CHAPTER 1: Introduction to the field

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction to the field

In 2003, I was teaching in a small town in Kerala. In a casual conversation one of my students mentioned a wedding she had attended in her village. The bride was from a town a few hours from her place. A girl who had come with the bridal party was wearing a short kurta (a kameez which stops slightly above the knee), which became an object of curiosity for the villagers. Extremely shaken up by the girl's outfit, my student's brother later confided in her that he had felt like tearing it off her. After my initial shock at what I read as an over-the-top reaction to a dress worn by young Malayali women, I was intrigued: why is it that a 20-year-old man, with secondary school education and access to television and print media, and who is not part of any political/religious group find the instance of someone wearing a short kurta so offensive? Why does this young man take the perceived transgression by someone unknown to him as a personal affront? Why did my student remember the dress and describe that instead of the wedding per se? Why am I upset over something someone else felt at a time and a location far away from mine?

Introduction to thesis and research problem

It is a generally held view, though much contested in academia, that Kerala is far ahead of India in respect of literacy, women’s status, general health and life expectancy. When I first decided to do a Ph.D, all I wanted to do was work on women and Kerala. With a broad field like women and Kerala, I needed to narrow it down to a specific set of issues/problems that would be both interesting and challenging. It was by chance that I discovered that there was this huge archive of materials from the early 20th century which has not been analysed until now. I started looking at a variety of materials from different archives and noticed that there were a large number of articles in women’s magazines from this period
about women’s education. At a time when the state of Kerala is presented in general as having one of the highest literacy rates for women, it is also surprising that not much is known about the history of women’s education in the state. Other than some linear accounts of how women’s education progressed in Kerala, detailed academic work has not been done in this field from the period 1880 to 1940. These magazines were painting a picture of women and education that was vibrant and different from developmental discourses and celebratory accounts of the Kerala model. A typical example of how women’s educational status is represented is given below:

Kerala has built a tradition for female education since the beginning of the 19th century. Western education was introduced as early as the beginning of the 19th century, especially under the patronage of the rulers of Travancore and the initiative of Christian Missionaries. School education in Travancore was compulsory for children in the age group of 5-10 without any gender discrimination. Therefore, Kerala leads the other states of India in women’s education and literacy. 85% of women in Kerala are literate, and girls outnumber boys in higher education.²

The articles in the magazines from the early 20th century were different in the sense that for the women getting an education was replete with tensions of various kinds – the women writers were having to state that education would not lead them astray, having to prove that it was necessary to learn how to manage a family, hoping that it would provide

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1 The state of Kerala was formed in 1956, merging the princely states of Travancore, Cochin and Kasargode taluk of South Canara with Malabar, which was a province of the Presidency of Madras. O. Chandumenon uses the term Kerala in Indulekha (1889). One of the textbooks used for the matriculation examination in 1937 has a chapter on “Aikyakeralam” (united Kerala). This was even before the state of Kerala had formed in 1956. Therefore, there was always a sense of being a Malayali among the residents of the area even when politically there was no unified Kerala state. See: K. Vasudevan Mussath, "Aikyakeralam," in The Malayalam Text Book for Detailed Study - Group A for the SSLC Public Examination and for the Matriculation Examination: 1937 (Calicut: Madras and Andhra Universities, 1936).

2 From the site of Kerala State Women’s Development Corporation: [http://www.kswdc.org/education.htm](http://www.kswdc.org/education.htm) [cited 14 September 2009].
them with upward social mobility, proving to the Westerners that Indians were ‘modern,’ training for new jobs like teaching, midwifery etc. while maintaining the gender-power relations, etc. – and developmental discourses do not capture the nuances of what it meant for these women to get educated. It was also fascinating for me to see how some of the concerns expressed by the writers of the time were similar to those voiced in 21st century women’s magazines. These writers from the early 20th century were championing the creation of a new space for women and could probably be called the first Malayali feminists. This was a part of women’s history that, I felt, provided insight into the current notions of ‘what a woman should be’ in the state.

I decided to base my research project on the debates on women's education in Malayalam-speaking regions between the 1880s and the 1930s. It was during this time, particularly from the 1920s to 1935, that an image of the Malayali woman was constructed indirectly through the debates on education in the magazines. This image was steeped in the middle class notions of the writers and often took on predominantly Nair characteristics. Earlier notions about women were along caste, community and religious lines. Travancore and Cochin were Princely states at the time, while the rest of present-day Kerala, particularly Malabar, was under British rule. These two states had a high level of female literacy compared to other parts of India. The native governments had a stake in this field. The Travancore and the Cochin governments were offering incentives in the form of abolishing

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3 The term feminism carries with it a wealth of meaning and different schools of thought, both Indian and Western. Here it refers to an awareness of women’s oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family, and conscious action by women and men to change this situation. From: Kamala Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan. Some Questions on Feminism and Its Relevance in South Asia. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986.

4 The Census report for 1951 placed women’s literacy rate at 31.65% in Kerala. Only Delhi recorded a higher rate. Mysore which was a princely state had a women’s literacy level of 9.16%.
fees for girls at primary school levels (Jeffrey, 1987). There are detailed administrative reports on the state of education (in school and college) by the Department of Education in Travancore and Cochin which emphasize the governments’ interest in the field. There was also interest among the people of the region as is evident from the large number of articles on education in the magazines/journals of the period, the increase in the number of private management schools and the steadily increasing number of literate women in the Malayalam-speaking regions. Other than these factors there was a personal reason why I chose the above locations for my research - I grew up and obtained my education in Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. This work has been for me a way of discovering the past; of uncovering the difficulties faced by women who wanted to get educated a century ago and of exploring what went into the making of the education system that I was a part of.

In many of the popular women’s magazines the debates during the turn of the century had been specifically on the question of whether or not women should be given education. The thesis looks at a particular shift in the debates that happened in the 1910s and carried through to the 1930s. The debate then becomes about what kind of education women should be given. The project proposes to account for some of the questions raised by my preliminary reading of the sources [some of the women’s magazines, government records and

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5 The two governments worked at different paces in offering incentives to lower castes, girls and Muslims. Travancore abolished fees for girls in primary schools in 1896 and Cochin in 1909.

6 I have collected around 85 articles that are specifically on education and other articles that mention education from between 1891 to 1960.


8 Cochin is spelled so now.

9 The capital city of Travancore is called so now. Earlier it was called Trivandrum.
a few fictional materials from 1880 to 1940] and to map the changes in the meaning of concepts like *sthreedharmam* [roughly translated as woman’s duties], *parishkaaram* [roughly translated as reform] and *sthreeswaathandryam* [roughly translated as women’s independence]. My interest would be in understanding the role played by the education debates in the way in which these concepts were formulated and how these discussions then constructed the image of a Malayali woman that was different from earlier notions of the Malayali woman. I specifically show how the notion of the Malayali woman is often conflated with the image of the Nair woman in the magazines and even in the government writings. I demonstrate how writers from other communities question this notion in subtle ways, consciously or unconsciously.

The writings on women’s education were at their height during 1920 to 1935 and decrease after this period. Interest in women’s education waned and the model of education put forward after the 1940s was one that suited the emerging nation’s needs and aspirations. In terms of curriculum, women and men received the same kind of schooling after most of the schools in India started to be converted to Basic schools around 1951-52 (Nair, 1989). In this drive, the special status that women’s education had in Travancore-Cochin was done away with. One of the reasons for this dwindling interest could have been that women’s magazines (except for a couple of magazines) stopped being published around 1940 as a result of a shortage of newsprint (*History of Press in Kerala*, 2002), and in the general magazines the concerns were towards laying the foundations for an education that would foster nationalist sentiments and bring up a generation that would think of themselves as Indians as opposed to Keralite/Travancorite/Kochinite etc.
Methodology and hypothesis

This work is an exploratory research study and aims to provide insights into the cultural history of women from Kerala by looking at the field of women’s education in Kerala before the 1940s. It is an exploratory study since there are very few academic works specifically on the period before the 1940s in the field of women’s education. The overarching methodology draws from the fields of women’s studies, history and literary studies. Textual analysis of historical documents (magazines, census materials, administrative reports, education codes) and literary materials (fictional and non-fictional) has been the main method by which this has been done.

Since this work is an exploratory study, it starts off with a working hypothesis: I would like to propose that the concept of sthree dharma was deployed to construct an image of the modern Malayali woman in the educational debates, and in the process, sthree dharma itself gets reconstituted. The writings and discussions on and around women’s education then become one of defining sthree dharma.

Style guide

I need to make some clarifications as to the spellings and other stylistic devices I have used in this thesis, since both of these were constantly problematic. I use the square brackets when I need to mention something tangential to what is being said, especially when the tangent is necessary to an argument that is yet to be made and so cannot be relegated to a footnote. I have also put the source in the footnote when the author is not known and the title of the text is too long to be included in the main text. Spellings of the names of the writers and the magazines were sometimes difficult to pin down since in various places they would be spelt differently.
I have tried to maintain the same spellings for words/names throughout. However, sometimes in the quotations the writer(s) would use a different spelling, and the difference is maintained. For example, the word Diwan is usually spelled with an ‘i’ but reverts to an ‘e’ when the text uses ‘e’. Another example is the spelling of ‘Namboothiri’ where the ‘b’ is followed by ‘ooth’ except when referring to the magazine *The Unninambudiri*.

Another aspect of this thesis is that I have had to explain in the footnotes and sometimes in the main text the various places which would be well-known to Keralites but would be unfamiliar to people from outside Kerala. Some of the well known social, religious and political movements have also been explained, which might appear redundant to Keralites, but had to be included nevertheless because this work is not being submitted in a University within Kerala.

**Chapters**

In the next sections of this chapter I introduce the archives and the materials I have used in this thesis. I also engage with critical and scholarly work already done in the field of women’s history and education in Kerala and show how my work differs from them. The second chapter titled “Malayalam magazines and the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam*” explores the concept of *sthreedharmam* and shows how the concept is re-fashioned through the debates on education in the women’s magazines. *Sthreedharmam* is re-fashioned because it was not a new concept but a fashioning of something that was already in place. I use the term education to mean not just formal education but also a wide range of practices that come under the term including curriculum, models put up for consumption in the form of novels, stories and other fictional and non-fictional materials, teachers and even customs and practices in daily life that work towards educating the woman. The social domain in the early 20th century Kerala was divided into the public and the domestic (Devika, 2008). The public
sphere was where the political, economic and intellectual fields were located. The domestic realm was the aspect of social life which was seen as ‘naturally ordained' for women as opposed to the public domain. Located within the home, women’s magazines, fictional materials, government documents, etc. projected this space as in need of an entity, that could manage it, and had capacities which were specifically ‘womanly’. Sthreedharmam encompasses these womanly capacities. In the early 20th century, sthreedharmam includes (formal) education in its ambit, which was not an aspect of earlier notions of it. I explore the various meanings and nuances the term acquires during this period. Sthreedharmam is related to sthreethwam, the essence of being a woman. In the 20th century, sthreedharmam included nurturing sthreethwam within oneself. I also show how both sthreedharmam and sthreethwam are connected to the concept of sthreeswaathandryam and how the early writers, particularly the proto-feminists, have to show that sthreeswaathandryam and education will not lead women astray and make them forget their sthreedharmam. In the second section of the chapter, I show how the discussions happening in Kerala parallel similar discussions in other parts of India, but are also different from them.

The next chapter titled “Ideas and practices in formal education” looks at formal structures of education. The first section of the chapter sets out the historical trajectory of women’s education while simultaneously doing a selective analysis of the curriculum that was put in place for women’s education.10 In the second section of the chapter I analyse four textbooks that were used in high schools in Kerala to show how sthreethwam and sthreedharmam were fashioned through formal education. I try to see if education led to the

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10 I was not able to get a comprehensive list of textbooks used in Malayalam-speaking regions. Therefore this section is a study of whatever I was able to salvage from the archives. Moreover a complete study of the curriculum/syllabus would have to be a project in itself.
individuation\textsuperscript{11} of the Malayali woman or placed her firmly in the space of the domestic. I also show that there were constant tensions within the official discourse as to the kind of education that women needed – (professional and domestic) useful skills or (art and cultural) accomplishments and how this complicates the individuation process of the woman.

The fourth chapter, “Malayali women: Imagined and real” tries to figure out if there is a homogenous figure of the Malayali woman in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Malayali imagination. It does this through an analysis of fictional material from the period - \textit{Indulekha, Sukumari, Abhhande Makal} and \textit{Parangodiparinayam}; “Oru Yadhaartha Barya” and “Thalachorillatha Sthreekal;” and \textit{Pennarashunadu}. These texts are used as writings that imagine the ideal world and engage with their present in order to do so. They then justify and prescribe these ideal worlds for the reader to conform to. These texts are read as archival materials that engage with the larger universe of meaning that they occupy and interact with.

The chapter delineates how tradition\textsuperscript{12} and modernity\textsuperscript{13} are seen as important aspects in the development of the self of the ideal (fictional) woman. The chapter shows how conjugality

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\textsuperscript{11} Individuation is used in the sense of the development of the individual from a social group and the movement of the self of the individual away from the dictates of the community/group. From: Robert Audi, \textit{The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
\textsuperscript{12} Tradition is defined as the handing down of knowledge or the passing on of a doctrine or technique. Tradition changes in the process of handing down, though it is commonly perceived to be frozen and static. In this thesis it is used to refer to the customs and practices peculiar to Malayalis that existed right before the advent of modern education. For details, see: Romila Thapar, “Tradition,” in \textit{Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity - A Twentieth Century Anthology}, ed. Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998).
\textsuperscript{13} Modernity in the context of Malayalam-speaking regions was different from the Western variant. Literary critics use the term \textit{navodhanam} to refer to Malayali modernity, which was a movement in literature of stepping away from Sanskrit texts to new forms like the novel and the short story and the revival of older literary forms like the drama. Social, cultural and political critics see this Malayali modernity as an amalgamation of different strands of thoughts like Humanism, Rationalism, Liberalism, Marxism, monotheism, etc. In the thesis the term is used in the latter sense of the term, but also as the changes that accrued on contact with the British and modern education. For details, see: P. Govinda Pillai, \textit{Kerala Navodhanam Oru Marxist Veekshanam - Onnam Sanchika} (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2004).
\end{flushright}
and the domestic are reinforced as the state and the space that women should aspire to in early 20th century even while advocating education as a necessary quality for women. The second section of the chapter, which is treated as an extended endnote, analyses the autobiographies of two women, a writer B. Kalyani Amma and a politician K. R. Gowriyamma. This is included as a counter point to the fictional rendering of women in the first section. This section is not a detailed analysis of their lives but is used to trace the development of the self and the formal educational experiences of ‘real’ women from the period.

In the final chapter titled “In Conclusion” I review issues of the magazine Vanitha from the period 2007-2008 to show how some of the ideas that get entrenched about women in the 20th century are played out in a popular magazine almost a century later. I do not perform a thorough analysis; rather, I point to some of the commonalities and differences between the magazines from the two periods. I refer to the Kerala Development Report for 2008 to show how some of the ideas about women are played out in the current social scenario. In the appendix, I have included a brief history of education in Kerala before the advent of the missionaries, a summary of a letter written to the Madras government by the Maharaja Rama Varma of Travancore, “Observations on Education,” and a list of photographs pertaining to the thesis.

The archives

The most difficult and interesting aspect of beginning to write this thesis had been in collecting the materials. I have used a variety of materials, ranging from women’s magazines, journals, census reports, administrative reports, governments files, education reports, Diocesan Gazettes, a few biographies, textbooks, essays, novels, short stories and a play from before 1940. Most libraries had a catalogue which showed books from before the 1940s, but
often when I started looking for them, they would be missing or in shreds. It was quite by chance that I was able to get a few textbooks and novels from the period. All the archives and libraries had discarded or not maintained texts by non-canonical writers. I had planned on including newspapers in my list, but had to give up the plan because without knowing specific dates, it became difficult to find relevant articles from the period 1880-1940. Even with the magazines, I had access to only those published from 1891, and have had to rely on other writings about the period to get information on magazines from before this period.

The archives I visited could be roughly divided into four: (a) the old libraries that had books, and/or newspapers and magazines from the early 20th century - Ulloor Smaraka Grandhashala, Sree Chithira Tirunal Grandhashala and State Central Library in Thiruvananthapuram; St. Joseph’s Monastery library, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Orthodox Theological Seminary and Collins Library of Church Missionary Society College in Kottayam; archives of Satyadeepam and Deshabhimani in Ernakulam; Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Appan Thampuran Memorial Library in Thrissur; Deshaposhini Vayanashala and personal collections of Dr. T.K. Anandi in Kozhikode;\(^{14}\) (b) the government archives that had census reports, administrative reports, government files, education reports and a few books - the State Archives, the Central Archives and Kerala Legislature library in Thiruvananthapuram; Regional Archives in Ernakulam: Regional Archives in Kozhikode; (c) the university/college libraries that had research theses/works by other scholars on education and history - University Library of Kerala University in Thiruvananthapuram; Malayalam Department library of Sree Kerala Varma College in Thrissur; C.H. Mohammed Koya Library and History Department library of Calicut University; (d) Other libraries namely, - Sakhi Women's Resource Centre and Centre for Developmental Studies (CDS) library in Thiruvananthapuram.

\(^{14}\) Calicut is called Kozhikode now.
The magazines

The list of magazines used in this thesis is given below. Additional details on publication are given when available in brackets. *Lakshmibai*,\(^{15}\) *Sharada* (the first women’s magazine to be published by women)\(^{16}\) and *Mahila* (started in 1921 and went on to run for twenty years without any serious breaks – the longest that a women’s magazine had been published in the early part of the 20\(^{th}\) century)\(^{17}\) are the well-preserved magazines in the archives. All the (available) volumes of *Sharada*, *Mahila* and *Lakshmibai* were referred to for this thesis. Articles from the other magazines were used depending on availability.

*Vanitha Kusumam* (which had one of the highest circulation figures),\(^{18}\) *Shrimathi*,\(^{19}\) *Sumangala* (the only family magazine to be published in Malayalam),\(^{20}\) *Vanitharathnam*

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\(^{15}\) A women’s magazine which started to be published from Thrissur (a district in central Kerala north of Kochi) in 1905 and was published till 1940 with breaks. For details, see: C.G. Herbert, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1106 M.E," (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1932).

\(^{16}\) Edited by B. Kalyani Amma, T.C. Kalyani Amma and T. Ammukutty Amma, this magazine was started in 1904-05 from Tripunithura (a town in Ernakulam district) and went on till 1908. It started again in 1915 and was published till 1924. For details, see: G. Priyadarsanan, *Masikapatanangal* (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 1974), K. Saradamoni, *Sthree, Sthree Vadam, Sthree Vimochanam* (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1999b), "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D." (Trivandrum: Department of Statistics, 1924).


\(^{19}\) This magazine was edited by Anna Chandy. For details, see: "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105 M.E. 1929-1930 A.D."

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Basha sharada, Mahilamandiram and Maryrani are the other women’s magazines of the time used in this thesis. Other than these, a few general magazines like Bashaposhini, Vidyavinodhini (the second literary magazine to be published in Malayalam), Sahithyachandrika (which dealt with matters related to the Namboothiri community), Gurunathan, Paurasthyadoothan (details not available), Mangalodhayam, Malayalamasika, Mathrubhumi, Sadhguru, Rajarshi, M.N. Nair Masika and Vidyalokham (details not available) have also been used minimally.

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20 It started in 1916 from Kayamkulam (a town in Alappuzha district, south of Kochi) and was edited by P.K. Joseph. For details, see: Priyadarsanan, Masikapatanangal, "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D."

21 This magazine started in 1915 from Punalur (a town north of Thiruvananthapuram) and was published by R. Vellupilla. It went on till 1919. For details, see: Priyadarsanan, Masikapatanangal.

22 This magazine was edited by G. Parukutti Amma. For details, see: "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105 M.E. 1929-1930 A.D."


24 This magazine was started in 1889. For details, see: Antony, "Bhaasha Sahithyapurogathikku Bhashaposhini Masika Vahicha Panku Kollavarasham 1114vare - Oru Padanam".

25 It was published from Thrissur. For details, see: Herbert, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1106 M.E."

26 This magazine was edited by B. Shiva Rama Pillai and was published from Parur (a town in Ernakulam district) and stopped publication in 1940. For details, see: "Statistics of Travancore: 1098 M.E. 1922-1923 A.D."

27 This magazine, published from Thrissur, dealt with literary and social matters. It was started in 1907 and went on till 1972. For details, see: Herbert, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1106 M.E."


29 This weekly was started in 1932 from Kozhikode and is published to date. From: http://mathrubhumi.info/static/about/about.htm [cited 07 September 2009].

30 This literary magazine was published from Irinjalakuda (a town in Thrissur district). For details, see: P. Narayana Menon, "Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1098 M.E." (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1923).
The writers

The medium of magazines being of an ephemeral nature, not much is known about the writers. Well-known poets, playwrights and educationists of the times used to write in the magazines including the women’s magazines. Many of the male contributors to the magazines are known even today, but not the women contributors. K. Lakshmi Amma, a contributor, is said to be one of the earliest women officers in the Travancore Education department (Devika, 2005c). She is also said to have been associated with Nair reformism. K. Chinnamma (1882-1930) was an Assistant Inspectress with the Travancore Education department. She began the Shree Mulam Shashtyabhdapoorthy Smaraka Hindu Mahila Mandiram at Trivandrum, an institution for educating and training poor girls. This institution used to publish the magazine *Mahilamandiram*. Edattatta Rugmaniamma, used to write under her married name Mrs. Kannan Menon, and was the first woman to be educated in a convent in North Malabar. Her husband was a prominent figure in Nair reformism. K. Chinnamallu Amma (d.1958) was a teacher and social worker. She had the unique experience of appearing for a public examination in which her book was included in the syllabus. B. Anandavalliamma was a Professor of English and later, the Principal of the Women’s College in Thiruvananthapuram (Saradamoni, 1999). R. Eshwarapilla was a teacher, school inspector, thinker and writer (Saradamoni, 1999). B. Bhageerathiamma (1890-1938), the editor of *Mahila*, was known to be a powerful public speaker and a vocal advocate of an active, informed and disciplined domestic role for women. She was one of the women considered for

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32 This magazine was edited by M.N. Damodaran Nair and published from Ernakulam. For details, see: "The Statistics of Travancore: 21st Issue: 1115 M.E.: 1939-1940 A.D."

33 All the biographical details are taken from J. Devika’ book *Her-Self: Early Writings of Malayalee Women on Gender 1898-1938* (2005) unless mentioned otherwise.
membership in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha\textsuperscript{34} in 1927. B. Kalyani Amma was a writer and teacher. Her work *Vyaazhavattasmaranakal* (1916) is a well-known biography of her husband Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishan Pillai.

The women’s magazines dealt with various topics – women-related (women’s education, home management, women’s dependency, chastity, women and reform in rituals/customs, childcare, conjugality, famous women, foreign women), literature (mythology and *puranas*, writers, poems, novels, short stories, criticism), science & health (body, science, agriculture, health, recipes, Ayurveda, medicine), art & history (art, artists, history, historical figures, music), and general (lifestyle, astrology, *parishkaaram*, national news, theology, general knowledge, ethics, economics, behaviour, spirituality). The functions of these magazines were to educate women, make them capable of judgement, and through these, achieve progress in their status (Satish, 1990). These writings bring to light how reason, rhetoric, history, mythology, irony and humour was used in reform movements, claiming to liberate women. Except for a few magazines like *The Unninambudiri*, *M.N. Nair Masika*, *Maryrani* and *The Muslim Vanita*, which were for specific communities/castes, the other magazines were purportedly for the general reader. However, since many of the writers were from the Nair caste, the articles were often written explicitly for women belonging to this caste. So the writers would speak about the need for changes in the condition of the Nair woman as opposed to the Christian woman, the Bengali woman and so on, but the overall vision of the magazines was for the generic Malayali woman. It was assumed that there was a collective of ‘Women’ with common interests, inclinations, duties, and rights.

I conducted around 12 interviews with women and men who did their formal education in Kerala before the 1940s. I have included their comments and inputs in the

\textsuperscript{34} This was the first ever legislative council in Travancore. The Maharaja constituted it in 1904. It was not a law making body, but provided people participation in the administration. In the beginning membership was limited to landlords and merchants. From: [http://keralaassembly.org/history/popular.html](http://keralaassembly.org/history/popular.html) [cited 17 January 2012].
footnotes when they concur with or drastically differ from the main text of the thesis. These women were teachers, doctors and housewives from different parts of Kerala. Their sense of Kerala and education was different from that of the writers or the government agents. Since the interviews were in the nature of a preliminary survey and were not done in depth, they have not been included in the main text of this thesis.

**Through the literature**

Since this thesis overlaps the fields of history, women’s studies, literature and education, the body of literature from these different fields needs to be mentioned here.

The works on education per se usually attribute the high levels of literacy among women in Kerala to a combination of factors – the work done by the missionaries in the 19th century, the interest on the part of the government and the system of matriliny among a large majority of Malayalis (Gladston, 2006; Saradamoni, 1999). Factors like the introduction of the co-educational system, free boarding, the introduction of vocational education, the appointment of lady teachers in girls’ schools, the establishment of training institutions for teachers, the establishment of the press, the publication of literature, the opening of libraries and reading rooms, the development of health care sector and the development of various industries are areas that had also aided women’s education (Gladston, 2006) but had not been researched in detail. Hepsi Gladston’s work is specifically on the history and development of education of women in Kerala from 1819 to 1947 (Gladston, 2006). This work pays more importance to the work by the various missionary groups and passes over the other factors that aided the development of education. It does not delve into the reasons for or provide the cultural aspects of what it meant for women to be educated or the nuances of the nature of education provided by the missionaries.
The role played by the governments of Travancore and Cochin in the progress of literacy is emphasised by scholars who worked specifically on the field of education (Nair, 1989, Jeffrey, 1992). The various acts that were passed and the measures taken by the governments are mentioned to support this line of argument. Jeffrey’s work on education lauds the crucial role played by women in making Kerala a highly literate state. It also takes into account the caste differences that were an important aspect of life in Kerala and how these influenced the schooling system and literacy rates. A differing take on this position asserts that the state was only one of the players in the transformation of Kerala into a highly literate state in India. The efforts of foreign missionariness – London Missionary Society (LMS) consisting of the Evangelicals, Anglicans and Dissenters, and the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission – the various indigenous churches like the Syrian Christian Enterprise together with the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP)\(^{35}\) and Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sanghom (SJPS)\(^{36}\) were equally important in the educational upliftment of the depressed classes in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries (Mathew, 1999). Another comprehensive and nuanced work on the socio-economic conditions in educational development in Kerala places the onus for the same on the commercialisation of the economy and the resultant demand for basic literary skills, the changes in the social structure and the rise of elites from castes/communities who then laid claim to the bureaucratic positions linked to education, and the settlement pattern in Kerala that made access to schools easy for a large section of the population (Tharakan, 1984b). While these works provide a comprehensive history of the high literacy rates and educational accomplishments of

\(^{35}\) SNDP was founded by Padmanabhan Palpu (1863-1950) for the emancipation of the Ezhava caste in 1903. The first attempt of the organization was to remove the obstacles to the admission of Ezhavas to government jobs and government-aided schools.

\(^{36}\) SJPS was established by Ayyankali (1863-1941) in 1907 to work towards the upliftment of the Pulaya community. Traditionally Pulayas formed the dominant slave caste in Travancore.
Malayalis, they do not provide a history of the ideas and practices inherent in the educational system in the early 20th century and how it affected women.

J. Devika’s work on 20th century Kerala provides the frame for much of my work (Devika, 2007a; Devika, April 2002; Devika, 2007b; Devika, 2005c). Her exhaustive work on the reform period in Kerala examines discourses around education, reformism, the construction of ‘womanliness’ in the works of early 20th century writers of fiction, tracts and magazines, and legislative assembly proceedings. She postulates that in this period individualism was bound to a certain structuring of society based on gender differences. Thus, the individual although seen as free, was already implicated in social domains – the public and the domestic – which required capacities specific to each sex. Since this work provides an overarching theory for the entire social reform period, it is also not able to provide the contradictions and micro picture within the macro frame. My work uses her theory of gender difference as being the basic principle of structuring society and tries to see how this complicates and fits the discussions on education. While Devika’s work has portrayed the role of education in the social reform movement and sees it as shaping new hierarchies (Devika, 2007b), my work takes a different route or standpoint on women’s education. My focus has been on the discussions on sthreedharmam and how this concept and the ideology that surrounds it shape the discourse on education within the magazines, fictional materials and government policies. The public/domestic divide that she advances for the social sphere in Kerala has been more useful than the public/private dichotomy advanced by Partha Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 1993; Chatterjee, 1989b) because Devika’s formulation sees gender as preceding the public/domestic divide, which helps to explain the trajectories taken by women’s education in Kerala (explained in Chapter 3). I also show in the following chapters how I have taken some of her other formulations (for example the one on sthreeswaathandryam), and extend the argument.
Critics and social scientists read most of the novels I have used in this thesis, particularly Indulekha, as taking a critical stand on the matrilineal system, joint family system, the power of the male head of the family, the position enjoyed by Namboothiris in society, the nature of Nair-Namboothiri marriages and the influence of education on the development of the self (Devika, 1999; Gopalakrishnan, 1982; Menon, 2004; Pillai, 1998). Parangodiparinayam has mostly been seen as a satire on Indulekha and other early novels (Irumbayam, 1985), though Devika reads this novel as marking an important 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). Sukumari has been discussed as a lower caste novel which traces the development of the self and the community by critics (Menon, 2004). Apbhande Makal is considered the next greatest social novel37 after Indulekha that problematizes the position of Namboothiri women within the illam (Namboothiri joint family household headed by the oldest male relative) by Malayalam critics (Pillai, 1998; Pillai, 2005). My work acknowledges these frames as being useful but does a different reading of the characters and the unfolding of the plot by positioning gender as the main focus of my arguments for the different characters/works.

Some of the materials I have used are completely new, and therefore, have not been reviewed by the critics and social scientists working on Kerala history, culture and literature. The four textbooks I have analysed in the third chapter, the two short stories by women in the fourth chapter, and the autobiography by Gowriyamma are texts which I bring to the field of women’s studies. Even the autobiography of B. Kalyani Amma, though known among critics, has been largely ignored by the canon. The magazines have been used in some works,

37 In literary criticism, a social novel is a work of fiction that dramatizes a prevailing social problem such as gender, class, race, etc. through the characters. The social novel emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on shaping characters and determining events; often, it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform. From: M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009).
particularly by J. Devika, K. Saradamoni and Toshie Awaya (Awaya, 2003; Devika, 2007b; Saradamoni, 1999b). Devika’s work is not a specific analysis of the magazines, but fit her larger project on the social reform period. Saradamoni’s work focuses on the proto-feminist leanings of the writers in the period and Awaya’s work is confined to just three of the magazines – *Mahila*, *Sharada* and *Lakshmibai*. These limit the range and nuances of the arguments made by many of the early women magazine writers and also do not actually look at the nature and status of education in women’s lives in the early 20th century.