Chapter III

The Nair Community, Marumakkattayam and Taravad: Aspects of Colonial Constructs

The previous chapter looked at the evolution of the intermediary class in Kerala. We saw how, they were able to emerge as a dominant community in the pre-colonial period, and continue in the position by turning the situations in the early colonial period to their advantage. Colonialism was not an enterprise that merely involved military conquest of land and resources, but it also involved bringing into its sphere of influence the colonised people and recasting their socio-cultural aspects. This was possible as a result of the operation of power-knowledge combine or due to discursive practices. The colonial discourses placed the natives into a subject position. Colonial subjects were constituted by several distinct modes. The first was through divisive practices of constituting an opposition, pitting one against the other and thereby creating a 'gap'. For eg. the opposition between the educated and uneducated. The second mode is by objectifying the productive subject, the subject who labours in the analysis of wealth and economics. Third is by objectifying the self or turning the self into a subject.² For Foucault subjectification referred to the strategy of remoulding the human being into new subjects through the various modes of subjectification mentioned above. In the colonial society there were several sites through which these process were carried out.

In the Gramscian concept, the civil society is understood in the sense of political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the society as ethical content of the state. He made an analytical distinction between civil and political society in which the former

---
¹ The concept of discourse in the most general way denotes a group of statements, verbal performances that belong to a single system of formation.
is made up of voluntary associations like school, families and unions while the latter
consists of state institutions like police, army and the central bureaucracy. In the
colonial society these were sites through which subjectification occurred. Initial
requirement then was the knowledge of the people and their culture and this was
gathered and codified through surveys, manuals, historiography, census and other
administrative reports. But in this they were heavily influenced by the concept of the
'orient' that has been analysed by Said in his seminal work.4 This first section of the
chapter looks at the creation of the naif caste in the colonial period and the images that
were created about them their customs, practices and their system of descent and
inheritance through the travelogues, which were then taken up by the colonial
administrative writings and soon internalised by the nair-s themselves. The second
section looks at the construction of the taravad and tavazhi in the colonial writings.

The initial accounts that the West got about the Malabar Coast was from the
accounts of the travellers like Barbosa, Baldaeus, Nieuhoff and others. These accounts
talk of the nair-s as being a matrilineal martial community. The other aspect of the caste
that was highlighted was the marital relationships among them - their practices of
talikettu-kalyanam and sambandham. These accounts reinforced the exotic primitive
image that formed the part of orientalism discourse. This image construction is very
important as the conquest of Malabar by the British led to the reassertion and
perpetuation of these images among the people of Malabar.

---

The Creation of the *Nair* Community

For the British, the Indian society was divided into the four castes into which the various sub-castes came. The British, through the census that were taken periodically, classified the society into various castes and sub-castes that came under the main caste. This operation not only led to a rigid compartmentalisation of castes and *jati*-s but also at times meant certain *jati*-s moving up the caste hierarchy. This crystallisation, of the various sub-*jati*-s or *jati*-s under a caste during in the colonial period soon, helped in the growth of the idea of the community. The creation of this consciousness, as a result of which certain common interest could be achieved, was phenomenon of the colonial period. Soon caste-based organisations and movements sprang up intensifying the caste feeling among the people. These organisations worked towards the reform of customs and practices and worked for the uplift of the people of that caste. In the context of Travancore, we see that they tried to even bargain for jobs in the administration.

The caste, that became the *nair* caste during the colonial period, can be traced to the new sub-castes that were created after the 3rd century A.D. These sub-castes were classified as the *sudra*-s. They included a whole host of functionaries like agriculturists, artisans, craftsmen including washermen and warriors whose services were needed by the *nambutiri*-s. Initially the *nair*-s was the name of just one of the sub-castes that would carry arms but this term soon became the term that was applied to the caste as a whole. This was as a result of the image of the warrior caste, created through the writings, as can be seen in the subsequent section. The word "*Nair*" means 'lord', 'chief' or 'master'.

---

6 The Malayali Memorial and the Ezhava Memorial were examples of this.  
7 According to K V Krishna Aiyar, the word *Nair* in earlier times was "applied only to those who were required by custom to follow the profession of arms, who had undergone the customary military training and received their arms from the chief or elder of the community." Cited in Durate Barbosa, *Land of
As mentioned before the earliest known reference to the nair caste was the statement attributed to Megasthenes by Pliny. Various explanations are given to the term nair. It is said to have derived from the Sanskrit ‘nayaka’ meaning ‘leader’. The census of 1891 says,

"The Nayars are a Dravidian caste, or rather a Community, for we find several distinct elements with totally different occupations among the people who call themselves by this title. The original Nayars were undoubtedly a military body, holding lands and serving as a militia, but the present Nayars caste include persons, who by hereditary occupation are traders, artisans, oil-mongers, palanquin bearers, and even barbers and washer men. The fact seems to be that successive immigration brought from the Canaries and Tamil Countries different caste and different tribes, and these settling down in the country adopted the customs and manners and assumed the caste names of the more respectable of the community that surrounded them."  

The census of 1901 had about 130 sub groups classified under the caste nair. These sub-divisions vary, in the names given to some of them, in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Moreover the fact that they are elastic is attested by the inclusion of Tamil Padan, immigrants from the Tamil Country. Their occupation was sweeping and cleaning of temples and carrying of lamps during processions etc.

Logan, without any reference to social standing, enumerates in his list of the nair caste Menon, Menokki, Muppil Nayar, Pata Nayar, Kuruppu, Eradi, Nedungadi, Vellodi, Manmadiyar and Manavalan. To these, according to Govidan Unni, were added Tampis and Pillai of Travancore, Poduval and Nambiar of Cochin and Malabar, Unnithan and

---

* Census of India 1891, Vol. XIII, Madras, The Report on the census compiled by H A Stuart, chap X, para. 348, p. 222. The different sub-caste finally agglomerated together to form the nair caste during the colonial period. Reports and census served to rank these various sub castes under the general head of the nair caste. In fact we see that with each successive year the number of sub caste that were there under the generic term nair was reduced.*  
Velliathan, two powerful families of Travancore. P Bhaskaran Unni gives the following sub castes under the nair-s: Kiriyattil, Pannikkodan, Sudran, Charnavar, Pallichan, Asthikurichi, Vattakadan, Adnuran, Urali, Chempottinayar, Tharavan, Moothan, Mannadi, Akathethara Nair, Kaduputtan, Chalion Velakkithavalan, Veluthedan, and Kanmalar.

Table: (1) *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub division</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agattu Charna</td>
<td>32,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attikurissi</td>
<td>13,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiriyattil</td>
<td>1,15,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pullic'chan</td>
<td>16,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purattu Chama</td>
<td>1,09,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudra</td>
<td>42,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vattakadan</td>
<td>30,980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(*-It has to be noted here that statistics for all sub caste have not been given. But this table gives us the rough strength of some of the nair caste by the turn of the 19th century.)

According to V Nagam Aiyya, the five main nair subdivisions in Travancore are Kiriyathil Nayars, Illakkars, Swarupam Nayars, Pamangalam and Tamil Padan to these are added the goldsmiths, Chembokottiar, carpenters, and blacksmiths who constitute the lower orders along with Idachery or herdsman Marcus who play the pani and other musical instruments during temple service, Odathu Nayar or tile maker, Kalamkottis or potters, Vattakkadans or dealers in oil, Pallichans or undertakers, Chetties or traders, Cheiryans or weavers, Veluthedan or washer man and barbers or Velakkuttalavans.

Below the higher caste nair-s, like Kiriattile nair-s, the Purattu Charna nair-s, Agattu Charna nair-s, Pallichan nair-s and the sudra nair-s. (who were the retainers over the servants of the Brahmin families), came the non-military nair-s like Vettekad nair, Odatt nair, Andura nair, Attikurissi-s, Veluttean-s and Velakkataravan-s. In addition this there was also a distinction based on geography. The nair-s of north Malabar were considered to be socially higher than those of the south, the boundary between the two regions being the river Korapuzha. This could also have been also due to the fact that the nair-s of south were matrilocal, while in the north they were patrilocal.

Reason for this, heterogeneous group being bracketed under one single caste might have been, due to the fact that, their services was needed by the Brahmins and by classifying them as nair-s, the degree of pollution attached was much less compared to the other lower castes. Another common element among these sub-jati-s was that they followed a matrilineal system and corresponded to the large sudra caste when compared to their counterpart elsewhere.

It was the 20th century that saw these caste distinctions diminishing. The many organisations of reform that had sprung up advocated the amalgamation of various sub-castes into the nair caste fold. In 1891 Census of Travancore, 130 sects of nair-s were retained; in 1901 it was reduced to 116 and by 1931 there were just 2. It is interesting to

---

note that the bill introduced in Travancore by K P Raman Pillai in 1922, it was specified that the term 'nair' would include all the sub-castes. And the resolution of All Travancore Joint Nair Conference held at Trivandrum called for the amalgamation of this as one united body of nair-s. As the census of 1901 said

“This was originally a military caste but the term nair is now so generally adopted by persons of all sorts of professions and so loosely used that it is often scarcely more than a title”.

Thus by the initial three decades of the 20th century the crystallisation of the nair caste through the census was done. As the number of people who acquired western education increased, the various caste organisations that come up for reforming the practices of the castes and for uplifting the people, started involving themselves in putting forth petitions to the government like the Malayali Memorial. It is possible, that one of the reasons why, these organisations started talking about the dissolution of sub caste distinctions and merging them into one caste, was because increase in numbers meant more bargaining power. In the case of nair-s the various artisan groups and the others of the sudra status who followed the system of marumakkattayam was brought under one caste. The travelogues generally talked about the nair caste as a whole rather than its various sub-castes, while talking about their customs and practices. The basis for this identification was also the fact that they all followed the matrilineal system of descent and inheritance or the marumakkattayam system. The crystallisation of the caste done by the colonial census gave the caste an official legitimacy and documentary legality as one caste in the eyes of the colonial government, which became acceptable to the nair-s themselves.

16 Malayala Manorama, December 28, 1922.
17 Travancore – The Present Political Problem by the Executive Committee of the all Travancore Joint Political Congress submitted to H H The Maharaja of Travancore, 1934, p. 7.
The Construction of the Image of the Nair-s

This section tries to look at construction of two major images about the nair caste - as the warriors of Kerala with loose marital relations. This is important, as it is these images that once again get reinforced through the colonial administrative records.

a. As the Martial Caste

As said before, a study of the travelogues shows that, nair-s as a caste has often been fascinating for the foreign travellers who looked at them with varying degrees of wonder, romanticism and at times scorn for the primitive customs. It was the custom of marumakkattayam and the martial spirit that drew their attention. These portraiture often tended to romanticise these warriors of Kerala. It is possible that the martial spirit of the nair-s gained emphasis as it was seen as the cause of the marumakkattayam system prevalent among them. It is interesting to note that even the earlier writers wrote about their courage, though being unorganised in their rank. Mickle Comones in Book VII wrote:

"By the proud nairs the noble rank is claimed
The toils of culture and of art they scorn
The shining faulcheon brandis'd in the right-
Their left arm wields the target in the fight". 19

Baldaeus talks about them as being "expert both in handling the bow and fire arms". 20

"They are all bred to the, war even from the seventh year of age, when they begin to anoint their limbs with certain ointments to render the nerves pliable, which makes them very active and nimble, and the best wrestlers in the world. They are ... well acquainted with masquets and great cannon; for I have seen them give a salvo with the same order and dexterity as our best disciplined troops in Europe". 21

---

20 Philip Baldaeus, A description of East India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandal with their adjacent kingdoms and provinces of the empires of Ceylon and of the idolatrie of the pagans in the East Indies, 1703, London, p. 625.
21 Ibid., p. 644.
But according to him they were intoxicated with opium before going in to fight. In Nieuhoff's records too we see that he talks of the nair-s as highborn caste of warriors who go about with a sword and shield in hand and under go training in the use of arms from a very young age. But Walter Hamilton in his accounts says,

"All nairs pretend to be soldiers but they do not all follow the martial profession. There are supposed to be 30 distinct classes of this general tribe many of whom practice the arts of husbandry, accounts, weaving, carpenters work, pottery and oil making. Formerly, however, they were all liable to be called upon by their sovereign to performance military services."  

Johnathan Duncan paints the nair-s as "who walks along holding up his naked sword with the same kind of unconcern as travellers in other countries carry in their hands a cane or a walking staff". According to Elic Reclus:

"The nairs of the ancient type were so many Spartan warriors so many knights of a court of love. All knew how to read and write but the chief part of their education was carried in the gymnasium and the fencing school where they learnt to despise fatigue to be careless of wounds and to show an indomitable courage of ten bordering upon foolish temerity ... war and gallantry, love and battle, my scored and my mistress! These were their devices and they were ticklish sticklers for the point of the honour".  

Tom Pires too echoes this image in his description of the nair-s.

"they are fighters with sword and buckler and arches. They are men who adorn their king and if by chance the king does in battle they are obliged to die ... The nair-s are loyal and not traitors ... No Nair when he is fit to take up arms can go outside his house unarmed even if he be a 100 years old, and when he is dying he always has his sword and buckler by him so close that if necessary he can take hold of them. They always make a deep reverence to the masters who teach them."  

22 John Niehoffs Remarkable Voyages and Travels into the Best Provinces of the West and East Indies, K Sankaran Nair (transl.), Niehoff Kanda Keralam, Trivandrum, 1996, p. 49.  
24 Jonathan Duncan, "Historical remarks on the Coast of Malabar", Asiatic Researcher, 5, 1799, p. 17.  
"The Nair-s or Gentlemen; we have been speaking of, have a great conceit of their nobility, because they fancy themselves descended from the sun, they give place to none." 27

"The 2nd are Naéirs, who are the same as the gentle folks among as; and these are obligated to bear sword and shield or bow or lances. When they go through the street, if they didn’t carry arms they would no longer be gentlemen" 28

"It is strange to see how ready the souldeour of this country is at his weapons; they are all gentlemen and trained Naires. At 7 years of age they are put to school to learn the use of their weapons, where to make them nimble and active, their sinneues and joints are stretched by skilful fellows and anointed with the oyle sesamus: by this anointing they become so light and nimble" 29

"Their continual delight is in their weapons persuading themselves that no nation goeth beyond them in skill and dexterity" 30

Thus we see that these accounts construct the nair as a caste of warriors of the Kerala, dwelling at length on their military training. These descriptions are very similar to each other. The image created can be compared to the image of the chivalrous medieval knights. In a sense it could be the re-living of their notions of medieval knights that abound in their literature. Their main pursuits seemed to be of love and war. Sometimes these do have a Don Quixotic tinge about them ("courage of ten bordering upon foolish ternary ..."31).

As regards their warfare though they tell us about the skill in use of both traditional weapons and firearms, they also portray them as being disorderly in their ranks during attack. It shows the lack of tactical procedure of the army. Individually they all stand out. Some of the writers seem to think that the nair-s took opium before fight. But how far this practice was prevalent is difficult to say. Another vice alleged to have

30 Idem.
been prevalent amongst them is their fondness for intoxicants like liquor. Walter Hamilton says, "The nair-s generally are excessively addicted to intoxicating liquors and are permitted".\(^{32}\) In the words of Drury Heber:

"It was understood that a large majority of nairs indulge in pleasures of bottle at the close of the labours of the day. Women, war and wine seem their appropriate motto. It is a vice which has too frequently to disqualify from their functions ... and a nair is not degraded in the eyes of his neighbour from drinking and is never attempted to be excluded from his caste on this account".\(^{33}\)

To these later writers the nair-s presented a listless image with their glorious warring days being over. According to Drury Heber:

"Yet in former days the habits of the nair-s were peculiarly military and he was trained to hardest and the exercise of war from his earliest youth".\(^{34}\)

"He now prefers a quiet swing in the verandah or a lounge under a tree, chewing betel".\(^{35}\)

This image finds an echo in the later administrative records also. While acknowledging the image of the warriors of yore, they talk of how now they have become attuned to a civil life. According to William Logan:

"The martial spirit of the nair-s in these piping times of peace has quite died out for want of exercise. The nair is more and more becoming a family man with a large increase in their numbers and with comparative poverty. For the large body of them the race is fast degenerating".\(^{36}\)

Ananthakrishna lyer speaks of how nair-s had lost their war like qualities and had become agriculturists. But they were on the whole held in esteem by the British, as is evident from the following passage.

"Race of people who are in general held estimation by Europeans. Are high minded, intelligent, active, intrepid and independent in their manner but can did and respectful. Endowed with a keen sense of honour

\(^{33}\) It has to be noted here that this description from a travelogue was used in an administrative report. It could be that this vice was being highlighted here as a disqualification from active military service. After the British conquered Malabar they had disbanded the nair armies. H S Greame, Report on the Revenue Administration of Malabar, January 1822, para. 23, p. 7.
susceptible to insult and vindictive, but capable of strong attachment and I believe on the whole loyal to the British government. When the necessity for exertion doesn't call them into action, they are indolent, dissipated, intemperate and sensual".\(^{37}\)

Another factor that must have been favourable to them must have been the image of 'good subjects'. John Waye in his report wrote,

"They are the best and the quietest subjects. I have never found any difficulty in managing these people; they are obedient and pay their dues to the government without any trouble."\(^{38}\)

As fighters they had earned the respect of the British in their fight against Tippu Sultan. As the dominant caste of Malabar they were seen as a group of people who would cooperate with the British. The outbreak of Moplah outrages in Malabar from the early 19th century served to confirm this. Moreover they were the first ones to take to western education and filled many of the administrative post. Thus the British felt that the nair-s were a class on whom they could depend upon.

b. Marital Relations – Talikettu-kalyanam and Sambandham

Nair-s gained prominence as a result of the attention that has been paid to their customs not only by the travellers but also by the administrators. Their accounts are replete with descriptions of these customs like talikettu-kalyanam, Sambandham and marumakkattayam. These descriptions of their unusual customs created an interest among anthropologists and sociologist about them. According to Barbosa, talikettu-kalyanam the first rites, which a woman undergoes, is held when the girls are around 12 years. The tali-tier is either a kinsman or a great friend of the family. The man ties the tali and departs if he is a kinsman or co-habits for the stipulated period of 3 days if he is

The general description of this ceremony is similar except minor variations. According to some accounts cohabitation takes place while others disagree and ends with the tearing of a cloth into two pieces symbolising a ritual divorce. Ward and Conner says:

"...the young nair girl at a very early age undergoes the form of having the tali tied: this with the wealthy is a expensive ceremony, but indispensable with all, he who personates the bridegroom receives a certain recompense any of equal or superior rank are eligible".

Later on, while clamouring for reforms the nair leaders targeted the talikettukalyanam for being expensive. Many a times, families had to sell or mortgage property to meet the expense of the ceremony. We get descriptions of all the girls of the taravad from 11 year olds to infants being tied tali together on the same day to reduce expenditure. Poor families, which could not afford to conduct the ceremony by calling a tali-tier and feasting relatives, this could be done by the mother of the girl. The ceremony had to be conducted before the girl attained puberty. The tali-tier should not be of a lower caste than the girl. When he died she observed pollution for fifteen days and her children called him 'Achen'.

Another point of discussion among writers of this period was whether this constituted the marriage ceremony. This has been a point of debate from the early accounts itself. According to Jonathan Duncan,

"But the Nayres practice not marriage except as far as maybe implied from their tying a thread round the neck of the woman at the first occasion wherefore the acts and practical maxiums of this sects are suited to their condition and they look upon the existence or non-existence of the matrimonial contract as equally indifferent".

---

The superintendent of the 1891 Census of Travancore had to make 17 different sub columns to get the accurate statistics. For H A Stuart, Talikettu-Kalyanam was the survival of real marriage ceremony due to the strong resemblance that it has with marriage rites. But he feels that it was

"far more probable that this ceremony is an innovation of the Brahmins and that in Malabar it was never allowed to grow beyond a mere form as the Brahmins preferred for their own purposes, the original polyandrous system which they ... found in force on their arrival".43

The 1901 census of India talks of 3 types of husbands in the West Cost

"those who merely tie the tali and have nothing to do with the girl thereafter, those who are married by the Sambandham or cloth giving ceremony and those who are wedded by the full rites".44

But since a women could only enter into sambandham relations with a man after talikettu-kalyanam this was not considered as marriage. Samuel Mateer looks at it as a "mere formality, (which) simply sets her at liberty to exercise and follow out her own inclinations in more mature years".45 Fred Fawcett equated it with the ceremonies performed at the dedication of a Basivi in other parts of south India.46 The Sambandham relations due to its polyandrous nature (though by 18th this practice has diminished) loose rites seemed immoral to the Europeans. Forbes in his accounts wrote thus

"Among the nair-s, wife is common to many husbands who co-habit with her by turns; during this temporary arrangement the arms of the inmate are placed over the door of the houses to prevent the intrusion of another husband".47

71, par. 15, p. 56. 
5, par. 15, p. 56. 
Thus the label of prostitution was being reaffirmed through the writings. Fred 

Thus the label of prostitution was being reaffirmed through the writings. Fred
“These men are not married, their nephews are their heirs. The nayre woman of good birth are very independent and disposes of themselves as they please with Bramens and the nayres but they do not sleep with men of caste lower than their own under pain of death”.

He talked of how only the eldest nambutiri could marry within their caste and the younger brothers "who remain bachelors sleep with the nayre woman, they hold it to be a great honour". According to Nieuhoff in the case of nair women having relations with the nambutiri, she could not have relations with other men. But in the case of women having relations with nair men such a restriction was not there and could have as many men as she liked.

Jonathan Duncan talks about how these men distributed their time with the nair women.

“Among the nair-s it is the custom for one nair women to have attached to her two males or four or perhaps more and among these a distribution of time is made so as to afford to each one night ... but rarely happens that enmity and jealousy break out among them on this account.”

These men while they had relations with the women provided her with the daily necessities like "oil, clothing and ornaments". These travellers accounts fired the interest and imagination of people in the west especially sociologists and anthropologist.

Some of these pictured a merry choosing of men by the woman according to her whims.

“She choose two, four or even as many as twelve husbands, on whom she bestows her favours and recovers in return small gifts for herself and her mother. Each lover remains at her command for 24 hours, and he must make himself useful to her during this period by fetching wood and the like, and he also enjoys the rights of a husband. Both parties are free to break off the connection without any ceremonies and divorces are very frequent. The paternity of every nair is unknown.”

---

49 Idem.
Elic Reclus in his work *Primitive Folk*, talks of the merry life that the nair women live. According to him, “nuptials are here interposed only to emancipate the women, and introduce her into the world. She takes a master to gain independence; with the contract of servitude in her hand, she acquires personal liberty. Provided she wears her *tali* round her neck, she is free of conjugal bonds... She intends to lead a merry life and unite herself with whom she pleases, except with her lawful husband. That would be a slip for which public opinion would never pardon her... In the north of Malayalam, which has advanced further towards the paternal family, it is not considered suitable for one lady to have more than one gallant at a time. But in the south, ... the more admirers a woman has the more she is esteemed.”

These images were written on the basis of images in travel documents like Barbosa

“If any of them wishes to leave her, he leaves her and takes another and she tells him to go and he does so or makes terms with her. Any children they may have stay with the mother who has to bring them up.”

It was these images that got popularised and led to the creation of loose morals of the nair women. This then was repeated in colonial documents. The Malabar District Gazetteer calls it as the

“simplest and loosest form of union between men and women. It depended... entirely on the free will of the parties, either of which was at liberty at any moment and for any cause to terminate it by the simplest expedient of discontinuing it, no sort of ceremony resembling divorce, whether legal or religious being requisite for that purpose. The women was at liberty to entertain in turn any number of men, so long as they observed the law of hypergamy... no unions and no number of unions could be regarded as illicit.”

Ward and Conner in their memoirs say that this union is termed ’*vissivassum*’ but also say that this is “a great misnomer as it in no measure binds either party; and perhaps we

---

54 Cited in *ibid.*, App. I, p. 20.
should overrate their morality in supposing that one such union is continued for life.\textsuperscript{57}

But, that this was a fallacy, was pointed out by Logan

"Although the theory of the law sanctions freedom in these relations, conjugal fidelity is very general. Nowhere is the marriage tie, albeit informal, more rigidly observed or respected, no where is, it more jealously guarded or its neglect more savagely avenged . . . absence of ceremonial has encouraged the popular impression; but ceremonial, like other conventionalities is an accident, and the nayar women are as chaste and faithful as their neighbours, just as modest as their neighbours, although their national costume does not include some of the details required by the conventional notions of modesty.\textsuperscript{58}

Logan has correctly highlighted the reasons for this general impression of loose marriage ties. The fact that their practices were vastly different from the other castes in the society or from conventional notions of fidelity and modesty does not imply that their morals were lax, but they had their own codes of conduct. Another pitfall in this case was the theories of social evolution, which looked upon matriliny as a practice prevalent in the primitive societies and as societies developed they would become patrilineal. This notion was one of the many reasons that the nair-s in the twentieth century wanted to reform their customs after internalising the Victorian morality. The easy facilities provided to begin and dissolve a relationship must have strengthened this feeling. Thus was established the fact that nair-s did not have marriage relations among them but practiced concubinage.

But the colonial administrative documents did not take up Logan's statement but stuck to the image created. H S Greame in his report talked about the marital relations of the nair-s as 'sexual commerce'.\textsuperscript{59} Officially, too it was accepted that the nair marriages

was not legal. This was emphasised through the judiciary too in their judgments according to which it was 'not marriage, but a state of concubinage'. MMCR concluded that *marumakkattayam* did not recognise marriage.\(^{60}\) The MMCR talks of it thus,

"The relation of husband and wife, or of father and child, is not inherent in the conception of a Marumakkathayam family. The person that begot a child on a Marumakkathayam female was originally regarded as a casual visitor and the sexual relation depended for its continuance on mutual consent.

It is pretty certain from the usage obtaining in Kovilagams, or the families of ancient rulers and petty chieftains, that in former times there was not marriage in Malabar. There, the ladies cohabit with Nambitiri Brahmins without any formality, and are at liberty to change them at their pleasure, with the consent of the senior Rajatis. It may be that the aristocracy of a country adhere to an ancient usage more tenaciously than the middle and lower classes, but it is anything but probable that the institution of marriage originally existed among the latter whilst it did not exist among the former."\(^{61}\)

*Sambandham* relationship, unlike marriages elsewhere, was not seen as a sacred institution.

"They are not regarded as constituting a religious ceremony or *samskaram* or sacrament in the Hindu or European sense of the term. There is no officiating priest in attendance. There is no formula to be repeated, there is no *vedic* or *puranic* or religious chant or exhortation and there is no formal benediction."\(^{62}\)

This was the view held by *nambutiri* Brahmins of Kerala for whom marriage rites had to be conducted by a priest according to *vedic* or *sastraic* chants. Among the *nambutiri*-s the eldest son who married from their community was only recognised as marriage while the *sambandham* relations was the provision made for the younger *nambutiri*-s as marriage was customarily denied to them. For the *nambutiri*-s, this was merely a relationship with the *nair*-s, that did not have the strength of a marriage and they could form more than one such relationship. This reinforced the arguments that *nair* marriages

\(^{60}\) MMCR, p. 26.  
were more in the nature of concubinages. The nair-s too talked about their marriage in similar way.

"Every other religion and state has a code prescribed for prostitution; but for the marumakkattayee this is not deemed necessary is a crying shame.... It is the duty of the government to see that the subjects are living in the right way."^{63}

Thus weak martial ties and no responsibility and commitment to each other as seen in other caste became a glaring defect of the nair sambandham due to which it was equated with concubinage^{64}

Though the nair-s of north Malabar were patrilocal, in the south they were matrilocal with the men visiting the women at her taravad. In the case of the former, they live in the man's taravad until his death, whereupon they come back to their own taravad. The children in this case belong to their mother's taravad. But the accounts tend to look at the nair-s as following a unified pattern of practices.

Easy divorce was yet another reason why marriage ties were considered as loose. Heber talks about the amicable way in which a relation could be ended.

"Should the husband after a certain period not be pleased with the lady of his choice, he has the option of the returning her to her parents or relatives, when both are at liberty to seek a fresh union in other quarters. No disgrace is attached to this proceeding nor is the summary divorce and violent disruption of the marriage tie, in any way illegal. There is... no actual marriage tie, such as we understand the sacred institute, in any way illegal and it is in consequence of a custom so abhorrent to our feelings of propriety and one so subversive of everything which should create and strengthen the ties and relationship of domestic life."^{65}

---

^{63} Malayala Manorama on May 31, 1890.
^{64} K R Krishna Menon, Rtd. Sub-judge, Walluvand taluk, Appendix IV, A T I, MMCR, p. 7. K P Krishna Menon, Ibid., pp. 1-2, to name just two. V T Arasu, in the Debates of the Madras Marumakkathayam Bill in Legislative council of Madras, Nov. 2, 1932 Vol. Liii 1930, p. 345 echoes a similar sentiment. It is seen as a form of marriage that is as free as air so far as these communities where concerned. K P Raman Menon, Ibid., p. 361.
specious of propriety, legality and morality that led to the viewing of nair customs in horrifying fascination. This led them to pronounce strong judgements about the state of affairs. Only Samuel Mateer talks about any type of settlement to end the relationship where accounts of presents, expense of marriage, ornaments etc. are settled and a deed of separation is drawn up and signed in the presence of four witnesses of the same caste. But this might have been crept in later, as the accounts of presents, ornaments and marriage expenses seem incongruous with the earlier nair system of marriage.

According to Nagam Aiyya if the husband wants to dissolve the alliance, he sends two respectable persons or goes himself to give the intimation to his wife's taravad. If the wife wishes to divorce the husband then she with the consent of her karanavan tell the husband in the presence of her relatives her reason. Misconduct and incompatibility of temper is the general reason. But such dissolution is always regarded as degrading and dishonourable. Another indication of man ending a relationship was the lack of customary presents during festivals like Onam and Vishu. It is said that, customarily, if a man find his slippers pointing away from the women's house, it was a tacit way of indicating to the man that the women wished to end the relationship. Thus, though there were accepted norms to end a relationship, the picture that we get many from the accounts of the travellers is that, of hardly any procedures being there. But as to Nagam Aiyya's statement that dissolution was regarded as dishonourable and degrading, it was something that must have crept in by the 20th century reforms and the changed perception of the people.

---

Soon the nair-s themselves started looking at their marriage in which “both the legal and religious sides are wanting. They are not legal as they do not create any correlative rights and duties.” The feelings of the western educated nair-s in the 20th century can be summed up in T N G Panikkar’s words: “It is high time that some efforts were made to place the nair-s on a basis of equality with the enlightened nations of the world”. The key word here being ‘enlightened’, this goes on to show how much the nair-s had internalised the images that were constructed through these writings.

Constructing Marumakkattayam

Marumakkattayam was seen as the system of descent and inheritance that was traced through the female line. The descendants of the male are not members of the taravad. Even in the case of the nair-s of Northern Malabar, who are patrilocal the descendants of the male are members of their mother’s taravad. This system of marumakkattayam had evolved and functioned through centuries as a result of the socio-economic conditions that prevailed in Kerala. John Shore writes:

“The right of inheritance as well as to the Rajaships as to private property has thence naturally enough been fixed on the basis of primogeniture of seniority among the brethren born of the females of the same family without regard to acknowledging any percentage on the father’s side”.

Barbosa talks about the children staying

“with the mother who has to bring them up, for they hold them not to be the children of any man even if they bear his likeness and they do not consider them their children, nor are they heirs to their estates ... heirs are their nephews”.

---

69 Ibid., p. 25.
According to the *Malabar Marriage Commission Report of 1891*, "Marumakkattayam possesses no code". There were no scriptural injunctions to it.

The *marumakkattayam* system of inheritance was seen as a corollary to the strange system of marriages prevalent among the *nair*-s. Buchanan says that once the woman attained maturity she

"is taken to live in the house of some *namboodiri* or *nair*-s and after she has given her consent to do so, she cannot leave her keeper; but in case of infidelity to his bed may be punished with death ... remains with him until he either dies or turns her away. In either case, she returns to her brother's house, of which she resumes the management and brings with her all her children who are her brother's heirs".

"In consequence of this strange arrangement no *nair* knows his own father and every man considers his sister's children as his heirs ... A *nair*'s movable property on his decease is equally divided among the sons and daughters of all his sisters."

This unnatural system led to "nepotism substituting the place of paternal affection".

The travelogues, talk in detail about the customs and practices of the community the effect of these images, was the construction of the system as obsolete. The construction of *marumakkattayam* as 'primitive', 'unnatural' devoid of proper marital relations and as one that bred nepotism was disseminated through the various sites of discourses leading to its acceptance by the *marumakkattayee*-s themselves. It was the alternate world-view internalised by him, in the process of the creation of a colonial subject, which led to the demands for reform among the people. But it was not as if the people of the colonies uniformly accepted these constructions. The subjectification varied as a result of which the demands of reformers their view also varied. This section

---

72 MMCR, par. 24, p. 10.
tries to look at the internalisation of the three images mentioned above by the na"ir-s that led to the clamour for reforms.

a. As Primitive

Matriliny was seen as a freak remnant from the past, an indication that the society had not progressed to a civilised stage. This was a result of the theoretical pronouncements of sociologists like J F MacIennan, L H Morgan and J Lubbock that traced the evolution of the society from savage to civilised stage, linking of matriliny with earlier stages of human civilisation. The pronouncement of primitiveness was taken from the image of primitiveness already constructed by the travelogues. This was further cemented by the various administrative reports that were sent from Malabar. Thus the construction of the system as unnatural, primitive and that which breeds nepotism was internalised by the na"ir-s and other sections of the society were soon held out to be true as is seen from their statements. According to B Kumaran Nair, District Munsif of Chowghat in his Answers To Interrogatones (ATI) wrote,

"The nayar community had by the time only reached the stage of tarawad joint family system in their onward march to civilisation. The hindu-s on the other side of the ghats with greater facilities of communication and better education, had, by the time, reached a much higher stage. Individual rights in property had, by the time, become recognised law among them. But the nayar society, cooped up within their mountains and seas, and more often engaged in war and plunder than the civilising influences of education, art and cultivation had little time to think of marriage and education, and the rough old soldier returned to his sister with his loot towards the close of his life, when he was no longer fit for fight. This facilitated nambudiri connection with the nayar, and the consequent perpetuation of the joint family system. The courts of law found the nayar in this condition. They believed to be our law and justice was accordingly administered. No encouragement was given to the working of those natural causes which led on a nation gradually and almost imperceptibly in social progress and people were held fast to their customs".76

76 MMCR, Appendix IV, p. 4. In the A T I of K P Raman Menon na"ir-customs are described as "barbaric prehistoric relic." MMCR, Appendix IV, p. 5.
Here the person talks about the reason for primitiveness in much the same way as the Europeans did. The reason being, isolation, marital nature of the nair-s and the consequent lack of civilising influence all leading them to accept customs like sambandham. The inability of the system to grow out of this condition or being not yet civilised then becomes one of the major reason for all the ills of the system and the educated people who had become thoroughly subjectified saw reform of the system as the only way out of this.

The 'Memorial on Marumakkattayam Parishkaram' that appeared in the Malayala Manorama on April 29, 1908 also reproduces this sentiment.

"Marumakkattayam is only suited to a society in its infancy. It was suited to the earlier days but now the situation has changed. ... Obstacles towards becoming a patrilineal society should be removed as the society's progress from matriliny to patriliney is the most scientific reform that can be done."

The most important defect that was there in the system according to these people was the lack of marital ties. An example of this is seen in the article of Malayala Manorama on May 31, 1890.

"Wedding is the most important of all rites. The world is sustained by it. One gets a partner for life according to this rule. If there is no sanctity in a marital relation then there will be no love and respect between the couple. Instead of the wife being the preserver of the family, she ... won't be interested to work for the husband's benefit or the husband won't be inclined to provide for the wife and children after his life. He won't have the responsibility to educate or bring up the children. The marumakkattayam marriage goes against the Hindu pramana-s and is something that is laughed at by others."

Thus the system of sambandham that was seen as immoral by the Europeans was internalised by the nair-s who too started talking about it in similar terms. This linking of the sexuality of the nair females was the remnant of the earlier construction of the image.

---

77 Malayala Manorama, April 29, 1908.
of the nair-s from the account of the travellers other colonial reports. This idea was reinforced through the judiciary as is seen in Muhammad Haji Vs Kuliath Haji, where Judges Muthuswami Iyer and Turner ruled.

"The law governing the property of a tarawad has not reached the same stage of development as the law regulating the joint property of a Hindu family. Not only in the former case is succession traced through females but the property is undissoluble. So that the member of the family may be said rather to have rights out of the property than rights to the property."

Here the reason, attributed for, was the law of succession through woman or the system of marumakkattayam. Thus the image of 'primitiveness' was once again reinforced through the judiciary or rather the idea had become so deeply engrained that it gets manifested in these judgments.

Reinforcing this image of primitiveness was also the polyandrous nature of sambandham relations. Though by the 19th century this practice had come to an end the image continued. This led to the stressing on monogamy by the reformers. Soon they start blaming all their ills on the sambandham relations with the nambutiri-s. The tendency of the nair-s to blame the nambutiri-s for these evil customs is seen in their writings.

"Even at the present day a nambudin thinks that he has the right to have sexual intercourse. The British Government having no desire to protect the importance of the nambudiri and to make means for satisfying these carnal desires by compelling the nayar women to become prostitutes, is

---

78 G Arunima talks about this in her article and how the state intervention was "as much as a result of state policy as a cultural desire of the community to civilize itself from a state of primitive barbarism to one of modernity and progress," G Arunima, "Matriliny and its discontents", Op. cit., pp. 157-8.

79 3 ILR M, 169, cited in Madhavan Nair, The Malabar Law Digest (1862-1941) and Acts, p. 198. It is interesting to note that Muthuswami Iyer who was the president of the Malabar Marriage Commission was one of the judges in his case.

80 K R Krishna Menon, Rtd. Sub-judge, Walluvand taluk, Appendix IV, A T I, MMCR, p. 7. K Krishna Menon, Ibid., pp. 1-2 to name just two. The nambutin-s on their part refuted this argument. According to Kanippaiyur Shankaran Namboodiripad, the system was present even before the arrival of the nambutiri-s and neither was it a part of their system as the smriti-s mention that a Brahmin could not have relationship with the sudra-s. More over the book Keralaithile Noor Anacharangal does not mention such a custom. Kanippaiyur Shankaran Namboodiripad, Nambuthiriramarum Marumakkattayam, Kunnamkulam, 1961, pp. 1-4. Chirakkal Rama Varma Elaya Raja attributes the increase in the case of nambutiri sambandham to the craze among the nair-s to have relations with the nambutiri-s as it was a matter of prestige for them. Chirakkal Rama Varma Elaya Raja, Malayalathile Nayanmar, Kuthuparamba, 1913, p. 20.
not only justified in removing the restriction but is absolutely bound to do so.\footnote{51}

This led to their demand that the practice of the nair women having sambandham relation with Brahmins should be discontinued. Regarding the question of marriages, we come across letters in the Malayala Manorama as part of the reform debates describing the need for establishing a system among the nair-s, which would entail having the same rights and liabilities of husband and wife as in other countries.\footnote{52} Another letter expressed that "there should be no other bond in Malayali marriage other than that result in the love between man and wife".\footnote{53} Linked up with this were the questions of the law of inheritance and divorce. While the conservative sections of the society found the existing system good enough,\footnote{54} a section of people tried to present this as a thing of the past not practiced any longer among the 'respectable' people of the community. Thus 'respectable' used to differentiate the educated section of the community, who no longer practiced many of these primitive customs.

"I know of cases in which Nayars have three or even four wives at the same time. They are not generally respectable men."\footnote{55}

"Amongst the respectable classes in South Malabar, 'Sambandham' usually lasts for life. Not one husband in five, divorce once in his lifetime. Case of capricious divorce would not exceed 5%. I have never known of five instance."\footnote{56}

Thus just as how polygamy was linked to primitiveness, monogamous marriage was seen as respectable. This conjugal union was also to be unaffected by the capricious divorce. Another attempt was to counter the notion of 'free divorces' by talking of the procedure for divorce involving other members of the family and society. The point

\footnotesize{\begin{tabular}{ll}
51 & K R Krishna Menon, A T I. MMCR, p. 7. \\
52 & NNR, Keralapatika, September 1887. \\
53 & NNR, Keralapatika, November 1887. \\
54 & NNR, Keralapatika, December 10, 1887. \\
55 & Vallyavittil Raman Mara, MMCR. \\
56 & Kuthamballi Govindan Nambiyar, Witness No. 74, MMCR, p. 51.
\end{tabular}}
here is not on the truth of these but on the efforts to counter arguments of free divorce. M Kelu Nambiyar talks of two forms of divorce practiced in Kottayam and Chirakkal taluks other than usual absence for a year at the time of Vishu and Onam festivals. In the first the husband goes with two friends (if possible witness to the marriage) to the wife's house with 4 pieces of cloth and 2 fanams and in the presence of the wife's relatives, sever the connection. If it's the wife who wants end the relationship, then she communicates it to the karanavan through his wife. On gaining permission from him she could absent herself for three consecutive nights from the bedroom. The three nights time is given as an opportunity for mediation, after which the divorce becomes complete. According to P Cheria Raman, the practice of divorce is called Nyayamkodukka or acharantirkka whereby the relationship was ended by the communiqué to the effect by the man's karanavan to the women's karanavan in the presence of witness.

b. As Against the Law of Nature

The next construction about marumakkattayam was that it was 'unnatural' or against the law of nature. It again stemmed from the fact that this system was different from the normal practice among the followers of patriliny. This relationship, between what was natural and what one was accustomed to as a part of habit, is aptly put in the Memorandum of C Tiruvenkatacharir, Dewan of Cochin in the MMCR.

"It is argued that marumakkathayam proceeds against nature.... Natural affection is the result more of habit and association than of anything inherent in man".

This unnaturalness was a result of the new-world view which constructed 'natural', the components of which, was not there in the earlier system. This being the basic lack of

87 M Kelu Nambiyar Witness No. 2. MMCR, p. 3.
88 Witness No. 22, MMCR, p. 15.
89 MMCR, App. IV, p. 2.
marriage as an institution that established responsibilities of father, mother, children, husband or wife as has been discussed before. The MMCR in its report talks of the marumakkattayam family wherein.

"Their father is a stranger, who is not their guardian. The mother is not mistress of her house, but is only one of many junior members dependent on the Karanavan".90

In the novel Indulekha, through one of the character Cherusheri's statement to Suri Nambutiripad, we can see how monogamous marriage as against marumakkattayam marital relations are seen to be natural

"In a word the rule should be one man for one wife and one wife for one man. That is the natural law of creation."91

This unnaturalness was a result of a new world view that was internalised by the nair-s as a result of their contact with western ideas through education, missionary activities and governmental articulation through colonial administrative and judicial machinery.

c. As Breeding Nepotism

In a marumakkattayam family since all the members of the family where to be maintained by the family, the members did not have to worry about their livelihood. Working to support ones wife and children did not arise and men generally looked after the property of the family. In a period where the notions of progress and the protestant work ethics were dominant, this was blasphemous. Moreover Kerala was seen as a static society as a result of the extension of the old Orientalist notion which saw Asia as consisting of unchanging villages. The taravad was seen as institution that held people

90 MMCR, Para 50, p. 27.
The joint family being the provider of all the members of the family, a person could very well stay in its fold without doing anything. Unlike in the traditional society, progress was now being equated to the money a person would make. The notion, that each had to work for their living was something that was deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the Europeans. This was explored and theorised by Webber in his thesis on Protestant ethics. Being under this influence the colonisers and missionaries saw marumakkattayam was a system that bred nepotism. They, thus, saw this system as the bane of these communities and as being responsible for their lack of advancement. This, in turn, according to them, affected the economic efficiency of the society. They felt that the taravad joint family in whose security, the people were slumbering had to be broken. And the broken joint family would, in a sense, lead to the release the workers from its fold. This is seen in the judgement of OS 88 of 1894 Kuthiri Mussan Vs Matavankelothveetil Krishnan Nair and Beeverath alias Parambanmarakath Kunhamed where the issue involved was the property of Mammi Mussan. The claim of the plaintiff was that the deceased was a member of his taravad and hence the property should go to him, but the contention of his immediate kin was that the family had separated long since from the original taravad. The judgment went against the plaintiff but the judgment indicted the karanavan of the taravad thus

"Under Mammi Mussan’s careful management the valuable assistance rendered to him by his rich and influential father,..., Beebeerakath rose in course of time to the position of one of the richest Mopla Turwards in Cherakal Taluq Under the sheer mismanagement and needless litigation on the side of the plaintiff Parambanmarakath deteriorated from time to time and plaintiff became almost a pauper. He now attempts to reap what is not sown for him and he stands on antiquated claim the enforcement of which is now time barred."

The result of such an effort of creating a labouring subjectivity can be seen in the statements of nair-s themselves by the end of the 19th century. How well this was
internalised can be seen in the speech of Rama Varma the first prince of Travancore in:

his lecture at the Travancore Debating Society.

"The land of the industrious heapeth wealth" is the saying of one of the wisest of men is as true- to day as when it was said. The happiness, prosperity, power and glory of a society or nation may always be measured by its well-directed, well-conserved and progressive industry."

Here, we see the internalisation of the productive subject. The MMCR too talks of the situation of the taravad in this context.

"Nothing can be more erroneous and unfounded than the notion that every taravad has estates of indefinite dimensions capable of feeding an indefinite number of mouths. The great majority of Karanavans, probably 9/10th were small tenant farmers cultivating a few acres, on a precarious tenure, at a rack rent. a law which requires such a man from the produce of his farm to feed and provide for all the descendants of all his female relatives from birth to death, whether they work or not, is one of those laws which only continue to be law because they are habitually disregarded. If any will not work neither let him eat is a law of nature which must make itself felt sooner or later, even in the few Nayar Taravad which still have large estates, and the families which ignore it are doomed to poverty extinction".

It quotes Logan's remarks about the nair-s, "with a large increase in their numbers and with comparative poverty for the large body of them, the race is fast disintegrating". Thus the idea, each according to his work to each according to his ability seems to have become engrained in the 'native' consciousness. It was not only marumakkattayam but also aliyasanthana system that was looked upon thus can be seen from the petition submitted by the people.

"The law of Aliyasanthana or nepotism, therefore has ever since its introduction been breeding nothing but mischief."
Soon we see the nair-s too started looking at the system as one ideal for breeding nepotism. They started looking at the existence of such a system among themselves as a major reason for their backwardness especially when they compared themselves to other caste like the Christians. Vappalakalathil Chappan Menon in his deposition to the Commission linked the two very well.

"The Nayars as a whole, I am afraid, are not improving in material prosperity. There are not, I should say, more than 50 tarawads in the whole district that are not involved in heavy debt. I should say that about 60% of the Nayars can get two meals a day from their tarawad income. A large number of young Nayars now live in indolence, relying on their tarawad for food and refusing to do any work."

Once this image was internalised, we see that the people themselves started using these arguments for demanding reform in the marumakkattayam system. Soon this unworkability was ascribed also to the lack of unity in the taravad, the karanavan who was not accountable to the taravad and who cannot even be removed for mismanagement.

By the 1930's one more reason was attributed to the un-workability of the taravad system - the growth of individualistic ideas of the modern age as seen in the opinions recorded of the people on the two bills that were introduced by V P Narayanan Nambiyar and R M Palat. In the pre-colonial period, the caste of a person and the land holding were the factors that determined the status of an individual, but now the situation was changed. Land was not the only avenue for making money as trade and other commercial activities had opened up. Position in the colonial administrative machinery was lucrative but for this education was a must. Initially it was only a supplement to land showing how close a person was to the state. Later a government job meant an increase in social status of the family. Salary was fixed according to the education of the person.

---

95 For further details see Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance.*
96 MMCR, Witness No. 66, App. IV, p. 47.
Thus indirectly an individual's status depended on his education that also was responsible for the growth of individualistic ideas

"The system is also unnatural besides being opposed to the individualistic ideas of the modern age so that it leads often to the dissension and feuds among the members of the taravād."\(^97\)

This rise of individualistic ideas was seen as a result of western education introduced by the British. The fact that it was the western educated class that were demanding reforms has been re-asserted time and again in this context.

"Their marriages should be legalised. Although the illiterate and uneducated people do not feel the necessity for any marriage legislation and practically no harm has followed from the absence of such legislation, the educated section feel that their marriage law has not yet been brought up to the mark to which their advanced present civilised condition of society has reached. It is high time to give legal basis for marriages amongst them."\(^98\)

"The inroads made by western education on eastern ideals, the opening up of new avocations, resulting in the isolation of individual member and the want of sympathy on the part of established courts had been slowly undermining the system before and now the world causes that I have already referred to have practically killed it."\(^99\)

"The tarawād system has long outgrown its usefulness. When the joint family life was the ideal, - when self-acquisitions were unknown, - when individual was subordinate to the group, the tarawād system suited the people admirably. But modern individualistic culture and outlook rendered the fetters of tarawād life intolerable, and the autocracy of karanavan detestable. Thus the result was a large majority of junior members of the family began to hate the system, and the karanavan or manager did not love it."\(^100\)

Thus the colonial subject, who asked for reform was one that was created as a result of the process of subjectification in varying degrees. Their ideas are reflected in the art and literature of the period. The two earliest novels that teem with this are O Chandu

---


\(^100\) Govindan Nayar, *ibid.*, p. 128.
Menon’s Indulekha (1889) and Sarada (1892) set against the backdrop of the 19th century nair taravad. The new ideals as a result of the colonial cultural encounter can be seen in the characterisation of the novel’s hero and heroine who seems to embody what is best in the eastern and western traditions. It has to be remembered that these novels come out at the turn of the century when the initial debates for reform were going on in Malabar.

**Taravad as Constructed in Colonial Writings**

Construction of the image of the nair community and marumakkattayam meant a certain image of the taravad was automatically being constructed. While the travelogues

---

101 It has to be remembered the novel as a genre came into Malayalam literature during the colonial period. According to O Chandu Menon one of the reason for writing the novel was his wife’s desire to read in her own language a novel written after the ‘English fashion’ and to also to see if he would be able to create a taste among the Malayalam readers for the novel. The fact that the readers were able to identify with the characters and the situation of the novel much more than what the author visualised reveals the extent of subjectification of the people in Kerala at that time. “Mr. Chandu Menon’s Novel ‘Indulekha’ gives a vivid and true picture of... State of things which obtains throughout Malabar.” MMCR, AT1, P Govinda Menon, Deputy Superintendent of Census, Calicut, p. 5. The reviews of the book categorised it as a book that must be read as it not only provides entertainment but also knowledge. Malayala Manorama, April 3, 1890, August 16, 1890. Till 1956, it had run 50 editions. The studies on the novel Indulekha led to the ascribing various reasons for it. T C Shankara Menon in his forward to the 1905 edition said that the book was written with a view to focus attention on evils in contemporary Malabar society. *Indulekha A novel from Malabar*, Op. cit., According to P K Balakrishnan, the novel attempted to establish nair ‘humaness’ as against that of the nambutin. This view is a result of the writings that blame the nambutin for all the ills of the nair taravad. It also portrayed the crumbling feudal order and the emerging national consciousness. According to K P Sarathchandran, the novel portrays the crumbling marumakkattayam joint family and the emergence and the formation of the nuclear family. K P Sisupalan looks at these changes not only as a result socio-cultural factors but also as a result of economic factors like the integration of Malabar into the world economy and the attendant changes that occurred in the feudal order. Cited in *Indulekha Padanangal*, (ed.) P V Velayudhan Pillai, Prabhat Book House, Trivandrum, 1990, pp. 26-48. According to M G S Narayanan, the novel could be viewed as appeal for women’s education and liberation from nambutin sambandham, and on the other as making propaganda for colonial culture which was identical with the new congress brand of national culture. ‘Colonial Culture and National Culture: A Study of their convergence in Indulekha’, Samvad, May 16-20, 1998, p. 11. G Arunima looks at it as a contest of two types of sexuality: 1- the unbridled sexuality of women as represented by polyandry 2-the controlled disciplined one within the confines of a monogamous marriage that is stressed as the natural one. It was the men who were the agents of this discourse and love marriage was represented as choice for women while polyandrous practices as customarily enforced. G Arunima, ‘Matrilinear and it Discontents’, Op. cit., p. 161. But the author who pictured the ending of the novel in the formation of a new family form consisting of the hero, the heroine and their parents in the far off city of Madras was not for a complete change in the marumakkattayam system as envisaged by the bill of Sankaran Nair. This can be seen in the Memorandum submitted by him to the Malabar Marriage Commission of which he was a member. He did not believe in the fact the a law regulating marriage was needed but wanted the nair-s to be able to dispose his self-acquired property by will. Enclosure C, Memorandum by Chandu Menon, MMCR, pp. 1-11.

102 K N Panikkar talks about this in detail in his article, “Creating a new cultural taste: reading a 19th century novel,” in *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, New Delhi, pp. 223-44.
deal mostly with marumakkattayam and sambandham relations, the colonial records deal with the taravad in detail. The construction of the image of the taravad is vital as the taravad was the cornerstone of the nair family life and marumakkattayam system.

By and large, the colonial writings defined taravad as the family form among the nair-s, structured as the matrilocal extended joint family (koottukutumbam). However, various etymological derivations have been ascribed to it. Viewing it, from an architectural structure to a corporate land holding family unit or just a family form. The taravad was seen also as the focal point of affairs of the tara and depending on the four dignities (mentioned in the previous chapter) attached to it, its status and power varied. The word 'taravad' has been etymologically divided into its component parts, 'tara' meaning portion of a village or a unit of administrative organisation for civil and military purposes among the nair-s and 'vad' as a corrupt form of 'pad' meaning power, rank or authority. According to Prof. Gundert, 'taravad' was the house, chiefly, of a noble man or residence of landowners. Here the thrust is the architectural structure and the space well defined by a boundary wall with an entrance called 'patippura'. This definition of the taravad has its roots in the British assumption that all nair-s belonged to the local nobility. The definition was just an extension of the British imagination of the nair-s as an aristocratic community. But the taravad was not always that of a nobleman or a landowner. Many a time the taravad was not a landowner but an intermediary in the landed hierarchy. They held land on kanom or verumpattom tenures and then subleased it either to the actual cultivator or to the next rung of intermediaries.

Baden Powell looks at taravad as deriving from the 'tara'. According to him Dr. Mcleane talks of the nair-s as warriors of Kerala living in fortified gardens or had their

---

living fenced in and had in the 'tara', the village gymnasia (or kottam) to train their youth in the use of arms. Thus according to him the locality where the nair groups lived was called the 'tara', where the Brahmin-s lived the 'gramam' and where the tiyar-s and others lived the 'cheri'. Thus, their unit group or family came to be known as the taravad, with the affairs being managed by managing elders called the 'karanavar'.

Here the taravad is seen as unit of groups or families living in the tara. But the major factor that comes into play is the nair image as the warriors of Kerala.

The Administrative Reports sent by the various officials stationed in Malabar shows that their concentration was on the land tenures that were found in Malabar. The taravad was looked upon as the family form of the nair-s which was a property owning group. The Report of the Joint Commissioners in 1792-93 that investigated the newly acquired territories does not mention taravad directly but only about the system of marumakkattayam in connection with the succession of the kings of Malabar and of the practice of sambandham followed. The Malabar Land Tenures Report submitted by the Malabar Special Commission of 1881-82, in its first volume defined taravad in relation to the law of inheritance as the following,

"A Malayali Tarawad corresponds pretty close to what the Romans called gens, with this important distinction, however, that where as in Rome all members of the gens traced their descent in the male line from a common ancestor, in Malabar, the members of a Tarawad trace there descent in the female line from a common ancestress. All Tarawad-s of influence set apart property for the common use. So long as the common property exists, any number of families may hang together and form a Tarawad. Every member ... belonging to the Tarawad has an equal interest in the common stock, but no member can claim a share on it. The Tarawad, however, as a body, can, of course, make any division it pleases of the common stock .... Tarawad gets split up into subordinate divisions called Talavaries." 105

105 The Malabar Land Tenures Report submitted by The Malabar Special Commission of 1881-82, Madras Government Press, 1882, chapter VIII, p. CVII. This comparison to the Roman family gens was initially done by the colonial courts, which the administrative records then repeated. This is looked at in detail in the 5th chapter.
Thus *taravad* was seen as a family form that differed from the usual families found in a patrilineal society as the descent was traced through the female line in this case. The property was seen as that belonging in common to all the members of the family however distantly related. Though the property could in no way be partitioned for individual needs, it could be partitioned for the body as a whole. This was an acceptance of the fact that the *taravad* could be divided into *tavazhi*-s. In the beginning *tavazhi* partition seems to have been at least recognised but soon this was reversed by the judgement of the high court and was soon accepted by the colonial government. William Logan here sticks to the same definition of the *taravad* that was given by the Malabar Land Tenures Report.\(^{106}\)

The Census of 1891 looked at it in the sense of a family tracing its descent through the females. But it made a distinction between the *taravad*-s found in North and South Malabar. In South it is a smaller and more immediate circle of family members who are counted as against that of the North where it is a much more wider circle. For this Stuart looks at the prohibition of marriage relations among people having same *taravad* names even though no descent could be traced between the parties concerned. Thus it was seen as an exogamous unit that transcends regions.\(^{107}\)

T Muthuswami Iyer in the *Malabar Marriage Commission Report* (M.M.C.R) defined *taravad* in its simplest form as consisting of,

> the mother and her children living together with the maternal uncle as their karanavan. In its complex form it consists of several mothers and their children or their descendants in the female line, all tracing their descent from a common female ancestor and living together as a joint


family in subjection to the power and under the guidance and control of the senior male for a time being as its head or representative.¹⁰⁸

T Muthuswami Iyer in his Memorandum adds that the taravad in its secondary sense also includes

“a branch holding self acquired property and at the same time retaining its joint interest in taravad property. If the taravad is broken up by partition made by common consent, each branch is called a new branch...and the divided kinsmen are called Attaladakkam or reversionary heirs”¹⁰⁹

Here the taravad is defined as a family tracing descent from the common female ancestress in the female line subject to the authority of a common elder male member who is styled as the karanavan, the head of the family. Thus the emphasis here is more on the power of the karanavan who as a representative, speaks for the family and takes decisions on their behalf. In this the equation drawn is shown to be very similar to the general family forms or the patrilineal family forms that is the norm. In this definition property does not figure, it figures only while talking of the division of the taravad. Though the term tavazhi does not figure in the definition it is implied. Here in the definition two sets of property are being alluded to one the self-acquired property that belongs to the branch exclusively which it holds independently of the taravad and second its retention of joint interest in the taravad property. In this sense the pulasambandham (relationship that entails pollution on birth or death) is not severed while mudai-sambandham (relationship that entails common interest in property) though not severed is distinct. But the definition also visualises the taravad when the mudai-sambandham is broken and partition has been made by common consent and each branch becomes a new taravad in itself.

¹⁰⁸ Looking at the MMCR, we can see that the report depended heavily on the precedents set by the judgement of the court cases. Memorandum of the President T Muthuswami Iyer, Enclosure A,MMCR,p.1
¹⁰⁹ Here the allusion is to the tavazhi, Ibid., para. 2, p. 1.
According to the Malabar District Gazetteer,

"The Marumakkattayam joint family or Tarawad, as it is called, consists of all the descendants of a common ancestress, in the female line only. Neither party to a Sambandham union becomes thereby a member of the other's family; and the of offspring of the union belong to their mothers Tarawad, and have no sort of claim, so far as the law of Marumakkattayam goes, to a share of their father's property or to maintenance there from. The Tarawad property is the joint property of all the members, and each member is entitled to maintenance from it, but is not entitled to claim partition. Partition may, of course be effected by a mutual agreement between all the members."\textsuperscript{110}

Here too the stress is on the taravad as consisting of descendents of a common female ancestress. The membership of the taravad is clearly delineated as it decides the access to property and maintenance. This could be a reflection of the fact that by the end of the 19th century maintenance was one of the key issues brought up in the court cases field before the courts in Malabar. This is therefore a reflection of the decisions of the court cases that were being filed, where the right for maintenance of the anantaravan-s from the taravad was recognised by the courts.\textsuperscript{111} Another difference is in the acceptance of partition by mutual agreement between all the members suggesting a possibility of tavazhi partition. This is the reflection of the family karar-s that were increasingly signed by the members of the taravad on issued of management of property by different branches without effecting partition.

The Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee 1931, talked of

"Ancient families in Malabar often build(ding) their Tarward or family houses on kanom lands and give(ing) the names of these lands to the Tarwards themselves. The family deities are also located and worshipped in these houses. ... A Tarward could be represented by its name in all legal and other transactions. A Tarward cannot shift its residence in a day. If these families ever expected to be turned out of their houses in a few years after they were built, surely, they would not have given the names of the kanom lands to these Tarwards."\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{111} This is dealt with in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{112} Malabar Tenancy Committee Report, Chap. IV, p. 22.
Here the *taravad* is seen as the house (architectural structure) of the ancient families of Malabar. This definition has to be viewed in the context of the tenancy issues. By this time, the middle class *nair*-s had taken to western education and had made their presence felt, in the administrative, political and social spheres in Malabar but in the case of land relations the *nambutiri*-s occupied the higher tenure of *jenmom* when compared to the *kanom* tenure of the *nair*-s. Moreover, the *nair*-s used the tenancy discussions to project for fixity of tenure for the *kanakkar*-s rather than for the *janmi*-s or *verumpattakar*-s. The *kanom* holder was projected as having the real interest in the land rather than the *janmi*-s. Indicators like *taravad* names being derived from the names of land, the family deities being located in the compound were used to project the permanency and attachment to the lands held. The *kanom* holders mostly belonged to the emerging *nair* middle class. They were also the ones to push for reforms in *marumakkattayam* system and demand for partition of the *taravad*. Only if they would get the *taravad* properties partitioned could they be able to get hold of these lands for themselves. But in the issue of partition the colonial administration and judiciary was of the view that *taravad* properties were impartible. This was reflected in the reports of the period:

"It is further said that partition of landed property among the members of the family which is another process by which lands are distributed or diffused among the people is also inoperative in Malabar owing to the existing of the law of impartibility, that the marumakkathayam system of law, which governs the Rajas and the Nayar Janmis, recognises no individual share in family properties, and impartibility is an integral and essential part of the system, and that though the marumakkathayam system does not govern the *Nambudiri Janmis*, the law of impartibility is equally applicable to them."\(^{113}\)

---

Finally, in the Malabar Tenancy Bill that was prepared by the committee taravad figures as just a family form.\(^{114}\)

These definitions of taravad found in the colonial records have certain aspects common to them. Taravad figures invariably as a family form tracing its descent from the common female ancestress in the female line. Simply put, a taravad was seen as a family form following the marumakkattayam system of inheritance. The delineation of the members of the taravad brings out the claimants to the corpus of taravad funds or properties. The joint property of the taravad was seen as impartible. In this the individual right to claim partition is denied but at the same time, a common collective consensus could lead to tavazhi partition. Its members only had the right to maintenance from the property. This impartibility of land or the ownership of land in common stemmed from the notion of the Asiatic Mode of Production a by-product of the notion of Orientalism. They defined the orient, in juxtaposition with the occident, as exotic timeless and unchanging. The villages that formed the basic unit were constructed as being self sufficient, changeless and isolated. This image was again reinforced by the Reports of the Administrators as it closely followed the existing literature of the time. One of the fundamental nature of this grouping of persons was ‘ownership in common’ which resisted the emergence of individual ownership in land.\(^{115}\) The reason for this according to Baden Powell was official convinces.

“They laid stress on the point ‘the joint ownership’ or else on the sense of unity manifested by the villages, peculiarities which was specially important from an official point of view, as making it possible for them to be held jointly liable for one sum of revenue assessed on the whole villages.”\(^{116}\)

\(^{114}\) Ibid., Malabar Tenancy Bill, Chapter I, Clause 3-c, p. 109.
As a family form these definitions defined it by contrasting the inheritance and descent system through the females. This is what differentiated the *taravad* from other family forms they knew of. But even in this difference they emphasised the fact that the headship and management of this family rested with the oldest male member, the *karanavan*, who was vested with authoritative power. This was seen as a result of the occupation of the *nair* as warriors of Kerala. Only in the Tenancy Committee’s Report there is an attempt to place the *taravad* in the context of the over all land relations and economic structure. But even here this attempt is only a partial one in that as the attempt was to argue for fixity of tenure for the *Kanom* holders as against the power and privileges enjoyed by the *nambutiri janmi*-s.

Thus we see that the most common projection of the *taravad* is that of a matrilineal descent group in the colonial writings. This was again what was repeated in the definitions of the *taravad* that was given by the native writers of the time and later on.

In his article *Some Aspects of Nayar Life*, K M Panikkar looks at the *taravad* as a *nair* family consisting

“of all the descendents from the same ancestress, counting relationship exclusively from the side of the mother. Theoretically it may contain all those who have a common ancestry of this kind, but, in practice, when families grow unwieldy, they divide the common property and live under different roofs”  

But it is interesting to note that the term ‘*tharawad*’ was used only in two instances, one when talking of the ‘*Ammai*’ or the wife of the *karanavan* as “not belonging to the *Tharawad*”, and the other when talking of the *enangar* group as “a *Tharawad* along with its *enangars* formed a social group”. He says that though earlier the whole of *nair*
family life used to be based on close relationship with one or more families spoken of as enangars. Thus the taravad for him was the nair family and its definition we see proceeded very closely on the lines of the colonial definition. This is also seen in the writing of another person belonging to this caste who defined it in the same way as the colonial reports. Thus according to T N Gopalapanikkar also taravad consists of descendents of a common female ancestress, but believed that the partition of the taravad into tavazhi took place naturally.

“When by the constant addition of members to a Tarawad it becomes too unwieldy to be governed and managed by one man, natural forces began to work and bring about a division of it into various distinct Tarawads which keep up the original tradition of their common descent but have no legal right to the property of one another.”

Justice S Sundara Aiyar in his book, A treatise on Marumakkathayam and Aliyasanthana law, defines it again in the sense of a joint family and also in the sense of the architectural structure holding the joint family.

“This is a legal definition that has been evolved as a result of the court’s decision karanavan is placed in the position of responsibility of the taravad as its head and manager of its affairs and properties. V Nagam Aliyya defines taravad in the same way as the Malabar Land tenures Report equating the structure of the taravad to the patrilineal Roman family, the difference being the fact that descent was traced through

119 Ibid., p. 264.
the common female ancestress in the female line. The eldest male member who like in the gens was the head of the family was responsible for the management of the taravad.\textsuperscript{122} Thus, as far as the legal definition of the taravad was concerned the stress was on the family form in relation to the rights and control of property enjoyed by its members.

Hence we see that the construction of the taravad by the colonial administrative and legal machinery was accepted, internalised by the people who lived in Malabar. Here we have borrowed Foucault's concept and is applying it in the sense of a power-knowledge combine acting on an individual body. The operation of power-knowledge leads to the positioning of the individuals to that of a subject. Colonial knowledge with its thrust on rationality is contrasted with the existing knowledge of the colony and is shown to be inferior. This, dissemination of knowledge is referred to by Foucault as ‘objectivity’. Once this process is complete, the natives accept this image as the truth and internalise it reproduce it as is seen in the case of the definition of the taravad. Thus the colonial discourse defined the taravad as mainly a joint family that traced its inheritance and descent through the female line whose corpus of property is not subject to individual partition, cementing the idea of the joint ownership of property in the Indian villages, a part of the construct borrowed from the image of the unchanging village community in India. This could be because of the fact that the nair taravad due to its peculiarities as constructed in the colonial period had gained wide acceptance as one of the few remaining group that practiced matrilineal kinship and inheritance. It is therefore not surprising, that anthropologists and sociologist did most of the studies on them, scrutinising their customs and practices.

How later academic studies defined the taravad in the post-colonial period may now be examined. One fact that needs to be highlighted here is that many of these studies looked at the *taravad* as constructed during the colonial period. The academic studies too have looked at it as primarily a matrilineal descent group. A *taravad* might have consisted, according to C J Fuller,

"all the matrilineal descendants of a common ancestress and a child, of course, belonged to its mother's *taravad*. A *taravad* might have consisted of a set of sisters, their brothers, their children and their daughter's children but many *taravad* contained a much wider span of relatives. For instance it might have included a matrilineal descendants of several sets of sisters, each of these sets being linked through a common Mother's mother or a more remote ancestress. A *taravad* might have had 20, 30 or more members all, living together in one large house. Each *taravad* was an independent economic unit; its members collectively owned property from which they derived livelihood."\(^{124}\)

According to Robin Jeffrey

"All Nayars followed the matrilineal marumakkattayam system of inheritance based on the matrilocal family called the *taravad*. All members of a *taravad* were descended from a common female ancestor, but the management of *taravad* affairs was vested in the eldest male member, the Karanavan; the system was matrilineal, not matriarchal. The property and assets of the *taravad* were held in common by all members, no individual could claim her share of the joint property. The *taravad* house was originally built to be defended. It was surrounded by a walled garden was itself built as a rectangle around an inner courtyard."\(^{125}\)

Thus *taravad* is seen as a natural entity that was sustained by the operation of the laws of *marumakkattayam*. This view of the *taravad* is what majority of the studies reflected as primarily what a *taravad* was.

\(^{123}\) It is not the post-colonial perspectives and hermeneutic turn that are meant here, but the temporally specific meanings.


M S A Rao claimed that the taravad organisation of nair was a large lineage, the members of which reckoned descent from a common ancestress. It consisted of both dead and living. When it grew unwieldy it was divided into tavazhi (literally: Mother's line). Tavazhi-s, according to him was the functioning family unit with the bonds of exogamy and pollution with the other tavazhi of the same taravad. Property was impartible with the senior member, the karanavan managing it.26 Thus the understanding of the taravad was, as it existed in Malabar in the colonial period. Thus the taravad was seen as a co-residential and commensal unit.27 But he has tried to link the taravad in the wider context of the tara which he saw as the local community associated with the nair-s whose residents had access to the hereditary occupationists and their services. The heads of all the families in a tara formed the assembly or kuttam to manage its affairs.28

For Mencher, the taravad was a "unique form of family whereby households or taravads contained only the descendants, both male and female of a female ancestress."129 This is the definition followed in many of the academic studies. T K N Unnithan, sees taravad simply as the matrilineal family.130 For Chie Nakane,

"a traditional Nayar tarwad was a property group consisting of a matrilineal lineage exclusively, headed and represented by the senior male member, called Karanavan. Normally the members of a tarwad formed a distinguishable domestic unit. Spouses of the members of a tarwad resided in the tarwad where they were born, and a husband visited her wife at her tarwad at night and returned early morning. The father had no duty or obligation on his own children, instead, the Karanavan was the legal guardian of the offspring of the female members of the tarwad."131

127 Idem.
128 Ibid., p. 25.
Thus, to those who viewed the *taravad* from the angle of kinship and social organisations, they saw *taravad* as a family group or descent or lineage owning property jointly and being headed by the *Karanavan*. This was fully developed by Kathleen Gough in her articles and her book ‘*Matrilineal Kinship*’. For Kathleen Gough the *taravad* was a “lineage or clan which owns property, which assembles for legal, administrative, ceremonial or other purposes and which has a head, is an example... of a descent group. ... The Nayar *taravad*, described later in this volume fits this definition. The *taravad* holds property jointly, acts as a unit with respect to ceremonial as well as property matters, assembles on certain ceremonial occasions and has at its head the *karanavan*.”

Gough thus tends to look at the *taravad* as a descent group or lineage and according to her, the fundamental structural difference between patrilineal and matrilineal descent groups is that while lines of authority and group placements runs through the line of male in the former, in the latter lines of authority runs through men and group placement through the women. But in looking at the *taravad*, Gough has tried to place them in the context of the socio-economic structure, for she says,

“The word *taravad* (befitting for a settled agricultural people) was in fact equivalent to the English *house* in its sense both of ancestry and of place. The clan was usually called by the name of its original site.”

She also looked at it as a property group.

“When spoken of in its own right the property group like the lineage, was called the *taravad*.”

According to her at a time the lineage as a property group had a depth of some three to six generations including the youngest members and the common ancestress. The members being equal co-parceners in the buildings, land, serfs, movables and all other property that they inherited or were acquired by the efforts of individual members. The

---

karanavan (oldest male member) was its legal guardian and represented the family in the caste assembly. She looks in this connection at the land relations in passing.

"All Nayar property groups appear to have owned some leased land on kanam tenure from chiefs, royalty, or Brahmins if any were present in their village. A property group whose membership was expanding might bring under cultivation waste land belonging to the chief on a tenure known as kurikanam." But here too the construction of nair-s as aristocrats has come into play. Not all nair families owned jenmom lands. The majority of their holdings were on kanom tenure. But primarily the taravad was seen as a descent group all the others being relegated to a secondary position. Thus we see that in effect taravad slowly becoming a metaphor for a matrilineal descent group, owing property in common that could not be partitioned and being headed by the eldest male member all being subsumed under this metaphorical usage of the term 'taravad'. In defining it thus the difference between marumakkattayam and taravad too seems to be blurred and where it is automatically assumed that taravad follows marumakkattayam.

According to Milinda Moore "The Malayalam words 'marumakkattayam' 'taravad' are consistently translated as 'matrilineality' 'matrilineage' respectively". Her argument is that more than descent or biological relatedness it has to be looked at from the point of view of the inheritance or property transmission between two generations in contrast to taravad as consisting of members, both living and dead. Milinda Moore in her article, 'A New Look at the Nayar Taravad' claims to look at the taravad from an indigenous point of view to see what the taravad meant to the people who lived in it and to those who came into contact with it, as an alternative to the descent theory

136 idem.
137 Ibid., p. 390.
138 Ibid., p. 526.
139 Ibid., pp. 526-27.
constructed by Gough and others. She agrees that the taravad refers to a matrilineally related people more than deriving its solidarity through remembrance of a common ancestress or relation through her the persons have ties to a ritually significant property unit. She saw the taravad as a ritually significant "house-and-land unit" and not merely as an economic or geographic entity. Her effort is to give the ritual domain an independent reality.

"For what the British did... was to destroy the house-and-land unit as a political and ritual entity. What was once a center of a nexus of hierarchical social relations, an abode of gods and ancestors, a nourisher of those born into it due to the auspiciousness embodied in and evidenced by its grain, became a piece of property - partible, objectified, alienable." The rituals that are part of the taravad has been classified into three those connected with the deities installed inside the house or in its compound, the life cycle rituals of the members of the taravad that was held in and around the taravad house and the calendrical cycle of festivals including those of Vishu, Onam etc. relating to the resources produced in the rice lands and parambu-s.

Thus we see that right from the beginning taravad was seen primarily as a matrilineal family form whose members resided together in the taravad house under the headship of the eldest male member called the karanavan. The main referent in understanding this family was the patrilineal family as can be seen in the discussions in understanding the structure. But in the administrative and colonial reports and records this understanding was always seen in the light of the decisions of the colonial judiciary.

140 She looks at the histories of the establishment of 36 taravad-s, of which only 21 made reference to an origin event but in none of these she found that the women established the taravad alone. Of this in 12 women figured along with men - brothers or husbands. Moreover according to her histories of taravad-s were more of histories of expanding of estates rather than of lineages as karanavan-s who increased the corpus of taravad wealth were remembered. Milinda Moore, "A New Look at the Nayar Taravad", Man, 20,3,1985, p. 529.

141 According to her, it was the defining of the taravad as simply a property unit that made it easier for the taravad to be legislated out of existence by the British. Ibid., p. 525.

142 Ibid., p. 538.
The issues of partition, maintenance and headship of the karanavan brought into the definition of the taravad betrayed the influences of the then current judicial decision. Thus we see that in representing the taravad the colonial authorities saw only that part of its façade with which the court grappled through the cases that came to it and as a family system that had evolved out of their martial occupation that was in the lower scale of the evolutionary ladder.

Tavazhi in Relation to the Taravad

The taravad being defined thus let us now turn our attention to how the tavazhi was seen in this period. The colonial records maintained the impartibility of the taravad, but the tavazhi figures in them. As seen before T Muthuswami Iyer in his Memorandum adds that the taravad in its secondary sense also includes

"a branch holding self acquired property and at the same time retaining its joint interest in taravad property. If the taravad is broken up by partition made by common consent, each branch is called a new branch... and the divided kinsmen are called Attaladakkam or reversionary heirs". 

Here the tavazhi is defined as a taravad in a smaller sense. These tavazhi-s could be clustered together around the main taravad in different buildings or sometimes a taravad had many kitchens or small family units with mother as its centre and spread over a few villages. The management of affairs then would be distributed among its members. A junior member would be then entrusted to look after the day-to-day administration of the far away piece of land. Though there was no formal record authorising him initially later on in the colonial period family karar-s were drawn up. The junior members could spend only for the day today needs and had to account for the expenditure to the kararvan and acted under his instruction. In fact he did not even have the authority to pay any

---

\[143\] Here the allusion is to the tavazhi. MMCR, para. 2, p. 1.

---
other junior members who were residing in the same village.\textsuperscript{144} In the beginning of every year, members were given a share of paddy, oil etc. for maintenance while cloth was distributed on occasion of \textit{Onam} and \textit{Vishu}. It was up to the person to decide where he messed, which in all probability would be with his mother, sisters and brothers. This according to Rao was predominantly developed in North Malabar, where a man’s wife and children stayed in his \textit{taravad} and not in the wife’s \textit{taravad}.\textsuperscript{145} A \textit{taravad} when it becomes large consists of many \textit{tavazhi-s}. The \textit{tavazhi-s} could in most probability have separate residence and separate allocation of property. In the case of North Malabar, where a man’s wife and children lived in his \textit{taravad} their expenses were met by the husband’s \textit{taravad} even though they did not become the members of that \textit{taravad}. They went back to the wife’s natal \textit{taravad} after the death of the husband.

The MMCR talks of the various reasons for the development of the \textit{tavazhi-s} or of the ‘inevitable disintegration’ of the \textit{taravad} as the sheer impossibility of the increased numbers residing in one house. Citing the example of the Kavalappara Kovilakam, whose holdings lay scattered in as many as 20 \textit{amsam-s} of Palaghat and Walluvianad taluk-s the Report talks of such as land being managed by setting up a number of \textit{kalam-s} for stocking the paddy as harvested or received as dues.\textsuperscript{146} Each \textit{kalam} signified a household or a family of the \textit{tavazhi}. In the MMCR it is seen as a natural contingency according to which

\begin{quote}
“to secure breathing room in the \textit{taravad} house the junior members, male and female, move off to these \textit{kalam-s} and if the family is on good terms
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{144} But slowly over the years, a small branch of the \textit{taravad} would develop there. Initially his close kin living in the \textit{taravad} may shift in. Later on this would grow to become a full-fledged \textit{tavazhi}. The house name though would have the original \textit{taravad}’s name would also have other suffix or prefix distinguishing it from the original \textit{taravad}. Over the span of many generations this \textit{taravad} would become an independent \textit{taravad}.


\textsuperscript{146} It could be because of this we find that the core of the \textit{nalukettu} is the \textit{nira} and \textit{ara}. It is around this that the rest of the \textit{taravad} seems to be built.
with the karanaavan, an amicable arrangement is made whereby the
tavazhi-s cultivate and subsist upon certain lands set apart for each." 147

The scattering of tavazhi-s has to be viewed against the context of the management of
the paddy, the principal resources of the time. There was no infra-structure for
transporting the paddy from different places that were long way off the taravad. The
absence of road communication precluding the carting of paddy should also be,
therefore taken into consideration as a casual factor for the proliferation of kalam-s. The
branching off process was to a great extent an inevitable thing, contingent upon the land
revenue management of the taravad. This was true in the case of taravad-s with
extensive land-control. Sometimes a taravad would be divided into tavazhi so that the
rituals to be performed in the shrine would not be affected by deaths in the family and
the consequent pollution.

Thus the colonial records saw tavazhi as taravad in a secondary sense. Though
in theory, the tavazhi was seen as an institution for the expansion of taravad into distant
areas whereby a kalam would be established under the supervision of a junior member
that would in course of time develop into a tavazhi. In the colonial period the judiciary
saw the tavazhi was seen as contradicting the impartibility of the taravad. As far as the
nair-s were concerned it provided a paradigm for the dissolution of the taravad.

Summary

The creation of knowledge was a tool for domination in the colonial period. By
highlighting certain aspects of the customs and practices, a new thrust was given
leading to the re-invention of traditions that existed in the colonial society. This

147 MMCR, para. 55, p. 30.
knowledge creation can be seen in the construction of the customs and practices of the nair caste. These constructions were heavily influenced by, and were a product of the larger orientalist discourse of the period. They were decisive as far as the reforms were concerned. In other words, it was the 'lacks' that were perceived as a result of these constructions that became the agenda for the reforms introduced through the legislative interventions.