The winds of change have been blowing over institutions for long. No institutions can afford to remain static for long. It has to change with the time. One such institution that still remains popular and which seems to be under a savage assault from shifting social trends, is the institution of marriage, which is currently facing a number of challenges from the increasing rates of alternative forms of marriage especially singlehood.

Modern Kerala is passing through technological, social, cultural and demographic transitions and bravely marching towards progress and achievements that has also brought in changes in lifestyle. Keralite woman has a respectable place in most of the societies of the world. Her social and educational status is higher than that of any other woman of the world. She has become an ideal before the women of the other countries. With reference to Keralite women’s unique identity, there is a much talked about dichotomy that is between the patriarchy constructed system and the self-reliant, free and progressive woman which is a product of ‘modernity’. At present she is passing through the most critical phase of her modified lifestyle.

The present study was conceived in the context of the large scale changes taking place in the economic and social scenario of the State of Kerala especially in the attitude of women towards the institution of marriage. Studies disclose that more and more women are moving away from wedlock to singlehood. These single women of Kerala have been the focus of
the study of many social scientists. This research makes a comparative analysis of generation differentials of single women in Kerala. The focus of the study is single women of two generations, 225 single women belonging to the age group of 65 to 80 are considered as old generation, identified as spinsters and 225 young single women belonging to the age group of 35 to 50 are selected as younger generation, identified as singletons. An attempt is made to find out the factors that led women of Kerala to singlehood, their adjustment to this status, the stress associated with it, the problems they encounter, the support system they enjoy and the level of life satisfaction they have in their unique life style.

450 single women from three districts- Thiruvanathapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode were selected through Snow ball sampling. With the help of interview schedule the information regarding socio-cultural background, factors for singlehood, life satisfaction of single women in two generations were collected. Their adjustment, stress, problems, support system were measured with the help of the Adjustment, Stress, Support system scales developed for the study. It was also supplemented by informal talk and field observation. The filled in schedules, were edited, coded, analyzed and interpreted using SPSS. The economic theory of Marx, women’s economic empowerment theory of Blumberg, dramaturgical model of role theorists, Becker’s labelling theory of deviance, Michalo’s Multiple- discrepancy theory are the theoretical framework of the study.

9.1 Socio-cultural background

The analysis of the socio-cultural background of single women of Kerala shows that there is difference between spinsters and singletons on all background variables. The educational status of single women is in
proportion to the general female literacy rate in Kerala. In Kerala, where the female literacy rate is high, 98 per cent of the respondents are educated. There is difference between spinsters and singletons on their education, occupation and income. Modern singletons are highly educated with high status employment and come under the high income group compared to spinsters. They are engaged in all type of professional jobs even in the male dominated jobs. Out of total respondents, only 238 singles are employed, among them 62.6 per cent of them are singletons. Higher educational qualifications of singletons enable them to enter into more and better employment situations than the spinsters. In the case of income, 64.2 per cent of single women who have income of their own belong to singletons group. It is found that the percentage of single women is coming down among Christians and Hindus, but it is increasing among Muslim women. There is no significant difference between two generations with respect to their place of birth and place of residence. Though only 40 per cent are born in urban areas, 61 per cent are residing there presently because of the easy availability of education and employment opportunities. More over, high social pressure and strong family ties in rural area also push them to urban area. Out of the total single women, 80 per cent of them revealed that they prefer to stay alone; but the circumstances are not favourable even now in Kerala. Only 40 (8.9 per cent) respondents stay alone, among them 29 are singletons, and 25 are employed. It is found that the employment status determine their place of residence and an overwhelming number (93 per cent) of singletons stay in hostels. Out of 225 spinsters, 60 per cent are staying in old age homes, which reflect the changes in the Kerala family system.
9.2 Factors of Singlehood

Factors of singlehood are a significant field of interest in study. In this context, the perceptions of single women that led them to singlehood are analysed. It is found that there are generation differences between single women with factors that led them to singlehood. While financial factor was the most significant one that forced the spinsters to singlehood, it was freedom and independence that made the singletons to choose singlehood.

Marxian feminist, Blumberg’s (1984) work “A General Theory of Gender Stratification”, is found significant here. Blumberg argues that the key factor determining the status of women in the World’s Societies is their level of economic power. Where women’s economic power is high, women are able to translate this power into relatively high status. Blumberg stresses that the possession of economic power by women means more than simply the capacity to translate this power into high status – into a positive regard and respect for them on the part of men. It means an overall capacity to manage their lives in ways relatively free from male control. Economic power gives women substantial “life options”. That is, the “life options” mainly deal with two things; “Voice and Vote” in marriage (whether, when and with whom) and relative freedom of movement. The study found that the highly educated and employed singletons enjoy economical power as well as social status in the society. Their economic power is the fundamental reason for their singlehood life style. This difference between the singles is attributed to high educational and employment status enjoyed by the singletons.
The analysis of the motivational factors discloses that 61.3 per cent of the respondents were forced to singlehood by chance factors while 38.7 per cent revealed that it was their own choice. Of this group 72.4 per cent are singletons. The hypothesis, there is generation difference with regard to the motivating factors- chance and choice that led them to singlehood is proved significantly with the help of Chi-square analysis.

There is difference between single women of two generations on the important factors such as financial, thirst for freedom and independence, unhappy married life of others, did not meet the right person, failure in love affairs, social service and dislike for opposite sex or sexual life. There is no significant inter generational difference between single women on factors such as nobody to take care, problems of horoscope and physical appearance.

9.3 Adjustment

Adjustment, Stress and problems of single women are interrelated. With the help of adjustment scale that was developed, it is found that there is generation differential in the adjustment processes of single women. In general the single women of Kerala are adjusted to their status. The Percentage analysis and Mean Score revealed that singletons are better adjusted than spinsters. The earlier studies also revealed that in the past, spinsters are seen as a figure of pity and not adjustable persons. The separate analysis of the major components of the adjustment level also indicates that there is difference between spinsters and singletons. It was found that spinsters are emotionally (Mean score 30.30) more adjusted than the singletons. They are least adjusted in health (Mean score 23.56) matters. That is, as age increases emotional adjustment gets better but health adjustment is difficult which is natural. The statistical analysis of the Mann- Whitney test
proved the hypothesis, there is generation difference between spinsters and singletons on their adjustment level.

The adjustment level varies according to their education, employment, place of residence and income. Religion is found to be having no significant influence on the adjustment level. Income level also does not have any role in the adjustment of spinsters.

### 9.4 Stress

Regarding stress, it is found that single women of Kerala do not have much stress in their life. Out of the total respondents, only 10 per cent respondents came under high stress level. Both generations have stress but it is more for spinsters (98.90 Mean Score) than singletons (68.55 Mean score). The statistical analysis proved the hypothesis that there is significant difference between single women in two generations in their stress level. It is found that the stress level is varying according to variables education, employment, place of residence and income. The statistical analysis of Variance found that highly educated, employed, wealthy and urban singles have low stress in their life. Religion has no role in the determination of the level of stress in the life of single women.

### 9.5 Problems

The study also attempted to identify the problems of the single women in two generations. The percentage distribution analysis and ‘t’ test analysis revealed that there is significant difference between spinsters and singletons in their problems familial, financial, social, sexual, health, accommodation, religious and psychological problems except occupational problems. There is great difference between spinsters and singletons with regard to the
Findings and Conclusion

accommodation problem. The hypothesis that there is significant difference between spinsters and singletons with regard to their problems is proved.

The lack of familial adjustment leads to familial stress and familial problems in the life of single women especially for spinsters. Spinsters’ economic dependency is a burden to their family members. Unemployed singles, who stay with relatives, spend more time at home and it creates more problems. Most of the spinsters who stay in aged homes have no close relationship with their family members and it will also increase their familial problems. The percentage and ‘t’ test analysis found that both groups have social problems and there is significant difference between spinsters and singletons in their social problems. The spinsters never dared to overcome the norms of society but singletons always violate the societal norms and rules. This negative attitude towards norms creates more social problems for them. Their deviation is a response to society’s restrictions especially in the economic and social fields. Need for economic independence compelled the girls to enter into job market and gave more prominence to career than marriage. Their deviated status gives them the label ‘single women’ in a negative sense. This alienation creates problems for them.

Present study found that there is significant difference between spinsters and singletons on their financial problems. Thirty two per cent of the spinsters have high financial problems but only 12.4 per cent of the singletons belong to this category. Work holds the key to human happiness and fulfillment. The employment status and economic independence of the singletons reduced their financial problems. As Marx argued the female economic independence raised the status and power of women within the family as well as society. With regard to psychological problems also
spinsters have more problems in their life than the singletons. Both groups believe that society has negative attitude towards singlehood and it affects their attitude and perspectives. It creates psychological problems to them. The statistical tool ‘t’ test significantly proved, there is difference between spinsters and singletons on psychological problems. In the case of occupational problems, there is no significant difference between spinsters and singletons. Both generations face similar level occupational problems in their life. The nature of employment and its situations have changed a lot but the problems in work situations has not changed. Single women do not have much religious problems in their life.

The analysis of the inter relationship between the adjustment and stress level of the single women, disclosed that the association is negative for both generations. That is, if the adjustment level increase, stress level will decrease and vice versa. The spinsters and singletons differ in their adjustment and stress level association. With the help of statistical tool Pearson’s Product moment correlation the hypothesis there is difference between spinsters and singletons in their inter relationship between adjustment level and stress level is proved.

9.6 Support System

Relationships are considered as the backbone of the support system. One of the objectives of the present study is to explore the content and quality of the support systems of the single women. Life-long deprivation arising out of singlehood necessitates support system at several levels of existence. To measure the level of support system, a ‘Support System scale for Single Women’ is developed. In the percentage analysis it is found that, out of 225 singletons, 46.2 per cent of singletons enjoy good support system
in their life, while only 16.9 per cent of spinsters have good support system. The Mean Score also indicate this difference between spinsters (114.25) and singletons (151.15) in their support system. There is a significant difference between spinsters and singletons in each sub-section of support system. Singletons have better support system than the spinsters. Modern life situations of singletons allow them to establish a close relationship with others; while this is not the case of spinsters.

It was found that single women of Kerala have good support system from their family. The traditional structure of the family system in Kerala is the reason for this fact. Out of 450 respondents, majority of them have either high or moderate support from the family, only 21.6 per cent of them indicate that they have low familial support. Out of total respondents, 238 of them were employed. Among them, majority consider employment and friendship as a great support system in their life. Singletons have high friendship support system level because employment led them to high level of friendship relationships.

The analysis of the study revealed that most of the single women consider social participation as a support system in their life. Single women have relations with others and they are not frustrated and isolated in the society. Among the singletons, 50.7 per cent have high social participation and while only 26.2 per cent spinsters have high social participation. The traditional values of the society reduced the social participation rate of spinsters but singletons freedom and economic independence allows them more social participation. Out of the total respondents majority consider leisure has only a moderate role to play as support system. The Mean score indicate that spinsters have more leisure activities than the singletons but the
difference is not significant. Spinsters have various situations within their families as well as old age homes but singletons have no time or chance in the modern small families and in their hostels. Singletons, who are engaged with high status employment, are interested in leisure activities for relieving their job tension. The hypothesis the level of support system is different in two generations has been proved with the help of Mann-Whitney test.

It is also found that the support system varies according to the independent variables, education, employment, place of residence and income with the help of statistical test ANOVA. The spinster’s income level does not create any variation on their support system.

9.7 Life Satisfaction

An insight into the level of life satisfaction of single women is got with the help of a ten point scale. It included three aspects—general, social and personal life satisfaction. It is found that majority of single women are satisfied in their life. Only 30.7 percentages of single women have low life satisfaction. Spinsters revealed they have better life satisfaction. Only 17.8 per cent of spinsters come under low life satisfaction section, but 43.6 per cent of singletons come under low life satisfaction. Singletons’ mean score is also low compared to spinsters. The statistical tool, Mann Whitney test proved the hypothesis that there is significant difference between spinsters and singletons in their life satisfaction level.

Earlier analysis has shown that singletons are highly adjusted, less stressed and highly supportive. But their life satisfaction level is low compared to spinsters. Multiple –Discrepancy theory of Michalo is significant here. According to this theory, satisfaction is determined by one’s perception of “how
things are” vs. “how they should be”. Small discrepancies among these areas result in greater life satisfaction. Large discrepancies among these areas result in lesser life satisfaction. Singletons have high expectation and they couldn’t reach their expectation. So the gap between their expectations and reality is very high. So naturally their life satisfaction level decreases.

The analysis found that the level of life satisfaction varies according to their education, employment, income and place of residence except religion. It is found that religion has no influence on the level of life satisfaction of single women. Life satisfaction level of spinsters varies more on the basis of education than singletons. In both generations, higher education reduced their life satisfaction level. The variables employment, income and place of residence made more variation in singletons life satisfaction compared to spinsters. The percentage distribution and Chi-square analysis found that there is significant relationship between the dependent variables adjustment, stress and support system and life satisfaction level of single women. The analysis revealed that the adjustment and life satisfaction are highly associated. The high stress need not always lead to low life satisfaction. There is a significant association between stress and life satisfaction of single women and it indicated that high stress lead to high life satisfaction. Single women’s support system and life satisfaction are associated and single women, who have high support system, have high expectations in their life. If they can’t fulfill this expectation, their life satisfaction level will decrease.

9.8 Influence of Motivation

The motivation is a call to action that stimulates us to initiates particular behaviours in the world around us. A hypothesis the motivational factors determine the life satisfaction level of single women, is generated and
the statistical analysis of the study indicate that there is difference between chance group and choice group in their level of adjustment, stress and life satisfaction. The ANOVA tests revealed that the adjustment, stress and life satisfaction level are varying on the basis of their motivational factors-chance and choice in both generations. The hypotheses of the study, the motivational factors-chance and choice determine their adjustment level, stress level and life satisfaction level are proved significantly. High expectations of choice group of single women led them to low level of life satisfaction, even though they have high adjustability and low level stress in their life.

9.9 Suggestions

In Kerala even though singlehood is evolving as an alternative lifestyle, society still considers it as a personal failure of the single woman. This attitude of the society has to change and so that single women can live freely without any ‘stigma’. Society should give chance to single women for participating in all social activities and social organizations without any degradation and should allow the single women to live alone in their own villa. Single women should themselves become psychologically and socially strong. Such feelings would create boldness within them to stand for themselves in the society. The lack of awareness on the part of the public about the problems of single women is the major cause of the problems and stress experienced by them. The public as well as the families of single women should be made aware of the problems and stress of such women in their new life style.

Single women in stress and who are facing problems should be provided with easy access to counseling and other help. Efforts should be made for self employment among single women to raise their economic and
social status. Authorities should avoid the tradition of giving more work to single women only because of their single status. Media as a powerful agency for social change should pay more attention to the problems of single women.

Single women should not feel alienated from the society. They should not think that they are women who are more vulnerable than others and are not apt person for society’s membership. They should develop a positive approach and optimistic mind towards life. The single women should learn to hold in esteem their own qualities and potentials because they are not inferior to any other member of their own sex.

Government should take necessary steps to provide singlehood assistance for the welfare of the single women especially the unemployed and aged singles. Government should provide accommodation facilities in urban area for single women.

Certain findings in the study lead to the provision for further probe into the problems of single women. A Comparative study of single women and married women may be a good topic for further research.

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