

From the Inside Out: Discussing Women's Empowerment in Kerala with the  
Women's Studies Department at the University of Calicut

By

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## **Abstract**

This paper will contribute to the academic discussion surrounding education and its effects on the empowerment of Keralite women. Kerala's education system has been highly praised as a model for development due to its high performance in standard developmental indicators. This model, however, is increasingly becoming contested in academic scholarship, specifically due to its perpetuation of inequality amongst marginalized groups, such as women and members of lower castes. Indeed, the 'Kerala Model', while successful in many areas, appears to deprive subaltern sectors of society from the educational and economic benefits of development. Building upon the historical genealogy of academic work on the effects of education on the empowerment of women in Kerala, I am interested in how education within the Keralan model has or hasn't played a formative role in the experience of women. Works on this topic have sought to define how education has affected Keralan women's lives; I seek, however, to explore this topic through the personal positionalities and experiences of women in the Malabar region themselves. Their words will work in amalgamation with various explications of the social and cultural factors that reveal a disjuncture between standard development indicators and the "nonconventional indicators of ill health and violence." (Kodoth 2008:6) The question of how educational policies have transformed women's lives in Kerala will not be covered in its entirety due to the scope of my study. This work will explore the culture-specific relationship between women and their social surroundings and the critiques made by the women in the Women's Studies Department at the University of Kerala will take an active role in participating in the discussion of education and its effects on the positionality of women in Kerala, illuminating new required avenues of scholarship and attention.

## **Ethics Statement**

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this works from The General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with Department of Cultural Studies at Queen's University at the time of submission of this thesis.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filled with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Queen's University,  
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## **Chapter One : Introduction**

While state intervention has significantly catalyzed much of the positive educational policy that shapes Kerala as a model praised by development theorists, there are sociocultural and political factors that continue to perpetuate exclusionary practices apparent within the system. (Osella and Osella 2000, Simister 2011, Babu 2005) More specifically, examining the Malabar region in the south of Kerala, this paper will illuminate the ways in which the admired education system of the state has failed in granting women full access to the economic, political, and social fruits of development. My work uses in-depth semi structured interviews with the Women's Studies Department at the University of Calicut to document their educational trajectories and their critiques of the sociopolitical issues obstructing the empowerment of women in the Malabar region. Four interviews were conducted for my study, consisting of indepth conversations between myself, two professors and two students from the Women's Studies Department. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed thematically. The interviews interact with recent literature of my topic found through a current scan of existing studies and critiques. The women being interviewed varied in their social and cultural backgrounds, factors which affect their own analyses of the role of education on the empowerment of women in the Malabar region. Indeed while some were faced with challenges against their participation in the Keralan education, others were encouraged. It must also be noted that there are differences in their placement of particularly common sociocultural expectations of marriage and domesticity in the region.

This research participates in the conversation about the effects of education for the empowerment of women living within the Kerala model, but differs in its methodological approach. This project will be theoretically and methodologically reinforced by those working in

the fields of postcolonial feminist theory and anti-racist critical theory, which encourage a method of exchange in order to illuminate my own position within the field, the knowledge I am producing, and the structural systematic process of knowledge production that I operate within. I will primarily draw upon the works of Sunera Thobani, Chandra Mohanty, and Sherene Razack as sources for my theoretical and methodological basis. Indeed this style of research allows for women within the Women's Studies department to conduct their own analysis of prospective areas of improvement, providing new avenues for collaborative scholarship, research and potential development planning. These interviews will be used as guidelines throughout this paper, directing the materials and topics I have chosen to speak about. This method was chosen in order to allow their perspectives to be used as windows into the sociocultural conditions of a Keralan woman's life. This process aims to engage in a new discourse, hoping to form a collaborative relationship to break usual forms of object-subject analysis. I have taken a number of measures to overcome the bias and colonial overtones that may arise in my positionality as a Western scholar. First, my use of semi-structured in-depth interviews, as previously mentioned, will not act as a compliment to my analysis, but rather directly engage with prior theory that has been used to discuss this phenomenon in Kerala. More, in my interviews, I asked my interviewees the factors which I, as a scholar from Queen's University, should be aware in my inquiries on this topic. While the interviews at the University of Calicut will not stand as a representative sample, they will offer new perspectives in this discussion by engaging with members of Malayalam society who have been a part of the sociocultural conditions that this study, and ones before it, have aimed to analyse. The women from the University of Calicut contribute to this paper through their analysis of texts, Keralan curriculum, autobiographical reflections, and Keralan sociopolitical conditions. Moly Kuruvilla, Head of the Women's



Studies Department at the University of Calicut, has conducted a plethora of studies on the status of women in Kerala, and offers her own analyses based on these studies she has previously conducted, as well as her everyday experience with women from across not only Kerala, but also the country. Mini Sukumar, Assistant Head in Women's Studies, has worked on papers alongside J. Devika on this same topic, and significantly influenced by methodological approach for historical analysis. Their two female students I interviewed offer insights on the lived realities of millennial women completing their studies in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Each of these students come from different economical backgrounds, with families that support their educational pursuit to different degrees. Their words will allow for insight into varying views on the position of young women in Kerala, what their status may currently look like, and what their futures are shaped or limited by.

The present literature presenting an analysis of women in Kerala is multidimensional and often quite contradictory; whilst some statistics demonstrate a growing progressive society which fosters empowerment amongst a homogenous group of Keralan women, critical discussions have increasingly emerged calling the former statistics into question. More specifically, interdisciplinary studies of matriliney, dowry, land reform and education in Kerala continue to explicate the shortcomings of traditional development indicators. This paper will specifically explicate the important societal factors that have gone relatively unproclaimed in dominant discussions surrounding Kerala's well-known matrilineal model. The purpose of this discussion will serve to demonstrate the ways prevailing notions of matriliney have been confused with "matriarchy... [indeed] though inheritance and descent were through women" in many parts of Kerala, the "authority still rested with men." (Abraham 2006:76) This significantly affects the way women's rights were perceived in the region, and must be explored for its implications on

both a woman's social mobility and her security in or outside of a marriage. More, much of the work done on Keralan matrilineal systems focuses on Nayers, the highest caste in the state, which has "inadvertently furthered this myth" of authority. (Abraham 2006:76) Allowing the examples of a particular caste to explicate the ways in which an entire society function has inevitably led to misrepresentations of the very structure one's analysis of Keralan society may rely upon. In addition to matriliney having to be considered in relation to caste, one must also note that it while it existed in many Hindu caste groups, "the patrilineal family was the norm among large Christian religious groups, and both patrilineal and matrilineal familial norms existed in Muslim groups." (Menon 2012:42) Indeed alongside matriliney, patrilineal family systems co-existed. More, the practices of matrilineal kinship varied according to region, specifically central and southern Kerala, which will be explicated further later in this paper. Failure to distinguish the dynamicity of kinship household practices has led to dominant perceptions that the Keralan woman lived with seeming advantages due to matriliney. (Schneider and Gough 1961:305)

In addition to matrilineal narratives that have overtaken the well-known vision of the empowered Keralan woman, this paper will highlight how conventional development indicators, such as literacy and infant mortality rates, have also contributed to the narrative of the empowered Keralan woman. This paper amalgamates many of the recent discussions on Kerala whilst trying to escape the common paradoxical discussion that frames the problems of the Kerala model, which involves speaking of Kerala's high standard development indicators in comparison to its high suicide rates. Evading this paradoxical paradigm allows for acute analysis of the historical, social, and economical factors that have contributed to the status of the modern Keralan woman. It also, more importantly, takes the discussion of the women's status beyond statistics and into the lived realities of the women themselves. The use of in-depth interviews

provides insight into the lived realities of women in Kerala, for what this paper hopes to demonstrate as a research approach that may discuss, analyse, yet collaborate, with its subject.

This paper will argue that higher education in Kerala does not necessarily imply a higher status of women within the Malabar region. I will make this argument by first giving a brief historical overview of Kerala's political and social developments since the 1950s. Following this, I will explore the shortcomings of the Kerala model, specifically examining the lasting influence of changes in matrilineal structures, land reform, and dowry. Using various case studies, I will then explicate and analyse the various ways conventional development indicators have failed to represent the sociocultural realities of women in the Malabar region, in order to highlight some of the barriers to the elevation of status for women in Kerala society. The ideas put forward in this paper are grounded by the semi-structured in-depth interviews, done during my visit to Kerala in January 2017. The women I have interviewed at the University of Calicut will significantly contribute to both the analysis of female autonomy and empowerment in Kerala, as well as the proposal of possible methods of intervention and future avenues of educational and social change.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted in Calicut, Kerala, by conducting semi-structured in depth interviews at the University of Calicut. A two-pronged approach was used to select the University of Calicut as my location of study. First, it is the largest university in Kerala, and holds 426 colleges in the state. Second, it hosts the only teaching department of Women's Studies in Kerala, which "has implemented more than 100 programmes, including seminars, workshops and training programmes to fulfill its objectives." (Dpt of Women's Studies Website 2016). These programmes and workshops include orientation programs on gender related

intervention in colleges, seminars on the Women's Code Bill/Women's Safety, workshops on adolescent education and women's health and sexuality, and other leadership programs.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews for this study were done over a two-week period with four participants. (See Appendix A). While a general guideline of questions was drafted, the questions for the interviews changed according to the answers and direction of the conversation delivered by the interviewees. Rather than approaching these interviews as a sample study, the women at the University of Calicut have provided me with insight into the issues impeding women's empowerment that are important to them, which in turn provided me with the material and subtopics that are covered within this paper. The four interviewees open the floor for collaborative discussion which I put into fruition through an interactive literature review whereby my interviewees words coincide with my own analysis and the analysis of other academics on the varying sociocultural factors that impact women's empowerment. The scope of this paper is not large enough to host more than 3-5 interviews as a basis, and thus future studies of larger size will benefit from extensive field work with a larger number of participants, and thus larger discussions. For this paper, alternate views will be presented in response to prior studies on women's empowerment in the region in order to stimulate further inquiries and possible future directions for women's education in the region.

Postcolonial feminist scholarship is vital to my analytical lens and I primarily drew on the works of Sunera Thobani and Chandra Mohanty to inform my collection of sources as well as the analysis of literature that has been previously written on women in Kerala. Mohanty, Thobani, and other postcolonial feminists work will not as the framework and in foundation for writing about my engagement with women at the University of Calicut. In order to explicate the gap in

the growing academic literature exploring educational policy and the position of women in Kerala, as will be discussed below, postcolonial feminist methodology exposes the bilateral historicities that often shape this scholarship. The use of semi-structured interviews within my project is inspired by postcolonial discourse which seeks to unveil local voices that are often silenced in cultural scholarship; indeed this process works to transform the narrative from one discursive context to another. For example, in collecting data and speaking on behalf of a population to examine said data, post-independence Western scholarship often obscures the dynamicity of the sociocultural and historical factors that contribute. This will be explicated later in this paper, where I present custom developmental indicators and the proposed socioeconomic conditions they emulate, versus the complex conditions that are faced by women in the Malayalam region. Chandra Mohanty refers to this phenomenon of scholarship in the last century as the “decolonization and recolonization of the Third World.” (Mohanty 2003:7) Instead, postcolonial discourse changes the format of research from an object study to a conversation in as much as in this process the researcher may act as a publisher for the voices of the critical, participatory, lived experiences of locals. More, actively engaging in discussion regarding education policy facilitates a method of exchange by which new ideas may form in a collaborative manner.

Vital to postcolonial feminist work is the recognition and combatting of borders present within discussions of marginalized groups. Discussing borders involves acknowledging western ideological undertones that often confine feminist work. These ‘borders’ include literal and physical borders that are made due to race, geography, nation, class, and gender. Postcolonial feminist methodology provides a framework through which these borders may be acknowledged and deconstructed. Sunera Thobani explains this concept by engaging with “the ever present

exalted white subject and non-white other”, in order to “refuse complicity with an imperialist paradigm that has historically refrained from such exchange with those it dominates.” (Thobani 2007:182) This framework is essential to my work, as the historical colonial relationships that have been present in India are still being reconciled in public policy and socio-cultural structures, which will be explored in this paper when discussing the legacy of land distribution and matrimony in Kerala. Works which seek to justly speak to sociopolitical issues in any given region must recognize the historical colonial relationship that is present, and work to deconstruct this relationship. My work, then, acknowledges Mohanty’s vision of borders by recognizing my position as a white settler, as part of a Western institution of knowledge and scholarship, and my position as a researcher entering a state and country with complex histories and sociopolitical realities for women. More, my work interacts with Mohanty’s vision of borders in recognizing the colonial legacies which have shaped the current policies I am studying in the Malabar region, and how these legacies have an effect on the empowerment, or lack thereof, of women in this region. Postcolonial theory inspires my method of semistructured in depth interviews with women from the University of Calicut, as this allows for collaboration through conversation as opposed to strictly conducting an analysis through historical and textual reference. Thobani’s work is important to my research due to its crucial analysis of hegemonic structures of knowledge. Feminist scholarship often “seeks to overcome a divide of knowledge production by generalizing solidarity with nonwhite subjects, which often holds assumptions of civil and uncivil, developed and underdeveloped, and liberated versus oppressed”; the lack of recognition of said divide results in what Mohanty calls “exclusionary understandings of identity” (Mohanty 2003). Postcolonial feminist scholarship encourages the destabilizing of imperialist forces which produces said structures of identity. Hannah Arendt, in her book titled *The Origins of*

*Totalitarianism* discusses the issue of race thinking, “a structure of thought which divides up the world between the deserving and undeserving according to decent” using value rhetoric in order to “conceal the hierarchical sociality it expresses.” (Razack 2008: 8) Postcolonial feminism, instead of only discussing notions of unity amongst nations, first seek to identify, dismantle, and criticize not only what borders are playing a role in this phenomenon, but why. Throughout my work, this will be achieved by acknowledging former failures of analyses done on the status of women in the region, the ways in which these analyses were assumed, and how they can be overcome. For example, the discussion of matrilineal systems in Kerala will not be discussed without first identifying the failures or historical complexities that lie in previous discussions on this same topic, and how that has affected general perceptions of women’s empowerment in the region. As stated by Lugones, “the critique of closed boundaries opens the door to a plethora of resistant possibilities, alliances, understandings, playful and militant connections.” (Lugones 2003:162) Critical aspects of diversity, oppression and systematic difference need to be acknowledged as opposed to erased in alliance building, for the crossing and recognition of these borders proves to be, within postcolonial feminist discourse, one of the only ways for efficient historical analysis. Indeed in order to build an effective alliance with the women at the University of Calicut their words work alongside my own in a critique of the sociopolitical conditions that have shaped women’s autonomy in Kerala. In order for this alliance to take shape and prosper, critical aspects of systematic difference are acknowledged in my interview questions; most specifically, I address this issue in my interview with Mini Sukumar, one of the professors at the University of Calicut, who has largely influenced the methodological approach for my analysis of historical factors in Kerala. A truism of the history of Western relations with third world nations is that a particular power imbalance often takes place economically,

politically, and socially. Understanding how this power imbalance has operated throughout history is a critical task for postcolonial feminists. This task involves “critiquing Western nation-centered perspectives on gender, race, class, and sexuality, interrogating the colonial legacies impacting relationships between first- and third-world peoples and providing innovative ways for understanding difference in a transnational world.” (Encyclopedia Communications 2014) This concept has inspired the way I have chosen to write this paper, as the interviews as a means of reciprocal exchange form an effective alternative to the common power imbalances that take place in Western scholarship. Recognizing my position as a white woman scholar, observing a phenomenon in the state and city of these Keralite women, creates an opportunity to interrogate said colonial legacies that often influence research-subject paradigms.

In discussing the relationship between first and third world peoples, empire and the features of decolonization inevitably arise in the works of postcolonial feminists across a vast range of subjects. Sunera Thobani asks what “feminism can offer in resistance to contemporary reconfigurations of imperial relations”. (Thobani 2007:174) Imperialism for Thobani takes shape in the equation of whiteness as a sociopolitical category and social identity, embodying vulnerability, endangerment and innocence. (Thobani 2007:170) Through her critique of Judith Butler’s piece *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning*, Thobani explicates forms of imperialism which take shape in feminist writings of the ‘other’. In attempting to critique the claim to power held by those in powerful position, who speak on behalf of community, Butler states that “raced people can’t do [this]... they can only speak for their race.” (Butler 178) Thobani observes this sentiment, however, beyond its attempt to critique power, for its silencing of whiteness; indeed in making the racial power of whiteness invisible, Butler “complicates but does not contest imperial perspective.” (Thobani 2007:177) This concept is essential to my work



in Kerala, as publishing an analysis of women's empowerment in the Malabar region constitutes two unspoken processes: a categorization of the other, and an inherent power relation between both the analyser, myself, and those being analyzed. Here, a conversation between Butler, Thobani, and Mohanty could lead us back to Mohanty's vision of borders and a mutual agreement of anti empirical analysis. Mohanty, as previously discussed, emphasized the importance of recognizing borders in order to transgress them; Thobani recognized that Butler was not able to transcend binaries because she didn't "address the imperial racial binary made by human others" (Thobani 2007:182). Indeed "Butler's human subject is generalized so much that discussions of power relations between white and non-white subjects can be evaded." (Thobani 2007:181). In order to overcome the previously discussed power relationship, my work as a Western scholar must involve a process which not only acknowledges my position as a Western researcher but uses a method which may combat the racial binary Thobani discusses. To achieve this, my paper will involve an analysis of previous studies done on the same topic, that work in conversation with analyses made by the women at the University of Kerala. Their own personal reflections will penetrate the discussion in order to illuminate real-life examples of how different political processes affect a woman's access to power, social mobility, and empowerment. Indeed as stated by Razack, we must ask as feminists, who will fight against the occupation of women's bodies, and how this occupation is replicated unintentionally in the works of many feminist writings. The occupation of women's bodies can best be described in terms of writings on women in third world countries, by women of the Western world. Often, the work of Western scholars offers an analysis of particular female issues in a given country's population, indicating various areas of improvement or need for change, with little consultation of said population. Although these women are not physically colonized, per se, Razack and Mohanty explain that

they are recolonized through the literature that analyses them. In this empirical process, Western women become the “colonial subject... speaking on behalf of and owning the Other woman’s body” (Razack 2008:86) In believing that one is engaging with women of the east for their benefit, one disregards the possibility of one’s own position in empire and colonization. The result of such occupation renders the voices of the ‘other’ unheard or disregarded and the definition of feminism or feminist relations is defined based on the most powerful source of dictation. Razack writes of academics: “we must pay attention how to Empire is embodied, physically structured... ways that race, class and gender shape the encounter between the West and its other so we can begin to understand how casting takes place and how it can be resisted.” (Razack 2008: 20) The work of Razack, Mohanty, Spivak and Thobani thus inspire my method for in depth interviews with the women of the University of Calicut, in order to attempt to combat the previously mentioned occupation of women’s bodies.

Postcolonial feminism addresses an additional issue which often arises in works on women in the the third world. In attempts to create solidarity between the west and the third-world, it is not uncommon for Western feminists to speak of women abroad in terms of their supposed inherent connection to one another. This connection, based in gender, composes the third major issue in feminist writing that postcolonial feminists seek to dismantle. The misconception of a worldwide sisterhood brings forth numerous problems for women in third world countries. First, important issues for Western feminists, such as reproductive rights and gender equality, are usually the focus for feminist movements due to the fact that Western feminists have a dominating voice in the sphere of representing women. As stated by Amalia Sa’ar, this feminism that then becomes “widely acknowledged, documented, and popularized is linked with women who are relatively well off, well educated, and white, that is, fairly well

positioned vis-à-vis the liberal order.” (Sa’ar 2005) The second issue of this misconception of sisterhood comes about in the form of misrepresentation of the “other”. The prior sentiments on colonizing the body of the ‘other’ woman brings forth the conception of a unified community of women, whose problems all have equal footing. In posing the struggle of third-world women as inherently connected to our own, Western feminists claim the same experience of suffering, as if there is no distinction. This poses a major issue for third world women, as geographical, historical, political and cultural processes are ignored, belittled, and simplified, in order to create a seeming feeling of unity. The ‘we’ of Western feminism disregards historical analysis of empire and colonization that were discussed in the previous section, by silencing the Western feminist’s active role in the conditions and creation of the third world woman. This claim to community also inherently silences the ‘other woman’, for a claim to community disallows the others’ ability to share their own perspective. Postcolonial feminism attempts to redeem the other’s perspective by ridding the space of dominating white identity and replace it with the voice of the other. An example of this will be seen later in my work where I discuss potential moves forward towards the empowerment of women in the Malabar region. One of the post-grad students I interviewed, expresses to me where she believes improvement can be made in the elementary school system in Kerala, and how the curriculum within this system propagates visions of the submissive female wife, and what this role entails. My proposition for progress forward thus is based in Asvithi’s critique, which is used as a basis for my discussion. In this way, my analysis is analogous to hers, as opposed to primary. This works in combination with the acknowledgment of my position as a white Western researcher, and Asvithi’s position as a Keralan interviewee. This acknowledgment is crucial for transparent discussion on the issues that will be presented in this paper, as Martina Ortega, who, through the discussion of recognizing

women of colour, states that there are dangers in “appropriating others' identities through our desperate rush to find similarity” (Ortega 2015:185) Martina Ortega analyzes the notion of ‘loving knowing ignorance’ whereby one “produces ignorance about women of colour and their work at the same time claiming to have both knowledge about and loving perception toward them.” (Ortega 2015:185) Her systematic approach first questions the nature of academia in terms of percentage of books written by women of colour in feminist publications and the way in which their work has come to be something of a reflection or anecdote in the larger project of a white feminist’s work. This reflection of loving knowing ignorance, however, cautions against even the work of those who are seemingly well intentioned. Ortega acknowledges that this does not mean one will always fail in the discussing the issues for women of colour, but rather seeks to show the dangers of this work. Postcolonial feminist discourse seeks to acknowledge these challenges in order to systematically dismantle them, giving the third world woman a voice in her own histories, political positions, and cultural analyses.

An important aspect of postcolonial feminist scholarship surrounds the notion that uncovering, rewriting, and reconceptualizing historical and political texts not only involves theoretical rigour on behalf of Western feminists, but the importance of action on the ground. While these discussions previously mentioned must take place on an academic level, postcolonial feminism questions and encourages how physical action can take place -- this includes, but is not limited to, the active participation of third world women in creating their own histories. Chandra Mohanty discusses the space between ‘vital women’s movements and feminist theorizing in the U.S. academy’ which she claims has led to a career-based feminism. This career-based feminism means that the structural limits of academia ‘stand in for the world’ and feminist theory becomes a politic of furthering one’s academic position instead of translating

into practical social action. Indeed the theoretical depths of academic discussion create a guise of change when the experience and participation of third world women is still not occurring. A practical example of this can be drawn from the work of Frye and Ortega, who discuss why this academic phenomenon occurs through the conversation of what they call the 'arrogant perceiver'. Frye suggests that women are guilty of participating in the cycle of othering and silencing third world women due to the "mortal dread of being outside the field of vision of the arrogant perceiver." (Frye, Ortega 80) The arrogant perceiver, being one who uses the 'other' in attempts to further their own social agenda, may be imagined as the white male academy. The woman in academia, then, for Frye, ends up attempting to practice feminist theory whilst still fitting in the academic boundaries allotted to them. Ultimately, for fear of being extradited from theoretical validity, the feminist does not go far enough in challenging the social norms assumed in hegemonic cultural discussions.

The final feature that shapes the themes and critiques of postcolonial feminism surrounds the notion of the Americanisation of feminism. In a world increasingly shaped by the naturalization of capitalist culture, Mohanty draws attention to the ways in which ideals of feminist discussion center around neoliberal consumerist values. An example of this can be seen in the emphasis on male and female financial equality, "grounded in capitalist values of profit... U.S. corporate culture [becomes] the norm that women should strive for." (Mohanty 2003:6) More, Mohanty's feminist framework is rooted in decolonization through the means of anticapitalist critique. This anticapitalist critique entails the critique of the "operation, discourse and values of capitalism and of their naturalization through corporate culture... [as well as] demystifying discourse of consumerism" which allows for the "emancipatory collective practice.. of rethinking" how these Eurocentric themes have shaped the project of feminism.

Likewise, Thobani's work, as previously discussed, emphasizes the implications of failing to observe the experience of occupied peoples by conducting feminist analytical approach through an imperial lens, rendering the genuine conversation of their experience "impossible in the absence of the transformation of the conditions of imperialist domination (Thobani 2007:177).

This work has been structured to juxtaposing the words of interviewees with my own analysis and the analysis of other scholars on this topic. Semi-structured in-depth interviewing can be made to meet the goals of feminist research. Thobany, Mohanty, and Razack, operating in the context of action research, state that "[it] is not a method but a way of collaboratively orchestrating social research processes to enhance liberating social change processes." (Greenwood and Levin 2007: 100) Using the interviewees words alongside my own exemplifies this process by proposing analyses of socio-cultural issues with [both a] insider and external view. Indeed in action research, the researcher and the "insider community are coresearchers in the process... based on the affirmation that all human beings have detailed, complex, and valuable knowledge about their lives, environments and goals." (Greenwood and Levin 2007:103) The style of the interview itself may work to "probe deeply, uncover new clues, and open up new dimensions of a problem to secure vivid accounts from informants based on personal experience." (Burgess 1982: 107) Indeed my process was partially inspired by Bulmer's work on unstructured interviews as conversation, following that "no matter what questions are posed, it is vital for researchers to allow informants to talk in their own terms, providing some guidance and support when these are required." (Bulmer 1982: 107) An unstructured interview is "encouraged to vary the manner and wording of the questions in order to suit the peculiarities of the situation, and he [she] may follow up on opportunities suggested by the respondent's replies." (Manheim, Bulmer 1982:212) This method of interviewing, thus, changed the dynamic

of typical interviewer-interviewee relations by loosening the structure surrounding the questioning process in order to foster as natural a process of interaction as possible.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Anti-racist critical theory is paramount to the postcolonial feminist lens and greatly influences my research approach. The central concept of critical race theory “speaks to the structural systematic level of the processes of knowledge production” (Thobani Interview, HCS: 2014) identifying where feminists often “take for granted their location and the knowledge they work within and produce.” (Thobani Interview, HCS:2014) As stated by Thobani, critical race theory provides some of the means for deconstructing and not colluding with colonial relations, as an intellectual and political project. The work of Mohanty, Razack, and Ortega will significantly influence the theoretical framework for my research. In conducting these interviews, women within the Women’s Studies Department offer their own analysis of where the field needs improvement. Antiracist critical theory entails a method of a critically transnational feminist praxis, by moving through borders in order to make connections of the “levels of social reality we experience... and organize against repressive systems of rule.” (Mohanty 2003:4) Analysing these repressive systems of rule requires an attentiveness to the role race plays in creating and dismembering power relations. I will use a number of theorists in order to explicate this point. Thobani discusses the issues of race in feminist work in terms of “the equation of whiteness as a social identity and the [ways] the sociopolitical category of the West has been seen as particularly problematic for its implication in colonial imperialist projects” (Thobani 170). In an interview with The Human Condition Series (HCS), Thobani explains that even those who do not intend to participate in personal interests embedded in racial position, often “take for granted their location and the knowledge they work within and produce.”

(Thobani Interview, HCS; 2014) Here, the normalizing of white supremacy, elaborates upon her claim of whiteness as a social identity. Her work specifically aims to discuss race at a ‘non-blatant level’, using Canadian citizenship conceptualizations as an example. She explains that if one states they are proud to be a Canadian, there is an implied understanding of that meaning one is humanitarian and compassionate; this, she argues, is not necessarily racist. Critical race theory, however, allows one to observe how deeply racialized this statement may be in terms of what it represents. Indeed non-blatant racial sentiments operate on the level of what certain ideological concepts, in this case citizenship, represent. The concept of citizenship is highly imbedded in white supremacist ideology, “as Canada was founded on the dispossession and colonization of Aboriginal peoples.” (Thobani Interview, HCS: 2014) Statistically, people of colour did not have access to citizenship for more than one hundred years in Canada, and when citizenship was finally attained it implied being “complicitous in the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples.” (Thobani Interview, HCS: 2014) Thus, for Thobani, critical race theory provides some of the means for deconstructing and not colluding in these relations, as an intellectual and political project - thinking of citizenship in a new transformative way.

Sarita Srivastava’s article “You Calling me a Racist?” eloquently tackles the issue of race discussion in feminist theory by placing it quite literally, through interviews and fieldwork, in the academic arena. Srivastava discusses race in terms of “colonial and contemporary representations of virtue, honesty and benevolence” as they have been “a historical foundation of whiteness, bourgeois respectability, and femininity.” (Srivastava 2015:30) Her aim is to show this history in “Western feminist movements... adding another layer of moral imperative to the historical constructions of racial innocence.” (Srivastava 2015:30) Srivastava’s discusses social movements in terms of their innate racial undertones, similar to Thobani, specifically discussing



“distinct moral accounts of self that disallow open discussions of what it might mean to be antiracist... [looking] at historical shifts in moral narratives of white feminists.” (Srivastava 2015:31) As stated by Thobani, we need to begin our discussion of the third world with the issue of racism itself; she asks “how it shuts down opportunity for meaningful anti-violent struggles... as racism is likely to strengthen patriarchal currents in communities under siege” (Razack 2008:137). She forces the question of how our interactions with the third world secure racial myths, and in this question one may appropriately begin a diagnosis and dismembering of the empirical system that may taint one’s relations with the third world. Postcolonial feminism finds its roots in a common goal of changing the ideological frameworks that have shaped feminist and political discourse. While the field predominantly focuses on the five themes discussed previously, postcolonial feminism most importantly seeks to radically change our methods of historical analysis and production, allowing voices of the conceived margins to the forefront of ideological structures of knowledge.

For my research, I am participating in a discussion about women in Kerala that has circulated academic discussions since the birth of the Kerala model. My theoretical and methodological approach, however, necessitates a style of analysis that actively involves the women I want to study. While the professors and students at the University of Calicut cannot be held as a representative sample for Malayalam women, they are central facilitators for my discussion. The issues I analyze are central to their own studies, allowing for a conceptually collaborative discourse.

## **Chapter Two: Historical Discussions on Kerala**

### **Historical Overview of Kerala**

In 1956, the British Malabar and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin united, forming the state of Kerala. (Devika 2010:799) The growth of neoliberal policy and economic globalization, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, “catalysed communist and socialist parties around the world to re-examine their basic beliefs. (Williams 2009:97) The Communist Party of India (Marxist), elected in 1957, used socialist democratic alternatives and, in this new form of government, unlike the model of Soviet communism or state centered socialism, thrived on society centered socialism. In this form of governance, citizens were integral to developmental and parliamentary changes, used and organized in mass-based institutions. (Williams 2009:99) It is important to note that the state level party in Kerala, like other states in India, have a great amount of autonomy; this attribute allows them to respond to demands of the subaltern (Williams 2009:99). Their vision of socialist democracy gave rise to policies that involved collective decision making and the progressive empowerment of subaltern classes. (Williams 2009:99) The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution prioritised democratic decentralization, whereby Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI), were introduced as the basic system of governance and administration across India. They operate on a three-tier system of local governance, whereby greater power is given at the district, block and village levels. (Sreekumar 2007) This same system was called Gram Swaraj by Gandhi, who encouraged the decentralisation of government in order to allow villages to work through their own affairs. (Sunny 2014:42) In addition to this, the CPI(M) sought the formation of “participatory bodies that intersected with government institutions” making the government accountable to civil society; Grama Sabhas or village councils were created in development processes. (Williams

2009:101) Unique to Kerala, Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) were able to represent scheduled castes and tribes proportionate to their population, “ensuring increased participation of marginalised people and women.” (Sreekumar 2007:2) This unique development in Kerala led to astonishing results which are now being analyzed by scholars; 20th century Kerala “defied western development models by achieving indicators of physical quality of life like ‘developed’ nations.” (Williams 2009) The government’s unique redistribution, education, and healthcare policies catalyzed what is now called the “Kerala Model” and has become a focal point for Western political scientists and observers. A historical competition between communist and noncommunist parties in Kerala produced new social policies focused on land reform, health care models and most importantly education, which have created the amicable developmental outcomes that are now posed as a “desirable and replicable model of social democracy.” (Devika 2010:800) Despite this claim, the Kerala Model has been subject to systematic critique, especially in the last few decades, with women being central to the analysis of these development results in this competitive political environment.

The debate surrounding the Kerala Model brings forth questions of the intrinsic inequalities it perpetuates, and thus argues that further investigation is necessary for creating new avenues of opportunity and change, specifically in the education sector. Most critique stems from discussions regarding the continuing inequality for subaltern groups, i.e. women and members of lower castes. Disappointments include low average levels of income, low levels of elected females in politics, and high dropout rates past the 10th standard<sup>1</sup> for underfunded groups (Scaria 2014). In 1975, the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram, under K.N. Raj, presented the text “Poverty: Unemployment and Development Policy: A Case Study of Selected

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<sup>1</sup> 10th standard is grade 10 in Kerala high schools, as well as the final year of high school.

Issues with Reference to Kerala,” to the United Nations Committee for Development Planning. This volume argued that “the state of Kerala as a case which will support the basic needs and special targeting of development.” (Tharakan 2006:2) Problems such as “persisting female disadvantage in social and economic roles” and issues of severe class disadvantage and representation in policy making were pushed aside in this new ‘development narrative’, highlighted in the former text. (Tharakan 2006) “Without discussing the historical factors regarding the education of women in Kerala, we cannot move forward... first we must discuss historical dynamics within Kerala, then from here we can start to talk about education.” (Sukumar, 01/17/17) As stated by Mini Sukumar, Professor at the Women’s Studies Department at the University of Calicut, the historical context through which women’s education was given approval and legitimacy contributes to its manifestations and effects in present day Kerala. Sukumar emphasizes the importance of recognizing the connections between colonial modernity and current conceptions of education in relation to women’s empowerment. Indeed the “process of modernity influenced in many ways, the modern model for femininity and masculinity in Kerala.” (Sukumar, 01/17/17) Thus, in order to understand instances or lack thereof of empowerment within Kerala, this paper will first engage in “the process of how the modern Malayalam woman has been constructed.” (Sukumar 01/17/17)

### **Historical Discussions on the Formation and Dismemberment of Matriliney in Kerala**

Research on the historical construction and deconstruction of matriliney in Kerala often focuses upon the Nayar community, a matrilineal group which constitutes “a large section of landed elite in Malabar.” (Arunima 2003: 3) Indeed the earliest the Nayar community was often a model for legal change in other communities, such as the lower castes of “thiyas, Mappilla Muslims, and Nambuthiri Brahmins... making studies of the changes in this community

significant.” (Arunima 2003:9) As stated by Arunima, in *Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliney in Kerala, Malabar c. 1850-1940*, anthropological research has often attempted to “extrapolate abstract rules regarding marriage, inheritance, and residence” in the region, instead of locating “theoretical understandings of kinship within a process of change.” (Arunima 2003:4) Many idealized narratives, more useful for “cross-cultural study of matrilineal societies all over the world” (Arunima 2003:4) thus permeate many matrilineal discussions. Kathleen Gough, a British anthropologist and feminist, may be termed as one of the most influential contributors to anthropological theory on Nayar matrilineal characteristics of the time. She argued that the tharavadu<sup>2</sup> was an “exogamous<sup>3</sup> matrilineal lineage, of which a segment, whose members jointly held lands... constituted the most elementary link within it... [indeed] Nayar lineage was maintained through polyandrous marriages, where only the natal kin were counted as members of said lineage.” (Arunima 2003:7) The structure of matrilineal lineage in Central Kerala included spouses living separately in natal units, with husbands visiting their wives.<sup>4</sup> (Schneider and Gough 1961:335) The origins of said lineages are largely discussed on the basis of two prominent assumptions: first, that matriliney evolved due to the absence of Nayar men, who were part of local militias, and second, that Nayars were socially and economically dependent on Nambuthiris, who are framed as “hegemonic powers, through land ownership, inducing women to enter hypergamous sexual relations, known as Sambandhams<sup>5</sup>, with them.” (Arunima 2003:5,

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<sup>2</sup> Tharavadu refers to joint family homes. (See Janaki Abraham 2011:75)

<sup>3</sup> Marriage outside of a specific group especially as required by custom or law is *exogamy*. Exogamous groups sometimes even specify the group into which members must marry. Such groups are usually defined in terms of kinship rather than in terms of politics or territory. Exogamy is usually characteristic of groups that trace descent through either the maternal or paternal line only. (Marriam Webster)

<sup>4</sup> This is called a “Duolocal marriage.” (For further information, see Gough 1961:561)

<sup>5</sup> The impetus for the first marriage legislation at the end of the nineteenth century came from elite Nayar men who sought to legitimize their conjugal arrangement called sambandham, which literally means connection. (See Abraham 2011:101)

Robin Jeffrey 1976, K.N. Panikkar, 1989). Just as these explanations of matrilineal formation are used as a “blueprint for subsequent studies on the socioeconomic changes of Kerala in the 20th century” (Arunima 2003:7), so too are the reasons for its deconstruction. Most prominently, matrilineality changes primarily due to colonial rule. (Gough, Arunima 2003:7) During the colonial period, matrilineal familial structures within Kerala were attacked by British rulers, and thus many reforms were taken since the 20th century to match the colonial vision of a civilised institution of marriage. (Jeffrey 1992) These models of matrilineal construction and deconstruction, while holding particular historical accuracies, do not encompass matrilineality as a whole in Kerala. This is mainly due to the multiplicity of matrilineal models that ranged from the north to the south, due to varying socioeconomic contexts. Residence patterns, for example, for Nayers, varied from “classic matrilineal<sup>6</sup> tharavadu in rural areas to neolocal tharavadu in Tellicherry and Calicut.” (Arunima 2003: 13)

In her book, Arunima discusses several issues with the previous historical explanations of matrilineality in Kerala, followed by proposed alternate origins of development and dismemberment. The study of matrilineality, for Arunima, was often simplified as creating the image of a matrilineal family in mirror image of a patrilineal one. This may be due to the ease in which understanding said model would come to those wishing to further study it, as a ‘blueprint’ model of kinship would be far easier to understand in contrast to the dynamic, changing model of matrilineality that existed in actuality on the ground. Indeed, the structure of matrilineal kinship “underwent continuous change, ranging from legal redefinition by colonial state to economic ideological pressure that was brought to bear in the tharavadu by changing circumstances of Malabar in this period”, which will be discussed in the following section. (Arunima 2003:14) Matrilineality can be

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<sup>6</sup> Matrilineal, whereby the husband lives with the wife’s community, versus neolocal, whereby the husband and wife both live separately from their natal households.

visualised as a household of people related through the female line; indeed the relationships of a matrilineal tharavadu were traced through the mother, including inheritance and “the right to receive and bequeath ancestral property... thus changes of familial structures lie at the heart of changing the social landscape in this region.” (Arunima 2003:10) The formation of the matrilineal tharavadu coincided with the variety of property rights that were able to exist along the Malabar coast. It was often possible, for example, for “women to establish separate branches of lineage, with revenue and property... meaning women could retain rights of a unilinear succession of property demarcated specially for them.” (Arunima 2003: 35) These branches were able to form without destabilizing the tharavadu. Studying the process of matrilineal reform is important in the discussion regarding the empowerment of women in Kerala society, as women held a particular right to space and property in the matrilineal system. The key to understanding this system lies within the relationship between the tharavadu and their larger environment, not simply between the power relations of the male and female sex.

Features of the matrilineal household dramatically changed over five decades of colonial rule. In the early 19th century, The Company<sup>7</sup> officials began to redefine households in the region, with the “eldest male within the house chosen as the individual responsible for managing economy and making revenue payments... which affected both the internal structure of the Tharavad and relations between kindred and dependent members.” (Arunima 2003:36) In one household, the Karanavan<sup>8</sup>, were given the authority to “deal with the representation of the household, its relations with feudal lords and high authorities, and managed civil disputes.” (Schneider and Gough 1961: 339) The significance of this practice lies in the aspects of

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<sup>7</sup> The East India Company is an “English company formed for the exploitation of trade with East and Southeast Asia and India, incorporated by royal charter on December 31, 1600.” Encyclopedia Britannica 2017.

<sup>8</sup> The Karanavan is the group’s oldest male member. In a property group - it is the segment of lineage having time depth of three to six generations, including youngest members and common ancestress. (S+G 334)

representation and external relations entrusted to the male of a house, increasing his role and perceptions of his role as a figure of authority within and outside of the home. The dismemberment of the Tharavad over the 20th century changed varying rights to residence and obligations of kin, which may be structurally still present in Keralan households observed in the last fifteen years. (Abraham 83) More, law reform had significant impact on the foundation for tharavads in the state. For example, in 1925, the Travancore Nayar Regulation Act, initiated by the British, kickstarted a transition from the customary matrilineal system to a system of inheritance by individuals. (Chacko 2003:64) Between 1860 and 1976, at least 20 pieces of legislation passed, ultimately abolishing matrilineal practices relating to ownership and inheritance of property and legal guardianship of children. The tharavad “heads of power were comparable to the Roman Patriarch, with avuncular patriarchy becoming the norm of the household... [critically impacting] women, fighting harder to maintain positions and facing legal discrimination to their male peers.” (Arunima 2003:72) Indeed female rights to residence and property, were gradually lifted and replaced with the formation of a colonial vision of a patrilineal household. The designation of Karanavans were a product of colonial reforms that sought to “legitimise the avuncular patriarchy it had created.” (Arunima 2003: 193) Colonial reforms succeeded in this context for a few reasons. As Arunima mentioned previously, matrilineal kin groups, contrary to the swooping narratives that describe them, did not necessarily exist upon a foundation or concept of female power. Reasons for particular lines kinship ranged in region as well as purpose, such as, for example, the absence of men relocating in local militias.<sup>9</sup> In many cases, while women were the line through which property and

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix C for charts showing kinship customs. (Gough 549)



ownership was passed, men were still making household decisions.<sup>10</sup> British reform, in many ways, exploited the weaknesses currently present in the existing matrilineal system. This is to say that if males were still often the decision makers, having a law which designated revenue payments and management of economic affairs to the eldest male of a house, further legitimized the dominant presence of a male-headed household, sweeping away any access to empowerment a woman may have been closer to before reform. More, Joint family systems were “broken under colonial rule, as they didn’t comply with the Western vision of familial structures.” (Mini Interview 01/17/17) Indeed matriliney was seen as immoral, “promiscuous and polyandrous... precluding the possibility of natural families” promoting the “desire for marriage legislation [that would] enable definition of the family on conjugal lines.” (Arunima 2003: 193) Over time, Malabar, Hindu, and Roman natural law, overturned matrilineal customs in the state.

Changes to women’s social mobility may also be traced to this period, as under Company rules, women could only move away after marriage, in contrast to precolonial times when women could move off the “main tharavadu in order to create her own new branches.” (Arunima 2003:99) The emergence of the modern Malayali man “hinged on a rejection of women-centered otherness of their matrilineal past.” (Arunima 2003:195) As stated by Mini Sukumar in my interview with her, changes in matrilineal structures must be understood in order to fully understand the landscape upon which female education developed in Kerala. Indeed the security, held in the concept of “collateral property disintegrated in the formation of nuclear families... and new sources of livelihood were sought; thus, women naturally began to gravitate towards education.” (Mini Interview 01/17/17) As educated females they could now lead the modern patriarchal Keralan household. More, while the 19th century brought education for females, it

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<sup>10</sup> See Table 4 in Appendix C for charts on decision making study.

did so “without jeopardising the interest of the patrilocal family.” (Kodoth 2008:23) This unique process has allowed for the “dominant construction of womanhood in Kerala [to be] wholly agreeable in state interventions in the name of social welfare, while remaining inimical to any radical politicization.” (Devika, Sukumar 2006:4471)

### **Research on Women and the Historical Lineage of Female Education in Kerala**

Women’s Studies in Kerala arrived later than the rest of the country, “marked by a weakness of institutional support... by University Grants Commissions.” (Devika 2007:10) The development of women’s studies coincided with various social and political developments within the state; this concept is crucial for the analysis of the research produced and studied regarding the status of women over the last forty years in Kerala. During the late 20th century, economic and social modernisation are crucial to Travancore’s position on a modernizing international scale. During the 1950s, new disciplines “are politics and psychology, reflexive of the global priorities of knowledge production”, more, university departments are forming in Kerala State in order to “find solutions to problems of Kerala’s economy.” (Devika 2007:14) Devika, in her works interrogating the historical contexts of knowledge production on women, explicates the implications of the social sciences operating under “projects of nationalist governance and transitions of colonial power.” (Devika 2007:15) These new disciplines are defined by their “empiricist orientations and quantitative techniques” and women are “figured in peripheries.” (Devika 2007:16) Knowledge generated at CDS<sup>11</sup> in the 1970s refers largely to “Kerala’s social development; it served to shape a subnational feeling that took pride in developmental achievements.” (Devika 2007: 9) Under the eye of the international community, growingly recognizing Kerala as a model for development in third world countries, unavoidable narratives

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<sup>11</sup> Centre for Development Studies: a premier social science research institution. Over the years it has established a tradition of interdisciplinary research on development problems in India. (Centre for Development Studies 2012)

of the place of women in this development model begin to rise. Indeed “modern scientists urge that society’s progressiveness is judged from the treatment it metes out to women and children.” (Ramachandran 1995:110) A surge in educational, health, and social development brings forth a new foundation for women in the public eye, gaining visibility in the 1980s onwards. Rising as “objects of social scientific investigation... women are conceived as a homogenous category... offering the most credible evidence for its progressiveness through their exemplary performance in several indicators.” (Devika 2007:20) Indeed over the late 19th century, with a rise in the recognition of Kerala’s impressive development indicators, so too comes an emerging image of the Keralan woman.

Over the 20th century, different agencies, such as missionaries and the state, worked to change the traditional status of women by encouraging women’s education and health care. (Devika, Scaria 2007:428) This change was accompanied by supporting governmental policy in the form of grants and free primary education. Women were increasingly trained in practices such as midwifery (Cochin Government Gazette 1886), and the popularisation of education was promoted in lower castes through missionaries. (Scaria 2014:428) With a British colonial presence, underlying systems of matriliney were being overthrown, whilst missionaries penetrated varying spheres of social development such as education and domestic training in skills such as midwifery. Womanhood, then, formed in newly combined image of the Brahmanical *pativrata*, devout, and the Victorian domestic wife. (Scaria 428, Devika 2007) Indeed in the 20th century the central concern of women’s movements was to “modernize them, initiate their education... forming a sort of patent or mold for women, that one must be educated but also a good housewife.” (Mini Sreekumar Interview 01/17/17) Mini Sreekumar, professor at the University of Calicut in Kerala, emphasizes the importance of the historical context through which

education became prioritized for women in the 20th century. The modern Keralite woman gains education whilst undergoing a “process of conditioning, conditioning within a particular set of codes and ethics.” (Mini Sreekumar Interview 01/17/17) This unique development of modernization formed a new ideological concept of “acceptable womanhood and the image of femininity in Kerala - modified in terms of colonial modernity.” (Mini Sreekumar Interview 01/17/17) The matrilineal model, rather, the loss of this model, is often a basis for analysis in the disempowerment of women in the state. Devika and Sukumar, however, critically examine how the essential issue lies in the conceptualisation of agency following the rise of patriarchy that was synonymous with the rise in women’s education in a move to modernity. Indeed, one may note that “female agency is more so a product of a certain bargain struck with patriarchy, as opposed to a political interventionist feminist agency.” (Devika and Sukumar 2006:4472) This is to say that female agency, one of the emblems of female empowerment, is significantly shaped by its implicit restrictions. A woman may be educated, well spoken, and is technically given access to employment, whilst socially constructed norms of motherhood and familial structures permeates her daily space; “this is a great impediment, as patriarchy in Kerala partly rests on the agency of the Keralan Model Woman - educated, healthy, and less fertile.” (Devika and Sukumar 2006:4472) This dynamic is difficult to measure from a development aspect, as its repercussions are complex. Most commonly, this phenomenon is covered in generalised statistical discussions, such as those which mention the common paradox of high education and high suicide rates in Kerala. (Mirta, Singh, Chacko, Sreekumar 2006)

In her study of women in Ernakulam and Malappuram, Professor Moly Kuruvilla notes that a working woman’s income is often used for “children’s education, health, and repaying debts, where a man’s income is used for building assets in his own name.” (Kuruvilla 2011:78)

One may notice a trend in the cultural practices of a home increasing a male's sense of autonomy and limiting a woman's social mobility. Here we see another example of the ways in which common development indicators, such as employment and education status, do not accurately depict a woman's access to autonomy within her household and community. A study conducted by Moly Kuruvilla and Aanaand in 2009 interviewed 180 women from the Malappuram District of Kerala, which showed that "nearly 50% of participants had no decision-making power, 33% had power over financial matters... 29% had property in their names and half of the woman did not have any control over their assets." (Kuruvilla 2011:83) Lack of financial control and the subsequent lack of control over decision making significantly alters a woman's access to empowerment for multiple reasons. Here I will use Kuruvilla's interview on this matter in her book "Discrimination Against the Girl Child: The Trajectory of Missing Girls", as a reference. When asked why women should be encouraged in an economic way, Kuruvilla states:

*"If a woman is economically a versatile parasite, she can never claim equal status. As long as she is dependent, she is treated as a slave at service of the provider and this aggravates her subjectivity to exploitation by the super sex... Jawaharlal Nehru reflects this when he says freedom depends on economic conditions more than political and if women is not economically free she will have to depend on her husband. Dependents are never free... [thus] Solutions [must] include equal sharing of household responsibilities, parenting, implementing government initiatives for providing maternity/paternity."* (Kuruvilla 2011: 144)

The cycle of dependency in turn, for Kuruvilla, cultivates a sense of helplessness in many Keralan women. Indeed, "millions of women fail to overcome their learned helplessness... copied with strong forces of oppression and discrimination pull down women from active participation in the public sphere including productive employment and political participation." (Kuruvilla 2011:141) Indeed woman "often accept a subordinate status and make trade-offs between their social status and economic support throughout their familial position." (Harish and Harishankar 2003: 113)

By the 1990s, scholars are beginning to counter and question these former compositions, by inquiring into sociocultural contexts. This process “encouraged productive instability vis-a-vis questions of methodology... less bound to imperatives of producing knowledge useful to the state.” (Devika 2007:21) In 1976, “the India Council of Social Science Research introduced a programme of women’s studies with three distinct objectives” which included identifying needed policy changes, persuading social sciences to re-examine methodologies and “analytical apparatus of social resource which had excluded women’s roles, and to revive the debate on women’s question which had emerged as a major issue during the freedom struggle.” (Harish and Harishankar 2003:133) The endeavor of challenging the processes and power relations involved in knowledge production is a relatively new phenomenon, thus “opening the veil that hides women from the perception of what constitutes knowledge is the first step in engendering the knowledge system.” (Harish and Harishankar 2003:137) Indeed the “raising of fundamental discourse on difference... silence... control over sexuality... has in a way proved itself as an area of study which cannot be ignored.” (Harish and Harishankar 2003:143) Women’s Studies must crucially, however, be tied to activism, as it cannot distance itself from “the concern of the struggling woman.” (Harish and Harishankar 2003:143) Later in this paper, Moly Kuruville will discuss how such activism may be delivered in women’s education.

In addition to the growth of women’s studies as both a conceptual paradigm and a departmental topic itself in academia, this paper must acknowledge barriers to education. Lack of access to the places where conversations of systematic change take place poses a strong barrier in developmental change. The empowerment of women in Kerala rises from a multiplicity of factors which shape how society as a whole values, treats, and views women. Jandhyala B.B. Tilak observes and critiques policies which have “been adopted by Kerala for the development of

higher education.” (Tilak 2016:4) Higher education in Kerala has increased from 170,000 in 1999 to 720,000 in 2012, and exceeds the ‘all-India’ level. (Tilak 2016:4) More, the “gross enrolment ratio among women, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes is higher than the ratio in India as a whole.” (Tilak 2016:6) Barriers to education have, however created problems, as the overall cost of higher education has risen, due “to the phenomenon of privatization and commercialization of higher education in the state.” (Tilak 2016:10) Most significantly, the rise in self-financing colleges has posed large barriers to access. A future study on this topic may look into the ways in which self-financing colleges have created modern restrictions to accessing education by all society members ranging in caste and economic background.

## **Chapter Three: Challenging the Kerala Model; An Interactive Literature Review**

In 1997, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) placed Kerala at the top of their lists for both Human Development Indicators and the Gender-related Development Index among Indian states. (Chacko 2003:52) As previously mentioned, this status is embodied by high literacy, life expectancy, and delayed age of marriage. Social scientists often attribute these indicators as a result of higher education, demonstrating greater female autonomy. This notion of female autonomy, however, is increasingly being critically explored, as many alternative indicators are demonstrating the disempowerment of women in the social, economic, and domestic sphere. Specifically, a closer look at the system of matriliney, marriage customs, land reforms and dowry may demonstrate the places in which women's autonomy is greatly lacking. For the following section, I will use Naila Kabeer's explication of empowerment as my central conceptual reference. In order to discuss the setbacks to a woman's full autonomy in Keralan society, empowerment is both necessary and foundational to social development. Empowerment, according to Kabeer, implies the ability to make choices. It is intrinsically linked to disempowerment, as the process of empowerment means acquiring the ability to choose, a process of change, that was previously denied. (Kabeer 1999:437) In order to understand whether education may enhance the empowerment of women in Kerala, one must first observe the sociohistorical context through which education has gradually been applied.

### **Barriers to Women's Empowerment**

#### **Social Status of The Keralan Woman**

Asvithi, a post-graduate student at the University of Calicut, expresses the idiosyncrasies of the modern Keralan women in her own reflections. The psychological and cultural repercussions of the move to patriarchy in Kerala is the first cultural concept I will discuss as an



obstacle to total empowerment, unbeknownst to standard indicators of the region. In Kerala, “women are restricted to a particular limit; there is always a boundary line that is given for girls.” (Asvithi Interview 01/16/17) There is a social barrier constantly present for women, as receiving higher education is limited by the event of marriage; this is what Asvithi describes as a social barrier to the empowerment of women in the state. Standard developmental indicators do not take into account cultural difference that “must be taken into consideration... Kerala, different from North American or Western countries, holds marriage of families as an important institution, rather than an individualistic romantic decision.” (01/16/17) Indeed this cultural phenomenon may be observed in the statistics of Keralite women’s employment. While the number of educated women in Kerala is high, the number of women in actual jobs is low. (Scaria 2014:439) Asvithi explores this phenomenon both through statistical observation and personal reflection.:

*“For a girl who gets married, her situation is doubly difficult for sustaining a job as she has the primary liability of looking after her household first. A husband is the primary breadwinner, which thus gives him freedom of choice in controlling the family and the family’s money. Here is where we see a role conflict between the traditional and the modern. Here, for example, many girls who have completed their MBBS (medical degree) don’t do anything after completing their studies. Because of the pressure of the families, they would rather get married, and let their husbands pursue their degrees. Women are encouraged to be educated, but not to get a job. Instead, they must simply be worthy as a partner for their educated counterpart.”*

Here, the classic analysis of binary roles in the Keralan household is complicated, as the dynamics of a woman’s role stretches beyond her economic or domestic place, but rather moves over to the psychological, cultural, and social pressures that complicate her ability to self-fulfil her economic, educational, or political pursuits:

*“My mother,” said Asvithi, “was a victim to this patriarchal system. She was suffocated between her familial responsibilities and her work outside the home. A passionate teacher, longing to pursue her higher studies, encouraged me as well to pursue higher studies rather than get married off in my early age. She felt a constant crisis in balancing*

*her family and her profession. While my parents were both very progressive, their parents were conservative. My father's parents didn't see my mother as a perfect housewife, as she rebelled against this image. She suffered several mental traumas, and finally, she committed suicide. I was always taught that she was not a good mother, that she didn't hold her part as the nucleus of the family. I was upset with her, and with my family, and I always felt the need to teach my sister how to properly take care of a baby or a child. Looking back, my mother was right, and my father was just a victim of this patriarchal teaching. His male-centric perspective in all activities made him want an obedient wife. My mother is a great example of what women face here in Kerala. Deconstructing my mother's life, she was an individual. For her, it was even her decision to quit life, and she quit it. Many women struggle like her, between their real and their bound life - the live they want to live, and the life they are bound to as a mother, daughter, or sister. There is a large difficulty for women here to fulfil their expected roles."*

Asvithi's story explicating the challenge faced by many Keralite woman emphasizes the importance of experience being the "site of radical critique and productive feminist politics" instead of a "conservative re-telling" of "gender paradox." (Sreekumar 2007:34) Often, development discourse "implicates women in gender neutral groupings" like literate or non-literate, as to provide "evidence of Kerala's standings as a socially egalitarian utopia." (Sreekumar 2007:39) These discourses regard women as gendered subjects, literate, yet subject to statistics of violence and household burden. This analysis generalizes the unique realities of everyday Malabar women, and encourages language that does not accurately reflect the dynamic issues on the ground. For example in the mainstream media, "the concept 'streepeedhanam' seems to mean everything from sexist comments and gang rape." (Devika and Sukumar 2006:4473) In the face of inadequate terminology, one is faced with "the double task of being watchful of both new and existent devices of language in order to probe their political implications" while "creating new terms to express adequately the whole range of the presently nameless female experience in Kerala." (Devika and Sukumar 2006:4473) For T.K. Ramachandran, "discussions of the female identity cannot afford to remain impervious to the vast body of theoretical material on the constitution of femininity and the ideology of the family

of the West.” (Ramachandran 1995:111)

### Land Ownership

The second dominant conversation surrounding the sociocultural conditions of women in Kerala involves discussions of land ownership. Often, matrilineal customs of descent are analyzed for their effects on women’s social mobility. (Jeffrey 2004) In order to understand its effects on said mobility, property ownership and land reform must be scrutinised in this critical conversation. The Land Reform Bill in Kerala was started in 1957, which sought to fix the purchase rights of landlords, the ceiling for the extent of holdings, the rights of tenants to fixity of tenure, and so on. (Mannathukkaren 2011:382) Indeed the “land tenure system of Kerala has been considered as one of the most complex and bewildering systems in India with a ‘maze of intermediary rights, esoteric usufructuary mortgage tenures, complex subinfeudation’ (Herring 1983, 157).” (Mannathukkaren 2011:382) In 1969, the Land Reform Bill Act abolished landlordism. Prior to this act, the upper caste Namboodiri Brahamins and the Nayars were owners of the land, while the lower castes of Tiyya and Ezhava, and the untouchable castes, “were the actual cultivators of the land with hardly any rights.” (Lieten 1982, Namboodiripad 1968, Mannathukkaren 2011:382) While this paper does not have the capacity to discuss the complexities of caste in these reforms, it is important to note that many land reform acts within Kerala technically gave access to land to all communities, but redistribution programmes were “internalised and devolved through patrilineal frameworks.” (Scaria 2014:441)

During the 20th century, Christian succession laws discriminated against women in varying ways. Women could only “maintain a husband’s estate after death if he didn’t have a will... claims ended after marriage, and unmarried daughters could only claim a 3rd of each son’s share of paternal property.” (Chacko 2003:55) Prior to this law, Nayar women appeared to

have a greater space for “marriage decisions and sexual relations... most notably, women’s ability to walk out of marriages was shaped by their permanent uncontested right to subsistence in their natal home.” (Kabeer 1999:14) Patrilineal societies drastically changed this reality for women. With the “absence of sexual control” came a “greater mobility and thus greater exposure of girls to locally available forms of literacy.” (Gough 1961, Kabeer 1999:14) Kabeer thus argues that the changes in marital organization “catalyzed a change in gender relations.” (Kabeer 1999:14) More, in addition to a restriction of mobility, a restriction of wealth was also imposed with the arrival of this new patriarchal structure of marriage. Most importantly, a daughter’s right to her father’s wealth was restricted by Sthreedhanam, dowry, paid at marriage. (Chacko 2003:55) The new legislations in Kerala redefined “relations of protection and dependence between husband and wife, father and children, and facilitated the growth of patrilocal families among matrilineal Hindu groups. (Kodoth 2008:12) Former rights in their natal homes, which “marked a sense of continuity rather than rupture and vulnerability” (Kodoth 2008:12) were severed in this new system of reform. Fuller’s study in a village in Travancore, for example, discovered that inheritance of land has become replaced by a new transfer of exchange which is much more substantial: dowry at marriage. This may be directly observed in the growing presence and general visibility of dowry in Kerala. (Kodoth 2008:20).

### Dowry

The rising presence and importance of dowry acts as an additional barrier to women’s empowerment in Kerala. The Status Study of Women in Kerala by Sakhi Women’s Resource Centre revealed in 2006 that “with the increase in education” in Kerala, “dowry is escalating.” (Kuruvilla 2011:80) Dowry is a practice that commonly denotes “a women’s share of wealth, transferred at a time of marriage” and a “properly dowered daughter reflected well on the father

and his social standing.” (Cacko 2003:55) Following independence, socioeconomic class began to surpass caste “as a touchstone of status... and dowry was one of the ways in which families’ upwardly mobile could display their affluence.” (Cacko 2003:55) Despite laws to restrict the practice of dowry, such as the Prohibition Act in 1961, and the further modifications to the Act in 1984, little impact has been made. Instead, a 2002 survey by All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) showed the presence of dowry to be rampant especially in literate states such as Kerala. (Cacko 2003:55) Sthreedhanam, while explicated as a transfer of family wealth to a woman, often fails to land in her own hands. Instead of “assuring financial independence... sthreedhanam is appropriated by husband and used to pay of loans, start new businesses... further disenfranchising women.” (Cacko 2003:56) With Kerala’s economic state remaining increasingly uncertain, dowry rates are rising and becoming unattainable. This coincides with the recorded rise of suicide rates in Kerala; for example, there was a case in 1990 whereby three sisters hung themselves to spare their families the financial burden of marriage. (Cacko 2003:56) The number of recorded suicides in Kerala has tripled from 1994 to 2000. Indeed “Kerala constitutes about 3.1 percent of the total population in India (Census of India, 2001), but accounts for 10.1 percent of all the suicides in India.”<sup>12</sup> (Mitra and Singh 2007:1230) More, it may be noted that the largest percentage of suicides for women occur in post-graduates.<sup>13</sup> Organizations provide counselling and legal assistance to women who have been disempowered by issues of dowry, land rights, and inheritance; these services, however, though positive, are reactive instead of proactive. The root of these social development issues require tentative dismantling in order to remove “structural and cultural barriers” (Cacko 2003:57) for furthering

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<sup>12</sup> See Table 4 in Appendix C for further details.

<sup>13</sup> See Table 5 in Appendix C.

women's social, economic, and familial standings.

The rise of dowry in Kerala catalyzes the discussion of the growing economic nature of marriage in Kerala. Indeed, Osella and Osella argue that marriage increasingly has become a “stage of public performance of a family's wealth status and style... it is a consumer practice providing access to social mobility.” (Kodoth 2008:17) Marriage, “raised to the level of social imperative, mediates gendered interest and identity” and thus “family decision regarding education of women are harmonized with the perceived requirements of marriage.” (Osella and Osella, Kodoth, 2008:17)

Marriage as an economic and social exchange, as well as a revelation of status, is central to understanding the misconceptions of education as a means to empowerment for women in Kerala. Whilst education and literacy rates are the highest in the country, further investigation reveals that education is often merely a ‘bargaining chip’ for a woman to be ‘married off’ (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) to a better husband and family. Indeed a new “emerging norm of femininity dictates that women use their education in the interests of marriage to be accomplished wives and mothers.” (Osella and Osella, Kodoth, 2008:17) Education, then, becomes a factor in “marriageability enhancing terms.” (Kodoth 2008:24) Indeed according to recent studies, “despite being much better educated than their husbands, 84 percent of wives of migrant males were most likely to remain housewives.” (Mitra and Singh 2007: 1235, Zachariah et al., 2003)

Moly Kuruvilla, Head of the Department at the University of Calicut in Kerala, in her experience as a participatory researcher in the Malabar region, states that “the same mentality of parents thirty years back in central Kerala is still prevalent today. After 30 years, parents are willing to send their daughters for higher education until they find a good husband.” (Kuruvilla Interview 01/17/17) Professor Kuruvilla demonstrates this through a study she conducted in 1988, and again

in 2014. In 1988, Kuruvilla asked boys and girls on campus about their attitudes towards women's employment; while women were in support of employment, boys and male scholars were against it. In 2014, she repeated the same study, with the hypothesis that with the growth of education, these results would have changed. Their findings showed that 100% of women believed women should go for jobs after their studies, while the boy students and scholars had not changed at all. After publishing the work, she received protest from her male students, who believed that their friends were all progressive<sup>14</sup>. When it came time to produce their own research, however, the same male students realized that while socially men would seem "positive and progressive, their minds were still conservative" with the reasoning that "we take care of these things, we are protectors and providers, so why should women do any of this?" (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) Kuruvilla explains that she believes the economic nature of marriage, in many cases, has resulted in a lack of "true love<sup>15</sup>, to surpass tradition, in the home." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17)

Such personal positionalities must be absorbed with the same attentiveness and validity given to standard social development indexes. If statistically, this region of Kerala is shown as progressive in terms of its conventional indicators, but case studies show that the positionalities of young men and families are unchanged, regardless of these indicators, then alternative research is both necessary and essential for any active change. Indeed "these kinds of interviews give a clear picture of the actual condition of women in Kerala, and researchers must not be misguided by WDI. You must look for new dimensions of indicators." (Kuruvilla Interview 01/17/17)

### **Failure Conventional Indicators**

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<sup>14</sup> Progressive in this sense meant that her male students believed their friends would want their wives or daughters to have jobs following their time in school.

<sup>15</sup> Love, for Kuruvilla, implied a sense of understanding, support, and care for a spouse. Moly Kuruvilla equates a lack of love with a lack of care, and thus a lack of want for empowerment, in a spouse.

The former conversation of dowry catalyzes the issue of failing and misleading conventional indicators. Conventional indicators of development observe the empowerment of women in terms of literacy, sex ratios, health care facilities and family size. These indicators often socially assume women's subsequential freedom in both the household and society. More, as stated by author John Kurien, often when people "allude to the Kerala model they are referring to the average situation - only the central tendency of the distribution of the indicators are used to establish said points." (CDS 1975; Ratcliffe, 1978; Rajeev 1983; Panikar & Soman, 1984; Franke and Chasin, 1989; Dreze & Sen, 1989, Jeffrey, 1992) Indeed in India, "Keralite women are seen as an elite group... the 'angels of paradise' because of their conventional indicator statistics." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) Professor Kuruvilla discussed her experience at conferences across the country, where women wished to speak to her in order to discover the various privileges she enjoys in this 'modern' society. This, as she says, "is a false notion... women are not enjoying anything that can be boasted about." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) An example of this phenomenon Moly discusses can be observed in varying statistics; for example, physical health and educational profiles are high, Kerala is home to the lowest mental health profiles in all of India. Gender equality, then, must be analyzed beyond said indicators, as education cannot be a sole reflection of status. A Harvard framework "based on Sara Longwe's formulation in 1991, list five levels of gender equality through empowerment: welfare, access, conscientisation, participation, and control." (Harish and Harishankar 2003:102) This empowerment approach focuses on a woman's sense of power rather than her power over. (Harish and Harishankar 2003:102)

### **Analyzing Empowerment**

Suma Scaria explicates the stark gap between conventional indicators of development



and the failed elevation of “women from their subordinate status in the household.” (Scaria 2014:421) Scaria describes this gap in terms of gendering at three levels including education, employment and access to economic resources; more specifically, social norms, dowry and the patrilineal system of inheritance affect this process, as previously discussed. (Scaria 2014:421) Women represent 70% of the poor in Kerala. (Kripa and Surendranathan 2008:200) The problem, Scaria states, is that many empirical studies done in Kerala have not challenged the conventional indicators and the subsequential narratives that follow. (Scaria 2014:422). Narratives, for example, which pose Keralite women as inherently empowered because of their high levels of education and physical health in comparison to women in the rest of India. Instead, indicators should include the influence women have on decision making within the household, their freedom of physical mobility, and their access to economic resources through the use of ethnographic research methods in order to “bring out the complex mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced.” (Scaria 2014:425)

The conversation surrounding women’s status and mobility within the Kerala model can must first be analyzed and critiqued for the fluidity of its common terms. Here I will use Naila Kabeer’s article entitled “Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment” in order to clarify the terms that will follow, as well as explicate their shortcomings.

A central tenant of development discussions involves the lack of resources available to women in improving their social and economic mobility. The term resources, however, must be qualified on various levels. First, resources should extend to “those economic, human, and social” spheres “which reflect rules and norms governing distribution in institutional areas” holding the ability to “define priorities and enforce claims.” (Kabeer 1999:437) Kabeer emphasizes the importance in understanding resources as physical and social; resources, only in

this sense, may catalyze and support agency and choice. Agency here can be defined as one's ability to choose "one's goals and act upon them, encompassing the motivation behind their activity as well." (Kabeer 1999:438) Agency often ties into discussions on women's social mobility, thus it is important to clarify that one must be tentative about how this word is used. True agency requires the ability of an individual to conceptualize what it is they wish to change or choose. Kabeer's work calls attention to the importance of these two words when discussing women's empowerment, or lack thereof. Indeed it is "only when failure to achieve one's goals reflects deep-seated constraint on the ability to choose that it can be taken as a manifestation of disempowerment." (Kabeer 1999:438) Another important section of her work emphasizes the importance of qualifying gender inequality beyond standard indicators of scarcity, as women's disempowerment must be understood as more than a matter of poverty. Measuring empowerment involves understanding and changing entrenched social structures that have been reconfirmed through custom and religion over the years, in order to bring forth individual agency and choice. (Kabeer 1999: 444) Indeed more important than the choice women are granted, is the conditions within which they are able to make said choices. In terms of the economy, for example, female work participation in Kerala is among the lowest in the country, and declining. (Gulati Rajan 1991, Eapen 1992, Kumar 1992, Kabeer 1999:27) More, "female work force participation rates are less than half of men" standing at forty-four, versus ninety-six percent. (Kabeer 1999:28) Women, if employed, often are engaged in jobs considered low on a professional hierarchy scale; indeed a weaker level of employment "indicates a worsening of their access to self-acquired income" (Kabeer 1999:30) which follows with a subsequent restriction of social and physical mobility.

For the following section, I will provide various examples of where apparently positive

developmental indicators did not necessarily result in the empowerment of women. Education, while important for social development, encompasses only a portion of necessary change.

### **Suma Scaria's Study at Kudumbashree**

The State Poverty Eradication Mission, known as Kudumbashree, is a “state-sponsored woman-centric poverty alleviation programme” which is “community based, women oriented, and participatory... implemented through local self-governments within the state.” (Jasmine 2014:73) Suma Scaria's study of Kudumbashree, however, reveals the shortcomings of women's community programmes in its ability to fully empower them. Her paper seeks to expose the “disjuncture between conventional and non-conventional indicators for women's well-being.” (2014:422) Scaria's study first considers three traditional theoretical approaches to the study of women's empowerment. First, a Women In Development, or WID approach, critiques the automaticity of this theory, and instead contends that economic growth will increase the inequalities between men and women in the initial stages “but decline after a certain stage of growth.” (Scaria 2014:424) Second, a Gender and Development, or GAD approach, analyses institutional structures, such as patriarchy and kinship systems in order to understand generated inequality between men and women. This approach “recognises the necessity to complement conventional with non-conventional indicators for measuring gender inequality.” (Kabeer 1994, Scaria 2014:424) Lastly, a neoclassical approach, which argues that the expansion of the market would lead to a subsequent growth in economic opportunity for both men and women, thus reducing inequality through employment. Scaria emphasizes the importance of ethnographic research methods in order to “bring out the complex mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced.” (Scaria 2014:425) Ethnographic research, for example, distinguishes a difference between choice and achievements. Her study in Wadakkancherry

village, known for its high GDI, uses structured questionnaires, open-ended interviews, and case studies, along with historical analysis, in order to reveal said complex mechanisms.

Jasmine C.K. Haseena conducted a study of Kudumbashree Ayalkoottam, an innovative mission by Kudumbashree in Kerala. This sector's most prominent features is its emphasis on empowerment through economy and micro-finance; indeed "economic empowerment is of the utmost significance in order to achieve lasting and sustainable development in a society." (Jasmine 2014:72) She mentions the work of Albee, in 1994, who demonstrated that economic empowerment projects focused on income generation allowed "women to independently acquire their income" as well as the works of Jaya S. Anand in 2002 who emphasized that credit alone "may not produce desired impact" but supporting services through which credit is delivered are critical for impact and sustainability. (Jasmine 2014:73) In order to measure women's empowerment, Scaria uses two measurements: the role of women in decision making, and physical mobility. (Scaria 2014:431) In order to obtain this information, she gathered data through questions relating to "purchases of goods and rights of mobility." (Scaria 2014:431) First, her study showed that 81% of women did not travel alone outside of their village, and half those who were not married were unable to move freely within the village. (Scaria 2014:433) More, those with their own source of income were not able to voice their own decisions in how to spend that money.

In terms of education, while the number of women in university was shown to be higher than men, the number of women in professional job oriented courses was lower than men. Here Scaria makes the analysis that education in many ways is still tied to domesticity for women. Dominantly, as previously discussed, women's education was tied to marriageability, and those who are able to be educated have surpassed factors including "inheritance, patrilocal residence,

and dowry.” (Scaria 2014:441) Women often pursue subjects such as “agricultural labour, household industry, and school teaching.” (Scaria 2014: 438) which reflects this division. These factors often influence women’s lack of access to higher education, leaving them to have feminised occupations such as agricultural labour, household industry, domestic service... office and shop assistants, and school teachers. (Scaria 2014:438) Her study found that many “women’s preference for particular occupations tied to domesticity [and] fear of social approval.” (Scaria 2014:438) For the Kudumbashree project, while women could meet and participate in activities outside of the home, “the problem in the analysis of Kudumbashree is in the misalignment between conventional development indicators and realistic empowerment failures.” As a woman’s educational and employment interests were still linked to domesticity, there is an apparent lack of both resources and agency in a women’s access to full empowerment. (Kabeer 1999)

### **Sharmila Sreekumar and the Gender Paradox**

The conversations surrounding education and women in Kerala also holds many structural flaws. Sharmila Sreekumar discusses the issues of gender paradox in representations of women in Kerala, in her work entitled “The Land of Gender Paradox: Getting Past the Commonsense of Contemporary Kerala.” The discussion surrounding women in Kerala often gravitates in two directions. First, it discusses the conventional indicators including high literacy rates, low infant mortality, and achievements in family planning. Women are included in these indicators, providing a guise of neutrality. Upon analysis, however, these generalised groupings of development have left out important marginalised groups, including women. The literacy rates in 1991, for example, of Scheduled tribe and Scheduled caste women, were 74 and 51 percent; these numbers strongly differ from the average representations of Kerala’s educated society.

Sreekumar discusses this concept in terms of Kerala's supposed utopia, asking whether this "utopia holds a place for those othered from it." (Sreekumar 2007:43) Indeed development indicators often "obscure axes of social difference such as caste, religion, and birth." (Sreekumar 2007:42) The issue of development indicator representations is two-fold. First, it often places those outside of dominant castes and social representation as those which "furnish the countryside of this utopia." (Sreekumar 2007:42) Second, the prevalence of woman's role within the household is minimized by the assumption that a woman's education brings her to a higher status, that she is somehow relinquished from these duties. Instead, women take on a double role, whereby they are expected to perform their duties within a household, whilst attempting to achieve their economic and educational endeavours. (Sreekumar 2007:41)

## **Chapter Four: Development Programs: Failures and Successes For Women**

In order to understand issues of women empowerment practically, this section of my paper will denote development program failures and successes.

### **Mussel Farming: Success without Education**

Kripa and Surendranathan discuss a mussel farming project's success in fostering women's empowerment through specific techniques such as risk aversion and self-help groups. Mussel farming has recently "gained popularity along the southwest coast of India, with more than 3,000 women owners of mussel farms." (Kripa and Surendranathan 2008:199) Kripa and Surendranathan's study is important to note, as it highlights the precise strategies that allow a project to reach success in its ability to increase women's access to resources, to be in control of their own projects, and to increase their power within the household. (2008:200) The study critically analyses the role of financial supports, the impact of the project in terms of employment opportunities and women's empowerment. The first essential point of the study indicates the importance of financial support; monetary access and support is crucial in starting their own farms. The next essential point of their study involves the discussion of risks; indeed, Kripa and Surendranathan's study demonstrated that in observing the harvests of other farmers, farmers were more inclined to venture into the project. (2008:201) More, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute identified the technique of mussel farming in 1996, and it has since gained popularization. (2008:199) Women self-help groups, such as SHGS, chose the technology for mussel farming and thus this factor also increased its popularisation. Other important aspects of the project included the "flexibility of working hours, proximity of the farm to the homestead... the low risk and reasonably good profit", all of which encouraged women to start farms each year. (2008:201) The profit from these projects was used for household benefits, such

as education, healthcare, and the repayment of loans. An additional benefit of the mussel farming project was its contribution to other industries, indeed the use of coconut husk increased production of the material in the same region. Kripa and Surendranathan's study demonstrates that "the rural poor in India have the competence, and given the right support can be successful producers of valuable goods." (2008:203) Here, without the presence of higher education, women were able to become empowered through projects fostered in their own vision, with financial and group support. Most importantly, the study explicates the importance of raising "women's access to resources and increasingly their level of autonomy and decision-making powers." (2008:204)

#### Gender Budgeting as a tool for the Empowerment (The Work of Professor Mini Sukumar)

Gender budgeting as a way of direction resources in a manner that recognizes the importance of gender equality in economic growth and social development. (Sukumar 2012:1) Sukumar discusses the importance of gendering local budget plans. Local Self-Governing Institutions (LSGIs) have a four part planning process. First, they develop policy framing in community level discussions meetings or Grama Sabhas. Next, strategy is developed through seminars and development reports. Third, working groups begin to plan in various fields, such as education and health. Last, plans are formed in documents and annual budgeting. (Sukumar 2012:4) Despite these steps, Sukumar argues that LSGI plans are not gender responsive; while funds go to Women Component Plans (WCP), they don't necessarily affect women's empowerment; for example, "physical allocation of funds to WCP<sup>16</sup> has been done successfully for many years but it is not reflected positively in influencing changes in gender roles or women's situation in general." (Sukumar 2012:4) While LSGI's put forth schemes which

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<sup>16</sup> Women Component Plan. (See Sukumar 2012)



“enhance opportunities for women in the local economy... the changing process is slow and mediated with stronger cultural and economical forces in the society.” (Sukumar 2012:4)

Kerala’s Institute for Local Administration (KILA), was thus started to engender development plans; identifying that development projects need to observe issues from a gender perspective. (2012:5) Aspects of gender development planning include, but are not limited to, identifying and categorizing gender issues, review effectiveness of past projects, and familiarizing groups on general concepts about gender planning. (Sukumar 2012:5) The methods of data collection included secondary data regarding “women’s literacy, health, employment, property and ownership over land, status, social participation.” (Sukumar 2012:5) Kudumbashree was used here as a method of access for local group discussions as the group created the space for members of the community to come together and discuss their concerns and solutions for varying social issues. Sukumar’s study highlighted that some of the problems observed through the data collection were: the unemployment of women, their lack of control over finances and the lack of opportunity for women workers. In observing past studies, Sukumar’s study report showed a lack of analysis in locally specific problems and subsequent solutions. (Sukumar 2012:6) One instance, for example, showed that despite the presence of schools in Mararikkulam, their infrastructure was lacking as it lacked girl-friendly toilets, proper toys and chairs, and sufficient transportation. Sukumar’s study, then, shows how gender planning may be effective. If the issue is that few women own land and do not identify as farmers and cultivators, the projects suggested include “awareness programmes for joint ownership of land, and cultivation oriented projects to distribute seeds and fertilizers.” (Sukumar 2012) For example, similar to the success of Mussel Farming, more loan schemes could be set up to enable women fish vendors. The success of gender budgeting surrounds the appropriate analysis of development

issues with a gender-specific approach; this “exercise puts economic freedom, women’s safety and mobility... as the central concern of planning for development.” (Sukumar 2012)

### Governance at the Grassroots: Leadership of a Woman Panchayat

Governance at the grassroots has shown to have significant impact on development outcomes, specifically when this governance involves the voice and participation of women. R.P Vasala, Panchayat of Chemancheri in Kozhikode, made a significant impact within her district through the use of alternative development models, consultancy and problem-solving methods. In her study of R.P. Vasala, Cline Sunny demonstrates the importance of “gender equality as a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development.” (Sunny 2014:40) Three major issues were present in Chemancheri, these included a fall in agricultural output, a lack of irrigation facilities, and a fall in prices of agricultural products, thus massive unemployment. (Sunny 2014:42) The type of intervention chosen for a development project must critically and directly respond to the issues expressed on the ground; more, intervention must be conducted in such a way that those adapting the changes directed their way can master, repeat, and teach to other members of the community. Often, complex technological interventions, or machinery that is economically unrealistic, results in the failure of developmental projects as it does not respond well with local people, and thus participation lacks and projects do not succeed. R.P. Vasala’s techniques of governance most importantly included discussions amongst *panchayats*, understanding the root of the problem for communities. More, with correct application, the rejuvenation of one project often contributed to the subsequent rejuvenation of another. For fishers, their fishing market was renovated and they were provided with financial assistance in order to improve their homes; water resources were renovated which resulted not only in fresh drinking water and the rejuvenation of agricultural production, but

resulted in the re-emergence of paddy cultivation. (Sunny 2014:43) With the construction of cattle sheds came high milk production, and with the raised awareness for education and night classes came a passing rate “of Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) from 45 percent in 2000 to 89 percent in 2005.” (Sunny 2014:43) More, opening a computer centre resulted in women’s employment. Women could now earn incomes for their households by doing jobs such as data entry. The projects in Chemancheri all began at the basic level. Solid waste management, roads, houses, and pathways, were placed as a priority and became attainable through tax collections and governmental schemes. The proposals for these changes, however, were not simply indicated and applied. Campaigns, local meetings and discussions at the ward level were necessary in order to promote co-operation and understanding in the importance of these projects and how they would prosper and benefit the community as a whole. Indeed, the key was “frequent interaction with the people, identifying and dealing with the problems of women” (Sunny 2014:44) and the promotion of women’s income through Kudumbasree entrepreneurial pursuits. In Chemancheri, 193 Kudumbasree units were formed, which in turn produced “income generation programmes like cultivation of horticulture and oyster” and other projects alike. R.P. Vasala’s success in Chemancheri stemmed from her ability to mobilise the population surrounding her in participatory measures to not only implement projects but to raise overall awareness on the priority of said projects.

### Intervention Methods

In the face of impending challenges, the women at the Women’s Studies department in the University of Calicut continually discuss ways to combat the obstacles to women’s empowerment in the Malabar region. One may observe effective tools of intervention in the work of Moly Kuruvilla. Professor Kuruvilla has been a catalyst for the facilitation and

augmentation of women's empowerment in the Malabar region. In 2008, she started the constitution of Women's Cells in the 460 affiliated colleges of Calicut University. In the colleges, "women cells are forums where students and teachers can discuss gender issues" with the Women Studies department at the University being the "lead agency." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) More, every year on March 9th or 7th, the days before and after Women's Day, the university organizes "workshops of women's coordinators, who sit together and share problems and stories, in order to chalk out 15 programmes for the colleges." These programs are things such as debates, which focus on topics "such as women's safety from marriage versus women's safety from employment." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) In these programs, there are "classes from experts of legal awareness, women achievers, gender theorists, educational empowerment seminars and discussions on the problems of the educational system." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) More, the university started an award system for the best women's cell in the state. For this award, "the school with the best activity report, qualified by programs that meet strategic gender needs that can improve the status of women, is given an award on March 8th." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) The central government of India has committees that assess the quality of programs, research, and extra-curricular activities of every university. One of the major indexes of said assessments involves "what the college or university is doing for gender equality... thus, earning this award makes said college or university stand out on these assessments." (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) These methods are effective tools for lasting change, and encourage the empowerment of women, through their ability to draw awareness to those aspects of sociality that impede the liberation of women in Kerala. Mandatory programs and debates which facilitate discussions on relevant gender issues may proliferate the awareness levels of students and families.

Beyond the actual programs that Moly has co-ordinated, she shares her insights on the

avenues that she believes need to be explored in order to change the situation of women in Kerala. “My new slogan,” says Moly, “is that we need male empowerment.” (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) Indeed “most of our girls have changed, their perceptions have changed, yet men are not willing to change at all.” Based on her study previously described in this paper, she mentions the psychological repercussions of a boy’s unchanging traditional views of his daughter or wife. “If a man is against the employment of his wife, yet his wife understands the value of a job, one can imagine the torture this woman would feel.” Indeed in most cases men desired for “a wife that would be just like our mothers.” (Kuruvilla 01/17/17) Kuruvilla describes this problem as Kerala being a tradition bound society. A woman has the right to work, so long as the household chores have been completed. She asks how we may begin to break the gender tradition of labour. Here is where, in her talks to schools, Moly encourages young boys to take a share of the responsibilities of household things; in most cases, however, boys do not want to do this. For post grad student Asvithi at the university, this issue stems from educational influence at a young age. While Asvithi believes that educating boys is important for change, she believes that a revolutionary change must occur in our educational system in Kerala from a low primary level. At present, faculties at the University of Calicut have been studying gender stereotyping, and the representations of gender stereotyping in primary class textbooks. The syllabus, according to Aswati, “must be totally changed in order to bring about gender neutral aspects and gender-neutral perspectives to the curriculum.” (Asvithi 01/18/17) While studying, young students are exposed to pictures of women represented as moms doing household chores, while the men are often reading newspapers and driving cars. More, young children in the book are depicted in gender stereotyped ways as well: “boys are seen climbing up trees, while girls sit on the ground and watch him while he plucks fruits.” (Asvithi 01/18/17) From a young age, a particular power

relation is represented and “internalised through these kinds of images, where women are told they should do this, while men should be reading newspapers.” (Asvithi 01/18/17) Young children take on these perspectives and “in the gendering process, children are manipulated and channelized, canonized and exposed to activities which then form their own character.” (Ibid) Indeed, “education is the manifestation of the perfection already within men; we must change this system and this style of educating. If you give this biased, one dimensional curriculum to girls and boys, you will get a biased product who will have a patriarchal, androcentric perspective of the future.” (Asvithi 01/18/17) Making room for the minds that may foster the empowerment of women in everyday Keralan society, then, seems to find its roots in youth education. Access to education, as seen in previous examples given, does not suffice in making absolute change in women’s access to agency, mobility, and empowerment. Indeed this access does not encompass the ideological overhaul that is necessary for systemic change. If, as given in the example by Kuruvilla, boys at the undergraduate and postgraduate level dominantly do not believe, despite their education, that a woman should work if it interferes with her caregiving abilities, then said education has not succeeded in transgressing the firm gender roles that have been formed for most of their young lives. A future project in this area may entail a proposition for certain elements of the youth education curriculum to be changed so as to extinguish the images of women as passive caregivers to an image of women actively participating in the activity or place of their choosing.

Changes for women’s studies in Kerala involves structural shifts in the production of knowledge on women as well. This concept may be discussed in terms of its relevance in Kerala and in women’s studies as a whole. Kuruvilla, in her work discussing gender components in teacher training, discusses the educational system’s failure to respond to “social concerns in a

proper way.” (Kuruvilla 2011:46) While education improves women’s qualifications, it does not necessarily improve their overall conditions. (Ibid) An example of this can be seen in the case of commerce graduate, Aswathi. Though she received a commerce degree, her access to such education did not come to fruition in the form of a well deserved and well paid job in her field. Aswathi’s education could not permeate the assumptions and thought processes of her employer.

“According to my education, I should have gotten a high paying job, but I was paid 3500 rupees per month, for a job another man was being paid 20,000 rupees per month for. They told me that I would do small work, but after I joined the work got harder and harder and I realized I should have been paid more, so I left. After that I haven’t been able to get a proper job. I know this is because I am a girl. They say that a man can work in a better environment. For women, in an interview, they’ll ask me if I’m married or not. If I’m not married, they tell me that I have to be married in order to work, because marriage may mean I’ll leave the company when I’m 25. This is why my sister is in Luxemburg, I will be leaving here and go there to look for a better job. I don’t mind working for hours and hours, but the work I do should be rewarded.” (Aswathi 01/15/2017)

Marriage, for Aswathi’s employers, is equated with quitting, as marriage for a woman intrinsically implies dedicated domesticity and thus unemployment. One does not assume the two can coexist. Aswathi’s age and marital status are essentially considered a liability in the workplace, as the preconceived notion of her role approaching the age of twenty five is presumed for her. Her education, in this case, allows her to perhaps enter the interview, and in the previous case enter the field itself, but there are still sociocultural boundaries that limit her from working the job she longs for. More, I must recognize that wage inequality is not strictly an Keralan-Indian issue. It must be noted, however, that here in the case of Aswathi, the female is making 18

cents on the male dollar, compared to the American 75 cents on the male dollar. An equally qualified male makes 5.7 more than his female counterpart in this example, where a male makes 1.8 more in North American contexts. For many of the women in Kerala, like Aswathi, it seems that education does not reach so far as to distinguish the stereotypic concepts that still penetrate the work force and many family homes. Education, rather, must work in amalgamation with other initiatives, as mentioned prior, in order to enact change.

Following the education of youth on gender stereotyping, Aswathi believes major change must come from the home. “Looking at the elements of socialization, parents must treat their children as individuals - not as girls or boys; they must inculcate a gender-neutral value in them.” (Aswathi 01/18/17) When asked how this could be achieved, Aswathi began with the example of allowing a girl child to ride a bike if she wishes to ride a bike, made possible through the education of parents. Aswathi tells me of her childhood in a similar fashion. When Aswathi was small, she remembers “being done our meal and being told to wash our plates, where the boys are taught to leave their plates for their mothers. We were treated very differently right from when we were young, which is when the biggest change can happen.” (Aswathi 01/15/17)

While not necessarily hopeful for the current generation, Aswathi holds hope for the coming generation of youth who may learn these values. More courses like women’s studies are necessary for for systematic change; indeed while “women’s centres organize programs related to women empowerment, they do not provide courses.” More, Aswathi believes that offering PG courses in women’s studies is “not enough; not enough because our character is already formed and all of a sudden we are entering a field that negates all the things which we have studied throughout the years.” (Interview) The bias towards women in this society has been internalized politically, economically and historically for years, beginning in childhood; thus, we must see a



dominant critique involves representative disciplines in youth syllabi in order to teach new thought patterns and behaviours from a young age.

### **Conclusion**

This work has explored particular aspects of culture-specific relationships between women, education, and their social surroundings in the Malabar region. Following the analysis of former works on this topic, and conversations with a few women from the University of Calicut in Kerala, three areas of investigation must be duly noted and are recommended for further inquiry. First, the general concepts which often dominate discussions surrounding women's development in Kerala must be individually identified, defined, and specified in order to proliferate accurate analyses on the historical implication of said concepts. These concepts include the prominent assumptions present in the writings about matriliney, such as those blueprint narratives for matrilineal formation and deconstruction<sup>17</sup>. These narratives must be dismantled in order to give way to the dynamic changing landscape through which the structure of matriliney in the region changed. This landscape includes legal redefinition by the colonial state, economic ideological change, and the changing social foundations for tharavadus in the Malabar region. Discussions surrounding dowry, land reform and land ownership, as well as access to education, must be similarly dismantled and historically analyzed in order to produce accurate representations of women's development in Kerala. More, women's development should be intrinsically linked to three crucial aspects of empowerment: acquiring access to the ability to choose, freedom of social mobility and rights over monetary and social decision making.<sup>18</sup> The second area of this study which may be noted and further investigated surrounds

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<sup>17</sup> See bottom of page 32 for details.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Two:

the style through which said study has been gathered. While this study has been limited by time and resources, and thus cannot provide large representative data to reflect Malabar society as a whole, it draws upon important postcolonial methodology that greatly benefits [this sort of work]. Indeed the effects of education on women's empowerment in Kerala may be best analyzed through a method of exchange that takes into account the multitude of social variables which may affect said the mobility, while actively engaging and valuing the analysis of those women who are directly affected by the previously mentioned social variables. The third focal point for discussions surrounding women's development in Kerala may surround an investigation into all aspects of childhood and adolescent school curriculum. Inspired by Asvithi's critique of Keralan curriculum, this portion of the paper seems to be the least explored in the scholarship surrounding women's empowerment in Kerala. Such an investigation may break through conventional indicators of development in the region, as well as commonplace narratives and focal points which surround women's development discussions, such as dowry, matriliney, and land reform. A focus on the structural components of gender curriculum, or specific studies such as that mentioned by Asvithi surrounding the images that are placed in childhood textbooks, may lead to new avenues of critique and foundations for new educational and social policies.

As this is a rather specific study, my work could be extended in a multitude of ways. First, more participants could be interviewed in order to gain a more diverse collection of the critiques, barriers and successes voiced by women in the education system in Kerala. Second, these critiques could be used as frameworks which may shape future models of education and socioeconomic policy in the state. More, these discussions could be subsumed into potential development and policy plans that can be replicated in other states within India. I believe it

would be interesting to see how even in states which are at a disadvantage economically, the social status of women can be improved, inspired by the voices and policy analyses of women themselves. Innovation through collaboration may bring forth a multitude of educational and developmental opportunities and lead to constructive conversations surrounding new public policy.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Transcripts and Information

All interviews and surveys were conducted in person at the University of Calicut in a private setting consisting of the professor's offices and the Women's Studies library. The interviews were recorded with a tape recorder then transcribed onto my laptop after completion. Interviewees were selected in two ways: first, Moly Kuruvilla and Mini Sukumar were chosen as the primary [sources] for my study, as the [chair and co-chair] of the Women's Studies Department. Moly Kuruvilla proposed the creation of the department at the University... [continue]. The two students I chose to interview were selected in different ways. Aswathi was chosen for an interview by recommendation of Moly Kuruvilla, based on her post-graduate work in a field similar to my own. Aswathi was chosen by me when met through a friend in Calicut, as her personal experience with education and job-searching post graduation reflected the concepts I try to explore in this paper. Below I provide full transcripts of the interviews taken in Calicut, Kerala, India, over the course of one week. My questions were drafted and altered through my submission and resubmission of ethical clearance by [say ethics board]. The questions I asked were meant to leave the discussion as open ended as possible, gearing the interview towards whatever the interviewee felt was most necessary to discuss. Semi-structured interviews were effective in allowing the interview to change according to the answers given by the interviewees.

#### Interview One:

Transcription for Awatha

Monday January 16, 2017.

12:30 p.m.

***What brought you to women's studies?***

My choice to be in this department came with opposition, from my parents, from my inlay parents. They were not convinced of me choosing this course. This is because the scope of the course's coverage, everyone has an opinion that this course doesn't have scope for further study or jobs. No particular job requires qualified women's studies graduates here in Kerala. I do want to pursue this course, and I am glad I came here.

Fortunately or unfortunately I got the GRF. I came here and asked my seniors about the scope or how the courses go and they told me that I could have joined another course because this doesn't have job opportunities, but I didn't lose my heart when I heard these words from them. I wanted to pursue this course and now I am very much interested and focused on pursuing this course. I am proud a woman's studies student because it is a discipline which opened a new perspective towards the world around us. It provides a different outlook it helps us to inculcate a different outlook towards the society out there. The things which we have been studying since our childhood, which are very much biased, that's a point we can understand when we choose this course.

***Following graduation, what do you see yourself doing? In terms of a career?***

What is ahead of me is my research, doing research. I have already obtained and qualified for GRF so immediately after completing this course I have to join for research and for five years I am doing that. *(Do you want to be a professor?)* This is not in my wildest dreams. My father is a journalist he is a teacher also, he is a local correspondent in a local newspaper called Malayalam Daily. I wanted to be a journalist when I was older. Somewhere I deviated from my journalist aspirations. I want to contribute to society. I want to be some kind of help to those who need me. That's all that I want. I am not at all a selfish.. What should I say.. Sorry I am blabbering.

***Do you think there are any limits to the types of jobs women can get here? What would they be?***

Socially there are much limits from family itself. Women or girls are restricted to, what should I say, get over a particular limit. *There is always a boundary line that is given for girls. What would those be?*

*Ultimately, every parent is looking for the girls to get married after reaching a certain age.* Probably

around 21, 22. Even my father also wanted me to get married after completing my Bachelor's but I wanted to do my PG. He even told me to do my further studies after getting married. ***This is the general perspective of the parents in Kerala. Girls always face these kinds of restrictions while they are going for their studies. Particularly higher studies they have this limit of marrying off. That is a social barrier.***

Then, there is always a preference for boys in particular jobs, like technical places they prefer boys to girls. There is an issue of pre-market and post-market for women entering jobs. Pre-market is discrimination of preferring men to women. Post-market there is a wage gap and less secure jobs and poor working conditions which discourage women to go for jobs and discourage women to sustain in jobs. In pre-market you can also say that parental restrictions and things like that. This is what women face when they go for jobs.

***Where should this discussion lead? What sort of changes can be made? You were saying you'd like to make a difference in whatever you do. What does that look like? As a society where to we look to start making those changes?***

Educating boys is important. But I personally think that we should have a revolutionary change in our education system in Kerala from the very early low primary level. The syllabus has to be totally changed and should bring some gender neutral aspects or gender neutral perspectives to the curriculum. That is what I primarily think. Here faculties are doing research on gender stereotyping. The representation of gender stereotyping in primary class textbooks. We can see that in those texts for those little ones studying, they are given pictures in texts where women always are represented as mothers doing household chores, and men reading newspapers, driving cars, and even little children.. boys climbing up a tree and the girls looking at the him plucking the fruits. These kinds of power relation is very much represented in the textbooks of school children from the very low age. We are from that period, we are internalized through these kinds of images and we quite receive this message that women should do this, men should be doing newspapers while women are doing their work in the kitchen. They are not permitted to enter to the public space. These kinds of messages are being received by children from their

very primary school period. They are taking these kind of perspectives.

You are familiar with the gendering process? In gendering we say that children are manipulated and channelized, canonization and exposed to activities and based on these they are forming their own character. My point is that the whole education should be changed. *So your intervention is through the syllabus?* Yes that's one thing. Moreover, education is the manifestation of the perfection already within men. We have to change that system and the style of educating. If you give this biased, one dimensional curriculum to girls and boys we only get an ultimately biased product, biased person, who is having a patriarchal, androcentric perspective in the future. So that's my first point.

Then, the attitude of parents upbringing their children. You know the elements of socialization? As I already mentioned, the gendering is very much important for girls and boys as well as the crisis that you're pointing out is concerned. Parents should treat their children as an individual, not a girl not a boy. Just inculcate a gender neutral value in them. *For parents, how do you see something like that being achieved? How can we make that happen? Or is that just something that comes with the growing generation?* Let the child grow in their own way. Don't channelize them. Let them do whatever they want to do, you don't need to restrict any of their freedom. If for example a girl child wants to ride a bicycle, bring her a bicycle and don't discourage her saying that it is for your brother. *For parents to come to that realization, how do we teach parents to do that?* This is where the importance of education comes. I don't think for the current generation how far it is possible for them. If they are sensitive towards these gender stereotyping and they know what the outcome of these treatments would be.. it's up to them to decide whether they should treat their children like this.

***So it's kind of like if education can be altered now, then coming generations are the ones that will reap the benefits of these new ideas in society.... but still through education.***

It is through education. Here, women's studies courses are only offered here in PG department. The only department in Kerala. In other districts there are women's studies centre but they don't offer any course as such. They organize programs related to women empowerment but they do not provide courses. In my

initial period in this department here I could understand that providing a PG course in women's studies is not enough. It's not enough because our character is already formed and all of a sudden we are entering Women's Studies which negates all the things which we have been studying throughout these years. So I personally think that providing a PG course is not enough but we should provide some of this syllabus from the young school period. All of a sudden they tell us there is always a biased kind of teaching or biased perspective that you have internalize throughout these years. When you look at history when you look at politics when you look at economics we can see gender discrimination and bias which is against women. So we don't see any representative disciplines anywhere in our syllabus. We say in history they only teach his stories... In literature also we can see that.

*For me, as a researcher, what's sorts of things is it important for me to know if I'm studying this topic? Is there any area I should be exploring? I'm coming from a North American institution and my work is about how if we're going to have this discussion let's have this discussion together. I want my thesis to be a collaborative piece. From the research I've done, but then from the words of all of you. Your words are incredibly valuable to my paper, they will be the center of my paper and that's the point, that your words are basically more important than my own. Because this is your issue. If my work is important, which I hope it would be, is there any area I really need to cover? What's important for us to study and look at here?*

First, culture. Cultural difference should be taken into consideration. As you said, you are coming from a different culture. In Kerala, different from North America or any Western countries. Here, still we give more importance to marriage of family as an institution rather than individualistic ways of life or career oriented ways of life. While looking at this issue, Kerala's education, we are having a very fair number of educated men and women here, but when it comes to the participation of work for men and women, women compared to men are very low. They are educated, they are highly qualified, but number of women going for work is very low.

The reason is this, as I have already mentioned that gender discrimination and marketplace as well as the restrictions from families. For a girl who gets married her situation is doubly difficult for having a job

or sustaining her job because she has the primary liability to look after her household compared to going for work. She has this primary responsibility, not her personal choice but this is a familiar liability I would say. Many girls who married early after completing high secondary education they have to undergo marriage and then their whole world will be related to the household and family. She is a secondary earner. Her husband is the primary breadwinner there, he has the primary objective of looking after the family, where the lady will be serving him. *In him being the breadwinner, he has the freedom of choice because he is controlling the family and money.* This restricts the process of women going for jobs. She will not be able to manage the whole household/course and the work outside which she will be doing. There will be a role conflict between the traditional and modern. Traditional meaning household and modern being the work outside she is doing for earning. Many girls are discouraged, they do not want to go for a job, they do not want to earn for themselves, but they would be happy in the arms of their husband. ***So even though education or opportunity might be available, is the will of women that has been instilled since a young age? So it kind of all funnels down to the primary age of shaping a mindset?***

Even here we can see the girls who have completed their MBBS (Doctor) degree, and do nothing after completing this degree. After getting this doctor degree they prefer to be at home than go and pursue their career. *Why do you think that is?* Because of the pressure of their families. Particularly, after they get married. If two partners have MBBS, the men will go for the profession and the women are not encouraged to go for theirs. This is because the household things will be lost. (On splitting roles - she says that adjustment wouldn't work here.)

Society is dynamic. It will change.

***(After discussing choosing your own partner, she indicates she did... I ask if its related to her parents education)***

I don't have my mother. She was a teacher, she passed away four months ago. Actually, she is a victim of this patriarchal system. She was suffocated between her familial responsibilities and her work outside. She was a passionate teacher, she wanted to pursue higher studies. She always wanted me to go for higher studies rather than getting married off in early ages. She had to feel this crisis or dilemma in balancing her

family and her profession. My father is a teacher also, the both are voracious readers and they are very much progressive. Their parents, though, are very conservative in their outlook. My father's parents wanted my mother to be a perfect housewife but she was very much a rebel to that. She had to undergo several mental traumas and finally she committed suicide. I have learned from her life and she suffered a lot. In the initial period, before I took this course, I always had a very anti monistic perspective towards her. I was always taught that she was not a good mother or housewife. My father always wanted her to be the nucleus of the family. She had to manage the whole thing. The relationship between her and my father from the very beginning until her death was not good. The other people around us taught us that she was someone who doesn't care about family, who will always go for her own choices and I had very bad attitudes towards her. I was very much upset with my family life as such with my parents and my grandparents even my sister. I always wanted to teach them a lesson how to look after a baby or child. Then I look back, and I can see my mother was right. My father was a victim of this patriarchal kind of teaching. He always had male-centric perspective in all the activities and things he wanted to do. He wanted my mother to be like that, to be obedient wife for him. But she was not like that.

My mother is a great example for this. This course opened my eyes to see my mother as my mother actually. Others were telling me that why was she always treating you like this, or always making us do all the work in the house and I was thinking of myself after having these amenities that I am bound to do all these work while my friends are not even experiencing the life in the kitchen? I was blaming everything that I went through.

***Is this a motivator for you now?***

The incident was a realization for me, of deconstructing my mother's life. The way she lived. She was really an individual. For her, it was her decision to quit the life and she quit it. It was her choice, but we miss her. There are a lot of lives like my mother's who was suffering this trauma between their professional and familial life. Their real and bound life. Real is the life they want to live, as a person, and the life they are bound to, as mother, daughter, sister and all. There is this problem with balancing these two worlds. There is difficulty in fulfilling these expected roles.



I want to lead a different life. Still I have lots of restrictions. My partner, my parents, my partner's parents, everyone has emotional hold which is hard to break. *You have pressure from all sides?*

My mother in law is a strong woman and very progressive but she always says to me that when I go for my research and all that to not forget my child behind.

Talks of NGOs like Awash and the other by a great poet in Kerala who runs a rehab home... There are many found in Kerala. *Is this what you're thinking for yourself or something different?*

Actually I want to pursue my higher studies. I want to do academic work and further my studies after PhD and post doctoral fellowship... I am not fixed about my career as such because I want to acquire more and more knowledge. At the same time I would love to work with NGOs or any organization that has the aim of serving society. I am not planning for a fixed job as such but I don't know how far it is going to happen... I am marrying in September and after completing my research I don't know how far I should be able to pursue my dreams but I will. I have to.

### **Interview Two:**

Interview with Moly Kuruvilla

Tuesday January 17th, 2016.

10:00 a.m.

***Tell me about this department of Women's Studies.***

This department was started in 2005, it is only 11 years old. This department started with exclusive funding from the Appex Board (UGC) At the university (University Grants Commission of India). This body controls funds for all Indian universities. All Indian universities must get consent from UGC. This UGC, after recognizing the need for starting a Women's Studies department, funded this department. This

funding was given after getting a proposal from the university. In 2004, the university submitted a proposal to the UGC for granting such a centre for Women's Studies. Initially it was called a centre for women's studies... and later the centre got transformed to the present department. At that time, faculty was given salary from there and all of our activities were given from UGC. UGC has strict guidelines regarding the functioning of the women's studies centres in Indian university. On the basis of the proposal submitted, the university approved and it was granted. In 2005, October 1st, the department started.

***Why did they grant such a department?***

It is a huge sum. Taking into consideration the backwardness of women in Northern Kerala. Here, the majority of the population is muslim. Taking into consideration the backwardness of Muslim women, in order to act as a catalyst to facilitate women's empowerment... this was established.

***How would you do empowerment programs?***

For that, there are strict guidelines. Accordingly, we started functioning and conducting programs. In 2005 and 2006, we had to face much resistance from the students, academics and the public. For students, what is the use of such a department? How is it going to benefit us? From accommodations, this is the first women's studies in Kerala where they are teaching courses they organized. What are they going to teach? The public would ask, oh you have come to make our girls feminist? Feminism is a word which is even today misinterpreted in Kerala. When you go for talks and lectures, the students while interacting would ask are you a feminist? See, they view feminist as something bad. So the public would ask me, you have come to convert them? To be prostitutes? *What was your response to this?* I used to tell them such women's studies programs are new in Kerala. Throughout India they exist, just wait and see what we are going to do. I can understand your feelings because you do not know the true meaning of feminism. Feminism is something divine and mandatory, this is what I Told them. In 2006, we started our first PG program. While starting the program, we had 12 seats - our intake was 12. We conducted an exclusive entrance exam, comprising of written, interview and group discussions, and based on that we chose, and two were boys. Other boys used to ask them, what are you studying? Anatomy? Physiology? Sex? What are you studying. For the public it meant body and anatomy. Women are always equated with their bodies

and this notion was there with the students too. They used to tease the boys about what kind of bodies they were studying? My first question I got in a classroom, I asked if they had any doubts, and one of the boys asked: Ma'am, you said you have a husband and daughter. How come a feminist has a husband and daughter? That was the first question I faced.

This was the misconceptions people had. Here, people have similar misconceptions. From such a situation, now we have reached a condition where the public, the students are all later us. They demand for our classes. Throughout the state people ask for our class because they know what we speak is something that will strengthen, family relationships, that will strengthen, man and woman relationships. I have done more than 1000 talks, and I go there and want to clarify our standing and make them realize what it means - feminism. I want to make them realize the purpose of our department, and what should be the real man and woman relationship. We have the highest literacy here, highest development indicators, the best sex ratio, the only state where women outnumber men. So, the whole Indian community views Keralite women as an elite group. The angels of paradise. Because of our numbers, our majority of girls go for higher education and post grad, and the development indicators.. (etc) all of these are the best which can be equated with Western countries. So, Indian women view us as elite groups. Whenever I go for conferences outside of my state women always want to speak to me just to know what kind of privileges our women are enjoying in our society. But this is a false notion. are not enjoying anything that can be boasted. Even if we are highly literate, highly political conscious, highly education with diverse qualifications, the women in Kerala re having the lowest mental health profiles in India. The IPA, has been warning that the mental health of kerlatie women is the lowest int he country and it is such a contradiction this having the highest physical is having the lowest mental health. Women in Kerala are not happy. I would attribute this unhappiness to the nature o patriarchy and control exercised by our men. We have one more black area, here we have high son profiles. Son preference is very high in Kerala. That too is because of the system exisitng. Another black side is we have a high rate of boys who are young. In our majority age as adults it is women, so it is a feminisation of the higher ages and masculinization of the younger. This is also happening in Kerala. Next, Our people drink alot. Our rate of consumption is 4x the

national average. In your country you have high control. Men are given full sanction on alcohol and even young boys. Women do not. What happens in our homes? Men drink a lot, they are the breadwinners, in Kerala the women even if they are educated are supposed to stay home. More women are joining the labour force of course but still it is considered as an extra privilege or sanction if a woman goes out for work. Socially, they don't like it. Husbands don't like it. Nobody wants women to work. Those who have economic or financial problems, perhaps they will want women to work. In the case of people who are rich, they do not want their women to work. When I was 22, I got two prestigious jobs. In those days women rarely bank of ?, exam was tough and women need went. I passed 2 exams without the knowing of my parents. I just wanted to know that I was capable. So without my parents knowing with pocket money I applied, I went with my friends to write the exam and I passed too. I asked my mom can I attend the interviews, she said I can go just to see how capable I was. I got selected in both cases. When I was selected, there was a huge meeting in my home with uncles and parents etc and gathered and said that if I go for this job, no good boys or good families will want to marry me. Rich boys did not want to send their wives for work it was considered bad. The family is rich enough so why should the woman work? The conception of the time was that good women from good families can get very educated, and should, so that they can become good wives. Our education is something the British people we must be thankful to. They introduced the science education, women's education, in the initial days. In those days, women never went for studies outside the home. Because of the British women started going out. In those days, women's from rich families were the only ones who sent their women. Women's from good families went for education but not for work. While I was in this position the idea was to become a good wife and mother. (Goes on about family, PG, hostels, five sisters, know condition of other girls and how to mingle with them from all backgrounds)...

What I want to convey here is that the same mentality of parents thirty years back in central Kerala is still prevalent in Northern Kerala. Even after 30 years, what I see here is parents are willing to send daughters for higher education until they get a good husband. Higher education is not to make girls join work force or become economically independent, maybe 10%.

***How then do you make a change here? Where do you move forward?***

Here we are to act as catalysts for facilitating and augmenting women empowerment. What we do is, we have made some specific strategies. These strategies is something unique and an exemplary strategy which can be followed by all of India. In 2008, we started and took initiatives to constitute Women Cells in all of our affiliated colleges. Our university has 460 affiliated colleges - these are under the control of the university. The teacher appointment, students they do on their own, but now we have a single window system over the last 3 years. Even the the student enrolment in the student PG programs are dictated by the University, exams by the university, but the teaching is the colleges. Decentralization. All of the colleges are government, religious, state, all ruled by their own, but co-ordinated and controlled by the university. (expands)

In all the colleges, we made it mandatory that they have women cells. These women cells are forums where the students and teacher discuss gender issues. We, the department of Women Studies, is the lead agency. We co-ordinate the activities of women's studies in all 60 colleges. Every year on March 9th or March 7th, before and after Women's day, we organize a workshop of women's co-ordinators from all 60 colleges. They are invited here. There they will sit together, and share problems and stories, and there we chalk out 15 programs. These programs are chalked out from which are sent out to the colleges. The colleges have to conduct at least 10 of these programs, but can take all 15. What kind of programs? These programs are things like debates, topics such as women's safety from marriage versus women's safety from employment. If this debate happens in a college you get a discussion on both sides - how women are secure in marriage and how women are secure in employment. Such discussions happen in all the colleges. This is our success. *How were you able to do this?* The faculty thought about it, chalked out the model, approached our APPEX body syndicate here, which decides, we convinced them of the need for such forums and the conditions of women in our area, and how we can produce a forum. In our higher education curriculum it is so overloaded with content that they don't have time for gender discussions. Here there are classes then from experts from legal awareness classes, women achievers, gender theorists, educational empowerment seminars, what are the problems in the educational system? How we can do it.

etc. Such seminars are in the colleges. One more thing we did, we started an award for the best women's cell. In every section we sent letters to colleges to send a report of the activities they have. The best one, not the maximum number of programs but the qualities of the programs —not cooking classes etc, but programs which are about something that could meet the strategic gender needs. Strategic gender needs programs can improve the status of women. The award is given March 8th. This award has a value, APPEX visits the functionings of college, this competition then goes between colleges to get an award from APPEX, showing that colleges are doing as much as they can for women's emancipation. From the central government, there are central committees who assess the quality of colleges/universities, they come and look at quality of programs, research, extra curricular activities etc.. one major index of quality of programs is asking what the college/university is doing for gender equality. When a college gets an award of this it is a check mark. We are happy we have done such a fantastic strategy. Now, gender issues are widely discussed in all colleges. I went to Wayanad, a women's cell has prepared a "She" manuscript... (explains)

The roles need to change from women as housewives to, women administrators, women publishers, women political and religious leaders.

Here I can reach the boys and tell them why girls should have leadership roles. *How?* During the past 12 years I've done over 1000 talks, went to over 600 colleges. I am getting older, my voice is getting weaker, but I send my students and scholars. I ask them to listen to me and then carry forward the message I carry.

*What avenues should I be going down to get to the bottom of this issue? What should we be discussing?*

Definitely, you cannot get a clear picture of the women here through standard development indicators. That is a surface thing. The problem with the indicators is that the new one needs to include, the decision making power of women, the rate of violence amongst women, political leadership, all of these needs to be explored. Definitely you will get statistics from the internet, but you have collect these with the other positive indicators. These kinds of interviews as well will give you a clear picture regarding

the actual condition of women in Kerala. (Tells me to glance through the titles of the studies at the university, like decision making power of women within marriages). Here you will see Keralan women don't have power in decision making at home except in regard to children or what to eat etc. Researchers like you must not be misguided from WDI. You have to look for new dimensions of indicators. Political leadership here is very low, in all political campaigns you see processions of women, but when it comes to candidates, or when it comes to those who can run in elections women are not given opportunities. Even if they are elected, when it comes to forming the ministry, maybe one woman will get a chance. Such lack of leadership exists in politics and in education systems, in our workforce, in managerial posts, participation of women in senior management for women in India is only 5%. It is 10% in the globe. This kind of discrimination exists.

I am very happy with the Canadian people. After visiting their twice, I felt so bad that I didn't take a decision to move there. I said I was very happy with my India and Kerala. But when I visited, I was so happy to see how the men respect the women. Nobody looks at how you dress. The moment you walk on an Indian street, the people are staring at you. One thing. Another thing, supposed you get to an elevator, in Canada, a man says ladies first. Here in India you can't see such a thing anywhere. Women bashing here, they are pushed aside and pulled out. Least respect for individuality.

Politicians here, attacks are put on the woman. In most conferences, after the great ministers say things about women being the reason for the attacks. When I get a chance to speak. The big police officers and politicians support such assault in the name of women provoking men. I would say you are becoming beastly, men who can not control yourselves. I would equate them with monkeys. If you go to Wayanad you see the monkeys having sex etc, just like that men see so men and he becomes immediately provoked which means he is not a man at all. If a man is a man, God has given him the control of self-control. It must be there. Instead of blaming the lack of self-control, you people are all supporting these such words. The minister then said he didn't mean it like that - but then what did he mean? The dressing style of women was the main reason. But this is even happening to small babies, women in burqas, etc. Small

girls 3 or 4 with no body at all have been assaulted by their teachers. Parents suggest to their girls to not speak out against it either. A friend of mine is a gynaecologist, she told me that in the government hospital a mother and a grandmother brought a small girl of 8 years in, she was bleeding. When she asked about how it happened it was mischief done by the grandfather. The doctors then asked the mother and grandmother why they would let it happen? If they were there how? Internal bleeding is not stopping. Why did you let it happen? The old lady said: "She's a girl. Such things will happen in a girls life. If you have medication, do it. If not, shut your mouth." Such things happen in girls life? This is not an issue. What is the thinking of women? It is natural and it will happen? We will suffer that? So many of girls are abused and harassed to different degrees and their own brothers and parents will tell them to keep quiet. Let others not know about it. If a girl is getting physical advances - we have done a study. (Tells about the study). The response of girls on campus to sexual advances. Some of the girls said that their brothers have advised them to adjust to it, such things happening they must never make it an issue. If you make it an issue, your life will be lost, so you better adjust to it and keep quiet. That voice was given by all brothers. IT shows the degree of stigma attached to women experiencing sexual harassment and domestic violence. Victim blaming is incredibly high here.

***Do you believe in the changes in Women Cells or in early curriculum it can change?***

My new slogan is that we need men empowerment. We have done enough for our girls and women. Now we have to focus on our boys and men. Girls have changed alot, majority of girls have changed. Their perceptions are progressive but unfortunately men are not willing to change at all. In 1988 I collected a study in the campus, that study was on their attitude toward women's employment. Globalization was settling in and women were going out for jobs. I conducted a study just to know what support these women were getting from men and whats the attitude of men towards women empowerment. The findings of the study was that all the girls SUPPORTED women must have employment. But all the boys and scholars and employees were against it. If a man is against the employment of the wife, we can imagine the torture that a lady might be feeling at home with the husband. Such a thing was there in 1998. In 2014, we repeated the study, with the hypothesis that men would have changed. Same campus etc. Our



findings? Women, even today, they are highly progressive, 100% wanted women to go for jobs. Men also changed there were positive changes, but, our boy students and scholars did not change at all. Can you believe it? That was the research. We published it, and when I discussed it in the classroom, with theory, boys in the class said ma'am your sample was wrong. They said their friends were all progressive. When the boys reached fourth semester they did their own research, and they came and said sorry. What you've said is correct. In our studies we got the same findings. The boys are highly conservative. They socially and interacting seem to be positive and progressive, but the fact is, they are least progressive within their minds. Their minds is still conservative. I have done so many studies regarding gender conception, etc. They are against women having equal property rights, against women having jobs and political leadership, they are against it all. Why should women? We are there to take care of that. We are the protectors, why should women? Within their progressive show, they are still very traditional. Even in the most elite institutions this is the case. They want a wife who will take care of the home and us when we get back from the office. We want a wife just like our mothers they said.

This is our most basic problem. It is a tradition bound society. This includes women being in charge of household. You can work provided all household work is done. This is the sanction our women receive. Even if a man comes home first, he will wait for the woman to come home to prepare the dinner, take charge of children, etc. How can we break the gender tradition of labour? In my talks I encourage boys to take share of responsibilities of household things but they are not ready. They want to be free. I think it is because of a lack of true love. If true love was here, it could surpass the traditions. If there is true love for your partner and have compassion you will take up responsibility at home. This is my wife so I must make sure she is happy and she can be free. There is no such thing. Here we call it being married off.

***What is your hope for your students here?***

My first hope is unlike me, I didn't have any body to guide me when I was a student. To expose me to the realities of life when I was young. Nobody was there to tell me the things waiting for me. Now, we are there for our students. I am there for my students to tell them the realities, what is the call of a woman's

life? What she should be, what is waiting for her, how to face the challenges. I am there to guide them. So they have studied and learn everything. I am also a counsellor for 18 years, given for free for girls. God has given me this experiences and refined my thoughts. It is my mission in life to help others. That's why I do this, not for any other reason. My credits are with God. I am there for my students. I share my counselling experience without revealing their identities. I share everything with my students. So, they know what they are. What they can become. The sky is their limit. Work hard, have dreams and hopes. To be something. To leave a mark of their own on this world. You have lived on this globe, you must leave a mark. Such a lady like you has lived here. At least somebody must remember. I want this. People must remember me. I lived and I helped them make them survive they are living because of me. Leave a mark that you have been here on this world as a human being, not getting income and superficial things, in the minds of people you must leave a mark. So I ask my students to do this. Bring about social change, I am getting older, my sound is getting weaker, but my voice and sound is my students. I started a project recently. I could have taken any, but I took up a project for which I am getting funds. This fund is for my students who passed last year. I give them ten days training, on adolescence education. Adolescence education right now is bullshit. It is simply about health and hygiene - what is menstruation? What kind of pad? etc. I analyzed it and found it weak. Adolescent girls face many challenges in our society. From her (my students) research on this topic I chalked out a new program. It is called Safety Quotient, just like IQ it is SQ. In that I have included six brackets. Nobody teaches their girls anything about sexuality before marriage. I work in a program where I meet Muslim girls, almost all of them are married. During my classes, during my interactions, I felt so shocked that they knew nothing about sexuality. Nothing. They have been sexually abused by their husbands, The type of sex they are having.. some girls come in and ask me: "Madam, you said something about penetration and vaginal sex? What does that mean?" During my last married life, I never had such experience. Whatever I do is oral sex for him. He is taking care of me, dress, mobile, food, taking me to Mecca in Medina... doing oral sex for the man is what I do." I couldn't sleep all night because I was thinking if something like that happened to my daughter? But it won't. My daughter is very strong and powerful she knows her voice and space. But this is happening to

so many girls. So in my package I have involved sexuality, sexual abuse, cyber crimes, and all these types of violences and how to face them. I give training for 10 days and I always get doubts from girls because they won't speak openly. In my sessions I read the doubts that have been written to me and I have sent them to schools.

(Inaudible)

I cannot go to classes anymore. So my students have taken on this role. All of my funding is given to them. They are so happy to get a salary. (inaudible) My girls told me they said M'am, they just called us madam. I said your body language, your thoughts, your speech, everything must be as madams. They are telling me we love this so much from our practical sessions in the schools. So it is good. Some of them I am giving to training in parents education, we have PTA in our schools - there we discuss what should be a parent, what should be socialization practices? This is, like the author of Second Sex, "The girls are made to become girls. By the time they become a woman, all of their spirit, their talents, their fire everything has been gone." So we are providing PTA classes where we ask our parents to have the same type of socialization for boys and girls.

I have so much hope in my students. Agents of social change. Now they have to carry this on.

### **Interview Three**

Interview with Mini

Tuesday, January 17 2017.

12:00 p.m.

***What is most important for me to know leaving this department and what you've worked on?***

How are you situating this in Keralan history? Historically are you looking into women's education in Kerala? There are historical factors regarding the educational of women in Kerala. Without discussing this we cannot move forward. The reason is this contributes a difference between Kerala and other states

in the country. It is not a given thing that women's education or empowerment or development in Kerala it is not a given thing. We can place it in the historical dynamics happening in Kerala, and from there we can start talking about education. There is a difference between South India and North India, there is a difference between the other states and Kerala. Mass education is happening in this historical context. Detaching what is happening now to that process will not be complete. You have to identify certain things.

The history of education started from the 18th century, modern education. We have to start from there and see how it has contributed towards a legitimacy or approval for women's education. In Kerala, women didn't have a fight for education, there were no such instances, largely. But in many other states they did have a fight, they did their fight to have education. That's a difference. Also, the product of the colonial rule here and missionaries and the indigenous movements, and the church - these also influenced women's education in Kerala. At certain levels there is an advantage and at certain levels it was like a conditioning for women. That connected with the present day conditions or present day incapacities/status. At once it was an advantage for women, education and what was given to women for having education - jobs for being smart and efficient etc. But at the same time there was a process of conditioning, conditioning a particular set of codes and ethics. The takeaway from this is how the education and empowerment happened and what is its exact nature? How is it connected with colonial modernity? How it is influenced by the colonial modernity and how it become? for women. This is your framework of exercising your agency. Within that framework you are exercising your agency your efficiency your capability for choice. The world choice is exercised through that patriarchy (?) The process of modernity influenced in many ways, to create a modern model for femininity and masculinity in Kerala. We think that we are exercising this, and it is very much family oriented, fashioned for the West and like the West. There is a different process here than elsewhere so we cannot take for granted that we are now empowered, educated, in Kerala. This paradox we experience is situated in a particular historical setting, not in the present. The paradox is the product of this historical gesture. There is a paradox, many researchers have analyze and described it, but it is not a product of the present it is a process. This is the

main reason we cannot move forward with things. For example the notions of sexuality. The notions of sexuality has tremendously changed from the old times to the modern times. It becomes rigid... (inaudible).. now it is like a very constraining thing for exercising your own sexual rights. (inaudible) Perhaps talk to first-second generation migrants in Canada from Kerala... that could paint a clear picture of this...

For this paradox you have to go back and forth. It is not a factor of the present but it is a process. You have to engage with the process of how the modern Malayalam woman has been constructed then it will be easier to discuss this paradox.

#### **Interview Four:**

Interview Aswathi Mahendran

January 16th, 2017.

Re: Marriage

In my family there are a lot of love marriages so my parents have told me it is fine for me to choose my own partner. There are many different religions in my family. I haven't found anyone yet, but in Hinduism we strongly believe in Astrology. So if you are not married by 25 people look at you and ask you why you aren't with anyone yet.

If we have dreams, we have to listen to our parents. We don't want our parents to feel bad because they have suffered. Religion is also a very big deal here as well, especially between Hindus and Muslims. If a Hindu marries a Muslim, the Hindu has to convert Muslim.

Re: Accountant Job

I graduated with a commerce degree. I did my master's in commerce, while I was studying I was working, according to my education I should have gotten a high paying job but I was paid 3500 RS per month, for

a job I should have been paid nearly 20,000 RS per month. They told me it would be small work but after I joined the work got harder and harder and I realized I should have been paid. So I left the job. After that I haven't been able to get a proper job. I know it is because I am a girl. Men are being paid more and they say a guy can work in a better environment. For women, in an interview they ask me if I'm married or not. If I'm not married they tell me that I have to be married in order to work because marriage may mean leaving the company when I am 25.. (They equate marriage with quitting a job). I believe marriage should be when I am ready not at a certain age. This is why, my sister is in Luxembourg and I thought of going there to look for a better job. I don't mind working for hours and hours but the work I do I should get it back.

Old generations have the opinion that we have to stay. The youth I feel have changed a lot, believing more that husband and wife can both work. My friends would talk about this and the attitudes have changed. The change should be brought from home itself, when we are small - this happened in my home - for example when we were done with our meal we were told to wash our plates but they taught the boys to leave their plates for their mothers, so the change should happen in the home. We are treated very differently from when we are young and that's where the biggest change can happen. Other examples: I was in a joint family. My cousin's brother would be with us - in the evening, he can play outside until 7 p.m, but I had to be back by 4 p.m. When I was small, he used to watch WWF, so I would get really interested as well. My family would tell me that I wasn't supposed to. Even now, when I mention WWF, they think I am crazy.

In sports, boys are encouraged to play instead of girls. Society puts women down if they are inclined to play any sports. When boys talk about football, they assume girls don't know anything about the sport and socially talk like that.

## Appendix B: Charts and Statistics.

i) Percentage of Suicide Rates of Females for Different Suicide Causes in Kerala: 1994-2000.

Mitra and Singh. 2007.

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TABLE 4

Percentage Suicide Rates of Females for Different Suicide Causes in Kerala:  
1994–2000

Causes of Suicide	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Failure in examination	51.6	46.6	47.6	45.5	58.6	57.9	61.9
Love affairs	46.3	56.6	50.7	47.5	39.5	39.2	44.4
Fall in social reputation	16.7	8.5	16.9	34.1	26.2	36.7	47.3
Illegitimate pregnancy	100	100	100	100	87.5	100	100
Dowry disputes	84.6	100	86.7	97.3	94.3	70	100
Poverty	18.2	7.7	34.4	7.1	31.3	22.2	0
Insanity	33.3	32.1	36.9	34.2	33.9	38.9	31.3
Dispute over property	22.7	29.1	37.5	30.8	29.6	37.3	28.8
Dreadful diseases	29.9	31.1	32.5	30.5	31.8	33.9	26.6
Unemployment	14.4	13.4	17.7	13.0	17.8	22.1	15.0
Bankruptcy and sudden changes in economic status	13.2	12.1	12.3	13.1	20.9	21.6	19.7
Death of a dear person	25.0	41.6	46.8	51.4	57.7	42.9	40.8
Causes not known	26.0	27.0	27.5	31.2	27.2	28.7	31.9
Other causes	28.6	61.6	37.0	31.5	30.0	19.3	29.1
Total	28.1	29.9	33.0	30.6	30.6	29.9	28.9

Source: State Crime Records Bureau (1993–2000).

ii) Percentage of Female Suicides by Educational Status in Kerala. Mitra and Singh 2007.

TABLE 5

## Percentage of Female Suicides by Educational Status in Kerala

Educational Status	1999	2000	2001
No education	33.6	35.9	37.4
Primary	34.9	32.8	11.3
Middle	28.7	27.2	28.6
Secondary	25.5	24.9	25.1
Higher secondary	29.9	29.1	30.1
Diploma	27.2	26.3	14.5
Graduate	27.7	33.5	30.5
Postgraduate & above	37.14	19.4	31.5

Sources: Calculated from Accidental Deaths & Suicides, 1999-2001, National Crimes Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

iii) Women and Decision on Major Household Purchases, Visit to Her Family and Hospital,

2006. Scaria 2014. (Next Page)



Table 4. Women and Decisions on Major Household Purchases, Visit to Her Family and Hospital, 2006 (n %)

Marital Status	Major HH Purchases						Visit to Own House						Visit to Hospital					
	H	W	B	O	T	(n)	H	W	B	O	T	(n)	H	W	B	O	T	(n)
Currently married	81.1	0.8	10.6	7.5	100	81.4	7.8	7.2	3.6	100	74.1	15	6.1	4.7	100			(360)
Never married	n.a.	15.7	n.a.	84.3	100	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	24.3	n.a.	75.7	100		(70)
Widowed	n.a.	26.7	n.a.	73.3	100	n.a.	33.3	n.a.	66.7	100	n.a.	33.3	n.a.	66.7	100			(90)
Separate/divorced	n.a.	57.1	n.a.	42.9	100	n.a.	71.4	n.a.	28.6	100	n.a.	85.7	n.a.	14.3	100			(7)
Deceased	n.a.	0	n.a.	100	100	n.a.	50	n.a.	50	100	n.a.	50	n.a.	50	100			(2)
Total	55.2	7.9	7.2	29.7	100	63.8	13.9	5.7	16.6	100	50.5	20.4	4.2	24.9	100			(529)

Source: Sample Survey 2006.

Notes: H—husband, W—woman, B—husband and wife together, O—others, T—total, HH—household, n.a.—not applicable. Figures in the brackets show absolute totals.

## Appendix C: General Research Ethics Board Letter of Ethical Approval



November 22, 2016

Miss Victoria Sicilia  
Master's Student  
Cultural Studies Program  
Queen's University  
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

**GREB Ref #: GCUL-062-16; TRAQ # 6019728**  
**Title: "GCUL-062-16 From the Inside Out: A Look Into Kerala's Education Policy"**

Dear Miss Sicilia:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "**GCUL-062-16 From the Inside Out: A Look Into Kerala's Education Policy**" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John B. Freeman".

John Freeman, Ph.D.  
Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Villia Jefremovas, Supervisor  
Dr. Dorit Naaman, Chair, Unit REB  
Ms. Danielle Gugler, Dept. Admin.