations), *Unninamboodiri*, 1926 (ME.1101 Meenam), Vol.7(7), pp.423-432

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid*, pp.347-351

<sup>827</sup> G.Arunima.op.cit,p.169

education and marriage, eventually managed to subsume within the frame work of their protest. These factors blunted the edge of the issues raised by women, and they became merely a part of the movement for creating a new caste identity.

V.T.Bhattathirippad held the view that women emancipation could be achieved gradually.<sup>828</sup> He was of the opinion that acceptance of *parivedhanam* (monogamy) would help in ending *adhivedhanam* (polygamy). V.T.Bhattathirippad judged that literary activities had great role in reforming society and stressed the adaptation of literary changes to community life.<sup>829</sup> V.T.Bhattathirippad stood for the promotion of two types of remarriages-widow remarriage and remarriage of *sapatni* (co-wives). He was of the opinion that checking *adhivedhanam* would put an end to the custom of *sapatnis* and considered problem of *sapatnis* as a short transient issue because end of *adhivedaham* would result in the end of the question of remarriage of *sapatnis*.

V.T.Bhattathirippad considered the struggle of Kuriyedathu Thathri as the first struggle by a Namboodiri woman for freedom. He viewed that Thathri used her own body to challenge the illicit way of life of Namboodiri men and thereby fight against male domination and aristocracy.<sup>830</sup> VT opined that women should themselves come forward to solve their problems and the solution rested upon the breaking of rituals and restrictions. Radical reformers including V.T.Bhattathirippad suggested measures by which the element of love would be brought in to the marital union, so that the traditional bonds of marriage would be completely transformed. V.T.Bhattathirippad for instance suggested that Antherjanam should adopt modern dress, acquire modern knowledge and

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<sup>828</sup> VT Bhattathirippad, 'Remarriage or Widow remarriage', in VT Sudies and Memoirs,p,142

<sup>829</sup> Ibid,p,142

<sup>830</sup> VT Sudies and Memoirs,p,127

familiarity with modern way of life in order to establish a new sort of relation – one of companionship- with their modern educated husbands.<sup>831</sup>

In the Namboodiri reformist discourses on women there was also attempt to glorify past to unveil that Namboodiri women enjoyed freedom in the past. Golden age was often coincided with periods in which respect and freedom granted to women. The argument pointed that Namboodiris in the past had considered women as the goddess of home and there was many women were pictures as paragons of virtues like ‘Kurur Amma’.<sup>832</sup>

These reformist discourses of 1920’s and 1930’s had shown the anxiety of Namboodiri community over their women folk and the need to restructure the status of women in society. But related with women issues Namboodiri reformers debated themselves and these differences of opinion highlighted their reformist discourses.

### **Women educational commission: Tradition verses modernity**

A sensational public debate in the 1920’s was concerned with the most suitable type of education for Namboodiri women. This resulted in the formation of Namboodiri Female Education Commission.<sup>833</sup> Namboodiris were strictly adhered on the conventional notion about the impropriety and even danger of women education until this period. The important issues taken up by the Education Commission were the condition of Namboodiri women education, method of education, need of changes in the existing system and new method of imparting education. The Commission requested

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<sup>831</sup> Vt.Bhattathirippad, ‘Namboodirimar Manushynayi Mariyenkil’,Appendix to *Karmavipakam*, pp.332-336

<sup>832</sup> M.N.Neelakandan Namboodiri, ‘Antherjanangalude Adunikavastha’(The Modern condition of the Antherjanams) in *Vanitakusumam*,Vol.1(5),1926-27,p.125

<sup>833</sup> *Namboodiri Female Education Commission* was formed in M.E 1102 (1927) as per the decision of 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Yogakshema Sabha with AKTKM Guptan Namboodirippad as the President and Muthiringodu Bhavathrathan Namboodirippad as the secretary

responses from the community and from the general public on this issue.<sup>834</sup> Progressive Namboodiris approached the commission with great enthusiasm because the commission was headed by Muthirangode Bhavathrathan Namboodiri, a progressive Namboodiri reformist leader.<sup>835</sup> But the responses received by the Commission on the issue of women education reflected the traditional outlook of the community members. The Commission discussed not only the condition of Namboodiri women education, but the matters that affected the Namboodiri community as a whole like exogamous marriages of younger Namboodiris, self-imposed restrictions on women, overburden of rituals and modernizing family life.

The Commission commented that Namboodiris were in a false pride that they had captured all prosperities of the world without having real understanding of the condition of the community.<sup>836</sup> Commission requested to the relative communities to have a close observation on Namboodiri community which was in a degraded state and opined that exogamous marriages of Namboodiri youngsters' aggravated grievances of Namboodiri women.<sup>837</sup> The Commission expressed the irrationality in blaming other communities for the decline of Namboodiri community and argued that the Namboodiris themselves should discover the cause of their decline and to find solution to overcome it.<sup>838</sup> The

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<sup>834</sup> Editorial, 'Women Education Commission', *Unninamboodiri*, 1927(ME.1102 Karkkidakam), Vol.8(11), pp.606-608

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid*, p.606

<sup>836</sup> *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam, 1927, p.2

<sup>837</sup> Editorial, 'Women Education Commission', *Unninamboodiri*, 1927(ME.1102 Karkkidakam), Vol.8(11), p.606, The number of Namboodiri male and female were equal, but only the eldest male members were allowed to marry a Namboodiri girl, and this would come only 10% of Namboodiri male was available for marrying Namboodiri girls and the remaining 90% of the Namboodiri youths were engaged sambandam (exogamous marriage) with other caste women. This custom made the life of Namboodiri women pathetic. It was pictured that Namboodiri women's life before marriage as '*kadinatadavum*' (rigorous imprisonment) and life after marriage as a life of loneliness (isolation)

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid*, p.2

commission was of the impression that the deplorable condition of their women was the sole reason for the degenerations of Namboodiris community.<sup>839</sup>

The responses to the questionnaire circulated by the Commission could be viewed as the proof of debates within the community and among the general public on the nature Namboodiri women education. The respondents were almost unanimous in the opinion that Namboodiri education was in a deplorable condition. They added that the old system of education made their life as that of an animal having any knowledge about modern world and women were not intelligent to use the facilities of the modern world for they were leading an isolated life.<sup>840</sup>

The Commission reported that the education of women was limited to the study of 59 alphabets and reading of *Puranas*.<sup>841</sup> The Commission Report had made comparative study on the women education between foreign countries like England and Germany where only 1/100 and 2/200 women were illiterate and the Namboodiri women where only 20 out of 200 could read even their mother tongue. The Commission noted that the main cause for the lack of education among Women was the false belief existed among the Namboodiris that if their women were educated they would destroy their good habits.<sup>842</sup>

Serious discussions were conducted by the Commission for deciding the nature of Namboodiri women education. One argument was that different types of education should be imparted to men and women by considering their nature of work. There was also argument which stood for granting equal rights and powers to men and women in

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<sup>839</sup> Ibid,p.2

<sup>840</sup> Ibid,p.4

<sup>841</sup> Ibid,p.6

<sup>842</sup> Ibid,p.7

the sphere of education<sup>843</sup> It is relevant here to evaluate the opinion of Annie Beasant, the prominent social reformist leader and the leader of Theosophical Society in India, that western education was not suitable for eastern women and they should be taught in their own history, science, drama, and stories. But majority of the respondents opined that special curriculum to cater the special needs of Namboodiri women should be framed.<sup>844</sup>

The main suggestions emerged on the curriculum was that a comprehensive study of three languages- Malayalam, Sanskrit and English should be initiated for women. But a few of the respondents suggested that basic knowledge in Malayalam, Mathematics, Sanskrit and English along with knowledge in astrology, music and primary medical treatment must be included in the curriculum.<sup>845</sup> Some suggested that women should study these subjects with the support of the *karanavers*.<sup>846</sup> The Commission pointed out that Malayalam, English, Sanskrit, Mathematics, History, pediatrics, gynecology and crafts must be the subjects of study for the Namboodiri women.<sup>847</sup> On the question of duration of Namboodiri girls education majority of the respondents suggested that girls between the ages 5 to 12 must be admitted. A total of 8 years, wherein five years compulsory education and three years of higher education had been viewed as advantageous for girls.<sup>848</sup> They perceived that by eight years of education Namboodiri women could lead a life like that of women in other communities.<sup>849</sup>

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<sup>843</sup> Ibid,p.11

<sup>844</sup> Ibid,p.12

<sup>845</sup> Ibid,p.13

<sup>846</sup> Response of Avanappara Namboodiri, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam,p.34

<sup>847</sup> Proficiency in mother tongue was considered as a vital factor for leading a meaningful life and for proficiency in Malayalam, the importance of the study of English and Sanskrit was recognized. Knowledge in Sanskrit was recognized as essential for interpreting religious texts whereas English for connecting worldly affairs, Math's for managing house hold affairs, History and Geography for acquiring worldly knowledge and Music and arts would inculcate aesthetic values in life.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid,p.15

<sup>849</sup> Ibid,p.15

Another domain of debate regarding female education was the nature of schools, whether public school or special school needed for Namboodiri women.<sup>850</sup> A few respondents stood for special schools for Namboodiri women. There was argument which supported establishment of good hostels where Namboodiri girls could be accommodated. Some of the respondents favoured sending of girls to public schools. But the Commission commented that these two opinions had some practical difficulties because karanavers who were lazy and reluctant to send girls to schools would not be ready to send them to hostels or to public schools. Though there was argument in favour of establishing the special schools some of the opinions pointed that even special schools meant for boys were facing the shortage of students.<sup>851</sup> The argument was that a common centre should be arranged among the cluster of Namboodiri illams (houses) where the students should be taught with the help of special teachers. This argument was in support of the suggestion that learned women from other communities could also be appointed as teachers. Salary and other expenditure of this institution should be met by parents of the students.

Education Commission expressed the opinion that, .Namboodiri men and women should reject baseless rituals. The Commission also opined that women organizations should be established in different places and educated women should take the leadership of these organisations. These organizations must be able to open new reading rooms, conduct speeches, publish articles and organise different arts and entertainments targeting upliftment women. The difficulties in running these organisations should

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<sup>850</sup> Ibid,p.12

<sup>851</sup> Ibid,p.15

overcome by women themselves by putting their own hardwork.<sup>852</sup> Forming schools on the model of Convent of the Christian missionaries was also suggested as a way to educate Namboodiri women.<sup>853</sup>

The Commission proposed for starting Women schools in different places of Kerala like Taliparamba, Pozhayi. Valluvanad, Thirunavaya, Panjal, Trissivaperur, Perumanam, Iringalakkuda, Tiruvalla and Chengannur. The Commission called for avoiding of luxurious rituals and utilizing this spared amount for education.<sup>854</sup> Commission expressed its readiness to accept educated Nair women as teachers and if women teachers were not available elderly people could be appointed as teachers, but at the same time there was a strong opinion that elderly people were not progressive and they always look backward.<sup>855</sup>

The intensity of debate over female education was well attested by the various responses to the Commission. There was argument that by present system of education Namboodiri women were able to read puranas and epics and this education inculcated many good habits like bhakti, devotion and chastity which reflected the traditional concept on education.<sup>856</sup> An opposite point of view could be seen in the suggestion that framing separate curriculum for Namboodiris would result in unnecessary economic loss and difficulties and sending of Namboodiri girls to public school helps them to develop

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<sup>852</sup> Response by MP Kousalya Amma, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam, p.43

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid*,p.28, According to this opinion primary schools were needed initially and in every year one class should be upgraded. Nair woman who had completed school final should be appointed as teacher, and one or two Namboodiri women should be appointed as managers this school. The Commission remarked that while education of a Namboodiri boy makes him intelligent and competent for getting job, the education of Namboodiri girl would result in the transformation of the society

<sup>854</sup> *Ibid*,p.35

<sup>855</sup> Opinion of A Ramavarma Thampan , *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam, pp.33-37

<sup>856</sup>Opinion of N Tuppen Namboodirippad. *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam,pp.39-40

with others.<sup>857</sup> Another type of traditionalism could be seen in the argument of giving importance to the study of dharma. This group argued that current problems were due to the growth and popularity of western ideologies namely worships of matter. They wanted to save Namboodiri girls from the western influence and suggested the study of some religious principles to Namboodiri girls.<sup>858</sup>

The Commission was of the opinion that early leaders of Yogakshema Sabha have not showed much enthusiasm in women education.<sup>859</sup> It outlaid that traditional beliefs of the leaders of Sabha forbade them to consider girls education.<sup>860</sup> Though there was opinions which supported sending of Antherjanam's to public schools, their opposition in sending girls to mixed schools showed that they were not progressive enough to accept mixed schools as they feared that it would endanger their marriage customs and belief in chastity.<sup>861</sup> Another interesting opinion in support of sending girls to public school was that it was far better than their practice of sambandham.<sup>862</sup> Opinion also were that that Man and women not created equal by god and so in education there should be this difference. The argument support basic education for women but not up to men.<sup>863</sup>

Reformist argument that Namboodiri women should be educated on modern lines for preparing them for a modern life also appeared in the report.<sup>864</sup> This argument

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<sup>857</sup> Opinion of AKTM Narayanan Namboodiri, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam,p.39

<sup>858</sup> Opinion of Kurur Narayanan Namboodirippadbid,p.50

<sup>859</sup> Ibid,p.55

<sup>860</sup> Opinion of Mullamangalathu Neelakandan, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam,p.56

<sup>861</sup> Ibid,p.62

<sup>862</sup> Opinion of Madangerli Narayanan Namboodiri, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam,p.63

<sup>863</sup> Opinion of T.E.Narayanan Thirumumbu,Tazhekkattumana, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam,p.65

<sup>864</sup> Ibid,p.68

supports sending of Namboodiri women to colleges if any one was ready for the same. Opinion for establishing schools at temples was also appeared.<sup>865</sup> Argument that after 11 years Namboodiri girls should be educated only at their own houses reflected its traditional character.<sup>866</sup>

Newspapers of the period also expressed their opinion on Namboodiri women education. These opinions were also reflects of debate existed within the society on the question of Namboodiri women education. The *Swarat* opined that arrangement of Namboodiri women education should be made in the Namboodiri houses itself with Hindu women as teachers.<sup>867</sup> The *West Coast Spectator* expressed its surprise on the existing system of education of Namboodiri women.<sup>868</sup> It suggested for sending of Namboodiri girls to girls schools. In localities where there is a cluster of large number of illams, special schools should be started. Rich Namboodiris should provide facilities for the education of poor girls and the Government also must see to the speedy spread of education. All subjects, the knowledge of which are essential to girls, should be taught, and special stress should be laid on the study of Sanskrit and domestic science.

The *Mithavadi* stood for minimizing Sanskrit education and viewed that women education would help for increasing world knowledge to them and thereby would help

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<sup>865</sup> Opinion of Madamana Narayanan Namboodiri, *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam, p.68

<sup>866</sup> AKTKM Ashtamurthi Namboodirippad , *Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report*, Trissur, Mangalodayam, p.71

<sup>867</sup> Opinion of Nenmenimangalath Vasudevan Namboodiri, p.81

<sup>868</sup> It expressed that because of the superstitious beliefs community denied systematic education to their women and consequently ignorance and illiteracy become the heritage of Namboodiri women. With the primitive kind of dress and ornaments, confined to the four walls of their illams, impenetrable to the rays and civilization the Namboodiri women were leading a life of obscurity, and ignorance. They have not the courage to demand their rights, mingle with their enlightened sisters and to work out their own salvation. The jealous care of their guardians, the superstitious vigilance of their masters have reduced them to a position of helpless and degradation from which to save them is the immediate and sacred duty of all progressive members of the community. The paper viewed that the appointment of women as the sign of realization of the community that education would lead them to progress and change their way of life

for community development. In the modern world good English education also was essential.<sup>869</sup> The daily *Sahodaran* opined that all types of education giving to their men should be imparted to their women. It expressed its disagreement in extending differences of men, women and religion in the field of education.<sup>870</sup> At the same time *K.Manorama* stood against idealizing ladies and gentlemen who got modern education and wanted education for the promotion of spiritual and mental progress.<sup>871</sup> *Yogashemam*, the mouthpiece of Yogakshema Sabha though declared women education as indispensable like men education, demanded only primary education for women and supported special schools for women education.<sup>872</sup> These discussions within the community and in the society reflected the attitude towards Namboodiri female education. Though majority supported for a change in the existing system of education there was also traditional elements that stood for the continuance of present system of education as they feared that it would affect the caste exclusiveness and existing caste rules.

The above discussions shows that on the issues related with women there existed dialectics within the Namboodiri community throughout the reformist phase. The attitude and programmes of the male reformers reflected their constitution of women. By 1940's Namboodiri women began to organize themselves and lead an independent life. Reformers perception on women emancipation was influenced by the prevailing belief systems in the society. From 1920's we could see the attempt for reorganization of the

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<sup>869</sup> Ibid,p.85

<sup>870</sup> Ibid,p.85

<sup>871</sup> Ibid,p.86, The paper stood with the traditional opinion of restricting Namboodiri girl's education between 5 to 12 years and rejected public school system and demanded special schools. Nasrani Deepika opined that education giving to other women should be given to Namboodiri women.as knowledge not related to any religion

<sup>872</sup> Ibid,p.96

status of Namboodiri women and it reached the level of demanding independent life by them in the 1940's.