Chapter III

SOCIAL CONCEPTION OF OLD AGE IN MODERN KERALA

Political Changes and the Concept of Old Age
Economic Changes and the Concept of Old Age
Social Changes and the Concept of Old Age
  Religious Reforms and the Conception of Old Age
  Modern Education and the Conception of Old Age
  Medical Education and the Conception of Old Age
  Change in Family Structure and the Conception of Old Age
Emergence of Institutions and the Conception of Old Age
Chapter III

Social Conception of Old Age in Modern Kerala

Modernization is a process that results in the transformation of the total society, and it provided the experience of a new mode of life and its practices. It is the breakthrough of traditional practices and behaviour. Hence, it creates changes in the social conception of old age too. This chapter discusses the impact of social changes (modernization) that changed the social conception of old age in modern Kerala. Cowgill and Holmes attempted to understand the relation between modernization and status of the aged. According to them the major aspects of modernization combine to place the aged in a very different position from the younger generations, and the net result is lower status for the aged, as prestige-generating social structures are replaced with devaluing structures.\footnote{Russll A. Ward, *The Aging Experience..., Op.cit.*, p. 81.}

For Ellen Rhoads Holmes and Lowell D. Holmes, the concept of old age is relative to the degree of modernization.\footnote{Ellen Rhoads Holmes and Lowell D. Holmes, *Other Cultures..., Op.cit.*, p. 257.} As the degree of modernization increases it affects the status of the old. While we consider the society of Kerala, the impact of modernization is not restricted only to the upper strata, but to the lower mass also. Hence it calls for a detailed study that examines how the political, economic, social and cultural fields are affected by the degree of modernization. Also, it says how various fields
are enabling themselves to produce changed conceptions of old age. This study deals with the position of elderly in each aspect of modern Kerala.

Besides the societal transformations, modernization is characterized by new framework of ideas about man, society and nature. This new framework of idea is known as modernity because it functions in the intellectual or conceptual level. Since the study deals with the social conception of old age in modern situations, characteristics of modernity and its impact are of special importance.

The modernity prescribes freedom to the individual where the role of the society is to provide context to enhance the individual empowerment. Its power of rationality advocates autonomy for individuals, where the ‘mind’ is more important through which rationality works and the ‘body’ functions as a complement to such rational thoughts. It assumes human as an autonomous individual with the embodied consciousness. It

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3 The features of modernity in Tim May’s words are, it is first, a concept of freedom based upon an autonomous human subject who is capable of acting in a conscious manner. Second, the pursuit of a universal and foundational ‘truth’ gained through a correspondence of ideas with social and physical reality. Third, a belief in natural science as the correct model for thinking about the social and natural world over, for example theology and metaphysics. Fourth, the accumulation of systematic knowledge with the progressive unfolding of history. Tim May, *Situating Social Theory*, Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1996, p. 8.

Modernity refers to a historical period which began in Western Europe with a series of cultural, social and economic changes during the seventeenth century, and it is usually characterized by three features: first, culturally, a reliance on reason and experience conditioned the growth of science and scientific consciousness, secularization and instrumental rationality; second as a mode of life it was based on the growth of industrial society, social mobility, market economy, literacy, bureaucratization and consolidation of the nation-state; and third, it fostered a conception of the person as free, autonomous, self-controlled and reflexive.

enables modern man to act according to rationality that he has gained through the constant interaction of social and physical reality. The freedom of people as individuals to interpret the world against the medieval interpretation of the world by the church is one of the characteristics of modern society. This may question the traditional role of old as intermediaries between man and the unknown, the interpreters of rituals and religious rites or the specialists of spiritual power. Belief in the natural science as the correct model for thinking is another principle of modernity. It provides an unquestioning belief in the certainty and the eventual completion of the quest for knowledge in science and philosophy. It is the combination of scientific principles and technological power that produces rapid changes for developing modern culture. The idea of mechanistic universe makes all relationships within the universe mechanistic. In short, we can say that the modernity is in favour of ‘individual’ than the community or its correlates. Social scientists view that enlightenment as a catalyst brought this development of particular school of thought. Here, the ‘aged’ in whom the traditional authority was assigned as they were heads of communities are less adequate. The role of elderly with practical medical skills and knowledge in genealogy are obsolete in this context. The

5 Tim May, Situating …, Op.cit., p. 8. For Him, the major contributions of enlightenment are concepts of freedom, pursuit of universal truth etc.
long years of survival that produce a man as ‘aged’, who is considered as a man of authority in economy, knowledge, technology and skills becomes irrelevant.

In the new ideal of community, different communities have begun to open themselves to other communities and more inclusive communities have been created. It propagates emphasis to national development with fast economic growth. Modernity is thus the consequence of process of modernization, by which the social world comes under the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of the various spheres of the life world, the bureaucratization of economic, political and military practices, and the growing monetarization of values. Modernity with this kind of scientific, technological and revolutionizing force allows the operation of power through institutional arrangements. Thus, modernity is the enlightenment, which allows philosophical project of developing the spheres of science, morality and law, and art in accordance with their respective inner logics in order to achieve a ‘rational organization of every day social life’.

Here, the old who need care and assistance by the younger generation will be in trouble. Similarly, the advancement of science and technology may

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reduce the importance of the old. The knowledge that embodied in the old through the long years of survival and experiences is not considering as a big matter. In the present day context the knowledge is not confined among the aged only, but with anyone. One who seeks can attain it. The accumulation of capital/knowledge is considered as an individual’s right that provide him power. So the power is with the individual who seeks it, whether he is young or old. This thought is able to produce a different concept about old age, to a certain extent, the aged get devalued.

Modernity arose with the spread of imperialism in the sixteenth century in Europe\(^8\) and reached India through the European traders. The contact with the West brought the new thought, learning, and culture called ‘renaissance’\(^9\) to India. In Lawrence E. Cahoone’s words, through colonialism, trade, and the export of ideology, the modern West has injected components of its own civilization into the indigenous cultures of non-Western societies.\(^10\) Similarly, the French Revolution brought out many structural changes. It changed the whole social, economic and political life of the people. Money became the new measure of wealth in place of land as in the feudal era. The social change accelerated in the West


\(^9\) It was the influence of Industrial Revolution and French Revolution which upheld the ideas of ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ that brought the great fundamental transformation of ideas and institutions in the West. The Industrial Revolution led to a gradual change in the social structure of the feudal society by transforming it first into a mercantile society and later into an industrial-liberal society Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origin of our Time* as cited in Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of..., Op. cit.*, p. 123

through the important features of Renaissance-- rational thinking, spirit of inquiry and scientific temper about humanity and the universe-- reached the local people in Kerala. The changed (new) conceptions of old age can be considered as the by-product of modernity (Renaissance), the result of new framework of idea about man, society and nature. In the West, it is the consequence of modernization. So the study investigates the impact of modernization on the society of Kerala in order to know whether they caused any change in the traditional conception of old age.

The process of modernization brought about many changes in culture and social structure of Indian society. According to Yogendra Singh, the emergence of politically active urban middle class, breakdown in the feudal structure, liberation of peasantry from the feudal-military domination, decline in the credibility of church, transformation of feudal--patrimonial system of power into liberal democratic form, were the major forms of changes brought about by modernization of India. It implies changes in a whole system of relationships. He divided the structural changes into two: macro structural changes and micro structural changes. Macro structural changes are industrialisation, organisation, politicisation, while micro structural changes are changes in caste, family, village, community etc. But the changes that take place in the micro structures, for instance, in family, can be analysed in two frame works: first as a spread

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effect of transformation in the society like industrialization, second as a consequence of endogenous forces of change. That means the changes in the macro level must have influence upon the micro level too. For example, traditional joint family not only functioned as an agency of security for the old, widowed, disabled and of procreation and socialization for new members, but also performed as agency for occupation, education, leisure, recreation etc. The nuclear families evolved during the rapid modernisation and industrialisation have reorganised all these functions. Similarly, this study looks into the structural changes of Kerala through micro and macro level analysis. The major areas of macro changes are political, economic and social, and the micro changes are in the field of education, family, religion etc. All these may contribute to the changed conceptions of old age in modern Kerala.

**Political Changes and the Conception of Old Age**

Jack Goody has observed that “Politics is an area, even in industrial societies, where old age is rarely an impediment to office. In the Western world, political leaders are often active after others have retired, and the same is true in non-industrial societies”\(^{13}\). This statement can be true to a certain extent in the case of Kerala. For example, the former chief minister K.Karunakaran is politically active at the age of eighty six, while many others

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of the same age are retired and inactive. But it does not give the meaning that ‘old age’ is the major determinant that provide political power to an elderly like the traditional society. In traditional societies, political power rests in a council of old men who, by virtue of their purported wisdom, serve as community decision makers and arbiters of disputes. Such societies often operated on an age-grade principle, where the old is ornamented with certain ‘given’ powers. But the political changes occurred through the process of modernization will not provide such ‘given’ powers to anyone for simply being old. This section explains the political changes happened to the society of Kerala in modern era and its impacts on the social conception of old age.

The last phase of the pre-modern era witnessed the rigidity in caste system, feudal system, and arrival of the Portuguese. The Portuguese arrival could not succeed in inducing major socio-political changes in Kerala\textsuperscript{14}, except bringing the local Christians outside the ritualistic space of the developing Hindu religion. They were not able to penetrate deeply, or were

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\textsuperscript{14} Their major interest was to bring the local Christians outside the ritualistic space of the developing Hindu religion and under Roman Catholic religious hierarchy imposed through a series of Decrees called the Synod of Diamper in 1599 dictating Western socio-religious terms of Christian existence. By 1600 A.D. the Malabar Church is brought under the Roman domination, but a section of Syrian Christians could not accept it. They put a strong resistance and took an oath (\textit{Kunan Kurisu Satyam}), neither to follow the Decrees nor to obey the ecclesiastical authorities of Rome. \textit{Kunan Kurisu} Satyam which divided the Syrian Christians into two; one recognising the papal sovereignty in Rome and the other recognising the authority of Patriarch of Antioch and consecrated Marthoma I Metropolitan in 1665 as their Bishop. This led to the division of the Malabar Christians into Syrian Catholics and Jacobites. Rajan Gurukkal, “Development Experience of colonial Keralam” in M.A. Oommen, ed. \textit{Rethinking Development- Kerala’s Development Experience- 1} New Delhi, Institute of Social Sciences, 1999, pp. 80-81.

able to induce a cleavage in the strong hold of caste based social system, but their attempt came to a halt by the arrival of the Dutch. But caste system with its hierarchy based on hereditary rights still continued. Marthanda Varma (1729–1758), initiated the monarchic feudal system in Kerala. He helped in the formation of Travancore as a centralised Hindu monarchy. The Brahmin supremacy still continued, but made certain restrictions like, the monopoly of the trade was controlled by the State, introduced a number of reforms into administration—organized a new public service based on efficiency and loyal service so as to prevent the monopoly of certain families, a regular survey of the land was undertaken, etc. He expanded the political border by conquering the neighbouring chieftains, retained the political and jurisdictional power over the land he invaded and employed a Flemish officer. The regiments were increased in number, better discipline was enforced, superior arms were supplied and a better sense of loyalty and

Rajas were mere puppets in the hands of certain Brahmins and petty chieftains. The emergence of Swaroopangal (small feudal units) were the characteristic feature of the period. The laws known as Kachams (customs) for the temple centred administration, the extensive power to Kovil Adhikarikal (temple authority), economy with purely religious feudal character, and the constitution of Brahmin ooralasabha (temple committee) were other the prevailing characteristics of Kerala between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. William Logan, Malabar Manual, vol1…, Op.cit., p. 350.
obedience was infused among the rank and file.\textsuperscript{20} He proclaimed that the land except that which belonged to Brahmins and temples were the property of the State. The Nairs who were the protective force once became the salaried, disciplined and uniformed employee. This organized army and the tax collectors were to strengthen the centralised administration of the State. The religion and the monarchy were thus fused together in maintaining caste system during the time.\textsuperscript{21} All these show the influence of the religion on the political matters.\textsuperscript{22} The Brahmin monopoly still continued to a certain extent and their elders must have enjoyed their political power even to the very last of pre-modern period. But the public service based on efficiency, better discipline to the regiments, uniformity and discipline in employment (like tax collection), State’s interference in the trade etc. started to loosen the monopoly of the elder (among different communities) to the political affairs.

\textsuperscript{21} To introduce these radical changes, Marthanda Varma needed to establish his authority on a more rigid basis, Koji Kawashima commented. He dedicated the state to Sri Padmanabha, the tutelary deity of his family, and became the greatest servant of sovereign deity\textsuperscript{21} and more or less adopted a divine kingship theory. The rituals observed by Marthandavarma, \textit{hiranyagarbham} (ceremony of re-birth), \textit{mahadanams}(great donations), \textit{tulapurusadanam} (weighing the body) were all reaffirming the ritualistic importance of caste system and to promote the dignity of rulers .


\textsuperscript{22} In Marthanda Varma’s period, ‘charity’ meant to provide alms, food and other comforts to the Brahmins. The management of \textit{Uttupuras} and the construction of several new \textit{Uttupuras} by the Maharaja was another feature of the time. These were to feed the Brahmin travellers.

The feudal polity had its role in a political disharmony which played a major part to the invasion of the Mysoreans first and then the British to Kerala. Marthanda Varma entered into a pact with East India Company in 1723 to suppress the insurgence of the Nairs and to resist the attack of Hyder Ali and later Tipu sultan, the rulers of the Mysore Kingdom. These agreements paved the way for British interference in the internal administration of Travancore in the nineteenth century. It was through the office of the residency that the British involved themselves with the political affairs of the country. Among the residents, Col. Munro had an intensified role as he introduced new administrative system. The reforms introduced by him initiated far reaching changes on the political formation of modern Kerala. He remodelled the administrative system largely on the British style of ‘secretarial system’ and was successful in bringing order and regularity in the administration. Slowly, the British residents started to introduce restrictions to diminish the influence of

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23 The British helped the Malabar rulers to fight against the invasion of Tipu, they could bring supremacy all over Malabar at the withdrawal of Tipu. Their major contributions to the administration of Malabar were: declared freedom of trade except pepper, introduced the collection of revenue even from the rulers, and settled the allowances of Raja etc.

24 A British resident was appointed for the states of Cochin and Travancore from 1800 onwards and appointed Col. Macaulay as the first resident.

25 He was the resident during the period of Gouri Lakshmi Bhai (1811-1815) and Gouri Parvathi Bhai (1815-1829). When he took charge the administration was in a chaotic state. The central power was weak and the subordinates were corrupt, as was reported by Col. Munro Report to Madras Government dated 7th march 1818 cited in Nagam Aiya, Vol.I, Travancore State Manual…, Op.cit., p. 461

temples and likewise the political domination of Nambudiris.\(^\text{27}\) Since then, the expenditure, establishment and the routine of ceremonies, and rules for management were settled by the Travancore Government.\(^\text{28}\) The kāriakār (mostly the elders) were deprived of their judicial and magisterial functions and were reduced to the mere collectors of revenue.\(^\text{29}\) The accountant Reddy Row was asked to organise an account department for the State and secured substantial savings to the State. Abolition of several taxes [for which the Brahmins and Nairs were already exempted], such as the tax on the inheritance of property, taxes on Christian festivals, some vexatious taxes imposed on ‘lower caste’ people etc. paved the way to equality of all the subjects irrespective of their birth came into practice. The British demanded a reduction in the expenditure of temple, a starting point to the separation of religion from State. More specifically, it was an initiation to the British domination over the Nambudiri domination. The result is the creation of major political changes based on the principle of humanity and justice where the Brahmins, Kṣaṭriyās and Nairs lost their special power and privilege and likewise the authority of their elderly. Gradually the British interventions shook the Brahmin supremacy and their elders’ role as

\(^{27}\) For instance, Colonel John Munro, the resident of 1811, assumed control of landed property of 378 temples and also took over 1171 minor temples which had no property Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu*..., *Op.cit.*, p. 24.


\(^{29}\) Pepper, Tobacco and Salt were made government monopolies and their sale was regulated by measures beneficial to the people Nagam Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, vol.I, ..., *Op.cit.*, p. 463-464.
authority in the politics of the state. The rise of a number of well wishers like Sankaracharya, made remarkable contribution to the development of ‘bhakti movement’\(^{30}\), which made a religious stir among the people. After the ‘bhakti movement’, some social/political reformations could take place at the time of Mysorean invasion. They took effort to regulate the system of administration and social reforms. The most important among them was the disappearance of feudal system of administration and its replacement by centralised system of Government. The establishment of a clear and definite scale of pension to dependent chiefs and \textit{sir}kar servants is also remarkable change to the political conditions of Kerala\(^{31}\). Otherwise, the Brahmin elders were protected by the temple as they were provided food and other protective measures in their old age from the temple. The \textit{ūṭṭupurās} and \textit{dharmaśālās} were the institutions that provided care to the Brahmin elders who enter into the stage of \textit{vānapṛasta} and \textit{sanyāsa}. By the above reforms these protections were restricted.

In caste society, it was the monopoly of the higher caste elders to punish the guilty and to keep as many as slaves they wanted. Munro

\(^{30}\) A religious stir made possible by the act of certain leaders to fight against the ruin practices like enmity between the rulers, and the use of artillery and weapons for own victory. The Bhakti movement emphasises the doctrine of \textit{Bhakti} as the means of salvation.

\(^{31}\) The administration of \textit{Dewaswom} was reorganised, under the direct control of \textit{sir}kar, giving allowances for the performances of religious duties and the supplies for the institutions were brought from the people, giving adequate prices, rather than arbitrary extractions. New rules were framed for the management of these institutions (destroying Brahmin hegemony), paving the way for secularism.
established civil courts with distinct procedures, and banned the purchase and sale of slaves through Royal proclamation in 1812, though the total abolition of slavery was enforced in 1855. The eradication of uncivilised punishments with the imposition of Indian penal code was a major outcome to the oppressed and downtrodden. This act could facilitate bringing the guilty person to justice irrespective of caste. For the proper administration of justice, the Court of Appeal and five jilla courts were established for the trial of offenders and for adjudicating on civil claims. The jilla courts had two judges each and a śāstrī. The officers were all selected from among the most respectable Nairs, Brahmins and Christians. Col. Munro, a devout evangelical Christian, gave equal importance to humanity and justice as that of diffusion of Christianity, aimed at the religious, social and political renovation of the traditional Christians. He devised plans for their upliftment, in a period before the awakening of a social conscience in Kerala. The first step he took was to free them from the disabilities by the innovations in the administrations. He also tried to improve their status by constituting new laws to appoint them in sirkār services especially as judges. He also provided proper

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32 The Revenue department was restructured under the Tahsildar in each district with an account or Samprati and a number of Provertikars under him, his duties being confined to the collection of land revenues. Nagam Aiya, Travancore, vol I,..., Op cit., p.462.
33 Ibid. pp. 461-462.
leadership by strengthening the institutional structure of the Syrians. He organized two battalions of Nair sepōys and one company of cavalry as bodyguard and escort to Royalty.  

Srinivas says, British rule can be considered as the one which laid ‘the foundation of a modern state’ and bringing radical and lasting changes in Indian politics and through which the humanitarianism, equalitarianism and secularism are introduced. It resulted in the religious beliefs and social customs of traditional culture to progress towards ‘reason and humanity’ at both ideological and institutional levels. The British ideology was marked by the humanisation of western renaissance and was motivated with colonialism of imperial capitalism. The new ethics emphasised equality and state protection to all irrespective of caste, creed or region to which the person belonged. These reforms created a new consciousness with regard to justice in public life. The new concept of equality fermented momentum in all aspects of social and political life. Thus, the dawn of nineteenth century arrived with the political, economic and social changes in the history of social progress in Kerala. The practice of appointing a British resident became irrelevant during the so called ‘Rao period’ in the history of Travancore from 1817 to 1872. Those born and brought up in the

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State lost their chance to advise, guide and direct the policy of the rulers.\textsuperscript{38} The need of the political integration of India was also on the rise. The spread of Western education sharpened the vision and shaped the political ideas of the people here.\textsuperscript{39} The last quarter of nineteenth century marked the beginning of an epoch of remarkable intellectual progress, which synchronised with the rapid spread of English education provided by the Missionaries initially and by the Government agencies later. The impact of western civilization brought a broad social and political outlook among the people who became independent in spirit and critical in attitude.\textsuperscript{40} Education aroused the civic consciousness among the younger generation and resulted in the social and political awakening among them. This made people aware of caste inequalities more and the struggle for the recognition of equality started. By the early decades of twentieth century the organised form of resistance in the social and political level gained momentum and the situation surrounding the ideology of a Hindu State got changed. The political awakening of various castes was the reason behind this change. The co-existence of different religions was the specific feature of premodern Travancore. The divān of the time, V.P. Madhava Rao at the first meeting of Sri Mūlam Popular Assembly in 1904 stated that ‘equality of treatment to all religions’ was one of the principal features of


\textsuperscript{39} idem.

\textsuperscript{40} idem.
Travancore State. In 1922, the *devaswom* department got separated from the revenue department after long and repeated protests from the Syrian Christians and the *avaṇṇa* caste. The political awakening of various Hindu castes and the non-Hindus led to the creation and development of the Legislative council and the *Sri Mūlam* Popular Assembly, the state became more secular. In 1932, another reformed assembly came into effect. But that also did not evoke a positive response from the general public, except the Savarnas. The deprived communities started to represent their case through memorandums and deputations to improve their position in the assembly. In effect, All Travancore Ezhava political League (for Ezhavas), Wajānathul Muḥammadiya Association (for Muslims), Travancore Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha, The Travancore State Catholic Congress (for Christians) emerged in the year 1932 demanding reservation of seats on numerical basis.

Then, by the joint effort of three communities (Christian, Ezhava and Muslim), All Travancore Joint Political Congress established in  

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43 Also, the ‘model state’ could not satisfy the population by giving Government posts irrespective of their communal barriers. The Christians, Ezhavas and others realized that the franchise was constituted on ‘feudal theory’, for the land owners or high caste Hindus. George Mathew, *Communal Road to a Secular Kerala*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1989, p. 88.
December 1932 formed the first step towards the formation of a civil society, says, Louis Ouwerkirk, against the unquestioned political dominance of the Nairs\textsuperscript{45}. The petition submitted requested for fair representation of all communities but resulted in the ‘abstention movement’. This movement was in fact the starting point of major political change breaking the supremacy of high caste Hindus in the Government. Later the Joint Political congress changed its name to State National Congress, eventually becoming instrumental in bringing democracy in Travancore. By this time Indian National Congress also became active in Travancore. Agitation against divān C.P.Ramaswamy’s attempt to ‘independent Travancore’ also accelerated during this time. The state congress Committee at a meeting held on 20 July 1947 demanded the immediate dismissal of the divān, the introduction of responsible Government to be set up, a popularly elected constituent assembly to frame the constitution of Travancore. The State Government appealed to all communities to take part in the fight to remove the despotic Government and misrule, with special emphasis to stick on to non-violence and received the support of Travancore Students Congress, the State Muslim League, the Kerala Catholic Congress etc till the royal proclamation of granting full

responsible government\textsuperscript{46}. The elections on the representative body, the first democratic election to the constituent assembly based on adult franchise were held on 4 February, 1948, and Travancore State Congress won with a huge majority. Pattom Thanu pillai was elected leader and T.M.Varghese his deputy. The assembly was converted into legislative assembly by a proclamation of the king. The palace, the royal family and the Dewaswom were excluded from the jurisdiction of assembly. An interim Government was formed with Pattom (Nair) as Chief Minister and Varghese (Christian Marthomite) and Kesavan (an Ezhava rationalist and sympathetic to Marxism) were the members of Cabinet. They struggled for responsible government through the medium of communal representation.\textsuperscript{47} Travancore was the first state in the Indian History to have a responsible civil Government and the first to introduce universal suffrage. In 1956, Travancore-Cochin and Malabar merged together to form the state of Kerala by the joint effort of intellectual elites of various communities who were rationalists in thoughts and deeds. It revealed that small groups of Congress men were able to exert ceaseless pressure on the Government and to attain proper share in administration and educational facilities. Thus, in the twentieth century political power situation reached the hands of the common man (adult franchise) and affirmed status irrespective of

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, p.269.

\textsuperscript{47} George Mathew, Communal Road..., Op.cit., p. 121.
communal barriers. The political power rests in the hands of citizens irrespective of age, sex, caste or class.

The middle of the twentieth century the educated youths became politically active. The agitations and struggles led by the youth gave way to the formation of civil society, which demanded progressive association with the administration of the State. The systematic political participation of almost all the communities is reported: “each caste wanted a separate unit of the body politics so that its interest may not suffer from want of advocacy, natural instinct for self preservation and self advancement and collective forms”. The participation of the dynamic youth in the political democracy and national independence irrespective of caste restrictions were a major change in the political situation of Kerala during the time. In such political settings, progress are extolled with the political awareness and assertion of individual rights of the young people. The power and authority of the elderly became irrelevant. A sense of secularism has developed through the long-drawn struggle for responsible government. It created an atmosphere where the people of different communities could work together and live together irrespective of their communal identities. No special privilege or status for the Nambudiri or their elderly was accorded. The authority is embedded with the politically reformed adult and not reserved for any hierarchically determined ‘elder’. The

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transformation of feudal-patrimonial system of power into liberal democratic form led to the decline of authority of the elderly belonging to the high castes. The break up of feudal polity also was not favourable to the elderly group who owned most of the land. The changes induced by the reforms, social, political, and judicial by Col. Munro gave more opportunities to the upliftment of other communities, instead of Nambudiri Brahmins. The kāriakārs (mainly the Nair elders), were the principal administrative officers who exercised several functions, fiscal, magisterial, judicial, and military, carried much prestige in caste society. Their salary was the authorised extractions from the people and this gave them added power. When the revenue, Dewaswom judiciary and military department were formed, salaried employees were appointed and thus the symbolic power of the Nairs got reduced. Moreover, persons from other communities, especially the Syrian Christians who got appointment as judges became important.

The leadership and the power came into the hands of educated youth whose initiation to the political organisations and fight for the equality of opportunities replaced the symbolic power of the old. Here, the individual became important irrespective of caste label or age considerations. Democracy is the characteristic of political life in modern state. It enhances the most important positive revolutionary aspect of modernisation, the discovery of individual person with his/her fundamental rights of non-
conformity. But the power is depending on the strength of the individual. So in the modern world, wisdom and accumulated experience of old may be seen as signs of obsolescence and so disqualify rather qualify them to lead. Ageism is appearing to have been strengthened by transitions associated with globalisation.

**Economic Changes and the Conception of Old Age**

Sheehan has stated that the esteem for the aged has certain correlation with socio-economic structure of the society. The reasons for low esteem are “they have the fewest material resources and human relationships available for control and usually located in harsh environments favouring youth and vigour”. Decline in status of the aged is often observed in societies involved in modernization. Kerala is example for such a society in which the radical changes of modernization affect the socio-economic structure, which in turn result in the lower status for the aged. The highest esteem for elders was enjoyed among the landed peasantries. This was true in the case of Kerala on its traditional socio-economic condition where the economy was organized around agriculture. But the changes accompanied with modernization that equated with industrialization, urbanization and westernization affected the fortunes and

activities of the elderly in Kerala too. This section seeks the major economic changes that happened in the society of Kerala and its impacts on the social conception of old age.

Agricultural production was the major means of economy in the pre-modern society. It is believed that the Brahmans were the one who introduced the organized way of cultivation here. The land held by them as brahmasvom was a privilege of their birth. The hierarchy of land rights had the landlords at the top, tenants or kudiyārs under them, and at the bottom of the ladder, were a large mass of kudiyār, who did substantial part of labour on land\textsuperscript{51}. Thus, the caste system that offered birth right on lands to the Brahmans offered economic independence to their elderly especially. The geographic and climatic conditions of Kerala also played a major role in this type of economy based on agriculture. But the change from the caste society to the modern society is associated with radical changes in the agrarian field.

Cultivation of food grain, especially paddy, was the major feature of agrarian society, and was utilised mainly for the subsistence of the population as well as for the upkeep of the temples, Brahmans, and territorial chiefs.\textsuperscript{52} But the interest of kings and nāduvazhis to encourage


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. 127.
trade with foreigners played a major role in the introduction of cash crops in Kerala. The trade with European countries encouraged the production of crops and other export items as it was realized that the expansion of land for cultivation would increase the overall income of their kingdom. Many cash crops such as cashew nut, pineapple, potato, and banana were brought to this land. This new form of expansion was assisted by rulers of eighteenth century particularly as they realised that the expansion of land for crop cultivation would increase the overall income of their kingdom.

Increase in overseas trade under the influence of Arabs and Europeans facilitated the process of cultivation of large areas of land for cash crops and for spices and pepper as per its increased demand. So the economic historians did classify the period as a phase of transition from feudalism to capitalism, which advanced the forces of production. The change from feudalism affected the monopoly of the Brahmin elderly as they were experts in the paddy cultivation and in the knowledge of the weather conditions of Kerala.

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53 Among the rulers, the Marthanda Varma, who ascended the throne of Tiruvitamkur in 1729, has realized the fact well and played a vital role to make major changes to the land system of his kingdom, so as to improve trade and commerce. Among the cash crops, pepper was the most important and Malabar was known to foreigners as the pepper country. Coconut and areca nut also became important items for sale and export by sixteenth century. Teak, rosewood, cine etc were in great demand from foreign countries, for making ships, boats etc


The garden land cultivation offered job opportunities to the illiterate youth as well as to the educated ones irrespective of caste discrimination. The educated youth (mainly Syrian Christians and Nairs) were appointed as clerks, supervisors, tea makers etc. during the colonial times. In commercial economy, the system works on the principle that the one who produces more can accumulate more wealth. So it encourages individual effort. Each individual may have his own unit of economic distribution from his accumulation; the community which he considers as external from his own unit may not possess any consideration. Then, the security of the old that was supposed to be provided by the community underwent a change. At the time of old age due to degenerating health, an individual may not be in a physical condition to work hard, which affects productivity and thereby his position.

Introduction of land reforms, policy and revenue were the other major changes occurred during the eighteenth century in Kerala. Since the time British residents started residing here and were involved in the administration of the region, the extraction of revenue, mainly land revenue, became the major thrust. This development has prevented many janmis from holding of unlimited areas. It was the main onslaught against the feudal exploitation of Indian peasantry. The British authority interpreted the “janmam” rights as equivalent to absolute ownership rights and gave legal sanction to landlords to extract a larger share of produce
through forcible expropriation from peasantry. The janmis, who were the custodians of law and order in traditional society, were now made to act as intermediaries in the collection of revenue from the producers of surplus. Thus, the imposition of enhanced claims to the produce of the land eventually turned out to be a powerful destabilising factor in the functioning of traditional society. The decline of traditional feudal society and the decline of military and political power of chieftains reduced the janmam right of Nambudiris and likewise their elders. Since majority of the landlords belonged to the elder category, the introduction of land revenue system can be considered as a major threat to the elderly. But it did not affect the elderly of Muslim community as those in the other communities. The reason is they did not hold land on a substantial scale under sirkār patṭom or other tenures in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The opening up of the economy for investment and trade of the period had also improved the prospects of Muslims who were active in trade.

The land revenue became the most important source of governmental income. Plantation agriculture and leases for plantation were also introduced during this period as direct colonial interest behind the policy for favouring plantations. Tiruvitamkur area (Travancore) developed

56 Ibid, p. 368.
more as the land suited in terms of soil conditions, elevation etc and was suitable for cultivation of plantation crops. But not only plantation crops, but non-plantation commercial crops on commercial scale were also encouraged. By the end of nineteenth century, a significant group of peasant proprietors emerged as the result of ‘pro-tenant’ land policy of Tiruvitamkur. This policy provided freedom of land development and choice of crops for the peasant proprietors and helped to expand commercial crops. The coconut cultivation spread rapidly in coastal plains while spices and plantation crops expanded in midlands and high ranges. Tea plantations, initially its principal form of ownership was proprietary, were later taken over by public limited companies as tea-growing required larger work-force, and thus the technological intervention helped substitute labour. Thus, the introductions of land revenue, land policies that provide freedom to the selection of crops for cultivation etc, decreased the monopoly of Brahmin elders who faced problems for holding on to large acres of lands.

The eighteenth century documents show that the Christian and Muslim communities were becoming landholders of various kinds, for example, the acquisition of land by the Christian churches, Christian and

Muslims of Malabar as tenants etc.\textsuperscript{60} In 1818, a Government Regulation encouraging conversion of waste land into agricultural land opened up the possibility of Syrian Christians and Ezhavas acquiring siṟkāṟ land on lease for cultivation which was impossible earlier, as distribution of land was largely governed by the dictates of the traditional caste structure.\textsuperscript{61} In caste society, ownership of land was the exclusive right of Brahmins by their birth or \textit{jannam}. This erosion happened as the result of two processes: transformation of communities into tenants, and the spread of cash crop cultivation encouraged the other communities to concentrate on agriculture.\textsuperscript{62} These processes have shaken the absolute ownership rights of Brahmins and likewise their elders. For example, the \textit{Janmi-Kudiyān} Act gave permanent occupancy rights to tenants on \textit{jannam} land as well.\textsuperscript{63} In all, the introduction of policies like, Madras Act, 1887, The \textit{Janmi-Kudiyān} Act, 1896, Malabar Act, 1930 have provided some restrictions on the power of \textit{Janmis}. The Syrian Christians who had considerable share of siṟkāṟ tenancies could exploit the opportunities for developing commercial cultivation inherent in these reforms, based on the advantages patriarchal family organisation and earlier trading traditions.\textsuperscript{64} This shift to superior tenancies on private \textit{jannam} land

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with patriarchal equal claim of every adult to his father’s property provided
incentive to the individual initiative. Further, it helped to shift the influence of
the *janmam* right of Brahmin elderly to the Syrian adults. Other communities
also started to accumulate sufficient capital through land holdings and
commerce. The report of a major research by the UGC revealed that the
Syrian Christians became a powerful community in Travancore in later years.
They were able to acquire land which became available in the market. They
acquired the landed properties that were being alienated by the *janmam*
holders and private landholders.  

The existence of caste society was mainly on the basis of its
occupational structure. The caste identity shaped by the division of labour.
Each caste was associated with an occupation that was inherited
intergenerationally. But the changes in the economic condition have
brought forth a class society. The gradual erosion of caste based
occupational system also affected the elderly. For example, among potters
their elders were the authority in pottery making. The introduction of the
machinery to make vessels and jewellery alienated the ‘guilds’ as well as
their elderly. In caste society, the caste name or the father’s name typically
gives information on who they are and what status they occupy in the
society. In modern society, father’s (elder’s) occupation may not influence
and help in determining the status of the son. Easy way of handling the

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machinery attracted the younger generation. The elder people with their traditional techniques were becoming less in demand in the modern situation. As the Industrial Revolution spread, the peasants and other traditional labours started to prefer industrial work. The benefits of industrial mass production and improved productivity\textsuperscript{66} attracted the younger generation to the industry rather than caste based occupation.

The wage system opened opportunities for labourers. The British investment was mainly in coir processing, tile manufacturing and plantations.\textsuperscript{67} In Tiruvitamkur, as early as in 1891, an Agricultural Loans Act\textsuperscript{68}, provided loans to needy agriculturists, created favourable conditions for the growth of financial and trading and also of commercial banks. Also, the establishment of a link between agriculture and industry is the latest development. For example, coconut is very significant for the agrarian economy in Kerala. At the same time the rise in demand for coconut oil and coir products increases the importance of variety of processing industries. So by the nineteenth century peasant proprietors emerged, in place of \textit{janmam} proprietors of caste society as a consequence of expansion of commercial agriculture. It can be considered as the first phase in the transformation to commercialized agriculture and a significant feature of economy. These

\textsuperscript{66} Egbert, de Vires, \textit{Man in Rapid Social Change}, Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, INC., 1961, p. 27
changes attracted many to the commercialized agriculture and industry. “The Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of a series of advances in technology and a rise in per capita output rapid enough so that marked changes occurred within each generation and indeed during each decade”⁶⁹. An active land market also developed during this time.

The commercialisation of agrarian economy has attracted the low caste by providing job opportunities in plantation industries. Thousands of them became salaried employees, where as earlier the work force was mainly occupied in coolie work. Many of them were engaged in works like the construction of roads, railways, buildings etc. and became the beneficiaries of wage labour system. The disciplined work style and the regular salaries attracted the younger generation more than the unorganised and uncertain returns of traditional occupations. This reduces the tendency of following the traditional occupation in which the elderly are authority. This situation consequently affects the role of the elderly and they became less privileged. Also, in commercialised economy, one who produces and works more can accumulate more money. This encourages individual effort, and individual could save without sharing it with the community. As a consequence, the community support that was traditionally given to the old, aged and the infirm. At the time of old age due to the ill health, an individual may not be in

a physical condition to work hard, and the security that was supposed to be provided by the community declined considerably.

The processing industries and the plantation cultivation could employ large sections of the rural population and provided fresh economic job opportunities. So large groups of rural population started to move to the industrial centres and were tempted to settle down there. This triggered the process of urbanisation and the emergence of a new group called ‘sālariat’ in terms of Hamza Alavi and John Hams, which means, salaried class. Growth of cities and urbanisation due to industrialisation irrespective of caste considerations began to take place in India only after its contact with the West. Industrialisation and urbanisation give less chance to the old who are physically unfit to work hard and earn money. The advent of industrialisation affected the elderly because the old were unable to adapt to the new economic processes. For many old people, who got left behind in the villages, industrialisation disrupted family ties.

70 Urbanization is the product of Industrial revolution, with modern facilities of health and sanitation, a rational structure of public utility services, stable security and modern firms and industries. In traditional India, urbanization was considered as a mark of social prestige and upward social mobility. So the intention behind urbanization was to seek better life with modern facilities. But it does affect man in his basic relation between people and nature. But one of the major features of such employments is its specific demarcation of culminating time, through which one has to retire from the employment. Yogendra Singh, Modernization of Indian..., Op.cit., p. 157


In premodern society, savaŗņa castes had dominated by appropriating the agricultural surplus produced by the avarṇa castes who had remained marginalised as a result. But the diversified occupational structure emerged through the economic interventions benefited the intermediate groups more than the savaŗṇa castes. Here too, education played its role as an agent of transformation. In K.N.Panikkar’s opinion, Nairs were the first to accept Western education, which gave them advantage over others in Government employment. Tamil Brahmins also entered into administration by the same route. By the end of the nineteenth century, both these groups virtually shared the bureaucratic and administrative positions. As an impact of malayāḷi Memorial in 1891, other castes like Christians, Ezhavas also got representation in Government services. Role of Christian Missionaries in education created a middle class of Christians, Muslims and Ezhavas. The educated class then clamoured for government employment and better living conditions, and thus emerged as ‘middle class’ or salaried class who had little dependence of agricultural economy. In the emerging system, the Brahmins were the last to benefit, due to their reluctance to take to modern education and secular advancement, Damodaran Namboodiri says. They held on to their traditional way of life. This attitude towards modern occupation lessened their economic security and also their dominance in the society.

73 K.N.Panikkar, Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921, Delhi, OUP, 1989, p. 79.
75 Ibid. p. 443.
Hence, the land reforms, plantation agriculture, industrial progress, emergence of middle class, urbanization and mechanized way of production are the major economic changes that happened in Kerala society in its forward march to growth and development. But it led to a particular situation of achievement-oriented workforce of individuals who are highly materialistic in their economic values pushing the inactive and non-productive old to a low esteem. In Simmon’s words, many societies refer to the aged as ‘living liabilities’.  

Social Changes and the Conception of Old Age

Society is made up of individuals where each individual has his own skills, values, attributes and roles to perform to become a fully participating member of the society. In a modern society, an individual who is in his old age may suffer the loss of crucial social roles. Ageing is no doubt, a physical deterioration. But more than that, it is social changes that provide fewer roles to the elderly by reducing them to a state of dependence. Johnson and Williamson said, it is social expectations and cultural values that label an individual as ‘young’ or ‘aged’ today. Since the study is about the Kerala society, the trajectory of social change and its impact on the conception of old age are described in this section.

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The social change of Kerala can be identified as reformative, reactionary and radical. In Damodaran Namboodiri’s words, these reform movements enveloped the domestic, socio-cultural and religious spaces thus releasing at first the modern educated sections from the traditional ties like caste. Religion, education and family played major role to bring about social changes in traditional Kerala society. And it was the modern educated youth who broke away from tradition first. It is a change from the caste society to a secular society with civic sense and reformed sensibility. For Chandra Mohan, it is the upper caste Hindus and the Christians who got mainly affected by this; no community was outside the purview of these changes. However, the social changes of Kerala are accelerated mainly through the religious reforms, modern education and the break up of joint family structure.

**Religious Reforms and the Conception of Old Age**

Religious leadership was more likely to play a role for the care of the aged in preindustrial than in modern societies. It is a general trend that people turn more to religion as they reach the end of their lives. Religion advises the young to have filial piety to the aged, whether the society is modern or traditional. But the correlation between religion and

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the aged is such that it offers certain role to the aged even in its modernized form. For example, the Bible says, “Honour thy father and mother that thy days may be long”. The reforms that entered through religion did a lot for the social transformations. It created a different outlook about religion itself. Ultimately, the religion became an institution to organize people to think rationally and to work reforms. This situation causes the birth of many organizations, with separate religious titles, but the aim was to enhance human concern and societal reformations. The religion started to work in a better way with humanitarian concern and organized many facilities to accommodate the poor and weaker sections of the society. Hence, the reformed version of religion too offers certain space to the aged as they belong to the weaker section of the society. This part explains the various religious reforms of Kerala and its impact on the conception of old age.

The caste system of Kerala offered religious hegemony to the Brahmins, especially to their elders where the religious beliefs and social practices were closely linked. Superstitions, rituals, priesthood and polytheism were the religious practices of the upper strata while the lower strata were beset with magic, sorcery, witchcraft and demon worship. In both the strata, the elderly were being respected by the society due to their respective religious cohesions. The Brahmins had the right of consecration, ritual interpretations and religious teachings. Their monopoly
in vēdic-śāstrāic-purānic cosmology and the religious knowledge never allowed filtering down these rights to the lower strata of the society. The lower castes were not allowed to enter temples where the Brahmins conducted worship. The social practices like untouchability, and unapproachability were in vogue. Religion and state were not separated in those days. The religious head was generally considered as the leader of the whole society. Generally the heads were selected from the elder group. But the emergence of a new epistemic order that would enable the construction of new identities for the communities changed the situation and hence the role of the upper caste elderly on the religious affairs. To some extent ‘bhakti prastānam (movement)’ was instrumental to bring out the changes(reforms) within the Hindu religion. Under the leadership of Tunchat Ezhuthachan, it resisted the caste and varṇa system and challenged the Brahmin hierarchy and scriptural authority. It emphasised that all are equal before God and relinquished the sanctity of Sanskrit by the translation of Rāmāyaṇa and other epics into Malayalam. The reformation in religion had a major role in creating a stir in this caste rigid society.

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81 The orientalists and missionaries of eighteenth century have made out the statement that “the religious ideas and practices underlay all social structure”, they agreed “in the primacy of the Brahmin as the maintainer of the sacred tradition, through his control of the knowledge of the sacred texts” They worshipped totems, demons and deities with the offerings like fermented drinks and blood of animals. Milton Singer, and Bernard S. Cohn, Structure and Change in Indian Society ..., Op.cit., p.10.

82 Tunchat Ezhuthachan was the Reformist, Social Revolutionist, Scholar, Poet and Intellect. T.B.Vijaya Kumar, Bhashaposhini, September, 2005.
For Chandra Mohan, the initiative for social reforms in Kerala was first initiated by the Christian missionaries through the exertion of London Missionary Society, Church Mission Society, Malabar Basel Mission, Salvation Army etc. In their zeal for spreading education and abolishing slavery and forced labour as well as their fight for granting low caste women the privilege of covering their breasts, they became precursors of social reform movements in Kerala. Their work became the means to enlighten certain sections of the society by engendering the feeling of self-respect and equality. The social reform movements and the contemporary changes have influenced each other for the emergence of a new educated middle class, who favoured the introduction of contemporary Western bourgeois order. For Hamza Alavi and John Hams, with the advent of colonial rule, changes were evident in economic as well as in educational field. The caste prejudices kept the backward communities from literacy as it was limited to the upper castes. But the missionaries were the first to open their schools to educate the children of all communities. Thus, the reforms through religion could break the monopoly of the upper castes and their elders’ in social life.

The reformations led by the Protestant missionaries can be considered important landmarks to the Syrian Christian Churches of

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Kerala. The ‘Mission Help’ programmes led by Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn, and Henry Baker\textsuperscript{84} were responsible in the formation of Syrian Mar Thoma Church during the period of political turmoil of 1765–1808. Teaching the children, preaching the Gospel in the churches, educating the clergy, the establishment of printing press etc helped the people to start thinking intellectually and rationally. Translation of Bible into Malayalam by the Missionaries was also important to the reformation. The Christian schools imparted education among the masses which enabled them to develop a reformed mentality. The religion gave priority to humanitarian concern and organised many facilities to accommodate the poor and weaker sections of the society.

The reform movements in Kerala were initiated and led by the middle class under the influence of both traditional and Western ideas and the reformers were mainly from intermediate and lower caste background\textsuperscript{85}. The reformers of Kerala were of two categories as the first group believed that changes in beliefs and behaviour are to be effected through the influence of religion as the society of that time was steeped in religious superstition and social obscurantism. Thus Chattambi Svamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Theerthapada Svamikal, Sadananda Swami, Vagbhadananda and their followers held spiritual revitalisation as the basis


for the advancement of the society. For instance, the religious reformations and the struggles were undertaken by Chattambi Svamikal to eradicate the outdated customs and practices among the Nair community like *sambandham, tālikeṭṭukālyāṇam* etc. Thus, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham and Atmavidya Sangham are formed. The second group organised themselves under non-religious leadership and gained their ends through constitutional means. The movement of Nair Service Society, Sadhuparipalana Sabha and Nambutiri Yogakshema Sabha may be placed under this category. The reformers realised that no social reform movement could be effective unless Brahman ideology and hegemony was overthrown. So they started to question the Brahman supremacy in their own way: Chattambi Svamikal used his pen, while Narayana Guru appeared as a *Karma Yogi*.

Sree Narayana Guru took the battle against Brahman hegemony through his consecration of *śiva linga* at Aruvippuram in 1888. Then he forbade the worship of evil spirits and removed their images from the temple of Ezhavas. Through this action, he could challenge the supremacy held by the Brahmins of those days and at the same time, enlightened the oppressed community of Ezhavas. His initial consecration of the idol of Shiva despite his disapproval of idolatry was with a view to circumvent the

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87 Narayana Guru, the universalist social reformer, saint particular to Ezhava community, local Hindu deity or ‘avatar’ of Siva.
influence of both the elite and popular culture. His effort was mainly to establish secularism with the principle of “whatever may be the religion, people can be good.” With his influence the Ezhavas have struggled to dissociate themselves from their natural occupation—toddy tapping and to associate with the movement of temperance. Narayana Guru’s famous 1921 injunction says that, liquor being poison, Ezhavas should not make it, give it, or sell it. This advice was promulgated by ‘respectable’ Ezhavas keen for caste mobility and through SNDP campaign for alternative employment. Vagbhadananda opposed the polytheism, idolatry and all sorts of rituals and brought out a common theism that the foundation of all religions is the belief in one Supreme Being. He propagated niṣṇunōpāsana or worship without an idol. His leadership was tremendous for their awakening. He was against the Westernization, Sanskritization and Modernization but accepted the good essence of all such reformations. For instance, they have appointed Brahmins as pūjāris (priest) in Ezhava temples. The SNDP established in the year 1903 took great effort to

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establish schools, temples, and social organisations for the awakening of the community.  

Some religious stir among the Nairs also took place as a result of religious awakening that helped them to turn against the caste system in which they were placed next to the Brahmins. They could not tolerate their label as śudrās while they did the work of kṣatriyās too. At the same time, the Nairs were the first among other communities who adopted modern education introduced by the British missionaries though they were reluctant to attend the schools attached to the parishes in the beginning. Many Nairs got influenced by the ‘bhakti movement’ as it was promoted by scholars like ‘Tunchat Ezhuthachan’ who himself was a Nair, through the translation of Rāmāyana and other epics into Malayāḷam. The ‘bhakti movement’ and education was not enough to demolish the feudalism and casteism. The legal legislation in 1867 allowing the lower caste people to own land was an important landmark in the history of Travancore. The law to own land favoured the Syrian Christians and Ezhavas more, which facilitated social mobility to such communities in later centuries. Gradually the Brahmin monopoly was replaced by the middle class. In addition to Nairs, the Christians and Muslims also got honoured positions in the society. The reform movements and education made the people aware of

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92 ‘Bhakti’ as the supreme means of attaining salvation just by devotion to God, not through sacrifices or any caste originated supremacy.
their religious rights and caste disabilities which led to the conversion from one religion to the other. Many were converted to either Christianity or Islam. The religious conversion in Travancore region was mainly to Christianity\textsuperscript{93}. In George Wood Cock’s opinion, some high caste Hindus also started to convert to become Christians\textsuperscript{94}. Ezhava leaders even looked for conversion to breakaway from the bondage of the caste. They were influenced by the leadership of Ambedkar to promote the cause of liberation. These religious conversions challenged the monopoly of the upper caste elders.

The religious associations and caste associations were able to produce stir among their people which led to the formation of various organization for the upliftment of their own group. By the beginning of the twentieth century, caste associations became superseded and both the upper castes and lower castes of Hindus and non-Hindus like Christians and Muslims organised themselves to form certain reform movements like S.N.D.P yogam, N.S.S, Yogakshema Sabha\textsuperscript{95}, Sadhuparipalana Sabha, Nasrani Jathiya Sangham, Cochin Christian Association, Travancore

\textsuperscript{95} Social reformations engendered by the colonial powers and missionaries could not make any impact upon the Nambudiris as those were not in their favour and so turned away from the process of English education. But the reformations in the Ezhava community could sense them in a better way to move into the path of modernity. Thus they organised together to the formation of ‘Yogakshema Sabha’ in 1907 with the following agenda: start facilities to give English education to the Nambudiri youths, break down the joint family system and divide the properties into smaller units, permit the younger Nambudiris to marry from own caste, instead of practicing the ‘sambandham’ system, permit widows to re-marriage.
Muslim Association, Malabar Muslim Association etc. The effort made by the Palakkunnathu Abraham Malpan (1796–1845) could create a ferment among the people in the church who longed for removal of unscriptural customs and practices. He strove for the abolition of auricular confession, prayers for the dead, invocation of saints, translation of Syriac liturgy into Malayalam for worship in the mother tongue and unhealthy veneration of sacraments. Thus, the Malpan could affect reforms in Syrian church. But the religious reformation made by Abraham Malpan may be interpreted in its cultural dimension and is placed in the context of cultural awakening of Kerala. The religious reformation in respective religions caused an awakening among the people and were conducive for the development of organisations. In addition to the educational institutions, various other institutions oriented with humanitarian concern like, orphanages, destitute homes, homes for the physically and mentally handicapped emerged under the leadership of religious organisations. In turn, these religious reforms help the elderly by considering them as the weaker section of the society.

In traditional cultures the religion, culture, and society were integral each other and so any one of the region could make impact on the other fields as a whole.
The caste system with Brahmanic hegemony declined by the introduction of civil society with democratic government, but the caste organisations became prominent during this period. The census report of 1931 says that the organised form of resistance gained momentum through the social struggles. The social reform movement became the common feature of all the castes and communities. It carried a vigorous propaganda for the betterment of their social, political, economic and religious advancement. By the beginning of the twentieth century, caste associations were formed by both the upper castes and lower castes like SNDP yogam, NSS, Yogakshema Sabha\textsuperscript{98}, Sadhuparipalana Sabha, Nasrani Jathiya Sangham, Cochin Christian Association, Travancore Muslim Association, and Malabar Muslim Association etc\textsuperscript{99}. In Kabir’s words, the Muslim reform movements lacked cohesion and there was no central organisation or leadership like other communities. It is the influence of the religious solidarity, which is against the reformations\textsuperscript{100}.

\textsuperscript{98} Social reformations engendered by the colonial powers and missionaries could not make any impact upon the Nambudiris as those were not in their favour and so turned away from the process of English education. But the reformations in the Ezhava community could sense them in a better way to move into the path of modernity. Thus they organised together to the formation of ‘Yogakshema Sabha’ in 1907 with the following agenda: start facilities to give English education to the Nambudiri youths, break down the joint family system and divide the properties into smaller units, permit the younger Nambudiris to marry from own caste, instead of practicing the ‘sambandham’ system, permit widows to re-marriage.


However, in the caste organisations the notion of individual membership, instead of corporate membership of the traditional society, came into practice. Here the process of individuation protects the rights of the individual. Also, it is the transition from a caste-rigid society to the secular society. It involves a movement from the sacred ethos to the secular ethos, an element of modernity.\textsuperscript{101} The public morality is the main agenda of all the social reform movements, which emphasize egalitarian consideration than caste discrimination. It promises religious rights to all individuals irrespective of caste or religion. Similarly, the civic rights offer rights to the individual membership in organisations as per one’s merit rather than birthright. It encourages youth to involve in religious activities than the ‘old’ who are less active and reformed. The unquestioned religious hierarchy of the old (the metaphysical nature of religion) was challenged by the reform movements of modernity. At the same time, the caste organizations take the initiative to arrange alternate mechanisms to care about the elderly who are isolated in the modern society.

**Modern Education and the Conception of Old Age**

The word ‘educate’ is meant to train the mind, character and abilities and the process thus undergoing is learning. The oral way of education and learning was more prominent in tradition, in the sense that knowledge came handed down from previous generations by older

members of the society. Here, the role of the elderly was so prominent that they were the intellectuals of the society. The higher education in Vedas was an exclusive preserve of the higher castes, particularly the Brahmins, in medieval Kerala Society.\textsuperscript{102} \textit{vēdapāthaśālais} and \textit{sabhāmatts} were the institutions for their higher learning, most often receiving support from the royalty. Besides these, other institutions like \textit{pallijūdam} or \textit{kudipallijkūdams} were there; their origin can be traced back to early Buddhists or Jains, for basic educational facilities within the reach of caste and communities other than Brahmins.\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Aśāns}, \textit{ezhutacans} or \textit{vādhyāřs} were to impart elementary knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic, besides a smattering of astrology to enable simple calculations required for domestic ritual and agricultural operations. These schools were conducted in the houses of teachers themselves and they received some petty emoluments.\textsuperscript{104} These teachers were generally from the elder groups and the petty emoluments they received were known by the name \textit{dakṣiṇa}, not a fixed amount of fee, but a gift given out of respect and the matter to offer blessing. However, the teachers whether Brahmins or others, were highly respected. Here education as a means to the imparting of knowledge offered certain roles to the elderly. They transmit it from generation to

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\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid}, p. 1915.
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generation orally. The traditional values and the knowledge the elders acquired through the years of survival were the knowledge to be passed on.

Hitherto, the available education was the monopoly of upper castes. Education was not at all required for the lower ones for their practical life. The introduction of modern way of education changed the situation. The Protestant Missionaries were the pioneers of modern education in Kerala. They started educational institutions here. All the communities including the lower castes were their beneficiaries. It was through modern education that the individuation process, the formation of an individual identity with individual rights and responsibilities initiated. In addition to many other vested interests, missionaries had the intention to introduce modern education to promote habits of study, reflection and investigation and to inspire certain confidence in the natural power. They also expected to promote thinking as opposed to mere memorizing. A new horizon of knowledge was opened for the people. Another important landmark was the introduction of printing press which made literature easily accessible to all and to circulate more widely and systematically. The printed matters could bring radical change in the sensibility of its readers; and likewise to initiate a reformed mentality. Hence, the authority of the elderly as the

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106 Missionary Register for 1819, p. 428.
reservoirs of classics who passed such knowledge personally through generations underwent a change.

The process of schooling and the propagation of modern ideas through a proper curriculum helped to form a dent in the customary practices. The introduction of English education helped in the formation of liberal democratic power. The writers of the ‘Making of Modern Keralam’ have pointed out that the objectives of English education were primarily to train the Indians to man the lower level administrative structure and to civilise the Indians by changing their orientation through Western culture and the English schools were modified on the educational system in England. The British educational system was based on Western liberal capitalist values and was strongly ‘liberal and job oriented’. The Christian missionaries had clear conviction that education can be used as a tool for the evangelisation too. So they opened many English schools in different regions of the State. Thus, the beginning of Western education marked a new era in the history of Travancore. English gradually took the place of native languages of business and administration. The

107 The first Protestant missionary to establish an English school was Rev. William Tobias Ringletaube, at Mylaudy in 1806. He dedicated his whole life for evangelisation and wherever he went he carried the mission of English Education but was strengthened by the liberal contribution of Colonel Munroe107. They knew that a successful evangelisation was possible only reading the Bible; for that education is necessary as the human conscience could only be transformed through the education process. Report of U.G.C Major and Research Project; 1993-96 The making of..., Op.cit., p.31.

knowledge in English became inevitable to develop one’s prospects in the changing social formation. Also, the missionaries had the sense to understand that education was possible only through local medium, so that the gospel would reach the masses. So they introduced many schools with local medium of instruction. In that way, the Missionary schools could attract many low castes too to the educative process and thus the credit of initiating low caste education goes to the Christian missionaries as they made free education available to the masses. So in all, the educational enterprises of the missionaries could enlighten the people of India, not only to the upper castes, but to the lower too. The Christians and Ezhavas were the major beneficiaries of the pedagogic missionary work, says Rajan Gurukkal\textsuperscript{109}. By establishing printing press, Malayalam books reached the masses replacing the prominence of Sanskrit, the authority of Brahmins and the authority of elders.

Missionaries had realised the hold of women on customary practices as they were known as the bearers of culture. For instance, the patriarchal value structure of the family regards the claims of the husband, children and relatives as being the women’s priority\textsuperscript{110} E.P.Hasting has reported the power of maternal influence and her attachment to superstition and idolatry


Female education became another agenda for missionaries for the social reformation. An organized form of teaching for girls was initiated by lady missionaries (wives of missionaries) in 1820. An overall development of girls was the aim and many Syrian Christians started sending their girls to the schools attached to the churches. They were taught needle work, English and catechism. This type of female education that enhanced their domestic capabilities must have attracted girls from other communities too to these schools. It is reported by Anata E. Wood that the earlier concept of Girl’s education was directed towards developing in her those qualities which will enable her to reach this ideal at a faster pace. It is believed that training in the childhood may direct her towards realising the ideal of female modesty and domestic duties with the virtues of dutiful, obedient and helpful wife to her husband. Still the caste prejudices, less effort from the government side, made the progress of female education very slow.

Gradually more and more subjects were introduced in the school curriculum: vernacular languages, English in higher classes, history, geography, arithmetic and elements of natural philosophy. Changes due

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111 Proceedings of South Indian Missionary Conference on 1858, p. 197.
114 Ananda E. Wood, Knowledge Knowledge-before Printing and After-The Indian tradition in Changing Kerala, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 121.
to education became visible by the middle of the nineteenth century. Girls educated from the missionary schools started to teach in girl’s schools and thereby initiating their entry into the field of teaching profession. Technical training was then started and introduced printing, book-binding, tanning etc. The Syrian Christians made the maximum use of educational opportunities because in the beginning most of the schools were attached to the churches. Then Catholics also entered into the field by seeing the job opportunities. By the end of the century Nidheerickal Mani Kathanar, a catholic, and Pulikottil Mar Dinosyius, a Jacobite, made a joint venture, Nazrani Jathiya Aikya Sangham to start (a) English high schools and girls’ schools in all Christian centres, (b) a central college in Kottayam, (c) libraries in all parishes, and (d) go downs in Christian centres to store surplus grains till prices turned favourable to farmers. To explain the benefit of schools and Sangham, a Malayalam daily, Nazrani Deepika was also started. Following Christian missionaries, the government also entered into the field by starting the first school in Karamana in Trivandrum in 1859. As a result of all this, schools/education became the major space of subjectivization to the common people. Through lower caste education, female education and technical training, a new horizon to the people of all walks of life was

opened. So it was through modern education that the formation of individual or the subjectivization of individual was mainly initiated in Kerala.

In fact, education, the most important impact of missionary endeavours could awaken the conscious of human mind to act against the inequalities of caste system. It is reported by P.K.K. Menon that the struggle for the recognition of equality started and the intellectual progress is the causal factor to this shift. “The last quarter of nineteenth century marked the beginning of an epoch of remarkable intellectual progress, which synchronized with the rapid spread of English education. The new generation under the impact of Western civilization came to have a broad social outlook. The people became independent in spirit and critical of their attitude”. Education aroused the civic consciousness (by reading newspapers or other books). It became the period of reform movements and claims for individual rights irrespective of the caste. The native reformers like Tunchat Ezhuthachan made religious stir (bhakti movement) that led to the social reformation. All these aimed at the socio-political changes, and to the formation of new subjects who are aware of their individual rights. By introducing universal scientific education, the exclusive right of Brahmins on vēdic, śāstraic and sanskrit learning ceased.

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121 *idem.*
to exist. Thus, the opportunities became available for all, which hitherto was the birthright of the higher castes. The job qualifications made them fit for salaried jobs that led to the erosion of division of labour which was the basis of caste. The emergence of young dynamic middle class caused devaluation of the role played by the traditional elders like āśā or vāddhyāḍ.

Like Brahmins, Muslims also were partially antagonistic to the British education. It is revealed in the census of 1901 that the rate of literacy among the Muslim was 12%. In Kabir’s opinion, this educational backwardness underscored their younger generation with poverty. But this situation prevented them from sending children to schools and colleges and entering Government services. To a certain extent, this situation is resulted from their desire to keep a separate identity against modernity. At the same time, it created less opportunity to withdraw the traditional esteem from their ‘old’.

**Medical Education and the Conception of Old Age**

Medical education had far reaching effects on the formation of social conception about old age. It facilitated the general health of the population through the introduction of vaccination and modern medicine as preventive and curative measures. This increased the life expectancy of the

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people and likewise the proportion of the elderly in the population of the country. At the same time, the self-identity and individualism that developed among women through education (especially medical education) has affected the care of the elderly within the familial situations. Otherwise, the women were the primary care-taker to the family and its members (traditional concept about a woman). In later years, medically educated women started migrating to the other parts of India and the world and this created a situation where many elderly persons were forced to stay alone.

Generally old age is associated with health problems like communicable as well as degenerative diseases. The physiological changes in the old age lead to the impairments of sensory and circulatory functions, incidence of infections and poor immuno-functions. All these led to poor life expectancy and so the number of old who survived for long was very few in earlier times. It is reported by Nagam Aiya in 1891 that the value of vital statistics was unknown in earlier days. But the advancement in medicine and medial educational facilities has improved the general health of the population through various methods: introductions of preventive measures, e.g., vaccinations and curative measures. For instance, with the co-operation of Rockfeller Foundation, a Public Health Department was formed in 1933-34. Some of its activities were to maintain statistics,

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control communicable diseases, vaccinate the population, use of preventive medicine, conducting of maternity and child welfare work, public health education, rural sanitation etc.\textsuperscript{124} The positive attitudes towards these measures have increased the public health which in turn contributed higher standards of health with lower mortality rate. In medical activities the Travancore state dominated from the beginning with the contribution from the Christian missionaries. Nagam Aiya reported the involvement of missionaries as well as the State in the public health during the nineteenth century. The union of European system of medical aid, started in Travancore in 1811, and the Travancorean institutions made major impacts in the field of medicine here.\textsuperscript{125} A General Hospital was opened in Trivandrum in 1865 and a medical school in 1869. All such situations have gradually increased the life expectancy of the people here and likewise the proportion of the elderly in the population. A study by Irudaya Rajan reported that the change in proportion of the elderly in Kerala is more spectacular-- their proportion was around nine per cent in 1991 but is expected to increase to twenty per cent in 2021 and thirty seven per cent in 2051.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, p. 116.
However the act of missionaries and the interest of the Government worked together for the relief of diseases and sickness. Many young people were attracted to the field of medical education. It is reported by Koji Kawashima that the European Medical officer appointed as Physician trained a substantial majority of Syrian Christians as medical officers under his supervision.\textsuperscript{127} But another statement says that the Maharaja’s attention was directed to his own people and not to a white minority. It is stated in such a way that in order to avoid pollution through the treatment by a white doctor, Sree Mulam Thirunal had sent one young Brahmin to learn Western medicine.\textsuperscript{128} Whatever may be communal representation, it is true that state responded positively to the growing public demand for medical relief.\textsuperscript{129} But it is British colonial authorities in 1885, who began to provide medical instruction for women as doctors, hospital assistants, nurses and midwives. This might be introduced as a major instrument in the field of medical education that produced far reaching effects in the social conception of old age in Kerala context. Nagam Aiya reported that in 1887, Victoria Medical School and Hospital was created for the purpose of training women as midwives and nurses.\textsuperscript{130} However this step has decreased the role of “old women and the illiterate barber women” who

\textsuperscript{128} K.Rajasekharan Nair, “Prasasthiyodu Mukham Thirichunixna Dr.R.Keasavan Nair” in \textit{Samakalika Malayalam Vaarika}, August, 12, 2005, p. 68.
were the only help in delivery cases in the traditional society. Also a large number of high caste women, particularly widows among the Brahmins, received education in nursing and midwifery under a lady doctor.\textsuperscript{131} A female vaccinator was employed in 1891-92 to meet the wishes of those who objected to male vaccinators visiting their homes.\textsuperscript{132} Likewise, the missionary endeavours of female education and medical instructions have attracted many women to the field of medical education. For the missionaries, treating the sick was part of their proselytizing work. Syrian Christians may have also been attracted to this field due to religious zeal. A good number of women from this community started to learn nursing care and seek admission in nursing school and medical school. In 1907, Dr. Ida Scudder, the first lady missionary, started nursing school for women and its progress is invariably connected with the entry and progress of Syrian Christian women in medical profession. The missionaries also helped many to study medical science from foreign universities. This process of entry by a large number of women in the medical profession, especially nursing care, created a major vacuum in rural households with nobody to look after the aged and the sick within the familial atmosphere. Medically qualified women were attracted by better job opportunities in foreign countries worsened the situation in later years. It led to the break up of joint stay of families in the rural setting of Kerala. Migration of the younger women

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{idem}.  
consequently affected the care of the elderly. In short, one can say that the changed concepts of old age can be invariably connected with female education in Kerala.

**Change in Family Structure and the Conception of Old Age**

The family is humankind’s most basic, most vital, and most influential institution. It gives foundation to the society, by moulding the character and by being a mentor to the cultural values. The family is important while we consider the social conception of old age because, it is where one learns the values that will influence behaviour throughout life in dealing with the wider society. Ideally, it is a group where people care about and support one another in times of triumph or times of failure. With this reason, Leo Simmons says that “throughout human history the family has been the safest haven for the aged. Its ties have been most intimate and long lasting, and on them the aged have relied for greatest security”. But the continuation of family depends on the stability and moral cohesion among its members. More than the physical continuation of the species, the process of procreation, power relations, continuation of cultural norms and practices of the society are involved. What is reproduced in each generation is not the life itself, but the legal organisation of life. Many ideological beliefs about the sanctity of marriage and thereby the family

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133 Leo Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society*, New haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1945 (a), p. 177.
and the caring of the aged and the infirm are transcended from generation to generation.

The joint family system--Hindu undivided family (with property right to every individual-co-parcener) where several generations stay together in a single household(co-residence)-- was the common practice of family in India in its pre modern set up. The institutionalised stem family system is characterised with this co-residence of generations. Respect for the aged tended to be greater in such system. In Rosow’s words, “the position of the aged in a society is relatively higher when the extended family is central to the social structure because a clan can and will act much more effectively to meet crisis and dependency of its members than a small family. Mutual obligations between blood relatives--specifically including the aged-- are institutionalized as formal rights, not generous benefactions”.\footnote{I. Rosow, “And then we were old”, 1965. cited in Ellen Rhoads Holmes and Lowell D. Holmes, \textit{Other cultures…}, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 113.} Indian family systems consisted of both matrilineal (several generations of maternal lineage stayed together) and patrilineal (consisting of father, mother, father’s brother and family, unmarried/widowed sister and children under the paternal care and guidance). In such family patterns, support and expectations for receiving and providing assistance in old age are part of the continuing process of interaction among parents, children, and other kin. The family was the source of
“primary oneness, a kind of symbiotic atmosphere” which prevented the development of personal responsibility.\textsuperscript{135} This practice of un-divided family system continued to some extent to the modern period also. However, nuclear families have always been found among the lower castes of the Indian society. In Devanandan and Thomas’ opinion, the influences of different religions, especially Islam and Christianity have contributed certain features to family organisations\textsuperscript{136}. However, certain features of joint living system have continued even in the modern social formation also. Relations of mutual support are continued over life, but reshaped by the historical events like industrialisation, urbanisation and migration--the process of modernisation. A gradual disappearance of joint living arrangement is becoming common today in Kerala. Shah pointed out many reasons for this like demographic accidents, separation of son as the part of traditional developmental process, and the individualism which is induced into the present day society.\textsuperscript{137} In effect the nuclear living arrangement today is for a single generation, but provides new conceptions about human rights, new social laws to support it and new social structure for its implementation. It has acceptance today as the suitable living arrangement in keeping with the present situation. But the target group of the study,

aged and their comfort and well-being is invariably connected with the nature of family arrangement. Here family is taken for granted, the one permanent feature of society and in a sense impervious to the surging forces of contemporary world-life\textsuperscript{138}. The process of individualisation associated with modernisation has modified the family dominance over individual\textsuperscript{139}.

Even then, the nuclear family concept of Indian context does not give a completely detached type of living arrangement from the parental family. Kin serve as the most essential resource for economic assistance and security and carry the major burden of welfare functions. Social and religious functions unite the family together with oneness. Moreover the process of total individualisation has not taken place in modern Kerala. The continuance of several traditional institutions like arranged marriage is not only a union of two individuals but the beginning and continuation of relation between two families. In addition, the values like filial piety, respect to the old, often enunciated by religious doctrines and teachings had considerable hold over modern situation, especially in rural agricultural areas. Individual who subordinated their own careers and needs to those of the family as a collective unit did so out of a sense of responsibility, affection, and familial obligation, rather than with the


\textsuperscript{139} The insight is borrowed from Gail Wilson, \textit{Understanding Old Age- Critical and Global Perspectives}, London, Sage Publication, 2000, p. 162.
expectation of immediate gain. As Manu says, the Indian cultural values reaffirms, mātā, pitā, guro, daivam (Father, mother and teacher are revered on equal footing to God), even in the modern nuclear living arrangement.

In the Indian context, aged parents co-reside with their adult children and grand children in a multi-generational household. When the younger son marries, elder one may move to an alternate residential arrangement (in patriarchal families). The institutionalised stem-family system is characterised with the co-residence of generations. The adult children are expected to be the caregivers for the ageing parents and the pattern of care given are voluntary rather than forced by law. In most cases, the household is willed to the younger son (an economic resource), as he is obliged to look after the parents in patriarchal families. In matrilineal families, the daughters inherit the property and in turn take the responsibility to look after the aged parents. Holding on to the household and property--preparing ‘will’ to be effective after their life time--an exchange for future assistance in old age is an important survival strategy for older people. The aged parents retain their property in their life time, however meagre it may be, to ensure their old age security. These types of accommodations reflect greater flexibility in household arrangements.

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Children continue to stay in the parental home or move back and forth, in order to meet the needs of family: taking care of ageing parents, or in some cases, young siblings or others. The life transition of younger generation gets intertwined with those of older generations. This interdependence dictated parental control over the children’s life transitions, especially education, marriage alliances etc. Parents’ sense of obligation was dictated by this family interdependence.

Modernization led only gradually to differentiation in age-specific functions in Kerala context in twentieth century. Discontinuities in the age specific roles were not marked. For example, parenthood was not segregated in early adulthood. Higher fertility and extended parenting often let at least one child remain in the household for longer period, sometimes over the parents’ entire life period. One adult child, usually, the youngest was expected to remain at home while the parents were ageing. Widowed or not, the extension of motherhood over most of the life course continued to engage women in active familial roles into old age.141 Where the woman’s role was primary to the existence of family at the earlier stages in other cases, as a grand mother, women had active role in the nurturing of grandchildren or in other household affairs.

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However, modernization in its advanced stage has changed the family pattern of Kerala too. The size and composition, residential pattern and role of family members have changed. Migration, geographical mobility, increasing proportion of women working outside the household, and thus a greater move towards nuclear family with emphasis on the rearing of children and decision about their education and careers became the common trend. The study by Leela Gulati and Irudaya Rajan reports that more than fifty per cent of the families are nuclear in Kerala.\textsuperscript{142} This has certain implications for the life of elderly in Kerala. With the improved chances of survival of the old on the one hand and of the children on the other, the distribution of time and resources in the care and support of the elderly poses difficult choices for the younger families. It is due to the shift from the dominance of familial values to an emphasis on individualism and privacy. It occurred first in the middle class and later extended to the other classes. Modernity defines social structure by giving importance to the dignity of individual. Modern individualism favours the emergence of interest-oriented family from a kin-oriented family system.\textsuperscript{143} The interest enveloped by the individualistic nature includes a single generation of immediate family members, and thereby excluding ‘aged’ from the


membership of a modern family norm. Modern society considers individual as the basic unit of society, instead of family in traditional society. When we consider elderly care as a familial norm, it becomes a burden to the individualistic society. In many cases, the children residing abroad remit funds for the support of the elderly; finance may not be a problem, but they have difficulty in living with the elderly in a joint household. This creates a social problem.

**Emergence of Institutions and the Conception of Old Age**

Organized services or institutionalization for the aged is a modern concept about the care of the elderly. The correlation between the institutions and modern conceptions of old age can be summarized in two ways: (1) the institutions are the alternate arrangements that help to adjust with the societal changes (2) the availability of institutions is producing modern conceptions about old age i.e. the modern ideology that those elderly no longer able to live independently in the community must be housed in institutions. The institutions act as a causal factor to the changed concepts of old age to a certain extent. When we consider the situation of Kerala, it is seen that the social ageing in Hindu communities had an institutional structure defining the fine expressions of *purusārt* (the aims of life) and *āsrama* (the stages of life). However, *purusārt*-āsrama *vyavasta* (organisation of aims and stages of life) were relevant essentially
for males of the Brahmin caste in its traditional set up. The establishment of āṭṭupurās (dining room) and the concept of giving alms to the Brahmins were to fulfil the concept of charity of the earlier Hindu State. But it is the modern ideology that brought out meaning to the term ‘charity’ in a different way. The Maharajas and the Travancore Government got convinced by the idea of ‘charitable state’ and made great efforts to help a large section of the poor classes in Travancore like giving food, medical aid and protection of orphans etc. The State realised that providing charity for its people is an important function of a Hindu State. Charity became one of the cardinal duties of Dharmarāj and placed it within the reach of all classes of its people. Government took interest in the provision of gratuitous relief to the aged, the infirm, and the destitute, as its cardinal duty.

The role of missionary endeavours and British administration to the modern idea of ‘charity’ is also noticeable. It inspired a radical transformation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was the British administration that made possible the egalitarian concept. The Budget report of T. Madhava Row for 1036 M.E., dated 19 March 1861 stated the need to support thousands of men, women and children who had no resource as the price of food rose higher due to the repeated famines and

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144 Seminar, 488-Ageing-a Symposium on Greying of Our Society, April, 2000, p. 59.
droughts. Food was given gratuitously to the poor in several localities as also clothes, small sums of money and other similar aid. Relief was administered to a large section of the poor classes in Travancore by the missionaries like giving food, medical aid and protection of orphans etc. Charitable contributions of missionaries were involved around the medical activities. The Salvation Army, CMS and LMS made major impacts to this field. The CMS started a leper Asylum in 1871, the Church of England Zenana Mission started a dispensary at Trivandrum and the Salvation Army started medical activities etc with the same intention to do charity through medical relief. Gradually medical relief also became the part of charitable work.

The elderly who are impaired with the dual problems of physiological deterioration and financial trouble fell automatically into the category of ‘destitute’. The State considered them eligible for charity and assistance. The Travancore State Manual by Nagam Aiya who quoted Baroda Administration Report for 1902–03 and 1903–04 evidences to this statement that:

The next item of relief that has engaged the attention of His Highness’ Government is the provision of gratuitous relief to the aged, the infirm, and the destitute, who are all thrown upon the bounty of the State with the contraction of private charity and the shrinking of family incomes. Relief by the

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distribution of village doles, and the housing of the destitute incapables in poor-houses, has been an acknowledged form of help in times of famine. Directly the period of tests and trials is over, the opening of Relief Works has to be largely supplemented by the starting of village-doles and poor-houses in towns.\textsuperscript{147}

Besides the State, the religion also made remarkable emphasis to protect the poor of the society. The feeding of the poor has always been recognized a sacred duty by all Hindu governments from the olden days. Manu speaks of it as one of the important duties of kings. Even in modern world, religious teachings have certain relevance in the moulding of individual life. The Mahabharata says, He who desires prosperity for himself should give food to great Brahmins and beggars even if his own family affairs are in distress.\textsuperscript{148} Christianity advises to practice the love of Jesus Christ among the poor and wretched. It says, “Love your neighbour as your brother”, the way to attain salvation. It advises its people to help those who are in need. Buddhism also emphasises to ‘help others who are in need’. In all, when the religion and its reforms (relief mentality) unanimously enjoined to the duty of feeding the poor and distressed in the country, the birth of a new institution came into practice. It is the result of intervention of modern ideologies, the provision of relief to the aged, destitute and distressed, regardless of the cause of destitution, whether sick,

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{148} idem.
disabled, retarded or aged. The destitute homes became the institution for all those who are financially struggling due to the inadequate life situations. In other words, ‘ageing’ became a major cause to label one as ‘destitute’. The concept of old age has changed in such a way that the ‘life stage’ must be taken care by the application of institutional devices. Today, Kerala is abundant with destitute homes run by the Government, private sector and also by religious denominations.