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TO STAND ON THEIR OWN: WOMEN'S HIGHER EDUCATION IN
CONTEMPORARY KERALA, INDIA

BY

ALCIRA FORERO-PEÑA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Date

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Date

Jean P. Mendenhall
Chair of Examining Committee

[Signature]
Executive Officer

Jane Schneider

Shirley Lindenbaum

Eva Friendlander
Outside Reader

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

To the memory of my mother, Elvira, and to Cecilia, mi tía. In their belief that women must be educated and “cultivated”, they always encouraged and supported me (though they never imagined this journey of mine would take that long...)

ABSTRACT

STANDING ON THEIR OWN: WOMEN'S HIGHER EDUCATION IN KERALA,

INDIA

by

Alcira Forero-Peña

Advisor: Professor Joan P. Mencher

This is a study of the significance for women of college education as it occurs in colleges administered by Christian nuns in Kerala, India. Particularly, it looks at the paradoxical effects of the dramatic social changes Kerala underwent during the twentieth century that guaranteed, among other things, formal education, including post-secondary, to a large proportion of women. On the other hand, it shows not only the persistence of blatant social inequalities fed by class, caste, and gender distinctions but also the increase in inequality due to the forces of globalization. On close examination, there is little correlation between the vast numbers of educated women and those who possess personal autonomy along with meaningful employment. The interplay between gender constructions and the absence of symbolic, cultural, and financial capital can be seen as major factor in the processes leading to social reproduction through educational practices and institutions. The prestigious women's colleges run by nuns tend to reinforce the "traditional" roles of women as mothers and wives through enforced disciplinary measures that discourage independence and dissent.

Therefore, access to formal education is not enough to guarantee gender or even social equality. As elsewhere, in Kerala the cultural and social capital available to most

young women is unequally distributed. The rise of distorted interpretations of “dowry” contributes to downplaying women’s acquired formal education and the stress that the woman or her family has to undergo to arrange her marriage. All these phenomena, the dissertation shows, have their roots in historical developments related to the Indian colonial experience which resulted in the decline of social institutions such as matriliney that assured women’s property, high regard, and home regardless their civil status.

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Dreams, needs, desires, pressures, projects, efforts, illusions (our own and others): all are part of the explicit or unspoken subtext of what we are, what we do, and what we would like to become. This dissertation is the result of all of these things. As a woman of Latin American origin, the research on women's education has impelled me to reflect on my own paths of intellectual and existential wandering. It has also involved emotional challenges, struggles, and discoveries, which in turn, are related to the specific ways gender and class are constructed and reconstructed in that part of the world where I come from. For me as a woman from the "South", the process of reflecting on women's education in India has unfolded as a mirror (not necessarily upside down) of Latin American societies. As a woman from the "South", a new immigrant in the US, a "Latina", and a "woman of color", the whole process of obtaining a doctorate in the US, has involved a constant struggle with identity, with new ways of being, feeling, thinking, and obviously, learning and un-learning.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Women's education in Kerala, India's southwestern-most state has been one of the most publicized topics in the literature about women living in developing societies. The topic of education figures importantly in discussions of family planning, education and "empowerment" of women in contemporary India and in the so-called Third World. However, these discussions only take into consideration issues of literacy and primary education. This dissertation examines the significance of women's higher education in Christian Colleges run by nuns in Kerala State, India on the personal lives of women, on their families, and society in general, and how it fits into the "Kerala Model"¹. In particular, it focuses on how, within the confines of these colleges, students get special training for the university entrance examinations and for English competency, whilst conformity to the status quo is being instilled, to comply with a subordinate social script for women that privileges men's agency. This script emphasizes family life and marriage over everything else.

In 1995-1996, I did fieldwork in Kerala, with a focus on women's colleges run by Christian² nuns in urban and semi-rural settings. Most of the observations and data were gathered while living in Travancore, the southern region of Kerala, specifically in the

¹ The "Kerala Model" of social development refers to the particular social profile in spite of a low per capita income of Kerala's population; this includes the high rate of literacy and formal education among women and girls. Kerala's long history of progressive/socialist politics including the democratic election of Communist Party's candidates resulted in socialist-style programs, which were continued by candidates from other parties.

² In Kerala there are dozens of Christian divisions, notably the Protestant, the Catholic churches, and the Syrian Christians (an indigenous formation); each has several branches. The colleges I focused on belonged to either Catholic or Syrian Christian.

state's capital, Trivandrum (or Thiruvananthapuram, its current name)³. I also undertook short visits to this type of college in the regions of Cochin and Malabar. The data collected included conversations, interviews, and frequent participant observation, both within and outside of college settings. These experiences revealed many signs that young women, including those receiving a college education, have been constrained by certain social mores that have not been present in the West since the 1970's. The scope of their activities and their professional development seemed to be limited by historically constructed social and economic forces that impinge upon their autonomy⁴. These forces prevent young women who attend the mentioned colleges from realizing their full potential compared to young college women in most of the Western world. In other words, in the West, those college students who can afford to act upon their independent judgment whether as the result of the social class they belong to or as a result of certain cultural established institutions, and principles, would certainly take advantage of college education.

Based on observations, interviews, a survey, and the examination of the literature, I will argue that the cultural emphasis on marriage and the distortion of the dowry system⁵, social control and gender inequalities, have created a climate that seriously limits and is unfavorable to women's personal and professional development. The dowry,

³ In this work I use the name of the cities and regions as they used to be at the time I did my fieldwork. Just before leaving the field, many cities in India and in Kerala changed their names. Thus, Bombay became Mumbai, Madras became Chennai, Trivandrum became Thiruvananthapuram, Calicut now is Kozhikode, Cochin is Kochi, etc. Most of these names, at least those from Kerala, are in fact the original ones, prior to the British colonization.

⁴ By autonomy I mean the capacity of an individual of making independent, decisions that affect her life at the personal, social, and political level.

technically, is defined as the gifts (in kind or cash) that the parents give to the daughter upon her marriage and that are supposed to remain her property. This often corresponds to her share of the family inheritance. In India, this custom has become distorted so much so, that future in-laws or prospective husbands make exorbitant demands on the girl's parents before the marriage can be arranged. The process causes great psychological strain on the young women, economic hardships for both her family and the girl herself, and ultimately for society as a whole. Legally, dowry is banned in India. The imbalance between college-educated women's qualifications and the dearth of opportunities offered to them in terms of employment, child-care programs and professional development are also related to dowry.

Findings concerning the roles and status of women in Kerala, regardless of age, religion, caste, ethnicity and even social class, some of which could be considered less apparent, are also discussed. Among them are the notions of *streedharma*⁶ or female propriety, the emphasis on motherhood and domesticity, the preference given to and deference required by males, which are all factors that contribute to maintaining the low status of and expectations for women. Some of these elements also affect women in ways that are not immediately apparent but that curtail women's autonomy, as is for example, that they are unable to freely occupy certain public spaces and to circulate non-chaperoned without being harassed verbally or physically at any time of the day. This

⁵ At a collective level, as reminded by Dr. Eva Friedlander, my dissertation's outside reader, dowry becomes a burden to all as it damages and taints all involved.

⁶ A Sanskrit word that designates women's duty and by extension, it is meant to be a set of rules for women's behavior in society. A detailed discussion of *streedharma* and its social manifestations will be given in Chapter III (?).

phenomenon obviously begs the question of the scope of the formal education women may have access to.

Most of my data was gathered using participant observation and interviews in Trivandrum. The research included forty (40) intensive unstructured interviews with a wide variety of young women, as well as their family members, educators and government officials in twelve of Kerala's fourteen districts. In the course of my fieldwork and through interviews which were primarily conducted in English, I began to notice the particular ways people make use of certain concepts deriving from Sanskrit and Malayalam pertaining to social relationships, institutions, customs, etc. some of which can not be easily translated into English. In addition, some English expressions as they are used in Kerala may have different meanings and nuances than they would in standard British or American English. As a non-native speaker of English, I myself began to adopt many of these expressions unaware that they were not "standard" English. Having discovered this upon my arrival to the US, I began to appreciate the richness of the language as it is used in India and will therefore provide a brief glossary in the Appendix of some of these terms and concepts.

Equally important to take into account is the fact that the overwhelming majority of my interviewees had English as their second language and that also became an unspoken link between us, when they learned that I was not a native English speaker. However, I have to acknowledge that the ideal would have been conducting all interviews in Malayalam, then, no intermediaries (interpreters) or a second language would have mediated the relationship.

My objectives were threefold: 1) To understand the impact of college education, specifically in Christian-run colleges, on Malayali⁷ women themselves and on Kerala society in general. 2) To inquire into late 20th century Malayali constructions of womanhood and determine how formal education and disciplinary practices inside colleges contribute to, perpetuate and/or contest the norms of a society that is highly stratified in terms of class, caste and gender. 3) To understand the links between women's college education, and demographics (fertility transition, reproduction rights and sexual health issues), and how these variables influence the quality of life in Kerala, particularly for women. This, in turn, would inform the soundness of the "Kerala Model of Development."

I chose to limit my study to women's colleges run by Christian nuns from both the Catholic and Syrian Orthodox Churches, though what applies to them may not necessarily apply to other women's colleges. The chosen colleges are among the most prestigious in Kerala and in all of India; thus, the strategic role that this particular college education plays in the lives of the Malayali women and their families will be highlighted. Kerala's socio-cultural characteristics from a historical point of view will be traced in order to contextualize women's education within a broader setting. To this end, I formulated several questions to guide the research. These included but were not limited to:

⁷ Malayali or Malayalee is a common term to designate people from Kerala; it derives from Malayalam, their language. I will be using the terms Malayali that is more commonly used by people in Kerala and Keralites as well.

1. Kerala may have the highest female literacy and school enrollment rates in India, but does that guarantee Malayali women a greater measure of empowerment than other women in India?
2. By receiving college education, do Malayali women become more autonomous?
3. If they become professionals, are they freed from subordination found in “traditional”⁸ women’s roles?
4. Does their education actually change society’s perceptions of womanhood, women’s roles and status?
5. Has the “traditional” sexual (gendered) division of labor changed enough to allow women to forsake the most burdensome aspects of the reproductive sphere?
6. What opportunities are being created for college-educated women in Kerala?

These and other questions were the basis for my interviews with students and their families, college faculty and administrators, as well as with governmental, religious, and medical representatives.

In discussions of women’s education in official and non-official circles, one rhetorical phrase was often quoted: “if you want to educate the Nation, you must educate the woman”. This phrase implies an assimilation of the notion of biological reproduction with another form of reproduction—that of “passing on” or “reproducing” the values,

⁸ “Tradition” or/and “traditional” are highly charged concepts in Indian society. I am using these words the way they are used in India. By tradition/al, I am referring to certain stereotyped female roles, i.e. as the

norms, ideals of that very Nation. In this context, mothers are perceived as guides to their children's process of socialization, as guardians of the family's honor. Even more importantly, they are expected to be the guarantors of their daughters' propriety and purity beyond the age of majority, even after marriage.

The "Kerala model of development" also makes a number of assumptions in relation to women and the role of female education. The "model" maintains that Kerala, despite a lower per-capita income within the Indian context, has achieved levels of social development that approximate those of so-called developed nations. In Kerala's socialist-inspired system, everyone, women and girls included, have access to primary education, basic health care (including pre-natal and family planning), and government-sponsored food programs, in which they are encouraged to participate, and which, in some cases, is mandatory. Furthermore, it asserts that women's social roles, agency, and status are better than in the rest of India, the explanation for which is Kerala's high female literacy rate. These claims have given Malayalis a sense of achievement and pride and many have deemed the "Kerala Model" as an example to be followed by other "developing" regions and nations, a view that has been validated and propagated by numerous international agencies.

There are additional issues which are related to college-educated women's agency, autonomy, and political power in contemporary Kerala which are crucial for gender equality. Since 1994, Indian legislation requires a one-third percentage of women representatives in the local government and women's agency and participation at this

model of filial piety, obedience, domesticity, and the most fundamental among them, the reproductive domain.

level is expected. How this has affected women is explored, along with the pivotal issue of the “dowry” system and its relation to a woman’s education. Most important of all, perhaps, the thesis will examine the declining importance of matrilocality and matrilineality/matriliny⁹, one of the hallmarks of an important section of Kerala society. As an anthropologist whose primary interests lie in the study of contemporary women, I was especially drawn to this quite unique kinship system which traditionally involved between 20-25% of households; it provided fertile ground for a discussion I planned to do on women and higher education. While in contemporary Kerala most of the population follows either patriliney and patrilocal or neolocal residence patterns, the impact of the matrilocality and matriliney transcends time and locale, and has become an important symbol. Very often people in Kerala would refer to matriliney and even to “matriarchy” as a way to explain why women in Kerala were better off than in other parts of India.

Additional motivations for my research included the fact that I am a woman from “the South” (Latin America) and believe that a direct South-South dialogue is not only valuable but essential—especially for women. India, and in particular Kerala, seemed to be the society where I could pursue my interests in gender and women’s studies in the “Third World”, having done some research in my native country. I have always been interested in the intersections between the personal and the political, in cultural identities, and the multifaceted issues around education as a catalyst for class mobility and other important processes. I also sought to learn more about the impact of higher education on

⁹ Matrilocality refers to the special family organization in which the members live in the mother’s residence. In the case of Kerala, matrilocality was a corollary of matriliney: the lineage and identity of the family members derived from the mother’s kin.

women's lives, self-perceptions, their relationships with the men in their lives and society at large, as well as on their present and future professional aspirations.

The historical processes affecting Kerala and the effects of Western influence on "traditional cultures" are explored in detail, including the impact of colonial intervention which introduced new cultural agents and commodities, and exacerbated the already strained relations between different corporate groups and castes through the introduction of new educational and legal systems (See Fleming 1989, Forbes 1996, Gough 1968, Tharakan 1984, see also Induleka in Appendix). These influences were instrumental in creating the gradual late 19th century shift from matrilineality to the nuclear family. British influence and laws clearly caused the breakdown of the *tharavad*¹⁰ or large matrilineal "houses", inhabited by several generations. The advent of Western Christian missionaries (of all denominations) is a key factor in the history of Kerala's education and society at large particularly with regards to the education of women and girls, specially in southern Kerala. These religious institutions built churches and schools, and provided teachers whose primary mission was to indoctrinate native children and, eventually, teach them to read and write.

Most of the people I interviewed in Kerala belonged to the middle and upper-middle classes and possessed at least an undergraduate degree. These interviews came about from the contacts I made through acquaintances and through my institutional affiliation, the Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum. Besides, the women's church-run colleges I chose to study as well as the secular women's colleges I visited are

far from average. These colleges cater to middle and upper class students of all religions, although the student body in the church-run colleges is primarily Christian.

In addition to in-depth interviews and participant observation, I discovered that the more I observed, the more I needed to see and to understand. I knew that I needed to carefully monitor and take notes of daily, "normal" events that Malayalis would take for granted and that were going to be interpreted accordingly. I was aware of the fact that we, human beings, do not always do what we say we do. Besides, I suspected that, like in any other society, people would be reluctant to acknowledge or disclose matters that they considered were going to show them in a negative light. I needed to be particularly tactful, understanding, and non-judgmental and I tried my best. And yet, consciously and unconsciously I passed judgment, and this will be reflected in this work.

Moreover, whether this came naturally or I gradually became conscious of it, there were many occasions in which in the middle of an event I could not forget who I was and what I was there for, and my gaze changed to that of an anthropologist. Then, I re-started taking mental notes, observing with new eyes, and inquiring -asking questions to people around me, trying to understand the multiple phenomena occurring simultaneously.

Thanks to the insistence of my field supervisor, the late Dr. T. N. Krishnan, one of the founders of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) and fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health, I designed an open-ended questionnaire to be used in a survey. The survey was then explained to most students and faculty, and distributed in selected

¹⁰ The word *tharavad* implies not only the physical house, but as well all the land owned by the joint

colleges.. Its rationale was to standardize the information I sought and to be able to easily process it. It also became a convenient guide in both informal and formal conversations with different individuals and provided basic data on more than 400 students (See Appendix).

While in Kerala, I traveled to twelve out of fourteen districts in order to briefly visit a wide variety of women's colleges run by nuns, to observe women in relation to public space in different localities, and to learn about regional histories and social relations. However, detailed observations done over extended periods of time, took place in Trivandrum.

Understanding Kerala's general history, sociological trends, and population profile, gave meaning to some of my queries and proved indispensable. Women's higher education in Kerala is quite a unique subject and needs to be seen within a wider framework, that of the rest of India. I often had to remind myself that, in spite of its uniqueness, Kerala is very much part of India, sharing many cultural and social features, not to mention the many policies dictated by the central government in New Delhi.

Kerala and India

Kerala, one of India's smallest states in terms of territory, with a population of near 32 million according to the most recent census figures (Kerala Census 2001), it is one of the most densely populated regions on earth. Well before the colonial period, Kerala already encompassed three very distinct cultural, historical and administrative regions: Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. In spite of their differences, these regions

family, and even implies a kind of ideology of matrilineality which guarantees women's property and

were amalgamated to form the state of Kerala in 1957 when the state was restructured into fourteen districts. Prior to British colonization, the Kerala economy was primarily agricultural, which remains the case today, though it also provided a vast emporium for trade even in Roman times.

Lower caste Malayali women have played a very important role in agriculture, working alongside men in the fields, as well as in agriculturally based industries. Economic necessity “allows” lower-caste women a freedom of movement seldom “granted” to women from the upper castes and middle class in South India. In addition, Malayali women participate today in various newly created service industries and make key contributions in the fields of health and education.

Scholars, particularly Indian economists such as T.A. Krishnan (1994), Thomas Isaac (1995), K.N. Raj, Gulati, (1975,1985), and A. Sen and Dreze (1995, 1997) have constructed, deconstructed, and commented on a “Kerala model” of social development, highlighting Kerala’s successful social development profile, which, they believed, was based upon the high education and literacy rates among women. However, as remarkable as Kerala’s achievements may be, other influential factors are at play, as revealed by the Australian historian R. Jeffrey (1987,1993). His analysis of women’s education in Kerala, which, as he shows, dates back to [the 19th century], problematizes the claims made by the “Model” proponents. As far as Malayalis themselves are concerned, most of them would say that Kerala is better off today because, among other reasons, girls are not

inheritance rights.

subject to discrimination and are allowed to go to school along with their brothers, although not always to the same school.¹¹

Prior to the early 20th century, Kerala was among the most socially stratified regions of India in terms of caste and class distinctions and inequalities. This began to change with the struggles started first by Nairs who sought to break up their *tharavads* and to gain more independence. Soon after, their example would be followed by other disenfranchised lower-caste and “untouchables” who were looking for social reforms. In the 1920s and 1930s, leftist parties galvanized a movement for social justice and the redistribution of resources. In 1957, the world’s first democratically elected Communist government was inaugurated which led to a land reform policy that was only implemented later on,¹² and which tried, although unsuccessfully, to transform the educational system. In response to popular demand, subsequent governments, including those of the Communists parties who held power on and off, have enacted laws concerning the more equitable distribution of resources to fund education, health, and improved infrastructure.

Some of the statistics on “social development” regarding education for India as a whole are troubling; statistics regarding women’s education may be the reflection of a grim scenario. If one compares this with Kerala, the contrast is striking. While fifty-eight percent of India’ s female population remains illiterate, Kerala has a female illiteracy

¹¹ About 90% of children go to government schools. Families who can afford to, send their boys and girls to single-sex schools among mostly Christians. By and large parents may not pay as much tuition for their daughters’ education.

rate of less than twenty percent (See Franke and Chasin 1994 and Velayudhan 2002, Indian Census).

As previously mentioned, traditionally, at least two of the most numerous castes of Kerala had a matrilineal family pattern as well as a matrilineal kinship system up to the middle of the twentieth century, and in south Malabar until fairly recently. This is perceived by some scholars as the key to explaining the uniqueness of Kerala's social development, said to be a reason for a different profile from the rest of India in regards to women's education (Jeffrey 1993, Saradamoni 1994,1996,1999, Dube 2001, 2003).

Among other social achievements for which Kerala is well known, one could cite the highest life expectancy for women in India. While in Kerala life expectancy for women is 74, in India as a whole it is 64 years of age. (Chasin's Web Page 2003 and Government of Kerala 2001:158). Additionally, the lowest birth rate which in India is 32, in Kerala it is 22 percent; and the highest female literacy rate which for all of India is 43 percent, it is 66 percent for Kerala. . All these elements together have been taken to constitute what is known around the world as "The Kerala Model" of social development.

Although these are major achievements, the state still faces the challenge of advancing the well being of its population in spite of good intentions and real efforts by some members of the leftist governments. Kerala remains a society sharply divided along class and caste lines and may be in the process of becoming even more so, as a consequence of the 1991 policies of liberalizing and restructuring the Indian economy. It

¹² This land reform, according to some researchers in Kerala, actually did not succeed in ensuring that the tiller would have access to land; those who really benefited from it were those who already had a plot and were tenants. For more details see Mencher (), Mencher and Saradamoni ().

has been given a boost in the last four years as India as a whole closely follows the World Bank's prescriptions and the current emphasis on commoditization, privatization, and the set up of new industries, namely tourism. These measures have been taken by all the political parties in the Kerala government as a way to confront the virtual economic and industrial stagnation that has existed since the 1970's, and the source of a very high rate of unemployment, (Mukherjee and Isaac 1994). One of the many adverse results of these measures is the very high rate of unemployment among both the educated and semi-educated males and females in Kerala.

My Fieldwork

Questions of Location, Identity and Reflexivity

During my fieldwork I was repeatedly confronted with questions of representation given my particular position of being a foreign woman, Western trained, though not coming from the centers of power. This meant that I often had to check my assumptions. Although I received a partial "convent education" (for the equivalent of upper high school) in Colombia, my native country, it is also true that by the late 1970's the congregation to which the school belonged, had adopted a certain liberal outlook and was inspired by the Second Vatican Council, which resulted in less disciplinarian practices by the nuns. An example of this is that if the "boarders" didn't go home during the weekend, a few sisters were willing to take them to a dancing party where they danced with young men. This illustrates the cultural milieu I was more familiar with and highlights the

extreme contrast between those schools in Latin America in the 1970's and those colleges of Kerala in late 1996.¹³

Similarly, I had to ask myself repeatedly about the validity of making generalizations out of a sample. In short, I experienced a certain uneasiness regarding my established relationships in the field. To name just a few issues, most of the people I interviewed were English speakers and educated, thus leaving outside of my sample a larger section of Kerala's population. Therefore, I am not claiming that this ethnographic work is a reflection of all of Kerala's educated women; it is, rather, an attempt at understanding the circumstances and lived experiences of certain college-educated women only. My focus was primarily on the female colleges administered by religious women (Catholic or Syrian Christian nuns). It is important here to remind the reader(s) that most of the female college population attend the Government Colleges or colleges associated with other religions such as the Maharaja's College in Cochin (Hindu) and the Zamorin's College in Kozhicode (Muslim). More recently, one has to mention the mushrooming of "parallel colleges" or the privately owned centers that provide training for students to take the university entry exam.

For the most part, I was able to establish a good social network, thanks to the institutional support offered by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), a prestigious and well-known institution affiliated with Jawarhalal Nehru University in New Delhi. I had remained in touch with acquaintances I made during one year spent studying in Trivandrum (1989-1990), including some individuals who were not part of the academic

¹³ Experiences such as this one were not generalized: some of my friends were in fact punished by being

community and who became a window to “common” people. Most of my informants spoke English, the language I used during the fieldwork. On a few occasions I hired an interpreter so I could interview people, mostly women, who were not English speakers. A few Malayali friends graciously accepted to be my interpreters. This factor, in my view, played a role in the social universe I was able to move in and associate with. Compensating for the language drawback, I roamed all over the place, including spaces where women were not supposed to be, often used public transportation, and in general moved around at ease thanks to the overall kindness and sympathy of people towards a foreign woman by herself. However, when “escorted” by my male companion, I noticed a certain easiness that I was otherwise denied in some situations, places and times. My interpretation of this, confirmed by my educated Malayali friends, is that everything was “ok”, since I was not by myself and had a “husband”. Of course, this may also vary depending on the age of the woman. If older, she may be freer to venture almost anywhere at anytime without being harassed.

Methodology

While this study on women’s education focuses on women’s colleges run by nuns, it also takes into account other locales as eminent places where less formal education is imparted: people’s homes, theaters, public transportation, conference rooms, movie theaters, markets, churches, temples and mosques, to name just a few.

Once in Trivandrum, I made phone calls and wrote letters to more than a dozen colleges, mostly, though not exclusively, run by nuns, introducing myself and requesting

sent to schools where no such arrangements or practices were even thinkable; their congregations were still

an appointment with the Principal and the opportunity to talk with students, faculty and staff on the college premises. A good source of basic information about women's colleges was the "Hand Book" of the Department of Collegiate Education produced by the Government of Kerala, published in 1994, and whose Director Mr. V.P. Joy granted me an interview at his office of Trivandrum.

Among the colleges whose Principals invited me to visit are: All Saints College, Loyola College, and Mar Ivanios College in the District of Trivandrum; Assumption College in Changanacherry (Kottayam District), St. Joseph's College for Women in Allepey District; St. Therasas' College in Ernakulam; Vimala College in Thrissur District; Mercy College in Palghat District; and St. Mary's College in Wayanad District. Once I got a reply and or invitation, one or two visits to the college were made and I conducted in-depth interviews with principals, students, faculty, and staff. Simultaneously, I visited other institutions such as Kerala University's Department of Education in Trivandrum, and interviewed some of its faculty members. I also visited and interviewed both faculty and students at Women's College, one of the oldest institutions devoted to women's education in Trivandrum. Because I was told that there were many female students attending Kerala Agricultural University in the outskirts of Trivandrum, I paid several visits to its campus and interviewed the EO and some students of the Home Science Department, whose enrollment was entirely female. I also visited a Christian co-educational college in Wayanad, a rather isolated district, and one Christian College in Calicut (Kozhihode) that was co-educational and that had a fairly even enrollment sex ratio for their Bachelor degree programs. My criteria was that in spite of the fact that

living under a monastic discipline similar to those of Kerala.

some of these institutions were not administered by Christian nuns, nor were they single-sex ones, it was necessary to have an idea of the kind of institutions and programs available for women pursuing post-secondary education in the state of Kerala. Only then, I thought, I could gain a more comprehensive perspective, and in this way, I would be able to make possible comparisons. In fact, it was very useful to have a “panoramic” view of the “terrain”.

Likewise, I met government officials in positions of responsibility for women’s education or women’s colleges in order to know their views of what they perceived was happening in that field. Also, I felt the need to gather historical and statistical data. To this purpose, I traveled to Bombay, today Mumbai, State of Maharashtra, to undertake bibliographic and historical research on women’s education in India and to establish contacts with researchers in the field at S.N.D.T. (Srimati Nathivai Damodar Tackersey), at Women’s University.

The life histories of 25 women of different ages and levels of education were collected mostly in Trivandrum. They were, for the most part, formally educated (having completed college education). My field supervisor, Dr. T.N. Krishnan, had insisted that a survey would be quite useful to me and the questionnaire I prepared was the basis of the survey that I undertook in each of the mentioned colleges. This consisted of 45 questions (see Appendix I) and was distributed to approximately 400 informants during my visits to nine different women’s colleges run by nuns in nine out of fourteen districts.

To anticipate my overall conclusions, the significance for Malayali women of being educated is ambivalent. Although higher education per se has helped some women to gain paid employment, it has not necessarily improved women’s status overall. This is

especially so in light of contemporary structural conditions of extremely high unemployment and underemployment for Malayalis, men and women, including those with education. Though signs of women's organizing and mobilizing demanding a place in society are present, existing ideologies that encourage women's dependency and subordination do not help to improve their overall situation.

Despite women gaining access to higher education, in some areas such as Malabar, where matriliney and matrilocality prevailed among a large section of the population, the status of women among the Nairs and other castes has gone down. Women whose grandmothers were extremely independent and vocal during the independence struggle, for example, are now controlled by new social rules of behavior and the elevated role of males as husbands. Even worse, among communities where "dowry" payments were not customary such as the Nairs and other Hindu castes in Northern and Central Kerala and Muslims in North Kerala, the increasing demands for consumables are insatiable, thus undermining the potential gains made through higher education. The effects of the incorporation of "dowry" are especially devastating for working women who have to abide by the new "tradition" and must work extremely hard to save money to pay the dowry if they want to get married.

This thesis will also show, in the last chapter, how discipline, control, and "character-building", important components of the "culture" of the women's colleges, reinforces the concept of male dominance and the subordination of women. The only exceptions are the students who come from social backgrounds with symbolic and social capital that value women's autonomy and individuality.

Women's Education in Relation to Other Research on the Topic

My research has benefited and was inspired by three bodies of literature:

- (1) Critical theory of social class, caste, and education, with a major focus on the role of education as instrumental in social reproduction, particularly in the "Third World".
- (2) Feminist theory with a focus on gender constructions and on reproduction, agency and empowerment of women within Indian society.
- (3) Anthropological analysis of the relationships between gender, dowry, and women's property rights.

Critical Theory

As a student of Anthropology in the 1970's and early 1980's in a Latin American country, I shared with my friends, colleagues, and professors the fervor for transcending theory and incorporating practice in order to go beyond explaining the world and instead actively contributing to change it¹⁴. Those were the days when European thinkers and their works were read and discussed within and outside the confines of our campuses. One of the strands of the continental production was Critical Theory. A theoretical approach with roots in European philosophy; it is resolute in its interest in human emancipation and, therefore, is committed to seeking radical social change, and as such, it has been pivotal in my own theoretical formation. Currently, it is a theoretical approach

¹⁴ For example, Orlando Fals Borda's research-action methodology was already inspiring the new generation of social scientists in Colombia and beyond.

to various problems in the human sciences, as well as problems of social and cultural theory, history and politics. Here it is important to remember that with the rise of the “post-modernist” turn in theory in the late 1980’s and during the 1990’s, the theoretical significance of Marxism at the basis of “Critical Theory” lost some ground, and in many instances, became marginalized from analytical and theoretical works.

In relation to education this approach was shared by researchers on both sides of the Atlantic, mainly in the 1970’s (Althusser:1971, Leacock:1969 and 1976, Bowles and Gintis:1976). They considered the reproduction of society and its class arrangements as the main and foremost role of the school¹⁵. Education was seen as one among various systems in the form of a distinct and specialized institution within the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser:1971).

A variation on Althusser’s theory, that of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron:1977, Bourdieu and St. Martin 1974c), sees the role of schools as legitimating the dominance of society’s elites, enhancing their children’s “cultural capital”¹⁶. Students belonging to these social groups have already acquired the *savoir-faire* and *ethos* necessary to succeed in a society that cherishes middle-class values and manners, which these schools serve to reinforce. Bourdieu and his colleagues emphasize the oppressive nature of social structures “...because [schools] selectively transmit skills and attitudes according to class, sort people through credentialing into class-related social positions, and profoundly shape identities to fit class identities” (Bourdieu and Passeron: 1977).

¹⁵ ‘School’ here refers to the formal process of attending an educational institution. This may encompass kindergarten through college.

¹⁶ The concept of cultural capital was introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977c).

Although these authors acknowledge the power of social structures, they also maintain that the latter may yet be open to contestation and change, since they are socially and historically constructed. This theoretical possibility encourages the analysis of how and why teachers and students produce culture and meanings in spite/because of the overwhelming power of the surrounding structures.

Other researchers (Arnot and Yates 1993; Connell 1987, 1989; Freire 1993; Gramsci 1971; Foucault 1980), place greater emphasis on social class and notions of class formation. In North America, Bowles and Gintis (1976) undertook a similar analysis. In their view, schools advance the interests of the upper class by shaping and reproducing a non-rebellious working class. Apple (1979, 1982), Giroux 1981, Leacock (1969) arrived at similar conclusions. The notion of social class is extremely important to understanding both the positives and negatives of what is unfolding in Kerala.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony has exposed the complex process by which the upper classes achieve domination and elicit consent from those they dominate. Briefly, the concept of *hegemony* denotes the predominance of one social class over others. This represents not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it accept it as 'common sense' and 'natural'. Commentators stress that this involves willing and active consent. Gramsci's scholars argue that Gramsci's writings on culture are firmly grounded in a Marxist theory of class relations (Crehan 2002). Culture, they argue, is "actively created" by classes, either for the maintenance of hegemony, or as part of an organized struggle against it.

The educational experiences in most schools and colleges are, for the most part, both instruments and processes that buttress the interests of the middle and upper classes and castes. These dominant classes/castes have the ability to elicit consent and to project/impose their worldview on the dominated classes/castes, and the educational system has been instrumental in furthering this project. Even when the dominated accept various hegemonic views as “natural” occurrences, (i.e. the differences brought about by castes divisions, tastes, preferences, etc.), my fieldwork gave me the chance to observe non-compliance/non-consent on the part of the members of labor and student unions and workers from non-organized trades in the form of strikes, sit-ins, marches, blockades and acts of civil disobedience. Only rarely did they focus on specifically women’s or family issues; moreover, I did not observe many women participating in these actions. A notable exception was an all-women’s march protesting violence against women in which I was an observer/participant at the end of my fieldwork (see pictures in Appendix VII).

The college non-teaching staff members, faculty and general population—including female students—have at times been able to struggle against the effects of the hegemonic process; however, this has not happened in the colleges run by nuns/priests where union activities are not allowed. In colleges where they are allowed, this resistance may take different forms and even coexist with the willing consent of certain students, faculty, and staff, as is the case in most societies where male-centered ideology and hegemony are in place. To engage in these and other problematic social relations and to make sense of the specific struggles confronted and enacted by women in any society, I have benefited from theoretical approaches from the corpus of feminist literature. In

particular, I have found those pertaining to women's education and/or "Third World" women most helpful.

Feminist Critique

Within the large body of feminist theory, my work has been influenced by feminist perspectives on the education of women (Arnot 1993; Connell 1987; Hollander and Eisenhart 1990; Weiler 1988, Mukhopadhyay 1994). These writers explain how relationships between individuals in the process of schooling, i.e. receiving an education, are mediated by socially specific constructions of gender. Other writers point to the State's failure to provide an education that truly empowers women or establish a clear policy challenging current gender ideologies and sexual division of labor.

Too often, the State, local and international development agencies, institutional religions, and many sectors of society view the primary purpose of women's education as a means to provide women with training that make them useful—and profitable—in the job market. As of the 1970's, there is a commitment in feminist literature to revealing the experiences of girls, young women, and adult women as students and increasingly as teachers within the educational system. Previously, only male experiences and worldviews were considered. Feminists working in the social sciences have addressed this shortcoming and their cultural critiques of the construction of knowledge—and who has the right to it—in terms of gender, social class, and nationality, etc.

Arnot (1993), Mohanty (1991,1997), and Spivak (1988) among others, problematize the extent to which women *qua* women share experiences.¹⁷ Questions of power are common to all women, whether they live in the “ex-” Metropolis (or core nations) or the “ex”-colonies (or peripheral nations),¹⁸ living in the same country, but divided by class, ethnicity/race, religion and even region. The possibility of certain commonalities of women’s experiences in higher education across different societies is one of the questions motivating my research.

The work by Dube (1986), Leacock (1969 and 1976), and Ardener (1993), Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener (1993) also provided a fundamental cultural and feminist critique of different societies where males are privileged over females in many respects, thus hindering opportunities for women’s advancement. Shifting from the “developmentalist” conceptions¹⁹ of women’s education as the means to train the labor force, thus furthering economic development as the main target, their research consider critical studies that highlight the new dilemma faced by women in many non-industrialized countries. Either their presence or their absence in schools with a western type of formal education seems to act to their disadvantage. In competing with men for scarce wage jobs, which is the case in Kerala, women’s absence from schools such as those of Engineering or of Science

¹⁷ This questioning extends to many other fields and experiences in women’s lives. In fact, there is a growing body of literature based on research and coming from “Third World” women in that sense (Mohanti (1991), Spivak (1988), John, Anzaldúa (1989), et alia).

¹⁸ I am alluding here to Andre Gunder Frank with his “World System” and “dependence” theories (1967, 1969) and later Wallerstein’s (1974) as well as “postcolonial” theory. However, I should mention Eric Wolf’s political economy approach that better serves to frame the unequal relationships developed between the expanded Europe and the rest of the world as he wrote in “Europe and the People without History” (1982).

¹⁹ Here I am referring to the usual approach in the 1970’s and 1980’s by international development agencies for whom economic growth was the key at no matter what cost and with a blatant disregard for people’s needs and even more, for gender-sensitive approaches.

puts them at a disadvantage. But they are also at a disadvantage if they attend primary schools only, as this promotes their dependence on men who are at the top of the labor market because they have more opportunities of being schooled.

This study shares the view that class domination under capitalism is heavily supported by male dominance over women in the workplace, in the family, and within civil society, which includes educational institutions (MacDonald 1982), and that despite cultural differences this is also true for Kerala, a patriarchal society. Here, I would like to make a few clarifications regarding the concept of gender, without which my argument cannot be furthered. In many societies there are cultural constructs that translate physical and biological sexual differences between males and females into different identities and roles for men and women. This results, more often than not, in systemic inequality between men and women as well as clear patterns of women's inferior access to valued resources and opportunities. Women would be thus systematically under-represented in decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. As it occurs, this pattern of inequality becomes a hurdle on the advancement of any society because one-half of the population has limited access to valued social-economic resources that impedes them to reach their full potential. This loss is a loss for society as a whole. The congruence of these social structures, thus, are socially constructed through a hegemony, which, as I showed above, wins men and women's consent to particular definitions of masculinity and femininity. The schooling process is one of its instruments.

Most scholars will agree with the view that the legacy "tradition" was a mixed one when in contact with "modernity", especially for women born after independence in India. Women had to struggle with a "tradition" handed down since the 19th century that

marks their subjectivity with an emphasis on the home (the family and marriage), religiosity, community and caste²⁰. Mary E. John (1996) unambiguously noted that the West has set the shape and substance to the questions and desires of post-independence women in a different way. It was within a few institutions that the coded imperative to Westernize in post-independence India came about; they provided the structures and the terminology of modernization such as progress and secularism.

Writing about these institutions, John argues that they:

provided a space for some middle class women to articulate themselves beyond the confines of prior constructs of “tradition” and especially to take advantage of the mobilities of education. I might only be arguing for a shift in the complex of forces, a shift that has been possible partly because of refurbished Western connection in our educational system since the electronic revolution, especially after the dwarfing of Britain by the USA as “our” contemporary metropolis. The promises of the new class have never been emblazoned in the languages of English and the sciences as they are today. Formal education is, after all, also a process by which we learn to avow and remember certain knowledges and devalue and forget others. We grow up repudiating the local and the personal in favor of what will get us ahead and away— thus coming of age within an intellectual field that, by no means arbitrarily, creates disinterest and oversight in some areas and directs desire elsewhere. It is within such an interlocking mechanism for the production of knowledges and “sanctioned ignorances” that our subjectivities are forged. This apparatus makes our transition to first-world institutions, especially in the United States, quite possibly among the smoothest within the third-world (John 1996, pp 11-12).

One cannot often find a more straightforward assessment of the workings of (post)-colonial education for middle and upper middle class women with an obvious impact on women’s education at large than this one. John’s critical views regarding the role of some educational institutions for particular life trajectories has influenced my

²⁰ A striking and beautiful portrayal of these processes is “The Home and the World”, a film by Satyajit Ray, a Bengali.

discussion of the impact of the chosen women's colleges in Kerala thanks to the "Reservation" system. The question arises as to what extent the mechanisms used by these colleges, whether implicitly or explicitly, force some students not only to dismiss but actually to repudiate "the local and the personal in favor of what will get us ahead and away". John is clearly referring to the problems presented to women from middle and upper middle class families. Also, one would have to ask what do women want?

A pertinent question is, however, what happens to those students coming from less privileged family backgrounds and who attend the colleges attended by the children of the middle and upper class families? How does their lack of the "right" connections affect their choices? Here the problems of the production of knowledge, the articulation and constitution of gender identity, and prominently, the significance of women's education arise, not to mention those of consent and hegemony to which I alluded above. What sort of desires do these students choose to privilege and what knowledge do these students decide to forget to achieve the desired social mobility? Equally important, how is Kerala's social fabric affected by these processes?

Anthropological Theory

The third body of theory guiding this study is primarily anthropological research with a focus on gender studies, on the family, and other social structures which have an impact on women's inheritance, their property rights, and "dowry" in India. Studies by Billig (1992), Schneider (1990), and Tambiah (1991) highlight the intricate and complex interrelationships between gender, "dowry", property rights, and inheritance laws as they concern women. The fact that a woman may have property rights and an inheritance would appear to grant her a measure of autonomy. However, in practice, even if legally

she does have rights, the question arises as to what proportion of her parents' (mostly father') property she inherits and, more important, how much actual control she has over it. This issue, as I perceive it, is related to the fact that for some families, the education provided to the daughter is, in some way, considered her "dowry" or, at least, part of it, so she "can stand on her own feet".

Indian society is, for the most part, patriarchal and patrilineal. As a corollary, most Indian families are patrilocal; ideally male heirs and their wives live communally in a joint or extended family home, though in fact, proportions doing so vary by caste, sub-region, socio-economic status, occupation, etc. After a wedding ceremony, the bride ideally leaves her family to live with her in-laws. Although the law states that she retains her rights to own property, in practice, a married woman loses her right to property and inheritance, and becomes entirely dependent on her husband's family. The "dowry"²¹ given to her is most often taken from her, becoming an "enhancement" to her in-laws' and/or husband's wealth. Increasingly, there are a large number of nuclear households as well.

In Kerala, dowry payments have become increasingly common. Since the 1970s, they have even become prevalent in castes for which "dowry" never occurred, such as the Nairs and the Ezhavas (one of the castes formerly known as "Untouchable"). It has always been *de rigueur* among Orthodox "Syrian" Christians who are highly responsible

²¹ I put the word dowry in quotes because what has been known in the anthropological literature as dowry, i.e. a transaction of goods from the bride's parents before or at the time of the wedding for the daughter's use and benefit, as it is practiced in many societies, has acquired perverse turns in India and within South Asia as a region.

for making “dowry” an institution among non-Hindus.²² In addition, a good number of Muslim castes in Kerala have introduced “dowry” in recent years. In Kerala, “dowry” has become endemic, cutting across lines of caste, class, religion, and region, and functions as a means of capital accumulation and social mobility²³.

As mentioned above, for some parents, the price of a daughter’s education is considered as part of her dowry. The years in school or college and the type of studies are serious matter at the moment of the marriage arrangements, not to mention the type of institution(s) the young woman attended; those which offer “convent” education being the favored ones.

Sadly, the current confluence of arranged marriage and “dowry” results in devalorization of female higher education (Carrol 1991, Derné 1994, Kishwar 1984). An educated woman is actually seen as a liability by some prospective in-laws, who fear that she will not comply with the grueling domestic demands made of her. Her education may, they feel, have provided her too great a sense of autonomy, sophistication, self-worth, etc. She may hold high expectations regarding her role within the family and her own personal and professional ambitions.

The collection edited by Mukhopaddhyay and Seymour (1994), a study of women’s education in India, demonstrates how the gender gap in educational achievements is especially notable when examining the under-representation of female students in scientific and technical fields. Besides the health and social sciences, together

²² Even in 1959 it was already very important among Christians according to Prof. E.I. George, a former Head of the Psychology Dept. at Kerala University in Trivandrum (Joan Mencher, personal communication?.)

with the Humanities, including education (for primary and secondary education), and despite women venturing into the male-dominated realms of science and technology at the university and/or research levels, their status away from work is not changed. Understandably, this gendered practice of careers choices for women has also resulted in positive attitudes about women in the arts and in literature, fields that have long been “feminine” domains.

Women’s Education in India and in Kerala

In India as a whole, education is tightly linked to the welfare of the family. Well-off, education-oriented families view educational achievement in scientific fields differently for females than for males and tend to invest less in their daughters’ academic education, which is perceived as rather inconsequential and without long-term economic benefits to the natal family. Though this attitude is changing somewhat, it still holds true among many families; high unemployment is, clearly, one of the reasons. For some parents, their daughters’ education is still conceived more as an adornment for them, which might not be that different from constructions of female education among middle and upper classes in previous generations and other geographic and cultural areas. The extent to which this is true was explored by Karlekar (1994) who argues that “...even among middle-class, urban residents of Bengal, views on what constitutes femininity have changed little despite the rapidly increasing participation of women in education at various levels and despite their employment in non-traditional areas.” In this case, the impact of formal education on women would be limited and this would become a waste

²³ In 2003 Dr. Mencher reported that she was told that even poor low caste families are now pressured into debt to give dowries even for daughters who are earning a salary.

of resources, both human and financial, and a ground for frustration by individual women. Karlekar makes explicit the inextricable relationship between gender constructions and ideologies and the scope and significance of women's education.

I also have benefited from Karuna Chanana's work on Indian women's education that spans a couple of decades (1988, 1998, 2000). Basu (1996), Jeffery and Jeffery (1996) and Desai and Krishnaraj (1987) are as well important for my own work. According to these sources, the dominant ideology about the socialization of females in India has not seen significant changes. Women's status, aspiration levels, and certain thought processes have undergone few if any modifications, something that will be examined in this research.

To better understand all these relationships I considered it imperative to bring to the fore the notion of caste. Studies of caste have been the landmark of Indian Studies for a long time. One of their limitations is that caste has been seen as an unchanging feature of Indian society. This research looks at caste as a historical formation in which social relationships are continuously changing, and not at all as a privileged concept. Its notions and external manifestations are constructed and lived by people, together with class, race, and gender distinctions, in a historically dialectical interplay. Caste adds, however, a particular dimension to this study of women's education since the women's colleges in Kerala (and elsewhere in India) follow caste as well as class lines and the "reservation system" is actually a result of a "positive discrimination" policy that acknowledges a historical caste-based social discrimination.

Last but not least, it is necessary to look at women's education not only as a phenomenon circumscribed within the four walls of the educational institution but to look

beyond, in many social spaces and cultural institutions; in peoples' attitudes and perceptions. As Lindenbaum has written, "women's education changes the ways society sees women and what society expects from women..." (1990a) This assertion is one of the reasons I endeavored to look at different spaces, both physical and mental, to evaluate the extent to which this is true in Kerala.

Education and "Conscientization"

To better address the research on the education of women one should look at the broader context. Cremin (1976) defines education so as to include not only education through formal schooling, but also the ways in which individuals act to educate themselves, and the ways in which institutions of education relate to one another in a particular time and place. He defines education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort" (p.27). This is a major breakthrough since the traditional divide between "formal" education or "schooling" and the "informal" one disappears. I find this shift particularly useful for my research because I am looking at the broader spectrum of educational possibilities open or denied to women in Kerala. One thing I would like to underline here is that in stretching Cremin's view, lies the potential of the educational experience to further the development of critical perspectives and thinking "outside the box" and, thus, to provide individuals with actual tools to liberate themselves in a broader sense. That is why I took seriously some of Freire's insights and works as they relate to education as precisely a liberating experience (Freire 1993). Some of these will be presented in the four chapter of this dissertation.

Women's Education in India and Kerala and Women's Colleges

Influenced by critical social theory, feminist anthropology and critical educational theory, I was convinced that the study of women's educational experiences would tell us about the persistence of male dominance, and class and caste in Kerala - and all of India. I hoped to discover, and even witness, strategies that women and like-minded men devised to combat the status quo. The important thing, in my view, was to formulate the questions that would help me to understand the social dynamics in Kerala, especially those concerning the twists and turns of gender relations from a historical perspective.

The issue of the caste system in Kerala has not been sufficiently addressed in its relation to education, particularly to women's education. The effects of caste hierarchies are at least as detrimental as class divisions and need to be included in any serious analysis of a society influenced by social constructions of inequality. In the context of India, caste is alive and well, to the point that a government quota program²⁴, similar to Affirmative Action in the US, was enacted to redress social injustices based on caste membership. Despite these efforts, lower-caste people continue to suffer oppression: laws are not enough when social inequalities are deeply engrained in the social fabric and reinforced by religious ideologies.

No discussion of India's - and Kerala's - social milieu would be complete without examining theories of social reproduction, such as those focusing on education. Class hierarchies (as much as caste) function as sites of exploitation that pervade the entire social system and are perpetuated from one generation to another. Feminists have tried to

explain privileges enjoyed by males (and some upper class/caste women) as a function of capitalist relations and intertwined with class systems. However, moving beyond the *clichéd* link between women's education, economic development, and family welfare made it important to look for the significance of education for women and not only for figures on access or enrollment as dozens of studies of the region's demography and economics display. It is necessary to also analyze teachers' expectations, the college authority structure, the formal and informal curricula of the colleges, and most importantly, their "woman centric" methodology. Another expressed aim is to blur the false dichotomy between the private and the public spheres as they relate to the schools (See Kelly 1982, 1996).

The fact that India belongs to the so-called Third World and is considered both an "Eastern" and "Post-Colonial" society, prompted me to review a few critical works on these concepts as they relate to South Asia, India and the "Third-World" (Mohanti 1991, 1997, John 1996.). I had the good fortune to engage Bulbeck's work (1998) and her insights. *Re-Orienting Western Feminism* is a deep and challenging study that defies the hegemony of white, Western feminisms. East / West and Third World / First World constructions are criticized when these divisions are used to describe the experiences of women who are not "native" to the western cultures. Using some of the insights from the post-colonial critique, Bulbeck writes that there is no pure East and West. She extends notions of cultural hybridity into gender and class. Hybridity is a useful concept for my study, given the nature of Kerala's recent social developments which include the early

²⁴ India's quota system, known as the Reservation System, unlike Affirmative Action in the US, encompasses not only the educational sphere, but public-sector employment as well.

monetarization of the economy, the acceptance of globalization, and the adoption, whether critically or otherwise, of the latest in communications technology for purposes such as advertising for “Matrimonials²⁵”. All this strongly resonates when analyzing India as a whole and Kerala in particular, given the devastating consequences of the “structural adjustment” policies that have been adopted.

In the book’s introduction Bulbeck provides a brief overview of the many feminisms, placing western feminism in the philosophical tradition of modernist and universalist claims, together with rationalist individualism. She writes: “race-based oppression has supplanted class-based oppression as the critique of universal sisterhood.” Based on Spivak’s (1988) work on post-colonialism, Bulbeck offers a sense of the diverse ways in which tradition and modernity are blended by women. Most importantly for my work, she points to the political effects of colonization on women in places like India and other “Third-World” countries, emphasizing that colonization is not simply a two-step process from tradition to modernization. For instance, India’s colonial history melded Victorian notions of women’s purity and domesticity, which derived from British occupation, together with revived Indian traditionalism regarding women’s special spirituality, a theme that P. Chatterjee (1993) has also explored in the case of Bengali women and the construction of the Indian “nation” based on particular presumed attributes of Indian women. Bulbeck’s work is also a critique of the sameness/difference debate by showing how differences and similarities are often seen in unexpected places and peoples. She, an Australian, finds herself sharing more politically with feminists

²⁵ Newspapers, websites, and magazines publish announcements of individuals looking for a marriage partner that includes basic information such as education and profession.

from the “developing” world than with North American feminists. Bulbeck also touches upon cross-cultural observations on how masculinities as well as femininities are constructed. By and large, this author’s work has been a fitting reminder of how dangerous it is to become too Cartesian in our analysis, especially for researchers, like me, who are crossing various cultural and social boundaries.

In summary, in this chapter I discuss the focus of my doctoral research, the places where I worked, highlighting that most of the research took place in southern Kerala. I introduce the main theoretical preoccupations that guided the quest for answers to the research questions, namely, the relationships between women’s college education and women’s autonomy, access to meaningful employment, and ideologies of marriage and womanhood.

CHAPTER TWO. KERALA: AN OVERVIEW

In this chapter I describe the most salient features of Kerala's geography and ecology and show how they have had an impact socially and historically. In so doing, I expect to lay out the most salient characteristics that have made of Kerala's inhabitants a rather idiosyncratic population. More importantly, I want to spell out some significant developments in the fascinating pre-Colonial and post(?) -Colonial periods as they relate to class/caste distinctions, religious identities, political processes, and last but not least, gender relations.

The Land and the People: A Few Generalities

With its lush green vegetation dotted with palm trees Kerala State presents a sharp visual contrast with most of India. Occupying the southwestern tip of the subcontinent, it is a distinct region separated from the adjoining states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu by the Western Ghats mountains that run parallel to the sea. One of the smallest states in India, measuring about 15,000 square miles, 75 miles at its broadest and 200 miles long, it lies along the Malabar Coast of the Arabian Sea. Its inhabitants are known as Malayalis because of Malayalam, the Dravidian language spoken by the people and which derives from Tamil and has a dose of Sanskrit. They are also known as Keralites.

Kerala's maritime spice trade has been well known since ancient times. The ancient port of Muziris, near modern-day Calicut,²⁶ was to early Christian era what

²⁶ I will continue using the names of the cities and towns as they were still known at the time of my fieldwork: Calicut for Kozhikode, Cochin for Kochi; Trivandrum for Thiruvananthapuram; Cananore for Kannur and Allepey for Alappuzha. I follow the same pattern for the names of cities and towns outside Kerala, using Madras and Bombay rather than Chennai and Mumbai.

Bombay is to modern India. Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Persians, Chinese, Romans and Arabs traded gold, horses, and other goods. and had their vessels anchored in this port, thus providing the region with a cosmopolitan outlook. These vessels left the port heavily loaded with spices, cashew nuts, tropical fruits,²⁷ vegetable oils, fish, and precious woods such as teak and rosewood. Kerala's ports were very appreciated by Christian and Muslim merchants who, in contemporary history, made an imprint on the social fabric: both groups came with religions of the "Book," encouraging literacy as well as dispersing goods.

Kerala's soil was also "traditionally" devoted to cash crops, such as precious woods, spices, coconut,²⁸ along with foodstuffs such as grains, legumes, tropical fruits, etc. Both of these agrarian regimes were based on large estates divided among tenants who were small holders who introduced slave or semi-slave labor on their farms. In addition, after colonization, there was extensive, plantation-like cultivation of spices and precious woods destined for local consumption as well as export. Kottayan in central Travancore was the gateway to the tea estates, established after British intervention and expanded by them in the nineteenth century. Kottayam was also an important stronghold of Christian (both Syrian and Latin Catholic) missionary influences. The "Mother Houses" of the nuns who ran most of women's colleges--which are the my focal point of my study were and still are located there.

Unlike most of India, Kerala has not (until very recently) suffered from a lack of water thanks to the two annual monsoon systems: one from the southwest, which begins

²⁷ These fruits included bananas, tamarind, mangos, tamarind, papayas, plantains, etc.; the oils were made

in late May or June and lasts through mid-September, and one from the northeast, which begins in October and lasts until late November. Monsoons, which give Kerala its permanent lush look are symbolically charged and mark important events in the State calendar, which is used in the schools. Kerala's geography is characterized by hills and valleys; these valley plains are very humid and warm with an average temperature of 85 degrees. Today, the "land of coconuts," as Kerala is often called, has the largest export fisheries in India.

Thanks to these various activities, Kerala's rural areas are ones of the most densely inhabited on earth. Traveling by land, boat, train or plane, one experiences what demographers label the "urban continuum", with no unused space present between villages. This is one of the manifold reasons Kerala presents a quite unique social development profile.²⁹ In the last census (2001) about 32 million Malayalis were counted. While Kerala has the densest population in India it has a literacy rate in the upper 90% making Malayalis the most literate people of India, and also making Kerala the state with the highest percentage of English speaking (as a second language) in the country.

Kerala, now considered the country's socially most advanced state with near 100 per cent literacy, also has the highest life expectancy and the lowest total fertility rate (a measure of the average number of children born per woman). For India the figure is 3.7, in Kerala it is 1.8, which is even lower than it is in China (2.0). Kerala's birth rate of 44 per thousand in 1951-1961, came down to 18 (1991); most of the population has accepted

of coconut and nuts.

²⁸ As early as the 16th century, Barbosa reports that rice, the staple food of the area, was imported by sea.

the two children family size as norm. Kerala's sex ratio is 1036 females per 1000 males which is dramatically different from the Indian one at 927. But the most remarkable figure is of deaths per live births. In Kerala, it is 16 per 1000 live births for girls and 17 for boys. This is much lower than China's 33 for girls and 28 for boys. The corresponding figure for Haryana, a northern state and very close to New Delhi, India's capital, is almost four times higher at 81.4 for females and 60.7 for males, as indicated in the table below.

Table 1. Development Indicators: Kerala and India

Indicator	Sex	Period	Kerala	India
1. Expectation of Life at Birth	F	1995-96	72.4	61.7
	M		67.2	60.6
2. Birth Rate		1998	18.2	26.4
3. Death Ratio		1998	6.4	9.0
4. Sex Ratio		2001	1058	933
5. Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)		1998	16	72
6. Maternal Morality Rate (per 1000 live births)		1990	1.3	5.7
7. Literacy Rate as % of Total Adults	F	2001	87.9	54.2
	M		94.2	75.8
Scheduled Caste	F	1991	74.0	24.0
	M		85.2	50.0
Scheduled Tribe	F	1991	51.0	18.0
	M		63.4	40.7
8. Total Fertility Rate		1991	1.8	3.6
9. Female Age at Marriage		1994	22.3	19.4
10. M/F Age-Specific Death Rates (age 0-4)		1990-91	1.2	0.9

Table from Mridul Eapen and Praveena Kodoth, CDS Working Paper #341, November 2002

²⁹ Demographers and planners have already found out that there it is easier to deliver services to populations who live in nearby places or who have easy access to adequate transportation to reach these services, whether they are primary health care or primary school, to cite just some of them.

As previously mentioned, Kerala has the highest life expectancy for women and this is especially significant in a country where, as in much of India, female infanticide and selective female feticide are widespread phenomena currently being fought in some states. These statistics are profoundly meaningful from Sen's point of view, "...because they reflect not only the linkage of education to important gender problems but reflect the actual attitude of society towards the girl child". Last, but not least, Kerala has the highest "age of marriage" in a country where pre-pubertal and early marriages are still common. The mean age at marriage is twenty-two years. One of the results, it is claimed, is that normally there is a larger span of time for women to obtain formal education before they become young mothers. Because of these distinctive indicators, Kerala would have, presumably, the "highest status" of women in India both within the household and in public life but this claim is being contested by Kerala women themselves in recent times, a contestation I agree with and I expect to explain in this dissertation.

Malayalis: Peoples and Histories, Ethnicity and Religion

Roughly fifty-five percent of Kerala's population is Hindu, twenty percent is Muslim, and twenty percent is Christian, thus making Kerala the state with the highest Christian population of India, together with the state of Mizoram. For the most part, these different religious communities have been aloof to "communalism". This expression is interpreted in the Indian context as the construction of separateness between different religious communities, whose members keep to their own social and political organizations resulting in different laws for each community and also, sometimes, in unfortunate clashes. The recent history of India provides several examples of "communal riots" and "communal hatred". The so-called Scheduled Tribes noted above, who speak

their own languages, hold animist beliefs and practice distinctive rituals and patterns of life, are at the margins of Kerala society.

All communities in Kerala share a common language, Malayalam, which is a Dravidian language closest to Tamil, a very ancient language spoken in neighboring Tamil Nadu by hundreds of millions of people. It has its own script which is slightly different from Tamil. It is also different from the Devanagari script used in Hindi, the national language. The vocabulary of Malayalam is a mixture of Tamil, Sanskrit and its own pre-Dravidian elements. Malayalam also has different dialects.

At the time of European contact, Kerala was among the most socially stratified regions of India. For this reason, at the beginning of the twentieth century Swami Vivekanand, a very famous Hindu reformer, well known in the West, called Kerala “a lunatic asylum”. Though he might have been alluding to the Hindu caste system, followed by the Hindus who made up the majority of the population, in fact some of the local Christian branches and sects (Syrian Christians or Mar Thoma and Latin Syrians) showed striking features of this extreme social hierarchy with very well established notions of “purity” and “pollution”. Merely *seeing* an “untouchable” conjured pollution by a high caste person after which this person had to wash and undergo special rituals of purification.

Hundreds of castes and sub-castes with strict rules of commensality as well marriage made up the Hindu society. The native rulers were Hindus and Hinduism was a followed with some variations by the different castes and sub-castes. More than fifty percent of the population follow a form of Hinduism in Kerala.

This hierarchical social system was in fact the basis of a very exploitative feudal mode of production, which included slavery and “landlordism”. An extremely unjust and unequal land tenancy system prevailed with a few landlords having rights to vast extensions of cultivable land to the detriment of the majority of landless peasants who served as tenants or agricultural workers without any rights on the land whatsoever and whose labor force was (over)exploited. Indeed, many worked as slaves until the middle of the nineteenth century. This feudal-like right to land was exacerbated by the British who equated traditional land rights with British concepts of ownership (K Gough 1068). Kerala feudal society more closely paralleled European feudalism than any other part of India. Ideas of purity and pollution also contributed to the reproduction of landlordism through paternalistic tactics that in turn often generated a patron-client dynamic disempowering a section of the peasantry. There are, however, records of rebellions and uprisings of this disenfranchised population (Menon 1994, Tharakan 1984).

The Hindus

Namboodiris

At the top of Kerala’s unequal social system were the Hindu *Namboodiris* or local Brahmins. They were endogamous and owned or controlled vast tracts of land, with only a limited number working in temples. Following patrilineality or patriliney, patrilocality and primogeniture, many of them were powerful landlords, whereas *Namboodiri* women the subject of a very strict seclusion (Mencher). *Namboodiri* women’s sexuality was closely controlled and most of them remained unmarried because only the elder male in a family was allowed to marry a *Namboodiri* woman though he was allowed up to four wives. The younger brothers had to marry outside the caste and for the most part they

married women of a lower caste and many chose women from the Nair castes. This was a very successful strategy to keep property in a few hands.

The Nairs, or Nayars

Following in the ranking, the *Nairs*³⁰ belonging to matrilineal and matrilineal warrior castes and sub-castes also existed; males received military training and were often hired to fight various wars before the unification of the most important princely states at the end of the eighteenth century. Unusually, a few women from this caste and from sub-castes of Nairs also received some military training in the form of *Kalaripayatu*, a native martial art. Women had access to property and inheritance and remained in their homes depending on locality and subcaste, having either short multiple or serial liaisons or more permanent marriage relationships with sometimes more than one *Namboodiri* (hypergamy) or *Nair* man (hypogamy). A lot of power in the extended Nair family, however, was held by the eldest man, whether the brother or the maternal uncle of the senior women of the “house”, even though these women made the major decisions (Mencher, Gough).

The Ezhavas, or Tiyyas

The *Ezhavas* or *Tiyyas* formed another important caste group which comprised sub-castes as well and which previously was considered “Untouchable”. Today, its members belong to the OBC’s, Other Backward Castes. Historically, members of this caste were engaged in manual labor, especially in agriculture (See Gough). In Northern Kerala they were matrilineal and matrilineal, although further South they were patrilineal.

(Ishwaran 1970:129-164). Today, the Ezhavas have surmounted caste barriers by imitating practices traditionally followed by upper caste Hindus in terms of religious rituals and in conspicuous consumption, by taking full advantage of their OBC statutes, and not surprisingly, through education and business.

The fact that the proportion of the Malayali population following matrilineage or matriliney and matrilocality with all their characteristics and effects was rather large has been interpreted by a few scholars (Mencher 1964, 1965, Mencher and Unni 1978, Saradamoni 1996 and 1999, Jeffrey:1993, Dube 2003 among others), and by individual women and men in Kerala as a crucial factor explaining why women in Kerala have not been discriminated against and, in fact, the birth of a girl child was welcome, in sharp contrast with the rest of India. From here, most of them have made a linkage between these two cultural features and the granting of girls the benefits of formal education in stark contrast with most of the Indian states.

Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Communities (OBC)

In Kerala there are still 37 Scheduled Tribes (ST) out of 48 tribal communities; constituting only 1.26% of the state's population. Because of the fast rate of their assimilation, their numbers have dramatically dwindled to the extent that in the past few years, 11 tribal communities have been declassified on account of the social and cultural "progress" they have made. Among the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala the numerically dominant ones are the Pulayas (also known as Cheramas), the Parayars or Paniyans, Maratis, Malayarayars, Kurumans, Kurichiyans, and Irulas.

³⁰ There are many written sources that refer to them as Nairs while others use Nayars. I chose the first one.

Cheramas or Pulayas

The *Cheramas*, as they prefer to be called, are a group of tribes who were exploited as slaves. The *Pulayas* were the most numerous among them and were mostly found in Travancore. The word Pulayam is said to be derived from 'Pula' that means pollution. The Cheramas working on Nair lands in Malabar and Cochin were matrilineal while those working on Namboodiri lands or with Tamil Brahmins were patrilineal.

The slave castes were dedicated to agricultural work. Thus; they could be sold, exchanged and inherited which explains why, in Kerala, both before and during the twentieth century, many converted to Christianity, hoping to escape the strictures of the caste system that denied them their human dignity, considering them "Untouchables"; this occurred mostly in Travancore. However, their mass conversions have not helped them greatly since the Christian Orthodox Church did not welcome them and instead subjected them to the most degrading treatments. Subsequently, many of them have reconverted to reclaim the few prerogatives to which the "scheduled castes" and the "scheduled tribes" are entitled under the new Indian Constitution.

Both SC and ST are also known as "backward classes", a clear connotation of their marginality within a "modern", "developed", socio-economic system. Thus, they have been the "targets" of modernization and development policies and education for them has been one of the several welfare reform goals. Students belonging to SC are granted waivers of the fees in schools and colleges for most of their educational lives, though some restrictions apply; for example, they will lose that privilege if they must repeat a course twice as a result of failure in examinations. They also have access to grants to buy books and uniforms and are provided with scholarships on the basis of

merit. More important, they have reserved “seats” in postgraduate and professional colleges. The Kerala government also offers them entry in Training Centers to prepare them for competitive entry examinations. Free boarding and lodging is also provided them in recognized hostels. In spite of all these “aids”, I agree with Saradamoni in that “The legacy of the past acts as a serious hurdle to changing and improving their lives. It haunts the older generation who wants a real break from the past for their children....Being new entrants to the field of education and still struggling to break the socio-economic barriers confronting them, the Pulayas face an uphill task to enter the field of higher education or the mainstream of socio-economic development” (Saradamoni 1980:4).

The Muslims

The Muslims or *Mappillas*, whose large majority lived for the most part in the old Malabar District and around Calicut and other ports, have as their main occupation fishing and trade. Muslims represent 24% of the population of Kerala, but their share in the public service sector is only six percent. Muslim history in Kerala dates to the seventh century when the Arabs trading along the coast converted into Islam. Their numbers increased in the ninth century. In the eighth century there were many centers for religious conversion in the state, a move that low caste and “untouchable” Hindus often undertook. The earliest peaceful conversions to Islam in India were in Kerala. These included the families (wives and children) of the pre-Islamic Arabian sea traders. During the Zamorin’s rule (which spanned several centuries) the Muslims of Malabar played a major role in the local army and navy as well as serving as ambassadors to Arabia and China. In the early twentieth century, the well-known “Mappila Rebellion” of 1921 unfolded in

North Kerala or Malabar and it constituted an important contribution to India's freedom struggle. It was the expression of the built up frustration and rage amongst Muslims against the wealthy Hindu landlords and the British Government because of taxation rights for the landlords. As a result, many Muslims were hanged or deported. Throughout the nineteenth century, Muslims were reluctant to use English or to enroll their children in "modern" schools, thus remaining one of the most "backward" (the way they are qualified in Kerala) communities, manifesting a lower literacy rate and lack of higher education.

The Christians

One of the peculiarities of Kerala's landscape, within the Indian context, is the view of hundreds of churches belonging to dozens of Christian denominations, sometimes built side by side with mosques or Hindu temples, and even a few synagogues, such as the one in Cochin. This fact speaks of a comparative harmony between the members of the several religions of the state in sharp contrast with most of the Northern states. Also, it is a symbol of the spread and to some extent of the strength of Christianity in this state: Currently, Christians account for twenty-one per cent of the Kerala population of thirty-one million, and they constitute a higher percentage in the southern part of the state. In spite of being a minority community in India, Christians in Kerala are a strong force, and education is one of their domains, in particular women's education. Kerala's women's colleges, the focus of my research, are in fact affiliated to the different dioceses and have to submit to the archdioceses to which their orders belong or where they are located. Notably, these orders have been crucial in establishing "Women's Hostels"

Newcomers to Kerala will be surprised by the number and diversity of the Christian “branches” or sects. The Biblical St. Thomas himself, it is claimed (in fact, it is an article of their faith) by the St. Thomas Christians, was a visitor to the land, and converted many Malayalis in the first century AD. He is supposed to have been buried on the east coast just south of Madras. It is historically proven that numerous Christians arrived at Muzuris (what is today Calicut), then the most important commercial center on the Arabian Sea, by the fourth century. Soon after missionaries from the Middle East came to preach, mostly along the Malabar Coast, they built the most ancient Christian church, which follows the Syrian rite in India. These first so-called “Syrian Christians” prospered by attaching themselves to the soil and embarking on trade as a result of the special material and social grants bestowed on them by the then Rajas.

The history of Christianity in Kerala is a complex one. Suffice is to say that the early Christians who arrived in Kerala from the Middle East in the early centuries of the Christian era claimed moral and doctrinal superiority over the Latin or Roman Christians who were converted by the Portuguese a millennium or so later (1498) and who vowed allegiance to the Pope in Rome. The former adopted many social mores from the high caste Hindus such as the fear of “untouchability” while the latter purported to be more inclusive vis-à-vis the lower class Hindus who converted to Christianity. This obviously had consequences that still are felt in Kerala’s social fabric and in its colleges. Today there are dozens of other Christian denominations such as the Jacobite Syrians, Orthodox Syrians, Marthoma Syrians, apart from the Latin Catholics who came to being with the arrival of Vasco da Gama and the missionaries. They differ on some points of practice and doctrine, the language used in ceremonies. For example, while for the Latin Catholics

celibacy is a compulsory vow for priests, for the Syrian Christians it is not. All have played, though, an important role in missionary work and in education.

The Syrian Christians

By and large the Syrian Christians form a very rich and influential community in both the political and economic life of Kerala. They believe that they were converted from *Namboodiris* and high-ranking Nair castes. This is possible because there are practically no rich *Namboodiris* in Travancore (Mencher, personal communication)). The Syrian Christians are markedly patriarchal, and have believed and acted as if they held a higher social status. Noteworthy in this regard is the case of Mary Roy, a very vocal Syrian Christian woman educator and mother of the writer Arundhati Roy, whose case was widely publicized in India a few years back when she challenged the inheritance and property laws that discriminated between sons and daughters amongst Syrian Christians in Kerala. She got the Supreme Court of India to rule that the law was obsolete and that sons and daughters in a Syrian Christian family should have the same rights to parental property. Previously, the parents of girls gave them a meager amount in the form of a cash dowry at the time of their marriage and no further claims were allowed. The Syrian Christians funded and have organized several religious orders, both males and females such as the Carmelites.

Latin Catholics

Latin Catholics are also an important community, both because of their numbers and their role in education in Kerala. They are the descendants of Hindus and Muslims, especially from lower castes, who converted to Christianity after the arrival of the

Portuguese at the end of the sixteenth century. More specifically, they typically descend from mixed unions between Catholic Portuguese men and native women. Unlike the Syrian Christian branches, Latin Catholics do not claim, for the most part, to be descendents of upper caste Hindus or Muslims. There were several important Catholic missions and some of them undertook forced conversions. Today the Latin Catholics, like the Syrian Christians, are a thriving community whose achievements in the education of both boys and girls, together with the setting up of schools, colleges, universities, and hostels is evident from their number and importance and is remarkable. Again, like the Syrian Christians, they also have played an important role in the media, specially newspapers, printing presses, and magazines. Interestingly, there are large numbers of Catholics who remain poor and still face the challenge of their low caste location in the hierarchy that translates into discriminatory practices from upper caste and upper class people. Poor Catholics, however, may enjoy some of the benefits of the “quota system” in education and employment.

A Noteworthy Feature of Kerala: The Work and Resilience of the Communist Party

Another unique characteristic of Kerala has been the strong hold that the Communist Party has had on a large section of the population beginning in the 1920's. Outside the academy (and sometimes within) people tend to identify Kerala as the “Communist State”. In fact, the reality is more complicated and that identification could be misleading. The Party indeed gained strength in the 1930's and 1940's thanks to extraordinary literacy campaigns, library movements, and political work among the disenfranchised. With the Congress Party (Jawaharlal. Nehru's) ruling all over India, the first-ever Communist Government in the world to be democratically elected in April of

1957 was that of Kerala. The reforms the Communists brought to Kerala include: South Asia's most substantial land reform, public health clinics and services, shops that sell staple food at controlled prices, and near-universal literacy (Namboodiripad in 1957). Soon after their victory in the 1957 election, they voted in the "Education Bill" that when promulgated was widely interpreted as an attack on Christian educational enterprises. Because of the ferocious opposition from Christian and Nair quarters, the communists had to make many concessions. Two years later their government was forced out by Christians, Ezhavas (especially in Cannanore where factory owners got all of their workers to strike), and Nairs allied with the Indian central government. Subsequently, Kerala's electorate has followed a pattern that, for the most part, alternates between the Congress Party to the Communist Party. Thanks to this, Malayalis have obtained a number of positive measure and the Party has advocated a few pressing social issues. In the field of popular education, the Communist have played and continuing playing an important role. Definitely, many of their members, with the creation of the KSSP and the most recent "Decentralization" planning have contributed to the people's consciousness raising and wellbeing.

British Rule and Aftermath, an Overview

When the current Kerala state was created at the end of 1956 it combined, on the basis of language, the princely state of Cochin, the southern kingdom of Travancore, and the former Northern Malabar District that had been part of the Madras State or Presidency. Traders and adventurers from Portugal came first, then the Netherlands, France, and England disputed amongst themselves and against the native rulers, fighting wars to gain political and economic power in Kerala. After the British defeated the

French, they decided the fate of Malabar from 1791 to the end of British rule in 1947 and indirectly ruled and controlled Cochin and Travancore the way they controlled all of the princely states of India. Malabar in the eighteenth century became part of the Madras Presidency, one of the British colonial entities that allowed them to control and “directly” govern the Southern Indian states³¹. A different path was taken by those of Cochin and Travancore, whose governments continued, at least in form, to be under the local royal houses, with relative political autonomy although they functioned under British indirect rule. During the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century Kerala experienced numerous changes, but they are beyond the scope of this thesis to go into them in detail. It is worth noting, however, that land relations were changed in a fundamental way. The caste structure and the matrilineal joint family systems continued in the three units that were to become Kerala.

By the end of the eighteenth century, tea, coffee, and cocoa plantations developed. In Malabar under the leadership of the British East India Company an industrial revolution began in the 1850s. British entrepreneurs with the support and help of richer Tiyya or Ezhava families started the manufacture of ceramic roof tiles, textiles, tiles, and coir, a fiber made of coconut husk.

In Malabar modern English education took root, especially among the Nair males, and a similar pattern was followed in Cochin and Travancore. The driving force among the Nairs was for men to learn the law and to be able to challenge the British in Court. An

³¹ While in Malabar the “Collector” was in charge of collecting taxes and following instructions from Madras, in Cochin and Travancore, the Maharajas’ governments could decide about expenditure and laws, with the supervision of the “Resident” or the British political authority); this was considered as “indirect rule.” (See Jeffrey 1993:32).

influx of missionaries contributed to Western education, which had the effect of strongly disrupting the vernacular systems of law, education, and government. Democratic institutions were formed in 1888 by low-caste educated individuals, however, and various communities began to agitate for access to government services such as education and health care. Simultaneously, religious reform movements by disenfranchised communities and castes challenged the orthodoxy of high-caste dictums and exclusions leading to striking changes and relative success for some of these communities (See Tharakan and Tharamangalam 19). This political activity was intensified during the 1920s when the Indian National Congress spearheaded the national independence movement. This was a period when the Communist movement gathered momentum, especially in Malabar.

Another factor that contributed to the rise of “modern” or Western education in Kerala was the British administration’s need for clerks to make the bureaucratic system work, though its impact was different in the three regions³². Men wanted to become lawyers and managers for the British trading companies. Tea estates also needed managers who knew English as well as Malayalam and who knew accounting. It was the upper castes the first and main beneficiaries of this dramatic shift in the sociopolitical realm: they had the means to start and further their education in the cultural centers such as Madras. The Nairs in particular took full advantage of the benefits of the educational institutions whereas the Namboodiries withdrew totally because they felt threatened.

32 For an interesting discussion about the beginnings of English education in India, see Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education," *Macaulay, Prose and Poetry*, selected by G. M. Young (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp-721-24,729.

Ironically, however, the British and some of the foreign missionaries brought with them a prudish Victorian outlook towards marriage as a result of which the Nairs' ways and social system were considered scandalous and immoral. The matrilineal system of inheritance clearly contravened English law and economic practices, which were patriarchal and was undermined by the colonial authorities as discussed below. There was also in the South an influx of missionaries contributing, as a side effect, to literacy, their primary aim being to convert and secondarily to acquaint the "natives" with Western thought and education. As a result, a new breed consisting of a small number of individuals belonging to lower castes, both men and women, gained access to knowledge and practices outside the caste system, which for many was a liberating experience.

In spite of or perhaps as a result of all these processes, democratic institutions were created in 1888. Political activity which began during the following decade, intensified during the 1920s when the Indian National Congress spearheaded the national independence movement. As India itself was edging towards independence from Britain in 1947, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar all entered India as separate units. This was a period when the communist movement gathered momentum especially in Malabar.

Kerala: Culture and Society

Well before the flourishing of studies and publications about Kerala, several Western scholars, mostly anthropologists, together with some Malayalis, had already provided appealing approaches to Kerala's culture and society; they tended to focus on kinship, caste structure and land tenure, to name a few topics, and to focus on certain castes such as the Nairs, the Ezhavas and others (Gough 1959, Mencher 1965, Mencher and Unni 1978, Mayer, 1952). No work on Kerala would be complete without taking

into account the bulk of studies undertaken by male Malayali scholars, working mostly in economics and demography at the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) (Krishnan, P.R. Gopinathan Nair, K.N.Raj) and whose works have been responsible, to some extent, for the construction of the “Kerala Model”. Because they were economists, some with international reputations, their work was the basis of the interest in and focus by international agencies on Kerala’s economic and social development. A few historical and sociological studies by Malayalis must be included here (Tharakan 1984, Saradmoni 1980, 1994.1999, Velayudhan 1994,2002, Menon, D, 1995, Menon, S. 1984).

The last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed important social reform movements undertaken by diverse sections of the depressed population in their struggles against extreme forms of caste hierarchy such as untouchability, and against landlordism, with its vastly skewed land tenure system and social inequalities and hierarchical relations in a rural setting. Among the issues with which these movements were concerned were the (Hindu) temple entry prohibition for most of the Hindu low-caste “polluting” population and access for their children to the school system, propelled by Sri Narayana Guru and other reformers from the Ezhavas and other castes.

Beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, leftist parties galvanized struggles for social justice including universal franchise, free education for children of “untouchable” castes, a not completely successful land reform, and redistribution of resources, among other things. Christians did not want to lose control over the profitable sector of education that they had owned and managed for quite a while. Nevertheless, as

a result of a highly politicized social mobilization, Congress governments as well as leftist governments have enacted policies to redistribute educational, health, and infrastructural resources in response to popular demand. Kerala's expenditure per capita on education is the highest in India.

Kerala at the Turn of Twentieth Century

Kerala is one of the most advanced states in India in the fields communication and health care delivery as well as education. (See table on following page). Yet, most of the advancement since independence has come in the field of education, at least in terms of enrolment. Industrial development has lagged behind some other centers in India, in part due to labor unrest and strong unions and the lack of energy resources and the governments' failure to plan ahead. Vast pools of highly trained technical people from Kerala are working elsewhere in India or overseas, despite programs of structural adjustment promoted by international lending and development agencies since the early 1990's. The extent of employment of educated Malayalis has also, paradoxically, had a negative effect on industrial development. Money from outside of Kerala was mostly used to build more conspicuous houses; modernize houses; and build temples, mosques, or churches; and only occasionally for industrial development.

Table 2. Literacy and Levels of Education: Select Indicators and States

India/State		Literacy rate for the age group				% of population in the age group 20+ who are			
		10-14		15-19		Matric. but below Graduate		Graduate and Above	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
India	Total	77.0	59.7	75.3	54.9	16.7	6.7	6.3	2.6
	Rural	73.4	52.3	71.0	45.8	12.4	3.3	3.0	0.6
	Urban	87.8	81.4	86.4	78.3	28.0	16.3	14.9	8.2
Kerala	Total	98.7	98.5	98.3	97.7	21.2	17.0	5.2	3.8
	Rural	98.6	98.4	98.2	97.4	19.9	15.6	3.9	2.8
	Urban	98.9	98.9	98.7	98.5	24.7	20.8	8.9	6.7
Tamilnadu	Total	89.7	80.6	83.6	69.2	19.0	9.1	5.9	2.6
	Rural	88.0	75.7	79.6	60.7	12.9	4.7	2.8	0.9
	Urban	93.2	90.2	90.8	84.3	30.2	17.7	11.5	5.7
Bihar	Total	65.1	39.9	65.1	34.3	15.8	3.6	5.9	1.7
	Rural	62.0	34.3	61.4	27.6	13.8	2.2	3.7	0.4
	Urban	84.2	73.4	85.0	72.2	27.9	13.9	19.2	6.7
Rajasthan	Total	72.1	34.0	72.3	29.7	12.4	2.8	5.5	1.7
	Rural	68.4	24.2	67.7	18.4	8.2	0.7	2.3	0.2
	Urban	85.6	68.3	85.8	63.5	25.4	10.0	15.5	6.8

Source: *Census of India, 1991: State Profile 1991*, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi, April 18, Table 19.

In spite of all of Kerala's remarkable achievements, there has been a virtual economic stagnation internally since the 1970's and consequently a very high rate of unemployment amongst educated men and women (Mukherjee and Isaac, 1994). Due to staggering rates of unemployment, Malayalis have looked for and found jobs all over India, in the Middle East countries, Australia, Europe and the US. The remittances this population continue sending have a tremendous social impact in Kerala society as a whole by generating new social divisions and alignments, by generating new expectations and new roles for certain groups, by shifting investments from one sector of the economy to others, just to name a few.

At the same time, Kerala faces a deterioration of women's status and autonomy in society, a fact that currently is being strongly debated by women's groups, by some government bodies, and by some sectors of the religious communities and institutions (See Table 2 on educated unemployment by sex and education). Kerala still faces the challenge of advancing the well being of its population. Further, Kerala remains both a caste and a class ridden society despite its strong leftist influence and may be in the process of becoming even more of a class society, as a consequence of the 1991 liberalization and restructuring of the Indian economy that includes Kerala, which both the Congress and Communist Parties have been implementing (Mencher:1994). Most notably, today in Kerala there is a growing feeling that women's advancements are being threatened by an increasing incidence of atrocities against them, especially by educated unemployed male youth and other males loosing out economically because of technological displacement..

There has been an increase for women and the lower castes of restrictions of movement (both geographical and social) and of social interaction, with the introduction of strict dress and language codes to control and enforce their established social position and distance. Women whose grandmothers refused to wear blouses when Mencher was working there in the late 1950's and early 1960's today worry if their blouse is long enough or well covered by the *dupatta*. Dominance of the high castes that used to own the land, the most precious possession, has certainly diminished, and requirements for servility and deference have lessened considerably but the trend toward more conservatism in female dress and mobility is troubling none the less.

Matriliny, which thrived well up to the end of the nineteenth century, also defined "old" Kerala. It probably spread from the North to the South and was also probably well established already in the fourteenth century. It was the system followed by the high status people, with the exception of the Brahmins (Jeffrey 1993:25). Features of the "new" Kerala include a diminishing matriliney, which was considered as "very revolting" by some of the first Protestant missionaries, such as Augusta Blandford, the founder of the Church of England Zenana³³ Missionary Society. In Malabar, however, matrilineal arrangements and customs have not waned completely.

Matriliny or the *Marumakkathayam* System

Some scholars reviewing the so-called Kerala Model of social development have linked the contrast between Malayali women and those from other states in terms of

³³ Zenana broadly speaking is the women's quarters within a highly sexually segregated society. That is why some of the first attempts to school the female "natives" used the already established separation of the girls/women from the boys/men for instruction.

women's education to the matrilineal system prevailing among several castes including the Nairs, the Izhavas, and other small matrilineal castes. In fact, by the time of the 1931 Census, 30 percent of the population, including the Nairs, the Izhavas, and the Vellalas, was declared matrilineal and 28 percent patrilineal. However, even among the lowest castes of Cheramans there was a tendency for those working in Nair-dominated villages to be matrilineal or at least matrilocal (they did not have much property to pass on); those working in Namboodiri and Christian-dominated villages tended to be patrilineal. Saradmoni's stand is that many of the women's rights, included those to property inheritance, were heavily eroded early in this century, thus destroying a relative degree of women's independence from males. "Between the 1910's and the 1930's, a series of laws dealing with the rules of inheritance and succession, marriage, and the joint family irretrievably altered the *marumakkathayam* system (Saradmoni:132). These changes were followed by dramatic changes in land relations such as the break up of large "taravads" between 1947 and 1975, and the introduction of private ownership of landed property, thus allowing members (males) to sell and or dispose of their share of their *taravad's* property. In the 1950's and 1960's because of the influence of Malayali Nair women, and some men, special inheritance laws were written by Parliament exempting them from the patrilineal practices of most of India. Overall, there was a gradual emergence of the conjugal family, and of privatization, as well as the spread of Western notions of progress and civilization.

These major changes in the legislation of Travancore and Cochin, the two princely states, and Malabar (Madras Presidency), under direct British rule, were brought about by the demands of a certain sector of the male population. Those changes were

seen as progressive and forward-looking by some people, but for women belonging to the above-mentioned castes they meant a change for the worse. However, as T.K. Velu Pillai, who worked hard to pass the legal changes, wrote "...the number of girls enrolled in schools rose from 1019 to 269,444 between 1874-75 and 1934-35. A large number of women had already entered the liberal profession[s] of pedagogy, medicine and law and had also joined the cooperative movement" (Saradmoni:135).

Nairs, by the end of the 19th century, made up 19 percent of the population of Kerala. Their function in Kerala as far as literacy was concerned, in contrast to that of the Brahmins or Namboodiris, "...pertained chiefly to government, politically administered trade, and feudal administration of fiefs and villages (Saradmoni:132). Literacy served different purposes, one of which was differentiating social status.

At another level of analysis, the matrilineal castes were vulnerable to Europeans' sense of morality that defined such matrilineally-derived practices as the freedom of women to have liaisons or unions with several men at will as immoral. Many European travelers and chroniclers described Nair women and women of Malabar as being unchaste, lecherous. Some commentators, for example, Duarte Barbosa (16th century), made implicit associations between women's sexual freedom and autonomy with prostitution. With the arrival of the British and other European merchants, missionaries and functionaries, those perceptions only worsened. By the end of the 19th century Nair men themselves were demanding the introduction of a "marriage law" so as to legitimize the "*sambandham*" or customary marriage, to replace polyandry with monogamous marriages, and to have men enjoy the advantages of conjugal co-residence and shared property rights (Arunima: 1995:157). Almost obligingly, the diverse governments in

Travancore, Cochin and Malabar passed laws to permit break-up of the *taravads* in the twentieth century; these laws brought with them an unfavorable transformation of women's rights at the individual level and as members of their castes, especially in Travancore. At a more subtle level, the laws encouraged "the production of a new morality that made matriliney appear an "uncivilized" and "unnatural" way of life to some by the twentieth century (Arunima: 1995:159). It would appear that this new morality has had a tremendous, although unquestioned, impact on society as a whole and on women, mainly Nair women or women whose roots were in matrilineal castes, and who would like to be regarded as chaste and demure. Perhaps, they feel like "making up" for their ancestress's "loose" ways. Certainly, they have become restrained and demure, and very worried and fearful about what people think.

CHAPTER THREE:

WOMEN'S LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN PRE AND POST-BRITISH INDIA: FOCUS ON KERALA

The importance of female education in India cannot be over-rated: and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives to give a good education to their daughters. By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men." Education dispatch issued by Sir Charles Wood, president of the Board of Control, in 1854 (1996: 40)

I intend in this chapter to place Malayali women's education within its socio-historical background while at the same time underscoring two phenomena: (1) The unbalanced gender relations in the "subcontinent" and the dominant role of men in colonial, and [pre] and post-colonial Indian society with clear adverse consequences for women's autonomy and opportunities. This would have a few exceptions, namely within the matrilineal castes as I expect to show. (2) The essentializing of "women" as a category closer to nature, to the reproductive sphere, and closer to notions of sexual danger. Women, then, are seen as the repositories of the family honor, as belonging to the inner realm.

Following Victorian principles, and as a result of the works of the Indian social reformers, together with those of some of the colonial authorities in the nineteenth century, Indian women came to be seen as symbols of purity and righteousness and this contributes to the discourses around the issues of their education and training. I discuss in Chapter 4 the fact that this process and its outcomes are still significant in Kerala society and in female educational institutions. Sir Charles Wood, quoted above, gave voice to the deeply felt relationship between the incentives for women's education and a certain

morality that this was supposed to confer on society as a whole, as women were and are conceived by some, then and now, to be the key reproducers of the social order. Here I want to point out the continuity of the perception that women and women's education are vehicles for the people's "moral tone".

In this chapter I will lay out some of the most salient historical events, discourses, debates, and practices that surrounded the subject of women's education in India at large, those that influenced local processes within the states, and those pertaining to Kerala in particular. As will be noted, the educational histories of high caste/upper class women and those of Dalits (untouchables) or low caste/working class women are universes apart, and most of what has been written refers only to the first group. The second has been neglected and only comes across in the accounts of missionaries or/and their wives. The literature, and the data I collected during fieldwork, show that women's educational histories have been and still are a contested terrain. This means that each history depends on who is telling or writing it. The recent construction of Kerala as a model that portrays a quasi-paradise for women because of its high female literacy rates has given an extra impulse to different actors and agents to claim partial or total historical responsibility for that feat. This thesis challenges the validity of some of these claims.

An examination of the pre-colonial social attitudes and practices regarding the education of women together with the dramatic changes brought about by the new colonial educational policies and attitudes and the compliance with or resistance to these policies and attitudes by the "native" population is essential in any study of Indian women's education. Most importantly, some of these policies, as well as the ideologies that supported them are still present in some of today's educational practices in both overt and

covert ways such as the enormous importance given to English studies in higher education to the detriment of the vernacular, Malayalam, to cite just one aspect.

While it is true that in Kerala the missionary work in women's education among the "Other Backward Castes" (OBC) and "untouchables" or Dalits, was quite remarkable, it is also true that only a minority of them fully benefited from it. Today, Dalit women educated in women's colleges, particularly in those run by nuns, are often at a disadvantage in India as a whole and in Kerala as well. In spite of the general social gains achieved by low castes and OBC in Kerala, female students belonging to these castes and who have the opportunity of being admitted to women's colleges run by nuns—on account of the India-wide reservation or "quota" system that includes tuition waivers, board, and book allowances—are still carrying the heavy burden of generations of deprivation and "backwardness" attached to their castes³⁴. Similarly, they carry the stigma of their families' occupations together with the lack of symbolic and cultural capital necessary to enter into the privileged circles of those who speak good English, who wear the latest and most expensive fashions, who have broadly traveled in and outside India, etc.

Even if they finish their college education, against all odds, their families need their income soon after that or else the young women are forced into low-income jobs so that they can save for their dowries, and/or they are married off. This translates into fewer chances for them to pursue higher education and/or a professional life. If they wish to further their studies, they usually lack contacts as well as a financial base to keep going, i.e. to pay for a "Hostel" or become a boarder in a trusted place while in a big city, which is

where the universities are located. OBC and other lower caste young women from all religions face similar challenges resulting in multiple disadvantages.

The argument of this thesis is that in spite of the dramatic social changes that Kerala has gone through that opened up for girls and women the avenues of formal education, there exist blatant social inequalities fed by class, caste, and gender distinctions and inequalities. On close examination, the interplay between gender constructions and the possession of symbolic, cultural and financial capital can be seen to be a major factor in the processes leading to social reproduction through educational practices and institutions. This closer look is required to account for inequality in educational opportunities and in educational institutions in the state based on gender. Access is not enough to "make it". As elsewhere, in Kerala the cultural and social capital available to most young women is unequally distributed. Secondly, the development of higher education for Malayali women in general stands in sharp contrast to the lack of personal autonomy. This is related to the adverse consequences of a social system that is harsh on women who dare to cross the "traditional" lines of the gender script written for them, which works in collusion with the reproductive character of the institutionalized disciplinary and sexist educational system.

³⁴ As an example closer to home, one should think about the difficulties and barriers that African Americans in the US still face in spite of some Affirmative Action policies and of the gains obtained as the result of the Civil Rights Movement.

Literacy in Pre-British Kerala Society and in Informal Channels



Nayica like “Ganika” or courtesan, some of whom, in ancient times, enjoyed a high social status due to their artistic accomplishments (Prabhakar Begde). This is a Khajuraho’s, marvelously sculpted feminine figure, probably writing a letter to her lover. The nagarka, a sophisticated, urban female citizen knew how to write pretty well. The statue of a princess who writes the titles of Vikramaditya, king of the Chalukya dynasty, is proof that the daughters of distinguished families studied calligraphy, apart from literature and the arts. This outstanding example of the Chandella (S. XI) art also illustrates how a cultivated young woman could commune with her lover. In *Shankuntalam*, Kalidassa speaks of the young woman, Shankuntala, who writes a letter to the king Dushyanta, a possible indication that even a humble young woman, the daughter of a hermit, had learnt how to write. The ganika must be the object of her mother’s careful attention right from her birth. She must be trained in the arts of bel canto, dance, acting, painting, cooking, perfumes preparation, writing, and the ingenious art of conversation. She also must know the fundamental elements of the grammar, logic, and astronomy. She must acquire practical lessons in the science of eroticism. Her favors should be paid at a high price. (Classical Age, footnote on page 573).

The irony highlighted by this citation could not be more evident if one were to compare the seeming empowerment of the traditional *Ganikas*, or the royal family daughters of ancient Kerala, and the current effective disempowerment of many of

Kerala's educated young women today.

In the scholarship on educated women, there are several instances in which “special” or “learned” women acquired an education equivalent to the educated men of their times. Indian history does not escape from this trend either: for example, one is told about the Vedic times when women were permitted to learn Sanskrit or when Buddhist nuns and other women were introduced to the *Palli* Buddhist texts. Another reference worth noting, in the context of Kerala, is the one mentioned by R. Jeffrey (1989) about a few outstanding women of this state who out of some combination of circumstances during the early and mid twentieth century penetrated the spaces of learning until then restricted to educated men.

In the wider context of India, the researcher will likely find the references about the Bengali Renaissance with M. Mohan Roy and others who struggled to extend formal education to women. For the most part, this approach focuses on informal instruction for girls and women at home, or more specifically in the “Zenana” (the special female quarters in a house within which men are not permitted).³⁵ In spite of its shortcomings, this stream of scholarship is a contribution to the understanding of the ways in which and reasons why certain individuals or groups of people have gained access to valued resources such as “formal” education while others are being denied the same benefits. In examining “informal” education, this category emphasizes the role of the family, the neighborhood, the media, religious settings and other social institutions in educating females as a primary feature of women's educational experience. Research on these

experiences outside “formal” educational settings throws light on educational opportunities and experiences for both men and women who, for the most part, are habitually being ignored and have not been studied.

The British Raj and Education in India

By 1844 Lord Harding announced that English-educated Indians would be given preference for government appointments (1996:36). This measure was received with support from free-traders and missionaries, the latter because they thought that the knowledge of Western philosophy and literature would be a civilizing influence; the former because their conversions would be easier with English as the language of professional advancement. However, and not surprisingly, girls’ and women’s education was then of little interest for most colonial governments. Missionaries, however, exerted pressure so they could secure more permanent conversions via women. Missionary women, whether they were unmarried or missionaries’ wives, were especially instrumental in this effort. *Zenana* schools or the education given to women in the women’s quarters of their homes, was one of the strategies used by the missionaries which, however, met little success (Forbes 1996:37). Nevertheless, by the middle of the century some individual colonial authorities took a special interest in the issue. Lord Dalhousie, Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856, for example, declared that “...no single change was likely to produce more important and beneficial consequences than female education” (Forbes 1996:40).

³⁵ This form of special and symbolic division in a house existed all over India up to the 20th century and its boundaries and restrictions were closely guarded and followed.

Unfortunately, and in spite of similar statements, the colonial authorities did not provide the necessary financial support. Moreover, and very importantly, most Indian families did not at first perceive women's education to be instrumental in their increasing prestige or in improving their financial situation. Also, the British model of schooling was allegedly incompatible with Indian customs and norms such as sex segregation or *purdah* for women, early marriage, certain characteristics of the joint family and its patrilocality, and girls and young women's dedication to "reproductive" activities.

Forbes (1996:41) maintains that one of the reasons why some Indians supported female education was the desire for social and religious reform, together with the desire for social and financial mobility. In addition, for a disenfranchised population it had a strong appeal. With more Western educated boys and men, more parents saw the necessity of providing some sort of education to their daughters so they could become "better" companions to their husbands and better mothers to their children in the new milieu (See Induleka in Appendix). They also could better understand the changes brought on by colonization and could enter the marriage market better equipped. Besides, their parents would be able to bargain in the process of upper mobility.

Beginnings of women's modern education in India

Most of the historical accounts about women's higher education in India are replete with debates which mirror the contradictory conceptions, both traditional and modern, about womanhood. Among these conceptions are that women are closer to nature as mothers and wives, affecting their position in the family and in society at large, assigning them the "private" domain, and excluding them from the political and public

ones. It is thought that what they need to learn should reflect the danger of young unmarried women tainting the family or caste honor. Paradoxically, and at the same time, positions presented by the native English-oriented intelligentsia and reformers, and some early native feminists, wanted to encourage women's autonomy and the banning of some of the most "traditional" Indian constraints and evils such as the prohibition for widows to remarry.

Women's colleges and co-education were still controversial issues when, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Hunter Commission in its review of the progress of education in India remarked that 98 percent of school-age girls were not in school. It recommended more liberal grants-in-aid, scholarships, and prizes for girls (Forbes 1996:45). It should be mentioned here that by this time, Kerala already showed the highest rates of literacy and education, even for girls in India. Interestingly enough, the current debate around co-education vs. women's-only educational institutions in the USA addresses themes that were very much at the core of the debates in much of India in the colonial period, and in some places, such as Kerala, still are.³⁶

The debates that are worth citing refer to the creation of S.N.D.T. (Srimati Nathivai Damodar Tackersey) Women's University in Bombay (Maharashtra) in 1916. Different views around women's education in India were exposed. There was a perception by a few Western-educated people, hardly generalized, that women should be prepared to compete on a par with men. "...men and women should have higher education under the same system and study the same subjects taught through the medium

of English and, also, undergo the same examinations without any discrimination of special subjects” (Forbes1996: 130). To support the creation of a women’s university, several social and cultural factors were cited as good arguments: “...various disabilities in the form of seclusion of women, child-marriage, partiality towards the sons, and a number of other humiliating practices persisted in India in spite of the untiring efforts of the social reformers for the “uplift” of women in the nineteenth century. Further, although the intelligentsia of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries felt that, without educating women, there could be no solution of their problems. The gates of “higher learning” were not opened to them and women still remained the ‘unlighted lamps’ of the Indian scene.” (p.132)

The fact is that S.N.D.T. Women’s University was originally conceived and finally created with the purpose of educating women only and today it is one of the most prestigious higher educational institutions in India. In Calcutta, in the state of West Bengal, however, “the students of Bethune College, the only government college for women affiliated with the Calcutta University, asserted the opposite to the Calcutta University Commission: “It is not desirable that there should be a separate university for women, on the following grounds: If there were one, the field of competition would be, for us women, limited to that amongst ourselves. If the standard were lower than that among men, we women could not stand properly by the side of our brothers. We women do not want to lag behind.” (p.131)

³⁶ The 1990’s have been plagued with debates about the benefits of single-sex schooling and the gender imbalances that affect girls and young women in coeducational institutions. See the AAUW’s several reports and the Atlantic Monthly article, NYT, etc. Also debates around Chapter IX.

The History of Women's Education in Kerala: A Contested Terrain

All of the literate groups contained some female schools and there was no prohibition on a woman learning to read...Some princesses as well as princes became famous grammarians, philosophers and poets. For example Manorama Tamburatti of the Kozhikode royal lineage, 1760-1828, who fled to Trivandrum during the Mysorean invasions. She was a grammarian and poetess and wrote commentaries on the *Puranas*. Among the Nayars...Both sexes were ceremonially initiated into letters at 5... Girls would receive education in Malayalam, some in Sanskrit, grammar, arithmetic and reading of epic or devotional poems. There was an emphasis on memorization...Girls ceased to attend school after the ritual marriage ceremony, *talikettukalyanan*, usually at age of nine to twelve...Nayars made 19 percent of the population of Kerala. Their function in literacy in Kerala, in contrast to that of the Brahman...pertained chiefly to government, politically administered trade and feudal administration of fiefs and villages...Literacy served different purposes; one of them was differentiating social status (Gough 1968:133-160).

Gough's reference is important because its focus is on Kerala and on the Nairs, one of the largest matrilineal castes. However, one has to be cautious since what she presents here is a portrayal of the ruling caste, the rajas. It is important to note that the girls of these castes, even after twelve, could continue to be educated in their own home or in the home of a well-to-do caste member. Namboodiri women also were literate and read poetry as well as religious texts. It is clear also that access to formal education and training in the valued knowledge and arts was the monopoly of the privileged women belonging to high ranking castes.

As far back as the nineteenth century, women's education was a relatively important subject for native social reformers and foreign and native missionaries in Kerala. In the nineteenth century the topic was the source of ideological battles among various parties: the English colonial government, the local princely states, lay and religious associations, and the public at large. Missionaries were involved in more than one episode of these battles for and against providing formal education for women, and were especially concerned with the kinds of school settings for "girls" and for young

women. It should be acknowledged that youth belonging to Dalit and other lower castes, were, to some extent, among the beneficiaries of these early struggles.

Before the arrival of the European missionaries to Kerala there was considerable formal education of women at home; in the large *taravad* houses created through mostly matrilineal living arrangements made up by the members of the matrilineal extended family. Even girls of poor Nair sub-castes came to listen to the lessons. There existed at least two systems of education. One was known as *ezhuthupallies* or *pial* schools, whose targets were students from non-*Nambudiri* castes. The other was known as *mutts* that were exclusively meant for and managed by local *Namboodiris* (the upper caste, known throughout India as Brahmins) whose “gurus” accepted boarding students and were remunerated and given special gifts (*gurudakshinas*). By and large, schools were for men. Formal religious and philosophical teachings were the main subjects of the training in these schools (Joy 1995:52-53). Women and girls were, for the most part, excluded from them, though there are records of high caste women being able to read and write Sanskrit. It seems that the *ezhuthupallies* or *pial* schools, organized in the villages, provided the basis of the missionary work.

Well-to-do Nairs running private schools for the members of their family engaged a teacher (*Ezhuthachan* or *Asan*) whose hereditary occupation was teaching. In these schools, the pupils were helped to acquire the basis of the “3 R’s” both written and oral, and bookkeeping. “The curriculum also included the learning of grammar, reading or singing of the ‘*Amaram*’, a collection of verses, and other ‘*Sastrams*’ (ancient Sanskrit texts). Students learned how to read religious books as *Krishnayniam* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Together with these [sic] training, arithmetic tables as well as a few problems were

taught...After undergoing a course of studies in the *ezhuthupallies* the students were sent to the *Kalari* or military school in order to get training in gymnastics and the use of arms” (Joy 1995:53). Curiously, girls from the Nair caste and subcastes were allowed into the *Kalaris*.

In appraising Kerala’s history of education one is faced with the dramatic socio-political and economic changes in the whole South Indian region brought about by the colonial enterprises and the above-mentioned Western missionaries, together with the collaboration of native agents, such as the local *rajās*, the government officials and later the social reformers. Among the colonial enterprises, it is worth mentioning the inflow of Western, mainly British, merchants, who were looking for the attractive spices market, for plantations, and other trades, soon after the defeat of Tipu Sultan by the British in the neighboring state of Mysore. The rural struggles for land and new land settlements due to the upward mobility of certain castes and communities, the disintegration of large Namboodiri’s and Nair’s *tharavads* and the introduction of the plantation system for cash crops (rubber, precious woods, spices, etc.) were part of the background and were among the forces that encouraged formal Western education. The opening of “modern schools”, the introduction of a new administrative and judiciary system, and the expansion of the printing business were other important factors that had an impact in the demand for and supply of formal Western education. These forces unleashed, in turn, dramatic changes in women’s status, roles, and education within matrilineal castes.

At the same time we recall the heavy pressure employed by some Nair men in the three regions for the replacement of the matrilineal system of property and inheritance with individual ownership one. As noted in Chapter 2, this pressure was fueled and

supported by the British government whose interests would thereby be promoted. This way only men, following the British system of inheritance, would have the right to inherit property and would be able to pass inheritance to their own children and not to their nephews or nieces (i.e., through their sisters). This would have a dramatic and long-lasting effect on inheritance and property laws, becoming more complex with the contemporary practice of dowry, which is related to women's education. For some parents, their daughter's education was and still is part of her dowry and it is definitely a very important issue and item in the marriage arrangements. To this factor one has to add the sharp criticism and censure by puritanical and Victorian missionaries at the turn of the century of gender relations and sexual practices within the matrilineal castes, especially the freedom of Nair women.

As a result of the strong English trade and direct colonial rule over Malabar (North Kerala and part of the Madras Presidency), as well as that of Travancore and Cochin where colonial rule was said to be "indirect", the plantation economy was established. Thus, Malayalis who were early on involved in transactions with the new rulers soon realized that the English language and Western educational training were essential. The Malayali elite were hardly uneducated before colonization, but the terms and the power of the English colonizers put new and different pressures on them. Resistance and consent to the new hegemonic ruling power were simultaneously at work in Kerala. However, as the result of the strong segregation of the sexes and seclusion of women from patrilineal castes, only men were expected to deal with the foreigners and so it was they who were initially forced to undertake "modern" education (See Jeffrey 1987 and 1993).

It is in the context of the British expansion that the work of the Protestant missionaries should be analyzed. The latter had to negotiate their way with both the British government and the native rulers and their functionaries. Equally important were the different vested interests of the different castes and communities in emulating the missionaries in their educational and religious zeal. In the case of Kerala, emulation was very much the trend with the exception of the Muslims and the Namboodiris .

Some native leaders such as the then “Rani” Gauri Parvathi Bai (female royal head of the princely state of Travancore) wanted to follow the Christian missionary efforts in providing education for the “masses”. In 1817 she introduced a system of free and compulsory primary education under the state’s control. This effort was supported and probably promoted by the *Dewan* (The British government representative in the princely state), Col. Munro. By 1818, Cochin had followed this example. Girls’ and women’s education was, however, excluded then. The Travancore and Cochin royal families, it has been widely acknowledged, pioneered these progressive social changes in India which in part explains the continued people’s desire to obtain formal education for their children, otherwise a puzzle (Jeffrey 1993 and Joy 1995).

The state developed a successful educational system that integrated the traditional and the new: Malayalam and English, government schools and (government-aided) private schools which catered to the different communities, castes, and pressure groups. The new system was open to large sections of the population including many previously disadvantaged groups (Tharamangalam 1998).

The Missionaries

The London Missionary Society (LMS)

One report from the London Missionary Society (LMS) stated: "The main concern of the school is to teach Christianity rather than other things" (LMS Annual Report, 1867:145). Missionaries were in fact successful in obtaining many conversions from under-privileged castes and classes, sometimes even mass conversions. But, "To educate a woman is like putting a torch in the hand of a monkey" according to this author's assessment of the attitudes of Malayali Hindu families regarding women's education (Hacker, 1908:84). The same author emphasizes the zeal with which missionaries, and more specifically the LMS missionaries' wives, undertook the task of *redeeming and enlightening* (my emphasis) "native" women.

In 1819 when Mr. Mead had taken another help-mate and Mr. and Mrs. Amulet arrived, and the two missionaries with their wives were settled in Nagercoil, the first small boarding school for Christian girls was established in what was then Kerala. This innovation of teaching girls, especially girls of lower caste-and more especially little slave girls, was regarded with the greatest astonishment. Everything had to be provided--board, books, clothes, and even a little fee paid to the children to induce them to come to school.

The girls were for five or six years taken from their non-Christian surroundings, placed in a Christian atmosphere, under the direct daily influence of a Christian lady, and the result is to-day seen in a large number of educated Christian women, whose refined life, good manners, and Christian character *give the tone* to our whole Christian community...The girls in the boarding school soon showed themselves to be apt pupils, and, in addition to all the elements of a primary education, needlework was taught (Hacker, 1908:84-87).

A good comparison to these processes and approaches could be those experiences by Native Americans who were taken away from home and put in convent-like institutions

with all the damaging, culturally and otherwise, consequences for the individuals, their families and their societies. I can not forget the following expression by Captain Richard Pratt when initiating the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania: "Kill the Indian, save the Man." (Adams 1995, Styron 1997).

Lace-making and embroidery became very important activities within these institutions, among other things, because it provided some income. In a visit to the mission, one Dr. Mullens, in talking about the missionary work, remarked: "...the respectability and cleanliness of the employment react on the mind and character of those who pursue it, and tend to preserve their intelligence and self-respect." (Hacker, 1908:88).

In the account by the Society's secretary on the LMS's beginnings, one learns that by 1853, Christian missionaries had already made an inroad in certain regions:

The city of peace, i.e. Santhapuram, lies opposite a noble hill, which stretches far into the well-tilled plain. Its pretty parsonage, its neat church, already too small for the demands of the Christian population, its flourishing girls' school, counting more than a hundred girls, its lace establishment, its almshouse for poor widows, its well-planned village and huge well, all reflect much credit on the perseverance and energy of Mr. Lewis, by whom it was founded. I shall never forget the happy faces of the Shanar girls at the station as they plied their spinning-wheels and sang, "Oh! That will be joyful, When we meet to part no more." (Hacker, 1908: 86-87) .

Experiences like this multiplied in Kerala and set the tone for the Christian missionary work in the field of women's education. It is worth noting here that in contemporary Kerala's Christian women's colleges there is a clear echo of these patronizing attitudes and perceptions vis-à-vis the Scheduled castes and OBC students. Reference is still made to "uplifting" girls and young women, especially those from lower castes and working class backgrounds. In interviews with the teaching staff, I found that

the college administrations were making an effort to compensate for the many “deficiencies” these students presented. Many seemed to assume that their efforts were of no avail and maybe they were right. It was evident that they did not respect the knowledge and values these girls brought from their own cultures, such as notions of health and medicine and an understanding of agricultural practices, to give just two examples. So it is rather a “charity” derived notion that prompted them to make such efforts without considering the whole social and economic structures that prevent those students from taking advantage of their formal education.

Hacker tells us that by 1872 and, thanks to the works of the LMS medical mission, a new school for high-caste girls was opened by one Mrs. Thomson; she and her colleagues soon discovered that in a “heathen” village of Travancore “...female education was entirely unknown and not considered, none of the women being able to read.” (Hacker, 1908:89). They encountered there some problems attributed mainly to the ignorance and superstition of the leading men in the village who were Brahmins. One of these men visited the teacher and said that he would allow her to be in charge of his daughter if she would use three Hindu books, which he and others wanted their daughters to be taught from. The reason was the belief that with the first book they would become wise, with the second they would become virtuous, and with the third polite and courteous. “Of course I declined changing my Christian books, and so this man has opened a sort of class in his own house, where a few girls meet to be taught wisdom, virtue and politeness.” (Hacker, 1908:90). The point to underscore here is that in Kerala somehow the missionaries’ example started to be followed by Hindus and to a lesser extent by Muslims.

The author also mentions that Christian women belonging to low castes, “...whose very presence in the streets and homes of orthodox Hindus was considered a degradation, slowly had a door opened for them for paid jobs in missionary schools” (Hacker 1908:90). This highlights two facts: the dramatic hierarchization of society and the shortage of female Christian teachers. It seems that thanks to the skills of Western medical doctors, who had access to high caste Hindus, some middle caste women were trained in midwifery, thus slowly breaking down some prejudices. Similarly, as a result of missionary women’s work, 2,365 women came under definite Christian instruction at the end of nineteenth century (Hacker 1908:92).

This kind of chronicle of the missionary work does not differ too much when compared with those that one can read about Bengal or Maharashtra; these all present a common trend of hard working missionaries with or without the support of native social reformers. However, a reminder is necessary: roughly one-fourth of the population in Kerala is Christian as the result of conversion, which makes Kerala unique in India. Further, some missionaries developed remarkable work in education as well as in health, in spite of extreme difficulties and cultural differences.

The Basel Evangelical Missionary Society (BEMS):

This Protestant society played an important role in pushing for the acquisition of printing presses and consequently the publishing of textbooks, grammar books, novels, storybooks, and journals in Malabar. This fact has been underlined as an important factor in the educational history of the state, which has the highest rates of publishing in India, including newspapers in Malayalam and in English. One cannot overlook the influence of this printed material in spreading ideologies since most of the books published by the

BEMS were in Malayalam and religious in nature. Also, the missionaries stressed the formation of catechists and teachers who would, eventually, mould the students' character, as per the explicit goals of the missionaries. This mission tried to appoint Christian teachers in their schools too. Likewise, it intervened in the *zenana* (women quarters inside the house) imparting bible teachings to women with literacy as a prerequisite. This work was also undertaken, and simultaneously, by the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Salvation Army, and the Lutheran Mission, all present in Kerala. The first three were the pioneers in women's "western" education, especially through the missionaries' wives. Parents preferred, and still prefer, female teachers or tutors for their daughters. Most importantly, at this moment in history the purpose of the education of girls and women was to socialize them into submissive and polite although cultivated roles.

The first lady teacher in the Malabar Mission was Julie Gundert. Later the missionaries appointed native lady teachers in the girls' schools...In 1858, there were 2 lady teachers in Chombala - Magdalene Kirackayil and Elizabeth Sundaren, and the lady teacher in Calicut was Anna Subaya. The number of schoolmistresses increased year by year. Some lady teachers were able to superintend the schools. In Malabar a lady superintended (sic) the Boarding School in the absence of the European superintendent. When Julie Gundert left India, the girls' school was looked after by Anna Subaya. She was an able teacher and the women of the congregation also liked to be advised by her and to follow her as an example. The missionaries wanted to appoint more female teachers in their schools. But the scarcity of them for higher grades was an obstacle to that. They remarked: "They are such rare birds that we cannot get them at all, or if we get some, so many situations are open to them that at any time they may threaten to leave us unless we increase their pay"...About the training of female teachers of that period the BGEM Report of 1904, p.32, comments: "Alas the training of Mistresses is by no means as satisfactory as that of Schoolmasters. *In the first place very few young girls take sufficient interest in studying, and then very often just when they are becoming useful, they marry, and this generally ends their service*" (Joy 1995:171; my emphasis).

The irony of this latter remark is that even now, many young women are being

married off soon after they obtain their bachelor degrees, thus ending their formal education and hindering their prospective professional futures.

It seems that little by little the education of women and the missionaries' work were of concern to various agents including the government. With the new Education Code of 1894 the Government was adamant that all teachers in state-aided schools should be qualified by passing an examination; this was a source of concern to many missionaries who had been teaching without the necessary training and in spite of the salary rise they would obtain by passing the examination. In the beginning, the salary of a teacher was determined by the number of pupils s/he brought to the school (Joy 1995: 84).

The Madras Presidency and its Impact on Kerala in the Twentieth Century

The following table shows how, by the 1901 Census, Malabar (North of Kerala) already was ahead of the other regions in terms of female literacy:

Table 3. Census of 1901

**No. of Literates/1000 each sex
(Report from Risley and Gait, p.160)**

	Rural		Cities	
	M	F	M	F
India	98	49	259	7
Bengal	104	63	276	9
Bombay	116	63	261	-
Madras	119	65	355	9
Malabar & Tanjavoor	93	70	304	8

Note: In the city of Madras 1 female for every 11 males can read and write.

During the Madras Presidency, the beginnings of higher education for women were accompanied by conflicts between those who maintained the necessity of a government College for women and those who defended the idea of a female Christian college. Already in the years 1911 and 1912 there were heated debates around the issue. It is remarkable that there were already 30 female, mainly Christian students "reading" in the Arts colleges for men mostly in Madras (Swaminathan 1992:34). The following citation illustrates the tenor of the deliberations and debates and the different positions of missionaries and of the government functionaries. On the one hand, representatives of the former urged that arrangements for women's colleges should be made by a private agency and suggested the names of trained teachers from London to undertake the task.

Two such trained teachers, Miss McDougall and Miss E. Roberts concluded that:

The college [i.e. a college for women] should be on a distinctly and avowedly Christian basis. There are many reasons for this, but two in special [sic] seem to me very cogent in India. In the first place, parents of all creeds will more willingly entrust their daughters to Christian care than to any other. Some anxiety is felt about possible change in religion, but these are outweighed by the confidence that the girls will be in [a] good moral atmosphere, that her [sic] health will be carefully guarded, that she will be treated with sympathetic kindness and above all that she will be protected from moral danger. A University woman bred at one of the English residential colleges has a number of interesting and lucrative careers open to her at home in comparison with which India with its trying climate, its distance from home, its scanty pay and limited possibilities of advance offers no attraction. Of course, there are exceptions but in our experience of Indian schools and colleges, it is only a sense of vocation that brings out from England, women of the best type, intellectual, moral and social to take up the very trying work of a teacher in India (Swaminathan 1992:36).

Toward this position, Lord Pentland, the then governor of Madras, was very critical, though he acknowledged the Christian effort in education. His view was that in South India the orthodox Hindu opinion was “growingly sensitive of the influence of Christianity in public education, was peculiarly distrustful of its influence upon Hindu women and girls” (Swaminathan 1992:37). The government was aware of the need to provide “the opportunities desired by the increasing number of higher caste and wealthy Indian young women who under no necessity or desire to seek University distinction but wishing to continue their education for its own sake are not willing or not allowed to do so under definitely Christian influence” (Swaminathan 1992:37).

Such opposing views between the missionary organizations and the government were not new; the former strongly protested any attempt by the latter to pursue the creation of a Government college for women. Missionaries were, obviously, fearing the loss of their benefits under the “aided”, i.e. assisted, educational scheme. That those attempts were perceived as threats to their vested interests became clear to the

Government. Similarly, some of the government reports accused them of using “education” as a means for their own end, which, “...however worthy it may seem, is not the end desired by the people of India” (Swaminathan 1992:39). Still other reports charged some of the missionary societies with the aim of monopolizing the extension of education to the detriment of the government’s autonomy.

In spite of all these debates and differences, the Madras Government was determined to continue with the plan of opening a women’s college. The outline of such a plan included three prerequisites: That the Presidency Training School for Mistresses in Madras would be developed into an institution providing for collegiate instruction for girls, that arrangements would be made for opening therein a junior intermediate class first and a senior intermediate class the following year; finally, that two women teachers with first class qualifications, recruited in England, would be provided for the purpose. This decision led to the following proposal:

The Director suggested that the opening of a women’s college for one year on a temporary basis with a view to avoid the delay which would be occasioned by recruitment of lady professors in England and also with a view to test the extent of the demand that existed for a purely secular college for women.

As regards subjects for instruction, the Director suggested that only group III of the intermediate course would be taught initially. Under University Regulation 179, students for the intermediate examination had to undergo the following courses of study:

- I English language and literature
- II Composition in one of the vernaculars, or translation into English from one of the classical and foreign languages named in Regulation 176.
- III One of the following optional subjects:
Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry
Natural Science, Physics and Chemistry

- IV Any three of the following subjects:
 Ancient History
 Modern History (Europe)
 Logic
 Classical languages (Latin, Sanskrit)

A second classical language or one of the foreign or Indian vernacular languages mentioned in Regulation 176.

In spite of the good intentions behind this design, the science subjects were out of question since there were no laboratories and there were no provisions to invest in them in the near future. Two interesting parallels with the current situation in Kerala vis-à-vis women's higher education are: (1) The bargaining between the private sector and the government is not something of the past: today, the government expenditure in education, including that on private educational institutions (the "aided" ones), is extremely high. It pays teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, provides grants in aids for diverse improvements in libraries, labs, hostels, etc), although public assistance is declining. (2) In most of the women's colleges I visited, labs were not very good and emphasis was still on languages, primarily English. The exception to the inadequate state of labs and equipment are the medical and nursing colleges.

By 1913 one of the government officials, the Honorable Mr. Sivaswami Ayyar, observed: "It was also felt that the college for women would attract many women students since such students 'will rather prefer to take up group III -literary subjects than either group I or II which will probably be more difficult for them'" (Swaminathan 1992:41). Today, most female college students opt for English and Liberal Studies, although there is a new trend towards Commerce, Sciences, and Computer Programming.

To finish this historical sketch on the backdrop for the creation of a women's college in Madras, its initial name was changed to "Queen Mary's College for Women". By 1927 there were 72 students studying in men's colleges because none of the 5 women's colleges, that is Queen Mary's and the four under private management, provided instruction for the "Honours' course". A few Malayali women attended this college then.

What follows is a list of principles the Colonial Indian Government held regarding women's education in 1913 (all of which affected Kerala):

The education of girls should be practical with reference to the position which women will fill in social life; It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys nor should it be dominated by examinations;

Special attention should be paid to hygiene and the surroundings of school life.

The services of women should be more freely enlisted for instruction and inspection;

"Alternative courses" in the curriculum were proposed for those girls/women who did not want or could not continue their studies until graduation. Drawing and music, practical hygiene and domestic science, for example, were included in almost all secondary schools for girls following the example of comparable institutions in England.

Some of the arguments put forward by some government officials were such as the following: "Women in India are not supposed to compete with men in appointments and the education which girls have to be given from the beginning will have to be such as would be of use to them in after life, in order to make them good housewives and useful members of society." K.R.V. Rao was a mover of the resolution regarding women's education by the Council of the Governor of Fort St. George held on November 25, 1915.

(Swaminathan 1992:47)

Following this rationale, curricula for women's education was deficient, facilities were minimal, there was no room for diversification and a class-biased agenda dominated growth. Interestingly, the situation in the Madras Presidency in terms of official views regarding women's education, which affected the whole region, was replicated to some extent in Travancore and Cochin. As it will shown afterward, problems of deficient facilities in women's colleges and a class-biased agenda are still part of the contemporary Kerala's educational landscape.

Contemporary Native Critiques

The royal families (Hindus and high caste Nairs) already mentioned were not alone in the educational enterprise. Hindu reformers, mainly from lower castes such as the lower Nair sub-castes and the Ezhavas, came up with new ideas about social inequalities and wished to counter the effects of other religions. Some sought to reclaim a better position in the Malayali social order and pushed for the opening of Hindu schools (and temples) and for equality in access to the existing ones. This implied a dramatic change in the social order of the state, similar to the "Emancipation Proclamation" in the USA.

Related to these developments, a Malayali woman intellectual wrote "...changes were creating a public space which was filled by men" (Saradmoni 1996:29). To illustrate this point she cited an article in the journal *Mahila* which reported that "...the male students of Trivandrum Law College, ably supported by a well known and successful advocate, voted against the entry of women to college where legal training

was imparted. The journal felt that it showered fear and confusion on the part of the male students.”(Mahila 1924:32) A year later the same journal also published on the difficulties experienced by women in Travancore, South Kerala, in getting representation in the newly created legislature, because there was no woman willing to accept such responsibility (Mahila 1925:3). This is extremely revealing of male perceptions of women and of women’s fear to take advantage of new opportunities. The phrasing is also revealing: the problem was that women *were not willing to accept such responsibility*. At the time I was doing my fieldwork, Malayali highly educated and capable women were absent from the public sphere, though there was one woman in the Government Cabinet.

With this background in mind it is easy to understand the difficulties that women who wanted a formal education or those few who had achieved an education had to face to make an inroad in public life. “When Lakshmi N. Menon, (subsequently a member of PM Nehru’s cabinet) returned from England after completing her higher education, it was a college in Madras and not Travancore that gave her a job” (Saradamoni 1996:32). Madras was the metropolis and Trivandrum was just a big town then and even today priority might have given to a male candidate. An interesting note about Lakshmi N. Menon is that she was from Malabar, as mentioned, a place considered more tolerant of women professionals than Travancore.

There is another thread in the complicated web of agents involved in women’s education that is worth mentioning: namely, the special developments in the city of Madras. Most of the research on women’s education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has focussed on the states of Bengal and Maharashtra, thus somewhat neglecting the developments in the Southern states, more specifically in the Madras

Presidency whose capital was the city of Madras (Tamil Nadu state) and whose developments had a direct impact in North Kerala.

Education was encouraged by a number of individuals and institutions, religious and otherwise, both native and foreign which included the British colonial government in its Madras Presidency. This is important because Northern Kerala, i.e. the North and South Malabar provinces, were, up to India's independence, under the administration of the British direct rule of the Madras Presidency and many Malayalis from all three regions used to go to Madras to work and to obtain Western, "modern", higher education. Indeed, a few Malayali women studied in the neighboring city of Mangalore, which was under the same administration, and many went to Madras itself.

Up to the 1980's, it was easier and faster to reach Madras from other parts of Kerala than Trivandrum because there was no railroad going there. In Madras social reformers of all sorts, native and foreign, became women's education promoters. Among the foreigners, and beside the colonial authorities, who increasingly took an interest in women's education in this area, Annie Besant was extremely important and influential; she was a member of the Theosophical Society. In her article on the "Education of Women" for the *Indian Ladies Magazine* she exhorted people to provide women an education that looked at the Hindu tradition and ideal of womanhood; in her view, Western education would "unsex" women. "Besant pledged her efforts to this reform and founded a women's college based on these principles" (Forbes 1996:44). Hers and others' views are in sharp contrast with what around the same period was the core of the debate among some educated Malayalis: the need for English and Western education for women. In *Induleka*, a novel written by a Nair man gave vent to the view of English

women and femininity as models to follow by Malayali women, sharply criticizing the Nairs' matriliney and matrilocality that resulted in more autonomy for women in terms of their love affairs. The novel is an apology for the need for an English education together with the command of English. (See appendix) Besant and Nair represent the contradictory views and messages about women and their position in society in the colonial period.

The Twentieth Century and Women's Education in Kerala

One of the central themes of "From the Gutter", a short and very successful novel written in 1944 by P. Kesava Dev (1904-1983), is the willingness by the main character, a poor Nair rickshaw driver, to provide education to an adopted girl; he wants to "make her a B.A."³⁷. As the education system spread, it led to the proliferation of a more demanding egalitarian ethic (Jeffrey 1992:153). Missionaries, native and foreign, Protestants, and native Christians from different rites were instrumental in this, but not as their main concern. Before 1947, missions were directly or indirectly supported to a degree by the colonial authorities while supposedly pursuing a policy of religious neutrality. Grants-in aid (scholarships for some deserving students), for some mission activities as well as an inspection system for medical and educational institutions attached or managed by missionaries are just some examples of how the government recognized missionary work. Some Indians were able to capitalize on what the missionaries offered, using mission institutions for their own purposes (Flemming 1989). These privileged

³⁷ For an enlightening account on this and other issues related to Kerala, see Jeffrey's work (1993:87-89)

groups were in fact starting to accumulate cultural as well as symbolic capital. It is important to remember that the missionaries' main concern was peoples' conversion.

In the early decades of the twentieth century there were already hundreds of schools for girls. Many of them were opened by members of different religious communities such as the Hindu Nair Society (NSS), by the followers of Sri Narayana Guru (low caste, Ezhavas), as well as by Christian congregations of women, by Catholic Syrians (Latin rite) and Syrian Christians (Syrian rite). Staffed by lay women and nuns, these schools became the most desired for many parents belonging to all castes and religions who wanted to endow their daughters with a "sound" education and "character building", together with an English "medium". It is from these latter institutions that the colleges, focus of my research subsequently derived.

Akkamma: A Singular Case

Focussing on Kerala's specific social history of the twentieth century one finds a few impressive examples of outstanding women who, against all odds, defied conventions and actively participated in public life, and more important, in public politics. This account will provide a scenario of the struggles women, even privileged ones, who had to fight to obtain autonomy and a place in the political and public realm. One such woman was Akkamma Cheriyan Varkey who lived between 1909 and 1982 and was born into a wealthy Catholic Syrian family. "She took a BA degree, became a high school principal, spent two and a half years in jail and, at 44, fought a parliamentary by-election when she was eight months pregnant with her only child" (Jeffrey 1992:146-149). Akkamma's fate was exceptional in many ways: in spite of strong patrilineal

tradition among Syrian Catholics, who tried to emulate Namboodiries (girls, by and large, were not educated, her house was a meeting place where the public reading of newspapers was customary and Akkamma listened and learned.

Akkama's father and mother were unique in that they withstood the harsh criticism of their community regarding their daughters' not been married off early. She also benefited from the very good school network in Travancore, attending school in her own town and then as a boarder at St. Joseph's High School in nearby Changanacherry. Subsequently, she went to Cochin to take a BA in St. Teresa's College and a teaching certificate in Trivandrum. In 1933 she was the headmistress of St. Mary's English Middle School in Kanjirappalli, her hometown.

By 1938 Akkamma was leading a procession to demand the release of political prisoners in Trivandrum who were fighting against the colonial Dewan (a native Hindu Brahmin administrator). At this point there were many educated Nair women who became Gandhi's followers and participated in the freedom struggles as well, so much so that some of them received awards from the independence government. From 1939 to 1947 Akkama was in prison on and off but that gained her a place in the Congress Party.

In 1948 she was elected with two other women to the 120-member State assembly in the first universal-suffrage elections. However, her own party colleagues opposed her and in 1953, she agreed to run as an independent, strongly backed by the Communists. Then, all the major Christian parties opposed and defamed her. Even so, large numbers of women crowded in to her political meetings and in spite of being defeated, she obtained 43 per cent of the 274,000 votes. Jeffrey (1992) rightly underlines the extraordinary life

of Akkamma, whose family's wealth allowed her to be a principled political failure. "Her career exemplified the price Kerala women would pay if they strayed from an area of life deemed fitting and respectable. Compared to the rest of India, these areas were broad. But Akkamma Varkey's story was more likely to deter Kerala women from public politics than encourage them" (Jeffrey 1992:149).

All this draws attention to how, in the last analysis, things do not seem too different today. There is a dramatic absence of women in the public sphere, with the exception of primary and high schools, women's colleges and hospitals where women workers are a majority in the lesser paid jobs; and among medical doctors especially in gynecology, obstetrics, and pediatrics. Otherwise, in Trivandrum, the state's capital, theaters, halls, even streets are deserted by women after 6 p.m. Time and again I had to admit the fact that in the evenings, I was going to be one of the few women among the public made up of hundreds of men attending a seminar, a recital, a film, or just to have a cup of tea. In larger cities such as Ernakulam or Calicut (Malabar), however, the presence of women in public spaces was and is more common; one could see them from of all walks of life strolling, un-chaperoned, in the evenings or attending social and academic events. In fact, people from Malabar think that Travancore is a very backward place.

Post-Independence

Private management has long been central to the educational system of Kerala, thanks to the historical role played by private religious agencies in the diffusion of schools putting Kerala in the forefront of the educational map of India. The women's colleges that are the focus of this research are very much an outcome of this

development. Once off the ground, the private agencies thrived, in some cases nurtured by the growing “communalization” of politics in India. In the end, the earlier partnership became transformed into a dependency; even if the government wanted to now, it could not get rid of the private agencies (Mathews p.186).

It is useful here to briefly explain how the Indian educational system works. College students must have undertaken 10 years of basic general education (includes primary and secondary school) and then they would enroll in the two year so-call PG or Pre-Degree program, whether in a college or another institution. Afterwards, they are required to pass an examination provided by the state. If successful, they formally enter college that lasts three years (all this is known as the 10+2+3 system). I should add that after +2 some girls may choose (or are forced to) enter a more technical or professional stream and go to the university or to colleges affiliated to the universities. For the most part, Malayali women will not reach college education.

In Kerala there is great deal of material about the indiscriminate expansion of the educational system. The number of Arts and Science colleges rose from 28 in 1965-57 to 172 in 1984-85; their enrolment from 22,000 to 2,97,745 during the same period. On the other hand, the pressure for college admissions from the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) holders forced the government to retract its position against expansion, open 37 new colleges, and adopt a shift system to increase the admission of SSLC holders from 1/3 to 2³⁸. Though for many this development may seem a success,

³⁸ Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) is the examination conducted by the Commissioner for Govt. Examination, Kerala. It is the annual examination for the 10th Standard students of Kerala and Lakshadweep. Around five lakhs pupils write this examination every year. There are 12 papers and the total marks is for 600.

there are also bitter critics because the government is sanctioning new colleges owned and run by adventurous entrepreneurs: "In Kerala a new college is a good business even if it is bad education. There is the sale of teaching posts and seats in colleges and there are courses without any public accountability" (Mathews 19 :180). In the same vein, the "Parallel Colleges" is the euphemism for centers that provide private "coaching" for students to pass the university entry exams. Thirty-four percent in pre-degree, forty percent in B. C. (Bachelor of Commerce) and forty-six percent in the M.A. courses is the proportion of private candidates permitted by examination to enroll in regular colleges. In 1980 nearly half the student population enrolled in regular colleges were students attending "parallel" colleges.

(The Kerala Education Bill of 1957 which unleashed the "war of liberation" by Catholics and the NSS and resulted in the ultimate fall of the first popular elected Communist government (See Jeffrey 1993:174-175).

There might be, however, a positive side to the explosion of educational institutions. In particular, they have prepared women who have gone to the USA, Canada, and Europe as nurses and other professionals such as teachers and for employment in banking and tourism in the Gulf States, mainly Bahrain, Qatar, and The Emirates. Nevertheless, because after 6p.m., when tutors start their work, in Travancore only men and boys are the lords of the streets, public spaces, and public transportation, young women are often reluctant to go for "coaching" or extra academic help. This is translated into fewer chances for them to achieve the needed highest "marks" in the examinations for the university entrance in careers other than the "traditional" female ones. Only those parents who can afford a private tutor or "coach" who comes to their homes will assure

their children the needed advantage, or those who have access to private transportation. Quite apart from the economic hardship most parents would endure to get their children this “extra” help, for “cultural” and economic reasons, too, they would most likely “invest” in sons and not in daughters’ education.

St. Teresa's College, A Christian Women's College in Kerala: A Case in Point

Looking at the websites of Kerala's Women's colleges recently, I noticed the following advertisement which matches very well the College's Year Books I collected upon my visits thanks to the kindness of their principals. The use of the advertisements serves well the purpose of illustrating the spirit, goals, and vision to which these institutions aspire. St. Teresa's is one of the most prestigious women's colleges in Kerala to which I paid a few visits. Besides, I interviewed several women who had studied there and seemed to cherish their experiences while attending the college. After having written an introductory letter to the Principal, I was rewarded with an appointment with her and a tour to the College arranged by her with the help of one of her trusted staff members, a very kind and efficient nun. It is important to note here that Ernakulam is an important port city with a very outward look, very cosmopolitan, the opposite to Trivandrum, the capital of the State, where I stayed most of the fieldwork. What follows are excerpts of an edited transcription of the advertisement.

St. Teresa 's College (Ernakulam) “Nationally Accredited at the Five Star Level”, affiliated to M.G. University, Kottayam.

St. Teresa's College, a Catholic Institution of Higher Education for Women provides University Education in a Christian atmosphere for deserving students. The goal of the College is the "Pursuit of Excellence" to promote the total development of each person in her uniqueness, through integrated physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social and cultural growth, in order to equip each student to collaborate with others, in building a civilization of love.

Objectives:

1. To develop the spirit of learning, discovery and creativity;
2. To enable every person to become the agent of justice, peace and love;
3. To provide an environment for the assimilation and promotion of our culture and heritage;
4. To foster universal brotherhood leading to the acceptance of the Fatherhood of God.

The mission and objectives are realized by linking the subject taught in the classrooms with life situations.

The text and style is very similar to those of the brochure and Year College Magazines that I collected from this and each college I visited and surveyed. In their texts it is explicit the particular Christian character of the institutions, something that for several Hindu and Muslim parents poses no specific problem and that for Christian parents, the majority of the patrons, becomes an extra incentive.

Location

St. Teresa's College is ensconced within the natural setting. St. Teresa's might be the most prestigious of all Kerala women colleges run by nuns. St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam is located in the heart of the city of Cochin, caressed by the gentle breeze blowing from the lagoons which open into the Arabian Sea. St. Teresa's has an Arts and a Science Block. The Science Block is located on T.D. Road.

Today, it is a First Grade College with a student-strength of over 3000 of whom 500 reside in our hostels. The faculty consists of 102 teachers and 27 ad-hoc teachers. The strength of our non-teaching staff is 65.

My reading of this ad is that the college administration is borrowing from the tourist industry imagery and expressions to further entice the possible patrons (and not so different from the advertisement of the American colleges). The word "ensconced" is, in my opinion, a non-gratuitous one for what most parents wish for their daughters is precisely enclosure and safety; no occasion for mixing up, gender or caste/class wise.

History

The College was born as the second women's College in Kerala and the first in Cochin under the leadership of the Carmelite Sisters of St. Teresa. Through the second-world war and British rule, the College continued to educate generations of young women. During the second-world war, the College buildings were transformed into a military hospital and the College was shifted to Trichur. In 1948, the College was relocated to its original premises. Founded in 1925 on a vision to provide higher education for women, St. Teresa's college, the first women's College in the erstwhile Cochin State was first affiliated to the University of Madras and then successively to Kerala and Mahatma Gandhi Universities. It still continues to be the only women's College in Cochin. Degree Courses were started in 1927 and St. Teresa's became a First Grade College. Post- Graduate Courses were introduced in 1962. St. Teresa's is also an approved Research Center of the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala. The Institution is run by the Carmelite Sisters of St. Teresa with its headquarters in Bangalore. The excellent stewardship of Mother Digna who took over in 1944 as Principal, is a significant phase in the history of this Institution. At present, Rev. Sr. Victorine C.S.S.T, the Superior General is the Chairperson of the Governing Body...At the same time its centralized position in the city makes it easily accessible by means of road, rail and air. The College combines the best of the two world's, rooted as it is in tradition, yet imbibing the multifarious facets of development offered with each passing year as attested by the changing face of the College. Additions have been made to the building, over the years, most notably the Library and the auditorium. A new Computer and Language Laboratory has been added very recently to accommodate our entry into the world of computers and communications. Yet undeterred by these physical changes this "Kala Kshetra" (temple of Learning) continues to flourish by its inner dynamism and the vigour and vitality of the successive generation of students and teachers. (In www.teresasernakulam.com/agout-main.htm)

The history of St. Teresa's College reflects the historical changes experienced by the state of Kerala from the Pre-Independence to the Post-Independence era, notably its affiliations to different universities as a result of the state's political and administrative rearrangements.

These excerpts from the college's web-site are illustrative of the type of discourses this and similar colleges convey and contribute to the understanding of their appeal. Increasingly, students whose parents work or have worked in the Gulf countries are applying and being admitted even when their parents remain abroad and making the

“Hostel” capacity insufficient.

The following is an excerpt taken from the web-site of another women’s college, Mar Thoma College for Women, last updated in 2001. “Recently introduced short-term courses like 'The Creative Art of Home Management' and 'Life Management' are meant to cater to the future employment prospects of the young ladies who are educated here”. The web-site boasts that the college also encourages many co-curricular activities, thus playing a major role in shaping the personality and empowering students to rise to the challenges in their daily life. Therefore, their main drive is to make them respond creatively and positively to the various needs of the society and the community they live in. The NSS, NCC, Career Guidance, Brains Trust, Speaker's Club, Women's Cell, AIDS Awareness Cell, Reader's Club and Nature Club are listed as present on campus. Apart from these, various “Enrichment Programmes” are being planned and conducted for the holistic development of the students. Though the college does not have a computer center, computer awareness and training is given to the students by an outside agency, within the college premises, under the supervision of the Mathematics department. The department of English conducts a Communicative English Course. In addition to all this, special emphasis is given to the spiritual and moral aspects of education. Value education is a compulsory part of the curriculum and each day begins with the Morning Worship. According to the web-site, the college is steadily progressing in academic, cultural and spiritual pursuits. “Within a short span of eighteen years we have won the love, respect and confidence of the community we cater to”. (From Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor Mahatma Gandhi University www.thebest-online.com/mtcwp/Default.htm)

Conclusion

So far, this is of course, a non-exhaustive history of the more meaningful events and developments that resulted in the spread of opportunities for the girl child and for women to enroll in formal education in Kerala. This summary highlights the problems posed for many Malayali women (and men) by an unjust social system that prevented a democratic entry to the learning centers by members of all castes and social classes. The dramatic changes brought about by the colonial approach to the economy and socio-political situation of what today is Kerala provoked different strategies with which different native Malayalis agents negotiated their way up the social ladder. The Western education of women was part of the colonial undertaking fostered by Western missionaries and native agents. Some of their discourses resound still today. Some of the reasons why Kerala has gained the important position it holds in the terrain of women's education and its position as a rather unique case in the context of India are discussed. A few historical facts that would help us understand why Kerala's real achievements.

CHAPTER FOUR:
SPACES OF CONTROL, SITES OF DISCIPLINE:
WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN KERALA

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the relationship between women's education and women's empowerment in the context of the All-India patrilineal and patrifocal ideologies that emphasize the role of women as wife and mother first. It will look at formal education practices and ideologies together with the examination of the pedagogical and disciplinary practices that exist in women's colleges run by nuns.-

The linkages between women's education and the marriage market, their "entangled" connection with inheritance laws, and the phenomenon of "dowry", are all explored. The discussion that follows is based on field notes and interview data from forty long interviews with both students and the teaching and non-teach staff of the women's colleges. It also uses information from observation(s), interviews and discussions with public administrators in the field of education, students, "common people" such as my neighbors in Trivandrum, - and not so common ones such as the faculty and staff at CDS. It was useful as well to look at the social interactions and behaviors of women at home, when and where my entry was granted, and in more public spaces, taking into account that in some of these spaces their movements are quite restricted. The "restricted" spaces include streets, public transportation, auditoriums, theaters, temples, mosques, "hotels", restaurants, and churches.

The arts in Kerala, and more specifically Malayali literature, offer abundant

examples of strong sexual segregation as well as segregation by caste, class, and religion. Women writers of Kerala such as Lalithambika Antharjanam (1994), Sorayya (aka Kamala Das, aka Madhavi Kutti 1990), K. Saraswathi Amma (1990), and more recently, Arundathi Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997) have contributed interesting glimpses into the diverse constructions of femininity and of the expected behaviors and roles that women were and are expected to play. Among them, female subservience, circumscribed forms of women's resistance, and gender discrimination are part of the common denominator. What has not been explicit in many social studies, is poignantly delivered in "fictional" representations of conflicts lived by women and men who have suffered from very strict rules of sexual avoidance, seclusion, and gender asymmetry³⁹.

Likewise, the works of a few male writers of Kerala such as Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai, M.T. Vasudeva Nair, Mohammed Basheer, and others, present a sharp social critique of the extreme patriarchal ideologies which result in a double standard as expressed in the coding of gender constructions and relations based on dichotomized perceptions of womanhood. An illustration of these dichotomies is expressed for example, in the counter position of the image of the mother to that of a temptress⁴⁰. In both cases the woman is closer to nature and therefore more prone to "fall" to carnal temptations and to become a temptation herself; thus her sexuality must be strictly controlled. Ironically, Kerala is today known as the "Pornographic capital of India" on account of the mushrooming of videos produced to cater to the male market in which Malayali women perform. During the time I was doing my fieldwork, Kerala society was

³⁹ Osella and Osella's work (2000) is an exception to the rule.

shocked by the revelations of how several men holding high-ranking government positions were involved in the kidnapping and sexual abuse of a very young girl who was used in the production of such videos.

To understand this, one has to realize how deeply rooted very ancient India-wide Hindu (Brahmanical) patriarchal and patrifocal family and caste systems have surfaced, and how they have been incorporated into more recent developments of class formation⁴¹. As a consequence, notions of honor and purity are very much ingrained and women are deemed responsible for guarding them. Similarly, in a process unleashed by the colonial encounters, new and old forms of patriarchy from the Victorian, and Pre- and Post-Victorian eras were adapted, such as the emphasis of “purdah” education for women. The irony of all this is that it occurred in Kerala, where, as it has been mentioned above, within some castes and up to the 1920's, matrilineal and matrilocal systems existed. These systems have given women a relatively greater autonomy just by providing them with access to property and inheritance as well as by allowing them more latitude in terms of sexual autonomy, though not full power, as the society remained in many ways a male dominated one.

The colleges I examined are sites of class [re]production, where students display symbolic and real capital and wealth in the form of conspicuous consumption. Both caste and class differences are enacted in their premises. In addition, the women's college, a physically safe haven serves as a “waiting hall” before marriage. As Deepa, one of my

⁴⁰ This is not too different from the well-known ideology of Marianismo that in Latin American cultures oppose the images of the Virgin Mary and those of the sinner woman or the whore.

⁴¹ Even at the risk of generalizing, in practice, this has not so sharply different from the patrifocal and male dominating ideologies of both the Christians of all the denominations and the Muslims.

informants put it, "In the convent school, it was confining. The sisters were strict: no flowers in our hair, no makeup, no tight blouses, but tie and shoes and socks in 100 degree heat. It was a nightmare."

Analysis of daily routines inside the colleges, their brochures, yearbooks and similar documents, together with the narratives of women, reveal hegemonic ideologies of identities, power, discipline, and control. These make it possible to locate ideal representations of womanhood that portrays women as the pillar of the family, i.e., the good mother and wife, and good citizen. This chapter situates these conceptions of gender and citizenship historically by examining how and what notions of womanhood have changed over time. It highlights the manipulation of discourses about womanhood in general, and about what it means to be an educated woman in particular.

More recently, on the national and regional level many discourses share an emphasis on self-reliance for women. Thus, "to stand on her own two feet" is a common expression used by parents and students alike, to convey the ideal of a woman who is sufficiently self-reliant to make her living by herself should the need arise. Independence, autonomy, and empowerment are not necessarily implied. On the contrary, due to an insecure labor market for both men and women, individual women and their families continue to show greater interest in the marriage market than in furthering the young women's participation in higher education. This chapter presents the ways in which this strategy sharply diverges from the official discourses on women's education in India and the paradoxical results of educating young women.

In the first part of this chapter I explore some of the issues that are at the core of

the Malayali society, especially in the South, as they relate to the higher education of women. They range from the underlying principle for education, and particularly the role of the women's colleges run by nuns, to the quality of this education. As a corollary, it addresses the rationale for single-sex education as well as the exercise of control and discipline for female students in Kerala.

In the second part, and as a meaningful link to the questions raised in part one, I look at marriage and dowry as they connect with educational practices and with important socio-cultural formations such as matriliney and matrifocality. I consider the decline of these formations in the twentieth century and the consequences for a large section of Malayali society. Women in particular were dramatically affected, having lost the possibility of actually enjoying and controlling property and inheritance. Similarly I draw what I expect to be a meaningful correlation between the reinforcement of the private/public dichotomy, the lack of jobs, and the increase in violence against women, including educated ones.

Part I

Parents and Daughters: Feelings, Expectations, and Practices

This section highlights the experiences, feelings and expectations of young women attending the colleges run by nuns, especially in southern Kerala. It also addresses the concerns of the parents and the kinds of preoccupations that contribute to the decision to enroll their daughters in the colleges administered by the sisters. Discussed first is the young women's views and concerns, i.e. what the students

frequently state even though this often mimics what one would hear from their parents and the faculty.

The student body in these colleges is primarily of Christian and Hindu middle class backgrounds, a fact that is related to the “quota system” referred to in the introduction. Muslim students are also represented, although their proportion is very low. For the same reason, one does not find too many students belonging to scheduled castes (SC), schedules tribes (ST), and Other Backward Castes (OBC). All are objects of disciplining practices and cloistering. Some of the students resent this but others “feel” that this is the way it should be; some even say that this is one of the reasons they came to the college in the first place. By highlighting some of the practices and daily routines that are intended to provide “character formation”, one of the expressed goals of education within these institutions, I expect to contribute to the understanding of these processes and practices. Many parents in Kerala have been and still are looking for discipline, order, and sexual segregation for their daughters; it is a primary goal to have them be safe in the years after the onset of puberty. Along with that, parents are looking for better “coaching”, by which is meant special tutoring that guarantees better results in the state examinations for university entry.

For the most part, women’s colleges run by nuns fulfill these demands. Further, a daughter’s education in these colleges is defined as an investment in prestige that, in turn, will eventually have good returns in the marriage “market”. Simply put, education for a young woman and where this education takes place would mean better, or fewer, chances of getting a good marriage “match” for her. It is not unusual to read the expression “convent educated” as an asset or as a requirement in the “Matrimonials” which are

advertisements in different media. One can read them in Indian websites (both in English and in Malayalam) as well as in the English-language newspapers of Kerala and of India, not to mention Indian, English and Malayalam newspapers in the USA (See Appendix III).

“Convent educated” means that the young woman has been secluded, and thus, she has been protected from risky contacts and relationships. It also means that her cultural capital, as it epitomized by *savoir faire*, certain tastes, and training, as well as the way these are perceived, accepted, and reinforced by middle class ideologies, is better than those of the students who have attended the “regular”, less prestigious and in some cases Malayali “medium”, government colleges. It is worth mentioning here that government colleges are more numerous in Kerala and that some of them are associated with looser norms, frequent strikes, inadequate education, and “mixed” crowds. The academic aspect is also weighed in the parents’ decision, as we will see later since some of the studied colleges are considered as the best. Because the demand of a seat in these colleges is so high it is so difficult for many young women to gain admission. These perceptions, do not, however, always match the reality.

The Social Context: A Reprise

In the context of India, where more than fifty percent of the total female population is illiterate, Kerala’s near universal literacy and access to education for girls and young women is indeed an accomplishment (See Table 1 Census of India). Nonetheless, formal education and the pedagogical approaches in practice in these private colleges have not been translated into more autonomy for the young women. By this I

mean the broadening of their choices to take up their preferred subjects, their free use of public spaces, and their ability to make their own decisions in many spheres of their lives. Instead, a young woman of Kerala is often “married off” after a sequence of negotiations between parents and other relatives, brokers, astrologers, and after certain rituals⁴² have been conducted. Marriage, thus, often takes place when the young woman has finished her undergraduate studies at around twenty or twenty-one - that is, if she has been lucky enough to have reached that level and her family has been able to afford the necessary expenses and, more importantly, her “dowry”. Her formal education hence ends at the undergraduate level. So the question arises, what is the role of these colleges in women’s lives?

As I discuss in the following chapter, there are women from Kerala occupying unorthodox positions for women within the national sphere. Nevertheless, one should not be misled by “the culture of learning” that has resulted in Kerala’s anomalous number of “firsts”. What is particular about these women is that many have left Kerala at some point in their lives and have lived in cities such as Bombay, New Delhi, or even abroad, after having had a “convent education” in Kerala and before starting their professional lives.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, diverse social movements pursuing social reforms emerged in Kerala out of the new forms of power relations that were

⁴²I am referring to the long and uncomfortable, mostly for the young women, negotiations and rituals because in more than one occasion some of them disclosed, with bitterness, details of this process to me, examples of which are easily found in literature. After the matching of the prospective couple’s horoscopes and checking up their character, the financial situation of the families, etc. the young woman has to be “seen” by the broker and the prospective husband and his family. A normal ritual is for her to dress “modestly” and display her knowledge of etiquette by serving them tea, showing how good she will be in the role of the housewife hostess. She is also the object of an informal questionnaire. Then, she may have the chance of actually talking to “the boy” for a few minutes. All this also might end in a rejection based on

developing under the impact of colonization. Many people incorporated the social changes brought about by low-caste individuals who fought against caste barriers and who, against all odds, obtained education. Some accumulated capital working on plantations in Sri Lanka. After returning to Kerala, they pushed for reforms that created a different social space in which they were not placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. The Religious Social Reform Movements undertaken by low-caste, i.e. “untouchable” individuals and groups are included here (Tharakan 1984). In addition, throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s the fervor of committed and passionate Communists battled at the village level against the social evils of caste, demanding school and library entry for the “dalits” (Namboodiripad 1965). Events like these catapulted developments that resulted in changes in land relations, commercialization and the rise of an educated middle class; all elements integral to processes of social class formation. However, the “elements which went into the creation of new social roles for women signified both an attempt to maintain the ‘reputation’ and ‘status’ of the caste as well as the subordination of women by controlling relations between the sexes within the family” (Velayudhan 1994:66). Everywhere the caste and class battles for mobility held real prospects of sexual danger as far as women were involved.

Of Streedharma or female propriety

The fire has never too many logs,
 the ocean never too many rivers
 death never too many living souls,
 and fair-eyed woman never too many men. (Mahabharata 1, 74, 40. In A. L. Basham, 1954)

her “looks” (complexion, height, weight are important factors), or incompatibility between the two families or disagreement over “the dowry”.

Notions of womanhood in India in general and in Kerala, in particular, are very much influenced by the overall Hindu dictum of *streedharma*, which could be defined as the inner implicit knowledge about how to comport oneself as a worthy Hindu wife. This notion dates from *Vedic* times, and it is reinforced in epics and myths with the power of the models and the images they convey. Implicit is the will of curbing a supposed female tendency to carnal temptations. It was transmitted through the *Brahminization* and *Sanskritization* of society in which strong male-dominating views represented by the priestly and literate caste (the Brahmins) were part of the orthodoxy and ethics.⁴³ *Streedharma*, then, involves notions of obedience and chastity for women and sets forth the pattern they may aspire to, one that might provide a sense of identity for the self and for the community. It is clearly an expression of a construction of unequal gender relations typical of a male dominated society.⁴⁴

As I mentioned in the Introduction of the dissertation, in Kerala, specifically in the Travancore and part of the Cochin provinces, matriliney and matrilocal residence were found even among castes including Hindus and Mappilas, as the Muslims were called in North Kerala. The groups involved were prominent until the middle of the twentieth

⁴³ One could easily remark this through a reading of the most important Hindu epics such as Ramayana and the Mahabharata which have been acted and enacted many times in comics, TV serials, etc., where the heroines are all devoted wives and ready to die to safeguard their chastity in spite of the sometimes ill character and worthless husbands/gods. I remember some of my friend's friends, professional married women of all religious backgrounds, working for an NGO and for a medical college, had problems whenever they had to leave home after sunset unless they were escorted. A car, then, was a powerful asset but it was (still is) out of reach for most of Malayali families

⁴⁴ For an example of the treatment of women in classical Hinduism, Ramayana, one of the most important Hindu epics which is being performed time and again all over India, describes how Sita, Rama's wife, has to undergo the ordeal of fire just to prove herself chaste so that her husband could take her back after he comes back home. Sita's virtue and devotion to her husband is invoked time and again. The other major

century, and were some of the most numerous in the state. In spite of this fact, today, women from these castes and groups, both young and adult, live under the underwritten double standard, - a gendered code of conduct, one for them and one for males.

A study of adolescent girls in Kerala by Joseph (1996) called attention to the curtailment of their freedom or *swathanthriam* and mobility, and how boys have more "*adhikaram*" or authority and *avakaasham* or rights. A fact that I already had noticed and remarked, she also, makes the point about the way in which boys can move around more freely than even the adult women who often need permission from male members, even their own sons. The girls' most valued attribute was "*swabhavam*" or character and from childhood their mobility was curtailed by instilling fear of gossip and violence. Despite high levels of education, the educational system does little to perpetuate women's positive feelings about themselves, as persons and as women. As Velayudhan's Report put it:

In recent years, violence against women, the emergence of dowry related deaths, a beginning of a reversal of the favourable sex-ratio in the 0-7 age group, the persistent and widespread retrogressive attitudes to women in public life, the prevalence of "machismo" culture and its reinforcement, its re-enforcement and perpetuation by the mass media, low work participation rates and high unemployment among women, low representation of women in trade unions even in sectors where women form the predominant section of the workers (eg. coir), have been cited by the women's movement as pointing to the need to demystify fundamental aspects of the Kerala "model." What follows are data that further supports my observations in the field:

Indian (Hindu) epics, the Mahabharata also provide examples of the same sort. For example, the disrobing of Draupadi provoked by her five husbands, the Pandavas, in a game and the blame is put on her.

1. Crimes against women increased threefold in the years 1993-1997:

1993	1,894
1994	2,595
1995	3,313
1996	4,970
1997	7,306

2. Dowry related deaths (registered):

1993	8
1994	9
1995	15
1996	23
1997	71

3. Molestation:

1993	468
1994	679
1995	825
1996	1,129
1997	1,512

Source: State Women's Commission (Kerala) quoting figures provided by SCRB, August 1998 (In Velayudhan 2002, pp. 9-10)

One possible explanation for the increase in these types of crimes could be that women are reporting them more than before; another explanation is that men are taking out their frustrations (unemployment or underemployment, gender roles reversals, etc.) by exercising power against a perceived weaker section of the population. It is also obvious that research is being done to disclose these crimes. Likewise, impunity is a factor in the trend of certain behaviors that result in crimes. It is also worth mentioning here that the report underlines how life is among the upper caste and upper middle class where women tend to "be subjected to violence in the family rather than to external "social violence"...It is in these sectors that dowry deaths are the most rampant, female feticide is most practiced, forms of suppression such as wife beating are common, and

where these are more often masked from social visibility than among lower class and rural women” (Jananeethi 2004:14)⁴⁵. A possible explanation for these occurrences might be that like in other parts of the world, the middle classes are more prone to self-censoring and to emulating certain upper class practices. Moreover, with the decrease in subsidies and public spending, the middle classes may be under pressure to perform in certain ways, while being constrained by objective conditions.

A Women’s College’s Routine

In 1996, I had an appointment with a nun, the principal of a prestigious women’s college in Trivandrum. Arriving before 9:30, the agreed upon time, I observed some of the different groups of students and teaching staff forming at the entrance. A bell was heard and there was massive student movement. The College schedule runs from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with a lunch break of one hour. At the beginning of the morning session, a warning bell (the one I heard), announces that the students should go promptly and silently to the Assembly Hall for the Morning Prayer or, on the designated days, to their respective classes for a “Prayer before class”.⁴⁶ After the assembly (or prayer) another bell is telling them to begin work. At the close of the afternoon session, the students recite the “Prayer after class” before they disperse. This routine is repeated in all the women’s colleges run by nuns, that I visited, with very few variations.

I knew there was a group of students who were not visible at the gate of the Campus: the “hostelites” or boarding students who represent an important component of

⁴⁵ This NGO, undertook an excellent project, to study dowry in Kerala and just published its report; therefore, it is a required reading for anybody interested in the subject.

the student population life on campus. Already inside, they are not “day students” and their movements are more controlled and circumscribed within the college. Indeed, it seems as though they are under surveillance. I saw a few nuns, easily recognizable by their habits, outside the main building. Most of them were inside where they made up most of the administrative staff. By contrast, the teaching staff was predominantly secular.

After the students had moved to their classrooms the first thing I noticed was the tranquil atmosphere, the order, and the space. Through the windows I saw very well tended gardens, a pleasant and tidy library (though extremely biased in terms of the titles offered⁴⁷), a chapel, a nice “canteen” or cafeteria, and the hostel for the boarding students. Thus, people coming to the college would find the physical settings rather agreeable. All this is a major contrast with some of the female or coed government colleges I visited, whose facilities often look rather run-down⁴⁸.

This, in part, explains why so many parents, especially in southern Kerala, try to send their daughters to these colleges. Unfortunately, to pay for the hostel or dormitory (board) and to keep up with the “voluntary contributions” that the administration requests from parents, not to mention the fines the students incur, is a serious financial burden for some of these families. Many of the students I interviewed were really appreciative of the tranquil and neat surroundings of the colleges.

⁴⁶ Here I’m referring to about 4,000 college students belonging mostly to the middle class. No men are to be seen with the exception of a gardener or a couple of school/college bus driver.

⁴⁷ See the section on English studies.

⁴⁸ There are two streams of Government Colleges. There some which affiliated to the three most important universities and also there are colleges that are directly part of the university and even they are on campus.

On Disciplining

The daily practices and routines of the women's colleges promote social reproduction through cloistered residence, a special curriculum, and discipline, bring to mind Foucault's concept of *heterotopias*, "these different spaces, these other places, a kind of contestation, both mythical and real, of the space in which we live"⁴⁹ (Foucault, 1998:179).

For example, a 16 year-old Christian student, belonging to the middle class, her father a businessman and her mother a housewife, claimed to be pursuing her "pre-degree" in the college because "...After my matriculation I wanted to take Group III which consists of Economics, World History, and Political Science." She then went on to complain about aspects of the college rules and regulations:

This college is not mixed. I prefer a mixed college where one can learn how to face the future after marriage. There are no such programs in this college that will help the student to improve her general knowledge and this year the college has banned break dance. Most of the students here are well dressed but they have put forward a new rule that from next academic year onwards every girl should wear either *sari*, *salwar kameez* or a full skirt. I don't like boarding. The wardens are nuns and they accuse you for almost everything you do. They think that we have some sort of relationship with other girls (homosexual) and they call us all sort of bad names. If we, by chance, saw a boy, they think that we are in love with him and they read all the letters that have been sent to us by our friends and even by our parents. Another thing is that they collect money for unnecessary things. They fine us Rs 20 or Rs 50 for just talking to a friend or for sitting on a friend's bed. I think it is stupid. If I could I would encourage the students to be more free. I like to have a carefree life with no restrictions put forward by anyone... Motherhood, I think it would be fine for certain period but after that one would surely get bored. I hate the idea of dowry. It is like selling a commodity. I want to enter into the business field and I don't have any plans of marrying soon.

⁴⁹ Foucault explores external spaces by drawing from Bachelard's poetic reflections (1994) on internal places of daydreaming and intimacy and comes out with the notion of heterotopias.

This young woman was giving voice to her adolescent views. As a child of a well-to-do family with access to valued goods and information, her expectations seemed to be different from most of the students (at least she articulated quite well her disagreement with the rules, something that most of the students did not). Fashion conscious, influenced by the media and a non-“traditional” outlook, she preferred to wear the latest fashion, for example, mini-skirts and jeans/pants, to interact freely with whomever she wished, and certainly with boys. This student raised interesting questions about disciplining and the power of the media, influenced by the West and by the Indian metropolitan centers in taste-creation and fashion. Coming from a business oriented family seems to have greatly influenced her views and her controversial position vis-à-vis the “traditional” notions of disciplining and control.

Another student made this observation:

At times the hostel is fun but they really limit our freedom. As it is a convent, I expect the nuns to limit everything. I had to change my whole wardrobe; we don't get to see any films, they don't allow us to go shopping or to go outside and they are always suspecting us of having a guy.

Many of the younger students (16-17) sounded independent, expressing their views of dissent and disagreement, unlike the older students who were an example of consent, at least in the way they spoke to me. The younger ones, by and large, more readily expressed acceptance of the media discourses, fads and fashions, offered by a society that increasingly promotes consumption.

Writing about “the art of distributions”, Foucault (1979) notes that “cloistering” (or “enclosure” as it is used in the translation) is an important element in the process of disciplining, and underlines how in the French context, educational institutions adopted

precisely this principle in their regime. Boarding, in his view, followed the monastic model and became the “most perfect” one. He then adds that cloistering was not enough to set up the disciplinary machinery and identified the “principle of elementary location or *partitioning*” understood as “Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual” so the space students occupy, in this case, is extremely controlled. “One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation...Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits....” (Foucault 1979:141-143).

I find Foucault’s insights about “enclosure”, i.e. cloistering, helpful but I would add that the disciplinary machine has its limits and its resistances. In the cases studied, it is impossible for the staff of a women’s college to control affiliations and groupings. In fact, these are an everyday source of support for some students and a source of bitterness and frustration for others, especially for those who are excluded from certain groups that at times follow caste or class lines. Also there are rites of initiation in which senior students enact behaviors, sometimes ritualized, upon the bodies and minds of the newcomers (gossiping, mockery, a special gaze, etc.) as they were recounted to me by a group of students.

Some students reenacted behaviors that reflected notions of “distinction” the way Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) conceptualized it. These were based on aesthetic and hygienic evaluations inherited from the English missionaries, and from the cherished

values of the high castes and middle classes. Newly affluent families with money from the remittances from the Gulf countries or other sources seek to differentiate themselves from the poor, low caste, working class students also try to construe their new identities by reenacting certain notions related to “distinction”. Indeed, the college could become a site of dislocation and disjunction for those students who, felt, or were represented as being, at the periphery of valid knowledge(s) because they lacked the *savoir faire*, or their command of English was faulty, or they did not keep up with the latest fashions and/or fads. All this might lead to self-denigration if they compared themselves with their peers who were located within the circle of privileged knowledge(s). For other students, the college could also become the site that fosters expectations and the promises of change.

A quick review of the brochures and publications available for the information of future students and their parents in terms of the rules and conditions for the registered students in these colleges illustrates the disciplinary character of college life that I have been discussing. Here is an example from one college.⁵⁰

On Good Manners and Behavior

1. In every class, each student is allotted a special seat and she may not occupy any other seat without the permission of the teacher in-charge.
2. No student will be permitted to leave the College premises during class hours. Disciplinary action will be taken for misbehavior.
3. Students are not permitted to have visitors in College.
4. Letters addressed to the students in College will not be given to them.

⁵⁰ Here I transcribed those belonging to one college but whose text is similar to those of other colleges, and thus can be considered representative.

5. Students are strictly forbidden to post or deliver letters for their companions (college female students) residing in hostels. Infringement of this rule is liable to severe punishment.

6. The College telephone may be used with permission and only for urgent calls.

7. Students should not circulate any notice or post it anywhere in the College without the permission of the Principal.

On Attendance

1. Teachers will take the attendance at the beginning of each period.

2. A student who is not in class when the attendance is taken will be marked absent. A teacher may however mark a student coming late, present, after dealing with her as she thinks fit.

3. Absence from class for an hour will be considered as absence for the session concerned.

4. Students whose attendance falls below the prescribed minimum shall apply to the University before 28th Feb. for condonation through the Principal. The fee for considering application for exemption from shortage of attendance up to 10 days is Rs 100; up to 20 days Rs 200.

Leave of Absence

1. A student requiring leave for an hour from the class must apply for it to the concerned teacher before the period begins.

2. The application for leave should contain the following: a. Name b. Residential address c. Class, Main/ Group and Roll No. d. No. of days or leave required and dates e. Reason for leave f. Signature of the student with date g. Counter signature of Parent/Guardian/Warden h. Counter signature of the Class teacher with date.

The annual reports of the various women's colleges I visited and the statements in the colleges' brochures heavily emphasize the shaping of the character of students as an aim of the college. Imposing routines, a code of conduct, and discipline are all used to "shape the character". Additionally, and much more subtly, through the development of curricula which emphasizes certain notions of femininity and the development of a certain aesthetics which would elicit consent more easily than if it were perceived as imposed by force. Examples within the curricula include Home Science with a focus on

“Family Resources” and Child Development. Both are offered in all of the women’s colleges, as well as Food and Nutrition.

Gramsci’s notion of hegemony offers a useful interpretation of the process enacted by students, faculty, staff, parents and Kerala society at large; specifically through his notion of “regulated society”, as the condition in which human beings really (and not just on paper) “agree to accept the laws spontaneously, freely,” rather than through coercion (Gramsci:1976:764 my translation). One young student at a Christian women’s college told me: “I came (to the college) because of the discipline one finds here. One need never fear about strikes. Also, all the lessons and topics will be covered in time for the exam.” This student was eighteen years old at the time of the interview, a Hindu Nair whose mother worked as a teacher and whose father was working in a private firm abroad. She was doing a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) program and enjoyed reading books, novels and travelogues; she was very assertive as well. What this student is expressing, among other things, is a wider view that perceives any political involvement as a dangerous activity. It is well known that in Kerala unions are strong; in fact, there are many strikes. Parents, however, do not want their daughters engaging in any activity other than studying. They also fear for their physical safety and their involvement with males⁵¹.

Talking about the disadvantages of being a day student, a Muslim young woman of nineteen said: “Being a ‘day student’, the worst disadvantage is the traveling problem. In the buses there is full rush. If we, however, get onto the bus the main problem is with

the *poovallans* [young unmarried men, who pass part of their free time in “Eve teasing”, i.e. harassing girls and young women who are unescorted; it is more often than not, sexual harassment]. “They will pinch; sometimes they even will say ‘goodbye’ and ‘see you’, etc., even if we are totally strangers to them.”

On the Quality of Women’s Education

There exist different criteria to judge “quality” of education depending on where the judgment comes from. The following are some of the criteria that scholars in the field of education have identified as crucial: The basic conception of knowledge(s) and education held by the institution, the teachers’ training and students’ roles in the construction of that knowledge. Further, the curricula, the textbooks, the planning, the evaluating (assessing) systems for both teachers and students, the overall learning environment, the kind of facilities provided by the institutions (library, Hostels or dorms, technologies, etc.), and the overall funding of the institution. To these, one could add the interactions between the educators and the students, and between these and their parents. In some cases, the involvement of the educational institution with the community where it is located results in positive steps to achieve quality, as it is the case of training in Education, Health, Social Work, and Anthropology. A very important issue regarding the quality of education relates to equality in the sense that the educational processes and opportunities, whatever they might be, should be imparted to and shared by all students equally⁵².

⁵¹ For an interesting discussion of this issue in the context of Kerala, see Ritty Lukose’s article “Private Public Divedes” (2000).

⁵² For a good discussion of the concept of quality in college education, see Robert C. Nordvall and John M. Braxton’s “An Alternative Definition of Quality of Undergraduate College Education: Toward Usable

KSSP, the Malayali NGO mentioned above, published a Report of the Kerala Education Commission. What follows is a review of KSSP's assessment of the quality of higher education in Kerala State that I consider relevant to some of the issues I am raising:

Higher education institutions in Kerala are a contrast to the primary and secondary education system. While near-universal accessibility and fairly regular functioning mark elementary schools, higher education remains largely inaccessible (with many students seeking admissions in other states), subject to frequent disruptions, and of questionable quality. In addition, as the report notes, many higher education institutions are offspring of "political and communal pressure" (p 949) and as a result fail to meet academic standards. Inadequate facilities, outdated syllabi, poor teaching-learning methods, politicization of campus life marked with frequent disruptions and prolonged closures combine to discount the quality of education in these institutes and universities. The report notes with concern the impact of the liberalization ethos on higher education. With the emphasis increasingly on professional technical courses, the result is a valorization of employment-oriented courses and a devaluation of social sciences and even the pure life sciences. In a similar view, it notes the contradiction that the social position of women in Kerala remains relatively low despite their high literacy levels. (Vasavi, A.R. 2000)

On the subject of quality of education in women's colleges, Devi, a seasoned educator and the ex-Principal of a Woman's College which is not run by nuns confided: "Except (for) medical and engineering schools that keep the old, ordinary standards, students do not do any work at all." To the question: What would you expect of a college? She answered: Guidance on the part of the teachers, inspiring lectures, and that students must be made to read a lot and do a good number of assignments that the teacher should supervise and evaluate. Apart from the many holidays that are observed, including school festivals, there are frequent disruptions in the form of boycotts and students or teacher strikes. This mostly happens in the Government institutions and not in the private

Knowledge for Improvement" In The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus, Ohio) v67 p483-97 S/O 1996.

ones; a good example of the latter is St. Thomas or Loyola. There, half the time is generally lost, causing the teacher to rush and not allowing time for responses from students.” According to Devi, under these conditions, teaching becomes a very mechanical craft and teachers more cynical about their work.

Another subject that I broached was the quality of teaching inside the colleges and Devi said: “Because the only kinds of inspections to be carried out are undertaken by the government to the college’s administration, the students’ evaluations of teachers do not exist. Teachers do not fear losing their jobs. In this regard, the powerful teachers’ union supports teachers unconditionally resulting, thus, in a damaging effect on government colleges. To top this all, in these colleges there is a lot of freedom for faculty, meaning that teachers can dismiss students with impunity. Both students and teachers misuse this freedom. You can go to class and still not teach. There are tricks that teachers learn very well. If you are known as an “interested teacher” there are no students for your course. This is not the case in colleges run by nuns, where neither faculty members nor students are allowed to join a union. It is also one of the reasons why parents make sacrifices to send their children to private schools or colleges”.

I am aware of the severity of these judgments, mainly those relating to the Teachers Union and its power in Kerala. Yet, this was not the first time, nor the last, that I heard such claims or was asked to consider their adverse consequences for students and parents. One has to remember though that most of my informants belonged to middle class families.

The whole situation, in Devi’s view, is worsened due to the fact that students who are able to repeat the lessons well get high marks and in college this is pretty much the

case as well. She said that ninety percent of the students in Kerala come from a Malayalam “medium”, that is, families and schools where the English language is more of a rarity. Malayalam, the language of Kerala that is spoken by everybody on a daily basis is a symbol of a lack of sophistication if spoken on certain occasions. English, on the other hand, if poorly spoken or understood inside the colleges brings very bad returns in grades and does not bring the symbolic “rewards” of mingling with foreigners like myself. This is not to mention the marginalization that the Malayali-speaking students suffer from the “sophisticated”, cosmopolitan, bilingual or English speaking circles of their peers, both within and outside the colleges. This factor commits the students belonging to the “minorities”, i.e. OBC, ST and SC, to an extremely competitive race towards high marks and success in college entrance examinations. It follows from Bourdieu’s view on cultural capital that the lack of English proficiency will weigh adversely on monolingual peoples. Devi, the ex-Principal, adds that most of the teachers who teach in colleges in the English medium in fact speak “awful” English.

It is impossible to ignore, then, the debate about the quality of education as it is constructed by Malayalis themselves. Many of my interviewees would judge private education as standing in sharp contrast to public (government) colleges. The physical conditions, technical facilities (computers and interconnectivity), and the libraries’ resources are elements that count in evaluating quality. The number of faculty who hold Masters or Ph.D. is another important criteria. Out of my own experience, the quality of the “Hostel” or the dormitory facilities is also taken into account by parents at the moment of choosing the “best” college.

Part II: On Marriage, Dowry, Matriline, Property Rights As They Relate to Education

One student (a Muslim of nineteen years of age) answering my question on motherhood said: "I think that motherhood is a must for a woman; otherwise the society will abuse her and consider her as a separate individual." However, in her response to the question about her future, she said that she would like to become a professional. This could mean that she would face problems if she pursues her interest in studying, because in Kerala marriage comes first.

Karlekar (1988) pointed out that "...a societal ideology based on male superiority in decision-making and control affects the self-perceptions of women as well as conditions familial views on the feminine role. This necessarily limits the nature and extent of change possible through education" (Karlekar 1988:128). In my field experience I found that this holds true in Kerala today. Time and again I found that the most expressed and cherished wish young women have is to get married and have children⁵³.

Of Dowry and its Adverse Effects on Women

In Kerala, many people, including Hindus, stated that the "evil of dowry" did not exist before. They are alluding to how, "traditionally" parents would endow their daughters with whatever they could before or at the time the young bride left her family of orientation to join her husband's. Most Hindus, notably the Nairs, and Muslim families did not have to pay to get their daughters married off unlike the Namboodiris who practiced a form of dowry or property exchanges and was a prerequisite of the

marriage. Over the past ten years, what used to be a voluntary transfer of goods from the bride's side, mainly in the form of saris, jewels, and kitchen utensils, became a series of "grotesque" and "pitiless" demands from the bridegroom's side before the marriage could be arranged. This started in the south of the state and gradually moved north into Malabar from the mid- to late 1990's. Conspicuous display of openhandedness before (in the form of expensive gifts for the bridegroom's family members) and during the wedding celebration, and a banquet for a large number of guests, currently are expected from the bride's family. Many of my interviewees touch upon this turn of events. I myself attended as a guest a few weddings and the subsequent banquet during my fieldwork, and I witnessed the conspicuous display of gold ornaments for the bride between Ezhava and Christian families.

The issue of "dowry" is extremely complex and must be viewed from different angles. A recent study on the legal aspects of "dowry" in South Asia (Menski:1998) notes that

a daughter clings to her dowry because that is all she is likely to see of her parental inheritance. Men (fathers, brothers, male relatives) resent having to find large sums of cash and movable items as dowry, but they would far rather pay dowry than give a daughter or a sister equal inheritance rights. But this dowry is no real inheritance. However large a sum it may be, it is always pitifully small when compared to the brother's share. Furthermore, most of it may go not to the bride but to the groom's family. Thus it may never provide for a woman's future security in the way that her brother's share, large or small, can. By associating the daughter's 'inheritance' with marriage and by handing most of it to her husband's family, Indian society treats her as perpetual minor, deprived of what little she is given. In contrast, her brother will receive his inheritance as an adult and will, by and large, control what he gains. (Menski 1998:34-35)

⁵³ I am aware that in other parts of the world, including the U.S., young women may be socialized with these expectations at the forefront.

Other scholars in India have, time and again, indicted the whole system within which “dowry” has evolved in South Asia, among them Madhu Kishwar, who has been a very vocal writer in one of the first feminist journals in India (Kishwar 1989a:4).

What happens when the young woman’s family is so poor that it does not own any property? Again, Menski (1998:53) observes that all the daughter can hope for is that her family can afford a “decent” wedding. Her marriage still will be arranged and her contribution (in formal economic terms) to her new “home” will be minimal; it will be mostly in the form of kitchen equipment and clothes, and I would add her labor, training and skill which are not quantified in the negotiations. “Significantly, Kerala is one of the Indian states with a low rate of dowry-related murders. While dowry murders linked to extortionate demands or unrealistic, oppressive expectations appear to be a middle class phenomenon in northern India, there seem to be other triggers for dowry-related violence in southern India” (Rao 1998, 1997,1995). Although Rao is not explicit, the increasing domestic abuse, both physical and psychological violence, is among the results. A more recent report, however, underscores the increasing numbers of “dowry” related violence including murders. To complicate further the matter, one has to remember that the exhibition of wealth at the time of marriage is often preposterous, and I was witness of a few, and that dowry is not an isolated payment as most of readers would tend to think. There is system of multiple “installments” made over several years and major occasions such as the birth of a child, religious ceremonies and festivals when “dowry” is exacted from the bride’s family rather obliquely and at times directly.

More recently, an important function of “dowry” is its role in postponing marriage for women, thus extending their formal education among certain castes. For

others, it means hard and harsh labor, especially for poor young women so they can save money to pay for their dowry, thus shortening their schooling years because they or their parents perceive no tangible benefits from their education. Accordingly, the relationship between female education and marriage arrangements regarding the bridegroom's social class, religious group and caste, work and earning capacity deserves a closer study. In the Appendix, it is possible to notice how the level of education of both the "boys" and the "girls" is mentioned.

In the recent study on dowry in Kerala conducted by the NGO Jananeethi (2004) attention is given to the educational status of the respondents, both males and females (Jananeethi 2004: 20). The overall results of the study based on a random survey among 3900 people in 14 districts of Kerala, concluded that:

1. Dowry is being widely practiced in Kerala society
2. The people of Kerala, irrespective of their religious, education, financial and occupational status or affiliation condone, if not openly promote dowry, even though all of them are quite aware of its disastrous repercussions,
3. The higher the educational status, the greater is the expectancy/demand of dowry,
4. Many affluent societies/families justify dowry for not giving equal share of the ancestral property to female members of the family,
5. Very few women believe that dowry should remain as their asset and that it should not be claimed by husband/husband's family,
6. Religious, political organizations, people's movements and volunteer agencies have not been able to bring control/restraint on dowry, rather they directly or indirectly facilitated for its continuance,
7. The evil consequences of dowry ruin several families, it causes stumbling blocks for the future of the younger one's at home, it cuts the bride's relationship with her own family and that it often ends up in suicide or homicide of the bride (Jananeethi 2004:9).
8. The tables and graphics (Appendix IV) better illustrate the above conclusions (Jananeethi 2004:20).

Matriliny or its absence has been a factor in the different outlook of Kerala's three regions. Thus Malabar, with more deeply entrenched matrilineal/matrilocal ideologies and practices, seems to experience a more relaxed attitude regarding women's assertiveness and autonomy (Mencher 2002).

According to an eighteen-year old Christian Marthomite middle class student who clearly emphasizes that she, along with her relatives who are studying, struggle to do well and to secure a job, dowry is fundamentally problematic:

I am not much interested in this system of selling a girl like in an auction center. But since it is part of our society, our parents should give some property in their daughters' name. But it should be used for the welfare of their daughter and her children and not for her in-laws.

Another student with a similar background added:

According to me, dowry is something that must be totally abolished because dowry has destroyed many family relations. It has resulted in murder and what not. Once a girl is educated and employed, the case for dowry shouldn't exist at all.

Here this student raises one question that I consider key to measure the impact of the education of women. Is it fair that an educated young woman, who is providing some income (no-matter how marginal) to her family (often her husband's as well), must renounce her inheritance and place herself within a commoditization system that is terribly disadvantageous for her?

A seventeen-year old Orthodox Christian who lived in Kuwait with her parents for a few years and who was studying in a Women's college told me:

Here in Kerala, people can't get married without the dowry. One is ill treated when they (the in-laws) don't get the precise amount of money they request. Moreover, the amount paid will almost come to be nearly equal to one's lifetime income. I'm totally against this practice but if one has to live and get married, one has to pay the dowry.

An eighteen-year old Hindu Cheramar (low caste) says about dowry and caste:

I am a person who has objections to the dowry system. Dowry had destroyed the lives of many women. Quarrels and fights are common aspects in relation to dowry. My opinion is that it should be abolished and men should be bold enough to marry women without accepting any dowry from the girls' parents. Caste differences are OK to some extent. But beyond that they cause many problems. During the past, caste differences had lead to the social evil of ntouchability. The Government should provide funds for the uplift of low caste people.

One of my interviewees, who is a faculty member, Mrs. Mary of St. Joseph

College in stating her opinion on dowry noted:

Women are treated as second-class citizens even though there are no differences between men and women that justify that. Even educated people are involved in dowry dealings. They consider marriage the ultimate aim or goal in life. So a woman becomes cheap when a man demands money to arrange the marriage. The higher the amount, the cheaper the woman becomes; it's a kind of a slavery." The parents are not sure the daughter will be happy in that family, and the woman doesn't realize that it is evil. In Kerala both men and women are earning, so who's the master and who's the slave? There are double standards in morality. Marriage has to take place for the survival of society so why worry about women's marriages? In Kerala dowry is the first cause of women's suicide followed by the lack of freedom between both sexes; unwanted pregnancy and finally bad results in school are other causes. Students learn by heart much of the stuff and there is a lot of pressure to succeed: it's a kind of suffocation by both parents and teachers. The other important cause of suicide is frustration given the lack of jobs.

To illustrate further how damaging the spread of the practice of "dowry" has become in Kerala, in a recent website (2002), part of a document by a Muslim association, BISMI, noted that:

For many years BISMI, working in Kerala with headquarters in Calicut, has been supporting the struggle against "evil practices associated with marriage and family life" in light of how, in practice, "marriage became only a daydream for a large number of poor girls...

BISMI has actively campaigned to enlighten society against the anti-social and anti-Islamic factors that have been predominant in Muslim marriages in Kerala, such as dowry, extravagance, and fancy for gold and other ornaments. Also it has been

effectively organizing ideal marriage congregations, in which a number of couples enter into wedlock at the same venue. Conducted in strict accordance with Islamic principles and practices, these marriages are noted for their high degrees of modesty and low levels of expense. No dowry is demanded or received by the male partners, nor is the financial status of the girls considered, neither gold or ornaments are encouraged, nor pompous shows and extravagance executed. The only concern is for ideological identity of both sides. BISMI offers seminars, study classes, books and cassettes to achieve its goal. Due to the great impact of BISMIs activities, the term BISMIs marriage is nowadays used as a synonymous to any modest and ideal marriage celebrations among the Muslims of Kerala. Responding to the call of BISMIs many male youth have come forward to vow that they will not demand dowry (www.islahikuwait.org/aboutus/bismi).

A recent work by Osella and Osella (2001) about the Ezhava community also touches upon the increase of “dowry” demands and compliance to it. In their view, women of this caste tend to loose their share of their “dowry” in an effort to emulate higher castes. All this is happening despite the legal “Prohibition of Dowry”.

From the Indian Parliament website page I found the recent reply by the Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Arjun Singh, to an inquiry about “Dowry”. It is very revealing of the persistence of the practices associated with it and the ineffective measures taken by the State to confront it or at least to curve it. He wrote that:

The Government has initiated various steps to discourage the giving and taking of dowry. These include: i) Amendments were made to Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 in 1984 and 1986 and consequential amendments were made in the Criminal Laws, such as the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Evidence Act. The Dowry Prohibition Act has since been reviewed again in January 1991. ii) Instructions have been issued to the State Governments and UT Administrations to effectively enforce legislation relating to crime against women. iii) Mass media campaigns against the social evil of dowry have also been

stepped up. Through the programs of electronic media social awareness regarding the evil is being disseminated. iv) A number of schemes for training, income generation economic development and various supportive services for women are being implemented by the Government to enable women to become economically independent so that they can withstand demands for dowry. v) Schemes for awareness generation are being implemented through women's voluntary organizations, institutions and Universities for organizing camps, legal literacy program and other activities for creating awareness of women's rights. (c) There is no proposal to give incentives for *dowry-less* marriages. (<http://alfa.nic.in/lsdeb/ls10/ses1/0312089101.htm>) (See more details in Appendix).

The question arises as to what extent dowry negotiations feed into efforts at social mobility by the lower class and lower caste population, and its relationship to capitalism. Given the rise of consumerism by the overall Malayali population and the high rates of unemployment in Kerala, it is not at all surprising that “dowry” demands have also increased among lower middle, working class, and lower castes. All this happens in spite of the punitive measures taken by the State together with the rebuff that it seemed to inspire among some sectors of the population who, as a community feel its adverse effects. To corroborate this, it is worth citing that last January 2004, my adviser, Prof. Joan Mencher was told again that consumerism was the main reason for these phenomena (personal communication).

Matriliny and its Effects on Women's Lives and Women's Education

The latest work on matriliney, to the best of my knowledge, was written by one of my interviewees (Saradamoni, K. 1999), a Nair scholar, who rightly decided to focus on Travancore, where she is from because. As I have mentioned before, matrilineal patterns and marriage customs differed along the West coast going from Malabar (the North), Cochin (central) and Travancore (South). Likewise their history of reforms and changes

also differed. Saradmoni makes a point about the strong ties of children and adult women with their matrilineal kin, constructing their identities around their natal home. With women's rights of residence and maintenance, and favorable inheritance laws, among other things, they also built a strong sense of belonging and womanhood, a certainty that today are on the wane with the increasing patrilocal patterns and patriarchal ideologies. Above all, security and independence played a role. "Even though they stayed with their husbands, women could and did go back to their natal places with their children when widowed or estranged" (Dube EPW 2000).

Women continued to be members of their natal *taravads* throughout their lives, with rights of residence and maintenance. . Even where the dissolution of *sambandham* occurred, women were not dependent on men who were not legally responsible for protecting or maintaining their wives and children. The entirely different character of this marriage pattern provoked a disapproving attitude among both high caste patrilineal Hindus, people of other religions, and the British, on economic and moral grounds. Judged by some as concubinage and irresponsible, all of which embarrassed Nair men, especially those who were educated and exposed to Western education and values (See "Induleka" in Appendix). It hurt their masculinity and they were made to feel inferior and uncivilized.

The new legislation (TMC) came to hinge upon man's role as protector and supporter of wife and children and thus on rendering women dependent and victims of hideous situations and crimes, such as being either exploited or evicted by their in-laws as they do not have, in practice, property rights. With patrilocality also came what authors in the Mukhopadhyay's edited volume asserted: less chances for women to

further their education, even in Kerala, because in a patrilocal family system, women are removed from their paternal homes and go to live in their husband's family home, thus, losing many of the rights their brothers, who stay at home, are guaranteed, if not by law, then by custom or "tradition". Also, in a patrilocal arrangement, men's skills and training become more meaningful than those of women, which translate into more chances for men to acquire them (See Mukhopadhyay 1994).

On English Language, English Studies and Colonial Hangover

In the case of Kerala, the emphasis given to learning and being educated in English is an example of the hegemony of the upper classes/castes and the direct result of British colonization. This emphasis on, if not obsession with English compels parents to take extreme measures, even going into debt, from their children's earliest years, to pay for an English "coach" or tutor. It is the parents' hope that their children be admitted to schools or colleges where courses are conducted exclusively in English, which are referred to in India as "English-medium" schools. The importance of English is not found only between the upper and middle classes, but among the lower middle-class and poor families as well. This phenomenon cuts across castes lines and the various religions in Kerala.

One only needs to visit the women's colleges' libraries to see the importance and weight of English studies. As I noticed in my visits, about eighty percent of the books and periodicals are English works, mostly English literature, and books related to English studies - many of them from Great Britain. But this, again, brings us back to the problem of literature as an instrument of ideology

...a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation...What is finally at stake is not

literary texts but “Literature”— the ideological significance of that process whereby certain historical texts are severed from their social formations, defined as “literature,” and bound and ranked together to constitute a series of literary traditions and interrogated to yield a set of ideological presupposed responses” (T. Eagleton, T. cited in Visvanathan 1989:4).

In spite of an extremely rich Malayali literary tradition with major literary figures some of whom I have mentioned, I perceived more than a lingering colonial penchant for anything English or in English within the colleges. The whole situation is worrisome, as Devi, the ex-Principal (see Chapter 4) reminds me, because ninety percent of the students in Kerala come from a Malayalam medium, meaning that for most of the families and schools, English language is more of a rarity on a day to day basis. Moreover, in certain milieus, Malayalam, which is spoken by everybody on a daily basis, becomes a symbol of a lack of sophistication. English, moreover, if poorly spoken or understood inside colleges brings very bad returns in grades and does not bring the symbolic cultural capital or “rewards” of mingling with foreigners like me. This is not to mention the marginalization the Malayali-speaking students suffer from the “sophisticated”, cosmopolitan, bilingual or English speaking circles of their peers, both within and outside the colleges. This factor holds the students belonging to the “minorities”, in particular the OBC, ST/SC, behind in an extremely competitive race towards high marks and success in entry examinations. According to Bourdieu’s view of symbolic capital, the faulty or absent English proficiency will weigh adversely on monolingual people. (For a good discussion of English in Asia see Viswanathan 1993, and in fiction, see Alexander 1993 and Lim 1996, among others).

To make things more complicated, I should add that the mastery of the spoken Malayalam is something that very few people could claim. In Kerala, as in Paris, France,

people are extremely “picky” about the correctness of the written and spoken language (a fact that was confirmed by Dr. Franklin Southworth, a linguist specialized in Indian languages, and Joan Mencher in personal communications). Indeed, it is very hard to get high marks in the Malayalam SSLC exam.

Colonial education for Malayalis in general, and for girls and women in particular, was conceived within a framework of power relations between the British colonizers and the natives of Kerala. At play were other power relations between males from the upper classes, i.e. the Nambudiris and upper caste Nairs, and males from the so-called Scheduled Castes. Likewise, there were striking differences between upper castes/class females and those from the lower castes/classes, and between men from the lower classes and women from the same ones.

All of these differences were crucial for the enforcement, regulation, and reproduction of patriarchal ideologies and practices, such as the need for a Western type of marriage vis-à-vis polyandry among Nairs, its repercussions for succession rights and for the mentioned colonial relations in the different class-caste formations in society. Women’s purity and the control of their sexuality assured a nascent capitalist system that property would not end up in the wrong hands. A fascinating example of all these trends appears in *Induleka*, a novel written by K. Nair (1889, reprinted in 1965. See Appendix II).

A Recent Voice

Looking at South Indian newspapers, particularly those from Kerala, I came across a very interesting article in The Hindu, one of the most serious newspapers in

South India, by the journalist Kalpana Sharma (2001). The article is a critique of the decision by The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to use the name, fame, and face of Ms. Lara Dutta, “the new millennium Miss Universe”, in a campaign to “generate support and funds for services that “empower women and girls everywhere to exercise their basic human rights.” Ms. Sharma calls for caution, and raises interesting questions as to the success of the enterprise. She transcribed the letter she received from a student in Kerala, which Sharma (and I) find extremely revealing of the extent to which women’s human rights, including those of educated women, are violated. These are some excerpts of the student’s letter:

Dear Madam,

I'm studying Electronics and Communication engineering at an Engineering College in Kothamangalam, Kerala (on the way to Munnar, a prominent hill station). I've been wanting to write to you for a long time. I'd like to point out the suppression of women in Kerala, a State supposed to have a high level of literacy and living. Though from the beginning of our education, we're taught that India is a free country, after 6:30 p.m., girls do not go out alone. Only saleswomen and office-going women, who have no other option, hazard public transport. Even in their case, newspapers have reported that the private working-women's hostels have a rigid stance.

In my college, girls are a minority. Our hostel opens only by 6:30 am and closes by 6:30 p.m. So those who have to leave early have to run behind the “Sir”, who is the hostel warden, the previous working day to get the sanction.

If not, they just cannot go by the early train/bus. The reason cited for not opening the gate by 6:00 am is darkness!! If it's winter, the hostel closes by 6:00 p.m. while our classes get over only by 4:00 p.m. How much time does that leave us for our personal needs like shopping or going to the temple?

If we're late, we've to call the warden, and what follows is humiliation. The implication is that we went out with guys. Ma'am, what does it cost a management to install one or two streetlights? Better still, all of us are above 18 years, can't we make a decision as to how dark the sky is? At least, the decision should be left to the resident matron. All this is only for the girl students. The boys can come and go as they please. If the gate is closed, they jump over it!

Regarding basic amenities, some blocks do not have toilets for girls. They have to go the ladies' hostel or the waiting room. Since our college is on

and around a hill, there is considerable distance between the blocks. All this while the same management has money to start the construction of a new engineering college, which is yet to be sanctioned.

Ma'am, my experience will be just one among many. In fact, in Chennai, in the RMK College of Engineering, I know from friends who study there, its immediate suspension for a girl and a boy who talk to each other!

Please do write about the enforced segregation between the sexes and the plight of girls in co-ed colleges. We are one section who is never taken into account. None have studied the difficulties faced by girl students in institutes of higher learning, especially co-ed ones.

I think it's only the very rich and the very poor that are truly liberated; one can get anything through money and nobody gives a damn about the other!

This student expressed frustration about the conditions imposed on women students. However, she was a lucky one. In spite of the hurdles, she was studying "Electronics and Communications Engineering. She had parents who both trusted her to the extent of allowing her to live in the College's hostel and who could afford to pay for it.

At random, I examined the web page of one college that offers Engineering and this is what it says: "The college is a residential institution and all students are normally required to stay in the college hostels. The Principal may, however, permit a few of them to reside outside the hostel in special circumstances. There is accommodation for about 1400 students in seven men's hostels including one for postgraduate students. The ladies hostel has accommodation for about 200 students." (College Brochure and College website). Clearly, there is a lack of facilities in terms of infrastructure as well as the attitude to grant female students some sort of autonomy while on campus.

Women studying engineering, experience similar constraints. For example, the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), one of the most prestigious

schools of Engineering, lacks suitable hostels for girls and the single available hostel is overcrowded. In 1987, CUSAT's one girls' hostel had doubled the occupancy for which it was originally designed (168 girls in 80 single occupancy rooms). In contrast, 350 boys were accommodated in 308 rooms"(CUSAT, 1987 and Mukhopadhyay 1994). So one can conclude that things are not better at the university level where women still experience similar constrains.

Consent or Resistance? Or Is There a Middle Ground?

What follows is a sample of the average responses I obtained from average students of the colleges run by nuns doing their Bachelor's degrees and in some cases their Masters. The first one is a Christian young woman with a female relative who studied in the college before her. As noted above, one of the main reasons for students to apply for the Hostel is to avoid the discomfort of traveling by bus, i.e. the long and tiring commute and the possibility of being harassed in or along it.

To the question of why she came to study in this college she answers:

This college being well known in all the activities undertaken by it in the past years prompted me to apply for a seat in B.Sc. Physics, and I was admitted to this college. For my part, there's a belief that I can become an all-rounded individual, studying in this college.

Asked about the least liked thing regarding the college (q. 13), and about the extent to which she exercised her choice to come to the school (q. 14), she said:

All the individuals require a little push to develop their talents. They need to be pointed in the right direction. It was my personal choice as well as my parents' and teachers' advice.

To the question about what she likes best in life (q. 16), she answered:

To stay with my family, parents, sisters, and brother as long as I live. To become a nurse and help the sick and needy is one of the best things I like in life.

To question 18, about a retrospective look, she says:

To face the world in a better way-to take all the pleasures and troubles that life brings with a smile and with a heart of kindness and care for others.

About the convenience of being a “hostelite”, she says:

A day student has to face the disadvantage of getting buses in time. If you get in the bus in time, you’ll have to suffer the rush and all the *hungama* going on in the buses and bus stands. You don’t enjoy the advantage of a boarder who need not board a bus to come to college at times of strikes, bandhs, etc I’m a boarding student because my house is half an hour drive to the college. As my parents aren’t here, I’d like to stay near to the college than worrying them always. Life in the hostel, especially with friends is really wonderful and enjoyable with mother like caring sister wardens and big and small sisters. [All] combined, study is possible.

Her opinions about marriage, motherhood, dowry, caste, etc are the following:

Marriage is a sacrament in which a man and a woman are pronounced husband and wife. They come to know each other closely, sharing all the joys and sorrows, facing the world with equal boldness and mutual support. A woman’s greatest role in life is the role of motherhood. Her bearing a child, delivering, nurturing and bringing up that child into a God-fearing one, a good citizen of the country and of the whole world makes a lady the happiest woman in the world. I don’t agree to dowry. It’s like buying a husband for the lady, who may or may not take care of her. It has got many bad effects of its’ own. Caste difference still exists and should be eradicated from the face of the earth. All men are equal in the eyes of God. Similarly, we should try to see each other in the same way, we expect them to see us ...or the position we expect to have in society.

This was an eighteen-year old Roman Catholic student. Her parents are professionals (engineer and nurse respectively) and she has two sisters and one brother.

Another student says about the college:

This is the best college in the region. In our college, regular studies are going well; then extracurricular activities like sports, arts, etc. are also given due consideration. In mixed colleges ladies are shy to come forward in extracurricular activities and if I get training in this college I can compete with other ladies and gents in higher studies.

Interestingly, eight out of ten students answered in a similar way to this question.

This fact underscores the extent to which the notion that the dynamics within single-sex schools or colleges encourage female students to do well academically unlike in co-ed institutions. Among the features within that the latter as per the literature on women's education, it is worth mentioning the lack of the girls' assertiveness vis-à-vis their male classmates due to the accumulated effect of low-self-esteem, the teachers' gender biased pedagogy, the atmosphere that discourage the girls to do well academically because this would result in undermining their chance to attract male classmates, etc.⁵⁴

A student in a Master program at the same college, a twenty-two year old Roman Syrian Catholic, who places herself as belonging to the upper middle class, and who had her mother, cousins, and sister as students there as well, gave the following reply to several questions:

What I cherish the most is the freedom to exercise my free will in all my personal affairs and I hate to act without conviction, according to the whims and fancies of others. I feel that marriage is "a necessary evil". In our social system, it is the responsibility of the parents to get their children married as early as possible. But now things are changing. And my parents have given me the freedom to choose the kind of life that I prefer. I will get married only after becoming self-reliant. I think there is something bad associated with the very term "dowry". The word creates some unpleasant feelings in us. I am against all "bargaining" in the name of a woman. A woman should not be treated as a commodity for sale. Instead, the parents should give their small share of wealth to their daughter and the guy must show the good nature to accept the girl as his wife and not as a source of his income.

From this latter answer, one could think that the student is more mature than most of the ones doing their "pre-degree" or bachelor degree studies and that she has been brought up as a quite independent individual.

⁵⁴ The American Association of University Women (AAUW), for example, has produced a wealth of literature based on research that seems to confirm the mentioned phenomena.

The excerpts of interviews and answers to the survey clearly show a rather multifaceted reality as it concerns women's education in Kerala. The challenges that the society, government, and individuals are facing today relate to the outstanding resources - human and capital - and how these can become the basis for the furthering of the social development for which Kerala has been known in the first place.

In summary, it is clear that the current values relating to gender roles and relations undercut female higher education and transforms it into education for conformity. In spite of women's mobilizations towards gender justice and to halting sexual violence, some of which I witnessed during my fieldwork, and in spite of women's organizations (with the participation of some men), reclaiming fairness or gender equality, people of Kerala have to carefully decide what to do with their young women (and men) and how the formal educational process should contribute to that end.

In this chapter I have discussed how women's education is not a simple phenomenon. Instead, it is riddled with extremely complex issues and full of paradoxes that clearly are not exclusive to Kerala, though in Kerala they may be intensified. This may be a consequence of Kerala's very rich historical context and progressive reputation that includes particular colonial interventions, the existence of matriliney, and a great religious diversity and tolerance. To this, one must add the impact of contemporary external forces such as "globalization" which in some of its guises are being fully embraced by Malayalis or being forced upon them.

CHAPTER FIVE:

EDUCATION, TO WHAT END? POSSIBLE FUTURES

Education can be a decisive intervention towards women's equality. We understand education not as a one-time transfer of reading and writing skills, but as an on-going process informed by a vision of justice and equality. An education, which empowers, must create circumstances where women critically analyze their life situation and become active participants in the process of change by seeking alternatives, breaking stereotypes and demanding new information. (Statement of Principles, Nirantar, an Indian organization focusing on women's health and education, 1993 New Delhi).

Introduction

As we have seen, the women's colleges run by nuns are not accessible to everyone in the state of Kerala in spite of being coveted by many parents and of the fact that the government's investment in them is quite significant. On this latest point, it is necessary to remember that the government contributes to the colleges' budget by paying the colleges' teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as providing grants for diverse projects ranging from the creation of "Women's Cells" (Women's Centers) to the construction of some of the colleges' facilities. These women's colleges have become institutions that cater mostly to a privileged minority of the population from the point of view of class and caste. In addition, a large percentage of the student body and faculty consist of women from Christian families. Nonetheless, the colleges mirror the views and practices of the larger society concerning gender, class, and race and, to a large extent, reinforce them.

This chapter aims to address the way women's formal education is instrumental in the reproduction of gender constructions. Consideration is given to the ways that this education does and does not contribute to women's perceived autonomy and

empowerment. Furthermore, consideration is also given to the demographic profile of Kerala (its low fertility rate, low infant mortality rate, and the two-child family).

Research on women's education in India in general, and in Kerala in particular, has been characterized by the production of a great many statistics and by a lack of qualitative investigation. Some studies have concluded with critiques of policies; others focus on teacher-student interaction or comparisons of enrollment statistics. Still others emphasize psychosocial explanations for poor performance such as "bad socialization" (Scrase 1993). By the end of the 1980's and in the 1990's, studies were focusing on the role of the state in administering and controlling education through ideological control of cultural formations. It is the state, after all who determines policies for textbooks, curriculum, teacher training, overseeing examinations, etc. (Scrase 1993).

There are a number of Western authors who have laid the groundwork for the critical study of education (Apple 1996, Carnoy 1985, Bowles and Gintis 1976, Bourdieu 1984, 1990). All deem schools, and to certain extent colleges, as sites where hegemony is maintained and reproduced in spite of the various degrees of resistance those students, faculty and the population at large may present. In addition to relying on these works, this chapter incorporates an important feminist critique of women's education, namely that it is a way to train and discipline female students to acquiesce to the *status quo* in gender relations, while at the same providing women with a relatively valuable formal training. Issues of admission policies, housing, and financial aid are raised and it is shown how the women's colleges are influenced by, and have an influence on, the overall Malayali struggle for full participatory citizenship. These issues bring to light the

pervasive gender asymmetry experienced in Malayali society as it is reproduced within the confines of the colleges and with tremendous impact outside of them.

Women's education in India, like in other "developing", "third world" nations, has been invested with many diverse meanings - a reflection of the often conflicting and problematic notions of womanhood as well as those of education itself. The diverse meanings of women's education also mirror the manifold conceptions of "progress" and "modernity" that the "West" has conceived as its patrimony and as a cherished value that should be shared/imposed on the rest of the world. The reader of this chapter will find examples of these differing discourses, some of which are translated into practices whose impact is certainly felt by women, their families, the educational institutions, and society in general.

What Numbers Tell and Don't Tell

The Report of the Committee on the status of women in India (1975:283) states that:

The educational system reflects and strengthen[s] the traditional prejudices...through the classification of subjects on the basis of sex and the underwritten [unwritten?] code of conduct enforced on their pupils has indeed become subservient to the prevailing society [']s social system. (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1975:283)

This Report, the result of the first systematic attempt to learn about the status of women in India by Indians, refers to India as a whole; it is a valuable resource. The above-cited statement, made more than 28 years ago, remains true even today and is quite applicable to Kerala, the "model" state of India. Further, I would argue that the statement remains true for the elite women's colleges. After twenty-seven years, the Report reveals

the predicaments which women's education faces. In 1986, the Indian Government, responding to a rash of Indian feminist critiques, stated that education is to be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women by countering the accumulated injustices of the past. It added that the government would emphasize the empowerment of women by fostering the development of new values (1986, Paragraph 4:2). However, since then, the meaning of women's education, including in the women's colleges, continues to be questioned, as if underlying gender politics had not changed at all.

In the last two decades researchers, academics, and politicians of all persuasions, in dozens of articles and books, have tirelessly highlighted the subject of women's education in Kerala as a major achievement. It has been invoked as the cornerstone of the dramatic social changes that Malayali society has experienced (e.g. Jeffrey 1993, Franke and Chasin 1991, Franke 199, Krishnan 1994, Sen; Sen and Dreze), among which the most often mentioned are the demographic transition⁵⁵, the near universal literacy and the high rate of women's education. Among recent commentators on the impressive performance of women's education in Kerala are Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economics from India (Sen 1990 and Dre'ze and Sen 1997). However, when they write about women's education, all of these commentators are alluding to little more than enrollment figures and mostly to literacy and basic education. They are right to be impressed with the 84% female literacy rate in the state as well as the high rates of girls' and young women's enrollment in formal education. Compared to the rest of the Indian

47. The demographic transition is a generalized model of a transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates. The model approximates what happened to birth and death rates in the most developed nations. In stage four (of four), which is where many of the world's more developed countries

states, as well as other countries of the South Asian region, Kerala's figures are indeed impressive. The question is, do they say enough?

It is important to take an approach that looks beyond means, averages and percentages to unpack the effects of the educational system and processes on the women themselves. These studies have largely overlooked historic gender relations in Kerala as well as the culturally stimulated daily routines and discourses (academic and otherwise) within the educational institutions. Furthermore, they have not analyzed the interplay between them. Their primary focus has been on broader gender patterns in the various curricula and the "girl-child's" and young women's access to schools and scientific training by a section of educated women. There are no serious questions about the under-representation of women in positions of authority, power, and prestige; nor any regarding positions with good salaries in industry, the private sector, or the school system. Even within the highly feminized educational system the majority of the female population remains in the system's lowest ranks. Neither are there serious questions about the significance of these impressive figures on women's professional lives as teachers, on the degree of their unemployment and under-employment, on their degree of personal satisfaction/dissatisfaction regarding the matching of their professional aspirations/expectations, and on their lives' realities. This research, which is based on primary data gathered through participant observation(s), in-depth interviews with the actors engaged in these processes, and a different set of research questions, brings a more nuance reality into focus.

find themselves today, both birth and death rates are low. There is little natural increase, and total population grows slowly if at all.

Sen and Dre'ze (1996) has given voice to the often heard claim: if you want to change adverse population and development patterns in rates of maternal and infant mortality, fertility, and life expectancy, you must educate women. I agree with him in principle, but feel that the issue is far more complex; one must take into account the socio-economic milieu of the hypothetical student as well as cultural patterns within and around her. Sen and Dre'ze, along with other well-intentioned economists and demographers, overlooks other gender dimensions behind the statistics.

A poor or lower caste female student must surmount many difficulties before her first class begins: obtaining "acceptable" clothing and shoes, negotiating fees and tuition, paying for food and boarding or transportation. If she does not live on campus or nearby, there are considerable hurdles she has to overcome in her daily commute on overcrowded public transportation; in this latest issue her brother(s) would fare better. Then there is the question of skills. One cannot assume that a lower-caste, poor young woman possesses the same cultural capital as her classmates from more privileged backgrounds. Her knowledge and values sharply contrast with those of her fellow students from the middle or upper classes whose particular cultural capital is precisely what the colleges, overly or not, reinforce. Her knowledge, which can be precious in other cultural and social contexts, will be looked upon as "backward", "traditional", outdated, "too popular" – in short - worthless.

Educating women in Kerala would require developmental strategies, not only in education, but real transformation on all levels of society - one that must also include men. In addition to economic factors, the social mores of a student's family and social circle may be quite different from that of other students, a fact I frequently observed in

my fieldwork. Though most of the students I interviewed were of Christian background, some were Muslims, Hindus, and even Buddhists. In my informal discussions of sexuality and the body with students from diverse backgrounds, I was struck by the silence and embarrassment of students who were otherwise outspoken and uninhibited. I noticed that even female faculty seemed apprehensive while talking about female sexuality or the body. I also was told of cases in which educated women, even faculty in the women's colleges lack knowledge about the physiological changes that women undergo, hence the empowerment that this knowledge is purported to foster, lags behind.

The principal of a women's college and a nun told me how sad she felt about one of her friends, a faculty member in her 50's. This woman was reluctant to look for medical advise regarding her menopausal symptoms because she felt ashamed about the whole thing and seemed to ignore basic biological facts about women's health. Like in previous sections, I hasten to make clear that this situation is more prevalent in Travancore than in Cochin or Malabar.

Some researchers inspired, among others, by Paulo Freire's theories and practice, are using concepts such as "social justice"⁵⁶ and "quality of life" which entail, among other things, equal access to a meaningful education for all. These concepts as they have developed and advanced by some, raise the very important question about teaching for social justice. This endeavor, in my opinion, should be at the core of both any planning and analysis of education because it aims at creating social awareness in which "learners"

⁵⁶ I find the concepts and practices of both social justice as well as that of teaching for social justice equally important. For further reference see Freire's works, Maxine Green, Barbara C. Wallace, the edited work by W. Ayers, J.A. Hunt, & T. Quinn, and several researchers at Teachers College of Columbia University; its Record 2000 is worth reviewing.

reach a state in which they won't tolerate injustice. The way I conceive this process, inspired by Freire, and in subscribing to some researchers on education such as Ayers 1998 and Wallace 2000, is by stimulating the students "and engage them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity and their freedom" (Ayers 1998). While in Kerala, I did find this spirit among some of the members and projects of the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) "Science for the People"⁵⁷ but not among the targeted colleges, although I did meet a few extremely "conscientized" (à la Freire) and critical faculty members and students.

What I found was that on the one hand, some women were being formally educated and thus their personal and professional expectations were probably heightened. On the other hand, many of them encounter walls or "the ceiling" that a gender-unbalanced society has constructed, which some of them may contribute to construct, and that very few of them struggle to shatter. This may be at the professional or social level. Thus, the context for the major developments in the history of Malayali women's education and the description of the agents behind this process are an integral part of this thesis. Women's education in Kerala is a construct that needs to be deconstructed.

That Kerala is, after all, an integral part of the Indian Union should be borne in mind. Though it is conceived as an exception, it shares with the rest of India, among other things, a colonial past and a postcolonial present, regional and cultural differences notwithstanding. It is important to remember that the Indian educational system has its

⁵⁷ KSSP is an organization based on voluntary work by teachers, scientists, and "common" people alike who have undertaken the difficult task of educating people through means that reach every population. Thus songs, theater, paintings, etc. are used as didactic tools to convey lessons in history or science.

ramifications in each of the particular States, and Kerala is no exception. Furthermore, it has varied in diverse parts of Kerala over time.

Women's Education as Cultural Capital?

I have found it is necessary to appropriate certain concepts such cultural and symbolic capital developed by Bourdieu (1984,1986,1992 and others) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) in order to re-examine Kerala's success in the field of the education of women. The spirit of complacency around this issue by Malayalis and others is then put in context. In Bourdieu and Passeron's view, cultural and social capital includes "immaterial" and "non-economic" forms of capital, such as knowledge, taste, and *savoir faire*, that can be acquired, exchanged, and converted into other forms of capital and hence into actual social power. Because the structure and distribution of capital also represent the inherent structure of the social world, Bourdieu argues that an understanding of the multiple forms of capital will help to elucidate the structure and functioning of the social world. More specifically, the term cultural capital represents the collection of non-economic factors such as the actual or potential resources in the form of family background, social class, social networks, varying investments in and commitments to education, diverse resources, etc. which could influence academic success. (See Bourdieu's Forms of Capital 1989:244) These authors did not consider, at the time, that gender was a meaningful analytical unit together with class, something that Bourdieu subsequently rectified (1998).

Another concept used by Bourdieu (1992) and linked to that of cultural capital is that of *habitus*. This would be the embodiment, within the individual, of the cultural

capital. It is better understood as the “the embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so it is forgotten as history...it is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product (Bourdieu 1992:56). For him, a social class is a class of biological individuals having the same *habitus* (Bourdieu 1992:59). Because the educational process is often deeply ingrained in our selves, these concepts enable us to understand female (and male) education as a complex mixture of past and present. They contribute to our rethinking the dynamics behind the divisions and reproduction of class and caste in which the schools (and colleges) would not necessarily be the sites of distribution of cultural capital but rather, they would be sites where the cultural capital of the middle and upper classes/castes obtain the valorization and legitimization of the cultural capital.

From the same work, Bourdieu cites a prerequisite for *habitus*, a set of multifaceted *predispositions*, which entail the understanding of identity as being rooted in familial legacy and early childhood socialization. *Habitus* is a dynamic concept encompassing the past and present experiences that permeate an individual’s body and psyche. It has helped me to further understand how social class and caste intertwine with gender, namely gender identity and stereotypes. At the same time, I see a connection between *habitus* and education - whether inside or outside the home, school or college – and how they are intertwined as tools of social reproduction. While my focus is college education, I can see the logical progression in the “steps” of the socialization processes that are reinforced once the student reaches college.

However, to fully understand *habitus* and related concepts one would have to make use of the concept of *field*, also from Bourdieu, and take into account the dialectical relationship that exists between the two concepts of *habitus* and “field”. A field should

be understood as "...a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" (Waquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:16). Further, "*habitus* would contribute to constituting the *field* as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy." (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Waquant 1992:127) These references and concepts should not obscure the fact that cultural and social capital, more often than not, are embodied by concrete individuals interacting within the social and economic patterns of family or groups to which they belong in a given society. In the case of Kerala, caste and subcaste and even religion and region count.

I also consider that to further assess women's educational development in Kerala and its impact on women's lives, the quality of formal education imparted within the given institution must be considered. This should be paired with the students' enrollment, the levels and kinds of discipline that are vehicles for discourses, whether implicit or explicit.

Keeping these concepts in mind, it is useful to examine some narratives that illustrate and highlight some of the issues that are at stake in the domain of women's education in Kerala. A series of texts, portions of interviews conducted in the field, and Kerala women's narrative responses to my queries form the bulk of the data. The first narrative is a written text that I requested from a professional woman from Kerala who does not currently live in India and was back in her hometown visiting her relatives for holidays while I was doing my fieldwork. She is in her early 40's and I have given the pseudonym Deepa. I had previously talked with her about my main research interests, asking her questions such as what does it mean for a woman to have been educated

within Kerala society. I also asked about the impact of women's education on the state and the society, and whether education for women in Kerala had had an impact on the relations of gender, class, and caste. Among the issues I pursued was the perception of *quality* of education on the part of Malayali parents and students, and the role this perception plays in choosing a college for a girl or young woman.

I was born in the late 1950's here in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala. Kerala, as you know, has a high literacy rate and is one of the most advanced states in education, women's rights and equality. I lived here for 22 years and assumed that everywhere else women could do what they wanted, study if they wished and aspire for any kind of life they desired. I grew up in a family of four sisters (no brothers) and although my mother was disappointed at not having a son, my father wanted all of us to get the best education offered and it is his dreams that spurred me to become an engineer. I still remember his pride when I got admission to College to start my career and when he came with me to meet the principal and pay the fees (which are minimal).

Deepa's family's social background was not a working class one. Her father was a professional in the public sector and her mother could afford not to work outside the home. Also, her family belonged to an upper caste, the Nairs, for whom traditionally and unlike other castes, the birth of a girl was rather welcome. Among Nairs, women used to be and still are (to some extent) looked upon with greater consideration than within other castes because of the matrilineal kinship system prevalent for so long among this caste. In spite of the fact that matrilineality as well as matrilocality are currently on the decline, and some would claim they have disappeared, Deepa's family was able to endure the economic and ideological burden that raising and educating four daughters represents in contemporary Kerala. She continues her narrative:

We have free public schooling and free hospitals here in Kerala, funded by the government that sometimes is chaotic, but always for the masses. Kerala is one of the two states (other state is West Bengal) that elected communist governments whenever the socialist government seemed like they were leaning towards the central government traditionalistic attitudes. My parents, although it was financially straining, sent us to convent schools so that we could get the best

education possible. We had to pay fees monthly and wear uniforms, shoes, tie, etc. But our parents and many of the middle classes (the majority) did the same. Education was first priority. It still is. The poor people in our neighborhood who had to choose between the boys and girls would send the boys to private schools and girls to public schools. Usually, the girls did better! Most of the rank holders are girls. We make a big deal when high school, pre-college or college results come out. Our photos come in the paper and we are given medals in a government ceremony. We are interviewed, etc. Overall, winners of first rank (gold medal) and second rank are treated like royalty. There are more women than men in most colleges in Kerala. That is because women comprise more than 51% of the population and most girls go to school. There are some schools where the men were the majority. In engineering, for example, men are the majority. In medicine, however, there is an equal number. I have never seen women doctors anywhere as common as in Kerala. In school, especially in girls' only convents, we knew we had every opportunity that boys had. In fact we were proud to be better than boys... To sum up, all avenues are open to us: Politics, education, medicine, engineering, and the arts, etc.

There is a clear self-congratulatory tone in this account, and Deepa seems to believe that Kerala has really achieved the summit of all that is desirable in a society. It sounds as it did when, growing up in Colombia in the 1970's, I heard about the impressive revolutionary social changes in Cuban society. This is not to dismiss Kerala's exploits within the South Asian context; they are impressive. Apart from that, Deepa's account did address the main questions I have already outlined. It is worth noting the exceptional qualities in Deepa's "educational history" within Kerala society. Comparing her account with those of other women from her age cohort, caste, class, religion, and region, one could get some ideas about the state of women's education historically.

Upon my specific questions on the issue of marriage for women and its relation to their education she said:

The attitude of society has always been to marry off women early enough for childbirth, etc. However, I know several women who refuse to marry, and have careers forever. These women are treated with dignity partly due to the matrilineal system that existed in Kerala until recently. I went to a women's college in Trivandrum in the seventies and then to study Engineering in the same city to get my Bachelor in Engineering... That was a lifelong goal for me.

Further Comments on Deepa's Narrative

Even among Nairs today, skyrocketing dowry demands are being met. One should remember, too, that Deepa's mother was disappointed at not having a son. Deepa's educational opportunities and accomplishments as well as those of her sisters, coming from a Nair, middle class family, are not that exceptional. More importantly, the family could afford to offer the girls the best possible formal education starting in a "convent" school and involving a significant expense. However, if one compares these advantageous conditions with women coming from a different, less privileged background, the whole picture changes. As it might correctly be assumed, most people do not get these opportunities in Kerala. Less enlightened, ambitious, and well-to-do families face tremendous problems in getting their daughters into a "convent school" and providing them with the "valid" knowledge and coaching required to "make it" - or else to register them into the ever-present "parallel" colleges⁵⁸ of the contemporary Keralan urban landscape,

Deepa's parents were educated; her father, a professional man, working with a government agency, provided a good head start for his daughters. They invested their cultural and symbolic capital in their daughters' well being by making available the right environment and a nurturing atmosphere for them to choose non-traditional fields, together with intangibles like good "taste" and other elements of an upper-middle class "*habitus*".

⁵⁸ Both private tutoring or coaching and the "parallel" colleges (those without affiliation to the government universities) are mushrooming in Kerala: parents want, at all cost, for their children to obtain the highest marks/scores in the university entrance examinations (See Mathews 1999). Given the high rate of educated unemployment these activities are being undertaken by the educated unemployed, who pursue them as businesses.

It becomes clear that Deepa greatly benefited from her father's "dream" of Deepa becoming an engineer, something that doubtless spurred her interest and encouraged her to live up to his expectations. Given her family background this might not be completely unusual among educated, enlightened and ambitious fathers, but all in all it is not the general attitude. I was told of cases in which women were discouraged from undertaking careers other than those commonly accepted for women: teaching children, nursing, even medicine, but not surgery - pediatrics and obstetrics were preferred and thought of as sensible choices, not risky ones. If one follows Bourdieu, the young women would lack the "predisposition" and besides, the "field" would not be conducive to higher aspirations and attainments either. What occurs in France and in the United States, if one applies the same optic, seem to be not that different. In Kerala, for example, a highly specialized woman surgeon was initially discouraged first from taking up medicine. She was advised to study to become a teacher, best fitting a "traditional" profession for women. Faced with her resolve when she had to choose the specialization, both parents and authorities then told her to choose pediatrics, gynecology or obstetrics; these specializations were perceived as better fields for a female medical doctor's practice. She is currently working in a leading health institution in India though she could well be working abroad, if so she chose.

Jeffrey (1993) who, as I mentioned before, is an enthusiastic observer of Kerala's achievements in the domain of women's education, writes:

By the 1960's, the feeling was almost universal in Kerala that even with an education, life was difficult; but without education, there was no hope at all.... In rural Malabar, on the other hand, Mayer in 1950 found less enthusiasm among lower, laboring castes who saw 'little economic benefit in being educated'. However, among higher castes, education was 'eagerly sought after', and 'many families' went 'into debt by sending their children to schools and colleges.' For them,

education had 'prestige value', as well as an uncertain promise of work (Jeffrey 1993:152).

For children such as Deepa and her sisters, however, and unlike most Malayalis, the promise of work was not that uncertain.

This "uncertain promise of work" affects many Malayalis. Kerala has been badly affected since the 1970's by a dramatically high unemployment rate for both educated and uneducated people. In addition to fostering higher expectations, having some formal education has led hundreds of thousands of Malayalis to seek their fortunes in the Arab states of the Gulf, the USA, Canada, Europe and South East Asia, "...partly because they have been able to read about the opportunities..."(Jeffrey 1993:52). What I found in Kerala during 1995-1996 was that, in spite of heightened unemployment including "educated unemployment", not everybody was able to, or had the social network, nor the economic support to leave the state or the country in search of a job (See Isaacs and Mukeherjee).

Another point, derived from Deepa's narrative that deserves careful examination is women's difficult access to the restricted higher education institutions such as the Engineering Colleges. Once one starts looking at the more specialized, demanding, and restricted institutions, the fewer female students and female faculty one finds. Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) is still home to fewer female than male students. As I mentioned earlier, the campus offers a very overcrowded Women's Hostel with very stringent policies regarding check-in and check-out hours, as well as restrictions regarding visits (See Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1994).

Examining case studies such as this, enhanced with life histories, the different interfaces of gender, class, caste, and religion become more evident. In the case of Kerala, even region accounts for variations⁵⁹. Thus, Deepa's account underlines some of paradoxes of the "Kerala model"; as she says: "The poor people in our neighborhood who had to choose between the boys and girls would send the boys to private schools and girls to public schools. Usually, the girls did better! Most of the rank holders are girls."

This is a point I have previously highlighted and it is the source of some of the main questions I raise in this dissertation: education to what end? Education for whom? What happens with the rank holders? What happens to those "young women who are treated as royalty", to use Deepa's expression? Do we find them, as numerous as before, amongst the highest ranking in the traditionally male-dominated fields of science and technology, in those institutions where just a small number of students are admitted? Are there avenues today in Kerala for these early academically successful young women if they lack the "right" social backgrounds and connections provided by class and caste and even religious positioning, together with the encouragement and high expectations, social and cultural capital, and the financial means? Many of the students after graduating from college will, in fact, join the service sector and low paid jobs or will be married off soon after their early academic achievements as will be seen below.

⁵⁹ To mention just one example, Malabar, where matriliney acquired a more entrenched expression, is more likely to witness a more open attitude towards gender relations, understood as the absence of a certain uneasiness pervasive in the South, regarding the intermingling of people of different sex and regarding the status of women as well. This is expressed in more outspoken women having a different, i.e. more open, demeanor. More importantly, in Malabar the practices associated with the "dowry" system as it was explained above, are not as generalized as they are in parts of Cochin and in most of Travancore.

Table 6: Occupational Classification of Workers other than Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers, Kerala:1981

	Male	Female	W per 100	F per 100	FM
Total Non Workers	1128822	848799			0.278839
01 post/tech edts	295388	963641	8.14866	19.28058	0.611614
07 ph post/tech categories	24420	7878	0.718495	0.881547	0.318278
08 Nursing	98151	21571	6.28854	2.558493	2.183273
150 arts/college	10292	5493	0.328789	0.645242	0.532744
151 high/tech schools	21563	30919	0.894907	3.99843	1.195429
152 middle school	18574	24389	0.590235	2.906118	1.333688
153 primary	12824	43373	1.046489	5.043388	1.221442
154 pre-primary	228	5883	0.007299	0.692314	23.68283
156 crdt	1941	4230	0.161876	0.498611	2.174137
2 administrative manager	98363	1856	7.115783	0.452776	0.039202
21 administrative official	35388	1167	1.32442	0.1164	0.079677
3 clerical/aks	25321	46271	3.073373	5.519392	0.182863
31 stenographic	3743	8271	0.278722	0.97387	0.446243
32 book keeper/reader	95338	7179	1.436554	0.848628	0.201912
4 sales/akts	951131	27435	14.38282	1.228862	0.069811
41 salesman, shop/akts	244772	10438	4.487777	1.229886	0.074086
5 unskilled/aks	279881	116349	8.574853	13.692	0.432585
53 manual	29427	71326	0.829	8.617197	2.426495
54 odd/contract worker	8910	13814	0.284685	1.998385	1.816723
55 casual/contract worker	16247	12570	0.327396	1.479241	1.224311
6 farmer/fisher/transporter	529463	164713	-16.87896	13.32167	0.197772
64 plant/seed/transporter	240039	86006	7.688785	10.12122	0.55899
74 production/worker	123253	96887	40.28887	44.82049	0.51045
74a extract/miner/acc	89676	133325	2.838817	15.688874	1.890741
77 filter/worker	46784	21796	1.491446	2.51786	0.487136
78 tobacco/processor	77135	48780	2.462205	4.783938	0.526863
79 tobacco/seed/worker	66889	22954	2.125718	2.698893	0.351943

Dissimilarity Index: 0.515579 Calculated as $(1/2) \sum (F_j/W) - (M_j/M)$

Source: 1981 Census of India, Kerala, Series 10, Part III-A&B (31),
General Economic Tables: 11B21 & 221

As appalling as it may sound, a few students ended up applying for janitorial positions as sweepers in the same college from where they obtained their laurels. They wanted to secure a permanent “Government” job. This event was extremely shocking to the Principal of the All Saints College who interviewed them for the job. I also met many secretaries at CDS, the institution to which I was affiliated. Most of them had studied Physics or Biology but could not get a job in those fields. They were lucky to have “landed” a job as secretaries, mostly typing or doing some other clerical tasks in a safe environment. The very few who finish a Masters or a PhD end up facing the problem of

shortage of jobs that fit them well. According to Malayali women I interviewed, getting a job requires political connections, endless waits in the college commission, taking on interim part time jobs that pay very little, and, last but not least, sexual harassment.⁶⁰ Eventually, some received full-time jobs as faculty members teaching in colleges or schools that permit neither the time nor the facilities for doing any research. This raises a broader problem that global capitalism is generating for “Third World” peoples and particularly for women by making people redundant. Even working in the fisheries now depends on knowing how to read and write; one has to be able to understand commands in English and follow certain instructions in this language. Yet these sometimes more than literate employees end up sleeping in dire conditions in prison-like accommodations after long hours of exacting work and being extremely exploited, as a woman activist, working with fishing women folk, confided to me. (See also Saradamoni 1996)

A contrasting Voice

For Mary Roy,
 Who grew me up.
 Who taught me to say “excuse me”
 Before interrupting her in Public.
 Who loved me enough to let me go.

Arundhati Roy’s Dedication (*The God of Small Things*)

One should closely examine “the culture of learning” (Jeffrey, 1993) that has led to an anomalous number of ‘firsts’ in India among women from Kerala. It is true that the

⁶⁰ Since the year 2000 there have been a series of debates around 2 sound cases of sexual harassment in Kerala involving two women holding important positions who sued the perpetrators, also men in high positions and with good political partners. The media have published part of the processes including all the tricks and slurs used by the accused men to avoid justice. For a very comprehensive analysis of the

first woman who became Indian Supreme Court Justice, the first female head of the Indian stock market, the first state (all-India) chief engineer, the first female surgeon general in India, and the first female international literary figure (Arundhati Roy) all came from Kerala (*Christian Science Monitor*, Tuesday Oct. 12, 1999 cover page)⁶¹. What is particular about these women is that they all share the experience of having left Kerala to live somewhere else for a while at some point in their lives. They have lived in cities such as Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta or abroad, after having received a possibly sound basic education in Kerala, before starting to develop their professional lives. In fact, some of them talk about the highly conservative and stifling atmosphere in Kerala, particularly in Travancore.

Most important for my discussion is the fact that they all hailed from educated, middle and upper-middle class families or else their fathers held positions of relative power, as in the case of K.R.Gauri⁶². There is, though, another recent “first” in the person of the mayor of Kerala’s capital. It is clear that in spite of all the praises Kerala has won, however, there is still a hindrance to the advancement of women in positions of power. In

phenomenon, see J. Devika, J and Praveena Kodoth 2001 (August 18) “Sexual Violence and Predicament of Feminist Politics in Kerala, Bombay: EPW (Economic and Political Weekly).

⁶¹ Some other names could be added to these “firsts”, for example, Kamala Das, a famous writer who publishes a lot and who writes in both English and Malayalam (also being published in the West without having reached the fame of Roy), Uma Nambiar, the first neuro-surgeon, etc., most of whom have left Kerala early in their lives, although sometimes they have come back.

⁶² As Bumiller (“May you be the mother of hundred sons”, 1997) [format title appropriately] wrote: “In three and a half years, the only woman I met who had achieved real political stature without the benefit of a male was K.R. Gouri, the Minister of Industries in the Communist State Government of Kerala. Gouri was sixty-seven, a tough, outspoken Marxist who had been drawn into politics with the peasant rebellions against a local maharaja in the 1940’s. Although she was the daughter of an influential social reformer who owned a coconut plantation, the family was of a low caste, and Gauri had not been elected on anyone’s coattails, she did [have], however, the advantage of living in Kerala, where historically women had been treated with respect...Gauri was an unusually powerful woman whose independence, competence and honesty had given her a massive following among the lower castes. Had it not been for the men in the party

sum, these examples also underscore the fact that class and caste hierarchies still play an important role in how far women can go and what they can reach. Thus, many of the “firsts” conceal more critical factors than they reveal.

Some people with whom I talked, including both women and men, and people from different castes, and especially those over 30, complained about the educational system in general and the state of women’s education in particular. Here, I am referring to conversations that went beyond the cliched Kerala Model. One informant, Devi, also a high caste Nair woman and now a retired principal of a women’s government college, told me how bad things were becoming for women in Kerala. We had a series of conversations that took place in her comfortable home in Chemeen. Her insights contribute to explaining why many parents prefer a private, nun-administered college for their daughters. She says that women “have become stereotyped”, meaning by this that they are channeled into unimaginative and unrealistic roles after their formal education, and consequently their views and training have nothing to do with the needs of the country or their society, and even less with their potential.

They all are herded into classes at the same time so the bright ones do not get what they deserve and the not so-bright do not get the individual attention and patience they need. This is even more evident in government schools and in ‘aided’ schools, where teachers do not deliver their message according to the students’ needs.

She adds that this state of affairs is prevalent in private schools following the “Central Board of Secondary Education”⁶³; they all have a heavy syllabus with emphasis

leadership, she might have become Chief Minister after the recent state election. Even in Kerala, of course, women and men were far from equal.” (Bumiller, 1990:177)

⁶³ In India there are different syllabi within the educational system responding to different demands. For example, that of the Central Board of Secondary Education is designed for a population that sometimes is no native to the region. As a result, parents are not interested in their children becoming fluent in the

on English and Hindi, which are compulsory. Nonetheless, Devi feels that things in these schools are slightly better and parents who are ambitious send their daughters there, though she says:

the teaching methods are the same, i.e., classes are taught in a more polished manner, and in a foreign language, but students are still passive recipients. In sum, there is no exception though there may be exceptional teachers.

Despite the fact that Devi is referring to schools in general I find her complaints relevant to what happens in colleges; she echoes what many have said or voiced through the press (See cited KSSP assessment and Mathews 1991).

On the subject of colleges, this professional in education reports: "Except (for) medical and engineering schools that keep the old, ordinary standards, students do not do any work at all." To the question: What would you expect of a college? She answered: Guidance on the part of the teachers, inspiring lectures, and that students must be made to read a lot and do a good number of assignments that the teacher should supervise and evaluate.

About poor educated women she says that while in colleges they are not made to think or given a sense of responsibility, and that some of them follow the "traditional" upper class idea that women were not supposed to work and idea that persists

...though not to the extent it did in the 1950's and 1960's. Some women do have the incentive of earning their own money and getting training to become teachers. Yet, once they get jobs, for instance in education at the college level, they work with serious limitations: The first one is that after teaching for a few years they won't know anything beyond their subject matter because there is no further reading or research. The second one is that the government organizes occasional refresher courses for faculty but few among female faculty members will attend since they are and they are thought, first and foremost, to be

regional language but in both English and Hindi, the national language. There are other differences but they are not so relevant for the present argument.

housekeepers and mothers. Besides some of these courses are not well designed, they have a classroom-like character, and they do not always aid in the dissemination of new knowledge.

In terms of the way teaching is structured on a daily basis, she was also sharply critical. She says:

The structure is such that courses run from 9:30 to 3:30 every day, with no interval in-between for properly eating or rest. In five hours there are seven class periods (out of which they teach five) and all this is physically taxing: classes are always packed, the syllabus heavy, and time short from June to March. A ten-day break comes during the Hindu festival of Onam (September) that could be loosely compared to the Western New Year celebrations. This holiday entails many preparations which, for the most part, have to be carried out in the home as well, such as purchases, cooking, cleaning, grooming the children, socializing, etc. and most are undertaken by women. In addition to Hindu holidays, some schools and colleges break for Christian festivities for about ten days. Apart from the many holidays that are observed, including school festivals, there are frequent disruptions in the form of boycotts and students or teacher strikes. This mostly happens in the Government institutions and not in the private ones; a good example of the latter is St. Thomas or Loyola. Therefore, half the time is generally lost, causing the teacher to rush and not allowing time for responses from students. Under these conditions, teaching becomes a very mechanical craft and teachers more cynical about their work.

Though it was not the main purpose of her narrative, Devi evokes some of the many obstacles in the way of the professional women who want to pursue a career: the dramatically juxtaposed and asymmetrical gender roles that reinforce them as wives and mothers before anything else. Therefore, most of the “domestic”, “inner” spaces and tasks performed in these spheres tend to be assigned to women. It is clear that in this way, the reproduction of the family and society is based on the “traditional” division of labor and women’s domestic unpaid labor. In short, it is not only during “Onam”⁶⁴ when

⁶⁴ Some of the traditional Onam festivities include the Atta-poo, an auspicious floral decoration that is made in the compound of the house. During Onam women usually get up earlier than usual and have a bath, wear fresh clothes, neatly pin strings of flowers and adorn themselves with jewelry. Onam falls on the twelfth day of the waxing moon in the Hindu month of Bandon (around August-September) when the rice has been already harvested. On the eve of Thiruvonam, the second and most important day of Onam, Mahabali, a divinity, comes to bless his people and houses are cleaned and decorated with flowers and lights. The eldest member of the family distributes clothes. A traditional meal is served on banana leaves.

women can get overwhelmed with domestic work. It is a daily experience for most of them.

Another subject that I broach is the quality of teaching inside the colleges. Devi says:

Because the only kinds of inspections to be carried out are to the administration, the students' evaluations of teachers do not exist, for example; so teachers do not fear losing their jobs. In this regard, the powerful teachers unions support teachers bringing a damaging effect on government colleges. To top this all, in these colleges there is a lot of freedom for faculty that means that teachers can dismiss students and both students and teachers misuse this freedom. You can go to class and still not teach. There are tricks that teachers learn very well. If you are known as an interested teacher there are no students for your course. And this is not the case in colleges run by nuns where neither faculty members nor students are allowed to join a union. It is also one of the reasons why parents make sacrifices to send their children to private schools or colleges.

To the question about female students' involvement in politics, Devi points out that:

The majority of the girls are not interested in college politics but a few of them are as effective as boys. The majority would go home for fear of physical danger if there is a rally or demonstration." What I observed in the field was that in women's colleges directly administered by the government, students are more likely to participate in internal campaigns, voting, and demonstrations, unlike those from the women's colleges administered by nuns where this type of activity is completely banned.

Devi was probably disillusioned after working for many years first as a teacher and later as a Principal in a prestigious government women's college in a major urban center. Other women and men whom I interviewed, though obviously most were not as acquainted as she was with the complexity of the issues discussed, share some of her complaints. What is important to underline here is the dramatic contrast between Deepa's congratulatory tone and the disenchanted one of Devi, this older educated woman who has lived in Kerala most of her life. Where is the truth? Does it make a big difference that Deepa studied in Kerala more than twenty years ago and then left the

country? Or is it the older woman's position (of authority as a college principal) - which is more salient?

The "Private"/"Public" Domains and How they Relate to Women's Education

Being a wife and attaining motherhood are ideals intrinsic to the constructions of womanhood and femininity in Kerala as in India, such that marriage occupies a privileged place in social life⁶⁵. That is why "spinsterhood" as well as widowhood are decried by all as disgraceful states in life. The only valid exits to these "adverse" conditions are provided by certain religious roles: becoming a nun among the Christians or a priestess, a female "*sadhu*", or a temple assistant within Hinduism. This is true unless the woman enjoys certain autonomy granted by a secure financial situation and an independent job or a supportive social and family network. In Kerala, one does not hear about cases of *Sati*,⁶⁶ but still widowhood is a condition to be feared.

In this context, it is not surprising then that ninety-five percent of the 400 students who answered the survey (see Appendix I) declared that in ten years they could see themselves, first of all, as married and with one or two children. What is worth noting is that in Kerala, the State renowned for being most socially advanced and with the most progressive politics and for having so many literate and educated women, educated women perceive themselves foremost as housewives and mothers.

⁶⁵ I am reminded here that, after all, apart from certain metropolis in the Western world, mainly in the North and among highly educated families, these ideals are quite generalized. However, the constructions of these ideals and the way girls and women are socialized to those ends may differ.

⁶⁶ The tradition, among Rajputs castes (Rajasthan) and a few others, of widow immolation in the husband's funerary pyre which in many cases is promoted by her in-laws seeking prestige and honor. It has become a symbol in extreme right Hindu politics.

Not surprisingly, men's involvement at home in "female" tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child care, and other housekeeping tasks is almost non-existent in Kerala, and this situation is pervasive even among the educated class where women work outside the home and have a profession⁶⁷. The difference, of course, is that among the upper class, people can afford to have paid domestic help and, among other classes, they may also enjoy the advantages provided by the unpaid, often female, labor of relatives in a "joint" family setting to perform these tasks. During weekdays in urban areas, any person can experience the daily rush at 5 p.m. when blue-collar workers, many of them women, as well as low-level government workers, also women, are trying to access public transportation to get back home. There they must continue (they start early in the morning everyday) that unpaid job with no help from their husbands or other male relatives living in the same household. Cleaning the house, helping children with homework, preparing food, washing and ironing clothes, (most of them with no aid of home appliances) is part of the "second shift".

As a foreigner, I could afford to go out and, in fact, I looked forward to roaming around public spaces at any time of the day, including after 5 p.m. Sometimes, I was by myself or in the company of my friends or my companion. Teashops, theaters, halls, even parks were full of men, and the sight of a woman by herself was immediately noticed because of its rareness. The comments, laughs and glances of both men and women often follow her; that they followed me is not surprising because of my physical appearance denoting foreignness. In a couple of cases I was the target of open sexual harassment just

⁶⁷ Of course, I found that some of my friends' husbands, who were intellectual men, tried their best to share somehow those tasks. Needless to say, these cases were exceptions to the rule.

a few meters away from the main entrance to the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), the center that provided the required institutional support. In one such event and upon its report to mostly female graduate students at CDS, I met a clear reaction: in their view I should not have gone out by myself after sunset; somehow they implied that I was the one to be blamed for the event.

Contradictions and Paradoxes

What follows are a few other examples of interviews that help to explore the manifold aspects of the phenomenon of “women’s education in Kerala”. Rema is 22 and lives in a village 8 Kilometers from Trivandrum. She belongs to a Scheduled Caste (Cheramar). She is currently studying for a Masters degree in a college run by a Christian religious institution. She comes from a rural area where everybody:

[i]s cooperative and helpful; over there the relationships among people are really close, unlike here, in Trivandrum. My father works in telecommunications, my mother is a housewife and studied to the 10 standard (just before college); my sister is 18 years old and studying a B.Sc. (Zool.). I studied Botany in Women’s College and my cousin was studying here and suggested that I come here too. I will start my masters in May and I’ll look for a job if I don’t get married; it will be in the field of social work; but a clerical work will do too. I have always studied with free concessions; for instance, now I’m getting Rs250 or even Rs300 for books a year. I also got a stipend of Rs170 per month; I also would have access to the college hostel but now I’m a “day student” because I prefer to be with my family. (NOTE: a paperback book like “The god of small things” was Rs150 or around US 4 at the time of my research).

Rema’s account sounds like a success story and it is one, to some extent. It is true that in spite of not belonging to a high caste or to the middle class, she has been able to study and to get access to the knowledge and networks (social and cultural capital) that enable people to take advantage of the possibilities open to them, in her case, the provisions that assist members of SC and ST. Her parents also sound quite exceptional;

they sound like actually empowered people. However, the fact remains that there are certain elements in her story that call for caution. She applied for a job at the Public Service Commission where she may have some chance. Right now she would like to become a housewife because “I don’t want any responsibilities.” In any event, she is considering applying for a job at the Central Bureau of Investigation and also at the Indian Space Research Organization. Asked about marriage she said: “My family already got a ‘proposal’ but my father didn’t reply; he said that only after graduation; however they already checked the boy’s family background; the boy’s *Jadhakam* and the horoscopes matched. My father also met his family who belongs to the same caste.”

To my question about dowry, she responded: “I don’t like that; I don’t like the fact that they (the boy’s parents) demanded something already and might get some property that is my share in my family: part of the plot.” At home, she says, she doesn’t have any restrictions (compared to the normal vigilance parents display regarding unmarried daughters). She adds that she would be able to tell her parents about a boy she likes and they would check the family profile and see if he is a good match. Her mother is a Christian and her father is a Hindu from the same caste and theirs was an arranged marriage. The fact that her parents are a mixed couple in terms of religion is revelatory of their possible flexibility regarding the usual taboos, and especially in a lower caste. She adds, however, that in rural areas there are some restrictions in terms of the dress that is worn and that people don’t see it as proper for men and women to mingle unless they are married. She wants to clarify that her family is different; she points out that her father is socially active and that he works at KSSP (Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad- Science for the People) in a Literacy program, and that he is also very active in the Office Union.

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Her mother is reserved but she participates in Literacy programs. Rema adds that she has taught 12 people how to read and write. She is currently participating in a literacy program from which she gets a lot of satisfaction.

This interview leaves unanswered certain questions: What happens if she gets married after all? What if she gets the job? How much will the ideology that emphasizes marriage and motherhood weigh in her decisions or those of their parents? Clearly, there is ambivalence here: she would prefer to get married because she doesn't want any responsibilities; nonetheless, she has applied for jobs. In terms of employment, she is ready to accept a clerical job even if she is finishing her MA and this speaks to her low expectations and the poor employment situation in and around Trivandrum. This young woman's case is a reflection of the contradictions Kerala women live with, but she is lucky. Both her parents are educated and have been involved in social movements such as KSSP, and done social work. They also have access to valued knowledge such as how to obtain the State support for SC's. She has had many opportunities that young women of her class and caste have not.

Clearly, contemporary Kerala society suffers from a large gap between legal regulations granting women access to formal education and employment and certain social practices that deter women from fully exercising their rights. By curtailing women's opportunities to walk around in public spaces, for example, or to vent their thoughts in a mixed crowd (i.e., consisting of both men and women), these social practices emphasize the ideals of "motherhood" and the role of a wife. In this connection, I remember some of the students at CDS who were extremely apprehensive about their marriage arrangements when they finished their Masters or M. Phil studies. Some of

them confided that they rather wanted to continue their studies but that they were sure that being already 24 or 25 years old their parents would not allow them to continue their scholarly life. Their chances to get a good match would be jeopardized.

Still fresh in my memory is the strong impression one of my interviewee's life-history made on me. Liby was 45 years old from a Catholic family, married with two sons (13 and 8 years old) and a member of the faculty in one of the surveyed colleges. She had degrees in Medical and Psychological Social Work and had worked for 16 years doing research on working women. What follows is an excerpt of a larger interview:

My mother was college educated and had a government job in Kerala; my father is in business. I've lived in a joint family (they lived with her mother's family-maternal family) for that reason my mother had lack of freedom; she had to ask permission from my father even about small things: food purchases and the like. My father lost everything in business. I was very inhibited and I even didn't ask for food and realized what suffering was and that gave me a motivation to get an education and independence. I made up my mind to be the best in my house with god's help. I looked for a person who could understand me and I got that person, to some extent. But he's the only who takes decisions at home: what to buy, what to do with the children. He doesn't do that with his own family, though; he gives more money to his own family. He brought his mother home; it's been already a year. Recently, there has been interference by another member of his family even though my mother now gave the house where we are living to me. Besides, I have more income than him. Lately, I have a bad temper and feel a lot of frustration. I keep asking myself why, in spite of being educated, I don't have a say. He's equally educated but he didn't get a lecturer's job and he gets less salary. He's very generous with his family; for example when his father got sick (dementia) he kept giving money to them.

The Ph.D. is a sort of revenge. I already finished my data collection...It's been a year. I built an extra room so I could concentrate on my dissertation because otherwise I can't focus on my work. Nowadays nobody wants my mother-in-law in our home. Before marriage I used to do so many things but not anymore. I remember I learnt French in school as a second language (there was not Malayalam at that time in Holy Angels); then I went to All Saints College and then I came to this college. I also went to Bangalore to get the M.Phil at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience

I could feel Liby's frustration and bitterness but I also felt her strength and determination. In spite of the latter, together with her training and professional status, she seems to be at the mercy of her husband and her in-laws' whims, even if they all are living in her house. In spite of her higher education and quite prestigious job, Liby lacks autonomy and she is resentful. I witnessed and discussed cases such as this with several women during my fieldwork and that is one compelling reason I am still reluctant to join in the enthusiasm about the empowerment of Malayali women.

Kerala's Unemployment and Educated Women

A few researchers from Kerala have noticed already that high unemployment is affecting both men and women, including the educated. (Mukherjee and Isaac 1994, Eapen 1999, Velayudhan 2000) This helps to explain why some highly qualified young women are choosing to study traditionally female fields such as English, philosophy, biology, and literature in colleges which seldom lead to positions of power or decision-making. Most of them do not have the opportunity of going away, outside Kerala or abroad, to a technical, advanced institution, to pursue a more demanding career where their skills, and even their limited knowledge of English, would be valuable.

Velayudhan (2002:4) underscores the fact that Kerala's work participation rates are among the lowest in India at 31.43% (9.15 million workers) in 1991. Women workers numbered 2.35 million; from her data, the rate of female work participation was 15.85% while the male work participation rate was 47.58%. Similarly she underlines the point that workers in household industries increased by 36% in 1981-91 and that women formed over 30% of employees in the public (state) sector. It is interesting that among the educated

employed there were 36, 000 *anganwadi*⁶⁸ workers earning Rs.500 per month (around US\$10 now but with that amount, a person may buy basic food stuff that lasts 2 weeks). Many of them are graduates and post-graduates. This salary, while by any means a fair remuneration, shows how anxious women are to take up any jobs and pursue special training to secure them.

Velayudhan (2002) also notes that gender differences in the labour market across caste, income and education categories continue. The sectors where women's workforce is concentrated (coir, cashew processing, etc) are declining or are stagnant. This author stresses that Kerala has the highest rates of unemployment for males and females as evident from statistics of registered job seekers. In September 1997, there were 35.19 lakh (1 lakh = 100,000) unemployed in the live registers at the employment exchanges in Kerala, which corresponded to 10% of total unemployed in India. This meant 19.2 lakh women were job seekers (54.5% of the total) compared to 16 lakh male job seekers. About 76% of these women were SSLC and above, 3.2 lakh (12%) pre-degree holders, 1.8 lakh (6.8%) graduate degree holders, and 36, 238 (1.4%) were postgraduates. Of the total, 1.35 lakhs had technical and professional skills-- 94, 000 (69.6%) were ITI degree holders, 30, 000 diploma holders, 2100 medical graduates, 7452 engineering graduates (See Table)

With the impulse given by global forces in the form of computerization and communications technology and their multiple applications, Kerala has experienced a

⁶⁸ Local, educated women are recruited as health workers after formal training in community based maternal and child health care. As they run a daily pre-primary classroom known as Anganwadi, they are commonly known as Anganwadi Workers (AW). Each AW is assigned an area with a population of about one thousand. AWs take part in a variety of community health programs not all of which are child focused. Home visits are part of their routine work; they keep detailed records about each household and update

mushrooming of “Computer Works”, “Computer Shops”, “Computer Training”, and “Computer Schools” business. Parents in Kerala have realized the immense impact and uses of computer technology, so increasingly they are sending their children including daughters to these schools. What is frustrating about these developments is to witness how much energy and resources are being wasted. One of my colleagues who conducted his doctoral research in Kerala a few years ago shared the following anecdote while commenting on a draft of this work. One of his Trivandrum-based friend’s daughters studied computer programming in one of the mentioned “Schools” and after finishing her training. He was told that she had a job in one of the Computer Centers, and he thought his friend’s daughter was very lucky to land a job in her field. However, he soon found out that her job did not have any relationship with the training she had received: she was the receptionist. And the family seemed happy that at least she had some income. An optimistic view would be to think that eventually she would get an offer if the center needed her skills. The U.S. media gives the impression that many Indian women are employed in this sector. Indeed, there are many but mainly in the neighbor state, Karnataka, where the “Silicon Valley of India” is located, more exactly, near Bangalore, an increasingly “modern” and cosmopolitan south Indian city. It is also happening in Madras (Chennai), the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu, another Kerala neighbor and ancient colonial capital. In Kerala, due to the lack of industries, and despite government efforts to attract national and foreign investment, I did not see that efflorescence. There were young, educated women who were receiving “training”, entering data for some of

them in annual surveys. They have excellent rapport with local residents and tend to be aware of major health problems faced by the families.

the software industries located at the “Techno Park”, a setting outside Trivandrum devised to attract capital. These young women were not paid nor compensated in other ways but some of them seemed quite content with the training. It would be interesting to ascertain to what extent today Malayali educated women are joining the labor force in the service industry in Karnataka. The trend, however, is to have overqualified personal as employees (males and females) in the mushrooming IT and Telecommunications fields.

In technological institutions such as Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), one of the most prestigious institutions for higher education in sciences and engineering, gender segregation is still very visible (Deepa’s account has already highlighted this). Electronics and construction have almost no female students or female professors, while secretarial courses are overwhelmingly female. By and large, at the graduate level, women professors and students are more often found in biology, literature, and languages, English being the most common choice, though some choose mathematics and physics as well. All this invites a cautionary look at Kerala society. It is easy to be misled by the large numbers of girls finishing their High School training and even passing the entry exams to start their undergraduate studies. Photographs of the young women that succeeded in passing these exams, even surpassing the results of young men, are published time and again on the front page of all the important newspapers of Kerala. This factor appears to validate the rhetoric of Kerala as the “model” for women’s education or the notion of women as having high status; however, it says nothing about the amount of women’s autonomy.

The potential effects of reform in Kerala, including the effects of coeducation on girls, are rarely and perfunctorily raised in contemporary debates. Girls and young

women in Kerala are largely adapting rather than resisting the authoritative culture of Women's Colleges. Distress over Kerala's "permanent crisis" in education rarely includes concern for society's loss of girls' talents and leadership.

More Critical Views of the Role of Women's Colleges Run by Nuns

A puzzling question for me was why, within gender-specific vocational patterns, girls have typically found neither encouraging female role models nor support to attempt nontraditional jobs. As noted above, during the pre-independence period, and soon after, we find women of Kerala playing very important roles, including roles that defy the patriarchal social system that tends to exclude them (Jeffrey 1993:94-95, Mencher's personal accounts).⁶⁹ The following excerpts from my field notes and the interview I conducted with a religious woman, the Principal of one of the colleges I chose for this study, may provide some insights regarding these problems.

It was almost 10 A.M. when finally we (my male companion and I) reached St. Joseph College in Allepey. Sister Dominique, the college's Principal had replied to my letter of introduction with a very kind invitation to visit the college's premises as well as conduct interviews with faculty members and students. Allepey is a small city of around 200,000 inhabitants situated along the channels and lagoons more commonly called "Backwaters", a very popular tourist attraction that Malayalis have been selling for many years.

⁶⁹ The Nairs and related caste women encountered outsiders' derision, especially from Tamilians and North Indians, as well as the British.

Upon reaching the college, we were received by sister Dominique, the college's principal, in her office and soon after treated to the ubiquitous "tchai" or milky tea and cookies. Simultaneously, she introduced me (my companion had gone to the library with her permission) to a very young and energetic faculty member from the English Department, Ms. Jothi. She was in charge of introducing me to all the groups of faculty and students that were getting ready to meet me. In fact, she went well beyond her assignment and at the end of the day my companion and I ended up in her home having "tchai" with her family.

Sister Dominique, 54 years old, from Ernakulam, starts her account talking about her family and about Allepey's society and the college, thus:

My mother studied until 7th standard of high school in a convent school and so did I. Later, I studied for 3 years in the Nair's Social Service organization (NSS) because it was near by; that was with a special permission from the parish. Then I joined the convent and by 1960 I joined this college. I did the novitiate for 3 years in Belgaum (Karnataka) and in 1964 I was back in St. Joseph and started my BA in History and got the first rank from Kerala University in 1968. Then, I decided to go for my MA in History and registered at Ernakulam's 'Maharaja College'. After I finished it I spent one year working at the Canosian High School in Bombay. By 1971 I was back again in St. Joseph and started teaching. From 1978 to 1990 I was working at St. Xavier College in Bombay (affiliated to Bombay University) and I enrolled in the Ph.D. in History. I came back at St. Joseph in 1991.

I had a very interesting opportunity: from 1985 to 1986 I was roaming around in Europe and then continued teaching when I came back in 1986, I was appointed the Principal of St Andrew College in Bandra (a section in Bombay) that was a coeducational college. At first I was very reluctant to take up the challenge but after one month I had the boys in my pocket. There was a very free atmosphere over there unlike in Allepey, which is a very conservative town.

At this point I raised the following question: "Does this college provide students with tools to face this conservative atmosphere?" to which she replied:

Not much. Changes are coming in very slowly. What the students get is a lot of influence from the media more than anything else. The major contribution of this college is to open employment opportunities for female students. For instance, alumni

are coming back to work here. The Christian influence is that women have to stay at home. But even at home, the decision-making is not too much open to women. This is true for women in public life. I became the Principal here at St. Joseph in 1991 and I'm retiring in one year, at 55. The teaching staff is only female but I suggested to have a few male teachers and to attempt some coeducational steps. Of course, my suggestions were rejected with the argument that men bring politics, i.e. party politics.

Concerning faculty in these colleges Sr. Dominique said:

There are not too many researchers or faculty with publications. Once you get a job, your ambition is over; then, the husband and babies' priorities come first.

About her plans after retirement:

I would love to visit Poland and Russia, which used to be Communist countries; I've got a wandering spirit. We are 7 children: 3 married, 2 are priests and one is also a nun. I have a brother in Michigan, so maybe I'll visit him sometime. I also would like to look after old people, listening [to] their stories, offering company to them... Publishing is out of my mind for now, but I'm a very good speaker, so I'd like to continue somehow with some academic work.

What is interesting for me in her narrative is how independent and spontaneous she sounds, something I missed in other Principals and many of the faculty members. One could argue that it is a matter of rapport but there are many factors: real time to expand but also will and interest, or ultimately empathy.

Regarding her opinion about single-sex education she believed that:

There is more sense to have coeducation right from the beginning so there is a mutual adjustment for boys and girls. From 3 to 21 years, girls are very protected so when they are finally outside they are at disadvantage.

Asked about religious vocations, she was emphatic:

About 30 years ago first class families, i.e. upper and upper-middle class families, considered [it] a great honor to have a religious person as a member of their family. In the last 10-15 years religious vocations are more abundant among poorer families. The life outside a convent is more challenging in many ways. I'd love more challenges so maybe I'll be writing.

The interview with this Principal, an educated and intellectually curious woman,

was conducted in ideal conditions; the setting was the women's college where my companion and I got the warmest welcome; the atmosphere felt really relaxed when compared to those of other such colleges. The Principal arranged a few meetings with groups of students and faculty members without making me feel that she was controlling everything, or that nuns were sent to monitor the interactions, "keep order and discipline", or to report on what was being said. The extremely policing environment found elsewhere was absent, or at least it was not apparent. Both faculty and students were quite open and spoke with candor. I was faced with a very open exposure to ideas regarding Kerala society, women, and the scope of the impact of women's colleges run by nuns.

At this college, I also met a fascinating, warm and vocal faculty member, Mrs. Sheela, who is also a District Councilor. A woman in her late 40's, she has 3 children: a son who is an electrical engineer working in Bangalore (Karnataka State); a daughter of 17 who just started her BS in Pharmacy in Kottayam, where she commutes daily; and a daughter of 13, who is in the 9th grade. Sheela told me about her life and expressed her views regarding Kerala, women's education, and women's colleges:

I want [the students] to become 100% human beings. For them I hope they have social responsibility and I don't mind their profession. I don't want for them spoon-feeding or intellectual obesity, which is what you get in these colleges. The urban and educated are rather indifferent to politics. They don't worry about poor people. There is a lot of selfishness and corruption, so the committed intellectuals are few. Besides, the Church destroys civic awareness. Kerala is filled with people who are mass-goers but are not charitable. Clergymen are bringing this havoc upon poor, blind people, the believers; especially women who are more superstitious and don't think for themselves. Education should make you more human, teach you how to be a better human being, a social being; 'good manners' come when the basic needs are fulfilled. But 'good manners' is more about hypocrisy, about artificiality. I'm a believer and my parents were role models to me; they were true believers but I'm not a churchgoer. I work in a village called Kumbalangi, 20 km. from Kochi. The nuns are, for the most part, blind believers; they're trained to go to church and to certain behaviors. Kerala

population is made up of 48% leftists, 49% Congress people [Congress Party members or supporters]; only the 1% determines who will win.

Here, she is referring to the “traditional” Kerala voting pattern where if one election is won by the Congress Party, the next it is won by the Communist Party.

Sugatha Kumari (a woman activist working for and with women) might have a lot of impact. Their demands may make the politics change but politics is a dirty field. There is something we call “character assassination,” which means that if a woman does not have too much experience she may end up being burn[ed] out [not Sati]. There is no political consciousness. The major expenses are met by the Government, but people are not aware of that and are not contributing to society (which is an obligation together with personal responsibility); also there is brain drain and those professionals who remain here are not socially responsible.

These colleges don’t allow the psychological growth of the students. There is a lot of fear among the students, for example, fear of men. So, for me, coeducation is a must. Women’s colleges are a misnomer for reclusion. St. Teresa is a little bit freer. It is more open to students mixing with people; there are a lot of programs and room for development. I got a BA from there. It is affiliated to the University of Kerala; then, I went to Trivandrum for two years so I could get the MA in English and Linguistics. I got a diploma in these two subjects so I can teach at the college level and I came here at St. Joseph and I love teaching.

To the question: Did teaching help you in politics? She answered: “It helped me a lot. I got a lot of votes and kind reception.”

What about power? She answered: “ I don’t like power just to enjoy power; it is just an instrument to achieve dreams and visions about society. Not for its own sake.”

About the cases that most come to her attention as a council member she states:

As a council member, the main problems are those of poor women who have to struggle with drinking men. Then, there are those of women filing for divorce and looking for peaceful settlements. Another problem is that of the construction of houses to shelter women.

Here again, I felt I was speaking with an exceptional woman. Exceptional in part because she did not feel threatened by sharing her views candidly with a foreigner like me. Interestingly enough, she emphasized the same point made by Sister Dominique, that

of the need for coeducation to provide youth with an atmosphere leading to healthier gender relations and to curb sexual violence against women. This was a point I never forced on or even suggested to either of them.

In summary, it is clear that the current values relating to gender roles and relationships undercut and transform female higher education into education for conformity. This is in spite of the women's recent mobilizations for gender justice and for halting sexual violence, and in spite of organizations of women seeking for fairness or gender equality. This is repeated elsewhere – again, you can keep it here for emphasis if you desire. I continue to follow these developments at a distance by corresponding with some students and professional women, which proves yet another paradox, namely, that it is mostly educated women who are leading these mobilizations.

Women, Education and Politics

In India there are no legal impediments for women to participate in the political process. However, they remain underrepresented in governance and politics. A 1998 "Times of India" report revealed that "domestic responsibilities, lack of financial clout, rising criminalization of politics (several politicians being indicted and prosecuted for common crimes) and the threat of character assassination" are making it increasingly difficult for women to be part of the political framework. Moreover, women politicians point out that even within the political parties⁷⁰, women are rarely found in leadership positions. In fact, the report adds: "women candidates are usually fielded to prevent 'losing' constituencies where the party does not want to 'waste' a male candidate", i.e. the

⁷⁰ There were more women in Parliament in 1948 and the early 1950's including Malayalees than today.

parties use them as “valueless tokens” (*Times of India* 1998 cited in www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/womensit/in-w-sit.pdf). What happens in Kerala is no different from what happens nationwide. No doubt, and in spite the difficulties, women have made inroads in public life, sometimes as the result of their hard work, perseverance, and achievements in the public sphere, and t also as the result of the so-called “kinship link” in the assumption that women access political life with the support, backing and contacts of the family, in particular that of the husband.

The “character assassination” which includes defamation and gossiping, cited in the report is a common occurrence in Kerala, with some very good illustrations from the past, as narrated by Jeffrey (1993:145). This weapon often discourages women from entering politics and even from entering into public places. Another important factor impacting women's access to political life is the presence of certain social and political movements. In Kerala “women’s movements” have articulated women’s concerns regarding atrocities against women, , and many marches and demonstrations, some of which I joined while in the field, created windows of opportunity to meet and organize (See pictures). A number of women have been able to take advantage of these opportunities to access political life. In particular, women’s activists from these movements, have been appointed by the government to lead an official Women’s Committee in charge of gathering data and evaluating gender and women’s issues. This, per se, does not guarantee reversal of gender inequalities as is demonstrated by this representative’s continuous lobbying just to be heard, even in New Delhi,. More informally but perhaps with greater effect, women are organizing around different themes

and issues at the regional and local level.

The 1993 "Panchayati Raj" constitutional amendments reserved 30 percent of seats in elected village councils (Panchayats) for women. This has brought more than one million elected women into the political life at the grassroots level. Given a five-year tenure, the Panchayats representatives have been assigned some 29 areas of responsibility ranging from agriculture to poverty eradication, to forestry, fisheries, family planning, health and education. I had the chance in 1996 to interview a number of Panchayat Raj women representatives in Trivandrum on the occasion of a "Women Empowering" workshop at Loyola College organized by the UNICEF office in Madras. A number of these women were young and vocal; many of them were college educated, quite articulate, and seemed self-confident. They were far away from their constituencies and families', a result of the workshop planning that envisioned precisely that, to have participants focus on the issues. Likewise, the report that Meera Velayudhan (2002), a Malayalee sociologist, kindly sent me gives various reasons to be optimistic about increasing women's active participation in political life in Kerala. However, this is how the report concludes:

The strong patriarchal values that prevail concerning women's private/public roles, [and] the increasing machismo culture underlines [sic] the attitudes of (all) mainstream political parties and influence women themselves. Involvement in women's organizations is not viewed as "politics" while national issues (inter-state/federal) and oppositional activities are viewed as "politics". Almost all members in our survey held that the social environment was not secure and that violence against women was a priority issue alongside unemployment. This curbed women's mobility and was a barrier to more comfortable working relations with male members of their representative body. A focus group discussion with poor *dalit* (Pulaya) women, many elderly women, in Korungotta (Cochin), a small island, on the theme of "women in politics" highlighted the prevailing social values in general and the attitudes of male political party members/ leaders. Here are some of the statements made by the participants in this discussion:

" Women's character is always questioned" "I participated in a *jatha* (march). My eldest son's child who was ill died. I was blamed for it. Now I do not feel like going out." "My husband scolds me when I go out. I am not a slave. I have come here because my mind is strong." "Now the environment is unsafe. There were days in the olden times when I travelled far to hear Anna Chandy speak on women's issues" (Velayudhan 2002:22).

Velayudhan's text begs the question, how is it that educated women and women who hold political power as elected officials still have to struggle against such problems? Most, probably the Panchayat Raj elected women who are quoted in the above paragraph, are not highly educated, unlike the ones I interviewed back in 1996, but still they are people's representatives at the local level. (See Table 4 District Council Elections, 1991 as it pertains gender.

TABLE 4

District Council Elections, 1991
Number of Representatives

	Total	Male	Female	% Women
Trivandrum	40	28	12	30.0
Quilon	40	28	12	30.0
Pathanamthita	23	16	7	30.1
Alleppey	38	26	12	31.5
Kottayam	34	23	11	32.3
Idukki	23	16	7	30.4
Ernakulam	40	28	12	30.0
Thrissur	40	28	12	30.0
Palghat	40	28	12	30.0
Malappuram	40	28	12	30.0
Calicut	40	28	12	30.0
Wynad	20	14	6	30.0
Cannanore	39	27	12	30.7
Kasargod	20	14	6	30.0

Source: Meera Velayudhan, 2002, p. 10.

As noted above, daily demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins are common events throughout Kerala, particularly in the neighborhood of Trivandrum's government headquarters. For the average "western" visitor, particularly from the U.S., the frequency of these events may seem quite high. This perception seems to be shared by much of the Malayali middle-class population who has to suffer traffic disruptions and the interruption of daily routines. For merchants and owners of small enterprises, these disruptions are felt as dreadful⁷¹, a feeling they share with administrators and students from women's colleges run by nuns. In my survey, one of the main reasons parents and students preferred these colleges was that there were no interruptions to the normal academic routine because teachers were prevented from unionizing.

What I observed in the field was that students in women's colleges directly administered by the government are more likely to participate in internal campaigns, voting, and demonstrations, than are students from the women's colleges administered by nuns, where this type of activity is completely banned. What I witnessed at Women's College in Trivandrum was the female students' agency (probably not the majority) and the easiness with which they were distributing fliers advertising the candidates to the elections.

To close this section on women and politics I want to share an interesting case that connects with another issue that is central to this chapter: education and labor force in the context of Kerala society. The case is taken from a recent newspaper article (See Appendix V) about a young village woman who participated in the Panchayat elections

⁷¹ R. Lukose (2001) wrote an interesting essay on how different the perceptions about expressions of

and got elected. Her main goal was to get a job; participation in politics was secondary. The ruse highlights the paradoxical position of Kerala regarding women's participation in the labor force, this being the Indian state where there are, supposedly the most educated women.

And yet, the picture is not entirely bleak as shown by another interview I conducted with a woman, who in her trajectory as an individual and as a professional, illustrates some of the shortcomings but also some of the achievements of educated women, from middle class, and mostly from Christian backgrounds. A faculty member at one of the surveyed colleges, Prof. Shina, is 38 years old, born and raised in Allepey District, in a joint family, and married for 15 years:

I belong to a Syrian Catholic family of 3 children and I am the eldest. I've got a brother and a sister. My father is a healthy retired man of 68 and my mother is 65 with no good health; they live in Madras. My brother is in Chicago and my sister is in Kuwait.

I married in 1981; he is from Malankara Catholic church. We have an 11 year-old son and he's in the 6th standard; we also have a daughter of 5; she goes to lower kinder garden now. I went to a Canosian Sisters school (LKG). We spoke Malayalam at home but the sisters were very particular about English. There was a sister very worried about my communication skills in English so my parents sent me to an English-medium school. There is lot of anxiety about children's performance in school; many parents feel that they have to start early with their English. I used to be very good in the school (Malayali medium) but in the 5th standard with the change to English medium I was very nervous; I still remember phrases such as "the earth is round" that they were asked to repeat again and again. I understood but I had difficulties in pronunciation. Thanks god I was forced to learn and I took up the challenge.

In 1972 I passed to 10th standard with distinction; then I did my Pre-Degree and then I opted for Science as my subject. My ambition was to become a doctor. I went to Allepey's St. Joseph also run by the Canosian sisters. I lived inside the campus, in the hostel for 1 year). I'm grateful to them. Then I took up Zoology for the Degree in Madras's Medical College because my father was there at that time and I failed. That was a turning point in my life: God wanted me to do another thing. I feel that teaching suits me more as a profession. Everything

political life were, depending on class and caste.

thanks to His guidance. But let me tell you that I had a deep depression at first. Well, after that I went to All Saints College in Tvm. for my degree. Then I joined Loyola College and applied for Psychology but my father said it was not a good choice. When I was in the hostel I was advised to go for a Masters on Medical and Psychological science but I graduated in Social Work and did a specialization. I also took a course on STD's from the WHO for 4-5 months. I was asked by the Principal to join the faculty in 1979. I taught my junior batch then. In 1981 I got married (it was an arranged marriage) and there has not been a conflict for being from 2 different Christian communities; then the children came.

I registered for the Ph.D. and finished the data collection. I applied for a leave so I can write. My idea is to come to college to write while on leave and think that in 1 year I'll make it; then everything will be OK. Sometimes I think, what if I change jobs, but then I also think that I won't have the same salary and my decision weakens. For instance, I've thought of buying a car but I'll need a better salary...Of course, working in a women's college I have more security and safety: one cannot be out there after 8pm. There are many thieves and the Malayali newspaper carry news about many cases. There are also exhibitionists near the schools.

From this narrative there are four points I would like to remind what I have pointed out elsewhere:

1. Parents' preoccupation with their children's education and the great importance of English training to give them a good head start.
2. The continuity of schooling from a girls' school to a women's college.
3. The importance of the Hostels for guaranteeing the continuity of studies; they provide a safe (sexually secluded) heaven for the students.
4. The emphasis on teaching as a career for a woman by providing stability and, if it is in a women's college or institution, it is even an extra incentive.
5. The perception of the actual danger women would experience in public spaces.

The cases I presented here are just some examples of the paradoxical role of women's education in the context of mostly south Kerala (Travancore). They are illustrations of women who sound and seem somewhat "empowered" by their formal education and life experiences and yet, they still have to make a lot of concessions to the

prescribed norms and mores scripted for them in Kerala. I grant that in a milieu in which the concrete conditions are restricted for women, including the educated ones, it is better to comply and to negotiate instead of antagonizing.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS:

KERALA'S EDUCATED WOMEN AND THEIR PROSPECTS

After looking at the data and reflecting on the significance of education for Malayali women, I can argue that although higher education in itself has helped some women to gain paid employment, it has not always improved women's status, especially in light of certain structural conditions and cultural traits of Kerala society. These include an extremely high rate of unemployment and underemployment for Malayalis, men and women, including among those with education, and the continued and increasing presence of ideologies that support women's dependency and subordination.

The "Kerala Model of Development" has been a construct based on many realities and a few myths. While it is true that Malayalis definitely have achieved what economists have labeled a "high index" of social development, it is also true that many of the exploits are being undermined by the recent economic policies geared to privatization in many spheres of Kerala's economy. The education industry has not been untouched by this process. Because of the very specific Malayali cultural and social outlook, the indexes that counted the most have related to women's literacy and primary education but as we have seen, these do not translate into more autonomy and real empowerment for women.

In chapter two I pointed out that in north Kerala, and more specifically in Malabar, where matriliney and matrilocality were the prevailing kinship and residence patterns among large sections of the population, the freedoms and rights once accepted for women belonging to the Nair and other castes have declined despite their gaining

access to higher education. I met women whose grandmothers were extremely independent and vocal during the independence struggle, and who are now controlled by new social rules of behavior and the elevated role of men as husbands and providers. Even worse, among communities where “dowry” payments were not customary such as the Nairs and other Hindu castes and Muslims, the demand for such payments is exorbitant, thus diminishing the potential gains women may have made through higher education. The effects of the incorporation of “dowry” are devastating for working class people, particularly for women who have to abide by the “tradition”, however new, and must work extremely hard to save money to pay the dowry if they want to get married. Moreover, Malayali society is filled with images, discourses, and practices discouraging other life choices.

In the realm of women’s education specifically, I noticed that one of the effects of discipline and “character-building” inside Christian women’s colleges, as well as their “culture”, in many instances serves to reinforce the concept of male dominance and the subordination of women. This is so even when the students come from a social background and possess symbolic as well as financial capital that used to foster women’s autonomy and individuality.

In my interview with Sister Dominique I asked her whether colleges run by nuns provided students with tools to face this conservative atmosphere. She replied:

Not much... Changes are coming in very slowly. What the students get is a lot of influence from the media more than anything else. The major contribution of this college is to open employment opportunities for female students. For instance, alumni are coming back to work here. The Christian influence is that women have to stay at home. But even at home, the decision-making is not too much open to women. This is true for women in public life. I became the Principal here at St. Joseph in 1991 and I’m retiring in one year, at 55. The teaching staff is only female but I suggested to have a few male teachers and to attempt some coeducational

steps. Of course, my suggestions were rejected with the argument that men bring politics, i.e. party politics.

The above quote is repeated, though I know it serves a purpose for my argument here. If one analyzes students practices in the observed and surveyed colleges and their responses to the survey questions, one is struck by the extent to which consent, in the Gramscian sense, is elicited to the main tenets of what a respectable woman's life should be. Marriage and motherhood seem to be the main goals of the students, their careers coming second. This is, in no way, different from the rest of India, which, interestingly, it is also consistent with the shortage of jobs available in the job market.

This dissertation made use of some documents, chronicles, and memoirs, to build the historical context of my main arguments. This is, of course, a non-exhaustive history of the more meaningful events and developments that resulted in the spread of opportunities for the "girl child" and for women to become literate and for some to enroll in formal education in Kerala, in spite of dire economic and social conditions. This summary highlights the problems posed for many Malayali women (and men) by an unjust social system that prevented a widespread entry to the learning centers by members of all castes and social classes. The dramatic changes brought by the colonial approach to the economy and socio-political situation of what today is Kerala, provoked different strategies with which different native Malayalis negotiated their way up in the social ladder. The education of women, as I hope to have shown, was part of the colonial undertaking. Western missionaries and native agents furthered it within a social context characterized by matrilineal kinship system and matrilocal arrangements, along with their associated ideologies. It is interesting that some of the missionaries' discourses resound

still today, especially those regarding “propriety” and “modesty” which match the indigenous “*streedharma*” dictum.

I have discussed some of the reasons why Kerala has gained the important position it holds in the terrain of women’s education and as a rather unique case in the context of India. Some of the historical conditions that help one to understand why Kerala’s real achievements are still limited, if one looks for quality and meaningful education of its women were suggested. Maybe much of the current reputation of Kerala as “a paradise for women” comes from educated Kerala women employed outside Kerala as teachers and nurses as well as those who have gained a good standing abroad.

In spite of the adverse developments in Kerala’s society as they affect all women, including the educated ones, I noticed several signs that make me hope for a better future for all Malayalis. Among them, I highlight the formation of a women’s movement that has been very vocal against any form of violence against women, reminding and requesting governments of both the Left and the Congress Party that women are half of the population.

One undeniable consequence of women’s education alongside other factors related to the economy, is the widespread preference for the two-child family in Kerala, which in turn has obvious repercussions in women’s lives. The demographic transition is a fact in Kerala and young women’s answers to my questions on this subject confirms it.

Another interesting development is that some educated women are taking their marriage arrangements into their own hands. Where previously it was almost unthinkable to find women themselves advertising in the “Matrimonials”, asserting their personal and

professional preferences, today one finds hundreds of advertisements made and posted by women themselves in newspapers and on the Internet. This is only possible when women are educated and reach certain levels of autonomy. Besides, this trend would match the development of technology and its appropriation by some, evidently, educated women.

As noticed before, women's active participation within the Panchayat Raj will be gradually guaranteed when they can make use of their formal education and autonomy. Then, they will be able to resist institutionalized forms of gender asymmetry that prevent them from speaking out, from appropriating public spaces, and from fully exercising their citizenship against a machinery. Currently there are fewer women occupying high positions in Kerala political life than during the 1950's and 1960's.

Structural problems such as chronic unemployment and underemployment for everyone must be first addressed and solved by the government and by society's institutions. Otherwise, the outcomes of higher education will become even more superfluous than they already are, adding the more educated persons to the "labor reserve army". Even worse, educated women will join the increasing ranks of clinically depressed and suicidal Malayalis. Likewise, parents will rely ever more on "dowry" as a way to "guarantee" a good and safe future to their daughters --a future that the economy and other structures are refusing them. The tragedy of this trend is that in so doing they will be shortchanging their daughters.

As we have seen, members of Nair and Christian families in the first decades of the twentieth century realized that no respectable, well-paying alternatives for women's careers existed except through the newly opened liberal profession of teaching, nursing,

or else, via clerical jobs. Currently, at the beginning of twenty-first century, most schools and colleges provide girls with comfortable gender segregated environments and choices, and low-profile professions that allow time and energy for domestic life. The sexual division of labor at home has not changed for the most part. Women continue doing the bulk of household chores, not to mention child rearing. Despite the attraction of familiar gender tracks, I interviewed a few female students who believe that schooling, even in women schools and colleges, does grant the possibility of critical insights, or the potential for individual and group agency and rebellion. In spite of the limitations already cited by some of principals, faculty members, and students I interviewed, I do think that the women's colleges provide a large social space for all students to reflect on and build their own identities. Unfortunately, as one of my interviewees pointed out, there are other factors at work, recreating a social order in which male power and dominance in society are the norm. Among these other social factors one could cite the media. Current societal stereotypes and familial pressures constrain girls, the dowry system being one of such constraints.

The implication is that adverse schooling practices re-enforce those values and norms. Colleges, then, can do little to persuade adolescent girls and young women to pioneer in male defined careers. Female students may not want to experience sexism in the form of unfair competition, nor employment barriers due to the socially approved gender division of labor and knowledge, still less the risk of being unmarried or isolated. The way public spaces have been constructed for the benefit of mostly men makes women more apprehensive about appropriating or transforming them. In 1996 I participated in a march, demonstration, and sit-in enacted by a broad coalition of

women's organizations. Their major demands and claims were for gender justice and the right to use public spaces without the fear of being sexually harassed or molested, a demand that I find totally justified and to which I subscribe.

The current trend in corporations both from in the US and within the European Community of "outsourcing" has different consequences for the workers depending on what side of the labor force they belong to. For those educated, English-speaking Indians, women included, especially those working in or near "the Silicon Valley" of India (Karnataka, Kerala's neighbor state), this has resulted in more demand for education and training that provide the requisite qualities: Computer knowledge and English accents. Although male workers undertake the bulk of the jobs, increasingly trained women are opening their way into this field, notwithstanding the difficulties. Women of Kerala no doubt are already there on account of their acquired training and having overcoming the fear of being away from the family (their own and their family's). Salaries and living conditions, though, would be good subjects of another research.

I would like to acknowledge that whether one likes it or not, the English language is basic, and is perceived as such in Kerala for the new generations. The colleges surveyed and visited provide the training, in spite of the shortcomings mentioned above. The fluency and command of English, together with specific training, has permitted Malayalis, including women, to venture outside their state and their country and greatly contribute to the well-being of their families abroad or in Kerala via remittances.

Today in Kerala, both the left and the right, the Congress, the Communists, and even the parties affiliated to the BJP (Bharata Janata Party) are all going along with a western model of development, including an emphasis on tourism, and building modern

highways at any cost. . This vision and practices are leading to a decrease in work for the people except as manual workers and in low-rank service jobs and people with formal education are reluctant to undertake such jobs. The creation of “Technoparks” as a way to attract foreign investment to eventually develop job sources, count on the exploitation of the educated labor force they find there.

The possibility of a favorable change in the lives of educated girls/young women remains to be seen. Even those girls/young women who are educated and know how to work with computers and computer programs need a dowry to get married. They may be able to stand on their own economically but not socially - and in a society like Kerala, that is a hard prospect. For all these reasons, only the educated women who belong to the “right” social classes and castes might really benefit from choices that go beyond marriage and motherhood. An even their choice of marrying is getting harder and harder.

With the privatization of the Indian economy and the implementation of neo-liberal policies that affect all levels of production, distribution, and consumption, including that of knowledge, and eventually of power, less and less opportunities are left for the majority of the population who lack social and financial capital – and even less for those whose work is perceived as ancillary. This is, obviously, not specific of Kerala or India, or even the so-called Third World. One can observe these trends within some sections of the population in the “developed” nations. These trends would undermine the honest efforts of certain individuals, government agencies, and NGO’s unless popular mobilization take-up these issues and strengthens civil society’s efforts, including women’s movements and organization.

GLOSSARY

Bandh: A public demonstration, often used by union members and other groups.

CDS, Centre for Development Studies: A very prestigious institution in Trivandrum devoted to higher education (granting Ph.D. Economics, Demography, History, Demography, etc.) and research. It was the institution to which I was affiliated and in whose campus (Women's Hostel) I lived for the first four months of my fieldwork.

Dowry (system): Most often used without an article.

To marry off: Refers to the common practice among most of Indian castes and families that follow exogamy and patrilocality that the bride goes to live in her husband's and more likely, her in-laws' home.

Hostel: The living quarters attached or not to the college (in or outside campus). Apart from dormitories, it may consist of a study room, a "canteen", a chapel,

Hostelites: Those students living in the hostel as opposed to the "day students" who commute or live in the vicinity of the college.

Boarding House: Hotel like living arrangement with more restrictive rules.

Canteen: Cafeteria inside the college are still limited have been presented, showing the quality and often the lack of a more meaningful education of its women.

Eve-teasing: More often than not, sexual harassment (verbal or physical or both)

Coach/Coaching: Preparing for exams/tests

English-medium: School/College where all or most subjects are taught in English

Girl-child: A conceptual way of expressing the particular predicaments/threats the female children in certain areas of the world, South Asia being one, as the result of son preference and patriarchal ideologies within the family and society.

Lakh: The equivalent of 100,000 units

NSS: Nair Social Service

Parallel Colleges: Educational institutions that are an outgrowth of the privatization trend in education in Kerala in the 1990's.

Rs. or Rupee: The unit of the Indian currency. By the time I did my fieldwork, a lunch in a good and popular restaurant was Rs. 15; at the time, 1 US dollar was equivalent to Rs. 40.

SSLC: Secondary School Leaving Certificate. It is the examination conducted by the Commissioner for Govt. Examination, Kerala. It is the annual examination for the 10th Standard students

Pre-Degree: Special training after high school and before entering formal college.

IIT Graduates: Indian Institutes of Technology

Backward/Backwardness: Indian expression that denotes "rural", "traditional",

“unpolished” and, notably, economically marginal and/or neglected places, and populations.

APPENDIX I:
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COLLEGE EDUCATED WOMEN
 IN KERALA (STUDENTS)**

Researcher: Ms Alcira Forero-Peña, Ph.D. Student at the City University of New York, Graduate School in New York City and affiliated to the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram.

To be answered individually

This questionnaire is part of a study being carried out in selected women's colleges in Kerala State to learn more about the educational attitudes, educational careers, the impact and the meaning of women's education for students, their families and the society as a whole. I think you will find the questions interesting and easy to answer. Please, answer exactly the way you feel; no one in this college will ever see the answers. This questionnaire is anonymous. You have a right to refuse to participate, although your contribution is very important if the results of the research are to be meaningful. You may also choose not to answer any item in this questionnaire. Remember that this survey is part of an anthropological study; therefore, there are no right or wrong answers. Please, do not spend too much time on any single question. When finished, hand your questionnaire to the researcher who will take it, with the other completed questionnaires, directly to the home university for statistical processing.

If you have any problem, please, raise your hand and the researcher, who has given you the questionnaire, will come to your desk and answer your question(s). Thank you for your cooperation.

Because this is an educational survey there are no right and wrong answers.

1. What is your age?
2. Please, indicate your religious, caste, and social background.
3. What is your parents' occupation?
4. How many siblings do you have? How many sisters? Please, precise your family ranking based on your age.
5. Are you from the state of Kerala?
6. In what year are you?
7. Specify if B.A., B.Sc., B.Com., M.A., etc.
8. Are you a boarding or a day student at this college?
9. If a day student, do you see any advantage to being a day student?
10. Do you see any disadvantage to being a day student?
11. Why did you come to this college?
12. What do you like best about this college?

13. What do you like least about this college?
14. Was it your personal choice to come to this college?
15. If a boarding student, why are you a boarding student? and how do you like it?
16. What do you like best in life?
17. What do you like least in life?
18. Ten years from now, as you look back on your college experience, what do you think will have been the most valuable part about it for you?
19. Did one or more of your relatives attend this or another college?
20. Have you participated in any of the following types of activities this year? Please specify.
 - a. Sports
 - b. Arts
 - c. Journalism
 - d. Religious
 - e. Social
 - f. Cultural
21. How often has each of the following been used in the courses you are taking this year?
22. Approximately what is the average amount of time you spend on homework a week?
23. What do you think about marriage?
24. What do you think about motherhood?
25. What do you think about dowry?
26. What do you think about caste differences?
27. What do you think about women in Kerala?
28. How do you see yourself in ten year's time (from the professional, family, and social point of view)?
29. If you had a girl child what would you like her to be?
30. If you had a male child what would you like him to be?
31. Do you discuss any of these issues with your teachers or other students?
32. If you had the power to change some aspects of this college, which one(s) would you change?
33. Is your perception of those aspects or issues divided between the private and the public domain?
34. How would you prefer to raise them or to solve them?
35. What kinds of organizational structures are involved in this process?
36. Do they require help from outside?
37. What sort of relationship develop between the Principal, other administrative staff, the faculty, the students, the families, and the alumni?
38. Do you belong to a student union or any other corporate organization?
39. If so, how the process of getting organized make you feel? Does this process help you to become "self-reliant"; do you feel that this have changed your life?
40. If you do not belong to any of these organizations, why not?

APPENDIX II. INDULEKA

Induleka, a novel from Malabar by O. Chandu Menon. Translated into English by W. Dumergue, C.S., formerly Malayalam translator the Madras Government, written in 1889 and first published in 1890 The Mathrubhumi Printing & Publishing Co. Ltd., Calicut, April 1965.

Indulekha was immensely popular; from 1889 when it was first published to 1956, it has run to fifty-three editions. It is a love story in which a unique young woman marries the man of her choice, the hero of the story, and lives happily ever after. The set up is in Malabar at the end of nineteenth century. It talks of "social evils" in Malabar, including, among other things, the "indecent" behavior of women belonging to the Nair castes by indulging in serial love affairs, the perceived low status of men (in a matrilineal and matrilocal society). The reason I am including this annex is that a major theme of the novel is the blessings brought by Western (European) institutions and education and how Malayali women could benefit from them. "The important difference which the author makes in this story between the two generations is not so much age, but English education. Again and again, directly, or indirectly through characters in the story, he affirms his faith in the refining and liberating influence of English education and the great need for giving that education specially to the women of India" writes the author in the preface (pp. iv-v). The novel portrays a concrete moment in the social life of North Kerala (Malabar), with some changes taking place.

"What do you mean by saying that they are all powerful in tormenting men?"

"That is not all," said Madhavan, "but in Malabar women don't practice the virtue of fidelity so strictly as do the women of other countries. Why, in Malabar a woman may take a husband and cast him off as she pleases, and on many other points she is completely at liberty to do as she likes. Hence our Malabar women are proud and overbearing to a degree, and this what I meant."

"Good gracious! You are very complimentary" said Indulekha. "With all your learning and knowledge, this is the opinion you have formed of Malabar women, is it? I am astonished."

Let us pause and consider what Madhavan meant by saying that in Malabar women do not practice the virtue of fidelity. Madhavan's remarks were bitter, for in Malabar, just as in other countries, the women who cherish this virtue are innumerable. Indulekha, cut to the quick (sic), retorted, "What, did you say that Malayali women are not chaste? She argued, 'To say that a woman makes light of the marriage tie, is tantamount to saying that she is immoral. Did you then mean that all or most of the women in this Land of Palms are immoral? If you did, then I for one certainly cannot believe him. If you intended to signify that we Nairs encourage immorality, because, unlike the Brahmins, we do not force our women kind to live lives worthy only of the brute creation by prohibiting all intercourse with other, and by closing against them the gates of knowledge, then never was there formed any opinion so false. Look at Europe and, America, where women share equally with men the advantages of education and enlightenment and liberty! Are

these women all immoral? If, in those countries, a woman who adds refinement of education to beauty of person, enjoys the society and conversation of men, is it to be straightway supposed that the men whom she admits into the circle of her friends are more to her than mere friends? Or when a woman has cultivated her musical talents, a dozen men go in a body to hear her sing, will you basely conclude that their real object is totally different and by no means so innocent? You men, being fool, take pride in a reputation for gallantry, and we women are implicated helplessly in your scandals; but unless you are utterly lost to all sense of honour, you will surely not besmirch with this foul calumny the fair name of women, who belonging as they do to your own race and caste, have the strongest claim on your loyalty. A woman may have countless occasions and opportunities for enjoyment and amusement and mirth in male society without swerving a hair's breadth from the path of virtue, and it would cause me the greatest surprise if you took the side of those pestilential scandal mongers who assume that gratification of lust is in reality the one and only object of such past time." (pp.40-42)

"In my preface I have recorded the reasons which led me to write this book, and the point which I wish chiefly to impress on my fellow-countrymen by means of it is the advantage which would accrue if the women of India were given the same privileges of education that are enjoyed by the men. Although Indulekha was only a sensitive, delicate girl, who had been left helpless by the untimely death, first of her father and then of her uncle who had nurtured her so tenderly, and although the grandfather under whose care she lived was a man of unbridled anger and sternly opposed the choice of husband she had made, yet the firmness and strength of mind she had acquired through education enabled her to attain the object she had in view...the women of India should realize that if they are ignorant and illiterate, men will not only despise them but show by their conduct the contempt they feel....Some of you have studied Sanskrit, and some music, but these attainments are not enough. If you wish to really enlighten your minds, you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn many things which you ought to know in these days and by such knowledge alone can you grasp the truth that you are of the same creation as men, that you are as free agents as men, that women are not the slaves of men. To those women who have no means of learning English, men who have a knowledge of English should impart as much instruction as lies in their power. There are in Malabar many Malayalis who can elucidate, by books written in Malayalam, arts and accomplishments derived from the English people and it is a matter for deep regret that they neglect their opportunity. It is the study of English that gives knowledge, yet my opinion is that, in the present day, no study is so productive of moral and mental excellency as is the study of English. Someone has written a book in Northern India to show that if the women of this country learn English, there is the greatest danger of their being vitiated by adopting English habits and customs; but if English education would make our women as intelligent and clever and cultivated as are the English women, then I for one am ready to do my utmost to precipitate that danger." (Chapter XX, L'envoi pp. 368-369)

O. Chandu Menon, as you might have surmised, was a Nair. He was educated and a member of the Indian Civil Service and made a successful career in it, getting promoted

to Sub-Judge, post that he held for seven years. He was conferred the title of Rao Bahadur and the Madras University made him a fellow of the university.

APPENDIX III: "MATRIMONIALS"

Profile Name: Biji joseph **Account ID:** Leegi_123 **Location:** Kanhagad | Kasargode
| UK Age: 27 **Appearance:** Medium Looking **Hair Color:** Black **Skin Color:** Very Fair
Height: 5 FT 4 IN (163cm) **Body Type:** Thin **Astrological Sign:** Undisclosed

Marital Status: Unmarried **Marriage Timeframe:** Marriage within 6 Months **Number**
of brothers and sisters: 5 **Family Values:** Moderate **Want children:** Yes **Lifestyle:**
 Active

Smoking Habits: Non-Smoker **Drinking Habits:** Never drink

Education level:
 Medicine - General - Dental - Surgeon - Others **Monthly Savings:** Over \$1,000
Occupational Field: Nursing **Occupational Description:** Staff nurse

Religion: Christian Syrian **Language and Culture:** Malayalee

Hobbies: Music, Travelling, reading and watching tv

I would be willing to migrate or relocate.

She is quiet in manners and liberal in outlook. She is a straight forward person , is caring, homely and god fearing. She belongs to knanaya catholic community . She is presently working in u.k as staff nurse and planning to come on vacation by june 2003. The man should be educationaly qualified . He should be working, godfearing and minimum complexion, from good family background.

Profile Name: Bijo Account ID: Bijo Location: Dammam | Kottayam | SA Age: 23
Appearance: Good Looking Hair Color: Black Skin Color: Fair Height: 5 FT 4 IN (163cm)
Body Type: Normal Astrological Sign: Capricorn

Marital Status: Unmarried Marriage Timeframe: Marriage within 12 Months Number of brothers and sisters: 1 Family Values: Moderate Want children: Yes Lifestyle: Very Active

Smoking Habits: Non-Smoker Drinking Habits: Never drink

Education level:

Medicine - General - Dental - Surgeon - Others **Monthly Savings: \$1,00 - \$2,00 Occupational Field: Dental Occupational Description: Doing internship**

Religion: Christian Jacobite Language and Culture: Malayalee

Hobbies: Music, Reading, Watching TV

I would be willing to migrate or relocate.

The girl has just passed B.D.S. and is currently doing internship, which will finish by January 2004. Wish to go for M.D.S. Parents in Saudi Arabia.

Looking for a boy, who has done Masters and who is working outside Kerala. Preference for IT professionals, Engineers, M.D.S., MBAs.

Profile Name: Ambily Account ID: Infonetadoor Location: Adoor | Pathanamthitta | IN
Age: 27 Appearance: Medium Looking Hair Color: Black Skin Color: Wheatish Height: 5 FT (152cm) Body Type: Normal Astrological Sign: Pisces

Marital Status: Unmarried Marriage Timeframe: Marriage within 12 Months Number of brothers and sisters: 1 Family Values: Traditional Want children: Yes Lifestyle: Active

Smoking Habits: Non-Smoker Drinking Habits: Never drink

Education level:

Phd **Monthly Savings: \$1,00 - \$2,00 Occupational Field: Education Occupational Description: Lecturer in B.Ed college**

Religion: Hindu Ezhava Language and Culture: Malayalee

Hobbies: Devotional Reading, TV, Music, Cinema

Proposals invited without Dowry

Profile Name: Ponnu Account ID: Ponnu Location: Aroor | Alappuzha | IN Age: 29
Appearance: Good Looking Hair Color: Black Skin Color: Wheatish Height: 5 FT 6 IN
(168cm) Body Type: Thin Astrological Sign: Sagittarius

Marital Status: Widowed Marriage Timeframe: Marriage within 3 Months Want children:
Yes Lifestyle: Active

Smoking Habits: Non-Smoker Drinking Habits: Never drink

Education level:
Phd Monthly Savings: \$2,00 - \$4,00 Occupational Field: Teaching Occupational Description:
 research

Religion: Hindu Pillai Language and Culture: Malayalee

Hobbies: Reading and travelling

I would be willing to migrate or relocate.

we lost our dear dad 5 years back, he was an engineer, amma is an house wife, sister is married, brother is an engineer.i want a man who know the real value of love and life and he should be caring, understanding and loving.

Profile Name: galaxy Account ID: Galaxy Location: Abudhabi | Thrissur | AE Age: 22
Appearance: Undisclosed Hair Color: Black Skin Color: Fair Height: 5 FT 3 IN (160cm)
Body Type: Undisclosed Astrological Sign: Scorpio

Marital Status: Unmarried Marriage Timeframe: Marriage within 3 Months Number of
brothers and sisters: 2 Family Values: Moderate Want children: Yes Lifestyle: Active

Smoking Habits: Non-Smoker Drinking Habits: Never drink

Education level:
 Bachelors - Arts - Science - Commerce - Others **Monthly Savings: Undisclosed Occupational**
Field: Undisclosed Occupational Description:

Religion: Muslim Sunni Language and Culture: Malayalee

Hobbies: Reading, Listening music

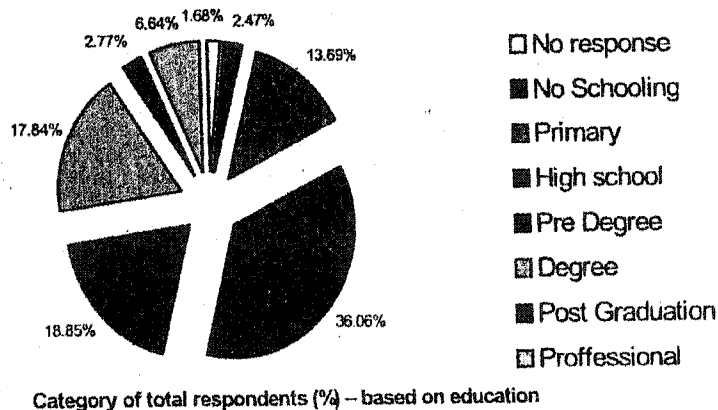
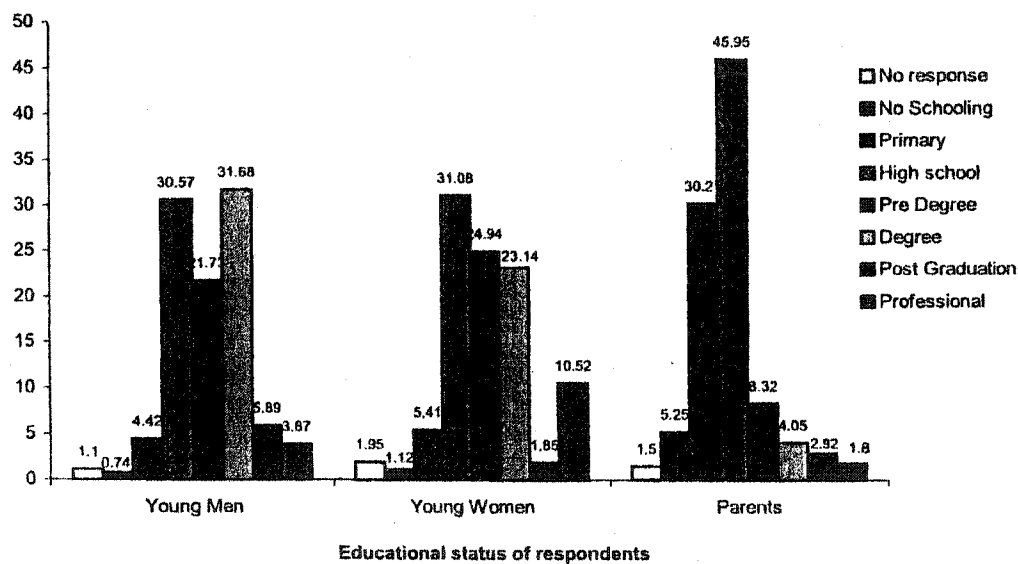
Looking 4 a guy with pleasing personality. He should be from Trichur or adjacent districts. Contact missgalaxy123 at hotmail dot com.

APPENDIX IV:

EDUCATIONAL STATUS AMONG DIFFERENT GROUPS IN KERALA

Source: Jananeethi 2004 A Study on Dowry in Kerala. Thrissur, p.20

Education	Young Men		Young Women		Parents		Grand Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No response	9	1.70	35	1.77	22	1.54	66	1.68
No Schooling	3	0.57	19	0.96	75	5.25	97	2.47
Primary	20	3.78	100	5.07	418	29.25	538	13.69
High school	160	30.25	602	30.54	655	45.83	1417	36.06
Pre Degree	115	21.74	493	25.00	133	9.31	741	18.85
Degree	172	32.51	469	23.78	60	4.20	701	17.84
Post Graduation	29	5.48	39	1.98	41	2.87	109	2.77
Professional	21	3.97	215	10.90	25	1.75	261	6.64
Grand Total	529	100	1972	100	1429	100	3930	100



APPENDIX V: JOBLESS RURAL WOMEN SEEK POLITICAL SOLUTION

Asia Times-Online (www.atimes.com/ind-pak/CB02Df02.html)

February 2, 2001 Jobless rural women seek political solution

By R L Bindu

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, India - The young village woman Ajita is proud of having been elected to the local self-government body in her hamlet, not far from this capital city of India's southwestern coastal Kerala state. However, the real reason for her happiness is that she now has a secure paid job for five years, unlike most educated women in her village in India's most literate province.

Like many educated village women in mainly rural Kerala, the 30-year-old contested the local body polls held last year, more with the aim of finding work than a career in public life. She is aware that she can use her position to help other educated women who are trying unsuccessfully to find paid work.

Ajita is confident that things are going to improve with the large number of women elected to the local bodies. Women make up 38 percent of the successful candidates in the "panchayat" (village council) elections.

"I know the problems of unemployed women, because I have experienced these. So obviously, my main aim will be to generate more jobs for women," she says.

Ajita was one of the participants at a mid-January expert consultation here to discuss the strange situation of women in Kerala, where their high literacy level has failed to better women's economic lot.

A decade ago, Kerala became the first "fully literate" state in a country where about 50 percent of the people still cannot read and write. Nearly 90 percent of women in the state are literate against the national average of 39 percent.

Kerala is often cited by international development agencies as a role model for the rest of South Asia and developing countries because of its achievements in literacy and basic health care. But this has been of little use in securing paid work for women in the state. According to government statistics, the percentage of women in paid jobs in the state is slightly less than 16 percent. This is much less than the work participation rate of women in other Indian states with far lower levels of literacy.

Figures from the country's last decennial census in 1991 show that Kerala has three times the national unemployment level. In the villages of the state, the proportion of jobless women is seven times the national average.

Women make up 54.5 percent of job seekers who have registered their names in the state government's employment exchanges. Many believe, like Ajita, that the situation will be

corrected once more women are elected to decision-making positions.

"Yes, that is true. Women in responsible positions can do many things for their mobility," Sasikala Sanker, the newly elected president of the Thiruvananthapuram district Panchayat, told the meeting.

A top Indian census official, Jayant Kumar Banithia, said there was no clear explanation yet for this paradoxical situation. "It is really amazing. The work participation of women in the state is very low as compared to 40 percent in [southern] Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu [states]. Kerala is ahead in all other indicators. We are not aware where the problems exist," he told the gathering.

Among those present was Nobel economics laureate Amartya Sen, who said that Kerala's women would have to raise their educational status. "The reach of primary education was very strong in Kerala, though the same could not be said about higher education. In many other parts of India, higher education was over-expanded with the base of the education pyramid, represented by primary education, being narrow," observed Sen.

"The state could perhaps subject the contents of its higher education to a closer scrutiny so that it could be made a more effective tool for progress," he advised.

But others think that the problem has arisen because educated women want office-based work, opportunities for which are limited for women with just a basic education. For the moment, jobless educated women are setting their eyes on elected office, like Ajita.

The findings of a survey by the group Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat show that nine out of every 10 women elected to the local bodies had no previous experience in politics. "The situation is definitely going to improve," says J Chandra, Thiruvananthapuram's first woman mayor in 60 years. "A large number of women coming to contest elections is a great sign. Even those who have contested the elections with a degree of reservation, will be in a position to fight the polls independently next time," she adds.

(Inter Press Service)

APPENDIX VI: EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES) VISITED AND SURVEYED AND THEIR LOCATIONS

Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram) District:

All Saints College

Loyola College

Mar Ivanios College

Women's College

Kerala University

Agricultural University

Centre for Development Studies (CDS)

Kottayam District

Assumption College in Changanacherry

Allepey (Alappuzha) District

St. Joseph's College for Women

Ernakulam District

St. Therasas' College

Trichur (Thrissur) District

Vimala College

Palghat District

Mercy College

Wayanad District

St. Mary's College

Calicut (Kozhihode) District

Christian College

**APPENDIX VII: SCENES OF WOMEN'S DEMONSTRATIONS TO END
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (1)**



The expression of this Muslim woman illustrates the general feelings about violence against women. The signs behind her read "Women are also human beings."



With the aid of these signs, women such as the young woman in the front expressed the urgency of their demands.

SCENES OF WOMEN'S DEMONSTRATIONS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (2)



മതേതരതയെ
 ഉറപ്പാക്കി
 സമൂഹത്തിൽ

This is another illustration of the march/demonstration/sit-in to stop violence against women.

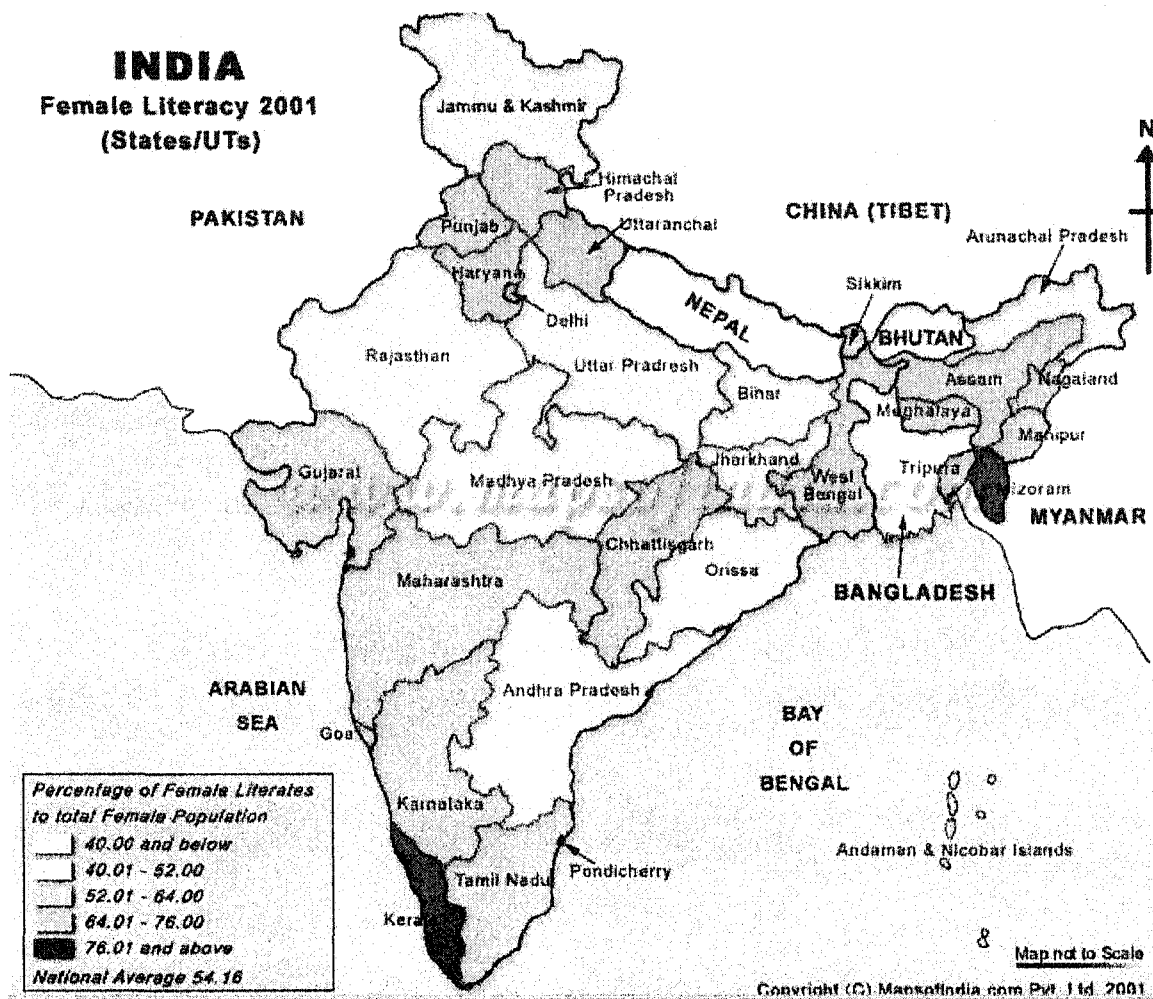


In Trivandrum women of all ages, belonging to various organizations such as YWCA, and all districts (there is a sign from Pathanamthita District), got together to demonstrate their opposition to violence against women.

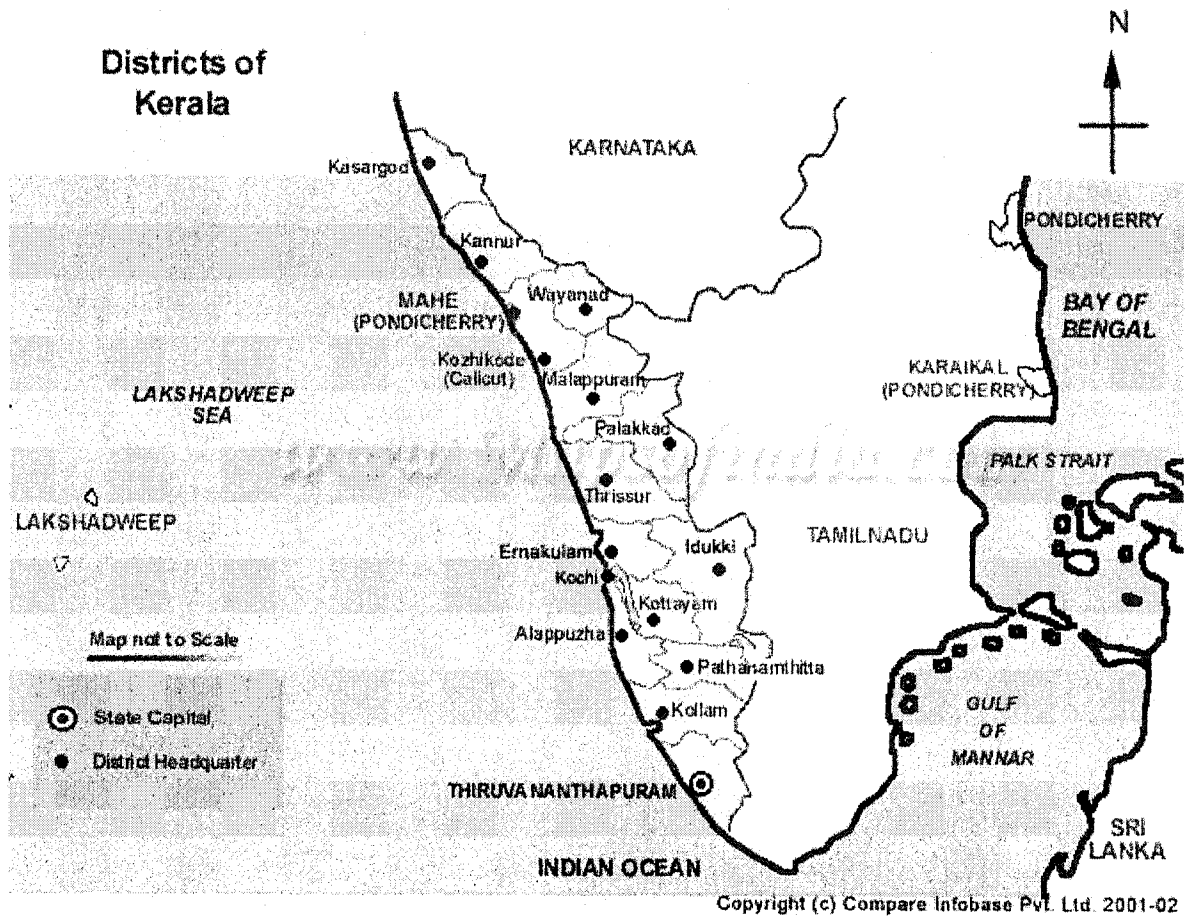
Map 1. Location of Kerala in India



Map 2. Female Literacy in India 2001



Map 3. Districts of Kerala



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