© 2019. *Social Orbit* ISSN 2395-7719, Vol.5, No.1, pp.57-73

The Gender Paradigm: Early Malayalam Print and the Women's Question

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Abstract

Since the early 20th century, Kerala has witnessed a thriving print culture seminal in shaping critical political changes and advocating legislative reforms. Yet, as a society, its engagement with gender and the inability to formulate a progressive political language around the same remains a matter of deep concern. Recent protests by conservative Hindu Right groups, amongst others, against women of menstruating age entering the Sabarimala shrine is an illustrative example of the conflict between tradition and law in contemporary Kerala society. Employing print debates on women's education, I will attempt to glean out the threads that have historically shaped the discourse around women and gender in Kerala society. For the woman writer/thinker of the time, entrenched in her caste-class location, a new self which reflected shifting ideologies around tradition, family, conjugality and freedom was an enduring area of concern. I argue how this rhetoric of change posited vital consequences for the restructuring of gender norms and sexuality and consequently feminist praxis.
Key Words: Print Culture, Gender, Self, Tradition, Public Sphere, Women's Education

The correlation between contesting print cultures and identity formation is an enduring area of historical inquiry (Eisenstein, 1982; Johns, 1998; Blackburn and Dalmia, 2004; Venkatachalapathy, 2012; Orsini, 2013). Even as contemporary scholarship reflects the range of this symbiotic relationship, the critical import of such methods for the study of knowledge formations and epistemological conceptualization vis-a-vis marginalised groups need to be further evaluated. *Navodhanam* (Renaissance) refers to the processes of intellectual and socio-political ferment that facilitated the birth of a *modern Self* and an idea of the *Public Sphere* in colonial *Keralam.* Despite gender having been central to the making of 'modern' communities in the region,

it continues to languish under the burden of tradition and customs.[1]

Employing material from some of the prominent women's magazines published in the erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Cochin at the turn of the 20th century, this paper will argue that the hurdles facing feminist interventions in Kerala today owe considerably to the historical conditions under which gender becomes a site of knowledge production in colonial Keralam. Mapping some of the variables of the women's education debate, I trace how popular print helped define the contours of ideal womanhood and in the process related notions of femininity and masculinity. It also dictated permissible avenues of activities for women which was decidedly'a political' and located within the space of the 'domestic'- a binary that has social and political relevance even today.

Women and the Written Word[2]

Colonial Kerala's first women's magazine, albeit run by men, *Keraliya Sugunabodhini* came out of Travancore in 1885 (1062, Mithunam). The first issue carried a statement which explained the paper's position and politics.

> "In Kerala numerous magazines and newspapers are being run smoothly by many great men. However, all of them are being published with Kerala's men in mind. For the knowledge and entertainment of women there are no magazines or newspapers in Kerala. From 1062 *Mithunam* onwards a magazine '*Keraliya Sugunabodhini*' exclusively dedicated to women will be published."[3]

The inaugural editorial statement set numerous precedents,

> We will publish no material related to politics. Philosophy, physiology, entertaining tales, writings that arouse the moral conscience, Womanly Duty, the science of cookery, music, biographies of ideal women, the history of nations, book reviews and such other knowledge enriching topics will be published...We will publish no narrow arguments related to religion."

The first few issues carried an assortment of articles- a pattern which was replicated in later women's magazines and, hence, initiated a trend. There are articles on topics as varied as women's education, chastity, responsibilities of a good wife, parables of a moral nature and a miscellaneous section giving details of the status of women in other parts of the sub continent and sometimes, the world. One of the issues of the magazine also carried a biography of Pandita Ramabai.[4]

Sarda is popularly considered the second women's magazine and was started in November, 1904 from *Tripuinithira* part of erstwhile Cochin. Unlike *Sugunabodhini*, *Sarda* boasted of a strong wo-

men's presence and the editorial reins were in the hands of three women – TC Kalyaniamma, T.Ammukuttyamma and B. Kalyaniamma.[5] The magazine ran intermittently for three stints before closing down. The editorial statement in the second stint is again illustrative[6]

> "This new effort is considered a new beginning…this magazine is priced like the '*Indian Ladies Magazine*' of Madras…as far as the articles go, like before, a critical analysis of political matters *has not been* (emphasis mine) included. This issue onwards *Jyotilakhmi*– a novel by K Narayan Gurukkal, who has changed the face of Malayalam novel writing, has been serialized."[7]

Thus, even during its second innings the magazine dutifully steered away from all matters that were remotely considered 'political'. The *Swadeshabimani* Press from where *Sarda* was being published was also home to other popular magazines like *Keralan, Vidyarthi* and the revolutionary *Swadeshabimani* which published some of the earliest anti government articles of its times. However, none of that radical content made its way into the magazine. Other popular women's include magaizines *Mahila*[8], *Sumangala,Vanithamitram, Sthreesahodiri, Muslimvanitha, Vanitha Kusumam. Vanitha Kusumam* may be regarded as the first women's magazine to openly espouse the cause of woman's freedom. Brought out from Kottayam by V C John, the editor of another daily *Prathidinam*, the magazine declared on its first anniversary,

> "The efforts by '*Kusumam*' towards women's freedom have angered-many traditionalists and many of them have advised us not to pursuet his task now. We have rejected the opinions and suggestions of such people who stand in the way of women's freedom. Since this is a magazine run for women it is the responsibility of '*Kusumam*' to work for the benefit of all women. No matter how many get angry and threaten us we will undertake this responsibility of ours"(Raghavan,2008: 112).

Prominent the matic overlaps included discussions on ideas of woman hood, domesticity and companionate marriages, Indian culture and tradition and its relevance for the present, motherhood, childcare, women's health and book reviews. A "miscellaneous" section was also part of most journals as an effort was made by women to build bonds across the Indian sub continent, and quite often, around the world.

Women's Education

Women's education- its necessity, content and relevance- was central to the debate around reform and women's emancipation. What makes the issue even more pertinent for analysis is the fact that it proved

to be one of the earliest themes, and "one of the rare ones on which a large number of women had a lot to say". Tanika Sarkar elaborates,

> "in sharp and significant contrast to a relative silence on the other major controversies of the 19th century – sati, widow remarriage, Age of Consent – education stimulated substantial responses from them in print, enabling few women to enter the public sphere of debates and arguments in their own right. It was also a field where they were quick to seize the initiative from the hands of male reformers" (Sarkar, 2002: 154).

Often women's education was proposed as an 'end all' solution for addressing an entire spectrum of women's issues from *purdah* and child marriage. Men and women argued that education not only sensitized and enlightened women about their problems but also enabled them to engage and challenge them. While aspects like co-education and syllabus were volatile issues, a crucial aspect that defined the education debate were the terms along which the debate was conducted. Often, supporters used tropes such as domesticity couched in the language of moral and familial improvement in order to make their point. It was also important for women to establish that education was not a threat to the responsibilities of a woman- chief of which was undertaking domestic chores. Himani Banerji points out that often the 'public' use of women's education "lay in its nature as private acquirement." She adds "its ability to meet social needs to create appropriate personalities, familial social relations and households, and offering a moral basis for the everyday life of the *bhadralok* or the gentry, provided the ground for its justification"(Bannerji, 1991: 52).

Scholars have demonstrated how women's education was central to the imagination of those working towards *re-forming* society. For example, Vir Bharat Talwar tells us that early 20th century Hindi literature was laden with images of women who were humiliated and devalued "only because they were uneducated." They saw their lack of education as a major reason for their oppression and humiliation and also opposed oppressive practices like child marriage and *purdah*"on the ground that these were obstacles in the way of education"(Talwar, 2003: 270).

The intensity of the taboo associated with women's education made it impossible for many women to read and write. Superstitions such as educated women would become widows or that they would become immoral were factors that impeded women's learning. The example of Rasundari Debi and her insatiable thirst to study, propelling her to self teach clandestinely, is one such powerful and evocative example.In the

late 19th century, numerous satires were written in Bengali to highlight the perils of educating women. A farce written in 1897,titled *Educate the Woman*, and You are *Digging your Own Grave*, the educated woman becomes an adulteress and eventually kills her husband (Sarkar, 2002:158). The example illustrated the kind of criticisms supporters of women's education had to face on aconsistent basis. Thus, whenever the issue was raised on a publicplatform, it was important to frame the debate along 'acceptable' lines so as to not risk a conservative backlash.

In colonial Keralam, one of the earliest surviving pieces on the topic, simply titled *Women's Education*, was published in Kollam (erstwhileTravancore) based *Chandrika* in 1900. The article by C Krishnan Pillai[9] begins by pointing out how scholarly women were "few in our villages" hence people were not familiar with the efficient functioning of an educated woman and not repelled by the "foolish ways" an uneducated one handled domestic responsibilities. He says,

> "These days, on an average, boys remain with their mother still about the age of 10. The habits acquired in childhood are impossible to do away with age…the nurturing of educated women is crucial for the intellectual growth and good manners of their sons."[10]

The article ends making a suggestion that is rather progressive for its times,

> "…They would acquire good lessons from science, mythology and history, learn of world philosophies and acquaint themselves with the actions of great based on truth and other such virtues. Rather than learn of all this from their educated male counterparts it is best that they read of it on their own and independently and critically analyse knowledge on their own. We are familiar with the stories of educated women like Sakunthala and Seelavathi in ancient India…irrespective of whether or not we choose to believe that these women existed, we have evidence that women education existed during that time…"

The importance of an educated woman to efficiently and properly undertake her responsibilities as a mother and caretaker of her familyis integral to the debate around *woman's education*. *Sarda* also carried an article on women's education in its first issue largely using similar arguments. Again titled '*Women's Education*', the author T. Ammukutty Amma, highlights how education would help promote a family's growth and prosperity by equipping women to take better care of her children.

> "… No matter how much money the family might have, if the children do not have proper health, humility, education and other such good attributes everything else is pointless. Amongst us the responsibility

> of raising children is the chief task of mothers. If the mothers do not have the right kind of knowledge about health and the cause of various illnesses, the children could end up sick, malformed, mentally retarded or short lived...as a child spends its entire childhood with its mother, her habits irrevocably influences the child's character…"[11]

She wraps up the piece by reiterating her argument.

> "…if our children are to become healthy, good natured and scholars women's education is the only way. Not only this, if boys are not educated then the consequence of that ends with the boy but in the case of girls it could last for generations.Hence it can be argued that education is more important for girls than boys and that women's education is in fact an introduction to male education…"

Even though it might seem that both Pillai and Ammukutty Amma are using the same logic – the ability of the woman to become a better-homemaker – there are subtle differences in their argument. One of the major ones was the fact that while Pillai talked exclusively about the boys in the family, Ammukutty Amma chose to refer to'children'. Yet, Pillai's article does offer some progressive suggestions. At a time when the few women who were receiving any form of education were the wives of male reformers and others interested in spreading women's education, the idea that they are asked to read and think about books on their own is a rather bold one. Sarkar points out that "reformist writings constantly exhorted the husband to come forth as the teacher" and "it was done to obliterate the firm association between education and non-conjugality that early women writers carefully underlined the fact that their education had been initiated by their husbands" (Sarkar, 2002: 168). The case of Anandibai Joshi of Maharashtra was one such example as he had taken a keen interest in educating and grooming his wife.

References to India's ancient past and the elevated status women enjoyed then were also intrinsic to the education debate. Articles were often written so as to assert that educated women were not colonial products, and thereby 'foreign', but an integral part of Hindu society. In an article titled *Ways of Learning – New and Old*, the author P. A. Raman Thampi (B.A B.L) devotes a brief paragraph to women's education. In it he says,

> "…We can't say that female education is a recent development. Mothers who are passing their primary and main exam, have mothers and grandmothers who would have atleast learnt lullabies…old women who do not know the early morning hymns must be rare. At least this can be said about the general population. Women born in to decent

families must have learnt the krishnapattu (a form of devotional song) and also learnt to read the Ramayan and the Bhagwad. In those times, those who knew how to read did not really know how to write as there is scant evidence of any woman author."[12]

Similarly, the article in *Sarda* also argues for the presence of educated women in ancient India.

"…However, it would be incorrect to assume that women's education is a new fad as our history and mythology is replete with examples of women scholars and achievers in the field of music and literature. Due to intermittent wars and attacks off oreign kings and mass exodus of people, the field of education has suffered over the years. However, it is safe to assume that it had never been against our culture and textbooks for the specific purpose of teaching women from earlier times are testimonies to this fact…"

Issues like fear of conversion (in the light of Christian prosetylisation work), tradition vs. modern debate, the importance of formulating a proper syllabus etc were also abiding concerns in the articles on women's education. In Travancore and Cochin, where issues of conversion were particularly prominent, magazines attempted to constantly address the problem. In 'Women's Education in Our Country', author Parameshwaran Panikkar, highlights how the Duchess of Westminster's crucial opinions on women's education had been initially overlooked due to misplaced fear of conversion. The article read,

"In 1893 when the Duchess of Westminster visited India one of the first ideas that she had was that Indian girls needed to be educated. Some of the skeptical Indian men requested her to be patient for some more time… they were also worried what a foreign lady's intentions could be and also the consequences for society and the possible harm caused to society due to educating girls. Moreover, the fear that the Christian lady's idea was aimed at converting Hindu girls was also another fear eating away the locals…"[13]

The author also emphasized in no small measure the necessity of ensuring the syllabus taught rose out of the organic needs of a community and region,

"…when the demand for women's education emanates from a region it has to be kept in mind that it resonates with the society's make up and this has to be borne in mind while educating our Hindu girls as well... Based on the collective opinion and for the collective benefit of caste members, which would in turn work for the Hindu system, tenets have to be identified which should become part of women's education...they

are – when a woman becomes a wife and a mother, she has to have the ancient wisdom of looking after her husband and family well…"

Finally, the question of co-education and its desirability was a matter of serious deliberation. In the article 'Man-Woman co-education', R. Easwara Pillai, B.A., discusses in great detail the countless virtues of implement co-education and the ability of the system to make a positive different in the state of women's education in the region.

"Co-education which is going through an experimental stage in India is already past that stage in America and has today become a regular feature there…a lot of people fear that coeducation would lead to deviating from the right path…Education is not masculine or feminine but human. Men are yet to make amends for denying women a lot of human rights in earlier times…won't creating an artificial divide between boys and girls actually lead to more chances for deviating from the right path? Isn't it when authorities at boys' school have no control over the girls and vice versa that the actions of both boys and girls become uncontrolled?"[14]

Combating accusations of encouraging unwanted relationships-between boys and girls, Pillai argues that, "…co-education can only make the atmosphere comparatively purer. The presence of girls will only be enough to keep the vices of boys under check… there might be areas where it is necessary to divide men and women but education is not one." He also stresses on the financial liability of the model considering efforts to promote women's education was turning out to be an economically unfeasible affair for the Indian state due to low attendance rates.

"…Even if the financial aspect is explored, co-education is in fact desirable and necessary. A considerable decrease in numbers can be achieved in the number of schools and teachers…The lag in women's education can also be addressed through this…the fact that university educated women are found in the many states of America is due to the high number of co-education institutions. Such a thing is not to be found in other countries…These are not the times to restrict women… they are capable of and strong to protect their states. All they need is a chance…"

However, not all articles published were in favor of women's education or larger reform. Quite a number of people, often anonymous, highlighted their reservations and ridicule towards, what was perceived to be a blind aping of the west. An illustrative examples an article titled "My!! The Way Women are Going!" by the vaguely named *Vikadan*.

> "When I think of some of the men today my skin starts peeling off in shame. How many of them are following women around, heeding their every whim and command. No wonder these women are acting up so! Shame!! Shame!! Kaliyuga has come. All that our ancestors predicted have come true…If all those who had argued for women's education and claimed it would make the world a heaven were to see the state of affairs now…they would have become saints and gone off to the forest!!"[15]

Location and Caste/Class Subjectivity

Feminist historians like Joan Wallach Scott have established how 'gender' functions as a relational category and hence for it to be used as an 'analytic concept' it must include a notion of politics. Thus, female subjectivity does not originate in a vacuum but from a space where other subjectivities coexist and compete with one another. A person's identity in Travancore and Cochin was circumscribed by determinants like gender, caste and class. Most of the contributors and proprietors of the magazines discussed in the thesis were from uppercaste and class communities. Often they were born into families which were active in the reform and other social movements implying they were exposed to a certain kind of liberal grooming and education. In many cases the women contributors and proprietors of the women's magazines were married to men who had enormous social and cultural capital. Examples include *Swadeshabhimani* Ramakrishna Pillai's wife B Kalyaniamma, one of the editors of *Sarda* and Kadambini Ganguly, one of the first female physicians of South Asia and wife of Brahmo reformer and radical Dwarkanath Ganguly.

As mentioned earlier, most magazines carried a miscellaneous section on women across British India and around the world, thus establishing its national and international credentials. However, this is also the period when social mobilizations around caste and class lines are taking place in Travancore and Cochin. Yet, this richness does not get reflected in the magazines. The issues projected as women centric in most popular magazines tilted heavily towards the upper caste and class background of the discussants of the issue. The exception was of course when a magazine of a particular caste group like the lower caste *Ezhavas* talked about women's issues which would then engage with problems like untouchability and caste pollution[16]. The absences may also be due to the notion that politics was not a suitable topic for women of a particular social location to intervene in.

In an ad for the women's magazine *Lakshmibai*, the magazine description reads, "A Malayalam monthly journal conducted in the interests

of the Ladies of Kerala. It is the cheapest, the most widely circulated and one of the most useful and inspiring Malayalam Magazine in Kerala and the best medium for advertisement." Similarly, an ad for the seminal women's magazine *Mahila* calls it "An illustrated Monthly magazine: Conducted in the interests of the Women of Kerala". Though the magazines professed to speak for all women, in the articles they wrote very rarely did they take up issues of women from other communities and religions. This aspect of women's journalism is also present in other vernacular publications which took up the women's cause due to the fact that the people involved were largely from the same strata and hence the issues they faced were also similar.

A Patch of Uncolonised Space[17]: Gender as Discourse

By the early 20th century, women across British India were actively intervening in some of the critical debates of their times, albeit a large chunk of it specifically dealt with issues of women's oppression and their new social role in a changing political ethos. Magazines were often a way for them to communicate with one another and an avenue to shape a discourse of their own on diverse issues. There was a vast geographical spread to these magazines and their content tells us about women's 'consciousness', their dreams and aspirations and thoughts on how to challenge and change their lives for the better.

The 19th century also saw the genesis of *bourgeoisie domesticity* and the demarcation of gendered familial roles – concerns which get amply reflected in the vernacular women's magazines. Popular themes included discussions on ideas of womanhood, domesticity and companionate marriages, Indian culture and tradition and its relevance for the present, motherhood, childcare, women's health and book reviews.

It is interesting to note that almost all the early women's magazines had 'Bodhini' as part of their title. The first Hindi journal was *Bala Bodhini* set up in 1874 by Bharatendu Harishchandra of Benaras, one of the earliest Bengali women's magazines was the *Balabodhini Patrika* set up in 1863 Calcutta and in Telugu *Satihidabodhini* (1883) was the first women's magazine. Feminist historian J. Devika points out that the very name of the magazine- *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini*- is "indicative of the importance of developing internality in the fashioning of Womanhood" (Devika, 2007: 51).

She highlights how gender took on an unprecedented role in the imagining of a modern Kerala community to be attained through reform. "The qualities one possessed were seen to be strongly determined by the sexual characters of one's body – its maleness or femaleness. Thus, ideally, attaining modern individuality would automatically mean that one would

be inserted into an idealized 'womanly' or 'manly' subjectivity, in the distinct spheres of the domestic and the public" (Devika, 2007: 51). This is a very critical point considering the endemic and pervasive role played by modern institutions of education and popular print in disciplining the female body by "correct training". These two mediums essentially defined natural behaviour for the sexes and thus fed into debates around the shaping of the ideal woman. For example, in a response to a heated debate around the question Is *Sheelavati* the ideal woman? [18] in an early issue of *Sarda*, an ambiguously named writer BG criticised the original author of the article for her opposition to *Sheelavati's* actions. BG elaborated, "there cannot be more than one head in an organisation, whether in the army or family. Nature had determined that woman must govern the house and man the world no one could change that" (Velayudhan, 2002: 90).[19]

In the case of the Indian sub continent, the notion of the perfect Indian woman comprised facets like *Stree dharma*, companionate wife, motherhood, the mitigation of common feminine vices such as jealousy and an embracing of Indian traditions and values. Historian Uma Chakravarti argues in her essay *Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi*?, that it was during the 19th century that a construction of a particular kind of past happened which in turn was the "context for the construction of a particular kind of womanhood" (Chakravarti, 2003: 35). Thus, the 'woman', who was, "the subject of there formers' and the orthodox gaze was a de-eroticised creature, occupying as she did a threshold space that was only meant to measure the distance between the past and present"(Geetha, 1999:)[20] Due to these factors, debates around tradition and women were ample in the magazines.[21]

Women as yardsticks or indexes of civilizational progress wasendemic to Orientalist and early colonial literature. From John Stuart Mill, who foregrounded the sorry state of Indian women in his immensely popular *The History of British India* (1817) and *Subjection of Women* (1869) to Katherine Mayo's controversial *Mother India* (1927) the trope of the 'miserable' and 'pathetic' state of the Indian woman was one that enjoyed immense traction.[22] It provided the framework within which orientalist discourse was generated and colonial interventions were moulded. From its inception, the language of reform vis-a-vis women revolved around the idea of woman as mother and moral compass of the *family* and, in the heyday of nationalist fervor, Mother India herself. As historian Samita Sen puts it, "the idealisation of womanhood as the repository of tradition and the construction of the domestic sphere as the proper and rightful domain of women were based on a general valorisation of motherhood: as

the creator and protector of the sanctuary of the home, as the good and chaste wife and the iconic representation of the nation" (Sen, 1993: 235)[23]

The above magazine excerpts illustrate how certain conceptual understandings subtly make their way into the language of women's rights and emancipation. Implicated in the narratives of advocacy and change, were notions of a morally pure, tradition bound woman who could adopt the right dose of modernity without unsettling the fragile familial and community linkages forged on and over her. The articles also demonstrate how the press often operated as a disciplinary institution, realigning socio-political power structures while dictating permissible avenues of activities for women which was largely 'apolitical' and within the *domestic.*

However, it must be reiterated that women were not passive recipients of these complex processes of gendering. A good number of women were editors and regular contributors, enabling early print culture to operate as an effective site of resistance and contestations for countless unknown and forgotten women. Cumulatively, these developments had far reaching consequences for feminist practice in Kerala by informing the epistemological landscape of gender conformity and related notions of ideal womanhood, *femininity* and *masculinity.*

Notes

1. Historians such as K N Panikkar, Dilip Menon and G Arunima have argued how print was crucial for the reconfiguration of a new *self*- moulded as both response and resistance to a hegemonising colonial machinery. In their seminal work *Women's Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K Lalita observe that the most 'compelling imaginative task'in the fictional works by most of the major women writers of the 1920s-40s was 'the creation of a new resilient self,'where the backdrop was often 'domestic.'
2. Panikkar aptly points out that, "the written word as a cultural factor became increasingly important and influential during the course of the 19th century. The context in which it occurred was the access to print technology and the consequent commodification of 'vernacular' literature.". K. N. Panikkar. 1995. *Culture*, *Ideology, Hegemony,* NewDelhi: Tulika Publishers.
3. Editorial Statement, *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini,* Vol 1, 1894 July – 1895 June.
4. Ramabai was one of the pioneers of women's emancipation and education in British India. For a detailed discussionof her life and times see Uma Chakrvarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, Zubaan: NewDelhi, 2015. The reference to Ramabai is also interesting as it shows how early on there was an attempt at forging ties with women

from various parts of the country and the world and thus build a larger sisterhood.

5. In its first run the magazine's manager and owner was K Narayana Menon and it was published from the Bharathi Vilasam press. The magazine was also under the protection of Rani Lakshmibai and Rani Parvathibai of the Travancore royal family while also enjoying the support of Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran who contributed a short poem onWomen's education for the first issue. The issue also carried an editorial note explaining Sarda's birth and purpose -"Sarda has been started exclusively for the use of women. Our efforts will be directed towards providing women familiar with the Malayalam language simple and easy reading material that would facilitate their progress and also help them inculcate good traits. This magazine is first of its kind in Malayalam. This effort is new to us. Hence, during the initial years there might be certain glitches. Some people might wonder why the editors are from different places. When we were thinking of starting a magazine like this we heard that B Kalyaniamma was trying to start a similar magazine inThiruvananthapuram. T C Kalyaniamma enthusiastically followed it up prompting B Kalyaniamma to also joinenthusiastically…"
6. B Kalyaniamma was married to *Swadeshabimani* K Ramakrishna Pillai who is considered a trail blazer in Malayalam journalism and one of the earliest journalists to actively oppose government positions through the newspapers he edited. Thus, it only seemed natural that when *Sarda* shut down after running for two years, the paper was reinstated by Ramakrishan Pillai and printed from *Thiruvananthapuram* (Travancore). In its first issue during its second stint the magazine carried the editorial statement written by Pillai.
7. Editorial Statement, *Sarda,* 1080 *Vrishchikam* (Malayalam year and month, 1905), Book 1, Issue 1.
8. *Mahila* was one of the most successful and long lasting women's magazines brought out during this time. It was begun by B Bhagirathiamma, wife of Attungal Neelakand Pillai, from Chengannur (in Allepey and part of Travancore) in January 1921 under the patronage of the Junior Maharani of Travancore and ran for almost 20 years. *Mahila* was the only women's journal recommended by the Travancore government for circulation within government schools
9. Pillai was an activist and early reformer of the upper caste *nair* community. He founded a monthly newspaper called the *Samudaya Parishkarini.* His reform work was instrumental in initiating change of customary practices

within the *nair* community.

10. 'Women's Education', *Chandrika*, 1075 Meenam (1900), Book 1, Issue 12.
11. 'Women's Education', *Sarda*, 1080 Vrishchikam (1905), Book 1, Issue 1.
12. Ways of Learning: New and Old', *Chandrika*, 1075 Meenam (1900), Book 1, Issue 12.
13. Women's Education in Our Country', *Maryrani*, 1088 *Dhanu* (1913, Dec-Jan), Book 1, Issue 4, pp.110-115.
14. Man-Woman Co-Education', *Gurunathan,* 1110 *Dhanu* (1935, Dec-Jan) Book 14, Issue 5.
15. *My!! The Way Women are Going!', Vanitha Kusumam*, 1104 *Thulam-Vrishchikam* (1929), Book 2, Issue 6,7,pp.202-204.
16. Magazines like *Mithavadi* was a vocal supporter of the anti slavery and anti caste movements of the time.
17. Janaki Nair's evocative line capturing the essence of what the domestic space metaphorically stood for both the colonisers and the colonised. See, Janaki Nair, "Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in-English women's Writings, 1813-1940", *Journal of Women's History: John* Hopkins Universtiy Press, Volume 2:Number 1 (Spring 1990), pp.8-34.
18. Sheelavati is a mythological character portrayed as the perfect example of a devoted wife. Despite being married to a man inflicted with leprosy, she serves him dutifully and fulfills his every wish.
19. I have relied on Velayudhan's essay for the Sheelavati debate as I was unable to locate this issue of *Sarda.*
20. V Geetha, 'Gender and the Logic of Brahminism: Periyar and the Politics of the Female Body', in (ed.) Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti, *From Myths to Market: Essays on Gender*, Manohar Publishers: New Delhi, 1999. Also see Lata Mani for early analysis of how the Indian woman's body becomes the site for the tussle between modernity and tradition itself. *Contentious Traditions*
21. Some examples include 'Some Puranic Women', *Mahila* (Unsure Issue); 'Indian and Western Femininity-Morals',pp.478-479, *Swadeshabimani*, 1102 (1926-27), Book 3, Issue 9,10; 'The Deplorable Status of Hindu Women',*Lakshmibai*, 1096 (1921), Book 16, No.7.p.55; 'Our Societal Problems', *Mahila*, 1927, Book 7, No. 1, p.332. The article *Indian and Western Femininity-Morals* which appeared in *Swadeshabimani* was a translation of a speech Swami Vivekananda's gave in America. In the

speech Vivekananda locates the figure of the Mother as the crucial difference between Indian Hindu culture and western culture. "Indians consider the Mother as the ideal woman. It is said that the moment a Hindu hears the word 'woman' the image of the mother appears in his mind. Hindu's God is also amother….However, in western cultures the feminine ideal is the wife. In India, even a commoner believes that the ultimate and complete feminine power lies in motherhood. In western homes it is the wife who rules…such is the power of the Hindu Mother that the son's wife enters the family taking the place of her own daughter. She (the new wife) also has to listen to the Mother and respect her status as the queen of the family. Till her womanhood achieves wholeness she has to continue doing so. She attains that wholeness only when she herself becomes a mother..."

22. See Eric Stokes. 1959. *The English Utilitarians and India*, New York: Oxford University Press,; Mrinalini Sinha.S*pectres of Mother India*, Duke University Press,
23. Tharu and Lalita have pointed out how the tropes in women's fiction writing shifted towards the early decades ofthe 20th century stating, "If the 19th century texts had the recurring figure of the Hindu widow then the central fictional relationship of husband and wife in the 1880s becomes the mother and son in the 1920s." This indicates how by the early 20th century ideas around 'the mother' and motherhood assumes a crucial political and cultural function. Articles such as 'An Ideal Mother', 'Habits that Need to be Inculcated in a Child', which appeared in *Lakshmibai* and '*Child psychology*' in *Mahila*, stressed on the importance of an educated, cultured and caring mother who would be able to teach and impart good values to her children. A recurring logic used by most writers revolved around the impressionable mind of a child. The argument, hence, was that since children are raised primarily by their mothers, it was paramount that the woman herself was well equipped to handle such a vital responsibility.

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