CHAPTER 4: Malayali women: Imagined and real

Table of Contents

**Section I**

Representations of Malayali women in fictional material .......................................................... 177
Different women, different locations – role of education in fictional imaginings... 177

  - Modern educated Nair woman in fiction ................................................................. 180
  - Modern Nair woman represented by a traditionalist .................................................. 188
  - Modern educated Christian woman in fiction ......................................................... 194
  - Namboothiri woman and education in fiction ......................................................... 201

Fictional rendering of educated women and conjugal life ..................................................... 205

Critique of a proto-feminist .................................................................................................. 213

**Section II: Two Lives: real women** .................................................................................. 223
CHAPTER 4: Malayali women: Imagined and real

The previous two chapters track the re-fashioning of the concept *sthreedharmam* that happened in the public sphere, particularly in the magazines and in the space of formal education in Kerala, in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Is there a homogenous figure of the Malayali woman in the 19th and early 20th century? On the outset, taking into consideration the arguments advanced in the previous chapters, it looks like there was a category ‘Woman’ that emerges in 20th century Kerala. This chapter tries to figure out how this ‘Woman’ was imagined in the fictional narratives of the time. It depicts how education was an important aspect of the imagined figure of the woman. The chapter analyses four novels: *Indulekha*, *Sukumari*, *Parangodiparinayam* and *Apbhande Makal*. *Indulekha* portrays an image of the progressive middle caste/class Nair woman, while *Parangodiparinayam* portrays the counter-image of a traditional Nair woman in the late 19th century. *Sukumari* represents the newly converted Christian woman and *Apbhande Makal* represents the upper caste Namboothiri woman. The first three novels imagine a social milieu where the figure of the woman had already undergone changes as a result of modern education and social movements in the late 19th century. *Apbhande Makal* is set in the 20th century after most of the other communities had already started their internal reform processes, while the Namboothiri community was still debating on many internal matters including dress reform, education (for women and men), inheritance rules, marriage rules and so on. I have included two short-stories, “Oru Yadhaartha Barya” and “Thalachorillatha Sthreekal”, written by the earliest women writers. These stories provide a different take on the subjective position of women within the fictional narrative. I would have liked to include a novel written by a woman, but could not do so, due to non-availability of fictional materials written by women writers from the period. This chapter also analyses a play *Pennarashmunadu*, set in the 1930s, after the first and second
generation of women had already been through modern education and were working in the public sphere. The play provides a satirical image of a proto-feminist. It shows how a woman, who had moved away from her *sthreedharmam*, is made to adhere to the space of the domestic. In the last section of this chapter, I have included two autobiographies by Gowriyamma, a veteran politician, and B. Kalyani Amma, a writer. It illustrates how education changed the lives of real women in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It also tries to see the role *sthreedharmam* (used in the broad sense of the term) played in their lives. This section is treated as being separate from the main section of the chapter, as it has been given the position of an extended endnote than as a part of the main chapter. The analysis of materials used in this chapter is not extensive or in-depth since it had to necessarily include a variety of materials. Each of these fictional materials is important not because of its genre, but because they provide differing standpoints on what were the constituent elements of the model woman and her *sthreedharmam* in late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Kerala. There are similarities in these materials written by male and female writers from different caste/religious affiliations at different times. Since the fictional materials were written long ago there might be discrepancies in the way I read them from the present. I am not sure how much I have resolved this issue, and it is a constant problem that most of us who use archival material constantly struggle with. The non-fictional materials are used to provide the counterpoint to the fictional material. They provide a counter in the sense of real women narrating their lives from their own point of view and also women who were writing of their lives looking back at the past. Autobiographies have been analysed keeping in mind that they cannot be made to stand for the ‘objective truth’ as one needs to take into account the problem of verifiability, the self-interest of the author, and the problem of intentional or non-intentional elisions.
Section I

Representations of Malayali women in fictional material

The development of printing in the 19th century played a major role in disseminating the cultural content of the new literacy all over India. By providing access to literary products, printing contributed to the making of a new cultural taste, sensibility and a new cultural personality. The spread of English literacy had a spill over effect on the vernacular reader, with the cultural essence finding its way into Indian languages and through that into a larger audience (Panikkar, 2002). With the advent of printing, reading became an individual and private activity. There was a change in the attitude towards leisure itself. Women and men could read the printed material at their convenience. In fact, the very act of reading was criticized by many traditionalists. The educated middle class found reading as a new and innovative way of spending their leisure time. Leisure activity became increasingly personal. Reading became a means by which the cultural world of the West came within the grasp of the Indian reader. New literary genres like the novel were a product of this process and emerged in concurrence with the educated middle classes being drawn into the colonial cultural world (Panikkar, 2002). The novel was also rooted in the intellectual needs and aesthetic sensibilities of the middle classes. The early novelists were neither entirely won over by the colonial ideals nor confined within a traditional outlook, but often took a middle position.

Different women, different locations – role of education in fictional imaginings

The novel as a genre entered the Malayalam literary field in the late 19th century. North Kerala, which under the British had a history of strife and violence among the different

---

157 A good example would be in the novel Parangodiparinayam, when the novelist makes fun of the new generation of novel reading women epitomized by Parangodi.
classes/communities in the early 19th century, was where most of the early social reform novels appeared. Travancore, where social movements were tending towards revivalism with the different caste groups demanding representation in the government and for rights in the public sphere, was where the historical novels appeared (Irumbayam, 1985). The early social reform novels, according to Shivarama Padikkal, could be classified thus: (a) those that speak of an ideal yet to be realized; (b) those which want to revive an ideal; (c) those that spoke nostalgically of an ideal that was being destroyed (Padikkal, 1993). The early social novels that came out of Kerala mostly fall within the first category. The historical novels, from south Travancore, fall within the third category.

The style of writing in the social reform novel was strongly influenced by the English novelists. This is not to say that they were imitative of the British novels. The writers were borrowing a new form and animating it with a culture and language that was situated in 19th century colonial Kerala. British India was debating and discussing women’s roles, constructing myths and counter-myths through their writings. A Victorianisation of the Indian woman was happening simultaneously with this as has been mentioned in the previous chapters. The Victorian doctrine of separate spheres located domesticity and the home as the woman’s realm where she would be protected from the dangers of the outside world. Not only would the women be protected in this space, but it would also be a space that would contain her sexuality (Sen, 2002). Since British writings were widely read in Kerala, the Victorianisation of Indian woman had resonances in the Malayalam novels.¹⁵⁸ For instance, Kundalatha, the heroine of Kundalatha (1887),¹⁵⁹ is educated away from civilization, in a

---

¹⁵⁸ O. Chandumenon and Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon specifically mention reading English novels in the introductions to their novels.

¹⁵⁹ This novel is often considered the first novel to be written in Malayalam by a Malayali writer. It was inspired by the Waverley novels of Sir Walter Scott. The first novel to be written in Malayalam is considered on the one hand to be the translation of The Slayer Slain (1878) called Ghathaka Vadam written by Mrs. and Mr. Collins, and on the other hand to be Pullerykanju (1882) written by Archdeacon Koshy.
forest by her adoptive father (Appunedungadi, 2004). She has the qualities of an ideal woman like naivety, kindness, love, humility and fear of adharma. The author mentions that because she has not had occasion to be in contact with ignorant and wicked people, she was free from bad habits, cunning and frivolity associated with normal women. The author also makes a statement that she was not taught music, or poetry as her adoptive father did not think that these made one a morally upright person. This should be read in conjugation with debates in Malayalam magazines in the late 19th century where essayists were debating on the usefulness (or not) of certain subjects taught to girls ("Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891a; "Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891b; Subramanyayan, 1897) and on the connection between certain art forms like dance and sexual licentiousness. Kundalatha was taught laws of nature (science, particularly biology), reason and religion. Again this was in keeping with the importance given to Science, Hygiene etc. in Britain, British India and Kerala at the time. Kundalatha was taught laws of nature (science, particularly biology), reason and religion. Again this was in keeping with the importance given to Science, Hygiene etc. in Britain, British India and Kerala at the time. Kundalatha was used as a textbook in schools in Travancore, Cochin and Madras till the second decades of 20th century.

Kundalatha has also been mentioned here to show the links between fictional material and social, educational and caste movements in Kerala. Early novels in India often addressed a troubled present in which questions of self, community and society were posed afresh (Menon, 2004). The discussions on social issues particularly those relating to the status of women in the novels suggest a close affinity with ongoing debates in the social sphere. This does not mean that these texts are being read as representing reality, rather that they are being read as archival material that engage with the larger universe of meaning and dialogue that they occupy and interact with. Dilip M. Menon mentions that the early Indian novels were concerned with the question of fashioning the self and new forms of community, and that these themes were often thought through the idiom of religion. I would like to extend this argument and say that early Malayalam novels also included the theme of gender as an
important aspect of the newly fashioned self in varying degrees. The fashioning of the self with gender as an important constitutive element was also central to the play and the short-stories analysed in this chapter.

The early novels in India located in the then present show the engagement of the native intellectual with aspects of modernity. A thorough reform of existing customs and traditions was not possible under colonialism, given British hesitations on taking drastic measures in matters of law and religion after the Revolt of 1857. Novels located themselves within this dilemma where they imagined their world. The novel became a means of reform through other means (Menon, 2006). This is particularly true of the novels *Indulekha*, *Sukumari* and *Aphande Makal*.

Modern educated Nair woman in fiction

The first perfect novel to be written in Malayalam, according to Malayalam scholars and critics, was *Indulekha* in 1889 (Chandumenon, 1995).\(^{160}\) It had all the qualities of a classic novel: well-developed and believable characters, a unified and plausible plot structure and a pervasive illusion of reality. This novel was so popular that it was sold out in three months (Irumbayam, 1985; Panikkar, 2002). It was also translated into English within a year. *Indulekha* was so important in the canon of Malayalam literature that it was a prescribed textbook at school level till 1998. Written in the third-person, the novel occasionally has the voice of the author speaking in the first-person.\(^{161}\)

*Indulekha* was mostly read as a critical take on the matrilineal system, joint family system, the power of the karanavar (the eldest male member of the family in charge of the

---

\(^{160}\) Chandumenon was a head clerk and later Sub-judge in the Calicut Civil Court. He was also a writer and an essayist.

\(^{161}\) The plot is about the love between Indulekha and Madhavan. Her grandfather, Panchu Menon, and another Namboothiri, Surinamboothiripad, come between the young lovers. A dejected Madhavan leaves the place as a result of certain misunderstandings, but comes back and marries her at the end.
day-to-day running of the house and holdings), the position enjoyed by Namboothiris in society, the nature of Nair-Namboothiri *Sambandhams* and the influence of education on the development of the self (Devika, 1999; Gopalakrishnan, 1982; Menon, 2004; Pillai, 1998). *Indulekha* is important in this thesis not just because it was the first perfect novel, but also because it set up a kind of gender stereotype for later novels. This novel upheld a new social morality and promoted the rights of individuals to choose their own life-partners as opposed to the arrangements made by elders. In this chapter I focus on the aspects related to development of the self and gender stereotyping in *Indulekha*.

Indulekha and Madhavan are both educated in the modern style. In fact her accomplishments are so varied and numerous that the author himself states that Indulekha was more an ideal of what a Nair woman could be than any real woman at that period. She is well read on English classics; proficient in playing both Indian and Western musical instruments, and knows sewing and painting. Though Chandumenon states at the outset that dark and fair women can be equally beautiful if they are graceful and lustrous, Indulekha is described as fair, has a perfect body, red lips, dark hair, and ample breasts. Though, well-educated, confident and smart, she stays well within the limits of modesty, refinement and the decorum expected of a Nair woman, according to the author. She dresses in the traditional attire [but without too many ornaments: similar to the exhortations of the magazine writers], while Madhavan is allowed to dress in English-style clothes. She wears an upper cloth, deviating from tradition, where Nair women did not normally cover the upper part of the body. Yet, this is not exactly an imitation of the West, but an imbibing of a certain kind of modesty [probably the influence of missionary/Christian education]. She also follows the

---

162 *Indumathiswayamvaram* (1890), *Meenakshi* (1890), *Lakshmikesavam* (1892), *Saraswathy Vijayam* (1892), etc. were some of the novels that imitated *Indulekha* in more or less degrees with regards to plot, themes, and characterization in the 19th century. Countless other novels followed the themes in *Indulekha* in the 20th century also. From: P.V. George Irumbayam, "Nalu Novalukal - Oru Padanam," in *Nalu Novalukal*, ed. P.V. George Irumbayam (Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1985).
rituals and customs of the *tharavad* (family home). The only time she consciously makes a break with tradition is when she decides to marry Madhavan, and refuses to consider Surinamboothiripad’s proposal though her grandfather wants her to do so. She does not rebel, but through wit and self-assertion keeps the Namboothiripad away. Indulekha’s progressive ideas are depicted as the positive results of her education. Though Madhavan also is educated, he is not portrayed as strong-willed or as prudent as Indulekha. Within the relationship, she is the one who guides him. This feature, which was categorized as essential to being a woman, was taken up in later writings, where the woman was the one who was supposed to direct the man when he made wrong decisions. She needed to be educated to be capable of this charge, which in this instance Indulekha was. Thus, education becomes necessary not just for the acquisition of culture and the refinement of the woman, but also to enable her to guide her spouse.

The idea of masculine and feminine qualities and the expected behaviour for the modern man and woman were put in place through the new genre of the novel. Indulekha’s femininity, or *sthreethwam*, is portrayed as connected to her body, her comportment, her education, her musical talents, her morality, her faith, etc. Madhavan’s masculinity is also connected to his body, his education, his morality, etc.¹⁶³ Both Indulekha and Madhavan are shown as having traditional Sanskrit learning. *Indulekha* is written in relatively simple Malayalam, with a few Sanskrit verses added here and there. By the time this novel was being written, English had slowly begun to replace Sanskrit as the language of learning and culture. However the author does not make his protagonists completely modern. Both the main characters are a blend of modern and traditional learning. When Surinamboothiripad

---

¹⁶³ He is portrayed as being fair, having a well-proportioned body and long hair reaching till his knees. He is intelligent, smart, and humble. He excelled in a number of English sports, was interested in hunting, and had a few revolvers, pistols and guns. Madhavan is also fearless, as the incident, where he uses his gun to kill a wayward cheetah at the Calcutta zoo, shows.
tries to recite Sanskrit slokas, he makes mistakes, which provide a comic effect. His lack of knowledge and culture is explained as a result of his lack of education. Some of the subjects or skills Indulekha has learned would not have been available in the schools of the period. So Chandumenon explains that she had had private tutors instituted by her uncle, a Diwan.

Marriage and conjugality are important themes in the novel. Madhavan and Indulekha move away from an older system where the needs of the individuals were secondary to the needs of the family. Their decision to join in marriage is their individual choice and not that of their families. Indulekha even has a lengthy discussion with Madhavan about the freedom enjoyed by Nair women with regards to marriage. Madhavan believes that the nature of *Sambandham* makes Malayali women (Nair/Namboothiri is equated with Malayali women throughout the novel) less chaste. They also have other kinds of freedom which makes them arrogant, he states. Indulekha argues that not all women misuse their right to break a *Sambandham*. She sees the right to break an abusive relationship as a positive aspect of *Sambandham*. She does not see this as a problem with Malayali women’s freedom, but believes it is an empowering aspect. [In this text *swaathandryam* is used by Chandumenon to refer to Nair women’s freedom to start or break a relationship. It also refers to their ability to mingle with those of the opposite sex, to converse with them, to be able to showcase their musical abilities, etc. Being uneducated and confined to the home was seen as being antithetical to *swaathandryam*]. Chastity and marital fidelity begins to be seen as important aspects of marriage in this novel.\textsuperscript{164} The development of their individuality, in Madhavan and Indulekha, is fulfilled through the attainment of the state of conjugality. However, both Indulekha and Madhavan are still part of the joint family system in a different manner. They do not make a complete break with the system; when they finally marry, his parents shift with him to Madras. This shift to Madras can be read as a move from the space of the village or

\textsuperscript{164} Indulekha’s mother was a widow, who had re-married at the time of the story, and she is portrayed as being faithful to her husband.
tradition, to the space of urbanity or of opportunity, and material progress (and provides a break from the stifling caste rules in the village).

Desire and love were themes related to conjugality. Love is an emotion that is acceptable, especially when it is mutual. Madhavan’s and Indulekha’s desire for each other is legitimate because it stems from their mutual love, which will lead to a monogamous and lasting marriage (as opposed to a Sambandham, which is considered contractual and temporary). Indulekha considers Madhavan as her husband from the beginning of the novel and there are various references throughout the novel when she calls him so, especially when she falls sick after his departure. She accepts him as her husband defying social position and wealth. This is in direct opposition to her grandmother’s position, when the older woman urges her to accept Surinamboothiripad, as he is wealthy and would bring prosperity and status to the tharavad. Indulekha refuses to think of marriage as an economic transaction, which it often was in the 19th century, but as individual choice. Surinamboothiripad is a comic figure in the novel, not just because he is vain, lacking in education and intellect, but also because of his voracious sexual appetite and exploits.165 In a discussion with his confidante/friend Cherussery, the latter tells him that if a man and a woman desire each other following from their mutual love, then it is meaningful desire. However, if the desire is not reciprocated then it becomes a mistaken or a meaningless desire.166 But Surinamboothiripad is not able to comprehend the concept. Cherussery explains to him that love is the basis of providing sexual pleasure. Sexual act without love, he says, takes a man down to the level of an animal [This is also the reason Khalabadan’s desire for Prabhavati is illegitimate in the previous chapter]. Thus in the novel, love, particularly romantic love, is seen as the basis of

---

165 He has a number of temporary alliances, and also shows interest in Indulekha’s mother, her maid and her young cousin.

166 Desire between a man and a woman (heterosexual desire) is the only one considered in all of these novels/play/short-stories.
desire, and desire becomes legitimate only when it leads to marriage. And it is love that causes Indulekha to make a break with tradition.

Modernity, desire and gender are connected to material possessions in *Indulekha*. Surinamboothiripad is interested in expensive and flashy items and clothing. He imagines that his desirability is linked to the several gold and silver ornaments – a gold mirror, a gold betel carrier, a gold clock, etc. – that he carries about his person. Yet, these items and his obsession with them make Surinamboothiripad effeminate (in spite of his sexual prowess), and show him up to be a vainglorious simpleton. Indulekha and Madhavan also possess material items like Indulekha’s piano, books, the divan in her room, and Madhavan’s collection of pistols and guns. But in their case, these are items that enhance their modernity because these items are also subtly connected to their education. Usage of large number of gold and silver materials seems to have been considered old-fashioned by then. This would also explain why Indulekha wears minimum required jewellery; she even refuses to wear a necklace which her grandmother insists she wear for Surinamboothiripad’s first visit. While Surinamboothiripad’s use of gold embodies wealth, Indulekha’s minimal jewellery indicates, rather than embody, wealth and value (Menon, 2004).

Education was an important aspect of this imagined social world in *Indulekha*. Madhavan is engaged in a serious discussion by his father, Govindapanicker and cousin, Govindhankutty Menon, on the effects of modern education at one point. Their discussion happens in Bombay away from the women and also away from the domestic spaces occupied by the women. They discuss aspects of religion, spirituality and education. It was as if discussions of marriage, marital fidelity and the home were relegated to women while religion and politics were seen as male domains. Govindapanicker says that the modern generation, who had been through the English system of education, did not believe in God, religion and morality, and gradually lost their faith, love and respect towards their elders and
other relatives. This was a serious argument against sending children to school at the time repeated by many of the magazine writers/novelists of the time. However, Chandumenon, through Madhavan, counters this argument.\textsuperscript{167} The early Indian novels in general, says Shivarama Padikkal, had the purpose of inculcating morality. “It often speaks of how children should behave, how they should obey their elders, what kind of education they should acquire, and other matters” (Shivarama Padikkal, 1993). Through Madhavan, Chandumenon also makes a case for morality or spirituality, without the confines of religion. The lack of moral education in government schools was an issue of debate and discussion among the Intelligentsia during the period which went on till the 1940s as I have mentioned in the earlier chapters. The Christian schools had catechism and though some of the other schools did try to introduce moral science, they were not successful (Banerji, 1914c; \textit{The Travancore Education Code}, 1941). Chandumenon counters the claims made by the British and others that knowledge was available only with the West. He invokes the rich cultural history of India, with her ancient learning and schools of thought to refute the image of a prototypical Oriental – a biological inferior that is culturally backward, peculiar, and unchanging – depicted in many of the writings on India during the period.

Madhavan (and Chandumenon) considers that with increased levels of literacy and awareness, many superstitions could be abolished. This was the crux of Chandumenon’s argument for English education: education creates awareness and knowledge; only with knowledge could the average Indian combat superstition and better the lot of their fellow Indians. Modern education was not an aping of the cultural markers of the West, but stood for much more. \textit{Indulekha} captures the historical process whereby British rule was accepted

\textsuperscript{167}Govindhankutty Menon takes the radical position of the English-educated liberal reformist who thinks anything to do with Sanskrit texts and knowledge is useless and outdated. Madhavan takes a middle position and believes that one should not dismiss ancient Indian knowledge without understanding the context in which the different texts were written.
together with the emergence of a national consciousness; where tradition and modernity were seamlessly woven into the characters of Indulekha and Madhavan; and where education was leading to the development of a self grounded within the confines of gender.

The novel as a genre caught the popular imagination in the late 19th century. The early novels were different from the other literary genres which took inspiration from Sanskrit. *Indumathiswayamvaram* (1890), *Meenakshi* (1890), *Lakshmikesavam* (1892) and *Saraswathy Vijayam* (1892) were some of the popular novels that followed *Indulekha*. Most of them took up contemporary problems and presented them in the style of the English novels, without the aesthetic value of *Indulekha*. The traditionalists believed that this new genre was unnatural and thought of it as a dangerous change brought about by the young generation [Even Gowriyamma, whose autobiography is discussed in the last section of this chapter, mentions that reading novels, that dealt with adventure and romance, was looked down upon by elders in her family. She used to hide the novels within her textbooks to read them. When her eldest brother discovered this, she was instructed to read only history books and historical novels. However, this happens much later in the 1920s and 1930s, and was a part of the disavowal of the sensuous eroticism in literature within the SNDP movement.]. The novels were perceived as attacking hereditary beliefs and customs. This popular literary genre was mostly written by those belonging to the Nair and equivalent castes and the protagonists belonged to these castes. They portrayed an existing middle class and middle castes. The main protagonists in most of the early novels were educated to some level. Though fictional, these characters have been taken up for analysis as they portray the ideal women and men who were put up for consumption by the reading public.
Modern Nair woman represented by a traditionalist

*Parangodiparinayam* (1892) falls into the second category of novels that Shivarama Padikkal mentions: those which want to revive an ideal (Padikkal, 1993). Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon, the author, could be read as the mouth piece of the traditionalists. *Parangodiparinayam* (Parangodi’s Marriage), is a burlesque on *Indulekha* and the number of similar and imitative novels that followed the publication of *Indulekha* in 1889. This novel represents the anxiety and complex negotiations involved in the acceptance of English language and modern education by Malayali society at large.

*Parangodiparinayam* was the first satirical novel to be published in Malayalam. This work also attains historical significance because it was able to put a stop to literary productions in the form of novels for a time. The first edition of the novel (1000 copies) was sold out in the first three months. Contemporary writers of Ramankutty Menon usually read it as a satire and many expressed displeasure of the gross misrepresentations of English-educated students by him ("*Parangodiparinayam*", 1893). This novel marks an important

---

168 He was a well-known writer and essayist, with a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit and Malayalam. He was well-versed in English as well. His father was a famous Sub-judge, Kizhakkepattu Krishnamenon.

169 The story is not similar to *Indulekha*, though there other kinds of similarities. Parangodi and Parangodan, both of the Nair caste, are in love with each other. They decide to marry. The karanavar of Parangodi’s house decide to get her married to his son, Pangashamenon, the inmate of another Nair household in the neighbourhood. However Pangashamenon declines the offer since he does not find her suitable. Meanwhile, Parangodi informs Parangodan, now a lawyer working in Madras, of the marriage proposal. He returns to Kerala and realises that the marriage is not to take place. He then tells Parangodi that they will court each other for some more time in the manner of the English. Parangodi is still single at the end of the novel, the irony being that the title of the novel is ‘Marriage of Parangodi’.

170 A prominent writer and critic of the time, Vengayil Kunjiraman Nayanar, had mocked the process of novel writing in the magazine, *Vidyavinodhini*. He suggested around nine nonsensical titles and added the title “Parangodi Parinayam” and said that anyone could write a novel in this manner. Ramankutty Menon was captivated by this article and undertook to write a satire and used the titles suggested by Vengayil. For details, see: Irumbayam, "Nalu Novalukal - Oru Padanam.", Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon, *Parangodi Parinayam* (Samyuhta, 1892 [cited 10 September 2011]); available from http://www.samyukta.info/archives/vol_4_1/fiction/kizhakkeppattu%20ramankutty%20menon/parangodi%20parinayam.htm.
moment in the social sphere: the registering of a breakdown of the sense of self in the established order, and a perception of this lack (Devika, 2007a). Following this breakdown of the self is an effort to re-create a stronger self and Ramankutty Menon accomplishes this through a selective rejection of Western education (not all aspects of Western education is rejected) and revivalism of Sanskrit education.

In the preface, Ramankutty Menon says that he had intended to satirize the *Indulekha* imitations. However, a close reading of the novel brings out the not so subtle criticism of Chandumenon’s novel. The description of the heroine Parangodi is a good illustration of this:

Now she has completed eighteen years. As people differ in their concept of beauty, if I describe her looks in the way one group sees her, the others may not appreciate it. So I shall just say that she pleased each and every eye that fell on her. Let the readers contemplate on how this comes about, according to their sensibilities. I have stated earlier of her great intelligence. If she hears something once, it is retained as if etched in stone. She had learnt to read and write English very well. She had also studied the mechanics of trains, steamships, telegraph etc. She was adept at needlework. When our Parangoda Marar became a lawyer, she had stitched a most singular cap for him and sent it to him as a gift. All around it was embroidered ‘Parangodan’ in English letters with glittering thread which at first glance looked like creepers. Parangodan’s English friends on seeing this fine craftsmanship was amazed that there were such gifted needlewomen among the Nairs. Parangodikutty was not enamoured of the typical Kerala ornaments. She was usually dressed in a skirt and a jacket (Menon, 1892: 238).

Ramankutty Menon refrains from giving a detailed physical description of Parangodi as a protest against the often excessive narration of the facial features and physical attributes of the female protagonist in other novels including *Indulekha*. He makes fun of Indulekha’s learning by stressing Parangodi’s knowledge about the mechanics of modern scientific
Inventions. In *Indulekha*, there is a scene where she stitches a cap for Madhavan and gives it to him. So Parangodi is also made to stitch a cap for Parangodan. Parangodi is more westernised than Indulekha; she even wears western clothes. Clothes, as I have mentioned before, were an issue of contention in the 19th century. Parangodi being made to wear western clothes by the author marks her rejection of custom and tradition. The work is interspersed with high sounding Sanskrit terms and quotations that bear no resemblance to the theme which add to the humour. The names of the main characters are in themselves humorous with a local flavour to them. The writer chose them because these names were far removed from the Sanskrit names used by the other novelists of the time. It could even be a tongue-in-cheek rejoinder to Chandumenon’s preface, in which he explains why he chose the name Indulekha for his protagonist.

The protagonists in *Parangodiparainayam* are portrayed as being completely spoilt because of their English education. They have lost touch with their ethnic identity and roots, developed contempt for their mother tongue, and are vain, arrogant and ignorant. The other characters that have had no English education are firmly rooted in their culture and are successful in life. Chandumenon entered the literary scene as a supporter of English education and as a champion of concepts such as individual thoughts and rights for women and men. For Ramakutty Menon, those who had traditional education were the ones with the discerning power. The English-educated Parangodi has a well developed (though flawed) sense of individuality, but in the end she is not able to exercise her choice in that she is made to court Parangodan forever. In this novel, like in *Indulekha*, conjugality is seen as the desired state to be achieved for both the English-educated and traditionally educated characters.

Malayalam literature came under massive Western influence from the 1880s. Previously, to be an educated person in Kerala meant to have knowledge of the Sanskrit

---

171 In the novel, Indulekha is not awed by anything because she can even explain the principles on which the railway train is driven.
classics and Sastras (George, 1972). The term acquired a new meaning, and an individual who knew English was considered educated after the 1880s. The 10th chapter in Parangodiparinayam is titled “A Conversation or the Eighteenth Chapter”. It was the 18th chapter of Indulekha that had won acclaim for its discussion on education, religion, spirituality, politics, and the Congress and the British Rule. In the 10th chapter in Parangodiparinayam, the longest in the novel, the author counters the arguments forwarded by Chandumenon. As opposed to Madhavan’s argument in Indulekha, Pangashamenon is of the opinion that English language education was not particularly useful to people who had no contact with the British. He believed that the time utilised to learn English could be used to learn something more useful:

Learning English will not make one more intelligent or knowledgeable… For that one needs education. Education cannot be equated with language learning…

Education is acquired through teachers (guru), self-effort, from sabrahmachari, and through experience (Menon, 1985: 246).

From Pangashamenon’s remarks the reader gets the sense that the ruling class was far removed from the daily lives of the Malayali although Malabar (where the novel is set) was under Madras Presidency. Education, especially scientific education, was considered valuable. Pangashamenon has knowledge of Sanskrit, is educated (the reader does not know what kind of education), but he has had no English education. He represents the ideal and desirable model of manhood. He is aware that education provides a person the opportunity to develop mentally, morally and intellectually. He himself is shown as being intelligent and as having the ability to manage his family and further wealth by means of his agricultural activity.

The author through Pangashamenon manages to capture most of the complaints against the modern (English) educated Malayali. This complaint was prevalent all over India during that time. In a report compiled by the Christian Vernacular Education Society at
Madras, quoted in the *Diocesan Gazette*, vernacular education was considered beneficial, but the same was not the case for English education:

Rudeness and self-conceit are first noticed; the utterances of the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, the Indian Mirror and of H. H. the Maharaja of Travancore are cited, to show that rudeness is becoming in many cases a marked characteristic of educated men in India. The last named remarks, “I am here led to observe that our contact with European civilization has not resulted in unqualified success so far as our manners are concerned. Perhaps you know the story current among us of the crow that attempted to study the swan’s gait but lost its own and did not secure that of its model. I am afraid that the comportment of not a few of our educated youths would strongly suggest comparison with this crow” (*Education in India: A Review*, 1881: 170).

Like in the quotation, Parangodan represents the English-educated man whose insufficient training has left him pompous and has alienated him from the established social order. The women writers in the Malayalam magazines from the early 20th century often refer to similar kinds of arguments made by people in other spaces. They constantly try to find justification for modern education. The discontent of some groups with English education was not extended to formal education, but with the contents of education or the way in which education was being imparted. Pangashamenon is all praise for the Boarding school education given to English children in England. But he perceives the differences in Malayali culture and believes that the kind of education required in Kerala is different.

While the modern educated male was criticised, Ramankutty Menon through Pangashamenon, has even more to say about the English education given to Malayali women, and sewing in particular. According to him, not everyone needed to be trained in tailoring, since the kinds of clothes Malayalis wore did not need elaborate sewing/stitching. The tea drinking, newspaper reading, and late rising habits, which Parangodi acquired through her
education, has made her a useless member of the tharavad. She has also not been instructed in sadvidabyasam (moral and gainful education), which English women gain from their education. In the late 19th and early 20th century, government education was criticised for not being sufficiently disciplinary, for not including moral education and for not providing girls with the opportunity/option to develop the feminine qualities inherent in them. Parangodi then epitomises these shortcomings. She was also a failure in the sense that she was not an able manager of the domestic realm, since education was expected to equip women to take over the domestic realm [and this was one of the main arguments put forward to support women’s education]. Her education consisted of merely ‘accomplishments’ as opposed to ‘useful’ knowledge and/or training [In this sense Indulekha also only had ‘accomplishments’ and not ‘useful’ knowledge]. She spends her time reading and playing the piano and other musical instruments. She cannot help with the daily running of the household. She is arrogant and haughty, with no time for local traditions like the kaikottikali. This dance was performed by women on special occasions like the Onam festival. She looks down on such performances and at one point equates kaikottikali to the devil dance of the Africans. Africa is for Parangodi, the ‘other’ [used in the sense of the ‘Other’ in Orientalist discourse], which is not desirable. She is representative of the Indian Intelligentsia exposed to Western ways and Western learning and to whom Malayali culture was anathema. And her rejection of kaikottikali is inappropriate because it was a legitimate dance form and was not termed immoral like some of the other dance forms of the time (or other customs like covering the breast). Her rejection of the dance then is the depiction of a flawed feeling of cultural and intellectual superiority. This development of ‘flawed feeling’ is precisely the problem with her education. For Pangashamenon the West is the ‘other’. Western culture was acceptable in piecemeal fashion – their system of education or the formal structures of schooling, and

172 A traditional dance form that the Diwan of Cochin had suggested could be included in girl’s curriculum, mentioned in chapter 3.
Western Science and rationalism. He is a colonial subject who has internalized scientific rationalism, but there is the simultaneous rejection of what was perceived as Western cultural markers.

**Modern educated Christian woman in fiction**

In *Sukumari* (1897) the protagonists are Christian converts from the lower caste (Moolliyil, 1985). The author, Joseph Moolliyil,\(^\text{173}\) mentions that most of the events in this novel are incidents that happened at various places and times, and it was not written with the idea of establishing an ideal community. The novel is written in the third-person with occasional comments by the author like in *Indulekha* and *Parangodiparainayam*. The objective of the novel, according to Moolliyil, was to write a history of the Christian community, as it existed for the then Christian women and Christian youth, and for posterity (Moolliyil, 1985). It tries to narrate the enclosed world of Christians trying to negotiate new forms of self, community and family. The novel is set around the time slavery was abolished in India. Dilip M. Menon mentions that the major themes in lower caste Malayalam novels confirm the universal experience of slavery: experience of loss, homelessness, and sudden, violent death (Menon, 2004). In *Sukumari* the spiritual life of the main protagonist starts from the time her aunt and later her grandmother (whom she believes to be her sister and mother respectively and realises the truth only much later) dies. After baptism, she becomes Sukumari (a Sanskrit name) from Chirutha (a lower caste name). The novel is about the coming of age of Sukumari; and her movement from spiritual darkness to Christianity; from being an orphan to being a wife. This novel provides the cultural historian insight into what was expected of a mission educated Christian woman in the late 19\(^{th}\) century.

\(^{173}\) He was a Tiyya (equivalent to Ezhavas), who had converted to Christianity, and was a member of the Basel Missionary Society in Malabar. He was a teacher in the Madras Christian College and later became the principal. He taught both Malayalam and English in the college and had written a number of textbooks.
Towards the end of the 19th century, the British government had started to take an interest in women’s education and had also started imposing rules regarding curriculum on the missionaries (Gladston, 2006). Being a member of the Basel Evangelical mission, Moolliyil reproduces the missionary disapproval of government education. Through Satyadasan, Joseph Moolliyil also voices the fear among the Christians on the increasing influence and control over women’s education by the British government:

Gradually the government will start schools for girls. There will be no religious training there. In our educational institutions we teach our girls to take on their responsibilities and be self-reliant. In government schools, they will teach them to cater to their lazy husbands or train them to think individualistically. My mother believes that they will not be capable wives or mothers (Moolliyil, 1985: 330).

Here the term individualistic is a translation of the term *tandedam*. It means self-servingly brash. Missionary education trained women to be modest and humble, loyal to the church, steeped in the spiritual teachings of Protestant Christianity, capable proselytisers and Bible women, and part of the family. Sukumari, a brash and independent child, is trained to be a humble and self-effacing Christian and develops the homemaker instincts (in the way she shows an interest in cleaning up and tidying the space of the domestic). Women were expected to be financially self-reliant in missionary ideology. All the women in the novel are trained in some skill/handicraft or the other. However, this did not mean that they could be independent from the space of the family or the Christian community.

The line between being a Christian and not being one seems to hang on education for the newly converted Christian woman. The hierarchical ordering of society based on caste is rejected in the novel and the new criterion for social ordering is that of gender (Devika, 2007a). Joseph Moolliyil goes into detail on the subjects that the girls had to study. Girls above 14 years would have finished their education and were trained in cooking and sewing, and in *grihabaranam* (household management) and *dhanasamrakshana vidya* (saving
money/maintaining accounts), thrice a week. He gives a detailed account of what was taught in the five forms (where girls studied until they were 14).

1. Catechism
   Bible and history of Christianity
2. Reading Malayalam
   Poetry: Panchathantram
   Prose: A book called *Sanchariyude Prayanam* (Traveller’s journey)
3. Mathematics
   Weight and Measurements and arithmetic
4. Handwriting
   This was an important lesson, and it was necessary to pass this exam for moving up a form like in the case of Catechism
5. Reading English
   Second textbook
6. Geography
   Briefly about earth, and in detail about Madras state.
7. History
   Kerala history and India history in brief
8. *Shareerasukhashastram*
   (Health science)
9. Sewing
   Stitching of all kinds, and normal embroidery
10. Music
    English songs

Married women had childcare and *grihanayashastra* (homecraft) lessons twice a week (Moolliyil, 1985: 311-2).

This curriculum is an almost exact replica of the curriculum that was in place in missionary and government schools in Kerala in the 19th century. While English customs and practices might not have been completely acceptable, education of the modern kind was valued by the author. In this Moolliyil takes a similar stand to Ramankutty Menon. While
Ramankutty Menon is against women learning sewing and English music, Moolliyil does not see any problem with his women characters learning both and this detailing of the curriculum is given only for Sukumari and not for Satyadasan. The inclusion of the curriculum reveals the importance of education in the process of development of the self and community among the newly converted Christians. It underlines that for the converted Christians also fashioning the *sthreedharmam* of the woman was done through education. Like in the magazines, homecraft, health science, childcare etc. are included in their curriculum as part of the larger project of situating the woman in the domestic space.

Evangelical Christianity saw inequality and superstition as the defining features of Malayali society. The missionary rhetoric related the lower castes to (lack of) hygiene (Menon, 2006). Sukumari, after she is adopted by Tejopalan, sets about cleaning the house, removing the cobwebs, setting the table right, covering the bed with a blanket, tidying the kitchen and so on. The missionaries emphasised cleanliness and tidiness as markers of the new self. Sometimes it was even defined as the marker of modernity itself (Mohan, 1994). By the late 19th century, this emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene had been taken up by educators throughout India as I have mentioned in the previous two chapters. In upper caste novels like *Indulekha* the interior of the home and the artefacts in it were the markers of civilization and modernity. In missionary education, cleanliness, tidiness, and comfort were important, but aesthetics and affectation were not encouraged. In *Sukumari*, though there are references to commodities/new household items, they are kept to a minimum. Satyadasan speaks disparagingly of Indians who have developed tastes for “jelly, jam and cheese”, about people who do not want fresh sardines for 1 ps. but would happily spend 25 ps. on 12 sardines in a tin. This could also be read as the cultural differences and political tension

---

174 He is Sukumari’s friend and later becomes her husband.
between the German missionaries and the British because some of these customs were brought about by contact with the British.

Another concern related to culture which is mentioned in the novel is that of attire. At various occasions the characters in the novel speak disapprovingly of men who imitate the dressing styles of vilathiyar or foreigners (especially the British). Satyadasan mentions coffee plantations in Wayanad where they employed men only if they wear English-style clothes. Moolliyil, through, Satyadasan denigrates the craze of imitating the British in dressing styles, and also considers it absurd that a person had to be dressed in a particular (and foreign!) manner to be employed by the British, though he does not explicitly state that the plantation managers were British. Yet another matter that is mentioned related to this craze of imitation is people changing their surnames to sound English. The problem with the change to English names, according to Moolliyil, was that the men who changed their names had not converted to Christianity. Changing one’s name was related to the experience of the spiritual/religious and not something to be done for fashion or expediency. It would also appear that name-changing was considered to be a rejection of one’s culture and roots that was different from when it was related to the spiritual/religious as it was for the newly converted Christians.

Use of English language in daily life was another matter of contention. Satyadasan mentions men who intersperse their conversation with English words. He himself had been taught English by an elderly Portuguese man. However he does not incorporate English words in his speech in the same manner an acquaintance of his does. Changes in culture, lifestyles, and attire imitating the British does not appear to be acceptable practice even for a

---

175 For example, Karuna (who adopts Sukumari when Tejopalan dies) mentions that Hindus who went to work in places like Belgaum (where her family stayed for a brief period) changed their names: Vasu to D’Vaz, Raman to Raymond, Achutan to Atchinson and so on. The newly converted protagonists in the novels too had changed their names, but these were more Indian sounding names like Sukumari, Jnanabharanam, Satyadasan, etc.

176 This was another Christian convert, who had changed his name from Devadasan to D. Watson
Christian convert who had himself (or herself) changed many of the practices related to their daily life. The changes they (Christians) had adopted were termed under ‘necessity’, while the changes imitating the British came to be seen as being affected or flashy – a direct contradiction of the Protestant missionary ideals of humility and economy. The changes brought about in dressing, language, and name as a result of modern education are taken up in the magazines as well.

In 19th century Kerala, caste defined the organisation of the community and the subordination of the individual within it. Christianity began to be seen as the way out of the oppressive caste system by many of the lower castes. Missionary discourse posited the choosing, reflective person as the premise of this new community of equality (Menon, 2006). The reflective newly converted Christian protagonists in *Sukumari* were different from the Nair protagonists of the other novels. The Christian characters were constantly looking inward and imagine a lack, defect or shortcoming within themselves, especially the older converts Mata and Manickam (Sukumari’s grandmother and aunt). Their sense of self is related to a sense of being a sinner. They believe (or are led to believe by the missionaries) that this state of sin is something that they are born with – the Original Sin inherited from Adam and Eve in Christian theology – in the same manner that the sexual endowment of the body is something that they are born with. Training at the religious school was supposed to give them the necessary knowledge for constant self-correction and to keep their souls in a state of readiness for the other-world. Training at the missionary schools while giving the necessary self-control and discipline also trained them to be ideal women and men. Since sexual endowment of the body was deemed natural, it was considered natural to inculcate skills appropriate to each sex, and education came to be gendered for boys and girls. Sukumari and Satyadasan, the protagonists, are constantly trying to grapple with the new Christian ideology and identity that they have acquired. The Christian doctrine of “salvation
of the soul” is the motto that dictates their actions. Even the discussions and debates among the characters are about the ways to lead a Christian life, about the dharmam of a Christian individual, etc.

The creation of a secure family is an important feature of the early social novels. In the Nair imagination this family is nuclear, modern and patrilocal. Falling in love and the consent of the individuals were important aspects of the new Nair identity. The ambiguities, tensions and delays in the consummation of desire were as much a part of the narrative technique as about the constitution of the new self (Menon, 2006). The notion of family is structurally different in Sukumari. Tejopalan, having lost his wife and child, looks after Sukumari and her grandmother, and adopts her after the grandmother’s death. In this case, the family is born out of paternal love and compassion rather than blood ties and love. There are no joint-families and all the families mentioned have members who are missing or dead. Bodily desire is peripheral in Sukumari. The movement of the story is not based on desire or love as it is in Indulekha or Parangodiparinayam. It is only at the end, when all the other characters have died that Sukumari and Satyadasan come together as a family unit based on conjugal love.

This novel marks the movement of a lower caste community from a hierarchical space to a place of freedom; from a religion that sanctions subordination (in the form of caste) to one that promises equality. The character of Sukumari is different from Indulekha and Parangodi, in the sense that she moves from one subjective location to another. Her character is transformed – through education and through religion. Indulekha and Parangodi have already reached a position of subjective development. Both Indulekha and Parangodi have more or less received the same kind of education as Sukumari, and it leads to different

---

177 Sukumari’s grandfather and mother are not alive at the time of the story, Satyadasan’s mother and grandmother are widows, and Karuna’s father is a widower.
kinds of subjective development in all of them, depending on their religion and caste positions.

Namboothiri woman and education in fiction

*Apbhande Makal* (1932) (Daughter of Apbhan) by Moothiringottu Bhavatran Namboothiri is often described as a political novel. This novel is considered the next greatest social novel after *Indulekha* by Malayalam critics (Pillai, 1998; Pillai, 2005). In terms of technique, this novel (or novella as it is quite short) has well-developed characters, a compact plot and realistic rendering of the social conditions in early 20th century Kerala. Like the other three novels, the novelist has used a third-person narrative in *Apbhande Makal.* This novel created and provoked discussions in the social sphere; it brought to light the plight of Namboothiri women in the ancestral home, the need for modern education among the Namboothiris, about the double-standards that existed in the treatment meted out to their Nair progeny, and about the need for intra-caste marriages. *Apbhande Makal* provides the

---


179 The writer was an active member of the Yogakshemam Sabha, which worked towards the upliftment of the Namboothiri community. His speeches and written works were about intra-caste marriage, women’s education, and equal share in ancestral property for the Namboothiris.

180 This novel is about the daughter of an Apbhan Namboothiri belonging to Edakattumana. Sulochana, the daughter, has a Nair mother, so she is herself a Nair and middle caste. The Apbhan is the current karanavar of the upper caste aristocratic household. Ittichiri is a young female member of Edakattumana. Madhu is another Namboothiri from a lower sub-caste and a dependent of Edakattumana. The basic plot is about the love of Sulochana and Ittichiri for Madhu. Madhu loves Ittichiri, but cannot take the relationship forward since he is a dependent. Ittichiri tries to commit suicide when her marriage is fixed to somebody else [The marriage is fixed without her consent and knowledge. Hence the usage of ‘fixed to’ to denote her lack of subjective status.]. Sulochana saves her. Since Sulochana loves Madhu, but also realises that he does not reciprocate her love, she consumes poison. On her deathbed, she implores her father to get Ittichiri married to Madhu.
Namboothiri idea of the modern woman, different from the Nair and Christian protagonists in *Indulekha, Parangodiparinayam* and *Sukumari*.

Access to modern education was not easy for the male and female members of the Namboothiri community even in the early 20th century, while other middle caste members were already sending their children to school.\(^\text{181}\) English education was equated with a lowering of caste status in the orthodox Namboothiri psyche. By the time this novel was published, there were already proposals to allow Namboothiri boys to acquire certain skills through English education. There were discussions happening around setting right what were perceived as certain imbalances within the community: dowry, inter-caste marriages, control over property, female education, etc. Moothiringottu Bhavatran Namboothiri gives English education a superior moral position in relation to Sanskrit in the novel.\(^\text{182}\) English education is equated with progress, modernity and material benefits like in the earlier novels (except *Parangodiparinayam*). Sulochana and Madhu, the protagonists are discerning and moralistic individuals as a result of their education. However Kunju, another young Namboothiri strays from the virtuous path because there is no figure of authority to monitor him. The problem with Kunju’s (Sanskrit) education is the manner in which it is imparted: all he did was learn

\(^{181}\) Devaki Nilayangodu mentions in her autobiography that this was true even in the late 1930s and 1940s. From: Nilayangodu, *Kalappakarchakal*.

\(^{182}\) In this novel while Sulochana, the Nair progeny, was allowed to go to school, Madhu’s father was not sure if the karanavar would approve of a young Namboothiri boy being sent to school. So, he asks the Apbhan for permission and the permission is given because the Apbhan Namboothiri regards Madhu as the perfect travel companion for Sulochana. Moreover, Madhu belonged to a sub-caste not associated with learning mantras and scriptures. In the early 20th century, the female members and progenies of Namboothiri households were not sent alone to any place. Sulochana would have had to be accompanied by servants. Madhu, being upper caste, passes the karanavar’s scrutiny because he is thought to be more responsible and capable than a servant. Sulochana is not considered a part of the Namboothiri household. Though her father wants her to go to school, this benefit is not extended to the other members of his household, including the younger male members. The male members were given a traditional Sanskrit education till the age of *Upanayanam*. When Ittichiri’s brother Kunju had wanted to go to school the karanavar refused to even think about a high caste Namboothiri, who had to learn and recite the Scriptures and Mantras, studying English.
things by rote without understanding any of it. His high caste status or his scripture and mantra recital privileges do not insulate him from immorality in the same manner that Surinamboothiripad in *Indulekha* is not insulated from being immoral. Another writer from the period, V.T. Bhattathiripad, mentions that while matrilineal communities took *Indulekha* to heart, the Namboothiris were angrily aware of their grandfather’s – the Surinamboothiripad’s – idiocy and lecherous nature (Devika, 2007a). Kunju is a young version of the Surinamboothiripad caricature or what would become of the younger Namboothiris if they were not given proper guidance.

By the 1920s and 1930s a large number of Nair women and men had been educated in the modern schools. There were strong caste based movements from among them to change the matrilineal system of inheritance and marriages. Sulochana, the Nair progeny of the Apbhan is shown as being able to partake of the progressive ideas and chart her life in an independent manner. She has financial autonomy, because she is not part of a larger Nair household (she and her mother stay in an independent house near Edakattumana). Madhu, Ittichiri and Kunju are all bound by the laws of the Namboothiri community. The younger Namboothiris are ineffectual figures and the antarjanams\textsuperscript{183} are passive and suffering. *The Unninambudiri*, a magazine that specifically dealt with Namboothiri reform, makes similar comments on the passive and suffering figure of the antarjanams (Antharjanam, 1929; Bhageerathiamma, 1922; Namboothiri, 1930; Savithri, 1930; Sridevi, 1930). General consensus among the reformers (and the novelist) was that they had to be brought to self-awareness through reform. The essayists exhorted the young Namboothiri men to take steps to bring about changes in their community. In the novel, Ittichiri is a naive, innocent, chaste and sensitive soul as opposed to the bold Sulochana. Sulochana’s boldness is partially due to her education, partially due to her financial independence, and also due to her spatial

\textsuperscript{183} Female Namboothiri women were called so.
separation from the (confining) space of the Namboothiri household. Her boldness also reads as an essential aspect of her modernity while Ittichiri’s timidity marks her as Sulochana’s counterpart. Since Ittichiri had not been sent to school, she and the other young female members of the household were taught in secret by the progressive Sulochana, a bit like the historical unfolding of events where Nair reform led to awakening among the Namboothiris in Kerala. Like *Indulekha*, this novel also imagines an ideal that is yet to be achieved with regard to the Namboothiri community.

Like in *Indulekha* and *Parangodiparinayam*, love and conjugality are powerful themes that move the plot forward and important aspects of the new identity imagined for the Namboothiri characters. It is her love for Madhu and despair over the non-fulfilment of that love that makes Ittichiri to try to commit suicide. It is his desire to be deserving of Ittichiri that drives Madhu forward in life. It is Sulochana’s love for Madhu that leads her to consume poison, and thus pay the way for the other two to unite. The educated Sulochana and Madhu would have been the ideal conjugal couple, but Madhu is made to pair with Ittichiri. Sulochana’s love for Madhu remains unfulfilled. Moothiringottu advocates an intra-caste marriage rather than an inter-caste marriage. At that point in history, the younger sons of a Namboothiri household were not allowed to marry within the community. The Namboothiri Family Regulation Committee was discussing the issues of marriage within the community for younger brothers and the issue of polygamy (Menon, 1970). For Madhu, being of a lower sub-caste, it was even more difficult to marry Ittichiri. However, the match between him and Ittichiri would not be unequal because he is educated (and a doctor by the end of the novel) and Ittichiri has also been home-schooled by Sulochana. In that sense the novel is also not advocating a total rejection of the Nair-Namboothiri social ties. Simultaneously, in this formulation Ittichiri can finally be saved from her misery only by another Namboothiri.
Fictional rendering of educated women and conjugal life

The earliest short stories in Malayalam were imitative of American and English authors. Though a few Malayalam short stories were published in the first half of the 19th century these were usually connected to the proselytization activities of the missionaries (Pillai, 1998). According to Malayalam literary critics, most of the short story writers of the period concentrated on elements of adventure, comedy, fantasy and surprise than on unity and structure of the plot necessary for the short story (Pillai, 1998). This could also be because the novel, essay, drama and poetry were the popular literary forms. By the beginning of 20th century, there was a demand for short pieces of literature and this coincided with the publishing of a large number of periodicals, which catered to them (George, 1972). The periodicals also provided an avenue for a number of women writers to publish their short works. M.M. Basheer, who has compiled a set of short stories by women in the early 20th century, remarks that Malayali women’s literary efforts seem to be concentrated in the genre of short story than any other form (Basheer, 2004). Susie Tharu and K. Lalita write of women writers:

Women articulate and respond to ideologies from complexly constituted and decentred positions within them. Familial ideologies, for instance, clearly constitute male and female subjectivities in different way, as do ideologies of nation or of empire. Further, ideologies are not experienced – or contested – in the same way from different subject positions. What may appear just and rational from a male or upper-class point of view may seem exploitative and contradictory from a working-class woman’s point of view. If we restrain ourselves from enthusiastically recovering women’s writing to perform the same services to society and to nation that mainstream literature over the last hundred years has been called upon to do, we might learn to read compositions that emerge from these eccentric locations in a new way; we might indeed learn to read them not for the moments in which they collude.
with or reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class, nation, or empire, but for the
gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them (Tharu and Lalita, 1991: 38-9).

There are two kinds of women writers in Kerala – the feminine and the feminist. The
works of the category dubbed feminist, often called pennezhuthu (a term coined in the 1980s)
in Malayalam, were criticised for its explicit political stance (Arunima, 2010; Devika and
Sukumar, 2006). Many of the early writers fall within the feminine. These writers were
careful to keep the subversions in their works subtle, so as to not bring on the ire of the
conventionalists (Kochukuttyamma, 1938). Most of the early women fiction writers did not
question the so-called natural divisions of gender, and the associated set of qualities,
preferences, duties, and characteristics deemed inherent to each gender. Instead, in their
writings they often blur the boundaries between the public and the domestic, and carve out a
space for women in the public, where womanly qualities were deemed necessary and
acceptable. The two short stories have been analysed not just because they have been written
by women, but also because the stories revolve around issues that were being discussed in the
magazines of the time. On the outset, the main themes and resolution of the themes collude
with hegemonic ideologies on gender and class. However, there are also moments of
subversion, where the narrative differs from the mainstream or canonical literature in
Malayalam. For instance, the short stories (in this thesis) posit married women as the main
protagonists. They narrate the women’s life after marriage, while in the early novels, the
women are usually (not always) single and then moving towards conjugal or wish to move
towards conjugality.¹⁸⁴ In this chapter, I have used two stories with married women as
protagonists, which then complicate the expectations of/about women and their
sthreedharmam to provide a counterpoint to the single woman protagonists of the novels.
They were published in Lakshmibai and Bashaposhini in the 1910s, hardly a decade after the

¹⁸⁴ Other women short story writers have used single women as their protagonists.
first short stories by women started appearing in print. Since the nature of the genre calls for brevity, there is no in-depth analysis of the protagonists and the plot revolves around one single moment of revelation in their life.

“Thalachorillatha Sthreekal” (Brainless Women) by M. Saraswathibai (Bashaposhini 15 (8-9), 1911) is the story of an astute woman, who makes her husband realize that it is absurd to think of women as being simpletons without any literary ability. The story is written in simple Malayalam in the third-person, and mostly narrated through the eyes of the male character. The husband, Govindhannair, has pretensions to being a great writer and does not accept his wife’s suggestions regarding his work. Govindhannair stands for the modern man, who aspires to be the sole provider for his family. For this reason, he marries from an insolvent Nair family, but his literary efforts do not bring in enough money to meet the needs of the growing family. When Kalyanniamma, his wife, offers to teach a few children in their neighbourhood to bring in extra cash, he refuses:

> It is not befitting a woman’s femininity or her husband’s masculinity if she has to earn money for her upkeep. I know men who utilise their wives’ money as their own.

> I am not like that. I will not use money earned by my wife. A woman loses her sthreethwam and dignity when she starts to work for money. I do not need a wife like that (Saraswathibai, 2004: 35).

He represents the new man, who takes an extreme stand against the traditional matrilineal practices. His masculinity is dependent on his ability to earn and provide for his

185 The first short story by a woman was published in 1904. For details, see: M. M. Basheer, ed., Aadhyakaala Sthreekathakal (Kozhikode: Lipi Publications, 2004).
186 There is no information available about the author.
187 In a literary competition conducted by a magazine, he loses out to somebody called Balakrishnan Nair and realises that it was his wife’s penname. Govindhannair has always been jealous of Balakrishnan Nair since the latter’s stories and essays were constantly being published in journals and magazines. When he comes to know that his literary opponent is his own wife, Govindhannair’s pride takes a beating and he decides to leave his wife and children. In the end though, husband and wife decide to spend the rest of their lives supporting their mutual literary efforts.
family. When Govindhannair gives up his regular literary efforts and distances himself from the daily running of the household to write a novel [much like it would have been in the then modern nuclear families], Kalyanniamma manages to make ends meet, pay the bills, does the cooking, minds the children, and makes sure that they do not disturb him. It is only at the end that the reader realises that she was also writing a novel and sending off her regular essays and stories to the magazines simultaneously. The author manages to capture what the early generation middle class female wage earners had to contend with in the absence of any outside help. This is different from the depiction of the female protagonists in the novels, who are shown as having servants to take care of their needs.

The resolution of the story is similar to that of the novels with the man and the woman moving towards a companionate marriage. However there are phrases or terms which appear in the narrative that reminds one of the subversions that Tharu and Lalita mention. For instance, when Govindhannair refuses to consider Kalyanniamma’s request to go out and work, he sends her off with a hug and a kiss. The author mentions her irritation that lasts for a few seconds, but which she suppresses because she loves her husband. The reader glimpses the interiority of a character forced to live with a patronising husband in those few sentences. Even the description of the household chores does not feature in the novels – paying bills to the milkman, butcher, baker, ghee seller, provision store, and washer man – which in the short story are important aspects of the duties of the (married) woman. This story was written in 1911 at a time when many critics were discussing the merits and de-merits of education, about the position of women in journalism, about women’s duties, and so on (Achuthamenon, 1907b; Ramakrishnapilla, 1906; Rukmaniamma, 1907). The story serves as a reminder/avowal that women could be educated, knowledgeable and still carry on their duties that many traditionalists were sure could not be simultaneously done. It also makes fun of the so-called male writers and intellectuals with their head in the clouds. Govindhannair is
not interested in knowing how Kalyanniamma finds the money for food and other necessities. His literary efforts were usually returned and what little he earned was not enough for his own expenses. What is not being said but glaringly obvious to the reader is that Kalyanniamma, the meek housewife, is the one who actually needs the money. The meek housewife, who is the traditional and passive woman in the novels, is subverted in the story. Kalyanniamma emerges as a modern and capable woman, who is also intelligent and witty.

“Oru Yadhaartha Barya” (A Real Wife) by Thachatt Devaki Nethyaramma\(^\text{188}\) (Lakshmibai 14(10), 1919) is probably one of the earliest fictional accounts of domestic violence by a woman. This story is narrated in the third-person in simple Malayalam. The protagonist, Janakiamma, unable to stand the abusive relationship with her husband, Raghavakaimal, decides to elope with a childhood sweetheart, Balakrishna Menon.

Balakrishna Menon is a loving friend, financially well-off and works far away in Burma, so she will be away from censure even if she goes away from her marital household. She is bothered by her decision to elope, but reminds herself of Kaimal’s evil nature. There are two important things that this story brings to one’s notice: (a) physical abuse of wives by husbands was occurring even in matrilineal communities; (b) women thought it was their \textit{dharmam} to stay in such marriages no matter what. In \textit{Indulekha}, Indulekha mentions how the freedom to choose a partner and to break a relationship has always worked well for the Malayali woman. In this instance, the protagonist decides on a traditionally acceptable custom of breaking the \textit{Sambandham}, and then moves towards modernity, paradoxically by deciding to stay back in the abusive relationship.\(^\text{189}\) It is a paradox because with Malayali modernity, the nature of marriages changes among matrilineal groups and the concept of conjugality and the woman’s \textit{dharmam} towards her husband began to be posited as the most

\(^{188}\) No information is available about this author.

\(^{189}\) On the way to the railway station, Janakiamma sees that her husband had been involved in a serious accident and decides to stay with him.
important one; the earlier freedom to disengage from a non-viable/unsuitable relationship is taken away. In this depiction of the modern family, the woman decides to stay in the marriage. No one (physically) forces Janakiamma to stay. Janakiamma’s return to her husband could alternatively be read as masochistic, or as the writer’s ironic take on how patriarchy/modernity has shaped women’s will in such a manner that she finds herself worthy/useful/credible only when she stays within a monogamous conjugal space.

This move, while it may appear regressive in the post-feminist era, in the context of the early 20th century, was being debated among the reading public. There were articles in the magazines of the period about a literary character, Sheelavathy. She was mostly depicted as an ideal wife, chaste and forever obedient to her husband. The husband becomes a drunkard and asks her to carry him on her shoulders to the house of a courtesan. She does so without any complaint. When he dies, her devotion, prayer and chastity bring him back to life. The discussions were centred on whether Sheelavathy could be considered a model woman or not. Some considered her action of taking her husband to a courtesan shocking. She should have been guiding his steps on the path of righteousness instead of giving in to his unreasonable demands. Some others applauded her devotion and obedience (B.G., 1919; Lakshmikuttyamma, 1920; Narayanamenon, 1905). Janakiamma would then seem to be like Sheelavathy in that she decides to stay on in an unequal relationship. This story appeared in Lakshmibai the same year as these discussions on women/men placed within the frame of the family. In the story, nobody realizes that Janakiamma is being abused by her husband. The solitariness and loneliness of the woman in the new nuclear family is clear in the way the story is narrated. Janakiamma has no support system to fall back on, financially and emotionally. Moreover, since she had chosen her husband on her own (despite her father’s objections), she probably does not feel that she can enlist any of her relatives’ help. Within the modern marriage, the woman loses some of the earlier rights. Janakiamma and the other
protagonists (from matrilineal communities) enter/chose to remain in the newly patrilocal family on their own initiative. The authors do not present this move as being forced upon them by other members of their family, particularly the men. What this foregrounds is the emergence of an overarching ideology that posited the patrilocal family as the norm to adhere to. This story in particular seems to be a forerunner to some of the movies in the late 20th century and early 21st century, where a battered and wronged wife goes back to her husband because her ‘rightful place’ is by his side (Anubhavangal Paalichakal, 1971; Bharya, 1962; Ozhimuri, 2012; Snehadeepam, 1962; Sthree, 1950). Matriliny did not guarantee that the position of the women in the household was better than that of the women in patrilineal households. A missionary record from the period gives a not so rosy picture of the reality of matrilineal households, where the women moved to the husband’s house:

The system of inheritance through the female line which is not found anywhere else in India gave the women a certain amount of freedom and importance. But, it cannot be said, nevertheless, that they enjoyed a really enviable position. The majority of them were illiterate. Girls were given in marriage at the age or six or seven or at any rate before ten. The wife was not much better than the head-servant. The sole occupation of her life was to please her husband and his parents. The mother-in-law difficulty was the curse of the country. She was to revere her husband as her god and to serve him was to be her religion. She was incapable of participating in the larger interests of his life as she moved in a plane far below him. An exalted position was given to one sex at the expense of the other (Thomas, 1913: 106).

Since this was written by a missionary who also had the agenda of justifying the presence of missionaries in Kerala and the need for resources, it is a possibility that there is some amount of exaggeration and elision in the account. Yet, it provides a completely different view of the educational condition of women in the matrilineal household from that
of the census reports where the writer claims that most women in Kerala were taught the three R’s.\textsuperscript{190}

About the story, the argument is not on the existence or non-existence of domestic violence, but rather that the depiction of the same is what differentiates this story from other narratives. In \textit{Sukumari} one of the characters Vasanthi tells Sukumari about being in an abusive relationship. But in \textit{Sukumari}, the abusive husband turns a new leaf as a result of his self-realization, shame, guilt and the Christian influence of Vasanthi. There is no detailing of Vasanthi’s life and the incident is merely re-told by Vasanthi. Thachatt Devaki Nethyaramma manages to capture small details about Janakiamma after she had been hit by her husband in the beginning of the story. For example, she looks in the mirror, ties up the loose strands of her hair and tries to remove traces of her crying. Both she and Kalyanniamma, from the previous story, are aware of possible scrutiny by other people. While talking to Balakrishna Menon at a party, Janakiamma makes certain they do it in a manner that they are not noticed. None of the other female characters in the other fictional work (written before and after these short stories) are self-aware to the same level that Janakiamma and Kalyanniamma are. The latter live their lives as if they are under constant surveillance. Janakiamma’s anxiety about people’s reaction (if she leaves with Balakrishna Menon) is caused by this feeling of being under surveillance. The single women in the novels are not as bothered about their interactions with the opposite sex or as aware of their surroundings and the people that populate them in the same manner that Janakiamma and Kalyanniamma are. Women were learning to negotiate the new public spaces and the new spaces of the nuclear family in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. And it fell upon the progressive writers of the period to show that women could successfully negotiate these spaces. Both Janakiamma and Kalyanniamma, thus make a

\textsuperscript{190} 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.”
success of their lives in different ways by taking an active part in the decisions that lead to the final resolutions.

**Critique of a proto-feminist**

In Kerala, the drama entered the literary scene quite late. The first plays in Malayalam were published in the 1880s, same decades as the first novels were being published.\(^{191}\) Plays took on a proper literary form in Kerala during the 1920s to 1940s, according to literary critics (Chaitanya, 1995; Pillai, 2005). The literary scene in Kerala moved towards a Socialist realist phase in the 1930s (George, 1972). Many playwrights started to use comedy to deal with serious issues. E.V. Krishnapilla started writing satires in dramatic form during this period.

E.V. Krishnapilla’s\(^{192}\) play *Pennarashunadu* (The land where women rule) is the story of a woman who dominates her husband in the name of *sthreeswaathandryam* (roughly translated as women’s freedom here) (Krishnapilla, 1935). This play was taken up for analysis because it was one of the few fictional works that had a depiction (albeit comical) of the proto-feminists in Malayalam-speaking regions. It was published a few years after the other works analysed in this chapter and at a time when the younger generation of male

---

\(^{191}\) The first plays were translations from Sanskrit. In addition to renderings of Sanskrit dramatists, several writers attempted original plays on the Sanskrit model. In many of the plays, in spite of prose dialogues the highlight was on poetic sequences. These plays were far removed from the then contemporary reality by their themes and styles. Later, there emerged a number of plays based on English plays. The first play in Malayalam was *Keraaleeya Bashashakuntalam* (1882) by Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran. These plays were written to be enacted on stage. Other kinds of plays had been enacted on the stage long before this. These were usually religious plays that emerged from contact with the Portuguese. The first social drama in Kerala with a completely indigenous theme was *Mariyamna* (1897) by Kocheepan Tharakan. For details, see: Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai, *Malayala Sahithyam Kalakkhattangaliloote* (Mavelikara: Prathibha Books, 1998).

\(^{192}\) E.V. Krishnapilla was a lawyer and the editor of the newspaper *Malayalam*. He was also a member of the Travancore Legislative assembly. He was the most popular writer of farce in Malayalam. His plays were very popular and he used to write historical and social dramas with strong comic elements.
writers were in the process of constructing a masculine identity, which they positioned in opposition to their perceived emasculation in matrilineal households (Arunima, 2010). This masculinity was constructed not in opposition to that of the traditional woman, but the modern educated woman and the traditional man. The first and second generation of women had already been through the modern education system and working in the modern institutions at this period. There were a number of women’s organizations and groups working for the betterment of women’s conditions in Kerala and in India in the 1930s, as mentioned in the preceding chapters. The early women’s writings and activities in the public sphere clearly threatened many men, who either offered paternalist advice on safeguarding women’s voice and/or subverted their activities by lampooning them, like E.V. Krishnapilla does in this play. This work was strongly criticised by the magazine Shrimathi for its rhetoric against women (working and taking part in activities) in the public sphere. The protagonist Bhageerathiamma wants a reversal of gender roles and authority to reside with women. She calls Unnikorakaimal, ‘husband,’ and he does the cooking, cleaning and serving in their house. The use of the term ‘husband’ satirizes those modern educated women and men who had taken to interspersing their conversation with English terms to appear more modern.

E. V. does advocate a clear demarcation between the public and the domestic domain. Bhageerathiamma is a failure because she has distanced herself from the domestic domain.

---

193 One is led to wonder if it is a coincidence that the name is very similar to two prominent women writers of the time. Both these women used to write on women’s education in the magazines in the early 20th century.

194 They speak in Malayalam, and whenever Bhageerathiamma calls addresses her husband, she uses the English word ‘husband’. Her husband, Unnikorakaimal, does the household chores, while she runs an organization that works for the freedom of women. The sub-plots deal with that of M.S. Nair, Bhageerathiamma’s secretary, and his relationship with his wife, and the love between Vasanthi and Shekharapilla, two other characters known to Bhageerathiamma. The only followers Bhageerathiamma gets are 2-3 women of the servant class. They neither understand what she wants them to do, nor do they have any stake in the organisation. Bhageerathiamma’s husband humours her bossy behaviour and goes along with her to see how far she will go. She is the only one who believes that she holds the cards in her marital relationship. The ending of Bhageerathiamma’s story is in direct contrast to that of M.S. Nair’s story, where his wife becomes the dominant partner in the relationship.
This again presupposes a solidity of the “natural” divide between women and men that assigns to them specific sets of qualities, dispositions and preferences like the other writers do. The idea of the new Man is inherent in this play; a Man not dependent on the *tharavad* or the modern woman. Though Unnikorakaimal acts subservient to his wife, at one point he tells Shekharapilla that the household runs smoothly because there is ample property/agricultural land which provides a means for sustenance (as she does not contribute anything financially). Their household is not part of a large joint family, which in turn allows Unnikorakaimal to be independent of his wife or her family. At the end, he asserts his masculinity by exerting his control over his wife: he takes her hand forcefully and sends her off to the kitchen to cook, clean and to take care of the children. The narrative seems to suggest that the masculinity of the man is authenticated and brought in to being in opposition to the radical and modern womanhood presented by Bhageerathiamma. Madhavan in *Indulekha* and Madhu in *Apbhande Makal* also stand for this new masculinity. Madhu is shown in contrast to the older and traditional Karanavar and Kunju, who though young is part of the traditional masculinity.

Satyadasan and Pangashamenon are not conceptualized in the same manner as the other characters in this chapter. Satyadasan is not pitted against a karanavar or any other older man standing in the stead of the traditional Man like in the other novels. His sense of self is not as caught up in the intricacies of being seen as a Man like the other Hindu characters. This could also be because the patrilineal groups in Kerala in the 19th century were not as invested in the notion of masculinity as were the matrilineal communities. This emergence of the discourse on masculinity was linked to the critique of matriliny and aided and abetted by the growing national and communist movements (Arunima, 2010; Sreekumar and Radhakrishnan, 2007). Pangashamenon is also different from the other characters by virtue of his traditional education. He is not a modern man, but he is representative of Man. The new Man was usually educated, like the modern Woman, and was given the task of providing for
the financial needs of the family. He was sometimes part of other social movements like Shekharapilla is in the play and had interests outside the family. At one point the de-masculinized Unnikorakaimal is asked by Shekharapilla:

Who is this? Man or Woman? Why brother! Now you should wear a sari and blouse and become a woman (Krishnapilla, 1935: 23).

The concept of the man and that of masculinity was rooted in his attire, his control over his wife and family, the kind of duties that were expected of him. Unnikorakaimal does the cooking, cleaning, feeding the children, bringing refreshments to guests, etc, and thereby strongly marks these activities as being part of woman’s domain. The humour or the satire is in knowing what the expected behaviour was for women and men in the context of Kerala, and then the characters do not conform to the norm, and the norms are reversed. Thus, in this play more than in others, gender (and not class or caste) gains prominence and is the principle that differentiates human beings.

The modernity of Man is linked to urban spaces and travel, in the novels. Madhavan, Madhu, Parangodan, and Satyadasan have all either studied in Madras/Bombay/Calcutta or have had to travel to other places as part of their moving on/growing up in life. The urban space is seen as necessary to make them modern or progressive. Pangashamenon, being a representative of the traditional Man does not make this journey. Even in the short story, “Oru Yadhaartha Barya”, the character of Balakrishna Menon is working in Burma. Janakiamma is plotting her escape to an urban space which would also provide her with anonymity.

---

195 Bhageerathiamma asks Unnikorakaimal to leave the veranda of the house when other women arrive. In another instance, an MLA, Purushothamanpilla is forced by Bhageerathiamma to marry Chirutha; Chirutha gives a piece of cloth to Purushothamanpilla (usually given by the man to the woman in a Sambandham) and M.S. Nair makes a musical hooting sound (traditionally made by women during marriages).
In the play, E.V. Krishnapilla lampoons the stereotype of the man-hating radical feminist. Critics like J. Devika also read the play as vocalising ire against women’s aspirations towards a public life (Devika, 2007a). On a close reading of the play, one realises that it is not against women’s empowerment or education, though in the beginning one is led to think so. The reader/audience is aware from the beginning that Bhageerathiamma’s character is all fury without efficiency, without the strength of character or understanding to bring about real changes in the lives of women. The flaws in her character bring about her downfall. The entire play is a satire on women’s groups, and their cries for *sthreeswaathandryam*. The play ridicules the more radical notions of *sthreeswaathandryam*. In this play, *sthreeswaathandryam* means a lot more than simple freedom: it means breaking gender moulds/roles, taking on the mantle of authority, not shirking responsibilities linked to one’s gender, remaining within a monogamous conjugality and so on. When Unnikorakaimal speaks to Shekharapilla about Vasanthi (Shekharapilla’s love interest), the question of transgressing gender moulds/roles comes up:

Shekharapilla: Brother! Don’t make her a Man by teaching *sthreeswaathandryam* to her too.

Unnikorakaimal: She has spunk. Fear not.

Shekharapilla: It is tolerable now. Hope it doesn’t increase. (Krishnapilla, 1935: 25)

This is a concept that is very similar to what is called “being over-smart” in common parlance in current Malayalam. “Being over-smart” is when a woman transgresses certain limits of freedom, outsmarts a man, acts superior and know-all. *Sthreeswaathandryam* in this particular instance is used to connote a state of mind where a woman considers herself superior to men, and does not keep to expected gender/domestic roles. The character of Vasanthi is that of a strong woman, who does not fall within the expected gender norms. Though she is obedient to her father (a landlord), she is no doormat. Vasanthi is a champion of women’s rights. Yet, she neither joins any organisation nor advocates the radical position...
taken up by Bhageerathiamma, and thus she is not a part of the public sphere in the same way that Bhageerathiamma is. Vasanthi is educated and believes that women have as much of a right as men to chart a life for themselves, though this is not at the expense of family life.

E.V. Krishnapilla, like the other writers of the period, posits the role of the woman as being that of a mentor and a moral force within the man-woman relationship. While the man was imagined as the chief provider for the family, the woman was the moral force that held the structure together. Her natural affinities or inherent qualities make her capable of this. In the play, M.S. Nair while pretending to support Bhageerathiamma’s cause, ill treats his wife, Meenakshi. Vasanthi plays a pivotal role in making M.S. Nair’s wife realise that she can take her life in her own hands and need not be a victim of abuse:

> Women should be aware of their position. And not just resort to prayers and tears. It is a wife’s dharmam to guide her husband when he takes unwise decisions. You were born in a good family; but your husband has become wicked as a result of the weakness of your character; because you did not do your duty. If you continue like this, he will become even worse. You will have to take responsibility for this before Man and God”. (Krishnapilla, 1935: 95)

In this formulation, the place of the woman is within the family, but she has to be strong, educated, and capable of guiding her spouse almost in the same manner Indulekha guides Madhavan in their relationship. Bhageerathiamma, however, is an object of ridicule because she is neither diplomatic nor astute and tries to bring about sudden changes in the existing social structure. Published two decades after the story by Thachatt Devaki Nethyaramma, in this sub-plot we see a different kind of depiction of domestic violence or resolution to domestic violence. By then, nuclear families had become the norm. In this play, the character stays within the marriage, and changes the equation of power within the relationship with outside help. Vasanthi’s relationship to Shekharapilla, the reader is led to believe, will be a more companionate kind of marriage than the other two relationships.
Vasanthi works within the structure of the family. However she is also seen as being able to travel alone to the houses of Bhageerathiamma and M.S. Nair without anyone accompanying her; though a woman, she is not curtailed by immobility. Rather, she is allowed to go to these places, because she is working towards keeping these families safe and fit the norm. Social scientists and cultural historians have pointed out that Nair and other lower caste women had certain freedom of movement within their villages, compared to Namboothiri women (Arunima, 2003; Schneider and Gough, 1961). However, this freedom of movement, in the play, is allowed when it is done quietly and without attracting attention. Bhageerathiamma is ridiculed when she transgresses by becoming part of an organisation that is also ‘public’. When women’s efforts were towards a re-affirmation of their sthreethwam, sthreedharmam and the domestic space, their movement into the public space was not read as a transgression. Though Pennarashunadu may be written in a comic vein, it provides the modern reader insight into norms of behaviour for women and men belonging to the middle class/caste in the third decade of the 20th century.

The one consistent fact in all these novels/stories/play is the invisibility/vagueness of the figure of the mother, which could well be a problem with the text selection done for this thesis. Most of the female protagonists have mothers, some have children, but the relationship between the mother and child is never portrayed even in the sub-plots and episodes. The incidents and dialogues are usually among the female and male protagonists, the karanavar of the family, and the father of the male or female protagonist (in some cases). This is puzzling when one looks at the non-fictional writings from the same period. There were a number of articles on the duties of a mother and on childcare. Most of these articles were also written by women for women, while the fictional works were usually written by men. There are no strong bonds among the women in the fictional narratives. They may have a maid or a relative in subordinate positions, but never equals, except in Sukumari.
(Sukumari and Karuna are friends and confidants, but in Sukumari the nature of relationships are different as I have shown before). The women protagonists are always alone and in some cases lonely. This could even be read as a feature of Malayali modernity where the woman is now severed from her ties with the joint family, is spatially and emotionally removed from this space, which is perceived as being orthodox and traditional. The figure of the mother, sister and friend are eroded to give prominence to the male protagonist, who would then become friend, confidante and lover. The conjugal relationship attains prominence in all of the fictional narratives. The figure of the woman seems to attain completion only when she is married, and once she has attained marriage, only if it is a companionate marriage. To be able to attain the state of marriage, women were expected to be educated and to stay within the norms of respectable behaviour. The companionate marriage had clear divisions of roles, labour, duties and tasks. The man was envisaged as the primary provider in that space, though the women writers do question this notion. The women were the ones entrusted with the care of the young – their physical, mental and moral nourishment. The daily running of the household was also the task of the woman. The only women who were not shown as being mired in household tasks were the characters from financially well-off families like Indulekha, Sulochana, Parangodi and Vasanthi.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the novels, short stories and the play:

- There was a definite sense of a traditional woman and a modern woman in all the works analysed here: being traditional or modern hinged on the education of the woman.

- Most of the works depicted the traditional woman as being passive, naïve, not very capable of taking charge of their lives or the space of the domestic and in most cases as being not educated in the modern educational institutions.
- The modern woman had differing qualities and accomplishments depending upon the class, caste and religious position of the character. However education of some kind began to be universally accepted as a given for the modern woman.

- Conjugality was seen as the desired state for women in all of the fictional works. Love and/or bodily desire were an important aspect of conjugality in most of the novels. The object of affection of the protagonist was exclusively the spouse/lover and there was no space or place for other figures/relationships within the narratives due to the importance given to the state of conjugality. It was often the steadfastness of the heroine’s love that held the romance/relationship together. In the short stories and the play, where most of the protagonists were married, desire was not as important as the conjugal relationship itself.

- Modernity, in some sense, seems to isolate the female protagonists, especially the radical ones.

- For the relationship to move forward, it required the woman (not the man) to be humble, moralistic, and domestically inclined; to not transgress a perceived invisible divide between gender roles.

- The family itself began to be imagined as patrilocal and nuclear. The ideal family was also the union of individuals from within the same community.

- The short stories depicted an internal-looking subject, more so than the other works. The protagonists in the short-stories were constantly aware of external scrutiny, which dictated their actions.

I started writing this chapter with the question whether there is a homogenous figure of the Malayali woman in the fictional narratives. While there are aspects of sthreethwam
and *sthreedharmam* that are common to all of the characters, there are also differences in their development or where they have arrived at, in relation to modernity. The ideal to be achieved for different women varied with respect to the class, caste, religious and ideological position espoused by the writers. What Kizhakkepattu Ramankutty Menon imagines as the model woman is different from what Joseph Moolliyil or E.V. Krishnapilla imagines. Conjugality and the domestic sphere were seen as aspects of *sthreedharmam* (together with education) for all the women. Even the characters with well-developed sense of self and individuality are finally pulled back into the conjugal relationship. A sense of self is not allowed to be able to exist in isolation: Janakiamma who tries to break out of the oppressive relationship needs the external help of Balakrishna Menon; Indulekha, who is well provided for and living in comfort, cannot live without Madhavan; Kalyanniamma requires Govindhannair by her side; even Sukumari is only happy with the presence of Satyadasan in her life. Bhageerathiamma, who is a ‘hard individual’ as opposed to the other softer feminine characters, is alone; as is Parangodi, who has lost some of her *sthreethwam* (according to the author). It is almost as if a happy ending is possible for the female characters only if they fall within the prescribed gender roles assigned to them by their authors.

The characters need education so that they are trained in their *sthreedharmam* – towards their families and society. Education also played an important role in the depiction of the development of the self of the fictional characters. Their educational status (or lack) is what makes these women take the steps/actions that they do and move the narrative forward. Even Vasanthi and Bhageerathiamma, whose educational qualifications are not mentioned, are not the stereotypical traditional and passive women. Their lack of passivity itself points to some kind of education. Education is shown as being possible in the case of the female characters (specifically from matrilineal communities) when a male member of the family provides the money and the opportunity. The women do not gain access to education on their
own initiative. In *Apbhande Makal*, Sulochana requires her father’s permission while Ittichiri and others are in turn taught by her in secret. The other women require the permission of the Apbhan Namboothiri to start formal education. Thus, in the fictional narratives access to modern education itself was mediated through the male authority in their lives – for both matrilineal and patrilineal communities.

* * * * *

**Section II**

**Two Lives: real women**

The first autobiography in Malayalam came out in the 19th century written by Pachumuthathu (1814-1883). His autobiography was a recording of certain incidents in his life. The genre became popular in the 20th century. The majority of autobiographies in the Indian context are reticent about the private self. But the mode of writing is in the first-person voice and is about a lived history. Indians were also occupied with the experience of historical change in their narratives (Kumar, 2008). This is true of novels and other kinds of fiction as shown in the earlier section. The claims made in the autobiographies were historical and personal at the same time (Kumar, 2008). This is particularly true of the autobiographies by Malayali women writers. B. Kalyani Amma’s *Ormayil Ninnu* (1964) (From Memory) is a strong and passionate narrative of her life and society.196 K. R. Gowriyamma’s *Aatmakatha* (2010) (Autobiography) is not just the narrative of her life, but

---

196 B. Kalyani Amma (1884-1959) was one of the writers and editors of *Sharada*. She was married to the writer and political activist Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai. She worked as a teacher and Headmistress in Malabar and Mangalore until she retired in 1937. Some of her literary works were used as textbooks in schools. Parts of the text book *Mahathikal* analysed in the previous chapter were probably written by her because she mentions writing a collection of biographies by that name in her autobiography. She was also a close family friend of Tharavath Ammalu Amma (mentioned in chapter 2).
also the history of her village, of its customs, its people and the history of the beginnings of the communist movement.\textsuperscript{197} Her childhood was spent in a period that is marked in public memory as the advent of Kerala’s modernity. The social and political processes of the time that changed not just individual lives, but the dressing styles, the social relationships between different castes, relationships and customs within families, etc. are discussed in the early parts of the narrative.

It was not just awareness of the changes happening in the public sphere that were important to many of the autobiographers, but Udaya Kumar states that the early autobiographers felt the burden of associating the exemplary with the enterprise of writing (Kumar, 2008). Life stories were important in the era of social and caste reform in Kerala. The Maharaja of Travancore himself asked Valia Koil Thampuran\textsuperscript{198} to compile a biography – *Mahacharitha Samgraham* – published in 1895 (Pillai, 1998). Biographies were an important part of the school curriculum from 1866 and were included in the magazines of the period as mentioned in the previous chapters. The early autobiographers were not just writing about their lives, but also writing/changing the history of the nation; and they were recording the latter through their writing. When Gowriyamma first started to write her autobiography in the magazine *Deshabhimani*, she appeared infrequently in the history (of the people who were instrumental in bringing about socio-political changes in her Taluk, of the beginnings of the labour movement, of the socio-political milieu of Travancore, about the life of ordinary people, of the peculiarities of her Taluk, the role played by her family members in the changing socio-political milieu, and so on) that was fore grounded (Gowriyamma, 2010). So,

\textsuperscript{197} K.R. Gowriyamma (1919- ) was a well known activist in the SNDP in the 1930s and later became a member of the Communist Party of India. She was a minister in the Kerala Legislative Assembly in various years and in 1994 established a new political party named Janathipathiya Samrakshana Samithy (JSS). When she was re-elected in 2004, at 85 years, she was the oldest and longest serving legislator in Kerala history. Currently, she has retired from active political life.

\textsuperscript{198} The consort of Rani Lakshmi Bayi mentioned in the previous chapter.
when the autobiography was to be published in a book form, she consciously rewrote it with more of her personal life included in the narrative. Since this book is about her life till the time she joined the Communist Party in 1947, it does not exactly present herself as being the ideal individual in the narrative, as the political activist and the efficient administrator in her were yet to emerge. Her work is more a slice of Kerala from before 1947 as seen through the eyes of the young Gowriyamma. Contrarily, Kalyani Amma did see her life as being kind of exemplary: in the preface to her autobiography, she mentions that she wrote her memoirs and left it with her friend Tharavath Amminni Amma because she did not want journalists to pester her daughter or her friend after her death. She realises her life was different and it would generate curiosity once she was no more.

For both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma, childhood was an era of spectacle, of remembered pleasures and awe: the taliketukalyanam, the temple festivals, the viewing of Kathakalli performance, etc. Yet, Kalyani Amma sees some of these as being superstitious and outdated cultural practices. She speaks of the custom of caste pollution as one such outdated practice, while presenting herself as being outside the system or not imbibing the system. Her rejection of what she reads as out-dated practices is also the development of a self that sees itself as being different from others around her. She describes one incident when she wanted a kind of glass bead necklace worn by the Pulaya women working in her ancestral home. She was given permission to get it from them, but the necklace had to be broken, the thread removed from it, the beads washed and put inside a rounded leaf and put down on the ground (as she belonged to one of the Nair sub-caste who was not allowed to be near Pulaya women and collect anything from their hand). In exchange for the glass beads, she was to give the woman a small mundu. In her excitement, she placed the mundu directly in the Pulaya woman’s hand. Her uncle, who saw the exchange, was shocked and angry; and

---

199 She was another writer of the period and the daughter of Tharavath Ammalu Amma.
her aunt was sent to fetch her. Kalyani Amma was forcefully given a bath in a nearby pond, which was by no means clean. Her aunt also took a bath in the same pond to remove the pollution she herself accrued by contact with Kalyani Amma. The young Kalyani Amma could not accept this practice of pollution and she used to climb trees, exchange fruits and touch the Pulaya children who came to play in the family orchard in the afternoons, while the adults were busy. Her awareness and understanding of caste pollution as an out-dated practice develops after she starts her education.

Gowriyamma’s sense of her caste identity does not develop in a similar manner. Since she was born later, her childhood memories of caste pollution were located in a time when the SNDP had become a strong organization working towards eradicating many of the social evils associated with caste. Gowriyamma’s sense of caste pollution and other socio-political movements originate from the strong ties her family, particularly her father, had with the SNDP movement. She, though from the Ezhava community, was part of a rich middle class family. There were very few upper caste families in her village/locality. She is aware of her caste position and mentions that she is from the Ezhava caste in the beginning of her autobiography. Kalyani Amma, however, does not feel the need to state her caste in the narrative. To her, it would appear her caste was a given or something she takes for granted that other people would recognize. She does mention that her father was a Brahmin, and for this reason as a child, before the glass bead incident, she had to be careful of where she ate, from whom she accepted food and so on.

Kalyani Amma is also aware of the contradiction of being made to take a bath in a dirty pond to get rid of the caste pollution she accrued in the glass bead incident. She sees this move or development of her self as not just from superstitions and other social evils, but also as a movement towards rational thinking and Science. She mentions that the building housing the Zenana mission school, where she studied, was reputed to be haunted by a ghost.
Students used to faint and unusual noises used to emanate from the top floor of the building. Kalyani Amma herself believed that there must have been a ghost there, while her friend did not believe in there being any such object/being called a ghost. The study of science and scientific principles changed their beliefs:

The top floor of the building was made entirely of wood – floor and walls. The sounds produced by the seasonal shrinking and expansion of the wooden boards were responsible for the eerie bumps and knocks. We tried to convince some of the students and teachers, who believed in ghosts and spirits (Amma, 1964: 49).

Kalyani Amma and her friend were not able to convince others in the school as to the non-existence of the ghost/spirit. This incident also marked for her that not everybody was ready to give up on traditional beliefs/customs when confronted with the rationality inherent in modern education and Science. Kalyani Amma’s rejection of some of the caste practices should not be read as a rejection of caste/religion. There are certain aspects of caste which she rejects consciously and certain aspects which she is not aware of as being a caste/religious practice. For example, in one footnote she mentions that she was born under the Malayalam astrological star of mulam. She reads her school days as being auspicious since that particular period in her life was under the influence of shukra (Venus, which in astrology meant a period of luxury, fortune and comfort).

In the case of Gowriyamma, member of a progressive Ezhava family (and born nearly 35 years after Kalyani Amma), negotiations with caste/religious practices were through the new structures and customs put in place by SNDP. She mentions that temple-related activities were not a major aspect of their daily life and that lower caste people were not allowed in most of the temples during her childhood. So the visits to temples would be to pay tribute or pay the land tax (Kannam) since the land held by her father had been taken on contract from the temple. Gowriyamma could attend the village school and later a Devasom school (Temple authority owned school) in town without any problems even though she was
from the Ezhava caste. There were a few caste practices/restrictions she had to adhere to, but they were not as oppressive to someone from her financial and social background. There was a man from the Potti caste (a high caste) to make drinking water (water boiled with herbs) for the high caste students so that they did not ‘lose caste’. The school wall bordered a temple and on certain days the members of the royal family used to bathe in the temple pond. So, students belonging to the lower castes were not allowed to be near that particular wall. She also mentions a male teacher who used to speak badly of the lower caste students in class, but would visit her home for food and often take loans of money. When she complained about him at home, he was stopped from visiting them again. Thus, ideas related to caste pollution were changing, and like in the case of the teacher, was expressed not so much in outright acts of physical aggression as being present in the common psyche. These narratives also highlight how caste was indeed a part of these writers’ lives.

For both the women, school was also a place where they learned facets of culture and gendered behaviour. This was not through the curriculum, but through other aspects of teaching/disciplining. Kalyani Amma mentions that when repeated admonishment had not put a stop to their habit of shaking their legs, their teacher changed their regular benches to shorter benches. The (male) teacher thought it important that these girl students learn to sit and conduct themselves in a manner expected of girls and made changes to the physical arrangement of the classroom towards that end. When Gowriyamma joined the High school in Chertala, she found that the students were from a different social background than one she was used to:

Around half the students in Chertala High School were children of government officers, business men and landlords. Their behaviour and dressing styles were different. As a result, the atmosphere and discipline in this school was also different. It was compulsory to wear clean clothes, to plait or brush one’s hair, and to learn one’s daily lessons (Gowriyamma, 2010: 102).
It was not just at school, but by the time she entered puberty she was restricted from “talking aloud, running, going to places were adults were talking, conversing with men and laughing with them” at home as well (Gowriyamma, 2010).

Education was an important achievement for both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma. Going to school was not a chore; at that point getting educated was a matter of pride and a privilege for the common man, but unaffordable. Government schools were free for the lower castes, but many of the students had other chores to do at home, and their income was needed to put food on the table. Gowriyamma remembers being excited about going to school, especially when she had to join the English school after her primary education. Her village did not have complete schools, so she did her primary, lower secondary and high school education in different institutions. She was the first woman in her family to study past high school. After her matriculation, the entire family was discussing which college she should join. Her father wanted her to become a lawyer, and she did become the first Ezhava lawyer to pass her examination from the state of Cochin. Her educational status was important to the entire family.

Education did not always mean the academic kind during the period. Her elder sisters, who were not as brilliant academically, were trained in vocal music, fiddle, veena and harmonium. Her description of her eldest sister’s lifestyle is very similar to that of Indulekha’s life in Indulekha. This sister’s husband was in Iraq. So she stayed with them. Her child was taken care of by the servants and other members of the family. The sister would wake up in the morning and after her morning ablutions start her music training. Gowriyamma remembers acquaintances coming to the house to listen to her musical performances. This sister, she says was not interested in the daily running of the household or in anything else. Gowriyamma foregrounding this sister and her lifestyle meant that it was significant to her understanding of how women led their lives. This particular sister also
learned to ride a motorcycle (with a side car), and used to take Gowriyamma and the child on rides to the town. Cars, buses, and even bicycles were rare in those times, and so, people used to come out and watch her ride the motorcycle. They used to whistle and shout which would anger her sister, but did not make her stop. Gowriyamma mentions that their father made her stop riding the motorcycle when he heard about people’s reaction. He felt the time was not right for her to continue her passion/hobby. There is regret and reluctant admiration in the way she mentions her sister. Here was a woman who was not interested in the domestic aspects of everyday life, accomplished in the finer areas or accomplishments of education, but also bold and courageous enough to experiment with a new technology. The reader is given a glimpse of a new kind of woman in the figure of the sister. This figure also embodies the kind of woman the readers were exhorted not to become by many of the magazine writers of the period. Gowriyamma herself, does not act out of place or make a move that compromised her position as a ‘good woman’ throughout her educational phase. Here again is the perception of the external scrutiny, like in the short stories, and women having to abide by certain invisible rules. Gowriyamma did give speeches and helped out with the various charitable activities carried out by her family and attended a few SNDP meetings. Though these do place her as being different from the average student from that period, she herself does not see these as being very unusual since it was done with the implicit approval of her father and her brother.\(^{200}\)

For Kalyani Amma, going to school was not as easy as it was for Gowriyamma. Her family could not afford to send her to school. However, by then education for women was becoming acceptable among the Nairs and even began to be seen as a necessity. She managed to study till her matriculation because the mission school provided books and other stationeries and also paid her a monthly stipend. Kalyani Amma joined school around the

\(^{200}\) The brother immediately elder to her was also politically active and went on to become a lawyer. Both of them sat for their matriculation together, but he failed and later continued his education in a different college.
turn of the century. But once she finished her middle school (there was a public examination in the 3rd Form, equivalent to the 7th class today, at that point), her family did not want her to continue, and the head of the school, who was a foreign lady, managed to find more funding for Kalyani Amma and her friends. Thus, though education was seen as necessary, it was not important for her family to send her for higher education. Kalyani Amma does not provide reasons for this reluctance on her family’s part. One of the reasons was the inability of the family to financially support her, the second could have been that in the late 19th century though learning to read and write were beginning to be seen as important, women were not expected to train in ‘useful skills’. Kalyani Amma finished her high school education as a private student of the school, since the school did not officially have a high school section. The school authorities had engaged tutors to teach the 3 girls who had shown interest in continuing their education. This marks the shift in the attitude of the missionaries towards girls’ education – education was no longer merely about training girls to be good wives, Bible women, etc. but was also about a sense of achievement and further opportunities for girls. Kalyani Amma was married off before she passed her F.A. (equivalent to the current pre-degree course). However her husband encouraged her to continue her education, and helped her pursue her writing career as well.

An autobiography can have the elements of a romance: both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma met their future husbands outside the space of the traditional structures of marriage. In the period described in Gowriyamma’s narrative, T.V. Thomas was still an acquaintance. But she mentions a few incidents where she met him, or almost met him. Her justification, she states, is that there were stories going around that she was in love with T.V. Thomas much before she actually met him. Her narrative also ends with a scene

---

201 They married in 1957, the same year both of them became ministers in the first Communist ministry in Kerala. The couple later separated.
describing her being taken to the Kerala Central jail. T.V. Thomas was already there for another political offence. There is a dramatic post-script that says:

This does not end here. The rest is being written. It will soon reach the reader

(Gowriyamma, 2010: 383).

It is as if she sees her life as taking a major turn with her imprisonment and with T.V. Thomas waiting for her in jail. Kalyani Amma’s narrative is not so dramatic but it is nonetheless a bit like the novels of the time:

This young man’s clothes were not at all ostentatious. He was wearing a white dress, a black coat and a shawl. His hair was cropped. In one hand he held an umbrella and in the other he held some books. I was attracted by his overall nobility and good manners, his face blazing masculinity, and the kindness and sincerity within his eyes. His lean body proclaimed his good health (Amma, 1997: 43).

Other than the obvious romantic way in which she has described Ramakrishna Pillai, what attracts her to him is also what was considered the correct mode of style and mannerisms: he is dressed in simple clothes – much like the writers advocated in the early magazines. He had also cut his hair and was wearing a coat, the signs of the modern educated man in Kalyani Amma’s time.

Desire and consent were important aspects of the modern marriage. Kalyani Amma’s married life was unusual in the strong bond she shared with her husband. The marriage itself was unusual in that they knew each other before the marriage proposal was brought to her family and Ramakrishna Pillai had to woo her to get her to agree to marry him (by words and letters). After the marriage was fixed, it was found that their horoscopes did not match. But they decided to go ahead with the ceremony in spite of the objections of both their families. Their decision thus breaks the ascriptive caste and family control over the institution of marriage. When Ramakrishna Pillai was arrested and banished from Travancore for his political beliefs and journalistic activities, she decided to join him taking their two young
children with her and leaving her teaching job. Her decision was considered unexpected and bold in those times. It was also a re-affirming of the centrality of conjugality in her life. She spent just 12 years with her husband, but sees those 12 years as the crucial period in her life. The rest of her life was spent working to make ends meet and educate her children. Her break with/rebellion against traditional practices end with her move into conjugality. Her subsequent life, in her own reading, falls well within the expected behaviour for a woman.

Gowriyamma’s narrative does the opposite: though she does introduce T.V. Thomas in her story, he is not central to her sense of self. She describes an incident that happened after she had passed the 10th class. An acquaintance fell in love with her and approached her with a letter while she was home. He approached her again when she was in college. She felt some kind of affection for him, but later realised that it was merely sympathy for him and not really love. She felt at that point that marriage had to be based on affection and love. However, she mentions that on hindsight she realised that it was a misconception that love was central to marriage. She does not present herself as being rebellious, though she does see herself as being strong and bold. For her, the break with tradition had already occurred by the actions of other members of the family. She sees herself as moving away from the life expected of her only when she joins the Communist party.

The two incidents that marked important moments in Gowriyamma’s life in the narrative were her brother’s move towards Communist ideas which then took him away from the family and her father’s death. She realizes she needs to support herself at that point. Though she had been working before her father’s death and supporting a large number of family members, she had had additional financial help from her father. She becomes an individual on her own right after her father’s death. In that sense, both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma view death (of spouse/father) as an important moment that mark the beginning of their transformation into autonomous individuals. This did not mean that they believed
that they had no freedom before that, but in the sense of learning to be responsible for themselves without a safety net to fall back on. Gowriyamma’s initiation into the workings of the Communist party began after her father’s death, since he had objections to her following in her brother’s footsteps.

Both Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma were/are not women typical to their times, but rather the exceptions. They were/are also women who were/are in the public sphere. These women were negotiating a self between earlier and newer forms of subjectivity. I have mapped out certain aspects of their narratives to show how these two women negotiated some of the themes and issues discussed in the earlier sections/chapters. They occupy two different positions in terms of time, location and development of the self.

In the case of Gowriyamma, there is a marking of the different stages that led to the development of her self. She also gives thick descriptions of the other characters that inhabit her world. She sees her life as moving from childhood to puberty and related issues/changes and then to her professional and political career. It is surprising that for a woman from the lower caste, caste-related issues were not as problematic as it was for the middle caste Kalyani Amma.

In Kalyani Amma’s narrative she has described the early years of her life in detail, but the other characters in the narrative are not as well-developed, except perhaps that of her friend Chinnamma.\(^{202}\) Kalyani Amma sets aside separate chapters to describe her literary accomplishments, her childhood, married life and professional life. Thus, she considers her life as being held together within these frames. There is not much description/explanations about her children other than passing mention. Kalyani Amma traces the development of her self from a position of traditional caste based subjectivity to acceptance of science/rationality/education, and then to a position of conjugal dependency and finally to

\(^{202}\) She was one of the other magazine writers of the period.
financial autonomy. But she also presents the last place as one of loneliness in spite of the presence of other family members, friends and well-wishers. She describes her thoughts with a certain amount of depth only about the last period of her life.

The two autobiographies have been used to show the differences in the way real woman charted their subjective selves through the changing social and political milieu in the early 20th century. It would be difficult to draw parallels between their lives and that of the fictional characters in the previous section of this chapter. There are obvious similarities in the way some of the themes related to women’s lives in the different kinds of narratives are developed and discussed, especially education, conjugality, love, desire, gender roles, and so on. Kalyani Amma and Gowriyamma were constantly aware of their gender positions and the difficulties that this posed in their daily lives. Gowriyamma’s life has been read by Robin Jeffrey as a failed promise of literacy in Kerala (Jeffrey, 1992). Though an efficient administrator, she was always sidelined in Kerala politics and within the Communist Party, as she says in her foreword to *Aatmakatha*. She was considered for the position of Chief Minister several times, but was sidelined for political and personal reasons. It is said that T.V. Thomas threatened to resign from the ministry (in the 1967-69 period) if she were made Chief Minister (Lukose, 2008). Kalyani Amma, a noted writer and teacher, has also been forgotten by history, except perhaps in occasional references to her husband. Their lives also underline the fact that female individuation for Malayali women could only happen within certain invisible boundaries set within the frames of family and community. Their lives show how education (formal and informal) was an integral part of their gendering process. Education brought about other changes in their lives: like in the case of Kalyani Amma, her acceptance of Science/rationality that mark her as different from many others and in Gowriyamma’s move to a political/public life. While education then changed their perception
of their *sthreedharmam*, it did not take them away from the space of the domestic and/or *sthreeithwam*. 