CHAPTER 2: Malayalam magazines and the re-fashioning of sthreedharmam

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CHAPTER 2: Malayalam magazines and the re-fashioning of sthreedharmam

The early 19th century was a period of reform all over India. There were debates around sati, raising the age of consent, widow remarriage and women’s education in the public sphere.\(^{38}\) Education in the colonial period focused on basic learning, refinement of domestic skills, moral education, and the study of religious texts. Education was also the means of setting the middle classes apart from the lower castes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, various castes and communities were in the process of self-transformation as a result of the social and political movements taking place throughout Malayalam-speaking regions\(^ {39} \) and elsewhere in India. One of the urgent and compelling issues being debated in the print media and in the social sphere was that of the role of the woman in the changing milieu. Different communities had different agendas for their women. A cursory look at some of the novels and magazines of the 19th and early 20th centuries reveals that education – modern English or Sanskrit – was seen as a necessary quality for women by then. Education was also being used as a tool for the construction of the new woman. This was done in many ways: by providing certain kinds of role models through texts – fictional and non-fictional; by role models provided by older women in the form of teachers and wardens; by putting in place customs and rules for conduct, behaviour and dressing; by policy decisions that made certain options (un)available to women in terms of subjects/trades/professions etc. Moreover, by the early 20th century, syllabus throughout Kerala (Travancore, Cochin and Malabar) had been brought under the purview of the respective government educational authorities through various grants and rules. Since Travancore and Cochin generally followed the same syllabus

\(^{38}\) Here the term is used in the loose sense of public spaces, as opposed to private spaces like the family.

\(^{39}\) I use the term Malayalam-speaking regions in the first and second chapters whenever I indicate the differences between the regions. The differences were important for the government documents. It is not so evident in the other kinds of literary materials.
that was being prescribed by the Madras Education Department, there were no major
differences in the formal educational structures in these places.

Education involves policy, administration and dissemination of knowledge and
culture. Literacy is the ability to read and write, as distinct from education. Schooling is the
act of going to school, and may provide literacy and education. High rates of literacy need not
translate automatically into education. In the case of Kerala, in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the
percentage of school-going children, both male as well as female, went up. The increase in
literacy was the result of the large number of educational institutions that had come up during
the same period. The Christian missionaries started schools in the early part of the 19\textsuperscript{th}
century. By the second half of the century there were a good number of schools for girls run
by the missionaries and the government in both Travancore as well as Cochin.\textsuperscript{40} There was
also an increase in the number of printing presses and publication of literary works – novels,
magazines, newspapers, etc. which contributed to the increase and sustenance of literacy
levels. These works also contributed towards the education of the population by the
dissemination of knowledge and culture. Many of the literary works were prescribed as
textbooks/reading materials in the schools from the period. Thus, literacy and education were
closely connected to formal structures of schooling in Kerala. The acculturation of the
Malayali woman started with modern schooling and the advent of printing as both these
brought together women from various class/caste/religious backgrounds which was not
possible in an earlier century.

In this chapter, I show how the concept of \textit{sthreedharmam} (woman’s duty) is
deployed by the magazine writers in imagining a new and modern Malayali woman. I

\textsuperscript{40} The actual female literacy rates for Travancore and Cochin were 0.5\% and 0.4\% respectively of the total
female population according to the 1875 Census. This was high compared to 0.2\% female literates in Madras
Presidency. Malabar had the third highest female literacy rates among the districts of Madras Presidency. For
details, see: D. Duncan, "Proceedings of the Director of Public Instruction: State and Progress of Education in
demonstrate the relation between *sthreedharmam* and education in the debates and show that the caste/religion/class of the writers is important in the kind of positions they take regarding *sthreedharmam*. In 20th century Kerala, the term *sthreedharmam* came to mean a variety of things as I will prove in the subsequent sections.

Studies on women’s magazines in India focus on the opportunities they provided for women writers and readers: the magazines tried to create a social, moral and cultural space for women. In her work on women’s journals in Hindi, Francesca Orsini periodizes them into two phases: the first from 1890s to World War I, and the second from 1920s to 1940s. In the first period, the focus was on reforming women into more appropriate forms of domesticity. The second period, she calls, a “radical-critical phase” (Orsini, 1999: 137). This periodization can be extended to Malayalam magazines also. The first section of this chapter tries to lay out how the re-fashioning of *sthreedharmam* happened through the medium of magazines in the two periods. Re-fashioning happened in the sense that the category called Woman did exist in the period before the 1880s. However, with the advent of printing, access to modern education, changes in the caste structures, changes in ideology about the space of the domestic, etc. the category called Woman and her duties changed. This re-fashioning was consciously done by the different agents – writers, government agents, and women themselves. The second section compares and contrasts the women’s issues discussed in the magazines from Kerala and from other parts of India.

**Section I**

Printing took off in the Malayalam-speaking regions in the second half of the 19th century, around the same time that the literacy rates increased.
Circulation figures for select magazines (no. of copies) with the year in brackets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of magazine</th>
<th>1900-20</th>
<th>1921-30</th>
<th>1931-40</th>
<th>1941-50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bashaposhini</td>
<td>700 (1906)</td>
<td>1850 (1923)</td>
<td>900 (1940)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurunathan</td>
<td>800 (1930)</td>
<td>350 (1940)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakshmibai</td>
<td>1500 (1917)</td>
<td>600 (1923)</td>
<td>600 (1931)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. N. Nair Masika</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>800 (1940)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahila</td>
<td>500 (1930)</td>
<td>400 (1940)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahilamandiram</td>
<td></td>
<td>1400 (1930)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangalodhayam</td>
<td>650 (1917)</td>
<td>500 (1923)</td>
<td>600 (1931)</td>
<td>500 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paurashyadoothan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>300 (1931)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajarshi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadhiguru</td>
<td></td>
<td>375 (1923)</td>
<td>300 (1931)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharada</td>
<td></td>
<td>750 (1923)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrimathi</td>
<td></td>
<td>700 (1930)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unninambudiri</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>700 (1931)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanitha Kusumam</td>
<td></td>
<td>2000 (1930)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty periodicals were being published in Kerala before the turn of the century.

From the beginning, the popular magazines of the time, particularly the women’s magazines, were interested in the education of Malayali women. The debates on whether women needed education started in the 19th century. Until the 1920s, the arguments were more on the need

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42 The first Malayalam journal Vijnana Niksepam was published from Kottayam (a town south of Kochi) by the Church Missionary Society in 1840. However, most records place Rajya Samacharam brought out by Hermen Gundert from Tellicherry (a town in north Malabar known as Thalassery nowadays) in 1847 as the first Malayalam journal. The first women’s journal Keraliya Suguna Bodhini was published from Thiruvananthapuram in 1884.
for women’s education. There were only 2-4 women’s magazines being published specifically for women during this period. After the 1920s, until the 1940s, the arguments move towards the kind of education women need, and the number of women’s magazines increase to 12 or more at this time. The general and women’s magazines were for a pan-Kerala audience, even if they were published from different regions. This did not mean that the writers themselves were always writing for a pan Kerala readership. Some writers do specifically address people from Travancore, Cochin, or Malabar depending on where the magazine was published from. For instance, in the article by Tharavath Ammalu Amma in Vanitha Kusumam, she valorises the educational efforts by the ruling family in Cochin and the article is meant for people from the region. The rest of the article is about the need for improving the curriculum in the state, especially for women (Amma, 1927). Another article by Konniyoor K. Meenakshi Amma is about Nair women and home:

In home management, women should concentrate on helping men rebuild the community, the economic foundations of which have fallen to pathetic depths. Some allege that Nair women are lacking in frugality and order. And this is more or less true. We must speedily remedy this defect. It can hardly be concealed that now Nair women who have gained a modicum of sophistication revile housework as beneath their dignity. Therefore in most Nair homes which are fairly prosperous, cooks are indispensable (Devika, 2005c: 90).

Though the magazines did state in their editorials that they were for all women, the articles were often (not always) addressed to a Hindu reader and most often to a Nair woman. But the magazines were read not by Nair women alone. The Mahila was subscribed in government girls’ schools in Travancore as a result of a government order from 1924.

43 She was a noted Sanskrit scholar and dramatist.
44 The translation of this work is from J.Devika’s book. J. Devika, ed., Her-Self: Early Writings of Malayalee Women on Gender 1898-1938. (Kolkata: Stree, 2005c). In the rest of the thesis, I have done the translations myself, unless mentioned otherwise.
Therefore, it is safe to assume that the *Mahila* at least was read by a wider set of people. Most of the writers for *Sharada, Lakshmibai, Mahilamandiram, M.N. Nair Masika* and *Mahila* were upper and middle caste\(^{45}\) Hindus. However, other magazines like *Vanitha Kusumam, Bashaposhini, Sadhguru, Gurunathan, Maryrani, Mathrubhumi*, etc. had Christian writers too.\(^{46}\) *Vanitha Kusumam* was the only women’s magazine with pictures/photographs in every issue. It was an editorial policy to include pictures, which were of contributors, famous people, events like the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) meetings and even dances from London. This magazine was also radical in its views when compared to the magazines that had exclusively Hindu writers. Social scientists like J. Devika and Toshie Awaya who have done work on the social reform period in Kerala mention that most of the magazines of the period address a Nair woman (Awaya, 2003; Devika, April 2002; Devika, 2007b). The Nair women appear to assume a position of leadership among the Malayali woman. In their articles, the Nair writers refer to themselves as Malayali women, and women from other caste/religious groups are addressed or tagged using their religion or caste. The magazine writers accept the equation between Nair and Malayali women as non-problematic. This has led many of the social scientists to argue that the modernity of the Malayali women is often based on ‘a Nair modernity’. Udaya Kumar mentions how the term Nair came to refer (in the Nair reform language) to a site of shared memory and possible collective initiatives (Kumar, 2007). Caste came to be rearticulated as community in the caste reform movements of the

\(^{45}\) The Varna system worked in a complex pattern in Kerala. The Nairs and the Syrian Christians were considered equivalent to the Sudras. They also acted as the warrior castes on occasion. They sometimes had better access to education and material goods than many other castes including the Brahmins. Therefore, I prefer to use the term middle caste to refer to Nairs and equivalent castes. Ezhavas were lower in the social rung and were considered polluting castes by the Nairs and Namboothiris. Ezhavas and other untouchable castes are referred to as lower castes in this thesis.

\(^{46}\) None of the 465 articles I collected from various magazines have Muslim writers. This is not to say that Muslim women did not write in the magazines. There was only one Muslim women’s magazine listed in the administrative reports. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a copy of the same.
time. The Nair reform initiatives of the turn of the century, he says, gave a specific inflection to this trend by proposing a close identification between the newly emerging Malayali identity and the Nair identity being forged by the reformers (Kumar, 2007). Travancore was dedicated to the Hindu deity of Sri Padmanabha and the Travancore ruler was know as *Sree Padmanabha Dasa* (servant of the Lord Padmanabha). The state of Travancore was considered the seat of Hinduism and was highly orthodox in its ideas of caste pollution, and caste-related customs and practices. The highly-priced jobs close to the royal family was held by the Nairs (except the top positions in the government departments, which was usually filled by Tamil Brahmins) (Tharakan, 1984a). Many of the aristocratic Nair families were settled in Travancore. The Christians were spread in the rural and hilly regions of the state and the Muslims were only a small percentage of the population in the early 20th century (Ouwerkerk and Kooiman, 1994). The relationship between Nairs and people of other castes/religions was tense and the elections to the representative government aggravated the caste and religious differences. One can only tentatively put forward that there must have been a convergence of religious identity with regional affiliation/identity happening within the Nair community. Certain groups of Christians, Muslims and the Brahmins had ancestors from outside Malayalam-speaking regions. These groups had also imbibed customs and traditions, which to outward appearances would seem ‘foreign’ and not ‘native’. Numerically, the Nairs and the Ezhavas were the largest groups in the whole of Kerala. However, as a

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47 The Rajas of Cochin were also Hindu rulers and considered themselves as the keepers of Hindu religious practices. However, Cochin had a stronger presence of people belonging to other religious communities than Travancore did. A part of Cochin was under the Portuguese, later the Dutch and then the British. These must have influenced the religious character of the state. Today Kochi is considered the most modern and fashionable city in Kerala.

48 The Sri Mulam Praja Sabha was the legislative assembly to which members were mostly elected. The Nairs formed only 16% of the population, but held the majority of the elected seats. The different Christian communities formed around 31% and the Muslims were around 7% of the population. For more details, see: Dick Kooiman, "Communalism and Indian Princely States: A Comparison with British India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 34 (1995).
result of the continuing caste pollution rules, the Ezhavas were not in a position of hegemony. They gained access to education and other modern institutions in large numbers only towards the middle of the 20th century. All of the above-mentioned causes could have been the reason for the Nair women writers to present themselves as ‘the Malayali women’. A reading of the magazines that includes Vanitha Kusumam provides a different picture. The large number of Christian writers in the magazine provides a broader definition to the term ‘Malayali woman’. The articles were also addressed to a wider variety of middle class readers. There is less mention of matters pertaining to only a Hindu reader. The examples and references include characters and incidents from the Bible, and mentions Arab, Egyptian, Roman and Israelite customs. For instance, a writer (probably Christian), in an article on “Greatness of Hair,” mentions the biblical character, Samson and how his strength was located in his hair. (S)He mentions that the ancient Egyptians used to cut their hair for special occasions and this custom was later copied by the Romans (K.M., 1927). Vanitha Kusumam also had the largest circulation figures among the women’s magazines (2000-3000 copies compared to 1400 for the next most popular women’s magazine).

Many of the male contributors to the magazines are known even today, but not the women contributors as I mentioned in the previous chapter. The men were well-known poets, novelists and essayists of the time. Of the women writers, some were doctors, some had a BA degree, some were teachers and school inspectresses, and a few identified themselves as married women, using the prefix “Mrs”. The women of the matrilineal communities were not used to identifying themselves with their husband’s family. This use of their husband’s name was a new trend, and many of the writers themselves spoke up against it. However, more and more women were adopting this style. B. Bhageerathiamma (1890-1938), the editor of Mahila wrote, “The mark “Mrs.” is nothing but a sign of enslavement” (Bhageerathiamma, 1929).
The women’s magazines had contributors from other parts of India. Muthulakshmi Reddy, a contributor to *Vanitha Kusumam*, was a doctor and social reformer and was the first woman legislator in India. There were a few articles published in English and were often contributed by writers from other states in these magazines; there were also excerpts from other language newspapers/magazines.

**Education and chastity**

Women’s education was a topic that had been in public debates from the 19th century in India. In Malayalam-speaking regions, as far back as 1891, there was an article in *Vidyavinodhini*, a general magazine, on the need to have education for women ("Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891b). The author(s) addresses some of the concerns expressed by the general public regarding women’s education. The chief concern of the general public, according to the article, was the fear that women would no longer be chaste if they were educated. The article argues strongly that this was a wrong assumption and that it was not women alone who were responsible for their chastity, but the men were equally responsible and were equal partners in cases of adultery. The author(s) equates women’s subordination with the unequal caste/class relations in society. This article was written around the time that caste movements were becoming strong in Malayalam-speaking regions. The author(s) also mentions some learned men giving a public speech in Thrissur against women’s education. Thus, it is clear that the issue of women’s education was receiving attention in the public sphere and not all of it was positive.

Chastity is a quality that is evoked in many of the articles, and even in textbooks from the period. A few essayists even went on to say that one way to make sure that women and

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49 There are probably articles on women’s education from before this time. This is the oldest one I found in my archival search.

50 The name of the author(s) is not given. The article is written using the first-person plural pronoun.
men were not tempted to commit adultery was to make arrangements for the husbands and wives to stay together disregarding the current customs of many matrilineal groups (Parameshwaramonon, 1901). Around this time, the various Marumakkathayam laws\(^{51}\) were being discussed and put into place. The “Sambandham”\(^{52}\) itself was under scrutiny and was being touted as indecent in different quarters and by different people (Arunima, 2003; Kodoth, 2002; Kodoth, 2001). One could even argue that chastity was being enforced in a subtle manner by these frequent allusions to it. Moreover, chastity did not necessarily mean that the figure of the husband was central to the wife; rather, the emphasis was on the effect of the quality upon the woman. A chaste wife was imagined as one endowed with the power of redemption – of the husband, the family and the nation. Historical and mythical figures like Sita, Savithri, Damayanthy, etc. were put forward as model women to be emulated, as was Queen Victoria. Their love, steadfastness and loyalty to their respective husbands and their chastity were the qualities that were fore-grounded in the articles. The revering of these demi-goddess/ideal female figures was also used to portray the exalted position enjoyed by Indian women in ancient times. However, a few of the writers also cautioned against placing too much importance on the presence of these goddess/ideal woman figures saying that it did not mean that real women were treated in the same manner in their homes (Kuttannair, 1929).

\(^{51}\) These were matrilineal laws. The Nairs and other sub-castes, the Ambalavases, the Ezhavas and equivalent castes, and some Muslim groups followed the matrilineal system of succession. The Namboothiris, the Christians and other lower castes followed the patrilineal system of succession. Travancore, Cochin and Malabar witnessed a wave of social change in the early 20\(^{th}\) century. The high and middle castes were devoting their time and attention towards the transformation of family systems and matrilineal inheritance of property in the early 20th century. The matrilineal joint family system was slowly giving way to the nuclear family system. The Travancore Act of 1925 allowed men to transfer property to their wife and children. Similar acts, later on, like the Madras Marumakkathayam Act and Moplah Marumakkathayam Act in 1933, forced the rest of the Malayalam-speaking regions to legally transform from the matrilineal form of succession to patriliny.

\(^{52}\) Sambandham was a contractual agreement between a man and woman that was not a sacred ritual like a Brahmin or Christian marriage. The Nair and various other sub-castes followed the Sambandham system of marriage. Among the Namboothiris, only the older son was allowed to marry from within the community and he could have upto four wives at the same time. The younger sons had Sambandham with Nair women.
**Education and sthreeswaathandryam**

When arguing for the need for women’s education in the early decades of the 20th century, the writers had to state that it would not lead woman astray, that they would not misuse *sthreeswaathandryam*. The term *swaathandryam* originated from the *smritis*, and meant taking responsibility for one’s actions. The term came to acquire the meaning of independence as opposed to *parathandryam* (loss of independence). In the early 20th century this concept could mean various things. It was used in the sense of arbitrary power, or not bowing down to somebody else. It could also mean coming into one’s own (Gundert, 1992; Pillai, 1987). It was also used to mean women’s independence from the external constraints of culture.

The magazine writers refer to a common fear of the Malayali woman turning into a replica of the tennis-playing, dancing, restaurant-going Western woman as a result of modern education:

When speaking about giving women freedom for the betterment of society, most people imagine western women who play tennis in the tennis court with men; and women who dance in the arms of men, inebriated by alcohol. Not only that, it appears that as a result of this imagination, people fear that by allowing freedom to their sisters and wives they will have to search for them in “tennis courts” and rest-houses (Panikkar, 1917: 399).

The writer recognizes that it is only a stereotype, but feels the need to dispel this possibility and state that Western and Indian cultures were very different. Since education was connected to *sthreeswaathandryam*, education could not be seen as leading women to extreme Westernisation.

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53 There has been no scholarly work done on etymology in Malayalam language. The etymology of the words *sthreedharmam*, *sthreeswaathandryam* and *parishkaaram* were provided by Prof. T.B. Venugopala Panicker. He was the Head of the Department of Malayalam, Calicut University and has published several works on Malayalam language, linguistics and phonology.
The women’s movements happening around the world after World War I found resonances in Malayalam-speaking regions as well. A few of the radical thinkers were hoping for the same kind of freedom for Malayali woman as her Western counterpart enjoyed. This was couched in the language of utility: women needed education to be capable, to take over the reins if the need ever arose.

Who took care of their responsibilities when the men, intoxicated by war, were in the battlefield? Women! If Kerala had to face such a situation? God! Let it not happen! Imagine? Are our women of any use? … They have been brought up in the kitchen, which has made them useless. …Why (say) more, it is important that women be allowed rightful swaathandryam (Pachiamma, 1921: 110-1).

The concept of sthreeswaathandryam appears to be a melange of myth, common sense and utilitarianism. The concept seeks to find its roots in Hindu texts and Malayali culture, particularly the upper class position of the Hindu writers. Mythological figures like Sita, Damayanthy, and Savithri, who purportedly enjoyed swaathandryam, were invoked to show the historical roots of this concept. The writers do not seem to question whether some of these women were indeed real-life women or just literary characters. These women are given authenticity because they have been handed down by tradition. Sthreeswaathandryam gets inseparably linked to chastity, bravery, love and, above all, duty when figures from the past are invoked. The writers discussing the pros and cons of women’s freedom bring up the laws of Manu. The male writers were the strongest critics of his dictate na sthree swaathandryam arhati: it was seen as hypocritical to deny freedom to one section of the society and was explained as an outcome of man’s selfishness and fear of change (Balakrishnamenon, 1915; Narayanamenon, 1939b; Panikkar, 1917). It could well be that some of these champions of women’s freedom and right were women writers using men’s name as pseudonyms. For the radical thinkers, the sanction/restriction placed by the puranas/smritis on freedom was good enough reason to give up their (puranas/smritis)
authority as legitimate codes of conduct for Malayali women. These radical writers stated that society had changed so much from the ancient times that the older rules/customs/traditions had no relevance in modern times.

*Sthreeswaathandryam* included elements of modernity in its ambit. Modernity in the context of the Malayalam-speaking regions was different from the Western variant as mentioned in the previous chapter [footnote 13]. Sometimes called *aadhunikatha*, modernity signified a time of ever-changing progress, endlessly urged by *parishkaaram* (Awaya, 2003). The writers regarded modernity as coming from the West through contact with the coloniser and modern education. It includes institutions like schools, hospitals, law courts, administrative system, revenue system, public works department, etc. brought in by the British. What the writers considered as problematic was not modernity itself, but certain elements associated with it. Customs inherited from the coloniser through education, changes in lifestyle and the education system itself were being critiqued during this period. If education was leading people to be unrestrained, to be selfish, to blatantly disregard customs/rituals, etc., then education was neither necessary nor desirable according to orthodox thinkers/writers:

*Swaathandryam* means freedom, i.e., unrestrained individualism. Unrestrained individualism is not allowed for women; or for men. If so, there would have been no need for law or *dharmanasasthras* (religious texts on conduct). Therefore it is clear that nobody should have *swaathandryam* beyond their rights. When looked at like this, we will be forced to say that women have *swaathandryam* within the limits of their *dharman*. Now if education leads to unrestrained freedom, that would affect men too, and so men too should not be educated (Parameshwaramenon, 1901: 297).
The crux of the diatribe against *sthreeswaathandryam* and education was the development of individualism. This individualism could develop into egoism, where the women or the man would place their interests and desires above that of the community. The individual is placed in a position where her/his desires and conduct cannot be contained by the caste/religious groups and this was not acceptable to the orthodox thinkers/writers. The woman and the man should/could not also transgress the perceived boundaries (in terms of actions/comportment/dress/speech etc.) put in place for each gender. According to J. Devika, the purpose of modern education was the development of a self with a focus on interiority:

Both in the sense of a supposed inner-space that pre-exists any education, and in the sense of the act of looking inwards. By *swaathandryam* was meant not just the removal of external forms of constraint on a person but also their replacement by internal means of regulation. More importantly, the ability to conform to ideal gendered subjectivities – the ability to be ‘Man’ or ‘Woman’, to be comfortable in the domains specified as proper to them – was crucial in *swaathandryam* (Devika, 2002: 10).

She goes on to say that prior to attaining this state, one was to undergo a training process through which the capacities inherent to human beings, determined by sexual endowment of the body, as well as the ability to regulate oneself were to be developed. *Swaathandryam* in this formulation was pitched against *tantonnitam* (doing-as-one-pleased). *Swaathandryam* could not transgress the separate domains of ‘Man’ or ‘Woman’. Devika defines the notion of *swaathandryam* related to women to mean “self-means for survival”. My reading of the magazines suggests that terms like *swaathandryam* were not fixed in their meaning. They evolved and changed over time. I would like to extend this argument to say that

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54 Individualism is used in the sense of a moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that makes the individual its focus. For a detailed analysis of individualism see: Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. 
swaathandryam was problematic because it was also seen as developing a self/individual opposed to her/his community and caste identities; and the problem with education was that critics believed it would lead women to ask for swaathandryam from lifestyles/dressing styles, etc. connected to their caste positions.

Swaathandryam was simultaneously used to refer to financial security and the absence of authority figures. It entailed duties and responsibilities that one had to take up to be eligible for it. For example, a magazine writer mentions how women in Russia work alongside their husbands and have financial security, and thus, have a certain amount of freedom. Russian women also served in the army. Malayali women who asked for freedom should be ready to serve their nation and also to serve in the army as this was an important duty of the citizen (K.L.P., 1933). Sthreeswaathandryam is also used to develop a sense of nationalism that does not seem at odds with the regional identity of the writers (Editorial, 1928a; Ramanmenon, 1929; Reddy, 1927). These kinds of outwardly non-problematic double moves have been found in other parts of India (Chandra, 1982). The term is used in so many ways that it is difficult to pin down one particular strand.

**Education and dress reforms**

Throughout India, various assumptions and expectations on/of/about women were debated upon and put in place through women’s education. An article in Vidyavinodhini from the same period argues that women will not become less womanly because of their education ("Sthreevidyabhyasam", 1891a). There is a description of a hand wearing bangles and rings inscribing in a good handwriting; of educated women with curly hair; of sensual women with earrings and nose rings. The author mentions that none of this will disappear with education. The fear of the public/the critic was that the image/appearance of the woman will change due to education. Dress/clothing became a site through which Indian/Western was defined.
throughout India, be it Kerala in the 19th century or Gandhi and khadi in the early 20th century. It further became a way to sartorially mark the boundaries of work, education and home. In Bengal, the debates around the appropriate dress for the middle class were also tied within debates of community, and anticolonial Indian nationalism (Lukose, 2008). Travancore had witnessed the “Breast-cloth movement” in the 19th century when women from the Shanar community asked for the right to wear an upper cloth. The lower caste women started wearing their clothes/Accessories imitating the styles of the upper-caste women under the influence of the missionaries and this caused a furore among the upper and middle castes. In 19th century Malayalam-speaking regions, dress was a marker of social difference and deference (Devika, 2005a). Different styles of dressing distinguished various castes and religion. The manner of wearing the waist cloth and the hair especially distinguished the Pulaya, Muslim, Syrian Christian, Nair, Brahmin, Ezhava and other groups from one another. Ornamentation was also an important way of marking the hierarchical divisions in society. These signs had to be maintained strictly. These differentiating functions continued in to the 20th century as well. The new mode of dressing marked the modern educated Malayali from the traditionally educated and illiterate Malayali. Clothes were increasingly acquiring the qualities of civilization, modesty, decency, and culture. Even the education codes by the government mentioned that pupils should wear clean and respectable attire. As per the government code, respectable attire in the early 20th century meant “a decent and tidy garment covering the upper part of the body, say an Indian shirt with a second cloth” (Matthai and others, 1921). The writers mention the changes in women’s clothing and use of jewellery. Plain white clothes were the traditional dress of the Christian communities (who

were a major group statistically in Travancore and Cochin areas). The upper and middle class/caste Hindu communities were used to wearing plain white clothes with gold/coloured border. The Muslim women also wore white, cream or light coloured blouses/jackets with their mundu (a piece of cloth worn at the waist like a dhoti).\textsuperscript{56} Hence, simplicity/plainness in dress would have been familiar or the norm for most Malayali women. With access to the new schools and jobs, many of these groups were switching over to the Brahmo/Parsi sari which was more colourful. Items of clothing brought in by contact with the West/other Indian communities like boots, skirts, etc. were noted by the writers (Parameshwaramenon, 1901). The changes were often mentioned in a negative vein – as being an expensive taste and overtly imitative of the West and other groups in India. Interestingly, the sari is never mentioned in the writings.\textsuperscript{57} However, the use of the upper cloth/blouse/jacket does appear in a few articles. Hindu traditionalists still considered wearing a jacket/blouse as arrogance and impropriety on the part of the younger generation. The younger generation, especially the writers, had to prove that wearing the new dress was neither a sign of dissolution nor immorality. They give examples of members of the Brahmin community and people outside Kerala wearing blouses/jackets to substantiate the point/necessity (Lakshmiamma, 1906). The writers supporting the new dress reform resort to using arguments couched in utilitarianism, custom and propriety. Sthreeswaathandryam, to its critics, also included the freedom/ability of educated women to adopt the dressing styles of other communities. And since dress was a marker of caste, by extension sthreeswaathandryam also challenged certain aspects of caste.

\textsuperscript{56} This information was provided by friends (and their grandmothers) belonging to various religious communities in Kerala. In her autobiography, Devaki Nilayangodu also mentions that the Namboothiris and the Nairs generally wore plain clothes. For details, see: Devaki Nilayangodu, Kalappakarchakal (Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi Books, 2008).

\textsuperscript{57} Since this work cannot claim to be exhaustive in any sense, this is a tentative claim made from a reading of around 465 articles published in Malayalam magazines from the period.
Jewellery was another important marker of caste/community during this period. The arguments about the use of jewellery were such that an essayist writing under the pseudonym Sthree was forced to state: “Some say that we are crazy about jewellery, and some point out that we will not conceive if we do not wear jewellery!” (Sthree, 1933). It was not just imitation of the West that was under the scanner; any kind of fashion – Tamil, Parsi, and Bengali – that was seen as imitative was criticised. Bengali and Parsi women were mentioned by so many writers that a woman writer of the period mentions that though people do speak about Parsi styles, most Malayalis have not seen Parsi women to actually imitate their styles (Kalyaniamma, 1915). So where did the image of the Parsi woman come from in these discussions? The Parsi community was one of the most westernized and successful communities in colonial India. Their customs, dressing and other attributes were considered progressive throughout India (Luhrmann, 1996). There was a very small percentage of Parsis in Kerala at the time. They had settled in different parts of the state, particularly Malabar, for trade (Chandrahasan, 2005; Menon, 1944). Their high percentage of literacy (96.6%) was noted but not elaborated upon, since the population was not significant enough to be mentioned in major statistical charts. There must have been places with enough Parsi population that their presence, customs, and lifestyles were noted by some of the writers. It was not just Parsis from Kerala who were mentioned; Parsis in Bombay were also the subject of an article (Amma, 1906).

**Culture, virtue, caste and education**

The magazines often took a didactic tone in their articles, and sometimes, they exhorted, bullied or cajoled their readers to do their bidding on the various issues discussed. *Vanitha Kasumam* appears to have had competitions/interactive games/feedback forms for its readers. There was a feedback form published in 1927 to find out the qualities of a model
woman ("Mathreka Vanitha Malthsara Pareeksha", 1927). The write-up on the results of the competition mentioned that it was disappointing that only 482 people had taken part in the competition which was less than half its subscribers. The majority of readers had mentioned faith in God and patience as the most desirable womanly virtues. The most undesirable qualities were craze for money, worthless entertainment, and extravaganza. The need for religious teaching in schools was repeated by many writers of the time. The schools run by missionaries had scriptural teaching/catechism. Since there was protest against this and the native governments came to see this as a tool for proselytization, they started to control religious teaching in schools receiving grant-in-aid (Gladston, 2006; Kawashima, 1998). The native governments decided to follow a policy of secularism. However, the Christian schools were later given permission to teach catechism to Christian students after school hours (Banerji, 1914b). It was following this period that the need for moral education was raised by many of the writers in the magazines. The need to curb ostentatiousness in daily life was repeated by many writers and it seems the readers had imbibed this when they list it as a negative quality. The nationalists were questioning the necessity of jewellery and the silk clothing favoured by members of the upper classes and upper castes all over India. Gandhian ideals of economic self-sufficiency and limited consumption were at the heart of these suggestions.

Since aspects of culture were an important bone of contention, music – another marker of culture – was a topic that was discussed often. The music of Thyagaraja Dikshitar is mentioned by a few writers, some with awe, and some as a usurper of Malayali music culture.\textsuperscript{58} This kind of music was new. Music was also part of the school curriculum in many

\textsuperscript{58} Music was taking on an institutional character during this period. All-India music conferences started to be held from 1916. The Madras Music Academy was established in 1929. Even before that in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, efforts were being made to retrieve, preserve and transmit Indian music by Indian literati. Schools were put in place for teaching music to students and musical soirées were being organised in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The
of the schools and considered a skill women needed to have. The central administration followed by the British was instrumental in bringing about an exchange of art and culture within India that was rapid and reached large sections of Malayali society than it did under the various native kings. From the writings it is clear that it was not just the British and/or Western influence that was receiving attention and/or disapproval, but also the cultural practices from other parts of India. Not all the practices were looked upon with disapproval and not at all times. By the time the magazines were being published on a wide scale certain practices like drinking tea/coffee were accepted as indigenous practices. What some of the writers do question is not the consumption of the beverages, but the manner of consumption [and it was considered a luxury]. A woman sitting on the veranda, drinking coffee and reading a newspaper in the morning without taking part in the domestic chores was an image that was ridiculed time and again by the essayists and the novelists of the period (Amma, 1930d; Menon, 1985). It is surprising that most of the writers do not question the English medical practitioners and other science-related aspects of daily living. These were welcomed and accepted as necessary for a good life. The writers were only a small percentage of the population and it is difficult to ascertain the attitudes of the general population to science, technology and medicine at that point in time.

Other than a handful of writers, not many speak about the growing menace of dowry (Eshwarapilla, 1927; Ramanmenon, 1915; Subbarayan (Mrs.)). Even then it did not engage with the issue, but rather mentioned that the custom was present in India as in the West, and that the practice was probably becoming deeply rooted. The practice of dowry was prevalent among the Christians, the Brahmins, the Nadars and the Ezhava community, and it was

Music Academy in Madras was sponsoring competitions and performances to sustain growing amateur interest in classical music. By 1931, the University of Madras had music courses, and undertook teacher training courses for those teaching music in various places. For details, see: Lakshmi Subramanian, "The Reinvention of a Tradition: Nationalism, Carnatic Music and the Madras Music Academy, 1900-1947," The Indian Economic and Social History Review 36, no. 2 (1999).
slowly spreading among the matrilineal communities with the changes taking place in their succession laws (Amma, 1940). Mrs. Subbarayan mentions in her article about a bill introduced in the legislative assembly to use girls’ dowry for education. What this brings to light is that the issue was being discussed elsewhere, but the writers did not take it up strongly.

Another curious fact is the lack of female Malayali figures as role models in either the magazines or the textbooks from the period. Queen Rani Lakshmibai\(^{59}\) and Manorama Thampuratti\(^{60}\) are the select few mentioned. One possible reason is that some of the figures like Unniarcha who were lauded in textbooks from a later period were fighters. The other female role models introduced in the magazines (and textbooks) were usually from a distant Indian past (with a few exceptions like Sarojini Naidu), and a handful of English women like Florence Nightingale.\(^{61}\) It must not have been a sound editorial decision to mention figures from a very recent past, especially those with a history of violence against the British. Also, the qualities that were appreciated were the softer qualities of compassion, generosity, chastity, kindness, spirituality, etc. Figures like Unniarcha would not fit in with the soft qualities that were seen as feminine, natural and needed for the (what was then considered) modern Malayali woman.

The early decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century were rife with conflicts over caste and community differences in Kerala (Ouwerkerk and Kooiman, 1994). The writers in magazines like *Lakshmibai, M.N. Nair Masika, Unninambudiri*, and *Mahila* exhort the readers to forgo

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\(^{59}\) Rani Lakshmibai was the Regent of Travancore from 1924 to 1931.

\(^{60}\) Manorama Thampuratti was a Sanskrit scholar who lived in the 18\(^{th}\) century. She belonged to Kizhakke Kovilakam of Kottakkal, a branch of the Zamorin dynasty in Kozhikode. She was well known in Kerala as a gifted poet.

\(^{61}\) Women like Christabel Harriette Pankhurst (1880–1958) were also mentioned to show the contrast between radical English women and Malayali women. She was a suffragette born in Manchester, England and co-founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).
sub-caste differences and think of a unified Nair/Namboothiri community in the 1920s and
1930s. The Nair writers sometimes also presented the Christians as models to be emulated
because of their well-organized community structure with a spiritual head, Sunday Catechism
for the young and organizations for women (Anandavalliamma, 1939; Eshwarapilla, 1927;
Narayanakurukkal, 1927). Women from an earlier generation of writers spoke scathingly of
the proselytization zeal of the missionaries and felt that Hindu women needed separate
educational institutions (Amma, 1917). The Nair writers contrasted themselves with women
from other communities also; the Namboothiris and the Pulayas were mentioned time and
again, and when mentioned were shown as being ‘backwards’ and needing help to change.
The spirit of competitiveness among the different caste groups in other locations emerges in
the articles as well.

Socio-cultural movements and the magazines

The writers of the women’s magazines mostly kept to topics/issues that were safe
from British scrutiny. There would be passing mention of living a frugal life, of making khadi
clothes, and even mention of the Home Rule movement. The census and administrative
departments kept a careful watch on the content of the publications.62 In 1921, Kerala saw
one of its first tragic episodes in the freedom struggle, the Mappilla/Malabar rebellion.63
Following this, most newspapers were circumspect about printing material that overtly
supported the national movement or were critical of the British administration (History of

62 Travancore passed a Newspaper Regulation Act in 1926. The Madras government also followed a policy of
strict control over newspapers. For details, see: Menon, P.K.K. The History of the Freedom Movement in

63 The Mappilla revolt refers to a series of riots by the Mappillas (Muslims) of Malabar in the 19th century and
the early 20th century (1836–1921) against the (Hindu) landlords and the state. The Malabar Rebellion of 1921 is
often considered as the culmination of the Mappilla riots. The Mappillas committed several atrocities against
Hindus during the outbreak.
Press in Kerala, 2002). One is also led to wonder if this circumspection shown by the magazine writers and publishers had not affected the content of women’s magazines in present-day Kerala, where it is assumed that politics and caste-related subjects, which in some ways are present in the daily life of people, are not suitable subjects for women.

However, when there were social movements that were creating a huge impact on the social and political arena, they found mention in the magazines. For instance, when the Temple Entry Proclamation\(^6^4\) happened in Travancore, *Mahila* had an article not just supporting it, but also stating that Travancore women were acting upon it.

The woman of Travancore can at all times say with feelings of the utmost pride that she has most fervently and with an innate sense of responsibility done her part in carrying out the purport of the proclamation to the very letter. Till a short time ago, there were in a few quarters certain misapprehensions as to the way in which the Travancore woman viewed the Temple Entry Proclamation; and a few Sanatanist papers outside the country made no delay in representing that the average Travancore woman is dead against such temple entry. Such statements were completely unfounded and false, and were the results of mean and ignoble tactics of certain narrow-minded bigots who had their own axes to grind (Amma, 1937: 151).\(^6^5\)

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\(^6^4\) The government-controlled temples were not open to the lower castes. The roads around the Siva temple at Vaikom in north Travancore were closed to them, as were the roads near most other temples. In 1923, to appeal to a broad a section of Hindus the demand at first at Vaikom was not for temple entry, but for the right of avarna Hindus to use the roads near the temple. The roads were not opened to them, but diversionary roads were built that the lower castes could use without polluting the temple. After about 15 years of agitation and political wrangling, the Temple Entry Proclamation was made in 1936. All the temples in Travancore state were opened to all Hindus irrespective of caste. In Cochin, it took another decade for the Maharaja to open the temples to all Hindus. The Temple Entry Authorisation Proclamation was made in 1947. The Madras Temple Entry Act of 1947 extended this reform to the Malabar area. For more details, see: Louise Ouwerkerk and Dick Kooiman, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in the Princely State of Travancore, (1921-1947)* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1994).

\(^6^5\) This article was published in English and is not a translation.
Apart from being a sign of support for the Temple Entry movement, the article was also a reaction to accusations of antagonism towards the movement. When meetings were being held to unite members of the Ezhava (who were the prominent activists in the movement) and the Nair community, the aristocratic Nair families of south Travancore, who held positions of power in the government and were close to the palace, stayed away from the movement (Jeffrey, 1978). The 1930s was a period of intense class and caste politics. This was different from the early decades of the 20th century, when the caste groups were immersed in building up a ‘community consciousness’. Now the caste groups were better organised and competition was fierce amongst the different groups. The writers of Mahila were mostly from the Nair community. As mentioned before, the Nair writers often spoke of themselves as Malayali women and consciously or unconsciously saw themselves as standing in for all women. The antipathy of certain caste Hindus to the movement could not be seen as shared by this group of writers who saw themselves as mostly progressive and devoid of caste discrimination. In one of the general magazines of the time, a writer also spoke about the need to give up on practices of caste pollution, untouchability (which was rarely mentioned or acknowledged as being present in the women’s magazines) and the need to work towards the Temple Entry movement (before the proclamation was made). This writer also suggested that caste pollution was an important issue to be taken up by women because it was closely related to family practices (Narayanikuttyamma, 1932). This was part of a larger movement/ideological shift happening in Kerala (and in India) to involve women in the nationalistic movement and towards social service.

66 In her autobiography, K.R. Gowriyamma mentions the custom as being prevalent in many places in Kerala in the 1930s.
**Sthreethwam and sthreedharmam**

The duties of women were another aspect that was important to the writers in the magazines. The duties were termed under *sthreedharmam*. The concept is reconstituted through the debates on education. What exactly is *sthreedharmam*? The word is from the Sanskrit term *dharma*, and was used to mean ‘that which holds’ for a social group. It was used to refer to the function of each person in the caste system. It could also mean justice, law, custom, behaviour, alms, duties, piety, spirit, virtue, Upanishads and *yagas* sanctioned by the Vedas. *Sthreedharmam* could mean menstrual blood, duties (particularly towards husband), and laws pertaining to women (Gundert, 1992; Pillai, 1987). In the magazines, various writers include a range of duties/activities/chores/qualities under this umbrella term. It involved duties towards husband, children, parents, relatives and the home. It would include taking care of the elderly and the sick. It meant being compassionate, generous, humble, capable, and loving. It constituted having knowledge of money management, good conversation skills, cooking, childcare, gardening, etc. It also embodied one’s *sthreethwam* (state of being a woman (Pillai, 1987)) or femininity (Achuthamenon, 1907a; Ambhadevithampuratti, 1927; Amma, 1919; Amminiamma, 1933; Chinnamma, 1909; Kalyaniamma, 1905; Parvathiamma, 1918).

Upfront, *sthreedharmam* seems to be a wider and more encompassing concept than *sthreethwam*. *Sthreedharmam* was action-oriented and not an innate quality. It would appear from the way the concepts were used in the magazines that *sthreethwam* had more to do with qualities that were understood to be inherent in women; feminine qualities like love, patience, kindness, spirituality, compassion, chastity, humility, etc. *Sthreethwam* could not be taught, but the right kind of education would enhance and bring out the *sthreethwam* of women. *Sthreethwam* distinguished women from men. *Sthreethwam* was a quality that all women had.

The requirement of the time was to bring it to the forefront so that women remained women
and did not metamorphose into men or acquire masculine qualities. *Sthreedharmam* included nurturing *sthreethwam* in oneself.

Shinnamallukovilamma, in her article on *sthreethwam*, says that women need education and work, and they can work with men and still protect their *sthreethwam* (Shinnamallukovilamma, 1931a). Women were required to maintain certain ‘Womanly’ qualities even when they were allowed to work. Reading from a different standpoint, it meant that women could work if they were careful about retaining and/or acquiring qualities deemed ‘Womanly’. According to Shinnamallukovilamma, sympathy, patience, kindness, love, affection were all inherent in a woman and a woman’s *sthreethwam* showed itself in how she conducted herself as a wife and mother. A woman fulfils her wifely *dharmam* when she becomes equally involved with and helps her husband in his work and they develop a bond, but helping the man did not mean that the woman had the choice of distancing herself from the domestic sphere:

> Do not misunderstand me, this does not mean that I support women leaving their homes, acting all masculine, like men. Western women may say that Indian women are unlucky because they cannot play cricket and tennis with men. Similarly, men may also be ridiculed. But, we need not bother. This is not our ideal (Shinnamallukovilamma, 1931b: 243).

There was a demarcation of women’s sphere/capabilities/duties and men’s sphere/capabilities/duties in a majority of the articles. This demarcation was not unique to Kerala, but was found in the nationalist discourse of the 19th and 20th centuries from other parts of India as well (Chatterjee, 1989a; Chatterjee, 1989b). Women’s duties were tied up to activities in and around the home. To many writers, this was also a way to differentiate themselves from Western women. In the early 20th century, the reading public together with sites like the reading clubs, debating society, the modern novel, drama, essay and poetry were all involved in the fashioning of a new middle class. These sites of formation of public space
formed a nascent public sphere (Devika, 2002). The women’s magazines and women’s
groups called “Sthreesamajams” addressed a population that supposedly already possessed a
specific set of capacities deemed “Womanly”. Discussions within these arenas were focussed
on how to benefit modern society. Women were a prominent part of public debates that
focused on the domestic domain. The question of the condition of women was subsumed in
the question of defining modern domesticity (Devika, 2002). The *sthreedharmam* of the
woman becomes more important than her aspirations and her rights. Women and men could
not transgress the spheres/activities that were deemed ‘Womanly’ and ‘Manly’ without
incurring the wrath of the traditional and orthodox writers.

*Sthreethwam* and *sthreedharmam* were also presented as subsets of each other, i.e.
actions (*sthreedharmam*) moulded/shaped femininity (*sthreethwam*). Women attain
*sthreethwam* when they fulfil the duties of wifehood and motherhood. However, a woman
could become a great mother only if she excelled as a virtuous wife according to most
writers. The nationalist movement had used the image of the mother to represent the
nationalist aspiration. In Bengal, the image of motherhood was associated with the goddess
figure of Durga. This was later developed into the image of Bharat Mata (Sunder Rajan,
1998). Prior to this move of ‘goddess-ification’, the mother figure was validated through her
duty to her sons, and was empowered through him (Bagchi, 1990). In the Malayalam-
speaking regions, the safety of a child – the future citizen of the nation – was placed in the
hands of the mother. The child (usually gendered as male) would go out into the world and
help with the construction of the nation (Govindhamon, 1927; Kochukuttyamma, 1935;
Kunjikaavamma, 1927). Motherhood was not placed on the same pedestal as wifehood, but it
was an important aspect of *sthreedharmam*. Education was put forward as being necessary
for fulfilling the maternal role:
Mental refinement should be the aim of education. A child brought up by a mother devoid of mental refinement will take after her. All the people in the world grow up under the guidance of their mothers. If one takes the case of extraordinarily gifted persons, it could be seen that the base for their accomplishments were laid by their mother. Even if the father is an idiot, if the mother is smart the children may grow up all right. Therefore parents should take extreme care that girls are brought up properly. Their education should be given more importance than their marriage. A virtuous woman is an asset to her home, whether she is married or not (Devakiamma, 1924: 55).

In this formulation, a girl child is important for the future role that she would play in the smooth running of the home. This could also be read as a round about way to create a need for the girl child to be educated.

In the early 20th century, sthreedharmam included education in its ambit, which was not earlier seen as a part of dharmam. Modern education for woman was itself a new phenomenon. Of the many proposals for the kind of education that women needed, this one would capture the essence of the arguments:

It would be ideal if the following curriculum could be implemented in women’s educational institutions –

1. The medium of instruction for women should be their mother tongue. Then knowledge can be gained without difficulty.
2. Women should have some knowledge of English and Sanskrit.
3. All women should definitely learn Hindi because the mother tongue of Bharat [India] is really Hindi.
4. Women should become experts in sthreedharmam, politics, home management, health science, cooking science, needle work, music, and painting.

If women are given training in the above subjects, their health and intellect will increase and they will become true bharatheeyagrehadharmini (Indian housewife) (Anandavalliamma, 1927: 360-1).
As can be seen from this quote, education for women included a mix of achievements and skills, accomplishments and functionality. Women were not expected to laze away their time, gossiping. The writers repeatedly ask women to spend their afternoon reading or learning useful skills. This was not just a way of regulating their leisure hours but also a way of regulating social interaction among women. The act of ‘gossiping’ itself came to be seen as non-constructive activity detrimental to the morality of women.

**Nationalism and other women in Malavali imagination**

There was a sense of being part of the larger nation of India in these writings. The nationalist movement happening elsewhere in India had its resonances in the Malayalam-speaking regions too. Many of the writers in the magazines were relatives of political activists and activists themselves. The famous poets of the time produced/wrote works that added to the feeling of being part of the larger nation (Sreedhara Menon, 1967). Moreover, with direct British rule in Malabar and with Travancore and Cochin being under indirect British rule, there was a sense of unity among the people. Other than education, a new aspect of *sthreedharmam* was the woman’s role in nation-building. She was expected to do this through the rearing of her progeny in a manner that would ensure that the child would become the perfect citizen. She was also expected to help the nation in whatever little ways that she could. Some writers suggested starting small-scale industries like weaving; others suggested teaching their less fortunate sisters in rural areas. These small scale industries were attached to the home, and would not have physically taken her far from home. Thus, women’s right to work was also being linked to the larger project of nation-building. Articles written after the 1920s show the influence

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67 Kerala did not experience a vigorous nationalist movement like other parts of India did. In the early 20th century, the focus was on caste and (religious) community movements, which then gave way to leftist/Marxist/Communist movements.
of Gandhi and the nationalist movement. A large number of articles on untouchability, need to abstain from sex, simplicity in clothes, Gandhian ideals, etc. are found in the years immediately after he visited Kerala [1925 and 1927] (Ammukuttyamma, 1928; Bose, 1929; Krishnabhai, 1928; Kuttannair, 1929; Ramamenon, 1929a; Ramanmenon, 1929; Sharada, 1927-28).

The writers were constantly comparing Malayali women with Western women. Descriptions of women from different countries in the West (England, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Australia, and U.S.A) were given in many of the magazines. There were also articles on women from Asian countries like Japan, China, Burma, etc. Japan and the West were two frequent points of reference for the magazine writers. Japanese women were almost always positive ideals to be emulated. Japan being one of the few ‘developed’ countries in Asia could have been the reason for its complete acceptability to Malayali writers. Japanese women were also presented as being softer and less competitive in nature compared to Western women (Aandipilla, 1909; Bhageerathiamma, 1932; Manjja, 1928). Western women were portrayed as negative or positive role models depending on whether the writer was espousing a traditional or a modern position/role for women. Thus, the women reader of the period was aware of not just the Western women, but of the larger world through the magazines.

Women’s education and curriculum

Until the 1920s, most of the articles on women’s education were about the need for educating women. The writers argued that modern lifestyle required women to be proficient in a variety of chores and tasks previously not taken up by an earlier generation. This required that the woman be a companion to her husband, and be able to converse with him on an equal footing. She was expected to help him in his work in the
public sphere. This did not take her away from household duties – her primary duty. After 1920, the arguments move towards the kind of education that women need. It would appear that by the 1920s it had become generally accepted that women needed education. By the 1930s, women were also thinking of education as a stepping stone to enter a profession/learn a useful skill (Amma, 1936a; Amminamma, 1936; Sthree, 1934; "Sthreekallum Sarkarudyogavum", 1930; Thankamma, 1932). However, according to the writers, there were shortcomings with the kind of education/schooling women were receiving. Women were entering government and private service as doctors, nurses, teachers, advocates, school inspectors, etc. They were entering jobs previously reserved for men. The magazines, the administrative reports and even the census reports mention a prevailing belief that women were competing with men (Karthyanikutty, 1926; Veerarayanraja). Women were also seen as moving away from the space of the domestic, some even preferring to remain unmarried. The status quo could not continue; some felt that education had to address this issue.

Therefore, writers asked for separate schools for girls: “After the initial schooling girls should be sent to special Girls’ Schools”, says B. Kalyani Amma68 (Amma, 1930a; Amma, 1930c). “At this age they realize that they are different from their brothers, and they start feeling naturally that they have a different dharmam to fulfil”. She adds:

Girls’ schools can be divided into two kinds: primary schools which provide general education for girls between 8 and 14 years and high schools that impart higher education. After girls have completed their education in these high schools they can either opt to get married, find work, or join a college for higher education (Amma, 1930b: 41).

The so-called natural differences in the nature/aptitude of girls and boys were the focal point on which the detractors of co-education located their arguments. The inherent differences

68 She was a teacher.
between boys and girls, many writers felt, meant that the kind of education imparted to them should also be different. Some felt that this difference would be addressed by including subjects like music, arts and painting. Others did not feel a need to differentiate between boys’ and girls’ education and some even scoffed at the inclusion of subjects which they thought were useless (Rukmaniamma, 1922; Subramanyayan, 1897). It was not that writers who considered music and sewing as useless subjects also supported a non-differentiated curriculum for the two genders. Even towards the end of the 1930s, after many women had successfully been part of the new professions, there were arguments against the suitability of certain professions for women. Many writers firmly believed that women could not physically stand the rigours of a professional life and manage the domestic space simultaneously (Narayanamenon, 1939b).

It was felt that many women were moving towards a western style of living. They were spending their time reading novels, entrusting the running of the household to servants, not giving enough attention to their children, showing aversion to Indian arts, wanting to play English sports, not getting up early in the morning, not spending time in the kitchen, not reading the Bhagavat Geeta, not visiting the temple and even not getting married. Therefore, the writers give a list of things women/girls should not be doing. The following quote would be something that is universally told to Indian girls even today:

Girls should not argue about unnecessary topics; should not go alone to strange houses or amusement/picnic areas; wish for clothes and jewellery worn by other girls; postpone tasks allotted to them; talk in excess and/or loudly; and on growing up engage in activities that would irritate their husbands and sons (Ambhadevithampuratti, 1927: 24).

This literally limits the mobility of girls (in the same way that starting a small-scale industry would). Not only are her duties or dharmam different from that of men but she is also placed in a subservient position to men when she is expected to place their needs above her own.
Inherent in this formulation was a sense of disciplining – her actions, speech, and the clothes she wears – that had to be imparted via education.

**Parishkaaram**

*Sthreedharmam* and *sthreethwam* were frequently presented as changing due to *parishkaaram*. What was *parishkaaram*? *Parishkaaram* could mean different things – change (positive and negative), development, progress, reform, sophistication, culture. It also meant decoration (appearance), ornament, civilization, cleansing, or even fixing defects (Gundert, 1992; Namboothiri, 1972; Pillai, 1987). *Aadhunikatha* (modernity; something that has come into existence recently (Namboothiri, 1972)) was seen as ushering in *parishkaaram*; education had ushered in *parishkaaram*; imitation had ushered in *parishkaaram*. The term also included the sense of civilisation/progress/reform in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1905, an article published on women’s education mentioned that women’s education is not a new *parishkaaram*. Here, it is used in the sense of innovation. The concept of tradition/modernity was implicit in the idea of *parishkaaram*.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, India was ‘rediscovering’ her traditions, both under the British – in the guise of Indic studies – and by her own scholars (Veer and Lehmann, 1999). In the Malayalam-speaking regions while countering what was observed as change, the idea of a homogenised ‘tradition’ was being formulated. The writers and intellectuals of the time were aware of the difficulty of this proposition and were drawing on various sources to put together a tradition. Therefore, sources like the *puranas*, Mahabharata, Vedas and even figures from Indian history were used to this effect. Simultaneously, modern or Western culture and manners were inculcated into this tradition. This was occurring in some measure as a consequence of the new formal education that was in place. The British education system with its schools, colleges and universities disseminated western science and technology, law
and culture. It restated and reorganised forms of Indian knowledge. The British system also acquired the status of ‘being modern’ and desirable and necessary for upward social mobility. Those who had undergone English education were faulted with imitating the English in manners, dressing and lifestyle. This imitation of the English came under fire from various quarters and parishkaaram took on the meaning of ‘change by imitation’ in this context. Education was alluded to as one of the harbingers of change. So, parishkaaram was directly related to education, though education was only one of the causes.

The term tradition is used by the writers in the early 20th century to refer to Malayali culture, rituals and lifestyle before the advent of colonialism. With the coming of the British and the institution of the British system of education, they sense a change in the traditional structures of kinship, caste, community, family, lifestyles, food habits, dressing styles, customs and even within individuals. At the turn of the century there was a perceived rupture within traditional structures of society. Whether this rupture could be articulated or not it implied a notion of crisis. The question of whether change was for better or for worse began to be asked during this period. Tradition had to be kept extant in some way and the burden fell upon the newly-imagined figure of the Malayali woman. One way of doing this was to delineate parishkaaram [taken to mean change] as intellectual, physical and moral. Intellectual parishkaaram was seen as needed, but not physical or external parishkaaram [culture, customs, dressing]. The following quotation uses the term in the sense of influence, trappings/appearance, culture, change, transformation, progress:

It has to be agreed that because of Western parishkaaram there has been huge progress in the condition of women. But, often we follow the external parishkaaram of Western culture instead of understanding the remarkable qualities of that culture. As a result of this imitation of Western culture we forget the Indian ideal of womanhood, scorn our ancient culture which has at many times astonished other nations, sneer at our life styles and customs. It is thought to be Western parishkaaram
when we make changes in our dressing styles, manners and bearing, and look down upon rural people…Hindu society needs to undergo parishkaaram. But this need not be a blind imitation of the West. Parishkaaram should not be a boycotting of traditional culture (Anandavalliamma, 1939: 131-2).

Here parishkaaram takes on various meaning. Parishkaaram used in the sense of culture/influence was acceptable to some extent as long as it did not bring about any drastic changes to the outward markers of culture. Malayali society, especially the matrilineal communities, was going through changes, and the questions were how much change was needed, how much was acceptable, where to draw the line, and so on.

While physical parishkaaram was not desirable, intellectual and moral/spiritual parishkaaram were. This dichotomy of the spiritual East and material West in public discourse in colonial India has been mentioned by other scholars (Chatterjee, 1989b; Veer, 2001). In the Malayalam-speaking regions people were advised to embrace literary and scientific aspects of parishkaaram. Morality and/or spirituality were proffered as the forte of Indian culture as opposed to the worldliness of Western culture.

The various disturbances happening in the world today is the effect of parishkaaram. India moved away from spiritual parishkaaram a long time ago. One wonders if western parishkaaram has caused the West to deteriorate too. Intellectual development brings with it increased negative consequences. So then where does progress lead us? What about parishkaaram? To rectify the problems of Western material parishkaaram, there is need for Eastern spiritual parishkaaram. Progress can happen only when both [spirit and intellect] develop simultaneously (Kunjukuttyamma, 1927: 67).
Parishkaaram used in the sense of material progress was a negative force according to this writer. Spiritual reform or progress was then needed to counter the relentless march of material culture.\textsuperscript{69}

A problematic issue connected to parishkaaram was the increasing dependence on the servant class (Amma, 1936c; Kannanmenon, 1916; Kavamma, 1913; Narayananambi, 1917; Ramamenon, 1918; Ramanpilla (Mrs.), 1927-28; Subramanyayan, 1897; Velupilla, 1930). A large number of writers complained that the young wife/mother was relying too much on servants for the running of the home:

As a consequence of this affinity for parishkaaram there is no dearth of harmful activities that take place in our homes. Certain women who act as parishkaarikal (women with parishkaaram) are disinclined to do household chores owing to the mistaken belief that it is contemptuous. Is it a feature of inner parishkaaram to think of virtuous household duties as contemptuous? It will not be wrong to say that in many homes there are more servants than family members. Some women will not be capable of running their homes, and some will not have the need to do so. I am not saying that women should do all the household chores. Depending on their financial situation and needs they can appoint servants, but do not make them responsible for everything …There have been many problems with the raising of children, as in the case of the running of the household, because of this affinity for parishkaaram. Our children have become weak mentally and physically on account of our custom of giving over the children to the care of untrained servants following the Western custom of leaving the children in the care of a nanny (Kavamma, 1913: 43-4).

One of the reasons for this paranoia of dependence on servants could have been that many of the younger women were moving away from the natal families and starting smaller

\textsuperscript{69} It should be noted here that writings in the magazine Lakshmibai appear to use the term in the negative sense more often than in other magazines. This magazine had a male editor and was published from Thrissur, often called the seat of culture/literature in Kerala.
family units with their husbands as a result of the availability of new jobs, the break-up of the joint family systems, and the new rules regarding inheritance and marriage that were being put in place. The younger women did not have family members for help with household chores and for taking care of the children. Most joint families had servants who had been with the family for generations, and the nuclear families could not expect to have such loyal servants. The servants did not have the necessary training, education, or loyalty to take care of the children, cook a nutritious meal or manage the household supplies. Cleanliness, hygiene, health, and proper management of money were qualities that were associated with modern education. Therefore, the servants were not considered efficient as they were not educated. Another reason was that since the younger women were taking up the new jobs available to them outside the space of the home, they had to depend upon others for help with the household chores. Yet another reason could be that caste pollution and other caste-related regulations were becoming lax as a result of the work of the missionaries and the caste groups themselves. Intermingling and inter-dining among the upper and lower castes were not prohibited by law, as it had been a century ago. Lower caste people were not allowed inside the houses of the upper and middle caste people in the 18th and 19th centuries (Amma, 1964; Arunima, 2002; Menon, 2006; Radhakrishnan, April 1986). In the 20th century they were

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70 Devaki Nilayangodu mentions that in her ancestral home, there were Nair women to take care of the children and generally help the antarjanams (Namboothiri women). If a man had more than one wife, each wife was assigned a separate servant to take care of her needs and her children, irrespective of their numbers. There were even women to wet-nurse infants who needed it, though they would usually be from among the Namboothiri sub-castes. Thus, the use of servants was not a new phenomenon (at least among the upper caste/class families) as many of the writers made it out to be. For details, see: Nilayangodu, Kalappakarchakal.

71 A couple of my interviewees, Draupathiamma and C.K. Sarojiniamma, mentioned that the Nair and Namboothiri students had to take a bath after coming back from school. The upper caste Draupathiamma was not allowed to bring her lower caste friends even to the veranda of her house. She herself would be served her afternoon lunch on a side veranda on days she had classes. Another lower caste interviewee, K. Ammukatty spoke about having to sit on a grass mat and not a normal woven mat when she went for tuitions to the house of her Nair teacher. This was because the normal mat would have been considered polluted if she, a member of a lower caste, had sat on it.
forced to sit together and mingle with each other in the modern classrooms and other public spaces. Some of the educated young people were probably not as rigid about prohibiting the lower caste/class servants from entering their homes. I would like to suggest that, in the magazines, the lowering of the caste boundaries was probably the stronger reason for the paranoia about the so-called over-dependence on servants than anything else since most of the writers who speak about it were Nairs.

The woman was expected to take up complete responsibility for the household and its residents. Her position was to be that of a manager of the domestic realm. The so-called inherent qualities that a woman possessed like compassion, purity, chastity, attention to detail, etc. were supposed to make her the right person for this. However, in the new nuclear households (and in some joint families), women were moving away from the roles and duties assigned to them. What was to become of these new women who were refusing to take up their place in the domestic realm? Blatant imitation of Western customs was held responsible for this state of affairs. These women had to be brought back to the protective space of domesticity. The writers use a mix of pedagogic tone and common sense to advice woman on their duties – sthreedharmam – and the proper running of the household. Since this alone was not enough, they proposed that women’s education be revamped to instil these qualities in women.

The writers blamed the incomplete education that women received for this state of affairs: late rising, apathy regarding domestic chores, etc. They defend the need for education, but emphasised that education needed to cater to the needs of women. A few of them also mentioned that not all women were meant for marriage, although grihastashramam (state of being a householder) was their primary duty. The magazine writers even suggested a separate curriculum for women who wanted to get married and those who wanted to take up...
jobs. By the 1930s, however, most of the writers seem to suggest that household tasks and jobs can go hand-in-hand (Anandavalliamma, 1939; Thulasthar, 1918).

There was a sense that women and men were competing for the same resources/jobs/positions in the family and society as was mentioned before. The blame was laid at the feet of parishkaaram and modern education. When used in connection with Western culture, parishkaaram was seen as being instrumental in bringing about a rift:

The kind of parishkaaram among our Western sisters is not at all worth imitating. There women and men have become two opposing communities. Sometimes it even takes the form of a duel. Each side takes responsibility for their own happiness and works towards their own advancement (Kochukrishnapilla, 1918: 270).

Thus, the Malayali women were not to compete with men for the same kind of jobs, especially government jobs (Ammukuttyamma, 1927; Eshwarapilla; Govindhankartha, 1925; Rukmaniamma; Shankunnimenon, 1909; Sharada, 1927). Many of the government jobs reserved for particular castes were opened up to women by the 1920s and 1930s. However, there was a popular consensus being developed that certain kinds of jobs were more suited to the temperament of women like teaching or the medical profession. This ensured that women and men were subtly directed towards different career choices.

The debates for and against parishkaaram lasted for nearly three decades. It had become so important that a Malayalam textbook used in Malabar from 1937 had an essay on parishkaaram. Through its inclusion in a textbook, the students were also being exhorted not to blindly imitate what was seen as Western culture. The students were asked to accept parishkaaram discerningly.

Look at the Westerners themselves. Though they take their parishkaaram wherever they go they do not seem to imbibe foreign parishkaaram. So contemplate at length before deciding to give up our ancient culture. There are many things that we need to learn from the West. These are appropriate and necessary for increasing our
knowledge. But, forgetting our lifestyles, national character and ancient culture by imitating their vices and digressions is not seemly. We will suffer spiritual loss more than worldly gain by doing so (Eshwarapilla, 1936: 64).

*Parishkaaram* is used synonymously with culture here. There is also the exaltation of ancient Indian culture and an emphasis on the spiritual nature of Indian culture, which was considered superior to material culture; at the same time, there is no complete rejection of Western culture. At another point in the same essay, there is mention of Indians having taken to smoking, drugs, tea drinking, using processed food and so on as a result of the influence of the West. What Eshwarapilla finds problematic is not the foreign nature of these customs, but their detrimental effect on the health of Indians and the expense they incur for an average Indian.

The writers who supported women’s education had to defend themselves against allegations of modern education leading women astray. These writers nearly always put forward *parishkaaram* as being positive. *Parishkaaram*, for them, was always towards a better future, away from a stifling past. The writers make an argument for education being necessary for this future to happen. Progress/reform/mental upliftment was highlighted as the direct result of the right kind of education.

There are some *parishkaarikal* (reformers – used in a negative sense), who are afraid that women will become *tantonnikal* (those doing as they pleased) as a result of education. Before deciding whether education brings out women’s good or bad qualities, they should be given the chance to refine their intellect by appropriate education. Isn’t it piteous that there is an outcry on account of the wrong impression

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72 This essay was published in *Lakshmibai* in 1927. It was later incorporated into a Malayalam textbook in 1937. *Lakshmibai* was published from the princely state of Cochin, while the textbook was published from Calicut for the Madras University. This again proves the fact that printed material crossed political borders in the Malayalam-speaking regions.

73 The translation of *tantonnikal* is from Devika’s translation of the word *tantonnittam* (doing-as-one-pleased). From: Devika, *Imagining Women's Social Space in Early Modern Keralam* ([cited]).
that all literate women are learned? The actions of the former are collated to that of a parishkaaramathy (a woman who has parishkaarām – used in a positive sense) and it is said that women should not be educated; that they will become of loose morals; that they will long for unearned swaathandryam; will not enter the kitchen; and there will be no more cooking. The real function of education is mental parishkaarām (Kavamma, 1915: 463).

The right kind of parishkaarām was seen as coming about from the right kind of education. The writer differentiates between women who were merely literate and women who were knowledgeable and wise. The right kind of education would place the woman within the domestic ideal. It was not as if one group was for parishkaarām and another was against it. The ‘right kind’ of parishkaarām was acknowledged as useful, and it was also put forward as being necessary for society. The ‘right kind’ of parishkaarām was what made a Sheelavathy⁷⁴ or a Sita different from an Annie Besant or a Sarojini Naidu.

There is evidence that in olden times women had talent for arts, and also that they were not without parishkaarām. Like in the 20th century there were music experts, writers, fighters, experts in rulership at various stages of our history. But, these women were not idealized as model women. Women like Sheelavathy, Satyavathy, Damayanthy and Sita were neither literati nor famous for their ability to rule. Mrs. Annie Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Miss. Sathyabala Devi, and Miss. Tarabai are known today not only in India, but all over the parishkrithalokham (civilized world).

Some people will oppose the fact that these women are ideals worth emulating and that their biographies illustrate how women too can attain fame in all avenues open to human intellect (Kochukrishnapilla, 1918: 269).

In the above formulation, the ‘right kind’ of parishkaarām was responsible for a Sita or a Sheelavathy being endowed with the necessary womanly virtues. These model women had a

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⁷⁴ Sheelavathy is a character from Indian mythology. She was so chaste and devoted to her old and inebriated husband that at his command, she agreed to carry him on her shoulders to a courtesan.
certain inherent *sthreehwam*. The author mentions that some people do not think of Annie Besant etc. as being model women. The reason for this was that these modern women had moved away from the domestic realm. Moving away from the domestic was equated with losing *sthreehwam*.

**Health, conjugality, sexuality**

Given below is an excerpt from an article on the special subjects to be taught to girls in *Malayalamasika*:

Health Science – This should be compulsory in girls’ schools. It is the responsibility of a homemaker to take care of the health of the members of the household and herself. This subject should be taught in the lower classes in the primary section and should be over by the time they reach the higher classes. Girls should gain complete knowledge of the shape and nature of our organs; respiration; circulation; care for organs; gains of exercise; need for rest, etc. from school. As a home maker, mother and nurse she will need to know these.

Home management – This should be taught in connection with health science. Cooking, nursing the sick, baby care, honouring guests, cleanliness, economy etc. are part of this. It is important to teach the girls to live according to the social, communal and financial situation of our country.

Another subject that needs to be taught in the upper primary classes in conjunction with home management is conjugal science. Majority of the women in our country think that the aim of marriage is just attending to the needs of the husband, childbearing, and childcare. There is no doubt that these are the main responsibilities in a marriage. But, these alone will not bring a completion to life. They also need to do political and communal activities. Most women do not have time to even think about these. They complain that even before a child is weaned another is conceived. The solution to reducing the number of maternal deaths on
childbirth resulting from weakened health of women, to reducing the number of sickly, weak and malnourished babies, to preventing poverty and hunger is by creating awareness among our young women and men through schools. Therefore it would be good for the future of our country if we could include lessons on conjugality in the school syllabus (Amma, 1930c: 68-70)

The term Home Science came to be used in the 1920s (in India). It was an amalgamation of Home Economics (taught in USA), and Domestic Science (taught in England and British India), and combined both to include elements of a nationalist pedagogy (Hancock, 2001). The idea of teaching women Domestic Science existed before this period among the elite Indians in urban areas of Bombay, Madras and Bengal, and in princely states like Mysore, Baroda, Travancore and Cochin. As far back as 1897 (and possibly even before that), Malayalam magazines argued for women’s education so that women could have knowledge of matters related to health, nutrition, childcare, etc. (Subramanyayan, 1897). The colonial administration hoped that women’s education would dampen political activism by extending Western modernity into Indian homes. Domestic Science, it was believed, was not only apolitical, but would instil scientific outlook in Indians (Hancock, 2001).

In Madras Presidency, Home Science was a term applied to food and nutrition, home management, maternity and child welfare, clothing, and hygiene and preventive medicine. In Travancore and Cochin, Home Science included all these sub categories. In Kalyani Amma’s description (quote at the beginning of this section) of the subjects to be taught a new category is added: conjugal science (dampathyashaasthram). Though she does not explain what she means by conjugal science, it should not be difficult to re-construct the meaning. She says women do not have the time or energy for social and political activities as a result of continuous childbearing and related chores. Women and children were also becoming unhealthy and malnourished as a result of poverty. Therefore, women and men need to be
taught conjugal science to decrease the population growth. From this, one can make the logical jump that she was implicitly referring to teaching birth control and/or sex education.

The institution of special subjects for women, especially Home Science, implied that both the woman and the home could be modernized using natural scientific principles (Hancock, 2001). The modernization involved knowledge of hygiene, nutrition, health, and ultimately, the health and well being of the nation. It also asserted that the domestic sphere was female. However, by stating that women needed to study these subjects to be better mothers/wives/hostesses, Home Science denaturalized the link between women and domesticity; domesticity was no longer an inherent talent/skill of women. In Kerala, the government records after 1930s lamented that there were very few takers for the optional subjects instituted for girls, and girls generally preferred to take up the same subjects that boys did. The Travancore Education Reforms Committee states:

While the authorities on the one hand, have apparently not encouraged differentiated courses for girls, the few experiments that have been tried, in the girls’ high schools, have shown that the pupils themselves or their parents are not anxious to take advantage of separate and special courses of study, unless those courses can be made use of, ultimately, with the same advantages as the present courses, terminating in recognised certificates. The experiment was recently tried of introducing alternative courses in domestic science in three girls’ high schools; but it was found that few girls were willing to undergo the course; and, in all three cases, the alternative courses were eventually given up. (Statham et al., 1933: 262-3)

In spite of the large number of writings on the need to learn Home Science/Domestic Science, to take up fine arts, music, etc., Malayali society did not show an interest in these subjects. The majority of the population who were opting to send their girls to schools expected them to study the same subjects that the boys did. Education or knowledge itself
began to be seen as gender neutral in the 1930s. The gender differentiation morphs into other areas like the kind of jobs/courses considered suitable for women.

The turn of the century saw a move towards recognising public health as being important in the Malayalam-speaking regions and throughout India. The print media showed an increase in articles on health and illness. Hygienic practices were related to being modern. There were many debates on child-bearing practices, midwives, the health of mothers, etc. (Amrith, 2007). European techniques of medicine were not a completely new innovation. The rulers of Travancore promoted Western medicine. The ruling family in Travancore had availed of the small pox vaccination as far back as 1865. The upper, middle and certain lower castes (Ezhava) had access to and were practitioners of Ayurveda. The Cochin Maharaja Kerala Varma (1864-1943) was a reputed physician (Jeffrey, 1992). Western medicine and medical practices gained acceptance in Kerala in a much easier manner than other cultural practices probably because of this history. Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* was published in 1927 and this had heightened the Indian awareness of scientific and hygienic medical practices. Malayalam magazines from 1927 and beyond have references to Mayo and her work (Cousins, 1928; Editorial, 1928a; Ramamenon, 1929a; Thomas, 1928). Child health and maternal health were matters of utmost public concern. Individual health was routinely connected to national progress. Malayalam writers were giving advice on the importance of cooking food properly so that the body received the needed nutrition. Dire warnings were given about what would happen if this were not done properly, including impending widowhood if the husband was not given proper food (Achuthamenon, 1907b).

The period saw discussions about the increasing population growth, women taking control of their body and planning the family (Kurup; Parameshwaranpilla, 1935; Sangar, 1934). Contraception and birth control were being discussed at various locations not just in Kerala, but in other parts of India too. Though there were discussions at the government
level, the states were reluctant to push for a strong birth-control agenda in colonial India. In the Cochin legislative assembly, when a member tried to propose a resolution to start birth control clinics in association with government hospitals, the resolution was not passed for religious and moral reasons (Ayyappan, 1931). The need for birth control was couched in terms of (a) economy – financial resources of individual families and drain on national resources; (b) medical – the health of the mother and the infant; (c) moral/religious – uncontrolled sexual activity and break down of family; and (d) culture/civilization – as an acceptable practice in the West and as a sign of modernity. There was a distinction made between birth control and abortion in many of the writings and the writers often had to state that both were not the same. In fact, it was said that the non-availability of proper birth control methods was responsible for many women having to depend on quacks (Kurup, year unavailable). However many people found that there was scant difference between preventing a life from coming into existence and cutting off a life that is in existence (Ayyappan, 1931). The manner in which it was discussed in the legislative council, birth control was not a matter of choice for the woman. Even for those who supported the resolution, it was something a husband granted to his wife to keep her healthy; it was seen as giving the man better control over the family’s finances. Moreover, the Census report for 1931 had shown a high rate of increase in population leading to high rates of unemployment among the youth (Statham et al., 1933). Mrs. Swaris, the only woman to speak during the question and answer session in the legislative assembly, opposed it. She considered it “immoral” and “indecent” to openly discuss the matter in the council and considered the whole matter to be the [negative] outcome of modern education. Mrs. Swaris confessed that she had exited the council on the previous day to preserve her self-respect. She had been part of the AIWC discussions on birth control and had opposed the move there too. The AIWC had discussed the topic in 1931. In the Cochin legislative assembly the issue was discussed 4 times between 1931 and 1934; in
the Travancore legislative council, it was discussed once in 1936.\textsuperscript{75} In both the councils, the resolution was not passed. In the debate in the AIWC in 1936, Miss. Rosemeyer, Miss. Watts, and Miss. Ouwerkerk, all Christian women from Travancore, opposed the resolution (Ahluwalia, 2008). These women were all single and opposed it on religious grounds.

In the magazines, the discussion on contraception and birth control came up as early as 1929 (after the publication of \textit{Mother India}). The discussions in Malayalam magazines were related to women’s sexuality, her nature/instincts, her \textit{sthreethwam}, etc. The following passage is a summary of an article by one of the traditionalists among the writers.

There are many examples of the kind of people Miss Mayo speaks about in her book. Just look at the examples of Mumtaz begum and the Maharaja of Indore.\textsuperscript{76} Indian women are not like Western women. They do not take legal action against men who mistreat them. Rather, they try to change them with their exemplary deed, words, etc. Women should not be given freedom as this will lead to them losing their \textit{sthreethwam}. Women should not travel with men as this will lead them to losing their chastity. Students should be taught to be self-efficient. They should have proper exercise and religious education. They should keep good company and read good books. They should give up meat and other food that stimulates the sex drive. People should have sex only for reproductive purposes. Having excessive sex will adversely affect one’s health and decrease longevity. One should not read porn or use stimulants like alcohol and drugs. One should not use artificial birth control, but use abstinence

\textsuperscript{75} These are the only records I found. The issue could have been discussed at other times.

\textsuperscript{76} There was a scandal involving the then Maharaja of Indore and a dancer in his court by the name of Mumtaz begum. For more details, see: "Kidnapped for Romance," \textit{The Milwaukee Sentinel}, 6 January 1946. Available from: http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1368&dat=19460106&id=qFFQAAAIBAJ&sjid=Dw4EAAAAIBAJ&pg=6088,5251164

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to control one’s sex drive. Mahatma Gandhi’s life is a good example of how sexual drive is kept in check by masculine power (Ramamenon, 1929b: 323-30).

There are contradictory threads in this article. Contradictions were frequent in the writings from the period, as the writers seem to be trying to find a middle path between cultural reform and cultural revival, between what was perceived as tradition and modernity, between the Occident and the Orient, between the writers’ own sense of their culture and the colonialist’s sense of Malayali/Indian culture. Eastern women were said to be pacifists, patient and loving while simultaneously giving the example of somebody like Mumtaz begum. The article was also trying to contain sexuality through restrictions on mobility, food and inter-personal contact. The woman’s sexuality was imagined to be easily out of control. Women and men were not segregated into a strict purdah/zenana in Kerala, except among the Namboothiris and a few Muslim communities. However, the mingling of the sexes in the modern school and at the workplace was looked at with suspicion/anxiety as both the women’s and the men’s sexuality could easily transgress into immorality. The detractors of birth control were championing for natural methods including abstinence. Gandhi himself was against the use of chemical or mechanical contraceptives (Ahluwalia, 2008).

Even the act of reading was linked to sexuality. Books were seen as double-edged swords. Many families prohibited their daughters from reading novels. However with careful supervision, they could:

After the age of sixteen there is no objection to reading works like Shakuntala,

Naishadham, and others which have the quality of sringara (romantic/erotic love), in the company of one’s husband or women friends. In fact, it is necessary to read them

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77 This is not an exact translation of the text, but a gist of the arguments as per my reading.

78 K.R. Gowriyamma mentions a similar restriction in her autobiography. This information was volunteered by one of the interviewees, K. Ammukutty also. She remembered that her family considered novels as vulgar and restricted her from reading them. However, another interviewee Chinnamma Cherian said that she had read a number of novels and had even been to see plays.
to develop one’s ability to carry out one’s duties and to develop the strength of character to protect one’s chastity (Warrier, 1931: 226).

The sexuality of the young women/girl could not be allowed to grow unchecked, but had to be kept within the bounds of propriety and chastity. The more radical thinkers of the time were in favour of including aspects of conjugality, sexuality and birth control practices in their writings and even in school curricula as can be seen from the quote at the beginning of this section. There were articles cautioning women from engaging in sex during pregnancy (Ramamenon, 1916), about the care needed when a woman was menstruating (Narayanamenon), the precautions needed during pregnancy and other topics related to women’s health (Kochaachiyamma, 1928; Mathew, 1929). It is worth noting here that a number of articles on marriage and divorce started appearing in magazines around this period (Abraham (Mrs.), 1928; Kalyanikuttyamma, 1928; Krishnanthampi, 1924; Manjja (Mrs.), 1928; Mary, 1928; Ramamenon, 1929a; Stoker, 1932; Thomas, 1928; V.C.A., 1928). This was mirrored/paralleled by a wide range of legislations/bills on child marriage, civil marriage, absence of marriage, property rights under marriage, dissolution of marriage, etc. presented in the Travancore and the Cochin legislative assemblies from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Instilling discipline in the body and mind of the young girl/woman was an important aspect of re-fashioning her sthreedharmam. This was also true for boys/men and was not exclusively related to women. The model individual was one who was seen as having control over one’s body, thoughts and words. The injunction against reading novels (the romantic and erotic kind; this was not so strictly enforced against reading historical novels) was also an aspect of disciplining the mind from falling into excessive sexuality. The inclusion of drill and the directives to include exercise into the daily regime of women was part of disciplining
the body (Bose, 1929; Ramamenon, 1929a; Shankunninair, 1921). Education was proposed as providing the necessary training to discipline the mind and to inculcate good habits.

Some of the women’s magazines mention the increasing number of female suicides that were taking place in Kerala at the time (Amma, 1936b; Reddy, 1927). They do not glorify women’s work/chores and perceive the gap between what women expected and what their reality was. They present the increased rates of suicides among women as a result of the bad treatment many women received at home. To these writers, education was making women aware of the unjust treatment within marriage. One of the writers also mentioned that women in bad marriages had no legal recourse to end their marriages (Reddy, 1927). The so-called increase in suicides could have been the result of better reporting because of the increase in print media during the period. However, it could well have been the beginning of a trend – according to current socio-economic reports Kerala is among the states with the highest number of crimes committed against women and has increased cases of depression among educated women (Mungekar et al., 2008).

Some of these ideas that emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Malayalam magazines were carried forward into the 21st century. The “Kerala Development Report” published in 2008 notes that the unemployment rates for urban educated women in Kerala was 34.9%, while for all of India it was 18.2%; for rural women in Kerala it was 32.3%, while the all-India rate was 15% (Mungekar et al., 2008). The reasons cited for the high rates of unemployment are that (a) women are unable to procure jobs commensurate with their skills, (b) women prefer to remain in the educational stream in the absence of ‘desired’ employment, (c) as families move up the social ladder women are withdrawn from the work sector to take care of the home and children, (d) women prefer to work near their homes, and (e) women are fewer than men in the technical/professional education except nursing.
Reading from a modern position in time, what is missing in these descriptions (from the early 20th century) of the woman and her duties is the absence of an individualistic self: a woman was always a wife and a mother first, then a daughter and sister, and sometimes a hostess, a medic, a caregiver and a home manager. Her agency or sense of self was directed towards the needs of the family and the nation. The development of self in the Western narratives of womanhood, which was demonstrated by the protests the Western woman led against the authorities for temperance, wage parity, the Suffragette movement etc., was looked at with fear and suspicion because these were seen as disruptive. These would have taken the Malayali woman out of her home. The Hindu writers (from matrilineal communities) of these magazines also had the added task of trying to come to terms with a new conjugal unit, where the woman and man had moved out of their natal families. The children were taking the names of their father; the wives were taking the names of their husbands – both practices were new and different from custom. The nuclear family was too new and tenuous, and at that juncture in history, it would have been seen as a double betrayal by the woman if she had asked for the recognition of a self that placed itself above the needs of the family. The first betrayal would have been the woman moving away from what was seen as her traditional roles/duties in the joint family. For the patrilineal families too, the nuclear family was a new phenomenon, and the energy and time of the woman was absolutely necessary to run the household smoothly.

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**Section II**

**Issues: Indian magazines and Malayalam magazines**

This section analyses women’s issues discussed in magazines from other Indian states during the colonial period. I have further narrowed it down to two South Indian states
(Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh) and two North Indian states (Gujarat and Bengal). Critical and scholarly work on women’s history and print culture, particularly on magazines from the colonial period, are available for these states. It was especially important to include work on Tamil journals because not only does Tamilnadu border Kerala, but Malabar was directly under the Madras presidency. There was an exchange of ideas happening in the form of students from Malayalam-speaking regions going to Madras for higher education, and the native states patterning their syllabus on the one followed in Madras University. The women’s groups in both the states also had contacts with each other. Tamil journals were published in Kerala. Bengal is important because not only was it frequently mentioned by the writers, it was alternatively a place to look up to; often, Bengali women were the ‘other’ to Malayali women in the same way Western women were.

Some of the Malayalam women’s magazines had news articles which reported the meetings of the Women’s Indian Association (founded in 1917) and the All India Women’s Conference (founded in 1927) and the resolutions passed in these meetings/conferences. Sometimes, the reporting was done by a delegate who had herself attended the meeting. This brought to the reader a sense of what was happening at the national level regarding the “woman question”. Therefore, the issues discussed in Malayalam magazines were not always Kerala-specific.

Mytheli Sreenivas’s work on Tamil magazines maps a movement from reformist emphasis on domesticity at the turn of 20th century toward a moral radical critique of gender relations within the family by the 1920s and 1930s (Sreenivas, 2003). The rise in female literacy was the catalyst for the growth of women’s publications from the turn of 20th century in Tamilnadu. This growth in female literacy prompted a debate on whether boys and girls

should have the same curriculum, or whether the latter required to be taught different subjects (similar to discussions in Malayalam magazines). The perceived gap in girls’ education was filled by creating a body of writing which included general and women-specific topics. Consequently, household hints for women were published alongside articles on science, medicine, geography and history. Motherhood and wifehood was the focus of debates on education in Tamilnadu. Like in Malayalam magazines, Tamil magazines of the time also had articles on childcare, hygiene, household management and even on home life in England. Images of an ideal domesticity from ancient India and from England were juxtaposed in the magazines. Tamilnadu witnessed the emergence of the new elite in the 1890s. These men had obtained modern Western education and served the colonial state, and there was a group of professional elite who were also Western educated but were not as closely bound with the state machinery. Sreenivas points out that the wives of these elite men could have been the target of the new domestic ideal in Tamilnadu. These women had moved to Madras and other urban areas, creating households apart from mothers-in-laws and other senior relatives. These young women assumed sole responsibility for the care and education of the children.

Early Telugu journals for women concentrated on the education of women (Ramakrishna, 1991). Attempts were made to educate women on elementary science, health science, upbringing of children etc. There were articles pertaining to “good conduct” of women. In Telugu journals of the period, “good conduct” was not a moral or ethical question, but was broadly taken to mean the spirit of adjustment and accommodation in living with other members of the family and especially with their spouses. The writers were often part of the larger social reform movements and the journals were a medium to disseminate their ideas. Later Telugu journals (from the 1920s) discussed issues concerning freedom of women and political developments in the country in addition to social reform and the needs of women. As mentioned before Malayalam women’s magazines were reluctant to discuss
overtly political matters. Ramakrishna also mentions differences between male and female edited journals:

Instructional and sermonising tone could be noticed in the male-edited journals whereas the journals edited by women were more positive in their expression of support to women's rightful place, though appeared to be less assertive in their views. Further, it is observed, that journals edited by men were writing less about the problems confronting women. Their main emphasis appears to be on topics such as 'Chastity', 'House-keeping', 'Frugality', etc. On the other hand, women-edited journals discussed the issues like infant marriages, condition of widows, need for women teachers to teach children, child birth and child care etc. (Ramakrishna, 1991: 85)

In Malayalam magazines, the difference seems to be with individual writers and the decade in which they were writing. Ramakrishna notes that early women journalists/writers were not so assertive in their writings. In Kerala too, this seems to hold true. Journals like Shrimathi and Vanitha Kusumam which were late entrants into the field were more assertive, radical and confident in their writings. In its twelfth issue, the editor of Vanitha Kusumam proudly wrote:

We are the only magazine to fight for women’s political freedom. Many people have advised and threatened us against taking such a stance; so we have stopped listening to them and gone ahead with our agenda (Editorial, 1928b: 426).

In Gujarat, the early women’s journals were addressed to women undergoing modernisation whose husbands were part of the colonial, British way of life (Shukla, 1991). These women could not be educated by mothers and mothers-in-law, since these would recreate the older models. The men needed companions in the British model. The education of middle/upper class mothers and wives was the aim of the journals. They introduced instructional material in skills such as sewing, knitting, ‘chikkan’ embroidery, sketching, and
drawing, and other appropriate skills – for rich women to spend their leisure hours and poor women to earn a living. Malayalam writers also saw these activities as being useful for the same reasons. However, lace making, sewing and knitting were the preferred activities for women. The early Malayalam magazines were also not particularly addressed to the colonial elite, probably because Travancore and Cochin, being native states, did not have the same kind of contact with the British as Gujarat did. Most of the early writers in the Gujarati magazines were Parsi and Hindu businessmen and professionals. There were articles asking women to learn to mingle with men of their own social standing, to be receptive to change in dress, housekeeping, and marital relationships. This is in complete contrast to what the Malayali writers were asking of their readers – to stop imitating other cultures, to not mingle with people from the opposite sex, etc. There were articles in the Gujarati journals asking women to give up complicated and superstitious rituals and ceremonies. Malayalam women’s magazines do not generally mention these aspects of culture as the caste organizations had already taken it upon themselves to deal with customs and practices seen as superstitious, useless and extravagant.

**Education and motherhood**

Education was an important issue discussed in Bengali magazines from the turn of the century (Bannerji, 1991). The stress was on home-based education to meet the social need of creating appropriate character traits, familial-social relations/households, and offering a moral basis for daily life. Malayalam journals/magazines, when speaking about education, always associated it with schools and formal structures. The qualities needed for an educated Malayali woman were discussed through the deployment of the concept of *sthreedharmam/*sthreethwam. The Bengali woman in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was portrayed as being the centre of the family consisting of the father, the mother and the child. The entire
childcare and related activities were invested with this mother figure. Bannerji mentions that in reality there would have been other female figures like the grandmothers, aunts, older female siblings, cousins, and male and female servants who would be part of taking care of a child. The argument moved from the self-improvement of the mother to the improvement of the home, and then to the nation. The mother helped to educate the son, who then went on to serve the nation. Though Bannerji does not explicitly say so, the emphasis on the male child should be noted here, because interestingly, when Hindu Malayali writers made the same connection through mother to the nation, the child who was seen as profiting from her education was always male. This is not to say that suddenly there was a preference for male children within the Malayali community, but it could well have been to do with the semiotics of the language.

In Bengal, mothering was combined with ‘teaching’ in this period. The woman was seen as a natural teacher, but as needing instruction in moral philosophy and practical sciences for this. Combining mothering with teaching reworked a service ideology into a gendered form (Bannerji, 1991). The role of the teacher is that of a moral disciplinarian, while that of the mother is of a loving nurturer. The mother-child relation encompassed all women and men and the woman was conferred adulthood while the man was infantilised. However, this was not an actual figure of empowerment for the women, because though she had an agency – a socially regulatory role – she was also governed by the needs of the child to be educated, forced to be heroic to nurture the future citizens of the nation. There was ambivalence about women, her innate nature, instincts, and feelings. Women were portrayed as both strong and weak at the same time, as creatures of instinct, emotions, and intuitions, rather than rationality. Both the pro and anti-reform groups supported this view of the woman. Arguments for education presupposed the potential for reason and the notion of an instinctual feminine (Bannerji, 1991: WS 57). Similar to the arguments used in Kerala on the
need for education, in Bengal also, it was put forth that education would finely hone and correct the faults in the femininity of women. Career development and economic viability were seen as leading to better motherhood and home. Malayalam writers till the 1920s saw career women and married women as having separate aims in life. Victorian and American women were the images used by the Bengali educationists as reference points, inspiring anecdotes of freedom of ‘another woman’, as a venue of expression of their own freedom and desire as women, and as a subtle acknowledgement of the inferiority of the Indian women. Though the Malayali writers used Western women as models, they were never completely acceptable to some of the traditionalists. Malayali writers were proud of their high literacy rates (and their superiority resulting from that) when compared to other women of India. Malayalam magazines also looked to a wider range of nations for the ideal qualities of the model women and this did not mean they considered themselves inferior to any other women.

**Education and culture**

Tanika Sarkar in speaking about the image of the 19th century Bengali woman in literature refers to a particular caricature that is an expression of the nostalgia for a lost tradition:

The woman, however, was the metaphor for both the unviolated, chaste, inner space and the possible consequences of its surrender. There is something like an obsession with the signs of that final surrender, the fatal invasion of that sacred space: giving up of sindur, betelnut, deference towards husbands and in-laws, religious faith; aping of foreign fashions and insistence on a greater leisure time for herself which might be misspent in reading novels and developing a discordant individuality. There is a tie-up with a whole range of themes made popular in pulp literature and bazaar paintings from the 19th century – the westernised, tea-drinking, novel-reading, mother-in-law
baiting wife as a kind of a folk devil on whom are displaced all the anxieties and fears
generated by a rapidly changing, increasingly alien social order (Sarkar, 2000: 172).

This description of the westernised woman who takes the brunt of the anxiety generated by a
c-changing social order is present in the writings on women and *parishkaaram*. The Malayali
woman who imbibes only the physical aspect of *parishkaaram* is the equivalent of the folk
devil in the Bengali print media. In 20\textsuperscript{th} century Kerala, the writers realise the futility of
denying or trying to change reform/progress/cultural changes. Therefore, the image of the
ideal Malayali woman is entrusted with the task of keeping in check undesirable aspects of
*parishkaaram*. The elements that were undesirable were subjective.

An aspect of the duties of the Gujarati and Bengali woman was her ability to play a
musical instrument to entertain family members. Though many Malayali writers do mention
music as essential to a girl’s education, some of the male writers from an earlier generation
find music and sewing as useless (Subramanyayan, 1897). When a writer mentioned that
women needed to have a different kind of education from what the men had, and learn more
of arts and music, another writer replied sarcastically that they might as well change all
universities to music universities and teach all children only fine arts (Rukmaniamma, 1922).
The original article was published in a Bengali magazine, and Rukmaniamma scathingly
added that it was not surprising that the article was published in Bengal, the only state in
India to not accept women’s voting right. She saw the publishing of such an article in
Malayalam as further proof of the selfishness of men. Music, sewing and fine arts do not
attain the importance of a Science, Social Sciences and Arts education in the Malayali psyche
in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Like in Kerala, magazines from other parts of India also showed a change in their
print culture post the 1920s. Tamilnadu saw a boom in the publishing industry with an
increase in the number of women writers and editors. During this period, for some writers,
the focus moved from transforming the wife to transforming the family/society. The question of dowry was a rallying point for the transformation of society (Sreenivas, 2003). Since nearly half the population in the Malayalam-speaking regions was matrilineal, dowry was probably not as wide spread in Kerala as it was in Tamilnadu. This could also explain the under representation of the issue in Malayalam magazines.

Conjugality

In her article, Sreenivas mentions a number of instances when marriage was discussed by the Tamil writers. At the turn of the 20th century, the prominent idea was that the woman had to/would model herself to be the perfect partner to the man. The belief of conjugality as central to the family emerged during this period. Later articles mentioned marriage as an inegalitarian market exchange that included practices that were not exclusively monetary (Sreenivas, 2003). The texts wanted to replace the market-like quality of customary marriage practice with an emotional bond between the couple. Child marriage was another spin-off of the same theme, whereby the practice was seen as preventing couples from developing a close emotional bond since marriages were fixed by the parents. Child marriages were also seen as adding to the problem of dowry. It put pressure on the brides’ parents and amplified the image of the girl as being a burden on the family. Bengali magazines of the time also spoke about the evil of child marriages (Bannerji, 1991). In the late 1920s, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy had moved the Madras Legislative Council to accept the minimum marriage age of girls as 16 and that of boys as 24 (Chattopadhyaya et al., 1939). Throughout India, there were campaigns to mobilize public opinion and garner support for raising the Age of Consent and Minimum Marriage Age. A Malayalam writer in an article (which was the summary of a Hindi article) mentioned that child marriage was one of the reasons women’s education was not progressing in India (Anandavalliamma, 1927). However, a year later, another writer
mentioned that child marriages were not common except among the lower classes. She also mentions that older men marrying younger women/girls had been common among some communities in Travancore (Thomas, 1928). There is an article by Margaret Cousins,\(^80\) where she mentions that Indian women do not have protracted childhood. They had to stay at their husband’s place and take on responsibilities at a young age. Then she goes on to mention, rather contradictorily, that only Brahmins get their daughters married off before the age of 14 (Cousins, 1928). The general opinion seemed to be that child marriages were not as prevalent among Malayalis as it was in other parts of India. After the age of 14, girls were not considered children. Therefore, very few writers take up the issue, except around the time the Sarada Act\(^81\) was being discussed at the national level.

Widow re-marriage was another issue that was discussed in the print media of the period. Certain Tamil writers took a radical position with regard to the issue. The containment of the widow’s desires was at the root of the social restrictions placed upon upper caste widows. Tamilnadu also saw a move among the lower castes to control the sexuality of the widow as a marker of social prestige. Some of the writers developed the idea of the interiorized desire of the widow, and produced her as a desiring subject. Sreenivas argues that this depiction complicated the representations of widows as passive objects of reform (Sreenivas, 2003). However, the narratives were not able to show the widow as being able to remarry, though she came close to doing so. What these few radical articles did was to set the stage for possible social change.

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80 Margaret Cousins (1878-1954) was an activist and a freedom fighter. In 1908, she played an active role in the Women’s Suffragette Movement in Ireland and England. Later, in 1917 she established the first women’s organization in India, the Women’s Indian Association in Madras Presidency. She used this organization very effectively to exert pressure on the government to grant voting rights to Indian women. Mrs. Margaret Cousins became the President of AIWC in 1938.

81 The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 was known as the Sarada Act, which fixed the age of marriage of girls at 14 years and of boys at 18 years.
In *Streebodh*, a popular Gujarati women’s journal of the time, there were poems/articles on the condition of widows, but it was never suggested that the taboo against widow remarriage should be removed (Shukla, 1991). There were no discussions on the aftermath of the movement for widow remarriage. Social movements against female infanticide, the case of Rakmabai vs. Dadaji in the matter of restitution of conjugal rights, or the movements to raise the age of consent for consummation of marriage were not covered by the journal. However, the magazine did discuss the issue of child marriage at length. Shukla mentions that one reason could have been that the editors and publishers wanted to keep the journal out of controversies, but it could well have been a way of limiting the sphere of women to home and family, and keeping their interests out of larger issues.

Malayalam magazines do not have too many references to widow remarriage. The few times that the topic came up were in relation to education, in the sense that education would equip widows to support themselves financially. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his social reforms were venerated in connection with this. The references to widows occur more in articles from before 1920, and even then it was usually in conjunction with women’s issues like child marriage and sati, which were not really issues in the Malayalam-speaking regions according to the writers. However, the Census reports for Travancore and Cochin did mention the presence of child wives among Malayalis (Aiya, 1894). For the Nairs especially, these were not serious concerns (Balakrishnamennon, 1915). A few of the writers glorify the image of the widow and widowhood. This was an extension of the exaltation of chastity:

The main characteristics of *sthreedharmam* are obedience to the husband and maintaining physical and mental purity. Once the husband is no more, the wife should live like a widow till the end of her life for the salvation of her husband’s soul (Amma, 1919: 194).

Chastity and monogamy were qualities that were emphasised in relation to the transformation to patriliny. Figures like Sati and Savithri were used to accentuate monogamy. The paradox is
that while in other parts of India, the reform movement was trying to better the conditions of widows, in Kerala the writers were espousing widowhood as part of *sthreedharmam*. There were mixed reactions to widow remarriage. “If widowers remarry, why cannot widows?” asks a writer in an article on “*Purushadharmam*” (men’s duties) (Lakshmiamma, 1907). Another author mentions a letter (reprinted from an English paper) written by a widow asking whom she should marry – a relatively rich man, or a virtuous poor man. The Malayali author approves of the reply which says that ideally the woman should not marry as she had a fourteen year old daughter, but if she had to marry she should choose the virtuous man and make him wealthy (with her money). The widow is asked to take care of the daughter’s needs instead of thinking of herself (Appunnimenon, 1907). It would appear that widow remarriage was not prohibited, but was not easy in the Malayalam milieu. Her role as mother was more important than her aspirations for herself. And her education was important so that she could support herself.

Education for material benefits versus education for moral, spiritual and social enlightenment was a constant bone of contention for some of the writers and the government. The high ideals for education envisioned by the former and the latter do not seem to have been shared by the general population. The University Committee of Travancore states:

> A girls’ collegiate career is directed to qualify for a post with a high salary, and is regarded as a financial speculation on the part of her family, and that it has not yet come home to parents that the education of girls is as much an incident of family self-respect as the education of the boys (Aiyangar *et al.*, 1925: 56).

The overarching ideology about women as mothers and wives which was circulating in Bengal, Tamilnadu and other parts of India is replicated in the Malayalam magazines also. The differences among the different regions in customs and culture were the differences that showed up in the magazines. In Kerala, the print media was targeting not just the urban elite, but the people in rural areas as well. Getting an education and a middle class job in
Travancore did not involve the break with one’s relatives and locality that it often did in Bengal (Jeffrey, 1978). In Kerala, the ideas and interests circulating in the towns soon reached the countryside. In some cases, this also acted in reverse: some of the customs and traditions of the countryside are/were present in the urban areas of Kerala. So, while the Gujarati writers asked readers to shed some of their inhibitions and mingle with men from their own social standing, Malayali writers ask their readers to be more circumspect in their behaviour towards members of the opposite sex.

It is difficult to argue for a single position regarding many of the issues discussed in the magazines, as very often, there are writers who expressed contradictory opinion to what was generally proposed. The analysis of the materials can be summarised thus:

- The magazines from the different areas seem to voice the same issues from different entry points. The cultural differences in the different areas also changed the issues in subtle ways.

- The early 20th century woman’s sthreedharmam and sthreethwam began to be imagined differently from how they had been done previously. Education, especially modern education became an important aspect of sthreedharmam. Education was seen as taking women away from their sthreedharmam and sthreethwam, and paradoxically, it was suggested that education be re-vamped to address this issue.

- Though the woman’s duty to her children was important, the role of the wife was seen as being slightly more important. Conjugality was seen as the state to aspire to, and the education of girls was to be directed towards this with lessons in hygiene, domestic science, household accounts etc.

- A few of the writers did mention that women who planned to go for higher education did not need the same kind of education as those who were planning to get married. It is almost as if these two kinds of women could not be one and the same in the early
decades of the 20th century. This attitude changed towards the 1930s when it came to be accepted that the working woman could also take care of the home, husband and children. So the space of the domestic was still seen as being part of the woman’s dharmam.

The change in the lifestyles of the modern educated woman who was also living away from the joint family was subject to criticism, especially her so-called ‘complete reliance’ on servants. Since servants had been part of the older joint family system, this might have been a problem because the new women were not as insistent about maintaining caste/class distance with other people. And this was also connected to new notions of health, hygiene and economy.

Concepts like sthreeswaathandryam were deployed in relation to sthreedharmam, and the term could mean a variety of things in the early 20th century: individualism, self-reliance, right to education, breaking away from caste/community rules, breaking away from cultural codes of conduct, etc.

The writers constantly compared Malayali women with women from other parts of India, and the world (and not just the West). Bengal was a frequent point of reference for women within India. England, America and Japan were other countries that were seen as positive or negative role models, depending upon the ideological position taken up by the writer(s).

Many of the issues discussed in the magazines like contraception, marriage etc. closely followed legislations and discussions happening in Kerala and in India. Contraception generally seems to be acceptable (though there were a few detractors) to the writers.

The matrilineal and middle caste position of the writers also colour the way the writers approach certain issues and they also assume to speak for other women when
in reality some of the issues under discussion were related only to women from their caste/class positions. The differences are obvious when one analyses the magazines owned and run by writers belonging to other class/caste/religious groups.

- Education for developing necessary life skills versus education for cultural attainments was an issue that was being discussed in this period.

- Education for the woman was proposed, not exactly for her sake, but for the sake of her family, the community and the nation. Since education was not universally acceptable or accessible to all Malayalis at this period, it was also the only way the argument could be made. Towards the end of the 1930s there was a change in this trend with a few writers advocating education as being necessary for the self-development of the woman.

I have tried to show through this discussion of the education debates in the Malayalam magazines that women’s education was not an easy process/achievement for women – the writers had to prove that education was necessary while stating that it would not bring about drastic changes in the social and gender structures. Women were more closely bound to domestic structures than before and education was seen as essential to this process. The kind of employment/industry that was put forward as being suitable for women were the ones that utilized their ‘womanly’ qualities and/or kept them closely connected to their domestic duties, their sthreedharmam.

Many of the concepts closely related to education like sthreeswaathandryam, parishkaaram, sthreedharmam, and sthreethwam changed during this period. Changes in cultural and caste practices were also seen as being connected to educational structures. The concept of sthreedharmam was crucial to imagining the new and modern Malayali woman. Sthreedharmam was imagined as changing due to the advent of education and parishkaaram, and paradoxically, education was then postulated as being necessary to teach women their
sthreedharmam. The caste, religious, and community affiliations of the writers were important in the kind of positions taken up by them regarding sthreedharmam. However, in spite of the differences, there were commonalities in how sthreedharmam was conceptualised.

The articles in women’s magazines are useful in tracking the changes taking place in the social and cultural milieu of the 19th and the early 20th century Kerala. The subtle shifts in the nature of the arguments, the references to happenings, meetings, conferences, etc. capture a history for posterity that is not available in standard history books. Women’s magazines are also the only way in which women’s history in Kerala can be tracked to some extent. Unfortunately the well-preserved and popular magazines from the 19th and early 20th century are mostly written for and by the hegemonic caste/class groups, and the history that is available through them is also about this group. There are certain qualities that are common to the model women put up for the readers: chastity, obedience, education, domestic capabilities, modesty, altruism, courage when required, prudence, self-effacement and beauty. These qualities are represented as being present in women from various locations, time, class, caste, community, and stages of life. This representation of the figure of the woman gains hegemony over time and becomes ensconced as the image of the ideal Malayali woman. What is interesting is that the current image of a Kerala woman as expressed in magazines, newspapers, television, the Internet, etc. is also similar or derived from the image of the woman that was put together in the early women’s magazines.

This chapter delineates the nuances of the education debates in Malayalam magazines. It illustrates how the re-fashioning of sthreedharmam was an important aspect of the education debates, and how the ideal Malayali woman was imagined by the writers through the re-fashioning of sthreedharmam. The magazines were just one of the sites where women’s education was discussed. The following chapters analyse the education debates in
government policies, curricula, and fictional materials. Through these chapters, I try to prove that *sthreedharmam* was an important aspect of the education debates in not just the magazines, but also in other sites.