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Formation of Social Conception of Old Age in Traditional Kerala
Chapter II

Social Conception of Old Age in Traditional Kerala

This chapter seeks to survey of the sociological and anthropological aspects of the aged in traditional Kerala. The society of Kerala before colonization\(^1\) was traditional. The assumption behind this demarcation is that it is colonial modernity that introduced modern ideology to the human mind of Kerala. Otherwise it was characterised by hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence- the characteristics of tradition\(^2\). There are studies which agree this demarcation by pointing the striking changes from 1850-1910 due to ‘anglicization’, ‘modernization’ and ‘secularization’ in India. According to Robin Jeffrey, perhaps nowhere in India, were the changes of these years so dramatic as in the Malayalam-speaking region of Kerala\(^3\). The period before this ‘dramatic change’ can thus be called traditional or pre-modern.

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\(^1\) The period of Colonialism in India was in between 1600 and 1950. India was at the heart of British Empire and was initially controlled by the East India Company. During this period many socio-political changes have undertaken to the Indian situation. But the company’s political power was ended by the Indian Mutiny 1857, it resulted in the Crown taking over the Government of India in 1858. British India gained independence in 1947 and became republic in 1950.

http.//page. Britishlibrary.net/empirehist/history.htm

\(^2\) For the details of tradition, see, Yogendra Singh, Modernization of Indian Tradition, Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 1994, p.32


\(^3\) Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nair Dominance-Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, Delhi, Manohar, 1994, p. xvii.
Tradition is strongly rooted in values, rituals, beliefs and practices. So it gives the responsibility to the ‘old’ to pass on this knowledge from generation to generation by word of mouth or practice. Giddens\(^4\) supports this view that traditional society inevitably is bound up with collective memory and rituals where the older people function well as the repository and the guardian of the tradition. The normative and moral content of the tradition, which gives a binding character, offers a measure of ontological security to the old as its guardians. The traditional societies emphasize the organic and the religious aspect of life in a manner that enslaves human beings to natural forces and human individuality to the group dictates\(^5\). Practice of hierarchy is an important characteristic of tradition where it could be determined on the basis of age, gender, class, caste and power. Yogendra Singh also thinks that the notion of ‘tradition’ constitutes a very significant element in the ideology of social structure in India\(^6\). The system of ‘social structure’ and ‘tradition’ covers the entire gamut of the Indian social phenomena and its realities\(^7\). These arguments bring forth an idea that tradition in India is something that holds control over the individual due to its richness in values and ideologies, because these values are imposed over the individual.


\(^7\) *Ibid*, p. VII.
The pre-modern Kerala shows the distinct features of traditional practices. It favoured the elderly with certain defined roles and thus to the social conception of old age. In the way of life based on agricultural economy, people are said to be old when they are no longer able to do heavy agricultural work or the more strenuous domestic tasks. For instance, in Samoa, with its agricultural economy, sedentary life-style, benign climate and large extended family, the old age is traditionally considered as the best time of life. The elderly are revered for their wisdom, judgement and knowledge of Samoan way of life. Bela Kothari and Rolly Sinha also give the same opinion that agricultural societies have traditionally held the elderly in high esteem. Gangarade points out that traditionally Indian economy has been one in which an overwhelming majority of the population depended on agricultural and allied occupations. There the practical, intellectual and emotional aspect of knowledge had concerns regarding the elders as they were able to do things, think about the things, and to judge the achievements. As the life was organized so much through obedience and faith towards forms prescribed by tradition, there was clearly the need of a guardian to build up

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9 Ibid, p. 166.
12 Ananda Wood, Knowledge-Before Printing and After-The Indian Tradition in Changing Kerala, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 11-12.
a sense of power and authority, and it was achieved symbolically through the elders. Here, the elders and teachers are respected as representatives of the concentrated experience and knowledge of tradition\textsuperscript{13}. In these discourses, traditional culture develops an attitude of laborious formality where the reproduction of form and formal detail is a major time-consuming activity around which people organized much of their lives and culture. Secondly, an attitude of repetition and concentration in traditional learning, and in daily routines like yoga and rituals are formed. The third attitude is obedience and faith to achieve results of obediently performed and faithfully repeated things under the guidance of an experienced teacher. The fourth attitude needed by the traditional discourse consists of respect and reverence. All these attitudes offer prominent positions to the elderly and thus to the formation of social conception of old age.

According to Giddens\textsuperscript{14}, in tradition, older people are repositories of oral literature and culture, not only because they absorbed them at an earlier point than others but because they have the leisure to identify the details of these interactions with others of their age and teach them to the young. Here we can consider the elderly as the organizing agents of collective memory, who transfer such memories to educate the young. This memory is about organizing of the past in relation to the present. But past

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, pp. 3-5.

is not preserved as such; it is continuously reconstructed on the basis of the present. Such reconstruction is only partially individual; more fundamentally it is social or collective. Thus, 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. Oral culture of tradition also gives certain roles to the elderly as there the communication cannot be made without an identifiable speaker.\textsuperscript{15}

Giddens\textsuperscript{16} also considered the elders as guardians of rituals, the formulaic notion of truth in tradition. Not only the elders, but the healers, magicians or religious functionaries are also believed to be the agents of such causal powers. They are dealers in mystery, but their arcane skills come more from their involvement with the casual power of tradition than from their mastery of any body of secret or esoteric knowledge. Here, the ritual is a practical means of ensuring preservation. Again, the rituals cannot be interpreted by lay individuals. It involves formulaic truth, to which only certain persons have full access. The ritual language is performative, and may sometimes contain words or practices that the speakers or listeners can barely understand. Ritual idiom is a mechanism of

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, pp. 64-65.
truth because of its formulaic nature, and ritual notion is a notion which makes no allowance for disagreement and hence, contains power of a compelling quality. Thus in tradition, the rituals were interpreted within the directives of their guardians, where the elderly had their major role as source of formulaic truth.

In order to check the status of the aged in traditional Kerala society, its inhabitants are put under two categories: the inhabitants of tribal society and the inhabitants of stratified society. In both the societies the status of the aged is checked on the categorization of political, economic, social, cultural and familial organizations.

**Old Age in Tribal Society**

No one seems to have done a comprehensive history of the problem of old age in India for us to resort to it. This is much truer in the case of Kerala. Therefore, old age in pre-modern societies is a matter of social-anthropological imagination, an extremely difficult exercise of piecing together diffuse intimations available in social history. One has to imagine the multiple aspects of old age in different social formations of the past in the light of history of structures, relations and processes. The most primordial of pre-modern social structures is that of tribal people, which in a broad sense comprises different shades between the simple and the complex.
There is evidence to say that tribal community is important in the social configuration of Kerala. The tribal are known by the name ādivāsi (ādi-original and vāsi- inhabitant). The tribe being a closely knit system of kindred descendants, the aged as the head of the lineage, normally commanded enormous power. The eldest embodied the tribe as a universal feature. The importance of the aged can never be exaggerated in the case of tribal societies, since their functions were pivotal to the structure. The eldest constituted the wisest, the most experienced and the ubiquitous. vṛuddha in the north Indian village settlements and kiḷan or kizhavan in the south Indian villages exemplify the power of the aged. Gōṭra talavan, gōṭra mūppan, gōṭra vaidyan are all part of the hierarchy of a tribal culture. The headman runs the village administration and the village head exercises powers in political and judicial matters. The head of the family had the power to punish any member who violates the tribal norms. The guardianship of the family rests with the elders (headman) and thus power

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and functions vested in them. The observance of taboos and the performance of rituals and ceremonies rested on them.\textsuperscript{19} They headed the settlements where their role/function were specified or ‘given’, economically, politically, socially and culturally.

The tribes are called by ‘kādintemakkal’ (sons of forest) which itself puts the entire meaning to their lifestyle. They are very attached to the nature/forest: the tribes are ‘of the nature, for the nature, and by the nature’. They could not live away from the nature; birds, animals, plants and trees were all part of their lifestyle and brought a particular discourse on which the economic conception of old age was formulated. As hunting is the primary means of food gathering, the elders were needed by the younger generation to learn the skill as well as to become aware about different techniques like proper time for hunting, proper places to get the animals trapped etc. This type of information can be attained only through experience: that is the wealth of elders. Their experience and knowledge in making tools, agricultural processes, in taming animals, traditional medicine, navigation, and so on were very valuable to the society. There the society assumed wisdom with age, and so the elderly scored a high rank. The knowledge regarding agriculture was safe in the hands of elderly, as the past experiences were the only available knowledge of tradition. For example, the elders could easily predict when it is going to rain next, an

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{idem.}
important knowledge regarding cultivation. The elder’s words considered final in the selection of seeds, settings (place) and time for cultivation. Again, the elder women were experts in transplanting and uprooting the seedlings in cultivation.

The old men who served as story tellers and old women who were founts of medical lore were all the repositories of knowledge out of experiences and served as the sources of tradition. The old were the custodians of tradition. They were the repositories of wisdom and traditional knowledge. They used to transmit it to the generations through folk songs and stories. It was the responsibility of the old to pass on the values, rituals, beliefs and practices from generation to generation by word of mouth or by practice. In tribal society, the aged were regarded as repositories of traditional wisdom, and their status was extremely high. In Christina R Victor’s words, older people will also be respected by all, as they are seen as guardians of the tribe’s technical, legal or social knowledge.20

Ancestral worship, the worship of totem trees and stones, kāvu, and distinct gods were the characteristic feature of Dravidian religious practice. Durkheim points out that religion is central to the belief and modes of conduct, which cohere the less developed society. Religious beliefs express the character of the social totality and religion is considered to be the

original source of all forms of thought. Religion usually involves ritual. Rituals are integral to the social framework, which confer integrity upon traditions and are a practical means of ensuring preservation. The observance of taboo and the performance of rituals and ceremonies rested on elders. There the elderly may be ascribed significance if they are seen as links with the past, or with the supernatural. Older people often take on the roles of priests or leaders of religious rites and they function as intermediaries between man and the unknown. They were also considered as the authorities of magical incantations. In Gidden’s words, “guardians, be they elders, healers, magicians or religious functionaries, have the importance they do in tradition because they are believed to be the agents or the essential mediators, of its causal power.” The ancestral worship and the guardianship of rituals must have paved the way to an esteemed position in society. The essence or substance as categories of metaphysics provided universal explanations and determined one’s place in graded hierarchy.

It is culture that holds the community together. It constitutes the collective memory of the people and collective heritage, which will be

handed down to generations still to come. Culture of a community can be viewed as the community’s life based on moral and spiritual values, and the people’s celebration of these community values. The concept of community assumes shared practices and meanings, which its members imbibe from traditional patterns of relationship and shared conceptions of reality. Durkheim holds the view that in simpler societies all embracing moral consensus is a necessary condition of social solidarity. He named this type of social cohesion, mechanical solidarity. In kinship groups and clans, this type of mechanical solidarity is prominent. The individual is strongly subordinated to the conscience collective. The conscience collective is the prevalence of strongly held collective moral beliefs of a social formation. The conscience collective is most coherent and strong in the simplest forms of society. In such societies, collective beliefs are centred in religion. Here, the criminal law is the religious law (repressive law). Durkheim is of the opinion that where the mechanical solidarity is the basis of social cohesion, social conduct is controlled by shared values and beliefs; the collectivity dominates the individual, and there is only rudimentary development of individual self-consciousness.

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In simpler societies, every individual had his/her place in a fixed hierarchy of things.\textsuperscript{30} Tribal culture is characterized by mutual responsibility, and solidarity expressed through folk art, folk music and dance and social thinking against individualization. The traditional way of life is in harmony with the rhythms of nature. The tribal culture in the olden days is known for its egalitarianism. The accumulations as well as distribution of food were on the basis of communal needs. The need of everyone in society was taken care of and no one was allowed to be neglected or to starve. The old, handicapped, and underprivileged categories were especially cared for, mainly due to the fellow feeling born out of community living.\textsuperscript{31} The old, who can no longer produce for themselves, are rendered dependent upon others for their livelihood.\textsuperscript{32} The custom of marriage among Gonds known as \textit{hamsāniya}, in which the son-in-law has to live in wife’s house for the whole life, so some of the tribal opt this as old age security in the later stage of their life\textsuperscript{33}. The community itself takes responsibility of protecting their aged ones. Dwellings of the tribal are mostly \textit{katchā} in nature, which require constant attention. But their relatives and neighbours do such works for them. During any kind of sickness, they depend on \textit{siṛha (gōṭra vaidyan} – local medicine man) who

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 31.
only can understand the reason behind the sickness. All the elderly have a very deep-rooted belief in this system. If the old man is alone, the *sirha* takes him to his house with him and treats him. The burden is shared by the community. The elderly people are regarded as the responsibility of the community, if there are no close relatives, and especially during the sickness which is very common in this age. Again, the role of elderly is related to their ability to control scarce resources within the social group.³⁴ The social system which depends upon the continuing performance of numerous age specific functions accommodates their elderly with reverence and affection. The tribal society is an example.

**Old Age in Stratified Societies**

The most important premodern social formation appeared in history as the structured outcome of stratification. Therefore, the discussion of the old age in history has to focus on the structure, relations and processes of stratified societies as to understand the status of the aged. Premodern stratified societies were hierarchically structured agrarian societies. In Yogendra Singh’s opinion, practice of hierarchy is an important characteristic of tradition where it could be determined on the basis of age, gender, class, caste or power.³⁵ In India the strata represented the hierarchy of castes which distinguishes India from all other societies. But of all the

regions of India, Kerala had the most rigid and elaborate caste structure and was considered as one of the most caste-ridden parts of India. The census report of Cochin (1911) points out that, caste rules and restrictions are more rigid and severe among the ‘malayāḷis’ than among other classes in India. The agrarian social division of labour had its institutional expression in the caste system. As the economic status, social position and nature of freedom varied according to caste, the conditions of the aged have to be examined caste-wise.

**Priestly Caste/Land Lords**

The famous *Paraśurāma* legend and the *Puruṣasūkta*--the Brahmin was born out of the mouth of *Brahma*, the *Kṣaṭṭiya* from his arms, and the *Vaiśya* from his waist and the *Sūdra* from his feet-- supports to establish a predominant position for the priestly caste in the caste society. This led to the social stratification, with the Brahmins at the top most level and various other communities placed in a graded hierarchy. The social division on the basis of means of survival and the socio-

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Parasurama legend says, “Brahmins are believed to have been brought to Kerala by Parasurama, one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Parasurama had to take vengeance upon Kshatriyas in order they killed his dear father. So to pay penalty of his own sin, Parasurama decided to make gift of land to the Brahmins. So he threw his axe across the sea from Kanyakumari and water receded up to the spot where it fell; thus constituted the land of Kerala. Parasurama, then invited Brahmins to this new land and presented Kerala to them”.

political organization on the basis of religious authority offered a unique place to the Brahmins in the social structure. Their scriptural authority, solar calendar, ayurvedic medicine, and superior technology of agrarian management, helped to gain dominance in social formation. All these hierarchical hegemony helped their aged to claim higher status, since they were the real authorities of such positions. The higher status of the elders of Brahmins at the apex of the hierarchical pyramid was due to their birthright.

The Brahmin settlers were keen to organise the social structure in such a way with agriculture as the means of their survival. According to Brahmin customary law the possession of land was possible only by one’s birth in that community. And for Kesavan Veluthettu, the janmi means one who got land by janmam (The name jāti is of Sanskrit origin, connected with janmam or birth) and naturally the elders were the janmis. As advisers of the rulers and as the religious authority the Brahmins, especially their elders obtained land and likewise the social status for their services. Though the Brahmins were owners, they were not cultivators by themselves.

40 Brahmins selected riversides, not too close to the forest or to sea, for their settlement and built many villages on the basis of agrarian economy. Their main attraction was proper place for cultivation. These lands must have been presented to them by the Naduvazhis in return of conducting religious services to them. Accumulation of land was of two fold, as their own private holding (Brahmaswom) and as the property of the temple (Dewaswom).
This necessitated the existence of an intermediary class in order to have control over the agrarian activity. This situation created the division of labour on which the salient feature, of the caste system in agrarian society was formulated. Being the owner (janmi) or landed organiser, the Brahmins and likewise their elders acquired authority over the cultivators and they could escape from hard work in soil. So the physical decay of old age would not even affect the economic status of the janmi. The ‘janmi system’ helped the Brahmin elderly to enjoy their old age with the acquisition of land and wealth. The economic well-being of the Brahmin community offered status to their women too. Their agricultural know-how and the knowledge to predict the weather was helpful in agrarian activities. The Brahmins were allowed to have food from the temples and so their elders too were cared for by the temple centred operations. Even the economically poor could attain the respect merely by virtue of caste and its practice. Osella argues that the Brahmanic hegemony grew in such a way that, dignity is strongly bound up with caste status and rooted in forms of ossified symbolic and cultural capital such as family name and religious practice; independent of current economic capital- poor Brahmins can receive respect merely by virtue of caste and lifestyle.\(^{43}\)

In temples, all the various services had a hierarchy of ritual and material statuses.\textsuperscript{44} The tantrī headed the hierarchy of ritual status. Naturally these tantrīs were the learned elder Brahmins. Sabhaiyar headed the hierarchy of material statuses\textsuperscript{45}. The structural details of sabha (Brahmana land holders of an īr constituted sabha) reveal that all the Brahmana families of a settlement were represented by their elders. Hence, the ritual and material status of the Brahmins were safe in the hands of their elders as per the caste hierarchy.

According to Nagam Aiya, a Nambudiri is theoretically a life-long student of Vedas; he spends the greater part of the day in his religious exercises and devotions.\textsuperscript{46} The study of Sanskrit was considered as Brahmins’ birthright. Only Brahmins of noble origin were allowed to study and practise Vedas and for them the Vedic learning constituted the true knowledge.\textsuperscript{47} They liked to keep Vedic tradition in their life style as they devoted their life to religion and priestly professions. They need to learn Vedas, śāstra, art, literature, logic, astrology, ayurvéda etc. The boys were allowed to marry only after completing their religious education. Since the learning of Veda was essential for a Brahmin youth, it was the responsibility of the elder priests and scholars to teach these to the young

\textsuperscript{44} Rajan Gurukkal \textit{The Kerala Temple...}, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid}, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid}, p. 248.
according to their customary practices. In all the chief ceremonies like nāmakaranam (naming ceremony), vidyārambham (initiation of the letters of the alphabet), upanayanam (investiture of the sacred thread), the presence of the father or an elder Brahmin was essential in conducting the ceremony. Giving gifts to Brahmins on auspicious occasions was the practice of the day.48 In this manner, the elder Brahmins had reputed role in the community and were being respected for the same.

Instituted form of education was confined to Vedic instruction for Brahmins and the temple managed it in the śālā-s attached to it. Here the concept about education became more selective, not meant for the general public, but for the pupils of upper castes. The temples took the initiative to transact knowledge among their own favoured caste and started śālā-s as attached to the temples where it offered specialised learning in auxiliary branches of Vedic literature.49 Since the knowledge were in the minds of the individual as collective forms, the young who were in need of education must stay with the authority or the guru for its proper transfer, the way of education. Here the role of the elder Brahmin was so great that all the knowledge was in their minds, and it was the mercy of the guru or the elder one to impart knowledge among the young who take pains to stay with him. Thus, the ‘gurukula sampradāya’ came in effect as the concept

of education got more meaning-imparting functional knowledge. This is a type of tutelage system where the pupil stays with guru, so as to learn more functionally and to be acknowledged with more practical wisdom. So that the student gets enough time to learn, all the skills and knowledge through practical lessons and theories from the guru, the teacher. The gurus were naturally the elder Brahmins who could command certain respectable position in the society.

The Brahmin family had a pre-dominance of joint family system that provide a concrete base to its social structure. The joint family system of traditional agrarian society is the one in which members of three or more generations stayed together on the basis of common ancestry and property. Such families were patriarchal; women had a subordinate position; elder family head had sole authority over all the members and guided all activities. Only the eldest brother can marry from the same caste, younger members may have sambandham with the women of Kṣatriya and high caste Nair. Thus, the sole authority of the entire joint family was the eldest Brahmin, and his wife was the authority of the household matters.

The ancestor worship and inheritance of property are the twin aspects that supported the joint family system. In both the cases, a warm relation between the young and old was necessary. The ancestor worship and

the prayers offered on behalf of them by the sons for the father’s salvation made the relation between them a comfortable one.

According to RigVeda, these ancestors or ‘pitris’ are supposed to be living under King Yama, the God of death, and other spirits. On supplication and offering of prayers King Yama visits the grieved relatives with a thousand ‘pitris’ who partake of the food offered. Since the time of Manu, the sons alone were regarded as eligible for offering such prayers; and the ancestor-worship offered by the sons would help them in their spiritual march.  

In Vedic life, the father-son relation was strongly bound as both of them needed each other. The presence of a son and the son’s son is important for the salvation of a Hindu. So with the birth of a grandson one is assured of oneself being the starting point of ancestral śrāddhās. Their faith in rebirth encouraged the younger generation to give respect to the elderly. Otherwise, it would invite punishment by being born as an animal in the next birth. So the filial piety was practised by the younger generation earnestly.

The Nambudiri families were patriarchal and patrilocal. The entire wealth of the large family belongs to the patriarchal taravād, the joint family, and all its members had the right to receive food, shelter and

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53 Ibid., p. 3. Shraddha means rites performed in memory of the departed souls.
clothing as per need. The father’s property was inherited by all his children. The relationship between the grandfather, the aged man, and the grandsons, the young ones, was strongly knit for the existence of a family in Vedic tradition. In the words of Tamara K. Harevan\textsuperscript{54}, in the past, it is the family that keeps control over the timing of its individual members’ transition to managing its resources, especially in balancing members’ contribution to the family economy. The acceptance of authority of father over the entire family property and its inheritance after the death of the head of the family also needed a balanced relation between the father and the sons. In such relations the joint stay in a common household put great impacts over its members. Inheritance of property was an important factor that brings respect and power to the old in traditional joint living arrangement.

In a joint family, everyone contributes according to the ability each has and gets according to his/her needs. So it is very much like a social insurance agency for the old and the diseased. In a joint family set-up, the children as well as the old and infirm members get a sense of security and assurance that their needs will be taken care of. This system was helpful for many of the Brahmin women because many of them remained unmarried due to their caste practices like, only the eldest brother can marry from the

same castes, and the Nambudiri women were allowed to marry only from the same caste. The Nambudiri women were known by the name *antarjanam* (*agathammamāṟ)*, meant to stay inside the house and to look after the household affairs, not to keep contact with the outside people. ⁵⁵ This ‘*antarjanam*’ practice was favourable to the elder female as she could enjoy all the conveniences of the *illam* without doing any hard work. Their marriage system did not mind to marry young girls to aged Nambudiris; thus they lived for the sake of their husbands. So the aged Brahmin was cared for. In all, the joint family system favoured the aged men and women Brahmin in one way or the other.

Brahmins accepted ‘*vaṟnāśyaṃdhaṃma*’--the *brahmacharya* (student life); *grahasta* (married life); *vānapṛasta* (life of retirement); and *sanyāsa* (the life of renunciation) -- as the ideal way of life prescribed by the Vedic philosophy to acquire salvation. It provided a special place to the old and period of old age. By the time a son reached maturity and started clamouring for *vānapṛasta* authority his father would have ideally stepped down and entered the ‘stage by delegating his authority to the son. It is the stage of “dwelling as a forest hermit”. In this period, the man should detach himself from all the family and mundane matters; and should go for pilgrimage with or without his wife. And the last stage, *sanyāsa* advocates the life of renunciation or self denial which advises to free the soul from

material things by meditation and penance and to become a homeless wanderer with all the earthly ties broken. This process of institutionalization of old age is simultaneously provided with necessary arrangements by the Brahmins to care and cater those elderly who enter into the stage of vānaprāsta and sanyāsa. The dharmaśālas served the purpose of temporary shelter for the use of pilgrims, and was built by kings of various times. But most of them were built as attached to the temples of the time. There is evidence that shows that the presence of ūttapurās during the Brahmin oligarchy, the institutions that were supposed to have been established chiefly for giving food to Brahmin travellers and their aged and its management was considered as the important functions of the community. Here on the institutionalization of old age; the Brahmin oligarchy played their role well. Their elders were prepared themselves to face old age courageously in high esteem and the society too had special arrangements and caring facilities for the aged people.

**Tenant Castes**

In land relations, the Nairs hold the position of ‘the karālar’ or ‘the tenants’-who got the land leased from the Brahmins. In Rajan Gurukkal’s words, the Nairs are traditionally, a martial people, they are distinctive of two characteristics- a strong sense of pride in the clan and a healthy respect for women. They seem to have been the foremost among the non-brahmana
order. They could hold privileged positions like class of intermediary in the land system, second dominant position in the socio-political realm and so attained position as sāmanta chieftains, and a major recruitment ground for military establishments. The close relationship with the Nambudiris and their military role offered a high-caste status to Nairs in the society. Automatically, these privileges helped their elderly to have higher status in the society. The Nairs, the upper and lower, established very close relationship with the Nambudiris and they were appointed as the cultivators of large acres of land owned by the Nambudiris, and later they became the land owners themselves. As the owners of large acres of land, their elders became the economic authority and thus enjoyed higher status in the society. Among the Nairs, their old were in great demand to give proper advice and direction to the Brahmins in time of danger. On some cases they were the faithful servants to the Brahmins and were called by the name kāryastan at their old age, Nagam Aiya says.

The Nairs had political power of the Nairs was high for the maintenance of law and order in each nādu. In older times, at the village level the Nairs had nāṭukūṭtam (local fellowship), and were the custodians of ancient rights and customs. There, the elder head had to keep a close

check on the chieftain’s ministers. The tara was their territorial unit of organization for the civil purposes. Each tara was represented by the eldermost male member or kāraṇavar of a taḻavād. Kāraṇavan, the eldest male member of the taḻavād (joint property of the entire household) is legally responsible for the well-being, control and management of the members of the family too. As the management of the ‘taḻavād’ was vested with the eldest male member, his power and authority were much higher. In short, the elder member had the responsibility of managing three or four generations together under one roof. The kāraṇavan as the autocrat of the taravad, possessed unlimited power over the family. He is greatly respected; veneration for him after his death taking the form of ancestor-worship, a practice peculiar to Nairs. The role of the kāraṇavar, in a traditional Nair family is described well in the novel, Indulēkha. The kāraṇavar, Panchumenon is 70 years old and the super power of the entire joint family (taḻavād), which include his own family, his children’s family, sister’s family etc. The Nairs follow the marumakkatāyam system of inheritance. A mother and all her children, all the children of her daughters, and all her brothers and sisters and the descendants on the sister’s side, in

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61 O.Chandumenon, Indulekha, Kottayam, India Press, 1889.
brief, all the women’s relatives on female side live together in one taṟavād and enjoyed together the common taṟavād property. Under the marumakkatāyam system, the property rights of the joint family are vested in the female members and are passed on from mother to daughter, though the property is managed by the oldest male relative of the family, kāraṇavan. Every member male or female has an equal interest in the taṟavād, but cannot claim his or her share of it.62 There, the elder women could enjoy higher status over the entire household. Their joint family system could hold all the members of the family together as their women were not allowed to go away from the ‘taṟavād’ through marriage system. The widowhood, divorce or old age did not affect the Nair women materially. They did not have to depend on the husband’s family for protection. They are protected by the four walls of taṟavād. The aged were cared for by other family members and never felt lonely. As the marumakkatāyam system allows the child to take the mother’s family name, the older mother and her family is being remembered and respected by the younger generations. Since the property and assets of the taṟavād were held in common by all members, the aged too were taken care of, never neglected. The junior member of the taṟavād is practically voiceless.63 The sambandham is usually arranged by the kāraṇavans of

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two families. All these show how the high status and power of the elder male and female in the entire household of traditional Nair taravād.

In the edited work of P.N.Chopra, the role of an old man is noted vital, when the daughter of a Nair house attains puberty; they celebrate a ‘mock’ marriage. It is written that ‘The “bridegroom” is a respected old man from the neighbourhood, whether married or not. He ties gold talīs (mangalasūṭrās) around the necks of the girls and his part is over.’ Though the responsibility of the old man is over after tying of the mangalasūṭrā, his role is vital for the function. The aged Nairs wielded power as nāduvāzhis, chieftains, King’s representatives, karāḷar, kāraṇavaṟ, heads and members of Tara associations, kalari gurukkal and village teachers (ezhutacchan). Many of them were professional warriors with high skill in swordsmanship, and played vital role as fighters. So, attached to the house of each village headman, there was a kalari in which youths were trained in the arts of combat and defence. There, the elder Nair as the Kalari Guru was respected by the youths. Sastṛakaḷi, vēlakaḷi, kathakaḷi are the important cultural contributions of Nairs and every Nair considers them as part of his life. It is mentioned by Nagam Aiya that ezhuttachan (professional village school masters), or the Nair or ambalavāsi teacher, who had been teaching vernacular to the Nambudhiri, received dakṣiṇa or

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64 Ibid, p. 357.
consolidated fee from them, indicating a respectable position in the social
formation of the period. Similarly the office of the learned astrologer
(vāddhyān) is used to decide on the horoscope and fix the muhūrtam of the
marriage by almost all communities. In all the ceremonies of the family
like nāmakaraṇam, annaprasanam, vidyārmbham and sambadham, the
kāraṇavan of the family had an important role. Not only for the Nairs,
but for other communities, an aged Nair being needed and respected in
traditional days. For the Nairs, the matrilineal system brings respectful
position to their women.

Artisan Castes or Kamala-Jātis

The Ezhavas of Kerala belong to the artisan caste or kamala-jātis. Though they constitute a backward community they have gained position
of strength in the social and political life of Kerala. Originally they are
toddy-tappers, but are good cultivators and engage in every kind of work
which requires bodily strength and vigour. Other occupations in which they
are engaged are astrology, traditional medicine, (for instance, ashtānga-
hṛidaya) teaching of grammar and vēdānta. In all such occupations, their
dyers had a vital role to teach the skill (kulattozhil) to their youngsters.

68 Ibid, p.352-357.
The role of an old as the headman of the community was vital when they perform important ceremonies like *pudavakoda, tālikeṭṭu, thirantukūṭi* and so on, it could take place under the supervision of the headman. As among several other castes, the Ezhavas had their social headmen who are known as *cannarmāṛs, mutaltaṭṭukaṛs* etc. In south Travancore, the consent of the *cānnar* and in other places that of *tandān* was required for the consummation of marriage. The elder *cānnar* or *tandān* was respected by the entire community. In each circle consisting of certain number of *karās* or *murīs* – village and its subdivisions- there were a few of these headmen, whose business was to make preliminary enquiries about social disputes and convene meetings for the arbitration and settlements of such disputes. The managements of village temples were entrusted to the headman.\(^69\) In Ezhava community, the village head men were responsible to settle the disputes and had power to conduct and legalize the marriages according to the usages of the caste. The stories of the redoubtable *ārōmal cēkavar*, his sister *uṇṇiyāṛcha*, and her son, *ārōmaluṇṇi*, are sung by the peasant women in the rice fields.\(^70\) These are the stories that describe their heroic origin which they pass on to generations by the singing of elder peasant women. The role of the elder women was so tremendous in keeping their community spirit. As the Ezhavas belonged to the category of *avarṇās*, they occupied a lower position in the social hierarchy. Their

\(^{69}\) *Ibid*, p. 401.

elders could not enjoy the power and prestige among the society (as a whole) even at the time of old age. Even then, their caste and the customary practices offered specified roles to the old in the families and in their own community. Generally, the village head men were selected from the senior ones. Their role and supremacy in the community were unique and recognized by others.

**Enslaved Castes or Atiyala-Jātis**

The group that occupied the lowest ladder of the caste hierarchy was the so called ‘out castes’, or enslaved castes. Mainly they are composed of Pulayās, Paṟayas and Kuṟavās. They belong to the category ‘avaṁā’, the near presence of such men or women was offensive to caste Hindus, Syrians and even Muslims. They had to cry out to warn high castes of their approach. As the caste name denotes, their aged also belong to the lower strata of the society. Unlike other communities, even in traditional days, their aged never had any chance for social, economic or political status in the society. The condition of these people before the abolition of slavery was reported by Samuel Mateer that “the aged, if there are any, suffer from debility, and may lie helpless day after day until they die”. Though there is no clear cut evidence for this, one can assume that their own family and community must have given authority to their elderly.

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72 Ibid, p. 22.
Kuṟavās shared some of the characteristics of the hill tribe and they formed the chief field labourers. The role of the elderly was to teach the skills to the young. They followed marumakkatāyam system of inheritance and celebrate keṭṭukalyāṇam, and sambandham and observe sixteen days’ death pollution. Due to this system, their elder women must have been given respect, at least for the inheritance of property. In the midst of economic insufficiency, inheriting property is a matter of economic well-being. So the elders were needed by the young for their survival.

In Caldwell’s opinion, paṟaya form one of the aboriginal tribes, and derives the word paṟaya from paṟai or drum as the caste furnishes the drummers, especially at funerals and when State criminals were taken to the gallows for execution. They are strong and muscular in build and capable of hard work and formed a vast majority in agricultural labour. Either as drummers or as agricultural labourers, the younger generation needed the elders to learn the proper functioning of their traditional job. In Nagam Aiya’s opinion, they are demon-worshippers. In that way too, the elders had a significant role among the community. Valluvans acts as priests, whose major function is singing of songs at the time of marriages where there was no other religious ceremony as such. There the role of the elder valluvan was considered vital in the conducting of such ceremonies.

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74 idem.
75 idem.
The *Pulayās* form a regularly organized tribe and the village organization among them was on the territorial basis. Public affairs are controlled by an assembly of elders who punish delinquents and decide caste disputes. It is an assembly composed of heads and chieftains that sits in judgement over the erring *Pulayās*. The *aikarayajamānan* (a descendant of the *Pulayā* chief and still commands great respect), is their recognized leader, and under him are two chieftains known as *taṭṭeri acan* and *mannathu kōil vallan*. Subordinates to them are the head *valluvans* (performs priestly functions) whose jurisdictions extend over particular villages or *dēśams*. This political configuration expresses the power of a *Pulayā* chief over the communal affairs. *Pulayās* are a hard-working race and their work lie almost exclusively in the rice fields. Their elders pass on this hard-working nature to their youngsters by bringing them to the fields and giving small works. The old and the young, men and women refresh themselves with toddy as their favourite drink. They have no temples, but worship demons, evil spirits or deceased ancestors called *cāvaŗs* and the elders were the experts of such worships. Their important ceremonies like *tālikeṭṭu* and nuptials are celebrated under the supervision of elder ones.

Though the social formation of caste society did not offer an honourable position to the lower castes, their own caste and familial

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77 *idem.*
organizations provided important roles to their elderly. Since the work of agricultural field lie almost exclusively among these communities, their elders too were highly needed by the society. Their knowledge and experience in farming and other agricultural activities offered authority over the youngsters who were new to the field.

**Christians**

The Christians of Kerala traced their origin to the tradition of St. Thomas who is believed to have come to the Malabar Coast in the first century of A.D. This is the basis of their tradition and identity, distinguishing them from other indigenous community of the region. As merchants and traders and as the followers of a different religion, they were positioned outside the caste system; but they could establish a distinguished class position in the hierarchy of caste system. They had a higher position in the social hierarchy, which was sanctioned by the rulers.78 The Christians of Kerala were treated in the same way as high caste Hindus and honoured with high positions socially and economically. Though they hold a separate faith, their social and cultural practices had much similarity to that of the regional people. The Christians of Kerala were rigid with the practice of untouchability and unapprochability, said,

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78 The Syrian Christian identity and their belief of the superior of their ancestors in the past is based on 72 social privileges granted to Thomas of Cana, for example, the privileges given to the tenants of the nagaram and to the Ancuvanam and Manigramam) and the title ‘Mappilai’ was inferred as the son-in-law to the king also elevated them to a very dignified position. C.P.Mathew and M.M.Thomas, *The Indian Churches of SaintThomas*, Delhi, Ispck, 1967, p. 20
George Wood Cock. This social, economic, political and religious identity favoured their aged too who enjoyed certain status in society.

Mainly, trade and commerce were the major means of survival for the Christians of Kerala. Later, the interest of Kings and nāduvāzhis to encourage the trade of agricultural products and spices could help the Christians to get involved in agriculture, a major source of livelihood in the region. The geographic conditions of Kerala also prompted them to select agriculture as a means to survive. In all such economic activities, either as the authorities or as guides, the elders had distinguished roles to perform.

The social, political and religious organizations were more or less the same for the Christians. All the three were organized more around the church where the aged were the centrality of religious functions. There are indications which suggest the centrality of religion and religious practices helped the social life and importance of elder group. The Archdeacon, an elder person and the native head of the Christian churches, was the social leader of the community also. In India the title, Archdeaconate, is known by the name ‘jātikku kartavian’ (head of the community) in later centuries.


80 For details see M.G.S. Narayan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p. 5. He says that the early Christians came Kerala, the undeveloped semi-tribal Dravidian society, devoid of naval power and coinage, with shiploads of gold and the promise of trade.

81 The Jewish and Syrian Christian trade corporations, Anjuvanam and Manigramam were powerful as Kings’ representatives to decide the kind of articles and price of articles and the monopoly of maritime trade. William Logan, Malabar Manual, Vol.1, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1995, pp. 110-120.

82 Jacob Kollaparampill, The Archdeaconate of All India, Rome, 1972, p. 15.
The role of the elderly as representatives to instruct Christian identity and constancy of religious practices are evidenced in the account of Cosmos Indicoplestus.\(^{83}\) It says the first evidence of an organized church in Malabar in the sixth century ordained bishops, priests, and representatives. These representatives were sufficiently instructed, so that they could lead the community even in the absence of priests; and these representatives were mainly from the elder group.

The role of the elderly in church activities was vital. The churches were autonomous in nature and were governed by the parish assembly or \(yōg\)am (presided by the priest) consisted of the ‘elders’ selected from the senior male members of the church. Giving due respect to the elders and seniors were their invariable custom. The \(yōg\)am decided all the social and ecclesiastical aspects of the community, the management of the church properties, selection of candidates to priesthood etc. Theses candidates were trained locally by learned priests known as \(mālpān\) in his house similar to that of the \(gurukula\) institute of learning.\(^{84}\) The old priest was held in great respect. In addition, the selected members from parish assembly constituted the regional assembly which had the power to take

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decision about punishments.\textsuperscript{85} No ecclesiastical community questioned the decisions taken by the general assembly, presided by the Archdeacon or jātikku kaṛṭavyan.\textsuperscript{86} Since most of the selected members of general assembly were from the elder group, the symbolic expression of respect (being old is enough to give respect) is valued while taking decisions.

The Syrian Christians followed patriarchal customs and practices in their social and religious life. Adherence to the St. Thomas tradition (‘martomāyude mārgavum vazhipādum’-life style of Mar Thoma) also indicates the importance of the strict practices of patriarchy to their religious life. Due to this reason, it was the elders, mainly the male, who formed the decision making body of the church and the community. In domestic life also the respect given to the elders is legendary.\textsuperscript{87} The youngsters never sat before the elders or participated in conversation unless specifically asked. The system of ‘patriarchy’ among them allowed their elder most male member to act as decision making body and control the resources of the family, and of the community. In patrilineality, the elder male of an extended family has an important role in all the family affairs. The role of the elderly to the cultural transactions was high among the Christians. The Christian families pray and sing at home, both morning and

evening, under the guidance and supervision of the aged parents. Reciting the rosary, reading Bible and conducting prayer are done under the guidance of the elderly through which the moral values and good conduct are passed on to the generations. It was the responsibility of the family to care for all its members including the sick, poor, and elderly. Christians consider Bible as the ‘Word of God’ which says to imitate only the life of Jesus Christ and to follow it to lead a Christian life. Jesus’ life was filled with love and compassion for the weak and wretched mankind. He always had a soft corner for the disabled, widowed, aged and destitute sections of society. Bible emphasizes the need to honour ones’ parents and to respect the elderly. Some verses from the Bible stand as evidence of this argument:

Listen to your father, without him you would not exist. When your mother is old show her your appreciation. (Proverbs 23:22).

Anyone who makes fun of his father or despises his mother in her old age ought to be eaten by vultures or have his eyes picked out by wild ravens. (Proverbs 30:17).

We admire the strength of youth and respect the grey hair of age. (Pro 20:29).

Never move an old boundary-mark which your ancestor established. (Pro 22:28).

Christianity as well as Bible always favours the elderly with respect and gratitude. As the Bible says in Ephesians 6: 1-3,

“Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do. Respect your father and mother, is the first commandment that has a
Obey the parents is the right behaviour to achieve prosperity in life, says Bible. These types of teachings were helpful to have certain measures of respect and reverence to the elder members. Impact of this type of teaching to the Christian life is well described in the novel, Parishkārappati. The novel is published in 1892(M.E.1067) and explains the traditional discourses of Christian families. In it the ‘mūppēnnu’(elder one) was well prepared for his old age and was sure that he will be cared pleasantly by the ‘anantiravaṛ’(youngsters). He was happy to divide his property among the children, and took the privilege to bless his generation happily. According to Christianity, the old have always been accorded decision making power and social status, the father is the main provider and mother is the figure of family cohesion.

**Muslims**

Islam reached Kerala in early half of the seventh century and spread rapidly in Malabar Coast due to the warm welcome offered by the Chera emperors. It is said that the Cheraman Perumal and one zamoṛin did not

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89 Ibid., p. 231.
90 Ibid., p. 239.
oppose conversion to Islam as they were happy to accept it. The royal support of the Kings helped Muslims to have certain rights and privileges. The Muslim community and their elderly are said to have high status in the society. Though they were outside the formation of the caste system, the wealth attained through trade and commerce helped them to attain a higher position in the social hierarchy. Like Christians, they were also generally accorded ‘respectable’ status by Hindus.

Trade is in the very blood of Muslims who are hard working and adventurous in nature. Trade became the major means of survival where the elderly had specified roles as experts of trade and its secrets. Soon the number of Muslim traders increased and Kings gave special privilege to settle down in coastal areas as they needed to improve trade and commerce with foreign countries. However their interests were primarily commercial, questions of land did not necessarily involve them.

While we consider the social conception of old age, religion had greater influence than political, cultural or other social aspects. The reason for this is the religious commitment of māppilā (the Malayalam speaking Muslims) and their intensity of religious devotion, the particular characteristic

M.G.S. Narayan, Cultural Symbiosis..., Op.Cit., p.6. He has been emphasized the fact of merchants and ambassadors of Arab culture were well received by rulers of that time in Kerala.


94 idem.
of traditional Muslims.\textsuperscript{95} The religion is the major determinant of social status for the Muslims. Muslims of Kerala were strict in the observance of their religious customs and practices. They claim to be faithful adherents of Islam while the outside worlds were full of infidels or kāffīrs, towards whom the free use of sword is sanctioned by the Koran. They offer prayer five times a day alone or in congregation with the elders. The priests who are known under the name of tangals exercise considerable influence over the religious practices. The tangals were generally from the category of elders. It may not be wrong to assume that the strict observance of religious practices (fasting and prayers five-time a day) and precepts, and their adherence to the Islam inscribed certain ‘defined’ roles to their elderly.

The Muslims follow lunar higra Calender for all religious matters, weddings and celebrations.\textsuperscript{96} The calculations of ramzan, (a chief occasion for the giving of alms to the poor) and bakrīd need intensified knowledge about the practices of Islam. The elders had a significant role to play as they are experienced. The mahōmedans are characterized by their piety and devotion. They go for pilgrimage to the holy city, Mecca, the birth place of Mahomet. It is one of the chief aims of a Moslem’s life, and one among the five important

precepts ordained by the Prophet.\textsuperscript{97} Pilgrimage to Mecca is one among the five duties that a Muslim needs to perform at least in old age.

The Muslims sent their children to ‘\textit{mada\textsuperscript{s}ās}’ to study Islam as well as Arabic script. The religious teachings were in order to foster the sense of brotherhood and equality. Nagam Aiya says, a religious schism among them is sufficient to estrange the feelings of their kith and kin from the schismatics.\textsuperscript{98} This in turn produces care and attention about the weaker section, like the aged, diseased of the society. The adherence to the religious practices and customs helped the youngsters to respect and honour their elders.

According to Nagam Aiya, they follow patriarchal structure for the religious routines, but ‘\textit{marumakkatāyam}’ is followed in North Malabar, while ‘\textit{makkatāyam}’ is followed in the South Malabar.\textsuperscript{99} In P.N.Chopra’s opinion, ‘the law of inheritance is aimed at avoiding concentration of wealth…. Daughters get one-third of the property or one-half of the male share and widows one-eighth. A woman is absolute mistress of her property. Both the husband and wife are heirs to the spouse’s estate.’\textsuperscript{100} Due to this reason, old age of both the husband and wife was equally safe in their own families. P.N Chopra adds, dowry is not a bride price but a bridal gift which

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{idem}.
\textsuperscript{100} P.N.Chopra, ed. \textit{Religions and Communities…, Op.cit.}, p.196.
the husband must give to the wife. In case the husband has not paid the _mehr_ (dowry) during his life time, the widow is entitled to get it from his estate and can retain the possession of the estate till the _mehr_ is paid to her.\(^{101}\) So _mehr_ may function as old age security to a widow at her old age.

The Kerala Muslims exhibit the mixed culture of Hinduism and Islam. The system of joint families and jointly-owned properties and the _taravād_ system, (found in Brahmin and Nair communities) which are found among some Muslims, reflect this tradition.\(^{102}\) Hence, the old age of a Muslim was safe within the four walls of their family arrangement and community living. Both accorded respect and reverence to them.

All the religions encourage tolerance and kindness, and the fundamental religious teachings accommodate the old. The predominance of religion or degree of religiosity influenced the conception of the elderly in pre-modern days.

**Formation of Social Conception of Old Age in Traditional Kerala**

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. Tradition itself was a prime source of authority. When we speak of specific institutions of authority, religion

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\(^{101}\) *idem.*

obviously has a leading place. Religious tradition had the authority to determine one’s way of life in a society. So this chapter that surveyed traditional conception of old age on the basis of religion/caste-wise categorization is apt and important. By quoting Wundt’s theory of religion, Durkheim says, in simpler societies, religion is the principal source of social cohesion; religious beliefs comprise a set of ‘metaphysical speculation on the nature and order of things, but these are integrated with ritual forms of conduct and moral discipline. Religion in such societies is the source of altruistic attitudes which have the effect of restraining egoism, of inclining man towards sacrifice and disinterestedness’ thus attaching him ‘to something other than himself, making him dependent upon superior powers which symbolize the ideal. It can be said that many of the religious aspects of Indian tradition began in the Harappan civilization. Among them, Hinduism which is indebted to Vedic thoughts, known as ‘sanātanadharma’, is the Eternal spiritual Tradition of India. Hinduism laid great stress on ‘varnāṣṭramadharma’ the ‘brahmacharya (student life); grahasta (Married life); vānapṛasta (life of retirement); and sanyāsa (the life of renunciation) – the ideal way of life prescribed by the Vedic philosophy to acquire salvation. It played an important role to the life

103 Anthony Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity…, Op cit., p. 194.
of the people of India. Accordance of varṇāśramadharma as the ideal model of stages of life provided a special place to the old and period of old age.

Vanaprastha, the third stage, is literally the stage of dwelling as a forest hermit. By the time a son reached maturity and started clamouring for authority his father would have ideally stepped down and entered the Vanaprastha stage delegating his authority to the son and assuming a lesser role for him. Dwelling as a forest hermit means the man should spend some years in contemplation and devotion to the Gods. He ideally begins to loosen the personal and social ties, which have bound him to the world, a process which is completed in the final stage of life, Sanyasa. This is a period of asceticism and renunciation of worldly ties, in which the man should end in days. He should live a solitary existence, having discarded all attachments to other human beings and worldly goods and concerns, passing his days in meditation and the quest for spiritual perfection.\(^\text{105}\)

Srinivas Tilak viewed that this awareness about the stages of life helped into the development of new endeavour for spiritual liberation. He says,

When this awareness spread rapidly into the mainstream of the society, old age came to be associated with a major social problem inviting the Brahmins to respond in their role as the custodians of social organization, welfare and control. The result was the development of the ideal model of stages of

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life (asramas), and the institutionalization of old age as the final stage in life in which to strive for spiritual liberation.\textsuperscript{106}

But in later period as a quest for salvation, philosophical traditions of Upanishads have occupied a very high position with emphasis on ethics. Jainism and Buddhism originated in this context and their philosophies and ethics had many followers.\textsuperscript{107} But in later period, Buddhism declined and the development of Hindu ideal views based upon the ‘\textit{dharmaśāstra}’ were formulated. The ethic of \textit{dharmaśāstra} (the compilation of Buddhism and Vedic thoughts) assumes ageing as a process running parallel to the developing self whose intellectual capacities and ethical sensibilities are expected to grow, mould and change with growing age. \textit{Dharmaśāstra} considered the elderly as people full of intellectual capacities and ethical sensibilities which they attained through their life’s experiences. It is formulated by uniting the good essence of both the Buddhist and the Vedic philosophy, says Srinivas Tilak.\textsuperscript{108} It is the union of gerontophilia (love towards old age) of Vedic philosophy and gerontophobia (fear of old age) of Buddhism.\textsuperscript{109} It is the acceptance of ageing as a particular stage of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} Srinivas Tilak, Religion and Aging..., Op.cit., p. 158
\item \textsuperscript{107} idem.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Shrinivas Tilak, Religion and Aging..., Op. cit. p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid p.157. Old age, along with illness and death, became the source of the most fundamental conflict between the Brahmīn and Buddhist thinkers regarding the meaning and purpose of life.\textsuperscript{109} Buddhism never recommended long life with sufferings and anxiety. Never has it stood for any circumstances that may produce any pain. Generally, the old age is associated with the pain and sufferings; and with that reason there was a fear about old age. Buddhism, advised people to find out and practice their own way to fade out the ill feelings that may happen to each one’s life.
\end{itemize}
decline and decay, a more sophisticated understanding of old age. It is the acceptance of old age as a distinct stage of life with its own unique meaning and purpose, and ageing as an irreversible and inevitable process leading to disease and death. Even though, varṇāśraṇadharma advised to disengage in old age from the worldly affairs, dharmāstṛa considered old age with full of intellectual capacities and ethical sensibilities that attained through the experience of entire life. It recommends a golden conception for old age. In traditional Kerala, where the social control being exercised by religion, the social conception of old age is encircled by the religious aspects. Hence the role of religion is vital to the formation of social conception there. Besides Hinduism, Christianity and Islam too play their role well in traditional Kerala. All of these consider old age as a stage of intellectual capacities and ethical sensibilities.