CHARTER 3: Ideas and practices in formal education

Table of Contents

Section I................................................................................................................................. 92
  Missionaries and the beginning of modern education .............................................. 92
    Beginning of girls’ schools in Malayalam-speaking regions .............................. 95
    Problems faced by the missionaries in the early years........................................ 98
    Kinds of schools ........................................................................................................... 102
    Curriculum and objectives ....................................................................................... 102
    Changes wrought by missionary education ......................................................... 105
  Modern education in Kerala and India: initial hurdles ...................................... 108
  Government(s) and education ................................................................................. 110
  Ideas and practices in education ............................................................................... 114
    Education: hygiene .................................................................................................. 116
    Education: music ...................................................................................................... 117
    Integration of missionary education to government rules .................................... 118
    Women’s education in the early 20th century ...................................................... 119
    Problems that beset women’s education ................................................................. 123
    Professional/vocational training and women’s curriculum .............................. 128
    Discipline through education .................................................................................. 133
    Women’s capabilities and employment ................................................................. 135
    High rates of literacy and education ...................................................................... 139

Section II: Model women: through the textbooks ............................................. 152

90
CHAPTER 3: Ideas and practices in formal education

An often-asked question about the high literacy rate in Kerala is regarding the different factors that played a role in creating this literacy. Many scholars ascribe it to the matrilineal system that prevailed here. Christian scholars prefer to credit the missionaries who started the first modern schools as the harbingers of change. A few scholars also point to the benevolent rulers as another factor. Most histories of education concentrate on the role of the missionaries, or the matrilineal system or the role of the government, but not all of them taken together. The cultural factors that played a role in the rise of literacy are often overlooked, except perhaps by a handful of social scientists like Robin Jeffrey, Michael Tharakan and J. Devika. This chapter, through an analysis of the history of missionary and government education and the curriculum in place in both systems in the Malayalam-speaking regions in the 19th and early 20th centuries, shows how these concretised certain ways of thinking about women’s education and their social/cultural status. In the previous chapter, I mentioned how literacy and education were related to formal structures of schooling in Kerala. This chapter delineates how formal schooling was constantly fraught with the tensions of female individuation as opposed to situating the body of the woman within the domestic ideal. This chapter also attempts to unearth ideas and practices that went into the making of a tradition for the 20th century and 21st century Malayali woman (in the sense of looking back from the present and seeing ideas being formulated in the past that then gets defined as tradition). The thesis and this chapter in particular try to capture the cultural history of women’s education.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{82} This work does not claim to be an exhaustive study of all the aspects of women’s education because not only are the archives too vast to be included in a mere chapter, but also all the materials are not available for perusal. I have included and/or looked at some of the major policy documents related to formal education like the Education Codes for Travancore and Cochin (from 1910 to 1941), some of the administrative reports of the
The first section of this chapter deals with the history of general education in Kerala in the 19th and 20th centuries since women’s education cannot be separated from general education. There were commonalities in the problems faced by Malayali girls and boys just as there were differences. Initially the hurdles that women's education faced were the same for the Malayalam-speaking regions and the other parts of India. However, the particular nature of caste relations, matriliney, the presence of a large number of native Christians, the interest shown by the ruling families, the availability of relatively large number of reading materials (newspapers/magazines/books), etc. all worked towards making education easily accessible to a wider set of communities and groups.

The second section of this chapter analyses some of the textbooks that were in use in the early 20th century. The texts provide insight into the kind of women that were presented to Malayali students as being ideals worth emulating. These texts were taught not just to the girls, but also to the boys. This section attempts to demonstrate that most of the textbooks – while seemingly about strong women (from mythology, history and literary fiction), many of whom played significant roles in the public sphere – also manage to contain their sthreethwam within the domestic space.

Section I

Missionaries and the beginning of modern education

In 1813, when the Charter of the English East India Company was revised, official sanction was given to British missionaries to carry out mission work. The East India Company had come under pressure in England for monopolizing the Indian market and for
keeping it underdeveloped. The company was forced to take on the role of custodian of English trading interests. Thus a commercial interest was turned into a form of colonial governance. The colonial state then had to include service to the colony, which implied the creation of a new order in India, and a civil society among the natives. The violence with which the British Empire was built could not continue and coercion had to be replaced by socialisation. This was where education had a role to play (Kumar, 1991).

The Protestant Christian missionaries started work in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar along with the expansion of the British supremacy in these states. In October 1810, John Munroe was appointed as the Resident of Travancore and Cochin. Colonel Munroe’s interest in education cannot be explained away by the utilitarian doctrine of creating a class of clerks or as a move to strengthen the imperial rule. He was keen on supporting the work of the Christian missionaries. He believed that Christianity would help the progress of the people, and also that religion would stabilize and consolidate British political power in India (Gladston, 2006). He also needed educated people to man the newly expanded administrative system during his reign (Tharakan, 1984b).

The London Missionary Society (LMS) had started work in Travancore in 1806, before the Charter was revised and before John Munroe’s appointment. The basic facilities of reading and writing were required for the missionaries to start their proselytization work among the natives. There was a system of education (in single teacher schools called ezhuthupallis) in place in the Malayalam-speaking regions that provided basic literacy and a smattering of arithmetic and astrology. However this system was not widespread, nor was it accessible to all castes/classes. The first English school for mass education was opened in Mylaudy in 1809 by a German Lutheran missionary, William T. Ringeltaube. Free instruction was given in reading, writing and arithmetic to poor children (Thomas, 1993).

---

83 For a short history of education in Kerala before the advent of missionaries see Appendix I.
84 A place in present-day Tamilnadu
Colonel Munroe framed a series of questions and sent it to Ringeltaube, in order to understand the exact history, the present condition, and the requirements of the Mylaudy Protestant mission in 1813. One of the questions was specifically regarding the state of education:

Query No. 6. What arrangements subsist for the education of the clergy, what schools for the youth are maintained, what instruction given in those schools, how are books and teachers supplied, are the natives disposed to send their children to school, and what additional sums would be required to provide an adequate system of education (Agur, 1990: 595).

Ringeltaube’s reply:

No arrangements for educating the clergy. Six schools for the Laity as per query. The instructions that are given consist in lessons, of reading, writing, Arithmetic, as also to Christian children, the catechism and reading in the New Testament or other religious books. The natives are not much disposed to send their children to school. The reason is, it is more profitable to have them instructed in the various exercises by which they must gain their livelihood hereafter. Girls never come to school in Travancore which is a great loss. Books are supplied by presents from the Reverend Missionaries at Tranquebar, but not in sufficient number. For school masters, I choose such out of the congregation that can read and pray fluently which is an incitement to others to come on well…An adequate system requires a printing office, with solid buildings, workmen for printing and binding materials & c., without such an institution a Mission is helpless and hopeless abortive production. It is also necessary that new converts and children should be boarded for sometime, which again requires buildings and batta also for several married Missionaries. I have hitherto struggled with the bitterest want (Agur, 1990: 595-6).

By 1815, there were six schools with 188 students in Travancore. However, girls were not yet attending schools, as Ringeltaube had mentioned. When Ringeltaube started the first
Protestant mission in Travancore, not many parents were willing to send their children to school. This could have been because the schools set up by him were of an unfamiliar kind, and there was also the fear of proselytization. Moreover, for the mainly agricultural labourers and the people of other lower castes in the area, there was not much of an incentive to go to school, since it did not provide any visible gains. The working conditions of the missionaries were difficult, and the Hindu rulers and Diwans in Travancore were not sympathetic to their activities.

**Beginning of girls’ schools in Malayalam-speaking regions**

From missionary records of a slightly later time, it would appear that people, albeit a small percentage of the total population, were asking for schools and churches to be built in Travancore. In 1819, Charles Mead opened a seminary in Nagercoil. His wife, Johanna Mead, started a school for girls at the same time, which marked the first attempt in the field of women’s education in Travancore. It was a boarding school and the missionaries found it difficult to get girls to join these institutions. Mead's letter of April 24, 1818 describes the general state of the Mission.

The South Travancore Mission is assuming a pleasing aspect. Many are applying continually for instruction and baptism. The former Christians feel their drooping courage revived, while others, undecided before, have come to the determination of declaring on the side of truth. In several villages, persons have applied for schools to be established, and a Christian Church to be built in their neighbourhood (Agur, 1990: 683).

These missionaries thought that female education was important for the progress of India. Christianity was seen as the true religion and native practices were seen by them as

---

85 Nagercoil, ten kilometres west of Mylaudy, was part of Travancore until the formation of the state of Kerala in 1957.
being superstitious. The objective of the early missionaries was to bring salvation to the souls of the [what they believed] heathens. Culture and civilization, they believed, resided with the Christian faith. Their sense of morality was deeply rooted in the Protestant Christian ideals of the early 19th century.

Johanna Mead was joined by Martha Mault, the wife of another missionary. About one-third of the first batch of students belonged to the slave castes. Mead’s primary objective was to impart plain education with religious instruction (Gladston, 2006). Boarding schools were important because they helped to reduce the drop-out rates, and as Mrs. Mault reported, the missionaries found it far preferable to have the students entirely away from their homes to secure them from the influence of the non-Christians, who were considered to be a bad influence on the new converts (Haggis, 2000). Classroom teaching was combined with vocational training: the girls were taught reading and writing in the morning, and spinning cotton, knitting, sewing, and embroidery in the afternoon. In 1820, a lace industry was started in the Girls’ Boarding school at Nagercoil. Thus, from the very beginning, missionary education gave equal importance to practical skills. This kind of education was very different from the one given in the ezhuthupallis.

---

86 Here, culture is used in the sense of cultivating the mind. Culture used in a wider sense refers to behaviour patterns acquired socially and transmitted by symbols. It includes language, tradition, customs and institutions. For more details, see: Thapar, "Tradition."

87 All castes from the Brahmins to the Ezhavas possessed slaves. The Pulayas, Cherumas and the Kanakkars formed the main slave castes in the Malayalam-speaking regions. They were lower than the Ezhavas in the caste hierarchy and worked in the fields. They were paid paddy as wages, were provided housing and had no holidays to speak of. They were considered the property of the landlord, who could sell them, mortgage them and punish them (sometimes in inhuman ways). The Parayas were a slave caste even lower in the caste hierarchy than the Pulayas. The above mentioned castes along with the hill tribes were called the backward classes in official reports. For details, see: Francis Day, The Land of the Permauls, or Cochin, Its Past and Its Present (Madras: Adelphi Press, 1863), Samuel Mateer, Native Life in Travancore (London: W.H. Allen & co., 1883), T.K. Gopal Panikkar, Malabar and Its Folks (Madras: G.A. Natesan and Co., 1900).
The beginning of modern education in Travancore can be traced to the issue of a Royal Rescript by the Regent Rani Gouri Parvathi Bai (1815-1829) in 1817:

The state should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the state might be advanced there by (Thampi, 1942: 155).

The village school teachers88 were not being paid sufficiently by the villagers, and this rescript was issued to resolve this. Many scholars regard this as the first formal recognition of education as part of the public administration system by the state (Tharakan, 1984b; Thomas, 1993). This early attempt by the state did not produce any tangible results, as state-run schools were few and were not in any way superior to the indigenous and missionary schools in terms of subjects of study, methods of teaching, or the qualification of the teachers. However, it marked a new beginning in terms of the government showing an interest in primary education and instituting agents to inspect the schools, there by bringing in the concepts of inspection, order and discipline to education. Scholars are also divided as to whether this Royal Rescript was solely the contribution of a 15-year-old queen. Some scholars believe the decision was influenced by Colonel Munroe (Tharakan, 1984b; Thomas, 1993). The later missionaries’ work among the natives was facilitated by the supportive attitude of the ruling family and the Resident. The rulers in Travancore and Cochin, before Rani Lakshmi Bayi (1810-1815), were not as supportive of the missionaries.89 Under the rule of Rani Lakshmi Bayi, the College started by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in

---

88 When the Travancore government started to take a renewed interest in education in the late 19th century, some of the teachers were absorbed from the old ezjuthupallis. From: Robin Jeffrey, "Governments and Culture: How Women Made Kerala Literate," Pacific Affairs 60, no. 3 (1987).

89 When the Diwan of Travancore, Velu Thampi, and the Diwan of Cochin, Palliyath Achen openly revolted against the British in 1808-1809, native Christians bore the brunt of their fury. A series of atrocities were unleashed against them. Over 3000 men, women, and children were maimed, tortured, and butchered, and thrown in the backwaters and the sea in both Travancore and Cochin.
Kottayam was presented with Rs. 20,000.\textsuperscript{90} Emulating the Rani’s generosity, the Raja of Cochin presented Rs. 5,000 for the benefit of the Protestant Mission in Travancore (Agur, 1990). The initial interest shown by these governments in starting a few schools and encouraging missionary activities by grants was similar to that followed in British India at the time (Tharakan, 1984b). Thus, the native rulers supported the missionary schools under the direct or indirect influence of the British.

Problems faced by the missionaries in the early years

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) started a girl’s school in Kottayam in 1820, which was the first of its kind in North Travancore. Amelia Baker, wife of the missionary Henry Baker, started this school. It was difficult for the missionaries to secure regular attendance, so she made arrangements for the girls to stay with her. Irregular attendance was a constant grievance as indicated by the following extract from a letter send by a missionary, Mrs. Chapman, to the CMS secretary, dated March 2, 1849:

I have reason to think that my dear school-girls are going on well. Two have left me lately at a very early age to be married. And I regret, that during the few years they had been learning here, their parents kept them at home for so many months at a time, that they have left me with a very small amount of knowledge. One of them, however, is a very nice good girl: and both can read very well, and are, I know, in the habit of reading the Word of God at their own homes. If the Lord will grant the dew of his blessing, the seed sown will spring up and bring forth fruit into eternal life. Some of the girls now with me have been under instruction for three, some for four years.

\textsuperscript{90} This was laid out in land. Earlier the Rani had gifted Rs.1000 for erecting a chapel and furnishing the buildings of the college. She also annexed a tract of land to this in the neighbourhood of Kollam (a town north of Thiruvananthapuram), with several subsidiary grants in order to render it productive, and appointed a monthly allowance of Rs.70 from the state funds in 1818 for the support of a hospital. Later rulers of Travancore were also supportive of modern education and Western medical practices/medicines.
They are still young; I hope therefore to keep them longer still, if spared (Chapman, 1849).

Early withdrawal of girls from schools and the early age of marriage were some of the problems that the missionary wives constantly struggled with. For the missionary wives, running these schools was a fruitful way to spend time. The schools run by the male missionaries often employed other teachers to teach the various subjects, and so they could take in more students than the female schools (which were usually run by the missionary wife on her own). Chapman wrote further:

   I am glad and thankful to tell you, that my weak health does not interrupt my attention to my little school. I should feel quite sorry to be without it.

   I think it better not to increase the number as I have not room for more, and I feel sure too, that I have as many as I have strength properly to attend to.

   I have sometimes been much pleased, with the serious inquiries – which the women, who occasionally come to see me, make. Piety and intelligence are I am sure gradually on the increase among our native females. This is evident in the improved manner in which they train up their children; and in their desire to bring them as early as possible to our schools (Chapman, 1849).

Reading the scripture was an important aspect of missionary education. Being able to read the Bible and keeping at it punctually were seen as indications of piety. Piety was also equated with morality. Contact with the missionaries was already making small changes in the way people thought about education. The first Protestant converts were ready to send their children to schools. They also began to follow a new system of worship and several new customs and traditions, following the Protestant missionaries. Scripture reading was not part of the Syrian Christian91 lifestyle, and there were no Bibles available in Malayalam in the

---

91 According to tradition, the Syrian Christians were indigenous Christians converted by St. Thomas in the 1st century A.D. When the Protestant missionaries came to Kerala, this community of Christians was already
early 19th century. Therefore, the Protestant missionaries had to undertake the translation and printing of the Bible.

When more missionaries arrived, similar schools were started in Alleppey, Cochin, and other places by Mrs. Bailey, Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Ridsdale. The earliest CMS girl students were children of Syrian Christians or high caste Hindus. At Cochin, the early pupils were Jews. The major missionary work in Malabar was done by the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society based in Germany. Julie Gundert, wife of Hermann Gundert, started a school for girls in 1839 in Tellicherry (in Malabar).92 Some of the first students to go to schools in Malabar were the children of Christians who had moved from Tamilnadu (Gladston, 2006).

The Malabar area lagged behind Travancore and Cochin with regard to modern English education.93 Scholars cite a number of factors for this lag. The Mappillas (the term used for Muslims from this region) perceived the British as oppressors due to the violent history of the region.94 This led to hatred of the English language and Western education. Misapprehension about religion and superstitious beliefs caused many people to believe that Christian missionaries would weaken the faith of young girls and boys, and that they would present here. While they were concentrated in Cochin and North Travancore, the Muslims were concentrated in Malabar in the north.

92 At the time she started the school in Tellicherry, there were already 144 boys and 13 girls studying in CMS schools. From: Heps Gladston, "History of Development of Education of Women in Kerala (1819-1947)," Samyukta: A Journal of Women’s Studies VI, no. 1 (2006).


94 The 19th century saw a large number of peasant revolts against the landlords or janmis and their supporters.
propagate Christianity (Ali, 1994; Gladston, 2006). This belief was strong because Catechism was taught to students belonging to all religions till the early 20th century, until an order was passed by the governments putting a stop to the practice. When the missionaries introduced the use of slates in 1856 in some of their schools, the parents interpreted it as a plan devised for conversion (Gladston, 2006). The orthodox Ulamas (theologians) who wielded great influence over the Muslim population denounced education as anathema and they interdicted the education of girls. English language was dubbed as the language of hell and Western education was considered a passport to hell (Ali, 1994). The Namboothiris in the region also considered English language as contemptible. Together with this, there was the British policy of indifference towards the development of primary education (Nair, 1989).

The religious constituency of the north Travancore and the Cochin missions were different from that of the south Travancore missions. In south Travancore, mainly recent converts from the lower and polluting castes sent their children to schools. Due to this difference, the problems that beset the two missions were different. The lower caste converts came under attack from the upper castes in south Travancore missions when they started to adopt some of the customs and the dressing styles of the upper castes under the guidance of the missionaries. The earliest stirrings against caste pollution and restrictions started in south Travancore. In north Travancore, the missionaries had to face stiff opposition from the Syrian priests at a later date over the differences in religious dogmas between the two Churches. The Syrians were banned from attending the Protestant mission schools after 1837 (Aiya, 1906). The missionaries had to confront caste-related hurdles in both Travancore and Cochin. The upper caste members were unwilling to allow their children to sit with lower caste children. In Baker’s letters to the missionary centre in London, he writes of having had to rebuke, and

95 I am not sure if this can be read as misapprehension or whether it was in fact a reality considering that missionaries were using the schools as sites for religious conversion.
even excommunicate some of his upper and middle caste converts, because they refused to inter-dine with lower caste converts.

Kinds of schools

There were different kinds of schools established by the missionaries: seminaries (for theological studies and for supplying the mission with teachers and catechists), normal schools (for teacher training), preparatory or middle schools (for preparing students for high school), boarding schools, day schools, parochial schools (run by Christian parishes where religious education was given together with conventional education), high schools, Anglo-vernacular schools, Franco-vernacular schools, and infant schools (Gladston, 2006; Thomas, 1993).

Curriculum and objectives

The missionaries followed a curriculum adapted from what was taught in England in the first half of the 19th century. According to a government report on the differentiation of curriculum for girls and boys in England (Hadow et al., 1923), public schools and other proprietary schools were started in large numbers from the 1820s in England. This was around the same time that the missionaries started to come to Kerala in large numbers. These new English schools had a wider curriculum than the older Grammar schools. The girls’ schools of the time taught English, reading, writing, keeping accounts, drawing, plain and fine needlework, dancing and French. Music and Italian were added in the more ambitious schools. The education of women, in general, was scanty, superficial, and incoherent. Traditional education for girls up to about 1845 accentuated the differences between the sexes (Hadow et al., 1923). The early missionary wives were all products of this traditional education. Therefore, the courses offered in their schools were based on the curriculum they
had studied, with some modifications. The primary/basic schools run in the Malayalam-speaking regions did not have dancing, accounting, foreign languages [except English] or geography and history in the early decades of the 19th century.

In Victorian England, the husband or the father was the head of the household and the moral leader of the family. The role of the wife, though secondary was not unimportant: she had duties towards the husband and had to raise the children properly. These ideas were later taken up by the nationalists and other educationists in the early 20th century as one of the main arguments to push for women’s education. A native pastor, Thomas, commented on the Baker school in *CMS Proceedings* in 1881 that the girls formerly taught in their school, unlike the other women in the country, had become real help-mates to their husbands by being qualified to help them in keeping household accounts, paying the labourers in the paddy fields, teaching the young children and so on according to their circumstances and positions in life (Gladston, 2006). A Victorian wife was expected to track payments to household servants, the grocery store, the baker, the butcher etc. These ideas were impressed upon the young students in the missionary schools. It was not possible to have enough missionaries sent from England, given that India was a large country. The missionaries planned to train local converts to take up some of the outreach work. The first schools established near the mission centres had local teachers, some of whom were recent Christian converts. One of the aims of the boarding schools was to have suitably educated wives for the young Indian missionaries. The importance given to attendance and proper deportment was part of the missionary and Victorian ideal of the ordering and disciplining of the body and the mind. [This was taken up in the early 20th century by the government policy-makers, though by then the focus of the need for discipline changed, as I will show later.]

The missionaries felt that no community could make real progress unless the position of the women was improved. The traditions and customs of a society were believed to be
perpetuated through the mothers. The connection between women’s education and motherhood was made as early as the mid 19th century. This was also connected to their belief in the civilizing power of the West and the cultural backwardness of the Indians. The teaching in Baker’s as well as similar boarding schools managed by the wives of missionaries in central Kerala was first planned chiefly to give the pupils necessary domestic training (Hunt, 1920). Domestic training mainly comprised of needlework – embroidery, knitting, spinning, crochet, lacework, and sewing. Training in needlework provided income; this kind of manual work was not regarded as menial by the girls. The girls were taught to stitch their own as well as their families’ clothes. They were trained in pounding rice, and assisted in cleaning the school’s living quarters. The girls were instructed in reading and writing the vernacular language, with special training in English for the more talented students. The lady missionaries believed in developing the overall qualities of the girls based on Christian principles, which they brought to effect through reading and writing portions of the Bible and the liturgy. In later years, history, geography, arithmetic, and elements of natural philosophy were taught in the higher classes (Haggis, 2000; Jacob, 2005). The missionaries were making their students self-sufficient financially while also grounding them in a domesticity that was home-based. Missionary education was slowly delegitimizing certain kinds of traditional jobs, customs, lifestyles, etc. The training in skills given by the missionary wives, for example crochet, lace-making etc., gained prestige over time. The students were also learning about the larger world, beyond the boundaries of their own caste communities and locality through history, geography and natural philosophy. The missionary-educated girls were from different communities (upper, middle and lower castes) and intermingled in their daily lives. This then would have influenced their perceptions regarding their own communities and caste practices, and differentiated them from girls educated in indigenous schools.
Changes wrought by missionary education

Though the first girls to be educated were meant to be trained to be good mothers and housewives, the European teachers consciously or unconsciously introduced new role models as teachers and leaders – persons with interests outside the family. To the Malayali girl student, the figure of the missionary woman, who had moved away from the space of the joint family and had interests/work outside the family/caste occupation, would have been a revolutionary image. Even among the matrilineal families, women would not have had many opportunities to be academicians/teachers in the manner of the European teachers. A large number of the second-generation missionaries were single women (Haggis, 2000). These women again would have provided a different kind of role model to the students. They were away from the folds of their immediate families (while the missionary wives were away only from the joint family). These single women were not starting schools as secondary institutions to boys’ schools, but were running them separately and were giving their time and energy to a cause that was not related to their family/caste occupation. Many of them were proto-feminists, who not only taught their charges, but also provided medical advice and help to Indian women (Forbes, 2005). The missionary women were thus directly responsible for getting Indian women interested in Western medicine and related practices. Personal hygiene was another important aspect of missionary training. The students in boarding schools were also living away from homes in community living, thereby breaking certain traditional customs and superstitions. Community eating was not part of Malayali culture even in the early 20th century. However, the missionaries insisted on erasing caste-related biases in their institutions. Autonomy and dignity of the individual was at the heart of Protestant thought. Most of the basic tenets of missionary education were cemented in the later education system. The gender bias in the domestic training courses and the emphasis given to hygiene and science by the missionaries were taken up by educators in the first half of the 20th century.
The inclusion of subjects like history, geography and natural philosophy would have widened the knowledge base of the students in ways different from the indigenous system of education.

The missionaries started girls’ schools at a time when the general public did not perceive any need for such institutions. However, over a period of time, there was a change in attitude towards girls’ education. Mrs. Norton wrote in *The Missionary Register* in 1851 that the girls brought up in their school were anxiously sought for marriage by young men of the congregation and that the men appeared to be quite aware of the advantages to be expected from a union with women whose minds had been subjected to some degree of cultivation (Gladston, 2006). Thus, the missionaries were also creating a need for a particular kind of woman, who did not exist before the advent of modern education, who was moulded in a kind of Victorian womanhood. From the 1920s, the debates on women’s education in magazines and elsewhere centred on defining the fine line between Malayali traditions and the English culture brought in by missionary education and other kinds of contact with the West (in the form of literature, assimilation of lifestyles, food habits etc. from the British and so on).

By the latter half of the 19th century, the missionaries started to insist on public education for Shanar96 girls outside the home, in part to delay marriage.97 By the 1890s, the rule was that the girls in boarding school could not get married until the age of 17 (Haggis, 2000). Thus, missionary education was directly responsible for raising the age of marriage among their converts. Part of the LMS agenda was that these girls would take up the

---

96 The Shanars were one of the lower castes and faced oppression from the upper castes. The Shanar women were the first group to protest against some of the caste practices imposed upon them, including the famous “breast-cloth” or “upper-cloth” controversy. For details, see: Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, J. Devika, "The Aesthetic Woman: Re-Forming Bodies and Minds in Early Twentieth Century Keralam," *Modern Asian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2005b).

97 The Basel missionaries also introduced compulsory education among the children in their congregation - Christian children were supposed to study in schools till they were 14 years old. This was to put a stop to the early marriage of girls.
‘Christian duties’ of conversion and upliftment of their non-Christian neighbours. The missionaries wanted teachers and Bible women, who took outreach work to high caste Hindu women and Muslim women, who were in the zenana (Haggis, 2000). The girls were being prepared for the Matriculation examination of Madras University by 1898 in the Nagercoil boarding school, but the training was still within the rhetoric of domesticity; this revealed the contradiction of training women to be teachers in mission schools and for zenana work, while the primary aim was to equip them to be good wives and mothers. This contradiction was reconciled by bracketing the teaching as being God’s work (spiritual and moral) and work that was directed towards other women (Haggis, 2000). Though some of these women were physically far from their respective homes, the work was seen as falling within the bounds of ‘women’s work’ since they were teaching other women which the missionary men could not do at that point in time. This was the same argument that was extended to other kinds of work that women were aspiring towards in the early 20th century. Certain kinds of ‘women’s work’ then began to be seen as needing qualities inherent to women and started gaining respectability more than others. Teaching and medicine which were the occupations practised by the lady missionaries are still considered the perfect jobs for women in 21st century Kerala.

The missionary wives drew on the conventions of evangelical womanhood that was taking shape in Britain around the notion of a female sphere that was subordinate yet influential in moral and spiritual matters. The early missionary wives assumed responsibility for the moral upliftment and spiritual education of the women and children, like their counterparts at home were doing. However, mainstream missionary organizations did not support these women’s work financially or institutionally. The first formal recognition of women’s work came from LMS in 1875, with the establishment of a Ladies Committee to oversee the appointment of single women missionaries (Haggis, 2000). Thus, women’s work
began to be integrated in the organizational and policy structures of missionary organizations, and it continued till the second decade of the 20th century. Until then, women’s work was usually self-supporting. This would also explain why the early missionary girls’ schools needed to start lace and other industries – these schools were not only training the girls to be self-sufficient, but the sales from the products were a means of subsistence for the schools.

The lower caste women in Travancore were involved in agrarian labour in the 19th century. Lace-making was considered to be more respectable than the traditional occupations of making jaggery or trading oil and other products from the palms that the men tapped. It also removed these women from the influence of their Hindu overlords, thereby giving them lesser opportunities to re-convert to Hinduism. The sale of the items manufactured by the new converts was done through the missionary wife (Haggis, 2000). Mass conversions were the norm during this period, when entire villages would convert to Christianity. Given the nominal nature of these conversions, relapse into older rituals and customs were frequent. The missionaries had to constantly visit such areas to retain the faith of the converts (Haggis, 2000). The training in useful skills meant that mission-educated women were not only being taught cultural accomplishments but were also being given the opportunity to be financially independent. This was different from the earlier dependency on caste occupations and caste hierarchy (in the sense of overlords, land leased from overlords, etc.) for food and other necessities. Thus, training in these new skills helped to keep the newly converted Christians in closer contact with the missionaries than literary education (as opposed to an education that trained them in useful skills) alone would have done.

**Modern education in Kerala and India: initial hurdles**

As many scholars and social scientists have stated, matriliney did not mean greater autonomy for the (middle caste) women. Access to schools was difficult for most girls in the
19th century as it was in other parts of India. Some of the problems that hindered the education of Malayali women in the 19th century were: a) early marriage; b) indifference and resistance to education; c) the issue of fees (a considerable amount of money had to be given as dowry in certain communities like the Syrian Christians; therefore, spending money for school education was an extra expense. All the early mission boarding schools provided free lodging, food, and clothes to the students. In certain cases, the missionaries also promised to help with the dowry.); d) prejudice towards sending girls to co-education schools; e) non-existence of secondary schools in many areas; and f) caste prejudices (Banerji, 1914b; Gladston, 2006; Jacob, 2005). Separate schools were established for the backward classes and most schools admitted Ezhavas boys in the early 20th century, but the girls of these communities were not admitted to any of the schools. Caste prejudice was more apparent in the education of girls than of boys. As far back as 1813, missionaries had to face opposition from the upper castes when schools were opened for slave girls.

Elsewhere in India, the obstacles in the way of women’s education were not very different. The Calcutta University Commission, in 1917, pointed out that in Bengal, the early marriage of girls was a serious hindrance to the development of women’s education. Promising young girls were removed from school at the time when their mental development was only beginning. Parents did not want to spend money for education that might be needed for paying dowry. The purdah system was another hurdle that women had to overcome. [In Malayalam-speaking regions, only Namboothiris, Brahmans, and a few high class Muslim families practised the purdah or the zenana. Therefore, it was a problem only with a small percentage of the population in the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, it would appear caste pollution was a strong obstacle to women’s education only in Travancore, Cochin and, Malabar.] The few women who had come out of the purdah were considered denationalised/breaking community norms by the others. The rending of the purdah was
strongly opposed by older women and by men, some of whom had passed through the western system of education. The next problem highlighted by the Calcutta Commission was the belief of orthodox women/men that women should not come under any influence outside their own family as it was so enjoined in the Hindu texts. These women/men believed that no agency could provide any kind of education superior to the moral and practical training given at home. Western education was felt to be an unsettling influence on women and men. The orthodoxy feared that the women’s emancipation and Suffragette movements in the West would be assimilated and followed by the Indian woman. These were very similar to the arguments against women’s education in the Malayalam-speaking regions as well.

**Government(s) and education**

The Educational Despatch of Sir Charles Wood in 1854 laid out the blueprint of the modern system of public education (George, 2009). The Despatch noted that there was evidence of desire on the part of many Indians to give a good education to their daughters. The Despatch also noted that by this interest an educational and moral tone would be added to the education of men. Thus from the beginning government interest in women’s education was connected to spirituality, morality and the home because women’s education was supposed to aid men.

Education, particularly women’s education, came to be connected to progress, change and social reform in Kerala in the second half of the 19th century. In his administrative report of 1862-1863, Sir Madhava Rao, Diwan of Travancore, stated that very little had been done for female education and that the subject called for prompt attention, since education among other advantages was the foundation of social reforms (Jacob, 2005). Until this, only the

---


99 Ibid.
missionaries had shown serious interest in girls’ education.

By the second half of the 19th century, schooling for girls became fairly acceptable throughout India. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, there were more than 300 schools for girls. The British government took an interest in girls’ education around this time. However, in times of financial difficulties, the first casualty used to be female education. The reasons given were many: setting up a girls’ school was considered more expensive than setting up a boys’ school, as the entire expense had to be borne by the government, and parents were unwilling to spend money on girls’ schooling. In Oudh, another reason given by the government was that women had nothing whatsoever to do with the progress of trade, or in fact, with any other pursuits except what was purely domestic and secluded (Menon, 2003). This was in sharp contrast to the encouragement given to women’s education in the south, particularly in Travancore and Cochin.

The progress in education attained by Travancore took place during the boom in the economy created by the commercialisation of agriculture and the modernisation programmes initiated in the 1860s. The market relations that emerged from commercial cultivation required the peasants as well as those associated with the processing and marketing of these crops to acquire essential skills, not only in arithmetic but also in reading and writing. Besides, the expansion of trade and the increase in the area under cultivation sharply raised the Government’s revenue such that from the early 1860s till 1904-05, Travancore experienced surplus budgets. This facilitated the Travancore Government to allocate an increasing proportion of its expenditure on social services, especially education and health care.\(^{100}\)

\(^{100}\) In 1862-63, Travancore’s budgetary allocations for education were 0.58%. By 1899-1900, the figures rose to 5.34%. The educational achievements of the state were important to the successive rulers and the department of education had become one of the major departments by 1940. By 1941, nearly 24% of the government revenue was being spent on education. From: Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, CDS, "Human Development Report
The Government saw education as a vehicle to bring about change. The content of the change was what differentiated the various players. The idea of training the native to be a dutiful citizen was shared by the missionary, the British and the native governments. There was also a sense of social equality implicit in the teachings of the missionaries and in the later policies of the government. A number of government schools were started, sometimes near mission schools. It would appear that the government was also trying to break the near monopoly of Christian missionaries in the field of education. Many parents preferred to send their girls to government schools, where there was no Bible teaching.

While the missionaries concentrated their efforts on teaching the lower castes and the Christian children, the Travancore state concentrated on the education of the higher caste children at first. In 1864, a school was started in Travancore for higher caste girls with support from the Maharaja and Diwan Madhava Rao. Before that, another vernacular school was started by the government in 1859 (Tharakan, 1984b). The backward classes were demanding entry to the government schools. Since this was not possible 30 schools were started for the Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, Marakkan, Muslims, etc. from 1894 to 1896. Caste prejudice was markedly more in the case of girls than boys and they were not allowed to attend ordinary government schools.

It might or might not be a coincidence that the Travancore government started to take an interest in vernacular language education from 1859 (with the establishment of the first girls’ school and later in 1866, with Taluq and Poverty schools) after the Shanar agitation. The Royal Proclamation of 1859 abolished all restrictions in the matter of covering of upper parts of the body by Shanar women (though there was the stipulation that they should not imitate the dress of the upper castes) (Aiya, 1906). Earlier in 1855, Travancore had abolished all kinds of slavery in the state. In 1859 the government had been sent a letter by the Madras
government on “the manifold abuses then prevalent in Travancore and advising him to avert the impending calamity by an enlightened policy and timely and judicious reforms” (Aiya, 1906: 513). This letter was in response to a number of petitions received from the natives of Travancore, the missionaries and a series of articles that appeared in the newspaper *Athenaeum* criticising the administration. It would appear that missionary activities (and initiatives from among the natives) were leading to changes in existing caste structures with the spread of education among the lower castes. Though there were some Hindu students in missionary schools, from the Census figures of 1875 and 1891, it is clear that the Nair and Kshatriya castes were the ones to benefit most from the government schools. Caste feelings were running high during the time, and the government could not take any ‘precipitate action’ by throwing open its schools to all classes/castes/creeds. Diwan P. Rajagopalachari stated in 1908 that the government was not prepared to force matters in that direction. He hoped there would be a time when it would be possible for Brahmin, Nair and Ezhava girls to sit together in all rural places, as the boys of those communities were doing (Kawashima, 1998). The reason behind this prejudice towards lower caste girls cannot be easily explained. The women from various lower caste communities in Travancore were undergoing changes which were conspicuous, precipitous and also objectionable to the upper castes. The lower caste women’s aspirations for better conditions were viewed with anger and trepidation. If education became freely available to all castes, the differences between the castes would have further reduced. Moreover, the presence of lower caste students in schools was barely tolerated by the upper castes. The former had to sit on separate benches away from the other students in many government schools. Education for the lower caste male students could have been tolerated to some extent by reasoning that they needed to get educated to be bread-winners/to get a job/to better the conditions of their families. During the turn of the century, women were primarily seen as care-givers and not bread-winners. Moreover, the percentage and presence of upper
caste girls in schools were tenuous. Girls were withdrawn from schools earlier than boys. The government prioritized the education of the upper caste children and it might have seemed prudent to wait to push the cause of the lower castes.\footnote{In Cochin, the first government school for the education of higher caste girls was opened at Thrissur in 1887. A few years later similar schools were opened at Ernakulam and one by the Sisters of Carmelite in Ernakulam. Girls of all castes were allowed admission into the lower secondary department of the school in Thrissur and in 1911, the restriction regarding admission to the primary department was also removed. Travancore was considered the seat of Hinduism and was highly orthodox in its ideas of caste pollution, and caste-related customs and practices as mentioned in the previous chapter. The Cochin rulers were more open to English education and Christian influences. However, this did not mean that the general population was ready to accept drastic changes in caste-related rules. The administrative report for the year 1921 stated that there were individual instances of beating up of lower caste students by upper castes. In a couple of government schools, the Nair students were withdrawn on account of the admission of Pulaya students. However, there was a positive note that in spite of the opposition to admissions of lower castes to schools, the people were slowly reconciling to the idea.}

**Ideas and practices in education**

For the different players in the field – the missionaries, the government, private individuals, the people – the reasons for providing and gaining education were different. There were several facets to the colonial enterprise. The colonizer took on the position of the adult and the native became the child. This adult-child relationship entailed an educational task. The native had to be initiated into new ways of thinking and acting (Kumar, 1991). This idea is repeatedly confirmed in the letters by the missionaries and by the British civil servants. In the case of John Munroe, it seems to have been a complex mix of paternalism,
evangelism and a political and economic enterprise. The British administrative officers in Travancore and Cochin were hoping to proselytise the population. They believed that Christianity was conducive to progress, and the sharing of a common religion would stabilize British rule. The underlying hope was that if the ruler and the ruled shared a religion, then the latter would naturally follow the traditions and customs of the former and over the years would accept British rule instead of seeing them as a foreign power.

The missionary wives thought it important that women should be educated for the progress of the nation. The first attempt was to teach them the basics of literacy with a smattering of domestic training. This was coupled with their desire to spread the teachings of Christianity and their wish to impart ‘culture’ to the native. However they realised that people were not ready to send their girls to school for learning to read and write alone. The missionaries started teaching the girls to stitch, embroider, make laces, etc. so that they could learn something useful as well as have a means of subsistence. Simultaneously, the girls were being trained to be good wives and teachers.

The idea of industrial training for woman was present in the official discourse on education as well:

The Darbar’s wish to popularise the purely feminine side of the education of the girls has succeeded in its aim,… for not only do most of the School final pupils take Needlework and Embroidery instead of History or Mathematics or Science, but there is a great rush to get admission to the purely Industrial side of the school (Banerji, 1914a: 15).

This “rush” to industrial education could have been because these would have provided immediate job opportunities. The other subjects would have required further education/training if they were to lead to paying jobs/skills since in the 1910s not all jobs were open to women in Travancore and Cochin.
Education: hygiene

Towards the first half of the 20th century, when girls from middle class and caste families started attending school, the government believed that the focus of the classes had to change. The curricula for girls across the Malayalam-speaking regions were to include domestic sciences and hygiene, thought to be the domain of women. In the previous chapter I mentioned how the term Home Science/Domestic Science came into use in the 1920s in India. Hygiene was an extension of the argument for including Home Science in girls’ curriculum. The course on hygiene was open to both girls and boys in class 5 and was an optional subject during this time. Hygiene was an amalgamation of scientific principles and native customs with topics as varied as an oil bath and communicable diseases. The subject was divided into personal hygiene, domestic hygiene, town and village hygiene and general hygiene in Travancore (Hodgson, 1908). Teaching hygiene was a necessity for the government. Schools had to be closed down for short periods in different places as a result of the spread of various communicable diseases among the population (Matthai and others, 1921). Not only was it causing problems to the school authorities, there was also the wider issue of making the general population aware of ways to combat these diseases. There were also discussions happening in other locations within India of the necessity of including hygiene as a topic in school education (Matthai and others, 1921). Even though aspects of health and hygiene were seen as important topics to be taught to girls, in practice it was made available to both girls and boys. The differentiation in the curriculum of girls’ and boys’ was being eroded in small ways by the government through these measures and it then came to mean that men were also responsible for health and hygienic practices and it was not the sole

102 Hygiene for class 5 included Personal hygiene (1. The bath; 2. The oil bath; 3. The morning meal; 4. The mid-day meal; 5. Exercise; 6. Supper; 7. Sleep; 8. Clothing). Domestic hygiene (1. The house; 2. Water supply and drainage), Town and Village hygiene (1. Housing; 2. Water supply; 3. Drainage.), and General hygiene (Common diseases and their prevention: (a) Malaria, (b) Cholera, (c) Dysentery, (d) Plague.) were meant for classes 6 and 7.
responsibility of the woman. While there were many factors that affected the (positive) general health conditions of women in the late 20th century (and in the present day), the inclusion of health and hygiene-related practices in the curriculum in the early 20th century and the access to such information would have been equally important in bringing about these positive changes.

**Education: music**

Music was another subject that the policy-makers deemed important enough to be included in the curriculum. Music was originally part of girls’ schools, but many schools were including them for boys as an optional subject. In the case of a girl, music was a skill she had to acquire to entertain and soothe her family members (Matthai and others, 1921). Music was considered to have elements that not only gave joy and enjoyment, but later was also seen as having a refining and elevating potential. Music was seen as related to culture and civilization. It could also foster nationalist sentiments. All the government schools in Travancore and Cochin started the day with a prayer invoking the native ruler.\(^{103}\) When music took on elements of nationalism,\(^{104}\) it could not remain a mere cultural accomplishment relegated to women. It was then taken out of the domain of the domestic sphere and made available to both women and men in the public sphere. Hygiene and music came to be included in boys’ curriculum for different reasons – knowledge, awareness, civilization, fostering feelings of nationalism. While hygiene and music were not considered completely gender-neutral subjects in actual practice (in the sense of not being popular or acceptable courses for boys to take up), they were no longer relegated to the women’s domain.

\(^{103}\) All of my interviewees mentioned a song “Vancheenadu...” eulogizing the King being sung in their schools. One of the interviewees, Mr. A.M. Mathew, also mentioned that Civics was an important and interesting subject in his school days. It included lessons on how to conduct oneself, hygiene and so on.

\(^{104}\) Though Travancore and Cochin were not nations in the modern sense of the term, here it is used in the sense of developing feelings of loyalty, trust, reverence, etc. towards the rulers in the princely states.
Integration of missionary education to government rules

By the second half of the 19th century, in Malabar, the missionaries had to follow the curriculum prescribed by the Madras government. The children had to learn two or three languages in the elementary schools, though the missionaries disapproved of the system. The report of the Basel Evangelical Mission in 1894 stated that though they entirely disapproved of the system, they were obliged to conform to it because schools that did not conform to the rules were not acknowledged by the Government, and their pupils were not admitted to Government Examinations (Gladston, 2006). So even though the Basel Mission started schools to enable their members to read, to write and to lead a Christian life, it had moved beyond these simple aims. It was important for the missionaries that the children in their congregation were trained to take the ‘Government Examinations’ so that they could move on to an advanced level of learning, and partake of the new opportunities available to the educated. This change in objective of missionary education influenced the girls’ education as well. Women were being trained to become not just good Christian wives and Bible women, but they were also being trained to take up the new jobs available to those with access to higher education. [This would also be because by the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, with increasing numbers of upper and middle caste/class groups entering the field of education, the caste/class constituency of the school-going girls had changed.] The jobs available to girls with higher educational qualifications were different from lace-making, sewing, and other skill-based work. High schools were started in Malabar region by the mission in the first decades of the 20th century. There were no separate colleges/intermediate schools for girls, but they were admitted to the boys’ colleges and schools.

A large number of missionary and government-aided schools was started in Travancore and the number of school-going children also went up between 1859 to 1866.
(Gladston, 2006). From 1869, as education became popular, the Travancore and Cochin governments decided to assimilate the course of instruction in the private schools with that of the Government schools by putting in place various grants-in-aid codes. This strengthened government control over education. Due to various reasons the LMS, CMS and Basel Missions handed over their schools to the government and other agencies by the early 20th century. With the government taking over education, some of the differences that existed between girls’ and boys’ education began to be done away with, as I will show in the subsequent sections.

Women’s education in the early 20th century

The British government was making plans for the expansion of girls’ education in the first decades of 20th century. The government defined its policy in the famous Resolution of 1913:

(a) The education of girls should have a practical bias with reference to the position which they will fill in social life.

(b) It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys, nor should it be dominated by examinations.

---

105 In 1865 there were 47 schools for girls in South Travancore. From: Gladston, "History of Development of Education of Women in Kerala (1819-1947)."

106 One of the conditions to obtain the grant-in-aid was that the course of instruction and the books used in the vernacular schools had to be the same as that used in government schools (Aiya, 1906). The Madras government was urging the Travancore state to establish more educational institutions. In 1875, a new grant-in-aid system was introduced and a large number of aided schools were started. However no new government schools started. The first government school for girls in Cochin State was started at Thrissur in 1889. The system of grant-in-aid to private schools was also started around this time in Cochin. Travancore began efforts to bring in educational reforms with a new grant-in-aid code in 1894. Attempts were made to control curricula, qualification of teachers, state of buildings, and accommodation and sanitation conditions in aided schools.
Special attention should be paid to hygiene and the surroundings of school life.

The services of women should be more freely enlisted for instruction and inspection; and

Continuity in inspection and control should be specially aimed at. (Mathur, 1973: 56-7)

Most of the policies adopted by the Travancore and Cochin government regarding women’s education were directly based on this policy. Repeated moves to bring in separation of curriculum for girls and boys, the importance given to hygiene, and the utilisation of women teachers and inspectors were all meticulously followed by the native governments.

The re-organisation of women’s education started with the appointment of a Female Inspectress of schools in 1908 (Aiyangar et al., 1925). The government was thinking of providing separate curriculum for girls and boys even before this, but there was not much demand for the same among the public: parents were insisting on the same kind of education for their daughters as was being given to their sons. There were not many takers for the domestic science courses because these courses did not have a final examination or provide a recognised certificate at the end of the course (Aiyangar et al., 1925). These courses did not lead to any form of employment. However the government policy-makers were insistent that these courses were essential. Even among the policy-makers, there were differences as to

---

107 The appointment of inspectresses was not unique to the princely states. British India also had inspectresses for the supervision of female students. To popularise primary and secondary education, the grant-in-aid system was generous in girls’ schools. Girls were also permitted to compete for scholarships which were open to boys. From: Y.B. Mathur, Women's Education in India. 1813-1966 (Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1973).

108 The Quinquennial Review of Education in India, 1917-22, noted that in Bengal too, the experiment of introducing domestic science courses failed because the girls were more interested in courses that provided a matriculation certificate than courses that the government authorities considered practical. In Madras, Punjab and other provinces subjects like physiology, hygiene and domestic economy were included in the curriculum as optional subjects for the SSLC examination. For details, see: Ibid.
what had to be included in the curriculum for girls. For instance, in 1905, the Diwan had recommended that there be instructors in *kaikottikali* (an indigenous dance form),\(^{109}\) singing and needlework for girls. However, when the order was finally passed in 1908, it was decided that it would be sufficient if all the primary schools for boys had a drill instructor and the girls’ schools a music teacher and sewing mistress (Banerji, 1914c). This could be interpreted in two ways: (1) that dance had not yet acquired a respectability to be considered as a cultural subject in school, and (2) it was a dance form practiced and performed in Hindu households, and therefore would not have been seen as a secular art form. Moreover, girls were not to have a drill instructor. Their education was to include only courses that were termed “feminine”.

The governments of Travancore and Cochin were very proud of the educational status of the women in their respective dominions:

The Travancorean is most zealous in the education of his sisters and nieces. No Travancore girl is permitted to grow up to womanhood without a fair knowledge of reading and writing. These are considered the *sine qua non* in every household. In the case of the well-to-do families, the curriculum of the girl’s studies goes beyond the proverbial three Rs. A knowledge of Sanscrit so as to read and understand the Kavyas, the Natakas and the Puranas is a common qualification. Vocal music and sometimes practice on musical instruments are considered desirable accomplishments in a young lady… To these may now be added some knowledge of needlework and the playing upon English musical instruments taught by our European sisters (Aiya, 1894: 485-6).

Note that the terms ‘sisters’ and ‘nieces’ are used instead of daughters or wives. In a matrilineal system, sisters and their progeny inherited property while wives usually stayed in

\(^{109}\) This dance was traditionally taught to Namboothiri and Nair girls after they had learned their alphabet. In the case of rich households, women used to be employed to come and teach the girls. From: Nilayangodu, *Kalappakarchakal*. 

their maternal homes. The idea of what constituted a woman’s education had already changed by 1891. The mastery of English musical instruments and needlework was an additional accomplishment to a basic education involving knowledge of the three Rs, Sanskrit and the Puranas. This image of the Malayali woman is also not a pan Kerala image, but specifically refers to a Nair (and in some instances a Brahmin) woman. Thus, “Travancore girl” comes to be equated with Hindu/Nair girl in the official language.

The government and the people were also aware that the status of women in India was seen as deplorable by the coloniser.

In one side of our humanity, particularly the status of the gentler sex, we are undoubtedly below the English model. Our women are inferior to English women in nearly all the many-sided beauties and charms of woman’s life, whether natural or acquired; and this must be so, so long as our women are regarded as fit only to subserve the interests of man, not as having a destiny of their own to fulfil as his companion and counterpart (Aiya, 1894: 486).

A decade earlier, the missionaries had expressed quite the opposite sentiment while speaking about educated women as having become “real help-mates” to their husbands. They were speaking in particular about the mission-educated women, while the government report is speaking of “Hindu women” in general. The “Hindu women” had not yet attained the companionate position within marriage which was espoused in other locations. In this formulation, the government was also thinking of women as adding to the grace and beauty of the home, rather than as individuals with duties and interests outside the domestic sphere. Her education was not seen as training her to be independent, but as training her in cultural accomplishments so that she becomes a bearer of culture. [During the turn of the century, the hegemonic image of the woman was that of her role as a wife, and not that of a mother or a daughter. Women were not on an equal footing with men, and even when they were to be
treated as equal to men, it was to be within the space of conjugality. The centrality of conjugality was enmeshed in the idea of the woman.]

Problems that beset women’s education

By the early 20th century, the problems that beset women’s higher education in Kerala were slightly different from those in the rest of India. The report of the Travancore University Committee which came out in 1925, eight years after that of the Calcutta Commission, gives a different set of reasons for the backwardness of women’s education as compared to that of men’s education (Aiyangar et al., 1925):

(a) Families were thinking of girls’ collegiate career as directed to qualify for a post with a high salary [This then meant that if the family did not want the woman to work, then she would not have been given the opportunity to continue her education. The Census report of 1931 stated that women were being given higher salaries than men as an incentive to continue higher education].

(b) Slowness in replacing men teachers with women teachers in educational institutions for women.

(c) The unattractiveness of subjects offered to women in colleges. Women were not being offered subjects useful to them in later life, especially those not desiring employment. In other Indian universities like the Mysore University, there were discussions on creating degree courses in Domestic Science and similar subjects following the example of American universities. The Committee opined that it was doubtful whether such courses could be regarded as equally valuable as the usual university courses. It was necessary to make provisions for the special needs of women in the courses of study. But, the Committee continued, it did not follow that the intellectual needs of women and men were so totally different as to necessitate an entirely new set of subjects of study for the latter. The
Committee went on to mention that no such demand had been made by any of the ladies who were consulted by them (Aiyangar et al., 1925). [There was a great deal of confusion as to the special subjects to be instituted for women. On the one hand, the Committee knew that special subjects might be needed for women. On the other hand, instituting such subjects had not been a persistent or active request by either women students or fellow women educationists in Kerala. Domestic Sciences and related subjects would not have been considered on par with Science and Social Science courses. So it was doubtful whether there would have been takers for these subjects. Also, there was a sense that in a state where women were thought to be on nearly equal footing with men intellectually/educationally, providing special subjects for women would be creating a differentiation between the two sexes that did not exist previously.\textsuperscript{110} Underlying this was also the idea of equal treatment of women and men, but the Committee also did not imagine equal treatment as entailing identical courses of study or treatment in education. There was also a divide being made between women who wanted to continue their education and enter a profession and women who wanted only to get married after schooling. The special subjects were for the latter women.]

(d) The absence of proper residential facilities in colleges for women.

e) Failure to provide for religious and moral training equivalent to what the women would receive at home. This particular reason is tentatively put forward as a possible explanation by the Committee. It could refer to the Muslim and Brahmin women who were statistically backward with regards to modern education. The Committee was aware of the prevailing

\textsuperscript{110}This is another instance of the counter currents within formal educational structures. In 1894, Nagam Aiya, spoke of women as being considered subservient to men, while in 1925, the Aiyangar Committee saw Malayali women as being on a nearly equal footing with men. In the span of 25 years the social, cultural and educational status of women had changed or perceived to have been changed. However, the later Committee is also speaking about women who were already educated or in the process of getting higher education. So the Committee is speaking of/for a particular caste/class constituency of women.
notion that moral education was more important for women than for men. But the report sets down that there was no validity to such a differentiation and also that it was not practical to give religious instruction in a university setting.

(f) Women were often forced to study in colleges for men: in small classes (Post-graduate and Honours classes) where women received individual attention from the staff, they were not as reluctant. This last problem brings to light the fact that women were not entirely comfortable in a co-educational institution. In the 1920s, these women would also have been the first and second generations to have passed through the school system to enter the university. Women were not yet independent or sure about themselves to feel secure in large groups of mixed gender. The Travancore University Committee devotes a few pages to the issue of co-education:

The practice of co-education is fairly common in Kerala… The absence of a *purdah* system in Malabar and the existence of natural and unhampered relations between the sexes are both advantages in facilitating co-education. Co-education may diminish some of the unhealthy attractions of the sexes which may arise from keeping them apart in separate institutions. Our girls have proved their equality to their brothers intellectually and have shown that they could profit by the same courses of study. There is no evidence that their health as a rule suffers owing to competition with boys and increased effort demanded by such emulation…The practice of co-education has

---

111 In her autobiography, B. Kalyani Amma mentioned studying in a co-educational college for her teacher training course. She states that though it had felt strange at first, she slowly got used to the male students and in later days the female and male students even developed a rapport with each other. From: B. Kalyani Amma, *Ornayil Ninnu*, ed. K. Gomathy Amma (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 1964).

In another such anecdote, Samuel Nellimukal mentions that when women were first admitted to CMS college in 1913, the male students used to compete with each other to get money from them for the collection box during mass, until the novelty of having women in college wore off. Samuel Nellimukal, *C.M.S. Colleginte Charithram: 1816-1996* (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1997).

112 The term Malabar being used as a synonym for Malayalam-speaking regions in this report from Travancore further substantiates the idea that there was a sense of unity among the different political regions.
had no appreciable bad effect on the age of marriage, and has undoubtedly not been responsible for any suspicion of a reduction of the morale of students of either sex. The objection that co-education would force girls to take up studies uncongenial to them or unattractive to them, is much diminished by the fact that most of the girls voluntarily prefer to submit themselves to the same courses of training and examination…Thus it is difficult to understand why, despite its apparent success co-education is still unacceptable to many of our educationists. In colleges for men, particularly, there is even more reluctance to admit women students than there is a hesitation on the part of the women students to seek admission in them (Aiyangar et al., 1925: 325-7).

The issue of co-education was tricky. The Committee supported co-education as it was already in place in Kerala. From the report, it appears that most of the critics of co-education were from outside the state. There were discussions on the (in)advisability of co-education in the magazines from the period. However, the government report has not taken that into consideration here. The report considered objections raised by educationists from other Indian states and abroad, but the Committee did not think of these objections as being applicable to Malayalis. Around the same time in British India, co-education had to be encouraged by offering special grants to girls studying in boys’ schools (Mathur, 1973). Within the state, co-education was read as mostly being a problem of administration – of having to provide for “the convenience of the two sexes in a common institution”. Separate institutions for girls were generally requested in the intermediate and degree classes. These would be the mid to late teenage groups. So the difficulty with co-education for this age group was probably less to do with the intrinsic evils of co-education and more to do with the issues related to teenage. The report, in general, supported many practices that would have been considered progressive. It refuted most of the arguments against co-education by pointing out that there was no proof to support the arguments of the detractors. It would not
have been possible for the members of the Committee or the government to implement the
suggestions regarding co-education, religious instruction, special subjects for women, etc.
unless the social climate of the state was also favourable.

The government was facing problems with regards to grant-in-aid rules for primary
schools. The grant-in-aid rules were different for boys’ and girls’ schools. During certain
years, some girls’ schools would move from the list of girls’ schools to the list of boys’
schools and vice versa, depending on the number of girls in the school in that particular year.
In addition, grants were withheld from aided schools when they had a larger number of girls
or boys than the education department thought fit.\textsuperscript{113} By 1933, it was proposed that primary
schools should be classified as primary schools instead of as boys’ or girls’ schools (Statham
\textit{et al.}, 1933). The result of these policies related to co-education was that Malayali women
were entering or being coerced into entering public spaces which were previously mostly
male spaces. Not all women were happy to enter that space, as is clear from the reports and
many of the magazine articles. With the establishment of the new educational institutions and
the opening up of many new jobs which resulted from that, women were entering these
spaces tentatively, but with increasing confidence.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{113} The inspection work was also done separately by the female and male inspectors in the different schools. It
was found that the men were inspecting only the education of the boys in the boys’ schools and the women were
inspecting only the education of the girls in the girls’ schools. The girls residing in the area of a boys’ school
were not considered the concern of the men’s branch and the boys in the area of a girls’ school were not
considered the concern of the women’s branch. Moreover, in terms of actual educational progress, the women’s
branch was not concerned about the boys in girls’ schools and about the large number of girls in boys’ schools.
Thus, it was proposed that the distinction between boys’ and girls’ school at primary level should be abolished.

\textsuperscript{114} One of the magazine writers mentioned that women’s groups were laughed at by people at one point and
when women were invited to speak in public meetings the response from the crowd was hostile. She intoned that
it was considered shameful to talk to men or attend public gatherings and co-education was considered
bad/improper/wicked. For details, see: B. Anandavalliamma, "\textit{Shreekallude Samuhyajeewithathinte
Naveekaranathikantheerhavikkunna Prashnangal}," Mahila 1939.
Akkamma Cherian (1909-1982) was a freedom fighter who gave up her position as headmistress in a school to
lead the Travancore State Congress in its historic fight for responsible government. Her biographer mentions
Professional/vocational training and women’s curriculum

The need for instituting technical and science-based education at the school level worked in unexpected ways in the individuation process of women. In the 19th century the government needed educated people to fill up the various new posts created as a result of the changes wrought in the administrative structure as mentioned before. Later the government recognised the need to co-ordinate education with the means to earn a livelihood especially for the backward groups. The idea of training the lower classes in technical subjects was a continuation of the training given to them by the missionaries. The government had utilitarian considerations in giving an impetus to technical training: it would improve the material condition of the people and as well as the resources of the State. The State was also following the developments in other places like America, Europe and Japan (Aiya, 1906; Matthai and others, 1921). For the native governments, the aspiration to being characterized as a ‘modern state’ and maintaining that position involved having an economy that was highly productive and based on the adoption of scientific technology in industry, agriculture, fishery, dairy-farming, etc. The training of the artisans, farmers, etc. in the technical schools was seen as part of this modernizing effort. The government was also worried about the adverse effect of spreading purely literary education since many of the students were turning away from their hereditary occupations. Educated youth were unwilling to settle down as agriculturists; many were aspiring for professional and clerical jobs, and were unwilling to accept manual labour as being suitably remunerative or fitting. Malayalam-speaking regions were also hit by the global depression during the war years (Statham et al., 1933). So, it was hoped that these problems could be addressed by instituting schools and courses in technical education. The
Report of the Travancore Education Re-organisation Committee in 1946 emphasised that basic education was designed to give boys and girls sufficient knowledge and training to make them good citizens and to fit them for a very large number of avocations in life (Papworth, 1946) The term “boys and girls” were used instead of a gender neutral term. This was part of a larger ideology of seeing gender as the main principle of ordering human beings as opposed to their class/caste status.

It was proposed that training be provided in the following subjects to cater to students in the age group of 10+ who wished to leave after primary education:

(a) Gardening, Tailoring, Spinning, Weaving, Coir work, Basket making, Mat making, Shoe making and repairing.

(b) Book-binding, Commercial lettering and posters.

(c) Brick work, Masonry, Motor repairs, Wood work, Metal work, Leather work, Carpentry, Tidsmithery, Blacksmithery, Ivory carving, Clay and Pottery.

(d) Agriculture, (arable farming and animal husbandry), Poultry keeping and Bee keeping, Sericulture and Horticulture.

(e) For girls:- Home-craft, Sewing, Embroidery, Screwpine and Lace-making

(Papworth, 1946: 23-4)\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Tailoring, which involved the use of the sewing machine, is included in general education, thereby marking it as a masculine occupation. While, sewing, embroidery etc. were appropriated by upper and middle class women as being respectable occupations, tailoring (for men) did not quite make it as a completely upper/middle class occupation until recently with globalization/liberalization and the growth of the fashion industry in India. Even then, it was not tailoring so much as (fashion) designing that was appropriated by the upper and middle class.

\textsuperscript{116} Different provinces under British rule had different curricula, though generally girls’ schools and boys’ schools within the province had the same curriculum. Many elementary schools made arrangements for vocational instruction for their students. Carpet and tape-weaving, spinning, basket-making, lace-making, embroidery, needlework, housework, crop cultivation, cooking, health and sanitation, household accounting etc.
Of the total number of girls in primary schools in Travancore, 93% were studying in boys’ schools. This meant that most of these girls were not taught special subjects thought to be an integral part of their education. However, the idea of differences in the capabilities, talents and duties of girls and boys and the need to incorporate this difference in formal education continued towards the middle of the 20th century. A large number of girls were not allowed to continue their studies beyond primary schooling. So the Committee thought it prudent to teach them the basics of ‘domestic life’ at school.\textsuperscript{117} The Papworth Committee recommended that at the middle school level, there should be arrangements for special training in music, sewing, home-craft and dancing for girl pupils, and to provide them with special facilities for games (Papworth, 1946). Dancing was thus introduced for the first time.\textsuperscript{118} Dancing was earlier an art associated with the courtesans and the devadasis. By the 1940s, the dance form was ‘sanitised’ and was even being endorsed by people like the Diwan of Travancore (Devika, 2007a).

High schools were to be re-organized as two main types: (a) Academic High schools and (b) Technical High Schools (Papworth, 1946). The Committee suggested that the academic high schools were to work out a detailed curriculum and syllabus from among the following subjects: mother tongue (Malayalam and Tamil), English, classical languages, modern languages, History (Indian and World), Geography (Indian and World),\textsuperscript{119} were some of the subjects termed as special subjects for girls. For details, see: Mathur, Women’s Education in India. 1813-1966.

\textsuperscript{117} Around this time, music, needlework, painting and domestic science were being taught in many secondary schools in Bombay, Bengal, Delhi and other provinces of India. From: Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} However, it is difficult to ascertain if this was taken up by school authorities in earnest as the period in which this recommendation would have been put in practice is outside the time frame/scope of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{119} Geography and history were other subjects that were related to fostering a feeling of nationality among the citizens. History became an important subject in modern schools in India in the early 20th century. History and Geography were relatively new subjects, and not part of the ezhutupallis. These subjects would have instilled a sense of the nation and of citizenship in the students. Geography was also seen as a subject that would inculcate a sense of scientific rationality in the students. The princely states included British history in their syllabus.
Mathematics, Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Physiology and Hygiene), Economics, Agriculture, Civics, art, music, needle-work and embroidery, Domestic Science and Physical Training. And the technical schools were to include Home Science as one of the subjects. Thus, the difference in the duties and the station of the girl child was to be instilled and reinforced from primary level to high school. Lace-making, Domestic Science, etc. were not part of the earlier mode of learning with the Asan. It was brought in with missionary education. The government took up these subjects as being integral to the process of training women to be women. The so-called special subjects for girls were not a comprehensive curriculum, but rather a few subjects which were identified as being feminine and therefore to be taught to girls. Though the government speaks about the need for differential training for boys and girls at school level, in actual practice, there was not much being done to take it forward. The government was able to influence only certain aspects of the girls’ training as opposed to the missionary wives: the government schools were giving training in certain tasks/pursuits/occupations that were seen as part of women’s sphere. Some of these were useful skills; some were (cultural) accomplishments. Some were related to the domestic sphere and some would have required the girls/women to move out into the public sphere. There were other influences on the girls in the form of teachers, mode of conduct expected of them at school, etc., but these were not officially part of the curriculum. In the missionary

because (1) History and Geography were linked together in the Madras School final system and (2) knowledge of the history of the British Empire was considered to be essential to educated citizens. The inclusion of British history in the syllabus was also to appease the vanity of the coloniser and part of a complex negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized where the latter identified (partially) with the culture and civilization of the former. Constructions of histories were also morale boosters. History as a subject linked up present aspirations with more or less imagined pasts in an effort to move towards specific kinds of future. The history books in use in the princely states in the 1930s implicitly approved change – highlighting the triumphs of the English parliament and the people from the 17th to 19th centuries. These subjects were important in carving citizens out of the students. For details, see: Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being: How Kerala Became 'A Model'* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992). C. Matthai and others, “Report of the Committee for the Revision of the Cochin Education Code,” (Trichur: 1921).
education/boarding schools, even these were more or less under the control of the missionaries. However, it is doubtful whether the parents or girl students themselves were interested in taking up these subjects seriously. As the reports show, a large number of the girls were studying in boys’ schools, which did not offer instruction in the “domestic subjects”. So having access to education specifically tailored to the needs of women was not a necessity as far as the majority of the population was concerned. This state of affairs could also be read in a slightly different way: since there were not enough girls’ schools with special subjects, the female students were forced to take up the same courses as the boys, and over the years, the existence of a common curriculum for girls and boys at the school level came to be the norm. Moreover, for the native governments it was not advisable to spend too much money and effort on a venture which would not provide measurable and visible returns. So although the various committees did recommend starting new and varied courses for women/girls, in actual practice these recommendations were not taken up aggressively.

Women’s education was initially an issue of prestige for the government. The first census in 1875 showed a high percentage of women literates in the Malayalam-speaking regions compared to other parts of India. The subsequent efforts consciously or unconsciously were to keep this up. There was also a vague sense of what constituted women’s duties and sphere of work which permeated the policies on women. The Education department did not make it mandatory that women opt for the special subjects, but it was put in place for those who needed it – the women who could not continue on to the collegiate level. The Papworth Committee report of 1946 is different from the Travancore University Committee report of 1925, where the differentiation of subjects for the two sexes at the higher education level was not considered very necessary. There is a definite proposal for the differentiation of the curriculum for the two sexes in later reports. It should be noted that the differentiation is proposed at the school level in the later reports. It must have been because at
that point in time, women who went for higher education also opted to work after the completion of their education [and the differentiation in curriculum was for women who planned to stay at home]. The domestic sciences course was supposed to help the women improve the conditions of their home and introduce modern methods of household management. The implicit understanding was that the Indian households needed better management. There also seems to be a wide gap between what the government thought women’s education should be and what the women themselves were expecting to gain from education. The government hoped that education would broaden the outlook, bring new contacts and create “new impulses” in the women (Statham et al., 1933). But the policymakers were also aware of the fact that most educational institutions were so dominated by class work and examinations that there was no room for inculcating a broader perspective on life.

**Discipline through education**

It was not just the households that needed management, the character and the comportment of the student were also seen as needing discipline and direction. In the missionary education this was done through the regulation of daily life, particularly in the boarding schools with the strict regimen for waking up, play time, study, learning useful skills, prayer, washing up and so on. In the government reports too discipline was an important sub-section. In the Travancore Education Reform Committee of 1941, for instance, under the heading of Discipline it was stipulated that:

1. Every pupil shall wear clean clothes.

2. Every pupil shall salute the teachers on the occasion of his first meeting them for the day within the school precincts.
3. On the teacher entering his class room, pupils shall rise and remain standing till they are desired to sit or till the teacher takes his seat.

4. No pupil shall be allowed to leave the classroom without permission of the teacher or until the class is dismissed.

5. Pupils are forbidden to organise or attend any meetings in the school or to collect money for any purpose without the express permission of the Headmaster. 

(\textit{The Travancore Education Code, 1941: 40-1}).

Discipline was implemented by controlling not just the students’ behaviour, but also through their clothes, their body language, whom they were allowed to meet, their activities, etc. Discipline was also seen as being maintained through examinations and attendance. The Report went on to say how to punish misconduct, and when corporal punishment had to be resorted to:

Corporal punishment shall be administered rarely; this form of punishment shall be resorted to only in case of boys and in the following cases –

(i) continued repetition of minor offences which minor punishments have failed to check

(ii) moral delinquencies which are not serious enough to merit expulsion, such as deliberate lying, cheating, making false excuses, bearing false excuses, bearing false tales about others, obscenity of words, insubordination, etc.

When this form punishment is resorted to, it should be limited to six cuts on the palm of the hand and administered only by the Headmaster of the school in such a way as to inflict pain without bodily injury (\textit{The Travancore Education Code, 1941: 42}).

Discipline was one way in which the so-called inherent differences between girls and boys were reinforced. The female student was not to be subjected to corporal punishment, only the male student. Here, there is even a clear description as to exactly how the punishment is to be
carried out. The school was not just a place for learning skills and to acquire literary and mathematical skills, it was also where the character of the student was to be moulded to enable them to perform their duties in a manner appropriate to the future citizen; and this entailed training them in self-control. In the previous chapter, it was this same self-control that was put forward as being lacking in the modern educated women with their late rising, tea-drinking habits.\(^{120}\)

**Women’s capabilities and employment**

Women began to be seen as intelligent and as capable as men in the field of education and other professions around this time. The policies taken by the government gave more stress to the teaching profession with recommendations to start teacher training colleges in conjunction with women’s colleges (Aiyangar *et al.*, 1925). The Papworth Committee recommended that women teachers be recruited to teach the first three classes of primary schools as women were better in taking charge of small children and better caregivers. The recruitment of women teachers was to result in all schools being able to provide instruction in sewing, elementary homecraft, music and singing for girl pupils because the large majority of girls in boys’ school had no separate subjects (Papworth, 1946).

The private/public, the East/West, the spiritual/materialistic dichotomy that Partha Chatterjee argues emerged in Bengal during the social reform movement (Chatterjee, 1993; Chatterjee, 1989b), manifested differently in the reform movement in Kerala. J. Devika mentions that gender difference was the fundamental principle of ordering human beings, as the alternative to established social order that privileged birth and inherited status in Kerala

\(^{120}\) The 1930s saw a number of political movements and processions in Travancore taken up against the administration by students, teachers and other groups. Though the protests were not directed towards the Maharaja, the cry for responsible government was strong in Travancore at that time. So ‘discipline’ was not just about morality, capability and comportment, but also about carving out the right kind of citizen.
(Devika, 2008). The public sphere came to be conceived of differently in the early 20th century, and Devika mentions how the school, the hospital and the ideal modern community were all envisaged as working best through the powers of words, persuasion, discretionary sense and patience – precisely the qualities attributed to women. Women’s natural capacities were being used to justify their entry into these new institutions. Women could be part of the public domain as long as it required her ‘gentle powers’. Women, she says, were able to move out of the domestic domain only after making sure of not losing her gender identity. This is different from Partha Chatterjee’s argument where he says that women could move out of the inner/private space once her essential femininity was fixed in terms of certain “culturally visible spiritual qualities” (Chatterjee, 1993: 130). In Devika’s formulation not only is the woman’s gender identity fixed, but certain jobs were then seen as needing the feminine touch. This argument helps to explain how certain jobs/professions were becoming dubbed as women’s work and/or as being more suited to women. Jobs like teaching, nursing, etc. came into existence as a direct result of modern education (put in place by the missionaries and the government) and were considered befitting a woman’s abilities. Entering such jobs would not then cause her to lose her sthreethwam. I would add a further note to this and say that in early twentieth century Kerala, even if women had to move out of the physical space of the home, it was acceptable as long as they did not abandon the duties expected of them at home and simultaneously conducted themselves in the public space in a manner that did not conflict with their inherent sthreethwam. This sthreethwam included virtues such as chastity, self-sacrifice, devotion, religiosity, kindness, patience and love. With the advent of education certain new virtues were added to this list: sense of discipline, hygiene, thrift, sense of responsibility, literacy, ability to do household accounts, etc.121 The

121 This was not confined to Kerala. Partha Chatterjee speaks about discussions on how education was meant to inculcate bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social forms of disciplining: or orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility, literacy and so on in 19th century Bengal. Simultaneously
kind of subjects proposed suitable for women were also those that would keep them tethered to their *sthreethwam* – domestic science, sewing, lace-making – because these were by then seen as feminine subjects. The duty towards the home – the domestic sphere – was strongly enmeshed in the *sthreedharmam* of the Malayali woman. The woman had to be careful that neither her *sthreethwam*, nor her *sthreedharmam* were compromised in order to move away from the physical space of the home. So even when she seemed to move away from the domestic domain, in reality she was still connected to it by her *sthreedharmam.*

The employment of married women was under discussion in various sites. The Committee for Educational reforms in 1933 suggested that it would be advantageous in recruiting and retaining married women as teachers in Departmental primary schools, but not secondary schools.

There are obvious difficulties in the way of a married woman, particularly a married woman with a family, doing inspecting work or doing teaching work in higher grade institutions. Apart from these difficulties, however, we feel that the large unemployment amongst educated young men and women should by itself, necessitate

---

122 As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, this *sthreedharmam* is not the same as the private/inner/spiritual that Partha Chatterjee speaks about.

123 There were discussions in the legislative council on the rules prohibiting nurses from marrying during the bond period (first five years of compulsory service). Some members questioned the logic behind the ruling, and asked why the ban was not extended to midwives and doctors and if there were similar prohibitions in other public departments. For details, see: "Travancore Legislative Council: Second Council: Second Session, 1101," (Thiruvananthapuram: Travancore Legislative Council, 1926). The proceedings are available from: http://klapproceedings.niyamasabha.org/index.php?pg=search_result
the withdrawal from employment of a woman, working in the Education Department, who desires to get married (Statham et al., 1933: 69).

Married women, it was believed, would not be able to put in as much effort into their careers as unmarried women. When there was a problem with high rates of unemployment, the first casualties were to be married women. The needs and/or aspirations of married women were considered secondary to that of men and of unemployed unmarried women. The right of the married woman to work and to be financially independent was considered secondary to her primary duties towards the home and the hearth. I would read this as further confirmation of the proposition that women could move out of the domestic domain provided she did not compromise her sthreedharmam towards the home. The policy-makers were reluctant to burden married women with, what they believed, was additional work. What was also inherent in this formulation was the idea that married women would be taken care of by their husbands; that the Malayali family had become patrilocal. Married women were considered more experienced, patient, kind and nurturing than unmarried women (whatever the ground realities). According to the committee, the younger students needed a softer touch which could be given by the married women. But these same women were not considered dedicated enough to teach in higher classes or work in the department. The other underlying assumption in this statement was the differences in the degree of work involved in teaching primary schools and secondary schools and the preferential treatment meted out to higher education by the government agents. Though most of the students in schools were in the primary classes, the government insisted on trained and dedicated teachers only in the higher classes.

124 British India had difficulty in training school mistresses for primary schools because the latter kept themselves so busy in domestic work that they did not attend to their work carefully. The husbands of married women teachers interfered in their work sometimes by instigating the teachers to make petitions and neglect their duties. From: Mathur, Women's Education in India. 1813-1966.
The Census report of 1931 stated that the unemployment of educated women and men was a serious issue and educated married women seeking employment were classified under the category of unemployed. This portrays the change in the way women’s status was perceived by the government. Almost a decade before that, a literate housewife would not have been classified as unemployed. Gainful employment of women outside the physical space of the domestic sphere was increasingly becoming acceptable. From 1925 there were a large number of educated unemployed women and the government was not in a position to provide employment for all. Providing basic training for later self-employment (for women) at school level was one way of addressing the unemployment problem.

**High rates of literacy and education**

I had illustrated the relationship between literacy levels and education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the previous chapter. This section shows that it was not just matriliny, missionary education and/or government interest, but other factors also played an important role in increasing the literacy levels of women in Kerala.

By the middle of the 20th century, it became possible for all those who had the ability and desire to be educated to benefit by that facility. Education was also equalizing opportunities by creating a social environment inside the schools and outside it which was conducive to development of inter-caste and inter-religious solidarities which were not possible a century ago. The content of education was pitched as one that promoted the development of scientific and rational thinking. High levels of literacy in Malayalam-speaking regions can be attributed to the activity of Protestant missionaries. The first schools were started by them and the first groups to go to school were the converted Christians and the Syrian Christians.
The high percentage of native Christians in the population was another factor that aided literacy in Travancore and Cochin. According to the 1891 Census, 36,652 females were under instruction in Travancore.\textsuperscript{125} Of the population of school-going age, Christians took the lead with 20.6\%, followed by Hindus (10.3\%), and Muslims (7.5\%). Malabar district was in third place in point of female literacy in the whole of Madras Presidency (Duncan, 1897). Among Christians, the proportion of illiterate women and men was higher among the Roman Christians (the Roman Catholics and the Syrian Catholics\textsuperscript{126}) than among the Syrians or the Protestants. The chief reason for this state of affairs seemed to be that modern English education was never undertaken in earnest by the Roman Catholic clergy in Malayalam-speaking regions in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The Catholic clergy were mostly Italians, Spaniards, and men of other nationalities, who found it difficult to take an active part in English education, and to realize its usefulness or importance (Tharakan, 1984a).\textsuperscript{127} Another reason for the backwardness of the Syrian Catholics, according to the Census report, was that the converts were mostly high caste (Molony, 1912). This affected the percentage of female literates among them. In Malayalam-speaking regions it was the middle caste women who had easier access to schools than the upper caste women. Since Syrian Catholic families

\textsuperscript{125} In the academic year 1887-8, there were totally 2,14,206 girl students in Bombay, Madras, Bengal and Assam. The number of schools for girls was largest in Bombay and Madras and smallest in Bengal and Assam. For details, see: Ibid.

\textsuperscript{126} These were the Syrians who had joined the Roman Church.

\textsuperscript{127} The Catholic priests in India in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century were often Italians, French, etc. Places like Bengal, which were under British rule, requested for English-speaking priests to be sent to India. Some religious orders like the Jesuits (a catholic order based in Rome) then send English-speaking personnel to these areas. The Jesuits started a vernacular Parish school in Malabar in the 1850s, and in 1862 the parish priest handed over the management of the school to Christian Brothers, who introduced English in the syllabus. There were very few English schools under the Catholic Church in Kerala and they were introduced only when there was demand for such schools in this period. From: \textit{About School}. (St. Michael's Anglo-Indian Higher Secondary School, Kannur, [cited 28 February 2013]); available from http://stmichaelskannur.com/about_school.html, John Felix Raj, \textit{Jesuits Education}. (St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, [cited 28 February 2013]); available from http://www.sxccal.edu/jesuitsEdu.htm.
tended to follow the upper castes in their caste pollution rules, it is safe to assume that in the matter of education also, they would have followed the Malayali Brahmin custom of restricting women’s access to modern education. Thus, even within Christians the percentages varied among the various sects. But to outward appearances, it appeared as if they were moving towards modern education and material progress as a united group (Jeffrey, 1992). This added to the competitiveness among the various caste/religious groups that I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

The presence of Christians alone does not explain the relatively high number of literates in Malayalam-speaking regions, because there were areas like Goa with a huge Catholic Christian population in the 19th and 20th centuries who did not have the same high levels of literacy. As I have mentioned before, Catholic priests (especially in Portuguese Goa) were often from non-English speaking places. They did not have the means or inclination to invest in the British system of education. Protestant missionaries always started schools near their missions and they undertook translation of the Bible and other texts into the native languages as part of their larger aim of proselytization and education. For the native Christians in Kerala, it was culturally and socially easier to send their children to schools run by people professing the same faith.

Tamilnadu had regions of high Protestant missionary activity with schools attached to each mission – English and Tamil schools – in the 19th century (Frykenberg, 2008). However,

---

128 In Goa, in the early 20th century, parents were sometimes reluctant to send their children to schools because of factors like the medium of instruction, inclusion of Portuguese history and literature in schools, etc. In 1920, of the total number of children of school going age only 7% were enrolled in schools. Goa had a literacy rate of 31.23 % in 1961 while Kerala had a higher rate of 46.85%. From: Ricardo Cabral, *The Development of Teacher Education in Portuguese Goa, 1841-1961* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co, 2009), V.L. Chopra et al., "Goa Development Report," (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 2011), Bhalchandra Mungekar et al., "Kerala Development Report," (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 2008).
the percentage of literates in the Presidency never equalled that of Travancore or Cochin.\textsuperscript{129} While the rate of female literacy tripled for Madras in 1891 from 1875, for Travancore and Cochin it increased five to nine times. The matrilineal system prevalent among many of the communities is often cited as one reason. The first groups that send their children to schools were not the matrilineal communities. However towards the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the number of Nair children in school outnumbered the Christian children.\textsuperscript{130} Other than these the highest percentage of school-going children was among the Kshatriyas (or the ruling families), and the Ezhavas – both of whom were mostly matrilineal. The missionaries had started separate schools for Nairs and Brahmins in Travancore. The number of literates among the Ezhavas and the Brahmins were high.\textsuperscript{131} Even though the percentage of educated Brahmins was higher than the other communities, in terms of sheer numbers, Nairs, Christians and Ezhavas outnumbered the former. This in turn, provided these communities with the numerical strength to take positive action. Among the females, the number of educated Nair women outnumbered the native Christian women.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{129} The percentages for educated men in Travancore, Cochin and Madras were 19.11, 23.82 and 11.43 respectively and the corresponding percentages for women were 2.69, 3.76 and 0.66 respectively in 1891. The Census report of India for 1901 pointed out that the education of those in Malabar seemed to be superior to that of Tamils and Telugus. The educational status of the Malayali Brahmin, the Nair and the Tiyya/Ezhava were better than their corresponding castes in Tamil-speaking regions and Telugu-speaking regions. From: W. Francis, "Census of India, 1901. Volume XV. Madras. Part I. Report," (Madras: Government Press, 1902).

\textsuperscript{130} There were 90,542 educated males (37\%) among the Nairs and 56,537 educated males (21.29\%) among the Christians. From: V. Nagam Aiya, "Report on the Census of Travancore, Taken by Command of His Highness the Maharajah on the 26th February 1891 - 16th Masy 1066 M.E., Along with the Imperial Census of India," (Madras: Addison & co., 1894).

\textsuperscript{131} There were 24,996 (12.10\%) educated males among the Ezhavas and 11,925 (51.72\%) males among the Brahmins.

\textsuperscript{132} There were 16,673 literate Nair women and 8,454 literate Christian women. The Brahmins had 1,469 and the Ezhavas had 1,089 women literates among them. From: Aiya, "Report on the Census of Travancore, Taken by Command of His Highness the Maharajah on the 26th February 1891 - 16th Masy 1066 M.E., Along with the Imperial Census of India."
The interest taken by the rulers of Travancore and Cochin in the matter of education cannot be discounted. By the second half of the 19th century, a number of new schools were opened for the high caste students, older indigenous schools were incorporated into the government system and grant-in-aid scheme was instituted for existing private schools. The Diwans from 1857 were products of the Presidency College (Madras), and the Raja’s Free School (Travancore) and they were desirous of spreading English education in the state (Aiyangar et al., 1925). The institution of English schools in the native states also helped the native rulers to depend less on Madras presidency for trained officers in administrative positions. By the turn of the century the government had opened other schools for the lower castes. They were equally interested in the education of women. The women and men of the ruling families in Travancore and Cochin were highly educated. The various Census reports, administration reports, reports of the Education Committees have separate sections for female education and education of backward communities. Girls in government schools were paying only half the rates prescribed for boys till 1932 in Travancore. Without the special interest shown by the governments, women and backward classes would not have had easy access to schooling and literacy. The policies of the Travancore and Cochin governments were not taken in isolation, but as is clear from the various reports mentioned in this chapter were influenced by activities and movements taking place elsewhere in India, Asia, Europe and America.

The various caste/religious organisations that came up in the early 20th century were deeply interested in raising the standard of their fellow caste women and men. A common characteristic of all these movements was their emphasis on education.133 For the

133 Under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru, the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham) was founded in 1903 by Dr. P. Palpu for the Ezhavas. The government schools of Travancore were opened to the Ezhavas only by 1910. In practice, entry to schools were difficult even after this and in a petition submitted to the Maharaja in 1917, the SNDP complained that they still had no admission to schools, particularly in girls’
economically dispossessed lower castes and outcastes, education was the route to liberation. For the others it was a method to stabilise or improve their social position. Apart from placing their demands before the State, each community addressed the question of education by opening their own institutions with resources raised from within the community. The SJPS raised resources from the poor agricultural labourers to start its own school for the Pulaya children. Later the Nair Service Society (NSS), the SNDP and Muslim organisations like the Lajnathul Islam Sabha collected funds from their members to establish schools of their own

Schools. Sree Narayana Guru started a school at Aruvippuram and another at Varkala (both in Travancore), in which the medium of instruction was English. From his point of view education offered a means to improve the position of the group, to transform irrational social customs, to fight against avidya (ignorance) and superstitions and to thus achieve mokkhsa (deliverance).

Ayyankali, the leader of the Pulayas was fighting for the cause of the depressed castes. In 1907, Ayyankali established the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) to fight for the cause of the depressed castes. Like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali viewed education as the most important means for the liberation of the lower castes. The Sangham demanded admission of outcastes into schools and for the removal of the social disabilities arising from caste. The lower castes were also working towards the abolition of social distance among the various caste groups. This movement started in the 19th century when the lower caste women started wearing their clothes/accessories imitating the styles of the upper caste women. It took other forms in the later decades. The Temple Entry movement was one such. The Sahodara Sangham (brotherhood) founded by the Ezhava leader, K. Ayyappan, in 1917 worked towards eradicating the evils of caste and popularising the idea of inter-dining among the Ezhavas and other castes considered inferior to them in the social scale such as the Arayas, the Pulayas, etc.

The NSS (Nair Service Society) was founded in 1914 with the motto of service to the community in general and the Nairs in particular. It provided effective leadership to movements towards the eradication of sub-caste, abolition of decadent and wasteful practices like talikettukalyanam (ritual marriage of young girls before puberty to a Brahmin), tirandukuli (celebration of start of puberty), etc. The NSS also started schools from 1915 for its members. Similarly, Abdul Khader Moulavi established the Muslim Mahajana Sabha to propagate reforms within the Muslim community and to promote education. Even before embarking on an organisational mode, Moulavi had started to use publications and journalism as methods to bring in social reform among the Muslims.

The most important contribution of these organisations was their efforts to create awareness among the members of their own communities about the need for education. The caste groups were also fighting for freedom – freedom from hereditary constraints on their status and freedom to compete for betterment of their status. This betterment could be effected through individual effort and hard work. The individual effort could work only in an environment of equal opportunity – opportunity to rise in social and economic status. Thus, these groups had a high stake in education.

The different kinds of school management in existence in Kerala in the early 20th century were the Bible Faith Mission, the Mar Thoma mission, the Salvation Army, the NSS, the SNDP, the Muslim educational society, the Roman Catholic mission, the CMS including the Zenana Mission, the Basel Evangelical Mission, the Lutheran Mission, the LMS Mission, the Jacobite mission, the Brother mission, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Arya Samajam and also over 900 schools run by private individuals (Statham et al., 1933). Some of the above groups were Christian denominations and a few like the Arya Samajam were part of the larger Arya Samaj in north India. The government was urging these and other caste/religious groups to arrange for the education of the adult members in their communities (Menon, 1932). With the high competition among the different caste and community groups it was possible that the women of the groups found it easier to go to schools and continue their education as is clear from the educational statistics. What this also meant was that some of these women’s access to literacy and education was mediated through and influenced by their caste/community groups. This then would have developed a new sense of caste/community affiliation different from the earlier unorganized caste/community structures. So while schools were bringing together women from different caste/community backgrounds, paradoxically some of the schools were also creating a new sense of
caste/community awareness among the students [the sense of community among the magazine writers peak around the time the caste/community groups were being formed].

The impact of the social reforms was felt immediately on educational enrolment and literacy in Travancore. The removal of certain caste barriers on school admissions during the second decade of the 19th century led to a sharp increase in literacy rates. Similarly there was an increase in literacy in the 1930s, which is attributed to the removal of all barriers on the access of lower castes and outcastes to public places (CDS, 2006). The progress in literacy was very slow during the first three decades of the 20th century in Malabar. It suddenly picked up during the next two decades, due to social reforms among the Muslims, the nationalist movement, and movements of peasants and teachers. There were enthusiastic attempts to bring children to schools, to organise libraries and reading rooms in rural areas, and to spread the spirit of education among the ordinary masses (CDS, 2006). It can be further proved that the cultural climate of Malayalam-speaking regions was favourable to education through the example of Baroda. When the Diwan of Travancore, Madhava Rao, left Travancore, he became the Diwan of the princely state of Baroda in 1875. There he duplicated the education system he set up in Travancore. The literacy in Baroda was always above the all-India average, but female literacy was only 0.8%, while in Kerala it was between 3% - 4.5% in the different regions in 1901. In 1941, total literacy of Baroda was 23%, which was only slightly more than half that of Travancore and Cochin (Jeffrey, 1987).

Another factor that played a big role in furthering the cause of literacy and education was the existence and dissemination of relatively large numbers of printed materials – books, magazines and newspapers. The newspapers and magazines of the time dealt with political, social and literary matters. There were 28 private presses in Travancore in 1905 which increased to 166 by 1937. There were 89 newspapers and periodicals being printed in Travancore and 40 in Cochin in 1937. The highest circulation rates were around 7000 for the
newspaper *Deepika* in 1940. At the beginning of 20th century, there were 21 libraries which increased to 136 by 1941 in the state (Aiya, 1906; Thampi, 1942). The corresponding figures for Madras Presidency were higher during 1940. The number of newspapers and periodicals published in the Presidency were 917.\(^{134}\) There were 1151 libraries in the Presidency.\(^{135}\) However, Madras Presidency included not just parts of Tamilnadu, but also Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Many local associations emerged for the promotion of the regional language and literature throughout Malayalam-speaking regions as it did in Madras presidency.

This compilation of statistical data on literacy and printing from various sources has been done to show that the high literacy rates in Kerala were the result of a number of factors. Literacy, schooling and education were inter-related in Kerala from the 19th century as I have mentioned before. Women’s education and access to schools were therefore influenced by these various factors. The education debates in the magazines and formal structures of education were in turn influenced and shaped by the first groups with access to literacy, education and printing. Since these groups were mostly the middle castes (including the Christians) the debates were then mostly about issues that concerned them, at least in the early decades of the 20th century.

The details available about the history of education in the 19th century and early 20th century are sketchy and piece-meal. The social history of education, particularly women's history is put together from disparate accounts and the opinions expressed by the policy-makers might not have been shared by the majority of the people. Based on the reports/records perused here certain aspects can be summarized:

- The levels of literacy in different areas of Kerala were influenced by the caste and religious affiliations of the groups residing there, the presence of missionaries, access to further reading (newspapers, books, magazines), and the presence of

---

\(^{134}\) 253 in English, 210 in Tamil, 184 in Telugu, 26 in Kanarese, 24 in Malayalam, and 19 in other languages.

overlords/authorities who were sympathetic and interested in the education of the people.

- Access to education was unequal in the case of various castes. It was influenced by their proximity to various missionary agencies. Even the government was initially interested only in the education of the upper and middle caste groups. It was only by the middle of the 20th century that education became truly accessible to all irrespective of class, caste and sex.

- Current discourse and discussions on education in Kerala do not address the underlying tensions, especially those related to caste. The numerous rules related to caste, like pollution by sight and distance, prohibition of inter-dining, etc. have remoulded itself in other ways, like competition for resources, job opportunities, reluctance to inter-marry, etc. Some of the ways caste difference manifests in the 21st century can be traced back to the early 20th century caste movements, with the formation of official and legal caste groups.

- The missionaries being the first group to enter the field of women's education, had problems with attendance, caste differences and relapse of students into older ways of living, faith, and customs.

- The missionary wife was training her students in a late Victorian model of womanhood, some aspects of which persisted in later systems of schooling.

- The obstacles faced by the different missions were different and depended on the part of Kerala in which they had established themselves in, and the caste constituency of the area.

- In official discourse, school was seen as a place where the student was given some literary and cultural training, while not alienating most of them from their hereditary occupations.
- The Travancore and Cochin rulers had multiple reasons to start educational institutions – enlightenment of the population, moulding citizens faithful to the native rulers, pressure from Madras Presidency, need to retain the image of a 'model state' and thereby to stop the British from taking over the helm, demand from the population (especially the lower castes during the closing years of the 19th century), need to counter the proselytization activities of the missionaries, to make provisions for the education of the upper castes, to bring in modernization, increase revenue, to have citizens with the necessary qualifications to help the government with the newly formed departments, to train women to be better mothers, homemakers and caretakers, etc. Education of the subjects became a necessity for the native governments after the advent of the missionaries and the British.

- At the school level, the authorities were certain that Domestic Science, moral education and hygiene were subjects that had to be included in the curriculum, even if they were only to be optional subjects. However, at the university level, though the authorities were aware that the subjects on offer were not suitable for or interesting to the women students; they were not agreeable to thinking of Domestic Sciences as an alternative. Domestic Science was not recognized as equivalent to other subjects. The authorities were ambivalent as to what might address this issue.

- The policy-makers were also making a distinction between married women and unmarried women. There were distinctions being drawn as to the capabilities of each group. Single women were given a chance to work outside the house and recognized as having a right to earn a living. It was assumed that men would earn for themselves and their wives. The family itself began to be imagined as patrilocal.

- Though special subjects were being instituted for girls, a large number of girls were studying in boys’ schools/colleges and studying the same subjects as boys did.
of these girls were also aspiring for the same kinds of jobs as the boys. Though the
government instituted a few subjects for the perusal of girls, there was no aggressive
follow up to get girls to join these subjects/courses, nor did the government come up
with a comprehensive curriculum to differentiate and/or develop the so-called
differentiated capabilities/capacities and roles of girls and boys. Thus, the separation
of male and female spheres of activities was not entirely successful.

- Disciplining the body of the student was an important aspect of school education. This
  was done by controlling their dress, comportment and meting out punishment.
  Physical punishment was reserved as a last resort and meted out only to boys. This
differentiation of boys and girls was another way in which gendering took place at
schools.

The history of education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the 19th and early 20th
centuries may not be unique. However, certain trajectories taken by the different communities
in the region as a result of access to education lead to a higher literacy rate in the mid 20th
century when compared to the rest of India. This was accompanied by better health
conditions, lower infant mortality rates and lower growth rates. Though, women in the region
were better educated than their counter parts in other parts of India, this did not translate into
increased autonomy or control over their own lives. The government and the missionaries re-
introduced the idea of the separate spheres/roles of girls and boys. Some of the ideas
connected to the separate spheres/roles were taken from the traditional roles of women and
men, but there were also new ideas being introduced. These ideas and practices were a result
of the amalgamation of ideas happening in the colonial period with elements from Victorian
England, missionary ideals, government policies, community needs, etc. Though the
government tried to introduce courses/subjects to develop what they understood as the
inherent/innate qualities of girls/women the policies were not aggressive enough or
interesting enough for the women to demand for more such courses. It became increasingly easier for women to seek employment outside the space of the home. However they had to do this in a manner that did not threaten their sthreethwam or disrupt the space of the domestic. This led to a different kind of individuation of the Malayali women, who were simultaneously being placed within the space of the domestic. The space of the domestic was also reconfigured during this time, which was shaped in middle class and caste notions influenced by Victorian, Protestant missionary and nationalistic ideals.

In the policy decisions the government agents tended to vacillate between imagining women’s education as an extension of teaching them domestic duties and providing them with the same opportunities open to men, training them to be self sufficient and thereby providing them with a chance at individuation. The tensions that accrued with imagining women’s duties as being related to the home and the public was negotiated partly by the gendering of the public sphere. This was not a sharp/clear cut division. Thus married women could teach/work as long as it did not interfere with their domestic duties/obligations. Work itself was being gendered by associating certain “feminine” or “masculine” qualities with certain kinds of work. With each generation of women entering the workforce, the demarcation of “feminine” and “masculine” work became less rigid, which explains how women came to be in a wider range of jobs/professions in each decade in the early 20th century. But in the process of women encroaching on jobs traditionally thought to be masculine and thereby pushing certain boundaries, their sthreethwam/femininity was placed more rigidly on them. The constitutive elements of sthreethwam and sthreedharmam had changed as I have shown in the preceding chapter. So even when Malayali women appeared to have more education and opportunities than earlier generations they were also more firmly ensconced within a (hegemonic) frame that dictated their actions, thoughts and autonomy.

* * * * *
Section II

Model women: through the textbooks

This section analyses a few textbooks that were in use during the first half of the 20th century: three novels and a collection of biographical essays. The fictional works are not original: the novels and the play are free translations of English and Sanskrit works. It was serendipitous that of the dozens of dilapidated and moth eaten books pulled out of various libraries, five turned out to be texts used in schools in various years. Therefore this section cannot claim to be a comprehensive study of the syllabus of the period, but rather a study of whatever was available. In the three fictional works analysed in this section, the writers have paid more attention to the content and to translating the language/culture of the original works (so that the Malayali reader might understand it) than to the form of the prose/genre. There is no data available about the authors of the novels and essays used in this section. The fictional narratives are written by men from the Nair caste (deduced from the surname). Some of the issues and ideas that are discussed in the fictional material had direct relevance to matrilineal communities. I am not doing a detailed criticism of the materials but pointing to some of the important aspects that are relevant to the issues of gender, female individuation, culture and caste in the early 20th century.

The novel Chaaritraraksha (Protecting Chastity) by P. Kunjiraman Nair is a free translation from Ramayana (Nair, 1931/2). This particular text was approved by the Madras and Cochin Text Book Committee and prescribed as a Malayalam non-detailed text for the S.S.L.C. Examination of 1933. It falls in the category of mythological prose. Throughout India, the mythological literature has derived its plot from Sanskrit epics, puranas, and even Buddhist lore. Mythological literature has created a structure of perceptions on which are created new allegories, fables, parables and archetypes. In India, mythological themes are
usually found in the genres of poetry and drama. It is rarely found in prose form. The novels accommodate the mythological theme when it is worked out allegorically (Das, 2006). Chaaritraraksha is written in the form of a novel with conversations set out separately, like in the structure of a drama. There are vivid descriptions about the characters, the expressions on their faces, their internal monologues and Nature. There are no scenes or acts, but chapters. It is an allegorical prose about protecting the chastity of the woman.

Writers from different parts of India writing in different times and using different genres have focused on four important episodes in Ramayana: the marriage of Sita, the incident of the golden deer, the abduction of Sita, and the banishment of Sita (Das, 2006). This particular text contains incidents from the time Sita was kidnapped by Ravan and her purification by fire episode at Lanka. Sita has always been the model/ideal woman in Hindu culture/religion. She treads a fine line between a flesh and blood woman and a minor goddess in the Indian psyche. In speaking about the formation of goddesses, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan mentions that they were often an embodiment of attributes like justice, wealth, learning, etc. in the female figure/body. Indices of the status of women like female sex-ratios, life expectancy, literacy, income, subjection to violence, equality of opportunity, income, legal equality, etc. show up poorly in societies that have goddesses (Sunder Rajan, 1998). And Sita, the minor goddess, is re-introduced to Malayali students at the time that some of these indices were changing (some for the better).

According to the reformers, Sita has been the epitome of a woman in sync with her sthreedharmam. Paradoxically she has been used by proto Indian feminists as an example of

---

136 Allegory is a narrative strategy. It is a device in which characters or events represent or symbolize ideas, concepts, modes of life, and/or types. For details, see: Abrams and Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms.

137 Though there are strong regional Goddess figures, they are not worshipped throughout Kerala in the same way Durga is worshipped in Bengal and other places.
the emancipation of “modern Indian woman”. Sita following her husband into the forest was often read by the proto feminists as an example of women’s partnership with men in ancient India. Women were seen as the symbol of India’s glorious past, where they also bore the burden of saving the nation. In this mode it was women’s duties that were more important than their rights. Sita was mostly used as a submissive heroine to perpetuate the subordinate and dependant role of women in textbooks and as a role model in the socialisation of girls (Pauwels, 2008; Sunder Rajan, 1998). The figure of Sita was invoked time and again by the Malayalam magazine writers, fictional and non-fictional alike, as an ideal.

The reworking of this episode in the Ramayana emphasised certain religious and ethical value system. And this reworking was not simply a search for religious meaning, but it was also a reworking of the past. While one part of the intended reader was unquestionably Hindu, the novel was also meant for a secular and general reader. Sita’s steadfastness, chastity, purity, obedience and love for her husband and faith in him are the qualities that are focused on in this novel. The other characters are also endowed with imitable qualities: Lakshman’s loyalty and love, Hanuman’s loyalty, Mandhodari’s love and chastity. Raman’s character is firmly rooted in patience, understanding, generosity, and a sense of duty.

Desire is one important theme which is interwoven into the idea of chastity. In this version of the epic, Sita is shown as not just chaste, but also someone who is in control of her desire. At one point, Shoorpanaka asks Lakshmanan how they could be leading the life of ascetics when Raman is with Sita. Lakshmanan replies that they live like siblings, (implying that bodily desire has no place in their lives). At another point, on hearing Raman’s cries for help (false cries as it turns out later) Lakshmanan is reluctant to leave Sita unprotected at their forest abode. Sita insinuates that Lakshmanan is doing so under the dictates of his (unholy)

---

138 Sarojini Naidu had used the figure of Sita with selective reinterpretation as an example for the ‘modern Indian woman’ in the early 20th century. See: Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels, The Goddess as Role Model: Sita and Radha in Scripture and on the Screen (New York: Oxford, 2008).
desire for her. She pays for this transgression when she is abducted by Ravan and feels remorse for doubting Lakshmanan. Desire outside the space of the conjugal unit also brings with it dire consequences. It is Ravan’s desire for Sita that leads to his downfall. Ravan is aggressive and guided by kama, desire that is not based on love. Shoorpanaka too, pays for desiring first Raman and then later Lakshmanan, who are described as desirable: ideal men with strong and well proportioned bodies, wide chest, strong and long arms and masculine eyes. Desire has no legitimate space in this series of episodes (and this version of) of Ramayana. At Lanka, when Raman sees Sita after a long time, she appears all decked out in jewellery/finery to him (which the reader is told was the effect of a boon Sita had received). She appears desirable to Raman, and it is her desirability that causes him to doubt her for a moment. The representation of desire and sex was not a new phenomenon in Indian literature. Pre-colonial and nineteenth century literature had strong erotic elements. But from late 19th century sex/desire/eroticism became a controversial subject in Indian literature (Das, 2000).

In Malayalam literature for young readers, desire is not just taboo, but also becomes antagonistic to the virtue of chastity.

This particular text should be read in the background of the existence of matrilineal and patrilineal joint families in Malayalam-speaking regions where the husband and wife were slowly becoming a separate unit from the joint family. The primary duty of the woman and the man until then would have been towards taking care of the needs of the extended family which included older women, men and children. When Sita and Raman are posited as the ideal couple, it is not just the idea of chastity and loyalty to each other that is being lauded, but also the concept of the new conjugal unit. Though Sita is not portrayed as being mired in everyday domesticity, she is also not a person in her own right. She has no completion as a person when she is away from Raman.

V.T. Sankunnimenon’s Aranyapremam (Pastoral Love) is the translation of
Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (Sankunnimenon, 1931). The author wanted to familiarise Malayali students with great works from English. However, he set the story in Kerala, with Malayali characters, local dialects and some of the incidents have also been made to relate to Malayali customs in order to make it more realistic to a Malayali reader. The story is told in fourteen chapters, which also differs from the structure of the original play. There are descriptions of nature, descriptions of the internal thought processes of the characters and so on, different from a typical dramatic structure. This work is meant to be read rather than staged like *Chaaritraraksha*. Thus, even though the storyline is borrowed from the West, it is neither merely imitative nor derivative, but acquires a unique flavour of its own. Sankunnimenon chose the title of the play following the tradition of Rabindranath Tagore and others who according to him were attracted to the theme of pastoral love in this play.\(^1\) This play was prescribed as a textbook for the SSLC examination by the Madras Textbook Committee in 1932. The novel draws from the English/European traditions of Romance\(^2\) and Tragicomedy\(^3\) like its original *The Tempest*. The marriage of Prabhavati is the main theme of the play. She is the ideal woman brought up in seclusion. The prince, Marthandavarman, considers her the finest woman he has met. Her education and comportment set her apart. She is innocent, forgiving, kind, and pleasant.

\(^1\) Tagore had written an essay in Bengali in 1907, comparing *The Tempest* with Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. According to contemporary critics, Tagore actually read *The Tempest* as a story of power and domination at a time when most other critics were reading it as an epitome of pastoral romance. For details, see: Paul Skrebels and Sieta Van Der Hoeven, eds., *For All Time?: Critical Issues in Teaching Shakespeare* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2002).

\(^2\) Romance is a style of prose/verse that was in vogue in early modern Europe. They were fantastic stories with adventures, often with a knight portrayed as having heroic qualities who goes on a quest. For details, see: Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

\(^3\) Tragicomedy is a genre that blends the characteristics of both tragic and comic forms. It is often used to describe a serious play with a happy ending or a tragic play with comic elements to lighten the mood. The important agents in a tragicomedy included people from the higher classes and lower classes. For details, see: Ibid.
Marthandavarman is enslaved by Prabhavati’s father to facilitate love between the two. When Baskaravarman, her father, frees the prince, he entrusts the latter with Prabhavati. However, he tells the prince that if he takes her without the sanction of the sacred ritual of marriage conducted around the fire amidst the holy chanting of the priests, their relationship will never be happy and may cause peril. Baskaravarman does not want her to become the prince’s concubine. This emphasis on virginity, chastity etc. of the woman in a textbook for 15-year-olds is repeatedly seen in other textbooks from the same period. This is an extension of similar discussions in the social sphere on the attributes of the modern Malayali woman, her character, her qualities, her education, her dressing, and also her place within the family. The marriage practice among the matrilineal groups did not involve a ceremony around the fire. This play was written around the time the various Marumakkathayam laws were being discussed and put into place. The “Sambandham” itself was under scrutiny and being touted as indecent as mentioned before (Arunima, 2003; Kodoth, 2002; Kodoth, 2001). In other spaces there were discussions taking place on the pros and cons of love marriages and arranged marriages (Editorial, 1928a; Kalyanikuttyamma, 1928; Karott, 1928; V.C.A., 1928). Here the text seems to suggest that love becomes legitimate only when it culminates in a lawfully sanctioned Sanskritic marriage ritual.

Another major theme is that of ownership of land, about colonialism: who is the rightful ruler, who is allowed to rule, who is civilized, and what are the markers of civilization. A gandharvan, Gaganacharan, helps Baskaravarman with keeping the other occupants of the island in line. He is grateful to Baskaravarman for freeing him from imprisonment inside a rock, but he is also impatient to finish his bondage to the latter. As a

---

142 In Indian mythology, gandharvas are male nature spirits. They have superb musical skills. From: Monier Monier-Williams, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeller, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymological and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999).
spirit, Gaganacharan has no rights to the island though he lives there. The island belonged to the human servant of Baskaravarman, Khalabadan. When Baskaravarman is stranded on the island, he becomes the owner of the island. His mystical powers, learning and knowledge give him the authority to rule over the other inhabitants: Khalabadan and Gaganacharan.

The domestic help cum native of the island, Khalabadan, speaks a particular northern Muslim dialect in the play. The father and the daughter speak a semi-literary upper caste Hindu language, to show their refinement. The upper class characters all speak a variant of this language. There could be two reasons for the particular Muslim dialect attributed to Khalabadan: Lakshadweep where the play was set had a predominantly Muslim population, and in Malabar (where the book was published) the lower classes were mostly Muslims. Baskaravarman reminds Khalabadan how he had taught him language, and tried to make him civilised. But Khalabadan had shown no improvement and tried to violate his daughter’s modesty. Ideally, he should have kept Khalabadan in chains since that was what he deserved, instead had allowed him to live on the other side of the island. The idea of colonialism is tied to the chastity/virginity of the woman. The native is under chains to preserve the modesty of the daughter of the coloniser. Like in Chaaritraraksha, desire has no place outside the conjugal space. And love is allowed only between intellectual and social equals [The marriage between socially equal caste members was an issue of debate and discussion among the Hindu communities and will be explored in detail in the next chapter.]. Khalabadan has no right to desire Prabhavati because he is not educated or refined in a manner acceptable to Baskaravarman and cannot speak the language of the upper caste. There is a valorising of upper caste Hindu customs in this text. The differences between the utterances of characters indicate differentiated access to power and resources.

This text, like the others, had specific traits attributed to the male and female characters. Even the language used by the male and female characters is very different. The
daughter is soft and feminine in her utterances, the father and the prince use a more masculine and harsh language. For instance, the father says to Khalabadan:

Why are you nodding your head? Sourhead! I will break your bones if you refuse to comply or show reluctance in carrying out my orders; your screams will draw out the wild beasts (Sankunnimenon, 1931: 29).

Prabhavati is submissive and obedient to her father. She does not rebel or raise her voice even when he gives her orders that appear unjust. The same is true for Sita as well. The one instance when Sita resorts to harsh language and disobeys Lakshmanan, she pays the price in the form of her abduction.

*Sateeratnam* (Sati) by N. Sankaran Nair was used as a textbook by the Madras and Cochin Textbook Committee in 1931 (Nair, 1930). The author says in the preface that it was a free translation of a Sanskrit play. This could be *Charudatta* by Bhasa,\(^\text{143}\) which was later adapted by Shudraka in 6 Century A.D. as *Mrichakatika* about the life of a courtesan. Like the other two textbooks mentioned before, this work was written in a format that was a mix of drama and novel. *Sateeratnam* is written in 26 chapters while the original Sanskrit play combines a political and love intrigue in ten acts. The main theme of *Sateeratnam* is about a devadasi, Vaasanthasena, falling in love with an impoverished Brahmin, Chaarudhatthan.\(^\text{144}\)

The choice of the title (probably chosen by the author since the original title was different) illustrates the importance given to the figure of Sati: in this story it could be either

---

\(^\text{143}\) Bhasa was a celebrated Sanskrit playwright who was supposed to have lived either in the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) century B.C. or in the 5\(^{\text{th}}\) century B.C.

\(^\text{144}\) At the end, overcoming several obstacles she becomes his wife. The moral of the story, according to the author, is the destruction of an Indian King as a result of his shortcomings in upholding the ideals of Truth, propriety, charity, piety, chastity, etc. However the king does not appear in any of the scenes. The larger issue is the breakdown of law and order: an innocent man is accused of a crime that was never committed, a city where women were not safe, where thieves abound and so on. Towards the end of the novel, a fugitive overthrows the king and becomes the new ruler.
Vaasanthesa or Dootha, Chaarudhathan’s wife,\textsuperscript{145} who gets ready to enter the pyre on hearing about the judicial order to execute Chaarudhathan. Sati in the novel is a reference to the goddess than the practice of sati. The goddess Sati was the first wife of Lord Shiva. Her devotion and asceticism attracts Shiva’s attention. She lures him into marriage so that he could be incorporated into the world and enters the role of the householder to utilize his energies in a positive manner (Kinsley, 1986). Later she commits suicide when her husband is insulted by her father. Her act is that of a faithful wife who cannot endure the insults to her husband. It is this act of faith, love and devotion, (which paradoxically in the myth brings grief to the husband and breaks that relationship) that had been taken up by the practitioners of the sati and by the novelist.

The focus of the novel is on the character and aspirations of Vaasanthesa. She is steadfast in her love. She is also generous: when she hears that Chaarudhathan’s son wants a gold cart to play with, she gives them her ornaments to buy the toy. She is kind: when her maid and friend falls in love with a Brahmin, who had taken to thievery to earn money to buy the girl’s freedom, Vaasanthesa lets her leave without any fuss. Born into a devadasi community, her salvation is her chastity and devotion to Chaarudhathan. Another character Vidan asks her why she does not want to follow her hereditary profession:

\textit{Vidan: Hey Vaasanthesa! Why are you opposed to following your caste occupation?}

\textit{Vaasanthesa: There is nothing called a caste occupation. There is only eternal \textit{dharma}. For a woman it is truth, propriety, faith in god, chastity, etc. (Nair, 1930: 5).}

This play becomes a text in Malayalam-speaking regions at a time the figure of the devadasi

\textsuperscript{145} Dootha is also a virtuous and chaste woman. When Vaasanthesa’s pearl jewels left with Chaarudhathan are stolen, she immediately gives her priceless gem necklace to him to replace Vaasanthesa’s stolen one. Her love for her husband is self-effacing: when he marries Vaasanthesa, she accepts the decision without dissent.
was being discussed in the public sphere. The abolition of the devadasi system was part of the larger reform movement related to women. It was not only seen as being detrimental to women, but also as a threat to the institution of marriage. In this novel, Vaasanhasena escapes the devadasi system, not through education, but by marriage. It should be remembered that the earliest supporters of modern education for Malayali women had staunchly argued that education/schooling would not make the woman fall into prostitution. From the devadasi known as a vessel of culture – of music, dancing and entertainment – the then modern woman took up the mantle of being the bearer of culture.

Desire or illegitimate desire is the cause of the downfall of the villain in this play. The king’s brother-in-law, Shakaaran, desires Vaasanhasena. She does not reciprocate this desire. His downfall is the result of his illegitimate desire for Vaasanhasena and the other vices which follow from this: anger, murder, slander, and selfishness. At the same time that Shakaaran is exposed as being guilty, the king of the country is overthrown and the former loses his position in court. Thus, the narrative is also about the triumph of good over evil. In this play, the focus is not on the education of the characters, but rather on their virtue.

This play is also about the fashioning of the self and the formation of the family. Vaasanhasena is able to escape the boundaries of her caste and find a place within a family.

146 In 1926 the devadasi system was abolished by the Travancore Maharani. The government had pensioned off devadasis supported by it, in spite of their protests, in 1930. In Cochin, a bill was presented and passed for the prevention of the devadasi system in 1931. The Madras Legislative Council had passed the Hindu Religious Endowment Act of 1929 to initiate a ban on the devadasi system.

147 The politically correct term to use would be sex work, but since this text is from the early 20th century I use a term that was in common use then.

148 When the devadasi was taken out of the picture, dance was removed of the stigma of sexual immorality and could be added to the canon of legitimate art. The Papworth Committee had suggested (in 1946) dance as an optional subject that girls could take up. The different kinds/sub-genres of dance became acceptable art form in later years. For details on the devadasis and the legitimisation of dance see: Devika, En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-Forming in Twentieth Century Keralam.

149 Shakaaran kidnaps Vaasanhasena and tries to kill her. He then falsely accuses Chaarudhatan of her murder. She appears at the place where Chaarudhatan is to be executed and saves him.
Once she falls in love with Chaarudhathan, she is chaste and her focus is only on him. The same cannot be said for Chaarudhathan: he falls in love with her while already married and the father of a child. But his love for her is an affection that is not mere desire: his love for her arises out of his realization of her nobility of character, her generosity and intelligence. Though polygamy was outlawed in Kerala by 1920, since this novel was set in an earlier time when it was the customary practice, his actions do not stand out and are not presented as being a moral transgression. If one looks at most of the early novels and plays set within the Nair-Namboothiri homestead, there is a clear pattern that emerges: it is the woman who has to decide between a lover of her choice and one chosen by the family. There is usually no such choice given to the man. It is the woman’s chastity, steadfastness and freedom of choice that is highlighted. The narratives often hinge on this one focal point.

Since this section cannot claim to be a comprehensive study of all the textbooks in use in the early 20th century, it would be presumptuous to claim that it seems as if polygamy was more acceptable than polyandry. Certain studies on the matrilineal families did claim that polyandry was present in Malayalam-speaking regions (Mateer, 1871). The nature of polyandrous relationships and their existence was a highly contested issue: some scholars termed it a different kind of non-marital sexual relationship. The nature/kind of sexual relationship among the matrilineal communities was under scrutiny (Arunima, 2003; Mann, 1996). In the light of such a situation it becomes interesting to see how other kinds of marriages/sexual liaisons were put out in the public sphere, especially through reading materials for young students.

Sanskrit literature had a venerated position in Indian history. Malayalam literature used to borrow heavily from Sanskrit language/ literature. The use of translations from Sanskrit was an extension of this history. Elsewhere in India, as part of a scholarly strategy of

\[150\] *Indulekha, Sharada, Parangodiparinayam, and Lakshmikesavam* are examples of popular Malayalam novels that follow this pattern.
assertion against rapid Westernization and as part of dissemination of Brahmanical learning and Indian classical heritage, many works from Sanskrit were being translated into native languages. These texts were used as chains to link the literature of the past with the present (Das, 2006). An important event with relation to Sanskrit scholarship was the discovery of the plays of Bhasa in Travancore in 1912. Thereafter a large number of writers translated his work into other languages including Malayalam (Das, 2006). Thus Sateeratnam could have been chosen as a text in the background of these incidents/movements.

A collection of essays called *Mahathikal* (Great Women) was a textbook used in Malabar in 1922 and in 1940. It contains short biographical accounts of Queen Victoria, Chand Bibi, Tarabai, Florence Nightingale, Queen Alexandra, Krishna Kumari, Sarah Martin, Rani Padmini, Bharati, Yohanna (Joan of Arc), Maharani Swarnamayi, and Rani Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi. Biographies were considered important by the Travancore Maharaja himself, who translated some life sketches from Samuel Maunder’s *The Biographical Treasury: a Dictionary of Universal Biography* (1851) in the late 19th century (Pillai, 1998). With the advent of the textbook committee set up in Travancore in 1866, biographies were a part of the school curriculum (Kumar, 2008). Biographies in Kerala generally dealt with people in the fields of literature-art, politics, social service, and religious-spiritual spheres. Women who worked in all the fields – Indian and British royalty, a few British philanthropists, and Indian intelligentsia – are included in this collection. The focus is on these women’s virtue. Since the text is meant for a young teenage reader, some of the indiscretions of the characters are not mentioned and sometimes the exact opposite is portrayed as the truth.

The Victorianisation of Malayali women is evident in that the first essay in the text is on Queen Victoria. Queen Victoria represented a femininity centred on family, motherhood and respectability. She was also considered the epitome of marital stability and domestic
virtue. The chapter gives a concise sketch of her life with focus on her different roles as wife, mother and queen. A salient feature of her childhood, according to the text, was that she was brought up in a normal and decent family. She was taught the value of money and to use it economically. The young princess was not allowed to attend the coronation of her uncle (she was his heir presumptive), and according to the chapter, this was done in accordance with the idea of inculcating humility and modesty. Other biographers of Queen Victoria’s life comment on the strained relationship between her mother and the King. The King had a number of illegitimate children by his mistress, who were allowed in court, and the Countess did not approve of them.\textsuperscript{151} One instance in the new queen’s life (Queen Victoria) that is highlighted is from her coronation ceremony, when she helps an old duke who stumbles in the middle of the ceremony. She gets up to catch him, and this is portrayed as part of the womanly anxiety that is integral to her character, that is also praiseworthy. As the Queen, her life was seen as a good example for other women. She refuses to make public appearances after Prince Albert dies. The narration implicitly approves of this withdrawal from public life.

There is a romancing of the domestic life especially in the descriptions of Queen Victoria’s life in the country, instances of her daughters cooking and keeping house for their parents, the queen and her daughters stitching clothes for soldiers taking part in the Crimean war and so on. The public aspects of her life are glossed over or omitted to give prominence to the domestic aspects of her life. This could have been because (a) the author could have been highlighting aspects of her life and English culture that would be comprehensible to 15-year-old Malayali students or (b) part of the larger project of gendering women and imagining the space of the domestic as being an extension of their womanly capacities.

The latter argument seems to hold true for how the textbooks generally present the women characters. Women were portrayed as being feminine instinctually and it is their femininity that makes them do certain things or show interest in certain activities. So even when a warrior like Yohanna takes to the battle field it is because faith and religion were read as part of women’s duties. For most of these women, the student is told, the nation and its people were more important than their personal needs. Like in the magazines, catering to the needs of the nation was seen as being part of a woman’s duties since their natural capacities/qualities make these social activities possible. It is their instinctual nature that makes a Florence Nightingale or a Sarah Martin\textsuperscript{152} take to social work in this text. Sati, a practice not commonly found in Kerala, is valorised in the stories of Tarabai\textsuperscript{153} and Rani Padmini.\textsuperscript{154} Death was seen as being better than losing one’s chastity. The author was probably not trying to sanctify Sati, but rather the emotion behind the action: the image of the obedient and adoring wives, devoting their lives, subsuming their comforts, and modulating their desires to that of their spouses. The author even mentions that satis (women who commit sati) considered death as a better option to living without their husbands. In truth, in the case of Rani Padmini, it could well have been the fear of having to submit to/raped by/taken prisoner by the conquering army.

Marriage and chastity were themes the writer invokes over and over again – themes and qualities thought to belong to women and the domestic realm. The domestic realm itself was reorganized to include certain qualities and activities that were at odds with the submissive and retiring nature of women. In the essay on Rani Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi

\textsuperscript{152} Sarah Martin was a British philanthropist; she earned her living by dressmaking, and devoted much of her time amongst criminals in the Tollhouse Gaol in Great Yarmouth.

\textsuperscript{153} She was the wife of Prithviraj, Prince of Mewar. She fought alongside him in the battle of Toda and committed sati on his death.

\textsuperscript{154} Rani Padmini (Padmavati in the essay) was the queen of Chittoor and the wife of King Rawal Ratan Singh. She steps into a pyre to save her honour from the covetous Sultan Alauddin.
Bayi the author mentions that Malayali women should emulate the bravery she displayed on behalf of her husband (Narayananmenon, 1939a). It was not so much the bravery, but the fact she stood up for her husband that made the action a virtue. The main feature of the women portrayed in the text is their selflessness. These women had set aside and/or given up their life for something they believed in. Courage is made feminine or part of sthreethwam by connecting it to the sthreedharmam of love towards family and nation. The women, who were depicted as working towards the larger ideal of the nation/state in the texts, usually sacrificed themselves for the greater good in the narratives.

When women were shown as having qualities that were inherent, there was also the argument put forth that these qualities were latent and often had to be developed. One such quality was that of empathy and kindness. For example, the essayist laments that Malayali women were not well known in other parts of India because they had not developed their altruistic qualities. Figures like Rani Lakshmi Bayi were the exceptions that proved the rule. This was also the reason that education was seen as necessary: to develop the inherent qualities in women. Rani Lakshmi Bayi was taught Malayalam and Sanskrit by her mother and after her adoption into the royal family she learned drawing, painting, etc. from trained

155 The Rani’s consort was the famous poet and writer, called the father of Malayalam literature, Sri Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran. In 1860, the Rani’s adoptive uncle, Maharajah Ayilyam Thirunal succeeded to the throne. Both Ayilyam Thirunal and his brother Visakham Thirunal were initially close to Kerala Varma. However in the 1870s there occurred a palace conspiracy, involving Visakham Thirunal, Kerala Varma and the Diwan T. Madhava Rao and the three got alienated from the Maharajah. Matters took a turn for the worse when Kerala Varma was arrested by the Maharajah in 1875 and imprisoned at Alapuzha (north Travancore). The Rani’s entreaties to the Maharajah to forgive her husband were met with no sympathy and so she proposed to go with him. But the Maharajah refused to permit this and constrained her in her palace. At the same time from all quarters she was pressurized to leave Kerala Varma and accept a new consort. The Rani refused and to force her, her allowances were cut off by the Maharajah. She managed her affairs with loans taken from influential people. For details, see: Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Manual, T. K. Velu Pillai, The Travancore State Manual, vol. II (Thiruvananthapuram: 1940).
tutors in the palace.\textsuperscript{156} The Rani was an expert on music as well as literature. The educational levels (or lack) of the women were referred to in most of the essays. Other than Bharati and Rani Lakshmi Bayi, none of the other women were learned. And their learning was not for self-advancement, but for the good of those they loved or for the society. For those without a formal education, some skill was substituted that was again utilised towards the good of society. Altruism was another quality that was desirable and bracketed as inherently feminine.

Another textbook of the period, \textit{Aadarsharathnangal} (Ideal People), was a collection of essays for Class V (Achutavarier, 1939). It had short excerpts from the lives of 21 women and men from history. The historical figures are Gette, William Tell, Padmini, Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, Bertrand, Julius Caesar, Columbus, Akbar, Shivaji, Champlain, Buddha, David Livingstone, Mungo Park, Noorjahan, and others. The figure of Padmini is repeated in two textbooks written and edited by two different authors for different levels of students and published in the same year. This could well be a coincidence. In this text for 9 to 10-year-olds, the main focus is on the qualities of bravery and courage. The chapter on Padmini ends thus:

After several days of intense battle, the Rajputs started losing. Seeing this, the women in the kingdom, made a huge pyre inside the palace and gave up their lives in the fire.

Simultaneously, the men went out, fought bravely and manfully and attained salvation (Achutavarier, 1939: 14).

These texts show the process of gendering of the male and the female students in formal education. There were qualities that were assigned as specifically female and male. Women were exhorted to keep to altruistic activities – to become little Florence Nightingales. This was one of the legitimate public activities that seemed to be allowed to them. Of the

\textsuperscript{156} Rani Lakshmi Bayi and her cousin Parvathi Bayi were adopted by the Travancore Royal family when there was a succession crisis in 1857. Rani Lakshmi Bayi held the position of the Senior Rani till her death in 1901.
entire list of historical women, Bharati is the only one who is learned and intelligent. However, it is not her intelligence that is fore-grounded; instead it is her sense of fairness, and self-effacing quality. And she is venerable not on her own merit, but because Sankaracharya was impressed by her knowledge. Some of the women display characteristics gendered ‘male’ like bravery and skill in warfare, but they are contained by obedience, modesty, love and chastity. Their courage is needed only when the occasion demands it. This is different from a mode of invoking the image of the militant goddess/heroic woman towards propagandist and reformist end to mobilise women to participate in the nationalist struggle, and to provide an inspirational symbolic focus the way it was done by Hindu nationalist in the 19th century and in the decades leading up to the freedom movement (Sunder Rajan, 1998). The goddess figure is often deployed as Prakriti, nature as feminine principle, and as Shakti, the autonomous force of the destructive goddess. Here the potential Shakti figure is taken up and toned down to fit the Prakriti principle.

There are certain points that can be drawn from the analysis of the novels/plays and essays in this section:

- The novels and the plays were about the fashioning of the self, within the frame of the family and the larger frame of the community/nation.
- In the textbooks, a demi-goddess, a naïve young girl, a devadasi, and queens have certain common qualities: chastity, obedience, education, domestic capabilities, modesty, altruism, courage when required, prudence, and beauty. These qualities were portrayed as being present in women from various locations, time, class, caste, community, and stages of life. This representation was mostly based on the figure of the modern educated Nair woman, but certain aspects of the Victorian ideal of the woman, the nationalist ideal of the woman and the missionary idea of the Christian woman was also present.
In the case of the imagined women, bodily beauty was framed within the colour and shape of the body, shape of the eyes, and length of hair, kind of clothes worn and use of ornaments. In the case of the men, the descriptions were about their strength, the firmness of the body, their courage and valour in battle. Thus, the textbooks took up and disseminated the gendering of qualities termed feminine and masculine.

Desire was one axis along which the story moved in the fiction. In the textbooks, both fictional and non-fictional, the presence of desire was negated and/or cleansed.

The position of the woman within the family changed with the move to patriliny and the move away from the joint family. For the Nair woman, this move ensconced her firmly within domesticity. Representations of other “real” women imitated this move, by selective highlighting and glorification.

The narratives were usually about/based on the middle class and the upper class women. Thus, the models provided to the young students (in print) were also about the values/traditions/customs/culture of this group.

It is the “feminine” qualities of the women that move forward the narratives, whether fictional or non-fictional. What the narratives also simultaneously do is to bracket certain qualities as being specifically “feminine”. These narratives about women seem to be conflicted: tensions between conceptualising women as being instinctual and attributing reason to them (they are shown as being capable of discerning between right/wrong, good/bad, and of having self-control once they have developed their *sthreeethwam* through appropriate education), tension between *sthreedharmam* (or women’s duties) towards the public and *sthreedharmam* towards the home, and finally indecision as to whether education should lead to female individuation or merely adequate exposure to modern domestic ideologies. The few teaching materials that have been analysed here seem to suggest that women were mostly seen as having only three duties, towards the husband, the children and
society (and other relatives). Even when attributing women with reason, the reason was expected to lead them towards the space of the domestic or towards protecting the space of the domestic.

The previous chapter brings into focus predominantly women’s voices in the debates pertaining to women’s education in Malayalam-speaking regions in the 19th and 20th centuries. This chapter focuses on the voice of the policy-makers in the debates on women’s education. However, due to the vastness of the area it cannot claim to be an exhaustive study of all the nuances and counter currents in the ideology on women’s education. The focus has been on the history of modern education and writings around curricular material to throw some light on how women’s education was perceived by policy-makers. Though the two sections of this chapter deal with different genres of writing, they are very similar in how they imagine the figure of the woman, her capabilities, talents and duties. Women were taken from the folds of their communities/caste groups and placed within the category ‘Woman’ for policy purposes. The category ‘Woman’ that the policy-makers imagine does not belong to any particular community. While the matrilineal origins of some of the government agents are clear in their writings, the policy-makers (who were from different communities and not just matrilineal communities) in general take a secular middle class position. Both policy decisions and curricular material imagined the ‘Woman’ as being irrevocably connected to the domestic realm. They saw women as having certain qualities that were universal like the ability to love, nurture, patience, chastity, love of beauty (not just physical beauty, but appreciation of beautiful things like laces, embroidery etc.), generosity, altruism, humility, etc.

The few textbooks analysed here mirror the concerns/interests/themes taken up by the policy-makers even when the writers might not have been part of the larger policy making bodies. Subjects like music, hygiene and domestic economy that were included in the
curriculum is shown as talents and as being intrinsic to the female characters in fictional and non-fictional material. Issues like matrilineal laws, devadasi system, polygamy which were being discussed in the public sphere found their way into the textbooks.

In the beginning stages of modern education, Malayali women had no agential role in developing the curriculum being taught to them. In the 20th century, the government agents mention that women educators were consulted in the process. So, the decisions were not always taken by male agents. The decisions on the direction female education should take was influenced by policies followed in British India, Britain, America, Japan and other parts of the world. It was also influenced by social and political movements in Malayalam-speaking regions. While the government does not use the term per se, sthreedharmam of the woman was an important aspect of the discussions on women’s formal educational structures. The government policies show that there was an all pervading sense that certain qualities and roles were intrinsic to women. Education could not be seen as taking women away from her sthreedharmam.

From the beginning, the space of the domestic was linked to the feminine (that did not mean that there were no opposing impulses, ideas and practices in this overarching ideology). The government does try to take this into account while formulating special courses/subjects for women. But the government could also not afford to spend too much effort and money on the special needs of women. Moreover, there was no clarity among the government agents as to whether women needed only useful skills (vocational training and/or domestic science) or they needed (arts & culture education) accomplishments. The debates/discussions on women’s education were thus about imagining or putting together the sthreedharmam of the woman. The system of co-education (by choice or necessity) meant that special subjects could not be implemented successfully. In addition, the students/parents were not particularly insistent about having special subjects for girls/women in Malayalam-speaking regions. So in
the 20th century, the first and second generation of educated women were part of a formal educational structure that was not radically different from that given to men. Yet the sense of difference persisted in the way the textbooks were put together; the way certain jobs/professions were marked out as being masculine/feminine or the way the role models were presented to girls. Through the curriculum, gender difference became an important marker of the self for the girls/boys, more so than their caste/community affiliations. If one takes the idea of gender as being the principal of differentiating human beings in early 20th century Kerala, then it helps to understand why this difference was played up in the textbooks. When there was a simultaneous move taking place to differentiate purely academic education with practical education, the gender difference was taken into account in this as well.

The policies taken up by the government or the missionaries in the early 20th century were not really geared towards the individuation of the female subject. However, the government (and the missionaries) was also not aiming to produce women whose only ambition was the care and nurturing of the domestic. Malayali women/girls were presented with role models (missionary women, teachers, and historical, literary and mythological women) who were different from the traditional women in their communities. Women/girls were expected to have knowledge of a wider range of subjects/skills than an earlier generation of women. All of these meant that the interest of the educated women was not limited to traditional domesticity. The space of the domestic itself gets reconfigured with the emergence of the modern educated Malayali women. When the space of the domestic is reconfigured sthreedharmam also gets re-fashioned. Thus, from the beginning, female individuation in Malayalam-speaking regions was different from that happening in other regions of India as a result of the particular trajectories taken by educationists and the people/communities themselves in Malayalam-speaking regions. Further studies of the way
communities/caste groups put together their educational policies will add additional dimensions to this formulation.