

**RESTRICTED SELF AND REGULATED SPACE:  
A STUDY OF THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL OF  
NAMBUDIRI WOMEN IN KERALA  
(c.AD 1200-1905)**

Thesis  
Submitted to the University of Calicut  
For the award of the degree,

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY**

**SREEPARVATHI. D**



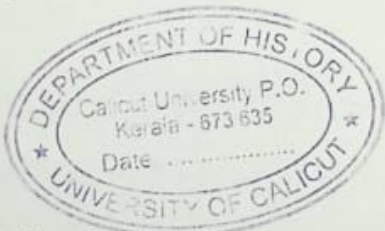
**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

**SEPTEMBER 2020**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this Thesis entitled '**Restricted Self and Regulated Space: A Study of the Ideological Control of Nambudiri Women in Kerala (c.AD 1200-1905)**' submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of the University of Calicut is a bona fide research carried out by **SREEPARVATHI. D.** under my supervision and that no part of this thesis has been presented before, for the award of any degree, diploma or other similar title.



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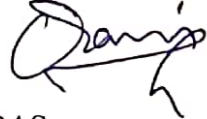
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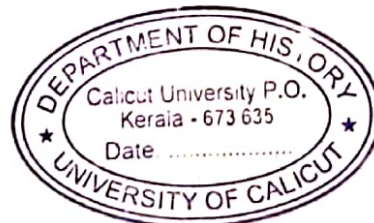
## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **RESTRICTED SELF AND REGULATED SPACE: A STUDY OF THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL OF NAMBUDIRI WOMEN IN KERALA (c.AD 1200-1905)** is the result of bonafide research carried out by SREEPARVATHI.D at the Department of History, University of Calicut, under my supervision and submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY. The corrections/suggestions recommended by the adjudicators have been incorporated in the thesis and that the contents in the thesis and the soft copy are one and the same.

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## DECLARATION

I, Sreeparvathi.D, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled **'Restricted Self and Regulated Space: A Study of the Ideological Control of Nambudiri Women in Kerala (c.AD 1200-1905)**, is a bona fide record of research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. V.V. Haridas, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Calicut, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History. I also declare that this thesis or part thereof has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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## INTRODUCTION

The present study is an attempt to unravel the Brahmanical patriarchal ideology embedded in Brahmanical texts that regulated the lives of Brahmin women in Kerala confining them to domestic space. Brahmanical patriarchy is a set of rules that ensured the perpetuation of patrilineal family, protection of property rights and caste purity. Women play a crucial role in preserving these rights. The position of women in Brahmanical patriarchal discourse was mainly confined to the household. As daughters, wives, and mothers, the roles they had to play were defined and controlled by Brahmanical patriarchal norms.

Brahmins in Kerala are known as Nambudiris, and their women were called *Antarjanaṃs* which means the people dwelling inside. The word itself indicates their space in the society that they were mostly invisible in the public domain. Even within the domestic household, their spaces were restricted to the kitchen and *Paṭiññārri* (western side of the inner house). They were permitted to go outside only on rare occasions, accompanied by servants and covering their whole body.<sup>1</sup> They were alienated from the space of knowledge and rituals. They were also denied property rights and marginalized both in production and reproduction processes. They remained passive receptacles of Brahmanical rules and restricted their lives accordingly. Nambudiris were the most privileged class in society, but their women were the worst victims of patriarchy.<sup>2</sup> They were the tools for reproduction and were given the roles of daughters, wives, and mothers. They were considered irrelevant or non-existent as widows, and they were not permitted to become a

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<sup>1</sup> N.P Unni., ed., *Śāṅkarasmṛti (Lagudharmaprakāśika)*, Promoting Committee for the Publication of Sanskrit Laws, International Academic Union, Torino, 2003.p. 301

<sup>2</sup> J. Devika, *Engendering Individuals: The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2007, pp.122-123.

renouncer.<sup>3</sup> The Brahmanical ideology created gender hierarchies within the household to perpetuate their dominance. Nambudiri women accepted or internalized the patriarchal norms which oppressed them. Though there were instances of dissent in the form of sexual transgressions, it was only in the early part of the twentieth century, the wretched condition of Nambudiri women began to be discussed as a part of social reform.

The attempts to reform the community began with the formation of Yōgakṣēma sabha in 1908 at Aluva.<sup>4</sup> But in its initial year, woman question was absent from its objectives<sup>5</sup>. ‘Woman question’ was a central issue in nineteenth-century British India because foreign rulers had focused their attention on this aspect of society. But it was not an objective among Nambudiris in the initial stages. The primary motive was to protect their rights as landowners and to equip them to keep up with the new political, social, and economic changes. But their property rights and family systems were interlinked. They followed a peculiar custom of marriage in which the eldest son of the family alone could marry within the caste.<sup>6</sup> All other male members were engaged in *sambandham* relations with *Kṣatriya*, Nair, *ampalavāsi* women. It was a custom that helped to protect the family property undivided. As a result of this peculiar system, Nambudiri women had to suffer the competition from co-wives.<sup>7</sup> The eldest son enjoyed the right to marry

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<sup>3</sup> Brahmanical Patriarchy did not permit women to become saints. Women were given a social status related to their marriage and family. The *Bhakti* saints like Ālvār, Akkamahādēvi, Meerabai all challenged this notion of womanhood and became saints. See, Uma Chakaravarti, *Every Day Lives Every Day Histories, Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, (2006), Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2012, pp.275-291.

<sup>4</sup> J. Devika, *Op. cit.*, p.124.

<sup>5</sup> One of the major concerns of 19<sup>th</sup> century reformers was the condition of women. Women question became a site on which the tradition was debated and reformulated.

<sup>6</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.*, p.186.

<sup>7</sup> The denial of *swajāti* marriage to the younger sons of Nambudiri had an adverse effect upon the condition of women in the community. Old men marring young girls that too

three or four girls from their caste and also engaged in *sambandham* relations. Most of the Nambudiri women were denied the bliss of marital life. The dowry system, which prevailed in the past, had multiplied their agonies. Nambudiri women had to bear sufferings due to such practices. The British rule and change in the political and economic scenario compelled the Nambudiris to reform their marriage practices. If the family structure was to be amended, the women within that framework had to change. From the 1920s onwards, attempts were made to modernize the Nambudiri women under the leadership of the youth wing of Yōgakṣēma Sabha.<sup>8</sup> The issue of marriage began to be debated, and there was an enhanced demand for amendments. The reformers were aware of the fact that unless the women were not liberated, the attempts to reform the marriage custom would be futile. In 1921 V.T. Bhattathiripad's play *Aṭukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangattēkku* was staged. It was a cyclone that swept the entire community.<sup>9</sup> As a result of the endeavours that followed, *Antarjanaṃ* come out from their restricted space of the kitchen to the public sphere. Several Nambudiri women like Parvathy Nenminimangalam appeared without *Ghōṣa* in public.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the 1920s, several others came out and formed *Antarjana samājams*.<sup>11</sup> A commission for women's education was formed who were till then denied the right to learn. The first Nambudiri hostel began to function in Thrissur.

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three or four become a practices and women had to suffer fight with co-wife or early widowhood. Many remained spinsters all through their lives.

<sup>8</sup> It was with the formation of *Yuvajana Samājam* in 1919 that the radical change including the women question emerged in the *sabha* activities.

<sup>9</sup> See, V.T. Bhattathiripadu, *Aṭukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangattēkku*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> *Ghōṣa* was the system of carrying an umbrella and covering the whole body with a shawl when a Nambudiri woman goes out. It was the symbol of patriarchal restrictions up on Nambudiri women and their unfreedom. By abandoning *Ghōṣa*, Parvathy Nenmanimangalm challenged the age-old practices of Nambudiris. Interview with Gangadevi Ongallur, 26/12/2014.

<sup>11</sup> J. Devika, *Op. cit.*, p.127.

Attempts were made to reform marriage practices like *Adhivēdanam* and *Parivēdanam*.<sup>12</sup> The young members of Yōgakṣēma Sabha began to protest against polygamy and the practice of marrying young girls to old Nambudiri as his third or fourth wives. They also demanded the right to marry within the community. One of the most revolutionary steps taken by the youth wing was the facilitation of first widow remarriage. It took place in the 1930s. The widow remarriages became possible, as P. Geetha argues, because of the courage shown by the *Antarjanam* who remarried.<sup>13</sup> If a Nambudiri woman became a widow, no matter how young, she was not allowed to either to commit Sati or to remarry.<sup>14</sup> It was this custom that they questioned.<sup>15</sup> The stories, the poems, and discussions in the journals like *Uṇṇi Nambudiri* demanded the changes in marriage customs, clothing of women and argued for women's education. The endeavours of reforms had a profound impact on the lives of Nambudiri women. Arya Pallam, Devaki Narikkattiri, Gangadevi Ongallur, Kavungara Bhargavi, Sreedevi Antarjanam and Priyadatta Kallat were among those who fearlessly challenged the community's evil practices. Kavungara Bhargavi remembers how, in the process of social reform, the authoritarian ways of reactionaries and their traditions were lampooned through *tullal* songs and plays by the *Antarjanam*.<sup>16</sup> They had to face stiff resistance from the orthodox section of the society.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Adhivēdanam* was system of marrying more than one woman and *Parivēdanam* is a system of the younger sons marrying within the caste. Interview with Narayanan Nambudiripad, Kanippayur library, 10-08-2016.

<sup>13</sup> P. Geetha, *Peṅkālangal*, Current books, Thrissur, 2010, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> N.P. Uṇṇi, *Op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>15</sup> Though there were attempts from the part of social reformers to create consciousness about the plight of widows and the need for widow's remarriage, they had to face initial opposition from the conservative men of the community. Madambu Kunjukuttan, *Abhivadaye*, Poorna Publications, Kozhikode, 2011, pp. 155-156.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Kavungara Bhargavi, 26/12/2014.

<sup>17</sup> The *Antarjanam* had to face criticism from orthodox section, who started a weekly *Patāka*. Through a series of articles, songs and poems, *Antarjanams* were ridiculed.

By the 1940s, the *Antarjanam* surpassed kitchen chores and made their way to work centres. The play *Toḷilkēndrattilēkku* made the *Antarjanam* conscious of working for a living to become economically independent. Kavungara Bhargavi, who played the female protagonist in this play, had resented against the patriarchal practices in her life.<sup>18</sup> A *Toḷilkēndram* or a workplace was started at Lakkidi for the training of *Antarjanam*.<sup>19</sup> Many of them later became part of the leftist movement.

Even amid such attempts for social reform, the age-old customs continued. *Smārttavicāram*<sup>20</sup> continued in several places. There were *Adhivēdanams*,<sup>21</sup> and widow remarriage did not become a normal practice. Right from the trial of Kuṛiyēṭattu Tātri, who brought about a revolution in the community in 1905, a series of transformations occurred. For instance, Parvathy Manezhi abandoned the *Ghōṣa* system. Parvathy Nenmanimangalam and Sreedevi Antarjanam became members of the legislative assembly. Kavungara Bhargavi and Sreedevi Pariyanampatta became the first *Antarjanam* to engage in weaving to earn a living. Arya Pallom and Gangadevi Ongallur attempted to reform the community. Uma Behn<sup>22</sup> shreds

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See various articles in *Patāka*, 1948. Parvathy Manezhi along with her husband were ostracized. There was strong criticism from the part of orthodox section. When Sreedevi Njaloor abandoned *Ghōṣa* she was asked to do some rites of expiation. Ester Gallo, *The Fall of Gods: Memory, Kinship, and Middle Classes in South India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, p. 326.

<sup>18</sup> *Toḷilkēndram* at Lakkidi was inaugurated in 1947. The students were taught skills like weaving, and stitching. The members of *Toḷilkēndram* also staged a drama called *Toḷilkēndrattilēkku*. See, T.A. Usha Kumari, ed., *Toḷilkēndrattilēkku: Nāṭakam, Caritra Rēkha, Paṭhanam*, Samatha, Thrissur, 2014, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Vinodini, Shoranur, 26/12/2014.

<sup>20</sup> *Smārttavicāram* was the trial and punishment for adultery. It was a mechanism of discipline and punishment which kept Nambudiri women under strict surveillance.

<sup>21</sup> The members of *sabha* including women went to protest against the *Adhivēdanam* of a sixty-five-year-old Nambudiri at Ongallur. But the protest failed to achieve its objective. Interview with Gangadevi Ongallur, 26/12/2014.

<sup>22</sup> Uma was a Nambudiri woman who rejected the bond with her husband and later married a Muslim and a Punjabi Brahmin respectively. V.T. Bhattathiripad who stood

away the conservative patriarchal values by her marriage, and Devaki Narikkatiri set up a hotel in Trissur. These *Antarjanam* revolted against the traditional patriarchal values in the Nambudiri community within a short span of twenty years.

This study examines the Brahmanical patriarchal power and ideology that dominated the lives of Nambudiri women for centuries confining them to domestic space. The study is primarily based on *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, the *Smṛti* text of Nambudiris. The texts like *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra*, and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* serve as valuable sources for analyzing the norms that formulated gender hierarchies among the Nambudiris. The texts are written by men, essentially for the men and the voices of women are absent. But the texts reveal the ideology that conceptualized the power hierarchies within the spatial context of domesticity. Before analyzing Brahmanical patriarchy, it is relevant to give a brief discussion of the term patriarchy.

## **Patriarchy**

Patriarchy can be defined as the complete authority or dominance of the eldest male member of a family. Patriarchy is not just authority over women, but supreme power over all members in a family, which includes the woman, man, and children. In a patriarchal society, women are denied identity and space. In many patriarchal societies, even property rights are denied to women.<sup>23</sup> Women who did not have the position of the wife, mother, or daughter, or the widow or devotee, or the courtesan were marginalized in the society. Those who did not obey the patriarchal social norms were all regarded as marginal groups. There was the custom of defeminizing women who did not conform to the conventional reproductive

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for the liberation of the women couldn't accept Uma's marriage. See, Ester Osegallo, *Op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>23</sup> V. Geetha, *Patriarchy*, Stree, Calcutta, 2007, p. 6.

norms. Witch-hunting in Europe was one such process. In medieval Europe, there was the practice of stamping women who did not follow the accepted social rules on women's sexuality as witches and punishing them. This practice was related to property rights. This witch-hunt also helped to distance women from property rights. The concept of *yakṣi* in Kerala can also be interpreted in this manner. Women who were outside the Brahmanical sexual code were pictured as dreadful *yakṣi*. It is the uncontrolled sexuality that is depicted here as dangerous and a threat to society.

In his book *Origins of the Family, Private property, and the State*, Engels observes Patriarchy as a system where complete authority rests with the paternal head. Patriarchy has been used to define social relations in connection with domestic production. Engels introduced patriarchy as a phenomenon of pre-capitalist society. Engels says that earlier societies were egalitarian. The division of labour was simple. Men used to hunt, catch fish, and bring in raw materials necessary for food. Women were engaged in child-rearing and cooking. Each was a master in his or her work in such household communities. The centre of each household was the woman. The home consisted of several families. The woman had complete freedom in sexual relations within the house. Men were mere visitors. However, this scenario changed after the hunter-gatherer society progressed, and with agriculture providing a settled life for people. New modes of cultivation became a cause for surplus production. This surplus production led to fights among families. Those who were defeated in the war became slaves of the victor. This is the first division in society that Engels talks of slaves and masters. The increase in production also influenced the nature of man-woman relations. The household became a private domain, and the wife became the domestic servant. That is, as production increased, private property came into being. Not only land, animals, and slaves, but also women became the private properties of the men.

To transfer his private property to his children, men began to control women and children. Mother's rights over children started to disappear, and the home and family began to be father-centred. Children's lineage began to be patrilineal. Engels terms this change from a woman-centred family to a man-centred society as, "the world-historic defeat of female sex". When woman became the private property of the man, their sexual freedom was also lost.<sup>24</sup> Monogamous marriage and fidelity came to be regarded as women's virtues.

Other than Engels, several others have defined patriarchy. Kate Millet described patriarchy as "a relationship between dominance and subordination." Millet says that patriarchy is man's power over women, as well as the power of the elder male over others in a family.<sup>25</sup> Patriarchy is a word that inscribes the power relations between a woman and a man. Though this is hierarchical, it creates interdependence and solidarity between them in some sense and helps men to subjugate women.<sup>26</sup>

Patriarchy is also interpreted as a set of relations that control a woman's fertility and sexuality. The sexual hierarchy gives more power to the man in patriarchy. Here the woman is merely the mother or domestic worker.<sup>27</sup> Juliet Mitchell calls patriarchy, the law of the father.<sup>28</sup> Some maintain the opinion that the basis for patriarchy is the marriage contract. The

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>25</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, (1969), Columbia University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 23-24.

<sup>26</sup> Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards A More Progressive Union', in, Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, South End Press, Cambridge, 1981, p.14.

<sup>27</sup> Zilla Eisenstein, *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1975, p.xvi, cited in, Mary Murray, *The Law of The Father: Patriarchy in the Transition From Feudalism to Capitalism*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 8



woman is a domestic labourer within the family. A marriage contract is, in a way, a labour contract. What the woman receives from a family is mere subsistence.<sup>29</sup> Patriarchy is also defined as a social system in which men exploit and dominate women.

Though it is a fact that patriarchy is primarily male domination, its depth may differ in different cultures. Patriarchy prevalent in India was defined as Brahmanical patriarchy. Like any other patriarchal society, the changes in production relations and the right to the wealth brought about changes in the position of women and women's sexuality. In the unique circumstances in India, caste, and purity and pollution notions connected to that played a significant role in subordinating the woman's life. Marriages used to take place as a commodity exchange. Girls were exchanged as gifts among families. This exchange makes women consumable goods of exchange and creates a sex-gender system that brings about discrimination between women and men. It is this exchange that is a factor subordinating women. First, they become objects and thus lose the right over their bodies and sexuality. They lose rights within their own families.<sup>30</sup> Household and family are spaces where power hierarchies are regulated. The economic power of men brings the family and home under their control.

Production and reproduction are the causes for two kinds of exploitation. While one exploits human labour, the other exploits women's reproductive capacity. The caste system in India links the two and makes them subject to exploitation. Men and women have unequal access to resources within the household. The woman is accepted as the wife to safeguard the man's property rights and to produce sons for the same to be

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, (2003), Stree, Calcutta, 2013, p. 29.

transferred through generations. Here the reproductive capacity of the woman is utilized for the perpetuation and protection of the patriarchal family and the caste system. It is here that the institution of marriage becomes relevant to keep women under control and to see that they don't flout caste boundaries. The socially accepted marriage system is endogamous. It is through this that the caste system is maintained and reproduced. By making marriage and procreation highly ritualized among *Brāhmaṇas*, they prevent illicit desires.

Sati and enforced widowhood were customs that women had to observe in connection with marriage. The most important is the observance of "*strīdharma*" of wifely loyalty. Women were compelled to obey patriarchal norms through coercion and consent. Brahmanical ideology regarded *strīdharma* as something women had to practice compulsorily. The purity of caste and family honour was centred on female sexuality. For the same reason, adultery was not permitted. It is not just the social norms, but also the interference by the state that made adultery a punishable offence.

Adultery should be interpreted as linking property rights. The woman is simultaneously man's property as well as the preserver of his property rights. This ideology means a person gets rights over property according to the high position he holds in the caste hierarchy. The *Brāhmaṇa* and the *Kṣatriya* had more rights over land. To safeguard this, he had to consolidate position in the caste hierarchy. For this, rules were made regarding women's bodies and sexuality. Any kind of deviation from this rule was not allowed. If a woman was sexually abused, it was not regarded as an assault against her, but as an assault against the man's caste and his pride. Here, caste, family, and property rights are interrelated. Brahmanical patriarchy had formulated a set of norms to protect the rights of upper-caste men by subjugating women and their sexuality in which both coercion and ideology play significant roles.

## **Ideology**

The term ideology derives from the French word *ideologie*, which means the science of ideas. There are various definitions of the term ideology. Ideology is related to power. To maintain dominance, force, or legitimization, or sometimes both were used. However, to contain a large section of people following different customs, ideology works for hand in glove with force. Ideology is defined as false consciousness and also as an individual's imaginary relation to his real existence. According to another view, ideology cannot be separated from the power struggles of society. The hidden motive of an ideology is the legitimization of the ideas of those in power. There are similarities between the concept of ideology and the design of 'cultural hegemony.' 'Cultural hegemony' is the process of bringing about domination through a set of beliefs and values.<sup>31</sup>

Every society would have an ideology that controls it. When the existing social organizations have to face a threat of some kind, their ideology helps to establish and legitimize its concepts or to offer remedial support. The oppressed or exploited class had to acknowledge the dominant ideology of a society. The ideological force that controls any society is always the ideology of the dominant class of that society. Moreover, the control of the production relations of the society will be in the hands of this ruling class. In other words, society is controlled by the ideology of those who are in control of production. One method of propagating and maintaining this ideology is through texts. All over India, *Brāhmaṇas* were establishing their ideological

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<sup>31</sup> The term ideology has been defined by various scholars like Marx, Althusser, Terry Eagleton and others. The term 'Cultural Hegemony' was defined by Antonio Gramsci. In a discussion on ideology in his seminal text on religious process in Bengal, Kunal Chakrabarti provides the definitions of various scholars on ideology. My discussion on ideology is based on the text written by Kunal Chakrabarti. See, Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇa and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp.8-17.

dominance through texts. To establish their authority and to make the local inhabitants internalize their ideology, the *Brāhmaṇas* depended on texts. These texts helped legitimize as well as contribute to some of the customs that existed in society.<sup>32</sup>

Ideology is an essential tool used to subjugate women in a patriarchal society. Even without the use of force, the consent of women to patriarchal values is obtained through ideological legitimization. This subordination of women is attained by women internalizing dominant patriarchal values. However, there would be some women who do not conform and choose to resist. It is they who are made to surrender to patriarchy by the use of force. Both are related to the power structure. *Brāhmaṇas* never handled political affairs in India, nor did they completely control production relations. There were zamindars among them, and rulers like the Peshwas of Maharashtra. However, complete authority was not vested in the hands of the *Brāhmaṇa*. The *Kṣatriya* rulers and non-Brahmin landlords had power over land and administration. However, the *Brāhmaṇas* enjoyed special privileges in the caste hierarchy, as those belonging to the high caste. They had a monopoly over knowledge and were regarded as ritually pure.

### **Caste and Gender**

The power and privileges of upper castes in the society were inextricably linked to the caste system. Caste is a unique aspect of Indian society. It played a crucial role in the construct and transformation of society. In India, the caste system is sustained mainly based on religious rather than political ideology. Caste and its rituals and Brahmanical hegemony in the caste structure are the cornerstones of Indian society. The existence of the caste system and the social position in it is primarily determined regarding

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

*Brāhmaṇas*. The twin aspects of the caste system are purity and pollution. Though the king is the highest form of authority in the political domain, in the caste system, the *Brāhmaṇas* hold the most elevated position.<sup>33</sup> *Varṇa* and *Jāti* are the two terms used in Brahmanical literature to describe the Brahmanical system of social stratification. *Varṇa*, which means colour in Sanskrit, referred to the four divisions of society, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, and *Śūdra*. Later a group called untouchables was also added to the *Varṇa* division.

*Jāti* denotes an endogamous unit within one must marry. Members of a particular *Jāti* follow a specific occupation, and they belong to a common descent group. Each *Jāti* maintains its cultural practices, food habits, rituals, art forms. Uma Chakravarti observes, “Nevertheless the relationship to the occupation and specific cultural traditions of each caste functions within a broader framework in which the localized hierarchy is based on ritual status, control or lack of control of productive resources and power. This is the basis for the internal differences within the caste system, making for the division between upper or higher castes and lower castes”.<sup>34</sup> Certain castes are pure high and impure low, and this categorization was expressed ideologically in ritual terms. Those who can learn Vēdas and perform sacrifices were regarded as high, and those who could not be kept in a lower position in the caste hierarchy. The work and public spaces were separated, and the lower castes were denied access to public places.<sup>35</sup> The mixing together of castes was prohibited because it would threaten the Brahmanical hegemony. “Each caste is a closed and bounded group, and all social relations are represented in

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<sup>33</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 9

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.10-11

terms of bounded groups: eating, physical contact, and marriage are highly ritualized and strictly confined to other members of each bounded group”.<sup>36</sup>

The power and prestige of *Brāhmaṇas* were maintained through the hegemony they enjoyed in the caste system. It was their supreme knowledge in Vēdas and in the world of sacrifices that strengthened their position in society. Their specialization in the field of rituals was necessary for the conduct of sacrifices like *Rājasūya* and *Vājapēya*, which strengthened the position of kings. Moreover, the rulers were given *Kṣatriya* status by the *Brāhmaṇas* to legitimate their position.<sup>37</sup> This factor subsequently led to the strengthening of the *Brāhmaṇas-Kṣatriya* alliance. It was a fact that *Brāhmaṇas* had to face opposition from powerful *Kṣatriya* rulers, and also, there are indications of *Kṣatriya* s imparting knowledge to *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>38</sup> The *Smṛti* texts, including that of Manu, had instructed that it was the duty of the king to protect the *Brāhmaṇas* and caste hierarchy.

Manu begins the *Smṛti* by proclaiming the hegemony, purity, and divinity of *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>39</sup> Brahmanical ideology also states it clearly that the king should be selected to preserve the privileges of *Brāhmaṇas* and to protect *Varṇāśramadharmā*. Thus, the caste hierarchy with *Brāhmaṇas* at the apex was protected by the *Kṣatriyas*. The *Vaiśyas* and *Śūdras* were exploited by the upper *Varṇas*. *Brāhmaṇas* and *Kṣatriyas* controlled the power and resources of the society. Even the labour was labelled as pure and impure.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Suvira Jaiswal, *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender, and Vaishnava Theology*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 17-18.

<sup>38</sup> For example, in *Chandogya Upaniṣad*, there is a dialogue in which, the king Pravahana imparts knowledge to Svetaketu and his father Uddalaka. Patrick Olivelle, ed., and tr., *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, pp. 234-235.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005. pp. 91-92.

The sacrifice, Vedic knowledge, and teaching were regarded as pure, while work that requires physical exertion was regarded as impure.

There are various studies on the peculiarities of the caste system in India. Louis Dumont, in his seminal work *Homo Hierarchicus*, argues that purity and pollution are the unique principles of the caste system.<sup>40</sup> Another argument is that the caste rules are so influential that the lower castes follow the hierarchy among themselves, replicating hierarchy at a lower level.<sup>41</sup> He also admits that the caste system operates not on an ideological level but material resources. Scholars like Nicholas Dirks argue that it was under the British that caste became a single term capable of expressing organizing and, above all, systematizing India's diverse forms of the social identity of community and organization. He holds the view that caste is not an unchanged survival of ancient Indian society or a single system that reflects a core cultural value.<sup>42</sup> Shekhar Bandopadhyaya defined caste as a cultural construction of power, and he owes this definition to Dirks. He further states that as a cultural construct, it tended to continually change to reflect the actual relations of power in Indian society, even though colonial rule altered the context within which these power relations were located.<sup>43</sup> Dipankar Gupta defines the caste system as a form of differentiation wherein the constituent units of the system justify endogamy based on putative biological differences, which are semaphored by the ritualization of multiple social practices.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Symbolisations*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1918.

<sup>41</sup> Dipankar Gupta, *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in India Society*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 8-17.

<sup>43</sup> Shekhar Bandopadhyay, *Caste, Culture, and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Dipankar Gupta, *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in India Society*, p. 141.

Hierarchies are the reflections of politico-economic power and may vary according to the change in it.

One of the significant aspects of Brahmanical ideology was the control of women and her female sexuality. A woman's role was connected with procreation. Women of upper castes were needed for the perpetuation of family and clan. Since servile labour was readily available for upper castes, women of these castes were free manual labour. At the same time, their role in reproduction was glorified and overemphasized. But within the Brahmanical patriarchal ideology, there were examples of the birth of sages as mind-born sons. In *Ṛgvēda*, Vasiṣṭha is regarded as the mind-born son of Urvaśi, Varuṇa, and Mitra. Here one can see the degrading of the procreative role of women. The Vrajas is said to have had this kind of pure birth. In *Purāṇas*, there are references to the pure birth of sages. The first ruler was also a mind-born son. The stories indicate the anxieties and fears of *Brāhmaṇas* about the reproductive powers of women.<sup>45</sup>

The most fundamental concept of the caste system is related to purity. The idea of purity remained as a protection against the practice of untouchability. To maintain their supremacy, the *Brāhmaṇas* have used the ideology of 'purity' by making people of other castes comply. The idea of purity again was used for the expulsion of the oppressed communities from modes of production. The fundamental principle of the caste system is the maintenance of purity of the Brahmin's body. The Brahmin doesn't come into contact with things or jobs that generate impurity. When duties which were pure and had the status of rituals were assigned to the Brahmin, the oppressed did jobs that were impure. The basis of the caste system is to maintain the Brahmin as pure. For this, while the people of the lower caste, both men as

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<sup>45</sup> Suvira Jaiswal, *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender and Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 110-111.



well as women, served the Brahmin and engaged in jobs that were impure, the Brahmin women maintained the purity of their bodies and, at the same time that of the male Brahmin, and through them, of the community. The fundamental principle controlling the life of the woman was the idea of purity and impurity of the Brahmin male.<sup>46</sup>

With the institutionalization of private property and caste and class divisions, it became imperative to have strict control over female sexuality. Women in the upper castes are considered essential to protect the purity of the caste system and the privileges of elite men as a propertied class. Women play a crucial role in maintaining the boundaries of the caste system. The patriarchal norms did ensure that the caste system is reproduced without violating the hierarchical order of closed endogamous circles. Brahmanical patriarchy, the unique patriarchal system of India, is a mechanism to protect the land rights and ritual purity of upper castes by controlling female sexuality.<sup>47</sup> Women were allowed the domestic space where they had to live a life of seclusion to protect the caste purity.

Space is a social construct being constituted through social relations and practices. Space is linked with power relations. About woman and space, efforts have been made to analyze how women are allotted space and to what extent this can be seen as a reflection of patriarchal norms, and how does the space allotted to them plays a significant role in the formation of their feminine role and their everyday lives. Space and gendered identities are intimately connected. The mapping of a location or a place on to gendered identities has been a vital part of the establishment and maintenance of women's status and is 'reflected in both materiality and symbolic

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<sup>46</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

representation of women's lives'.<sup>48</sup> Doreen Massey thinks that space is interlinked with time. Spatial relations are created out of social relations. As social relations are not static but dynamic, the spatial relations also change.<sup>49</sup> The organization of space is both product and producer of existing social and economic relations.<sup>50</sup> Space contains social arrangements among individuals, groups, and nations, and the arrangements are linked to power relations.<sup>51</sup>

Women and men are spatially segregated in ways that reduce women's access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women's lower status relative to men. Gendered spaces separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege.<sup>52</sup> Spatial arrangements between the sexes are socially created. When they provide valued knowledge for men while reducing access to that knowledge for women, the organization of space may perpetuate status differences.<sup>53</sup> Space is also sacralized by human action and behaviour, and certain spaces become sacred because people treat them differently from ordinary spaces.<sup>54</sup>

Feminist geographers attempted to theorize the relationship between space and gender. They observe "that the urban structure in capitalist societies reflects the construction of space into masculine centres of production and feminine suburbs of reproduction".<sup>55</sup> Women are confined to a subordinate role in the domestic realm but men enjoyed access to both public and private

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<sup>48</sup> Kathyne Beebe and Angela Davis, eds., *Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History And The Spatial Turn*, Routledge, New York, 2015, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space Place and Gender*, Polity Press Cambridge, UK, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Minrose C. Gwin, *The Women in Red Dress: Gender, Space And Reading*, University of Illinois Press, USA, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Daphne Spain, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Daphne Spain, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

spaces.<sup>56</sup> For women, space is regulated, and so is their body. The body is also a significant site of regulation and transgression.<sup>57</sup> In Brahmanical patriarchy, the space of the upper caste woman and her body is linked to the maintenance of the caste system.

The questions of space and women, the regulation of their body and mind, are relevant in the study of the position of Nambudiri women, and the present study tries to address them. Nambudiri women were allotted the inner space of the house, including the kitchen, *Naṭumurram*, and *Paṭiññārri*.<sup>58</sup> *Paṭiññārri* was a secluded space that denied access to men and outsiders. The life in *Paṭiññārri* is shrouded in mystery. The Nambudiri house was a hierarchized, regulated, and differentiated space. Though women occupied the inner part of the main building, it was not entirely under their control. Even in that confined space, their movement was regulated by the customs and rituals. Their movements were generally limited to this space even though on rare occasions, they could move outside.<sup>59</sup> The outskirts of nearby temples were the liminal spaces that they could occupy. They were excluded from the spaces of knowledge and sacred spaces. *Tēvārappura*, and *Vaṭakkini*, where the domestic rituals performed, were the sacred spaces within the Nambudiri household.<sup>60</sup>

The men were never allowed to enter the spaces allotted to women. In a sense, the restrictions resulted in the extreme seclusion of women. One of

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<sup>56</sup> Tony Williams, 'Thresholds of Desire and Domestic Space in Nineteenth- Century French Fiction', in, Franlioyd and Catheriene O'Brien, eds., *Secret Spaces, Forbidden Places: Rethinking Culture*, Berghan Books, 2000, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Nambudiri household is known as *Mana* and *Illam*. The structure of the building is divided based on gendered identities. Both men and women were prevented from crossing the spaces allotted to them. Interview with Parameswaran Nambudiri, Kunnamkulam, 12/01/2016.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Parvathy Antarjanam, Nenmanimangalam Mana, Thrissur, 31/12/2015.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

the reasons to have this kind of space structuring is to protect the women from the sexual advances of outsiders and denial of sexual pleasures to women. Sexuality is regulated by Brahmanical norms. But this space was often got transgressed, as is evident from the documents related to the trial of Kuriyēṭattu Tātri.<sup>61</sup>

Another question is that to what extent they internalized the patriarchal ideology and restricted their selves in society. “Self and space, both arenas are the centres of power relations. In a community creating a space for women becomes creating a space for the self. The woman is the self; the other is patriarchy or male oppression.”<sup>62</sup> The protest against the patriarchal norms challenged the age-old practices of the Nambudiri community, and the outraged Nambudiri women were successful in forming a space for themselves. The intensity of their protest clearly shows the brutality of repression. This naturally raises the following questions.

1. What dominant role did Brahmanical patriarchal ideology play to confine Nambudiri women within the household? How did household as a sacred site become a centre of resources and rituals and became a site of gender discrimination?
2. What was their mechanism to control female sexuality and reproduction?

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<sup>61</sup> Tātri’s accounts of her union with Okki illath Itteeri Nambudiri, Akazhi Nambudiri, her childhood friend Madhavan Nambudiri, Kalpakasseri Narayanan Nambudiri and with Kavungal Sankara Panikkar were examples of domestic space used as sites of resistances. She had physical union with Akazhi Nambudiri at *Purathalam*, in her house, with Madhavan at her house, she had relations with Itteeri Nambudiri in her room in the illam and Kavungal Panikkar at *pattāyappura*. Most of her physical relationship had happened within the premises of domestic space. For details, See, *Smārttavīcāram Records*, Ernakulam Regional Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Seemanthini Niranjana, *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization, and the Female Body*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 23-24.

3. How did the Brahmanical notions of femininity were represented in the literary texts of pre-modern Kerala?
4. How did the customs of marriage become a repressive tool against women?
5. How did they alienate the women from economic resources?
6. What extent the ideology of pure and impure, low and high played a dominant role in subordinating Nambudiri women and denied their access to public spaces?
7. Did the gender hierarchies that formed within the household make them silent and second-sex in the community?
8. How did they conform and confront with Brahmanical patriarchal ideology in their everyday lives?
9. What were the ways by which the dominant Brahmanical ideology dealt with the violation of their norms?

The present study attempts to answer these questions by exploring the ideology represented by *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, the seminal *Smṛti* text of Nambudiris. The text is examined within the broad social and economic context of Kerala between 1200-1905. By the twelfth century, after the disintegration of Cēras, the Nambudiri became a powerful and most privileged class in society. Their patriarchal norms to control their female folk has to be examined in this context because endogamous marriages and control of female sexuality were inevitable to sustain their ideology of caste purity. The year 1905 was crucial in the history of the Nambudiri community as it was in this year that the *Smārtavicāram* of Kuṛiyēṭattu Tātri took place. The transgressed woman was excommunicated along with sixty-five men of various upper castes. The incident quaked the very foundations of patriarchal ideology, and what

followed was the reform movement, which transformed *Antarjanam* into *Bahirjanams*. In locating the study within the chronological context of Kerala between 1200-1905 makes it different from early studies. Several scholars had addressed the question of the subjugation of Nambudiri women in Kerala, but they were attempts to uncover the problem within the context of the social reform movement of the early twentieth century. The present study raises the question of the subjugation of Nambudiri women by interlinking caste, class, and gender. Though the formation of caste and class division is not a central preoccupation of the study, it is necessary to explore the relation between production, reproduction, caste purity, and control of female sexuality to unravel the dominant ideologies that oppressed the women.

### ***Śāṅkarasmṛti* and the Brahmanical Ideology**

Nambudiris, who had migrated to Kerala, established thirty-two settlements in fertile river valleys. With their superior knowledge in agriculture, astronomy, weather, and in sacred scriptures, they were able to attain power and special privileges in the society. They became the largest landholders with the ownership over both *Brahmaswam* and *Dēvaswam* lands. *Dēvaswam* lands were those donated to temples, and *Brahmaswam* were directly controlled by Nambudiris. They were the advisory council during the Perumāḷ period and exerted considerable influence in the power structure. The relationship between Nambudiris and various other social classes was one of domination and contestation. Nambudiris brought various sections of society under their control through legitimation of their power. In their search for new lands and as a result of their influence spreading to new areas, they might have faced opposition. They created a world of ideas necessary for the survival of a socio-economic structure they had dominance over and gave it ideological legitimation. They had propagated the idea that the *Brāhmaṇas* is at the apex of the social ladder so that their authority remained unquestioned.

References to a class of armed Nambudiris called *cāttirar* indicate the fact that force might have also played a role in the crystallization of their position in Kerala.

Nambudiris had even attempted to create an ideological system to stabilize their position and to bring about the nonconforming elements under their control. The assimilation of local practices was also a method used by the Nambudiris to protect their power and status. As a consequence of authority spreading itself to certain new land areas and new societies, the Brahmin often assimilated the customs and local deities of the non- Brahmin. This is how Bhadrakāḷi and Ayyappan became the family deities or chief deities of the Nambudiris.<sup>63</sup> Most *kāvus* [temples of non-*Brāhmaṇas*] accepted the rituals of Brahmin temples and thus became sanskritized. In these places, the Brahmin became the chief priest. Assimilation took place not only in the mode of worship but in their way of life as well. Matriliney is one such custom. Although the *Brāhmaṇas* did not directly involve in the governance, matriliney and *sambandham* helped them gain influence over the ruling class. Texts like *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* gave legitimacy to this. Brahmanical ideas and beliefs reached the common man through the reading of the *Purāṇas*, through *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, and *Bhakti* tradition. They tried to consolidate the notion that a Brahmin is pure. Brahmanism is an idea that unifies the entire Indian culture. Brahmanism is not the idea of one society alone, but it is a set of values, ideas, concepts, and practices that can be found in their literary tradition and social institution. As people who possessed knowledge of the cosmic order, the *Brāhmaṇas* decided the status for everyone in the society and the way they should conduct themselves in a society in the hierarchical order.<sup>64</sup> By making the local population believe

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<sup>63</sup> Majority of Nambudiri Families in Kerala worship Bhadrakāḷi as their family deity and there are families which worship Lord Ayyappan.

<sup>64</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

that they had superior knowledge, the *Brāhmaṇas* were able to bring about dominance over them.

The *Brāhmaṇas* in Kerala did not disregard the knowledge of people of other castes or their services. The blacksmith and the carpenter, who came with their tools, were not deemed ‘impure.’ Similarly, the washer woman who came with the washed clothes and the *kumbhāran* who came with mud pots had access to the courtyard of the Nambudiris. Art forms like *kūttu*, *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, *kathakali*, etc. of the Nair and *ampalavāsi* community were not regarded as impure. It was not knowledge and art that were declared as impure, but it was individuals who were thus categorized. The Nambudiris, who considered the accepting of land as a gift as something below their dignity, spread the myth that the whole of Kerala was originated by Paraśurāma by throwing an axe and that it was granted to Nambudiris as penance for slaying *Kṣatriyas* .

The non-brahmins of Kerala and their ways of worship were thus brahmanized. Along with popularizing their ideas and ideology to dominate the local inhabitants, they also adopted some local manners. They made this process happen not just through coercion, but through their ideology as well. *Kēraḷōlpatti*, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, and *Śāṅkarasmṛti* are the ideological texts that helped legitimize as well as consolidate the dominance of *Brāhmaṇas* in Kerala.

*Kēraḷōlpatti*, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, and *Śāṅkarasmṛti* were the texts that were used to consolidate their power. These texts must have been written when they had anxieties about their power being questioned. *Kēraḷōlpatti*, which describes the formation of Kerala, states that sage Paraśurāma created Kerala. Paraśurāma gave the land of Kerala to the *Brāhmaṇas* to atone for his sin of killing *Kṣatriyas*. The *Brāhmaṇas* were gifted with land in Kerala, and it was declared as land for their *Karmakāṇḍam* (for holding sacrificial rites).



Kerala was given as a space for performing *yāgas* and *yajñas*. When discord arose among *Brāhmaṇas*, Paraśurāma gave the representatives of the villages of Periñcellūr, Payyannūr, Parappūr, and Chengannūr the right to rule Kerala. When this system also failed, one among these representatives of the four villages was declared the saviour, and it was decided that he would rule for three years. And when this also failed, they held a meeting at Tirunāvāya and gave power to a Brahmin to rule for twelve years. However, when competition arose for power, it was decided that a Brahmin need not rule the state henceforth, and instead, a *Kṣatriya* would take his place.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Perumāḷ, the *Kṣatriya*, as proclaimed the ruler of the land. After Kēya Perumāḷ, another *Kṣatriya* was brought to Kerala along with his sister. This sister married a Brahmin, and her children thereof were called *Kṣatriyas*. All these *Kṣatriya* rulers were known by the title ‘Perumāḷ.’ When the last Perumāḷ left Kerala, it again came under the political authority of *Brāhmaṇas*. Later, after Kriṣṇadēvarāya sent new Perumāḷs to Kerala, direct rule by the *Brāhmaṇas* came to an end. Through the story that the Perumāḷ was made the ruler by the *Brāhmaṇas* and that Brahmins gave legitimacy to their authority. Moreover, *Kēraḷōlpatti* proclaims that Kerala being a *yāgabhūmi*, a land for sacrifices, if sacrifices were not performed without any hindrance, pandemics and torrential rain would follow. Also, they instruct that the responsibilities and duties of each dharma should be done promptly.<sup>66</sup> The legend was an ideological shield against any harm happening to the authority of *Brāhmaṇas*, who handle matters of the *Dēvaswam*, *Brahmaswam* lands, and who has power over the temple which manages the landed property.

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<sup>65</sup> M.R. Raghava Varier, ed., *Kēraḷōlpatti Granthavari*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2013, pp. 53-57.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

In *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* also, one can find similar stories. The text states that Paraśurāma gave the land, which is free from all sins for *Brāhmaṇas*, who are lords of the earth. The *Brāhmaṇas* were brought to Kerala by the sage Paraśurāma, but they returned to their original places, fearing the snakes. Following that, he gave the land lying between the four oceans to the *Brāhmaṇas* as alms. He brought *Brāhmaṇas* from other parts of India and allowed them to settle here. They had specific rites and rituals assigned to them. Paraśurāma created six months of rain, and six months of sunshine, and different varieties of plants and trees. As per Paraśurāma's request, the *Brāhmaṇas* conducted *yāga* in North Kerala. Apart from this, as per Paraśurāma's request, Lord Brahma, in the presence of Gods Viṣṇu and Mahādēva, and many sages, decided on the kind of costume the Brahmin should wear and the rituals. He decided on how death rites should be performed. He ruled that the eldest son alone can marry within the caste, and the younger sons should engage in liaisons called *sambandham* with women of matrilineal communities. At the same time, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* stipulates that the eldest son should refrain from *sambandham* relations. Paraśurāma stipulated the rituals be done by the women of the household. He said that they should be strictly loyal to their husbands, hold a *maṛakkuṭa* when they step out of the house, all Brahmin women should wear white, should not wear nose rings, and in the absence of their husbands, should always be accompanied by a maid. In *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, there are references for the ex-communication of woman who was not chaste.<sup>67</sup> The text also says how they were imparted *tantra vidya* and magic, and also describes the various temples and the kind of meals served to the *Brāhmaṇas* there, and how to respect a Brahmin.

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<sup>67</sup> V. Rajeev, ed., *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2012, pp. 192-194.

Any power, when regarded as God's gift, attains more vigour and acceptance. Such an ideology will help gain power and acceptance. This is precisely the main objective of ideology. *Kēraḷōlpatti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* were written in the same manner as *Manusmṛti*, which declared the Brahmin, who was born out of God's mouth as the most sacred. Though lacking in stories of similar justification, the *Śāṅkarasmṛti* also was written with the idea that the Brahmin was equivalent to God on earth. The authorship of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, which justifies the caste system and discrimination based on caste, is attributed to Śāṅkarācārya, the great philosopher. Another significant fact is that they propagated the view that the text is an abridged form of *Bhārgavasmṛti*, a text said to be written by sage Paraśurāma himself. Through attributing the authorship of the text to two great men, the Nambudiris tried to construct an ideological system that legitimates the social order dominated by them. The text discusses the superior position and sacredness of *Brāhmaṇas*, how the *brahmacāri*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sanyāsi* among *Brāhmaṇas* should live, what are the specific customs of a *gṛhastha*, what should be the relationship of a Brahmin with other castes, how the *ṣōḍaśasamskāra* should be performed, what the primary duties of the four castes are to be, and the rituals specific for a Brahmin woman.

Though the *Brāhmaṇas* violated the Paraśurāma dictum that a Brahmin should get married and should desist from relations with other women, none of the rituals assigned for women has been violated. Those customs stipulated in *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, such as the women should hold a *maṛakkuṭa*, should wear white, should wear no ornaments, and should have no adornments, can be found in *Śāṅkarasmṛti* as well. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* is the epitome of the Brahmanical ideology that strictly controlled their women. Many of the rules that *Manusmṛti* delineates were changed to suit local requirements by the Nambudiris. For example, *Manusmṛti* says that a Brahmin should never marry

a *Śūdra* woman.<sup>68</sup> However, here, though the Nambudiri men don't marry as per the ritual, they indulge in sexual pleasures with the *Śūdra* women and even beget children. To perpetuate his power, the Brahmin has relations with the Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women and has children through them. As a result, Nambudiris came to be regarded as the pater familias of the ruling class, the *ampalavāsi*s, and the Nair community in Kerala. This sovereignty became helpful for the protection of their caste and wealth. They also succeeded in making these communities believe that it was a matter of honour to have an alliance with Nambudiris. The presence of Nambudiris became necessary for the legitimization of *Svarūpams*, the power centres of pre-modern Kerala. Though the Nambudiris had many conflicts with the rulers, they gained suzerainty on account of their ritual and social supremacy. The caste system and the notion of untouchability that took shape in Kerala helped the Nambudiris to maintain their purity. Still, the Nambudiris had to depend on other castes for various services. The *ampalavāsi*, Nair, *Vaṅṅān*, and carpenter communities became service providers of different kinds and lived in proximity of a Nambudiri household. The sexuality of the men of these communities turned out to be a threat to the purity of Nambudiris and the ideological and practical superiority they achieved in the social structure. The mechanism to face this threat was the imposition of strict control over their women.

The *Śāṅkarasmṛti* put forward such a Brahmanical, patriarchal ideology. Even while talking about women, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* is different from other *Smṛti* texts. The Nambudiri women had to follow strict, rigorous customs that were worse than those of women of other Brahmin communities. Through strict observances of everyday life, the women's minds were controlled, and if any of these were violated, they were subjected to

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<sup>68</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 109.

‘*Smārttavicāram* (unseen in other Brahmin communities in India), thus inducing fear in their minds. Myriad was the rules put forward by the *Śāṅkarasmṛti* to control women.

## Historiography

There are several studies on Brahmanical patriarchy and women in Brahmanical literature. The first attempt to write a comprehensive history of women in India was made by A.S. Altekar.<sup>69</sup> The studies of Uma Chakravarti,<sup>70</sup> Kumkum Roy, and Jaya S. Tyagi addressed the question of women in *Dharmaśāstras* and *Gṛhyasūtras*. Uma Chakravarti’s seminal work, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*,<sup>71</sup> examines the crucial relation between caste and gender. She makes a critical study of Brahmanical patriarchy in India and unmasks the working of the caste system and analyzes the perpetuation of the patriarchal society by subordinating women. By examining the *Dharmaśāstra* texts, especially *Manusmṛti*, she argues that the control of female sexuality was essential for the maintenance of the caste system. The centrality of endogamous marriages, denial of economic resources to women, differences of patriarchal control in each caste, the concepts of *Pativratā*, and the plight of widows are also discussed in this book.

Kumkum Roy’s *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Exploration in Early Indian History* analyses gender relation in early India

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<sup>69</sup> A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, (1959), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2014; *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1996; *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of 'Ancient' India*, (2006), Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2012, provide different dimensions of Gender relations in India.

<sup>71</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*.

with focus on its diversity.<sup>72</sup> She provides a general analysis of institutions like household, renunciatory tradition, urbanism, etc. The study also focuses on rituals which were used for socialization. By examining the textual sources like *Manusmṛti*, *Arthaśāstra*, *Kāmasūtra*, Prakrit and Pali texts and inscriptions, she gives a picture of the notions of power embedded in these sources.

Another important work by Kumkum Roy, *Emergence of Monarchy in North India: Eight-Fourth Centuries BC: As Reflected in the Brahmanical Tradition*,<sup>73</sup> discusses the emergence of the monarchy in north India based on a detailed reading of the various ritual and philosophical texts of Brahmanical tradition. Roy argues that monarchical form was only one possibility among alternative and contending concepts of political power in later Vedic text. This institution is shown as the single definition of legitimate power and authority during the post-Vedic scenario.

Jaya Tyagi's, *Engendering the Early household Brahmanical Perceptions in the Early Gṛhyasūtras middle of the First Millennium BCE* provides a detailed study of rituals in *Gṛhyasūtras*.<sup>74</sup> She examines the socio-economic background in which the *Gṛhyasūtras* compiled. She reveals how these texts consider home as a sacred space with two important functions; production and reproduction. Through a detailed analysis of rituals in *Gṛhyasūtras*, she argues that the sixteen *Samskāras* of a Brahmin's life are centred on the patriarchal notions.

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<sup>72</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender & Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, (2010) Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Kumkum Roy, *Emergence of Monarchy in North India: Eight-Fourth Centuries B.C: As Reflected in Brahmanical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Michigan, 1994.

<sup>74</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the first millennium B.C.E.*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2008.

*Contestation and Compliance: Retrieving Women's 'Agency' From Puranic Traditions*<sup>75</sup> by Jaya Tyagi, analyzes the ritual in the *Purāṇas*, with particular reference to *Matsya Purāṇa*. The study tries to explore the representation of women in the puranic tradition by analyzing *vratās* and myths. The work examines ritual spaces allotted to women in Brahmanical culture and how they may have used these spaces in their lives.

*Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women Ritual and Hospitality in Ancient India*<sup>76</sup> by Stephanie Jamison focuses on the role of sacrificer's wife in Vedic rituals, especially *Śrauta* rituals. The text also discusses the role of women in other cultural institutions like hospitality and gift exchange. She examines the role of women in Vedic India by studying the sacrificial hymns of *Ṛgvēda* and *Brāhmaṇas*. She argues that the Vedic women, as both sacrificers and sacrificed, represents the paradox of the notions of womanhood in Brahmanical tradition.

Julia Leslie's edited works *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*,<sup>77</sup> *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*,<sup>78</sup> and her translation of Tryambaka Yajvan's *Strīdharmapaddhati* also throw light on the place of women in Brahmanical tradition. *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women* examine the positions in the textual sources. The study examines the lives of women, the victims of oppressive ideology, or active agents. *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition* contains essays that analyze the role of women represented in myths like that of Lopamudra

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<sup>75</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Contestation and Compliance; Retrieving Women's 'Agency' From Puranic Traditions*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Stephanie W. Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife Sacrificer's Wife, Women Ritual and Hospitality in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996.

<sup>77</sup> Julia Leslie, ed., *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1992.

<sup>78</sup> Julia Leslie, ed., *Myth and Myth making: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*, (1997), Routledge, New York, 2017.

and Ahalyā. Tryambaka Yajwan, a court poet of Thanjavur in the eighteenth-century, wrote a Sanskrit treatise on the rules and roles of a *Pativrata* wife. Julia Leslie translated *Strīdharmapaddhati* with a commentary under the title *Perfect wife*.<sup>79</sup> This book substantiates the fact that the ideals of womanhood were not much distinct from that of *Manusmṛti* even in the eighteenth century.

*Faces of the feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India*, edited by Mantakranta Bose, throws light on the lives of women in India by reviewing the rules and ideals that have been generally understood in India to be the historical bases for defining women's life and also examine the control of female sexuality by the rules envisaged in scriptures.<sup>80</sup> *Women in Hindu Tradition: Rules Roles and Exceptions* by Mantakranta Bose discusses the feminine role in Hindu tradition both as immortal and mortal.<sup>81</sup> She argues that there are continuity and contradiction in the notions of women hood in hegemonic Hindu discourse. The collection of essays published by Suvira Jaiswal under the title *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender, and Vaishnava theology* discusses the evolution of Brahmanical hegemony and patriarchy in early India, focusing on the role played by religion and mythology.<sup>82</sup>

Scholarly works are treating the subject of female sexuality in Hinduism. J.J. Mayer's classic work *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, Ranjana Kumari's *Female Sexuality in Hinduism*, and Sudhir Kakkar's *Intimate*

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<sup>79</sup> Julia Leslie, ed., *The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Women According to the strīdharmapaddhati of Trymbakayajavan*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1995.

<sup>80</sup> Mantakranta Bose, ed., *Faces of feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> Mantakranta Bose, *Women in Hindu tradition: Rules Roles and Exceptions*, Routledge, New York, 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Suvira Jaiswal, *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender and Vaishnava Theology*.



*Relations* focus on sexuality.<sup>83</sup> Arti Dhand's *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in Mahābhārata*, examines the Hindu ideas of sexuality and women, focusing upon the epic *Mahābhārata*.<sup>84</sup> She argues that sexual ideology is one of the most crucial elements in crafting a coherent religious framework in Hinduism. Wendy Doniger's works examine sexuality in different aspects.<sup>85</sup> Julia Leslie, Stephanie Jamison, and Laurie Patton studied the issues of sexuality by using Vedic and Classical texts.

Recently there are attempts by scholars to view the position of women from different perspectives. Snigdha Singh and Satharupa Bhattacharya analyses the economic status of women in the inscription and thereby their social status.<sup>86</sup> Tarasheemar examines the status of women in Kashmir by the reading of the text *Kathāsaritsāgara*.<sup>87</sup> The writings of Devangana Desai<sup>88</sup> and Shonaleeka Kaul<sup>89</sup> also throw light on a different aspect of gender relations. The books of Prem Choudhary,<sup>90</sup> Vijaya Ramaswami, and Shalini Shah help us to study the women's condition. Vijaya Ramaswami examines

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<sup>83</sup> J.J. Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India: A Study in the Comparative History of Indian Culture*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1947; Ranjana Kumari, *Female Sexuality in Hinduism*, Joint women's programe, New Delhi, 1988; Sudhir Kakkar, *Intimate Relations Exploring Indian Sexuality*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1989.

<sup>84</sup> Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in Mahabharata*, SUNY Press, New York, 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, Penguin Classics, London, (2005), *On Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Kumkum Roy, Snigdha Singh, and Satharupa Bhattacharya, eds., *Beyond the Women Question: Reconstructing Gendered Identities in Early India*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2018.

<sup>87</sup> Tara Sheemar, *Plunging the Ocean: Courts, Castes, Courtesans in the Kathasarithsagara*, Primus books, New Delhi, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India: A Socio-Cultural Study*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1990.

<sup>89</sup> Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagine the Urban: Sanskrit and the city in Early India*, Permanent black, New Delhi, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Prem Choudhary, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana, 1880-1990*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008.

the bhakti saints and their role<sup>91</sup> while Shalini Shah studied about the sexuality in Sanskrit *kāvya* literature.<sup>92</sup>

Leela Dube, who defined the role of women in reproduction in her theory seed and earth, is another prominent figure among the feminist scholars of India.<sup>93</sup> Though does not fall precisely into the time frame of the present study, the writings of Kalpana Kannabiran, Karin Kapadia, Lynn Tesky Denton, Meera Kosambi, Lata Mani, Kumkum Sagari, Patricia Oberoi, Jyoti Puri, Tanika Sarkar, Judith Walsh, Pratiksha Baxi, Sharmila Rege, and Vasudha Narayanan help us to understand the dynamics of caste and gender in India and also the trajectories of Indian women through centuries.

For the study of the period of *Dharmaśāstras*, apart from the seminal volumes on the *History of Dharmaśāstras* by P.V. Kane, the studies conducted by the scholars like Richard Lariviere, Ludo Rocher, Patrick Olivelle, Sheldon Pollock, Wendy Doniger, Sanjay K. Gautam, Donald R. Davis, Brien K. Smith, Preethi Singh, Chandrakalapadia, Fedrico Squarcini are referred.

Several scholars studied the history of Nambudiri *Brāhmaṇas* in Kerala. Nagam Aiyya, Pachumoothathu, K.P. Padmanabha Menon, William Logan, Edgar Thurston, K.M. Panikker, Fawcett, and Fritz Stall described the practices of Nambudiris. The writings of M.G.S. Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat, Rajan Gurukkal, Raghava Varier, Elamkulam, and K.N. Ganesh discuss the socio, political, economic, and cultural history of Kerala and also examine the temple-centred dominance of Nambudiris.

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<sup>91</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Walking Naked: Women, Society, Spirituality in South India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1997.

<sup>92</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love, Eroticism, and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh-thirteenth Centuries*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009.

<sup>93</sup> Leela Dube, *Anthropological Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields*, Sage Publications, Michigan, 2001.

The works of J. Devika, Marjatta Paropla, Ester Gallo, T.K. Anandi, and P. Geetha throw light on the subjugation of Nambudiri women under Brahmanical patriarchy and examine how did they revolt against these patriarchal practices during the social reform movement. The works of G. Arunima, Saradomani, and Praveena Kodoth examine the transformation of matriliney in Kerala.

### **Sources**

The present study is primarily based on *Smṛti* texts, which provided the code of conduct for both men and women. There exists a vast corpus of *Smṛti* texts as well as its commentaries. But this study is mainly based on *Manusmṛti*, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, and more importantly, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* the seminal text of Nambudiris. I have given particular emphasis to *Manusmṛti* and *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* as M.R. Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal have demonstrated in their *History of Kerala* that the legal matters in Kerala were based on them before the compilation of *Vyavahāramala*. *Vyavaharamala*, a legal text, constitutes another source for the study. The *Gṛhyasūtras*, primarily *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra*, are analyzed because they dealt with domestic rituals. Additional emphasis was given to *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* as the majority of Nambudiris in Kerala follow this particular text for their domestic rituals. Apart from these sources *Ṛgvēda*, *Dharmasūtras* especially Vasiṣṭha, Āpastamba, and Gautama, epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, *Upaniṣads*, various *Smṛti* texts like that of Parāśara and Nārada, *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* were also made use of to get a clear picture of the position of women in Brahmanical scriptures. The problem with these texts lies in the fact that they are written by men for men. Women's perspectives are lacking in these texts.

There exists a paucity of sources for the study of gender relations in Kerala for the period under study. The inscriptions of the Perumāl period have given glimpses of royal women donating land. But references to Nambudiri women are absent. In Tamil Nadu, inscriptions are referring to the donations of Brahmin women. The inscriptions show the property rights of royal women. Sangam poems of the *Akam* category were analyzed to get a picture of the representation of female sexuality. The *Maṇipravālam* literature like *Vaiśikatantram*, *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam*, *Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam*, *Uṇṇiyaccicaritam*, *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam*, and *Candrōlsavam* describe women with agency. *Tullal* songs of Kuñcan Nambyār, *Kiḷippāṭṭu* of Thunchathu Ezhuthachan, *Āṭṭakkathakal*, especially *Naḷacaritam* of Uṇṇāyi Vārier constitute the sources for the study of Brahmanical perception of women both as a seductress and chaste wife. The significant limitations of these works are they do not directly deal with Nambudiri women but reflect Brahmanical notions of womanhood.

The lives of Nambudiri women were not directly discussed in any of the sources of medieval Kerala. They are mostly invisible. The accounts of foreign travellers provide a few references of Nambudiri women. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* represent the ideological base of Nambudiri women lives. *Smārttavīcāram* documents give an insight into the relations between caste, gender, and the state. The autobiographies of both Nambudiri men and women, discussions in the periodicals like *Uṇṇi Nambudiri*, interviews conducted with Nambudiri women who participated in the reform movement, private diaries, and the texts that narrate the rituals of Nambudiri women were the sources for the study of the lives of Nambudiri women but these sources belong to the early part of the twentieth century. We do not have the sources to examine how did the Nambudiri women live in the pre-modern Kerala. But sources that belong to the twentieth century show that

their lives were rigorously controlled by the patriarchal ideology and the code of conduct prescribed by the *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. It enables us to assume that the patriarchal norms might have restricted their lives in the preceding centuries also. Apart from the above-mentioned sources, *Granthavaris*, and a few inscriptions were used to give a picture of the social and material conditions of the period under study.

### **Methodology and Hypothesis**

The study is primarily dependent upon the theory of Brahmanical patriarchy by Uma Chakravarti. She situates gender relations within the context of caste and class relations, and her approach can be characterized as broadly Marxist feminist analysis. Any Feminist interventions in the study of Kerala also cannot ignore the caste, class, and gender interactions. This study also addresses the question of the control of Nambudiri women by the dominant male-centred knowledge within the context of caste and class structures and their consent and dissent within these structures. While studying the position of women, gender is used as a tool because it is necessary to understand what a man constitutes to understand what a woman constitutes. Gender deals both with men and women and analyzes how they are socially constructed binaries and not biologically. Both men and women do not possess similarity in their lives because their lives vary according to caste, class, region, and gender.

The study is based on a hypothesis that the Brahmanical patriarchal ideology enforced by Brahmanical texts like *Śāṅkarasmṛti* was a mechanism to preserve their caste purity and property rights by regulating the lives of Nambudiri women and by controlling both production and reproduction.

## Chapterisation

The study is divided into five chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter is an attempt to locate *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, the text of the code of conduct of Nambudiris. The chapter is relevant to the project as the patriarchal norms prescribed in this particular text that regulated the quotidian lives of Nambudiri women in the ritual and non-ritual world. The chapter examines the migration of Nambudiris, their thirty-two settlements, and the dominance they had enjoyed as landowners, temple authorities, and the rights they had in the realm of knowledge. The chapter tries to address the question of what were the material and social conditions that prompted the Nambudiris to write or compile a *Smṛti* text to legitimate their dominance.

The second chapter tries to explore the Brahmanical patriarchal notions of femininity represented by the selected literary texts of the period under study. Most of these texts were written by non-Brahmanas, but the ideology of womanhood reflected in them is predominantly Brahmanical. The chapter argues that the Nambudiris might have faced opposition from the powerful non-Brahmanical community. But these non-Brahmanical communities were also profoundly influenced by the Brahmanical notions of womanhood.

The third chapter explores the gender hierarchies in a Nambudiri household by studying domestic rituals. The chapter seeks answers to the questions like how did the sixteen *samskāras* and everyday rituals create boundaries in their lives, how did the rituals regulate their space within the household, and how did they suffer gender discrimination right from birth itself. The chapter provides a discussion on the concept of *Gṛha* in Brahmanical scriptures and among Nambudiris. As the space allotted to women was *gṛha*, it is relevant to trace gender division of the spaces within a *gṛha* and to examine how separate spaces were allocated to girls before puberty, after puberty, spaces of married women, and widows.

The fourth chapter focuses on the marriage practices of Nambudiris and the lives of Nambudiri women as wives and widows. Nambudiris followed a peculiar system of primogeniture in which the eldest son alone can marry within the caste. All the younger members were engaged in *sambandham* relations with the women of matrilineal communities. The outcome of this practice was the polygamous life of the eldest son, which resulted in the agonies of womenfolk. The majority of Nambudiri women were denied conjugal pleasures, motherhood and had to suffer the fights with co-wives. But they had to observe extreme seclusion as a part of their wifely duty. The patriarchal norms did control their minds and bodies and never permitted them to cross the boundaries. The chapter interrogates the question that how did the marriage practices become a repressive tool to subjugate Nambudiri women and how did the ritual of marriage envisaged for the *dharma* of the perpetuation of family deprive Nambudiri women of their femininity.

Next chapter analyses the procedure of *Smārttavīcāram*, the trial and punishment of Nambudiri women accused of adultery. The rigid control of female sexuality and the peculiar marriage practices might have naturally led to sexual transgressions. Sexual transgressions of Nambudiri women can be regarded as their resistance to patriarchal practices. As we lack sources on the life of Nambudiri women, we cannot say that the patriarchal practices existed for a long time without any kind of resistance. The myths like Muccilōṭṭu Bhagavati, the stories about the wife of Agnihōtri, and the stories about dreadful *Yakṣis* indicate that there were voices of dissent. The deviant sexuality and femininity were dealt with the punishment of ex-communication in the form of *Smārttavīcāram*. The nonconforming sexuality of upper-caste women was a threat to social hierarchies, which include the caste and class hierarchies. The chapter examines the procedure of *Smārttavīcāram* and the intervention of the state in it in the context of caste and property rights. The findings of these chapters are analyzed in the concluding chapter.

# CHAPTER I

## LOCATING ŚĀNKARASMṚTI IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL MILIEU

This chapter is an attempt to locate *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, a *Smṛti* text followed by the Nambudiris, in the broad socio-political history of pre-modern Kerala. The chapter tries to address the question of the socio-political condition that forced the Nambudiri community to have a *Smṛti* text, which contains the rules distinct from the Brāhmaṇa of other parts of India. The study is relevant to the present project, as it was the rules laid down by this particular text that formed the ideological weapon to dominate and discipline their women.

*Śāṅkarasmṛti* or *Laghubharmaparakāśika* is the *Smṛti* text which provides a detailed account of the customs of Kerala. It is believed that the text is an abridged version of *Bhārgvasmṛti* of Paraśurāma.<sup>1</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* is regarded as a part of *Bhārgvasmṛiti*, which is not mentioned anywhere in the whole of Sanskrit literature. It is a text which has unknown authorship and uncertain date.<sup>2</sup>

There are divergent views regarding the authorship of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. A group of scholars believes that it was written by Śāṅkarācārya, the great *Advaita* philosopher. Both T.C. Parameswaran Mussatu and Kunjikuttan Thampuran upheld this view.<sup>3</sup> K. Maheswarn Nair also supports this view.

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<sup>1</sup> N.P.Unni, ed., *Śāṅkarasmṛti (Laghubharmaparakāśika)*, Promoting Committee for the Publication of Sanskrit Laws, International Academic Union, Torino, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> There are divergent opinions regarding the authorship of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. For a detailed discussion, See, *Ibid.*, pp. 8-17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



Vadakkumkur Raja Raja Varma, a scholar of Sanskrit literature, also argues that the work must have composed by Śankarācārya himself.<sup>4</sup>

According to Ullur S.Parameswara Ayyar, it is not Śankarācārya, but Sankaran Nambudiri is the author of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*.<sup>5</sup> He elaborates his view by pointing out that Śankara's followers do not mention this work, and Śankara being an ascetic, will not prescribe a code of conduct for the householders. He states that Payyur Sankaran Nambudiri, who lived during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, might have composed this work. Vadakkumkur Raja Raja Varma, who earlier considered *Śāṅkarasmṛti* as a work of Śankarācārya, later changed his view that Sankaran Nambudiri of Mahishamangalam may be its author. He is also the author of *Vyavahārasamuddhāram* dealing with the customs of Kerala.<sup>6</sup> K.Kunjunni Raja and R.Narayana Panikkar also reject the view that Śankarācārya is, the author of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*.<sup>7</sup> According to N.P.Unni, the text might have been written by a Nambudiri Brāhmaṇa who was a follower of the Baudhayana school of Yajurveda.<sup>8</sup> Historians like K.N. Ganesh believe that the text might have composed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century or later, and the author is undoubtedly not Śankarācārya.<sup>9</sup>

Taking this view as the basic argument of my analysis, this chapter tries to trace the history of pre-modern Kerala and the dominance of Nambudiris. As the gender relations of a particular society are inextricably linked to caste and production relations, it is essential to understand the socio-economic and political context. The first part of the chapter examines the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Reflection on Pre Modern Kerala*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2016, p. 259.

migration of Nambudiris, and the second part discusses the way they established their hegemony.

## Nambudiries

The Nambudiris were migrants to Kerala. There were divergent views regarding their migration.<sup>10</sup> They were able to establish their power in the land of Kerala with their dominant knowledge of Vedas and *Varṇāśramadharmā*.<sup>11</sup> The dominance was legitimized through the text like *Kēraḷōlpatti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*.<sup>12</sup> According to these texts, the land of Kerala was donated to *Brāhmanas* by sage Paraśurāma.<sup>13</sup> They remained a distinct group with their ideology of purity and pollution. *Śuddhi* is a unique feature of the lives of Nambudiris.<sup>14</sup> Every Nambudiri becomes a slave to rituals from his childhood, as soon as he begins to make sense of the world. Even having a bath becomes a ritual.<sup>15</sup> Along with this, the notions of purity (*śuddha*) and impurity/pollution (*aśuddha*) control his entire movement. He follows a very strict routine right from childhood.<sup>16</sup> The ultimate aim of life to the Nambudiri men was never worldly; they were other-worldly. Logan writes that the Nambudiris were among the most conservative and closed-in, and

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<sup>10</sup> V. Rajeev, *Āryādhinivēśavum Nampūtirisamskāravum*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2015, pp. 39-40.

<sup>11</sup> Sahadevan. M., *From Brahmanism to Liberalism: Ideologies Attitudinal Change Modernity in Kerala*, Anoja Saha, Palakkad, 2008, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> See, V. Rajeev, ed., *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2012, M.R. Raghava Varier, ed., *Kēraḷōlpatti Granthavari*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> M.R. Raghava Varier, ed., *Kēraḷōlpatti Granthavari*. p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> ‘*Śuddhi*’ is a principal feature of the caste system in India. For further details of the relation between caste and purity, See, Patrick Olivelle, ‘Caste and Purity: A Study in the Language of the Dharma literature’, in, *Collected Essays Vol.1, Language, Texts and Society :Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2008, pp. 217-246.

<sup>15</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Dineshan Bhattathiripad, Veḷḷakkāṭṭu Mana, Nilambur, 02/08/2019.

from a European perspective, the least enlightened among the Malayali *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>17</sup>

On one side, they followed the customs and traditions and the social structure of the contemporary society that would enable them to maintain their ideology and their supremacy. They wished to segregate their community from the outside world and to base whatever remained of their social ties on religion and rituals. Simultaneously, they wanted to have supremacy and controlling power over other communities.

There existed a division based on various duties among the Nambudiris. The basis for the division, as mentioned above in the Nambudiri community, is the position they assume on account of rituals. The loftier among the Nambudiris, known as Ālvāncēri Tamprākkaḷ, live in Ālvāncēri in Kozhikode kingdom.<sup>18</sup> The house of Ālvāncēri is mentioned in *Kōkasandēśam* as Maṛayañcēri, and later their house found at Ātavanāṭu, both in the kingdom of Kozhikode.

Among the distinguished *Brāhmaṇas*, the Bhaṭṭatiris were actually Vedic scholars and teachers. The right to teach Vedas in Malabar was vested in this category. The *Vādhyār* section also belongs to this category.<sup>19</sup> They were teachers in the Vedic learning center in Trissur in the erstwhile Kochi kingdom and Tirunāvāya in British Malabar. These consisted of six family members, Taikkāṭu, Kaplingāṭṭu, Pāññāḷ, Perumpaṭappu, Kaimukku, and Ceṛumukku.<sup>20</sup> The *Smārttans* who used to interpret and execute caste rules

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<sup>17</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, (1985), Mathrubhumi Books, Kozikode, 2014, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> I.V.Babu, *Kēraḷīya Navōthhānavum Nampūtirimārum*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2017, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Fred Fawcett, *Nambudiris: Notes on Some of the Peoples of Malabar*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2001, (reprint) p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

are also regarded as distinguished *Brāhmaṇas*. The prominent families include Paṭṭaccōmātiri, Mūttamana Bhaṭṭatiri, and Veḷḷakkāṭṭu Bhaṭṭatiri. They conducted the *Smārttavicāram*.<sup>21</sup>

Among the *Jātimatrars*, the Aṣṭavaidyans, Śāstra Nambudiris, and Grāmaṇi Nambudiris had to give up Vedic studies on account of the duties and responsibilities they had to bear pertaining to their castes.<sup>22</sup> The initial learning, which is Vedic recital, or listening Vedic recitalis permitted to them. The other categories of *Brāhmaṇas* regard them as inferior. They cannot have a bath, food, or cooking, together with superior *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>23</sup>

There are three branches of Nambudiris, namely, *Rigvēdi*, *Yajurvēdi*, and *Sāmavēdi*.<sup>24</sup> The *Rigvēdi* further branches into *Āśvalāyanan* and *Kouśītakan*; and the *Yajurvēdi*, into *Boudhāyanan*, and *Badhukhagan*.<sup>25</sup> Among these, *Āśvalāyanan* and *Badhukhagan* can have *samāvarttanam* when they turn fourteen.<sup>26</sup> There are plenty of *Rigvēdis* and *Yajurvēdis* in Kerala, but only 24 families of *Sāmavēdis*.<sup>27</sup> The Nambudiri dwellings are generally known as *illam* and *mana*. Among these, *mana* refers to aristocratic houses. The Nambudiri dwellings were mostly located on river basins, slopes of hills, or in some area removed from public places. These dwellings reflect the distinction the Nambudiris had with others. The traditional Nambudiri houses used to be built in the midst of dense greenery, in naturally beautiful locations. In the expansive homestead, there would be mango, jackfruit, tamarind, and other trees. *Tulasi* plants were common, and so also the grove

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<sup>21</sup> I.V.Babu, *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

of snakes (*Nāgakkāvuor*, simply referred to as *Nāgam*). There would be invariably one or more ponds in the vicinity. The Nambudiris would have exclusively made temples for worship. There would be a *kuḷappura* adjacent to the ponds. All these were distinguished features of Nambudiri houses. After morning bath, Nambudiris perform prostration, Vedic recital, and muttering of prayers in the *kuḷappura*.<sup>28</sup>

The Nambudiri houses are usually constructed facing east. There would be a *paṭippura* (a gatehouse) at the entrance from the road. There would be a vast courtyard between *paṭippura* and house. The houses, which are *nāluketṭu* or *eṭṭuketṭu*, normally had a central courtyard. There would be one or two small buildings for the younger family members to live, near the main building, yet separate from it.<sup>29</sup> Fawcett gives a detailed description of the Nambudiri house.<sup>30</sup> They were to cater to different social needs and

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> “Some of the Namboothiri houses are immense structures almost palatial, while hard by is the temple, in adjunct of the house. At the eastern side of the compound is the gate entrance, sometimes almost a small house in itself, always kept scrupulously clean. In all the larger houses there is a room in this “gate house”, as it is sometimes called, kept as a guest chamber for strangers. Properly speaking, it as well as the house, should be thatched, but now it is very often tiled. The entrance to the compound is always over a step ladder. From the gateway to the house is a raised walk of earth or hardened mud. The yard in front of the house, *which faces the east*, is more or less square and flat: it is plastered with cow dung and kept perfectly clean. Usually there are outer verandahs and rooms upstairs. The building is, as rule, erected with blocks, like large bricks, of laterite cemented in mud. Mortar is rarely used. Doorways and windows are sometimes well carved. To the north east is the cow pen (*gosala*) to the south the *tekkinisala* or *pathiyapura* for receiving Brahman guest. There may be room at the north east corner, an extension of room called *pachakasala* for banquets. To the North West, or may be at a little distance from the house, is the *ellupashala* or grain-store. There is a tank in the north east or south west of the compound, in which, by the by, there should be a fig tree (*udumara*) near the house. The *Bilva* and the *Tulasi* are to be found in the compound. The *bilva* is of course specially sacred to Siva all over south India outside Malabar, in which district are observed none of the nice distinctions between Siva and Vishnu. In the house, or in the compound, is a place set apart for the serpent god, the figure being represented in carved granite. Construction of a house is commenced on an auspicious day fixed by the *Vaidikar*. Presents are given to other Brahmans on the occasion. There is also a ceremony, the chief part in which is *homam*

conveniences. Hence there were no conflicts over status or other internal issues. There were obligatory duties between each sector in rituals such as *piṇḍam*, *māsam*, *śrāddham*, *Vēḷi*, and *yāgam*.<sup>31</sup>

The law of inheritance, the food habits, the style of dressing, and the hair of Nambudiris are different from other *brāhmanas* of India.<sup>32</sup> The Nambudiris in Kerala followed a patrilineal system of inheritance called *Makkattāyam*.<sup>33</sup> Two different systems of inheritance existed in pre-modern Kerala. One is *Marumakkattāyam*, and the other is *Makkattāyam*. *Marumakkattāyam* was followed by *Kṣatriya*, *ampalavāsi*, and Nair castes. It is the law of inheritance through the mother's line Matriliney or *Marumakkattāyam* literally means inheritance by sister's son. The head of the *taravāṭu* was called *kāraṇavan* and was always a male. But the *kāraṇavan* is not the husband of the eldest female member of the family but rather the eldest male-related to the senior-most living female member of the family. The property was jointly owned, but the right to handle the property was vested in the hands of *kāraṇavan*. In a *Marumakkattāyam* family, the relationship between a brother and his sister and between uncle and sister's son is the foundation of the property dealing and the rituals of the *taravāṭu*.<sup>34</sup> *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* provides a description of matriliney.<sup>35</sup>

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done on planks over the well before the house is occupied". Fred Fawcett, *Op. cit.*, pp. 43-45.

<sup>31</sup> I.V.Babu, *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> V. Rajeev, *Āryādhinivēśavum Nampūtirisamskāravum*, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> I.V.Babu, *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed study of *Marumakkattāyam* See, G.Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliney in Malabar c.1850-1940*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2003, K.Saradmoni, *Matriliney Transformed*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1999, David M.Schneider, and Kathleen Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kingship*, University of California Press, California, 1961.

<sup>35</sup> V. Rajeev, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, p. 197.

The rulers of Kerala adopted the *Marumakkattāyam* system of inheritance.<sup>36</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan observes regarding the origin of the system that the matrilineal system might have existed among certain tribes and classes in this area from a very early period, either among the aboriginals or among the group of people whom the Aryan Brahmin settlers brought with them.<sup>37</sup> He writes, “Aryan Brahmin settlers who possessed the best-cultivated lands and dominated the economic and social life of the country must have approved it and made use of it for furthering their political interests. They must have persuaded the rulers who came to power with their support to adopt the system so that they could become part of the ruling class without giving up their exclusiveness and their social organization”.<sup>38</sup>

Nambudiris, except those of Payyannūr *grāma*, followed a system of primogeniture different from the rest of the brāhmanas of India.<sup>39</sup> The eldest son alone had the right to marry from their community.<sup>40</sup> All others were supposed to live a celibate life.<sup>41</sup> Since it was not possible, they were permitted to have *sambandham* with Nair, Kṣatriya, and *Antarāla* (intermediary) communities.<sup>42</sup> The property was jointly owned by the *illam*.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the eldest member of the family was the one who managed and controlled the property.<sup>44</sup> The remaining members of the family and female

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<sup>36</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals Of Kerala*, (1996), Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2013, p. 161.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> V. Rajeev, *Āryādhinivēśavum Nampūtirisamskāravum*, pp. 97-99.

<sup>40</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> V. Rajeev, *Āryādhinivēśavum Nambūtirisamskāravum*, p. 97

<sup>43</sup> Private land documents from Veḷḷakkāṭṭu Mana show that the property was jointly owned by the *illam* and managed by the eldest male members of the family. See land documents from Veḷḷakkāṭṭu Mana, Nilambur, Malappuram.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

members are entitled to nothing beyond maintenance.<sup>45</sup> This system is sanctioned by both *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*. The custom of permitting the eldest member alone to marry and the *sambandham* of younger members was prearrangement for the protection of family property.<sup>46</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* explicitly states that family property should not be divided.<sup>47</sup>

The purity-pollution concept had a profound influence on the food habits of Nambudiris. They are vegetarians, and meat and liquor are forbidden. Fawcett writes about their dietary practice.<sup>48</sup> The cooking in *illams* was done either by the female members or in large *illams* by *Paradēśi Brāhmaṇas* like *Embrāntiri* or *Paṭṭar*.<sup>49</sup> Nambudiris, most importantly, their female members, are prohibited from receiving food from another caste.<sup>50</sup> Patrick Olivelle opines that dietary restrictions form a fundamental feature of Indian society. He makes a detailed study of dietary rules in

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<sup>45</sup> K.C.Narayanan, 'Avatharika' in, V. T. Bhattathirippad, *VTyūṭe Sampūrṇa Kritikaḷ*, (1997), D C Books, Kottayam, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> K. N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinre Innalekaḷ*, (1990), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvanthapuram, 2015, p. 194.

<sup>47</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>48</sup> "The staple food is rice and curry. Upperi is a curry of chopped vegetables fried in ghee, cocoanut or gingerly –oil, seasoned with sesamum (gingerly), salt and jaggery. Avil is another: the jack fruit mixed with some vegetables. Sweets are eaten sometimes. Candied cake of wheat or rice, cream, cheese, rice boiled in milk with sugar and spices, are delicacies. Pappadams are eaten at almost every meal. The Namboothiri must bath and pray to the deity before partaking of any meal. An offering of rice is then made to the house hold fire, some rice is thrown to the crows, and he sits down to eat. The food is served on a plantain leaf or a bell metal plate. It should be served by the wife: but, if a man has other Namboothiris dining with him, it is served by men, or by children. The sexes feed separately. Before he rises from his meal, his wife must touch the leaf or plate on which the food is served. The reason may lie in this. The remains of one's food is called *echhil* and cannot be eaten by anyone. Just before finishing his meal, the Namboothiri touches his plate with his left hand and at the same time his wife touches it with her right (before he rises). Thus the food left on his plate is not *echhil* and she may eat it. The Namboothiri householder is said to be allowed by the sastras which rule his life in every detail, to eat but one meal of rice a day – at midday". Fred Fawcett, *Op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Sumangala, Dēśamangalam Mana, Vadakkanchery, 26/01/2016.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*



*Dharmaśāstras*.<sup>51</sup> Nambudiris follow the *Dharmaśāstric* rules of food habits, which include *abhōjya* and *bhōjya*.<sup>52</sup>

The way they dress and the style of hair also is different from others. *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* gives instructions of dress and hair of Nambudiris.<sup>53</sup> The ritualistic lives of Nambudiris consider bath as an essential ritual. The autobiographies of eminent persons like Devaki Nilayangode describe how important a bath to the community and how the nature of the bath varies according to the situation.<sup>54</sup> Thus the Nambudiris in each aspect of their daily lives differ from the brāhmanas of other parts of India, and *Śāṅkarasmṛti* provides 64 *ācārams* called *anācārams* which existed among the Nambudiris alone.<sup>55</sup>

## **Migration and Settlement**

The period after 1200 CE in Kerala history is wrought with changes in the political, social, and economic spheres. On the basis of historical changes, the period from 1200 CE to 1905 CE can be divided into two phases: first, the period from 1200 CE to 1500 CE until the arrival of Europeans. The second, after the arrival of the Europeans, extending over the British rule that ensued, which saw many economic, political and social changes. The social reformation in the nineteenth century was the result of colonial supremacy, English education, and the conditions brought about by the new economy. The social reformation movements that started at the time of Sri Narayana

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<sup>51</sup> Patrick Olivelle, 'Abhaksya and Abhōjya: An exploration in Dietary language', in, *Collected Essays*, Vol.1, *Language, Texts and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion*, pp. 351-366.

<sup>52</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 294-296.

<sup>53</sup> V. Rajeev, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Antarjanam: Memoires of a Namboodiri Woman* (Translated from Malayalam by Indira Menon and Radhika Menon), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 18-22.

<sup>55</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 303-306.

Guru questioned the caste system and the economic and family system existing in Kerala. It was at this time that the position of women also changed. According to RaghavaVarier, the period between 1200 CE and 1500 CE is darker than the time preceding it and that which followed. However, this is a period of utmost significance. It is the time of the fall of *Perumāls* in Mahodayapuram. The rise of the Nāṭuvāli Svarūpams also happened at this time. In this period, agricultural land extended to new frontiers, new products came up, and markets and fairs came into being.<sup>56</sup>

The Nambudiris or the *Malayali Brāhmaṇas* dominated society during this period. They were migrated to Kerala and established 32 settlements.<sup>57</sup> The following are the early 32 *Brahmin* settlements to the south of river Perumpuḷa (Chandragiri) according to the traditional chronicle.

Between river Perumpuḷa and river Karumanpuḷa:

“Payyannūr, Peruñcellūr, Karikkāṭu, Īśānamangalam, Ālattūr, Kārantala, Triśśivapērūr, Perumanam, Panniyūr, and Cōkiram.

Between river Karumanpuḷa and river Cūrṇi:

Paṛavūr, Airāṇikkuḷam, Mūlikkuḷam, Iringālakkuṭa, Aṭavūr, Cenganāṭu, Uḷiyannūr, Kaḷutanāṭu, Kuḷayūr, Iḷibhyam, Cāmuṇṭa, and Āvaṭṭiputtūr

Between river Cūrṇi and Kanyākumāri:

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<sup>56</sup> M.R. Raghava Varier, *Madhyakāla Kēraḷam: Sampattu, Samūham, Samskāram*, Chinth Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, pp.7-8.

<sup>57</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*(1978), Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2013 ,p. 26

Kiṭangūr, Kāṭūrmaruku, Kumāranallūr, Kaviyūr, Ērṛumānūr, Nīramaṇṇa, Veṇmaṇi, Āranmuḷa, Cengannūr, and Tiruvalla.”<sup>58</sup>

Their migration from Konkan to the south region commenced in the early centuries of the Common Era. They established their settlements on the basins of prominent rivers. One could observe that the places where Nambudiris came to settled were mostly arable lands and were, to a large extent, full of paddy fields.<sup>59</sup> The migration and settlement of the Nambudiris had a tremendous impact on the society of Kerala. Their villages were far more advanced in the cultivation process than the prevailing agricultural system. The significant contribution of Nambudiris was the planning and controlling of the means of production.<sup>60</sup> The knowledge they possessed on astrology helped them to calculate the seasons according to the astrological calendar known as *pañcāṅgam* (almanac). The mode of harvesting in the months of *Kanni* and *Makaram* (in the medieval period corresponds to September and February, respectively) might have arisen from their arrangements. The land was properly surveyed to check the quantity of profit from the harvest. They made use of their practical experience in the villages where they have dominance.<sup>61</sup> They made attempts to enrich the economic as well as socio-cultural relationships between the villages.

A significant aspect is that the settlements were temple centered.<sup>62</sup> The *Brāhmaṇas* who came here were given the ownership of the entire land, and rites and rituals were formed exclusively for them.<sup>63</sup> These texts say that six

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>59</sup> M. R Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kēraḷa Caritram Vol. I*, (1991), Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 1996, p. 113.

<sup>60</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinre Innalekaḷ*, p. 104.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, *The Kerala Temple and the Early Medieval Agrarian System*, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 1992. p. 29.

<sup>63</sup> V. Rajeev, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, pp. 77-79.

months of rains and six months of warm climate were also the creation of Paraśurāma.<sup>64</sup> The Vedic *Brāhmaṇas*, who received land distributed to the subservient people, built temples and formulated temple rituals. The *Brāhmaṇas* prescribed the responsibilities of each caste. *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* and *Kēraḷōlpatti* articulate these ideas.

The advent of *Brāhmaṇas* and, the foundation of their settlements, formed the most significant development in Kerala in the early medieval period. M.G.S. Narayanan writes on Nambudiris that “with their semi-autonomous temple centered *grāmas* (villages) and their common leadership, their Kanarese–Prakrit Sanskrit languages, their superior agricultural technology and their willingness to befriend and exploit the indigenous population, they became a formidable force in Kerala politics capable of reshaping everything according to their choice.”<sup>65</sup> Their ideology became the dominant ideology of society.<sup>66</sup> They legitimized their position with *Kēraḷōlpatti* tradition. *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* and *Śankarasmr̥ti* also contain legitimization to justify their power in the society.

During the period of Perumāḷs of Mahōdayapuram, the *Brāhmaṇas* enjoyed authority and constituted an advisory body known as ‘*Nālutaḷi*.’<sup>67</sup> The members of this council attended important meetings of the king. *Mēltaḷi*, *Kīltaḷi*, *Neṭiyataḷi* and *Cingapuramtali* constituted *Nālutaḷi*.<sup>68</sup> M.G.S. observes that “each of the four chief temples was the seat of the representative from a Brahmin settlement near the capital; thus the representative of Mūlikkuḷam grama sat in *Mēltaḷi*, the representative of Paravur sat in *Neṭiyataḷi*, and the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> M.R.RaghavaVarier, *Madhyakāla Kēraḷam: Sampattu, Samūham, Samskāram*, p.199.

<sup>67</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

representative of Iringālakkuṭa sat in the *Cingapuramtali* temple.”<sup>69</sup> He says that there was a close relationship between four chief temples in the capital and four chief Brahmin settlements around the capital.<sup>70</sup> It is argued that *Nālutaḷi* and Brahmin settlements had a significant influence upon the rule of Perumāḷs. Their advice guided the rulers.<sup>71</sup>

The close connection between the rulers and the *Brāhmaṇas* is evident from the fact that the ruler is considered as the protector of *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>72</sup> M.G.S. assumes that the later Cēra rulers were confirmed Kṣatriya status by the *Brāhmaṇas* by connecting their families with those of the classical heroes.<sup>73</sup> Śankara Nārāyaṇa, the court astronomer, refers to his patron’s family as ‘*Ravikula*’ and *Dīptāmsurāmsa*. Once they received the Kṣatriya status, it became their foremost duty to protect *Chāturvarṇya*, cow, *Brāhmaṇas*, and temples.<sup>74</sup> The subservient position of Perumāḷs to *Brāhmaṇa* is further evident from the Kollam inscription of Rāma Kulaśēkhara, which states that the king offered *prāyaścitta* for having offended *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>75</sup> The state under Perumāḷs was an oligarchical form of government, though it appears as a monarchy.

The disintegration of Perumāḷs was followed by the power of Nāṭus.<sup>76</sup> *Brāhmaṇas* of thirty-two villages continued to be mighty even after the disintegration of the state of Perumāḷ. The period from the twelfth to the

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>72</sup> There are statements in *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* and *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, which assert the fact that the ruler should protect the Brahmanas. See V. Rajeev, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, pp. 188-189 and See also, N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 280- 286.

<sup>73</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.158.

<sup>76</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinṛe Innalekaḷ*, p. 317.

end of the sixteenth century witnessed the expansion of various Nāṭus. The ‘Nāṭus’ was ruled by *Nāṭṭuṭayavar*, and most of them existed even during the Perumāḷ period.<sup>77</sup> After the decline of Perumāḷs, the Nāṭus like Ērālanāṭu, Vaḷḷuvanāṭu, Kuṟumpranāṭu, and Kōlattunāṭu became prominent. They began to expand their territories. The chief of Ērālanāṭu captured strategic regions like Kozhikode, Pantalāyani, and Ponnāni and emerged as Zamorin of Calicut.<sup>78</sup> Kōlattunāṭu controlled a major part of the region of North Malabar and parts of Vaḷapaṭṭaṇam. The southern part of Kerala, including the port town Kollam, was under the rule of the chief of Vēṇāṭu. In the fourteenth century, Kochi developed as a powerful Nāṭu displacing the authority of Koṭungallūr.<sup>79</sup>

Nāṭṭuṭayavar in medieval period followed ‘*Kūruvāḷca*’ as the form of political authority.<sup>80</sup> *Kūruvāḷca* implies a gradation of rights and privileges within the ruling houses with the *Mūttakūr*, identified as the *Uṭayavar* enjoying overall authority. Each male member had rank or *kuru*, which had income from land and other properties and resources attached to it. *Kūruvāḷca* also implies a seniority order, with the *Iḷamkūr* having claims to succeed the *Mūttakūr*.<sup>81</sup>

The power centers during this period were called ‘*Svarūpams*.’ *Svarūpam* was explained by scholars in various ways, such as a royal household, a territory, or even as a dynasty ruling over as empire.<sup>82</sup> The most

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<sup>77</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Reflection on Pre Modern Kerala*, p. 72.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> M. R. Raghava Varier, ‘State as Śvarūpam: An Introductory Essay’, in R. Champakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat and T.R.Venugopalan, eds., *State and Society in Pre-Modern South India*, Cosmo Books, Trissur, 2002, pp. 120-29.

prominent *Svarūpams* were *Kīlpērūr* and *Trippāppūr Svarūpams*, which controlled *Vēṇāṭu*, *Neṭiyirippu Svarūpam* which had authority over *Ēṛālanāṭu*, and *Kōlattu Svarūpam*, which dominated *Kōlattunāṭu*.<sup>83</sup> The *Kūruvāḷca* and matrilineal form of inheritance were significant characteristics of *Svarūpams*. The period of *Svarūpam* was one of political fragmentation and mutual conflicts. The conflict between Zamorin and, the ruler of *Vaḷḷuvanāṭu*, and those between Zamorin and Kochi were noteworthy.<sup>84</sup> Internal strifes within the ruling families were also not uncommon.

The *Brāhmaṇas* continued to enjoy their power and exclusive privileges during this period. The *Brāhmaṇas* played a crucial role in transforming the political-judicial authority of the *Svarūpam* into a sovereign sanctioned by the Brahmanical ideology.<sup>85</sup> Temples also played a significant role in legitimizing the authority of *Svarūpams*.<sup>86</sup> Temples were managed and patronized by the *Ūrāḷas*. Temples like Tiruppākkāṭal temple in *Kīlpērūr*, *Dēvi Dēvēśvaram* temple in *Kiḷimānūr*, and *Padmanābha* temple in *Thiruvananthapuram* were directly patronized by the rulers.<sup>87</sup> In the medieval period, the Brahmanical ideology and the institution of the temple become formidable factors in the political authority.

### **Brahman Settlements and Administration**

*Brāhmaṇas*, who had migrated to Kerala, established their habitats on the shores of prominent rivers. There they constructed their settlements based on agriculture. They received lands as *Brahmaswam* and

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<sup>83</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Reflection on Pre Modern Kerala*, p. 87.

<sup>84</sup> The festivals like *Māmānkam* was an instance of the strife between Zamorin of Kozhikode and the ruler of *Vaḷḷuvanāṭu*. See, V. V. Haridas, *Sāmūtiriperuma*, Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, 2012, p. 178.

<sup>85</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Reflection on Pre Modern Kerala*, p. 79.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

*Dēvaswam*.<sup>88</sup> Several inscriptions record the details of land granted to temples and *Brāhmaṇas*. The Kollūrmaṭham plates refer to the grant of land to meet the various expenses of the temple and also the private property of the twenty-three *Brāhmaṇas* families settled there. The Kiḷimānūr record of the tenth century shows that *Brāhmaṇas* from eight of the original thirty-two settlements were brought to Southern Kerala and established settlement around a newly consecrated temple.<sup>89</sup> These *Brāhmaṇas* were given the right to enjoy landed properties as their private property or *Brahmaswam* as well as the land given to the temple, which was under their administration.<sup>90</sup> Regarding the *Brahmaswam* and *Dēvaswam* Kesavan Veluthat makes, the following observation in his study on brahman settlements, “Brahman settlements revolved around the temple and that the village property, whose collateral ownership was enjoyed by the temples, was virtually the property of the *Brāhmaṇas*. While each individual managed his private property called *Brahmaswam* personally, the common property of the temple called *Dēvaswam* and other temple affairs were looked after by the *Brāhmaṇa* population of the village”.<sup>91</sup>

The Brahmans of the village controlled the administration under the name *Ūrār* or *Ūrāḷar*.<sup>92</sup> The administration of the temple was carried out by *Ūrāḷar*. The term *Ūrāḷar* denotes the inhabitants of the village. The powers of the village assembly rested nominally with the *Ūrāḷar*.<sup>93</sup> The administration daily was done by an executive committee called *Paraṭai*; members of

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<sup>88</sup> T.R.Venugopalan, *Sampattum Adhikāravum: Triśśūril Ninnuḷḷa Oru Kāḷca*, Current Books, Thrissur, 2012, p. 93.

<sup>89</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*



*Paraṭai* were known as *Paraṭaiyār*. They are selected from *Ūrālar* themselves and were given certain special privileges.<sup>94</sup> Apart from *Ūrālar*, the bodies like *Kaṇams*, the officers like *Potuvāḷ* and *Vāriyar* were also entrusted with duties regarding the temple.<sup>95</sup> Rules regarding the functioning of temples have also existed. The codes of conduct were called *kaccams*. *Mūlikkuḷam Kaccam* and *Kaṭānkāṭṭu kaccam*, etc. were mentioned in the inscriptions. M.G.S. Narayanan writes on *Mūlikkuḷam Kaccam* as follows. “Those who violated an agreement arrived at unanimously by the *Ūrālar*, and government officers had to excommunicate after the constriction of their rights and properties. This was essential to build up a strong, well-knit, and efficient system of local government in the Aryan Brahmin settlements. This was the secret of their unique success and continued prosperity in Kerala”.<sup>96</sup>

Several new Brahman settlements sprang up during the post-Cēra period. *Nālutali* and its four representative Brahman settlements lost their prominence, and two other settlements *Cōkiram* and *Panniyūr*, became leading Brahman settlements.<sup>97</sup> Tradition says that *Ālvāñcēri Tamprākkaḷ* is the spiritual head of *Cōkiram* settlement, and *Kalpakañcēri Tamprākkaḷ* is the head of *Panniyūr* settlement. *Maṇipravāḷam* texts of the medieval period refer to both these settlements.<sup>98</sup> One of the significant factors of the post-Cēra period is the conflict between *Panniyūr* and *Cōkiram*.<sup>99</sup>

The Brahman settlements lost their corporate character during this period and there evolved individual domination.<sup>100</sup> The nature of Brahman

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>96</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>97</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, p. 91.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinre Innalekaḷ*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>100</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, p. 102.

was shifted from semi-autonomy to complete autonomy. When individual Brahmans gained more power and wealth, temple properties also became the properties of *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>101</sup> Temples became a center of power and wealth during this period.

Temple '*Sankētam*,' which included both the temple and its land, enjoyed autonomous power. Temples were administered by *Sankētams*. The members of *Sankētam* were the representatives of the Brahmin settlements.<sup>102</sup> '*Kōyma*' was the right reserved for the ruler. But it is the members of the *Sankētam* who select a ruler for that position. There were three types of *Kōymas*; *Akakōyma* and *Puṛakōyma* had the role of administration in the management of *Dēvaswam* properties, and *Mēlkōyma* had all the powers inside and outside the *Sankētam*.<sup>103</sup>

There are some examples of power by *Sankētams*. Anyone found guilty of disorderly conduct within the village was summoned and punished. If any harm was done by the ruler or the feudal lord within the boundaries of the *Sankētam*, they too were punished.<sup>104</sup> A temple *Sankētam* is an area within a narrow boundary in which no king has the right to rule. The character of temple *Sankētam* also helped to strengthen the power of Brahmans.

### **Brahmans and Land Relations**

The production relations in Kerala were also largely dominated by the Brahmans. The Brahmans who migrated to Kerala established their settlements in river basins, which were self-reliant. They received land in the form of *Brahmaswam* and *Dēvaswam*. They did not directly involve in

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> T.R.Venugopalan, *Sampattum Adhikāravum: Triśśūril Ninnuḷḷa Oru Kālca*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

cultivation. They leased the land to *Kārāḷar*, who supervised land, and *Aṭiyār* were the actual tillers of the soil. Brahmans, as *Ūrāḷar* of the temple lands and of the *Brahmaswam*, got a share of production as *pattam* or rent. There were at least five categories of production relations around the land. They were *Uṭayavar* who held *Cērikkal* land, *Ūrāḷar*, *Kārāḷar*, *Kuṭiyar*, and *Aṭiyār*.<sup>105</sup> The *Uṭayavar* were the local rulers who had suzerainty over the entire land in the principality. They also had the right to sanction the exchange of landed property. The control of *brahmaswam* and *Dēvaswam* lands were the responsibility of the *Ūrāḷar* appointed by the Brahmans. *Kārāḷar* was a large section of landlords who received and gave a share of produce to the temple and *Ūrāḷar*.

The entire work of cultivation was done by *Kuṭiyar* and *Aṭiyār*. They had a subservient position to *Uṭayavar*, *Ūrāḷar*, and *Kārāḷar*. The land was acquired by the *Brāhmaṇa* as gifts. The chieftains, individual Brahmans, merchants, and even devadasis made donations in the form of land. Gold that was received as the donation was invested in the land, which then leased out to tenants.<sup>106</sup>

The rights over the land are categorized into several hierarchies. *Ūrāḷar* had *ūrāṇmai* or property rights. *Kārāḷar*, the householders of land in the form of lease, had the right of cultivation known as *Karanmai*. The artisan and craftsmen groups formed *kuṭimai*, and the primary producers were *aṭimai*. *Ūrāṇmai* became the *Janmam* right. Kesavan Veluthat states that *Janmam* is superior rights vested in the Brahman lords and *Kāṇam* is rights enjoyed by the tenant cultivated immediately below them.<sup>107</sup> A major portion

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<sup>105</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, *The Kerala Temple and the Early Medieval Agrarian System*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>106</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>107</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 285.

of land was controlled by the temple centered Brahman settlements. In the post-Cēra period, the corporate of the Brahman villages declined and, in its place, emerged certain individuals who had greater powers over the properties of the temples, apart from their own *Brahmaswam* property.<sup>108</sup> Instances of *Dēvaswam* properties appropriated as *Brahmaswam* is found. As a result, the Nambudiri landlordism had absolute control over the production mechanism.<sup>109</sup>

Brahmanical temples and land rights played a significant role in exerting the influence of Nambudiris in society. They had control over the administration of the land. On some occasions, the *Brāhmaṇas* used to hold hunger strikes called *Paṭṭiṇi* in order to punish the king who offended them. K.N. Ganesh observes about *Paṭṭiṇi* strike in his work.<sup>110</sup>

The temples, which were also economic and social centers apart from being religious centers, hastened the division of society based on caste. Hence divisions such as *Brāhmaṇas*, Nairs, craftsmen, skilled workers, farmers, etc. rose around the temples. It became necessary to ensure the service of various labor groups to the Brahmin settlements. This system of mutually dependent labor unions under traditional Brahmin centered society brought the service of all sections under the purview of rituals. There were duties that were to be observed by different castes in connection with village temples. Tenants

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<sup>108</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, p. 126.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> The practice of *Paṭṭiṇi* illustrated the power relation among the Brahmans, temple and *Svarūpam*. *Paṭṭiṇi* was a protest fast of the Brahmans mainly temple authority against the rulers. The practice of *Paṭṭiṇi* was based on the tradition that it was part of the customary duty of the chiefs to feed the Brahmans. If the Brahmans refuse the food by going on a fast, the political and moral credentials of rulers were challenged and the ruler had no other option than to acquiesce to the demand. There are several instances of *Paṭṭiṇi* performed before the houses of Vēṇāṭu, Kochi, Kodungallur and Veṭṭam *Svarūpam*. The practice of *Paṭṭiṇi*, implied the rupture in the power equations between Brahmanical temples and *Svarūpams*. See, K.N. Ganesh, *Reflection on Pre Modern Kerala*, p. 82.

cultivated the products necessary for daily use of temple worship and non-tenants. The upper castes enjoyed access to temples and its wealth, but the castes lower in strata were denied such rights; the festivals connected with these temples provided opportunities for each caste to participate according to their position.<sup>111</sup>

The caste system that was practiced in Kerala was peculiar in nature. Most prominent is the concept of purity and impurity. In the long line of caste, the upper castes were considered most pure, and so was their profession. As one descended the caste line, the purity began to decline. As a result, the profession of upper castes came to be regarded as pure, and the physical labor of the lower castes impure. In Kerala, all castes had to live in close proximity to each other. For the same reason, untouchability was strictly followed. The ideology which affected all domains of life was controlling human relationships as well. For the Nambudiris, this pure-impure concept and caste rungs became a useful factor even in controlling rulers. They could thus subordinate political power to their high ritualistic positions. Together with this, they were able to maintain caste divisions within a closed system and to consolidate their caste as fixed and supreme. Those who would not obey the conventional responsibilities of this system would have to face ostracism and social isolation.

The ideology of untouchability strengthened the position of *Brāhmaṇas*. Untouchability was an ideology that served two ways. One was that the separate identity of different strata of society became solidified, and the labor class was pushed to the lowest strata.<sup>112</sup> The notion of touch became

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<sup>111</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, *The Kerala Temple and the Early Medieval Agrarian System*, pp. 51-61.

<sup>112</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinre Innalekaḷ*, p. 162.

useful to define one's social position and to distance with other castes.<sup>113</sup> The *Brāhmaṇas*, who claimed supreme status and the rights to perform rituals in society, became the social point of untouchability. It was untouchability that protected the rights of the dominant caste. As the sovereign inheritors of God and caste, they would stay outside the production process but, at the same time, divide those of other castes into categories such as the ones who directly took part in the production, the middlemen, and the supervisors. By making economic, social, and political domains interdependent, the traditional society interfered even in the personal lives of individuals and controlled them.<sup>114</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Brahmin landlords had, as a sanction of their suzerainty and pre-eminence in matters of caste and ritual, their *smṛitiśāsanas* and local networks of etiquette and social interactions (*nāṭṭumaryāda*), which were pure and sacrosanct. It is as part of this general recognition that one should read the story of Paraśurāma prevalent in Kerala. As per the Paraśurāma story, the word, outlook, and rituals of Nambudiris, who had caste supremacy as well as land ownership, were deemed pure.

In a traditional society which is characterized by the close interdependence of the castes as well as ritual practices, land-based ties and caste system were mutually complementary. This means that one's respectability and social status depended on one's relation to the land. As a result, the control of land came into the hands of higher caste people. The excess or shortage in economic supremacy and rights in a caste-ridden society were sufficient to determine the institutions of authority in other domains of social life as well. The status and rights as a *Janmi* (landowner) also fell in the hands of Nambudiri. While the Nambudiris enjoyed the ownership of land as their rights and status, they were never involved in the production process.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

The people to whom physical labor was taboo never had any active status as far as labor was concerned. Surplus produce was donated to temples and other religious institutions. This was always done by the Nambudiris, who were deemed as *Bhūdēva* or “Devas of the earth.” This means Nambudiris were not merely landlords in the material sense but had ritual rights as well. Just as rights to land ownership in the production structure, the Nambudiris also had the right to the lion’s share of the production as well. Both of these were handed down from generations.

The Nambudiris were also regarded as spiritually supreme. The relationship between landowner and tenant with respect to local customs and rituals, precedence, and interdependence were determined by religion and caste rules. *Janmi* was not merely a rich landlord, but also an institution with many rights and authority. By propitiating landowners, they also believed that they were propitiating symbols of worship and the gods. This means that religious ideology camouflage economic exploitation. Nambudiris, as authorities of knowledge, were barred from physical labor. In this way, they could stay away from the production process while enjoying all material comforts.

The Brahmin monopoly in social and economic domains won them superiority in knowledge also. The main reason for this is that the control of the temples, which were carrying out the duties of education, spirituality, warfare, and finance, was vested in the hands of the Nambudiris.<sup>115</sup> The lower caste people were kept away from these temples. Therefore, the control of the world of ideas was almost entirely in the hands of *Brāhmaṇas*. The history of medieval Kerala, as Donald Davis argues, is the history of increasing control

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<sup>115</sup> There were *śālais* associated with temple which provided education and military training to Nambudiris. See, M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

of land and political power by Brahmanical temples.<sup>116</sup> Temples facilitated the expansion of agriculture through Brahmanical colonization. Temples were also centers of learning, as *Śālais* attached to temples imparted education. There was a large number of functionaries attached to the daily rituals of temples. Apart from *Brāhmaṇas Tantri*, and *Śānti*, there were Potuvāḷ, Vāriyar, reciters of Mahābhārata (Mahābhārata *Bhaṭṭas*), dancers and drummers as temple servants. *Bhaṭṭas* and *Cāttirars* were attached to temples. *Bhaṭṭas* were scholars and reciters of Mahābhārata and *Cāttirars* were Brahman students of Vedic and martial training. The temple servants were called *Antarāḷar*. They received land as *virutti* and *jīvitam* for giving their service. Later it became a hereditary right and came to be graded as per birth. There were craftsmen and artisans settled in the temple property to ensure their services to the temple and were ranked according to their birth and incorporated into the caste hierarchy.<sup>117</sup>

The caste-based social division and its proliferation through the temple perpetuated the broad framework of the *Varṇa* system on the one hand and the internal divisions within the professional caste groups (*jāti*) on the other. The Brahmin temples in medieval Kerala acted as the kingmakers. The alliances, forged by the burgeoning political leaders with Brahmin temples, became the source of power, prestige, and wealth for the leaders. The total absence of *praśastis* eulogizing a reigning king in the epigraphic record of Kerala further bolsters the notion that Cēra kings and other regional or local rulers called Nāṭuvāḷis, and Dēśavāḷis respectively, were politically weak relative to the Brahmin temples they supported.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Donald R. Davis, *The Boundaries of Hindu Law: Tradition, Custom and Politics in Medieval Kerala*, International Institute for Advanced Asian Studies, Torino, 2004, p. 44.

<sup>117</sup> Rajan Gurukkal, *The Kerala Temple and the Early Medieval Agrarian System*, p. 61

<sup>118</sup> Donald R. Davis, *Op. cit.*, p. 46.



In the post-Cēra period, the temples and Brahmin families became more prominent, the Nāṭuvālis continued to patronize temples. Temples began to acquire more land through purchase, mortgage, and donations. They achieved autonomy in power. The temples were owners of large tracts of land. *Brāhmaṇas* and the temples controlled by them acquired land as much as possible. It was a means to reinforce their status in the social, religious, and political hierarchies of the medieval period. Donald R. Davis writes, “Medieval Kerala people’s relationship to the land determined their social status. There were several kinds of *svatva* (property) one could hold: the highest *aṭṭippēr* rights, mortgaged property (*veppu/ orri/ paṇayam*), rented property (*pāṭṭam*), and even rights of slavery (*aṭṭima*). In between, there were other sub-varieties of these major categories of *svatva*. One’s place in the social life of medieval Kerala depended upon what kind of “property” one possessed. Conversely, the social position to which one was born practically guaranteed a particular relationship to the land. No Brahmin held occupancy rights, and no *Pulaya* held *aṭṭippēr* rights. Landed property in Kerala, therefore, was an idea, status, and fixed one’s position relative to other with and outside of one’s caste”.<sup>119</sup>

Temples like Tiruvalla and Peruvanam were rich in landed property. The land was leased to *Kārālar*, who, in turn, paid rent to the temples. The wealth of temples increased by donations from individuals and royals in the form of land and gold. The temple records refer to land donations for feeding *Brāhmaṇas* and for celebrating festivals.<sup>120</sup>

Brahmin supremacy was a reality in Kerala, but it is difficult to believe that there was no opposition to or conflicts against them. There were non-Brahmin settlements along with Brahmin villages. The *Brāhmaṇas* must have

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p. 73.

<sup>120</sup> T.R.Venugopalan, *Sampattum Adhikāravum: Triśśūril Ninnuḷḷa Oru Kālca*, p. 96.

used weapons along with their knowledge to consolidate their authority. There are references to weapon-wielding *Brāhmaṇas* called *Cāttirar*.<sup>121</sup> It is said that in the *śālas*, which were centers of Vedic study, there was martial training as well. The prevailing legends in some of the villages and the opposition the *Brāhmaṇas* had to face can be read in connection with each other. According to a tradition in *Karikkāṭu grāmam*, a Brahmin family lived at the foot of a mountain in Nilambur. This was the time when *Bakāsura* used to decide on the family he would devour each day. Once, this fate befell on a Brahmin family. They ran away from there, fearing Baka, and settled in the *Veḷḷakkāṭu* region. This is the origin myth related to the *Smārta* family in *Veḷḷakkāṭu* village of Malabar. This *illam* is situated in the early Brahman village of *Karikkāṭu*.<sup>122</sup> This story implies the enmity *Brāhmaṇas* faced from certain quarters.

*Brāhmaṇa- Kṣatriya* alliance is visible from the *Perumāḷ* period. Still, there were conflicts among them. The last *Perumāḷ* of Kerala, *Rāmavarma*, is said to have renounced his kingdom as penance for having quarreled with *Nambudiris*.<sup>123</sup> Even at the time of *Svarūpams*, the *Brāhmaṇas* had opposition within the *Svarūpams* where the *Nāṭuvāḷis* had prominence. Even in the *Svarūpams*, where the king's rule was strict, there was occasional opposition against Brahmin supremacy. The *Zamorin* of *Kozhikode* and the ruler of *Cochin*, *ŚaktanTampurān* often had conflicts with *Nambudiris*. As per legends, *ŚaktanTampurān* once came to attend a feast of the *Nambudiris* in *Vadakkanchery*. He was surprised by the wealth and land holdings of *Nambudiris* and confiscated many of their property to the state.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> C.K. Nambudiri, *Cāttirāṅkam*, (1980), Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trissur, 2013, p. 19.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Dineshan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*,

<sup>123</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, p.159.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Madhava Variar, *Edakkunni Variyam*, *Vadakkanchery*, 1/10/2010.

There are also stories of Zamorins of Calicut punishing Nambudiris. They prove that the authority of Nambudiris was often questioned.<sup>125</sup> By the medieval period, Nāṭuvālis and many prominent Nair families became landlords. These kings and chieftains received income not only from the land but also from coastal trade. The cities and markets mentioned in *Maṇipravālam* texts indicate the growth of trade. The Nambudiri did not have a prominent role in this city-market culture. The context of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century or later, must have been the emergence of the non-Brahmin landlords and the autonomous Nāṭuvālis. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* is believed to be a part of *Bhārgavasmṛti*, which is said to have been composed by Paraśurāma. The authorship of this is also alleged to Śāṅkarācārya, and that must also be a means to justify the superiority of Nambudiris. In the extensive studies on Smritis, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* has not been mentioned anywhere. This has been specially written for Nambudiris in Kerala. One can see anxieties regarding the powers and survival of Nambudiris through the length and breadth of this *Smṛti*. The *Śāṅkarasmṛti* describes the four varnas. This has been written entirely for the benefit of Nambudiris. While several texts have been written to project the caste-dharma ideology, it may be due to the fear of losing their influence in the same ideology that it was consolidated in *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. While it specifies the duties of each *Varṇa*, the *Smṛti* emphasizes that each one is meant to serve the Brahmin. Regarding the responsibilities of a king, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* delineates how a king should protect a Brahmin, and also the effect of non-compliance of it in the kingdom.

References can be seen in *Śāṅkarasmṛti* on the importance of *Yāgas*, and the gifts and alms given to the Brahmin. Apart from the income received from land, the Brahmin finds ways to earn his daily sustenance through such

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<sup>125</sup> For details of conflict between Brahmanas and Zamorin, See, V.V. Haridas, ed., *Appattu Aṭṭiriyuṭe Ātmakatha*, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 2018, pp. 19-23.

gifts and alms. The *Smṛti* rules are written in such a way that not only the *gṛhastā* but the brahmachari and *vānaprastā* are helped to find their sustenance. Along with them, rules were written to maintain the exclusiveness of *Brāhmaṇas*. Strict routines and ideas on purity are part of this. Most important is the purity of the Brahmin woman. The main factor that helped to maintain the authority of Nambudiris in Kerala was their ideological supremacy in the caste system. They feared that if the Nambudiri women had relations with men outside their caste, they would lose the purity of their caste and the rights they enjoyed as a result. Preventing the mobility of the women, controlling their routine, and executing *Smṛti* rules that impose control over their minds and body, were seen as a means to address these fears. The fears and anxieties of property rights and conflicts with non-Brahman communities might have prompted Nambudiris to codify the rules for conduct in *Śāṅkarasmṛti* to reinforce their power.

Though the conflicts and oppositions did exist, the dominant ideology of the medieval period was Brahmanical. However, the concept of femininity was the same in the Brahmanical as well as the non-Brahmanical thought processes. When we examine the literary works from the thirteenth century up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we understand that the ideology on femininity was essentially Brahmanical and patriarchal.

## CHAPTER II

# BRAHMANICAL NOTIONS OF FEMININITY: A STUDY OF SELECTED TEXTS

Brahmanical patriarchal notions of femininity embedded in *Dharmasāstras* are contradictory in nature. Women are worshipped and venerated as *pativratā*, whereas they are also considered as seductress and sensual. While the body of *pativratā* is regulated and strictly placed under surveillance for the perpetuation of caste purity and patrilineal family, the body of the second category (often called as *Gaṇikās*, *Dēvadāsis*, or *Vēśyas*) is celebrated without restrictions. The *Dharmasāstras* and *Kamasūtra* represents these two types of women. This chapter explores the double perspectives of Brahmanical patriarchal ideology, which is often contradictory and ambiguous, represented in the selected literary texts of the period under study.

*Maṇipravālam* texts *Vaiśikatantram*, *Chandrōlsavam* and *Rāmāyaṇam Kīlippāṭṭu* of Thunchathu Ezhuthachan, the first two representing the sensual women and the last chaste woman are taken up here for an analysis. *Āṭṭakkathas* and *Tullal* works are also utilized for getting a wider perspective. Further, an analysis of a nineteenth-century text called *Pativratā Dharmaśatakam*, which shows that the concept of *pativratā* was still a powerful ideology to be popularised among the people of Kerala when many debates were going on the transition of womanhood, is also taken up here. The preliminary analysis shows that both in the realms of *Kāma* and *Dharma*, women were denied individuality or agency.

The heroines of *Maṇipravālam* may seem like women of agency, but they are objectified and eroticized by male writers. They are mere objects for

male sensual pleasure. In fact, their lives are determined by the men who approach them for pleasure. Shalini Shah argues that the objectification of women is the most distinguished feature of patriarchal male erotic culture. Women were forced to agree to make sexual commitments to the males within approved patriarchal frames. She quotes Veena Das, “lover of the night becomes the lawgiver in the morning.”<sup>1</sup> This is absolutely true in the context of the above-mentioned texts. *Anangasena*, the heroine of *Maṇipravāḷam* text *Vaiśikatantram*, falls into this category of objectified women. Sīta, the heroine of *Rāmāyaṇam Kīlippāṭṭu*, was a true *pativrata*, but she had to conform to the patriarchal norms and prove the purity of her body. The heroines like *Anangasena* in *Maṇipravāḷam* text were eulogized for their beauty and Sīta of *Kīlippāṭṭu* for her *pātivratyā* (chastity). Both were, in fact, the victims of male fantasy and domination, and their bodies are regulated by misogynist norms.

Brahmin patriarchal ideology had bestowed upon the woman, the positions of daughter, wife, and mother. A woman’s identity was invariably defined in connection with the man. There was no considerable difference to the status of the woman, whichever caste she belonged to. She was either the chaste wife (*pativrata*) whose function was to sustain the *Gr̥hastāśrama*, to perpetuate the family, or a means to provide sexual pleasure to a man. In a patriarchal society, women are categorized as good or bad in terms of either their sexual behavior or their lack of docility.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to find womanhood, which is neither of these two. Paraśurāma is reported to have declared, as per *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* that Brahmin women need to be chaste, which is not binding in the case of women of other castes. When one marks

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<sup>1</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Shalini Shah, ‘Articulation, Dissent and Subversion: Voices of Women’s Emancipation in Sanskrit Literature’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 45, No. 9/10, September–October 2017, p. 81.

the position of women after analyzing gender relations, one can see the influence of this Brahmin ideology.

Sanjay K Gautham writes that the Brahmanical ideology divided the domains of knowledge into *dharma*, the code of conduct, *artha*, the law of political power and economy, *Kāma*, the law of sexual pleasure, and *Mōkṣa*, the spiritual liberation. Among these, he argues that *dharma* occupied predominance and sexual–erotic pleasure subordinated to it. The hegemonic character of Brahmanical law is based on the division of caste on a hierarchal basis. *Manusmṛti*, the prime text of Brahmanical law, emphasized the importance of the division of society into *Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, and *Sūdra*. Moreover, this discourse of Brahmanical law was based on the purity and power of the upper castes. This naturally led to the emergence of the institute of family and patriarchy. When caste and patriarchy became the cornerstones of society, the sexual practices were regulated, and women were subjugated. The women were reduced to mere tools for procreation.<sup>3</sup>

The Brahmanical patriarchy considers women in the extreme binaries of *Kulastrī* and *Kulaṭā*. The first category is of wives, and the second category includes courtesans, *Gaṇikās*, and *Vēśyas*. The wives are meant for reproduction, and all the other three are for pleasure. The sexuality of wives was regulated and controlled, but the sexuality of prostitutes is uncontrolled and dangerous. Shalini Shah quotes Damodara Gupta’s *Kuṭṭanāmatam*, which states that ‘sex with the wife is necessary for the sake of procreation, and physical conduct with a prostitute for avoiding sickness (*vyadhi*) or excessive sexual desire.’ This shows that the sexuality of prostitute being non-marital and non-procreative was considered as a threat. Even in *Mṛcchakaṭika*, where

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<sup>3</sup> Sanjay K. Gautham, *Foucault and the Kāmasūtra: The Courtesan, the Dandy, and the Birth of Ars Erotica as Theater in India*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 2016, pp. 51-54.

*Vēśya Vasantasena* is an object of romantic love rather than a mere tool for erotic love, the hero *Cārudatta* is reluctant to admit that a courtesan is his friend.<sup>4</sup>

The images of women in the *Dharmasāstric* texts like *Manusmṛti* are contradictory. The picture of a woman in Brahmanical texts, including *Manusmṛti* represents, either the woman as lascivious or as *Kulastrī*, who should be revered. *Kulastrī*, *pativratā*, and home makers are to be worshipped. Like *Sīta* and *Draupadi*, the duty of a *Kulastrī* is to perpetuate and maintain a patriarchal family. Here, the woman is just for procreation. At the same time, the Brahmanical texts view the woman in an erotic angle as well. They are not *pativratās* like the *Apsarās* in mythology. Known as *Gaṇikās* and *Dēvadāsis*, they were meant to entertain men. Although Brahmanical norms brought the sexuality of the *Kulastrī* under control, the second category of women had no restrictions.

In Bharata Muni's *Nāṭyasātra*, there are some interesting references to the differences in the conduct of women of noble birth and prostitutes. As a foreword, he says that a woman of noble birth is, as a rule, an introvert, and the prostitute an extrovert, and that the prostitute who leads a pure life is *bahyandara* in nature, and goes on to describe which category among these can be accepted by a king.<sup>5</sup> There are also interesting references in the *Nāṭyasātra* to the differences in the love play of the woman of noble birth and the prostitute. The text claims that sexual overtures, sidelong glances, fondling the ornaments, scratching the ear, drawing on the ground with the big toe, exposing the breast and navel, rubbing nails against each other, tying up the hair, are regarded as signs of sexual desire, and that the noble woman

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<sup>4</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> K.T. Ramavarma, *Kāmapūja*, (1985), Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2017, p. 58.



expresses desire in a different manner. As per the text, a prostitute is expected to walk slowly and sensually, her demeanor soft, wearing special ornaments, and accompanied by her kin. A noblewoman, on the other hand, should walk with her head bowed, scared, covering her hair, in a subdued and disciplined way.<sup>6</sup>

Vatsyayana, in *Kāmasūtra*, speaks about the different ways of making a man happy. On the one side, while the *Dharmasāstras* recommended the women to be kept in the confines of the house supporting the patriarchal family, on the other side, they created a section of women who could support the erotic sentiments of men. In many places, Brahmanical texts refer to the basic character of women as being fickle, sexually uncontrolled, and deceptive. However, these traits are curbed through marriage, motherhood, and through fulfilling the duties of a *pativrata*. Such mutually contradictory constructs of womanhood can be seen in *Mañipravālam*, *Kilippāṭṭu*, *Tullal*, and *Āṭṭakkathas*.

### **Patriarchy and Female Body**

Before analyzing the texts, we should examine the concepts of the female body in patriarchal ideology. The Dharmasāstric notions of *pativrata* and seductress are formulated around the purity of the female body. Femininity under patriarchy and Brahmanical patriarchy is concerned with the purity of the body. The body is a cultural construct. “The body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture.”<sup>7</sup> It is a site of social control. The bodies are regulated by social norms. The discipline and normalization of female bodies are a strategy

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1995), University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, pp. 165-166.

of social control.<sup>8</sup> The female body is a tool for patriarchy for male domination. Women were given secondary social status. They were denied agency and were defined in terms of their bodily functions.

Simone de Beauvoir writes in her seminal text, *The Second Sex*, that a woman is considered as a womb, or an ovary and the word female is enough to define her.<sup>9</sup> Simone de Beauvoir further states that the term female is defamatory because it imprisons a woman in her sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Germaine Greer, in her text *The Female Eunuch* states that female is viewed as a sexual object for the use and admiration of men. ‘Her sexuality is both denied and misrepresented by being identified as passivity.’<sup>11</sup>

The female body is regarded as the ‘primary object through which masculine power operated.’ Women’s body is regulated, colonized, and dominated by the patriarchy, and they were oppressed through their bodies.<sup>12</sup> Women in patriarchal culture are considered as the property of men, and this notion reduces her either as an erotic object or a tool for reproduction and maintenance of family lineage. It is this ideology manifested in the Dharmasastric femininity of wife and prostitute. While talking about prostitutes, the one who accepts only one man, ‘*Ēkaparigraha*,’ rises to the status of the chaste wife, says Vatsyayan. Hence, it becomes clear that even the person who wrote *Kāmasūtra* holds high the greatness of a virtuous wife. Another section is the courtesans and the *Vēśyas*, who submit their bodies for pleasure to the man. This section of women doesn’t have restrictions placed

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Simon De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, London, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> German Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, Harper Collins, New York, 2009, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Karthy Davis, ‘Embodying Theory: Beyond Modernist and Post Modernist Reading of the Body’, Karthy Davis, *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspective on the Body*, Sage Publication, London, 1997, p. 10.

on their movement, and no restrictions on their financial freedom as is mostly done on *pativratā* wives. Their bodies are not meant to maintain the purity, but on the other hand, to entertain. *Kāmasūtra*, *Kuchōpaniṣad*, *Anangarangam*, and *Kuṭṭanīmatam* are works on such women. According to their physical and psychological attributes. Women are classified as *Padminī*, *Citrinī*, *Śankhinī*, and *Hastinī*. There is one more classification that categorizes them as tall, dark, and lean, and fat, fair and short.<sup>13</sup> These descriptions tell us how the woman is reduced to just a body in a male-dominated society.

The influence of this ideology can be perceived in the literary works that start from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. A study on the representation of women in literature should start from the analysis of *Maṇipravāḷam* works. *Maṇipravāḷam* is a literary composition of medieval Kerala. The word ‘*Maṇipravāḷam*’ means a mixed language. *Maṇipravāḷam* is a form of writing that is a hybrid of Sanskrit and the local language.<sup>14</sup> In *Maṇipravāḷam*, which grew as a literary movement, there were *Champus*, *Sandeshakavyas*, and light verses.<sup>15</sup> The early *Maṇipravāḷam* works consist of *Vaisyatantras* and *Achicharitam*s. It was later that *Sandeshakavyas* (messenger poems) were written. Not only in Kerala, but in other parts of India as well, they used to mix the local language and Sanskrit in literature. Though it can be said that there were *Maṇipravāḷam* works in Tamil and Telugu, it was just their style that they followed. The oldest reference to *Maṇipravāḷam* in Telugu can be seen in the work ‘*Vrishadipustam*’ by the poet *Palkurkki Somnath* who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In Tamil, the earliest reference to *Maṇipravāḷam* is in the

<sup>13</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Mahilālimahāsapadā: Maṇipravāḷathinte Sāmskārika Parisaram*, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 2014, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Reeja V, Introducton. Reeja V, ed., *Maṇipravāḷam Punarvāyana*, Green Books, Thrissur, 2014, p. 5.

work *Veerachozhiyam* composed by Buddhamitranar, who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

Between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, many *Maṇipravālam* works have been produced. *Vaiśikatantram*, *Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam*, *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam*, *Uṇṇiyadicharitam*, *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam*, and *Chandrōlsavam* are the prominent *Maṇipravālam* works that portray women. It was a period of *Naṭuvallī Svarūpams* and Nambudiri dominance.<sup>17</sup> It was also a period of political conflict between *Naṭuvallī Svarūpams* and Brahmin settlements divided into *Panniyur* and *Chokiram* factions. The *Maṇipravālam* works were viewed by many as symbols of cultural degradation and decadence. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai sees these works as symbols of a vile period of the Nambudiris. According to Kesavan Veluthat, such a view was the result of the profusion of *śṛṅgāra* in these works on the one side, and the rise of Brahmin supremacy in Kerala on the other. During this period, there did exist Brahmin landlords as a category who had ample leisure time. Along with this, there was another factor which was the practice of the eldest son in Nambudiri families marrying from their caste, and his younger brothers seeking temporary alliances from matrilineal families. On account of these facts, morality had degraded in those days. There are no shreds of evidence that corroborate the fact that these works were written by Nambudiris. The number of men from other castes who came to meet *Maṇipravālam* heroines was greater than Nambudiris. But all those people

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<sup>16</sup> Naduvattam Gopala Krishnan, 'Maṇipravāḷathinte Kanappurangal,' in, Reeja. V, ed., *Maṇipravālam Punarvāyana*, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Śvarūpam is embodiment of the *nāṭus* in medieval Kerala. It was a form of political power after the disintegration of Perumals. See, M.R. Raghava Varier, *Madhyakāla Kēralam: Svarūpaneethiyute Caritra Patangal*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2014, pp. 11-17.

being upper caste, their concepts on women and sexuality were formed on the basis of Brahmanical ideas.<sup>18</sup>

The social milieu of the texts was the urban culture of medieval Kerala. Generally, *Maṇipravālam* is considered as a genre which portrayed women as sexual objects. But if one goes into the details of the text, we can find a vivid description of markets, emerging urban centers, and representation of nature.<sup>19</sup> Raghava Varier writes, “Overtly they are erotic poems which describe good looks and generosity of the dancing girls, admiration of lovers towards them and various moods of their love affairs. At deeper levels, these seemingly erotic poems have beautiful descriptions of newly developed settlement, extensive areas of cultivation of food crops and cash crops, busy places of fairs, markets, towns and emporia, and routes which connect these places of brisk economic activities. The image of journeys by messengers cutting across the boundaries of *Svarūpam* territories again presents the picture of political life and the presence of powerful *Svarūpams*”.<sup>20</sup>

*Maṇipravālam* texts eulogize enchantress women. There are references to *Kulastrī*, but the central protagonists were objectified women. *Maṇipravālam* texts were written in the background of emerging urban centers, trade, and markets. The development of urban culture is evident from the description of various cities in the texts.<sup>21</sup> The traders were a class who came to meet the heroines of the text. It is as a result of two types of

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<sup>18</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Mahilālimahāsapadā Maṇipravāḷathinte Sāmskārika parisaram*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Dileep Kumar K.V., ‘Sandesathile Samsakara Padangal’, in, Malayalpathanasangham, eds., *Samskara pathanam Caritram Siddhāntam, Prayōgam (2007)*, Vallatholl Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 2011, pp. 248-278.

<sup>20</sup> M.R. Raghava Varier, ‘State as Śvarūpam: An Introductory Essay’, in. R. Champakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat and T.R. Venugopalan, eds., *State and Society in Pre-Modern South India*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2002, p. 127.

<sup>21</sup> Dileep Kumar, *Op. cit.*, pp. 275-278.

economic development that Kerala attained progress in trade. By the time of the reign of the Perumals in Mahodayapuram, rice cultivation had spread in the wetlands of Kerala. Cash crops like coconut, arecanut, pepper, and betel leaves were also grown here. There are records of extensive cultivation of plantation crops in Kerala from the twelfth century onwards. The Arab, Chinese and European travelers who visited Kerala at this time are said to have exported the goods from the harbor towns and hinterlands of Kerala. Along with surplus production for trade exchange, the demand for these products worldwide became the cause of the increase in trade. West Asian trade was in the hands of Jews, Syrian Christians, and Arab Muslims. These trade links spread to China as well, in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. With this, foreigners started arriving at the Kerala shores, with the trade as their primary motive.

This growth in trade gave rise to the growth of cities and urbanization. There is plenty of shreds of evidence of Chinese-Arab trade from Kollam and other places in Kerala. This includes clay vessels and coins. Accounts of Arab and Chinese travelers have detailed descriptions of the ports of Kerala and the trade that took place there. There are references to urban centers, coins, markets, and various types of goods in *Maṇipravāḷam* texts. Tirumarutur, Kollam, Kodungallur, Valluvanagarapalli, Mangalapuram, Madayi, and Kulamukku were the important cities mentioned in the texts. Apart from *Āṇayaccu* and *Paṇam*, foreign currencies like the dirham, and Ashrafi, are also included in the list. There are detailed descriptions of markets in the texts like *Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam*, *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam*, and *Uṇṇiyachi Caritam*. Thus, it could be concluded that active trade took place in Kerala, and as a result, many city centers were formed. The other important parts of a city like

Kōvilakams, temples, other places of abode, main streets, and gardens were also mentioned in the texts.<sup>22</sup>

The wealth acquired through trade and land might have supported the upper class, including the rulers, *Brāhmaṇas*, and traders, to have an erotic relationship with women. *Kāmasūtra* was also written against an urban background in which *raga* and *rati* become prominent emotions.<sup>23</sup> Sonaleeka Kaul makes an in-depth study of the urban character of Sanskrit kavya literature.<sup>24</sup>

The analysis of *Maṇipravāḷam* texts provide certain standard features like the picturization of a woman's beauty, her sexuality, her ability to attract men, the training in eroticism, the description of the household of the heroine, and the types of men who visit their household. The description of the physical attributes of a woman is a common feature of the texts. Shalini Shah writes, "Within the *Kāmasūtriya* discourse erotic desire is essentially presented as a definite sensation for men, with direct reference to the female body which is perceived as inert."<sup>25</sup> To cite an example, the heroine of *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam* is portrayed erotically by the author. Each part of her body is equated with nature, and the description was so beautiful that it tempted Indra, the king of gods, to visit her home at Poyilam.<sup>26</sup> Similar descriptions are found in *Achicaritams*. In *Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam*, there is a detailed

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<sup>22</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Mahilālimahāsapadā: Maṇipravāḷathinte Sāmskārika parisaram*, pp. 9-19.

<sup>23</sup> Rajan Gurukul, *Myth Caritram Samūham*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-Operative Society, Kottayam, 2013, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> See, Sonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and City in Early India*, Permanent black, New Delhi, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Shalini Shah, 'The Philosophy of "Kama" in the Classical Sanskrit Literature, 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries C.E.', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 68, Part One, 2007, p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam*, State Institute of Language, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005, pp. 70-78.

description of the female body, which evokes desire in the moon god. The poem describes the beautiful hair of the heroine, her forehead, eyebrows, shining eyes, beautiful lips, and each of her body parts, which give pleasure to the eyes.<sup>27</sup>

Such a description of the female body is found in *Chandrōlsavam*.<sup>28</sup> This type of description of the female body brands *Maṇipravāḷam* as erotic poems. Women in these poems were reduced into body parts. As Adrienne Rich argues, the body of a woman is the ‘terrain on which patriarchy is erected.’<sup>29</sup> The female body is the site of patriarchal pleasure. She is an object of the male gaze. Sexual objectification of women is a notable feature of most of the *Maṇipravāḷam* texts. Women are treated as mere body parts and sites of pleasure of men. The term objectification is studied and elaborated by Martha Nussbaum. She delineates the following characteristics of objectification.

1. “Instrumentality: treating the object as a tool of one’s own purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: treating the object as someone lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: treating the object as if he or she lacked the agency or the capacity to act.
4. Fungibility: treating the object as if he or she was fundamentally interchangeable or replaceable with other persons.
5. Violability: treating the other person as lacking in boundary - integrity, as something permissible to penetrate or smash.

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<sup>27</sup> K T Ramavarma, *Op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>28</sup> Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Chandrōlsavam*, (1962), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-Operative Society, 2016, pp. 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1995, p. 65.



6. Ownership: treating the object as something that is owned by another or as something that can be bought or sold.
7. Denial of Subjectivity: The object is treated as someone whose experience and feelings need not be considered.”<sup>30</sup>

The *Maṇipravālam* texts clearly show they consider women as objects. The letter written by Punam Nambudiri to Sankara Kavi and the letter written by Sankara Kavi to Maralekha were perfect examples of the fact that the men considered women as objects.<sup>31</sup> The women depicted in *Maṇipravālam* cannot be considered as prostitutes or *Dēvadāsis* in real life, but poets fancied them nothing but prostitutes.

The women in *Maṇipravālam* text are objectified women for the male gaze. To cite examples, there are descriptions of the beauty and sensuality of the female body in the texts. In *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam*, the poet gives a vivid description of the heroine’s body.<sup>32</sup> They invoked desire in the minds of men

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in Lynn Mills Eckert, *Free Speech Law and the Pornography Debate: A Gender Based Approach to Regulating Egalitarian Pornography*, Lexington Books, UK, 2020, p. 52.

<sup>31</sup> K.T. Ramavarma, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> “If I say that the face is like the red lotus, the red tender leaves will abandon me. If I say that the heel is the outer petal of the lotus, won’t the face of the tortoise shrink? If I say that the ankle is like the *kaitha* flower, the peacock necks will complain. If I say the thighs are like beautiful white pillars, won’t the banana stems feel displeasure? If I say the waist is like sand bed, the seating platform of Kamadeva’s chariot will be offended. If I say the stomach is like the banyan tree leaf, what will the beautiful palm of the hand think? If I say the waist is as curved as Kamadeva’s bow. If I say the breasts are the buds of the golden shower flowers, the face of the tender coconut will become pale. If I say the hands are *kalpaka* vine, the *chempaka* garland will hate me. If I say the neck is a beautiful conch, gold *nazhi* will object. If I say the face is a soft lotus flower, the full moon will hate me. If I say the flower like mouth is the red ripe fruit of *kova*, the beautiful coral will certainly be offended. If I say the brilliance of the teeth is moonlight, the jasmine flowers will shout in protest. If I say the beautiful nose is the beak of the bird, the sesame flower will be angry. If I say the cheeks are mirrors, the moon on Dasami day will express sympathy. If I say the eyes which are long and beautiful, with arched eyebrows on top are the *karinkoovala* flowers in mud, the *kenda* fish will be disconcerted. If I say the beautiful twigs are the waves in the river, Kamadeva’s bows will vie to prove they are better. If I say the forehead is the crescent

and were not respected for their social and economic roles or individuality but praised for their beauty and eroticism. The place called Poyilam in *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam* and the house of the heroine, and the women residing there, all are introduced in an erotic way by the poet.<sup>33</sup> Shalini Shah argues that in most of the male-authored *Śṛṅgāri* poetry in Sanskrit, we can see the cultural superiority of men. She writes, ‘The woman is beloved but denied a voice and subjectivity of her own. In fact, in this tradition, women desire lies in being desired’.<sup>34</sup>

In *Maṇipravāḷam* texts, we can see women adorn themselves to attract men. In *Vaiśikatantram*, the mother teaches the daughter how to attract men by her beauty.<sup>35</sup> Several verses show that women are nothing but objects for

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moon, Kamadeva’s caparison will be offended. If I say the thick wealth of hair is karinchandicharrthu, won’t the row of laden clouds hide themselves in water? One object will not be enough to describe one of her body parts. Hence, let this description wait here. When I said that this is Uṇṇichirutheyi who is described in the Gatha who is an adornment for all brides, the hairs on the body stood up as if repeating what is said. See, Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Uṇṇiccirutēvicaritam*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>33</sup> In the garden with fresh flowers (un-withered) in order to enter the swarm of bees, after enquiring all around, and unable to find a proper place, *natyavidya* chose this space; listening to the words of the attendants trying to unite the swarms of lovers with the woman, the koel (cuckoo) imitates them in this space; this is the space where men come to battle with the eyes and breasts of beautiful women, the space, where the eyes of the daughters are like the *karimkoovala* flowers, those daughters who like the long poles tug at the hearts of young men; this is a garden filled with betel vines, the banks of the canal ablaze with flowering *kaitha*. There is a building called Thottuvayappalli, belonging to the danseuse. There stands a strangely beautiful building of expert female danseuses of Poyilam, some with beautiful middle bodies with swollen breasts rubbing against each other and swinging, with hair as thick as the peacock’s feathers, with eyes beautiful like the leaf of *koovalam* or fish, in proximity with their neighbours that are the ears, with faces that make the lotus pale in comparison, and is like the moon, and who talk sweeter than the koel. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-56.

<sup>34</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 189.

<sup>35</sup> Daughter, apart from the nine endowments such as smile, sweet words, respect, compassion, generosity, softness, beauty, coquetry, and youth, we don’t require any other enticing tricks ever. Intelligence, greatness, dressing up, group play, jewellery, beauty of form, beautiful glances, the ability to distinguish the virtues of men- none other is needed other than the above eight, in order to seduce the youth. To melt the hearts of men, there is no need to use *mantras*, medicines, deceit etc. With just one glance from an able woman, they will comply, like the iron in the forge. One with eyes

male pleasure. They were looked by men as mere bodies. Shalini Shah points out, “Looking is always an act that involves a power relationship and who look and at what highlights the dominate and dominated equation.”<sup>36</sup>In the text, men look at the women, denying them any kind of individuality. The body parts of women, her face, breasts, navel, thighs, feet, or all described in various ways. Laura Mulvey, in her study, opines that in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The female figure is fashioned according to male fantasy.<sup>37</sup> All these texts are written by male authors according to their imagination, which made the female body, to quote Shalini Shah’s words ‘fetishized object of male desire’.<sup>38</sup> Female bodies are potent sources. They are the sites of reproduction as well as domestic labor. It’s the dominant ideology of a society that makes the female body either as invisible or as an object. Women often internalize these patriarchal norms. The patriarchal domination is primarily centered on the sexual objectification of women. Being desired by men is an accepted feature of femininity. Shay Welch, in her study, observes, “For women, generally, being beautiful and sexually desired by men is their most socially valuable feature.”<sup>39</sup>

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like that of a red lotus, even Indra who sits in the heaven will come to you with just one seductive glance from you. O beautiful, there is nothing we can’t do if we set our minds to it. One who talks sweetly, sweating of the face when you see them, uttering demurely the words like *amrit* stuck in the throat - if you behave in this way, the minds of the young men will melt by themselves, just like the lac in a furnace. There are five tricks for us to attain wealth. The first is good character, the next, an innocent expression, the third, beauty of the body, and the fourth, sweetness. O one who is endowed with virtues, the fifth is Kamadeva’s five arrows. Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2016, pp. 66-74.

<sup>36</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 190.

<sup>37</sup> Laura Mulavey, ‘*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*’, <https://www.asu.edu>, p. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 191.

<sup>39</sup> Shay W, *Existential Eroticism: A Feminist Approach to Understanding Women’s Oppression – Perpetuating Choices*, Lexington Books, USA, 2015, p. 11.

The female protagonist of *Vaiśikatantram* is Anangasena. The subject matter of the text is the advice given to Anangasena in erotic pleasure by her mother.<sup>40</sup> The text explicitly states that the female body is a site of men's pleasure. In the text, there are verses that speak about the mother tutoring erotic arts to the daughter. Hence what the mother is seen to be doing is passing on the traditional *Vaiśikatantram* to the daughter.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> We understand from the Sanskrit texts that the prostitutes of ancient India didn't belong to any of the four *varnas*, and were regarded as a special category. The main aim of this category of young women was to lure men with all their charm and vile and thus snatch away their wealth. It was the duty of prostitute mothers to train their daughters to perform this task. Dandi's *Dasakumaracharita* talks about sage Mareechi who was a great ascetic and who possessed divine powers. One day, the chief prostitute Kamamanjari of Angarajya came wailing and fell at his feet. In her trail came her mother and kin to the ashram. One can understand from the uttering of Kamamanjari's mother to sage Mareechi many facts about the way of life of prostitutes, and what was deemed their duty. This is what those lines in *Dasakumaracharita* say: O saint, I shall tell you what offence I committed against her. You are aware of the special powers enjoyed by the prostitute's mother. They are as follows: Try to augment her daughter's beauty from the day of her birth; enrich her body in such a manner that her brilliance, strength, complexion, and intelligence increases, and her *other emotions and needs* are controlled; not allow her to appear even before her father from her fifth year onwards; teach her the art of sex; celebrate her birthday and auspicious days as festivals; train her to gain skill in dance, music, percussion, acting, drawing, cooking, bead threading, letters, word, etc; give her just the basic knowledge of grammar, debate, and astrology; train her to make her own living, through amorous games, and in dance and music; get her apprenticed under trusted people in erotic art, make her appear adorned in ornaments during journeys and festivals, and learn from performing artistes knowledge in music and other arts that will enable her to perform off-hand; spread her glory everywhere around via people well-versed in various arts; make palmists declare that she has auspicious traits; make the city dwellers such as dependants, comedians, bawds, beggars etc. declare through their pranks that she is endowed with beauty, fine manners, and sweetness; declare a handsome price for her when it comes to be understood that she has been targeted by the youth. See, K.T. Ramavarma, *Op. cit.*, pp. 61-66.

<sup>41</sup> "I give you advice as per the order of gurus what has been taught through three generations. My grandmother's mother recited this in her ear; she recited it to my mother; she recited to me the tactics she received. I give you the same advice in the order of gurus. You need a gem of a man to string together the virtues within you and wear it with deference. And that is a jewel very difficult to get. Anangasena, it is not as difficult to wear a jewel made of stone. The earlier you understand it, the better. You better understand that if the *Vaiśikatantra* way is inadequate, the bride will not be able to get even a small measure of bran. Experts opine that prostitution is far more difficult than walking on a thread". See, Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, pp. 17-19.

Likewise, the duty of *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines is to make men happy. The mother of Anangasena teaches her how to make men happy and describes various types of men.<sup>42</sup> Although ostensibly this is controlled by women, the real control is in the hands of men. The female body here is put on public sale like a commodity in the market. Like in the case of *Kulastrī*, female sexuality is being dominated in other ways here.

Shame and honour are two elements that control female sexuality in Brahmanical patriarchy. These two ideologies control the space, behavior, and body of the woman. The *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines don't have such 'shyness.' The daughter is advised to feign shyness when confronted by a male in *Vaiśikatantra*. Here, shyness or *lajja* is just one among the various *Vaiśikatantras* that are used to lure men. However, shyness is imperative for an aristocratic bride. There is such a description of it in *Chandrōlsavam*. The Moon and the celestial nymph Menaka become mutually attracted. They both decide on a date to be together. However, Rohini, the wife of Moon, comes to know of this and appears before Moon disguised as Menaka. Moon couldn't recognize his wife, and they copulated. Rohini, during lovemaking, doesn't restrict herself in any way as a *Kulastrī* does, but on the other hand, behaves like a celestial nymph. When Menaka arrived there, Moon realized that he

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<sup>42</sup> "Daughter, go to the lobby, and present one man with a smile; talk to the next with your eyebrows; the third, with the eyebrow you have lowered; and the remaining men, with your eyes. O beautiful one, when you enter a crowd, give one a smile, the next, a twitch of your eyebrows, another one, a sidelong glance, yet another, a look- thus give pleasure to the seekers. When you enter a crowd, send glances towards each of the *vitans*, making each one feel that you are looking at him, like the bee in the lotus collection. Darling, when you enter a crowd, create an interest in everyone's heart with all your tact and humour, and make sure that each one comes back to you after he leaves. If passers-by come to the court, give them alms; entertain your lovers secretly; If you come across poets, give them betel to chew; bow to Brahmins; heed the *vitans*; worship those in high level; entice the householder; praise the lechers on their face. Be more friendly with those who show affection; lure the seekers of sex with your expressions; lure poets showing deference, and feigning desire; give rice and clothes to maids; you should respect the man who will be of future use to you. Daughter, accept this mantra that I impart to you, *Ibid.*, pp. 29-34.

was duped. Thus, Moon curses Rohini, “You who are a symbol for the *Kulastrī*, lady love, since you cheated me like a prostitute, may you be born as a prostitute on earth.”<sup>43</sup>

Here, a distinction is made on what a *Kulastrī* and a prostitute should be like. The *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines express love and lust. Unlike the *Kulastrīs*, they have no reluctance to go in front of men or appear in public places. They openly show their emotions and are free with their bodily gestures. They are depicted as being devoid of real love.<sup>44</sup> The heroine of *Vaiśikatantram* is one who feigns love just for money. There is no need for the latter to feel shame or dishonor. For these women, desire is an emotion that can be expressed. But the fact remains that the existence of this kind of woman is also designed for the sake of man.

It is said that there are no evidences to show that the *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines were *Dēvadāsis*, courtesans, or prostitutes, which is also possible. However, when these works are analyzed, one can see a reflection of *Dēvadāsis*, courtesans, and prostitutes in the heroines, and the description of their households. For example, in Veena Talwar Oldenburg’s article on Lucknow courtesans, she talks about the neglect of the male child in the courtesan family and also the relative autonomy the courtesan enjoys in the household.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, in *Maṇipravāḷam* texts, male members are absent in the description of the household of the heroine.

Descriptions of the households of heroines are a chief feature of *Maṇipravāḷam* literature. Their households differ in form from others. A

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<sup>43</sup> Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>45</sup> Veena Talwar Oldenburg, ‘Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow’, in, Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, eds., *Contesting Power: Resistance and Every day Social Relation in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 23-61.

home is a place where power hierarchies are established, and gender relations are formed. In a patriarchal society, the home is a male-dominated space. Brahmanical patriarchy also regarded the household as chiefly a male zone. The male householder is the authority of the household. All members retained their identity in relation to the householder. Moreover, in a patriarchal household, the birth of a male child, the rituals associated with it were celebrated. The birth of a female child, on the other hand, was considered inauspicious. As opposed to this, the household of *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines was female-centered. All the *Maṇipravāḷam* households were matriarchal. Everyone obeyed the word of the eldest woman in the family or the mother.<sup>46</sup>

Here the mothers of the heroines have the same position as the householder in the patriarchal system. What kind of men should be allowed access? How should they be entertained? How should wealth be procured? What kind of men should be avoided? The duties the maidens should perform depending upon the nature of the paramour: in all these matters, it is the mother or elderly women members who advise the young maidens.

The *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines were portrayed as women who have an identity of their own. Hence these heroines must have come from the matrilineal Nair or ampalavāsi communities. The prototypes of *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines can be found in the *apsarās* of Sanskrit literature. An *apsarā* is a celestial nymph. She is different from *Vēśya*. The *dharma* of her life is the entertainment and enjoyment of celestial beings.<sup>47</sup> In many of the works, the heroine is a celestial nymph who has been born on the earth as a human due to some curse from heaven. The *apsarā* called Pravuttu, the

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<sup>46</sup> Seeking for the beautiful, endowed with good breasts and brain, and lovely face and a good set of teeth, means seeking wealth. However, if the eyes of the elderly woman don't walk in front and guide her, seeking will not be sharp enough.

<sup>47</sup> Oly Roy, 'The Other Women - Heavenly and Earthly: Notes On "Apsarās And Veśyās"', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 75, Platinum Jubilee, 2014, p. 186.

heroine in *Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam*, was born on the earth following Rohini's curse. Nangaipilla, the grandmother of the heroine in *Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam*, was born in the family of celestial nymphs. The heroine of *Candrōlsavam*, Medini Vennilavu, is *candrikā* born on the earth following the curse of Moon, prompted by the celestial nymph Menaka.

The connection the *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines are said to have had with celestial nymphs can be read differently. In Kerala, Paraśurāma brings from the heavens *apsarās* in order to sexually entertain the *Brāhmaṇas*. These *apsarās* are asked to entertain the *Brāhmaṇas* all the time.<sup>48</sup> They are not expected to be loyal to their husbands. The practice of *sambandham* and the position of women in that practice might have been justified by the comparison with the *apsarās*. Kesavan Veluthat has opined that *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines must have been women of the *sambandham* community. He also points out the connection these heroines of literature had with *apsarās*.<sup>49</sup>

However, they are objects of male desire. Male superiority is undoubtedly reflected in this. *Maṇipravāḷam* works are reflections of the ideology that women wish to be desired by men. The weapons of these heroines are their youth and beauty. The anxiety on the loss of youth can be seen in many verses of the *Vaiśikatantram*.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> V. Rajeev, ed., *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2012, pp. 202-203.

<sup>49</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, *Mahilālimahāsapadā: Maṇipravāḷathinte Sāmskārika Parisaram*, p. 23,

<sup>50</sup> “O, one with a body akin to a tender leaf, when one thinks about all this, everything will seem like magic. We have only this body as our asset; that too, just for a short period after the breasts sprout on the chest. Beautiful, for the brides, it is childhood upto the age of fifteen. After thirty, they are regarded as old. Hence, youthful period becomes much reduced. Therefore, don't remain inactive when you can act. After the breasts fall, and when they start giving birth, the seductresses lose their sexual attraction; O, one who talks like a bird, in order to attract *vitans*, you should start



The domain of *artha* is a central aspect of *Maṇipravāḷam* texts. In *Chandrōlsavam*, there is a verse that the *Kāma* is an important virtue of women through which she can have money.<sup>51</sup> In *Vaiśikatantram*, it is stated that the clients provide *artha* to women. In one of the verses of *Vaiśikatantram*, the mother says that for women, their *dharma* is *Kāma* and *artha*.<sup>52</sup> It is the *Kāma* that provides *artha* to them. The *Vēśyas* earn money through the pursuit of *Kāma*. The wealth of the women of *Maṇipravāḷam* texts is evident from the description of the household and the items they received from their clients. There is a woman who has a house with *Koothampalam* attached to it.

Maralekha, the heroine of *Chandrōlsavam*, was wealthy enough to hold such a festival and to entertain guests.<sup>53</sup> The heroines of a patriarchal household have never been given such economic rights. The economic rights of women that Brahmanical texts designate are those that pertain to dowry. However, the Brahmin women of Kerala were denied even this. These works describe well-ornamented heroines. There is a contradiction in this as well.

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playing the game well in advance. Adorning oneself in those ornaments not earned by one, one can be the darling of her lovers, and spend her life among them till the end of the growth of her breasts. O, beautiful-eyed, if you can be attractive to men even after you attain maturity, which is the mark of your cleverness". See, Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, pp. 59-64.

<sup>51</sup> Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Op. cit.*, p. 102

<sup>52</sup> "The Puruṣarthas (objectives of life) on earth are known to be three in number. The noblest among those three is *dharma*. O, beautiful, when man receives sex and wealth, he loses *dharma*. For us, however, *kamarthas* is *dharma*. Everyone loses wealth through desire. Dear daughter, sex, on the other hand, will fetch us wealth. O, one endowed with a beautiful body, among the most virtuous, I have not seen anyone equal to us among men, gods, or among flora and fauna. We can procure *dharma* and wealth through carnal pleasures. You must understand all this in whatever way you can. What difference is there between one who is not worth a dime, and one who is dead? If the paramours come and offer us some money, it is good. None else will give money to prostitutes. O daughter, who else has given the hornbill a drop of water other than the clouds? O one who has voice resembling the Veena and the bird, women should procure as much money as they can from their lovers while they are still very young. See, Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, pp. 24-28.

<sup>53</sup> Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Op. cit.*, p.100.

The ornaments of the virtuous woman were her husband and her chastity. The Brahmin women of Kerala wore only limited ornaments. They possessed comparatively fewer ornaments and were also denied too many. However, the heroines of these works adorned themselves, wore ornaments, and practiced dance and music. The duty of a *Kulastrī* was to remain chaste, and this was controlled by the men.

*The Kāma* has a central place in the texts. The mother of *Vaiśikatantram*, through several verses, teaches her daughter the significance of the *Kāma* in their life.<sup>54</sup> Similar verses considering the *Kāma* as divine can be seen in *Chandrōlsavam*. The women of the text consider the *Kāma* as a divine profession and strategy to earn wealth. The mother in *Vaiśikatantram* teaches her daughter the different types of lovers, and how to reach each one of them, how to treat them differently according to their wealth and position.<sup>55</sup> She also teaches different erotic arts. The men represented in texts consider the *Kāma* as a form of pleasure. But unlike the *Kāmasūtra* of Vatsyayana, these works have no descriptions of the sexual act. But they talk about how each organ of the female body can give pleasure to a man. These must have been written to entertain male readers. Many *Maṇipravāḷam* works begin by praising Kamadeva.

In *Chandrōlsavam*, the pregnant woman takes an oath that if a girl child is born to her, she will make her perform *Pūjā* to Kamadeva everyday, and also play the *Vaiśikatantram*.<sup>56</sup> Here, though, it may be perceived that the woman possesses subjectivity; in effect, it is the male-dominated ideology that is played out. While reading *Chandrōlsavam*, there is something that catches one's attention: girls are victims of patriarchal ideology right

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<sup>54</sup> Sundaram Dhanuvachapuram, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, pp.18-24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-32.

<sup>56</sup> Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

from their infant stage. In *Chandrōlsavam*, the description of the growth of a girl child is linked to the sexual act.<sup>57</sup>

Medini Vennilavu, the heroine of *Chandrōlsavam*, undergoes training in the *Kāmasūtra*. The poet has described the emotions that get reflected on her face as she listens to erotic stories. Likewise, she is described as breaking out in a sweat as she listens to descriptions of the heroic deeds of Rāma and Arjuna.<sup>58</sup> Here the poet also specifies what constitutes masculinity. The author of *Chandrōlsavam* also intends to say that only heroic men can evoke desire in women.

Power and desire are interconnected. The masculinity and femininity related to these are the products of particular social relations. The *Maṇipravāḷam* works were composed in a patriarchal world consisting of the Nambudiri, the local rulers, and other temple-centered communities. Here, femininity and sexuality are subjected to control and are disciplined. Discipline is a process carried out through the body. The female body is especially subject to discipline. Instructions on how to walk, how to talk, how to dress, how to adorn etc. are imposed on the female body as part of the male discipline. Reflections of this discipline can be seen in the texts.

It is generally agreed upon that *Maṇipravāḷam* works are of the erotic tradition. They are primarily constructed of the male gaze, which objectifies the female, and the masculine tradition. Seeing is an act that represents authority. Here the man looks at the female body and derives pleasure. One section of women is made to agree that their bodies are meant to be seen and admired by men. The *Maṇipravāḷam* heroines have just one feminine

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

responsibility, which is to please the male. Unlike *Kulastrīs* tethered to their homes, these heroines are endowed with beauty, adornment, and sensuality

*Maṅḍipravāḷam* heroines are moulded in a public domain in these works. The *Maṅḍipravāḷam* works were written in the backdrop of the *Svarūpadhikaram* that came up towards the end of Perumal rule, and of the Nambudiri-Naṭuvallī alliances. That was a time when the high caste community, including Nambudiris, *Kṣatriyas*, and ampalavāsis, entered into a loose contract like *sambandham*. This was a period when the Brahmin woman was restricted in matrimonial relations to the eldest son alone while the other members were dallying in many other relationships. These works are perhaps a reflection of their sensual desires. Since love and desire were not suited for the *Kulastrī*, they may have created “the other” as having such emotions and being erotic. It may also be written to make men conscious of women and their emotions.

Throughout these works, women have been regarded as subjects under male domination. Though they are given better identity and economic rights than the *Kulastrī*, these are all based on the man’s access to them. The statement attributed to Paraśurāma in *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* that except Brahmin women, no one else requires to be chaste didn’t give women any freedom, but on the other hand, gave the right of accessibility for man to exploit woman.<sup>59</sup> Here also, ‘caste’ is important. Those who visit the heroines in *Maṅḍipravāḷam* works are upper-caste men. This means that the sexuality of these heroines was also controlled by patriarchy and caste.

*Maṅḍipravāḷam* heroines are not regarded as prostitutes in the literature. But they were outside the domain of conceptualization of a *Kulastrī* by

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<sup>59</sup> V. Rajeev, ed., *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, p. 196.

patriarchal ideology. Even poets viewed them from an erotic angle. Their position was not connected to the institution of the household. All *Maṇipravāḷam* works are instances of subjugated femininity and dominated masculinity. In these works that make love and separation their theme, the construct of womanhood is related to her *dharma* and her body. In all patriarchal societies, the woman is her body. The *Kulastrī* veils her body exercises control over her speech and movements, and is forced to participate in erotic lovemaking silently and passively with just one intention of procreation. She is satisfied with the role of chaste wife and mother. The body of *Kulastrī* is the bearer of a man's honour, family honour, and purity of caste. Therefore, no transgressions are allowed for *Kulastrī*. If the body of *Kulastrī* is meant for procreation, that of *Kulaṭā* (harlot) is for imparting pleasure to a man.

The purity and power of patriarchal identity were maintained by subjugating women. It was through the ideology of wife or *pativratā* that the subjugation of women was realized. The *strīdharmā* or *Pativratādharmā* is an ideology in which women internalized and willingly subordinated themselves to their husbands. *Maṇipravāḷam* presents a picture of a life outside the Brahmanical caste identity. The heroines of *Maṇipravāḷam* were those women who did not conform to the ideology of *pativratādharmā*, and here *Kāma* and *artha* take precedence over *dharma*. The *Brāhmaṇas* and other upper-caste visited these women and objected them without the constraints of caste identity. In *Smṛti* texts, notably in *Manusmṛti*, it is stated that a *Brāhmaṇas* should not copulate with a *Śūdra* woman. But the primogeniture that the Nambudiris followed in Kerala resulted in their alliance with Nair, ampalavāsi women, and these alliances were meant for sexual erotic pleasure without any responsibility. This is evident from the text, which endorses Brahmanical ideology. The women who emerged in such an alliance

sought social acceptance being the sexual consorts of upper-caste men. For attaining the desire of upper-caste men, she has to be beautiful and expert in eroticism.

It is evident from the reading of above said *Maṅḍiravāḷam* texts that the primary qualities of women are beauty and her ability in erotic activities. This notion represents *Kāmasūtra*, which states that a courtesan should give more priority to sexual erotic pleasure over *dharma* and *artha*. The Brahmanical ideology, which was dominated by the ideology of *dharma*, imagined a world of eroticism through *Maṅḍiravāḷam* texts with women of matrilineal communities as central figures. The texts also reflect the patriarchal ideology that female beauty creates erotic sentiments in men, and women are objects of the male pleasure.

The Brahmanical patriarchy as the discourse of power encroaches to the very private spaces of individuals. They formulated laws to discipline bodies and produce docile bodies. Both men and women are subjected to the norms of disciplining the body. But the norms regulating the female body are more repressive and severe because female bodies are the perpetuation of caste purity and hierarchy. The women of the *Brāhmaṇa* caste are considered as the embodiment of purity and confined as invisible within the private space, the women belonging to the caste other than *Brāhmaṇas* are visible and symbolizes uncontrolled sexuality. The texts represent this dichotomy of Femininity.

### **Ezhuthachan and *Rāmāyaṇam Kīlippāṭṭu***

*Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kīlippāṭṭu*, extols *Bhakti*. It was written by Thunchath Ezhuthachan. The femininity imagined by Ezhuthachan is that of a chaste woman. *Dharma*, *Bhakti*, and purity of womanhood are the Brahmanical values addressed by the text. The excessive importance to the

notion of erotic pleasure and the sensuous way of life of the *Maṇipravālam* period might have prompted for composing a text on *dharma* and *Bhakti* based on two epics. *Rāmāyaṇa*, the ancient narrative, has a considerable influence on the social, religious, cultural, and political structure of India. *Vālm̄ki Rāmāyaṇa* has a wide range of telling and retelling in various vernacular languages. Tulasidas's *Ramacharitamānas* in Hindi, Kampan's *Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil, Krittivasa's *Rāmāyaṇa* in Bengali are notable among these. The dominant ideology of that region with specific gender values is expressed in these retellings.<sup>60</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa*, as a text, transmits the hegemonic Brahminic patriarchal values, but there are indications of dissent also. It is noteworthy that in Bengal, a Brahmin woman called *Candrāvati* wrote *Rāmāyaṇa* in the sixteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

*Vālm̄ki Rāmāyaṇa* represents many model characters who possess the virtue of selflessness. Each of these characters sacrifices their happiness for the sake of others, for example, *Rāma*, the ideal son who leaves the kingdom for the sake of his father's word, Lakshmana, the perfect brother who leaves a wife and a luxurious life to accompany *Rāma* into the forest, *Sīta* the ideal wife who leaves the comforts of the palace to be with husband, Kausalya, and Sumitra, the ideal mothers who wish all happiness for their sons, but still sacrifice their sons to the ideal of truthfulness and support to the family,

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<sup>60</sup> Kampan wrote *Iramavatharam* in Tamil in 12<sup>th</sup> century, Krittivasa wrote *Rāmāyaṇa* in Bengali in 15<sup>th</sup> century and Tulasidas's *Ramacharitamānas* written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>61</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* was retold by two women poets *Candrāvati* of Bengal and Molla of Telugu literature. There are both similarities and variations in their writings. Both were the first women poets of their respective languages. Both remained unmarried and wrote the epic in regional language instead of Sanskrit. Molla's *Rāmāyaṇa* which was considered as a classic one narrates the story in praise of *Rāma* with complete devotion. *Candrāvati* wrote the epic as a narration of *Sīta*. It was a woman's song about her everyday sorrows. Nabaneeta Dev Sen, 'Rewriting the *Rāmāyaṇa*: *Candrāvati* and Molla', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2/3, Crossing Boundaries, MONSOON 1997, pp.163-77. See also, Mandakranta Bose and Sarika Priyadarsini Bose, eds., *A Woman's Rāmāyaṇa Candrāvati's Bengali Epic*, Routledge, London, 2013.

Hanuman, the ideal loyal servant, who puts his own life in danger to help *Rāma*.<sup>62</sup>

Gender plays a significant role in the narratives of *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Sīta*, *Kaikeyī*, *Ahalyā*, *Śūrpaṇakha*, all these female characters represent different feminine qualities. The central character of *Rāmāyaṇa* is *Sīta*, whose abduction by *Rāvana* and subsequent *Rāma* -*Rāvana* war constitute the theme of the narrative. These female characters are portrayed differently in local variations of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Femininity is a construct of the dominant ideology of a given society. A.K.Ramanuja points out the differences in the narrative of the *Ahalyā* episode in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and Kamban's *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the former, *Ahalyā* was a transgressor, a violator of chastity who willingly accepted Indra and had sexual intercourse with him. The curse by Gautama was a punishment to the adulteress *Ahalyā* and her lover Indra. It was with the coming of *Rāma*, the incarnation of *dharma*, that *Ahalyā* was freed from the curse. In Kamban's story, *Ahalyā* knew of her misdeed but unable to resist her desire. Gautama cursed Indra to have a thousand vaginas, the pivot of his lust, and *Ahalyā* was turned into a stone, making insensitive not only to passion but to everything. In Kamban's *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bhakti* is the central emotion, and *Rāma* is revered as a lord and hero who destroyed the evil. The ideology of *bhakti* makes the release of *Ahalyā* from her rock-bound sin, as the purpose of *Rāma*'s incarnation is to release all souls from world bound misery.<sup>63</sup>

The story of *Śūrpaṇakha*, in a similar fashion, is also portrayed differently. *Śūrpaṇakha*, a demoness, is the sister of *Rāvana*, the demon king.

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<sup>62</sup> Vidyut Aklujkar, 'The Framing of the Shrew: Kaikeyi as Kalaha in the *Ananda Ramayana*', in, Mandakranta Bose, ed., *The Rāmāyaṇa Culture: Text, Performance and Iconography*, (2000), D.K. Print world, New Delhi, 2003, p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> A.K. Ramanujan, Three Hundred *Ramayanas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation, in, Paula Richman, ed., *Many Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, University of California Press, California, 1991, pp. 25-33.



When *Rāma*, *Sīta*, and Lakshmana live in exile in ‘*Panchavati*,’ she came there and was infatuated by *Rāma*. In *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the poet compares her appearance with that of *Rāma*. “His face was beautiful; hers was ugly. His waist was slender; hers was bloated. His eyes were wide; hers were deformed. His hair was beautifully black; hers was copper-colored. His voice was pleasant; hers was frightful. He was a tender youth; she was a dreadful old hag. He was well-spoken; she was coarse of speech. His conduct was lawful; hers was evil. His countenance was pleasing; hers was repellent”.<sup>64</sup>

Her love for *Rāma* and later for Lakshmana was rejected. She tried to attack *Sīta* in anger. As a punishment for her adultery, *Śūrpaṇakha* was mutilated. In Kamban’s *Rāmāyaṇa* heart of *Śūrpaṇakha* is filled with love for *Rāma*. *Śūrpaṇakha* recites a mantra and become a beautiful woman and approaches *Rāma*, as she knows that the form of demoness is not attractive, she accepts the form of *śri*. “Beautiful as *śri* on her flower flowing gold, like a streak of lightning fallen, never to vanish, out of the sky, with her jeweled chariot fresh as that of a young girl and softly clothed, and her shining face, the swords of her eyes, like a lovely myna bird, she came as if a peacock were coming, with eyes like a deer, of sweet, abundant beauty, with perfumed honey of words that would draw out a desire for her who had taken a body just like the *Valli*, glowing vine of heaven, given its life by the tall and fragrant wish-granting tree.”<sup>65</sup>

Here it is interesting to note that beauty is also an important quality that a woman should possess in a patriarchal society, and a woman is the symbol of prosperity. *Rāma*, in this narrative too, rejects her plea for marriage, and when she is forced to devour *Sīta*, Lakshmana cuts off her nose, ears, and nipples. A woman’s breast is considered a symbol of power in Tamil

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<sup>64</sup> Kathleen M. Erndl, ‘The Mutilation of Surpanaka’, in, Paula Richman, *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

society.<sup>66</sup> *Śūrpaṅakha* was denied her power by mutilating the nipples. The verse she tells to *Rāma* after her mutilation reveals the patriarchal ideology that along with the purity of body, a woman should appear beautiful “when a woman has lost her nipples, her ears with their earrings, her nose like a vine, isn't her beauty destroyed?”.<sup>67</sup> Mutilation is a punishment for women who violate social norms. When the breasts and noses of *Śūrpaṅakha* were cut off, she is devoid of power and honour. As *Śūrpaṅakha* is a ‘loose’ woman, she got the punishment as prescribed by the *Dharmasāstras*. It is a warning to all other women who may express their desire. The male violence against women is justified in the policy of disciplining women.<sup>68</sup>

Indian mythological stories represent the contrast between eroticism and asceticism. While Lord *Śiva* is the symbol of ascetic and self-control, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* represents the erotic desire. *Rāma* lived a life of an ascetic in his period of exile. Here *Śūrpaṅakha* interrupted his asceticism, and whenever a woman interrupts the ascetic male, she should be punished.<sup>69</sup>

*Sīta* was also portrayed differently by various scholars. *Sīta* is the embodiment of the Dharmasastric notion of *pātivratyā*, a Sati. But when *Rāvana* abducted her, she had to prove her chastity. The moment she was separated from her husband, she became sexually unconstrained and thus became a threatening creature, ‘*asati*’. She had to undergo the fire ordeal to prove her chastity.<sup>70</sup> *Sīta* in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* stands for the image of women in the Aryan prototype, in contrast to tribal women. The Aryans of

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>68</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Every Day Lives Every Day Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, (2006), Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2012, p. 235.

<sup>69</sup> Kathleen M. Erndl, ‘The Mutilation of Surpanaka’, in, Paula Richman, ed., *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>70</sup> Sally J. Sutherland, ‘Suttee, Sati, and Sahagamana: An Epic Misunderstanding?’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 26, Jun. 25, 1994, p. 1600.

Ayodhya are associated with agricultural society, whereas the *Vānarās* and Demons of *Rāmāyaṇa* belong to the pre-agricultural stage. The basic conflict in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is between Aryans led by *Rāma*, who represented an agricultural society and others who belong to pre-agricultural society. The women of the lower stage of economic development, those belong to *Vānarās* and demons, appear as strong individuals, but women of Ayodhya are subordinated by patriarchy and had to accept a strict sexual code. Lanka was a society in transition, moving from matrilineal to patrilineal still, the women of Lanka enjoyed relative freedom than the women of Ayodhya. The economic development of the society in the *Rāmāyaṇa* had a profound impact on the position of women. When the economy was advanced, the women lose their freedom and autonomy.<sup>71</sup>

### **Women in *Kiḷippāṭṭu Rāmāyaṇam***

In Kerala, Ezhuthachan followed a new narrative called *Kiḷippāṭṭu* in writing *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahabharata*. About the life of Ezhuthachan, K.N. Ganesh points out that “He belonged to the group of *Natteluttacchans*, who taught Malayalam letters and basic knowledge in indigenous schools called *Eluttupallis*, and one tradition has it that he was born of the alliance between a low-born *Cakkalā* Nayar (oil-monger) woman and a Nambudiri Brahman. Since the fatherhood of many literary persons who emerged from non-Brahman castes is attributed to *Brāhmaṇas*, the story of Brahman parentage need not be true. There is another strong tradition that he was a student of the famous mathematician and astrologer Puthumana Somayaji, who belonged to Alattiyur, near Tirur, which may be true. Teachers of *Eluttupallis* received formal Malayalam education and had a smattering of Sanskrit. Thunchath Ezhuthachan was one of those, who, although lower in the caste hierarchy,

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<sup>71</sup> Uma Charavarti, *Every Day Lives Every Day Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, pp. 226-227.

had the benefit of Sanskrit learning, and was familiar with the available text in the *Itihasa-Puranā* tradition”.<sup>72</sup>

Ezhuthachan in *Adhyatma Rāmāyaṇa* talks about an ideal family consists of the father, mother, brothers, wife, and husband. K.N. Ganesh writes about the social milieu of the text as follows. “Regional political entities called *Śvarūpams* were consolidating in all the agrarian units or *nāṭus* and new *Śvarūpam* were being formed. A new class of non-Brahman landlords and intermediaries, mortgagers or *Kāṇam* holders, *Kāryasthas*, and accountants were also consolidating under *Śvarūpams*. These new classes were also becoming literate, as writers and accountants in major households, *Kōvilakams* and temples. Craft groups, including Kammala groups, goldsmiths (Tattan), and weavers (*Cāliya*), were also setting, particularly around *Kōvilakam*. Trade centers like markets and *cantas* were also growing, which facilitated inland trade, and they provide the necessary inputs for the coastal ports of trade. Thus, the locality of *nāṭu* and *nagaram*, repeatedly mentioned by Ezhuthachan, and indicated the co-existence of the agrarian unit and trading center was being consolidated in medieval Kerala. The relation between *nāṭu* and *nagaram*, as well as among Brahmin intermediaries and producers, were determined by complexities of the system of customary obligation (*maryādai*), privileges (*avakāsam*), position (*sthānam*), and *mānam* (honour). This was also the period of increased tension and conflict (*patai*) among the Naduvazhis and among households (*ankam* and *poyttu*), a point that is particularly illustrated by increased militarization and growth of Kalaris”.<sup>73</sup>

Ezhuthachan is the representative of the new literate intermediary class that emerged during this period. This new class was proficient in Sanskrit and

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<sup>72</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Reflection on Pre Modern Kerala*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2016, p. 271.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

Dharmasastric ideology. What Ezhuthachan did through his texts was to incorporate this new intermediary class into the social order. In the time of Perumals and *Nāṭṭuṭayavar* with the temple centered economy and land ownership, the Nambudiris gained social supremacy. Landlordism, Brahmanical rituals, and caste-based divisions prevailed in the society. The *Svarūpams* that rose from *nāṭus* became the power centers of medieval Kerala. Landlordism, with its *janmam- Kāṇam* system, created vassals and middlemen. Trade and agriculture expanded.

In the interim period, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, *Maṇipravālam* style brought out works that were predominant in *Śṛṅgārarasa*. As mentioned in previously, these works were symbols of an urban culture that included markets and cities, and the hedonistic lifestyle of those upper in the social ladder. In these, the ‘woman’ was just a body to be celebrated. Ezhuthachan’s *Rāmāyaṇa* was different from these works that abound in eroticism. The aficionados of these were of *antarāḷa* caste and the Nair- Sūdras community. At the time of Brahmin supremacy and the dominance of local chieftains, they turned the epic-Puranā tradition into *bhakti* tradition. However, this *bhakti* tradition was unable to create a thought process that could question Brahmanism and caste. Instead, this *bhakti* tradition made different caste sections subservient to landlordism and Brahmanism. The readers of the *Bhakti* tradition of Ezhuthachan were of the Sūdras community as well as *ampalavāsis*. At the same time, those caste sections lower than Nairs weren’t inspired by the *Bhakti* tradition.

The Sūdras and *ampalavāsi* communities were using Rāma to receive a position in the Brahmanical world and to be part of the temple culture and rituals. They were creating the most ideal womanhood in order to be part of Brahmanical ideology. There is no better symbol among women than Sīta that would help maintain caste purity and supremacy. It is in the place of the

*Mañipravālam* heroines who cross the boundaries of morality that Ezhuthachan places Sīta, who has been forgotten by society. In the *ampalavāsi* communities where man-woman relations were not based on morality, Sīta was made popular through *Adhyatma Rāmāyaṇa*. In *Kiḷippāṭṭu*, Sīta perceives Rāma as her God. Sīta's marriage is based on Brahmanical rituals.<sup>74</sup> Sīta was given as a *Kanya* to *Rāma* by her father with several gifts like the elephant, chariots, *dasis*, cloths, ornaments, etc.<sup>75</sup> The warrior Rāma wins Sīta through *swayamvara*. Sīta did not choose Rāma, but *Janakā* gives her as a gift to Rāma, who wins in the *swayamvara* contest. The father gifts his maiden daughter. Besides, he gifts Sīta's sisters, Urmila, Madhavi, and Srutakeerti to the brothers of Rāma. Here the consent of these maidens, as in Brahmanical ideology, of course, has no consequence.

The women characters of *Rāmāyaṇa* are victims of patriarchal ideology. Sīta and Śūrpaṇakha are oppressed in two different ways. While Sīta is a symbol of ideal sexuality, Śūrpaṇakha is one of the undesirable sexuality. Rāma and Sīta are ideal gender constructs of a patriarchal society. Their relationship is an example of an ideal marriage. *Rāmāyaṇa* is an example of what a perfect family should be like. The plot of *Rāmāyaṇa*, as already stated, is one in which the son respects and worships the father, the younger brother respects and worships the elder brother, and the wife respects and worships the husband. Similarly, *Rāmāyaṇa* represents people worshipping the king, and the king, in turn giving due consideration to the will of the people. The turning points of this plot are constructed by women. The reason for the war is Sīta's chastity and purity. It is the duty of the husband and the king to protect and safeguard chaste women. Sīta is an ideal woman who wishes to maintain a patriarchal society. Two undesirable women were responsible for

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<sup>74</sup> Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, *Adhyatma Rāmāyaṇam Kiḷippāṭṭu*, Sahitya Pravartaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 1973, p. 91.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

this war, Kaikeyi and Śūrpaṇakha. Śūrpaṇakha is in total variance to the woman a patriarchal society imagines.

Sīta arrived at Ayodhya after marriage is presented as an ideal chaste woman by Ezhuthachan. Sīta, who proceeds to the forest accompanying Rāma, is an ideal of a chaste woman.<sup>76</sup> She tells Rāma that as a *pativratā*, her duty is to accompany him. The verses in the poem strongly show Sīta is subservient to the patriarchal notion of *pātivratyā*. In *Kiḷippāṭṭu*, there are lines that make one sceptic if it was Sīta's beauty that attracted *Rāma* rather than her chastity.<sup>77</sup> Here, Sīta is not given any other epithet than a beautiful woman. After reclaiming Sīta after the war, Rāma gives consent for her to appear in front of others as a mother.<sup>78</sup> Mother is a prominent figure in Brahmanical culture. Maternal authority is valorized by the term *Māṭṛdevo bhava*.<sup>79</sup> It is beneath Rāma's dignity to make Sīta appear before others as a woman or as his wife. It is a Brahmanical patriarchal idea that a noblewoman should not appear in public. A woman can be generally approached in the status of a mother.

Sīta's ordeal by fire is the result of the notion that the dignity of a community and family depends on the chastity of the woman. The purity of a woman is equated to the purity of the family. It is also the duty of the king to safeguard the purity of aristocratic women.<sup>80</sup> Sīta, who had been abducted by *Rāvana*, had to prove her purity for the upkeep of Rāma's authority. Ordeal by fire is conducted as part of the notion that if a woman is defiled, the

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

<sup>79</sup> Robert P. Goldman, 'Resisting Rama: Dharmic Debates on Gender and Hierarchy and the Work of the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, in, Mandakranta Bose, ed., *The Ramayana Revisited*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004. p. 26.

<sup>80</sup> Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, *Op. cit.*, p. 470.

kingdom would be destroyed. The Sīta of the *Kiḷippāṭṭu* doesn't, in any manner, resist the ordeal by fire. She performs it, deeming it her responsibility as a wife.<sup>81</sup> Even when Rāma demands it a second time, she relents, without any objection.<sup>82</sup> Sīta is the symbol of the notion that it was also her responsibility to prove her chastity.

The social codes of each society are defined by its dominant sections. This is mostly done by men. When sexual codes are defined, each society defines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Śūrpaṇakha represents the unacceptable code of conduct. In *Rāmāyaṇam Kiḷippāṭṭu* Śūrpaṇakha makes her appearance in the *Aranyakanda* of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Rāma, Sīta, and Lakshmana, who had gone in exile to the forest, were living in *Panchavati*. It is here Śūrpaṇakha approaches Rāma. The demoness Śūrpaṇakha was infatuated to Rāma and requests him to marry her. When Rāma rejects, she approaches Lakshmana. When both of them start juggling her, she turns to Sīta and scares her. It is then Lakshmana severs her organs. Women proposing men are against Brahmanical patriarchal ideas. Noblewomen never do that. Here Śūrpaṇakha commits two mistakes. One, she behaved like a prostitute. Two, she attempted to attack a noblewoman like Sīta. The *smṛtis* instruct that women who deviate from accepted social norms should be punished by severing their body parts. It is the duty of a king to ensure such a punishment. It is this duty that Lakshmana carries out. This is patriarchy's warning to all women who are different and deviant. Female sexuality not controlled or protected by the man is destructive. If it has to be controlled, the woman should get married and become a mother. Sīta is a woman protected by man, but Śūrpaṇakha is free, and hence, dangerous.

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.



In Ezhuthachan's *Rāmāyaṇa*, Śūrpaṇakha expresses devotion rather than lust. In *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*, she is a lustful demoness. Ezhuthachan's Śūrpaṇakha approaches Rāma like a devotee aspiring to be one with her god. Even though she is a devotee, since she deviates from the accepted female sexuality norms, she is punished.

The Sīta and Śūrpaṇakha of *Adhyatma Rāmāyaṇa* represent two types of womanhood. Sīta is a symbol of womanly *dharma*. It is a woman's chastity that maintains and increases a man's power, which Sīta symbolises. Since chastity is so important, in Ezhuthachan's *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is not Sīta whom *Rāvana* abducts; but illusory Sīta. As Sīta is the symbol of chastity, she cannot be abducted as per the dominant patriarchal ideology. The changing conception of women may be the motive behind creating the illusory Sīta. Wendy Doniger, while analyzing the Tamil retellings of *Rāmāyaṇa*, argues that as Rāma is an incarnation of God, people may not allow their god to treat women badly.<sup>83</sup> Here, Ezhuthachan as a proponent of *Bhakti*, worships Rāma as a man with all human qualities. As Rāma is venerated as *Puruṣōthaman*, obviously Sīta is the symbol of chastity and Śūrpaṇakha, the symbol of unchaste women. The two women characters in *Rāmāyaṇa* are two binaries. In *Tuḷḷal* works and *Āṭṭakkathas* also, one can see women being presented as binaries in this manner.

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<sup>83</sup> Wendy Doniger, 'Sita and Helen, Ahalya and Alcmena: A Comparative Study', *History of Religions*, Vol. 37, No. 1, University of Chicago Press, Aug., 1997, p. 27.

## Women in the *Tuḷḷal* Works

Kunchan Nambiār, who wrote *Tuḷḷal* works as resistance to Brahmanical hegemony, lived in the eighteenth century. Like the chief poets of the medieval period, Nambiār was also a member of the courts of Kings and lords. Nambiār was a member of the court of Chempakasseri Thampuram, Mathoor Panikkar, Nandikkadu Kurup, King Marthanda Varma, Ayyappan Marthandapilla Dalava, Manakkottachan, Paliathachan, and Kochi Thampuram. Nambiār composed *Tuḷḷal* at Chempakasseri and Travancore. Humour and sarcasm are the main features of *Tuḷḷal* stories. Though the main plot is drawn from the Puranās, Nambiār wrote them connecting them with contemporary society.

His writings exhibit the existing social and economic conditions. Though he was critical of Brahmanical ideology, Nambiār could not disagree with the concepts of masculinity and femininity that were predominant in the medieval period. He also adheres to the following notions that man is a symbol of physical strength, courage, and authority. The woman is weak and dependent. Only the body of a woman is a socially relevant factor.<sup>84</sup> The greatest pleasure a woman desires is sexual pleasure. Bhima of *Kalyana Sougandhika*, Kṛṣṇa of *Rukmini Swayamvaram* and, and Indra of *Mōkṣam* are symbols of masculinity. Bhadrasrenyan of *Harini Swayamvaram* vanquishes Harini's lover Vasumanass and abducts Harini. Harini accepts it as a sign of masculinity.<sup>85</sup>

The women who appear in Nambiār's interpretations, what Ahalyā experiences with Indra, and what Urvasi appeals to Arjuna for are sensual pleasures. There is a description in *Ramanucharitam* of Narada watching in

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<sup>84</sup> K. N. Ganesh, *Kuñcan Nambiār: Vākkum Samūhavum*, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 1996, p. 189.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

hiding Kṛṣṇa making love to his thousands of wives simultaneously. In *Ramanucharitam*, there is a description of acts akin to the sex act between Kṛṣṇa and Rukmini, and in *Banayuddham*, between Aniruddh and Usha. The description of celestial women’s sexual thirst in *Nivathakavachavadham* can be compared to this. In all this, women crave physical relations. Their bodies are designed for men’s pleasure.<sup>86</sup> This ideology can be seen reflected in many forms in Nambiār’s narrations.<sup>87</sup>

Nambiār in *Ramanucharitam* says that a woman who cannot experience sexual pleasures is like an arid land that cannot be tilled.<sup>88</sup> This idea originating from the fertility concept is a typical example of women’s obedience. This is, in fact, a reflection of seed and earth ideology expressed in *Smṛti* texts.<sup>89</sup> The idea that for a man, contact with a woman is dangerous can be found throughout the work. The strongest anti-woman idea in

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> “These women, with breasts akin to balls  
Have no room for sorrow.  
For, many a handsome man  
Would come wooing them.  
If a voluptuous one is fondled  
The other one’s face darkens  
And when she is revered  
The other one will complain.  
Brahma created the woman  
Gathering all that is disastrous  
The form of the woman  
Has thus become a means  
Of luring young men into the pit of danger  
To languish therein”.*Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick Olivelle, and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005. p. 191.

Nambiār's works can be found in *Pradōsha Māhātmyam*. This is in a conversation between Srutivrathan and Dharmaguptan. Srutivrathan explains in detail the hazards of having contact with a woman to Dharmaguptan, who is lured by Amshumati.<sup>90</sup>

Srutivrathan here warns that the man lured by woman loses wealth and honour, and even all the knowledge that he has acquired so far.<sup>91</sup> On the flip side of this warning is an indication of the extent of man's authority. Wealth, knowledge, position, power are all under man's control. He uses all this to fulfill his desire for a woman's body. The control of the woman's body is not in her own hands. It is only through a man that a woman becomes one. The remarks that a man need not obey a woman's authority and commands are part of the same ideology.

Men who obey women are ridiculed in *Kalyana sougandhikam*. The chief characteristic of a woman is her bodily beauty. Without this, she never gets acknowledged by man. A woman's cleverness is manifest in the way she uses her beauty and attractiveness. Thilothama's success in triggering a fight between the Sundopasundan brothers is a typical example. It is in the same way that Hanuman teases Bhima in *Kalyana sougandhikam*. Hanuman says

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<sup>90</sup> "She should get clothes, she should get food  
She should get pearls, and precious gems  
The woman has nothing  
Sans avarice of such kind  
She wants only the rich  
Has no respect for the virtuous  
He forgets that he learnt logic and grammar  
And simply lies supine  
And becomes penniless  
Debt takes possession of him". K.N. Ganesh, *Kuñcan Nambiār: Vākkum Samūhavum*, p. 191.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

that Panchali, through her eyes, can cheat all the five Pandavas. In the *Naḷaayani Katha (Panchendropakhyanam)*, which had been created to justify Panchali's polyandry, Naḷaayani who desires conjugal pleasure, receives five husbands as a boon from Siva.<sup>92</sup>

References to men resisting contact with women can be found in works like *Śīlāvaticharitam*, *Pradōsha Māhātmyam*, and *Pulindīmokṣham*. Though they are narratives from different contexts, all of them are centered around a woman's body. The main argument here is that since the woman's body is despicable, contact with a woman is also despicable.<sup>93</sup> In all these descriptions, the woman is a beautiful piece of flesh, and when this piece of flesh loses its beauty due to age or other natural pollution, it becomes despicable. What is presented here is the strongest form of Brahmanical assumption of patriarchy, according to which barring her sexual desire, what a woman needs most is wealth, adornments, and a luxurious life. She will go to any length to achieve these. While presenting the ideas centered on a woman's body, Nambiār also presents the concept of the family during the period of Nāṭuvāḷis and the idea of chastity that existed. He writes while *Perumāḷ* rules this earth, the chastity of a beautiful woman and of a maiden

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>93</sup> "A ball is rolled out of mud  
Some holes are bored  
For eyes, nostrils, mouth, and ear.  
For stirring the heart of foolish men.  
Lord Vishnu has sent it  
Cut into several pieces  
And each is named a woman". *Ibid.*, p. 193.

will never be violated.<sup>94</sup> It is for praising the chastity of women that *Śīlāvaticharitam* was composed. In this, the duties of women are delineated.<sup>95</sup>

Nambiār asserts the Brahmanical ideology that the husband is the master, and the wife, the serf. The idea that if this equation is violated, it is against the rules of Sastras and Vedas is born out of the Dharmasastric ideology of *Panchamahāpātakam* (five grave sins). The husband is the head of the family. In a patriarchal society, the wife never gets that position. In *Śīlāvaticharitam* the relation between Ugratapas and Śīlāvati is equivalent to *Gṛhamedhi* and *Gṛhiṇi*. Making use of this, Ugratapas asks *Śīlāvati* to send him to *Gaṇikāgriham* (house of the prostitute).<sup>96</sup>

Helping the husband to fulfill his wish, even if it was to commit adultery, was regarded as wifely responsibility. That was deemed as a mark of fidelity. However, a woman committing adultery was never tolerated. In a patriarchal society, when polygamy is regarded as righteous, polyandry becomes unrighteous.<sup>97</sup> He writes that if a man has several wives, it is natural,

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>95</sup> “The wife should at once obey,  
Whatever the husband instructs.  
While teachers/gurus instruct something  
One doesn’t heed the pros and cons  
Hence if this is not done so  
My purpose of being a husband is defied.  
Disciples admonishing a guru,  
and wives, their husbands  
For the sake of peace  
Is against Sastras and the Vedas”. *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “O, *Gṛhiṇi*, if you want to get  
Happiness here, and in the netherworld  
Send me, who is the *Gṛhamedhi*,  
To *Gaṇikāgriham* after dusk”, *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

but if a woman has several husbands, it is unacceptable. Morality can be of two types: firstly, those follow the *Dharmasāstras*, and secondly, those follow local customs. In both these types, polyandry is not accepted.

The ideas of wifely responsibilities came upon the basis of the ideologies that sustained man-woman relationships. It wasn't the same romantic framework of love that is a product of a modern culture that decided man-woman relationships of the medieval period. It was the sexual attraction between man and woman. The manner in which the swan describes Damayantī to Naḷa, as also the Brahmin's description of Rukmini for Kṛṣṇa relates to the body. The word '*swyamvaram*' itself is centered on the awareness of body parts.<sup>98</sup> Factors like intelligence, education, and aesthetics are all regarded as means to augment libido. Nambiār's descriptions of the feats that kings perform to attract the bride at the time of *swyamvaram* are relevant here. The art and physical feats that Kṛṣṇa performs with various beauties in *Ramanucharita* are the beginning of love-play.<sup>99</sup>

The relationship between man and woman in marriage was dependent on the sexual pleasures and duties of the wife and husband. The relevance of chastity and fidelity is crucial here. These terms are irrelevant to man-woman relationships based on romantic love and friendship. Fidelity involves subservience to the man who is a woman's master or husband. There is no difference between this and the gratitude and fidelity shown by a serf to the landlord. The husband has the same position as the idol of the temple, the chieftain in the village, and of the landlord in his inherited land. Nambiār writes about the power of husband in *Naḷacharitam*. The subservience of the wife to the husband was an accepted truth. Subservience ranged from the moment 'Nair came home hungry' to sexual obedience. When that is violated,

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

the man attacks the woman of the house and destroys household utensils, which means that he exhibits his masculinity and ensures the woman's subservience. This is a typical manifestation of male dominance in a man-woman relationship.

The women in Nambiār's narratives acknowledge male dominance. This approval doesn't mean complete faith. There is no indication that this is lifelong personal subservience. In medieval society, there were prolonged wars and conflicts. The women could not remain chaste. Nambiār writes about the women who accept their protectors during the time of wars instead of their husbands.<sup>100</sup> Here also, the masculinity of men and the beauty of a woman's body parts are important factors for man-woman relationships. Ordinary beings are not influenced by ideological factors like chastity, fidelity, duties of a woman, etc. If they discover that they don't like each other, both can leave the relationship. Men had more freedom and power to do this<sup>101</sup>.

Nambiār gives a picture of a polyandrous society here and how men were keen to have possession over women and to sustain them. This stood as

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<sup>100</sup> "The rescuers have all vanished  
They relegated themselves to a corner  
The woman should, no doubt  
Take sides with her rescuer  
O woman, if you fall for anyone and everyone  
Your fall is certain.  
Understand, your cowardly husbands  
Are all good-for-nothing. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>101</sup> Though our hair and breasts are good  
We are all worthless beings  
Our 'Nairs' are always morose:  
When another man comes home  
They frown and start calling for us". *Ibid.*, p. 200.



a hindrance to women's liberation. There are also references to women resisting men. One of these being about a Brahmin woman, this Brahmin woman leaves her husband's home for natal home. This example is in contrast to the total subservience of women in Brahmin families.<sup>102</sup>

The ideology of the patriarchal system made women look upon men as heads of family and protectors. The conflicts that arose in man-woman relations throw light on the flip side of this ideology. There was resistance from women in ordinary families while trying to impose patriarchy on them. The *achis* of Nambiār aren't prostitutes. They are legitimate women of the matrilineal Nair families who are handed over the *mundu* by the man (as part of the wedding ceremony), and with whom the man sleeps at night. They had no commitments in matters such as reproduction and succession rights. However, one can see in Nambiār's narrations these men living permanently with the women and taking up the position of heads of the family.

Women are also seen as acknowledging the protector status of these men. There are two main reasons behind this acknowledgment. Firstly, women are attracted by the wealth and gifts given to them by the men. Secondly, the status and distinction of these men in society raise the position of these women in society.<sup>103</sup> It is an honour for women to go sight-seeing with men in a high position. However, many men are in the lower rung of the caste ladder. Going with them would bring dishonor.<sup>104</sup> The difference in the

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> "If there are noblemen  
Who can go sight-seeing to Koyikkal  
I can go and see them  
But there should be a man to accompany me". *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>104</sup> "Ever since Eecharan Nair quit  
I don't go sight seeing  
If I go with Thachan Nair

portrayal of status between Eecharan Nair and Thachan Nair brings about a change in the woman's nature as well. Naturally, women wish to continue relations with men in high positions, say, with those in managerial positions. Caste and property that means class become a deciding factor in a man-woman relationship.

The resistance of women against the patriarchal attitude of men is revealed in their declaration of sexual freedom. The women of Nambiār's mad stories (*pekkathakal*) are the ones who indulge in sex with other men without the knowledge of their actual partners. The story of *Ittikali* and *Kunjitti* in Umayannoor house in *Govardhana Charitram*, the story of *Valiyā* Nambudiri and *Uṇṇi* Nambudiri in *Harini Swayamvaram*, the story of Mullakkal Muthakuruppu and Kummini in *Kumbhakarnavadham* are examples. The reactions of men in these stories are different. In the first story, *Kunjitti* and *Ittikali*'s lover together decide to live as husbands of *Ittikali*. In the second, the woman succeeds in presenting the *Uṇṇi* Nambudiri as *Kuttichathan* and duping *Valiyā* Nambudiri. She ousts *Valiyā* Nambudiri and accepts *Uṇṇi* Nambudiri as her husband. In the third story, Mullakkal Muthakuruppu murders his wife and also her paramour.<sup>105</sup>

Such stories of illicit relationships are portrayed by Nambiār. The person from whom she received the *mundu* is living with her while she accepts someone else as her secret paramour. This state of affairs is different from one in which there is sexual freedom, and from polyandry practiced in the matrilineal system. It is hinted here that in Nair families, there was a certain formality in man-woman relations. At the same time, there is an attempt to maintain the sexual freedom of women. The conflict arising, as a result, is the plot of Nambiār's stories.

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It will sure bring me dishonour", *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

The changes in man-woman relations create new problems in matrilineal families, and this was also reflected in his writings. The men and women in Nair families mainly criticize the *Kāraṇavan* and his wife. The complaint prevails that the *Kāraṇavan* showers wealth on his wife as a result of which the family declines.<sup>106</sup> In matrilineal families, it is the female line of succession that is followed. The mother is the owner of wealth. The uncle, acting as *Kāraṇavan*, controls all the wealth. However, earlier quotes prove that the man used to spend a lot of money on his wife. A portion of the *Taravāṭu* wealth used to be spent on the wife. This tendency created problems within the family structure.<sup>107</sup>

The Nairs who live in their wives' houses and spend the family wealth as they like are symbols of destruction. There are narratives to this effect in *Ghōṣayātra* and *Sūaswayamvaram*. Here the Nair who marries into the family destroys all the wealth and uses the wife's property to repay his debt. These are instances of men attempting to sabotage the structure of man-woman relation in matrilineal families. As a result of this, the importance of the *Kāraṇavan* and his wife increases in the family, and the mother's position is brought down. Nambiār, in his works, presents the then prevailing complaints that all the wealth of the *Taravāṭu* is being squandered away by the *Kāraṇavan* and his wife.<sup>108</sup>

Nambiār presents man-woman relations in society as being dependent on sexual relations and the idea of the safety of women. He explains these

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<sup>106</sup> Nambiar writes, "After the death of his mother  
The uncle is seen struggling  
Having spent all the wealth  
On aunt and children  
For food and clothing", *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

ideas in the context of festival venues. The Uṇṇi Nambudiris who arrive at the festival ground are adept in enjoying feminine beauty and sexually harassing them. It is out of fear of harassment from these young Nambudiris that many women take Nair men of high position along. The conversation in ‘*Harini Swayamvaram*’ is an example of the approach to women.<sup>109</sup>

Man-woman relations in Nambiār’s time cannot be evaluated using the ideas of morality and the nuclear family system that arose as a result of western influence at the time of the colonial rule. One couldn’t find families that confined themselves to single-wife and single-husband practice. The ideology prevalent at the time saw the relationship between the householder and wife as a dependent, service-relationship between the master and the serf. The man-woman relationship is shaped by a combination of factors such as sexual attraction and the man’s caste and position. Though caste is important to the woman, it is possible for a beautiful woman of lower caste to have relations with a man of a higher caste. It is among *Brāhmaṇas* that there exist strict restrictions and punishments against women’s freedom. In other castes also, a man posing as the protector and breadwinner imposes authority over women and stands as an obstacle to their freedom. Nambiār presents the male-dominated family equations of the matrilineal system. The changes in the matrilineal system serve to strengthen patriarchy. The writings of Nambiār clearly show the Brahmanical patriarchal ideology, which considers women in relation to their bodies as pure or impure.

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<sup>109</sup>“ Is there a need to see women?

You can see countless numbers there

Alas, one can’t attempt to talk to the women

Whom the Nair has brought with him.” *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

## Women in *Āṭṭakkathas*

*Āṭṭakkatha* is a literary form of Kathakalī. The origin and development of Kathakalī can be traced back to palaces, Nambudiri *illams*, and residences of landlords.<sup>110</sup> Kathakalī was widely performed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Brahmanical hegemony was prominent in the society. Kottarakara Thampuram and Unnayi Warriar were the prominent writers of *Āṭṭakkathas*. *Āṭṭakkathas* were based on epic-Puranā tradition as well as influenced by *Śṛṅgārarasa*. The perception of femininity in *Āṭṭakkathas* is not different from that of Brahmanical ideology. *Naḷacaritam Āṭṭakkatha* of Unnayi Warriar is examined in detail for the study of femininity with references from certain other selected *Āṭṭakkathas*. Let us begin with the origin and development of Kathakalī as an art form for a better understanding of the text and context.

*Rāmanāṭṭam*, which took its form in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, transforms itself as Kathakalī. With the decline of the centralized rule of Perumals in the twelfth century, the provinces under them became small *Nāṭus*. In this way, new power centers emerged in Kerala. Before the advent of foreign powers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, these power centers had gained strength. Along with agriculture, the wealth brought by international trade must also have contributed to the prosperity of many kingdoms. A new language consciousness and a new value system must have formed during this period. *Gurukulas* have played a major role in the imparting of knowledge these days. The inspiration for starting *Gurukulas* like Ezhuthachan's must have come from the Zamorin starting '*ezhuthupalli*' in his palace, that these *Gurukulas*

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<sup>110</sup> P. Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakal*, Vol.I, (1979), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2017, p. 31.

have been instrumental in developing a cultural and literary bend of mind among this neo-wealthy middle class.<sup>111</sup>

The backdrop of this economic and cultural awakening has helped in the birth of *Rāmanāṭṭam*. Kottarakkara Thampuran's *Rāmanāṭṭam* was emerged in the south, and spread to the north, and transformed as Kathakallī in Vettam. Kottarakkara Thampuran wrote eight plays on *Rāmāyaṇa* in the sixteenth century. These eight plays are considered as first *Āṭṭakkathas*.<sup>112</sup> *Ramanattam* of Vettam tradition reached Perumpadappu, Vadakkumkoor, and Thekkumkoor, Thiruvananthapuram, by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>113</sup> The world of epic and *Purānic* ideas was made acceptable to the common man through this art form, and these were popularised. *Bhakti* was not an important aspect of Kathakallī. N. Ajayakumar examines why *bhakti* lost its prominence in Kathakallī in his article. According to him, Kathakallī depicted the aspirations and conflicts of the newly emerged middle class, which took control over wealth, power, and culture. Kathakallī placed God in the backdrop and took stories from the epics and *Puranās* that spoke about human conflicts.<sup>114</sup>

Since it was the time of conflict for the power of Nāṭuvāli and *Svarūpams*, the *veerarasa* (heroism) got precedence in Kathakallī. The hero of Kathakallī is invariably courageous. He may also be an anti-hero like *Rāvana*. Characters like *Rāvana*, Keechakā, Duryodhanā, Dusassanā, et al. are heroes in Kathakallī. The courageous heroes also show subservience to

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<sup>111</sup> N. Ajayakumar, 'Kathakallī- Nayakathwathinte Nirmithi', in, Malayala pathanasangham, eds., *Op. cit.* p. 346.

<sup>112</sup> Unnayi Varier, V. Subramanya Iyer And Farley Richmond, 'Naḷa Caritam Āṭṭkatha, *Journal Of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2/4, Theatre In India, 1975, p. 211.

<sup>113</sup> N. Ajayakumar, *Op. cit.*, p. 347.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

those stronger than them.<sup>115</sup> In the time of local chieftains, there was a governing practice that was not subservient to Brahmin supremacy. There was a power center that did not reject Brahmanical ideology and yet remained distinct. It must be these new power centers which determined the new concept of heroism in Kathakallī. M.V. Narayanan observes how Kathakallī was influenced by the social conditions of a particular period citing the example of the *āttakatha* ‘*Ravanodbhavam*’. *Ravanodbhavam Kathakallī* made its debut in 1780. It was indispensable for the times to place a character as courageous as *Rāvana* in the place of the hero when there was an impending foreign rule. The first *āttakatha* that placed an anti-hero in the place of the hero was *Ravanodbhavam*.<sup>116</sup>

Whether *Veerarasa* or *Śṛṅgāra*, in the *āttakatha* made in the patriarchal set up, the woman is not given much importance.<sup>117</sup> Women, *Brāhmaṇas*, and sages were never given a central position in *āttakatha* and were insignificant characters. The women of *āttakatha* are of four categories: chaste women like *Sīta*, and *Draupadi*, characters like *Kunti*, who express motherliness, *apsarās*, and scary demonesses who belong to the particular category called *Lalitha*. These demonesses come as seductive heroines and suddenly turn violent when rejected in love. *Sīta* in *Sitaswayamvara*,

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>116</sup> M.V. Narayanan, ‘*Ōrmayude Udbhavam: Sāmskarika/ Āvarthana: Padanam*’, Current Books, Thrissur, 2018, p. 36.

<sup>117</sup> Gender roles in Kathakallī both male and female were enacted by men. Body language of a Kathakallī student is important to decide whether he is suitable to play the role of female character. Male characters demand a masculine type of anatomical features while the actors who play female characters should have feminine bodily gestures. The actors themselves have to transform in to the patriarchal concepts of masculinity and femininity to perform on stage. See, Jenny Nilsson, ‘The Sense of a Lady’: An Exploration of Transvestite Roles in Kathakallī and their Relation to Keralan Gender Constructions’, *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2004, p. 23. See also, Diane Daugherty and Marlene Pitkow, ‘Who Wears the Skirts in Kathakallī?’, *TDR* 1988, Vol.35, No. 2, Summer 1991, pp.138-156, MIT Press, DOI: 10.2307/1146093

composed by Kottarakkara Thampuran, belongs to the class of chaste women. Sīta makes her appearance at the time of her *swayamvara* when Rāma breaks the *Thryambakā*.<sup>118</sup>

The marriage system is as per the *Dharmasāstras* for the *Kṣatriya* community. Here, an independent choice is impossible for women. Even in *Sītaswayamvaram*, the father gifts the daughter to Rāma. The king holds the bejeweled bride's hand as per the *Dharmasāstric* rules and gifts her to the groom. In *Sitaswayamvaram*, Rāma's description surpasses Sīta's beauty.<sup>119</sup> He asks her to marry Rāma, the incarnation of human qualities, and the marriage takes place. Apart from this, he also gives away Urmila to Lakshmana. Here, the bride's consent for marriage is not sought. Madhavi and Srutakeerti are given away, thus to Bharata and Satrugna, respectively. Here also, women are exchanged as commodities for the maintenance of family honor.<sup>120</sup>

*Sitaswayamvaram* must be a reflection of the times in which it was written. The crucial point of *Sitaswayamvaram* is the boon of Paraśurāma. He meets the *Kṣatriya* king, who breaks his teacher's bow and invites him to war. He also demands Sīta earned by breaking the bow. Paraśurāma says that one Rāma will suffice for this world, Srirāma or Bhargava Rāma.<sup>121</sup> Seeing his rage, Dasaratha falls at the feet of Paraśurāma, paying his respects. However,

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<sup>118</sup> Kottarakkara Thampuran, 'Sita Swayamvaram', in, P. Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakal*, Vol I, p. 114.

<sup>119</sup> "It is your luck to get such a handsome groom, O, beauty, garland him". *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>120</sup> "Janaka says, this is a marriage suitable  
For Manuvamsha and Nimivamsha  
That the great sage Viswamitra's benevolence  
Has brought to us". *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>121</sup> "Either the Dasharathi Rāma or Bhargavarāma  
There should be just one on earth. Says Paraśurāma". *Ibid.*, p. 352.



Paraśurāma kicks Dasaratha's head with his foot. Enraged, Rāma takes the bow from Paraśurāma and asks him what his target is. Understanding that Rāma is Vishnu reincarnate, Paraśurāma is humbled.<sup>122</sup> In this *Āṭṭakkatha*, Paraśurāma, the Brahmin is presented with great honor. However, at the end of the story, Paraśurāma surrenders before Rāma, a *Kṣatriya*. Thus, the *Āṭṭakkatha* emphasizes that although medieval Kerala acknowledges the position of a Brahmin, it also recognizes the supremacy and authority of a king.

Kottarakkara Thampuran in his *Āṭṭakkatha* titled *Vicchinnabhishekam* presents the ideal relations within a family. In this, Sīta is an ideal of chastity. When Rāma sets out for the jungle, she follows him, saying that she hasn't been separated from Rāma ever, and hence, she wants to accompany him. Even when Rāma delineates the problems she would have to encounter in the jungle, Sīta stands steadfast in her decision.<sup>123</sup> In this *Āṭṭakkatha*, there is the incident of Rāma and Sīta visiting the hermitage of sage Atri in their jungle sojourn. There, Anasūya, the wife of Atri blesses Sīta, saying even if she were to part with Rāma for one moment, her beauty would increase each time she reunites with him. Here again, the physical beauty of a woman, instead of her individuality, is emphasized.<sup>124</sup>

Kottarakkara Thampuran extols in his *Āṭṭakkatha* titled '*Yuddham*,' the purity of Sīta's chastity. After reclaiming Sīta following the war with *Rāvana*, Rāma asks her to go and live elsewhere and that she was not suited to him anymore. Answering him, Sīta says that she is chaste, and if Rāma doesn't understand that, she is ready to die.<sup>125</sup> When she is about to perform

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.

<sup>123</sup> Kottarakkara Thampuran, 'Vicchinabhishekam', in, P. Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakal*, Vol.I, p. 134.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>125</sup> "O, why speak you thus to me?"

the test by fire, the congregation of gods tells Srirāma that Sīta is chaste and that he should accept her. Rāma responds to this in this way: “I know Sīta is chaste. However, she stayed in *Rāvana*’s house for several days. Hence her chastity has to be proven before the public. Or else, they will blame me saying Rama accepted Sīta out of lust for her”.<sup>126</sup>

Sīta is led to ordeal by fire for Rāma’s family honor and male honor. As mentioned earlier, the honor of Brahmin patriarchy rests in the woman’s virtue. Whether she is a Brahmin woman or a *Kṣatriya* woman, chastity, and purity are indispensable factors. The Rāma of *Āṭṭakkatha* is virtuous. He is the protector of the earth and an incarnation. The *Kṣatriya* Rāma is placed above the Brahmin. But Sīta, the woman, is a person endowed with Brahmin values necessary for safeguarding the clan. She will receive acceptance only after she proves her purity through the test by fire.

Damayantī of *Naḷacaritam*, written by Unnayi Varier, is one of the prominent female characters of *Āṭṭakkatha*. The smṛti texts say what a woman should be like. Similarly, the *Kāmasāstra* says what the beauty of her body parts should be like. The reflection of this can be seen in the presentation of Damayantī. Damayantī is beautiful, like Lakshmi, and more beautiful than the *apsarās* (celestial maidens). She is also virtuous. She is Śīlāvati (the best among the chaste). Damayantī is compared to fragrant gold. Damayantī possesses the beauty, youth, and virtues according to the dharmasastric ideology.<sup>127</sup> In *Naḷacaritam*, Unnayi Varier introduces Damayantī and her

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I never thought of anyone but you

In thought, word or deed

I never dreamed of anyone but you”. Kottarakara Thampuran, ‘Yuddam’, in, P.Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakal*, Vol.I, p. 284.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>127</sup> Unnayi Varier, *Naḷacaritam Āṭṭakkatha*, in, P. Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakal*, Vol.I, p. 425.

companions with a prayer to all *pativrata*s in mythology. This indicates that Unnayi Varier venerates the ideology of *pātivratyā*.<sup>128</sup>

All those Goddesses who bless Damayantī and her friends are within the bounds of Brahmanical ideology. Mahālaṣṭhmī, Saraswati, and Bhoomidevi are synonyms of prosperity, virtues, and patience. These are virtues a woman should possess. Śiva and Pārvatī, Sōman and Rōhini, Indra and Indrani- are all examples of an ideal couple. Anasūya, Lopamudra, and Arundhatī are symbols of chastity. These are the people who bless Damayantī. Unnayi Varier writes *Naḷacaritam* at a time when chastity was not mandatory for women outside the Brahmin community.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, it was a period when there were relations that were not so rigid and rather loose as a fall out of matriliney.

Unnayi Varier was preaching *strīdharmā* (duties of women) according to the Brahmanical world of ideologies, to the caste other than *Brāhmaṇas* through Damayantī. The words uttered by Damayantī to Indra reflect the importance of chastity. She says, “In this world of many chaste women, I am one too. I have already married Naḷa in my thoughts. Even if I have done it only through my thoughts, I cannot become Indra’s wife. If it

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<sup>128</sup> “Glory to *Brahma* and *Saraswati*  
And *Bhoomidevi*  
And *Kṛṣṇa* and *Mahālaṣṭhmī*  
Glory to *Sreemahadeva*, and the daughter of mountains  
*Soman*, and *Rohini* as well as *Kaman* and *Rathi*  
*Indran*, *Indrani* and all other lovely couples  
Let prosperity be upon them  
Let us be blessed by wives of sages  
Like *Anasūya*, *Lopamudra*, and *Arundhatī*”. *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>129</sup> Unnayi Varier belongs to a community in which women enjoyed sexual freedom in *sambandham* relation and were largely polyandrous.

happens, it will be a breach of the vow”.<sup>130</sup> Hearing this, Naḷa was immensely pleased. His respect and love towards Damayantī, a model of womanly duties, increased.

Brahmanical patriarchy glorifies chaste women. *Manusmṛti* says that a *Kulastrī* should always be worshipped, or the home will face ruin. A *Kulastrī* is one who honors Brahmanical patriarchy. Damayantī of *Naḷacaritam* is one such woman. In the Naḷa-Damayantī story, there are many *padams* (verses) where chastity is extolled. In *Naḷacaritam Randamdivasam* (second day), Naḷa, who has lost everything, asks Damayantī while in the forest, to go to her native land. To that, Damayantī answers that a wife should always accompany her husband.<sup>131</sup> Even when Naḷa abandons Damayantī in the forest, she doesn’t curse him. On the contrary, she wonders whether Naḷa wandering alone has faced some danger. Damayantī finds consolation in the fact that Naḷa rejected her because he lost everything in the game of dice and lost his bearings as a result.<sup>132</sup>

It is her adherence to the vow of chastity that saved Damayantī, who was abandoned by Naḷa, from danger. When a demon approaches Damayantī, abandoned by Naḷa in the game of dice, Damayantī curses and turns him to ashes.<sup>133</sup> It is through the strength of chastity that she could curse him. Śīlāvati, Sīta, Anasūya are all chaste women who have made superhuman achievements through the power of chastity. Damayantī is also one of them.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 493.

<sup>131</sup> Those who have knowledge of *Vedas*.

Say that a wife is the better half of the husband.

A wife is her husband’s other half.

Hence she cannot be estranged from her husband.

She is a panacea to his physical and mental ailments. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

*Naḷacaritam Randam divasam* instructs how the husband and wife should indulge in love, discarding their shyness and hesitation, which echoes *Kāmasūtra*. The *Padam* says that those women who strictly observe good conduct and good habits, and have the loftiest virtue of chastity as their armor do not need to fear anything.<sup>134</sup>

*Naḷacaritam* echoes Smṛti texts that women are fickle, and their minds cannot be controlled by anyone. When he goes for Damayantī's second marriage, Naḷa, dressed as King Rituparna's charioteer, wonders who would be able to understand the cunning deeds of a beautiful woman.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, Naḷa also believes that Damayantī wouldn't commit a shameful act like a second marriage. Unnayi Varier here indirectly hints that second marriage is denied to women. Unnayi Varier, through this *Āṭṭakkatha*, strongly support and popularize the Brahmanical ideals of chastity and fidelity of wife among the matrilineal communities.

Another category of women in *Āṭṭakkatha* is the women who take up the role of demons. They are women who challenge the patriarchal tradition. They enjoy the freedom and are open about their emotions. Śūrpaṅkha, Nakratundi, and Poothana belong to this category. Since they oppose patriarchal ideas, they also get punished. They take the role of ordinary women at the beginning of the *Āṭṭakkatha*, and later take on the form of a *rakshasi* (demoness). Śūrpaṅkha of 'Kharavadham' is one who approaches Rāma and Lakshmana, overcome by lust. However, when rejected, she took on the form of the demoness and went to attack Sīta. Śūrpaṅkha, who attacks a woman of high birth (*Kulastrī*) and behaves like a harlot (*Kulaṭā*), is

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 451-452.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 507.

subject to punishment by Rāma and Lakshmana.<sup>136</sup> In a patriarchal society, desiring women becomes transgressive: her sexual agency makes her a potentially disruptive threat to the containment of women and to family structures built on meeting the desires of men.

Similarly, the demoness Nakratundi in *Narakasura Vadham* sees Indra's son Jayantan and becomes sexually attracted to him. She expresses her love to Jayantan, coming out of her demoness form. When Jayantan declines, she takes on the demoness form and attacks Jayantan. Jayantan punishes her by cutting off her ears, breast, and nose.<sup>137</sup> It is the duty of the king to punish deviant. The most important punishment is cutting off limbs. This punishment, prescribed by the *Smṛti* texts, is what Nakratundi and Śūrpaṅakha receive. Brahmanical patriarchal values always viewed women's strength and their sexuality with fear. Hence, they were distanced from the domain of knowledge as well as the domain of wealth, thereby bringing them under the control of men. They got the right to knowledge and rituals, as well as rights overlaid through their status as women of high caste. The purity of caste could be maintained only by bringing women under control. They were aware of the strength of women in dissent, even when they were made financially dependent. Such women were, to them, 'the other.'

Celestial women and demonesses were, to them, forms of prostitutes. Yakṣis were also such 'other' beings. The myths of Yakṣis are compiled in *Aitiyamāla* of Kottarathil Sankunni.<sup>138</sup> Yakṣi is diametrically opposed to the nature of the virtuous woman that *Śāṅkarasmṛti* delineates. Stories of thick, long-haired, very beautiful Yakṣis appearing in *Śṛṅgārabhāva* (luring)

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<sup>136</sup> Kottarakkara Thampuran, 'Kharavadham', in, P.Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakaḷ*, Vol.I, pp. 158-162.

<sup>137</sup> Karthikathirunal Rama Varma Maharajavu, 'Narakasura Vadham', in, P. Venugopalan, ed., *Noottiyonnu Āṭṭakkathakaḷ*, Vol.I, pp. 544-547.

<sup>138</sup> Kottarathil Sankunni, *Aitiyamāla*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2016, pp. 279-281.

attacking and later devouring Nambudiris, followed by more ritually powerful Nambudiris tethering them are quite common. These stories propagate the idea of women's uncontrolled sexuality luring men and then landing them in danger. Along with this, the need to control sexuality is also propagated through such stories. Most of the stories are about patriarchy bringing under control the dissenting womanhood represented by *Yakṣi*.<sup>139</sup> Women are considered as sexual objects for the use and praise of men; female bodies are always under men's control either as chaste or as tools for enchantment. Laurie Penny writes that women are required to look confident and sexually accessible at all time, but shamed and ostracized if women show arrogance or any type of erotic emotions.<sup>140</sup>

*Yakṣi* is womanhood outside the accepted norms of family life, who does not fall under the heading of *Kulastrī*. This state is simultaneously frightening and luring. Patriarchal ideology through such stories is thus cautioning women who question social norms. Throughout these texts of literature, two different types of women, the *Kulastrī* as opposed to the harlot and the obedient, and the luring as opposed to the disobedient, in conformity with Brahmanical tradition can be found. These works reveal what is defined as *strīdharmā*, and also the punishments that follow if one deviates from this.

### ***Pativrātādharmam***

*Pativrātādharmam* is a 'śatakam' (one hundred verses) published in 1879. This is a work composed by Kallingal Chathunni Vaidyar, the son of Kattunni Kunjikkoru Vaidyar.<sup>141</sup> The text published in the nineteenth century reflects the notions of womanhood prevalent at that time of transition.

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.114-130.

<sup>140</sup> Laurie Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*, Zero Books, UK, 2011, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Kallingal Chathunni Vaidyar, *Pativrātā Dharmam*, (ed., Dr.M. Sreenathan), Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University, Tirur, 2018, p. 5.

Several texts in the various literary genre were published in the nineteenth century represented a transition in the institution of family as a result of social reform movements. The home was a space around which change was brought about as a reform.<sup>142</sup> It was also a period of debate going around the status of women. ‘Women question’ was a central theme in the social reform movement and national movement.<sup>143</sup> As many scholars argued, the reform of women her education and the changes in the family system did not weaken patriarchy but modified it to suit the changed socio-economic context.

The nineteenth century in India witnessed a new awakening as a consequence of new political, social, and, most importantly, the new economic environment.<sup>144</sup> The spread of western ideas and English education made the educated intelligentsia to look upon certain traditional customs of India as degenerating. The response from the educated intelligentsia tried to reshape the indigenous private space, including the space of women. One of the significant changes that happened in the nineteenth century is the ‘women question.’ The main question was not what the women wanted, but in what way they were to be modernized Geraldine Forbes writes, “It became the central question in nineteenth century British India because the foreign rulers had focused their attention on this particular aspect of society. Enamored with

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<sup>142</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community and Cultural Nationalism*, (2001), Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, p. 37.

<sup>143</sup> Partha Chatterjee, ‘The Nation and its Women’, in, *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 116-131. For further reading of women question, See also, Sumit Sarkar, Women’s Question in nineteenth Century Bengal, in, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Women and Culture*, SNDT Women’s University Bombay, 1985, pp. 165-172.

<sup>144</sup> The colonial education encouraged by state and Christian missionaries that modernised traditional social norms ‘new religious moments that revived and consolidated older humanitarian impulses’ and the activities of reformers who were eager to help other’ can be considered major reasons for the emergence of social reforms. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, ‘Introduction’, in, Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, eds., *Women and Social Reform in Modern India a Reader*, Indiana Univesity Press, Indiana, 2008, p.1.



their ‘civilizing mission,’ influential British writers condemned India’s religion, culture, and society for their rules and customs regarding women”.<sup>145</sup>

India responded to this colonial perception by redefining gender relations. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Easwara Chandra Vidyasagar attacked the brutal customs of Brahmanical ideology like ‘Sati,’ prohibition of widow remarriage, and Kulin polygamy.<sup>146</sup> Issues pertaining to women were addressed, and there were attempts to reform them and their space in the domesticity. The social reformist ideas were popularized by English educated middle class began to question Indian tradition. In the conflict between tradition and modernity, the traditional role of women within the space of home was valorized in the pretexts of being modern. In Bengal, the home was reconceptualised by Bengali *Bhadralōk*. The indigenous family relation and family hierarchies were restructured. The middle-class reformist tried to reform women in a way that it would not be destruction to her domesticity.<sup>147</sup> The new patriarchal order was created, which demanded young wives’ submission only to their husbands. Judith Walsh points out that Bengali domestic manuals of the period redefined the spaces of women within the new patriarchy.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>146</sup> See, Lata Mani, ‘Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India’, *Cultural Critique*, No. 7, The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse II, Autumn, 1987, pp. 119-156; Norbert Schürer, ‘The Impartial Spectator of Sati, 1757-84’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Fall, 2008, pp. 19-44; Jeanette Herman, ‘Men and Women of Feeling: Conventions of Sensibility and Sentimentality in the Sati Debate and Mainwaring’s “The Suttee”’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Comparative Cultural Studies, 2005, pp. 223-263; Tanika Sarkar, ‘A Prehistory of Rights: The Age of Consent Debate in Colonial Bengal’, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Points of Departure: India and the South Asian Diaspora, Autumn, 2000, pp. 601-622.

<sup>147</sup> Judith E Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice*, Rowman and Littlefield Publication, New York, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>148</sup> Judith E. Walsh, *How to be the Goddess of Your Home: An Anthology of Bengali Domestic Manuals*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 16.

The constructs of family and womanhood during the nineteenth century were influenced by the Brahmanical patriarchal values.<sup>149</sup> Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid write, “The recovery of tradition throughout the proto-nationalist and nationalist period was always the recovery of the traditional woman her various shapes continually readapt the eternal part to the needs of the cotangent present.”<sup>150</sup> Women Question was addressed and debated in various ways in different parts of India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the debate was represented in literature also.<sup>151</sup> The literary texts of the period represented different images of women, educated, liberated, sophisticated, and even the nation itself was given a feminine image.<sup>152</sup>

The text *Pativratādharmasatakam* should be studied in this ideological context. The social reform movement spearheaded by Sri Narayana Guru brought tremendous changes in the caste system, family, education, and the status of women in Kerala. The institution of marriage and family began to be discussed in the context of colonial modernity. Victorian morality influenced the concept of marriage that existed in Kerala. The ‘new woman’ envisaged by the social reformers was a replica of Brahmanical patriarchal values. The texts that were produced during the period endorsed the Brahmanical notions of womanhood like ‘*pātivratyā*.’ *Indulekha*, the novel written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, had a profound impact upon the psyche

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<sup>149</sup> Flavia Agnes, ‘Politicization of Personal Laws: A Study of Colonial India’, in, Bharati Ray, *Women of India: Colonial and post-Colonial Period*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., ‘Introduction’, in, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, (1989), Rutagers University Press, USA, 1990, p. 10.

<sup>151</sup> S. Anandhi, ‘Representing Devadasis: ‘Dasigal Mosavalai’ as a Radical Text’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 11/12, Annual Number Mar.1991, p. 739.

<sup>152</sup> Tanika Sarkar, ‘Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 22, No. 47, Nov. 21, 1987, p. 2011.

of Kerala society.<sup>153</sup> Without negating the traditions, the novel imagined transforming the entire family system of the Nair community with its characteristic features like joint family, matriliney, and *sambandham* into a new concept of the family under the changing socio-political and economic contexts. The novel addressed the Nair community among whom the women entered into *sambandham* with several men belonging to upper castes. ‘*Pātivratyā*’ was the *dharma* denied to them. O. Chandu Menon, through his construct of educated, independent, and strong female protagonist *Indulekha* introduced an educated, well mannered woman who is brave enough to reject the *sambandham* with a Nambudiri and most importantly, she is determined to marry Madhavan, a young educated Nair.

The novel criticises the plight of Nair women, their lack of education, the complications of *sambandham*, the moral degeneration of Nambudiris, and advocates a system of marriage based on conjugality and love. But the woman, imagined by the novelist, was educated but not independent. She is a *pativrata* devoted her entire life to the service of the husband in the pretext, not of *strīdharmā* but of love and conjugality. The discussion between Madhavan and *Indulekha* about *pātivratyā* of Nair women reflects, in general, the social attitude and, in particular, that of the novelist. The Brahmanical patriarchal ideology of ‘*strīdharmā*’ was remodeled and adapted.<sup>154</sup> It was the question of property that made Nair women, the concubines of Nambudiris. The change in the property relation, destruction of the joint family system, individual rights in family property made women the property of their husbands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ‘*pativratādharmasatakam*’ published in 1879, ten years prior to the publication of *Indulekha*, represents the same Brahmanical patriarchal

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<sup>153</sup> O. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2013.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65.

ideology of *strīdharmā*. The *dharma*, which existed among the Nambudiris, was percolated among other castes as well. One of the cardinal virtues of being an upper caste, is the control and confinement of women.

This is a text which makes the woman remain grateful, virtuous, and noble to ensure her sexual discipline and makes sure that she will live her life as a *pativrata* taking the vow of looking after her husband and without desiring anyone else other than her husband.<sup>155</sup> This work intends to ensure male domination over the mind and body of the woman and thus justify the ideal monogamous family structure. The husband is to be worshipped. A noble woman's main duty is to serve her husband every day.<sup>156</sup> This work says that it is a sign of the *pativrata* to desist from wantonness, to participate in household duties with her husband, and to remain disciplined inside the house.<sup>157</sup> The work also says that even if a *Gāndharva* approach her, she should not waver, and never desire anyone else other than her husband, and should live with her husband with a steady mind. In this work, there is a long list of duties prescribed that go into the making of a noblewoman.<sup>158</sup> It says that she should eat only after her husband has eaten, sleep, after her husband has slept, and never marry anyone else until her death.<sup>159</sup> Even if she doesn't burn herself in the husband's funeral pyre, she should look after the husband's parents all her life, never utter a harsh word to the husband, should talk to him lovingly, get up and make arrangements for him to wash his feet whenever he returns home, serve him food in a special plate.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Kallingal Chattunni Vaidyar, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

Rituals during menstruation, Ayurveda practices, and means to purify the woman are recommended in the text stating that menstruation is impure and that the wife is equivalent to an outcaste during this time.<sup>161</sup> This work also warns that if pregnancy rituals are not followed, it may lead to miscarriage.<sup>162</sup> The main duty of a woman is to spend time in the house taking care of her husband, worshipping him, looking after his parents, observing of pollution rituals related to menstruation, and remaining chaste, being a good homemaker, a good mother, and never fancying any other man.<sup>163</sup> An ideal woman's space is her home. The Victorian neo-Brahmanical value system proclaimed that there is no status for a woman in society without her husband is becoming clearer here. The basis of this value system is the male ideology that divine right can be imposed on an ideal wife, and thus, social purity can be maintained. An attempt to establish Brahmanical gender values without any discrimination of caste is evident in this text.

The strict control of women denotes the purity and privileges of caste. As a part of manifesting exclusive rights of a particular caste in the society, what they did was to strengthen their control on women. *Pativrataḍharmaśatakam* should be read as a deliberate attempt to spread the Brahmanical patriarchal values among the non-Brahman castes. At the same time, it can also be construed as an attempt to revive the morality and chastity of Indian women as against British imperialism.

The *Dharmasāstras* have envisaged two types of women: one is the noblewoman, and the other, one who has uncontrollable desires, or in other words, a harlot. The noblewoman exists for reproduction and the continuation

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

of the family lineage. Along with this, she is a co-participant of household and other rituals. The highest honor a woman can get is becoming a wife.

The influence of the ideology of *Smṛti* texts can be seen in literature as well. The reflections of this can be seen in the works of kālidasa and early Tamil literature of South India. Another fact is that a different version of this reflection can be seen in the works of *Bhaktins* as well.<sup>164</sup> In this, God is imagined as the husband, and the women submit to him completely. The *Smṛti* texts explain how a wife should behave in the presence and absence of the husband. Epics and Puranās also tell many stories about *pativrātās*. Sīta of *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sāvitrī of Vanaparvam in *Mahābhārata* and Gandhari were women strengthened by chastity. The influence of this strong ideology continued for centuries.

The ideology of restriction on the conduct of women is manifested in *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, the text of the code of conduct of Nambudiris. As the women's space is restricted to home in the ideology of Nambudiris, the training to become a wife begins since childhood itself. The formation of gender hierarchies through the *Samskāras* of Nambudiris confined women within the four walls of the home. Thus we take up the formation of gender hierarchies in a Nambudiri household in the next chapter.

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<sup>164</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Every Day Lives Every Day Histories Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, pp. 275-291.

## CHAPTER III

# BRAHMANICAL IDEOLOGY AND PATRIARCHY: HISTORICISING GENDER HIERARCHIES IN A NAMBUDIRI HOUSEHOLD

Households are considered essential building blocks in the reconstruction of past societies.<sup>1</sup> The study of households is important to analyze the gender relation because women are mostly visible in the domestic domain.<sup>2</sup> Women are identified with the home in almost all patriarchal ideologies. Household is a strategic site in the construction of gendered roles.<sup>3</sup> In Brahmanical tradition, a household is considered as a ‘sacred space’ where domestic rituals were performed, and production and reproduction were controlled by male *Brāhmaṇas*. This chapter discusses the early formation of gender<sup>4</sup> hierarchies in a Nambudiri household.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Penelope M. Allison, ‘Introduction’, in Penelope M. Allison, ed., *The Archaeology Household Activities*, Rutledge, New York, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Lawrence, ‘Towards a Feminist Archaeology of Households: Gender and Household Structure on the Australia Gold fields’, in *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> There are several studies about the concept of Gender. Gender is a relational term. To understand what it means to be woman, or a person with transgender identity, we need to be aware of what it means to be a man in the same situation. Gender is a social construction while sex is biological identity. Gender has been used to refer to a social identity. Male and female are really two cultures: and their life experiences are different. Gendered and sexual identities are influenced by social institutions and practices. The social institutions decide how does a man and woman should lead their lives. See, V.Geetha, *Gender*, Stree, Calcutta, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> A household is defined as follows: “A Household required a house- or rather some dwelling within which members usually sleep and eat. In other words, parts of our understanding of the term household is that it involves a particular type of space domestic space. This space is designated as both by material structures- walls and roof – but perhaps more importantly also by the social activities that are held to be appropriate to it. The location, design, and internal arrangement of this space is both a product of and in influence on these social activities”. Linda Mckie, Sophia Bowlby

Kumkum Roy says that ‘household’ is the passage to learning about everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Household is envisaged as one of the most important institutions where gender relations are structured, enforced, and contested.<sup>7</sup> Jaya Tyagi sees the household as the main site for socialization as well as production, consumption, distribution and reproduction.<sup>8</sup> Since the space of women, especially that of Brahmin women, is the home, it is imperative to study power relations within the confines of the home for the study of the influence of patriarchal ideology. It is necessary to examine *Samskāras* like *Jātakarmam* in Brahmin families in order to understand how the Brahmin male priesthood is equipped to interfere in domestic spaces.<sup>9</sup> Ideological intervention into the household helps to maintain hierarchies.

The rites and rituals of a Nambudiri household provided segregated space and right to males and females. Right from the birth itself, the girls were considered as the second sex.<sup>10</sup> The sixteen *Samskāras* of a Nambudiri’s

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and Susan Gregory, ‘Introduction’, in, Linda Mckie, Sophia Bowlby and Susan Gregory, eds., *Gender, Power and the Household*, Macmillan, London, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Kumkum Roy, ‘Introduction’, in, Kumkum Roy, ed., *Looking Within Looking Without: Exploring Households in Subcontinent Through Time: Essays in Memory of Nandita Prasad Sahai*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Kumkum Roy, ‘The King’s Household: Structure/Space in the Sastraic Tradition’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 43/44 (Oct. 24-31, 1992), p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2008, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Samskāras* are the rites of passage in an individual’s life. There are sixteen major *Samskāras* in the life of a Brahmin. They are *Garbhadāna*, *Puṃsavana*, *Sīmantōtyana*, *Jātakarma*, *Nāmakaraṇam*, *Niṣkramaṇa*, *Annaprāśana*, *Chūḍākaṇa*, *Karṇavēdha*, *Vidyārambham*, *Upanayana*, *Vēdārambham*, *Gōdāna*, *Samāvarttana*, *Vivāha*, *Antyēṣṭi*. Rajbali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1969, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Simon De Beauvoir’s Seminal Text *The second sex* is an attempt to study human history from a feminist perspective. She argues that men oppress women by characterizing them on every level as the other, defined in opposition to men. See, Simon De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, London, 1997, pp. 14-16.



life were envisaged to perpetuate gender discrimination and Brahmanical patriarchy. In this chapter, we will analyze the Brahmanical attempts of creating discrimination through rites and rituals, which play an important role in socializing the boys and girls and in preparing them for the parts they will have to play in their lives. The chapter will discuss the gender discrimination of Nambudiri household through a detailed study of *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra*,<sup>11</sup> the seminal text of Nambudiri domestic rituals, *Pakalīyamcaṭangu*,<sup>12</sup> which is a text primarily based on *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* and *Śāṅkarasmṛti*.<sup>13</sup> Besides, the autobiographies of eminent personalities like V.T. Bhattathiripad,<sup>14</sup> Devaki Nilayangode,<sup>15</sup> Lalithambika *Antarjanam*,<sup>16</sup> and Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad<sup>17</sup> were also taken into account. The books are written by Sumangala<sup>18</sup>, and Sreedevi

<sup>11</sup> Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyamantra (Bhāṣavyākhyānam)*, Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2004. *Gṛhyasūtras* are the texts which contain the manuals for domestic rites. These texts are valuable sources for the study of everyday life which include sixteen *Samskāras*, Laurie L. Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice*, University of California Press, California, 2005, p. 25. *Gṛhyasūtras* represent an attempt to systematize the domestic rituals associated with Gṛha. Kumkum Roy argues that this codification can be considered as a process of Brahmanisation of rituals already existed. Kumkum Roy, 'Towards a History of Reproduction', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.69,(2008), p.32.

<sup>12</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Pakalīyam Caṭangu*, Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> N.P. Unni, ed., *Śāṅkarasmṛti (Lagudharmaprakāśika)*, Promoting Committee for the Publication of Sanskrit Laws, International Academic Union, Torino, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> V.T. Bhattathiripad, *VTyūṣe Sampūrṇa Kritikaḷ* (1997), D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Antarjanam, Memories of a Namboodiri Woman* (Translated from Malayalam by Indira Menon and Radhika Menon) Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Āmakathakku Oru Āmukham* (1979) Current Books, Thrissur, 2007

<sup>17</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol.I, (1963), Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2008.

*Antarjanam*<sup>19</sup> throws light on the everyday lives and rituals of Nambudiri girls and women.

### ***Gr̥ha* and *Gārhastya* in Brahmanical Texts**

Before examining sixteen *Samskāras* and its implications upon the domestic lives of Nambudiri women, it is important to have a look at the concept of *Gr̥ha* and *Gārhastya* embedded in the Brahmanical texts with a special focus on *Gr̥hyasūtras* and *Manusmṛti*. In order to understand the role of the women in Brahmanical ideology, it is crucial to study the ways in which *Gr̥ha* is contemplated in the Brahmanical texts. The mechanism in which Brahmanical ideology is protruded, acknowledges women solely in the context of *Gr̥ha*, which is envisaged in the Brahmanical texts. The existence of women outside the realm of household stays unrecognized.<sup>20</sup> It is more evident to know about the enclosure of spatial confines of the women in the *Gr̥ha*, especially when it comes to the context of texts.<sup>21</sup> It is also essential to know the ways in which the freedom of women is limited, to understand how the model of *Gr̥ha* is formed and structured.

The *Gr̥has* are commonly projected as sacred spaces by Brahmanical texts with a focus on performing household rituals.<sup>22</sup> *Gr̥has* are projected as self-determining, independent, and distinctive entities by the Brahmanical texts, which is a microcosm with its distinctiveness and identity. For Brahmanical texts, domestic fire in the household may have been the center of ritual performance, but the ritual role can be activated only through the virtue and presence of the household. The practice of daily rituals shows a tendency

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<sup>19</sup> Kannishtamattathu Sreedevi *Antarjanam, Vennanattu Grāmattile Antarjanangaluṭe Āchārangal*, Kanjirakkattu Mana, Kochi (n.d.)

<sup>20</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gr̥hyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 65,

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

to include certain activities that need to be performed and practiced commonly in a household and thereby giving them Brahmanical compliance.<sup>23</sup>

In the Brahmanical ideology, the *Āśrama* of *Gārhastya*, or householder's life, was of prime importance. The four *Āśramas*, the student, householder, Hermit, and renouncer, are rooted in the *Āśrama* of the householder. The householder is the best of these four classes, and it is the householder who supports the other three.<sup>24</sup> The householder's primary duties were offering sacrifices and procreating children. There were daily obligations that a householder has to perform for the redemption of the debts like the debts to gods, seers, and fathers.<sup>25</sup> Some texts mention five debts, which include the debt to all men and non-human creatures.<sup>26</sup> *Manusmṛti* provides a detailed description of the duties of a householder. He should make a daily ancestral offering with food, water, or with fruits, vegetables, or with milk or roots. He has to please the ancestors. He should feed a Brahmin for the welfare of his ancestors as a part of five sacrifices. A Brahmin should please gods by offering food in the domestic fire every day. Agni, Sōma, Dhanvantari, to the goddess of the new moon, to the goddess of the full moon, to Prajapati, to heaven and earth together, to the fire which makes the offering

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<sup>23</sup> The major forms of households are roughly classified into four functions, production, distribution, transmission and reproduction. The rituals of *Gṛhyasūtras* are superintended towards the mellow performance of the function of household, where the reproduction function is known to have precisely preoccupied. Socialisation can be an addition among the four functions of the household which can be viewed as the fifth function, since the *Gṛha* is also expected to have presented as the prefatory ground for the formulation of relationship that are faked inside and outside of the household which happens as result of marriage, kinship and co-residence. *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 141. See, Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 112.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

uninterrupted and to the all Gods.<sup>27</sup> He should also make the *Bali* offerings to Indra, death, Moon, Varuṇa together with their attendants. He should make an offering to the ‘Maruts’ to the waters, to trees, and the various goddesses and to all Gods.<sup>28</sup> One of the most important duties of a householder is the honoring of guests. *Manusmṛti* gives a detailed account of hospitality.<sup>29</sup> To discharge the debt to ancestors, adult men of twice-born classes were expected to marry and beget sons. Thus, in the household and domestic rituals begin gender discrimination.

The sixteen *Samskāras* and domestic rituals (as advocated by the Brahmanical textual traditions) shape gender identities on a hierarchical base. The Brahmanical scriptures generally view women as inferior and her mind and body as sinful. *Manusmṛti* argues that at the moment of creation itself, women were allotted the habits of lying, love for ornaments, and qualities such as anger, meanness and treachery, and bad conduct. The sexuality of women was viewed as dangerous.<sup>30</sup> Their sexuality should be legitimately channelized into motherhood.<sup>31</sup> Marriage regulates and disciplines the sexuality and reproductive power of women. As a girl and as a woman, she has to observe chastity, her *Strīdharmā* as a wife.<sup>32</sup> Women were incorporated into Brahmanical patriarchy only for their procreative and nurturing characteristics. Procreation was regarded as an activity to beget sons for the continuation of Brahmanical ideology.<sup>33</sup> Hence a girl right from her childhood

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.113.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114. One of the features of hospitality duties of a householder is that it also reflects the *varṇa* system and its hierarchies.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>31</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, (2003), Stree, Calcutta, 2013, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, pp. 120-21.

should be trained to become a *pativrata* wife and a mother who play an active role in perpetuating Brahmanical ideology but completely controlled by her husband. On the other hand, a boy was trained to become the torchbearer of Vedic learning, and the one who preserves the Brahmanical order of society.<sup>34</sup> Hence all the offerings and prayers were done for begetting the male progeny.

### **Son in Brahmanical Tradition**

In the Brahmanical tradition, the son is always regarded as a continuation of the father or the symbol of his immortality.<sup>35</sup> In Ṛgveda itself, the desire for sons was expressed in hymns.<sup>36</sup> The father is reborn when he begets a son.<sup>37</sup> The son is a continuation of his father both in this world and the next after death. As Patrick Olivelle says, it is not just any child that constitutes the continuation of the father; it is the son.<sup>38</sup> The family line continues in the son even after the death of the father. It is the son who inherits the property of the father.<sup>39</sup> After his death, he becomes the ritual and economic head of the family. The continuation of the father in the son is expressed in the ancient rite of transmission. ‘When the father is about to die, the son comes and lies on the top of the father, touching the respective organs of the father. Thus, the father enters the son and stands firm in this world even

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> Kumkum Roy, ‘Towards a History of Reproduction’, in, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 69 (2008), p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Olivelle, ‘Amrita: Women and Indian Technology of Immortality’, in, *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1, *Language, Texts and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2008, p.106.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 195.

after his death. If the father recovered, he is expected to leave home and live like an ascetic or live in the home under the authority of the son.’<sup>40</sup>

The word for son *Putra* means one who saves his parents from hell. Gautama *Dharmasūtra* states that virtuous sons purify their ancestors.<sup>41</sup> The various *Dharmasūtras* and *Smṛti* texts also point out the significance of son. They laid down twelve types of sons and their positions in the Brahmanical world. *Manusmṛti* states about sons from different types of marriage as follows, “A son who is born to a woman married according to the "Brahma" rite and who does good deeds rescues from evil ten generations of forefathers before him and ten generations after him, with himself as the twenty-first; a son born to a woman married according to the "Divine" rite rescues seven generations before him, and seven after him; a son born to a woman married according to the "Seer's" rite, three before and three after; and a son born to a woman married according to "*Prājāpatya*" marriage, six before and six after. From all four types of marriage beginning, in order, with "Brahma" are born sons who are eminent in Vedic knowledge and respected by cultured people. Endowed with beauty, spirit, and virtue, possessing wealth and fame, furnished with every delight, and righteous to the highest degree, they will live a hundred years. But in the others—the remaining wicked types of marriage—are born sons whose speech is cruel and false and who hate the Vēda and the Law. From irreproachable marriages are born children beyond

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<sup>40</sup> Patrick Olivelle, ed., and tr., *The Early Upaniṣhads: Annotated Text and Translation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 57. *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* envisages the scenario of a dying man. He is advised to summon his son and pass on the sacred knowledge (that is self, sacrifice and the world) to the latter. Thus, patrilineage was intertwined with knowledge and other kinsmen and women were excluded completely.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p. 131.

reproach; from reproachable marriages are born children inviting people's reproach. Therefore, man should avoid reproachable marriages.”<sup>42</sup>

*Smṛti* texts clearly show a patriarchal nature with its desire for a male child. There are statements about the ideal time for intercourse to have sons, ideal families for marriage for which the families without sons should be avoided, and the *Smṛti* texts even ask the wife to eat the second of the three offerings to *pitṛs* if they desire for a son.<sup>43</sup>

If there is no son in a household, they even recommend adoption. There is a term called *putrika*, which means if there is no son in a household, the sons of daughters (grandsons) occupied the inheritance.<sup>44</sup> We do not come across any classification of daughters. In fact, the birth of a daughter is considered bad luck.<sup>45</sup> The daughter never inherits her father's ritual or economic property.<sup>46</sup> The Brahmanical texts alienate daughters from ritual activities, and there is clear discrimination in sharing the property.<sup>47</sup>

The desire for a son and the prominence of a son is evident from the *Ṣoḍaśa Samskāras* (sixteen rites of passage) itself. There are sixteen *Samskāras* in the life of a *Brāhmaṇas*. *Samskāras* infact represents gender

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<sup>42</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, p. 156.

<sup>44</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. p. 196.

<sup>45</sup> Mandakranta Bose, *Women in the Hindu Tradition: Rules, Roles, and Exceptions*, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp. 200-221.

<sup>47</sup> Preeti Singh, *Relocating Gender in Dharmasatras*, Kalpaz Publication, New Delhi, 2013, p. 168, See also, Anita Singh, 'Property rights of Daughter in Ancient India with special reference to *Dharmaśāstras*', in, Chandrakala Padia, ed., *Women in Dharmaśāstras a Phenomenological and Critical Analysis*, Rawat Publication, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 212 -213.

discrimination. It is laid down that the *Samskāras* were to be performed for the twice-born boys with Vedic *mantras* and for the girls without Vedic *mantras*. Marriage alone is the *Samskāra* in a girl's life performed with *mantras*.

### **Son in a Nambudiri Household**

The ideology of gender discrimination manifested in domestic rituals is strictly followed in a Nambudiri household. Being strong patriarchal families, the Nambudiris preferred sons to that of daughters.<sup>48</sup> The reason for such discrimination can be traced out in the nature of the Nambudiri household in pre-modern Kerala. A Nambudiri household works as the center for the procurement and distribution of resources while at the same time preserving the caste system. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* like *Manusmṛiti* states that *Āśrama* of the householder is important than other *Āśramas*.<sup>49</sup> It is the household that supports *brahmacāris* and other such beneficiaries. The household functions as a center of production, distribution, and transmission of the resources. Distribution took place in two ways. Through pooling and allocation of resources within each household and exchange and distribution. The resources received by a Nambudiri household are given to the various sections of the society in different ways. But the significant benefactors were the members of the community.

The *Gṛhasthāśrami* helps the three other *Āśramas* such as *brahmacarya*, *vānaprastha*, and *sanyāsa*. Whatever the *Gṛhastha* imparts with devotion (*śrāddha*) to the *brahmacāri*, the former receives back thousand-fold in return from heaven.<sup>50</sup> In the same way, if a *vānaprastha* is

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<sup>48</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>49</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*



given rice balls mixed with ghee, he will receive *amṛtu* from heaven.<sup>51</sup> The *Gṛhastha* should give alms to the *brahmacāri*, rice to *vānaprastha*, and alms also to the *sanyāsi*. The Smṛti text says that these three would ensure heaven to the *Gṛhastha*.

*Śāṅkarasmṛti* finds different means for the survival of each section of the community. The donation and gifts that a Nambudiri receives while participating in rituals, the rent from the serfs and a various gift from other castes make a Nambudiri household the center of the resources. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* says that only a Brahmin can perform domestic as well as *śrauta* rituals and thereby receives *dakṣiṇa*.<sup>52</sup>

A Nambudiri has to perform domestic rituals of which *auspāsanām* is the most important.<sup>53</sup> Only the eldest son in a Nambudiri household is the *Gṛhasthāśrami*.<sup>54</sup> For the same reason, the welfare of each member of the family becomes more of his responsibility than of his brothers. Along with this, he has to worship his forefathers, the gods, and guests. *Śāṅkarasmṛti*

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* says how wealth could be procured in accordance with the duties pertaining to each caste (*jātidharmam*). All castes can accept whatever has been handed down by ancestors, whatever is got as dowry, or as gift. However, only a Brahmin can receive wealth by performing *yāga*, or as gift, and through the learning of the *Vēdaśāstras*; a *Kṣatriya* can procure wealth from wars, taxes received, and from fines; a *Vaiśya* can procure wealth through agriculture, tending of cattle, and through trade; and a *Śūdra* can take whatever he receives by serving the above three castes. N.P.Unni, ed., *Op. cit.*, pp.173-75. Jaya Tyagi opines that the performance of ritual gives a householder a special power with which he can make an impact upon the prosperity of his family members and also of the cosmos. Here Tyagi quotes Olivelle who argues that the householder ‘stood at by virtues of the cosmic and social food cycles by virtues of the duties that he had to perform everyday which connected him to the various forces around him’. See, Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, pp. 241-242.

<sup>53</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* states that a householder has to perform many a ritual in the capacity of a benefactor. See, N.P. Unni., ed., *Op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

instructs that a *Gṛhasthāśrami* should perform daily *pañcayajñas*.<sup>55</sup> To propitiate the gods, *dēvayajña* (offering in the sacred fire), *bhūtayajña* (for all creatures and human beings) *pitṛyajña* (for forefathers), *brahmayajña* (learning the Vēdas), and also *niryajña* (entertaining guests). By performing all this, the sins of the *Gṛhastha* get annulled.<sup>56</sup> *Gaṇapatipūja*, *Gīta* recital, and *Sahasranāma* recital should be done by the *Gṛhastha* daily.<sup>57</sup> There are also many different types of penance. Since the *Gṛhastha* is the center of the Brahmanical world, it is his duty to do all the mundane as well as spiritual tasks necessary for its survival.

Specific duties described for *Gṛhastha* also help various communities and societies. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* tells that digging ponds, wells, giving water to cows, constructing a passengers' drinking spot (*taṅṅīrpantal*), thereby being useful to travelers, and by building temples, salvation can be attained.<sup>58</sup> Also, by planting trees, and by giving food to travelers, especially the hungry, one can achieve salvation. The *Śāṅkarasmṛti* instructs that the hungry be fed regardless of his caste.<sup>59</sup>

The rituals and the custom of hospitality provide ample opportunities for a householder to support his community members. The Nambudiris received *dakṣiṇas* for various rituals they performed like *yāgas* and *yajñas*. The Brahmin is entrusted with the responsibility of receiving *dakṣiṇa* from the rituals within the home and outside.<sup>60</sup> For most of the *Śōḍaśasamskāras*, and for *śrāddham* and penance, *dakṣiṇa* should be given. The Brahmin received donations or gifts while taking part in functions like *cōrūṇu*,

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.264.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

*jātakarmam*, and *śrāddham*. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* speaks about what donations or gifts are to be given to a Brahmin in a span of twelve months.<sup>61</sup>

*Dakṣiṇa* and the donations received would contribute to the basics of a householder's finances. They should also be appropriately distributed, says the *Smṛtis*. Entertaining guests is a means for this. *Manusmṛti* says that all holiness would flow out of the home of a householder who does not perform the hospitality rites.<sup>62</sup> Hospitality is the most important duty of a *Gṛhastha*.<sup>63</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* states that *Gṛhastha* attains heaven not through *yāga* or worship of *Agni*, but through hospitality.<sup>64</sup> *Manusmṛti* says that one should not have the food before serving the guest, for honoring the guest is a sure path to heaven.<sup>65</sup> If the guest becomes happy with the food and stay, the hardships faced by the household will be averted.<sup>66</sup> He should not accept *dakṣiṇa* from a *Śūdra*. By the compilation of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, *varṇa* ideology was crystallized. This is best expressed in the description of *dakṣiṇa*. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* clearly instructs from whom *Brāhmaṇas* can receive *dakṣiṇa*.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Such *Smṛti* rules reflect Brahmanical anxieties regarding the scarcity of resources. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

<sup>62</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp.113-114.

<sup>63</sup> All the Brahmanical texts provide special focus on hospitality.

<sup>64</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>65</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.114. *Manusmṛti* directs that only after the guests, relatives and servants are fed can a householder and his wife have food. At the same time, in this very act of guest-worship, one can see clear instances of high and low positions. For instance, the text states that, in a Brahmin's home, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, *Śūdra*, friends, guru etc. are not guests. In the same order, a *Kṣatriya* can be the guest of a Brahmin in the higher caste rung, or of another *Kṣatriya*. *Vaiśyas* and *Śūdras* will not be his guests. For a *Vaiśya*, *dvijātis* can be guests. The lowly *Śūdra* won't. By the time the *Manusmṛti* was composed, the caste system must have gained strength. The caste system is an ideological device brought by Brahmins to consolidate their Brahmanical authority.

<sup>66</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

*Śānkarasmṛti* prescribes several measures to support the members of the Brahman community. There were poor families among the Nambudiris themselves. Apart from public functions like *muṛajapam*, *vārasadya*, *ūṭṭu*, and marriages, they had also constructed social systems and regulations that enabled them to render their help within the Nambudiri households and also outsiders. For example, in many *illams*, there would be *tēvārapuras*. In the inner *tēvārapura*, the *Antarjanaṃ*, and outer, the Nambudiris performed *pūjas*.<sup>68</sup> There used to be the custom of Nambudiris from other *illams* perform the *pūjas* in the outer *tēvārapura*.<sup>69</sup> Also, Nambudiris were invited to all *Śōḍaśasamskāras* starting from *Jātakarmam* and used to be given *dakṣiṇas*. They used to be invited for *śrāddha* rites also.<sup>70</sup> The Nambudiris could go to any prosperous *illam* as guests. They would get food and clothes.<sup>71</sup> In this way, a Nambudiri *illam* was responsible for connecting community members with each other.

Certain customs prevailed among them also helped the community members who are not so prosperous. There is the ritual of seeing the baby. In this, every relative gives a gift to the child when they see the baby for the first time.<sup>72</sup> If there are occasions like marriage in a Nair or *ampalavāsi* home, they send all the necessary items for a *sadya* (feast) to the *illam*.<sup>73</sup> Sometimes, they ask for a Brahmin *sadya* to be prepared at the temple and would give the prescribed *dakṣiṇa* for the same.<sup>74</sup> If any woman of a Nair or *ampalavāsi*

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Vadakkumbattu Narayanan, Thrissur, 65 years, 08/11/2017.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Dinesan Bhattathiri, Vellakkattu Mana, Nilambur, Malappuram. 02/08/2019

<sup>70</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol.1, p. 222.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Sumangala, Dēśamangalam Mana, Vadakkancheri. 26/01/2016.

<sup>72</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol.1 p. 35.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

household gives birth, the baby is first brought to the *illam*.<sup>75</sup> They come with some gifts, in obeisance. They only see the *Antarjanaṃ*. As per the ritual, the *Antarjanaṃ* should give the baby a dhoti.<sup>76</sup> Feeding the Brahmin has been regarded as an important offering in Kerala. The king, as well as other *Gṛhasthas* or local chieftains, conduct the ritual of feeding the Brahmin. In the temple-centered culture of Kerala, food consumption of the Brahmin and their related castes is ensured by *ūṭṭu* and conducting *vārasadya* at the temple. An important aspect of domestic rituals is feeding the Brahmin and the gods. The common feature of all *pañcayajña* is the offering of food. One of the major tasks of a *Gṛhasthāśrami* is food management. Food is an important aspect of Brahmanical literature. Several creation myths are centered around food. The creator God of *Brāhmaṇas*, the Prajāpati is often portrayed both as the creator and the food of his creatures. The creation of the first beings is followed by the creation of food. In another myth, Agni, the firstborn, is known as food.<sup>77</sup> The importance is given to the purification ritual ‘*Annaprāśanam*’ shows the relation between food regulation and the human body.<sup>78</sup> Food is a vital substance, and food grains were used to be given to the Brahmin as rent from agriculture.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> Patrick Olivelle, ‘From Feast to Fast: Food and the Indian Ascetic’, in, Patrick Olivelle, ed., *Collected Essays, Vol. II, Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2008, p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Transaction of food is a major responsibility of the Brahmanical world. This responsibility has to be fulfilled by the *Gṛhasthan*. Only when food is shared does it get blessed. Hence it is the duty of a Brahmin *Gṛhasthāśrami* to share food with the *devas*, forefathers, guests, *bhikshus*, other fellow humans, and beggars. In the opinion of J.C. Heesterman, though the food is important in the *śrauta* ritual, it has more importance in the domestic ritual. Sacrifice is also an important example of the food ritual. In Brahmanical literature, food is considered an important factor. J.C. Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, p. 188.

<sup>79</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

Another major practice that supported the Nambudiri to acquire wealth was the gift from the royal families. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* explicitly states what rājadharmā is and how it should help the Nambudiri for his survival.<sup>80</sup> The king should appoint a Brahmin and make him perform domestic rituals and *yāgas* (sacrifices). The king should perform *aśvamēdhayāga* etc. He should give ample *dakṣiṇa* to the *Brāhmaṇas* as *dharmārtha*.<sup>81</sup> He should give the *Brāhmaṇas* money, grains, and a house. The treasure given to a Brahmin will never get stolen. The gift given to a Brahmin is considered loftier than *agnihōtrayāga*.<sup>82</sup> Wealth should be procured through wars and should be given to the *Brāhmaṇas*. The most estimable duty as far as a king is concerned is not to retract from wars or to look after his subjects, but to do service to *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>83</sup>

Even if he were to die in penury, a king should never collect tax from a Brahmin.<sup>84</sup> In whichever king's country a Vedic Brahmin wanders without food, that kingdom will be ruined. A reflection of this idea is seen in the practice of fasting as a form of protest that came to remain in Kerala.<sup>85</sup> If something is done against a Brahmin in Kerala, the Nambudiris would sit before the feast, but leave without taking the food.<sup>86</sup> The king, fearing that the hunger of a Brahmin would ruin a country, would fulfill their demands.<sup>87</sup> *Vārasadya* and rituals like *muṛajapam* were other things that were done to propitiate *Brāhmaṇas*. It was the Travancore kings who used to perform the

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> M.R. Raghava Variar, and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kēraḷa Caritram*, Part II, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, 2012, p. 193.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

*murajapams*, and all Nambudiris (men) would be present at the Padmanābha Swāmi temple to attend the same. Those who participated would get food, money, and grains as gifts.<sup>88</sup>

A Nambudiri household receives wealth and survives on various castes and distribute wealth among these castes for their survival. Nairs, Nambudiris, washermen, women, and blacksmiths provide multiple services to the Nambudiri household. It is impossible for an *illam* to survive even for a day without help from some Nair household.<sup>89</sup> For all types of menial jobs, Nair households are indispensable. Nair men were meant for menial work of Nambudiris, and Nair women, for Nambudiri women.<sup>90</sup> Nair men or women are accommodated in all Nambudiri *illams*. Their common names were respectively ‘*vālyakkāran*’ and ‘*irikkaṇamma*.’<sup>91</sup> ‘*Vālyakkāran*’ was regarded as a synonym for Nair men by the Nambudiris. Daily chores like washing dishes and cutting firewood were forbidden to *Brāhmaṇas*. In addition, ploughing the fields using cattle, harvesting with the sickle were also tasks that the *Brāhmaṇas* weren’t supposed to do; those were done by men belonging to another caste. Nairs were almost indispensable in the day-to-day lives of Nambudiris. If *Antarjanam* wanted to talk with men, she couldn’t do it without the intermediary of a *dāsi* (servant).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol.III, (1963), Panchangam Press, Kunnamkulam, 2003, p. 71. In Trippunithura *kōvilakam*, *chōrūṇu* and *upanayana* of Tampurāns, and marriages of girls would be solemnised by Kanippayyur Nambudiri. Expenses for travel, food, and stay will all be provided from the *kōvilakam*. In addition, they would get money and *Ōṇappuṭava* (new clothes). The *kōvilakam* has the same relationship with the four *illams*: Ōṭṭūr, Paipurathu, Pana, and Kilimangalam. They would be invited turn-wise. From this, one can understand that the Brahmins used to ensure their survival and supremacy through royal domestic rituals. See, Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, p. 126.

<sup>89</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>90</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol I, p. 22.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Interview with K.B. Sreedevi, Thrissur, 80years, 7/01/2017.

A maid servant had to be made to stand in between and be her spokesperson. Even if she wanted to go to the nearby temple, she had to be accompanied by a maid servant.<sup>93</sup> Not only in their mundane activities but also in their Vedic duties, the co-operation of Nairs was sought by Nambudiris. In some, the Nair men, in others, Nair women and in yet some others, both the categories had to help. In this way, those households who helped the Nambudiri family in all activities were commonly called *aṭiyārs*.<sup>94</sup> After menstruation, when a woman took a bath on the fourth day, some women from the *aṭiyār* household had to help the Nambudiri woman to be declared pure.<sup>95</sup> If an *Antarjanam* gives birth to a child, till the end of the defilement period, which lasted ten days, an *aṭiyātti* had to be there to look after her.<sup>96</sup> During this period, nobody else was allowed to touch the midwife, and also the things they touched; same was the case during menstruation, with the menstruating woman; if incense they touched, *puṇyāham* (sprinkling holy water) also had to be done.<sup>97</sup>

On special occasions, carpenter, blacksmith, and the rest, in accordance with the position related to their caste, had to bring materials or articles and present a gift to the *illam*, known as '*Ōṇamvekkuka*.'<sup>98</sup> A carpenter would present *ōṇavillu*, *āvaṇapalaka*, small wooden ladle, etc. *Mūsāri* would give small *aṭappan* (vessel in which *nūru* is kept), the *caṭṭukam* to take *nūru* out of it (*nūrṛucaṭṭukam*), small *ōṭam* (boat), *ceppittōṇṭi*, etc.; the goldsmith would make *cempumōtiram*, tiny

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, p. 23.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Parvathy Antarjanam, Nenminimangalam, Thrissur, 77 years, 31/12/2015.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, p. 29.



*cempukiṅṅam*, and coat with silver, and the *karuvan*(blacksmith) makes *kaṛikkatti*(kitchen knife).<sup>99</sup> The *kaṇiyān paṇikkar* should foretell the year's events. The *kuṛavan* should present a basket. This practice is also called *ōṇakkālca*.<sup>100</sup> The *pulayan* brings the mud for making *thrikkākkarappan* for *Ōṇam*. The *Chāliyan* would bring small dhoti, the *chakkan* oil, the *tōlkollan* (tanner) small slippers; every craftsman would present something related to their trade.<sup>101</sup>

Presents would be returned to them as a mark of gratitude. This is commonly known as 'aḷavu,' or 'ōṇaḷavu.'<sup>102</sup> The things on the list were rice, *pappad*, banana, salt, coconut oil, and the like. Besides, coconut and yam would also be given if circumstances permit.<sup>103</sup> 'Aḷavu' was given to everyone who came to *illam* irrespective of caste. It goes without saying that new clothes and dhoti would be given during *Ōṇam*. The quantity of the *aḷavu* and the quality of the *dhoti* would vary.<sup>104</sup>

There is a custom called 'neyyujapam' during pregnancy.<sup>105</sup> It should start on an auspicious day. The ritual consists of chanting *mantra* by *Brāhmaṇas* while giving butter to the pregnant woman. For the first pregnancy, in accordance with the affordability of each household, more *Brāhmaṇas* would be called for chanting, and *mantrasankhya* would be higher.<sup>106</sup> *Dakṣiṇa* would also be given accordingly. If the Nambudiri is not so wealthy, he himself will chant the *mantras*. On the tenth day after delivery,

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

there is a custom called *eṇṇavīttu*. The midwife should apply oil and bathe the Nambudiri woman that morning. The idea is to give what is left to the poor.<sup>107</sup> For the first boy child, oil would be in tins, and what was left would be distributed. The oil wouldn't be given in vessels. It would be poured on the head.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, we can observe that the Nambudiri household was the link that ties together social relations along with their hierarchies. Different castes had different rituals to be performed in a Nambudiri household. Untouchability, *tīṇṭāppāṭu* etc. were used to ensure the supremacy of Nambudiris as an ideology.<sup>109</sup>

The Nair men and women had to be there in the Nambudiri household to help them in all kinds of work. In household chores, the Nair women used to assist *Antarjanam*, look after the children, and accompany them as *dāsis* (maids) when they went out. Nair men would be present to help in matters concerned with outside of the home. The livelihood of these people was dependent on the Nambudiri household. Likewise, there were various *ampalavāsi* castes who helped the Nambudiri in the temple. The carpenter and the blacksmith were allowed to enter the Nambudiri house with their tools.<sup>110</sup> The *maṇṇātti* (washerwoman) was an indispensable servant in a Nambudiri household.<sup>111</sup> In *śrāddhakarma*, the help of *śītikan* is required.<sup>112</sup> Each *illam* would have separate *aṭiyānmār* (tenants or bonded laborers). On special

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinṇe Innalekaḷ*, (1990), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015. p. 162.

<sup>110</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>111</sup> The Nambudiri becomes free from all sorts of defilement only if he wears a dhoti washed by the washer woman. For instance, when the *antarjanam* is menstruating, as well as after her delivery, she has to wear the clothes washed by the washer woman.

<sup>112</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol.I, p. 25.

occasions, they give *dakṣiṇa* to the *illam*.<sup>113</sup> In addition, they give offerings to the family deity of the *illam*. Not only this, but a person also becomes *aṭiyār* of an *illam* by submitting *tirumulkkālca* to the *antarjanaṃ* and Nambudiris.<sup>114</sup>

The Nambudiris used to appropriate wealth, grains, and other materials necessary for a house through performing certain rituals. The different castes would get something in return from these households. This used to be the practice for festivals like *Viṣu*, *Ōṇam*, *Tiruvātira*, etc.<sup>115</sup> Apart from this, these *aṭiyānmār* would be served food as well. The women, as well as servants of the *illam*, would get food or equivalent measure of paddy from there. The servants would carry the news of the birth of the first child after marriage to the relatives.<sup>116</sup> The servant who did this would get presents in keeping with the economic status of the *illam*. For all this, the latter would get a gift from the *illam* sufficient for their subsistence. If the Nambudiri survives by way of alms received from various castes, *tirumulkkālca*, and rent received from tenants, these different castes were sustained through the distribution of resources by the Nambudiri for the various services and rituals.

Thus, a Nambudiri householder enjoyed power over his family members and the members of society. This power was exercised by the eldest son only. A Nambudiri household represents different hierarchies, such as the hierarchy between the eldest son and other male members of the family, the hierarchy between rich and poor members of the community, the hierarchy between various social categories and gender hierarchies. The gender hierarchies or segregation is the most significant characteristic of a Nambudiri

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>116</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

household. Within the *illam* itself, the spaces of men and women are demarcated. It is evident in the physical construction of the *illam* itself.<sup>117</sup>

A Nambudiri *illam* is not only a site that controlled production but also the reproduction. The feminine spaces were dominated, encroached, and also regulated. They were incorporated into the ritualistic world of the householder but marginalized. Women are important as mothers of male progeny but denied agency. It is the eldest male member of the family who had exercised power, and he was considered as the perpetuator of the patrilineal line of the family.<sup>118</sup> All other male members also had space though minimalised in the household. But women were not acknowledged as indispensable, and the gender discrimination within the family begins from the *Ṣōḍaśasamskāra* itself. Apart from this, the Nambudiri received services from various castes because they could reserve the ideological supremacy of being a high caste. They will lose this supreme position if the purity of the caste is violated. So, it

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<sup>117</sup> Distinct spatial differences can be found in the construction and use of Brahmin houses. A Brahmin house consists of a main *nālukeṭṭu* and around it two or more buildings. The woman used to stay in the main *nālukeṭṭu*, and the men, in the other buildings. The kitchen, the *tevārapura*, and the central courtyard would be in the main *nālukeṭṭu*. Within the *nālukeṭṭu*, the space for the woman was just what was called '*paṭiññāri*'. They had no freedom to come to the drawing room, or step out of the house. The main *tēvārapura* and *pūjas* were of the male. Women had separate prayer rooms. The Nambudiri houses are so designed that the women wouldn't be able to see any men other than their father, husband, or son. When programmes like Kathakali were staged, the women had the permission to view only from a covered area. Even the house was so designed that they had restrictions for entry into certain spaces. Along with it, restrictions were imposed on emotional spaces as well. The women couldn't laugh or talk aloud, or partake in any entertainments. They were allowed to sing only Kathakali songs and Tiruvātira songs, and, learning dance and music were denied to them. Thus, both the physical as well as emotional spaces of a woman in the home were filled with darkness and silence.

<sup>118</sup> The property of Nambudiri *Illam* was managed by the eldest son of the family. Writing about *Ūrālar* of temples, M.G.S. Narayanan observes that the term *Ūrālar* did not signify the chosen representative of an assembly of all the inhabitants of the *Ūr* or village but only the eldest male member of landowning brahmin families who were the trustees and managers of the property of the temple. M.G.S. Narayanan, 'The God-Presidents of Agrarian Corporations in Ancient Kerala', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 48, 1987, p. 125. This clearly shows that from the earlier times itself the eldest son was regarded as the owner of the property.

became inevitable for them to subjugate their women and control their contacts with the men of other castes. This led to the insistence of the girls to become chaste women, an inevitable need. The sixteen *Samskāras* make an attempt to prepare the girls to regulate and restrict their lives in accordance with patriarchal norms. At the same time, as Jaya Tyagi points out, male members were also prepared for the rituals and socio-economic role they have to play in the future.<sup>119</sup> As the male members are the perpetuators of family, the Nambudiri household gave prominence to the birth of a son.

The desire for the son begins with the Mantras in marriage rituals. The mantras during the marriage of a Nambudiri clearly show this. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* stipulates how the couple who wish for a son should hold their fingers.<sup>120</sup> During the *pāṇigrahaṇa*, the husband is asked to hold his wife's thumb if he desires a male child and her fingers if he desires a female child.<sup>121</sup> 'Surprisingly, this is the only occasion where the wish for a girl child is expressed.' At the same time, the decision making is taken by the husband, and the wife agrees silently.<sup>122</sup> She is obedient and submissive.<sup>123</sup> The *sūkta* during the ceremony asks for the birth of a son. In the second *hōmam* (sacrifice) of the marriage ceremony, the groom asks the bride to give him a son.<sup>124</sup> It is a male child who is wished through chants even from the time of

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<sup>119</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household, Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras, Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 179.

<sup>120</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.* p. 199.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household, Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 155.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *O bride may you be the one  
who gives birth to male progeny  
O Indra kindly bless her to become  
the mother of good sons and Soubhāgyavati  
and may I the husband be made the eleventh person*

wedding. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* states that “a couple without a son would be looked down upon by the departed manes as they have failed to provide an heir to offer the oblation of rice (*piṇḍa*) and *udaka*. A *Brāhmaṇa* should die only after seeing the face of his son, who is the foremost authority to offer oblation. The offerings of *piṇḍa* given in the holy temples, pilgrimage to holy places undertaken by the son will help the departed manes to reach heaven.<sup>125</sup> Thus, it is the son who helps the father to attain *mōkṣa* and, the prayer during the marriage ceremony seeks male progeny.

The next ritual is called *garbhadānam*, which is the act of conceiving. It may perhaps because one of the *Śōḍaśasamskāras* that *garbhadānam* is regarded as a Brahmanical ritual. The husband approaches the wife after fixing an auspicious time and chanting *mantras*. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* explains the proper time for a man to approach his wife. A man who ignores the menstruation period of his wife is regarded as a sinner.<sup>126</sup> The *Smṛti* texts forbid sexual activity during the day and instruct that one should not approach his wife with desire except for the purpose of begetting a son.<sup>127</sup> From this, it could be gathered that *garbhadānam* for the *Brāhmaṇas*, and especially for the Nambudiri, was more of a ritual than a natural process.

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*to receive her love*

*may her love which was once directed to me alone*

*be diverted among the ten sons and only remaining be given to me.* See, Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>125</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>126</sup> Not only *Śāṅkarasmṛti* but also *Smṛti* texts like the *Manusmṛti*, the *Kāmasūtras* and *Gṛhyasūtras* talk about the proper time of conception.

<sup>127</sup> Prayers were for invoking luck, and for the birth of virtuous sons. There were *illams* which made offerings at temples for the birth of *uṇṇis*. After the birth of *uṇṇis*, every month there would be offerings at the temple for their longevity. There was the custom of adoption in *illams* where no sons were born. However, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* does not mention adopting girl children.

All rituals connected to *garbhadānam* are male-centered. After *aupāsana hōmam*, followed by Gaṇapati *pūja*, and *Brāhmaṇas* being presented with jasmine flowers and *chāndu*, followed by gifting *dakṣiṇas*, the householder should enter the room after adorning himself with *chāndu*. There also he circumambulates the bed, adorns the lamp with jasmine garland, and goes to sleep with his wife in a ritualistic manner. It is instructed that this should go on for twelve days. The room is sprinkled with *puṇyāham* and purified before and after they sleep together.<sup>128</sup> All this is done by the householder. This indicates that *Garbhadānam* is regarded as a sacred act. Also, it is an example of Brahmanical patriarchal ideology making its entry into private spaces of people because of the presence of Brahmin priests is to bring them, especially women, under control.<sup>129</sup> The manner in which the conception was projected points out the crucial role of males in achieving conception and determining the sex of the child.<sup>130</sup>

When the wife gets pregnant, the first rite is *Puṃsavana*. Jaya Tyagi writes that “the *Puṃsavana* rite is to be held in the third month of pregnancy as Brahmanical thought on the physiology of a child envisaged that the sex of the child is determined during that time.”<sup>131</sup> The word *Puṃsavana* itself means the desire for *puruṣapraja* (male progeny).<sup>132</sup> At the time of the ritual of *Puṃsavana*, the pregnant women were given curd, beans, and barley in her hand and asked certain questions.<sup>133</sup> She replies *Puṃsavana*, indicating the

<sup>128</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Pakaḷiyam Caṭangu*, p. 54.

<sup>129</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 161.

<sup>130</sup> Jaya Tyagi, ‘Hierarchical Projections of Women in the Household: Brahmanical Perceptions Recorded in the Early Gṛhyasūtras c.800-500 BC’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 32, No. 5/6, May - June 2004, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p.158.

<sup>132</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Pakaḷiyam Caṭangu*, p.106.

<sup>133</sup> *What are you having?*

consumption of the medicine is for getting male progeny.<sup>134</sup> Following this, the husband chants the mantra for getting more male children.<sup>135</sup> This ritual completely neglects the female child, and the wife is nothing but a tool that carries the male child.<sup>136</sup>

From the time a woman gets pregnant, the *vārams* and other Vedic rituals begin. Mantras should be chanted every day, and the Nambudiri woman should prostrate before god Brahma twelve times.<sup>137</sup> These are for begetting a son.<sup>138</sup> They should pray to Pārvati and Śiva and prostrate before them. Also, they should face the rising sun while praying to the Sun god. This is for a noble son to be born.<sup>139</sup> In addition, they should chant *mantras* like *santānagōpālam* and make offerings at temples. It was ensured that when people outside the household were fed, pregnant women and sons should not eat the leftover of what is eaten by people other than *Brāhmaṇas*. That is, there is a strict rule that the leftover of the *Nivēdyam* that has been served at

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*What is the medicine (Oṣadham)*

*You are now consuming for?* See, Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *May the sperm of pumān enter your womb,  
May a brave son born to you  
May the pumān son born to you attain glory,  
May he be praised by everybody  
and may more sons be born  
Following him, Ibid., p. 28.*

<sup>136</sup> Jaya Tyagi argues that the objects used in this ritual resemble male genitals and are of masculine characteristics and though this ritual the Brahmanical ideology controls all events in the household. See, Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>137</sup> These mantras are not Vedic Mantras, Interview with Sumangala, 26/01/2016.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanagaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 33.



the temple should not be eaten by boys.<sup>140</sup> This means that the food given to those who are not *Brāhmaṇas* is considered impure. Boys should not eat impure food. This is not so with girls, for the existence of the *tarāvāṭu* is in the hands of the boy child.

In the fourth month *sīmantōtyana* is performed. The ritual uses the male-oriented language and indicates that the objective of this rite is the safe birth of a son.<sup>141</sup> The mantras of this ritual asks for a *puruṣapraja*.<sup>142</sup> Among the Nambudiris this is normally done for the first baby only. At the end of this ritual, another Brahmin woman should accompany the pregnant woman inside the house.<sup>143</sup> The Brahmin woman should be *sumangali* and the mother of a son. Here also, one can notice the importance given to the boy child. This is a ritual that projects the theory that a woman's existence is dependent on the husband and the son.

When the child is born, the first rite is *jātakarma*. It is a way to strengthen the bond between the father and the son.<sup>144</sup> The father has to give the child butter, honey, and gold dust from a gold vessel. It should be done before any person touches him. Hence the honey stands for wisdom, ghee for long life, and gold for prosperity.<sup>145</sup> The father then chants in his child's ear,

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<sup>140</sup> Kannishamattathu Sreedevi Antarjanam, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>141</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 166.

<sup>142</sup> *O lord Vishnu*

*Kindly bless me*

*With a son.* See, Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>143</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 167.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

verses invoking *Savitṛ*, *Saraswati*, and *Aśvins* to give the child intelligence and ask him to be strong and immovable like an axe, a stone, or like gold.<sup>146</sup>

*Jātakarma* should be performed within two days of birth. The father is given the right to do this, and in his absence, any Nambudiri can do that. However, no woman, including the mother, has the right to do it. After the child is four months old, the ritual of *vātilpuṛappāṭu* is done.<sup>147</sup> The child first sees the world outside on that day. Although the mother also participates in this, it is the father who carries him, circumambulates any sacred tree like the coconut tree or jackfruit tree, and hands the child back to the mother.<sup>148</sup> Thus, it is the father who first connects the child with the outside world among Nambudiris. Women have no connection with the outside world. The next ritual is *annaprāśanam*. Though this doesn't require the father, a Nambudiri who is a relative or acquaintance is mandatory. The child is fed rice initially by the father, followed by others. The mother feeds him last. The rice for *cōrūṇu* is prepared by a Brahmin.<sup>149</sup> However, the ritual of '*nēdikkal*' (offering) should be performed by the mother of the child.<sup>150</sup>

Another important ritual is *nāmakaraṇam*(naming). It is done on the twelfth day of the child's birth. The girl child is named soon after twelve days following her birth. It is believed that if this is delayed, her marriage also would be delayed. The naming is done by the father. Here it is interesting to note who performs the rituals for the child. As the mother was considered as impure for a certain period after giving birth, it is the father who performs all

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<sup>146</sup> Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit*, p. 36.

<sup>147</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

the rituals. The mother is marginalised or neglected. It is the father who does the *nāmakaraṇam* of the child with mantras.<sup>151</sup>

Next important *Samskāra* is the *Chauḷa* or the tonsure of the child's head.<sup>152</sup> This ritual among the Nambudiris is performed with the help of the *Śītikan*. The father chants the mantra asking for long life of his son.<sup>153</sup> Each time the child's hair is cut, the father should give it to the mother, who has to put it in the cow-dung pit. This is to ensure that no one else is able to touch it. This ritual also is performed by the father.<sup>154</sup> This ritual is significant that it marks the beginning of the practice of purity-impurity by the child. After *Chauḷam*, if anyone from other castes say a Nair, touches the child, he becomes impure. The survival of a Nambudiri household is dependent on the ideology of purity and pollution. This commences with the ritual of *Chauḷam*.<sup>155</sup> Another ritual is piercing the earlobe (*karṇavēdham*). The ear is pierced by a Brahmin priest. The Brahmin wears a *Pavitramōtiram* (a sacred ring) and pierces the ear of a boy. While doing the *karṇavēdham* of girls, the priests do not wear *Pavitramōtiram*. *Pavitramōtiram* is made of *darbha* grass

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>152</sup> Almost all the important rules of Brahmanas are connected with the shaving of hair. *Chauḷa*, *Upanayana* and *Gōdānakarma* are examples. The final rite of passage is funeral. In the Brahmanical funeral the head or even the body is shaved prior to cremation. For a discussion of the importance of hair in Brahmanical world, see, Patrick Olivelle, *Collected Essays, Vol.1, Language, Texts and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion*, pp. 321-351..

<sup>153</sup> *With what Dhātri has shaven*

*The head of Brihaspati, Agni and Indra.*

*For the sake of long life*

*With that I shave*

*They head for the sake of*

*Long life glory and welfare.* See, Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>154</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 182.

<sup>155</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 8.

and worn while participating in rituals and *yāgas*. The ring is also considered sacred like *yāga* and *yajña*. This ritual proves that only men could perform this. This is meant to train girls from their young age itself to think that they don't have *yajñādhikāram* and *yāgādhikāram*.

In the *Śōḍaśasamskāras*, *Upanayana* or initiation is very important for the male child. The ritual of *Upanayana* is significant because it is through this ritual that a boy becomes *dvija* or twice-born.<sup>156</sup> *Upanayana* is a constructive and transformative ritual. The ritual initiates three kinds of new births for an individual, a birth into a particular socio-ontological class, into the world of knowledge under the guidance of a teacher, and into the world of sacrifice.<sup>157</sup>

The word *Upanayana* means opening the eye, practically by placing under the care of the *ācārya*. Rig Vēda specifically mentions the importance of *Upanayana*.<sup>158</sup> With the submission of the student before the teacher (*ācārya*), Brahmanical supremacy and the authority of the Brahmin over Vēdas are monopolised. *Upanayana*, principally is an act of imparting the sacred Gāyatri Mantra.<sup>159</sup> The ritual assures the Brahmanical dominance over knowledge and transfer the right of knowledge to next generation.<sup>160</sup> All

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<sup>156</sup> N.P. Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>157</sup> Brian K. Smith, 'Ritual, Knowledge, and Being: Initiation and Vēda Study in Ancient India', *Numen* Vol. 33, Fasc.1, Brill, Jun., 1986, p. 66.

<sup>158</sup> P V Kane, *History of the Dharmasatras (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law)*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona 1941, p. 139.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, p. 193.

those who performed ‘*Upanayana*’ acquired the status of twice-born, but all the twice-born are not treated equally.<sup>161</sup>

Though there have been many arguments on whether women had the right to do *Upanayana* in the Vedic period, later, by the time of *Dharmasūtras*, *Gṛhyasūtras*, *Smṛtis*, etc., women were fully excluded from learning Vēda. When the spaces for the man and the woman were determined, the woman was excluded from the realm of knowledge.<sup>162</sup> This is expressed by the absence of the ritual *Upanayana* for girls. The entry of the boy into the male-centered Brahmanical world begins with *Upanayana*.

The word ‘*Upanayana*’ means to bring closer or to take someone close to somebody (here it is *ācārya*).<sup>163</sup> The rituals of *Upanayana* include the wearing of sacred thread and reciting the *Gāyatri* mantra. *Upanayana* can be conducted from seven to sixteen years of age.<sup>164</sup> “A Brahmin should be initiated in the spring, a *Kṣatriya* in the summer, and a *Vaiśya* in the autumn; a Brahmin in the eighth year from conception, a *Kṣatriya* in the eleventh, and a *Vaiśya* in the twelfth. When initiations are performed with an objective in mind, a person seeking eminence in Vedic knowledge should be initiated in the seventh year, a person seeking long life in the eighth, a person seeking power in the ninth, a person seeking an abundance of food in the tenth, a person seeking strength in the eleventh, and a person seeking cattle in the twelfth. In the case of a Brahmin, there is no lapse in postponing the initiation until the sixteenth year, in the case of a *Kṣatriya* until the twenty-second year, and in the case of a *Vaiśya* until the twenty-fourth year, so as to

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<sup>161</sup> Kumkum Roy, ‘Legitimation and the Brahmanical Tradition: The *Upanayana* and the *Brahmacarya* in the Dharma Sutras’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1985, p. 138.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>163</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 320.

<sup>164</sup> The *Dharmasūtras* and *Smṛti* texts like *Manusmṛti* suggest proper time for *upanayana*.

ensure that the person has the capacity to carry out the observances that we are about to describe”.<sup>165</sup> This ritual is also conducted by the father on an auspicious day.<sup>166</sup>

The major performers in the *Upanayana* are *ācārya* and the student.<sup>167</sup> When the *ācārya* who taught the boy dies, the boy is expected to offer death rite. This means that boy and *ācārya* share a father-son relationship. The *ācārya* performs the rite of *Mēdhājñānam* (production of intelligence) in *Upanayana*. The same rite is done by a father when a child is born. This means that *Upanayana* is a second birth.

The boy initiated receives his first alms (*bhikṣa*) from his mother. Jaya Tyagi observes this as the first step towards severance from the boy’s childhood and his mother.<sup>168</sup> This custom gives precedence to the mother. *Upanayana* alone is the ritual in the Brahmanical ideology, which gives the mother a prominent role. All other rituals neglect the role of the mother. This is to show that it is the child’s relationship with the mother that is severed, and not with the father.<sup>169</sup>

*Upanayana* is a ritual that makes the men conform to the Brahmanical tradition. *Upanayana* and study of Vēdas are enforced on the Nambudiris with strict caveats. These are the rituals that make a Brahmin boy’s entry into the narrow Brahmanical world, which is based on the purity-impurity concepts and is ritually bound. Initiation and the daily use of mantras form the

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<sup>165</sup> Patrick Olivelle, ed. and tr., *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasiṣṭha*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 25-27.

<sup>166</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, p. 181.

<sup>167</sup> P.V.Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>168</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gr̥hyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

defining mark of the elite class.<sup>170</sup> For the same reason, it is to be strictly followed. Bruce Lincoln, who conducted a study on rites of the passage, says that every rite will cause physical and ideological changes in the individual.<sup>171</sup> The above two rituals give passage for the boy into the most privileged Nambudiri community. This being exclusive rite of Nambudiri males, which bestow them special privileges, the woman and other castes are excluded from the ritual. The rite of *Upanayana* helps to perpetuate Vedic learning and its monopoly by Brahmanical male order. The rite marginalized women, by denying them the right to learning. A boy after initiation is to be introduced into a separate and distinct world full of privileges and responsibilities.<sup>172</sup> Kumkum Roy argues that rites like upanayana and *brahmacārya* indicate the hierarchy of privileges.<sup>173</sup> This is true in the case of Nambudiris. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* tries to legitimate the special privilege of Nambudiri by denying Vedic learning to all other varṇas. It is the power of knowledge that made them superior in society.

The initiate should be celibate until the time he completes Vedic learning. Their life at this time is completely ritual bound. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* insists on the duties of a *brahmacāri* boy, the food he should avoid, the way he should behave, etc.<sup>174</sup> They are expected to speak Sanskrit only.

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<sup>170</sup> Timothy Lubin, 'The Transmission, Patronage, and Prestige of Brahmanical Piety from the Mauryas to the Guptas', in, Federico Squarcini, ed., *Boundaries, Dynamics and Constructions of Traditions in South Asia*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2005, p. 88.

<sup>171</sup> Bruce Lincoln, 'Emerging From the Chrysalis', cited in, Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 193.

<sup>172</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian Society* (2010), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 124.

<sup>173</sup> Kumkum Roy, 'Legitimation and the Brahmanical Tradition: The *Upanayana* and the *Brahmacarya* in the Dharma Sutras', p. 142.

<sup>174</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 180- 184. The control on food, thought and speech enable the student to become a better, stronger and knowledgeable person. If mistakes happened

*Śānkarasmṛti* dictates that the boy should not have contact with women even in his dreams. The *Smṛtikāraṅka* also recommends ways to the atonement of the sin of sexual transgression during Vedic studies.<sup>175</sup> Jaya Tyagi says that *brahmacāris* are told to keep away from women, and sexual activity seems to have a deeper meaning than just control over their sexuality.<sup>176</sup> It implies that women are to be kept away from Vedic learning.<sup>177</sup>

*Upanayana* was a compulsory rite for a Brahman boy. Men who are not initiated are to be ostracized socially and forbid everyone from communicating with them. Kanippayyur remembers that the children in the neighbourhood who had already completed the ritual of *Upanayana* used to tease him when his initiation got delayed.<sup>178</sup> The sacred thread and Vedic learning are the symbols of Brahminhood, of the powers it bestows on those wearing it, and of the extent of the rituals on performing *Upanayana*, the body acquired the *dvija* status or was reborn. The second birth was considered as the best as it was spiritual as opposed to the earlier physical birth. The *dvija* could study the Vēdas, offer sacrifices, make gifts; that is, he alone could participate in rituals and possessed the special rights and privileges in the

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during the studies, punishment was very severe. See, M.N. Paloor, *Kathayillāttavante katha*, Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2015, p. 25.

<sup>175</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 183. The protagonist of the novel 'yajñam' by K.B. Sreedevi engaged in sexual intercourse with a Nambudiri woman when he was a Vedic student. Years later that woman, suspected of adultery was put to trial and the boy was leading a happy life. Still he was excommunicated because of the sin he had committed during Vedic learning. See, K.B. Sreedevi, 'Yajñam', Poorna Publications, Kozhikode, 1992, p. 65.

<sup>176</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, p. 202.

<sup>177</sup> The *brahmacāris* had not only refrain from sexual intercourse but had to avoid even touching, seeing or talking to women. Even after the studentship was over, the Vēdas could not be recited on the night of conjugal intercourse. It implies that the study of the Vēdas and contact with women are consolidated to be mutually exclusive activities. See, Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian Society*, p. 162.

<sup>178</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṅakaḷ*, Vol.I, p. 162.



*varṇa* based hierarchy.<sup>179</sup> *Upanayana* was a means by which class and caste differentiations were actualized, and individuals were placed on a hierarchical order.<sup>180</sup> The *Smṛti* texts like *Manu* make a clear differentiation in the matter of proper age of initiation for three higher *varṇas*. *Brāhmaṇas*, according to *Manu* and *Dharmasūtrakāras*, are able to initiate at an early age compared to *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*. But *Śāṅkarasmṛti* permits *Brāhmaṇas* alone to initiate and learn *Vēdas*. The *Smṛti* states thus, “Here only the initiated Brahmin is fit to be instructed in Vedic lore, and hence he alone should remain in the house of a preceptor, for the others have no right to the study of *Vēdas*.”<sup>181</sup>

*Samāvarttana* and *Gōdāna* are the last rites of Vedic studies. *Gōdāna karma* is the transition of a person from a *brahmacāri* to an intelligent male. Like *Upanayana*, *Samāvarttana* and *Gōdāna* are not performed for girls. *Samāvarttana* is a ritual bath.<sup>182</sup> Through this ritual bath, a child who is a *brahmacāri* comes to be regarded as an elite member of the community. The eldest son who reaches the Nambudiri home after *Samāvarttana* enters *Gārhastya* after *vēli*.<sup>183</sup> The rite of *Samāvarttana* among Nambudiris,

<sup>179</sup> The sacred thread is a symbol of Brahminhood and that is why, during the social reform movement V.T. Bhatathirippad asks the Nambudiri men to break off the sacred thread throw it away and become human. The shaving of *Kuṭuma* was also a symbol of resistance to Brahmin hood during those days. V.T. Bhattathirippad remembers his day of initiation thus: ‘There comes about a change in my thought process: I felt that I was elevated to a position higher than the ordinary people. I felt I was glorious Brahman and others *Śūdras* and thus categorizing people as binaries of noble and mean’. See, V.T.Bhattathirippad, *VTyūṭe Sampūrṇa Kritikaḷ*, p.184.

<sup>180</sup> Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1998, p. 95.

<sup>181</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>182</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early *Gṛhyasūtras* Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, p. 226.

<sup>183</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* instructs that younger male members should remain *brahmacāris* all through their lives. However, since this is not always practical, the *Śāṅkarasmṛti* legitimises practices like *sambandham*. Here one can notice the difference between *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and the other *Smṛtis*. *Manusmṛti* directs that a Brahmin cannot have relations with a *Śūdra* woman. However, in Kerala, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* and *Śāṅkarasmṛti* permit relationship with a *Śūdra* woman. This rule which was brought in

according to P. Narayanan, was different from *Brāhmaṇas* of the rest of India. This is deeply associated with the peculiar marriage custom of Nambudiris. Most of the *Brāhmaṇas* of India perform ‘*Samāvarttana*’ on the eve of the day of marriage. But the Nambudiri perform the rite towards the end of *brahmacarya*. This peculiarity was due to the custom of Nambudiris, among whom the eldest son alone marries from the community. All others were entered into *Sambandham* alliance with Nair, ampalavāsi women. *Sambandham* is devoid of any rites or *Mantras*. This led to the custom of performing *Samāvarttana* soon after the completion of one’s education.<sup>184</sup>

The *Smṛtis* instruct that a student, after the completion of his studies, can enter into the *Āśrama* of *Gārhastya*. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* stipulates that, to avoid the partition of family property, the eldest son can marry and others continue their lives as celibate or *snātakas*.<sup>185</sup> The *Samskāras* thus glorify the lives of a boy because it was he who ensures the perpetuation of *varṇa* hierarchy in the society and gender hierarchy in the household. In all the rituals at home, the father had superiority, and in society, a Brahmin male had the superiority. However, in domestic rituals, there are areas where a woman’s role is prominent. Caring for the child is the mother’s responsibility. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* elucidates in a chapter how mothers should perform child caring activities and

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for the economic sustenance of Nambudiris adversely affected the lives of Nambudiri women. Another fact is that after *Samāvarttanam*, a man can choose to continue to remain celibate all his life if he wishes. However, a woman has no such right. Intense devotion, celibacy, or *sanyāsam* were not allowed for the woman. The sacred activity of procreation was the main dharma of a Brahmin woman in society.

<sup>184</sup> P. Narayanan, ‘Towards Understanding Nambootiri Samavartana’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* Vol. 57, 1996, p. 213.

<sup>185</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 236-38. The birth of the first son was regarded as significant because the father with his first son thought to be free from his debts. The eldest son is considered as being born through *dharma*, with all other sons, having symbolic of *Kāma* or desire.

how boys should be brought up.<sup>186</sup> Another important ritual is *Upanayana*, where the mother gives the first alms.<sup>187</sup>

*Ṣōḍaśasamskāras* very clearly promotes gender hierarchy. There are two types of gender discriminations expressed in domestic rituals. First, all the rituals were performed for boys with the accompaniment of *mantras*, and for the girls, without *mantras*. This is the first step of excluding the girl from learning Vēdas. Second, all the rituals are performed by the father or any male relative. Mothers or women were denied the right to do the rituals. This clearly shows that the role of women in Brahmanical patriarchy is limited to procreation.

Among the Nambudiris, the eldest boy enjoys the rituals in their fullest form. Since the perpetuation of Brahmanical supremacy rests with the eldest son, the younger boys in a Nambudiri household are also neglected, like the girls. V.T. Bhattathiripad writes in his autobiography that in his next birth, he would like to reborn as a dog or cat but not as the younger member of a Nambudiri household.<sup>188</sup> It clearly indicates the extremely disciplined life even among the boys in a Nambudiri *illam*. The only difference is that they do not have to undergo gender discrimination, as in the case of the girls.

### **Daughters in Nambudiri Household: From Girlhood to Womanhood**

The life of a Nambudiri girl is described as by V.T. Bhattathiripad as follows. “Anyone with the name Srīdēvi has been, due to the fact that the name is too beautiful, came to be called ‘*Itṭichiri*.’ When she attains puberty, she was forbidden to see anyone outside and had to spend the rest of her life within the four walls of *illam*. Eventually, her father gives her to an old

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245-247

<sup>187</sup> In the Nambudiri community there are rare occasions in which the woman does the offerings at least within their restricted space.

<sup>188</sup> V.T.Bhattathirippadu, *VTyūṭe Sampūrṇa Kritikaḷ*, p. 186.

Nambudiri. All her hopes of happiness become crippled in the fire of being one of the many wives or having an older man as her husband. Finally, one day she becomes a widow”.<sup>189</sup>

A daughter in a Nambudiri household is an unsolicited person. She is regarded as a misfortune. Right from the birth itself, their lives encounter discrimination, disappointments, and sorrows. The Nambudiri community considers everything else except their death as an ill omen. A son’s birth is accompanied by boisterous howls of joy and sending of errands all around with the news. The birth of a girl is accompanied by certain discordant sounds signifying inauspiciousness. If an errand goes with the news of the birth of a boy, he is received with a gift of the dhoti. Whereas if it’s about the birth of a girl, it is received with remark ‘unfortunate.’<sup>190</sup> Events like the tenth day of a boy’s birth, his *annaprāśana*, as well as his first birthday, are celebrated with joy; the same is observed for a girl without celebration.<sup>191</sup> If it is a boy, the father was considered as fortunate. If it is a girl, he is a sinner.

In the Brahmanical tradition, a daughter was an unwanted child because it was the son who performed the *śrāddha* ceremony and was responsible for the continuation of the patriarchal household. It was he who inherits the property and becomes the head of the family after the death of the father. Daughters are protected by father and gave away as *kanyādān* for their

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>190</sup> Devaki Nilayangode remembers that in those days if the child was a boy, servants ululated in joy and announced the happy event. If it is a girl, the Nair maid servants conveyed the news with soft knocks on the door and in muted whispers. She was born on the Tiruvōṇam day in the month of Eṭavam. There were no joyous shouts. Only soft knocks on the doors. See, Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>191</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, p. 82.

husbands. They were like the commodities or properties exchanged between father and husband.<sup>192</sup>

A daughter is considered as a burden because of the customs of dowry and the risk of safeguarding her virginity. The heavy dowries of the Nambudiri caste impoverished several *illams*. Unable to give dowry, many of them remained spinsters.<sup>193</sup> It was not an uncommon practice that the girls from poor families were married off to the *vaṭakkuninnuḷḷa brāhmaṇan* (*Brāhmaṇas* from the north) from Kerala- Karnataka borders. In reality, such girls were sold off as prostitutes at Sirsi in Karnataka. Devaki Nilayangode writes that in those days, there were two or more grown up girls in most of the Nambudiri families, who continued to stay at the paternal *illam*, unmarried till the age of twenty or thirty, and it was not unusual for some poor fathers to sell their daughters to unknown men in the name of marriage. She says she was a witness to such a tragedy.<sup>194</sup>

Safeguarding the virginity of an unmarried girl was a difficult task. All the *Smṛtikāras* insist that a bride should be a virgin. “Unlike celibacy in males which symbolizes their self control, the virginity of girls implies control over their behavior by their kinsmen. Its loss is a loss of prestige”.<sup>195</sup> The purity of a woman was considered as the base for the purity of the community and

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<sup>192</sup> The Puranic story of Mādhavi was a clear example of how the daughters were considered as commodities. Mādhavi was given to Galavan by Yayāti without her consent. She was exchanged as a commodity between several rulers by Galavan and finally she was given to Visvāmitra as *guru dakṣiṇa*. See, Pakanaj K. Singh and Jaidev, ‘Decentering a Patriarchal Myth: Bhisham Sahni’s *Madhavi*’, in, Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti, eds., *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender*, (1999), Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001. pp. 3-17.

<sup>193</sup> Sahadevan. M., *From Brahmanism to Liberalism: Ideologies, Attitudinal changes and Modernity in Kerala*, Anoja Saha, Palakkad, 2008, p. 224.

<sup>194</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op.cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>195</sup> Shalini Shah, *The Making of Womanhood: Gender Relations in the Mahabharata*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2012, p. 83.

family.<sup>196</sup> So, the daughter was expected to be pure and virgin when she is getting married.

The dowry system, denial of education, the concepts of purity, and pollution all contributed to making a Nambudiri girl's life miserable. The gender hierarchies in the community created situations in which a girl's father has to put up with humiliations from inside and outside the household. Lalithambika Antarjanam writes, in her '*Preface to Autobiography*', that when she was born, her father was upset. He said, "I am not going to live here anymore. I will go to some city like Madras and marry foreign women and embrace Christianity". Then her mother asked her father what will happen if that woman also gives birth to a daughter. He replied, "I can bring her up as a human being." Lalithambika Antarjanam says that she understood the meaning of her father's words through her experiences in a community where even the birth of a girl child is considered inauspicious.<sup>197</sup>

A girl child in the Nambudiri community was neglected throughout her life. A childhood, which is generally a period of extreme happiness for anyone, is spent by Nambudiri girls in extreme wretchedness. If there were boys of the same age in the family, they enjoyed more freedom and privileges than girls.<sup>198</sup> The girls do not possess gold ornaments like that of boys. They were not served with tasty food. A mother discriminating between the boys and the girls was more pronounced in the Nambudiri community than elsewhere. A girl child experiences discrimination right from the early *Samskāras* of her life.

Within one and a half years after the birth of the child, *Jātakarma* should be done. On the twelfth day, the father performs the *Nāmakaraṇam*

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<sup>196</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p.108.

<sup>197</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Āmakathakku Oru Āmukham*, p. 8.

<sup>198</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, p. 162.

ritual. Since it is believed that the naming ceremony gets delayed, the marriage of the girl also will get delayed, and everyone promptly does the naming ritual on the twelfth day. Before naming, the child's lips are touched with *Vayampu* and butter. Unlike the boys, the girls are not given gold.<sup>199</sup> It is for intellectual development gold is given along with *Vayampu*. Since girls are not required to be intelligent, they are not given gold.<sup>200</sup>

After she completes her four months, the girl is taken out of the house. The ritual is called *vātilpuṛappāṭu*. At the end of the fifth month, *Annaprāśana* was performed. All these rituals were performed by the father or in his absence by his brother.<sup>201</sup> Here too, the mother has no role to play.

When she becomes one year old the mother makes the child sit on her lap for *pūjas* and is taught how to do offerings. And by the time she is three, she is made to utter chants. Three years old girl child has to observe the customs of purity. If she is polluted in some manner, she should take a bath.<sup>202</sup> In the fourth year, she is taught how to read, and they were not taught writing. Moreover, she shouldn't lie on a mattress; she can only sleep on a mat. Only married women could lie on a bed.<sup>203</sup> At an early age itself, she is trained to face the harsh realities of life.

The next rituals are *Chouḷam* or cutting the hair and *Karṇavēdham* or piercing the ears. Thereafter she is made to do the offerings.<sup>204</sup> On the day she starts to wear clothes, she offers *aṭa* (a sweet dish) in her *pūjas*. Girls prefer to

<sup>199</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangalum Āchāraṅgulum*, Panchangam Press, Kunnankulam, 2008, p. 12.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>201</sup> Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>202</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṅakal*, Vol. I, p. 184.

<sup>203</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangalum Āchāraṅgulum*, p. 20.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25. The ritual *chouḷam* was performed for a boy with the chants for long life and prosperity. Since girls are not regarded as priceless possession their rite is conducted without mantra.

offer *aṭas* because it is believed that if that is done, she will become the first wife of the eldest son of a Nambudiri family. After that, every day, she should give offerings to Gaṇapati, Lord Śiva, Śrīpārvati, and Bhadrakāḷi. Special *pūjas* and offerings were done for *Perumthrikkōvilappan* who is Lord Śiva of *Tali* temple. She should chant mantras of Śiva and Pārvati, Kriṣṇa and Rukmiṇi, to have a good husband. After *Annaprāśana*, a white thread ties around her neck.

When she begins her *pūjas*, she should utter *pañcākṣari* a hundred and eight times holding that white thread. Only after all these rituals, she could have her food. Besides, she should chew betel leaves thrice daily. The belief is that it is done in the morning for prosperity, in the afternoon for attaining beauty, and in the night for a long-married life.<sup>205</sup> Thus the rigid customs of a Nambudiri household teach a girl at a very young age that her entire life is ritually bound.

Kanippayyur writes that when a girl turns five, her ill fate begins. She was forced to help her elders in all their household duties. They were taught to be simple and servile. From childhood itself, the girls bear the brunt of harsh scolding and ridicule and even beatings from her relatives.<sup>206</sup> The girls were denied an education. The highest level of learning a Nambudiri girl receives able to read *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Daśama* fluently.<sup>207</sup> If they are able to sing ‘*Śukamoḷi*’ in the old style, they are regarded as scholars. The girls are considered as tools for household duties and for procreation and things like learning were not necessary for fulfilling their duties.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Kannishamattathu Sreedevi Antarjanam, *Vennanattu Nāṭṭile Antarjanangaluṭe Āchāraṅgaḷ*, p. 40.

<sup>206</sup> Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, *Ente Smaraṅakaḷ*, Vol I, p. 184.

<sup>207</sup> Sreedevi Kakkad, *Ārdramī Dhanumāsarāvil*, Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2015, p. 26.

<sup>208</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 26.



## *Ritumati*

When a Nambudiri girl attains puberty,(becomes *ritumati*) her life becomes rigorous imprisonment. She was denied even the limited freedom, which she earlier enjoyed. She was forbidden from attending festivals and celebrations. She was not permitted to go to the temple or pond. She was not allowed to see any male members. She was not allowed to attend the wedding of her sibling. Lalithambika Antarjanam remembers that on the day she attained puberty, it was treated like the death of a person in the family.<sup>209</sup> She could not open the doors of *nālukeṭṭu* to look outside. She writes that everyone had to surrender to the fate of a tradition that had been carried out for centuries. There was no compromise on that.<sup>210</sup>

Once a Nambudiri girl becomes *ritumati* (attain puberty), she had to observe the *ghōṣa* system. She was not allowed to go outside without a cadjan umbrella, maid servant, and shawl, which covers her body.<sup>211</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* strictly insisted on observing *ghōṣa* to safeguard the chastity of a maiden. *Manusmṛti* and other *Smṛtis* recommend pre-puberty marriages to ensure that the girl reaches her husband with a pure womb.<sup>212</sup> Among the Nambudiris, the pre-puberty marriages were not common. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* permits post-puberty marriages, but severe restrictions were imposed.<sup>213</sup> The objective behind such restrictions was to preserve the purity and chastity of the girl. They were not allowed to break these rigid practices.<sup>214</sup> V.T.Bhattathiripad remembers that

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<sup>209</sup> “That big incident happened one day. The day I became *ritumati* my mother wept. The maid servants cried. My father was upset. As far as the outside world was concerned, I was a dead person”. Lalithambika Antarjanam, *Ātmakathakku Oru Āmukham*, p. 20.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>212</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 71.

<sup>213</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>214</sup> There is myth, regarding the post puberty marriage of Nambudiri girls. A girl’s marriage was fixed at a young age. But before marriage she became *ritumati*. As

once a maiden girl failed in her duty due to severe restrictions. Her *apphan* (father's younger brother) hit her on the head, and she died. But the man had no regrets. He said to have commented, "5000 rupees gained, which should otherwise have been spent on her marriage".<sup>215</sup>

When the cycle of menstruation starts, the daily ritual of the Nambudiri girls also changes. Then onwards, they perform *Nēdikkal*, offerings, and undertake *vratās* to get a prolonged marital life. Devaki Nilayamgode says that the only prayer of Nambudiri girls is that they should have enough to eat and to cloth themselves and should have along with marital bliss.<sup>216</sup> Unlike the boys whose coming of age was celebrated with *Upanayana*, the coming of age of girls was not celebrated. *Gr̥hyasūtras* or *Sm̥rtis* are silent upon the rituals of the first menstruation of a Brahman girl.<sup>217</sup> But puberty rituals were observed by the Nambudiri household with elaborate preparations.

The rituals pertaining to girl child right from *Jātakarma* were done without mantras. The puberty rituals are also done without mantras. *Upanayana* and Vedic learning were the processes to train a boy to become the patrilineal head. Likewise, the puberty rituals make the girls ready for marriage. It was the transition from girlhood to womanhood and also a symbol of fertility.

There were many rituals when the girl starts menstruating. The maid servant bathes the girl. Then the girl is made to sit on a cloth spread over the *Kōlam* or design drawn on the ground. She should not brush her teeth and

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*ritumati* marriage was prohibited she felt sad. To avert her sorrow, Mēḷattūr Agnihōtri married her and thus began *ritumati* marriages among the Nambudiris. V.T. Bhattathirippad, *VTyūṭe Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p. 488.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>216</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>217</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gr̥hyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 196.

take a bath for next three days, and she should not eat salty food. She shouldn't touch anyone because menstruation is considered impure. She is served food in separate utensils. On the fourth day, the washer woman comes, makes the girl wear new clothes, and escorts her to her bath. She again wears new clothes, and only after that, she was considered pure. On this day, she can brush her teeth and have a bath. The other Nambudiri women of the household (who are *sumangalis*) also accompany her to her bath. On the fifth day, the servants shout boisterously. Nair women ululate and take her to bath. After the bath, a feast was prepared and served without customary chants or offerings to the gods. After five days, the Nambudiri Brahmin will sprinkle sacred water *puṇyāham*. Only after that day, her impurities are dispelled.<sup>218</sup> With *puṇyāham*, she can use *marakkuṭa*, the symbol of being an Antarjanam. She was not even permitted to go to the temple or pond. Every month after her impure days, she should make *aṭa*, and offer to Gods such as Gaṇapati, Śiva, Śrīpārvati, and Kāmadēva.<sup>219</sup>

In the rituals, we can see the Brahmanical patriarchal values, which considered the girl child as inferior. As Jaya Tyagi argues, she was regarded as impure and becomes pure only after a male Brahmin sprinkles holy water on her. The male alone possesses the sacred knowledge to dispel impurities.<sup>220</sup> The girls, through these rituals, are trained to internalize the patriarchal

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<sup>218</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 34.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>220</sup> Jaya Tyagi argues that the physiological development of a male child is celebrated with various rites accompanied by sacred chants. But the girls were neglected and their rituals were done without mantras. Thus, they were alienated from their access to Vedic knowledge. See Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E*, p. 220.

concept that their identity lies in their wifeness. They are also taught that they are the symbols of prosperity too.<sup>221</sup>

Moreover, she was forced to live in her restricted space during the entire five days. It indicates that in the future she should live her role as a wife, mother, or a widow within the regulated space of Brahmanical patriarchy. While a girl's menarche was the most explicit way in which transition to womanhood could easily be recorded, it is not recorded in Brahmanical scriptures. This seems to imply that the coming of the age of a girl is a state of tension for the Brahmanical patriarchy. Their aim would be to channelize it to the controlled sexuality of marriage, and motherhood. *Śānkarasmṛti* provides a detailed chapter on the duties of women during menstruation but is silent on puberty rituals.<sup>222</sup>

In the patriarchal household of *Brāhmaṇas*, the women were recognized only as wives. The initiation rite of a girl's life is her marriage. For her, marriage is a rite which transforms her status from asexual beings to sexual beings. It does not bring any change in her status or power as a domicile group. On the other hand, the initiation rites for boys make a transition in his status, authority, and place in society. The Brahmanical patriarchal ideology refused to recognize women outside the realm of marriage. Moreover, the physical aspects of women were deplored in Brahmanical ideology. The menstruating women were called impure and ill omen. The root cause of the very fertility and reproductive capacity of a woman was regarded as impure.

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<sup>221</sup> While writing about the puberty rituals of Tamilnadu Vijaya Rettukudi Nagarajan argues that the rituals represent prosperity. She further writes that the designs or *kōlam* on which a girl was made to sit represents the auspiciousness. See, Vijaya Rettukudi Nagarajan, 'Threshold Designs, Forehead Dots, and Menstruation Rituals: Exploring time and space in Tamil Kolams', in, Tracy Pintchman, ed., *Women's Lives, Women's Rituals in the Hindu Tradition*, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 85.

<sup>222</sup> N.P. Unni., *Op.cit.*, p. 80.

## From *Ritumati* to Wifehood

Once a Nambudiri girl attains puberty, the only objective of her life remains to be to get married. The experiences in the natal home realises her that the only option remains in her life is to get the status of a wife. Hence, she undertook several *vratās* (penance) to get a prolonged marital bliss. Rituals like *Vratās* provide women an opportunity to express their agency.<sup>223</sup> The Brahmanical texts categorize *vratās* into *nitya*, *naimikta*, and *kāmya*. *Nitya Vratās* are obligatory rites, *naimikta* are some occasional rites, and *kāmya* are optional votive rites; obligatory rites and occasional rites are considered to be without desire.<sup>224</sup> Women who are the primary practitioners of votive rites perceive them not as a way to attain *mōkṣa* or liberation but as a part of *Strīdharmā*.<sup>225</sup>

Nambudiri girls, as a part of their *Strīdharmā*, observed several *vratās*. They had to observe *Aṣṭami* every month.<sup>226</sup> During the day, after bathing, offer *nivēdyam* to Gods and eat it during the day itself. Since it is believed that this rite is auspicious to get a good husband, it was an obligatory rite. Another important ritual was the *Chaturthi Gaṇapati*.<sup>227</sup> Young maidens undertook fasting on that day and offer *aṭas* to the gods. After that, they have to chew betel leaves. *Ambikārādhana* (worshipping Ambika) and *Tiruvātira*

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<sup>223</sup> For a detailed study of women's agency through Vratas, See, Jaya Tyagi, *Contestation and Compliance: Retrieving Women's "Agency From Puranic Tradition"*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>225</sup> Mary McGee, 'Desired Fruits: Motive and Intention in the Votive Rites of Hindu Women', in, Julia Leslie, ed., *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1992, p. 88.

<sup>226</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanagaḷum Āchārangaḷum*, p. 44.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49

*vratā* were also observed by young maidens to get a husband like Lord Śiva.<sup>228</sup>

Another important ritual observed by maidens was *Pūramkuḷi*. The ritual is an offering to Kāmadēva and celebrated for nine days. On the last day, there is a rite called sending off Kāmadēva. A Nair male takes the bow and shoots an arrow at the idol of Kāmadēva made of cow dung.<sup>229</sup> This ritual is centered on the worship of Kāmadēva, the God of desire. The ritual ends when a Nair male puts an arrow through the idol of Kāmadēva. Desire or Kāma is a primary emotion. But in the Brahmanical patriarchy, it is considered as impure or sin. Nambudiris did not indulge in impure actions. Hence a Nair male figure is entrusted to put an arrow on the idol of Kāmadēva. *Dharmaśāstras* like *Manusmṛti* states that the innate nature of a woman is sinful, and she possesses uncontrolled sexuality. The worship of Kāmadēva symbolizes, this uncontrolled sexuality of a woman, but the ritual ends, indicating that desires should be strictly controlled by a Brahmin woman.

Thus, Nambudiri girl gets training throughout her childhood and girlhood in the duties of *Strīdharmā*. Devaki Nilayangode writes that she and her sisters were encouraged to read the stories of *Śīlāvati*, but she is not very sure whether her brothers had even heard of it.<sup>230</sup> There is no male counterpart for *Śīlāvati* in Brahmanical tradition.

The rigid practices and control imposed on her body and mind make them internalize the value of chastity and *pātivratya*. In order to control her desires, her bodily adornments were also restricted. She should not adorn her body with ornaments and perfumes. These restrictions teach them that

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50

<sup>230</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

marriage and *gārhasthya* were to preserve dharma and perpetuate the patriarchal family. They were denied freedom of mobility or any kind of authority. They believed that their lives centered upon the world of house, husband, and son. Hence, they restricted themselves and lived in the spaces allotted to them and prepared themselves to become wives and mothers. When a boy becomes twice born after initiation rites, the girl enters into another birth after her marriage. Within the space of self restriction and regulation, they have only two identities, that is of a wife and mother. The lives of Nambudiri women and their spaces in Brahmanical ideology as wives and widows are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

# NAMBUDIRI WOMAN AS WIFE AND WIDOW: BRAHMANICAL IDEOLOGY AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

The ideology of Brahmanical patriarchy was best expressed in the institution of marriage. Marriage is the most significant event in a man's life. A man gets special privileges and power only when he becomes a householder. He is obliged to marry and have sons because marriage is the focal point of the obligations through which the householder reproduces the social order, family lineage, property system, and Brahmanical status order.<sup>1</sup> According to Stephanie Jamison, marriage represented the fundamental exchange relation in ancient India, which permitted women to serve in symbolic exchange roles throughout the religious sphere.<sup>2</sup> Kumkum Roy refers to marriage as a medium for creating linkage within a community.<sup>3</sup> The marriage is crucial in a Brahmanical community because the sons born out of such marriages would give father immortality.<sup>4</sup> Thus marriage receives special attention in *Dharmasāstras*. Moreover, a man's caste is primarily decided by the caste of his parent and modified by his marriage and sexual encounters. As a result, marriage is directly integrated with the caste system.

Brahmanical patriarchy confers the issue of ownership, a central focus in normative literature. The focus is upon two kinds of ownership, one, the

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<sup>1</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, (2003), Stree, Calcutta, 2013, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie W. Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife, Sacrificer's Wife, Women, Ritual and Hospitality in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History* (2010), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Olivelle, 'Amrita: Women and Indian Technology of Immortality', in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1, *Language, Texts and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2008, p. 105.



ownership of land, and the second ownership of the procreative powers of women.<sup>5</sup> The control over the procreative powers of women was integral for the maintenance of patrilineal household and caste purity. Marriage is an institution that has to be carefully controlled in caste society concerned with the maintenance of boundaries.<sup>6</sup> The subordination of women was achieved through the ritual of marriage. The notion of wife in Brahmanical ideology is that of an instrument of procreation controlled by the husband. She is the *Kṣetra*, field owned by *Kṣetrasvamin*.<sup>7</sup> The woman is equated with the earth, the recipient of the seed represented by a man. The progeny is owned by the husband. The symbolism of ‘seed and earth’ reflects the fact that a woman has no control over her reproductive powers and her children.<sup>8</sup>

The woman who is not controlled or subordinated by man is viewed as dangerous. When a woman becomes wife through the ritual of marriage, the dangerous feminine aspects transform into a source of wealth and prosperity; she becomes ‘Sṛī’ or Lakṣhmi. This kind of patriarchal concept of women has reflected in the goddess worship also. There are Goddesses married and unmarried. In the Brahmanical goddess pantheon, Gods and Goddesses are paired like Śiva and Pārvatī; God is represented as dominant and the wife or Goddess as submissive. In the other pairing of Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses, God appears not as a husband but as a henchman or servant and Goddess as an impersonal force, bloodthirsty, and dangerous. The Goddess as wife represents social virtues and wifely duties, but Goddess as an impersonal force represents a danger as Lawrence A. Babb puts it, “when the

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<sup>5</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Leela Dube, ‘On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 18, 1988, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Leela Dube, ‘Seed and Earth: The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production’ in Leela Dube, E. Leacock and S. Ardener, eds., *Visibility and Power*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1986, p. 38.

feminine dominates the masculine the pair is sinister; when male dominates female the pair is benign.”<sup>9</sup>The ritual of marriage is a mechanism to tame dangerous feminine aspects.

This chapter discusses the institution of marriage among the Nambudiris of Kerala and examines how does the peculiar custom of marriage among them was interlinked with property relations, purity of caste, and how the custom led to the subjugation of Nambudiri women, denying them the conjugal pleasures of being wives and mothers. The chapter also explores how the institution of marriage became a repressive tool which controlled the everyday lives of Nambudiri women, confining them within the four walls of customs and traditions.

The institution of marriage was peculiar among the Nambudiris of Kerala.<sup>10</sup>Their family structure, purity of caste, privileges, and rights in the society were depended on the institution of marriage.<sup>11</sup> The basic factors that determined Brahminhood were marriage customs and the position of women in it. How important the institution of marriage was for the Nambudiri community is evident from the words of E.M.S.Nambudiripad. While writing about the reforms in marriage customs in the early part of the twentieth century, he addressed the first widow remarriage of Nambudiris and the same caste marriage as the ‘marital revolution.’<sup>12</sup>Nambudiris were a community among whom only the eldest son had the right to marry within the community, and all others were entered in the *Vijātiya* (inter-caste)

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence A. Babb, ‘Marriage and Malevolence: The Uses of Sexual Opposition in a Hindu Pantheon’, *Ethnology*, Vol. 9, No. 2, University of Pittsburg, 1970, p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> N.P.Unni, ed., *Sankarasmrirti (Lagudharmaprakasika)*, Promoting Committee for the Publication of Sanskrit Laws, International Academic Union, Torino, 2003. p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinre Innalekaḷ*, (1990) Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 193.

<sup>12</sup> E.M.S. Nambudiripad, *Ātmakakatha*, Chintha Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2008, p. 112.

relations.<sup>13</sup> This custom had an adverse effect on the lives of Nambudiri women. Before analyzing the custom of marriage and the lives of Nambudiri women, the chapter traces the injunctions of marriage in Brahmanical scriptures with a special focus on *Śāṅkarasmṛti*.

### **Marriage in Brahmanical Scriptures**

Among the sixteen *Samṣkāras* prescribed in the Brahmanical scripture, the institution of marriage is the most sacred one. The earliest reference to the ritual of marriage is the *Vivāhasukta* of Rigveda. According to Usha Apte, *Vivāhasukta* is regarded as the foundation of the Hindu marriage sacrament.<sup>14</sup> Suryasavitri, the daughter of the sun, is the author of the hymn. It describes the ritual of marriage in general and the wedding of Surya with the groom Soma in particular. The place of Soma in *Vivāhasukta* later bestowed upon him a significant place in marriage ritual.<sup>15</sup> The Brahmanical concept of marriage considered him as the first husband of every bride, Gāndharva, as the second, and Agni the third. This means that before marriage, these three gods had control over the body of the bride. Soma gives her ‘rasa,’ the power of sexual recreation, and Agni gives her the art of procreation. Gāndharva gives her accomplishments. It was these three gods who protected the virgin before her marriage. These beliefs continued to be held dear in Brahmin marriage customs thereafter.<sup>16</sup> The giving of the bride first to the Gods *Sōma*,

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<sup>13</sup> M.R.Manmadhan, ‘Malabarile Nambudirimar’, in, P.B. Salim, N.P. Hafiz Mohammad and M.C. Vasisht, eds., *Malabar: Paitṛkavum Pratāpavum*, Mathrubhumi Books, Kozikode, 2011, p. 406.

<sup>14</sup> Usha M. Apte, *The Sacrament of Marriage in Hindu Society from Vedic period to Dharmasāstras*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p. 43. Wedding (for a specific purpose, i.e., taking the maiden away to make her the wife), *Pariṇaya* (circumambulating Agni), *pānigrahana* (holding the hand of the bride), *Upayama* (make her his own) etc are the different terms by which marriage is referred to in Brahmanical scriptures.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> It was due to the custom that among the Nambudiris the cohabitation takes places only on the fourth day of marriage, *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Gāndharva, and Agni shows that a bride is an object of possession. Just as food is offered to God as *nivēdyam* before that was enjoyed by a human being, the bride is also offered to Gods.<sup>17</sup>

In the later Vedic period, marriage became a decisive factor that determined one's identity. *Gr̥hyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras* created a lot of rituals related to marriage, as it is considered as a sacred ritual. The marriage makes a man eligible to perform *Yāga* and *Yajña* because a householder alone can perform these rituals.<sup>18</sup> Begetting children, especially son, is a major objective of marriage, and through that, he becomes eligible to beget children and perform *Yāgas*. The wife comes to be known as *Jayā*. This is because man is reborn as his own son through his wife. Only a man thus born is complete.<sup>19</sup> And for that, there is a need for a wife. It is stated that there are two aims for marriage; first, a wife empowers a husband to perform his religious rituals. Secondly, by giving birth to a son, the man is delivered of perpetual hell.<sup>20</sup> The *Dharmasāstras* say that a man marries *Dharmasampati*, *Prajā*, and *Ratī*.<sup>21</sup> *Manusmṛti* says that a man should learn the Vedas through the observance of vows, and return home, get married, and perform his rights

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<sup>17</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gr̥hyasūtras Middle of the First, Millenium B.C.E*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2008, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 108. For *gārhapatyam* (domestic affairs) that a man makes a woman his wife; which means that through the ritual of marriage, a man becomes a *gārhastyan* (householder). Manu states that a person should carry out the observance relating to the three Vedas at his teacher's house, an observance lasting thirty-six years, or one-half or one-quarter of that time, or else until he has learnt them. After he has learnt in the proper order the three Vedas or two of them, or at least one, without violating his chastity. He should undertake the householder's order of life.

<sup>19</sup> P V Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law)*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1941, p. 216.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

as a *gārhastya*.<sup>22</sup> Learning alone doesn't accomplish anything. He should offer *gurudakṣiṇa*, enter *Gr̥hastāsrama*, and perform his duties in order to make his life worth living, so dictates *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*.<sup>23</sup>

Marriage is a very important ritual, and it is through this basic factor that different castes are segregated. Hence each step of the marriage ceremony is ritually bound. Starting from the selection of the bride and the groom, there are specific rules for each step, as per Brahmanical texts. Of this, the first step is the selection of the groom. *Aśvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra* stipulates that the bride should be given in marriage to an intelligent person only. *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* says that the bride should be given in marriage only to a virtuous person who also observes celibacy till the time of marriage.<sup>24</sup> As per *Yamasmṛti*, a groom should principally have seven virtues. They are a good family, good character, good physique, fame, education, money, and help from relatives.<sup>25</sup> *Yājñavalkya* stipulates that the groom should be from a family of reputation, and he should be young and intelligent.<sup>26</sup> *Naradasmṛti* also gives importance to the groom's family background.<sup>27</sup> On the day of marriage, a groom is treated as a god. He is given honors and worships normally deserved only by kings and gods.<sup>28</sup> That is why the *sastras* instruct that a groom should be selected very carefully.

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<sup>22</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.109.

<sup>23</sup> C.V.Vasudeva Bhatathiri, tr., *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, Department of Cultural Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> C.V. Vasudeva Bhatathiri, *Op. cit.*, p.20.

<sup>27</sup> P.V Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>28</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, p. 227.

## Selection of a Bride

The selection of a bride is paid more attention by the texts because marriage transforms a woman's life. What makes a man a *Brāhmaṇas* (twice-born) is the ritual called *Upananyana*. However, for a woman, marriage is of equal importance to *Upanayana*. *Smṛti* tradition says that for a woman, marriage is *Upanayana*. For her, the worship of her husband is *gurukulavāsaṃ*. "What she does as household duties eight times a day is service," says *Manusmṛti*.<sup>29</sup> Since the purity of marriage rests upon a woman, the *Dharmasāstras* recommend proper care while selecting a bride. A bride's foremost quality is her virginity, followed by good character and good health.<sup>30</sup> A girl's virginity in Brahmanical patriarchy is a state of dharma.<sup>31</sup> It is not nearly a physical condition of celibacy. The purity of the girl is crucial for the maintenance of the honour of the family. Virginity is considered as an asset not only for the individual women but for the entire family.<sup>32</sup> As a man's honor is related to his power to protect the women of his family, they are controlled right from their infancy. Their bodies are controlled through several rituals that are related to virginity, puberty, and marriage. A virgin represents controlled and imprisoned female sexuality.<sup>33</sup> But among the male, celibacy stands for self-control.

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<sup>29</sup> For females, tradition tells us, the marriage ceremony equals the rite of Vedic consecration; serving the husband equals living with the teacher; and care of the house equals the tending of the sacred fires. Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmasāstra*, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> The bride should be strictly a virgin. Only a maiden endowed with beauty, intelligence, good character and good health should be chosen as a bride. *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>31</sup> Aditya Bharadwaj, *Conception Infertility and Procreative Technology in India*, Berghahn, New York, 2016, p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Kaser, *Patriarchy after Patriarchy: Gender Relation in Turkey and Balkens 1500-2000*, LIT Verlag Munster, 2008, p. 231.

<sup>33</sup> George N.Lundskow, *The Sociology of Religion: A Substantive and Trans disciplinary Approach*, Pine Forge Press, California, 2008, p. 59.

Another important rule is that the bride should be younger than the groom and also prescribe the perfect marriageable age of the girl. The girl should marry before attaining puberty as per most of the *Dharmasāstras*. Uma Chakravarti opines that this is in order to ensure that the bride's womb reaches the groom without being made impure in any manner.<sup>34</sup> Some *Gṛhyasūtras* say that a virgin should be 'nagnikā'.<sup>35</sup> The word can mean someone who is about to reach puberty or one who has no clothes, or who hasn't yet been affected by adolescent passions.<sup>36</sup> In other words, a maiden should be given in marriage at a very young age. Since marriage is equivalent to *Upanayana* for a woman, the stipulated age for *Upanayana* for a boy, which is eight years, is considered the right marriageable age for a girl.<sup>37</sup> *Parāśarasṃṛti* says that a girl of seven will be known as Gowri, Rohini when nine, and Rajaswala after she crosses ten.<sup>38</sup> *Parāśara* says that the father and the brother who don't give away a girl in marriage before she is twelve will go to hell after death. Moreover, *Parāśarasṃṛti* says that the status of a Brahmin boy who marries a girl of twelve should be degraded.<sup>39</sup> *Vāyupurāṇa* stipulates eight years as the marriageable age for a girl. A son born to such a girl will purify the departed souls of the ancestors of his mother and father, states *vāyupurāṇa*.<sup>40</sup>

Uma Chakravati writes, "it was to channelize the overflowing sexual energy of women that early marriage became so crucial in the structure of Brahmanical patriarchy. If a girl did not marry by the time she reached

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<sup>34</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> P V Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 194.

<sup>38</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

puberty, she becomes an object of moral panic. Such a woman, untamed by wifedom and motherhood, is a liability to her kin, her caste, and to society in general”.<sup>41</sup> While prescribing the marriageable age for girls, the *Smṛti* texts show discrimination based on *Varṇās*. P V Kane states that the rules about the proper age for the marriage of girls were prescribed only for *Brāhmaṇas*. He points out that Malati, the heroine of the play *Mālatimādhava* written by *Bharabhūti*, was a grownup girl. In *Harṣacarita*, also the heroine Rajsaree, is a grown up girl. There are examples of grown up unmarried girls in *Puranās*. But these girls do not belong to the *Brāhmaṇas* Varna.<sup>42</sup> This description shows the anxiety of *Brāhmaṇas* regarding the purity of their women and their sexuality.

Moreover, the *Dharmasāstras* also states several characteristics of a bride. *Manusmṛti*, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, and *Parasaramṛti* describe the qualities of a bride, the patriarchal element of which makes a bride nothing but a tool to perpetuate the family of a man. *Manusmṛti* states that a person should not marry a maiden with brownish hair, or a very tall girl, or a girl who has long standing illness, or one with no hair on her body, or one who has too much of it, or someone who talks harshly or talks too much, or one who has red eyes cannot be recommended. She should not be named after a star, a tree, a river, low caste, mountain, bird, snake, a servant or any other fearful names”.<sup>43</sup> Manu further states that a man should marry a girl with a pleasant name, a girl who walks like a goose or an elephant, and who has a beautiful body, hair, small teeth, and delicate limbs.<sup>44</sup> The *Gṛhyasūtras* and *Smṛti* texts state that physical beauty, good character, good health, and auspiciousness are

<sup>41</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, pp. 225-26.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.108.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



the required quality of a bride. Physical beauty is considered as good quality. What all *Smṛtis* instruct is that the bride should have a brother. In a Brahmanical household, the ritualistic head was the father, and in his absence, it was the brother who performs all the rituals, including the *kanyādān*. So that the brother possesses a significant place in the Brahmanical world. Both *Manusmṛti*, as well as *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, instruct not to marry a girl who has no brothers.<sup>45</sup> Here too, the importance of a son in the family is asserted. The *Smṛti* texts held the view that a bride should completely break from her natal family after marriage. In addition, Brahmanical texts reveal the type of brides who should be avoided. The Brahmanical anxiety over the power of women forced them to prescribe such detailed norms regarding the selection of a bride.

### **Classification of Marriage**

Brahmanical scriptures, *Gr̥hyasūtras*, *Dharmasāstras*, and *Smṛtis*, classify marriage into eight types.<sup>46</sup> These eight forms are *Brahma*, *Prājapatya*, *Ārsa*, *Daiva*, *Gāndharva*, *Āsura*, *Rākṣasa*, and *Paisāca*.<sup>47</sup> What differentiates each form was the occasion and situation under which the bride becomes the possession of the groom. Scholars have given various definitions of these eight types of marriage. *Manusmṛti* states that the gift of a maiden adorned with ornaments by his father to an invited and learned (Vedic) bridegroom with good character is *Brahma*. The *Daiva* is the gifting of a

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, See also, C.V. Vasudeva Bhattathiri, *Op. cit.*, p.18.

<sup>46</sup> Iris Iranfarkhondeh, 'Married women and courtiers: Marriage and women's room for manoeuvres as depicted in the *Kathasaritsagar*', in, Nina Mirning, Peter- Daniel Szanto, Micacel Williams, eds., *Pushpika: Tracing Ancient India Through Texts and Traditions*, Contribution to Current Research in Indology, Vol.I, Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2013, p. 108.

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.109.

daughter adorned with ornaments to a priest who correctly officiates at sacrifices during the rite is performed.<sup>48</sup>

*Ārsa* is the rite in which the daughter is gifted, receiving two or more bulls from the bridegroom as a matter of law.<sup>49</sup> When the girl is offered to the groom with the blessing that together they should enjoy the marital life and fulfill the *dharma*, it is known as *Prājāpatya*.<sup>50</sup> *Asura* type of marriage is the gift of a daughter to a man who gives wealth to the relatives of the girls and sometimes of girls herself.<sup>51</sup> *Gāndharva* is the type of marriage that arises out of lust, love, and passion, and it is the union of the maiden and the bridegroom with mutual consent.<sup>52</sup> The forcible abduction of a girl from his house without her consent and by beating or breaking her relatives and house is the demonic type of marriage.<sup>53</sup> The vilest form of marriage is *Paisāca*, in which a man approaches a girl who is asleep, inattentive, or intoxicated.<sup>54</sup> In

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Manusmṛti* states that "When a man dresses a girl up, honors her, invites on his own a man of learning and virtue, and gives her to him, it is said to be the "Brahma" Law. When a man, while a sacrifice is being carried out properly, adorns his daughter and gives her to the officiating priest as he is performing the rite, it is called the "Divine" Law. When a man accepts a bull and a cow, or two pairs of them, from the bridegroom in accordance with the Law and gives a girl to him according to rule, it is called the "Seer's" Law. ^When a man honors the girl and gives her after exhorting them with the words: "May you jointly fulfill the Law," tradition calls it the "Prājāpatya" procedure. When a girl is given after the payment of money to the girl's relatives and to the girl herself according to the man's ability and out of his own free will, it is called the "Demonic" Law. When the girl and the groom have sex with each other voluntarily, that is the "*Gāndharva*" marriage based on sexual union and originating from love. When someone violently abducts a girl from her house as she is shrieking and weeping by causing death, mayhem, and destruction, it is called the "Fiendish" procedure. When someone secretly rapes a woman who is asleep, drunk, or mentally deranged, it is the eighth known as "Ghoulish," the most evil of marriages." *Ibid.*, pp.109-110. See also, C.V. Vasudeva Bhattathiri, *Op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

the first four forms of marriage, the girl is gifted by the father to the bridegroom. This is *kanyādān*. Here the father transfers the right of guardianship and control of the daughter to the husband. The daughter is well dressed and adorned with ornaments. This form of marriage is considered as best because here, the daughter is given without receiving anything from the bridegroom who is invited and honored by the father.<sup>55</sup> *Ārsa* is inferior to Brahma because the father of the bride gets a pair of cattle as a gift. The *Daiva* form of marriage is for the *Brāhmaṇas* because a Brahman alone could perform sacrifices; still, it is considered as inferior because the bridegroom receives the girl at the time of officiating the sacrifices, and it can be considered as a sacrificial fee. *Prājapatya* marriage asserts that the husband should live the life of a householder and will never leave his wife. The bridegroom promises that he will be a devoted husband to his wife in the matter of all the three *Puruṣarthas*, *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kāma*.<sup>56</sup> *Kāma* form of marriage is considered inferior because it involves the sale of a girl for money.

*Gāndharva* form of marriage is disapproved because it is motivated by lust and bodily desires. As the marriage was envisaged by ancient sages as an institution for performing religious rituals and beget sons, this type of marriage was given low status.<sup>57</sup> *Rākṣasa* and *Paisāca* were viewed with contempt because they involve the forcible abduction of the bride and also fight against the relatives of the bride. P.V. Kane opines that the ancient sage did not legalize these two forms of marriage, but they wanted to show that these are also included in the ways by which wives were secured.<sup>58</sup> The *Smṛti*

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<sup>55</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

texts undoubtedly declare that the first four are approved from of marriage.<sup>59</sup> The *Gāndharva* form of marriage existed among *Kṣatriyas*.<sup>60</sup> *Kālidasa* refers to this type of marriage in his plays. The marriage of Sakuntala and Dushyanta is a perfect example. There are references in *Mahābhārata* about *Gāndharva* form of marriage. Apart from these eight forms of marriage, *Dharmasāstras* refer to another form of marriage called *swayamvara*. It is the practice of finding or choosing a husband by the girl herself. A girl is permitted to seek a husband if her father fails to find out suitable bridegroom even after attaining puberty. There are several examples of *swayamvara* in epics and Puranās.<sup>61</sup>

Classification of marriage shows that women were not given any agency in the institution of marriage. Though the *Dharmasāstras* considered *Rākṣasa* and *Paisāca* as worse forms of marriage, they acknowledge its existence. This can be seen as the legitimization of forcible abduction, where women were victims. As the marriage is considered as the way for the sacred activity of procreation, it is also linked to the caste system so that the Brahmanical texts make a clear attempt to supervise marriage and prohibited marriage with the wrong person. As the progeny of proper marriage alone can purify the generations of mother and father, the texts promote the idea of proper marriages.<sup>62</sup> The first four types of marriages are approved by the texts because the progeny of these four types can purify the generations of ancestors. The next four types were given partial or no acceptance. For the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Brāhma* type of marriage is considered as the best. The rite involves the giving away of the daughter adorned with ornament by the father

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> R.S.Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1995, p. 80.

<sup>61</sup> P.V Kane, *Op. cit.*, pp. 263-264.

<sup>62</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasutras Middle of the First Millenium B.C.E*, p. 122

(*kanyādān*). The sons born out of this type of marriage purify twelve generations of bride and bridegroom's family.<sup>63</sup>

The classification of marriage shows how different types of marriages were incorporated into the Brahmanical ideology.<sup>64</sup> Attempts were made by the texts to harmonize and universalize the custom of marriage. By pointing out the marriage practices in the epics, Kumkum Roy argues that even though there were attempts to brahmanise the marriage custom and homogenize it, there was the indignation of tensions and deviation, which we can see in epic narratives.<sup>65</sup> *Gṛhyasūtras* do not interlink the marriage system with *Varṇā*, but *Smṛti* texts connect marriage with the *Varṇā* system. This shows that the *Varṇā* system was evolved during the period of the compilation of *Smṛti* texts. The eight forms of marriage are associated with different *varnas*. The highest form, *Brāhma*, is meant for *Brāhmins*, *Gāndharva* is meant for *Kṣatriya*, some forms are permitted for the lower castes. In the higher forms in which '*kanyādān*' is performed by father, a patriarchal element is more visible. The higher forms of marriage require the sanction of both father and mother. The lower forms of marriage were meant for those categories that were incorporated into lower strata of the caste system. Control over wife was not stringent among the lower classes, while among the upper caste, strict surveillance was kept upon the wife.<sup>66</sup>

As marriage is interlinked with the caste and *Varṇā* system, *Dharmasāstras* provide several definitions of endogamous and exogamous marriages. A man should marry a girl of the same caste, and *Brāhmaṇas* should strictly follow this. As per *Manusmṛti*, a *Brāhmaṇa*, a *Kṣatriya*, or

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>65</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in early Indian History*, pp. 224-228.

<sup>66</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist a Lens*, p. 81.

*Vaiśya* caste must take their first wives from their own caste. Then they can take wives from the lower varnas. By this, Manu disagrees with the practice of a *Brāhmaṇas* taking a *Śūdra* as his first wife.<sup>67</sup> Manu expresses his anxiety on *Varṇāsamkara*, the intermingling of *Varṇā*.<sup>68</sup> He considers it as polluting and more polluting and dangerous is the marriage between a woman of higher varna with a man of lower varna.<sup>69</sup> But within the same community, a man should avoid *sagoṭrā*, *sapṛavara*, and *sapinḍa* relations.<sup>70</sup> *Dharmasāstras* contain references on *sapinḍa* relations. *Sapinḍa* relationship is of a special place in the matters of marriage, inheritance, and impurity. Marriage with a *sapinḍa* girl is not allowed for all the four Varnas. *Sapinḍa* arises from being related to each other by a common ancestor. *Sapinḍa* literally means the one who has the same *Pinda* body or particles of the body. The *Dharmasāstras* prohibit marriage between two people who have a common ancestor.<sup>71</sup> Another form of marriage objected by the *Smṛti* texts was the marriage between two cousins. Though the practice of marrying a maternal uncle's daughter was prevalent in South India, the *Smṛtikarakas* condemn it.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>68</sup> S.J. Thambiah, 'From Varna to caste through mixed unions', in, Jack Goody, ed., *Character of Kinship*, (1973), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 196.

<sup>69</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 54

<sup>70</sup> *Gotra* denotes all persons who claim descent from common male ancestors. The founders of *gotra* are males and there are eight sages whose descendance belongs to eight *Gotras*. P.V. Kane differentiates *gotra* and *pravara* as follows: "Gotra is the latest ancestors or one of the latest ancestors of a person by whose name his family has been known for generation. While *pravara* is constituted by the sage or sages who lived in the remotest past, who were most illustrious and who are generally the ancestors of the *gotra* sage or in some cases the remotest ancestors alone". P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 250-252.

<sup>71</sup> The *Baudhāyana Srautasutra* states that "Vismitra, Jamdagni, Bharadvaja, Gautma, Atri Vasishta and Kashyapa are the seven sages and Agastya is the eighth. The progeny of these eight sages is declared to be a *gotrā*" *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Dharmasāstras* classify sons or progeny according to the type of marriage. If the marriage is an approved form or socially acceptable, then the progeny is good. If the marriage is of a condemned form, the son gets the lowest position. *Brāhma* form of marriage is considered as the best. *Brāhma* and other three types of marriage are full of blessings, and the sons born out of this marriage are endowed with wealth, health, long life, spiritual welfare while the sons of the other four types of marriage are regarded as haters of *dharma*.<sup>73</sup> *Manusmṛti* states that “A son who is born to a woman married according to the " *Brāhma*" rite and who does good deeds rescues from evil ten generations of forefathers before him and ten generations after him, with himself as the twenty-first, a son born to a woman married according to the "Divine" rite rescues seven generations before him, and seven after him; a son born to a woman married according to the "Seer's" rite, three before and three after; and a son born to a woman married according to "Prâjâpatya" marriage, six before and six after. From all four types of marriage beginning, in order, with "*Brāhma*" are born sons who are eminent in Vedic knowledge and respected by cultured people. Endowed with beauty, spirit, and virtue, possessing wealth and fame, furnished with every delight, and righteous to the highest degree, they will live a hundred years. But in the others -the remaining wicked types of marriage - are born sons whose speech is cruel and false and who hate the Veda and the Law. From irreproachable marriages are born children beyond reproach; from reproachable marriages are born children inviting people's reproach. Therefore, a man should avoid reproachable marriages”.<sup>74</sup>

From the above discussion, it is evident that the Brahmanical text provides the utmost attention to the institution of marriage, carefully linking it

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>74</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.110.

with the caste and *Varṇā* system. The next section of this chapter examines how did the above discussed Brahmanical ideology reflects in *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and how did the peculiar property relations and the caste system in Kerala make deviations in the marriage system of Nambudiris.

### **Marriage in *Śāṅkarasmṛti*: Text and Practice**

The Nambudiris, who were hailed as the lords of earth ‘*bhudevas*’ maintained their dominance and purity of caste in the society through the custom of marriage. The Nambudiri women, who were called *Antarjanaṃ* were kept under strict control in order to maintain caste purity. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* stipulates the marriage customs that were in line with other *Dharmasāstras* yet different in its way. Looking from a gender perspective, it is the marriage custom of the Nambudiris that kept the women of their community as *Antarjanaṃ*. The marriage system of Nambudiris was peculiar. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* insists that the eldest son of the household alone should marry. If he fails to have a son, his younger brother should marry. The reason for such a practice was to keep the family property undivided. The *smṛtikaraka*, who was allowed *swajatiya* marriage for the eldest son alone, has dictated *brahmacarya* (celibacy) for the rest. However, since abstemiousness is not easy, *Smṛti* recommends marriage for all the brothers.<sup>75</sup> But in practice for all, the younger brothers began to engage in *sambandham* (contractual) marriage with Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women. It was a valid marriage custom though it involved no obligations to their wives. Sheeba K.M. says that the custom of *sambandham* was useful to Nambudiris in two ways. Firstly, it provided sexual partners for younger sons, and secondly, it provided an opportunity to create valuable connections with important families.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 228-229.

<sup>76</sup> K.M. Sheeba, *Caste, Sexuality, and the State: The Changing Lives of the Namboothiri Women in Keralam in the Twentieth Century*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, JNU, New Delhi, 2002, p. 40.



Generally, *Dharmasāstras* do not permit *Vijātiya* marriage. *Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriya*, and *Vaiśya* should ideally choose a *savarna* maiden for their first marriage. A person can marry outside his caste to fulfill his sexual need, but he should not marry a *Sūdra* woman. If a Brahmin, led by lust, marries a *Sūdra* woman, *Manusmṛti* says that he renders his whole descendants *Sūdra*.<sup>77</sup>

Like *Manusmṛti*, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* also regards *Sūdra* marriage as unacceptable for a *Brāhmin*. If a Brahmin sleeps with *Sūdra* women, he goes to hell. If he begets a child through her, he becomes an outcast.<sup>78</sup> But in Kerala, Nambudiris practiced this system. *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* asks Nambudiris except for the eldest son to dally with *Śūdra* women.<sup>79</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* laid the textual foundations for the peculiar custom of marriage among Nambudiris. No other smritis permit *vijatiya* marriage. Almost all *smṛtikaras* opposed this system. But the Nambudiris continued to practice *Sambandham* system. According to K.N.Panikkar, the hegemonic power of the Nambudiri landowners, particularly in south Malabar induced Nayar women to enter into hypergamous sexual relations, or *sambandhams*, with them. This was beneficial for Nambudiris, as marrying outside the caste allowed them to sustain their joint-families based on primogeniture and patrilineal descent, and also it helped to maintain their position as landed aristocracy.<sup>80</sup> While the younger sons thus engaged in *sambandham*, the eldest son of a Nambudiri family married within the community. When it comes to the *Swajatiya*

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<sup>77</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.194.

<sup>78</sup> C.V. Vasudeva Bhattathiri, *Op. cit.*, p.21.

<sup>79</sup> V. Rajeev, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2012, p. 204.

<sup>80</sup> K.N.Panikar, *Samskāravum Dēśiyatayum* (2002), Current Books, Thrissur, 2010, p. 172.

marriage of their eldest sons, known as *Vēḷi*, they followed the rites and rituals prescribed by *smṛtis* and *Gṛhyasūtra*.

The process of selection of bride and bridegroom was given primary importance by *Śāṅkarasmṛti*.<sup>81</sup> The most important ritual of a marriage ceremony pertains to converting the woman as a symbol of prosperity. This prosperity is ensured by women. So that utmost care should be taken while selecting a bride. The *Smṛti* stipulates that the bride should be a virgin.<sup>82</sup> But unlike the other *Smṛtis*, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* does not encourage pre-puberty marriage for the bride.<sup>83</sup> Generally, *Smṛtis* insist on pre-puberty marriage as a way to control women's sexuality. Uma Chakravarti argues that pre-puberty marriage was insisted by *Smṛtis* to transfer the womb of a girl into the hands of the husband without pollution.<sup>84</sup> Here, as famous Anthropologist Nur Yalman opines, the rigid practices and customs that existed among Nambudiris restricted the lives of their women from birth to death. Hence pre-puberty marriage was not needed to ensure the purity of a bride's sexuality.<sup>85</sup>

Apart from this, a bride should be endowed with virtues like beauty and good character.<sup>86</sup> In addition, there is a test conducted while selecting the

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<sup>81</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 193-196.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>83</sup> There is myth regarding the post puberty marriage custom of Nambudiri. A girl's marriage was fixed but before the date of the marriage she attained puberty. She became very sad and to avert her sorrow Mezhathur Agnihotri married her and thus began the post puberty marriage. See, V.T. Bhattathirippad, *VTyude Sampūrṇṇa Kritikal*, (1997), D.C. Books, Kottayam, 2006, p. 488.

<sup>84</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 81.

<sup>85</sup> Nur Yalman, 'On the Purity of Women in Caste of Ceylon and Malabar', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1993, pp. 25-58.

<sup>86</sup> "The one worthy of marriage should have  
fragrance and beauty and  
she should smile with a slight twist of the head  
and should have even and hard breasts  
in addition to possessing noble qualities.

bride. The test and its result determine whether the bride is chaste and virtuous.<sup>87</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* also insists upon the qualities of a bridegroom. The *Smṛti* states that a girl should not be given to marriage to a eunuch under any circumstances. Since the central function of marriage is to procreate, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* asks, the father of the bride to test the manliness of the bridegroom.<sup>88</sup>

After selecting the bridegroom, the father should marry off his daughter at the appropriate time. He should raise money for marriage, he should beg if he doesn't have money without any hesitation, or marry a second or third time in exchange and somehow get his daughter married at the right time, says *Śāṅkarasmṛti*.<sup>89</sup> Documents state that if the maiden died before marriage, the body was cremated in accompaniment with the marriage rituals. Marriage is entered into and performed to ensure the immortality, continuity, and purity of male descent line. Marriage is regarded as vital to the maintenance of one's caste status. Hence the same caste marriages were conducted with the accompaniment of all the rituals. There are so many customs in the Nambudiri marriages. The exchange of woman or *kanyādān* is sought to be ritualized as the greatest gift a man could give away. As objects of exchange, women, therefore, have to leave the *gotrā*, and the *Vamśa* they are born into and enter into a new *gotrā* and *Vamśa*.<sup>90</sup> A man's position is fixed, but a woman changes her family.<sup>91</sup> The whole Ideology and symbolism

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*One should not marry a girl who has extra limbs,  
or deformed hair, too much hair or scanty hair on the body.*

*Or remains talking or looking out throughout the window". See, N.P.Unni, Op. cit., p.194.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-196.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>90</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

of marriage and birth are designed to express, interpret, and define the coming and going of women between *Vamśas*.<sup>92</sup> Women are mere receptacles, transmitters, and carriers of the family line. The meaning and symbolism of *kanyādān* maintain caste status and caste purity. This is the reason why it was ritualized to a great extent.

### **Rituals of Nambudiri Marriage**

Marriage is conceived as a prime ritual in the Brahmanical ideology because, as Kumkum Roy points out, it is a center of social existence around which are the woven concern of power status and both material and spiritual gains. The rituals associated with the marriage ceremony thus get a prominent place in Brahmanical literature.<sup>93</sup> The first step is the selection of time or *Muhūrta*. According to Kumkum Roy, marriage is constructed as a symbol of growth and prosperity. This is why the marriages are conducted at a specific time.<sup>94</sup>

The marriage rituals place the woman in a subordinate position, the one dominated by her husband and his family. Once the choice of the bride is made, the preparations for marriage begin.<sup>95</sup> On the day before the wedding, or if the ceremony is in the night, on the same morning, ‘*ayiniyūṇu*’ is conducted. The girl should take a bath in the morning and offer food to Ganapati, Śiva

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Exploration in Early Indian History*. p. 226.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> When a girl’s marriage is fixed, no one informs her. Nobody even discusses anything about the marriage when the girl is within earshot. When the preparations for it begin, the girl comes to know through the maid servant etc. And that too, she gets to know of the name of the *illam* (home), and nothing more. The girl has no clue as to whether the prospective groom is an old man or a young man, whether this is his first marriage or the third, or whether the *illam* is prosperous, middle-class, or poor etc. Nambudiri girls of the past never had any rosy dreams about their future. The child grows up seeing the lives of women in her own *illam*, and her mother’s home.

and Parvati. What is offered to Ganapati in the *uruli* (shallow cooking vessel) should be distributed to boys at home, and what is offered to Śiva and Parvati, to the girls. The bride's mother pours oil on the head of the bride, followed by the married women's relatives, using the tail of the *Vālkkañṇāṭi*. With these women, the bride takes a bath and wears washed new clothes. The hair is tied in a bundle to the side of the head. This way of tying the hair is necessary during all auspicious ceremonies. Untied hair symbolizes uncontrolled sexuality. The bride, together with the *Iṅangatti* (kinswoman, bridesmaid) who carries *Aṣṭamāngalya* and the lamp, enters the *Vaṭakkini* (room on the northern side) and sits on a low wooden stool which is decorated around with rice paste. The bride's *ayiniyūṇu* should be simultaneous with the groom's.<sup>96</sup>

The mother places a long banana leaf on the floor before the bride, lights a lamp, and places jaggery and banana on a piece of plantain leaf beside the lamp. The *Iṅangatti* (kinswoman) sits down to lunch to the right side of the bride. The mother sprinkles ghee (as a ritual) and serves lunch for the woman who sits on the right side of the bride, and then to the bride, and again sprinkles ghee. The other female relatives serve the other side dishes. After lunch, the bride cleans her teeth with *Pachottī* (a medicinal herb) and rinses her mouth with milk, and then she can get up wash her hands. She shouldn't raise her head even one bit. She should lower it considerably. If she can bury her head between the two knees, it is regarded as a sign of humility and self-restraint.<sup>97</sup> Patriarchy always demands humility from the part of women.

After lunch, the ritual of rolling out a thousand thread-wicks begins. The number thousand is not followed strictly. Two dhotis are torn and made into wicks. In some *illams* (Nambudiri homes), the new washed cloth is torn

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<sup>96</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanagaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2008, pp. 18-19.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

for the thousand wicks. Normally, it is the maternal grandmother's right to give away an old yet not torn dhoti for making a thousand wicks. The edge of the cloth is torn using a knife made of bell metal, and three loincloths are made and given to three boys in the family to wear. After that, wicks can be cut out. The wicks are rolled out on new mud pots. A *Vālkkaṇṇāṭi* should be held in the right hand by the bride. After the bride rolls out three wicks, all the married women who are relatives do the same. During this process, all the married women sing Malayalam songs wishing a happy married life.<sup>98</sup>

The next ritual is the application of *mehendi* on the bride's arms and feet. The *Aṭiyātti* (female worker) grinds the *mehendi* leaves into a fine paste and keeps it ready on a leaf. The *mehendi* should be applied to embellish the inside of her palms, her fingers, around her feet edges, and on the toes. The *Iṅgatti* holds the right to this. Following this, the bride is adorned with jewellery. There are no more rituals on that day except for a small feast. After this, married women perform *Tiruvātirakkaḷi*. For this, songs are sung in praise of gods.<sup>99</sup>

On the day of the *Ayiniyūṇu*, the mother of the bride in some *illams* light sixteen lamps and give offerings to the gods. In some other *illams*, sixteen lamps are lit only on the occasion of the wedding ceremony.<sup>100</sup> All the above rituals signify the prosperity of the bride, her fertility, and also emphasize the fact that humility is the required quality of a woman. Another fact is that the women who participate in the rituals should be *sumangalis*, the ones whose husbands are still alive. Brahmanical patriarchy recognises women only as wives and widows, and other women are outsiders.

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

On the day of the marriage groom, along with his family members and servants, goes to the bride's house. Once the groom enters the house, the bride's father welcomes him and washes his feet, saying, *Have bath and Marry (Kuḷichu Vēlkkā)*. Then he takes a bath, wears a new dress, and both the bride and groom receive *Puṇyāha* (consecrated water).<sup>101</sup> Marriage is an occasion when the person involved is purified and transformed as deities. The young bridegroom on the day of his marriage is honored and worshipped like kings and gods. Among the *Brāhmaṇas*, he is regarded as a deity. The groom is regarded as lord Śiva who is completed with his female consort Pārvatī. A Brahmin groom is complete with his wife. The young bride and bridegroom are looked on as incarnation of Gods, Śiva and Pārvatī. During the days when they are representatives of the deities, they must not bathe, so after the bath of the ceremony taken at the wedding, they can bathe no more for three days, and on the third day after the wedding, they bathe so washing away their divinity.<sup>102</sup> After *Puṇyāha*, the bride's father takes three strands of sacred thread and twists them together, and smears them with turmeric at the edges and strings *Cheṛutāli* and ties it around the bride's neck. This is to be the *Upanayana* for girls.<sup>103</sup> Unlike the boys, the girls are not permitted to go through the *Upanayana* ceremony. Marriage is considered as *Upanayana* for girls. After that, the four major rituals *Lājahōma*, *Pāṇigṛhaṇam*, stepping the stone (*Ammikkālchaviṭṭal*), and *Saptapadī* take place.<sup>104</sup> For the Nambudiries these rituals are more important than *Tālikēṭtu*. It is not the groom but the

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>102</sup> William Harman, 'The Hindu Marriage as Soteriological Event', *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1987, pp. 172-174.

<sup>103</sup> *Upanayana* makes a Brahman boy twice-born and it is considered as the most sacred *samskāra*, likewise marriage provides a rebirth to women and considered as the most important *samskāra* in her life.

<sup>104</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 23.

father of the bride who ties the *Tāli*.<sup>105</sup> It is after the new garment, or *Mantrakōṭi* is worn, the bride is made for frying the rice using the tail of *Vālkkāṇṇāṭi* or mirror. Then the father does the *kanyādān* giving away the bride with *mantras*. Uma Chakravarti says that what is being gifted as part of the *kanyādān* is not just the daughter but her feminine ‘quality,’ her femaleness, and her procreative power.<sup>106</sup> After *kanyādān*, the next ritual is *Pāṇigṛhaṇam* or taking the bride’s hand by the groom. According to Kumkum Roy, the seizing of the hand was viewed as symbolic of an appropriation of the procreative powers of women.<sup>107</sup> A mantra is used in this rite, which equates the groom with heaven and the bride with the earth.<sup>108</sup> The ritual of *Pāṇigṛhaṇam* clearly shows that the bride has a submissive position in the ritual.

The *Pāṇigṛhaṇam* is accompanied by *Agnipradakṣiṇā* or circumambulation of the sacred fire, which was probably conceived as sanctifying, rendering visible, and even setting in motion the marital bond.<sup>109</sup> A *mantra* is uttered with fire as a witness before the *Brāhmaṇas*

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 32.

<sup>107</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power, Explorations in Early Indian History*, p. 228.

<sup>108</sup> “O bride I take your hand for good fortune, until you get old and wrinkled and die, be with me, your husband, in all my deeds. All the Gods namely Aryamavu, Savitavu and pushavu have given you, the bride to me for the management of domestic affairs. Domestic affairs can be defined as all the deeds and rituals that have been and are to be observed as per the duties stipulated by *grihastasramadharmā*, by both the husband and the wife together. It is for this that we have been united let us go hand in hand on this journey till the end of our lives”. See, Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Āśvālāyana Grhyamantra (Bhāṣāvyākhyānam)*, Panchangam Pusthakasala, Kunnamkulam, 2004. p. 13.

<sup>109</sup> “I am Saama and you Rik, I repeat

I am Saama and you Rik.

I am Dyov (sky/heaven) and you Prithvi (earth)

Like the Rik and Saama coming together and like the

Letters coming together with the letter and like the Dyov



audience, shouldn't be treated just as advice, or taken lightly, but regarded as a pledge. After the *Agnipradakshinā* with seven steps (*Saptapadi*),<sup>110</sup> the bride's treading of stone takes place. The groom leads her around, and he makes her tread a stone reciting a *mantra*.<sup>111</sup> As Jaya Tyagi argues, through this ritual, a bride is expected to be loyal and committed to her husband, helping him to destroy his enemies. But the groom does not seem to need such an oath of steadfastness because it is assumed that it is not crucial for him to be firm and committed in a marriage as it is for the bride.<sup>112</sup> The verse shows the fear of Brahmanical patriarchy regarding the fidelity of the wife. In order to maintain the purity of paternity, the loyalty of the wife is needed.

The next ritual is *Lājahōmam*; the brother of the bride does this ritual. He sprinkles ghee on the hand of the bride, puts roasted grain on it, and sprinkle ghee again. The groom places his hand beneath the bride's. Chanting the *mantra*, the groom makes the bride offer the roasted grain into the fire.<sup>113</sup> This *mantra* prays that the bride should be freed from her natal family, but she should not be free from her husband's family. Freedom from here in the

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And Prithvi travelling together in union, we too come together.

We acquire an integrated state.

In that state, we come together here, in marriage.

We shall bring forth children.

As *ekapriyans* (with uniformity of tastes),

As luminous beings, and as magnanimous individuals,

We shall live together a hundred springs". *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>111</sup> "Step on this stone, be as unshakable as the stone. Stand firm with a healthy body, a firm mind and a firm foot. Fight with our enemies, vanquishing all of them. Stand victorious". *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>112</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 132.

<sup>113</sup> "Let the Aryamavu who possesses virtues of charity and is the foremost, whom this virg in marries, free her from the proximity of her parents, however she should never be freed from your proximity". Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

mantra would mean abdication of the father's family, and freedom from there would mean abdication of the husband's family. The mantra states that the gods may allow the smooth transition of the bride from the father's family to the husband's family. The hymn states 'let her be blessed, and no dangers befall her from her husband's home'. The same is requested by means of the second chant to Varuna and the third chant to Pooshavu.<sup>114</sup> This ritual symbolizes the bride's transfer from one household to another. The material for the *hōmam* was provided by her father or brother, and in the process of making the offering, the bond with her natal kin was acknowledged but surrendered.<sup>115</sup> This was accompanied by a plea for the creation of new bonds with her husband. Control over her sexuality was transformed from her natal home to marital home through this rite. Here too, the patriarchal connections are visible. The rite is conducted through the brother, the actual inheritor of her family. The bride does not have any role in this ceremony but obedience.<sup>116</sup>

After the marriage ritual, the bride is taken to the *Vaṭakkini* and made to sit there. Before dusk, designs are made on the floor with rice paste, and over this, rice is scattered, a cloth spread over it, and the bride should sleep on it for three consecutive days. This is known as *dīkṣavirikkuka*. She need not brush her teeth or have a bath these three days. On the wedding night, the bride is taken to the center courtyard along with the groom, and they pray to Arundhati star. This is for long married life and in order to prevent a breach of chastity. The bride is expected to be as chaste as Arundhati. After the *dīkṣavirippu*, the groom makes the bride sit on his right side and does the ritual of *auspāsanam* (worshipping the holy fire). *Vaiśvadēvam* (fire

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 133.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

worship) and *auspāsanam* are rituals the householder should perform daily. For *auspāsanam*, the wife should also sit. The wife sits on the left side and the husband on the right. This is called ‘*tuṭarnnirikkal.*’ This should be done for all rituals.<sup>117</sup>

On the fourth morning, oil is applied, and she bathes. As in the first bath after the first menstruation, when the bride dips herself in the pond, *kuruthōlapīndī* (plantain stem decked with coconut tree leaves) should be made to float in the water over her. After the bath, she should first enter through the western side of the house. She should kick the door open the first time. This is an indication that even though she is married and is now a member of another *Taravātu*, she has all rights to come to her home. After bath on the fourth day, she wears a special dress and ornaments brought from the groom’s house.<sup>118</sup>

If there is an auspicious time, the ritual ‘*Sēkam*’ or *Vēlišēṣam,*’ the first cohabitation is performed on the fourth night. A newly washed sheet is spread on a bed in a room and is decorated with garlands made of *konna* leaves and *tulasi* flowers, sixteen lamps are lighted, and the bride is made to lie down. The door is closed, and everyone steps back. At this time, the groom enters, lines the bride’s eyes with *kajal*, puts *chāndu* on her forehead, decks her hair with jasmine flowers, and chants mantras for the birth of virtuous sons, and then goes out of the room. The belief is that fertilization has happened at the auspicious moment. As soon as the groom goes out, the female relatives enter the room. The bride can then get up. She, along with the maid servants from her home and the groom’s home, goes and has her bath.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanagaḷum Āchārangaḷum*, p .24.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Following this, the bride and the groom should be sprinkled with *Puṇyāha*. After this, the bride serves food for the groom. A banana leaf with a lamp in front and with jaggery and plantain on it should be placed. After sprinkling holy water and ghee, rice is served, then again, water is sprinkled, and other dishes of the feast are served. After the groom's lunch, he gets up; the bride sits before the same leaf, and the groom serves her food. Except on the days of fasting, the wife eats after the husband, in the same leaf, was the custom.<sup>120</sup>

This is followed by entering the bedroom. It is called *Puṣpaśayya*. Two mattresses would be spread on a cot, over which flower petals would be scattered. A *tamala* and *kiṇṭi* (utensils) filled with water would have been kept in the *ovara* (urinal) by the mother and relatives. A lamp would be lighted and placed with a lot of oil in the room. Beside that, a *kūja* (a utensil) full of milk, a bell metal tumbler, and a platter (*tāmbālam*) with betel leaves, lime and dried areca nut would have been placed. The relatives leave the bride in the room and retreat. The groom enters, and the bride gives him milk in the tumbler. Then she gives him betel leaves with the other two ingredients, and she too has the same.<sup>121</sup> The rituals associated with cohabitation show that how the Brahmanical patriarchy does encroach the private domains of individuals. It also expresses the fact that the act of procreation should be ritualized and regulated. There is an interesting custom here. Generally, the rule stipulates that a food item should be had by the *Antarjanaṃ* only after it is served to the other members of the household. But the betel chewing is always done by her first, and then given to the others. She can give the betel leaves only to her husband before she has it.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

There are many rituals after the marriage, like the *panchamehani*, *daśamēhani*, and *darśapūrṇamāsam* (the period from one full moon day to the next new moon), which stretch for over a month.<sup>123</sup> On an auspicious day following the marriage, the *kuṭiveppu* (bringing wife ceremoniously to the husband's home) is performed at the groom's house. Mostly women attend this, normally. Only very close male relatives of the bride go for this. Before she gets ready and goes for *kuṭiveppu*, the bride takes rice in cupped hands, puts it on the jasmine-plant platform, and waters it. This is believed to be an indication that if she comes back to her home again, she has the right to have rice only there. With boisterous shouts, when the bride enters the drawing room from the *veranda* (hall), the *adiyaan* cuts down the banana plant leaf, which has already been brought there. This indicates the severing of blood relations. These are all just customs, and not to be accompanied by chants.<sup>124</sup>

The bride waits with her companions in some temple or *illam* close to the groom's house until the *Muhūrttam* (auspicious moment). When the auspicious moment comes, there is shouting from both the parties, and the *Aṭiyāttis* produce a chorus of sounds. The *Aṭiyāttis* from the groom's house welcome the couple with *aṣṭamāngalya* and *tālam*. The groom walks in front, holding a palm leaf umbrella. The bride covers her head and body fully with a washed new cloth and follows him holding an umbrella, flanked by her relatives on either side. As soon as the groom enters the house, his mother closes the door. The bride kicks it open and enters. This indicates that she has all rights in her husband's house. The bride is made to sit on a low stool in the center courtyard decorated with rice paste design on the floor, and the women relatives remove her drape. The oldest woman member of the *taravāṭu* makes offerings of *kārōlappam* to Ganapati, Śiva and Pārvatī. There is a custom of

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

the bride offering *appam* to a boy when the other boys snatch the *appam* and run away without letting the offerings to be made. Many decorated measuring vessels with rice and paddy would be kept at the center courtyard. Lamps would be lit. If somehow the offering has been made, the groom's sister makes the bride wear the *daśapuṣpa* garland on her hair. She is decked with *chāndu* (mark put on the forehead) and sandal paste and puts on gold jewellery around her neck.<sup>125</sup> Following this, the bride is made to take rice in cupped hands and circumambulate the *mullattara* (jasmine plant). The *iṅgatti* walks in front of the *aṣṭamāngalya* and lamp. They should go round thrice, and each time pluck the leaf of the jasmine and wear it on her head. In this circumambulation of the jasmine, all married women participate. This is called '*kuṭikolluka*.'<sup>126</sup>

After this, everyone sits together in the central courtyard and taking the sacred *Tāli* thread in their hands, utter twelve *Pañcākṣaras*. Then, in the *tāmbālam* (platter) kept ready in the center courtyard, they put together the three ingredients, namely betel leaf, areca nut, and lime. When the bride steps on to the center courtyard, all married women begin to sing the song of *Parvati swayamvara*. After chewing the betel leaves, the bride is taken to the front, either through the eastern side or northern side of the courtyard. She has to stamp on the rice (*uṅgalari*) scattered on the floor while entering through the front.<sup>127</sup> Then the bride is taken to the *vaṭakkini* or *kiḷakkini* by the women's relatives of the groom and made to sit down and take the rice in cupped hands, and she drops it into the pot thrice. The women of the groom's family participate in this rite.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

After this, the groom is called inside, and the mother of the bride gives milk and banana to both the bride and the groom. In the '*kuṭiveppu*' rituals, even the widows have the right to place the offerings in the courtyard and give milk and bananas to the couple. In other rituals, widows and girls cannot participate. There will be a grand feast with several dishes. On the day on which the girl is married off, only a feast as elaborate as a birthday feast is prepared. Hence it has been referred to as a mediocre feast earlier. In short, the *kuṭiveppu* feast had to be grander than on the *veli* day.<sup>129</sup> The day following the *kuṭiveppu*, the bride is made to bring the seeds of flowers like *alari*, *kōḷāmbi*, *mandāram*, and *tulasi* to the courtyard, offer them to the gods, sow and water them. All married women perform the *kaikoṭṭikkaḷi* around it.<sup>130</sup>

The entire status of a Nambudiri woman as a wife was expressed in the rituals associated with marriage. The bride enters the house of the groom after the marriage transforms fully as a member of that family. Before she leaves for her husband's home, she takes a little bit of rice and places it on *mullattara* and pours water, signifying that in the natal home, she has right only for food. Moreover, another custom is the cutting of a banana tree before she leaves for her marital home. The custom symbolizes the severing of connections with her natal family. On reaching the groom's house, the bride kicks open the door and enters the house. This signifies her rights in the marital home.<sup>131</sup> In one of the wedding hymns, the groom asks the bride to look after his parents, sisters, brothers, and all the other members.<sup>132</sup> The bride who crosses the boundaries of her natal home enters the house of her

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>132</sup> Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

husband as the wife, is not permitted to cross the threshold of her marital home. The threshold is her '*Lakshman Rekha*.'

<sup>133</sup>

Throughout the marriage rituals, the fertility of the bride is emphasized. The hymns often pray for making the bride the mother of male progeny. Another fact is that the act of procreation is considered sacred, and the first cohabitation between husband and wife is highly ritualised. The marriage rituals give the husband a dominating position and also enforce his control over his wife's sexuality. The woman is represented as a person who brings wealth and prosperity, and one who protects his family's honor. The bride, throughout the entire ceremony, is kept covered, and no one is allowed to see her. This shows the insecurity of Brahmanical patriarchy regarding the sexuality of women. The fidelity of wife is sought in the ritual of seeing the polar star, the Arundhati. The rituals consider the husband as a separate individual, but identity wife as linked with that of her husband.<sup>134</sup> The bride is always projected as an object possessed by her husband. The rituals prior to the first cohabitation emphasize his possession of her. It is he who puts kajal on her eyes, *bindi* on her forehead and prepares the bride. It shows that the female body is a potential site for patriarchal control, and exploitation of the female body is facilitated through such rites.<sup>135</sup> Brahmanical ideology thus begins to control the domestic space in which the bride is confined and also her body and its functions.<sup>136</sup>

The marriage rituals of Nambudiris provide space to women. There are rituals like *ayiniyūṇu*, *Mehendi*, *kuṭiveppu*, *tiruvātirakkaḷi*, which are

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<sup>133</sup> The idea is inspired by the study on Marathi women by Meera Kosambi. See, Meera Kosambi, *Crossing the Thresholds: Feminist Essays in Social History*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasūtras Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, p. 146.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*



performed exclusively by women. These are the rituals passed on through generations by word of mouth. They are not codified in any of the texts. But they are incorporated into the marriage rituals, which ultimately leads to subordinate them.<sup>137</sup> The rituals consider married women with living husbands as role models for the new bride to look up to.<sup>138</sup> This is why the women participants in the rituals are *sumangalis*.

The Brahmanical scriptures make no provision for the bride to speak during the ceremony. Her only prayer is to be with her husband all her life and to become a mother of his progeny.<sup>139</sup> She takes the vow to be with her husband until the end. The nuptial rites are the example of the power of kinsmen in the household in reinforcing control over women. Once she enters into the family of her husband, she is expected to devote her like a true *pativrata*. A woman has no existence apart from being a wife or mother. A woman's existence is rendered meaningful only through the status of being a wife, that too, she should be a *pativrata* (faithful), wife. A woman's chief duty, according to *Dharmasāstras*, is that of a wife.<sup>140</sup> All the Brahmanical texts, smritis, Puranās and the digests talk at length about the duties of a wife. The major duty of a wife is to worship her husband as a god.

### **Nambudiri Woman as Wife and Widow**

The wife is the most important center of attention in Brahmanical patriarchy. The normative texts prescribe several symbols, rituals, and norms for a *Brāhmaṇa* wife. A woman is recognized as a person only when she is incorporated into her husband. As a wife, she is auspicious; without the

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>139</sup> "Let me, your wife be blessed with off springs". Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> Vanaja Dhruva Rajan, *Hindu Women and the Power of Ideology*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 84.

husband, she has no existence in Brahmanical patriarchy. The primary function of the wife is procreation. She is the one who acts as an agent through whom a person discharges his debts by reproducing son. Thus, the wife helps man to achieve immortality and heaven through the son.<sup>141</sup>

A Nambudiri woman as a wife was only meant for reproduction and perpetuation of family, as well as for the conduct of *yagas* (holy sacrifice) and Vedic rituals and to perform domestic chores. “Most *Antarjanams* are behind the purdah. Though they have eyes, they are denied of beautiful sights. Though they have legs, mobility is restricted. Their lives are akin to prisoners”. “*Antarjanams* are born crying. They live in tears, and they die crying.” These are excerpts from Devaki Antarjanam’s speech on July 26, 1937, at the Sreemoolam assembly, which portrays the real conditions of the lives of Nambudiri women.<sup>142</sup>

As the protagonist of the novel *Agnisākṣi* by Lalithambika Antharjanam declares to his wife that marriage is for the perpetuation of *dharma*, a Nambudiri considers his wife just a medium through which he can fulfill his duties as a householder.<sup>143</sup> The mantra that he chants during *Pāṇigrhaṇam* underlines the fact that the wife is a companion for fulfilling obligations.<sup>144</sup> Throughout the marriage ritual, her role in reproduction, as

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<sup>141</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2012, p. 159.

<sup>142</sup> Palakkeezh Narayanan, *Dēvaki Narikkattiri: Navōdhana Nāyika*, Samatha, Thrissur, 2014, p. 17.

<sup>143</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Agnisākṣi*, (1976), DC Books, Kottayam, 2011, p. 24.

<sup>144</sup> “O bride! I hold your hand so that fortune may befall us. Be with me in all my duties whatever they may be, till we get old, or die. Gods such as Bhagan, Aryamavu, Savitavu and Pushavu have given you, the bride, to me, the husband for executing household duties. (*Gārhashtyam*)” Porakkudinjam Narayanan Bhattathiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

well as being a companion in fulfilling responsibilities, is stressed. However, the wife utters just one chant and enters his life as his wife.<sup>145</sup>

The wives who came with the dual responsibilities mentioned above had to face a miserable life after marriage. Because of the custom of *svajātiya* (same caste) marriage for only the eldest son, and *vijātiya* (different caste) for the rest, a Nambudiri woman has to remain a *sapatni* or a widow or a spinster till the end of her life. Since the eldest son also indulged in *sambandham* (contractual marriage with women of other communities) while still in marriage, the wife was often denied conjugal pleasures. The eldest son who used his wife for household duties and reproduction most often slept in Nair or ampalavāsi homes. In her novel *Agnisākṣi*, Lalithambika Antarjanam talks about ‘*Bhrānticheriyamma*’ (mad aunt) who went mad because of her husband’s dalliance with a Varrier woman.<sup>146</sup> The stories and articles that came out in *Uṇṇi Nambudiri* justify the fact that *sambandham* of their husbands led to perpetual sorrow for the *Antarjanam*. E.M.S writes thus on *sambandham*: “One of my aunt’s sons had married a girl who was a perfect match. But she was dumped in the *illam*, and he started *sambandham* in a *Kōvilakam*. The *sajatiya* wife didn’t produce children since there wasn’t much difference with respect to married life between her and the widows. However, the wife in the *Kōvilakam* had children and grandchildren. At this juncture, he married again, a *svajātiya* marriage, to raise money for his sister’s wedding. As a result, two women were neglected and spent their lives like spinsters in the *illam*”.<sup>147</sup>

Many women in the Nambudiri community were in this fashion doomed to spend their lives akin to those of spinsters in spite of being

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<sup>145</sup> In unison with you, my husband, long-lived, I will perform rituals and beget sons. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Agnisākṣi*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>147</sup> E.M.S. Nambudiripad, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

*sumangalis* (married women). It is the married status of an *Antarjanam* that renders her entire life miserable. In the Nambudiri community, *Svajāti* marriages were meant just for reproduction and to maintain the purity of their clan. *Vēli* (marriage from the same caste) was conducted in order to produce heirs for the *illam*, to maintain the rites and rituals, to give away girls, and for dowry. Some men married for the sake of getting the girls in their family married, or for solving financial problems. There was also a custom of exchange marriage among them. The custom was of age-old fathers marrying their very young daughters in exchange. This is known as *māttakalyāṇām*. In the exchange marriage system, the woman was considered merely as property. Exchange marriages took place in order to renovate the house, renovate the bathing hut, to give financial assistance to women in *sambandham*. Such marriages never required the consent of women. In the novel *Apphante Makal*, Moothiringod states an incident in which a twenty-year-old girl was given in marriage to a forty-five-year-old man and that too, as his third wife. Moothiringod's protest towards this custom is evident in the following lines: "One day, the father from Palapparambu mana came visiting the *illam*. During the reception of the guest that followed, the girl's case was fixed. In this way, while the two old men chewed and spit out betel leaves, they exchanged two members of their house."<sup>148</sup>

Most of the marriages were arranged when they attend Vedic recitations, sacrifices, feasts, and various competitions.<sup>149</sup> The woman had no rights here except as being the property to be exchanged.<sup>150</sup> The consent of

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<sup>148</sup> Moothiringottu Bhavathrathan Nambudiripad, *Apphanre Makal* (1932), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2008, p. 54.

<sup>149</sup> Joan P. Mencher and Helen Goldberg, 'Kinship and Marriage Regulations among the Namboodiri Brahmans of Kerala', *Man*, New Series, Vol. 2, No.1, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1967, p. 98.

<sup>150</sup> There are several instances in epic and Purānās in which women were exchanged as commodities. See, Stephanie W. Jamison, *Op. cit.*, pp. 208-210.

the woman was not necessary for marriage. Devaki Nilayangode says that she was told by her servant that her marriage is fixed.<sup>151</sup> Because of the heavy dowry, marriage remained a dream for many girls. Since *Śāṅkarasmṛti* declares not marrying off the maidens as sin, the girl was given in marriage to any old Nambudiri as his third or fourth wife. V.T.Bhattathirippad and Devaki Nilayangode remember that in cases where the girls couldn't be married off, they were given away to people who came from the North, and they ended up eventually as prostitutes at Sirsi, Karnataka.

Devaki Nilayangode remembers that “an *Antarjanam* who cooked at our *illam*, had two daughters. Both lived with their father in their *taṛavāṭu*. One day, a woman came to Pakaravoor and told her, your daughter's wedding has been fixed for tomorrow. You must come home immediately. The *Antarjanam* left the very same day. On reaching home, she found a visitor there, apparently a Brahmin. Her husband told her that the man was a Nambudiri from north Kerala and had come to marry their elder daughter. The visitor's language was difficult to understand. As the wedding was to be conducted at the groom's *illam*, the father left with the stranger, taking his daughter along. He, however, returned after seeing the girl off at the railway station the Brahmin had given him some money. The mother must have wept bitterly when she realizes that there was no wedding and that, having no dowry to give, the father had actually sold their daughter to the man from Mangalapuram”.<sup>152</sup> V.T.Bhattathirippad, in one of his shorts stories, portrays the miserable condition of a Nambudiri girl who was married to a man from Karnataka, and later she became a prostitute.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Antarjanam: Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman*, (Translated from Malayalam by Indira Menon and Radhika Menon), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 110.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>153</sup> V.T. Bhattathirippad, *V Tyude Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, pp. 93-98.

The marriage of a Nambudiri to two or more women was not uncommon, and this naturally led to jealousy between co-wives. Polygamy was a system oppressive in nature, but as women did not possess any decision-making right, they had to suffer the unjust treatment. Devaki Nilayangode describes the lives of Nambudiri women as co-wives in her memoir. In 'I know Lucy' Devaki Nilayangode portrays a woman who silently accepts the defiance of her husband and finds happiness in the fact that the son born to her husband's dear wife would perform her *Śrāddha* rites even if she is denied of the joy of being a mother.<sup>154</sup>

Fight among co-wives was an inevitable consequence in Nambudiri marriage. M.R.B.'s play, '*Marakkuṭakkullile Mahānarakam*,' has depicted the sorrow of co-wives. The protagonist of the play is Ittippatti, of the Poomuttam *illam*. It was decided to give her in marriage to an older man as his third wife. There was rivalry already existing among the first two wives. Having come to know this, Ittippatti says on the eve of her marriage, 'Now, there will be time only for competition and to get beaten. All my joys are about to end. I can't imagine waking up tomorrow morning'.<sup>155</sup> Ittipatti received torture from her cruel husband as well as from the other two wives. Once when Ittipatti arrived a little late for a *hōmam*. Her husband dragged her by the ear and tore her ear, saying, "*Āttēmmār*" (Nambudiri woman who remained indoors) should not be so proud. I am the one to decide that".<sup>156</sup> Unable to bear the torture any further, Ittipatti committed suicide. There were instances of wives vying with each other to eat from the leaf after the husband had eaten and to sleep with him. It was a rule among the community that a wife should eat the leftover from her husband's meal. A Nambudiri may have

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<sup>154</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>155</sup> M R Bhattathiripad, *Marakkuṭakkullile Mahānarakam*, Rangachetana, Thrissur, 2010, p. 32.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

three wives. The first wife would have the right to eat from the leaf from which the husband has eaten. Two more laves would be placed touching the first one, and a bit of the leftover from the husband's leaf would be served by the first wife on each of these. This was the custom.<sup>157</sup> In the earlier period, the husband and wife never even talked to each other. They would meet each other only while serving food or during daily rituals. A Nambudiri who has more than one wife and *sambandham* was not seen around at all in the nights.

Very often, a Nambudiri woman is forced to become the wife of an older man. She doesn't get the pleasure of marital life. The story titled 'Pratidhwani' by Lalithambika Antarjanam delineates the life of an *Antarjanam* who does not receive her husband's proximity at all. While the wife was sick, the husband was celebrating life with several other women. Her brother's negligence and her sister-in-law's sorrow takes the Nambudiri's sister to a state of madness. (Perhaps she must have anticipated her life also to be like this). The *Antarjanam* died, with her marriage just as a memory. Before dying, she uttered a prayer, "O God, please don't let me be born as an *Āttēmmār* at least in my next birth."<sup>158</sup>

Though they never enjoyed any pleasures as wives, the Nambudiri women had to remain faithful to their husbands. Paraśurāma has stipulated that in Kerala, Brahmin women should be *pativrata*.<sup>159</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* strictly laid down the duties of a *pativrata* wife. The woman doesn't have any other God except her husband. Hence, pilgrimage is not meant for a woman. For her, the water after washing the feet of her husband is holy water. She should

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<sup>157</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Smārttavichāram*, (1965), Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2009, p. 52.

<sup>158</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Kathakkal Sampūrṇam* (2009), D.C Books, Kottayam, 2017, pp. 42-48.

<sup>159</sup> There is a custom among Nambudiri women of gazing at Arundhati star after wedding, which signifies that she should remain as chaste as Arundhati.

eat from the same leaf after her husband eats. She shouldn't eat with her husband. She should not observe any *vratās* (penance) exclusive from her husband.<sup>160</sup> And the *vratās* should be for his long life and prosperity. The *Antarjanaṃ* have to observe certain rituals holding their *tāli*, for the longevity of their husbands. Apart from this, they have to observe several rituals at home too. J.Devika talks about the lives of *Antarjanaṃ* as “ritualized domesticity.”<sup>161</sup> There were a number of customs and rituals women had to observe as part of *pātivratyā* (chastity). A wife should wake up in the morning before her husband.<sup>162</sup> As soon as she is awake, she should take a bath and assist her husband in daily *pūjās*. Nambudiri women had to perform *nēdikkal*, which is offering to their family deity. Nambudiri women had separate spaces for their regular offerings. She has to prepare *nivēdyam* to offer. Then she should recite mantras and do *nēdikkal*. Usually, beaten rice, dried rice, jaggery, and plantain are used to do the *nēdikkal*. There are two types of *nēdikkal*, one is to Ganapati, and the other is to Siva as *Perumthrikkōvilappan*. *Ganapati nēdikkal* is for the welfare of the family, and offering to *Perumthrikkōvilappan* is to bring lasting marital happiness. Sitting facing the north, she had to do the *praṇāms*.<sup>163</sup> After the worship and offering, she has to do daily household work. No one was appointed to help them with cooking.

<sup>160</sup> N.P Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 300. An *Antarjanaṃ* was prohibited to utter the names of their husbands or address their names. V.T.describes this practice saying the wife of Raman Nambudiri can't chant the Mantra 'Sree Rama Rama'.See, V.T.Bhattathirippad, *VT yuṭe Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, p. 572.

<sup>161</sup> J.Devika, Introduction, in, Devaki Nilayangode , *Op. cit.*, p. 12

<sup>162</sup> Rising before dawn is prescribed for everyone from the Vedic student to the householder. *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* explains that a woman who lies down after her husband and wakes before him and who desires no one else in her mind is held to be as a devoted wife. Waking up early in the morning is an attribute of devoted wife. In *Mahābhārata* Yudhishtira eulogises Draupadi saying that she is always last in the home to go to bed and first to wake.

<sup>163</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p.11.



*Antarjanaṃ* from poor families sometimes used to stay in the house of the rich, as cooks. Normally, in most *illams*, this was women's duty. O.M.C. Narayanan observes that an *Antarjanaṃ* does not have much time for learning. Her duty in the kitchen starts at the age of eight. Besmearing the floor of the kitchen with cow dung, washing the dishes, clearing the leftover after everyone eats, are their duties.<sup>164</sup> Though she was expected to do all the domestic works, unlike the *Brāhmaṇas* women of other parts of India, she was not given the right to hospitality. An *illam* was expected to be a place of respite to travelers who were *Brāhmaṇas* and *Antarjanaṃ* as well as a place of abode of many workers. Jamison, in her seminal work, *Sacrificed wife, Sacrificer's wife* argues that showing hospitality was a right enjoyed by a *Brāhmaṇa* wife.<sup>165</sup> As Nambudiri women were forbidden from seeing men except their husbands or sons, her hospitality rights were limited to women visitors.

After the midday meals, they had to read the stories from Puranā and epics. Sleeping in the day time was prohibited. Till three in the afternoon, recital of Puranā continues, and afterward, they start evening pooja. Before the sunset, she has to do *pranams* to all Gods.<sup>166</sup> In the evening, when he eats, she serves him and eats what he leaves. Her final duty is to go to bed with him. (But among Nambudiris the existence of polygamy and *sambandham* system provided rare or no opportunity for a woman to enjoy the marital bliss). An *adhikāra* (privilege or authority) a Nambudiri wife enjoyed was that of being the sacrificer's wife. The first wife of the sacrificial priest of a Nambudiri household gets her space when he performs the sacrifice. She becomes the *Yajamānapatni*. But very few Nambudiri families

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<sup>164</sup> O.M.C. Narayanan Nambudiripad, 'Bhoolokanarakam Nambudirimarude Jeevitham', in, Palakkeezh Narayanan, *Op. cit.*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>165</sup> For a detailed study of hospitality in ancient India, see, Stephanie W. Jamison, *Op. cit.*

<sup>166</sup> Sumangala, *Antarjanangaḷum Āchāraṅgaḷum*, p. 13.

possess the right to perform sacrifices. Hence the right of *Yajamānapatni* was also enjoyed by very few *Antarjanaṃ*. Even though in the *Śrauta* rituals, the first wife of the sacrificial priest accompanies him to assist him in his elaborate rituals but it was the male who decides her entry and exit from the sacrificial arena.<sup>167</sup>

The *vratās* also provide ritualistic *adhikāra* within to the domestic world. Generally, *vratās* were observed by women for the prosperity of their husbands and family. But it creates a ritualistic space for women where they not only observe *vratās* but celebrate it. There were special festive days like *Tiruvonam*, *Tiruvātira*, and *Vishu* when the Nambudiri women performed *pūjās* in the central courtyard. *Vratās* provided them space, and sometimes they used it as a soft weapon against the rigid practices of the community. For example, rituals and performances of the *Tiruvātiravratā* break down the taboos indoctrinated in *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. This *vratā* is female community oriented and in praise of Siva and Parvati. One the day of *Tiruvātira*, the Nambudiri women sing, dance, wear new clothes, adorn themselves with sandal paste and *sindūra* on the forehead, and decorate their hair with garlands of flowers. In the everyday life of Nambudiri women, these things were forbidden. The Tiruvatira songs that they sing were in praise of the companionship of Lord Siva and Pārvatī. The kind of union of husband and wife complement each other (portrayed in *Ardhanārīśvara* Image) was a distant dream for the Nambudiri women.

Parvati was for them the symbol of their wish fulfillment. Moreover, the songs express the desires of the body, and sensual pleasures are given centrality. The Hierarchical structure of Brahmanical ideology places *dharma* above *Kāma*. When pleasure was subordinated to Brahmanical law, women's

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<sup>167</sup> Frederic M Smith, 'Indras Curse and Varunas's Noose and the Suppression of the Women in the Vedic Srauta Rituals', in Julia Leslie, ed., *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 178-182.

desire for sexual erotic pleasure had to hide behind a veil. Nambudiri women, through the Tiruvatira songs, express their innermost feelings. The *Vratā* indirectly weaves into Nambudiri women's fantasy of romance and desire, which have no place in their real lives.<sup>168</sup> *Antarjanam*, restricted by severe practices, always considered celebrations as a means of escape from their otherwise ritualistic lives. This was a chance for them to come out, though in a restricted manner, into public spaces. Music, *tālappoli*, *Vēḷi*, *cōrūṇu*, *piṇḍa*, *kuṭiveppu* – all these functions provide them opportunities to step out of their homes.<sup>169</sup>

Her role was ideally constructed as wives, as a subservient instrument for the maintenance and perpetuations of the household and patrilineage. The patriarchal hierarchy in the household kept women subordinate to the males. A woman has no existence or identity except as a wife. Despite the custom of primogeniture of marriage among Nambudiris, the girls always longed for marriage and married women for prolonged marital life.<sup>170</sup> The leisure time of Nambudiri woman was mostly devoted to holding the *tāli* and recite the

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<sup>168</sup> Sreeparvathi D., 'From Ritual to Romance: Interpreting the *Tiruvātīravratā* of Namboothiri Women', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 77, 2016, pp. 260-268.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Sumangala, Desamangalam Mana, Vadakkanchery, 26/01/2016.

<sup>170</sup> The only prayer of Nambudiri girls is that they should have enough to eat and to clothe themselves, and should have a long-married life. They don't deserve to pray for anything else. They can't get out of the house attend pujas, Veda classes or *Upanayanas*. They have no right to property either. In the Brahmanical tradition, the male members inherit the family property. Among Nambudiris, not all male children, but just the eldest son has the right to the family wealth. The other men are allowed to live in the *illam*, but not handle wealth. As for the women, they had no rights either in the *illam* of their birth, or the house they came to live in after they got married. The money they got as dowry simply dissolved in the husband's *illam*. Brahmin women of other communities get a lot of jewellery after their marriage. At least this was at their disposition. *Manusmṛt* stipulates that what is received as dowry is the wife's property. However, Nambudiri women seldom wore ornaments; they were allowed to do so only on rare occasions. Therefore, they don't get any such wealth. In short, what can be called as the wealth or possession of a Nambudiri woman is just a box and the four dhotis kept in it.

mantras for the husband's well being.<sup>171</sup> Retaining her married status was considered to be a woman's good fortune. Many of them suppressed the desire for the acceptance of their femininity and longing for motherhood. They lived, unwanted, in the inner quarters of the *illams*, in their kitchens, as one of the many wives of their husbands. A clear picture of the domestic life of a Nambudiri can be had from a speech of V.T. in the Vellinezhi upasabha on October 10, 1929, "the Moossa Nambudiri (elder male) of the *illam* who whiles away his time with nothing to do but have a bath, and eat well; the *Antarjanam* widowed in childhood and is forced to spend the rest her life in prayers; *sapatnis* who fought each other, younger Nambudiris who don't have the means to survive; maidens who remain spinsters because they can't afford to pay dowry – all these combine a Nambudiri household".<sup>172</sup>

Lalithambika Antharjanam writes in the story '*Pavitramōtiram*' on the lives of Nambudiri wives as follows. "There is no such thing as kindness in Nambudiri men's hearts. They only have rituals. They should see that the lamp in the *vaṭakkini* (northern part of the house) keeps burning. There should be lamps lit in the *Tēvāram*: but no consideration for those who lighted it."<sup>173</sup>

### **Nambudiri Woman as 'Widow Ascetic.'**

The miserable life of the Nambudiri woman is rightly called as the life of 'widow ascetic'.<sup>174</sup> Widowhood was a miserable and horrible condition among the Nambudiris. It is evident from the words of Lalithambika *Antarjanam*. In her story 'End of a journey' Lalithambika *Antarjanam*

<sup>171</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>172</sup> V.T. Bhattathirippad, *V T yude Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, pp. 551-53.

<sup>173</sup> Lalithambika *Antarjanam*, *Lalithambika Antarjanatinte Kathakkal Sampūrṇam*, p. 689.

<sup>174</sup> The term 'widow ascetic' is taken from the article written by Julia Leslie. See Julia Leslie 'A Problem of Choice: The Heroic Sati or the Widow-Ascetic' in, Julia Leslie, ed., *Remedies in Classical Indian Law*, E.J Brill, Leiden, 1991, pp. 46-61.

introduces her female protagonist; thus, ‘Sreedevi is a young widow, a Nambudiri widow whose life is a burden to her, to the society and for the earth.’ She states that the word ‘widow raises the alarm and fear among the minds of Nambudiri women.’<sup>175</sup> Before examining the condition of widows among Nambudiris, it is relevant to have a look at the conceptualization of widowhood in Brahmanical patriarchy.

The widows were regarded as dangerous. Uma Chakravarti writes “widowhood among upper castes is a state of social death. She is kept out of reproduction and sexuality. Once a woman ceases to be a wife, she becomes non-existent as a person. She has no status either as a daughter or daughter-in-law. ‘She was placed on the margins of society.’ She is on a liminal state between being physically alive and being socially dead. In her husband’s home, she was considered an outsider and also not socially accepted. The widow who had left her natal home after marriage becomes an outsider because she no longer belonged. The widow was simultaneously in her marital and in the natal home, given the status of an outcast.”<sup>176</sup>

Patriarchy set specific behavior codes for widows of the higher and lower castes. While the former was made to practice enforced widowhood, the latter had to practice enforced cohabitation. An upper-caste widow thus entered a social death along with the death of her husband. This was reflected in practices such as bodily mortification, food restrictions, and restrictions in the use of dress and colors, denial of entry to ceremonies, certain spaces.<sup>177</sup> Enforced widowhood and enforced celibacy were synonymous in the case of

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<sup>175</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Kathakal Sampūrṇam*, p. 1.

<sup>176</sup> Uma Chakravarti, ‘Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 36, 1995, p. 2248.

<sup>177</sup> Uma Chakravarti and Preeti Gill, eds., *Shadow Lives: Writing on Widowhood*, (2001), Zubaan, New Delhi, 2007, p. 8.

upper caste women. As with those of lower caste order, practices of the secondary unions such as levirate marriage ensured maximum utilisation of women's reproductive labor as well as their productive labor. Customary law manifested these differences in the status of upper and lower caste widows. Prescription law and cultural practices were aligned along the scale of caste.<sup>178</sup>

The widows being denied access to production resources were constantly dependent on their male kin; celibate widowhood, social ostracism, and financial dependence were their bane, and these confined them in their circle.<sup>179</sup> Celibacy was not always enforced. Early texts provide evidences on widow remarriage. From the Jataka Stories (c.400 AD), one could surmise that wealthy widows could remarry. As per the *Arthasastra*, widows could remarry provided they forfeited the bride price and any other wealth received from the husband. Moreover, widows, who remained unmarried, were held in higher esteem for their upholding of the *dharma*. At the same time, Brahmanical texts narrowed the options for widows. Manu disapproved levirate marriage, which was then largely accepted and quite common among the customs (other conjugal relations were regarded as adulterous) relating to the remarriage of widows.<sup>180</sup> Manu, at the same time, outlined the contours of a 'good' widow as one who fasted and remained faithful to her dead lord's memory. Ironically, the fact that Manu so vehemently condemned widow remarriage is an indication of its prevalence in those times. The linkage of widowhood with lifelong celibacy was derived from the Hindu upper caste

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

notion of marriage as a sacred and indissoluble union as propagated by Manu.<sup>181</sup>

The question of remarriage of the widow might also have been linked to the evolution of the idea of property, especially land, and inheritance rights in immovable property. Women's inheritance rights, whether as daughters or as widows, were curtailed by the joint family's traditional preference for men as property holders. Since women were not accepted as coparceners, they wouldn't be able to inherit immovable property. However, since remarriage of widows increasingly met with disapproval as opposed to that of women of lower castes, there had to be some way of supporting the upper caste sonless widow and see to her maintenance. Some jurists tried to give the widow her rights by including her amongst the inheritors, but others ruled against her. Finally, around the twentieth century, the laws were made providing the widow right to maintenance unless her husband had already claimed his share as coparcener before he died, in which case she could have a life estate if she was sonless, but the property would then go to her husband's nearest male heirs on her death. In either case, this was conditional to her leading a chaste existence.<sup>182</sup>

There existed many traditional biases against widows in those days. Apart from holding them responsible for the death of their husbands, they were also regarded as sexually threatening and inauspicious. The picture of the 'chaste and prayerful widow' is so ingrained in the public psyche that she is denied any form of pleasure. This is evident in dress and behavior codes, which though now are less dramatically enforced, are still clearly marked: widows still must give up the signs of their married status, the only status regarded as auspicious in the case of women. Since these forms of marking

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

still continue, so do the notions that the widow is inauspicious and has to be excluded from certain religious ceremonies and social occasions of the community. Widows were thus made victims of ‘linguistic oppression,’ with no identity of their own: on the one hand, abusive and suggestive terms were used to refer to them; on the other, they were referred to as inanimate objects like a piece of stone, etc., by referring to her as “that” or “it.”<sup>183</sup>

Dharmasāstras texts provide a number of rules regarding the behavior of widows. Widows are expected to keep their head shaved, sleep only on the ground, eat just one meal a day, emaciate bodies, give up ornamentation, and perform rigorous vows and fasts.<sup>184</sup> The Dharmasāstric texts give directions for how a widow should live. The *Baudhāyana Dharmasāstra* prescribes that a widow should give up for one year honey, meat, wine, and salt and should sleep on the ground; according to *Maugalya* she should so act for six months; after that period, if she has no sons, she may give birth to a son from her brother-in-law if the elders give consent.<sup>185</sup> This practice is known as *Niyoga*. It was a custom wherein a wife or widow was allowed to produce a son or sons from intercourse with an appointed male. It could have been her brother in law or other near kinsmen.<sup>186</sup> The *smṛtikarakas* like Manu condemn the practice of *Niyoga*. Manu prescribes the following rules for widows that have been repeated in almost all *smṛtis*. ‘After her husband is dead, she may voluntarily emaciate her body by eating pure flowers, roots, and fruits; but she must never mention even the name of another man. Aspiring to that unsurpassed law of women devoted to a single husband, she should remain patient, controlled, and celibate until her death. Thousands of *Brāhmaṇas* who

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>184</sup> David Brick, ‘The Widow-Ascetic under Hindu Law’, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4, Brill, 2014, p. 354.

<sup>185</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 295.

<sup>186</sup> Jeanette Pinto, *The Indian Widow: From Victim to Victor*, Better Yourself Books, Bombay, 2003, p. 37.



have remained celibate from their youth have gone to heaven without producing offspring to continue their family line. Just like these celibates, a good woman, though she is sonless, will go to heaven when she steadfastly adheres to the celibate life after her husband's death.'<sup>187</sup>

The texts like that of *Kātyāyana* and *Parāśara* also provide instructions that a widow should live a life of mourning throughout her life.<sup>188</sup> *Śāṅkarasmṛti* does not contain rules for widows. But in practice among the Nambudiris, a widow is considered as a bad omen or inauspicious. 'She was unwanted and referred to as the woman without marital symbol, the *Tāli* around the neck. They believed that the husband's death was caused by the ill-fated alignment of stars in his wife's horoscope. So, the widow was responsible for his death and held guilty of a criminal act of murdering her husband.'<sup>189</sup>

Several instances of the conditions of Nambudiri women were described by the writers like V.T.Bhattathiripad, Lalithambika Antarjanam, Devaki Nilayangode, and E.M.S.Nambudiripad. Immediately after the ritual of circumventing the fire as a witness, if the groom dies, the girl is doomed to widowhood for the rest of her life. Thus many *Antarjanam* didn't even experience the pleasures of married life. Devaki Nilayangode remembers that 'I know of a girl who was going to her husband's house a month after the wedding. Before this could happen, the husband died. A girl had no place in her parents' home after marriage. She could not be taken to her husband's

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<sup>187</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>188</sup> P.V. Kane, *Op. cit.*, p. 295. Remarriage of women was not prescribed by *Dharmasāstras* but it was not unknown also. In Atharvaveda we come across the term *Punnarbhu*, which means a remarried woman. *Baudhāyana Dharmaśūtra* uses the term *punarbhū* for a woman who discards her impotent or outcaste husband and takes another husband. *Vasiṣṭha Dharmaśūtra* also recognises the remarriage of women on certain conditions. But *Manusmṛti* strongly disapproves the remarriage of women.

<sup>189</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

either. What was to be done? The priests were in a dilemma. Their solution was that the girl should go to her husband's house accompanied by two or three Nambudiri women who, at the inauspicious hour of twilight, must kick open the kitchen door, take the girl inside, and leave. Nobody welcomed her with a lighted lamp. All her life was spent in this darkness".<sup>190</sup> E.M.S. writes in his diary, "My father's uncle's wife [aunt] became a child widow. She spent sixty years of her life, which followed, taking care of the people in her husband's home. One of my father's sister's sons married and passed away soon. The wife remained a widow for fifty years after that".<sup>191</sup>

Premature widowhood was common because mostly young girls were married off to old men as their second or third wives. Widowed at a young age of thirteen or fourteen, they had to live the rest of their life in perpetual mourning. The passage of the woman from the position of wife to the position of the widow is marked by various rites. Soon after the death, the son or the stepson requests her to remove her *tāli*, the symbol of her wifeness. Before lighting the pyre, she throws herself at her husband's feet as if asking forgiveness for her crime.<sup>192</sup> 'Throughout India, widowhood is considered as a punishment for a crime committed by the woman in her former birth upon the earth. After cremation, a widow takes a bath and was not allowed to dry herself or change her wet clothes and remains wet and dripping inside a darkened room with the windows shut. She stays there for ten days until the end of the *pulā* the period of defilement, without changing her clothing or seeing anybody.<sup>193</sup> A widow is regarded as the dark half of the womanhood, the structural counterpart of *sumangali*, the auspicious married woman. These ten days in the darkroom indicates the beginning of her inauspicious life.

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>191</sup> E.M.S. Nambudiripad, *Op. cit.*, p.29.

<sup>192</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

During these ten days, she is permitted to eat only once a day that too uncooked food. She has to take both three times a day, and she sleeps on the bare floor.<sup>194</sup>

Devaki Nilayangode remembers that in her childhood, two or three women spent their days wet, hungry, and weak. The only relief in sight was the end of the fights with their co-wives.<sup>195</sup> After the ten days of defilement, they observed a year of *diksha*, after which they could visit temples. But they could not participate in any auspicious functions. A widow has to suffer humiliations and abuses because she is an ill omen.<sup>196</sup> Even if her parents were alive, she would not get any sympathy from them. They kept a distance by blaming her fate. In the story *Kur̥rasammatam*, Lalithambika Antarjanam states that a widow cannot touch the *aṣṭamāṅgalya* or the lamp; she can't line her eyes with kajal, nor wear a *bindi* on her forehead. In the story, a girl becomes a widow at the age of eleven. The father of the girl gives her a *tulaṣi* garland after breaking her *tāli*. Only after she grew up did she understand the difference between the *tulaṣi* garland and *tāli*.<sup>197</sup> Uma Chakrvarti argues that all the rituals associate with widowhood concentrate on the danger represented by her sexuality. The existence of a widow after the death of her husband is a threat to his community. The ceremony and rituals of widowhood symbolizes the sexual death of the widow.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Lalithambika Antharjanathinte Kathakal Sampūrṇam*, p. 100.

<sup>198</sup> Uma Chakravarti, 'Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), p. 2249.

A widow, even if she is a child, was not allowed to remarry. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* does not sanction *Sati*, the burning of a widow, or remarriage.<sup>199</sup> She had to live a life of celibacy. Widowhood brought about changes in the dress as well. They were not to smear sandalwood paste on their forehead. Instead, they could apply only holy ash. The only piece of jewellery they were allowed was the ring worn at the time of their husband's funeral rites, the '*Pavitramōtira* which they continue to wear afterward.<sup>200</sup>

There were only minor differences between *sumangalis* and widows in the way of dressing. The coloured clothes, bangles, adornments that point out the active sexuality of a married woman were denied to Nambudiri women. Still the *tāli* gives them an identity and a purpose to exist in this world. By breaking their *tāli*, they were deprived of that identity. Perhaps it was the horrifying condition that the widows lived, forced all the Nambudiri women's

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<sup>199</sup> *Sati* is the virtuous ideal wife (an ideology produced by male elite class and internalized by women). She is devoted and subordinated to her husband. The earliest evidence for practice of *sati* dates from A D 510. It was commemorated in an inscription at Eran. In the Vedic times there are references on a widow performing symbolic self immolation at the death of her husband. 'Sati' was nearly symbolic during the Vedic period because later Vedic literature refers to remarriage of widows to their husband's brother. See, Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India from the Origins to A D 1300*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2003, p. 304. *Sati* is a ritual of self-burning of a wife by ascending the funeral pyre of deceased husband. See, John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Sati the Belssing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, p. 3. There are references in the normative texts regarding the custom of *sati*. The act of committing '*sati*' was endorsed by the power of ideology. Both men and women believed in the moral and transformative power of *sati*. It is believed that '*sati*' would give salvation not only to the women who burns herself but the whole family of her husband and her father going back for seven generations. See Mantakranta Bose, ed., *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient Medieval and Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, *Op. cit.*, p. 27. Thus, the real motive behind '*sati*' was masked by ideology. Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid writes, "Widow immolation is one of the most violent of patriarchal practise from other forms of patriarchal violence, first in the degree of consent it has received and second in the supportive institution and ideological formation that rationalize and idealize it." Kum kum Sangari, Suresh Vaid, 'Institution, Belief, Ideologies, Widow immolation in contemporary Rajasthan', in, Malathi De Alwis, Kumari Jayawardena, eds., *Embodied Violence: Communalizing Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, Zed Books, London, 1996, p. 239.

<sup>200</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

prayers *pūjās*, and fasts for the longevity of their husbands.<sup>201</sup> It is evident from the above discussion that Brahmanical ideology does not recognize any status for women except that of a wife and mother. Her identity and selfhood are derived from her relationship with males, husbands, and sons. Marriage, therefore, is the only institution that women were not only entitled but obliged to assume.

In a community that regarded marriage as a means to perpetuate the Brahmanical patrilineal family, the women did not enjoy any position except as a tool for reproduction. Marriage provided woman a position in society; at the same time, it was also a means to control her life. All the stringent rules regarding the way the women dressed walked and talked to others not only confined them within the domestic space but also their world view, knowledge, and experiences to the minimum. They had no other means of fulfilling their wishes except for being dependent on their husbands. They had to suffer domestic violence, physical torture from their husbands, and sometimes from the co-wives. As the women lacked access to economic resources or any kind of power resources, they had to remain as silent victims. The stories of M.R.Bhattathiripad and Lalithambika Antarjanam portrayed the lives of Antarjanam, who were victims of domestic violence. The relationship between husband and wife that happened as a result of marriage was a form of domestic slavery. Severe restrictions were imposed upon her body and mind. The mantras during the marriage rituals reveal that how does the Brahmanical ideology consider wife as a property of her husband.

The Nambudiri women, both as wife and widow, suffered domestic violence, oppression, and marginalisation in her life. She was neglected by her husband and lived her life fighting with her co-wives. The rites and rituals she had to perform and the domestic chores forced her to forget the conjugal

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

pleasures of marital life. She internalized the ritualized ideology of Nambudiri household and considered begetting a son is the only objective and *dharma* of her life. The patriarchal notions of the Nambudiri community had controlled the procreative power of the women by making them sexually, economically, and ritually subservient to their husbands. Their sexuality was controlled by making them secluded from the public gaze and restricting them to clearly defined spaces. Rules were laid down to control their dress, ornaments, and even mobility. As the body was regarded as a metaphor of power relations hidden body represented the lack of agency or power. The public space was a prohibited area for women, and the female space was within the four walls of *illam*. There too, their mobility was restricted. They did not move in the outer parts to the *illam* or veranda, or their movements were limited to *patinjarri*, center courtyard, kitchen, and the adjacent areas, space with which they had access was the temple, mostly situated near to the *illam*. There too, they should be accompanied by men.

The institution of marriage was a major Vedic ritual of the Nambudiris to ensure power, property, and caste purity. Caste purity is essential for sustaining power and property in society. For this purpose, women and their sexuality should be brought under male surveillance. Marriage, sexuality, and reproduction constitute the basic features of the caste system. The institution of marriage recreated class and caste inequality. Marriage, as the most important *Samskāras* among Nambudiri, contributed to the crystallization of gender hierarchies and hierarchically arranged power relations. Nambudiris considered their women as property that can be easily exchanged without their consent. Through the endogamous and hypergamous marriage system, they had maintained their control over their womenfolk as well as the women of Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women. The three types of marriage among them, be it *Vēli*, *māttakalyāṇam*, or *sambandham*, were the

Brahmanical constructs that ensure women's subordination and gender and caste hierarchies.

The custom of marriage among the Nambudiri should be examined in the context of their dominant position in society. They were the largest landowners in pre-modern Kerala, enjoying special privileges. The ideology of the purity of caste, access to resources, and dominance in the realm of knowledge played a pivotal role in sanctioning and legitimizing their control in society. Caste is reproduced with endogamous marriages, which can be regarded as a tool for safeguarding their purity and preserving caste and gender subordination.<sup>202</sup> *Vēḷi*, the endogamous marriage of Nambudiris, serves this purpose. Among them, the eldest son alone can enter into *Vēḷi* to keep the family lineage uninterrupted. It was a device to avoid the partition of family property and to maintain certain economic and social privileges.

The prime objective of *Vēḷi* was procreation or giving birth to sons. The continuation of male *vaṃsā* or line is the primary aim of marriage, and it requires a girl from another family to be brought in. The exchange of women as *kanyādān* is highly ritualised because it is through this exchange that the male line of a family perpetuates. The ritualised marriage was permitted for the eldest son alone. It also ritualises female sexuality and the reproductive powers of women, which were controlled to maintain the bounded nature of the caste system. Women had a crucial place in preserving the purity of the caste system. The purity of the blood and lineage was maintained through the control of women and their spaces. The custom of *Vēḷi* had made the Nambudiri women mere vehicles for carrying the patrilineal descent as daughters, wives, widows, that they were expected to conform to the

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<sup>202</sup> Suvira Jaiswal, *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender and Vaishnava Theology*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2016. p. 5.

normative rules of patriarchal ideology. When she enters the family of her husband, her life completely transforms, and she is expected to protect the interest of the new family. As a true *pativrata* she had to serve her husband and other family members. She was denied rights to complain even if she is ignored as a wife in the polygamous marriage of her husband or when she becomes a widow.

The Nambudiris, as a part of preserving their rights in the social order, entered into *sambandham* relations with other prominent castes like Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women. *Sambandham* is a word that was originally used to refer to a Nambudiri's marriage with Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women. The term connotes a Brahmin entitlement in the early medieval documents. In the later Chera inscriptions, one of the rights bestowed to Nambudiris was *kattileruka*.<sup>203</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> century inscriptions from Venad, it is stated that the Nambudiris were excommunicated as a punishment by taking away their trusteeship rights and *sambandham* rights.<sup>204</sup> From the perspective of male Nambudiris *sambandham* is not a formal marriage. It is just a right to cohabit, which can be annulled at any movement. Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* communities considered this form of sexual union with Nambudiris as useful to attain power and prestige in society. *Sambandham* played a significant role in consolidating relations between Nambudiris and local rulers and provided Nairs and *ampalavāsi* a well-defined space in the social order in pre-modern Kerala. These communities followed the matrilineal system of inheritance. Though, as K.N. Ganesh points out, we cannot say matrilineal was introduced by Nambudiris, matriliney, and *sambandham* were two practices that helped Nambudiris to forge social connections with *Kṣatriya*, Nair, and *ampalavāsi communities*.

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<sup>203</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinre Innalekaḷ*, p.194.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.



Matriliny is the form of inheritance of a *Taravātu* that comes through maternal lineage. Later, when the Nambudiris reached Kerala, they accepted the matrilineal practices and *sambandham* as that custom which would go along with their marriage practices.<sup>205</sup> It was given legitimacy with the claim that Paraśurāma sanctioned it in *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam*. This practice became equally useful for Nambudiris, Nairs, *Kṣatriyas* and *ampalavāsis*. *Sambandham* was loose, and to be precise, a temporary adjustment: as per Nambudiris' definition, "just a night's adjustment for a good sleep."<sup>206</sup> This could be terminated without any notice by either party. Children born out of such a relationship had no claim on their father's property.<sup>207</sup> Ideologically Nambudiris succeed in making others believe that taking the property of a Brahmin is a sin. As a result, the sexual needs of Nambudiris were taken care of without any loss of property.<sup>208</sup>

It was because of ideological supremacy and rights on land that Nambudiri preferences were acknowledged by matrilineal communities. Praveena Kodoth states that the *sambandham* system was inextricably linked to the system of land ownership and tenancy. The Nambudiris were landlords who control the greater part of the land in south Malabar, which they gave to their tenants. The intermediary tenants who received land from Nambudiris were Nairs. Such a hierarchically arranged system provided Nambudiris sexual access to the women of Nair tenant *taravātu*.<sup>209</sup> Since the sexual righteousness of Nairs was a Nambudiri construct, fidelity was not regarded

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>206</sup> K.N. Panikar, *Op. cit.* p. 173.

<sup>207</sup> G.Arunima, 'Writing Culture of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel', *Studies in History*, 13 2, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997, p. 276.

<sup>208</sup> K.N.Panikar, *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>209</sup> Praveena Kodoth, *Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, Sambandham, and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Malabar*, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No.2, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 352.

as a virtue among Nairs. According to *Kēraḷōlpatti*, the function of a Nair woman was to satisfy the sexual orgy of a Nambudiri.<sup>210</sup> If a Brahmin desires the wife of a *Śūdra* for his sexual needs, the *Śūdra* is bound to obey. This was said by Ashtamoorthi to the marriage commission quoting the smritis. The idea that only from those *Brāhmaṇas* who lived following the Vedic rules could a woman conceive daring and intelligent sons was inherent in the Brahmin tradition.<sup>211</sup>

The ideological influence was strong as long as Nairs continued to believe that having connections with Nambudiris who were regarded as superior due to their social authority benefitted by gaining high standing and importance. Only wherever the material status of Nambudiris was destroyed did this ideology fail. In their position as sole owners of the land, the Nambudiris could register land in the name of their consorts to build homes for them, and also take it back after severing relations with them. If there were beautiful maidens living in any of these houses which the Nair family received from a Nambudiri family, the Nambudiri had the right to make her his partner. Hence, family structure, marriage customs, land relations and succession are constructed by Brahmanical ideology.<sup>212</sup> The *Sambandham* system, which had adversely affected the lives of Nambudiri women, considered Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women as mere tools for the sexual needs of Nambudiri. The sexuality of the women of these communities was controlled and made use of the power relations in societies.

It has to be discussed whether women had such relations with their consent, whether it was their own choice, and what were the feelings of security and agency they experienced within that. Matriliney and *sambandham*

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<sup>210</sup> K.N.Panikar, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

were practices that enabled the existing landlords to maintain land and property relations as per the convenience of the male member who had ownership over the land. What the Nambudiris did on the basis of their supreme Vedic knowledge and power in the society, is that they made the Nairs believe that they are ideologically more privileged, that *sambandham* with the Nambudiri was the most suitable and superior form of marriage alliance for them. In this transaction, women were vehicles that maintained alliances between eminent families. Practices like *Tiraṇṭukalyānam*, which were rituals associated with women in Nair and ampalavāsi communities, placed the women on a pedestal, stating that they were fertility rituals meant to prepare them for conjugal relationship and motherhood in the days to come. There was the practice of *Tuḷasikkettu* among ampalavāsis. The representative of the *tuḷasi*, who is mostly an ampalavāsi or Nambudiri, would garland the ampalavāsi maiden with a *tuḷasimala*. This symbolised the offering of the girl to the god. This does not necessitate the girl to marry the same person later. It could be some other ampalavāsi or Nambudiri.<sup>213</sup> Just like *Dēvadāsis* being offered to the gods, here, the girl is being offered to the *Bhūdēva* (the lord of the land or Nambudiri). Beyond this, these rituals never offered women any freedom or equality. The sexual freedom that Nair women were supposed to have was not actual freedom, but the indication given to men, including Nambudiris, to have physical relations with them flouting all moral rules. Nair women did not have the freedom to accept any man of their choice. Here, caste was an essential factor. There were practices like *Maṇṇāppēṭi* and *Pulappēṭi* to avoid relations with men of a lower caste.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with Sathidevi M., Desamangalam, 80 years, 8/6/2018.

<sup>214</sup> Adoor K. K. Ramachandra Nair, *Slavery in Kerala*, Myttal Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p.26. *Maṇṇāppēṭi* and *Pulappēṭi* were a custom that existed in Kerala. It occurred during the months of February and March. If a low caste man met a woman of higher caste during this period, he might seize her and she will lose her caste and family. The custom was used as a tool to instil fear among the higher caste women and force them to conform to the norms of the caste.

Even they did not have the freedom to go beyond the boundaries of caste. The Nair and ampalavāsi women were also subservient to patriarchal ideology. As they were followers of matrilineal custom, they were known as the successors of a common ancestress. But they were not given the right to handle the property. All the immovable and valuable movable property was held in common in the name of the oldest male member of the family.<sup>215</sup> Their space was also so limited to the household.

When they married a Nambudiri, often, they were denied the status and respect of being a wife. Nair women or ampalavāsi women were denied the right to go to Nambudiri household. There were rare instances of Nambudiri taking their Nair, *ampalavāsi* partner to their *illam*. They were accommodated in a building outside the *illam*. They have to follow the rituals of purity and impurity. As Nambudiri never considered their partner as wives, they were not respected or given an equal status by the members of the *illam*. They were not entitled to the property of the *illam*, even if Nambudiri is the eldest son of the family. Kathaleen Gough observes that Nambudiris did not consider *sambandham* as a valid marriage but as a form of concubinage. The women with whom they had *sambandham* and her children had no rights in the patrilineal descent or inheritance. They were not permitted to enter into Nambudiris *illam* or touch its inhabitants.<sup>216</sup> After the death of Nambudiri, the children and the women of *sambandham* liaison were kept out of the *sraddha* rites.<sup>217</sup> There were instances of leaving the Nair or *ampalavāsi* women for

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<sup>215</sup> Joan P. Mencher, Changing Familial Roles among South Malabar Nayars, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 18, No. 3, The University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 232.

<sup>216</sup> E. Kathleen Gough, The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 89, No.1, Jan-Jun., 1959, p. 29.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with Praveen Nambudiri, Thrissur, 8/6/2017, He remembers that when younger brother of his grandfather died, his nair wife and children were excluded from *sraddha* rites.

marrying Nambudiri women. V.T.Bhattathrippad's life is an example of this.<sup>218</sup>

Those women who came into royal families as wives also had no proper position in the family except that of being the king's consorts. Manu S Pillai elucidates this in his studies on Travancore royal families. The king's wives were 'Ammaccis.'<sup>219</sup> They never received the title of Maharani. Occasionally, they would be members of the Nair society. They, as well as the women who had *sambandham* with Nambudiris, had to observe *ayittam* (pollution). The food they touched was polluted for the king. If the king died, these women would lose the position they enjoyed so far. It cannot be said that the royal women benefitted from the *sambandham* they had with Nambudiris. The mutual dependency and relations that existed between Nambudiris and the political power they wielded formed the basis of the *sambandham* between the royal families and Nambudiris. Due to their superiority in the caste hierarchy and the position of upholders of Vedic knowledge, they had influence over the rulers as well. It was the Nambudiris who imparted legitimacy to the Perumals and rulers of *Svarūpams* that came up after the disintegration of Perumal's. In return, the rulers and local chieftains sensured their privileges enjoyed by the *Brāhmaṇas*. *Sambandham* was a mechanism to maintain this kind of mutual dependency. Here also, the woman's consent was not relevant. The patrilineal family structure of Nambudiris subjugated the women of their community as well as those of the matrilineal communities to their advantage.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> V.T. Bhattathirippad, *V T yude Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, p. 282-291.

<sup>219</sup> Manu S. Pillai, *The Ivory Throne*, Harper Collins, Noida, 2015, p. 35.

<sup>220</sup> K.N. Ganesh makes a significant observation regarding *Vēḷi and Sambandham* (marriage). The descendants of Brahmins are present in *naṭuvallī* families, royal families or Nair *taṟavāṭus* through *sambandham* alliance. They are not regarded as pure Brahmin progenies. At least some should be maintained as pure. It is for this that the marriage custom known as *Vēḷi* was cast on the Nambudiri women. The Nambudiri

Among the matrilineal communities, the woman had better freedom of movement and other kinds of freedom compared to Brahmin women. For example, the freedom to wear ornaments and clothes, the freedom to sing and dance, were allowed. Their lives were not ritualistic, like that of the Nambudiri women. The Nambudiri women had to follow the rules such as *Smṛti* rules in matters of ornaments, adornments, and clothes. However, the lack of freedom faced by Nambudiri women, as well as faced by women of matrilineal tradition, were both subservient to Brahmanical patriarchal ideology. One category of women was maintained as the objects of reproduction for the Nambudiri men to maintain their family in the patriarchal tradition, while the other was used for the satisfaction of their basic instincts and at the same time to maintain their caste supremacy, their right over land, the influence they had to have in the political arena etc. Both categories of women were victims of Brahmanical patriarchy. Nambudiri women being upper caste had to suffer restriction more stringent than the women of other communities. This held true for all Brahmin women, whatever state they belonged to.

Discrimination against girls starts very early in all Brahmin families. Among Kashmiri Pandits, Tamil Brahmins, and Maratha Brahmins, the birth of a girl child is not welcome. Kashmiri Brahmins as known as Pandits also prefer sons to that of daughters.<sup>221</sup> Daughters are considered as guests. They are ornaments held in custody to be surrendered at the rightful owner's

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would marry for the maintenance of the *illam*'s wealth. Even while engaging in *Vēḷi*, they would maintain *sambandham* with women of other castes. However, Nambudiri women had the responsibility of maintaining the purity of *illams*. For the same reason, the outside world is denied to them. Their connection/relation with other men can be viewed as the destruction of the purity of *illam*, of wealth, and of purity of caste. See, K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷattinṛe Innalekaḷ*, p. 198.

<sup>221</sup> T.N. Madan, *Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir* (1965), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p. 77.

demand.<sup>222</sup> For example, the bride's father among the Kashmiri pandit gives his daughter as gift uttering, "I give my daughter to you." The bridegroom's father accepts the bride uttering the word, "I accept."<sup>223</sup> The Bengalis also considered being a male child's mother as a more important status than being a wife, for a woman. Even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the birth of a Bengali girl was regarded as a misfortune. Education was for boys only. Invariably, the girls were married off at a young age. Child widowhood was widespread among Bengali Brahmins.

Marriage was considered a gift of the virgin among Bengalis.<sup>224</sup> Due to the importance given to virginity, child marriages were widespread. Polygamy was strong among *Kulin* Brahmins in Bengal more than in any other state. There were *Kulin* Brahmins who had more than a hundred wives. *Kulin* polygamy was a predominant feature of Bengal society. Very often, it was for money that they entered into marriage alliances.<sup>225</sup> These noblemen had no qualms about marrying off their daughters to old and already married *Brāhmaṇas*. There are certain similarities in the customs of Nambudiris and these *Kulin* Brahmins. The Nambudiri men used to visit the houses of the Nair women with whom they had *sambandham*. They, in turn, never stayed in the Nambudiri households. Many *Kulin* Brahmins in Bengal also paid only occasional visits to their wives' houses. Most of these wives wouldn't leave their paternal homes and go and stay at their husbands' homes.<sup>226</sup> However, while such customs existed among Nambudiris between Nambudiri men and

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>223</sup> Sasisekhara Toshakhani, *Rites and Rituals of Kashmiri Brahmins*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2010, p. 80.

<sup>224</sup> See, Lina M Fruzzetti, *The Gift of a Virgin: Women, Marriage and Ritual in a Bengali Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990.

<sup>225</sup> Malavika Karlekar, 'Reflection on Kulin Polygamy- Nistharani Debi's Sekeley Katha' [www.cwds.ac.in](http://www.cwds.ac.in), p. 4. ,

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

their Nair wives, the same was followed by *Kulin* Brahmins with wives of the same caste. The autobiography of Nistarini Debi brings to light many aspects of *Kulin* Brahmin families.<sup>227</sup> It is said that there was a practice of keeping a record book among *Kulin* Brahmin men. It would contain the address of their wives and all their financial information. The dowry received from each girl and what is pending would be written there.<sup>228</sup> The wife's family would bear all the expenses of the male. It never crossed the minds of these men that the welfare of their wives was their responsibility.

In a male-dominated society, a woman accepts and internalises her condition. Most of the women accept polygamy as a natural custom. They continued to provide their service as a devoted wife.<sup>229</sup> Women did not have property rights either in their natal homes or in their marital home.<sup>230</sup> Woman's life was centered on family and marriage. They were expected to be loyal to their parents, husband, and other members of the family.<sup>231</sup>

In Maharashtra also, upper caste women lived within the four walls of their homes. They, too, faced restrictions akin to Nambudiri girls. Living in large joint families, they had to face many restrictions. They shouldn't meet or talk to a man other than their family members. They should respect the elders and should be completely subservient to the husband. Not only the lives of men and women 'separate', but they were also unequal. Ramabai Ranade remembers that her mother was docile and obedient to her husband. Women's lives were regulated and restricted by the ideology of

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> Srabarshi Ghosh, 'Birds in a Cage: Changes in Bengali Social Life as Recorded in Autobiographies by Women', in, Alice Thorner and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, eds., *Ideals Images and Real Lives Women in Literature and History*, Orient Longman, Mumbai, 2000, p. 42.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43-44.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44



‘*soubhāgyavati*.’ They are married at a very young age. The marriage should be conducted before the girl turns ten. If not, the parents were criticised. Immediately after the first menstruation, she is sent to the husband’s house. They become mothers at a very young age. Like the Nambudiries, among the Maharashtra Brahmins also the birth of a son was a celebration and the birth of daughter considered as misfortune. The dowry system was also prevalent.<sup>232</sup>

Maratha Brahmin girls above eight years were not allowed to enter the drawing-room of her father’s house, nor appear before other men.<sup>233</sup> Like the Nambudiris, there were marked ‘male zones’ and ‘female zones’ within their households as well. In Maharashtra, women were allowed only in the kitchen, and space called *majghar*.<sup>234</sup> Girls were denied everything in these Brahmin families. Unlike in Nambudiri families, there were pre-puberty marriages among all these communities.<sup>235</sup>

Among Maratha Brahmins, women were like birds confined in cages.<sup>236</sup> Women in the household hadn’t seen any other space except the kitchen, *majghar*, devotion room, the veranda, a Ganpati temple adjacent to the main building.<sup>237</sup> Ramabai Ranade remembers that in the world of women, there existed a hierarchy of their own. Like the Nambudiris, they made laws within the household in collaboration with the oldest women of the family. When Ramabai started learning to read and write, the elderly women tried to

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<sup>232</sup> Meera Kosambi, ‘Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Ramabai’s Contribution to Women’s Cause’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 44, Oct. 29, 1988, p. 39.

<sup>233</sup> Meera Kosambi, *Crossing the Thresholds: Feminist Essay in Social History*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p. 114.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

stop her, and also punished her.<sup>238</sup> Expulsion from the kitchen and verbal ostracism was the punishment meted out to such women on such occasions. They were denied physical as well as social spaces at the same time.<sup>239</sup>

Like in Nambudiri household, domestic violence was prevalent in Maratha upper-class families. Women were subjected to a lot of physical torture. From a very young age, the girls learn to discipline themselves. Moreover, women had to do all the domestic work. Meera Kosambi cites the life of Janaki Bai Tilak, who was treated harshly by her husband and died due to domestic violence.<sup>240</sup>

Like in Kerala, in Maharashtra also widowhood was a horrifying state of conditions. There were plenty of child widows. Widows were considered inauspicious. It was considered a punishment for a woman's sins. A Marathi Brahmin widow had to face many restrictions. She had to survive with one meal a day, had to wear white and do away with jewellery and other adornments. Tonsuring was a mandatory ritual. This ritual signifies the asexuality of the widow. The prescriptive texts do not mention the tonsure of a widow. Instead, they rule that the widows should not adorn their hairs.<sup>241</sup> The tonsure of a widow is a visible marker of the widow's entry into a state of social death. For a *Brāhmaṇas*, widow sexual death was social death

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>239</sup> In Kerala also, *Bhraṣṭu* (excommunication) was performed on non-conforming women with the help of other women. The cause for many a *smarthavicharam* was the enmity of *sapatnis* or sisters in law.

<sup>240</sup> Meera Kosambi, *Crossing the Thresholds: Feminist Essay in Social History*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>241</sup> Women in the royal family kept their hair unbound during the period of pollution and mourning. Unbound hair signifies widowhood in *Māhābhārata*. When Draupadi kept her hair unbound for twelve years she was symbolically proclaiming a state of widowhood and mourning. The tonsure of the widows was wide spread among Brahmin women in Maharashtra, Tamil nadu and Karnataka. Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, p. 166.

because apart from that of reproduction, she has no other role to play. Tonsuring was the most humiliating ritual of widowhood. The custom was that a widow's bangles and the hair should go along with the body of her husband. Hence, she had to be clean-shaven always.<sup>242</sup>

In Maharashtra, widows were regarded as a means for free labour. In their marital home as well as in their natal home, they had to depend on others. For the same reason, they were expected to do all domestic work. The sympathy they get as a child widows from their own homes, stop when they mature. A widow is treated as a low class maid servant. All other members of the household exercised power over her. Even if she collapsed in the middle burden of their domestic labours no one feel sad. Uma Chakravarti uses the term 'domestic drudges' to describe widows.<sup>243</sup> Anandi Bai Karve spoke of the movements in her life when she was a widow, in her autobiography. She got married at the age of eight. Four months later, she was widowed, and she returned home. There she had to face severe restriction that an eight year old child couldn't understand. She couldn't touch anything, play with other children or dress well. Moreover, she had to do household chores along with her grandmother.<sup>244</sup>

Though the customs had regional and caste-based differences, the lives of Brahmin women everywhere were more or less similar. Pre-puberty marriage, restrictions within the house, restrictions on their relationship with the outside world, polygamy, domestic violence, denial of economic rights, etc. were painful for all Brahmin women. Regulation of marriage, the laws

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<sup>242</sup> Meera Kosambi, 'Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause', p. 40.

<sup>243</sup> Uma Chakravarti, 'Social Pariahs and Domestic Drudges: Widowhood among Nineteenth Century Poona Brahmins', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 21, No. 9/11, Sep-Oct., 1993, p. 134.

<sup>244</sup> Anandi Bai Karve, 'Autobiography', in, D.D.Karve, ed. and tr., *The New Brahmins Five Maharashtrian families*, University of California Press, California, 1963, p. 62.

that control the role of the wife, the mother, and the widow that appeared in the *Smṛti* texts, which were means to safeguard the rights of upper castes in caste-ridden societies, adversely affected the lives of Brahmin women. The property rights, supremacy in the caste hierarchy, special privilege in the society, all these enjoyed by the Nambudiris, were sustained by subjugating their women and their sexuality by patriarchal ideology.

Although women were kept out of the production system and rights over resources, they still had rights over reproduction. That way, the woman remained a threat to her husband's family and its purity. If the woman's natural sexual inclination towards other men is not curbed, it is a threat to the purity of her caste. The *Smṛtikāra*kas found three ways to control that. One is fidelity to the husband. The woman should be praised for her chastity as well as motherhood. Propaganda should be given through examples of mythological characters, on the rewards of chastity, and hints should be made about the fickle nature of women. The second method is to punish those who don't conform. *Manusmṛti* has assigned responsibility for this to her relatives, including the husband, as well as to the king. It was made to be accepted that it was the king's responsibility as head of the state that a woman's chastity and purity is maintained. Manu thus proclaims how important the purity of women is.

*Manusmṛti* has detailed instructions regarding all kinds of duties: marriage rites, duties of a couple, and duties of a woman, for people of all castes. Manu tried to legitimize the caste system and to get the king's approval for the same. Manu states that it was the responsibility of the king to see if each caste is performing its duty. Manu also stipulates that Vaisyas and Sudras should be careful not to refrain from their duties. If the working class strayed from their duties, the social order formulated by Brahmin domination through control over rights on rituals, knowledge, land, production divisions

wouldn't survive. Moreover, *svajāti* marriage was a custom indispensable for such a social order. The family head perpetuates a social system that incorporates the family, community, property rights, and the position of *Brāhmaṇas* through the institution of marriage. For the same reason, *Manusmṛti* gives a lot of importance to the custom of marriage. The marriage had strict rules that helped to prevent a mixed breed.

Yet there were voices raised against this dominant ideology. These resistances are manifested in the sexual transgressions, which were condemned by all the *Smṛtis* as 'grave sin.' For adultery, severe punishment was prescribed by all the *Smṛtis*. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* advocates the trial called *smārttavicāram* to prove adultery, and, if found guilty, not only the woman, and the accused men but also their next generation were subsequently punished. The peculiar marriage customs of the Nambudiri, as well as the rigid control of female sexuality, are the main reasons behind sexual transgression and the subsequent *Smārttavicāram*, which we will take up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN  
BRAHMANICAL IDEOLOGY: PROBING  
THE CASE OF SMĀRTTAVICĀRAM**

*Smārttavicāram* was the caste trial of Nambudiri women accused of adultery. It was an elaborate procedure in which the king, the *Smārttans*, the *Mimāṃsāka*, and the kinsmen of the accused women played a vital role. It was an ideology of crime and punishment prescribed by *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and practiced by Nambudiris till the late 1920s. The ideological control of Nambudiri women was best expressed in the conduct of *smārttavicāram*. This chapter analyses the process of *smārttavicāram* and how did the Nambudiris controlled female sexuality by instilling fear in the minds of their women. Another question the chapter tries to address is the relationship between the control of female sexuality, caste purity, and property rights. Before examining the contours of *smārttavicāram* in Kerala, it is relevant to understand the relationship between caste, gender, and class and the ways by which female sexuality was controlled by patriarchy, particularly Brahmanical patriarchy. The attitude of Brahmanical lawgivers to the world of women and their sexuality and how the Brahmanical texts dealt with the crime of adultery is also examined.

**CASTE, GENDER, AND CLASS**

Caste and gender hierarchies constitute a significant aspect of Indian social structure. It is argued that “caste as a principal of social stratification in India is both an institution and an ideology within which are embedded notions of power and hierarchy.”<sup>1</sup> Caste, as an institution, shapes and

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<sup>1</sup> Supurna Banarjee, and Nandini Ghosh, eds., *Caste and Gender in Contemporary India: Power Privilege and Politics*, Routledge, New York, 2019, p. 3.

organizes different social groups in terms of their position in the social and economic structure.<sup>2</sup> Caste is a hierarchical system with purity and pollution as its integral characteristics. The ideology of purity separated people as pure and impure, and even some occupations as pure and sacred and others as polluted.

The caste system is maintained through various patriarchal practices. Control of female sexuality, limited or no access to material and resources, control of both production and reproduction contribute towards perpetuating hierarchy in the society.<sup>3</sup> Gender in a caste society is an instrument to protect caste honour. Kannabiran writes, “Gender within caste society is defined and structured in such a manner that the manhood of the caste is defined both by the degree of control men exercise over women and the degree of the passivity of the women of the caste.”<sup>4</sup> Women were subjugated, and her sexuality was controlled for the perpetuation of the purity of caste and patriarchal social structure. Endogamy and discourses on honor were used to protect the respectability of upper caste men.<sup>5</sup>

Upper caste women are more vulnerable to oppression and subjugation. As they were denied economic rights, they completely depended upon men.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as a matter of protecting honour, their movements are

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Kalpana Kannabiran, and Vasanta Kannabiran, *De-Erotizing Assault: Essays on Modesty Honours and Power*, Stree, Calcutta, 2002, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Dollimore observes that the subjectivity of woman is an important aspect of all cultures. Man has created culture as a mode of defence against nature. As for the woman, she is very often compared to nature. So, naturally, culture became a form of defence against nature, for the woman. It has also been observed that it is because the woman has been identified with nature that she is suppressed. See, Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. XXIV.

<sup>6</sup> Shatarupa Bhattacharya says that elite women have some control over resources which is evident from inscriptions. But the percentage of grants made by women is low. For example, in Vākāṭaka dynasty out of thirty-four published records only five documents

restricted, and they had to live in seclusion. Brahmanical patriarchy sternly controlled the sexuality of women.

### **Patriarchy and Female Sexuality**

One of the cardinal features of patriarchal ideology was controlling female sexuality. The norms of sexuality in a society were produced and controlled by oppressive patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy describes the authority of men in households, government, economics, sexuality, religion, and culture.<sup>7</sup> It also describes a particular kind of authority the direct power of the male head of household over their dependent sexual, economic, and religious choices, among others.<sup>8</sup>

In a patriarchal society, women are expected to be submissive and docile. They possess no right over their sexuality. Gerda Lerner, in her path-breaking study *The Creation of Patriarchy*, argues that even if women own economic rights, their sexuality and reproduction capacities were controlled by men.<sup>9</sup> Female sexuality was inextricably linked with purity, property rights, and notions of power in a patriarchal society. Women were considered as properties transferred from one family to another for the perpetuation of patrilineal descent. When access to resources was denied to women, they had to remain economically dependent on men. In India, the only resource majority of women possess is the jewellery they got as dowry. Economic dependency and ideological subjugation turned them into properties of men.

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are the grants made by women. See, Shatarupa Bhattacharya, 'Implicit and Explicit Markers of Gender Identities: A Study of the Vakataka Inscriptions', in, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 66, 2005-2006, pp. 147-154.

<sup>7</sup> V. Geetha, *Patriarchy*, Stree, Calcutta, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly A. Ryan, *Regulating Passion: Sexuality and Patriarchal Rule in Massachusetts 1700-1830*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> See, Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986. pp. 212-219.



Sexuality is not a natural instinct but a cultural production.<sup>10</sup> Dominant ideology, in a given society, determines the rules that regulate sexuality. It differs according to the nature of society and period but always forms the basis of gender inequality. Norms regarding sexuality make women subordinate, and their productive and reproductive capacities were appropriated by men for their benefits. Regulations of sexuality under patriarchy enforce heterosexuality and condemn all other deviant forms.<sup>11</sup> Heterosexuality is made obligatory by men to get access to women's sexuality and reproductive capacities. A lesbian is the one who refuses a man's sexuality access and lives outside the traditional structure. Her existence, therefore, has to be suppressed, for it challenges the order, not of nature but patriarchy.<sup>12</sup>

Sexuality is classified into masculine and feminine in all patriarchal societies. Masculine is domination, and feminine is submissive. All societies prescribe specific codes to control sexuality, and most of them were catered to female sexuality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sexuality is a cultural construct. It is the representation of the body through an ideological discourse. It is different at different times in the same culture. Its name will also vary in different cultures. Likewise, sexuality is the basis for gender inequality. An important aspect of the patriarchy is the sexual dependency of women. Family duties are divided into male and female roles, a dominant male role, and a subordinate female role. All societies have drafted numerous codes of conduct to control sexual activity. Some criteria are accepted, others are rejected. In general, all of these criteria are centered around a woman's sexual life. See, Shalini Shah, *Love, Eroticism, and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh-thirteenth Centuries*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Manu states that if a virgin is raped by another virgin, she must be fined 200, triple the price of the bride, and get ten lashes. If a virgin commits a crime, her head should shave immediately and need to cut off two fingers from her hands, parade her publicly on the ass. Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.186-187.

<sup>12</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love, Eroticism, and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh-thirteenth Centuries*, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

## Female Sexuality and Brahmanical Patriarchy

Female sexuality is viewed as dangerous and something to be controlled by Brahmanical patriarchy. The anthropologist Nur Yalman has opined that as per the Hindu social order, the land, the woman, and rituals were, in the past, protected within a closed structure. The three are interconnected structurally as well. It is impossible to maintain the three without severely controlling women's sexuality.<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to ensure control of the woman or rituals or, in other words, purity of caste-without strictly controlling the woman who is at the epicenter of the entire structure. A man's blood is two-sided in its origin. That is something received from the mother as well as the father. That is why it is said that both mother and father should be of the same caste.<sup>15</sup> This ideology has been often repeated in all *Smṛti* texts. However, there are deviants in the form of adultery, causing *Varṇasaṃkara*. Brahmanical texts have prescribed harsh punishments that involved the victim being beaten to death for the man of lower caste as well as for the arrogant woman who violates marriage laws.

As per the dictates of texts, there is a close relationship between caste, gender, and class. *Kaliyuga*, in Brahmanical texts, is a state of the complete downfall of existing social structure.<sup>16</sup> This takes place due to the breakdown of the Brahmanical code of conduct. This is a time when women, as well as people of the lower caste, stray away from their responsibilities and when there is inter-mixing of castes as a threatening state. *Kaliyuga* has been described as the period when families break down, and rituals fade into

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<sup>14</sup> Nur Yalman, 'On the Purity of Women in the Caste of Ceylon and Malabar,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 93, 1962, pp. 25-28.

<sup>15</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, (2003), Stree, Calcutta, 2013, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

forgetfulness, and women go astray.<sup>17</sup> Interbreeding of castes takes place as a result of such deterioration. The fears that *Smṛti* shad expressed about inter-caste marriages through his doctrine of caste intermixing, and the attempts he made to ban the same ideologically continued through the centuries, and all the *Smṛti* texts advocated subjugation of woman's sexuality as a major duty of the husband, father, other kinsmen and even state.<sup>18</sup> Brahmanical texts recognize the power of nonconformity inherent in all the women, which was enough to destroy the social structure. This is because of the belief that when a woman becomes corrupt, everything is lost. The Brahmanical texts elucidate the fact that upper-class women are the cause of moral insecurities.<sup>19</sup> The wealth and high positions acquired by the high caste men by repeatedly enlightening the people of lower caste and women on the need for their obedience with regard to the restrictions imposed by *Brāhmaṇas* might get overthrown by women's disobedience. In order to prevent such a predicament, efforts can be seen to have been made, in writings, to institutionalize the sexual inferiority of women. Attempts can also be seen to make such inferiority practical using the rights of the rulers. The methods used to get women's co-operation in these statutes are many: ideology, economic dependency, rights based on class, the respect showered on elite class women who conform to norms and are dependent, and finally, the use of power on them in times of need.<sup>20</sup>

Women were looked upon as people who safeguarded the respectability as well as the positions of men of high caste.<sup>21</sup> For the same reasons, they were to be carefully protected and their sexuality subjected to

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

careful surveillance. The women of upper castes were regarded as gateways—the spots through which one entered the caste system (a perfect example for this is the life of Kottapillamar of Tamilnadu). They literally remained within a fort, never going out. Only the men went out of the gateway of the fort.<sup>22</sup> The sexuality of the man of lower caste was regarded as a threat to that of the men of the higher caste.<sup>23</sup> For the same reasons, they strictly prevented the sexual relationship of men of lower caste with women of higher caste, institutionally by means of expert guard and vigilance. Violations of a contrary nature were punished until recently. Punishments were exercised in the form of ostracism, or conducting funeral rites when one was alive, or by killing the mother and the baby by drowning.<sup>24</sup> Hence it was necessary to get the approval of elite women for such statutes. This was ensured by getting consent—through enforcing ideologies like chastity of women, and the duty of women, on one side, and through the torture methods used by male relatives/the king/the state on the other.<sup>25</sup>

As Brahmanical patriarchy was an ideology connected with the purity of caste, rituals, and control of land, the control and purity of female sexuality become an essential factor. Women are more vulnerable to impurity, especially through sexual intercourse. It affects a woman both internally and externally, while for a man, it affects only externally. Leela Dube writes that “in the case of inter-caste sex, a man endures external pollution that can be easily washed away, but a woman endures internal pollution that permanently pollutes her. The contrast is culturally expressed by associating a woman with an earthen pot, which is easily and permanently spoiled if used by a lower caste man or a man of different religion, and the man, on the other hand, is the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

copper pot which is not easily polluted, and in any case, it can be restored to its original state by washing, rinsing and, if necessary, by setting it on fire, a quintessential purifier. This metaphor that distinguishes between men and women in terms of their vulnerability to sexual pollution is widely used. Women with upper castes are much more vulnerable to permanent pollution than women who belong to lower castes.”<sup>26</sup>

Women, in fact, are also considered as tools or objects for procreation. The female body is considered as a sexual body.<sup>27</sup> In a discussion about a man in *Upaniṣad*, his body is described in terms of vital functions: open mouth, breathing, speech, sight, and hearing. However, the description of a woman appears exclusively in terms of her sexual organs and how a man approaches her during sex: lap, lumbar, pubic hair, vagina, penetration, and climax. These examples illustrate that while the male body is linked to sacrificial and cosmological images in different ways, the female body tends to be described especially in relation to sexual intercourse and procreation.<sup>28</sup> In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, there are statements which express the idea that women are meant for procreation.<sup>29</sup> Brahmanical texts provide several verses which consider women as permanent moral threats.<sup>30</sup> Manu and several

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<sup>26</sup> Leela Dube, ‘Caste and Women’ in, Anupama Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste*, Zed Books, UK, 2005, p. 232.

<sup>27</sup> Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priest, Kings, and Women in the Early Upaniṣads*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007, p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Olivelle, ed. and tr., *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, pp. 46-47.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 190. The attitude of the Brahmanical patriarchy towards women was shaped by the concept of Manu. Meera Kosambi notes that Manu's ideas are so powerful and influential that nineteenth-century reformers in Maharashtra echoed his words. See, Meera Kosambi, *Crossing the Threshold: Feminist Essays in Social History*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p. 23. For example, Ranade argues that *Śūdras* and women are only indicative words of ignorance. While writing about social reformers, Uma Chakravarti claims that female sexuality was a threat even to social reformers. She writes about Dayananda Saraswathi that, on one

*Smṛtikāra*kas express their anxiety on uncontrollable female sexuality, which was expressed earlier in Vedic sacrifices. The Brahmanical notion of female sexuality is manifested in the following Vedic ritual. When the priest asks the woman about her lover, she has no other option but to name the person. The tradition did not accept refusal from the part of women. The priest threatened her that the refusal from her part would harm her family or near ones. The question was framed on the basis of the notion that every woman has a lover-. The priest begins the sacrifice after purifying the woman and by cursing her lover.<sup>31</sup>

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level, his thinking was related to how the monastic tradition in India had perceived women's sexuality as a threat to the search for salvation. But he had one foot in the Sanyasi ethos and the other (the most active foot) in the general regeneration of Hinduism. While he had absorbed the traditional sanyasi hostility towards women, he also had a dynamic vision of changed times and shared the nationalist spirit. The traditional suspicion of women's sexuality was lessened and women's sexuality transformed into a force that could be channelled constructively to serve in the regeneration of the Āryans. So ingrained was the anxiety to control sexuality that it occurred even in his conceptualization of the school system. Both boys and girls in this regenerated Hinduism had the right to education, but they had to be physically segregated. The structures to guarantee this physical segregation were of the strictest type. The schools themselves must be at least three miles apart. Furthermore, the preceptors and employees of the boy's school should be all men and, in the girls' school, all women. Dayananda ruled, "*Not even a child of five years of the opposite sex should be allowed to enter the school. As long as they as they are Brahmacharis [in the stage of celibacy] they should abstain from the following eight kinds of sexual excitement in relation to persons of opposite sex: looking upon them with the eyes of lust; embracing them; having sexual intercourse with them; intimately conversing with them; playing with them; associating with them; reading or talking of libidinous subjects; and including in the lascivious thoughts*". See, Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories, Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 25-26. Another instance is that in 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Rādhika Sāntwanam* written by a Telugu poetess Muddupalani was criticised by social reformer for its erotic angle. Kandu Kuri Veereshalingam, father of social reform movement in Andhra called Muddupalani, an adulteress. He stated that women should not hear many parts of the book. See, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, 'Erotic Poetry, Empire, National Heritage, and a Women's Text: Two Centuries of Radhika Santwanam', in, Kavitha Panjabi and Paromita Chakravarti, eds., *Women Contesting Culture: Changing Frames of Gender Politics in India*, Stree, Kolkatta, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Stephanie W. Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual and Hospitality in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, pp. 89-90.

The usual interpretation of the interrogation of the wife is that it represents a need for confession and purification before embarking on important religious duties. The question in this ritual is so phrasal that the wife had no chance to affirm her innocence. The ritual can be interpreted as women regularly took lovers, and they should be purified before joining with her husband in the Vedic ritual. A *mantra* is pronounced by both husband and wife seeking expiation for her moral deviation. After that, the sexual energy safely transferred to the family through the subsequent offering of meal dishes performed with domestic propriety by husband and wife together. This is, in fact, the taming of the uncontrolled sexuality of women.<sup>32</sup>

In the *R̥gvēda* verses, which constitute the dialogue between Yami and Yama, Lopamudra, and Agastya, and Romesha and her husband, we can see women make the sexual approach to men who are reluctant to accept.<sup>33</sup> In these Vedic hymns, the man is the victim of sex, never seeking it nor even welcoming it when it is offered. As Jamison argues, the ideological effort to preserve the image of man as desireless ascetic leads to locating active sexuality in the female, who chooses her unwilling partner, and seduces him, and enjoys sexual activity by herself.<sup>34</sup> While writing about Lopamudra-

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> “*I, Yami, am possessed by love of Yama,  
That I may rest on the same couch beside him.  
I as a wife would Yielded me to my husband. Like  
Car-wheels let us speed to meet each other*”.

*Yama replies:*

“*I will not fold mine arms about thy body: thy call  
it sin when one comes near his sister  
not me, prepare thy pleasures with another: they*

*Brother seeks not this from thee, o fair one*”. RV, X.107, as quoted by Sarva Daman Singh, ‘Polyandry in the Vedic period’, in, Kumkum Roy ed., *Women in Early Indian Societies*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2019, pp. 175-176.

<sup>34</sup> In another dialogue Lopamudra complains the neglect and oldness of her husband. Stephanie W. Jamison, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

Agastya dialogue, Laurie L. Patton argues that an ideology of gender is explicitly expressed in this hymn. Lopamudra's desire must be resisted, but which ultimately wins over Agastya. She has a role as the voracious and tempting one. 'Agastya, on the other hand, plays the role of the male who, although giving in to temptation, nonetheless achieves a kind of holistic unity involving both *tapas* and offspring.' In this hymn, gender roles are negotiated so that the female stands for the partial, and the male stand for the whole.<sup>35</sup>

This concept of uncontrollable female sexuality was a result of Indra's curse. Indra once committed Brahmicide, and he was cursed for his sin. He later divided his sin between trees, earth, and women. Among women, the curse symbolizes menstruation, which is related to both fertility and impurity.<sup>36</sup> As a reward, Indra gave women the blessing to enjoy sexual activity any time, including the period of pregnancy. At the same time, menstruation was also given by Indra as a symbol of impurity.<sup>37</sup> The menstruation of women was considered as impure, and *Smṛti* texts provide detailed norms to regulate the lives of menstruating women.<sup>38</sup> Julia Leslie writes, "Since ancient times, however, that unequal distribution of power has been explained by the dominant (and predominantly male) ideology in terms of the inherent nature of women. This traditional view of women may be

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<sup>35</sup> Laurie Patton, 'Fate of the Female Ṛṣi: Portraits of Lopamudra', in, Julia Leslie, ed., *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition* (1996), Routledge, New York, 2017, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> The concepts of purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are integral parts of Brahmanical tradition. *Dharmaśāstra* provide a detailed discussion of pure and impure and auspicious and inauspicious. Alf Hiltebeitel opines that more than anything else concepts of purity, and auspiciousness are associated with women. Alf Hiltebeitel, 'Purity and Auspiciousness in the Sanskrit Epics', in, Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagche, eds., *When the Goddess was a Woman, Mahābhārata Ethnographies-Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, Vol II, Brill, London, 2011, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahabharata*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2008, pp. 129-32.

<sup>38</sup> Julia Lesile, 'Menstruation Myths', in, Julia Lesile, ed., *Myth and Myth Making: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*, p. 88.



found encapsulated in myths and stories, or it may be confronted directly in treatises on the proper behaviour of men and women according to sacred norms (Dharma). At its simplest, this view maintains that women are threatening inborn sexuality and that they are innately impure”.<sup>39</sup>

This ideology of inherent impurity and uncontrollable sexuality form the very basis of the Brahmanical notions of womanhood and the punishments for adultery succeeded in subjugating women, which helped Brahmanical male to perpetuate his caste status and control over land and rituals. The notion of the uncontrolled sexuality of women was expressed in various texts. There are statements like, “there exist no friendship with women, they have the hearts of hyenas, and her understanding is weak.”<sup>40</sup>The *Dharmaśāstra* observes that as a rule, a woman is sinful by nature. ‘From the time of their birth, women have been attributed with a disposition for telling lies, wasting time, having greed for ornaments, cheating, and anger. Women, like kings, embrace anything in the vicinity. Women, according to Manu, are symbols of untruth and impurity.’<sup>41</sup> Manu further says that women should be restricted day, and a woman should avoid drinking, associating with bad people, and live away from her husband. She should not travel to other places and sleep in other people’s homes. Manu further state that women do not care for beauty or age of men, whether a man is ugly or handsome does not matter to them, they make love to him with the thought that he is a man. Lechery, the wickedness of mind, heavy heart are the characteristics of women, which make them hostile to their husbands. A husband should always take care of

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<sup>39</sup> Julia Lesile, ‘Some Traditional Indian Views on Menstruation on female sexuality’, in, Roypoter, MikulasTeich, eds., *Sexual Knowledge Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Stephanie W.Jamison, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick Olivelle, and Suman Olivelle, ed., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 191.

the woman.’<sup>42</sup> “Day and night, men must prevent their women from acting independently; because they are attracted to sensual pleasures, men should keep them under their control. Her father guards her as a child; her husband guards her, her youth, and her sons guard her in her old age; a woman is not qualified to act independently.”<sup>43</sup>

Through this, one protects one’s family, clan, children, and purity. Manu gives authority to the man to control his wife for protecting their child’s purity.<sup>44</sup> In order to prevent a man’s succeeding generations from intestacy, the woman should be placed under strict restrictions. Women, in particular, must be protected against the slightest inclination to evil, since when they are left without protection, they cause pain to both families. Seeing that this is the highest law of all social classes, even weak husbands try to protect their wives; by carefully controlling his wife, a man protects his progeny, his character, his family, himself, and the law specific to him.<sup>45</sup> A woman’s help, especially that of the wife, is necessary for the production of children, their welfare, good character, sexual pleasure, the salvation of the self and his ancestors.<sup>46</sup> “She begets children, and when they are born, she brings them up—day in, day out, the wife, evidently, is the linchpin of domestic affairs. Offspring, rites prescribed by Law, obedient service, the highest sensuous delights, and procuring heaven for oneself and one’s forefathers—all this depends on the wife”.<sup>47</sup> Thus states *Manusmṛti*.

The Brahmanical patriarch considered sexuality, which wouldn’t surrender even with praise as a threat. The reflection of this idea was

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

expressed in *Smṛti* texts, *Purāṇa*, and Epics. There is no greater pleasure for a woman than sex. Even old women fall prey to lust. It is not possible to destroy women's lust in the three worlds, according to Aṣṭāvakra in *Mahābhārata*. In the dialogue between Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira in *Mahābhārata*, such references to women can be found. Women are portrayed as persons with full of passion and sensual pleasure. They are the people with an uncontrollable love of sexual companionship.<sup>48</sup> The *apsarā* Pañcacūḍa speaks about women that woman stays with her husband because they fear others. They will, in fact, sleep with anybody. Whether it is an ugly or handsome, cultured, or uncultured man does not matter. If it is a man, a woman enjoys their company.<sup>49</sup> The mythological stories state that women's sexual satisfaction is higher than that of men. For example, once the king Bhangasvana was cursed by Indra and transformed into a woman. He had to live the life of a woman for a long time. Meantime she married a Brahman. Later Indra offered him a chance to choose either sex. The king decides to remain female because women always get greater satisfaction from intercourse than men.<sup>50</sup> Such negative images of women are plenty in mythologies. Mandakranta Bose cites several examples from various texts. The Buddhist author, Aśvaghōṣa proclaims in his *Saundarānanda* that Just as a cow if restrained from grazing in one object, goes straight to another, so a woman regardless of a former love, goes elsewhere to take her pleasure. For women may mount their husband's funeral pyre, they may follow them closely at risk of their lives, they may be subjected to no restraint, but they never bear love wholeheartedly. Even those women who treat their husbands as god and sometimes in one way or other give them pleasure, from the

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<sup>48</sup> Arti Dhand, *Op. cit.*, p.137.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.139-40.

fickleness of mind please themselves a thousand times.<sup>51</sup> She quotes *Dēvībhāgavatapurāṇa* which states that women symbolize falsehood, ignorance, and impurity. *Rāmāyaṇa* states that women are not stable in their character and changes like lightning.<sup>52</sup>

The Brahmanical perceptions of women influenced the Buddhist ideology of womanhood. Buddhism endorsed the existing and androcentric attitudes towards women, and both almswomen and laywomen were given an inferior position in Buddhism. It is said that Buddha was not keen on admitting women into the *sanghas*. One of the most quoted passages in this regard is a conversation between the Buddha and his disciple Ānanda which shows Buddha's attitude towards women.<sup>53</sup> There are many contradictions expressed about women in the *Pāli* Canon. There are remarks about women's nature, like 'women are weak in wisdom,' 'uncontrollable' or 'wise and virtuous.'<sup>54</sup> There are contradictions expressed in relation to Buddha's attitude towards women. I.B.Honer states that Buddha gave *Dharma* to both men and women, and he gave talks to householders and their wives.<sup>55</sup> While talking

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<sup>51</sup> Mandakranta Bose, *Women in the Hindu Tradition: Rules, Roles and Exceptions*, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 69.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> "Ananda: 'How are we to conduct ourselves. Lord, with regard to womankind?'"

*The Buddha*: 'As not seeing them, Ananda'.

Ananda: 'But if we should see them, Lord, what are we to do?'

*The Buddha*: 'Not talk, Ananda.'

Ananda: 'But if they should speak to us Lord what are we to do?'

*The Buddha*: 'Keep wide awake Ananda'". See, Vijaya Rāmaswami, *Walking Naked: Women, Society, Spirituality in South India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1997, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> See, Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, SUNY Press, New York, 1993, p. 42.

<sup>55</sup> I.B.Horner, 'Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Lay Women and Almswomen', in, Kumkum Roy, ed., *Women in Early Indian Society* (1999), Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2019, pp. 82-105.

about the conceptualization of female sexuality, there are negative remarks in Buddhist texts.

Buddhism believed that a female could attain salvation only after getting a male form. Though women were admitted to *sanghas*, they were not given equal status to that of a monk.<sup>56</sup> The *Jātaka* narratives considered women as a threat to the men seeking salvation. Women of the upper classes were associated with promiscuous behaviour. In the *Bandana Moksha Jātaka*, a queen makes the king promise exclusive fidelity to her, but she commits adultery with each of the royal messengers sent by the absent king to enquire about her welfare.<sup>57</sup>

Sudhir Kakkar, in his analysis of Indian tales, opines that the male concept of the woman as an erotic partner is of a sexually dangerous being who is fully ruled by the dictates of her body. “She is vulnerable to the power of eros, and the phrase ‘when her body was sorely troubled by the god of love’ is used solely in connection with a woman, never a man. She is the initiator of sexual advances. She has no moral constraints when in the grip of erotic passion. At such times, in her search for sexual passion, she would sacrifice her parents, husband, or children. When sexually intoxicated, the woman takes one lover after another without discriminating between young and old, handsome and ugly, rich and poor.”<sup>58</sup> Marriage, the most notable endogamous marriage, provides a tool to transform the uncontrolled sexuality of women into legitimized motherhood. Through the constitution of marriage, the ideology of ‘*pātivratyā*’ was popularized which women internalized.

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<sup>56</sup> The nuns in the sangha had to follow certain rules which were discriminatory. See, Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1979, p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories, Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, p. 212.

<sup>58</sup> Sudheer Kakkar, *Indian Identity*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 49.

The maintenance and perpetuation of a patriarchal society are dependent on women. Although the woman has been controlled, she always has the right of reproduction. Brahmanical society dealt with this right by simultaneously praising a woman, and at the same time, proclaiming that women's character is dangerous. The notion of chastity is an ideology that subdues the woman's instincts and her reproductive capacity. *Manusmṛti* says that only a chaste woman is virtuous. "A woman should control her body, speech, and mind. She should always be faithful to her husband".<sup>59</sup> Chastity and *pativratyā* form the ideologies which controlled women. *Strīdharmā* is considered as *pativratādharmā*. A woman's highest duty, according to *Dharmaśāstras* is that of a wife. *Dharmaśāstra* provides a detailed description of how a *pativratā* should behave. For example, *Manusmṛti* states, "In season and out of season, in this world and in the next, the husband who performed the marriage consecration with ritual formulas always gives happiness to his woman. Though he may be bereft of virtue, given to lust, and totally devoid of good qualities, a good woman should always worship her husband like a god. For women, there is no independent sacrifice, vow, or fast; a woman will be exalted in heaven by the mere fact that she has obediently served her husband. A good woman, desiring to go to the same world as her husband, should never do anything displeasing to the man who took her hand, whether he is alive or dead".<sup>60</sup>

Women control themselves through this. They themselves believe that their strength and honor increase when they remain chaste. Purity and chastity of wives were regarded as a means to attain salvation. This ideology succeeded in ensuring the role of women in maintaining an unequal society, and to tame women and socially restrict them. The women who were thus

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<sup>59</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

brought under control regarded themselves as breeding grounds of virtue. Epic characters like Sīta, Draupadi, Sāvitrī, Anasūya, and Śīlāvati came to be regarded as symbols of the notion of chastity.<sup>61</sup> It was only with the strength of her chastity that Sāvitrī could bring back her husband from the brink of death. Anasūya advises Sīta on the greatness of chastity. Sīta is by nature chaste and forbearing, an idol of purity. Śīlāvati prevented the sun from rising with her chastity.

When Satyabhāma, the wife of Kṛṣṇa, and Draupadi, the wife of the Pāṇḍavas met, Satyabhāma asks Draupadi, “How do you conduct yourself towards the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadi? How are they obedient to you? And how are they never angry with you lovely one?”. Draupadi answers the question with a detailed narration of the duties of a *Pativrata* wife.<sup>62</sup> As Laurie L. Patton says, Draupadi’s answers revolve around a single gender ideology. She speaks of servitude, of treating one’s husband as a God. She ignores her likes and dislikes and serves the needs of her husbands. Draupadi also speaks of her obedience. She never bath, nor eats nor sleeps until her husband has. She renounces what he renounces, eats, and drinks what he does. She declares that she never acts against the wishes of her husbands and is always guided by them.<sup>63</sup>

The story of Samboola is also an example of *pativrata*. Samboola was a gorgeous princess, who should have been the queen but for a misfortune. Unfortunately, her husband contracted leprosy, and he denounced the throne, living like a sage. His mother, father, relatives and other wives abandoned him since his body had turned ugly due to leprosy. Puss oozed out of the

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<sup>61</sup> Laurie L. Patton, ‘How do you Conduct Yourself?: Gender and the Construction of Dialogical Self in the *Mahābhārata*’, in, Simon Brodbect and Brian Black, eds., *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, Routledge, London, 2007, pp. 100-101.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

scabs. Still, his faithful wife Samboola nursed him. Expelled from the country, they reached a forest and began to live there.

One morning, after gathering necessary food for her husband from the forest, she saw a pond and dipped herself in it to bathe. When she came out, a demon happened to see her. He became enamored by her beauty and tried every means to possess her. Being faithful to her husband, she foiled all his attempts. Finally, when he attempted to kill her, she prayed to God, and God protected her. Returning home, she narrated the whole story to her leper husband, who didn't believe her. This pained her a great deal. Resolving to make him believe her, she declared that if what she said was true, his leprosy would be cured by the strength of truth, or else, whatever she said would be deemed lies. Thus, she sprinkled the water brought from the pond on her husband. It was a ritualistic deed. At once, he was cured.

Later, they returned to the town, and the king took upon the task of ruling the country. However, as soon as he became the king, he started showing more attraction to the young women of the court and began to neglect Samboola. At the end of the story, the King realizes his mistakes and accepts the life together with Samboola<sup>64</sup>.

Another woman Śīlāvati carries her leper husband in a basket on her head and takes him to a prostitute is being glorified as a model of Indian womanhood. Above all, they are all idols. They are idols of the women of the Indian society who have internalized fidelity to the husband as their main virtue. They are references in *Dharmaśāstra* about how a *pativratā* should conduct herself in everyday life. Manu states that “She should always be

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<sup>64</sup> P.P.Sathyan, *Laingikathayude Caritram*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2014, pp.143-44.



cheerful, clever at housework, careful in keeping the utensils clean, and frugal in her expenditures.”<sup>65</sup>

A woman should not go outside without the permission of her husband. She should cover her body if she goes out with the consent of her husband. She should not walk fast. She should not speak to any man who is not her relative. A trader, a *sanyāsi* a physician, and old man are exempted from this rule. A woman should not show her navel, breasts, or any part of the body and should wear dresses covering up to her ankles. She should not laugh loudly without covering her mouth, and she should not be friendly with dancers, gamblers, female ascetics, female fortune-tellers, or those women who perform magical rites. These restrictions were ordained to keep women of good families safe from a bad friendship.<sup>66</sup>

The anxiety of *Smṛtikāra*kas is expressed in the above lines. They fear the sexuality of women so that even her movements and attire are restricted. They also consider the freedom of female dancers, gamblers, and female ascetics as dangerous for the maintenance of social order. *Viṣṇu Dharmaśāstra* states that ‘a loyal wife should perform the *Vratās* that her husband performs, should respect the parents of her husband, elders, and guests, she should worship Gods, clean utensils, keep all things arranged and should not be extravagant. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states that a woman should worship husband like god Hari and she will ultimately go to the world of God. *Skandapurāṇa* states that a woman should not utter the name of her husband because uttering the name of the husband will harm his long life, she should not take the name to another male, and she should not cry loudly even if her

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<sup>65</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p. 146.

<sup>66</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law)*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1941, p. 285.

husband is angry and smile when he beats her. A *pativrata* wife adorns her body with *kumkum*, turmeric, *sindura*, and ornaments.’<sup>67</sup>

The concepts of chastity and *Strīdharmā* were shaped by men in tradition in a male-dominated society. While chaste women are thus described, there are also descriptions of fallen women. Ahalyā and Rēṇuka are fallen wives (*patita*). Rēṇuka had the strength of chastity that made her roll out wet mud, make pots out of it, and bring water for her husband. Once she came across a *Gāndharva* and wondered at his beauty of form, which is the only reason she was considered as a fallen woman. As punishment for this, her husband sage Jamadagni asks their son to behead her. Paraśurāma, following his father’s orders, does so. Ahalyā was the wife of Sage Gautama. Indra goes disguised as Gautama and had sex with her. The sage comes to witness this, and cursing her turns her like a stone.<sup>68</sup>

The influence of this powerful ideology was so intense that even in eighteenth-century a text on *Pātivratyā* called *Strīdharmapaddhati* was written by a scholar of Tanjavur court. Tryambakayajvan the scholar begins his texts writing about what is *Pātivratyā*? “Obedient service to one’s husband is the primary religious duty enjoined by sacred tradition for women. When the daughter of the Himalayas (Pārvati) realized that this was endorsed by her father, she put it into practice and so assumed the form (*abhajata*) of half the body of her husband.”<sup>69</sup> He continuously states that a wife should serve her husband as God.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>68</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p.76.

<sup>69</sup> Julia Leslie, ed. and tr., *The perfect wife: The Orthodox Hindu Wife According to the Strīdharmā Paddhati of Tryambakayajvan*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1995, p. 29.

These stories not only emphasize the need to be chaste but also establish the husband's right to punish an unchaste wife. The unchaste wife can be punished either by the husband or by his relatives.

Any form of deviants from chastity was not tolerated, be it adultery or homosexuality. Since sexuality is just for procreation, deviations like homosexuality, and lesbianism, are not approved by the *Dharmaśāstra*. *Manusmṛti* says that a male homosexual has to be expelled from the caste. If it is a woman, and if she happens to be unmarried, she should be given lighter punishment, and the crime should be kept a secret. If she happens to be a mature woman, she should be publicly insulted and paraded on an ass.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps this difference in punishment was due to the belief that a deviation on the part of a mature woman would be a threat to the sexuality and conjugal relations envisaged by patriarchy.

*Strīdharmā* or *Pātivratyā* was used as an ideology to subjugate women internalized wifely codes prescribed by Brahmanical texts and considered chastity and loyalty to the husband as the highest expression of selfhood.<sup>71</sup> The disobedient women were punished by the male members of her family. When the ideology and the punishment of family members fail to subjugate women, the state interferes.<sup>72</sup> The Brahmanical text viewed adultery as one of the major crimes in society, a violation of valued property owned by men in particular in the husband. The most punishable crime was women having sexual relations with lower caste men. This indicates the relation between the purity of women and the caste system. Purity here means the purity of the body. In *Rāmāyaṇa* even though Rāma was aware of the innocence of Sīta and her mind, he suspects that her body was touched and polluted by Rāvaṇa.

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<sup>70</sup> Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp. 186-87.

<sup>71</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p. 74.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

He insisted on a fire ordeal to prove the innocence of Sīta through the intercession of Agni, the greatest purifier.<sup>73</sup> Adultery is associated with the purity of the female body, which is interconnected with the purity of caste.

### **Adultery in Brahmanical Texts**

Adultery means the coming together of a man and women for sexual enjoyment violating the laws of *Dharma*.<sup>74</sup> According to Brahmanical texts there are three types of adultery. The sexual union brought about by force, cheating or sexual passion.<sup>75</sup> P.V. Kane writes, “The first occurs, when the intercourse is against the will of a woman (which is rape), the second occurs when a woman is brought into one’s house by some tricks or pretence, an intoxicant is administered to her or mind is brought under control and sexual intercourse takes place, the third occurs where intercourse happens by conveying to each other”.<sup>76</sup> The Brahmanical texts consider these acts as ‘*Mahāpātakas*’ and severe punishments were prescribed by Brahmanical patriarchy. Caste plays a role significant in determining the punishment. The sexual intercourse of a lower caste man with a woman of higher caste was severely punished by putting the man to death and the woman by mutilation.<sup>77</sup>

Death punishment, imposing fines, mutilation and humiliation in the public were the major punishments prescribed by the Brahmanical patriarchy. For example, *Yamasmṛti* states that an adulteress woman should be abandoned.<sup>78</sup> *Kātyāñasmṛti* says that a woman should pay a fine for lesser crimes and when

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>74</sup> P.V.Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstras (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)*, Vol.III, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institution, Poona, 1946, p. 531.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Patrick Olivelle, and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu’s Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, p.187.

<sup>78</sup> P.V.Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law)*, Vol.III, p. 533.

the male was punished by putting to death, a woman should be mutilated.<sup>79</sup> *Nāradaśmṛti* prescribes cutting of the penis as the punishment for a man who has intercourse with step mother, maternal aunt, mothers in law, father's sister, friend's wife, student's wife, wife of guru, sister, sister's friend, a 'Sagōtra' woman, a woman who has sought protection, daughter, daughter in law, queen, or an ascetic woman. *Manusmṛti*, *Kātyānaśmṛti*, *Yājñavalkyaśmṛti* and *Matsyapurāṇa* states that the man should be punished with cutting of penis and death sentence. The punishment for committing adultery varied according to the status of the woman, whether she is married or unmarried.<sup>80</sup>

The concept of purity and pollution, one of the principal features of caste system is the major reason behind such punishments for adultery. The purity of the offspring is most important for maintaining the purity of family. *Dharmaśāstras* state that it is the duty of the husband to ensure the purity of his children. *Smṛti* insists that a wife should be guarded by the husband from the approaches of other men and states that a woman should be confined within the house and their minds must be occupied with work so that a man could protect the purity of his family.<sup>81</sup>

The Brahmanical patriarchy's anxieties towards the sexuality of woman and her power over reproduction made the lawgivers to prescribe rules for controlling wives. In the *Anuśāsanaparva* of *Mahābhārata* it is stated that a woman by birth is sinful in nature. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* declare that woman, *Śūdras* and crow are the representatives of untruth, sin, and

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

darkness.<sup>82</sup> The Brahmanical texts viewed a woman's nature as dangerous and her sexuality as a threat.

An unwilling woman was not punished but had to do penances because she loses her purity. The fire ordeal of Sīta in *Rāmāyaṇa* falls into this category. The *Smṛti* texts prescribe death sentence to the woman who had intercourse with a man of lower caste even if she was unwilling. Kātyāna and Yama prescribe mutilation for the woman as a substitute for death punishment.<sup>83</sup> According to *Āpastamba Dharmasāstra* a high caste man who has intercourse with a *Śūdra* woman should be banished, and *Śūdra* man who has intercourse with *Ārya* woman should be executed.<sup>84</sup> *Gautama Dharmasūtra* states that if a woman commits adultery with a lower caste man, the king should execute the man, and the woman should be publicly devoured by the dogs.<sup>85</sup> The punishments for adultery supported the patriarchal system to subjugate female sexuality. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* also considers adultery as a punishable offense.

### ***Śāṅkarasmṛti, Female Sexuality, and Adultery***

*Śāṅkarasmṛti* does not explicitly exaggerate the uncontrollable sexuality of women. But it lays down norms to regulate the Nambudiri woman's body and mind. Instructions were given to control even the physical appearance of an *Antarjanam*. She should wear only a white dress, bell metal or silver bracelet.<sup>86</sup> Generally, white was a colour used by widows to denote

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<sup>82</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, p.70.

<sup>83</sup> P.V.Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)*, Vol.III, p. 533.

<sup>84</sup> Patric Ollivele, ed. and tr., *Dharmaśastra, The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha*, Motilal Banarsidass Publications, New Delhi, p.113.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177.

<sup>86</sup> N.P.Unni, *Śāṅkarasmṛti (Laghudharmaprakāśikā)*, Promoting Committee for the Publication of Sanskrit Laws, International Academic Union, Torino, 2003.p.305.

their asexuality. Married women in other parts of India wear red or other colours. But among the Nambudiri woman, the *Smṛti* prohibits them wearing a colour dress. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* again says that a woman should not loosen her hair. Unkempt hair signifies unrestrained sexuality.<sup>87</sup> Hair is indeed a symbol of the part of restrictions upon the sexual desires of a Nambudiri woman. The *Smṛtikāraṅgas* insisted veiling and put a restriction on hair and adornment. A Nambudiri woman shouldn't wear nose stud, a bindi, or a waist chain.<sup>88</sup> Her movement is restricted. She is not allowed to watch drama performances; she cannot play in the garden or in the pond.<sup>89</sup> Thus, severe restrictions were imposed both on the mind and body. The *Smṛti* suppressed feelings like love, care, and joy in the lives of Nambudiri women. As marriage was a medium for reproduction and perpetuation of patrilineal family, love, sexual pleasure, and intimacy were absent in their relationship.

Sexuality was not considered a sin. The hierarchical structure of Brahmanical ideology places *dharma* above *kāma*. The position of *dharma* was grounded in a caste identity and patriarchy. When pleasure was subordinated to Brahmanical law, women's desire for sexual erotic had to come to hide behind a veil.<sup>90</sup> The *dharmaśāstras* were concerned with formulating norms for regulating society and not with its pleasures. The man-

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<sup>87</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, pp. 167-168. Hair symbolises sexuality that is why ascetics and Brahmachāri students shave their hair. There are stories in which the hair left loose as a vow of revenge. The story of Draupadi and Chanakya are examples. See, Alf Hiltebeitel, and Barbara D., eds., *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1998, pp. 17-19. See also, Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: Essays on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2014.

<sup>88</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Sanjay K Gautham, *Foucault and the Kamasutra: The Courtesan, the Dandy, and the Birth of Ars Erotica as Theater in India*, Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016, p. 59.

woman relationship was centered on the procreative aspect and not erotic.<sup>91</sup> *Dharmaśāstra* states that a man should not waste a woman's *ritu*.<sup>92</sup> The central focus of cohabitation was the birth of progeny. This norm justified man marrying a second time if his first wife failed to give him children, particularly sons. The wife is only a means, a moment in the reproduction.<sup>93</sup> Her salvation revolves around her virtue and chastity as a wife. She is the field and the man the possessor of seed. The child belongs to one to whom the seeds belong; he also owns the field. The concept of seed and earth relegates women to a lower position. Women became vessels, and her sexuality was considered as dangerous.<sup>94</sup>

*Śāṅkarasmṛti* delineates the responsibilities in life for a woman, as a maiden, a wife as well as a widow. Like the other *Smṛtis*, the *Śāṅkarasmṛti* also lays a lot of emphasize on a woman's faithfulness to her husband, and her purity. A girl after attaining puberty should be married off at the earliest.<sup>95</sup> By even resorting to begging, if faced with financial difficulty, the guardian of the virgin has to conduct the marriage of his female ward.<sup>96</sup> The chaste womb of the girl is the property of the husband. In the chapter on the duties of the wife, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* specifies how a woman should conduct herself after marriage.<sup>97</sup> Like other *Smṛtis*, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* also gives excessive importance to chastity. From childhood, Nambudiri girls are made to listen to the stories of Sīta and Śīlāvati. Devaki Nilayangode remembers her mother

<sup>91</sup> Shalini Shah, *Love Eroticism and Female Sexuality in Classical Sanskrit Literature: Seventh- Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 57.

<sup>92</sup> Patrick Olivelle, and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>93</sup> Sanjay K Gautham, *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>94</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in early Indian Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 205.

<sup>95</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 227.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 257-258.



buying the book 'Śīlāvati' for her.<sup>98</sup> After marriage, the husband should explain to his wife the famous stories of virtuous women, from the *Purāṇas*. The idea of adultery doesn't enter a woman's mind as she has the role models of chastity such as Sītā, Śīlāvati, and Draupadi. Moreover, she is constantly reminded of the consequences of the breach of chastity through the stories of Ahalyā and Rēṇuka. The objective of the executor of *Smṛtis* is to ensure the girl's subservience to her husband through such stories. To encourage marriages within the community, and to ensure progeny, the rising sexual desire among Nambudiri women had to be suppressed by the *Smṛtikāraḥas*. The Nambudiri women have no right over their bodies. If they adorn it, the *Smṛtikāraḥas* suspect that they have sinful thoughts. Hence, she should be chaperoned, giving no space for any sin. With this purpose, restrictions have been imposed both on the mind and the body.

It was the marriage custom that made the life of a Nambudiri woman traumatic. As mentioned in the preceding chapter *Śāṅkarasmṛti* insists that only the eldest son should marry within the caste. His younger brothers engaged in a liaison relationship called *sambandham* with Nair, *ampalavāsi* and *Kṣatriya* women. The eldest son ended up marrying more than one Nambudiri women and had *sambandham* also. This system of permitting only the eldest son to marry a Nambudiri woman resulted in the increased number of unmarried women within the community. Even the married ones had to bear the jealousy of their co-wives. The practice of older men marrying young girls became very common. This practice often led to premature widowhood. Polygamy, dowry system, and sufferings as a co-wife made the life of Nambudiri women unbearable. Marriage was just for reproduction and for the exchange marriage of the women of their household. Hence, love, sexual

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<sup>98</sup> Devaki Nilayangode, *Antarjanam, Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman* (Translated from Malayalam by Indira Menon and Radhika Menon), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 54-57.

pleasure, and intimacy were absent in their relationships. Most of them were denied sexual pleasure and happiness of motherhood. Nambudiri women led their lives, controlling their innermost desires. Severe punishment was given to those who transgressed the code of conduct. The trial and punishment of a transgressed woman were known as *Smārttavicāram*.<sup>99</sup> It is the trial and interrogation of the woman accused of adultery by a *Smārttan*, whose position was hereditary; *Mimāṃsākas* meaning learned scholars, a representative of the king and a relative of accused woman. If she is found guilty, she is excommunicated.<sup>100</sup> *Smārttavicāram* was a system of trial and punishment that is not mentioned in other *Smṛtis*. It is an elaborate process with rituals and performative aspects. The complexity of the process was to terrify women about the aftermath of transgression.

### **The Procedure of *Smārttavicāram*: Text and Praxis.**

The eighth chapter of *Śāṅkarasmṛti* describes the nature of *Smārttavicāram*, the inquisition conducted before excommunicating a *Nambudiri* woman suspected of adultery.<sup>101</sup> The first step in the trial was *dāsīvicāram* (Inquisition through the maid-servant). If a householder suspects

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<sup>99</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>100</sup> *Bhraṣṭu* was an important mode of punishment, for violating caste norms. For examples once Nambudiris of other parts of the state decided that they need not participate in the *muṛajapam* (Vēda recital) at Thiruvananthapuram. M.N.Paloor remembers that his elder brother who participated in it, unable to bear poverty, was ostracized from the community. It is said that when a death occurred in the *illam* then, no one even cooperated in the funeral rituals. Another incident is of two men being ostracized because they participated in the first two widow remarriages. Many others including V.T.Bhaṭṭarippad were ostracized from the society. E.M.S. also had to face this after participating in the independence struggle and facing imprisonment. Those who participated in a *parivēdana* marriage were also ostracized. Poet Vishnunarayanan Nambudiri was the chief priest of Tiruvalla Temple a few years ago. He went to England for a few days and this became a cause for ostracism since he had crossed the seas. He had to perform penance for this. These kinds of ostracisms allowed the accused to do penance and return to the community. The ostracism of *Smārttavicāram* was more severe.

<sup>101</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

that his wife is involved in adultery (*Aṭukkaḷadōṣam*) owing to one or more reasons, he should, along with the family priest (*vādhyān*) go to his kin and talk about his suspicions.<sup>102</sup> After that, he should be escorted home five or six caste-men (*eṅangar*) and the *vādhyān* who are capable of extracting the truth and are eloquent. There, he should summon three of the *dāsis* who work there on a daily basis and are truthful and make the *eṅangar* ask questions to them. The *Antarjanaṃ* is now considered as an object (*Sādhanam*).

The *Antarjanaṃ* should be moved to the outhouse called *Añcāmpura* (literally fifth building) if the answer given by the *dāsis* to the statement serves to further strengthen the householder's suspicions.<sup>103</sup> Then the householder, along with the *eṅangar*, should go to the king and report his suspicions openly. "O king, you must help restore justice and redeem me from this situation."<sup>104</sup> Later, the king should summon four investigators (*Mīmāṃsakās*) and a *Smārttan* (inquisitor) skilled in *smārttavichāram* and send them to the house. He should also send a Brahman as his representative.<sup>105</sup> He is called as *Puṛakōyama*. A representative of the family known as *Akakōyama* was also a member of the caste tribunal. The king himself should offer his representative a headscarf. The headscarf should be thrown on the floor if he finds any mistakes in the questioning procedure.<sup>106</sup>

The *Mīmāṃsakās* should frame the questions using their knowledge. They should reveal these secretly to the representative and the *Smārtta*. This exchange should take place outside the premises of the object (*Sādhanam*). It could also be done in the temple premises.<sup>107</sup> They should only aspire for the

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

truth, whatever it may be, to be revealed. Understanding the questions properly, the *Smārtta* should go to the residence of the *Sādhanam* accompanied by the representative of the king as well as the householder. He should also invoke the Sun and the Moon, who are capable of seeing and understanding all the virtues and vices of man as and when they occur.<sup>108</sup>

The *Smārtta* should sit in a cell adjacent to where the *Sādhanam* is seated. They should not see each other. Making her sit next to the door, the questions that the *Smārtta* has thought out should be posed. The king's representative should cover his head with a dhoti and sit beside the *Smārtta*, grasping all the questions thus put forth. Whenever he feels that the questions asked are improper, he should throw the headdress on the floor. Taking cue from this act, the *Smārtta* should mull over where his question went wrong. Later, he should modify the questions according to what the *Mimāṃsākas* had intended. If the representative finds that the question is appropriate, he should replace his headscarf.<sup>109</sup>

The *Smārtta* should follow the answers to his question attentively and report the same to the *Mimāṃsākas*. This time again, the king's representative should repeat the same procedure. The process is repeated until the mistake is admitted or the suspicions are allayed. If she is ready to confess, she need not conceal herself. The *Smārtta* should sit face to face with her and asks her who her first lover was. If she reveals his name, he should ask who else. In this fashion, he should get the details of all the rest of her lovers as well as the details of the occasions when she had a physical relationship with each person. He should then report all this to the *Mimāṃsākas*, verbatim. After getting all the details of her paramours in order, they should jointly approach the king and report everything. When the *Smārtta* reports the facts to the king,

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

the representative need not stand there as a witness. Hence, he need not to cover his head. However, that representative, as well as the *Mimāṃsākas*, should stand around carefully listening to what the *Smārta* has to say.<sup>110</sup>

When they spot any mistake in the reports given by the *Smārta*, the *Mimāṃsākas* should correct him.<sup>111</sup> Or they could speak out the facts. When all this is done, the representative leaves the place. It is the responsibility of the representative to convince the king, in confidence, of any discrepancies in the conduct of *Smārta* and the *Mimāṃsāka*. The names of those ostracized are called out not by the *Smārttan*, but by a Tamil Brahman *kuṭṭipaṭṭar*. Perhaps it was because this was regarded as the most impure process that a *paṭṭar* was appointed instead of a Nambudiri for the process. At the same time, they wanted a Brahman himself to do this duty, and hence they assigned this to a *Paṭṭar*. Other than this, in no other rituals connected to the Nambudiri did the *Paṭṭar* participate. This process of calling out the names of the accused is called '*svarūpamcollal*.'<sup>112</sup> After this, the *paṭṭar* is supposed to take a bath. This shows how impure the ostracized were regarded as. For these reasons, it could be said that *Smārttavicāram* is a process designed by the Nambudiris with the help of the rulers in order to strictly maintain the caste system.

After the *svarūpamcollal*, the *Antarjanaṃ*'s umbrella is squashed. The *marakkuṭa* is a very salient identity of the *Antarjanaṃ*. The *marakkuṭa* is a symbol of protecting oneself from others and maintaining purity of caste and Brahmanism. With its destruction, the *Antarjanaṃ* turns a *bahirjanam*. A point to be noted here is that it was by the symbolic destruction of their

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>112</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Smārttavicāram* (2000), Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2009, p.130.

*marakkuṭa* that the *Antarjanams* of the twentieth century made their debut into the arena of social reformation. Later, the family also perform the ritual of '*Udakavicchēdam*.' After the *Smārttavicāram* process starts, the family members of the accused woman are all regarded as ostracized until the process ends. Therefore, after the *Udakavicchēdam* of the woman, followed by the bath and some other rituals of penance, they have food along with other members of society. This is called '*śuddhabhōjanam*.'<sup>113</sup> All the expenses up to the *śuddhabhōjanam* are to be borne by the family of the accused. Those who belonged to very poor *illams* receive the king's help.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, the *Sādhanam* which has confessed to all her relations without hiding any facts should be ousted from family and community by a clap of the hands, and then made to live at someplace in that state. If she happens to repent her wrong deeds and is certain that she will not repeat the same in the future, then she should not be made to wander about starving.<sup>115</sup> Whosoever's name has been uttered by her as her secret lovers should be ostracized from the community. In this way, the King is expected to preserve the caste ethics (*dharmas*) by weeding out all the sinners from all families.<sup>116</sup>

If the householder has been found to harbour false suspicions about his wife, and the same is corroborated on cross-questioning the *dāsis*, he should be made to atone for the same. The householder has to lie prostrate before the *Antarjanam*, asking her forgiveness. This is known as "*kṣamanamaskāram*."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>115</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Op. cit.*, p. 130

The sons born to the woman after she has had physical contact with her paramours are called ‘*KārajāhPeṭṭavar.*’<sup>118</sup> Among them, those who have already undergone *upanayana* (initiation ritual in Nambudiri community) will be taken into the *Cākyār* community, and those who haven’t, are taken into the *Nambiār* fold.<sup>119</sup> In this group, if it has been proven that adultery has taken place with the knowledge of the husband, in which case the husband also stands excommunicated, even the children born to him are not considered as members of the community. Even if the seed should be pure, the receptacle is impure. Thus, the sons born to this woman through her *Jāras* (lovers) should be ostracized from the caste. Another aspect of this procedure was that those declared by the woman as her secret lovers are summoned and heard before they are declared ostracized. If a person had been falsely accused of theft, it was possible to get ‘*pambu*’ (written order) from the *Smārttan*, go to Sucheendram temple and dip his hand in boiling water before the presiding deity to prove his innocence.<sup>120</sup> But women were denied such rights for proving their innocence.

There could be many hurdles while conducting a trial. The trial may take several days. Those who get the consent of the king for the trial have to deposit a sum of money (as security). Besides, the expenses of the *Smārttans* and others have to be borne by the householder.<sup>121</sup> As a result, the householder's *illam* has to incur a lot of financial liability. A crucial fact is that this procedure, which incurred financial liability apart from undergoing *bhraṣṭu* (ostracism) temporarily, was initiated by the woman's family members themselves. The process of *Smārttavicāram* begins following

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<sup>118</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 335.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Op. cit.*, p.135.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126

suspensions of the family members of the *Antarjanaṃ*. People outside, or the *Smārttans* or the king, do not interfere at the outset. *Smārttavicāram* is a proof of *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, just like *Manusmṛti*, insisting that a woman should be controlled in order to safeguard the caste, property rites, and rituals, and if it cannot be done by her family members, the state should interfere. It is because the purity of caste was of such prime importance that such a punishment that had various steps and had a very elaborate trial and punishment was meted out.

All the paramours pronounced by the woman are ostracized. The king excommunicates them from society. Once they were ostracized, they became excommunicated not just from their home and community, but also the society. Thereafter, it became impossible to even continue to live. Even people of other communities would not help them. *Mannan* (washer man) will not wash clothes. They are not given water from well to drink. They cannot use the temple or public ponds. Everyone drives them away as if they are mean creatures. There is a story of a mother and a daughter who were ostracized. It was following the ostracism that the girl attained puberty. The custom is that after the fourth day of menstruation, the *maṇṇātti* (washer woman) should give her washed fresh clothes to wear, and then only she would be free from impurity. In their case, no *maṇṇātti* did that. Not only that, but she also was not allowed to have bath in the ponds of any of the *illams*. They went walking to a river far away, and the mother and the daughter went to an *illam* of progressive thinking people who worked in collaboration with the *Yogakshema Sabha* and were admitted there.<sup>122</sup> While her peers were playing in the *illam*, this girl grew up as an untouchable among them and with no companion of her age group. Since she was the daughter of

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with writer K.B.Sreedevi, 26/01/2016. Her novel *Yajñam* is about *Smārttavicāram*.



an ostracized woman, no one was willing to marry her. This happened when the revival of the Nambudiri community was still in progress.

The Kathakaḷi artist who was ostracized during the time of the trial of Kuṛiyēṭattu Tātri was a prominent artist. But after *bhraṣṭu*, he had to move to Travancore. He was denied entry in the Kathakaḷi performance of Kochi. Later, he came to Kochi. When temples, *manas*, and *kōvilakams* refused him entry, he is said to have performed Kathakaḷi in the paddy fields. Another individual who was ostracized during Tātri's trials was the one who hailed from Palakkad district. He could not participate in any of the community gatherings. There is a story about him. He always visited the temple premises when all the arrangements of temple festivals were completed. As he was an ex-communicated man, every ritual has to be performed again. He continued to do this as a form of revenge against society. Eventually, following the request from the elders of the community, he stopped going for the festival.<sup>123</sup> Another ostracized person got his family property and went to another province and built an *asram* there. Those who were excommunicated after *Smārttavicāram* settled there. None of them could continue to live in their home province.<sup>124</sup> It is said that the women ostracized following *Smārttavicāram* would be caught and taken away forcibly by the men of the lower caste. There is a story that an *Antarjanaṃ* was ostracized in a place near Palakkad district, and she was caught and taken away by a man from the hill tribe.<sup>125</sup> The Mannanar Fort in Kasaragod was a place of refuge for the ostracized. P. Bhaskaranunni states that these women had the opportunity to live there either as the wives or as sisters of the Thiyya King Mannar.<sup>126</sup> Those

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with M.Sathidevi, Thrissur, 08/06/2018.

<sup>124</sup> Biju Kaippan Plakal, 'Kuṛiyēṭattu Tātri Vicāratinte Kāṇāppuṅgal', Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2015, p. 83.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Prakasan Chunangad, 12/10/2017.

<sup>126</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Op. cit.*, pp.143-145.

who flouted morality rules in their word, deed, or even thought were ostracized in those days.<sup>127</sup>

Documents state that several *smārttavicāram* took place in different parts of Kerala. There are references to *smārttavicāram* in *Granthavaris* of *Kozhikode* and *Vaḷḷuvanāṭu*, Kavalappāra family documents, Thalassery documents, Matilakam documents, and also the decrees made by Travancore rulers. The only available trial document which details the process is the *smārttavicāram* documents of KuriyēṭattuTātri. Apart from these documents, the memories of Nambudiris who belong to *Smārttan* family, speak about *Vicāraṇas* (trials) they heard from their elders. The prominent *Smārttan* families are Paṭṭacōmayārattumana, Veḷḷakkāṭṭumana, and Mūttamana. In most of the documented evidence, the *Smārttan* was Paṭṭacōmayārattu Bhaṭṭatiri. But there is no detailed documented evidence for such trials.

Many documents related to *Smārttavicāram* prove that the trial used to be conducted as per *Smṛti* rules. In the *Kōḷikkōṭan Granthavari* and *Vaḷḷuvanāṭan Granthavari*, there are references to customs like the trial of the maid servant. The accused being put up in the *Añcāmpura*, followed by informing the king, the king's orders granting permission to the *Smārttan* and

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<sup>127</sup> In the debate between Kākaśśēri Bhaṭṭatiri and Uddaṇḍa Śāstri, Bhaṭṭatiri just answered, “yes” to all the questions thrown to him by Śāstri. Śāstri and his fellow Nambudiris decided to put Bhaṭṭatiri in a tight spot. They accused his mother for being immoral; to this also Śāstri answered affirmatively. Immediately, the Nambudiris who were Bhaṭṭatiri’s enemies demanded that his mother be ostracized too. They also declared that for the same reason, Bhaṭṭatiri was not allowed to continue the discussion. Bhaṭṭatiri countered this arguing that after her marriage, a Brahmin woman is meant to dedicate herself to Soman in the first night, Gāndharvan in the second night, and Agni in the third. Only on the fourth day is she meant for a human; hence he answered like that. We can understand from this story that if a woman looked at, or had physical relation with someone other than her husband, she is punished.

others to do the trial, *Svarūpamcollal*, *Udakavicchēdam*, etc.<sup>128</sup> It is to be assumed that the punishments mentioned in the *Smṛti* text used to be executed.

In Kavalappāra papers, a few *Eṅangars* (relatives) of the Alampilli Mana send a letter to the Kavalappāra *svarūpam* asking for a *Smārttavīcāram* to be conducted. In it, there is mention of the crime being proved after the trial of the maid servant, and the *Antarjanaṃ* duly sent to the *Añcāmpura*.<sup>129</sup> This letter states that Vikraman Nambudiri of the Kariyannūr Mana was decided as *Akakkōyma*. Moreover, it asks to provide a report to Kavalappāra *svarūpam* after conducting the trial along with *Smārttan* and others. In another document in connection with this, there is a letter appointing Narippārā Sōmayājippāṭu as *Mīmāmsakan*. There is a letter which states that Accan Nambudiri of Karakkāṭṭu Mana is appointed as yet another *Mīmāmsakan*. These documents prove that the trial here was done as per *Smṛti*. *Śānkarasmṛti* says that the first step is the *dāsīvīcāram* of the suspected *Antarjanaṃ*, and if proved guilty, the *Antarjanaṃ* is sent to the *Añcāmpura*. The documents mention both these. The next step is the relatives informing the king. The document starts by saying "As per the arrival of the in *Eṅangars* from Alampilli Mana..." So it is assumed that the Kavalappāra Chieftain interfered as per the relatives' request. Another thing, the *Smārttan*, *Akakkōyma*, and *Mīmāmsakar*, are appointed by the chieftain. The

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<sup>128</sup> *Kōḷikkōṭan Granthavari*, Unpublished palm leaf documents, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Edappal, Vols, 26. 38, 45 and 53.

<sup>129</sup> Letter written by Ittuṅṅi Rama Tharavanār Thrivikraman Nambudiri, No. 1061. "Information has again been sent to the Kavalappāra *Svarūpam* (estate) from the *Eṅangars*(relations) of the Alampilli Mana requesting that arrangements might be made to have a fresh enquiry instituted into the matter of the suspected unchastity of the inmate of the Alampilli Mana of Eruppe Desam, wherein the suspect had been, after a preliminary investigation of the (Dasi) Sundrs woman in attendance on her, placed in (prison) anchampura (in the room in the 5<sup>th</sup> yard) in the house in the Mundamuka Amsam and Desam, belonging to the said Mana.

Information has been sent early to the Smartha, Patta Chomayarath Somayajipad to have the investigation conducted in accordance with the customary usage".K.K.N. Kurup, *Kavalappāra Papers*, Department of History, University of Calicut, 1984, p.123

*Śānkarasmṛti* clearly states that it is the state that should safeguard the chastity of a woman. It is as part of this interference that the trial takes place in the *illam* of the *Antarjanaṃ* or in a nearby temple. In this document, they are asked to go to the place where the *Antarjanaṃ* has been put up. Finally, the judgement of the trial should be read out before the rulers. Kavaḷappāra Nair has asked for the judgement to be reported.<sup>130</sup>

The *Smārttavicāram* cases referred to in Kavaḷappāra papers, similarly in the *Vaḷḷuvanāṭan Granthavari*, there are references to the local rulers like the Vaḷḷuvakkōnātiri sending letters to the Smārttans and *Mimāṃsākars* for *Smārttavicāram* to be conducted.<sup>131</sup> These documents show that the centre of the trials is the temple. The *Smārttans* and *Mimāṃsākars* used to stay in the temple close to the *Añcāmpura*. Another thing, as said in the *Smṛti*, it is the husband or relatives of the *Smārttans* who request the king to conduct the trial. In *Kōḷikkōṭan Granthavari* there is a reference to the trials. In Poṛamuṇṭakkāṭṭu *illam* the accused, after *Dāsīvicāram* has been sent to *Añcāmpura*. Zamorin has ordered that Paṭṭacōmāyarāttu Bhaṭṭatiri as well as many others from different Nambudiri families to take the position of *kōyma* and *Mimāṃsākars*. The order to conduct the trial and *Śuddha Bhōjanam* indicates that the money to be deposited as security for the trial.<sup>132</sup> The reference shows clearly that the trial was conducted according to the instructions in *Śānkarasmṛti*. Thus, the interference of the state is quite evident in the sexual behaviour of a Nambudiri woman.

Apart from these documents, there are references of trials in various texts. P.Bhaskaranunni mentions several trials in his book. He writes that a

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.124.

<sup>131</sup> S. Rajendu, *Valluvanad Granthavari (M.E.990-1094)*, K. Sankaranarayanan, Madhavam Perinthalmanna, 2015, pp. 244-46.

<sup>132</sup> *Kōḷikkōṭan Granthavari*, Vols. 26 and 38.

maiden of an *illam* in the Karalmannadēsam near Cherpulassery lost both her parents in her childhood. She had an elder brother too. This unmarried maiden went to throw her banana leaf outside the house while she had her menstrual periods. During her menses, she cannot eat from the vessels at home and is not supposed to touch the door, or the steps, or the staircase. The place where she sits would be earmarked by drawing with soot. One of the maid servants spotted a Muslim youth standing outside, where the maiden went out to throw the leaf. The news went round that she went to meet him under the pretext of throwing the leaf. Whispers passed, and this incident came to be regarded as a big crime, rumours spread, and *Smārttavicāram* was initiated. She was duly declared guilty. When this innocent maiden was wrongly accused, the Muslim youth, feeling uneasy for being inadvertently responsible, eventually married her. However, the maiden's anger at being wronged increased day by day. She kept thinking that the other members in the *illam* were the cause of her being declared a wrongdoer. The thought that she who had no parents was regarded as abject by the members of her *illam* gave immense pain to her and made her vengeful. She would thus visit the *illam* regularly, and would wait around till mealtime. Before the meal, she would use her hands or feet to desecrate the meal. She would then go back doggedly. The *illam* household would have to starve as a result.

Once she came to the *illam* at dusk and sat on the *verandah*. Afterward, she lay down and slept. The sister in law saw this maiden who came to defile their supper. It is said that the brother, hand-in-glove with his wife, threw the boiling water kept on the stove for rice, over her. Struggling, she ran to the pond at the *illam*, jumped in, and drowned herself. When there was a court case against them, they escaped saying they did not realize there

was someone lying on the *verandah*. However, the sister-in-law felt guilty after that and remained silent and penitent ever after.<sup>133</sup>

The memories of A.M.N.Chakiar substantiate the fact that the sons and daughters of excommunicated persons were forced to leave the status of Nambudiri, and they were incorporated into Cākyār and Nambiār communities. He remembers that the ex-communication of his father after the trial was a shock to his family. He writes, “It was late in the night that *Apphan* arrived at the *illam* to give the news of the sentence to his parents. Grandmother and I were not present there at that moment. We had gone to Chottanikkara temple to offer prayers, the day before. We went thinking we would sleep at the Pallippuram nearby, attend the next day's prayers at the temple and return. Hence we didn't witness the commotion the cruel judgment had caused at the *illam*. On our return, a messenger came to meet us on the way. While we were walking, a neighbor gave the horrible news to us. The news wasn't the king's judgment. It was that my father committed suicide the day before. It was more heart-rending than the king's sentence. My grandmother fainted. I stood there, dumbfounded.

Ritualistically, the three of us ceased to be members of that *illam* in the eyes of society. We lost our position in the *illam*. Still, we continued to stay there for a few more months. However, while doing household duties, we were not allowed to touch anyone else in the *illam*, including our mother. As per custom and tradition, the sons of a Nambudiri who has had illicit relations with an *Antarjanaṃ* and has been declared guilty are called *Cākyārs*, and his daughters, Elodammas. Since their family connections have been severed, and they cannot lurch in the dark, they are made to connect to some *Cākyār* family. Rāman *Apphan* and Vasudevan *Apphan*, who had by now turned our protectors, entrusted us with a *Cākyār* family called 'Ayinil Muringoth.' To

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<sup>133</sup> P.Bhaskaranunni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 149-150.

complete the ostracism, they not only made us members of a new family but also gave us new names. I attained the name of the *Cākyār* Neelakandan, who enacted the play in which I was received by him as an orphan.

A newborn child has no option to choose the name of adornment, or one connected to literature. However, I was at an age where I had the option to voice my opinion. Hence I made a request to retain my name as Krishnan, which my father had named me after lovingly performing the rituals. But, they told me that *Cākyār* does not use that name. My appeal was rejected. Thus, I, Nedumbarambil Cheriya Krishnan Nambudiri, turned Ayinil Muringoth Neelakandan Chakiar. Likewise, both my sisters were renamed Parvathy and Ammukutty”.<sup>134</sup>

The description clearly shows that how did adultery and its subsequent punishment affect the lives of their children. The anxieties and fear of Nambudiris losing their caste purity was manifested here.

The *Smārttavicāram* of Kuṛiyēṭattu Tātri in 1905 is a milestone in Kerala history. Through her *Smārttavicāram*, Tātri was, in effect, challenging the patriarchal system of the Nambudiri community. Tātri can be read as both the symbol of sexual anarchy of Nambudiri women as well as the power that is put to shame tradition as well as patriarchal values, using her own body. Since she violated social norms and thus became the cause for social reform, Tātri is interpreted as a feminist idol.

Kuṛiyēṭattu Tātri was the daughter born to one of the wives of Aṣṭamūrṭti Nambudiri of Kalpakaśśery *Illam* in Ārangōṭṭukara of British Malabar district. She was born in 1882. Before she was 10, she was sexually abused. Later, Rāman Nambudiri of Kuṛiyēṭattu Mana married her and

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<sup>134</sup> A.M.N. Chakiar, *Avasānatte Smārttavicāram*, Department of Cultural Publications, Thirvanathapuram, 2001, pp. 82-92.

brought her to Kuṛiyēṭattu. She was subjected to physical abuse both by her husband and his brother. Later she had transgressed the sexual and moral norms of Nambudiris and got involved in several illicit relations. As per the trial accounts of Tātri, she was physically involved with 65 men, including men of various upper castes.

### ***Smārttavicāram*: Public and Shaming Punishment**

Female sexuality and its regulation are intrinsically linked to property rights and primogeniture. Possession of a women's body is inevitable to ensure the purity of blood and legitimate inheritance rights. Ownership of land is associated with the purity of caste. The female body and its control were inevitable to sustain both; therefore, any unruly behaviour from the part of the woman was punished. *Smārttavicāram* was one of such punishments, and punishment was public in nature.

Public punishments were the actions taken against the violation of moral conduct in *Dharmaśāstras*. Shaming punishment and brutal execution in a public place were a part of *daṇḍa* articulated by *Manusmṛti* and all other *Dharmaśāstras*. Federico Squarcini, by analyzing the public punishment in normative Sanskrit texts, argues that the doctrine of penal prescription came from the alliance between two leading social powers ('Brahman and *kṣatra*'). "It is a doctrine that merges together the symbolic and regulative – and power of Dharma – with its guarantors and the necessity to preserve it concretely even with political coercion (*kṣatra*). This new alliance linked the norm 'dharma' and its guardians (Brahman) with punishment (*daṇḍa*) and punishers (*Kṣatriya*) evoking the idea of a divine origin of punishment and of the natural relation that exists between the administration of punishment and



the *Kṣatriya* class.”<sup>135</sup> Punishment is meant to communicate and enforce moral self-regulation. He writes, “even though a form of punishment would not prevent certain crimes, it would serve other ends, such as the affirmation of the cultural supremacy or- presumed supremacy- of a value system. Throughout the stanza of the *Manava Dharmaśāstra*, it is clear that, while punishing an offender, a specific group of social agents communicates something by means of the juridical authority. It communicates not only to the offender himself, but to all individuals who relate to him, and lastly to the society in its entirety. Punishment, therefore, serves the purpose of specifying, explaining, reaffirming, and transmitting to a large number of individual certain moral values, which are perceived as a necessary condition for maintaining a specific moral and social apparatus. Punishment, especially in public, was a mechanism to keep the society arranged under a strict hierarchy and therefore under control”.<sup>136</sup>

Punishment in public also instills a sense of shame in the minds of people. Shame damages an individual’s sense of themselves. The sheer impact of shame upon their psychological makeup and ego distorts their view of both the past and future. Such individuals are sometimes said to have no sense of the present because they are located into a cycle of guilt, remembering the consequence of transgression or anxiously awaiting future social failures with foreboding.<sup>137</sup> While describing the historiography of shame in their book, the historians David Nasha and Anne Marie Kilday state that shame has a pivotal role in community-based punishment rituals. In

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<sup>135</sup> Federico Squarcini, ‘Punishing in Public: Imposing Moral Self-Dominance in Normative Sanskrit Sources’, in, Steven E. Lindquist, ed., *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle*, Anthem Press, Cambridge, 2013, p.180.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Anne Marie Kilday, and David S. Nash, *Shame and Modernity in Britian 1890 to the Present*, Springer, UK, 2007, pp. 4-6.

Britain, in the early modern period, they say that there were instances where individuals who were perceived to have transgressed community norm, were forced to endure publicly prescribed ridicule of one form or another. This could involve anything from being ridden around the neighborhood on a pole or a donkey characters being burnt in effigy, or the production of elaborate street dramatization of misconduct which had taken place. They argue that most of the communally sanctioned shame punishments occurred when accepted patriarchal value had abused or inverted.<sup>138</sup>

There are instances of public punishments in the documents of medieval Kerala. In pre-modern Kerala, especially in the early medieval period, the administration of justice was done on the basis of the customary law of a community or locality. The duty of a king or chieftain is to preserve justice. It is the king who should safeguard the customs of a religion or locality. If the cases are against morality and religion, it is handled by the caste tribunals. The king sends a representative called *kōyama* to supervise this. The state would interfere in all criminal law procedures. In the *Vaññēri Granthavari*, there is a reference to the murder case of Kaippuṛam Nambudiri. This also happened in the temple premises. The *sankētam* executes law with the consent of the Zamorin. The Zamorin asks Triikkaṇṭiyūr Kōyama to implement the law. It is the *Kōyama*, Nair, and Brahman communities who execute the punishment. Donald R. Davis, who studied the temple records of Kerala in detail, says that chiefly four types of punishments are meted out here which are 1)corporal 2)paying of fine 3)ostracism and 4) public censure. Apart from this, imprisonment, forced labor, or tortures are not found in the records.<sup>139</sup> Here the punishment, according to the *Sankētam*

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Donald R. Davis, *The Boundaries of Hindu Law: Tradition, Custom and Politics in Medieval Kerala*, International Institution for Advanced Asian Studies, Torino, 2004, p. 90.

*Maryāda*, was executed as per the order of the king. Punishments were executed publicly.

An example of public censure is the offering of a silver vessel to the temple. This is, in one way, a forced atonement. Along with this, there is a public allocution. This is called '*Uttaramchollal*.' The public consists of only upper castes consisting of *Brāhmaṇas*, temple authorities, and royal officials. The punishments were also given to the upper castes.<sup>140</sup> As a rule, the *Dharmaśāstras* gave the right to prescribe punishment to the *Brāhmaṇas*. However, the ruler was to execute them. In the temple records of Kerala, one can find these divisions. Here also, the punishment is decided by the Brahman, and executed by the king. The relation between the Brahman and the king was called the pivot of the Indian tradition.<sup>141</sup> The mutual dependence of the king's material resources and the Brahman's spiritual resources is a speciality of criminal law procedure. The center of the legal procedure is not the court, but the temple. This procedure includes the king, the Brahman, and the Nair community.<sup>142</sup>

By shaming transgressors in the full glare of the public gaze, communities hoped to publicise scandal, to rectify bad behavior, and also to warn other of the likely consequences of similar indiscretion. *Smārttavīcāram* was both a public and shaming punishment; the elaborate procedure of the trial begins by temporal ostracism of woman. The woman was called *sādhanam*, which is a shaming word because it means a commodity. She was not permitted to live with other members of the family and was a force to stay in a separate building. The *Smārttan*'s questions regarding her illegal affair were also humiliating. After the trial, if she was proved guilty, she was

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

excommunicated along with the men; this was a public punishment. The procedure of adopting the children of ex-communicated Nambudiris into Cākyār or Nangyār family was also an example of public shaming punishment. The system of public punishment in classical Sanskrit sources was mainly motivated by the rise of social agonism within a specific historical context. It is an ideological weapon to dominate society and to preserve norms. *Smārttavicāram* is the highest expression of the ideological control of Nambudiri women. It is a trial where Brahmanhood and state alike forayed into the private spaces of womanhood.

### ***Smārttavicāram* and Purity of Caste**

*Smārttavicāram* should be analysed against the backdrop of the relation between caste and gender in India. The purity of caste and the privileges associated with it, including property rights, are an integral part of Brahmanical patriarchy. As the owners of land and the custodians of Vedic knowledge and sacrifices, they always tried to maintain their family lineage pure. The purity of progeny is ensured only through the strict surveillance of their women.

In the caste-ridden society of Kerala, the Nambudiris, who enjoyed a high position, established their supremacy. The economy was temple centered, and they enjoyed landed property both *dēvaswam* and *brahmaswam*. Though they did not directly involve in the production process, the benefits came to them in the form of *pāṭṭam* and as offerings to the temple. In addition to this, *Brāhmaṇas* became lords of wealth by means of various gifts and donations they received while performing sacrifices and conducting *pūjās*. The basis for this supremacy is that they succeeded in making others believe that they were supreme in society.

The monopoly they had in the domain of knowledge, the ideological legitimacy that temples and devotion imparted to them- all these helped the *Brāhmaṇas* to maintain their authority. Though they had power in the production arena, the reproductive power of women was something they couldn't have their hold on. In order to regulate this reproductive power to suit their authority, they used the institution of marriage. They wrote down rules to make women remain within the home and to restrict their bodies, minds, and their movements.<sup>143</sup> These rules recognize the fact that there is an inherent nonconformity to patriarchy codes in every woman. At the same time, Brahmanical patriarchy observed with fear of the sexuality of men of the lower caste. If women of upper caste or men of lower caste flouted these prohibitions, what they lost is the purity of caste.<sup>144</sup>

The factor that sustained the Nambudiri is the ideology of purity of caste, which is the constellation of ideas that declare the Brahman's position as most pure and lofty. The Brahman's purity of caste or even the caste system is sustained by prohibiting the intermingling of castes. In practical life, the Nambudiri couldn't lead a secluded life. They always needed the help of various castes in their everyday lives. What they could do was the control of

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<sup>143</sup> Movement for an individual is a means of interacting with the outside world. By restricting movement, they lose a chance to connect with the outside world, or with the world of new ideas. This may be the reason why the Nambudiri's movements were restricted. By restricting women's movements, it becomes easier to suppress them.

<sup>144</sup> The purity of women is equated with purity of caste. Thus, it ensures the purity of the social structure as well. The purity of not only the present society, but also the future society is dependent on the purity of women. As far as Nambudiris are concerned, purity is an indispensable part of their life. It is doubtful whether there are other sects of Brahmins who have given so much importance even to purity of the body. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* instructs how to achieve this bodily purity. The *Smṛti* talks about various impurities. Some of these impurities can be removed by bathing, some by penance, and some by *pūjā*. For example, some impurities can be got rid of by bathing: child birth, menstruation, etc. are exclusive to women. It is by keeping them away that purity is maintained. There are some impurities which are geographically regulated. If one crosses the seas, it is considered impure; once a person gets to the other side of Kora river, it is impurity: all these can be nullified only through *pūjā* and penance.

their women by restricting their lives. It was perhaps because of the fear of women's sexuality, and as *Manusmṛti* says, the innate nature of a woman that even the *svajāti* men were instructed not to come into contact with Nambudiri women other than those in their immediate family. They were thus utmost vigilant of maintaining the purity of caste. Nambudiris alone were not beneficiaries of the caste system, kings and local chieftains were also beneficiaries of this system. Though there were conflicts, *Brāhmaṇa - Kṣatriya* relations were strong even at the time of Perumāḷs and in the subsequent period. It was the *Brāhmaṇas* who gave the title of Kṣatriya to many royal families. It has been mentioned earlier that the advisory committee of the time of Perumāḷs was 'nālutaḷi' a Brahman committee. Even during the time of *svarūpams*, this alliance remained strong. The *Brāhmaṇas* succeeded in making the kings believe that it was their duty to safeguard the position of *Brāhmaṇas*. How *rājadharmā* should protect the Brahman is mentioned in both *Vyavahāramala* and *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. The king should not act against what the *Vedas* and *Dharmaśāstras*, dictate *Vyavahāramala*.<sup>145</sup> A Brahman who knows the *Dharmaśāstras* should be appointed to advise the king on matters of administration. In the absence of a *Brāhmaṇas*, a Kṣatriya can be appointed, and in the absence of a Kṣatriya, a *Vaiśya* can be appointed; however, a *Śūdra* can never be appointed to advise the king in the Rāja Sabha (court). If a king replaces a Brahman with a *Śūdra*, his country will decline.<sup>146</sup> If there are seven, five, or at least three *Brāhmaṇas* who know the *Dharmaśāstras*, *Vēdas*, *Vēdāṅgas*, and custom, that *sabha* can be equated to the *yāgasabha*.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> S. Paramesvara Aiyar, *Vyavahāramala*, Government of Travancore, 1925, p.3.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

In *Śānkarasmṛti* it is stated that a king should protect *Brāhmaṇas* and cows.<sup>148</sup> It also says that the exemption of tax for a Brahman is an auspicious thing. A king who does not collect tax from Brahman would reach heaven.<sup>149</sup> When a king obtains treasure from the land, he should give half of it to a *Brāhmaṇa* as a gift.<sup>150</sup> A king should not give capital punishment to a *Brāhmaṇa*. Thus, there are instructions in *Śānkarasmṛti* to protect the privileges of *Brāhmaṇas*. *Śānkarasmṛti* says that the other three sections should pardon the king for his wrongdoings. These lines are a reflection of a *Brāhmaṇa* - *Kṣatriya* relationship. It must be the fear of future threat to one's rights and protection that prompted the formulators of the *Smṛti* rule to declare that the king's duty is to look after the *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>151</sup>

In the *Smṛtis*, one is able to perceive the mutual dependence of the king and the *Brāhmaṇas*. While talking about kingly duties (*rājadharmā*), *Manusmṛti* warns that a king should not be insulted, for, an angry king will destroy a whole race. Not only that, but it also says that whether the king likes it or not, he should follow the *rājadharmā*.<sup>152</sup> It is the Brahman who instructs what *rājadharmā* is. The *Brāhmaṇa* is regarded as an image of God. The *Smṛtis* ask all other sections to obey the king's orders. At the same time, they manage to ensure special rights and favours for the *Brāhmaṇa*. *Manusmṛti* says that a king should worship the *Brāhmaṇa* every day, and should act according to his dictates.<sup>153</sup> The *Brāhmaṇa* should remain the most trusted counsel of the king, and the king should entrust everything to that

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<sup>148</sup> N.P.Unni, *Op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Patrick Olivelle, and Suman Olivelle, eds., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

*Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>154</sup> The king should appoint a *Brāhmaṇa* and make him perform domestic rituals and *yāgas* (sacrifices). The king should perform sacrifices like *aśvamēdhayāga*. He should give ample *dakṣiṇa* to the *Brāhmaṇas* as *dharmārtha*. He should give the *Brāhmaṇas* money, grains, and a house. The treasure given to a *Brāhmaṇa* will never get stolen.<sup>155</sup> The gift given to a *Brāhmaṇa* is considered loftier than *agnihōtrayāga*.<sup>156</sup> Wealth should be procured through wars and should be given to the *Brāhmaṇas*. The most estimable duties of a king were, do not retract from wars, to look after his subjects, and do service to *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>157</sup>

Protecting the *Brāhmaṇa* woman's chastity is yet another responsibility of *rājadharmā* (the king's duty). *Śāṅkarasmṛti* warns that if a *Brāhmaṇa* woman loses her chastity, the state will face destruction. Hence, a king's intervention is imperative, says the text. When the husband and the male relatives find it impossible to harness a woman, they do it with the help of the state. *Manusmṛti* also instructs that the adulteress and the men with her should be punished by the king. Along with theft, adultery is also regarded as a serious crime. This is an expression of the patriarchal society which views women as men's property. What the man receives when a woman loses her chastity is the same as what the robber receives when he steals a man's property. *Manusmṛti* has laid down punishments for adultery on various grounds such as prostitution with the woman's consent, walking the woman using force, touch, physical relationship. However, *Śāṅkarasmṛti* doesn't take into consideration whether these acts have happened with the consent of the woman or not.

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*



If the woman is fallen, she is ousted from the caste- this is the method adopted by the Nambudiris. This is, in effect, a public shaming punishment. They instilled a sense of fear as a means to make the others obey.<sup>158</sup> *Smārttavīcāram* is a mechanism to ensure the purity of the caste and the property rights of Nambudiris. The trial is also associated with property rights. The Nambudiris were the largest landowning community in Kerala. As a result of the peculiar geographical condition of Kerala, the land was not plenty. The law of inheritance among them demanded impartible property. In a study of the relationship between land scarcity and household structure, it is stated that there is partible inheritance if the land is plentiful and impartible when there is pressure on land. As pre-modern Kerala was a temple-oriented economy based on the resource from land, it was necessary to control the land to become dominant in society.

The Nambudiris, who controlled large estates of land, did not want the partition of the property. The partition would definitely lead to the weakening of their position. They took the utmost care to maintain their family property undivided and formulated strict regulations. They followed a unique system of primogeniture of having the eldest member of the family alone, marrying from the caste. They followed another system of permitting younger members to have *sambandham* relation with matrilineal communities. As matrilineal communities followed the law of inheritance based on female descent line,

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<sup>158</sup> The interrogatory procedure done with the intention of inducing fear, and for giving warning to others, was an elaborate process. The interrogation was a ritual that included the members of Nambudiri community, experts in *Smṛti* texts, relatives, a representative of the king, the woman's servants, and the woman. This used to ruin the woman's family economically as well as socially. Still the sexual transgression happens among Nambudiris the moments and daily routines of Nambudiris are strictly ritualized their prayers, *pūjās* were done in specific time and night most of the male members slept in the houses where they had *sambandham*. This practice left an *Antarjanaṃ* in an *illam* with considerable opportunity to cross the boundaries. This becomes clear from the documents on Tātri's trials. Tātri's relationships crossed over the *Añcāmpura*, *Vaṭakkini*, *Kuḷappura* and all such spatial restrictions. It is proven that these relationships which went on with no regard of whether it was night or day could have helped the sexual transgression of Nambudiris in at least a few *illams*.

they did not have any rights in the property of the Nambudiri. The *sambandham* also served another purpose. It provided opportunities to Nambudiris to have a relation with other dominant classes like the rulers. *Sambandham* was a system through which the Brahman blood permeated into other communities. At the same time, they have to keep their purity of progeny and caste. This purpose was attained through *svajāti* marriage of eldest son in whose hands vested the rights to control the family property. The inheritance through male descent was inevitable to protect their rights.

Another factor is that their rights as performers of sacrifices and priests are also male-oriented. This naturally led to the adoption of strong patrilineal forms of property rights. Patriliney and patriarchy are complimentary. To protect patrilineal rights, a strict patriarchal rule was imposed. Female bodies are considered by patriarchy as a means to cultivate social and political hierarchies. The bodies and minds of women of both matrilineal communities and Nambudiris were controlled and regulated according to the needs of Nambudiri male ideology. Women of matrilineal communities were forced to obey the sexual needs of Nambudiris, and women of the Nambudiri community had to bear the burden of protecting the purity of progeny, caste without any property rights or conjugal rights. Desire and agency were denied to these women. Patriarchy formulated several mechanisms to make these women conform to their ideology. Caste was a major factor that determined the life of women. The intermingling of castes is prohibited by patriarchy because the sexuality of lower caste men always posed a threat to the upper caste purity. The subjugation of women and control of female sexuality was one mechanism by which the upper caste purity was protected. As *Maṅṅāppēṭi* and *Pulappēṭi* had instilled fear in the minds of Nair women who crossed the caste boundaries, *Smārttavicāram* was a mechanism to discipline the lives of Nambudiri women by restricting their mobility and thereby protecting the purity of caste which is linked to the economic rights of the community.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Brahmanical patriarchal ideology shaped women's lives for the perpetuation of their property rights and power. The perpetuation of power and property is dependent on a caste system based on hierarchy. Caste and gender are interdependent. Women have a special role in shaping, reproducing, and developing the social system known as caste. The most basic peculiarity or characteristic of the inequality of the caste system lies in the unequal distribution of wealth. This inequality rested upon the control of women, especially those upper-caste women. The position of women is a focal point for relations of power in a society. The Brahmanical patriarchy considered women as a tool to sustain the principles of caste hierarchy.

The Brahmanical patriarchy was an ideology formed to delineate and safeguard the powers of the land, women, and ritualistic purity. It is indeed a representation of social stature, economic development, and social reproduction. The mutualism between caste and gender positions redirects in creating new horizons. The Brahmanical male dominance is the sole ideology to protect the boundaries of caste where women become the supplements or the mediums. The male dominance of Brahmanism is the norm that reproduces the caste system, thereby forming a dominant Brahmanical patriarchal ideology. Despite this, the classification of caste system based on the social stature related to women varies according to their status in caste.

The Brahmanical patriarchal ideology considers women as arable land. The seed sown in that decides the status of production. The owner of the seed is the owner of the earth as well. The symbol implies that women are fields owned by their husbands, and the husbands alone possess the rights over children. Under no circumstances does the Brahmin patriarchal system allow the seed of a man from a lower caste to be sown in a woman of an upper

caste. Even among married women, strict rules were enforced upon their movements, food habits, and conduct for this purpose. Despite this, if a breach of faith happened, harsh punishments were in store for them. To the women from upper caste as well as men from the lower caste who strayed, harsh punishments like cutting off of limbs, humiliating in public, making dogs bite them, and ostracism were meted out. These punishments most often happened in public, primarily as a warning to others. Apart from this, the state also would interfere. The same rule did not apply in the relationship of a man from the upper caste with a woman of a lower caste. The man is not polluted here. His pollution is nullified with a ritualistic bath and the changing of the sacred thread. Moreover, he is not punished, either. A person's right over resources and production is decided by his caste status. Hence, it is the objective of each man of the higher caste to guard his lofty position without mixing up caste, causing impurity. This is made possible by bringing the women of his caste under control and through endogamous marriages. Right over wealth, over property, and exploitation in the production process are related to caste. In such an arrangement, gender status plays a crucial role. In each caste, the rights and power of the male and the female vary.

The concept of 'purity and pollution' is the basic principle of the caste system. It works as a veil to the reality of the rigid social segregation. It hides the exploitative and discriminative nature prevailing between the powerful and the powerless that exist in society. The concept of "purity" helps *Brāhmaṇas* enjoy the power and position not only in the richness of materialistic life but also in the realm of knowledge. Women and lower-class people were forbidden from gaining knowledge, especially the sacred knowledge. For centuries now, the power experienced by the *Brāhmaṇas* is not solely visible in the world of knowledge, ritual performances, and religious texts but also leave marks on the materialistic and secular society. The resistance might have happened in the initial days against the Brahmanical dominance in the

world of knowledge. But this prevailed solely among the upper-class people, especially among *Kṣatriyas*. The tensions that lasted between the Brahmin and the *Kṣatriya* ended up in placing them in a different arena. For Brahmin, power was entrusted on sacred and ritualistic knowledge, whereas for the *Kṣatriya* on the battleship and soldiering. That is how the combined power of *Brāhmaṇas* and *Kṣatriyas* came into existence. This alliance later became very powerful to dominate all other caste groups.

To protect the purity of land and rituals, the control over the reproduction and cooperation of high-class women was crucial and inevitable. The *Brāhmaṇas* treated the upper-class women as a tool to strengthen their caste position. They always considered the sexuality of lower-class men as a threat to the upper-class. They did this to restrict the presence of lower-class men towards upper-class women. *Brāhmaṇas* tried to protect the concept of the ‘purity of blood.’ Based on the ‘purity of blood,’ they created a hierarchy of caste system beginning from the upper to the lower. The mandatory nature of this system is based on the performing of purified rituals, which ultimately reinforce power to the upper class delineating the powers of the lower class.

The caste, class, and disposition of gender are intertwined. They are stabilized through different forms like marriage, sexuality, and reproduction, which are considered as the foundation for the caste system. Similarly, it is also the basis for the prevalence of inequality in the caste system. The interests of the upper-class were mainly protected through the act of marriage. Endogamous marriages were strictly enforced to protect the system. Marriage was considered as the sole ritual to preserve the caste system. The discourse of marriage protected the prevalence of upper-caste male dominance. Same caste marriage is not only a set of beliefs but also a system that incorporates the values of Brahmanism. Endogamous marriage was a medium through which they held dominance over property and land, despite the concept of the

protection of the purity of caste. The upper caste male lineage is strengthened and made eternal through women. Through marriage woman and her femininity are handed over to a man to create a lineage. The woman who was used as the goods of exchange is the one who protects the purity of blood and caste. As a result, they were exempted from power, reproduction, right to own land, and knowledge.

Female sexuality was under the control of men. Upper caste women were expected to conform to the principle norms laid down by the *Brāhmaṇas*. Brahmanical texts considered women as sinful. This is drawn in the *Smṛti* texts like *Manusmṛti*. The dominant male society of *Brāhmaṇas* believes in the inherent power of women. They believed that if women get impure, everything in nature will become impure and destructive. The respect and power owned by the upper-classmen are to be protected by their women, and for this reason, women are to be protected, and their sexuality should be strictly restricted. They created notions on the purity of women, ‘*pativrata*,’ ‘*Strīdharmā*’ as the strong ideologies protected by their male relatives or by the ruler, imposing within the boundaries of the state. They made a clear differentiation between motherhood and female sexuality to safeguard the patrilineal family. To restrict female sexuality, they attributed the veneration of motherhood on women. This motherhood was approved to restrict the relation of women to just one male. Based on this system, women could have sexual relationships only with the man to whom they are legally permitted. Motherhood was then subjected to the ‘ideal.’ Beginning with the marriage taking up several roles became the responsibility and symbol of the ‘ideal woman.’ Women became a devoted subject as a mother and ‘*pativrata*.’ *Manusmṛti* states that women are born to give birth to a child and thus should be a devotee and devoted. The same concept, as explained in other *Smṛti* texts. ‘*Strīdharmā*’ is the ideal concept laid down by the dominant

*Brāhmaṇas* to confine the sexual urge of femininity to mere motherhood and ‘*Pātivratyā*.’ *Smṛti* texts state that the very sinful nature of women is always in conflict with ‘*Strīdharmā*.’ To mould femininity and restrict the wilderness of female sexuality, the ‘*Pativrata-dharma*’ is accomplished. The Brahmanical patriarchy formulated an ideology in the form of *Pātivratyā* to tame the uncontrolled sexuality of women to serve their power and position in society.

Women who are subjected to the patriarchal concept of ‘*Pativrata-dharma*’ internalized the ideology and controlled their ‘self.’ ‘*Pātivratyā*’ is a veil for the protection of the purity of high-caste women. Chastity and loyalty of wife were considered as the ways towards liberation. Mythical characters of Draupadi, Sīta, and Śīlāvati played a significant role in influencing and popularising such ideology. Similarly, the mythological stories of Rēṇuka and Ahalyā were projected as the stories of women who failed to protect their ‘*Pātivratyā*’ and thereby educating the women about the wifely fidelity. The myths also teach women regarding the consequences of not being able to devote themselves to their husbands. The texts also offer power to the men of their family to punish and bring a woman under the control of the system if she fails to obey. *Manusmṛti* strongly states, if men fail to control women, then they would destroy two families. In *Manusmṛti*, it is also said that the husband (*pati*) has the responsibility to protect and take care of her wife (*patni*). Hence, such texts offer the power to subjugate women, to bring them under control physically. When they fail to control women, they shall resort to physical abuse as directed in the Brahmanical texts. Even then, they fail, the power of the ruler intervenes. The purity of caste should be protected in the Brahmanical male dominant society by the state, which is considered as part of *Rājadharmā*. The state intervenes to punish such women for protecting the

purity of the male-dominant Brahmanical system. This is how the interdependence of the state, caste, and power-positions are sustained.

The patrilineal system of family, the social relations that were shaped by hegemonic Brahmanical ideology and property rights, were consolidated and reproduced by restricting and controlling the lives of women. The female bodies were subjected to the Brahmanical patriarchy. Whether the everyday lives of the upper-class women were completely controlled by the *Smṛti* texts is not evident. There is a paucity of sources, mainly because they were discriminated, silenced, and that their experiences and voices are not recorded anywhere. But how the power relations and gender were ideologically structured is evident in the Brahmanical texts, most importantly in *Smṛti* texts.

In Kerala also, gender relations are formed in a way that perpetuates the caste system. Women's lives were shaped in a way that preserved the hierarchical authority of the Nambudiris, *Kṣatriyas*, and Nairs. The Nambudiris were the dominant caste in Kerala. The normative text that represented the patriarchal ideology of Nambudiris was *Śāṅkarasmṛti*. It was a *Smṛti* text attributed to both *Paraśurāma* and *Śankarācārya* to legitimize their power and position in society. The Nambudiris, who had migrated to Kerala, established 32 settlements and soon became the most powerful section in the society.

The stories on the origin of Kerala in *Kēraḷōlpatti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* proclaim that it was *Paraśurāma* who created Kerala and settled the *Brāhmaṇas* here. Those *Brāhmaṇas* who came here were given the ownership of all the land, and rites and rituals were formed exclusively for them. These texts say that six months of rains and six months of warm climate were also *Paraśurāma's* creation. Those Vedic *Brāhmaṇas* who secured land distributed it to those under them built temples and formulated temple rituals. The *Brāhmaṇas* themselves decided on the responsibilities of each caste. The



*Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* and *Kēraḷōlpatti* gave legitimacy to *Brāhmaṇa* supremacy. The supremacy enjoyed during the reign of Perumals continued at the time of *Svarūpams* also. Naturally, in a temple-centered economy, they were the supreme heads. The power of temples and that of the *Brāhmaṇa* villages increased during this period. Evidence is pointing to the increase of power of the so-called temple abodes (*Sankētam*) at this time. *Sankētam* is a location with specific boundaries where no king could establish his kingly authority. It was a place ruled by lords and protectors elected by the members of the *Brāhmaṇas* assemblies. The king has only the position of a 'kōyma' in the *Sankētam*. He is also elected by the members of the *Sankētam*. Proper authority rested with the *Brāhmaṇa* representatives, who were known as 'yōgakkār.' The authorities had the right to punish whoever committed misdeeds in the *Sankētam*. The king was also not spared from punishment. It was clear that the kings had no authority over the land of the *Sankētam*.

In this way, the *Brāhmaṇas* remained the main keepers of the temples and agricultural land. Most of the agricultural lands in Kerala were those who came under the purview of *Dēvaswams* of the temples. There was also the so-called *Brahmaswam* land, which was the private property of the *Brāhmaṇas*. Later, the extent of lands which the temples held in possession increased in the form of donations from the kings, lords, and merchants. The land in Kerala primarily came under two heads: the *Brahmaswam*, and *Dēvaswam*. Since both categories were handled by the Nambudiris, in effect, the complete responsibility of the production process was in the hands of the Nambudiris. People were not made to participate directly in the production; the land was given on lease.

In the formation of societies hovering around temples, the division of labour was also based on the caste system—all divisions like the Nambudiris, *ampalavāsis*, and Nair community involved in the protection of property.

Agricultural laborers and manual laborers were centered around the temples. The services of all these sectors were ritualistic and were considered mutually obligatory. The work of the various manual laborers was structured in the hierarchical order of castes. Services from lower castes to the Nambudiris, who were in a higher stratum by their caste and ritualistic practices, were ensured through rites and rituals. In Kerala, there evolved a village system that was very different from other states. Here, people from other castes also stayed in the *Brāhmaṇa* villages. Agricultural laborers and manual laborers lived in proximity to Nambudiri homes so that their services were made available to the latter easily. However, strict rules of the pollution concept ensured the supremacy of the *Brāhmaṇas*. Those in the upper caste were regarded most pure, and so was their work. As they came down the caste ladder, they lost their purity. As per these rules, the work of those in the higher rungs was regarded as pure, and the physical labor of those lower down, impure. The concept of ‘pure and impure’ strictly retained untouchability practices. Untouchability made it impossible for people of various castes to mingle freely. The pure and impure concept became a factor that could help impose control over even political authorities.

The caste system was confined and made to remain immobile within a closed system. Within each caste, there were sub-castes, and there were hierarchies among the sub-castes, and also the ‘pure and impure’ concept. There were many sub-castes among Nambudiris themselves. A point to be noted is that even geographical boundaries were connected to the pure-impure concept. For example, if a person went from one place (*dēśam*) to another, he was regarded as impure. The Nambudiris in Kerala were denied the right to get to the other side of a river or to travel abroad, traversing the sea. The caste system in Kerala created different types of caste hierarchies performing different social functions and responsibilities.

The Nambudiris never participated directly in the production process, even though they enjoyed land ownership as a right. Yet they enjoyed the right to a major part of the produce. They were also in charge of the temple wealth. As those who had supremacy in the spiritual world, they enjoyed the traditional rights. They propagated that by propitiating the feudal lords who were masters of the land, they would propitiate the gods also. The loftiest form of charity is what is given to a *Brāhmaṇa*, and to make a *Brāhmaṇa* happy is the most important duty of a citizen. *Brahmahatyāpāpam* (the sin of killing a *Brāhmaṇa*), *Brāhmaṇasāpam* (the curse of a *Brāhmaṇa*) were ideas that emerged as part of this purpose. Caste-based rules such as *nāṭṭāchāraṅgal* (local customs), *kīlvalakkam* (precedence) helped to maintain their property also.

Though there might have been challenges against the dominance of Nambudiris, the notions of womanhood in pre-modern Kerala was predominantly Brahmanical. Brahmanical texts ambiguously conceive womanhood. On the one hand, women are valorised as *Pativrātā* or *kulastrī*, and on the other, she is considered as voluptuous. Both these categories view the female body as a site for enforcing patriarchal power. The body of *Pativrātā* is a site for procreation for maintaining patrilineal family, and the body of voluptuous is for the pleasure of elite men. Here women are victims of patriarchal power. The analysis of literary texts of the period under study notices the fact that these texts are androcentric in nature. Notions of femininity represented in the texts are dharmasastric. But the significant point is that most of these texts are written by non-Brahmin authors. *Maṇipravālam* texts reflect a world of luxury and enjoyment with women as objects of desire. They are the women eroticised by male writers and denied of the agency. The *Sīta* of Thunchath Ezhuthachan is the epitome of *Pātivratyā*, completely under the control of patriarchal ideology. The femininity represented in the writings of Kunchan Nambiār was patriarchal. He perceives a woman only as

a body. The *Āṭṭakathas* describe women both as lustful and as *pativrata*. These texts written by non-brahman authors show the brahmanization of femininity. *Pativrataḍharma śatakam*, a nineteenth-century text, projects woman as a person who should follow *Pativrataḍharma*. The text eulogizes *Pātivratyā* and makes statements about the duties of a woman which reflect the attitude of the *Smṛti* texts like *Manusmṛti*.

The study of literary texts shows that the Brahmanical patriarchal ideology was powerful enough to influence the society that even the non-*Brāhmaṇas* did follow the normative texts in their concepts of femininity. Women and her sexuality were regulated by Brahmanical misogynist norms. While the lives of *Brāhmaṇa* men were centered on privileges and pleasures, the lives of women were circumscribed within the confines of patriarchal ideology. Women were denied property rights, rights to knowledge, and desire. The Brahmanical normative texts glorify the *Āśrama* of a householder with procreation at its center to protect their privileges, and their women were confined exclusively to the domestic space.

The Nambudiris regularised familial ties and gender relations in a way that safeguarded their feudal rights. The *Śāṅkarasmṛti* which is estimated to have written after the fourteenth century contained *Smṛti* rules that regulated their lives. As per the *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, the family property can never be partitioned. For the same reason, only the eldest son could marry. The rest of them should lead *snātaka* lives, instructs the *Smṛti*. Since this is often impossible, they are denied of only *swajāti* marriage, and the *Smṛti* formulated rules that permitted them to have sexual relations (the custom called *sambandham*) with Nair, *Kṣatriya*, and *ampalavāsi* women. Contrary to *Manusmṛti* which states that under no circumstances should a *Brāhmaṇa* have relations with a *Śūdra*, and in the event of this happening, they will be deprived of their *Brāhmaṇya* and sent to hell, the Nambudiri freely engaged

in relation with *Śūdra* Nair women. Thus, rules which were different from other *Dharmaśāstras* existed among the Nambudiris. For the maintenance of the property as well as the caste supremacy that it brought in its trail, it became necessary for family structure as well as the women to be brought under control through the *Smṛti* rules. It was the ideology that went hand in glove with it that decided the space and the identity of Nambudiris and Nair women, and the *ampalavāsi* and *Kṣatriya* women.

The spaces of the woman and man in a patriarchal society are constructed in such a way that the woman's access to knowledge is reduced, and her social status lowered. Moreover, such spaces serve to strengthen the man's authority and position. Control of space is thus control of resources. Whoever controls space has more power. Women invariably accept the space offered to them without question. In the Brahmanical world, space is determined by the male elite. A woman's space is the interior of the house: the darkest, secluded areas within the home. They face many obstacles to come out of it. She has permission to come out of the house only until she attains puberty. After that, the girl never sees the world outside of her home or even visits the temple. After her marriage, she gets permission to step out only rarely. It is on the day of her marriage that there is a change in her space. After she steps out into the external world on her wedding day and undertakes her journey from her house to her husband's, her space is restricted within the husband's house.

She is only being transferred from her own home to her husband's house. Knowledge and resources are far out of reach of women. The sacred space and ritual space that *Brāhmaṇa* men controlled were denied to women. Women are given only a limited share of the ritual space. There is a special 'tevarappura' meant for women within the home. Here, they can worship God without chanting mantras. They can offer *nivēdyam*. They have

permission to undertake to fast as well. Women have permission to do worship on festival days like *tiruvōṇam* and for '*kuṭiveppu*' following marriage. There are many fasts meant for women only. On these days, the *pūja* and other rituals are performed only by women. In this way, a domestic space exclusively for rituals is given to them. However, these spaces are regarded as inferior to those assigned to men. Inside the home, main *pūjas* are performed by men. They are done with the chanting of Vedic mantras. Women are segregated from these spaces. Moreover, women don't have any part to play in important ritualistic spaces like *yāga*, or *ṣōḍaśasamskāra*. Though women are also part of it, their participation is under the control and leadership of men. Women have no participation in *pūja* and other rituals which receive *dakṣiṇa*. The practice of restricting the woman's space within the house, being denied of '*vēdādhikāram*' and '*yāgādhikāram*,' begins with the *ṣōḍaśasamskāra* of *Brāhmaṇas*.

Discrimination in the socialisation process of girls and boys starts at a very young age. Discrimination starts during the time of conceiving a child when they pray for a boy to be born, and for this, at the time of *pumsavanam*, they pray for male offspring and ingest '*ouśadham*.' The girl is denied the right to chant mantras in the rites she performs. Moreover, she is denied the sacred and privileged rites such as *Upanayana*. The feeling that they are inferior and don't deserve sacred knowledge spring in their minds as well as in the boys' minds from a very young age. This discrimination in the rites of passage can be seen in their everyday life as well. When a girl child is born, doors are quietly knocked to inform the family members of their birth, whereas when boys are born, there is so much fanfare that boys are considered symbols of happiness, and girls, of ill luck. This discrimination continues in the love and attention they receive from parents, and also in matters of food and clothing. There was even the custom of girls being

harmed by little boys. Girls grow up facing disregard, belittling, and with a feeling of inferiority.

In addition to this are the norms that restrict their mobility. The girl who has connections with the outside world till her puberty is forbidden to step out of the house when she attains puberty. Thereafter, until her marriage, she should remain indoors. Since it is deemed the woman's responsibility to maintain caste purity, they are protected. The sexuality of lower caste men was considered a threat to the purity of the upper caste. Hence, it is as part of the husband receiving the girl's womb without any impurity that she is confined to the home.

Brahmin women underwent strict restrictions even after marriage. It is the marriage custom of Nambudiri that made the lives of Nambudiri women a hell. Since only the eldest son was permitted *swajāti* marriage, many women remained spinsters. Dowry system was also strictly followed, and therefore it was a difficult task to marry off girls from families that were not prosperous. In the *swajāti* marriage known as '*Vēḷi*,' the eldest son married more than once. Naturally, women had to face rivalries from co-wives. Moreover, there was also the custom of exchange marriage so that the girls in the family got somehow married off. Often girls had to be wives of old men. Their consent was never sought when the girls were married off. Maidens were exchanged with the same casualness of exchanging goods. Very often, girls who grew up in affluent families had to go as brides into poor families. This means that when girls were married off, they never even bothered to assure that the groom's family had the means to support her.

The family was bent on marrying off the maidens. *Śāṅkarasmṛti* instructs that a father should marry off his daughter even if it meant begging for the same. This is not out of concern for the maiden's life, but because it was believed that unmarried maidens would be threats to the caste system and

purity of the family. The eldest son not only used to marry more than once from his own caste but also have *sambandham* with many other women. Hence, many women didn't receive conjugal pleasures from the husband. Domestic violence was also rampant. Brahmanical patriarchy used to handle women not as individuals, but as the private property of their husbands. For the same reason, domestic violence was an unquestioned, acceptable thing. Many women were victims of domestic violence. Apart from her status as a wife, the Nambudiri women never received any love or a feeling of motherhood; yet, she was forced to observe her vows of chastity. A Nambudiri woman is one who thinks only about her husband, observes vows and prays for him, and has no connection with any other man. Many among them move from the status of a wife to the inauspicious one of a widow. Since the custom of old men marrying young maidens was prevalent, there were many child widows too.

The practice of *Sati* wasn't there among Nambudiris. However, widows were expected to observe the lifelong vow of celibacy. A widow was regarded as a bad omen. Widowhood was the representation of a woman's social death. It was believed that widowhood is the result of sins committed by the Nambudiri woman in her earlier births. Therefore, the first thing she was supposed to do on her husband's death fell at his feet and asks for forgiveness for her faults. After that, she is regarded as a criminal by the community. She is made to remove the *tāli*, which had been so far her only identity. With that, the Nambudiri woman loses whatever dregs of acceptance she had thus far. Her life, which had even otherwise been confined to the interiors of the home, is relegated to darkness. There was a custom of giving a meal to the Nambudiri boys as atonement for their sins and widowhood, and it was called *iruttūṇu*, (having meal in the darkness) which symbolizes darkness in their lives. Even the limited space the woman received on auspicious



occasions and festivals was denied to the widow. They were allowed only the dark zones of the home and society.

*Śāṅkarasmṛti* gave the woman only the identity as that of a wife and a mother. The married life of a Nambudiri woman is connected to her property rights. It was for the family property to remain unpartitioned that *Śāṅkarasmṛti* prescribes that only the eldest son should marry. *Vēḷi*, which was a type of endogamous marriage, was highly ritualised. From the day of fixing the marriage, patriarchal elements were strong in all rituals. Since women's position was prominent in the family as well as in reproduction, and since women still had right over reproduction, selecting a bride was a laborious process. The *Smṛti* stipulates that the bride should be a virgin. The bride has to come to the husband's place, undefiled by other men, and maintain the family there. The objectification of girls starts from the time of *kanyādānam*. The girl, her sexuality, her motherhood - everything is transferred from the father to the husband.

The bride was thereafter the sexual property of the husband. From the time she sits with him in the *aupāsanāgni*, her difficult tasks begin. Looking after the husband and the family, and doing household tasks are her responsibility. Be she a virgin or a wife, she was removed from economic resources. Only the dhoti she received once a year remained her savings. She had no right over land or other property. However, the wife's presence was mandatory in all rituals. The most important is the right to sit as *yāgapatni* in *yāgas*. However, all these rights were performed in the space decided by men. Women had no agency or the right to express their individuality here. *Gṛhyasūtra* tells the wife to be a queen to the husband's family.

Each ritual of marriage is indicative of the woman's servility and slavishness as a wife, and her position as her husband's property. The wife is blessed with the saying, "Be a mother to many sons." The woman enters her

husband's house as material necessary for producing sons, and to maintain her husband's status as a householder. The *Smṛti* instructs her to center her life around her husband, disregarding other men. The bridegroom chants a mantra at the time of marriage to the bride, saying, "Live with me alone in your thoughts, without even the sun god seeing you." All rituals that include the wife are those that utter the vow of chastity.

The marriage customs formulated in Kerala by *Śāṅkarasmṛti* and *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* reshaped the lives of not just Nambudiri women, but also Nair, *Kṣatriya* and *ampalavāsi* women. While they insisted on Nambudiri women observing strict fidelity, *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* said that women of other communities need not observe the chastity. Women who were involved in *sambandham* relations with Nambudiri men were allowed sexual freedom. *Kēraḷa Māhātmyam* claims that Paraśurāma brought *apsarās* from heaven to entertain Nambudiris. *Apsarās* are believed to be entertainers of the Gods and said to lack fidelity. Likewise, women of the *sambandham* society are those who entertain the Lords of earth, Nambudiris. *Sambandham* was not regarded by Nambudiris as a marital relationship. Neither women who engaged in *sambandham* nor their children had any rights in the Nambudiri household. They followed the matrilineal system, which was the female line of descent. The tribal clans that existed here are said to have followed matriliney. However, the Nambudiris used this custom to their advantage by mixing it with the *sambandham* tradition, to protect their property and to satisfy their sexual orgies. There is an argument that matriliney and *sambandham* gave the women of these communities, economic autonomy and considerable sexual freedom. However, the reality was that even here, the property was handled by the eldest male member of the family. As for the royal families, except in Attingal, in no other family did women receive the right to rule.

In *sambandham* also, caste was a crucial factor for women. They had no right to accept a man of the lower caste. Even if the woman was to choose a man of the higher caste, they need permission from either the eldest male member or some older men in the family. In other words, women had no complete right over property or relationships. The Nambudiris succeeded in convincing those who followed matriliney that their status would be elevated if they had *sambandham* with Nambudiris. Therefore, so that the family received wealth and power, the women of these families were coerced into *sambandham* with Nambudiris. Here the women's opinion or interest was not a matter of concern at all.

The Nambudiris were using female bodies of higher castes to safeguard their patriarchal family, property rights, and their physical needs. The *Smṛti* rules were made by linking women's bodies and property rights. While the Nambudiris used the bodies of one section of women for entertainment and consolidation of their relations with other strong communities, the bodies of Brahmin women were used just for the perpetuation of the family, for the perpetuation of caste purity, and to safeguard their rights to the property. Brahmanical patriarchy needed not only the reproductive capacity of Brahmin women but also that of women of other communities. Since the rulers of many localities were sons of Nambudiris, it became possible for them to protect their rights with the interference of the state.

As protectors of the purity of caste and the honour of the Nambudiri family, there were strong restrictions and vigil placed on women. Since unlawful sexual relations or intermixing of caste would become a cause for the destruction of social order, women's sexuality was regulated using strict laws. Adornments were denied to Brahmin women. They wore only white. Usually, only widows of Brahmin communities used to wear white, but in

Kerala, even married Nambudiri women wore white. They used to extend their earlobes and wear only bronze bangles. The use of perfumes, wearing flowers, lining the eyes with kajal was denied to them. After the bath, the hair was not even combed but tied upward in a bundle. They had no permission to watch plays or festivals. Public places were closed worlds to Nambudiri women. When very occasionally, they went to the nearby temple or paid a visit to a relative nearby, it was to be done draping their whole body and holding a Cadjan umbrella, with female and male attendants escorting them in front. It might be due to the fear that *Smṛtis* had about Nambudiri women's sexuality that they said that the male servants would preferably be old men. Even in their own families, the women weren't allowed to look at anyone other than their husbands. The *Śāṅkarasmṛti* thus prescribed rules which were not found in any other Brahmin community, to control the women's desire and sexuality. Their objective was to protect Brahmin men's interests, property, and the caste system. Though there were elaborate rules to control female sexuality, her property rights, and her access to knowledge, there were voices raised against patriarchy in the form of sexual transgressions.

The desire of a Nambudiri woman was met with severe punishment. Any relationship outside those laid down by *Śāṅkarasmṛti* was regarded as a breach of law and sin. The patriarchal ideology of Nambudiris was not ready to tolerate adultery in any form. Adultery of the woman, as well as the man, was equally offensive. *Śāṅkarasmṛti*, like all other *Smṛti* texts, venerated the ideology of *Pātivratyā*. But the deviant women were punished with a trial and ex-communication. The procedure of *Smārttavichāram* was a mechanism to protect the purity of caste, property rights, and privileges of Nambudiris. The intervention of the state in the procedure shows the fact that female sexuality had to be regulated according to patriarchal norms, and they may be put under strict surveillance under paternal power and the ruler. The state ensured the safe functioning of a social system in which land, caste purity, and privileges

of Nambudiris were protected. Nambudiris, who followed a life based on the concept of purity, wanted others to acknowledge that they are ritually more pure, superior, and sacred than any other castes. This purity and sacredness were depended on the purity of their women. It was in this context that *Śānkarasmṛti* prescribed norms and rules for restricting women's lives. It was the duty and responsibility of Nambudiri women to protect the purity of the privileges of their men by internalising those rules and thereby restricting their selves. If they try to cross the boundaries, the combined forces of male members of the family, community, and the state intervene and enforce the law by punishing the women, her paramours, and even their next generation.

The subjugation of upper-caste women was interlinked to property rights. In the period under study, the form of property was land, and the one geographical peculiarity of Kerala is the scarcity of land. There are studies about the availability of land and the nature of households, which state that the inheritance becomes impartible in the societies where the land is not plenty. In Kerala, as the pressure on land was high, the Nambudiris followed a system of marriage to avoid the partition of property. The property was related to caste purity as they received most of their properties as the custodians of temples and because they are ritually supreme. Purity was dependent upon the control of female sexuality without controlling women. It would be impossible to pass on the pure patrilineal inheritance of Nambudiris. The female bodies were considered as a means to cultivate social and political hierarchies. The trial and punishment of *Smārttavichāram* was a mechanism to instill a sense of fear in the minds of women, which ultimately led to the regulation of public/private spaces for them through various patriarchal discourses.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Abhōjya</i>	-	non purified food
<i>Ācārams</i>	-	customs
<i>Ācārya</i>	-	teacher
<i>Accis</i>	-	heroines of <i>Maṇipravāḷam</i> texts
<i>Achi</i>	-	women
<i>Adhikāra</i>	-	authority or power
<i>Adhivēdanam</i>	-	Marrying more than one woman.
<i>Advaita</i>	-	non-dualism
<i>Agni</i>	-	fire
<i>Agnihōtrayāga</i>	-	sacrifice to Fire
<i>Agni pradakṣiṇa</i>	-	circumambulation of fire
<i>Ahalyā Mōkṣam</i>	-	salvation of Ahalyā
<i>Aitihiyamāla</i>	-	a collection of myths
<i>Akakkōyma</i>	-	a representative of the king in temple
<i>Alari</i>	-	a flower
<i>Aḷavu/ Ōṇaḷavu</i>	-	gift presenting, gift at the time of <i>Ōṇam</i> festival
<i>Ambikārādhana</i>	-	worshipping Goddess
<i>Ammaccis</i>	-	mothers, Old ladies
<i>Ammikkālchaviṭṭal</i>	-	stepping on the stone
<i>Ampalavāsi</i>	-	temple servants
<i>Amṛtu</i>	-	a divine drink
<i>Anācārams</i>	-	customs of Nambudiri peculiar to Kerala, degenerated social customs.

<i>Anangarangam</i>	-	a Sanskrit text
<i>Āṇayaccu</i>	-	a type of coin
<i>Añcāmpura</i>	-	fifth building
<i>Angāṭis</i>	-	markets
<i>Ankam</i>	-	military combat
<i>Annaprāśana</i>	-	first feeding of child
<i>Antarāḷa</i>	-	temple servant class
<i>Antarjanaṃ.</i>	-	Nambudiri woman
<i>Appam</i>	-	sweet dish
<i>Apphan</i>	-	younger male members of a Nambudiri household
<i>Apsarā</i>	-	celestial Nymph
<i>Ardhanārīśvara</i>	-	lord Śiva and Pārvati
<i>Artha</i>	-	wealth
<i>Āsati</i>	-	unchaste Woman
<i>Āśrama</i>	-	stage of life according to Brahmanical literature
<i>Aṣṭamāngalya</i>	-	an auspicious lamp
<i>Aṣṭami</i>	-	eighth day of a half of lunar month
<i>Aśuddha</i>	-	polluted
<i>Asura</i>	-	demon
<i>Aśvamēdhayāga</i>	-	horse sacrifice
<i>Aśvins</i>	-	two gods of medicine
<i>Aṭa</i>	-	a sweet dish
<i>Aṭappan</i>	-	vessel
<i>Aṭima</i>	-	servile class

<i>Aṭimai/Aṭiyār</i>	-	servitude/ servile class
<i>Aṭiyānmār</i>	-	tenants or bonded labourers
<i>Aṭiyātti</i>	-	maid servant
<i>Āttēmmār</i>	-	Nambudiri woman
<i>Aṭṭippēr</i>	-	land rights
<i>Aṭukkaḷadōṣam</i>	-	suspecting a Nambudiri woman of adultery
<i>Auspāsanam</i>	-	ritual of worshiping domestic fire
<i>Avakāśam</i>	-	right
<i>Āvaṇapalaka,</i>	-	small wooden ladle
<i>Aviyal</i>	-	a dish
<i>Ayiniyūṇu</i>	-	a ceremonial feast in connection with marriage
<i>Ayittam</i>	-	untouchability
<i>Bahirjanaṃ</i>	-	people outside
<i>Bahyandara</i>	-	extrovert in nature (prostitute)
<i>Bali</i>	-	offering
<i>Bhadralōk</i>	-	english educated middle class Bengali men
<i>Bhakti</i>	-	devotion
<i>Bhaktins</i>	-	female devotees
<i>Bhaṭṭas</i>	-	scholars who recites <i>Mahabharata</i> in the temple
<i>Bhikṣa</i>	-	alms
<i>Bhikṣu</i>	-	male monastic
<i>Bhōjya</i>	-	purified food
<i>Bhrānticheriyamma</i>	-	mad aunt
<i>Bhraṣṭu</i>	-	ex-communication



<i>Bhūdēva</i>	-	lords of earth, Brahmin
<i>Bhūtayajña</i>	-	feeding the non human elements
<i>Bilva</i>	-	a sacred plant
<i>Bindi</i>	-	a mark on the forehead
<i>Brahma</i>	-	a type of marriage in which a maiden adorned with ornaments and given to the groom by the bride's father.
<i>Brahmacāri</i>	-	celibate
<i>Brahmacarya</i>	-	state of celibacy
<i>Brahmajña</i>	-	learning the Vēdas
<i>Brahmaswam</i>	-	land owned by Brahmins
<i>Brahmayajña</i>	-	rituals
<i>Cakkalā</i>	-	oil-Monger
<i>Cākyārs</i>	-	a caste in Kerala who performs <i>Kūttu</i>
<i>Cāliya</i>	-	weaver
<i>Cantas</i>	-	market
<i>Cāttirar</i>	-	disciples
<i>Caṭṭukam</i>	-	a utensil
<i>Cempumōtiram</i>	-	copper ring
<i>Ceppittōṇṭi</i>	-	a tool used as buds
<i>Cērikkal</i>	-	land belonging to the ruler
<i>Champus</i>	-	a branch in Malayalam literature.
<i>Chāndu</i>	-	a mark on the forehead
<i>Chaturthi</i>	-	fourth day of a half of lunar month, a Gaṇēśa festival
<i>Chāturvarṇya</i>	-	four classes of Hinduism viz. brahmana, kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra

<i>Chaulā</i>	-	ritual of cutting the hair of a child for the first time
<i>Chempaka</i>	-	a flower
<i>Chempu kiṅṅam</i>	-	bronze bowl
<i>Cherutāli</i>	-	a sacred thread that ties around the bride's neck during marriage
<i>Chōdākarana</i>	-	cutting of hair for the first time
<i>Citraṇī</i>	-	a category of beautiful women in Sanskrit literature
<i>Cōrūṇu</i>	-	first feeding of cooked rice to a child
<i>Dakṣiṇa</i>	-	donation
<i>Daṇḍa</i>	-	punishment
<i>Darbha</i>	-	a scared grass
<i>Darśapūrṇamāsam</i>	-	month of full moon
<i>Daśama</i>	-	recital of devotional prayers.
<i>Daśamēhani</i>	-	a ritual in Nambudiri wedding
<i>Daśami</i>	-	tenth day of month
<i>Daśapuṣpa</i>	-	ten sacred flowers
<i>Dāsis</i>	-	maid servant
<i>Dāsīvicāram</i>	-	trial of maid servant
<i>Dēśam</i>	-	locality
<i>Dēvadāsis</i>	-	temple dancers
<i>Dēvās</i>	-	Gods
<i>Dēvaswam</i>	-	land owned by temples
<i>Dēvayajña</i>	-	offering for gods
<i>Dhanvantari</i>	-	god of medicine

<i>Dharma</i>	-	right code of conduct
<i>Dharmasampati</i>	-	right code of conduct and wealth
<i>Dhoti</i>	-	cloth
<i>Dvija</i>	-	twice born
<i>Dīkṣavarikkuka</i>	-	to consecrate
<i>Eccil</i>	-	leftovers of food
<i>Ēkavarigraha</i>	-	a prostitute who loves one man
<i>Eluttupalli</i>	-	schools in pre-modern Kerala
<i>Embrāntiri</i>	-	brahmanas from Karnataka
<i>Eṅangar</i>	-	a close relative
<i>Eṅṅavittu</i>	-	applying oil
<i>Eṭṭukeṭtu</i>	-	a house with two central courtyard and eight hall
<i>Eṭṭam</i>	-	months of May –June
<i>Gaṅapatipūja</i>	-	worshiping Gaṅapati
<i>Gandharva</i>	-	heavenly beings (musical spirits in Hindu mythology)
<i>Gaṅikā</i>	-	courtesans
<i>Gaṅikāgṛham</i>	-	the house of courtesans
<i>Garbhadānam</i>	-	conception (a rite of passage)
<i>Gārhastya</i>	-	stage of a householder
<i>Gāyatri Mantra</i>	-	a hymn
<i>Ghōṣa</i>	-	practice of covering the whole body by a shawl by Nambudiri women
<i>Ghōṣayātra</i>	-	ritual procession
<i>Gōdāna</i>	-	rite of granting cow to a Brahmin

<i>Gōśāla</i>	-	cowshed
<i>Grāmas</i>	-	village settlement
<i>Gṛha</i>	-	house
<i>Gṛhamedhi</i>	-	male head of the family
<i>Gṛhastha</i>	-	householder
<i>Gṛhastāśrama</i>	-	householder's life
<i>Gṛhasthāśrami</i>	-	householder
<i>Gṛhiṇi</i>	-	wife
<i>Gṛhyasūtras</i>	-	text of domestic rituals
<i>Gurudakṣiṇa</i>	-	offering to teachers
<i>Gurukulas</i>	-	ancient system of learning while living with the teacher in his home.
<i>Gurukulavāsam</i>	-	Learning knowledge by living with the teacher in his home
<i>Hastinī</i>	-	a category of beautiful women in Sanskrit literature
<i>Hōmam (Malar)</i>	-	offering of roasted grains in to fire
<i>Hōmam</i>	-	an oblation by offering made to fire
<i>Iḷamkūr</i>	-	youngest member of ruling family
<i>Illam</i>	-	Nambudiri household
<i>Iṅgatti</i>	-	maid servant
<i>Irikkaṅamma</i>	-	maid servant
<i>Iruṭuttu</i>	-	Custom of Nambudiri widow giving meals to Namudiri boys
<i>Janmam</i>	-	birth right

<i>Janmam-kāṇam</i>	-	a two tier arrangement in the land relations of Kerala
<i>Janmi</i>	-	landlord
<i>Jāras</i>	-	secret lovers
<i>Jātaka</i>	-	the horoscope of a person
<i>Jātakarma</i>	-	rite performed at the birth of the child
<i>Jāti</i>	-	caste
<i>Jīvitam</i>	-	payment for lifehood
<i>Kaccam</i>	-	regulations or agreement
<i>Kaikōṭṭikkali</i>	-	a song and dance performance
<i>Kaita</i>	-	a type of flower
<i>Kārajāh Peṭṭavar</i>	-	children born after the loss of chastity of a Nambudiri women
<i>Kalarī</i>	-	battlefield
<i>Kaliyuga</i>	-	last of the cycle of stages described in Brahmanical literature
<i>kalpaka</i>	-	a tree
<i>Kāma</i>	-	erotic desire
<i>Kāmaśāstra</i>	-	the science of eroticism
<i>Kāmya</i>	-	<i>vrata</i> performed with an intention
<i>Kāṇam</i>	-	right of tenancy
<i>Kaṇiyān</i>	-	astronomers/ astrologers
<i>Kanyādān</i>	-	gifting of the maiden in marriage
<i>Kārālar</i>	-	tenant
<i>Kāraṇavan</i>	-	male head of a matrilineal family
<i>Kāraṇmai</i>	-	tenancy right

<i>Karikkatti</i>	-	knife
<i>Karinchānduchārthunnu</i>	-	adorned with black pigment on forehead
<i>Karinkūvaḷa</i>	-	a flower
<i>Karmakāṇḍam</i>	-	Division of vedas for sacrificial rote
<i>Karṇavēdham</i>	-	ear piercing ceremony
<i>Kārōlappam</i>	-	a sweet dish
<i>Karuvan</i>	-	blacksmith
<i>Kāryasthas</i>	-	manager of a house hold
<i>Kattileruka</i>	-	a word in the inscription which denotes sambandham
<i>Kenda</i>	-	a type of fish
<i>Kiḷakkini</i>	-	eastern side of inner part of a house
<i>Kiḷippāṭṭu</i>	-	a branch of Malayalam Bhakti poetry
<i>Kiṇṭi</i>	-	utensil
<i>Kōlam</i>	-	design drawn on the ground
<i>Kōḷāmbi</i>	-	a spittoon
<i>Konna</i>	-	a flower
<i>Kōva</i>	-	a fruit
<i>Kōvilakams</i>	-	the houses of royal families of Kerala
<i>Kōyma</i>	-	right
<i>Kṣatra</i>	-	territory
<i>Kṣetrasvāmin</i>	-	owner of field –husband
<i>Kūja</i>	-	utensil for water
<i>Kuḷappura</i>	-	building adjacent to pond
<i>Kulastrī</i>	-	chaste women

<i>Kulaṭā</i>	-	women who wanders from one family to another(not chaste)
<i>Kuḷichu Vēḷkka</i>	-	have bath and marry
<i>Kumbhāran</i>	-	caste (potters)
<i>Kumkum</i>	-	a red mark on the forehead of women, saffron
<i>Kuṛavan</i>	-	a caste
<i>Kuṛrasammatam</i>	-	confession of a crime
<i>Kūru</i>	-	loyalty
<i>Kūruvāḷca</i>	-	status according to one's age
<i>kuṭikoḷḷuka</i>	-	staying
<i>Kuṭiveppu</i>	-	ceremony of first entry of bride.
<i>Kuṭiyar</i>	-	serfs
<i>Kuttichathan</i>	-	little demon
<i>Kuṭṭipaṭṭar</i>	-	Tamil Brahmin
<i>Kuṭumā</i>	-	long tuft in the shaven head of a Brahmin male
<i>Kūvaḷam</i>	-	bael tree, <i>Aegle Marmelos</i>
<i>Lājahōmam</i>	-	offering of roasted grains in to fire
<i>Lajja</i>	-	shame
<i>Mahābhārata Bhaṭṭas</i>	-	scholars who recited Mahabharata
<i>Mahapataka</i>	-	great sins
<i>Majghar</i>	-	the hall or main room within a house
<i>Makkattāyam</i>	-	patriliny
<i>Malar</i>	-	roasted grain
<i>Mānam</i>	-	honour

<i>Mānava</i>	-	human being
<i>Mandāram</i>	-	a flower
<i>Maṇṇān</i>	-	washer man
<i>Maṇṇāppēṭi</i>	-	a custom in medieval Kerala
<i>Maṇṇātti</i>	-	washer woman
<i>Mantra</i>	-	hymn
<i>Mantrakōṭi</i>	-	auspicious cloth in a wedding ceremony
<i>Mantrasankhya</i>	-	number of chanting
<i>Marakuṭa</i>	-	cadjan umbrella used by Nambudiri women
<i>Mārrakalyāṇam</i>	-	exchange marriage
<i>Marumakkattāyam</i>	-	matriliny
<i>Maruts</i>	-	god of wind
<i>Maryādai</i>	-	custom
<i>Māṭṛdēvōbhava</i>	-	worshiping mother as goddesses
<i>Mēdhājñānam</i>	-	production of intelligence
<i>Mehandi</i>	-	appling henna in a bride's hands
<i>Mīmāṃsakās</i>	-	one who is well versed in Vedic knowledge
<i>Mōkṣa</i>	-	salvation
<i>Muhūrta</i>	-	auspicious time
<i>Mullattara</i>	-	platform of jasmine plant
<i>Muṇṭu</i>	-	cloths
<i>Murajapam</i>	-	a ritual of vedic reciting at Sri Padmanabha temple at Thiruvananthapuram
<i>Mūsāri</i>	-	brazier
<i>Mūttakūr</i>	-	the eldest members of a rulingfamily
<i>Naazhi</i>	-	a vessel



<i>Nāgakkāvu</i>	-	sacred grove for snake gods
<i>Nagaram</i>	-	city
<i>Naimikta</i>	-	a <i>vrata</i>
<i>Naivēdyam</i>	-	offering
<i>Nālukeṭtu</i>	-	four storage building with one central courtyard
<i>Nālutaḷi</i>	-	brahmin council during the period of Perumāḷs
<i>Nāmakaraṇam</i>	-	naming ceremony of child
<i>Nāṭṭeluttacchans</i>	-	the person who taught Malayalam letters in the indigenous schools in Kerala.
<i>Nāṭṭumaryāda</i>	-	customs that existed in a locality
<i>Nāṭṭutayavar</i>	-	rulers of a particular territory
<i>Nāṭus</i>	-	territory
<i>Naṭuvalī</i>	-	local chieftain
<i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i>	-	a text on classical dance
<i>Nāṭyavidyā</i>	-	knowledge in dance
<i>Nēdikkal'</i>	-	offering
<i>Neyyujapam</i>	-	chanting hymns with ghee
<i>Nir-yajña</i>	-	one of the five domestic oblation
<i>Niṣkaramaṇa</i>	-	taking a child outside the home for the first time.
<i>Nitya</i>	-	daily <i>vrata</i>
<i>Nivēdyam</i>	-	offering to god
<i>Niyoga</i>	-	a practice in which a childless widow was permitted to cohabit with a younger brother of her deceased husband

<i>Nūrrucaṭṭukam</i>	-	a vessel
<i>Nūru</i>	-	betel quid
<i>Ōṇakāḷcha/ ōṇaḷavu</i>	-	gift during the festival of Ōṇam
<i>Ōṇamvekkuka</i>	-	presenting gift during the festival of Ōṇam
<i>Oṇapuṭavā</i>	-	cloth as gift at the time of festival
<i>Ōṇavillu</i>	-	a bow related to the Ōṇam festival
<i>Oṛri</i>	-	mortgage
<i>Ōṭam</i>	-	boat
<i>Ōvara</i>	-	a portion in the bedroom
<i>Pachotti</i>	-	a medicinal plant
<i>Padam</i>	-	part
<i>Padinjatti</i>	-	western portion within a house
<i>Pambu</i>	-	the order permitting ordeal like dipping hands in the oil
<i>Paṇam</i>	-	coin, wealth
<i>Paṇayam</i>	-	mortgage
<i>Pañcākṣari</i>	-	chanting the hymns of lord Siva
<i>Pañcamahāpātakam</i>	-	five grave sins
<i>Pañcamehani</i>	-	a ritual associated with Nambudiri wedding
<i>Pañcayajña</i>	-	five offering
<i>Pāṇigrhaṇam</i>	-	ritual of seizure of bride's hand in a marriage ceremony
<i>Paṇikkar</i>	-	astrologer
<i>Papad</i>	-	a thin crisp round flatbread
<i>Paradēṣi</i>	-	Brahmanas from outside of Kerala
<i>Paraṭai</i>	-	committee

<i>Paraṭaiyār</i>	-	members of committee
<i>Pravarā</i>	-	ancestors
<i>Parivēdana</i>	-	marriage of younger male members of Nambudiri family
<i>Paṭai</i>	-	conflict
<i>Pathayapurā</i>	-	a part of house
<i>Patinjaṟṟi</i>	-	western side of the inner house
<i>Paṭippura</i>	-	gate house
<i>Patita</i>	-	unchaste women
<i>Pativratā</i>	-	dutiful wife
<i>Pātivratyā</i>	-	chastity
<i>Pāṭṭam</i>	-	rent
<i>Paṭṭar</i>	-	Brahmanas from Tamil Nadu
<i>Pattāyapura</i>	-	a portion of house, the granary
<i>Paṭṭiṇi</i>	-	hunger strike
<i>Pavitramōtira</i>	-	sacred ring
<i>Pēkkathakaḷ</i>	-	mad stories
<i>Perumthrikkōvilappan</i>	-	lord Śiva
<i>piṇḍa</i>	-	rice ball offered to the deceased
<i>pitṛyajña</i>	-	oblation for forefathers
<i>Potuvāḷ/Vāriyar</i>	-	temple castes
<i>Poyttu</i>	-	a military combat in medieval Kerala
<i>Prājāpatya</i>	-	a type of marriage
<i>Praṇāms</i>	-	a gesture offering worship or respect
<i>Praśastis</i>	-	charters containing royal genealogy

<i>Prayāṇa</i>	-	movement or mobility
<i>Prāyaścitta</i>	-	atonement
<i>Pūjā</i>	-	offering
<i>Pulā</i>	-	defilement
<i>Pulappēṭi</i>	-	a custom of medieval Kerala
<i>Pulaya</i>	-	a caste
<i>Puṃsavana</i>	-	rite of passage in which the woman consumes medicine
<i>Punnarbhu</i>	-	remarried woman
<i>Puṇyāha</i>	-	holy water for purification
<i>Puṛakōyṃa</i>	-	a representative of the king
<i>Pūramkuḷi</i>	-	a festival and a vow
<i>Puruṣarthas</i>	-	four goals in a man's life called <i>dharma</i> , <i>artha</i> , <i>kāma</i> and <i>mōkṣa</i>
<i>Puṛattaḷam</i>	-	outer hall
<i>Puruṣapraja</i>	-	male progeny
<i>Puruṣoṭhaman</i>	-	man with all human qualities
<i>Puṣpaśayya</i>	-	bed decorated with flowers
<i>Putra</i>	-	son
<i>Putrika</i>	-	daughter whose sons are considered as the natural heirs of her father
<i>Rāja</i>	-	king
<i>Rājadharmā</i>	-	duty of king
<i>Rākṣasa</i>	-	demon
<i>Rākṣasi</i>	-	demoness
<i>Rasa</i>	-	emotion

<i>Rigvēdi</i>	-	Brahmanas who follow Rigveda
<i>Ritu</i>	-	season
<i>Ritumati</i>	-	menstruation of a girl
<i>Sabha</i>	-	assembly
<i>Sādhanam</i>	-	a Nambudiri women accused of adultery – literal meaning a commodity
<i>Sadya</i>	-	feast
<i>Sagōtra</i>	-	belonging to a family of common ancestors
<i>Sahasranāma</i>	-	recital of thousand names of god
<i>Śālas</i>	-	Brahmin educational institution
<i>Samāvarttana</i>	-	rite of passage at the end of vedic learning
<i>Sānavēdi</i>	-	those who follow <i>Sānavēda</i>
<i>Sambandham</i>	-	temporary alliance between a Nambudiri male and the women of matrilineal communities.
<i>Samskāras</i>	-	rites of passage
<i>Sankētam</i>	-	a protected area under the temple
<i>Śaṅkhinī</i>	-	a woman who is sexually more explicit
<i>Santānagōpālam</i>	-	a devotional prayer to lord Krishna
<i>Śānti</i>	-	temple priest
<i>Sanyāsa</i>	-	stage of renouncer
<i>Sanyāsi</i>	-	renouncer
<i>Sapatni</i>	-	co-wife

<i>Saptapadi</i>	-	ritual of taking seven steps in a marriage ceremony
<i>Saraswati</i>	-	vedic goddess
<i>Sati</i>	-	immolation of wife in the funeral pyre of her husband
<i>Satimāta</i>	-	women who committed Sati
<i>Savarna</i>	-	upper caste
<i>Savitṛ</i>	-	Vedic goddess
<i>Sēkam</i>	-	first co-habitation after marriage
<i>Sīmantōtyana</i>	-	pre-natal rite of passage
<i>Sindūra</i>	-	a red pigment on the forehead of women
<i>Śītikan</i>	-	barber
<i>Smārttan</i>	-	a scholar in <i>Smṛtis</i> or <i>dharmasāstras</i> –one who conducts caste trial in Kerala
<i>Smārttavicāram</i>	-	caste trial of a Nambudiri woman accused of adultery
<i>Smṛtiśāsanas</i>	-	rules in ancient and medieval law books
<i>Smṛti</i>	-	law books
<i>Smṛtikāraakas</i>	-	compilers of law books
<i>Snātakas</i>	-	celibate
<i>Ṣōḍaśasamskāras</i>	-	sixteen rites of passage
<i>Sōma</i>	-	moon god
<i>Soubhāgyavati</i>	-	women with good luck
<i>Śrāddha</i>	-	death rite
<i>Śrāddhakarma</i>	-	death rite
<i>Śrauta</i>	-	sacrifice

<i>Sri</i>	-	symbol of prosperity
<i>Śṛṅgāra</i>	-	eroticism
<i>Śṛṅgārabhāva</i>	-	emotion of eroticism
<i>Śthānam</i>	-	position
<i>Strīdharmā</i>	-	duty of a woman
<i>Śuddha Bhōjanam</i>	-	feast held in connection with purification of a Nambudiri family after Smārttavicāram
<i>Śuddha/ Śuddhi</i>	-	purity
<i>Śukamoḷi</i>	-	prayers
<i>Sūkta</i>	-	hymn
<i>Sumangali</i>	-	a woman with long marital bliss
<i>Svajāti</i>	-	same caste
<i>Svarūpamcollal</i>	-	the judgement in Smārttavicāram
<i>Svarūpams</i>	-	power centres of pre modern Kerala
<i>Svatva</i>	-	identity
<i>Swayamvara</i>	-	a type of marriage in which bride selected her groom. This type of marriage existed among the ruling class in pre-modern India.
<i>Tālam</i>	-	platter
<i>Tālappoli</i>	-	a festival
<i>Tāli</i>	-	sacred thread
<i>Tālikeṭṭu</i>	-	tying sacred thread, usually as part of marriage
<i>Tamala</i>	-	utensil
<i>Tāmbāḷam</i>	-	utensil
<i>Tañṇīrpantal</i>	-	drinking spot

<i>Tantri</i>	-	temple priest
<i>Taravāṭu</i>	-	ancestral house
<i>Taṭṭān</i>	-	gold Smith
<i>Tekkiniśāla</i>	-	southern part of a house
<i>Tēvar</i>	-	god
<i>Tēvārakkēṭṭu</i>	-	a ceremony in which a Nambudiri or ampalavasis tying tali to the women of ampalvasi caste
<i>Tēvāram</i>	-	daily offering to gods (a domestic ritual)
<i>Tēvārapura</i>	-	centre of worship within a house
<i>Thrayambaka</i>	-	sacred bow
<i>Tīṇṭāppāṭu</i>	-	unapproachability
<i>Tiraṇṭukalyānam</i>	-	ritual associated with first menstruation
<i>Tirumulkkālca</i>	-	presenting gift as a token of respect
<i>Tiruvātira</i>	-	a festival
<i>Tiruvātirakkāḷi,</i>	-	a group dance performance
<i>Tiruvātiravrata</i>	-	a vow
<i>Tiruvōṇam</i>	-	a festival
<i>Tōlkollan</i>	-	tanner
<i>Trikkākkarappan</i>	-	god Vamana
<i>Tuḷasi</i>	-	holy basil, a sacred plant
<i>Tuṭarnnirikkal</i>	-	ritual of wife sitting next to her husband in domestic rites.
<i>Udaka</i>	-	funeral rite
<i>Udakavicchēdam</i>	-	rites which cut off the relations
<i>Uṇangalari</i>	-	un-boiled rice



<i>Unṅis</i>	-	Nambudiri boys
<i>Upanayana</i>	-	initiation
<i>Ūrāḷar</i>	-	proprietors of a Brahmana village
<i>Ūrāṅmai</i>	-	status of village elders
<i>Uruḷi</i>	-	a round vessel
<i>Ūṭṭu</i>	-	feast
<i>Vādhyān</i>	-	vedic scholar
<i>Vādhyār</i>	-	vedic teachers
<i>Vaidikar</i>	-	vedic scholars who perform rites and rituals
<i>Vaiśvadēvam</i>	-	a domestic ritual
<i>Vali</i>	-	vine
<i>Valiya</i>	-	elder
<i>Vāḷkkaṅṅāṭi</i>	-	sacred mirror
<i>Vālyakkāran</i>	-	servant
<i>Vamśa</i>	-	lineage
<i>Vānaprastha</i>	-	stage of hermit
<i>Vānaras</i>	-	monkey clan in Ramayana
<i>Vāram</i>	-	a ritual
<i>Vārasadya</i>	-	feast related to the ritual
<i>Varṇa</i>	-	colour or classification in to Brahmana kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra
<i>Varṇasaṃkara</i>	-	mixing of castes
<i>Varṇāśramadharmā</i>	-	four stages of life and four classes
<i>Vaṭakkini</i>	-	north side of the inner part of the house
<i>Vaṭakkuninnuḷḷabrahmaṇan</i>	-	Brahmana from the north
<i>Vāṭilpurappāṭu</i>	-	the rite in which the child sees the world for the first time

<i>Vayampu</i>	-	medicinal plant, sweet flag or calamus
<i>Vēdārambham</i>	-	beginning of vedic learning
<i>Vēdas</i>	-	sacred scriptures
<i>Vēḷi</i>	-	ritualized marriage of Nambudiri community
<i>Vēḷiśēṣam</i>	-	first co-habitation after marriage
<i>Veppu</i>	-	mortgage
<i>Verandah</i>	-	hall
<i>Vēśyas</i>	-	prostitute
<i>Vicāraṇas</i>	-	trials
<i>Vijātiya</i>	-	outside one's caste
<i>Vīrarasa</i>	-	emotion of bravery
<i>Virutti</i>	-	land assigned as remuneration for service
<i>Viṣu</i>	-	a festival
<i>Viṭans</i>	-	panders
<i>Vivāha</i>	-	marriage or wedding
<i>Vivāhasūkta</i>	-	hymns of marriage
<i>Vratās</i>	-	religious vows
<i>Yāga / Yajña</i>	-	sacrifice
<i>Yāgabhaōmi</i>	-	land for Sacrifices
<i>Yāgādhikāram</i>	-	right to held sacrifices
<i>Yāgasabha</i>	-	assembly in a sacrificial area
<i>Yajamānapatni</i>	-	sacrificer's wife
<i>Yajñādhikāram</i>	-	right to held sacrifices
<i>Yajñas</i>	-	sacrifices
<i>Yajurvēdis</i>	-	those who follows <i>Yajurveda</i>
<i>Yakṣi</i>	-	dreadful women
<i>Yuddham</i>	-	war

## APPENDIX

### PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS BASED ON THIS PROJECT

#### Publications

Sreeparvathi. D, 'From Ritual to Romance: Interpreting the *Thiruvathira Vrata* of Namboothiri Women', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 77, 2016 , pp. 260-268.

Sreeparvathi. D, 'Who is Afraid of Kuriyedathu Thatri? *Sankarasmriti* and its Commentary on Female Sexuality,' *Proceedings of IV<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Kerala History*, Sahitya Pravartaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2017, pp. 671-677

#### Presentations

Patriarchy Revisited: A Reading of Tagore's Chokher Bali, in, National seminar, '*Redefining Morals; Recasting Models – Gender Formation During Colonial Period*', Department of History, KKTU Govt. College, Pullut, 2013.

'Revisiting the Brahmanical Patriarchy and Every Day Life of Nambudhiri Woman In Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kerala: A Reading of' Antharjanam Memoirs of a Nambudiri Woman', in, National Seminar, *Historical Writings On Indian Nationalism*, Department of History, Sacred Heart College, Chalakudi. 2013.

'Women and Forbidden Spaces: Reconstructing the Myth of Muchilott Bhagavathi from Gender Perspective' in. National Seminar, *Historicising Femicides in India: Rape, Honor Killing and Infanticide*, Department of History, KKTU Govt. College, Pullut, 2014.

‘In Search of a Space: Rajput queen in Contemporary India’, in, National Seminar, *In Defence of Secular History: Future Prospects*, Department of History, KKTU Govt. College Pullut, 2018

‘Aparadhiyaya *Antarjanam*: Smarṭtavicharathinte Dharmasastra Parisarangaḷ’ in, National Seminar, *Stree Pakshavayana Sanskrtha Sahitheeyangallil* , Department of Sanskrit, Govt. Victoria College , Palakkad, 2018.

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