Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Major Findings
The social history of Kerala reveals several changes in the conception of old age, which call for a sociological explanation. We have attempted to delineate the process of modernization, which includes industrialization, urbanization and westernization that have affected Kerala’s social structure. These processes at once promote ageism, the discrimination against old as well as mobilize policies that sanction the welfare of the old. From this perspective, we traced several variables that created changes in the conception of old age from its golden age conceptions of tradition.

Today the problems of the aged are engaged in larger debates at academic, political and social levels. The Central Social Welfare Minister, Meera Kumar announced in 2005 that a holistic policy would be implemented for the welfare of the aged which ensure shelter, cloth, food and finance to the poor class of the society. Now in 2006, the ministry is making a Bill that is bringing it a moral liability of the children to protect the aged parents. The Bill is allowing making tribunals in which neglected parents can give complaints and can find solution for their sufferings. It will legally sanction the care of the old by the children and will be supervised by the regional Tribunals. This announcement is the best evidence for the modern discourse which sanction the care of the old by the State.
This study began with the hypothesis that old age is devalued in today’s society. Old has no voice in this technically oriented modern society. But during the progress of the study it is revealed that modernization at once promotes ageism as well as care about the welfare of the old. It is not something that devalues the status of the old necessarily. Hence the present thesis contradicts Cowgill and Holmes’ theory of Aging and Modernization, which says that there is tendency for the status of the aged to decline, when a society’s degree of modernisation increases. Present study argues that it is subjectivization (process by which human beings are transformed into subjects) that produces changes to the conception of old age. It does not give the meaning that modernization declines the status of the old necessarily. Instead, the subjectivity that creates the concept differently. Similarly the concepts of tradition too were discursively constituted. With this reason, the tradition offered a golden age conception for old age. Michel Foucault’s alternative picture of discourse that enmeshes power, truth and practices, and the positioning of human beings within these historical configuration are used in the study to give theoretical explanation to this changed concept of old age. The act of discourse as the means of production of subject by the operation of power or the modern intervention is the major application of Foucault’s theory to this study. For analytical convenience the study is divided into various periods.
**Major Findings**

The social anthropological data given in the second chapter described the role of elderly of traditional Kerala. In the social, political, economic and religious context of Kerala, the elderly were held in high esteem. There the society and the family provided a better space and central role to the old. The joint family was the common family pattern that existed with the head of the family enjoying the rights and responsibilities and commanding obedience and respect. In tradition, older people were considered as the repositories of oral literature and culture. Oral culture of tradition gives certain roles to the elderly as there the communication cannot be made without an identifiable speaker. Tradition considered elderly as the organizing agents of collective memory, who transfer such memories to educate the young. This memory is about organising of the past in relation to the present. The collective memory of the old continually reproduces memories of past happenings or states, and these repetitions confer continuity upon experience. It is interesting to note that the people’s personal experiences were counted as the sources of knowledge. Tradition also considered the elders as guardians of rituals, the formulaic notion of truth in tradition. Here, the ritual is a practical means of ensuring preservation. Hence, the discourse of tradition did not indicated old age with problematic conceptions. The discourse was simpler to legitimise traditional knowledge and gerontocratic authority. For the sake of
illustration, the elderly of premodern Kerala are included in two separate sections: elderly of tribal society and elderly of stratified (caste) society.

In tribal society, the older people were seen as the guardians of tribe’s technical, legal or social knowledge. As the healers, magicians or religious functionaries, they were believed to be the agents of its causal power. The aged as the head of the lineage commanded enormous power. For them, the eldest is the wisest, most experienced and ubiquitous. The observance of taboo and the performance of rituals and ceremonies rested on the elders. The tribal culture is well known for its egalitarianism. So the old were taken care of and never allowed to be neglected by the community. The conscience collective is most coherent in simpler societies where the aged were protected and revered by the community. They valued simply for being old.

In stratified societies, the practice of hierarchy was determined on the basis of age, gender, and class/caste. So the position of the elderly was significant in a hierarchical society. Since premodern Kerala was characterized by the caste features, the elderly of higher caste could enjoy respect at both the caste and age levels. The *vēdic*, *śastrāic* and *purāṇic* knowledge and the authority in religious practices allowed Brahmin oligarchy in caste society. Among the Nairs, *Kāraṇavan* was the autocrat of *taṟavād* who possessed unlimited power. In Ezhava community the
village head men were selected from the senior ones. They were responsible to settle the disputes and had power to legalize the customs according to the usages of caste. Their role and supremacy in the community were unique and recognized by others. Though the social formation of caste society did not offer an honourable position to the lower castes, their own caste and familial organizations provided important roles to their elderly. The Christians of Kerala were treated in the same way as high class Hindus and honoured with high positions socially and economically. According to Christianity, the old have always decision making power and social status; the father is the main provider and mother is the figure of family cohesion. Muslims of Kerala were strict in the observance of their religious customs and practices; they claimed themselves as faithful adherents to Islam, which inscribe certain ‘defined’ roles to their elderly.

In short, the political, economic, social, cultural and familial organizations of tradition provided recognition for the aged; and that the status and authority of the aged was accelerated. When we speak of specific institutions of authority, religion obviously has a leading place. So this chapter that surveyed traditional conception of old age on the basis of religion/caste-wise categorization is apt and important. Religion is the principal source of social cohesion. The religious doctrines played a major role as the determinant of social conception in traditional Kerala, where all
the religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam played their role well. All accepted old age as a stage of intellectual capacities and ethical sensibilities of an entire life.

The third chapter dealt with the impacts of modernization that causes changes in the conception of old age. Modernity from Europe reached India through traders. It injected the components like autonomy for individual, rational thinking, spirit of inquiry and scientific temper into the indigenous culture here. It changed the whole social, political, economic and religious life of the people, which in turn produced changes to the earlier conceptions of old age. Modern political power is based on efficiency and better discipline rather than caste labels or age reservations. Humanitarianism, equalitarianism, and secularism are the ethics of Indian politics today. So wisdom and accumulated experience of the old people may be seen as signs of obsolescence in the changed situations of politics today.

Economic changes of Modern Kerala can be stated in many ways: changes in agrarian economy to the commercialized economy, feudalism to capitalism, or the emergence of a middle class or salaried class who lessened the dependence of agrarian economy. Industrialization, urbanization and westernization provide economic opportunities to the educated youth. Religion, education and family played major roles to bring about social
changes in the traditional ties of Kerala society. It occurred through the
religious reforms, modern education and the break up of joint family
structure. All these promise civic rights and individualism. Thus, the care
of the old becomes the responsibility of the society, instead of the family.
Medical education that provides job opportunity to the female members
outside Kerala and India causes isolation of the elderly more in village set-
ups.

In the new emerging system, the *nambūtiris* at the peak of the caste
hierarchy and *pulayās, parayās* and ādivāsis at the lowest have not
benefited. The former because of their ideology withdrew themselves from
the new set-up, the latter because of their earlier bondage failed to evoke
meaningful response to the new system. But the rest of the society
absorbed it. In Rajan Gurukkal’s words, the territorial resource
management, jurisdiction, legal structures and the pervasive means of
surveillance brought the people directly under the control of
administration. Through the various forms of institutionalisation, types of
objectives, systems of differentiations, means of generating power relations
and degrees of rationalisation, the colonial powers etc. transformed the
people as subjects of modernity. Again he says, the Christians and
Ezhavas were the major beneficiaries of the pedagogic missionary work.

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As there was no discrimination regarding the right of education, the public including Christians, Brahmins, Muslims and all other caste groups started to make use of the modern education and became the subjects of modernity. For modernity, the birthright is not the criteria to attain domination, but the individual right. So the elders of high caste communities could not claim high esteem through the caste reservations in a modern society. All these show that modern society does not favour dominance to any caste, instead it favours the individual. In George Mathew’s opinion, education, especially female education plays a major role in bringing forth holistic changes in the social aspects of Kerala. The female literacy rate of current Kerala is 87.86%.

Hence, the process of modernisation that entered India through trade and commerce; with the support of political power and by spread of education; it led to the formation of modern conceptions. The traditional value system and metaphysical thinking are challenged by rationality and science. Free, autonomous individual, capable of thinking and taking decisions came to the fore. The community-centeredness got replaced by organizations with individual membership. These organizations are clamouring for civil society. The elders and their traditional values were pushed away by the younger generations who eagerly adopted the modern

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ideology. Industrialisation and salaried jobs promoted urbanisation and nuclear living arrangement, where the wisdom of the old is not a priority. However, joint family system and the traditional values are not completely wiped out. It continued to subsist along with the nuclear families, especially in rural agricultural families. But the materialistic attitude replaces the traditional values more. The elders with considerable materials, in terms of property or money are respected. It became the means of security for the care they receive in the old age.

Since modernisation is the transformation of total society it is involved with several sites and forms of submission that belonged to the totalising domain of modernity. The subjectivities under the sites like political, economic and social focus more on individualism and materialism. A common epistemic foundation discursively unites these sites of modern institutions. The administrative essence, profit oriented economy, educational goals, medical advancements, nuclear living arrangement and reformist perspectives are inter-connected and reciprocally support one another to the process of individual domain. Here, the shaping of individuality is different from that of communality of traditional settings. The pre-modern social formation was outlined by hierarchy and heredity, which were interlocked by the institution of caste system in Kerala. But it underwent gradual process of radical transformations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For this,
the rulers of Kerala, British residents, Missionaries and the local reformists paved the way. An epistemic foundation is produced here. So a new set of power relations, a new strategy of domination and the formation of a new ‘subject’ came into existence. The new subject replaces the traditional aspects of old age. Tradition considered the ‘elderly’ with certain power relations and with certain strategies of dominations. The predetermined or defined ‘power’ were mostly inherited, not the achieved one. But the power offered by the modern institutions are not so. It emphasises most decisive role to the process of subjectivization. The components of modernisation such as universalistic legal system, expansion of western form of education, urbanisation and industrialization, spread of new means of communication and transport and social reforms took part in the formation of new subjects instead of the traditionally defined power to the elderly. It affected the productions, social relations, communication, health, urban growth, education, planning, and so on. Its procedures, which were at once individualising and totalising tended to transform the people into the subjects of modernity. Its impact was not limited among the individuals, but penetrated into the entire society.

Hence in modern Kerala, all the political, economic, social, religious and familial changes prescribe freedom to the individual where the role of the society is to provide context to enhance the individual empowerment.

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Here, the individual as the ‘made subjects of modern discourse’ prescribes both ageism and welfare of the old as the characteristic of a modern society. For instance, when the religion and its reforms unanimously enjoined the duty of feeding the poor and distressed, the birth of a new institution (destitute home or old age home) came into practice.

Since the study does not neglect the relevance of an empirical inquiry it takes a small sample for case studies from the particular setting of the district Pathanamthitta. The sample was taken from the middle-income group. The reason is that ‘the change in conception of old age’ is largely affected by the middle income group. For the lower income group, the problem of old age has not changed much from tradition to modernity. In most cases, both male and female among the poor undertake work till they are physically capable of doing for their own subsistence and to support their family. The higher income group, normally lead a successful life with considerable bank balance and social position; for them, the old age may not be a problem as such in both the traditional and modern settings. They may be respected by their children (at least for the inheritance) or they can employ servants to retain their previous life style or can afford ‘five-star old-age homes’. But those who are newly rich or the middle income group are affected by the changed conceptions of old age. They are the beneficiaries of social changes either by the economic prosperity due to the children’s
endeavours, or by the position or job acquired by them. For them, the problem of old age is different from traditional society to modern.

Chapter four described how the district Pathanamthitta as a microcosm of modern Kerala explains the contribution of socio-economic conditions to the changed conceptions of old age today. Here the impact of modernity is high especially in the matters concerning old age concepts. Migration of the younger generation that causes isolation of the elderly is the major component of changes here. Its migration rate (migration per hundred household) is 98.6 per cent. At the same time the district possess the highest proportion of the elderly, 15.5 per cent among the State. The district is characterized with the lowest birth rate of 0.5% and Zero population growth by 2001 A.D. which increases the elderly representation in the population. Again, the intervention of the ‘community’ to care for the immediate need of the society (care to the isolated parents) is also notable; fourteen old age homes are functioning well today. Old age home with paid status and the availability of home nurses to care for the isolated parents are the modern discourses that constitute new concepts about old age.

Hence, the district Pathanamthitta is revealed as a site of subjectivization to the modern discourse. Though old age is raised as a serious social issue, the coping mechanisms like the availability of old age
homes of paid and non-paid status, availability of home nurses to care about the old, senior citizen forums, making use of the living arrangements in flats or retiree’s village, considering of pensions, policies and bank balances as the economic security at old age etc. are largely accepted by the aged of Pathanamthitta. Here the role of communities for the welfare of the aged is mentionable. It is the characteristic of modern society that the responsibility for the welfare of the aged has been shifted to the community or State. The technologically oriented social and economic conditions made human thoughts into its ‘subjects’ today. For instance, gerontology has become a major field of sociology today and Geriatrics is an important branch of Medicine. This type of objectification of the subject also creates new concept about the old age. It is due to the functioning of the thought of the people. The argument is proved by the case studies among the small sample taken from the selected few of the seven major communities through direct interviews.

The findings of the case study given in the fifth chapter indicate how much the human thoughts are affected by the modern discourse to become the subjects of modernity. The formation of multiple sources of authority, instead of single authority of traditional order is the impact of modernity. But in the setting of ‘high modernity’ the traditional values are not replaced, but are reflexively made to the formation of ‘subjects’. In modernity, political power is not ‘given’ as birth right or by the mere
ownership of acres of lands (like "janmi"). Instead, humanitarianism, secularism, and equalitarianism determine the holder of power. Efficiency, health and money are some of the determinants of political power today. But this type of power cannot be identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth. Instead, it is in the mutual relations of its ‘subjects’.

Inheriting huge property is not determining one’s economic position, instead it is a liability. Here the ‘power’ that comes from below of the social universe makes it a liability to its holder. The economic changes “made it necessary to ensure the circulation of effects of power through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions. By such means power, even when faced with ruling a multiplicity of men, could be as efficacious as if it were being exercised over a single one.”

Similarly, the economic power attained through salaried jobs or migration too allows circulation of power throughout the social universe. It can be attained by anybody, irrespective of caste or gender. The level of education and job destination bring forth social position in modern society. But “the effects of the domination of power are attributable to various ‘dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings’. Its properties are invested in those over whom it is exercised, so it not only exerts pressures upon

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5 Tim May, Situating Social ..., Op. cit., p.188.
people, but is also transmitted by them.” In modern discourse, economic power exerts pressure upon people and also transmitted by them.

Though the reformed form of religion advocates status to any, it offers certain ‘given’ power to the elderly in the modern discourse too. The religious doctrines and teachings, especially the Indian concept of religion, ‘Karma for Moksa’ may be the reason that provides certain roles and power to the elderly in the discourse of modernity. This also occurred by the act of subjectivization. The religion advises its followers to imbibe the values of respect and filial piety towards the aged. Here the subjectivity does not promote ageism at once. Instead, it forms out of the relationship between the inner/hidden thoughts in ourselves, in which ‘self-examination has developed over time and thus creates changes in our conception. The modern concept of family includes a single generation of parents and their unmarried children. All the members beyond this, like grand children or grand parents have no space in such families. An effort for their inclusion may cause conflict in modern discourse and so the objectification of the old cause changes to the social conception of old age. Pension schemes, policies, availability of the home nurses and the old age homes of the paid category are other discourses that constitute human beings into subjects of modernity.

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6 Ibid, p.186.
Hence, with modernity as the causal factor, the spread of materialism and individualism constitute different subjects than the subjects of metaphysical authority and collective consciousness of traditional order. This new form of subjectivity brought new conceptions which in turn may posit the elderly to a different position, may be a devalued one. Dysfunctional nature of old age intensifies the problem more. This is the reason that theories of ageing like disengagement theory, activity theory, exchange theory, role theory, and continuity theory emerged during this period. Modernization theory by Cowgill and Holmes states that the aged are devalued in the modern society. This study considers these changes in conception of old age are the effect of modernity, where the discourse of modernity constitutes the human beings into its subjects.

Foucault who challenged Marxism (which says that human subject and forms of knowledge are given before-hand and the economic and social conditions of existence get imprinted on this given subject) has explained how the human beings are made into subjects with the act of power relations. For that he has investigated dimensions of knowledge (episteme), which regulate the functioning of the thought of the people. For Foucault, the episteme regulates the functioning of the thought (concepts) of the people. Since the episteme (of Foucault) is not available for direct
observation, they have to be reconstructed from accessible discourses. Discourses are autonomous systems of rules that constitute objects, concepts, subjects and strategies, thereby governing the production of scientific statements. The nature of discursive power that attracted Foucault is the discourse that is “material manifestations of the thought that is preserved, transmitted and still affects our present-day thinking”. For Foucault, this is the act of power relations, where “the ‘power’, circulates in and through the production of discourses in societies”. For him, power is an integral component in the production of truth or in the making of modern subjects in a given discourse. An exercise of power shows up as an affect, to affect other forces and to be affected by other forces. Here the power to be affected is like a matter of force, and the power to affect is like a function of force. Power is the relation between forces; or rather every relation between forces is a power relation. Today, the power cannot be identified with an individual, neither with the old always nor with the young. In Foucault’s terms, “Not the domination of the King in his central position, therefore, but that of his subjects in their mutual relations: not the uniform edifice of sovereignty, but the multiple forms of subjugation that

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7 Ann Brooks, “Contextualising Foucault: Power, Truth and Discourse” in *Post Feminisms* *Feminism... Op. cit.*, p. 49. Discourse is a set of practices rather than structures where these practices systematically form the objects of which they speak.


have a place and function within the social organism”\textsuperscript{11}. Hence, Foucault turned towards analyses of exercise of power in analysing social phenomena in terms of the politics of the truth. This led him to an objective ‘to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects’.\textsuperscript{12}

Foucault’s position of subject is outlined by Barrett that “subject should be thought of as constituted rather than a given and his interest in the practices constituting that subject (discursive, social, etc.)”.\textsuperscript{13} The ‘subjectivity’ that produced, reproduced and legitimated through the practices of disciplinary mechanisms creates concepts. The subject is relational to the discourse. Discourse is any system that gives possibility for knowledge. It may describe how the social, economic, and cultural discourses can subjectivize the human being to get into the process of constitution of the self. Here the ‘made subjects’ may or may not attain respect, at the time of old age. It varies relative to the discourses that he has undergone. Foucault’s concept of power relations make human beings into ‘subjects’. For him, the human sciences have made man both a subject of study and a subject of the State and have thereby subjected him to a set of laws which they claim define his very being: laws of speech, economic

\textsuperscript{12} Tim May, \textit{Situating Social ...}, Op.\textit{cit.}, p.185.
\textsuperscript{13} Sean Hand, ed. \textit{Foucault...}, Op.\textit{cit.}, p. 52.
rationality, biological functioning and social behaviour\textsuperscript{14}. This claim of very being is able to explain how the concepts of old age are changed today.

This can be explained by referring Foucault’s works on ‘subject positions, bodies and subjectivization’. While recasting his works around the question of the subject, three modes of ‘objectification’ \textsuperscript{15}by which human beings are transformed into subjects can be found out. The first one can be called ‘the objectivization of the speaking subject’. Here the emphasis is given to the discursive conditions that make knowledge possible; thus subjects are little more than ‘ways of speaking’ within a particular discourse. This results in a certain ‘decentring of the subject’ and a dispersion of the possible places from which one can speak. The second logic of subject formation centres on the operation of ‘dividing practices’ in which the ‘subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others’. For example, isolation of lepers, confinement of poor etc. The third logic is ‘subjectivization’ in which the human beings turn themselves into subjects through processes of recognition, self mastery and transgression.


\textsuperscript{15} David Howarth, Discourse..., \textit{Op.cit.}, pp. 79-81.


Here the person initiates an active self-formation through a variety of operations on his own bodies, thoughts and deeds.

Modern science in the form of ‘dividing practice’ establishes ‘normality’ as a rule of life, which acts discursively to the constitution of modern subjects. Modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge: claims and practices of human sciences. The sciences of man have, he argues, subverted the classical order of political rule based on sovereignty and rights, and have instituted a new regime of power exercised through disciplinary mechanisms and stipulation of norms for human behaviour. This attempt of human science defines normality as the rule of life and gives concepts of healthy man, young blood etc. as normal. This concept of normality brings the label ‘devalued’ to the old in modern society.

The dividing practices and scientific labels of modern discourses like economic sufficiency, political positions, scientific knowledge, better health, liking for nuclear living arrangement, training institutes to the religious teachings etc. objectify the ‘old’ today to become a passive subject. In addition to that, the ‘subjectivization’ by the old themselves to the changed situation of modern discourses does produce a group of active subjects. For example, today, some parents are ready to move into the old age homes or any other convenient living arrangements, and they do not
prefer the joint stay of many generations, while they get old. They turn themselves to the subject of modern discourses through the operations on their own bodies, thoughts and conduct. They are the active subjects to the changed concepts of old age. Here the power is not inevitably vested with the young, but in the relation between the humans. Its properties are invested in those over whom it is exercised, so it not only exerts pressure upon the aged, but is also transmitted by them. Power is part of the social body as a whole; it is a strategy that has evolved as part of the characteristics of modern society.\(^1^6\) With this reason, the modern society says that power is not with the old today, but the present study concludes that it is with anybody as well as everybody, as it circulates throughout the social body.

The transformation of society is involved with the submission of human thoughts and concepts. Here the discursively constituted subject is creating concepts. Or the discursively determined concepts cause changes to the conception of old age. Today old age is an issue because the society is discursively constituted. Some disciplining strategies too are embedded in discourses. This in turn causes disciplining of human beings by the intervention of modern institutions. Here the human beings are made into subjects of modernity which gives the effect of both ageism and care of the old.

The case study from Pathanamthitta reveals that the Christian community is active to the modern discourses than others. They are in the forefront for the coping mechanisms like old age homes, appointing home nurses and so on. Nair community is progressively thinking about such mechanisms. But the Muslims cannot withstand these activities. The subjectivization of modern discourses through the operations on their own bodies, thoughts and conduct affect differently on each individual. For that the modern discourses play relatively. Thus, the changed conception of old age is a socially constructed reality, which can be justified by the fact of their social relativity to specific discourse. Hence, we can conclude that today’s changed conception of old age can be of any of the three reasons: the subjectivization of the old by the effect of ‘modern science’, or by the dividing practices that divides the aged from others, or because the aged themselves turn into its subjects. So, it is subjectivization that produces changes to the conception of old age. It is the effect of modernity which constitutes the human being into its subjects today. Here the discursively constituted society brings the new concept about old age.

On the while, we can say that our study was a sample study and which can be a representative one for the changed conception of old age in a modern society especially of Kerala State. Here the district Pathanamthitta is revealed as a microcosm of modern Kerala.