WOMAN AND THE FEMALE BODY
Introduction: *READING (THROUGH) DRESS*

In the project of fashioning the Individual the body occupied an ambiguous position. At one level, the Individual as imagined within the order of gender was considered to be shaped entirely by her/his qualities of the mind. However, such attributed qualities seemed to proceed from sexual difference marked in their bodies; 'correct training' was ideally to develop and channelise these, and therefore directed at bodies. Not surprisingly, proposals of 'correct training' involved both the preparation of boys and girls for subjectivities deemed 'natural' to them and the inculcation of self-control -- control over bodily urges.

The intriguing way in which the body's ambiguous placing continued to haunt the project of fashioning Woman will be discussed here. For this we draw upon the history of dress-reform in late 19th-early 20th century Keralam. In these times local society witnessed remarkable transformation in the modes and functions of dressing. By explicating the ambiguities in the advocacy of female dress-reform, it may be possible to show how the female body gets reinscribed as a source of pleasure. It will also demonstrate how a non-reciprocal relation of *seeing* gets established between Man and Woman as seer and the seen, as almost inbuilt in the sexual contract. The ambiguous presence of the body has continued to complicate the project of fashioning Woman, perhaps to an ever-greater extent, today.

In nineteenth century Keralam, dress and ornaments served to mark social difference. "Anyone after living a little while in the country," wrote a C.M.S. missionary
from Kottayam in 1884, "even at first glance tells to what caste a stranger belongs by the way he or she wears their hair or garments". Indeed, this was a centuries-old way in which difference between social groups was signified in Keralam. The Synod of Udayamperoor (1599 A.D.) emphasised its necessity through one of its canons:

"The Church is particular that the difference between faithful folk and those who do not possess faith should be expressed externally through dress and ornamentation as well. Why? To distinguish these groups by their attire. The Synod upon seeing that there is no difference between Nazranis and Malayalees in dress and hair, bids them to make difference."

Besides, different styles of dressing distinguished various groups linked together in a common network (later perceived as a single caste). For instance, different styles of wearing the Mundu (the long piece of cloth covering the lower body) prevalent among Antharjanams of the Addyan and Asyan groups of Malayala Brahmins was one way of distinguishing them. Dress and ornamentation also marked hierarchical distinction—groups lower in the Janma-bhedam order were prohibited from using finer clothing, umbrellas and


2. Canon 14 (S: IXD. XVII), Dr. Scaria Sakaria (ed), *Udayamperoor Summahadosinte Kanonakal* (The Canons of the Synod of Udayamperoor), Edamattom: IICS 1994, p.240. The translation is free. This Synod was convened by the Latin Catholic bishop Menezes, and part of the Portuguese efforts to transform Syrian X'ians. For an account of this event, see, Rev. Mathew Daniel, *Kerala Kraistava Samaskaram*, Tiruvalla, 1985, pp.69-86.

gold jewellery. Jati-groups had to strictly maintain these signs. Breach of such conventions was tantamount to 

dosham— inviting inauspiciousness, as the story of the Samutiri's (the ruler of Kozhikode) shoulder-ache showed. 4 Besides, lower-caste disregard for such conventions would be read as a challenge to upper-caste power. The well-known 'Breast-Cloth Struggle' of the nineteenth century in south Tiruvitamkoor involved not only the issue of feminine modesty but also struggle around Jati. 5 Wearing the upper cloth would signify symbolic equality of the Channars with upper-caste Nairs, and the Tiruvitamkoor Sarkar conceded the demand for feminine modesty while refusing to allow that specific mode of dressing that implied symbolic equality Channars with Nairs. The Proclamation of 1865 allowed all classes to use the Kuppayam (blouse) but not the upper-cloth. Indeed, there is other evidence to show that the steadily-modernising State of Tiruvitamkoor was not at all averse to the demands of 'modesty' (read 'Civilisation') provided it did not interfere with the

4. The last powerful Samutiri (Zamorin) of Kozhikode is said to have suffered from an incurable pain in the right shoulder. At last a simple remedy was prescribed: that he should wear a wet torthu-mundu (here, upper-cloth), on the right shoulder. Wonder of wonders, the pain vanished, but along with it the fortunes of the Samutiri ruling-house. The pain had resulted from the Goddess of Prosperity resting heavily on the Samutiri's right shoulder. By wearing the wet torthu-mundu on that shoulder, the Samutiri committed an inauspicious act, driving the Goddess away, and with it, the source of wealth and power of the ruling-house. Soon afterwards, the power of the Samutiri ruling house suffered, but since the Goddess was reconsecrated in the market place, the prosperity of Kozhikode as a centre of trade remained unimpaired. See, Kottarathil Sankunni, Aitcehyamala, Thrissur: Current Books, pp.116-118.

maintenance of social hierarchy: when the Public Works Department was set up in Tiruvitamkoor in 1863, the clothing of the upper parts of the person was a condition for the employment of women as labourers. In nineteenth century Tiruvitamkoor, dress marked social distance and deference; at the same time through newly-emergent forces, reading in a person's dress qualities such as 'modesty', 'Civilisation', 'decency' or the lack of these, was slowly beginning to gain ground. In the 'Breast-Cloth Struggle' these ways of reading dress got entangled in one another.

The differentiating function of dress continued well into the twentieth century with important additions. For example, adoption of new modes of dress was a way in which 'Westernised' people could be identified from those who were not. For a long time, wearing modern dressss would signify close contact with modern institutions-- those who closely interacted with such institutions had to resort to such dressing. 'Sahitya Panchanan' P.K. Narayana Pillai remembers how the Peishkar Rajarama Rayar (who, he remarks, was highly insistent on the observance of local norms of dress that worked to mark off social hierarchy) had to wear a shirt when he met white officials, and how one such meeting got delayed because the shirt was missing. An old student of the school for the scions of the royal

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6. ibid., p.92.
7. P.K.Narayana Pillai, Smaranamandalam (Domain of Memories), Kottayam: SPSS, 1964, p.116. P.K writes: that "Because all those who sought favours from him knew well of his aversion towards any craze for dress and ornamentation, they would go before him only in dirty dress, and that which hardly (..continued)
family of Kilimanoor remembers that in the 1910's the school dress-code for in Tiruvitamkoor was observed in that school only during the day of the Inspector's visit. On other days, they would all go to school in Kaupeenams (loin-cloths). Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai remembers wearing his first shirt on joining an English school in the same decade, and how by that time, "those who wore shirts did not go to work in the fields anymore". Wearing new sorts of dress also began to signify new sorts of social hierarchies. It could even activate self-gaze, it seemed, that revealed one's 'lacks' or 'inferiority'. The reformer C.Kesavan vividly recollects such an experience in his childhood:

"All the children were sitting on the floor. In the group there was a child wearing a satin Kuppayam and a cap that covered the ears, sitting a little apart, close to the wall on the right. A somewhat special consideration was given to the 'Kuppayam and cap'. I was wearing a small Torthumundu (a coarse variety of cloth worn around the waist covering the lower body), that was all. I felt ashamed of myself".

Wearing certain sorts of dress did signify 'moving up' in modern social hierarchy.

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C.Kesayan remembers a visit to the SNDP Yogam's Industrial Exhibition at Kollam in 1905 as a 13-year-old, in which the leading men wore dark shirts, turbans and long coats. "It was surprising to many", he remarks, "that such clothes would suit Ezhavas". One could even make 'use' of this signification of modern dress, as the reformer C. Krishnan found out, on a journey to Ceylon in 1899:

"To be free of nuisance from other people, I started off in European fashion, hat and all. I was convinced of the efficacy of this trick after journeying in a train for some time. Because people would move away at the sight of the hat there was no nuisance in the compartment at all".

Because dress could thus differentiate people, it was very frequently a charged site of confrontation. It was nodal point of nationalist struggle: European styles were replaced by with local ones, foreign cloth with khadi. Wearing Khadar and the Gandhi cap gained political significance in Malabar during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Discussion of the reform of official dress of teachers was sometimes polarised around approval and disapproval of 'local' and 'foreign' fashions. Changes in dressing were also crucial in the

11. ibid., p.409.
14. See, for instance, the debate on the resolution moved by member E.Ikkanda Warrier in 1930 regarding (..continued)
constitution of new identities in most varieties of reformism: in the Yogakshema Sabha for instance, the issue of dress was a charged one; in the modern school for Nambutiri boys at Edakkunni, initially there were strict rules disallowing teachers and students from wearing Kuppayams during formal sessions.\(^\text{15}\) The twenty-first session of the Yogakshema Sabha was regarded to be revolutionary in that at this session the participants did not bathe or remove their shirts before lunch;\(^\text{16}\) the self-assertion of the lower-castes clearly involved open rejection of established dress-conventions-- the mass meeting of Pulayas at Kollam in 1915 saw the rejection of wearing the Kalla and Mala (certain ornaments worn by women of this social group);\(^\text{17}\) in movements that sought to organise them, such as the Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha, they were encouraged to wear 'white clothes' and keep themselves

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 reform of teachers' dress in Kochi State. Reported in the \textit{M.M.}, 18 August, 1930. In 1927, another member, Kunhunni Raja, had brought a similar resolution regarding the uniform of government servants in Kochi. See, 'Kochi Niyama Sabha' (Kochi Legislature), \textit{M.M.}, 17 December, 1927.


17. T.H.P. Chentarassery, \textit{Ayyankali}, Thiruvananthapuram : Prabhatam Publishing, 1989, pp. 103 -6. Interestingly, the \textit{Malayalee} reported that after the act of rejection, two of the garlands were taken by the president of the meeting, Changanashery Parameswaran Pillai, and the Chief Secretary of Tiruvittamkooor, both upper-caste men, as curios. In order to be perceived as 'curios' or 'aesthetic objects' the \textit{Kalla} and \textit{Mala} had to be first stripped off their function of signifying difference and social distinction within the \textit{Janma-Bhedam} order.
clean.  

But, besides this, the new dress-code was also found to signify the wearer's implicatedness in the project of modern Self-building. Modern dressing figured high-up in proposals of 'correct training'. So, often, dress was seen to signify not only a certain subjectivity but also a certain internality. Wearing 'white clothes' by lower castes therefore, could signify not only the rejection of the Janma-bhedam order but also purity of minds. Mahatma Gandhi in 1925 found the Malabar style of female dress praiseworthy not only because of its simplicity, convenience or 'Indianness' but also because it seemed to signify an inner-purity and willingness to sacrifice. He remarked that the white colour of women's apparel in Malabar reminded him of Seeta, following her husband into exile. Simultaneously, the acceptance of modern conventions of dressing which involved covering the body had become indispensible in the set of operations by which the Individual was to be fashioned. An author pointed out, "...And, especially because we human beings do not fulfil our desires unrestricted like animals, is it not shameful for us to leave exposed those

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19. 'Timvitamkoorine Patti' (About Tiruvitamkoor), M.M, 7 April, 1925. This was the translation of an article by Gandhi about his visit, published in Young India.
parts that incite desire?"\(^{20}\) The 'human being' is defined here by his/her ability to control bodily desire; covering up those parts which excite desire becomes necessary to become human. Covering the body is perceived as a way of ending the display of the body and therefore figured importantly in efforts to transform one-self by developing firmer control over sexual desire. Only when it figured thus did dressing have this importance. By itself, it was even felt that adopting modern dress could be a distraction from Self-building, often an empty imitation of the West (as, for example, the novel *Parangodipariningayam*\(^{21}\) sought to show). Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar, writing in the late nineteenth century, would lampoon the new fashions as signs of lack of Manliness, not compensating for the absence of proper training:

"... These days there are mostly half-female men. Necktie, collar, shirt, overcoat and so on. Though the need for exercise is often tom-tommed, there are few smart young men who can walk for a *Nasika (an indigenous measure of time)* or two."\(^{22}\)

New sorts of dressing therefore were not found effective in themselves in Self-

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building this cautionary word continued to be voiced well into the twentieth century. In E.V. Krishna Pillai's essay *Shirtukal* (Shirts) (1934) the shirt is criticised as the sign of a generation that shuns labour and lives as parasites. \(^{23}\) Covering the body was a necessary, though not sufficient, element in Self-building. In the imagining of ideal Men and Women in early Malayalam novels, the importance of 'decent dress'—significantly, not the blind imitation of European dress is stressed. Thus the heroine of *Indulekha*, characterised as wholly a *"Malayala Stree"*, however, keeps her torso covered with an upper-cloth always. \(^{24}\) She, however, does not wear European fashion. The heroine of *Indulekha*, thus is 'decent' or 'civilised', but not 'Westernised'. Western dress became acceptable only when it was required along with 'correct training' as in modern schools etc. Gandhi's criticism of adoption of Western-style dress by men in Malabar, voiced alongside his praise for women's dress is significant here. \(^{25}\) 'while the former seemed disagreeable as it appeared a blind

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23. From *E.V. Kritikal* Vol. 1 (The Works of E.V), Kottayam: D.C Books, 1978, p.187. He writes: "If it were the olden days, all men aged between twelve and ninety-six years would have reached the fields or gardens before dawn, clad in their single-mundus and armed with the staff, pickaxe and spade" (p.186). "The shirt has some disabilities. He is totally averse to the pickaxe and the spade. The fields, the crops and garden-lands are all in dire enemity with him. He can't stand the smell of paddy, tapioca, yams, tubers, millets all these are alien to him." (p.187).

24. O.Chandu Menon, *Indulekha* (1889), Kottayam: D.C Books, 1991, p.25. It was noted in the late nineteenth century itself that among the issues that appeared most frequently in the newly-arisen Novel, *Sthanachhadanam* (Covering the Breasts) was a prominent one. See Kesari Nayanar's criticism of the 'epidemic' of novel-writing which he warns of in the essay 'Novel' From *Kesari Nayanaruide Kritikal*, op.cit, n.22, pp.70-75.

25. op.cit., n.19.
imitation, one-to-one correspondence with Western fashion was condemned, but not dressing as part of a regimen of Self-building.

Though covering the body was stressed as equally important for both men and women, it seemed to have special importance for women. The nakedness of young Nambutiris invited reproach from those who advised them to modernise, like the Malayala Manorama; in Meenakshi, it was criticised as a sign of sexual over-indulgence, in 1928, even a scholar as eminent and venerated as Punnashery Nambi Neelakanta Sharma could be criticised for 'indecent display' on account of his conventional attire, as it happened at the Kottakal Sahitya Parishat convention. But the efforts to end female nakedness were far more determined and persistent. This will be examined in greater detail in the next section.


28. It was the Thiruvananthapuram-based lawyer, Malloor Govinda Pillai, who made this criticism, which however, irritated many of the Nambi's followers. Mentioned by E.V. Krishna Pillai in Jeevitasmaranakal Vol II (Memories), Thiruvananthapuram: Shree Rama Vilasom Press, 1948, p.621.
MEANING OF BARE-BREASTEDNESS

Sexual submissiveness of shudra women to the upper-castes, particularly the Nambutiris and Kshatriya groups, has often been projected as an important element of upper-caste dominance in Keralam, and the nakedness of the female torso has been taken to be connected to it. Historians of Keralam in the twentieth century have often drawn upon this interpretation. Thus, the pre-Brahmin past has been characterised as one in which "Women commonly used a Mulakkacha (garment covering the breast) and a light upper-

29. Such interpretation has been in prevalence since the late 19th century in Keralam, evident in the writings informed by modern ideas. R.Jeffrey quotes a letter that appeared in the newspaper Paschima Taraka (Western Star) which clearly demonstrates the presence of such interpretation, how it formed a significant element among the grievances voiced against traditional authority. It said, "The maid is indignant that women should be compelled to play the harlot, and go about with bosoms bare to catch a lover as a fish is caught with bait." The Nair woman, the 'Maid' of the letter, is made to emerge as victim, sexually exploited, and baring the bosom is part of this undesirable state. This was to become a key element in the criticism of upper-caste authority by the various kinds of reformism in 20th century Keralam. History-writing of various caste-groups has been an important terrain upon which such battles have been fought. To mention one such account, see K.Damodaran, Ezhavarude Itihasam (Saga of the Ezhavas), Kollam: Sri Rama Vilasam Press, 1929 in which there are hints that the upper-caste opposition to the adoption of the breast-cloth by the Channattis of Tiruvitamkoor in the 19th century was a result of their anger at the denial of the sight of the beautiful bodies of these women to upper-castes (p.16). Also see, Kanippayur Sankaran Nambutiripad's rebuttal of the 'sexual exploitation' thesis commonly advanced by Nair reformers against Nambutiris in his work Acharavimarshanam (Critique of Customs), Kunnamkulam: Panchangom Press, 1968. The chief targets of this polemic are the reformer Puthezhathu Raman Manon and the historian Elamkulam Kunhan Pillai.

cloth irrespective of caste, a convention that Brahmin dominance seems to have ended. Robin Jeffreys writes: "The Nayar girl was taught to bare her breasts as a mark of respect before such incarnate deities (ie, Brahmins), her greatest pleasure should be giving pleasure to them". P.K.Balakrishnan claims that even if female bare-breastedness predated the advent of the Brahmins, it was perpetuated as an element of the dominance of Brahmins over the lower-castes.

What is interesting here is the extraordinary attention given to female bare-breastedness, linking it to the Nair woman's obligation to provide sexual pleasure to the upper-caste man, while both men and women of the groups lower in the Janma-bhedam order were equally expected to display their submission by removing their upper-cloth. The anthropologist Fred Fawcett who argued against prudery regarding female bare-breastedness ("In Malabar, where there is prevalent the idea that no respectable woman

31. Elamkulam P.N.Kunhan Pillai, ibid., p.190.
33. Balakrishnan writes: "The sight of 'high-breasted females', must have been a great challenge to the Dharmasatras" (op.cit., n.30, p.363).
34. There is evidence to show that this was a long-established practice here. Jacobus Canter Visscher, the Dutch Chaplain of Kochi between 1717 and 1723 A.D, noted it in his letters about life in Kochi. He says: "The petty Rajahs, subordinate to the Rajah of Cochin (those of Mangatto, Porcad) must thus show their respect to him, and they should remove their upper garment in his presence and remain bare-shouldered till he gives them permission to resume it.... The women make the same obeisance as the men, letting fall their veils or coverings and folding their arms in front". From Letter XIII, reprinted in K.P.Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala, Kochi: Govt of Kochi, 1929, p.30.
covers her breast, there has crept in lately, chiefly amongst those who have travelled, a feeling of shame in respect of this custom of dress. Dress, is, of course, a conventional affair, and it will be a matter of regret should false ideas of shame supplant those of natural dignity such as one sees expressed in the carriage and bearing of the well-bred Nayar lady."


much discussion in Kochi in the early twentieth century in which a young woman had her ravukka (blouse) stripped off for not removing it in the presence of a princess of the royal house of Kochi. Such obeisance was to be paid to Gods—the general practice was to appear bare-breasted before deities in temples. Musicians playing Deva-Vadyams (musical instruments of the 'godly' variety such as the Edakkai as differentiated from the Asura-Vadyams such as Chenda) did not wear the upper-cloth, unlike those who played the Asura type. Not permitting women to cover their breasts does not seem to have been linked to forced display; in fact, as Fawcett observed, the reading of uncovered breasts as signifying immodesty seems to be of recent origin.

Autobiographies and travellers' accounts testify to the ordinariness of the sight of the exposed female torso, its commonness as everyday sight. John Henry Grose wrote:

"...the women of these countries are not allowed to cover any part of their breasts, to the naked display of which they annex no idea of immodesty which in fact ceases by the familiarity of it to the eye. Most Europeans at their first arrival experience the force of temptation... but it is not long before these impressions wear off, and they view it with as little emotion as the natives themselves, or as of the obvious parts of the body the face or hands". 38

There are a great many autobiographies in which female bare-breastedness appears as a common sight. K.P.S. Menon remembers thus: "... Nairs did not think it shameful to speak

37. ibid., p.204.

of breasts. Because they did not cover them.... Even when family members were together, speaking freely of certain parts of the body was not prohibited. Breast-feeding too is remembered as something done in public, and by children well past their infancy.

In fact, as observers like William Logan noted (and as Fawcett hinted, in the above quote), there seems to have been in force a reversal of the Western notion of modesty. Elic Reclus' account of the reaction of Tiyathis (women of the Tiyya caste) to European 'civilising' is telling:

"... the women, however modest and discreet, will wear no garment above the waist: they are not prostitutes, they say, that they should cover the bosom. English ladies who engage them as nurses have tried over and over again, in the name of English decorum, to make them wear a neckerchief but have encountered the determined resistance which they would have offered had they been asked to promenade the highways unclothed."42

K.P.S.Menon recalls that in his childhood wearing the blouse was associated with Veshamkettal—immodest dressing-up—and not with modesty.43


The association of the *covered* breast with immodesty seems to have been more general than might be expected, from today's perspective. Abbe Dubois noted it for the *devadasis* in his travels in India, in the early nineteenth century:

"Of all the women in India it is the courtesans.....who are most decently clothed. Indeed they are particularly careful not to expose any part of their body.....Experience has no doubt taught them that for a woman to display her charms damps sensual ardour instead of exciting it, and the imagination is more captivated than the eye." 

Interestingly, this has crept into a late nineteenth century text like *Meenakshi*, which explicitly attacks female bare-breastedness as immodest display. In this work, there is a seduction-scene in which, however, the seductress does not appear before her victim with breasts exposed. Rather she took up a "specially laundered *Bukka* muslin *mundu* and threw it over her shoulders in the *Makkana* fashion." Not surprisingly, this figures as an 'eroticising technique' in some of the 'seduction manuals'— *Ambopadesham*— in which the aspiring courtesan is instructed in the arts of seduction by her senior—such as in Venmani Mahan Nambutiripad's *Ambopadesham* in which the aspirant is advised to keep her well-formed breasts covered with an attractive upper-cloth (*Mel-mundu*) so that her body

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45. Cheruvalathu Chathu Nair, op.cit., n.27.

46. ibid., p.90.
becomes desirable to the eye of clients.47

One may object that the covered female bosom did not always signify the sexually-available female in the traditional order. True; it could also signify a particular position in the Janma-bhedam order. Wearing the Kuppayam was required of Muslims and Christians. Cloaking the body using the Puthappu (Cloak) and Olakkuda (Cadjan leaf-umbrella) were obligatory for Antharjanams when they ventured out of their llams.48 Covering the body, therefore, seemed to have been a technique adapted to diverse purposes—used in a certain way, it could signify one's identity; used in another way it could enhance the erotic appeal of the body. But the point is that the exposed female torso does not seem to have had the connotation of immodesty in any general sense.49


48. For a description of the dress of Antharjanams, see, K.P.P. Menon, op.cit, n.3, p.49. In his Proclamation of July 26, 1859, the Maharaja of Tiruvattamkoor agreed to let all Nadars wear the jacket like Christian Nadars. The 'Nair style' of wearing the upper-cloth was prohibited; instead, the style of Mukkavathikal (fisherwomen) was permitted. (S.Mateer, The Land of Charity, NewYork, 1871, p.305). Moorkoth Kunhappa mentions that Tiyya women of north Keralam had a special way of wearing the upper-cloth called Madiputhakkal. Mentioned in Moorkoth Kunhappa, Moorkoth Kumaran: Jeevacharitram (Moorkothu Kumaran: Biography), Kottayam: SPSS, 1975 pp.258-59.

49. The bodies of women do figure as sites of contestation between various social groups in the tales that circulate about such contestation. Often, in these, clothing the female body becomes an act of challenge to higher authority or between groups, in mainly male-driven contest. To mention two such tales: one is woven around a heroic figure, an Ezhava rebel named Velayudha Panikkar who lived in the mid-19th century in Arattupuzha in central Tiruvattamkoor. He is said to have intervened in conflicts around dress-codes at Kayamkulam and Pandalam (in which an Ezhava woman who had worn a nose-stud had been attacked for having broken the established dress-code) by beating up those who were behind (...continued)
The sight of women moving about freely without shame regarding their exposed bodies was noted by a great many visitors to South India who have left behind accounts since Marco Polo. In Marco Polo's writing, an association between nakedness and sin was made: "Man and woman, they are all black, and go naked all save a fine cloth about the middle. They look not on any sin of the flesh as a sin." By the nineteenth century, this association appears in much stronger terms in the accounts of missionaries. In Christianity, nakedness could signify innocence only before the fall; the sense of shame came after it. A conversation between a missionary and a colonial official in Malabar in 1871, reported by the missionary, shows the strength of these associations in the missionaries' reading of local society. The missionary was W.T Sattianathan, on a trip from Madras to Malabar. He writes thus:

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the outrage and distributing Torthus (upper-cloths) and nose-studs to a thousand Ezhava women. (Mentioned in Prof. M. Satyaprakasham, Sarasakavi Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panikkar. Thiruvananthapuram: Dept of Cultural Publications, Govt.of Kerala, 1998, pp.29-30). There is another tale around 'Kalyashery Achchan', an Ezhava notable of Kayamkulam who lived around the same period—around 1850—who made Ezhava women wear the Torthu and the ear-stud by force, in contestation with the Muslim tradesmen of the Kayamkulam and Kartikappally markets. (Mentioned in A.P. Udayabhanu, Ene Kathaillaimekal (Autobiography). Thrissur: D.C Books, 1991, pp.173-79). In the former instance, the issue hardly seems to have been that of feminine modesty, in the latter, the tension is said to have begun when Muslim men harassed Ezhava women in the Kayamkulam market. However, in the second case, the women themselves are mentioned to have resisted the attempts to clothe them. (ibid.).

50. Marco Polo about Quilon(Kollam). From Prof K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (ed.), Foreign Notices of South India from Megasthenes to Ma Hian, Historical Series No.14, Madras: University of Madras, 1930, pp. 181-82.
"On entering Palaghaut, I noticed a change in costume, language and manners of the people. The women were also sparsely dressed with just a piece of cloth around the waist and another small piece thrown loosely over the shoulder. We may hope that as education spreads, and the Gospels elevate these people in the scale of society, civilisation, the handmaid of education and Christianity, will spread also, and they will emerge from the social and moral degradation in which they are sunk. I may briefly allude to a conversation I had with the station-master at Palaghaut, who endeavoured to defend the customs and habits of these people. He said that they were simple and more in accordance with nature, with a state of primeval innocence, and not ill-adapted to the climate. He forgot that savages realised in a state of nature his idea of clothing compatible with 'innocence'.

True to his faith, the missionary points out that nakedness can signify only sin, and not innocence, unless in a state of nature. In any case, the naked body can signify only sin or its lack, the denial of 'civilization' or lack of it. Female bare-breastedness seemed an unmistakeable sign of sexual excess and unscrupulous display for material gain. Missionary writings often made this claim:

"Hear, readers. The Shudra women of Malayalam on attaining sexual maturity receive cloth from many and become the wives of many, bearing many children. Even the mother cannot know the paternity of her many children. Due to such evil practice, there is absolutely no faithfulness between husband and wife or love for one's father or children except out of the desire for material gain. Women, in order to make a living, give up their honour, and like offering bait to fish, cast off their upper-cloth and display their breasts in order to grab wealth."

Missionaries were not the only champions of such sensibility. All the representatives

51. W.T. Satthianadhan, 'Notes of a Tour Through Travancore and Tinnevelly', Madras Church Missionary Record Vol. XXXVIII, No.6, June 1871, pp. 177-78.

of 'civilization'—colonial officials, the modernising Tiruvitamkoor State and the institutions that it created, upheld it. Increasingly it was gaining ground among the newly-educated classes in Keralam. Indeed, signs of change were getting clear. In the *Report of the Census of Travancore of 1891*, V. Nagam Aiya noted that Shudra women,

"...do not, as a rule, cover their bosoms while at home, nor do they do so outdoors in North Travancore. Civilization is steadily advancing from the South, the effects of which are clearly discernible in Trivandrum, there being not one Nair girl who will walk out without an upper cloth".53

By the early twentieth century, the practice of young Nair women carrying lamps bare-breasted in the annual *Arat* procession from the Shree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was being opposed in the newspapers as barbarous,54 and by 1905, the *Arat* procession saw women with covered bosoms.55 This fixing of the significance of the female bare-breastedness as indicative of either sexual excess or sexual exploitation was made easier through acceptance of texts like *Kerala Mahatmyam* as providing authoritative accounts regarding the origins of female dress-conventions in Keralam. Since in this text the Shudras...


55. R. Jeffrey mentions this, quoting from *The Hindu*. op.cit., n.1, Note 33, Chapter 6.
of Keralam are said to have originated from *Apsaras*—heavenly courtesans—the dress-convention prescribed seemed to fit in well with the 'vice' associated with 'public women'.\(^{56}\)

That is, this text appeared to confirm the white Man's claim that female bare-breastedness among Shudras was the mark of their over-indulgence in sexual activity, and sexual slavery to Brahmans. And since it was Brahmans who were seen to be deriving pleasure from the sight of female nakedness, this text formed an important source of ammunition for the newly-educated groups in their struggle against the dominant Brahimin groups, growing more intense by late 19th century, as evidence against the Nambutiris. One advantage of this was that it seemed to absolve the Shudra groups from the responsibility of their women's bare-breastedness.

This was probably why this practice was roundly condemned by all the reformisms of twentieth century Keralam which upheld aspirations of community-building.\(^{57}\)

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56. The *Malabar Marriage Commission Report* of 1894 found that the aristocracy which defended *Sambandham* relied upon the authority of the *Kerala Mahatmyam* according to which 'descendants' of 'celestial damsels' brought by Parashuraman (who is said to have established the Brahmins in Keralam) were commanded to "........ satisfy the desires of Brahmans, enjoining on them to put off chastity, and the cloth which covered their breast, and declaring that promiscuous intercourse with three or four men in common was void of the least taint of sin". (*Malabar Marriage Commission Report*, 1894. Quoted in F.Fawcett, op.cit., n.35, p.227). However, quoting this opinion, Fawcett expressed doubt about treating it as a dependable account (pp.228-29).

57. Here one may mention a rather curious incident from the history of Ezhava reformism. It was related by the wife of the prominent Ezhava reformer, K.S.Shanku, Kunhiamma. The incident, might have never happened at all, but the way in which it is related probably illustrates how the association between the exposed female body and sexual excess had become rather firmly rooted in reformist circles. Kunhiamma says: "Once he (her husband, K.S.Shanku) conducted a *Jatha* (procession) of women wearing the blouse. The decision was to get about twenty women from Kottayam to wear the (..continued)
was probably a move to encourage covering of breasts by poorer Nair Women, the Nair conference held at Aiyitur in 1916 took the decision to permit women to wear the shorter 'jumper' instead of the longer kuppayam. In any case, by the end of the '20s and '30s, even women of royal families—the defenders of the local custom—of Kochi and Kozhikode were striving to wear the blouse. This is not to say that by that time bare-breastedness had ended—an anthropologist studying the Nair Taravad in the early '50s noted that even at that time, women-members were not provided blouses by the Taravad but by their husbands if they wished their wives to be so attired. In fact, a few decades back it was not strange to

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ravukka and take them up to Changanashery. It was I who walked in front wearing a ravukka. A lot of people had gathered on the way to see this. But after some time many of the women removed their ravukkas and put them on their laps. I have heard that a person called Kidangoor Mundan approached these women who were reluctant to wear the ravukka in a completely naked fashion'. Quoted in M.K.Sanoo, Shree Narayana Guru Swami: Jevecharitram (Biography of Shree Narayana Guru), Kottayam: SPSS, 1986. The use of violence to clothe women who refused to be reformed is sometimes mentioned in histories of reform and reformers. For instance, see, Ettumanur Gopalan, Dewer Enna Kormadheeran (Biography of P.K.Dewer), Kochi: Dewer Smaraka Samiti, 1993, pp.42-44, which gives an account of the use of force in making Araya women cover their bosoms.

58. N.Balakrishnan Nair, K.Chinnamma: Jevecharitram (Biography), Thiruvananthapuram: Srvilas Press, 1947, p.105. There were attempts to devise costumes that would not offend existing conventions of dress while achieving the end of feminine modesty, such as the Karuppan Kachcha, devised by Pandit K.P.Karuppan for Araya women. See, ibid., p.42.

59. 'Kochi Rajakudumbavum Atinte Bhaviyum' (The Royal family of Kochi and its Future), M.M, June 28, 1927. The article mentions that young women of the royal family had begun to attend public meeting and celebrations wearing the ravukka and mel-mundu. Also, 'Samutiri Rajavamsathile Streekalude Parishkarabhilasham'(Desire for Reform Among the Women of the Samutiri Royal House), M.M, April 28, 1930. In this report, the resistance put up by some women of the Samutiri royal house to participating bare-breastedly in a ritual procession is reported.

see old women going bare-breasted in rural areas in Keralam. But by the '30s, the condemnation of bare-breastedness as moral degradations, had crystallised into a force to be reckoned with.

**AESTHETICISING THE BODY**

Rejection of older conventions and adoption of modern dressing was often an act of defiance by women in these times. In literature, it sometimes symbolically expressed the resistant female subject's struggle against the older order as in the reformist play Ritumati. In Ritumati the Nambutiri-girl's struggle against forced reintegration into the Illam is expressed in her determination to wear a blouse. In this play, the resisting heroine Devaki

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61. In wearing modern dress it seems that women were often forced to resort to strategy. Kunhiamma Shanku (op.cit., n.57) makes this clear: "I myself wore the ravukka for the first time only at the age of twenty. That too, under the compulsion of my husband. I would cover the ravukka by covering myself with a cloth in the presence of my maternal uncle and others..." (Quoted in M.K.Sanoo, op.cit, n.57). A.P. Udayabhanu mentions two such instances, one involving the Ezhava reformer C.V. Kunhiraman's sister and another involving Lady Mandath Krishnan Nair, wife of a Dewan of Tiruvitamkoor, both in which the women complied with their husbands' wishes by wearing the ravukka in their presence, but discarding them when in their own homes. Mentioned in A.P. Udayabhanu, op.cit., n.49, p.178. In 1915, an article by Puthezhathu Raman Menon which condemned the adoption of modern dress by women as empty imitation received sharp retorts from women-authors who saw it as part of the efforts to attain 'civilisation'. See, C.P.Kalyani Amma, 'Anukaranabhramam' (The Craze for Imitation), LakshmiBhogyi Vol 10(12), pp. 457-462; Mrs.K.Kannan Menon, 'Anukaranabhramam', LakshmiBhogyi Vol 11(1), pp.22-27.

relies entirely on her cultivated mind, her only source of strength. Indeed, the mind was of central importance in the projection of ideal Woman. In the ideal monogamous union, the partners were to be attached to each other through mental compatibility. Such statements as the one quoted below are only too frequently encountered in writings about Womanhood in this period:

"It is true by experience that a special interest always develops towards the beautiful woman at first sight. But if love and respect towards her born at first sight must be sustained certain other qualities are essential. Of these the most important one is the lack of vanity." 63

While any sign of being manly in women was frowned upon, courage displayed by women in the face of any danger to their families, or in resistance put up against any suppression of Womanliness was heartily applauded. 64 Thus Devaki's insistence on wearing the blouse in *Ritumati* is approved as a defence of Womanliness, Womanly modesty. Covering the bosom by women was a defiance of tradition in favour of union with men imbued with new values and this often involved a struggle with traditional authority. To illustrate this, we draw upon an incident related in the autobiography of the reformer C. Kesavan. The female figure in this account is the wife of C.V. Kunhiraman, a prominent


figure in the Shree Narayana Movement, and it dates around the late nineteenth century, period in which wearing the blouse began to gain popularity in Tiruvitamkoor. The fashion reached Mayyanad (Kesavan's native place, near Kollam) from Thiruvananthapuram through a sister-in-law who was married there. Being presented with two *ravukkas* Mrs. C.V. Kunhiraman says that she ventured to try them on. Kesavan quotes her:

"...I too found them attractive, and tried them on, at once. Yes, pretty good. But ticklish; I took them off folding them and carefully, showed them to *Amma* very enthusiastically. *Amma* (mother) sized me up: "Where are you going, to gallivant? Fold and put them into the clothes-box..." I was very scared of *Amma*, she would kill me. At night I showed them to Vasanthy's father (C.V.). Good, you can wear them, he agreed. It would be alright now, I thought, since *Vadhyar* (teacher, meaning C.V.) had agreed...... *Vadhyar* left in the morning and I, in my simple mind, came out, wearing the *ravukka*...... engrossed in some day-dream I didn't see *Amma* come. But I heard the sound of a twig of firewood being broken and turned around quickly. There was *Amma*, all fire and fury. "Remove it at once, you hussy, dancing girl (*Attakkari*)! So you'll wear the *Kuppayam* like a Muslim!" I removed the *ravukka* that day out of fear of being beaten by *Amma*. But I too was stubborn... if *Amma* didn't want it, *Vadhyar* did. I wouldn't wear the *ravukka* during day-time. The night was mine. When I saw that *Amma* was asleep, I would take out my *ravukka* and wear it, duping *Amma*. *Vadhyar* would come only late at night, like a Gandharvan."

Wearing the *ravukka* here is already an act of rebellion against the established authority (*Amma*) which would see wearing the *ravukka* as a sign of being a 'dancing-girl' (*Attakkari*) or detect in it a change in the wearer's position in the Janma-bhedam order (being a muslim). The wearer of the blouse, however, wears it in defiance, seeing in it a way to make herself attractive to her husband. He needs it, even if *Amma* does not. The

'husband' emerges out of a combination of the images of "Vasanthy's father", "Vadhyar" (teacher) and "Gandharvan" (celestial lover, seeker of beauty, favouring young and beautiful virgins). It is for such a man--modern in tastes and inclination--that the woman in the account dupes traditional authority and wears the ravanika.

It may be argued that this account merely confirms the fear voiced by many reformers that unless modern dressing was not strictly regulated by placing it within, as an element of, a regime of 'correct training', it would turn into a technique of displaying the body as an aesthetically-pleasing object, instead of being an instrument of building sexual self-control. But aestheticising the female body did sometimes appear as a sort of necessity--indeed, we do sometimes find it being advocated by those reformers who insisted upon 'correct training' for women. The propaganda in favour of modern dress for Antharjanams, actively carried out by Nambutiri reformers is particularly striking in this respect. Acceptance of modern dressing by Antharjanams was considered to be of prime importance for the promotion of monogamous unions between educated Nambutiris and Antharjanams--reckoned to be of considerable importance in the project of fashioning the modern Nambutiri community. It was pointed out that the traditional garb of Antharjanams would be repulsive to modern-educated young Nambutiris, and the remedy prescribed was to make Antharjanams adopt modern dress so as to make them appealing to modern men. Addressing Antharjanams in one of his most well-known speeches, V.T.Bhattatiripad stressed its importance in attracting not only modern men, but even those of the older order.
Aestheticising the female body—adorning it with culture—is identified as of equal importance with culturing the mind. So, along with advising Antharjanams to cultivate their minds, V.T. also tells them to pay attention to their dressing:

"Many of us are turning head over heels about this (i.e. about intra-caste marriage) not because of our fascination for your sense of beauty, but merely out of a concern for morality. I do not hide the fact that many of us who are married are fed up of your ugly, disgusting dress and ornamentation, and are able to do no more than curse ourselves."67

In this account, elements of dress traditionally signifying the Antharjanam get marked out as primitive, disgusting, unhygienic while the new dressing gets presented as its opposite—attractive, sign of culture, cleanliness and good health. A healthy body, apparently, is not enough to hold a man; it must be aestheticised, 'clothed in culture':

"What is the difference between you and the Pisharasyar? She is dark-complexioned; her tresses are mostly fallen. in contrast your body is rosy and bright. But Karkatakan does not favour you. Why? Look at your ears and the Pisharasyar's. A first-rate ear-stud (on her's). (On) Yours, an ugly and clumsy Chittul! is not your back all dirty with oil and grime from sweat that keeps dropping from the Charadu on your neck? ... Alas, if this dress is disgusting even to Karkatakam, then how can it be appealing to folks like Madhavan? ... It may be true


67. Ibid., p.332. This suggestion was strongly opposed elsewhere by the Antharjanam-turned-Reformer, Parvati Nenminimangalam. She wrote that this was but a ruse to ensnare men: "A woman must seduce only her husband but not through artificial dressing. A man attracted by such dressing will definitely turn away from us if dress and ornaments get soiled; to make such a man one's husband is surely a mistake. One should try to seduce only with unblemished love—Premam....". Parvati Nenminimangalam, 'Streetam' (Womanliness), Stree Vol 1(1), 1933, pp.15-16.
that grandmothers may murmur if they don’t see that plantain-like Paapa or that Okku which resembles the Embrantiri’s betel-box, or the Koluthu, so very like the crane’s neck. But don’t grant it too much importance... Antharjanams who have any affection for their husbands must definitely give up those faded bronze bangles, acknowledging at least the fact that they give us immense discomfort in cold weather. I have a word to say about hair. Hair on the head, like the plumes of the peacock, generally appears beautiful. But upon an Antharjanam’s head its condition is pitiable. Nangema bathes at four Nazhika’s before day break. This Nangema who moves around the kitchen and the Vadakkini until late afternoon gets no time to untangle her hair tied up in its wet condition. What more? (When you)... approach the bedroom with your hair hanging in the condition of the haystack during the rainy season, our nostrils generally get blocked by themselves.

In this passage hygiene is advocated not merely for the sake of good health but more prominently of making the female body attractive. V.T.Bhattatiripad was by no means a lone figure in his emphasis of this need— it echoed through out the instances of the advocacy of dress-reform for Antharjanams in Nambutiri reformism. The ‘union of minds’

68. ibid., pp. 333-35. Karkatakam and Madhavan are characters who appear in V.T’S play Adukkalayi’ Nimmi Arangathekku (From Kitchen to Frontstage). Charadu, Chittu, Paapa, Okku, Koluthu refer to traditional ornaments worn by Antharjanams. Pisrrasyer is a caste-name meaning ‘woman of Pisrravody caste’ with whom Nambutiris often established Sambandham ties. Nangema was a personal name common among Antharjanams; Nazhika is a local measure of time; Vadakkin refers to a part of the Ilam.

curiously, seemed to require an aesthetic presentation of the female body; aestheticising the female body seemed yet another important means of cementing the modern monogamous marital union. Here, wearing modern dress was not only a technique of attaining sexual self-control; it was a way in which aesthetic pleasure from the female body could be accentuated.

In fact, inbuilt into the very construction of Woman is a role as provider of pleasure, as the 'Vessel of Culture'. It is in this sense that Woman differs from *Kulina* of classical texts. In texts like the *Natyasastam*., different types of women--*Kulina*, *Vesya* and *Bhrtiya*--are constructed as entirely different from each other with different lifestyles, functions, sexual preferences, gestures, movements,70 even group ethics.71 In this tradition of representation, the *vesya* was the *vessel of culture*, the provider of pleasure--aesthetic, intellectual and bodily pleasure--to men, of certain social standing, at a price.72 The list of


71. This is well-illustrated in the story of the *Yakshi* 'Panchavankattu Neeli'sung in the *Villathichanpattu* folk-tradition in South Tiruvitamkoor. This is the story of a *Vesya* murdered by a Brahmin priest in revenge of having lost all his wealth to her. She dies swearing that she had only adhered to the ethics of her group, and committed no sin. She is then transformed into a *Yakshi*. For a fuller account of this *Villathichanpattu*, see, Ulloor S.Parameswara Iyer, 'Panchavankattu Neeli', *Ulloorinte Prabanthangal* (Essays by Ulloor), Thiruvananthapuram : Ulloor Memorial Publications, 1980, pp. 309-28.

72. K.T.Rama Varma claims that around forty years back there was little stigma attached to the term *Vesya*, and that it was common for little girls to dress up and ask their mothers, "Have I not become a *Vesya* now" (op. cit., n.70, p.10). Whatever be the truth of this claim, female personal names like *Vesukutty*, *Vesamani* etc were certainly known in Keralam in the early part of this century. To call (..continued)
the skills of the ideal vesya, according to Arthasastra, included singing, playing musical instruments, recitation, dancing, acting, belles-letters, painting, making fragrances, the art of knowing the minds of others, dress and decoration, massaging and seduction. The Kulina, in contrast, was to bear heirs, perpetuate traditional norms and values, and the above skills were forbidden to her. The provision of pleasure, bodily and otherwise, was to be the Vesya's special task, while producing legitimate progeny was that of the Kulina's. This division seems to have held good to a certain extent—for example, in the completely different codes of conduct prescribed for Brahmin women and Devadasis observed by Abbe Dubois. He remarks:

"The courtesans are the only women in India who enjoy the privilege of learning to read, to dance, to sing. A well-bred and respectable woman for this reason would blush to acquire any of these accomplishments."

To Western observers, such cultural activity and sexual availability seemed inextricably bound in the Vesya, and the former stood as condemned as the latter. Singing by devadasis, for instance, seemed

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girl children 'Vesukkutty' as a term of endearment was also known (op.cit.,n.70).

73. Quoted in K.T.Rama Varma, op.cit., n.70, p.55.

"...often vulgar and lewd, and sung not only before assemblies of men, but even the deities with a view of exciting the lasciviousness of the men".75

One may also remember that discussions of female education in late nineteenth century often mentioned the criticism that education would make women immoral emanating from non-modern sources, countered by advocates of modern education. By early twentieth century, change was in sight. In a footnote to the above observation of Abbe Dubois', the editor added:

"In these days female education is slowly extending to all classes, and the prejudice which formerly existed no longer applies to women learning to read and write, though dancing is still restricted to the professional dancing girls and not considered respectable".76

Womanly education included learning literature, painting, music, etiquette etc. and the new Woman was to take over the function of being the 'Vessel of Culture' from the Vesya--but in a significantly different way, by bringing accomplishments such as music into the interior of the modern home as sources of pleasure to the family. This, in effect, was to turn them into instruments assuring the longevity and stability of the modern home by increasing pleasure in domestic life. Modern Woman therefore was imagined to be a combination of the Reproducer and the Vessel of Culture, with the latter subordinated to the

76. op.cit., n.74.
former, and the former relying upon the latter for strength. Throughout the period lasting from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century--and even into the present--a steady process in which Woman acquires the accomplishments of the Vesya--no doubt in the 'sanitised' manner mentioned above--has been in progress.

This may be further explicated by referring to two early novels in Malayalam, *Lakshmikesavam* and *Indulekha*. In *Lakshmikesavam*, a contrast is set up between Lakshmi, the ideal Woman, and a courtesan called *Mysore Muthumanickam*, who however resemble each other in remarkable ways. Both are peerless beauties; both possess considerable musical gifts and are capable of evoking male desire. But Lakshmi's beauty and music are solidly installed within the modern home, working to provide pleasure to her husband-to-be, and her family. But the courtesan's accomplishments are for all men of a certain social standing who can pay a price. The hero Kesavanunny visits the courtesan to listen to her famed voice but is mistaken to be an aspiring lover since in the established

77. It has been noticed that RajaRaviVarma's depiction of Malayalee women is not of nubile adolescents or voluptuous mistresses, but of "adult, self-assured women", who are "sensuous but not seductive, forthcoming but not coquettish". It seen that only thus "could they be the noble spouses of breeding worthy of the new domestic realm", which however, was still in a nascent form in the collective aspirations of the new middle-class in Keralam. R.Nandakumar, "The Missing Male: The Female Figures of Ravi Varma and the Concepts of Family, Marriage and Fatherhood in 19th Century Kerala", *South Indian Studies*, 1, January-June 1996, p.73.


79. op.cit., n.24.
understanding, the courtesan's musical skills and sexual appeal are inseparable. But for Kesavanunny, the courtesan's music cannot be an instrument of sexual seduction: "Though Kesavanunni was not too much stupefied by the matchless beauty of her form, her wonderful song impressed him." 80

To Kesavanunny, the courtesan's beauty and her musical skills are strictly separable: her music cannot be an instrument of seduction. Lakshmi's accomplishments have no economic significance--they carry no expectation of material gain--unlike those of the courtesan. Woman is in part Kulina in that she must be sexually chaste and produce good progeny; at the same time, she also brings pleasure into the monogamous marital union. But Woman is unequivocally distanced from the Vesya in that her accomplishments are not for a price. In Indulekha the heroine refuses to entertain the unwelcome suitor with her music precisely because she wants to turn down his suit. She performs only for her close relatives and acquaintances and not for material gain, and tells her mother that she would play for him only if he behaved "with dignity." 81

Dance, significantly, took much longer time to get thus 'sanitised'. In Meenakshi, a distinction was made between 'true' and 'false' sorts of dance, pitting Mohiniyattom as

80. Lakshmikesavam, op. cit., n.77, p.188.

81. Indulekha, op. cit., n.24, p.156.
false' against Kathakali as 'true'. Mohiniyattom was thus stigmatised because it seemed to highlight the body and exude erotic appeal, while Kathakali was seen to be a form of dance that did not foreground the body but appealed to the intellect. Mohiniyattom had to remain in this condemned state until reworked in Mahakavi Vallathol's institution, the Kerala Kalamandalam. Items like Esal, Mukkuthi and Chandana Nritham which not only seemed related to folk-forms like Kuraththikkali and Kakkarisinatukam but were also perceived to be lewd and ribald, were purged from the repertoire. The overtly sexual allusions have been interpreted as the expression of the Spiritual in erotic terms. The stigma against dance, however, lasted for quite some time; only in the recent years has it shown signs of disappearing. However, by mid-'50s, the possibility of imagining dance as a source of aesthetic pleasure and not as necessarily as an instrument of sexual seduction, was

82. Meenakshi, op.cit., n.27, pp.106-114.

83. Writing a foreword in 1975 to his play written in 1940, C.Achyutha Menon profusely apologised for his use of the term 'Mohiniyattakarikal' (Mohiniyattom Dancers) to mean 'women of loose morals'. He requests that the "Proponents of that exquisite art should not be angered. At the time this was written, Vallathol had only undertaken the initial preparations to revive Mohiniyattom in Kalamandalam". C.Achyutha Menon, Sevenathinte Peril, Thiruvananthapuram: Prabhatam Publications, 1975, p.7. By the 1940's, such 'sanitisation' of dance was proceeding from other quarters as well. Inaugurating the buildings of the Sri Chithrodaya Narthakalaya (Dancing School) at Thiruvananthapuram in 1941, Dewan C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer heartily endorsed it. See, his speech on the occasion, 'The Art of Dance'in P.G.Sahasranama Iyer (ed.), Selected Speeches and Addresses of Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer, Thiruvananthapuram, 1943, pp.20-23. For an intimate account of 'sanitisation' of dance in Vallathol's institution, see the autobiography of the Kathakali artiste Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, Ente Jeevitam Arangilum Anyaraiyilum (My Life Onstage and Behind), Kottayam: D.C.Books, 1986.

beginning to open up.  

In this reckoning one may see how wearing the blouse gets thus 'sanitised'. On the one hand, it gets removed from the association with the *Attakkari* (dancing girl; woman of easy reputation) dominant in the established understanding; it begins to signify 'modesty', 'civilisation', of the wearer. At the same time, it may serve to accentuate the aesthetic appeal of Woman's body, bringing pleasure into the husband-wife relationship. Woman, therefore, may aestheticise her body, but within strict limits:

"It is difficult to accept that the hearts of those women who beautify themselves with showy clothes and expensive jewellery are indeed pure. If this is done for the pleasure of their husbands, then their sin is forgivable."

Woman may be the provider of pleasure in the monogamous marital union, but is strictly different from the *Vesya* in that her accomplishments serve the very different purpose of cementing modern marriage. Women's Magazines in Malayalam have been,

85. In 1952, Mahakavi Vallathol is said to have made a speech defending the *devadasis* attached to the Tirumala Devasom temple at Kochi against a ban, arguing that they were the bearers of certain traditions, and that he would value art more than good morals. Criticising this, the radical reformer Sahodaran K. Ayappan wrote: "One does not understand the need to dedicate some women to the Gods as prostitutes for the encouragement of dancing. It is quite possible for them to learn dancing and earn a living by it without becoming *devadasis". From *Sahodaran*, 9 August, 1952; quoted in M.K. Sanoo, *Sahodaran K. Ayappan*. Kottayam: D.C Books, 1989, p.292.

86. V.R. Raman Menon, op.cit., n.63, pp.293-94.

87. The concern over fashioning appropriate dress codes for the new Woman was evident in Bengal in these times. See, Himani Banerji, 'Attired in Virtue: The Discourse on Shame (*tajja*) and Clothing of (..continued)
since the mid-twentieth century, engaged in negotiating between Woman-as-Reproducer and Woman-as-the-Vessel-of-Culture in their projection of ideal and desirable womanly subjectivity. It is common enough to find Women's Magazines offering advice to women about ways of developing their 'Individuality', 'Personality' etc. and at the same time suggesting ways in which women may deck themselves up in order to be attractive to men--and, in the same breath, warning that their bodies should not gain precedence over their minds in projecting themselves. This tendency was already evident by the '50s with 'Women's columns' publishing articles offering such advice. To quote one such:

"We should not forget our individuality in our obsession with fashion. Fashion without individuality is like curry without salt. No matter how attractive the sari is, no matter how expensive the ornaments are, if they do not suit our individuality they will never blend, like curd and paddy mixed together."88

88. V. Malaty, 'Feshionum Streekalum' (Women and Fashion), Mathrubhumi Weekly Vol 31(30), 1953, p. 26. Articles of this type were by now more frequent. To mention just two by the same author, 'Streekalum Saundaryavum' (Women and Beauty) in Mathrubhumi Weekly Vol 31(33), 1953, p.25, also 'Kesa Susroosha' (Hair-care) in Mathrubhumi Weekly Vol 31(40), 1953, p.33.
MARGINALISING THE BODY

The 'union of minds', so very prized in the writings of late nineteenth and twentieth century authors in Keralam, also seemed to require an aesthetic presentation of Woman's body. Whether this indicated a 'return of the body' to subvert the project of fashioning Woman as 'pure mind', or whether it actually effected a marginalisation of the body by demanding that it be aesthetically-culturally-presented, was debated. In leftist literature, for instance, one may find efforts to imagine the Individual as primarily defined by the Mind. Here, aestheticising the female body appears subversive to the fashioning of the Individual and is treated as something to be combatted. So also, Premam (Love) is rejected as a superficial refinement of Kamam (lust) which secretly sneaks back the body into what should ideally be the 'Union of Minds'. This is pronounced in the novel Devalokam in which the ideal communist-woman-intellectual is projected through the figure of Rajamma, lawyer and activist. Replying to the criticism about his depiction of this figure, (the criticism was that the novelist makes this character appear in working-class garb on her first meeting with her suitor, instead of making her dress up for the occasion), Cherukad (the author) defended his depiction thus:

80. ibid, p.XIV.
"Woman is not simply an attractive toy. She is as much an individual, equal to, as free as, and with the same (faculties of) reason and emotion as Man."

In his *Muthassi* too, Cherukad introduces his heroine Nani with the explicit comment that she is physically unattractive. The better way, it seemed, was to accept *Kamam* as a physical need given by instincts, and then to subject it to strict control by Reason and Science. Reason, rather than Love, was seen to be the appropriate internal force binding Individuals together in modern marriage. Thus in *Devalokam* marriage is totally a contract between rational Individuals. Rajamma's suitor tells her: "...And I have no Premam at all. Not towards Rajamma either. I'm prepared (for marriage) if Rajamma is prepared to agree to an honourable contract."

Indeed, Rajamma's transformation into an ideal comrade involves an overcoming of Love which is portrayed as whimsical and lustful. Marriage thus becomes a real 'Union of Minds'--the physical attachment between husband and wife gets projected as simply the satisfaction of unavoidable bodily needs in an orderly and socially non-disruptive manner.

91. ibid.


93. op.cit, n.88, p.229 Criticism of *Premam* as something that blinded Reason was also made in other sources, for instance, in the writings of K.Saraswati Amma. She wrote: "Because the emotional element predominates in *premam*, the powers of discretion may not work properly. *Premam*, which gives the appearance of a valuable gem to the humble Manjadi seed, is dangerous". From *Purushanmarillaththa Lokam* (A World Without Men), Kottayam: SPSS, 1961, p.30.
Another ideal couple who appear in Devalokam is a working-class pair whose union seems to be a contract that enables labouring and procreating together.94 'Progressive Literature' of the '30s and '40s too was seen to espouse a deep distrust of Premam-- but then it was sometimes argued that the progressive writers were actually attacking 'bourgeois Premam' mistaking it for the real thing.95 The 'real' Premam was then identified to be prevalent among the working-classes only, which "... is for mating and making a living through labour".96

By the '50s, the inefficiency of covering the body, in language and in everyday life,97 as a technique of toning down Kamam was being recognised. The double-edgedness of covering the female bosom was already perceived in criticism of the nascent Malayalam cinema, which would progressively find infinite ways of organising the female body as a source of viewing pleasure in the subtle play of concealment and exposure.98 At the same

94. ibid., p.61-64.
96. ibid., p.7.
97. C.J.Thomas, 'Veshavum Sadacharavum' (Dress and Morality)) in Ivan Ente Priyapotram, Kottayam: SPSS, 1953, pp. 19-25. In this piece, covering the body, irrespective of whether it was intended to aestheticise the body or not, was in itself found to heighten the desirability of the body.
98. P.K.Rajaraja Varma, 'Cinemayile Kuchabhramam' (The Craze over Breasts in Cinema) in Shreemati Kunji, Thiruvananthapuram, 1953, pp.51-59. In this article, the focus of discussion is the criticism (..continued)
time it was also being argued that it was useless to avoid explicit reference to the body in language. Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, speaking at a meeting of Progressive Writers in 1945, remarked:

"Those who are interested in the morality of the future generation should not seek to childishly conceal such terms as the above (i.e. terms like Mula-the breast) in asterisks; rather the effort should be to impart sex education to them from an early age."99

Of course this was no fool-proof solution, judging from its subversion in the large number of tracts and films of the soft-porn variety that claim to give 'sex-education'.

Such a criticism as the above continues to be voiced against the aestheticisation of the female body from varied quarters -- ranging from leftist-radical political circles and

(continued)
that the female body was being excessively projected in the nascent Malayalam cinema.

99. Explicit reference to the female body, particularly to the female breasts, was common in Malayalam. The breasts figured as beautiful objects in the 'Hair-to-toe' descriptions of Nayikas and goddesses in medieval Malayalam literature, in the Kaikottikkali songs goddesses (Kaikottikkali was a dance performed in homes by women), in the Stotrams chanted everyday in homes. The use of the word Mula(breast) to simply indicate 'female' was common, as for example, in the saying 'Two heads may mingle, four breasts, never', or in reference to the sexually-mature female as 'she whose hair and breasts have grown'. But this term was not the only one in use to denote 'female.' Adukakal (Kitchen) was another. The sexual transgression of Anarthjanams was called 'Adukkaladosham'; V.Nagam Aiyar in his Manual gives a list of the dues a tenant was to pay the landlord at the time of renewal of the lease (Kanampattom) in which he mentions a certain due called Adukkalakkanom which, he specifies, was meant for the ladies of the house. (V.Nagam Aiyar, Travancore State Manual. Vol.3 (1906), Madras: AES, 1989, p.318).

feminism, to rightist, conservative positions. At the same time, institutions which project the need to beautify the female body have also proliferated in the present—cinema, television, advertising, Women's Magazines, beauty parlours, beauty contests, fashion etc. But the body, in both, seems equally marginalised: either treated as unimportant in the fashioning of the Mind-defined Individual, or as primitive, a raw-material that needs to be cultured, beautified, bedecked, in order to be acceptable. This, however, is an inadequate account of the organising of the female body as a pleasurable sight and the contestations around it, in recent times in Keralam. This would certainly require much deeper inquiry. For instance, how may one understand the 'sex wave' in Malayalam cinema of the '70s? What implications does this have for the organisation of the female body as beautiful sight? What 'event' does this point to? Such questions, and others, will certainly be of central importance in the writing of the history of gender in Keralam of the post-'50s.
END-NOTE
Underlying the discussion in all the previous chapters has been the elaboration, in the writings examined, of a new political rationality, one which specifically targets the lives and conduct of individuals. This was of course also a period that saw new ideals of totalising legal-political forms. This indicates not a conflict but the emergence of the project and problem of attaining a balance between totalising power and an individualising ‘pastoral’ power through which a government of individuals was to be achieved, as a key question in discussions of society and power in Keralam in the period of concern. The government of individuals involves the deployment of a form of power that aims at getting individuals to act and commit themselves to ends projected in general models of possible action. This presupposes and calls for freedom and capacity for activity, and also reasonableness, on the part of the governed.

Much of the above-mentioned discussion centering upon the Individual (in course of which such a figure got constituted) focused upon the measures by which the ideal was to be realised. It was mentioned before that the problem of self-government by individuals occupied an especially important place here. But equally prominent was the issue of

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bringing them together; indeed, the public sphere itself presupposed the binding together of individuals characterised by capacity for reasonable argument to form a 'general' or 'public' opinion. The public sphere addressed individuals acknowledging their different particular interests, at the same time pegging the rationality of the exercise of totalising power given in legal-political forms to the freedom and reasonableness of individuals themselves. In modern institutions of 'correct training' such as the school, training in the exercise of reason accompanied the organisation of space, time and activities. Newly-educated groups engaged in self-evaluation in a variety of ways: for instance, the farces written by C.V.Raman Pillai in the 1910's focused upon the newly-emergent English-educated middle-class groups of Thiruvananthapuram in this period. All these were performed by the National Club of Thiruvananthapuram and by students of the Maharajah's College, and they draw upon the everyday urban life in Thiruvananthapuram. In general, such activity hints at the drawing together of individuals as reasonable intellects, amenable to persuasion by rational argument and appeals to 'general' interest, 'public' good etc. The language of reform generally addressed not so much a subject guided solely by his/her interests, as a governable subject whose egoistic interests are situated within the network of social bonds of associative

2. See, Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker, C.V. Raman Pillai, Thiruvananthapuram: University of Kerala, 1993, pp. 70-78. Also, the differences between early Malayalam novels, Indulekha and Parangodiparinaiyum have been interpreted as part of such 'self-fashioning' of the middle-classes. See, Meenakshi J. Nair, 'Adhunik Streetvattinte Nirmanam: Indulekhayum Parangodi parinaayum' (The Making of Modern Womanhood: Indulekha and Parangodiparinaiyum) in Kerala Padhanangal(7), forthcoming.
interests given within the collectivity in question (though it must be remembered that a critic like Antharjanam would find even this atomising).

The importance given to the techniques of self-government in the actualisation of such a subject can hardly be underestimated. The specific interpretation that was given to the notion of swatantryam (discussed in the first chapter) was not a mere coincidence. It was the correlate and instrument of a political rationality in which a continuity was identified between self-regulation of individual members and the management of the collectivity in general, and the inculcation of specific techniques of self-government for the attainment of the former end. In the context of the period in question, the exercise of freedom and rationality by individuals was posed against the traditional order as a project of 'liberation'.

The effort made in the present work has been to identify the ways in which the articulation of gender in these writings has accompanied and augmented the projection of Individualising power as necessary and desirable in social management. Gender can be seen as implicated in the process of making individuals governable. Because gender seems at once 'natural' (with its reliance upon 'internal qualities' given at birth) and 'social' (given that it seemed to essentially require training); at once individualised (being dependent upon the endowment of particular bodies) and general (implicating individuals in well-defined social roles), it seemed to link these, enabling mutual adjustment. Perhaps this makes gender a far more effective correlate of Individualising power than, say, self-identities implied by the Jati-differentiation. Gender implies a series of relations that appear 'natural' and also
seem to eminently serve the purpose of social governance, integrating individuals into the collectivity through organising sexual difference. Manhood and Womanhood are, thus, not 'ideal types', categories of historical interpretation, but projected goals to be realised through concrete activity, involving prescriptions according to which individual behaviours were to be directed-- thus serving to institute a mode of governance. Nambutiri reformism, it seems, did not merely involve imagining a new political framework for determining the conditions and forms of possible activity for Individual members. It equally involved devising practical ways and means through which Individuals of diverse inclinations, capacities, existences etc. could be integrated within the newly-evolving collectivity with minimum friction. The organisation of sexual difference through gender was one of the key ways in which this problem was to be dealt with (but the model of separate gender-specific domains was just one suggestion in this regard). The management of sexual difference seems to have involved the development of management-techniques specific to its needs-- it was seen in the last chapter how some of the techniques of managing the female body (which were intended to either aestheticise or marginalise it) in the project of realising the order of gender evolved, coming together in the drive towards dress-reform in twentieth century-Keralam.

The necessity of the exercise of pastoral power in the realisation of the order of gender was emphasised in Nambutiri reformism. The constitution of gender-difference in these writings is bound up intimately with the projection and increased acceptance of this form of power as the ideal way of achieving the goal of social government. It may be
remembered that the domestic domain was conceived as one completely sealed off from the world of political power; it is hardly surprising that this domain was projected as the space in which pastoral power could be granted prominence. Woman, in this scheme of things, would be conceived as the agent of such power. The closer identification of Woman with pastoral power rather than a certain domain accompanied the heightened influence and increasing spread of institutions resting upon such power in the public domain, which seemed to automatically require people with 'natural' ability for such management there. The idea of 'Womanly Society' represented a challenge put forth by pastoral power and a society managed by government against sovereign political power. So also, discipline gets adapted to the needs of government; a mechanical discipline is often argued against, and instead, discipline which takes into account the peculiarities of each individual and is based upon 'love', 'kindness' etc. is put forth. By the '30s, then, pastoral power acquires increasing acceptance through the figure of Woman, who is projected as an agent-- i.e. a form of power that does not appear to be power at all.

Not surprisingly, then, attempts to reimagine the organisation of sexual difference--Antharjanam's critique may be read to be as one such attempt--had to address the question of government. Antharjanam's critique reimagines the Individual and the Collectivity--

3. The family was often projected as the model for society based on government. T.Madaya Row's manual of childcare mentioned in Chapter Three upholds the model of the Patriarchal family as the model for government. However it is the model of a family ruled by 'love' and 'sentiment', overseen by the Mother, that appears in texts which uphold 'Womanly society'. 
Individuals are seen to be bound not by their reasonableness but through capacity for giving in this revision. It also included a critique of pastoral power, again, replacing it with relations of 'Giving' between Man and Woman, with Woman as the dominant partner.

But it must be pointed out that the construction of gender in these writings is neither fully stable or free of inconsistencies. To take an example, one might refer to a text mentioned in Chapter Three, written by 'A Cochin Lady', which appeared in the Malayala Manorama in 1925. In this we find forceful arguments being put forth in favour of treating 'Women' as a separate constituency of voters and giving them greater representation in the legislative council: the author quotes population statistics to show that women form a sizeable section of the population and points out that special constituencies like 'Commerce and Industry' or 'Planters' were given disproportionately higher representation. 'Women' is then compared with communities such as the Anglo-Indian and Jewish, and it is noted that the latter has been accorded unfair advantage. However, in the concrete proposals regarding the granting of greater representation to 'Women', the emphasis on gender-based identity gets qualified in many ways. Here we find figures like the "Tiyya lady" and "Christian lady" emerging: in order to strengthen the presence of "Cochin Ladies", "Tiyya" ladies and "Christian" ladies, it is recommended, must be nominated to the council (besides the Nair lady-member already nominated by the Government of Kochi). Such inconsistencies

4. 'A Cochin Lady', 'Cochin Legislative Council', Malayala Manorama, March 28, 1925.
abound in the literature surveyed here, and probably deserve separate study. At the same time, these were often noted with considerable clarity and addressed as problems inherent in the construction, calling for solution. The tension between 'Man' and 'Nambutiri' was sharply identified in Nambutiri reformism, and quite a large body of writing by reformers has been fuelled by this as a problem to be tackled. Again, as is evident from several of the texts referred to in Chapter Three (for instance, in Anna Chandy's speech), the issue of reconciling a general 'Women' with 'Nambutiri women', 'Nair women', 'Muslim women' etc. was a live one.

In this section, we reiterate some of the questions that have been raised but left halfway through in the previous chapters, highlighting them as lines that need to be explored in fuller detail. These are no doubt tentative questions at best. But if may be it assumed that the phenomenon of en-gendering Individuals did not somehow end by the mid-twentieth century in Keralam, and that this is indeed a complex phenomenon that can hardly be encapsulated in any one work, then these questions need to be framed and pursued in research.

First, to reemphasise some points already made: it has been claimed that the prominence accorded to gender-distinction in the organisation of social life in contemporary
Keralam is hardly the straight-forward continuation of a pre-modern system of values. The notions of gendered identity that underlay the visions of social change and the modern society were certainly different from earlier models available in local society (even when they drew upon the latter, redefining or remodelling them, and seeking legitimacy from them); modern ideals of domesticity and public life were also new (even when it was sometimes accepted that older models needed to be reworked rather than completely abandoned). Indeed, the claim of continuity between the old and the new was itself a source of legitimacy for the new and repeated attempts to find the new in a 'glorious past', as part of a long-lost indigenous legacy, were frequent. But those elements of the older models that did not fit the newer one were to be eliminated; those aspects of the past that did not confirm the new, i.e. an already-present legacy, were to be ignored or condemned. Further, the resilience and strength displayed by the order of gender in Keralam seems to lie in its openness to varied interpretations. Its continuity therefore does not imply rigidity, rather the contrary. We have seen how the vision of complementary sexual exchange between Man and Woman has been reinterpreted to produce different power-equations, to alter the boundaries of social domains, to have very different practical consequences and so on; we have also seen how gender-categories have been subject to interpretations that increased or decreased their inclusivity (here 'Women' have, admittedly, received greater attention than any other category). It was also seen that the construction of Woman involved not the exclusion of the body but a far more subtle move to aestheticise it, to 'cloak it with Culture'. Doubtless this history of change and adaptation has several aspects that may be
followed into the post-fifties, and into the present in Keralam, which is witnessing rapid and significant change in gendered existence.

It was also mentioned that social reform movements did not really abandon identities given in the established order in their thrust against the jati-order completely—caste names like 'Ezhava' or 'Nambutiri' were by no means lightheartedly given up. Also, the objects of social reform were directed towards several identities—national, regional, class-based or religious. But at the same time they were also directed, perhaps more powerfully, towards more general identities, those of gender. Very often, a line of continuity was traced between these—i.e, it was often claimed that a person who was a good 'Ezhava' could be a good 'Hindu', or a good 'Malayalee', a good 'Indian', and so on. But whether this was always the case is not clear. Perhaps this could open a potential line of enquiry which would follow the mutual linkages of these different identities and their historical transformation in Keralam. Also, the specific ways in which gender has informed these various identities and affected their mutual relatedness could be studied in greater detail. For instance, one could study how gender figured in the class-based identities put forth in the leftist politico-cultural circles in Keralam which began to gain prominence since the '40s. How was, say, the 'Working-Class Woman' conceived of? What political implications did this have? How did this specific relation affect the way in which class-based identities related to community-based, regional, national or other identities?.

It was also claimed earlier that increasingly the government of human beings came to
be identified as a 'Womanly' activity and that middle-class women's entry into the public domain was actively mediated by this. Around the same time, women were also being actively organised in trade-unions and other political bodies, such as the women's wings of political parties. How these different sorts of participation in the public domain have historically related to each other, what different sorts of authority (or the lack of it) have they implied, are questions that may be pursued. Another important question would be regarding the presence of women in the public sphere in Keralam. It was observed before that the early presence of streesamajams and print media that addressed women indicates that it was structured early enough on the basis of gender. Women's presence was certainly not negligible, but women who entered the public sphere seemed strongly drawn to what were highlighted as 'Womanly' issues. Of course the range and the depth of what qualified as 'Womanly' did not remain static. One could well pose the question of the relation between the participation of women in public domain and their presence in the public sphere: whether the entry of women into the institutions of human-management as agents and the identification of this activity as requiring 'Womanly' skills conferred upon them the authority to speak about such activity in the public sphere or not. Further, the ways in which women have been mobilised towards different ends-- from labour struggles to the projects of social management ranging from Family Welfare to the latest CDS poverty-alleviation

5. The CDS Programme was begin in 1995 at Alappuzha and it has successfully drawn upon 'neighbour hood groups' in mobilising women. The success of this endeavour has attracted international attention.
programme, can be investigated. This would throw light upon the changes occurring in the
gendered structuring of the public sphere, as well as upon the sorts of agency assigned to
them in the public domain.

(4) Not much has been said here about the internal changes in the organisation and
everyday workings of the agencies of en-gendering, though certain indications regarding
such change were briefly mentioned. One could possibly inquire into the changes in less-
noticed institutions such as the *streetsamajam*; what different types of *streetsamajams*
emerged: what changes may be traced in their links with other institutions, say, those of
reform, or medical and philanthropic institutions, state agencies such as the co-operative or
industrial departments; and most importantly, what changes occurred in their own internal
life. By focusing upon the latter, one could possibly gain considerable insight into the
development of the modes and techniques of en-gendering, and this could help one to
describe the history of contestation and struggle around them. But one could also open up
broader questions through the exploration of the internal transformation of institutions. For
instance in the mass of State-sponsored legislation revolving around the family and
community in Keralam in this period and in the debates around them, the management of
sexuality was still conceived to be within the ambit of caste and kin alliance. But new
notions regarding sexuality, maternal health, fertility, or the concern with distinguishing
'high' and 'low' sexualities was already in evidence in these debates and elsewhere. Perhaps
one could investigate through these the extent to which the 'deployment of sexuality' which
Michel Foucault talks about, was emergent, and what transformations of the control of sexuality via the 'deployment of alliance' might have entailed in en-gendering. This could, in turn, provide insight into the vicissitudes of political power in Malayalee society of these times and into the varying transactions between State and Civil Society.

It needs to be reiterated that this work does not provide an adequate account of the historical actualisation of modern domesticity in Keralam. It has been observed that the ideals of modern domesticity had gained considerable velocity through many agencies; also, women had begun to enter public institutions. How this latter development affected the constitution of modern domesticity here is yet to be examined. Indeed there is the claim that the nuclear-family model was gaining steady acceptance in Keralam by the 1950's. But the questions, how the totality of domestic practices were altered, and extent to which they were altered, have received much less scrutiny. Again, the entry and solidification of modern domestic values into the cultural words of marginalised groups such as the less-educated proletarian groups, the traditional communities of the coastal and forest zones, the communities that were formed in forest and forest-fringe areas when migrant groups settled there as farmers, is not well-studied. Such micro-studies are inevitable if one is not to view en-gendering as a sweeping phenomenon that encompasses all social sections and groups in


the same way, with the same intensity. The cultural effects of State initiatives in population management and its impact upon domestic life among people of different socio-cultural and geographical milieu too need to be charted.

(6)

It was observed in Chapter Three that the ideological justification for women's entry into certain institutions in the public domain was more or less ready by the end of the 1930's in Keralam. However the study of the historical emergence of the specific pattern of employment of educated women would call for much deeper enquiry. Ideological justification was clearly not enough. For instance, it was observed here that in Tiruvitamkoor at least, the claim that the profession of medical nursing called for 'Womanly' capacities was frequently made by the 1930's. But popular prejudice against the acceptance of this profession by women did linger on for very long, well-past this time. Robin Jeffrey's claim that the readiness of young women to enter the nursing profession "resulted from the remarkable place that women occupied in old Kerala", and this "suggests that all was not lost in the transition to patriliny" is not really an adequate explanation. It is not clear how the 'remarkable position' Jeffrey attributes to women of the older order in Keralam is linked to the acceptance of the profession of public nursing by some of them; it is not immediately evident how the older order, which did not take kindly to modern medicine or medical institutions could have lent support. Perhaps here the caste-/class-

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8. ibid., p. 195.
differences that might have operated in the structuring of the specific pattern of female employment in Keralam, might have to be considered. Also, though it is true that women's access into certain institutions of the public domain like politics, higher scientific research, art or literature have been severely circumscribed, there are indeed a number of women who did attempt to carve out niches for themselves there. The struggles and strategies involved in these attempts are worth charting; and such studies may offer insight into the ways in which gender-difference is consolidated in these domains as well.

While the mutual linkages of categories like 'Man', 'Manhood', 'Woman' and 'Womanhood' have been the focus of attention in this work, a fuller history of en-gendering would probably have to pay far more attention to the construction of Manliness and Manhood. The public domain continues to be unambiguously identified as Man's space; nonetheless, it may be important to follow the contestations around Manliness within this limitation, and their consequences and the institutions which have shaped and fostered such notions. We have observed here that ideas of Womanly subjectivity underwent considerable reinterpretation in the early decades of the twentieth century; the question whether a reworking of conceptions of Manhood has occurred in the time-period of concern here, or beyond it, needs to be considered.

It is true that generally one encounters a much greater volume of explicit discussion on Woman and Womanly subjectivity than on Man and Manly subjectivity in the writings that have been examined here. However, this hardly means that the latter is ignored in them.
Most often they rely upon implicit ideas about Man. Sometimes, contestation over Man is implicit in discussions in which gender is not explicitly a major issue. The discussion between Madhavan and Govinda Menon about the social duty of newly-educated natives in *Indulekha*,\(^9\) for example, could also be read as a confrontation of two ideals of Manly duty.

(8) This work has touched upon the importance of the ideology of *Premam* in demarcating a 'higher' sexuality. Modern Malayalam literature, it was noticed, was a powerful medium through which the ideology of *Premam* was disseminated and debated. This could prove a significant entry-point into the exploration of the implication of modern Malayalam literature in the history of en-gendering in Keralam. While the peculiar positioning of the sexes within the theme of *Premam* (which was discussed in Chapter One) continued to be endorsed with greater frequency in Malayalam literature in this period, there were interesting reworkings of it, such as the immensely popular pastoral elegy, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai's *Ramanan* (1936). It may be relevant to note that the publication of this work has been identified as an event of significance in the history of modernism in Indian literature.\(^{10}\) It could be that new trends in Malayalam literature were also entwined in debates regarding gender in the post-fifties period as well; for example, the


rise of the Modernist hero in Malayalam literature could point to a reinterpretation of ideals of Manliness. In the present work Lalitambika Antharjanam's shortstory Realism, which was a part of the debates over new literary trends in Malayalam, was read in the context of her reworking of the ideals of modern gender. May be such a method could be applied in the study of other texts, like Ramanan.\footnote{Indeed, Ramanan sparked off a great deal of thinking on the theme of Premam. Its unprecedented popularity was one reason: in 1945, the critic Joseph Mundashery wrote about this work: "For some time now, Ramanan has been Lesson One in the beach and balcony, the boat-jetty and vehicle-station, temple-kitchens and bungalows, huts, fields, factories and army barracks." (Preface to Ramanan, Kottayam: SPSS, 1987, pp.25-48). This work in fact, provoked several readings and revaluations of premam, among which K.Saraswati Amma's shortstory Ramani, written in the '40s, published in the collection Ponnukkadam (1945) deserves particular attention. For a fuller account of the theme of Premam in the writings of women writers in Malayalam literature, see, N.K. Ravindran, 'Problems of Women's Liberation in Malayalam Literature: A Study Based on the Contributions of Women Writers', Unpublished Ph.d Thesis submitted to University of Kerala, 1992, pp.245-88.}

(9) One important claim put forth by the present work is that reflections upon feminine difference, or upon a specifically 'Womanly' form of social power are much older than any contemporary version of feminist thinking in Keralam. But it does not draw up a fuller account of this view of reflection, even for the period under consideration. When such a history is pursued, surely, several other authors will have to be considered. For example, the writings of K.Saraswati Amma\footnote{K.Saraswati Amma has published several collections of shortstories some of which are Kanatha Matil (Invisible Wall), Kottayam: SPSS, 1953, Ellam Tikanya Bharya (The Perfect Wife), Kottayam: SPSS, 1958;Keelhoovanakkari(Lower(Female)Employee),Thrissur: Mangalodayam,and collection of articles titled Purushanmarillatha Lokam (World Without Men), Kottayam: SPSS, 1961.} who began publishing in Malayalam in the late '30s, represent a rethinking of gender significantly different from that which has been discussed.
in the present work, namely, the work of Lalitambika Antharjanam. But such a history would probably encompass not only the attempts to rework gender but also their caricatures (such as in the character 'Kunji' created by P.K. Rajaraja Varma\textsuperscript{13} which enjoyed considerable popularity in the '40s and '50s.); it would pay attention to the ways in which these attempts were opposed or appropriated. It may also call for greater insight into how such thinking related to the other strains of radical thought and social activism in Keralam of the post-'50s. Through following such avenues one may be able to construct a history of contemporary feminist thinking and women's activism in Keralam that is sensitive to its specificites and difference from the evocation of the 'Womanly' discussed in the present work.

\textsuperscript{13} P.K. Rajaraja Varma's numerous publications which center around the character 'Kunji' include \textit{Kunjiyammayude Chintakal} Vols.I & II (Kunjyyamma's Thoughts), Kottayam: Reshmi Publishing, 1969, \textit{Kunji Aviyal}, Thrissur: Current Books, 1961, \textit{President Kunji}, Kottayam: SPSS, 1961, \textit{Kunjiyammayude Atmakaitha} (Kunjyyamma's Autobiography), Kottayam: SPSS, 1961. The titles of these works are themselves significant in that they highlight the problem of situating women, and the linkages between the public and domestic domains.