

Blueprints of progress prescriptions media essay

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Introduction

The colonial criticism of the indigenous tradition of Indians as "degenerate and barbaric" (Chatterjee 1989, 622) had, by the end of the 19th century in Kerala, become a self-evident and an uncontestable fact for the emerging modern educated local population. Responding to this perceived decadent conditions that have enveloped the 'local', this relatively small section of the population' commenced an exercise in exhortation especially through the print media. The attempts to revive the local tradition and culture categorically maintained, above all, a rational prerogative for western centric values over the local ones. This was primarily reflected in the propaganda around questions surrounding women, body, sex, desire, erotic pleasure, propriety and respectability and so on. Rather than simply translating the Victorian values, this body of writings, appearing mainly in Malayalam magazines in the late 19th-early 20th -century Kerala, addressed even the most fundamental practices associated with the local life, rationalizing the larger transitional process towards a more modern and progressive society and thus making the logical enterprise of modernity a part and parcel of the local common sense. The rationalization simultaneously involved a derationalization of many local practices – both bodily and communitarian. The bifurcation into rational and irrational was mainly grounded on the predominant concerns that preoccupied this newly emerging public sphere around strengthening 'the 'material and moral' base of the society. The following account from the late 19th century illustrates this: Mental progress [manasika parishkaram], physical progress [kayika parishkaram] and moral progress [sanmargika parishkaram] are pre-conditions for self progress

[swayam parishkaram]. Mental progress has enabled the invention of such amazing and useful things as the steam engine, electricity etc., by the Europeans. Physical progress is related to the use of body [sareeram] for purposes that are directly related to the progress of the society as a whole. Moral progress is essential and fundamental for the other two pre-conditions for the overall progress of the individual self. It [moral progress] should be attained by following the moral values [sadhachara moolyangal] of a society of which the lines are drawn according to levels that would, in a long run, benefit both the society as a whole and the individuals living in it. Moral progress requires the individuals to abandon all immoral calls [asanmargika chitha vrithikal] which are rooted in the evil desires of mind. Anything that is motivated by and is oriented towards excessive desire for material things and pleasures is bound to bring unhappiness in life and will meet with ill fate. Such desires and attempts to seek pleasures will not only spoil the life of the individuals concerned but would also bring total anarchy for the society[1]. The rational ground of this envisaged morality remained precisely in the animated relationships between individual body and social progress. A new rationality was being constituted as an ideational ground for embarking and settling on a journey towards progress. This section purports to analyse in detail two important registers from Keralam's early modern history in a length of two chapters – the first one is the reform literature –especially covering those appeared in early magazines – produced in Malayalam during the late 19th-early 20th century period and the second one the contentious space around smarthavicharam. These narrative spaces remain as repositories wherefrom its preoccupations with reformation and tropes of body, self, desire and progress, produced and widely circulated therein, are <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

consistently borrowed in the Malayali public sphere in the subsequent periods. Patrick Hutton argues that accounts about the present-moment explicitly refer to the past and contain implicit references of the future. This helps those accounts to retain the relationality of the present (Hutton 1993). According to him print technology and its culture have not only allowed high speed dissemination of knowledge but have also opened space for a constant repetition and reproduction of that knowledge (Hutton 1993, 19). Past incidents, events, tensions and contentions revisit the present-moment through their availability in the form of print. In his analysis of contemporary notions of masculinity in Kerala Ratheesh Radhakrishnan argues that the " various events and moments in history are replayed [in the present] through narrativisation and popular memory" (Radhakrishnan 2005, 1). The early narrative spaces in colonial Kerala have a central significance in shaping future discourses of sexuality. The visions in the past about the past, present and future essentially dictate the contemporary discourses of sexuality and deviance through a set of value added formulations and a chief preoccupation about reformation and progress. This need not indicate a clean hegemony of ideas produced in the past or a smooth continuum of those ideas to the present. In his commentary about collective memory Schudson points towards their shared nature – that it is a repository of shared cultural images and narratives – and argues that this never imply consensus or an absence of challenge towards its hegemony (Schudson 1992). On the other hand these sites are filled with tensions, anxieties and, sometimes, stark differences at the same time as producing dominant versions that are reproduced via modern technologies of media and through which this past is remembered. These commemorative practices have a <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

substantial role in reconfiguring the multiple positions assumed by the public sphere in the later periods (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Schudson 1992) and in the technologies of subjectivisation. In an article Uma Chakravarty observes that "[w]hat was gradually and carefully constituted, brick by brick, in the interaction between colonialism and nationalism is now so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle classes that ideas about the past have assumed the status of revealed truths (Chakravarty 1989, 28). Whereas this thesis as a whole draws from the continuities and discontinuities in those discursive spaces this section examines the discursive production of knowledge about sex and desire. As opposed to regarding the colonial state as the context and conduit of regulatory power this section considers a huge array of indigenously produced texts as translating that power. Those spaces require independent analysis for the extent to which they were producing knowledge about local sexualities and reordering them from their location within the power hierarchies that characterized the colonial situation. The subsequent chapters in this thesis shall draw considerably from this chapter for contentions in the public sphere in the subsequent periods in Keralam return to this past. Through such revisits a reproduction of the sedimented networks of morality and progress in the region is attained by the public sphere. This chapter seeks to specifically explore how a newly emerging public sphere – represented in the narrative space of those early magazines – during the early modern Keralam was intensely engaged in working out new formulas for regulating body and desire. Situated in the mid of the colonial discourse of decadence and a newly inherited rationality and promises of modernity this narrative space borrowed from various resources including modern science, literature, especially Western literature, and <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

tradition to support its formulations. The discursive construction of normative sexualities during the reformation period simultaneously involved the production of an image of the other side of it – that is sexual forms and practices those were inherently framed as non-normative and deviant. Even while women's body and female sexuality were primary targets in the reformation discourse, the magazine literature discloses how a discursive imagination of normative sexuality was attained through vivid descriptions of a 'desirable' moral order. A whole set of canons was produced for the formal and informal subjection of desire with the 'new family' placed at the centre of those regulatory networks. The narrative space I am referring to here was not part of the popular media which too was in its beginning stages during this point of time. However the production of those magazines was mainly intended to bridge the gap that existed between traditional modes of organizing social and individual lives and modern norms. These magazines were situated at the centre of the reformation enterprises although large level movement at the level of pragmatic politics under the leadership of specific caste organizations was a later event in Keralam at the turn of 20th century. Nevertheless the narratives in those magazines were crucial in determining the discursive framework of reformation that, more than anything, stressed on the urgency with which the moral weakness of 'tradition' and impediments of subjection required to be overcome. This was prima facie a prerequisite for entering the age of modernity and for embarking on a journey towards progress.

Public sphere in early modern Keralam

The second half, especially the last quarter, of 19th century was a period when assumptions about local degeneracy, perceived in the earlier colonial versions of local culture, had driven an emerging public sphere in Keralam to engage in open discussions about raising/transforming the moral standards of the indigenous population. A primary location, where a feverish discussion concerning the new, modern morality with clear-cut differentiations between varieties of practices took place, was the magazines circulated during this period. This was made possible mainly through the combination of two factors – English education and print technology – both of which were crucial in organizing a new public sphere that was both spatially connected and rich in its resources. In a paper published by the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Devika contends that an " undisputedly significant development of the late nineteenth century in Keralam was the emergence of an English-educated class which began to review the existent social order, ideas and institutions in sharply critical terms" (Devika 2002, 7). An equally important phenomenon in this connection was the emerging significance of print that remained at the disposal of this new class which not only used it to protect their interests but also clubbed it with questions of reformation. This was a period when a reading public was gradually emerging in Keralam, a fact apparent from the increase in the circulation of Malayalam newspapers and magazines (Raghavan 1985; Priyadarshsan 1972, 1974, 1999). The period was also marked by the dynamics associated with the formation and opening of new spaces and venues for the modern English-educated men to come together and discuss " topics of general interest" (Devika 2002, 8). Instances of the opening ceremonies of new reading clubs and associations, <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

debating clubs, literary clubs and so on were more or less regular events during the period. Devika quotes from an author in 1911 as to how the "Puthanchandai Reading Association" and "Chalai Reading Club" – both in the Thiruvithamkoor province under British rule – started functioning to celebrate Nagam Aiya's appointment as the officiating Dewan in the 1890s (2002, 9-10). The availability of spaces to read and to discuss found its utmost expression in the unprecedented boom in the production of magazines and literature that dealt with issues those were, by then, defined as matters of common interest. The notion public sphere requires considerable amount of elucidation for it has always been a contested space attracting various claims from different segments of population. The Habermasian concept of the "public sphere" defines it as a sphere that mediates between society and state where the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion; a place between private individuals and government authorities in which people can meet and have rational-critical debates about public matters[2]. However this conception of public sphere by Habermas has been "increasingly dismissed as idealistic, Eurocentric and unwittingly patriarchal ... [although] it continues to be routinely invoked in debates around democracy, citizenship and communication" (Goode 2005, 1). The claims of Habermas regarding the universal access principle of (European) modernity have been dismissed by critics by pointing towards the evolution and existence of the public sphere precisely "through the exclusion of many groups including the poor, women and so on" (Cubitt 2005, 93). This sphere was "an arena of contested meanings" where "different and opposing public manoeuvred for space" (Eley 1992, 293). The notion of public sphere as conceived of by Habermas does not allow one to capture the politics of

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hegemony and the cultural/gender differences which have played critical roles in its very constitution. In the context of his discussion of public sphere in colonial Indian settings Neeladri Bhattacharya comments about the use of this concept provided one be cautious while applying it (Bhattacharya 2005). Its conceptual power can lead one to understand its fragmented nature rather than concluding it as a homogenous and consensual sphere (2005, 154-156). According to him the conversations in the public sphere often resulted in reaffirming the differences that characterized its very constitution (2005, 156). In the context of Keralam this sphere evidently excluded segments of population that had little or no access to modern English education and/or modern values. The public sphere in such a context catered mainly to the aspirations of those few who had had the privilege of gaining familiarity with western values and modern ideas basically through English education. This was added by the colonial interpretations of pre modern caste differences exclusively in vertical terms of social hierarchy. The narrative space of the early magazines was a clear reflection of the concerns and preoccupations that permeated the public sphere. It was not uncommon during those days for magazines to include transcriptions of speeches delivered by people who held important positions in administration or who held higher statuses in the society both with respect to their caste and education. Basically structured in the fashion of moral sermons such transcripts were generally meant to foreground the significance of reformation as a precondition to enter modernity[3]. The access to early public sphere was, by default, regulated strictly through the peculiar caste and class combination that had already gained entrance to modern education, government jobs and, sometimes, to higher ranks in colonial

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administration. According to Devika (2002) this smaller section of the population that constituted the public sphere was made up of " Tamil Brahmins and Nairs" whereas a major part of the population remained outside the purview of its definition (2002, 31). A brief survey through the names and titles of the authors of the articles appeared in the magazines, and the questions they raised and the issues addressed, reveal the predominant orientation towards upper caste interests reflected in this space. The upper caste, male dominance over the early public sphere which was a result of this situation had kept questions concerning caste outside of its purview. On the other hand the discourse of reformation specifically dealt with issues concerning the inauguration of a new moral regime. The heterogeneous practices of conjugality and property inheritance followed by different caste groups in Kerala which were not sufficiently integrated to modernity or were non-modern by definition were brought to the centre of this reformation discourse. Subjecting body to a new paradigm of morality where each and every function that it performs was thus systemically defined and brought in correlation with the larger question of social progress. The early deliberations in the public sphere were crucial to the extent the later expansion of the public sphere, through expansion in the technologies of representation, had to mediate through the sedimented idea of the region as connected through a progressive network of morality. In her paper on the Family Planning Programme in Kerala, Devika takes note of some of the preoccupations of the stream of writings in the early to mid 20th century. She argues that the " main reason for the acceptance of the Family Planning Programme in Kerala was that it did not clash with the sexual morality of the emerging educated middle class groups of Malayali society" (2005, 348; <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

emphasis mine). That this middle class sexual morality had attained considerable amount of acceptance and popularity in society by the 1950s has opened ample space to think through the fundamental logic of the Family Planning Programme. The idea that body needs to be subjected to modern heterosexual monogamous principles was already a given frame which allowed sufficient room to accommodate discussions about the different controls on sexual desire within the space of domestic family.

Reformation, the subject and a language of desire

While there definitely were debates and contentions on the question of social reform this space nevertheless was crucial in producing a conceptual terrain that delimited the scope and potentials of contesting these issues in the public sphere. The emergence of print in Keralam during the mid 19th century was crucial in evincing imaginations of linguistic nationalism[4]; the magazines produced during these periods addressed the readers as a homogenous category inhabiting Malayalam – the region. This enabled them to obliterate the heterogeneous identities and locations embedded within the local caste divisions and to foreground moral concerns as embodiments of common interests. For instance, highlighting hygienic and disciplined body as the irremissible quality of a modern subject was a common theme that captured a substantial space of these magazines. These columns, which I have discussed in detail in a later section in this chapter, translated the earlier language of public rationality and the language of universal moral standards deployed by the colonizer. Such deployment while enabling a reconfiguration of the subject in the public sphere simultaneously maintained west as a legitimate resource for modeling this process upon.

Although as Dilip Menon has argued elsewhere (Menon 1994) that caste reformation movements had to fill the vacuum that was left due to the absence of the movement of nationalism in 19th century Kerala a consciousness with regard to the cultural specificities of this linguistic terrain and a sense of belonging was simultaneously developing[5]. A number of magazines were produced in Malayalam during the second half of 19th century those basically were engaged in conceptualizing issues in the public sphere that transcended the caste lines and differences in the process of reforming the local cultural terrain. Thus reformation in Kerala was rather a hub where various elements including caste interests, mainly upper castiest, and linguistic identity were coalesced to produce new formulas of desire. Although any explicit reference to Indian nationalism or even linguistic differentiations was still in the waiting room, print literature in Malayalam was eagerly and intensely framing public opinions about reforming the cultural terrains of this linguistic region which itself was commonly addressed to as " Malayalam" – after the local vernacular used there[6]. In fact all the print materials produced in this period explicitly, if not exclusively, contained value added substances of social reformation. At the centre of this discourse remained the perception of individual subject reforming whose bodily practices and moral standards were a central agenda of this narrative space. This was attained primarily by addressing the various cultural practices situated around the issues of sex and gender which were thus centralized and identified as the key element through which individuals could be subjected to a different – albeit modern – set of norms and regulatory apparatuses. We have already seen the plethora of postcolonial academic literature produced on this issue that explicate the complexities of <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

these transformations in early modern Keralam and several other contexts within the subcontinent in the previous chapter. The desiring subject occupied a central space in this discourse and was made the target of the whole reformation programme. The early interpellative exercises started through print media were simultaneously setting the limits and possibilities of contesting the issues of sex and desire in public with any significance. The context of reformation and its tensions with regard to mapping ' a course of desire' was very well reflected in the popular literature as well. In her compendium of Malayalam novels published during the period, Hema Joseph (2008) articulates some of the anxieties and concerns that charted the space of those novels. While concern about visualizing a sexual order was prima facie something that preoccupied those authors, they were primarily engaged in a re-ordering of life as something that should take place within the space of monogamous families. This was very often contradicted with practices that privileged " immoral relationships and sexual intercourses in society" (Joseph 2008, 187). The novels contained exhaustive discussions about the need to regulate children's sexuality and the means of doing so, a constructed notion of the contrast between the chaste wife (kulasthree/ utthamayaya bharya) and the prostitute (vesya/ kulata) and about practices like marumakkathayam[7], sambandham[8]and the Nair Marriage Act and so on (Joseph 2008, 188-195). " A dichotomous division between the non-modern and the modern constantly guided the negotiations that took place in the space of those novels . . . [where] the non-modern and the modern were represented as barbarian and progressive respectively" (2008, 196). While systems like polyandry, polygyny and sambandham represented the non-modern/barbarian a system based upon one man-one wife schema

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represented the latter; " the novels clearly desired for a change in this direction" (196). In an article on the discourse of body and desire in early Malayalam popular literature Uday Kumar argues that this discourse " sought to make it possible for the subject to recognize itself as the desiring subject and to act upon this recognition through various modes of agency" (Kumar 2002, 126); that this discourse targeted the inner realm of the human mind as the locus of desire and sought to redraw it in accordance with the changing formulas (Kumar 2002). Evolving a language of desire that implicitly and explicitly contained references to legitimate and illegitimate practices and objects of sexual desire was prima facie an exercise undertaken during this period. This language was also consistently marked by the several impossibilities and issues of ethics. The narrative space of the early Malayalam magazines was evidently a primary spot where elaborate discussion about evolving the basic etiquettes to navigate gender relations and sexual desire occurred. This had fundamental reference to the discourse of cultural degeneracy and was instinctively directed towards a discourse of progress. This narrative space in the late 19th and early 20th century period presented, in a cunning fashion, the art and technique of situating social and individual progress in one's body and soul.

The formative stages

Prescribing a value base for human activities and definitions around, and transposing the social networks of, desire and sex was at the centre of the assortment of writings published during the late 19th-early 20th century period. This narrative space contained essential formulations regarding what constituted good and bad in all spheres of individual and social lives. This

was also the period when matrilineal systems, joint families and other local traditional systems were brought under legislation and were undergoing the random process of transition or were completely collapsing (Bhaskaranunni 1991; Kodoth 2002; Menon 1979; Joseph 2008). Hema Joseph in her thesis observes the centrality of these issues in the novels produced in the end of 19th century. She argues that apart from reforming both male and female sexuality those novels hosted and conducted long discussions on such issues as thali kettu kalyanam (pre-pubertal marital engagement between male and female), sambandham, Malabar Marriage Act, marumakkathayam (matriliny) and so on (Joseph 2008, 188). However a major ground of forging those anxieties and framing in a language that is both descriptive and coherent was the writings that appeared in Malayalam magazines. By the end of 19th century these magazines had already captured recognition, in the general mindsets of Malayalis, as authentic spaces for expressing both expert and public opinions regarding issues of social relevance. The narrative space in the magazines was a critical factor in synthesizing a language of desire and discipline, sex and hygiene that permeated child and adult and male and female sexuality as also normative and non normative sexual practices. The writers who wrote in these magazines were mostly blind consumers of the narratives of decadence that emerged from the British officials, colonial missionaries and anthropologists alike. This rather remained the predominant trend even from the early stages when print was only beginning to be popularized in Keralam. The initiative to conceptualise the region and its subjects through a moral framework came in the mid 19th century when Herman Gundart (1814-1893), a German missionary, started Rajyasamacharam, a journal in newspaper format, from Thalassery, in the <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

North Malabar of the erstwhile Madras presidency. A renowned figure for his contributions to Malayalam language Gundart introduced the art of creative journalistic writing in Malayalam[9]. This was primarily attained by simultaneously depicting experiences of unknown territories with social and political transformations as well as by foregrounding the significance of news items, commentaries and editorials to bring changes in people's mindsets (Manalil 2004)[10]. The familiarity with print Journals in Europe was translated into making Rajyasamacharam a commonly readable journal even outside the evangelical and religious interests (Manalil 2004; Priyadarshan 1972, 1974). Gundart who published Malayala Panchangam in a newspaper format before Rajyasamacharam very soon concentrated on the latter at the expense of the former as " Rajyasamacharam got a better reception than Malayala Panchangam mainly because Gundert could understand and reflect the tastes and viewpoints of common readers" (Manalil 2004, 32). Gundart [through his journalistic attempts] introduced common people and drew the attention of his readers during a period when the newspapers were full of kings and Lords. This . . . helped very much to ensure the participation of common people in newspaper and magazine reading . . . and became a beacon light to print media which were started later on. Manalil 2004, 34 Gundart subsequently started two more journals namely Malayalam in 1850 and Keralapanini in 1854 (Priyadarshan 1974). Priyadarshan observes that these magazines were primarily theological in nature though almost all the writings appeared in them had explicit references to reformation as a social enterprise requiring urgent attention and as a prerequisite to modernize the local conditions. Most of those writings were focused on the question of rethinking about the moral base of the society and the need for a

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radical shift towards a new base that would eventually help in the building of a new society. These magazines " mainly included articles about sanmarga bodhakangal (advice about good moral values), duracaharathinte vipathukal (admonition about the dangers of immorality) and what constituted sadhacharam and duracharam (good and bad morals) in the society" (Priyadarshan 1974, 17-19). The early magazines functioned as the precursors for texts and magazines produced in the subsequent periods although the later productions were much improvised versions and contained articles that addressed almost all spheres of daily activities. The early magazines started under the initiative of Gundart were apparently the first venue where a discussion of the ' causes and remedies for the fallen state' of Malayali culture occurred so explicitly and with such reach to a larger section of audience (Manalil 2004, 34-35; Priyadarshan 1974). This larger section however still implies a smaller segment of the indigenous population for it contained only a section of elites who both had access to education and were largely placed at the top layers of local caste hierarchy. Priyadarshan's analysis (1974) of the early magazines helps us elucidate the fundamental importance which they accredited to questions of morality. The idea of availing standard moral principles in order to lead a religious and civilized life was constantly instantiated through stories of individual transformations/ conversions to embrace a different moral and religious order[11]. This also determined the general frame of the commentaries included in the early magazines. This framework had significant impact in the subsequent stages of print media when questions of desire were centered upon and problematised and sexual discipline was concluded as the first and most important element in the process of becoming modern. Books <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

were published in the subsequent period – in both Malayalam and English – that inherited the tradition of evaluating the local culture from a modern moral perspective." Principles of morality"[12]written by Raja Sir Tanjore Madhav Rao (1828 -1891), was one such expression which exclusively depended upon the observations made by his erstwhile colonial officials[13]. Commonly known in Keralam as Madhavarayar, Madhava Rao had served as the Diwan of Travancore during 1857 to 1872 and his book was translated into Malayalam in the year 1881. Velu P. Pettayil, who was the translator in his foreword to the translated version, states that " the observations made by the enlightened Gundart, expressed through his magazines, with regard to our value systems are so significant to understand the reason why we continue to live in a state of anarchy. It is equally significant to understand why we need a moral system to ensure self discipline in our society which is very much essential for any modern society" (Pettayil 1881, 1). Velu, by drawing from Gundart and other writers in the mid 19th century magazines[14]attempts to make a frame for governing body and desire by commenting on what values should be followed in the modern context. Even the brief list of practices that he proposes foreground body and mind as the locus of cultural degeneracy. These included dhehasudhi (cleanliness of body), manasika parishkaram (mental development), mitha seelam (moderate habits) and maanasarishti/manodharmam (ability to distinguish between good and bad) (Pettayil 1881, 6-7). The author simultaneously draws on instances of characters from Shakespearean classics and Indian mythologies namely Ramayanam and Mahabharatham to support his observations. The making of these observations is clearly grounded on a complicated mixture of European discourses of science, ethics and colonial

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discourse of decadence and reformation. The selective appropriation of texts and events that the author follows in this book had largely become a common trend in the period. As Uma Chakravarty has observed in the colonial context of Bengal that such selectivity "centred on texts where male subjectivities could be understood in conformity with British notions of masculine virility, and where femininity and women could be marginalized" (Chakravarty 1989, 32)[15].

Sexuality and propriety

The early magazines were prima facie attempting to produce a logical enterprise that would be self-explanatory within the progressive, nationalistic frameworks of modernity. Body, gender, and desire were conceived of as central in the emerging social world and social realities. This evidently stood in contrast with, or so as it was widely represented, the previous modes of dealing with these questions 'rather loosely' or with complete disregard for the larger 'social interests of Malayalis' (Malayalikalute thalpariyangal). The recurrence of this term, Malayali, in throughout this narrative space was a definite signification of the emergence of a new identity consciousness defined in linguistic terms that would further assist in the rearrangement of the cultural and mental world by directly translating this consciousness to new forms and themes of desire. For instance the discussions in magazines around passing a marriage act mainly for communities those followed marumakkathayam. The magazines played an important role in expressing the diverging concerns around the forthcoming act even before it finally came into effect as Malabar Marriage Act in 1896. The forthcoming act was predominantly addressed as a brave and valid attempt to systematize " the

marital relationships of Malayalis"[16]. Vidyavinodini, a magazine published from Thrisur, published articles about the forthcoming act and invited readers to actively take part in the discussions. This was especially after Sir. C. Sankaran Nair, a prominent lawyer of the Madras High Court, introduced in the Madras Legislative Council a bill to provide for marriage and Malabar Marriage Commission was formed by the Government in Madras to inquire into matrilineal customs among the Hindus and explore the desirability of introducing changes in marriage, inheritance and family organization through legislation[17]. While the bill was generalized, even while it specifically addressed those communities which followed matriliney in the Malabar area, it was deployed by the public sphere as an opportunity to address and rectify the non-modern systems of marriage that prevailed among different communities and in different parts of this geographical region. For instance in the aforementioned article published in Vidyavinodini, which was part of a serialized discussion, the problems with the bill was pointed out in terms of the practical difficulties it produced for " the newlywed couples to visit a public office [office of registrar] in order to register the marriage and thus to legalise it immediately after the marriage"[18]. While there was a general agreement with the changes proposed in the bill the disagreements were mainly around the practical difficulties involved in implementing the recommendations of the bill. This space provided the magazines an opportunity to demonstrate the necessity of a ' Malayali' moral code that could further sanction marital relationships, provide legitimacy for the proposed shift from marumakkathayam to makkathayam (patriliny) and to depict modern nuclear family as the only suitable form for a progressive society. In throughout the discussions this <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

was reflected and the differences with the bill mainly spanned over questions concerning the conditions for divorce[19], the general criteria for measuring the intensity of blood relationship between the proposed bride and groom[20], conditions for registering the marriage[21]and so on. While the whole discussion was conducted under the generalized title ‘ marriage bill for Malayalam’ it was heralded as putting an end to unrestrained courtships, freewheeling of desires and other amoral practices like prostitution. It was marked as the beginning of a " decent and progressive existence"[22]. However this narrative space, rather than restricting itself to discussions around colonial reforms, instead treated reformation as a question that should determine the cultural world. At the heart of this project remained concerns about evolving practices at the daily level that would help in ensuring a morally disciplined and hygienic existence of individual subjects. This was attained through symbols that recurred in this narrative space as meta narratives those were treated not only as self explanatory but also as elements necessary for a progressive, disciplined existence. Illustrating abstract configurations of a modern, gente existence through typifying masculine and feminine qualities such meta narratives’ were built upon albeit new themes of desire. One of the overarching, meta-narratives produced as a result of this whole enterprise was a nonfigurative image of yogyatha. Yogyatha which could be roughly translated as propriety has a direct relation with its male connotation which is yogyan or a noble, virtuous man. This is because the feminine sound of yogyatha, a collection of given qualities and an assemblage of given values all of which directly pertain to a proper demeanor in the public space, which is yogini gets directly translated as a woman who practices yoga or a saintly woman. Yogini, the feminine

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sound, was a more uncommon presence than the common yogyan. Whereas the feminine body was often projected upon as the primary target of reformation, enterprises counterpoising between the masculine and the feminine within and outside the domestic spaces was already an established narrative practice of the magazines. While on the hand this was more an invisible task where the construction of an idealized woman and a housewife inherently involved the construction of the other side of it, it gathered more visibility during discussions of themes of desire. One of the main themes that had a direct bearing upon yogyan was mithabhogam. Literally meaning moderate desire or a balanced appetite for sex mithabhogam had wide ranging connotations that directly pertained to regulating one's sexual instincts. According to an author writing in 1886 in the magazine Vidyavinodini mithabhogam was an essential quality for an individual " to fulfill his duties and to remain honest to his material ambitions"[23]. Dealing with the question of desire (kamam) and to channel this energy into other more productive activities was one of the primary tasks, according to the author, that needed to be undertaken in order to build a modern society. " In order for one to be a mithabhogi unnecessary (anavasyam) and unnatural (prakrithiviruddham) desire for sex should be avoided"[24]. A plethora of writings produced by this narrative space valorized and romanticized the disciplined, and a morally binding, existence of subjects as directly contributing to the construction of a progressive modern society. For instance the pre-conditions put forward by columns on yogyatha (propriety) in these magazines included susheelam (good habits), subuddhi (good thinking), arivu (knowledge) and karyasthatha (ability to manage/supervise things). Susheelam (good habits) implied the ability to maintain a balance

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between the impulses, desires, and instincts at the desired level[25]. This was essential because freewheeling of desire was always highly problematic in fulfilling the duties and obligations. Liberating the mind from ‘evil thoughts and evil desires’ was the only possible source for the body and mind to possess good habits and good thoughts. Arivu (knowledge) and karyasthatha (ability to manage things) emerge as particularly important amongst qualities of good habits and good thoughts[26]. The spaces of these magazines, evidently preoccupied and obsessed with questions of progress, constantly evaluated mental and bodily dispositions from within this regulatory framework of modernity. Ranging from cleanliness of the households, discipline in life, respect for elders, clothing, food to marital life and career, they touched upon literally everything that was considered essential in the fashioning of these modern dispositions. As an invariable outcome of this discourse the image of an impeccable body and mind gradually emerged as a necessary prerequisite for embarking on the journey towards progress. These were not isolated or sporadic reflections, but they constituted the unremitting currents in the ongoing trend, that preoccupied this time period and these narrative spaces, of questioning the self and making things better.

Gender, Domesticity and Sexuality

A huge constellation of ideas of practices and values was consistently foregrounded by the reformation literature in order to subject the body to new regulatory practices. The early magazines were a key vehicle in transporting these ideas to the different parts of the region, in inciting local discussions and inviting responses and public action in this regard. They

constantly shuffled questions of progress and degeneracy as primary points to be surveyed at the same time as combining them to raise albeit newer questions of self. One of the important tasks undertaken in this respect was to construct ideal models of gender as inherent, natural and universal. In his compendium of early Malayalam magazines Priyadarshan notes about the importance with which those magazines looked seriously into matters associated with women and their status and dignity both within the family and the society (1972, 12-13). The author, while providing a brief summary of Keraleeya Suguna Bhodini, a well known Malayalam magazine of the period which started publishing from 1887 in the Malabar region, quotes from the magazine's first edition that it was meant for the " overall progress and development of women and the society as a whole" (1972, 14). The question of women was not a separate issue to the extent it was widely considered as an inherent component of the whole project of reformation. The ' new woman' was at the centre of the emerging middle class' conception of a modern and progressive society. She was focused as an easy target on whose body the new science and morals could be well interposed. Keraleeya Suguna Bhodini, the magazine Priyadarshan had referred as an instance of women's magazines published in the 19th century, mainly contained, among other things, philosophy, science of the body (sareera sasthanam), advice about moral values (sanmarga bodhakangal), the duty of women (sthree dharmam), the science of cooking, the history of noble (English) women and so on (Priyadarshan 1972, 14-15). The whole philosophizing of body and desire took gender as a natural category and continuously emphasized on the importance of performing its roles accordingly. They assigned this issue great importance that it was almost a

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customary practice for the magazines to allocate a substantial space for dealing with the question of women. Rasikaranjini, Sukhasamsi, Vidyavinodini, Unni Nampoodiri and Gurunathan were some of the prominent magazines where a discussion of women and their well being constituted an important part of discussions pertaining to reformation. This has important similarities and differences from what Chatterjee has observed in the colonial context of Bengal. In his well-known argument Partha Chatterjee has articulated about how local elite nationalists imposed a ghar/bahar – home and outside – division in their negotiations with the colonial administration. Women were exclusively defined and understood as belonging to the inner – spiritual – realm by the mid 19th century and women’s question – which was at the central of common anxieties until then – was never taken up as an important issue for negotiations with the colonial administrator (Chatterjee 1989). The concern about subjugating women’s roles into the space of families was a clearly visible phenomenon in the reformation writing in Keralam during the second half of 19th century onwards. There was a certain amount of unanimity in defining her sexuality within the domestic space of home. The articles produced in the early magazines were clearly working towards collecting images of practices from resources both within and outside the local context. These were then disseminated in a manner that was both self-evident and grounded in the analytical framework of reformation and concerns and concepts about the future of society. All the magazines named above including some which took women’s reformation as a central issue contained articles to address questions concerning Malayalis’ imaginations of self, caste specific practices concerning, most importantly, forming conjugal relations, women’s role in arranging the domestic spaces. A <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

common perception of modern family consisting of husband, wife and children had become, around this period of time, the base for building a modern and progressive society. The titles of some of the articles those were commonly found in the space of these magazines and those specifically dealt with the question of reforming women's roles within the family were Suchitwam (cleanliness), Souseelyam (about qualities for women), Sthreekal ariyentava (that which women should know) Shakespeare Mahakaviyude Nayikamar (Heroines of the Great Poet Shakespeare), European Sthreekalude Soundarya Bhramam (Beauty Consciousness among European Ladies), Vivahadambaram English Kudumpangalil (Wedding Excess among European Families), Garbha Samrakshaneeyam (Care required during Pregnancy) etc[27]. The politics of appropriating selectively from lifestyles, practices and models those suited the demands of a heterosexual, monogamous, domestic framework was clearly guiding these narrative spaces. Two strong structural concerns that permeated the late 19th century narrative space around the question of reformation were those of caste and gender. The upper caste politics involved in this whole presentation programme was observable from the fact that the question of compartmentalization of the native population caused by the caste divisions as it was commonly interpreted by the colonizer was never taken as a core concern. One needs to remember that caste identities were being ascribed with new and enhanced meanings during this period of time. The question of caste, in the context of reforming patterns of desire, was raised only in terms of changing and transforming the practices rather than challenging its structural existence as such. Through such transmutations the operational coherence of caste was sustained while simultaneously shifting the

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discursive domain of progressive modernity to concerns around engendering morally disciplined subjects. The question of gender, on the other hand, enabled these writers to transcend the shadows of elitism and upper-casteism that could have considerably damaged the reception of these writings. This was precisely because the concerns that surrounded gender and morality enabled these magazines to address the indigenous people as a single edifice cutting across caste divisions. As I stated earlier this narrative space was making use of the new common sense that was a mixture of modern science, the knowledge constructed by the coloniser about tradition and the degeneration of the local in terms of cultural, moral and physical impurity. Although still contested within these same narrative spaces Western Europe, as it was represented through English literature and translated into Malayalam, was looked upon as a model. Thus it was not the Brahminic texts that primarily catered to building this space. This was primarily because the important cultural contentions in the Malayali public sphere during this period were all around practices those were widely supposed to have emerged from the Brahminic hegemony over this land. In the next chapter I will discuss in detail about this aspect and its role in defining Malayalis' sexuality in typical ways. All the local customs and practices, those were predominantly criticized as irrational and emblematic and causative of the local cultural degeneracy, were commonly supposed as the byproducts Brahminic customs, practices and their dictates. Challenging the hegemony of Brahmins – Nambutiris, their practices, especially when it involved establishing sexual relations with females from other caste groups and Brahminic texts were part and parcel of the agenda of the reformation literature[28]. This was in a sense an important element considering that <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

defining sexuality in the new regime required to break radically from the old texts and practices. This continued to be the case even while the same narrative space borrowed heavily from the early Brahmin centered texts, especially fictions, and poems to romanticize and valorize the past[29]. This had actually resulted in a situation where the Nambutiri scripts were very often rendered legitimacy for the knowledge about the pre modern history of Keralam it provided[30]. While this was very often subscribed without any contestation those texts, mainly including Shankarasmrithy, were ridiculed by the authors who held them as responsible for the nonnormative, amoral practices followed by several communities including the Nambitiris in the region. The earlier discourse of decadence was a space where the colonial administrators and western anthropologists borrowed heavily from the specific inter caste relations and Brahminic texts those validated such relations to produce and disseminate knowledge about the region. In other words definitions of tradition and pre modern sexuality heavily drew from Brahminic texts, especially Shankarasmrithi. For instance Samuel Mateer, a 19th century missionary and a colonial anthropologist, who had written extensively on social and cultural life in the region borrowed from this specific historical background of the region to support his observations on the local practices, especially those which were situated around conjugal relations. These at large included the indigenous customs of marriage, cohabitation, property inheritance systems and women's role in society (Mateer 1870). Through illustrations borrowed from local instances of " easy divorce and easy re-marriage" he criticized the local customs and mores for their " negative role in the path towards a modern progressive society" (1870, 44). The systems that he studied included those followed by Nairs, <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

Izhavas, and certain sub castes who were engaged in such specialist occupations as carpentry, blacksmith and so on. He observed that the women involved in the marital alliances those were established according to the customs those caste groups followed " were at liberty to dismiss the man or the man to dismiss the woman, on very easy terms . . . [F]ormerly too, it was common for Nair females, residing at their brother's house, to receive more than one visitor of the male sex" (1870, 36-37). He characterized those systems of marriage as " most singular and licentious" (1870, 38). The centrality of practices like marumakkathayam (matriliny), sambandham and polyandry – all connected with each other and projected as the ill effects of the Brahminic hegemony – in the decadence discourse produced a counter narrative that attempted to build a definition of sexuality that would be based upon the western models of masculinity and femininity. This common prejudice against Brahminic tradition went alongside important derivations that these counter narratives drew in the context of defining masculinities and femininities as outside caste limits and exclusively as monogamous and heterosexual; that this narrative space had consolidated women's, as well as men's, sexuality to attain legitimacy only within the particular caste sections. Another important effect of both decadence discourse and reformation narratives was to accept (only) the above mentioned practices which were established to have connections with Brahmins for discussions in the public sphere. The heterogeneous practices followed by different communities, all of them mainly lower castes, were by default considered as falling outside of this framework. Thus this discourse defined ' tradition', with the help of the same Brahminic texts, in the course of contesting it. The ' new' sexuality was to be defined as a departure from this tradition. In the context of the earlier <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

colonial phase in Bengal, Latamani (1998) has made a similar observation. While discussing the "making" of the practice of Sati in the colonial discourses, she observes that "the privileging of Brahminic scripture and the equation of tradition with scriptures is a colonial discourse on India" (122-123). In the context of colonial Kerala the trend manifested a different complex where initiatives for reformation was part and parcel of non Brahmin caste groups' projects to establish independent identities. Even though a political manifestation of this came out in the beginning of the 20th century the undercurrents were very much triggered by the earlier colonial discourse of decadence. It became quite live and active especially in the last quarter of 19th century when the narrative space excessively borrowed from western literature and lifestyles. This eventually culminated in the discourse of a new sexuality where femininities and masculinities were commonly defined in terms of gender roles inside (femininity) and outside (masculine) the modern 'home' and as heterosexual and monogamous. This was also critical in defining women's sexuality and patterns of desire as they could be articulated within 'descent circles' and in the public domains. The late 19th century local intelligentsia was evidently deluged by the multiplicity of 'revival' processes at their immediate disposal and they needed to give a fresh beginning to the same by combining their caste-related interests with the modern preoccupations with a healthy sexual morality. For instance most of these magazines never addressed caste in any negative sense; rather it was implicitly and explicitly deployed to address the various practices that members of different castes followed. The primary concern was around homogenizing the local bodily practices around an already given set of principles and values shared commonly by the modern educated individuals.

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Apart from the caste preoccupations their class backgrounds were also clearly visible in these writings. Construction of the female and male sexual self involved the construction of ideal models with defined tasks to be performed in the private and public spaces. One such model, constantly reproduced by these magazines, was that of the ideal wife. What is the true job [vela] of a wife? to serve her husband. Or else why would have Sita devi and Damayanthi had to struggle inside the jungle with their husbands. Was there any need for Seelavathi to have stayed with her husband who was a leper? To follow those magnanimous [manaswini] models is the duty of Kerala women . . . [W]hat is required for such absolute service for their husbands? Wives should take care of cooking rice and other curries, making tea and coffee etc. Cutting firewood and gathering water could be entrusted on the servants . . . Wives are trustable since they wouldn't mix water, like many servants do, in the coffee if its quantity is less. It is really a mistake to not to allow them to do the kitchen tasks. Mainly officers commit this mistake. They do not even allow their mistress [kochamma/ammacchi] to bend down and collect a single waste.[31]Class and gender were central in such depictions of modern monogamous nuclear family. The quote above reflects how body was homogenized within patterns of domestic lives by addressing the duties of " Kerala women". Gender was being accepted as constituting the new identity which was further translated in terms of duties and tasks to be performed within and outside the domestic space of family. The clear cut differentiations made between the [dis]loyalty of servants, the allegiance and dedication of the wife and the generosity, lavishness and care of the husband, are idealized within the highlife of a modern middle class monogamous family background where the husband was invariably

supposed to perform the outside job (here officer) and the wife to take care of the household (inside) activities. The ‘outsidedness’ of the servant both from the domestic space – as depicted – and from the narrative space show the new class interests emerging and forming a part of this sphere. It is noteworthy here that the space of these magazines was making gender and family as inherently determining the contexts within which only discussions of sexuality had a meaningful existence. Naturalized depictions of this formula were part and parcel of this huge propaganda. The re-definition of ‘woman’ in her new roles was one such prominent area where the questions of family and a new value regime, the questions of male and female desire and of a new moral consciousness were constantly deliberated.

Sthreedharmam (duty of woman), sthree swathanthryam (freedom of woman), sthree samathwam (equality for women) and sthree vidyabhyasam (woman’s education) were columns that were continuously present in these magazines. This was the same in both women’s and other magazines.

Articles published in magazines like Vidyavinodhini, Lakshmibhai and Sukhasamsi emphasized women’s personae in strengthening the moral values of a society, the different roles expected of her in taking care of the children and husband and in preserving the honor and dignity of the entire household[32]. The attempts to reform women invoked classical examples from the Victorian context of women who cherished and cared for modern (albeit Victorian) values. Although putting more stress on women related issues, these narrations had always set conditions at the same time as contextualising the (perceived) current decadence so that it was always contrasted with a glorified past and an exalted West. This was done by drawing soothingly and incessantly from models of women from epics, <https://assignbuster.com/blueprints-of-progress-prescriptions-media-essay/>

English classics and other real life instances from, especially, the Victorian context. Classical examples were used to demonstrate the commitment and dedication required especially on the part of women to preserve the moral values and to retain the honor and pride of their culture. Reforming women was rather recognized as one viable topic where the patriarchal interests of this narrative space introduced new practices of constituting domesticity instead of directly addressing sexual practices as such. In an article published in the magazine Lakshmi Bai Malayali women were criticized for their lethargic nature, for their unsystematic life style and exorbitant spending habits in terms both of money and time. The classical instance drawn in this article to contradict with this was Queen Victoria of England. The article praised Queen Victoria for the way she made use of the available time for official, personal and noble purposes and pointed at her independent life style as opposed to Malayali women who depended on their husbands for everything. The same article contained another instance from Queen Victoria's life during her wedding occasion when the priest was puzzled about how to ask the bride [the queen] to take the oath that she will accept her husband as her master for the remaining part of her life. Confused on the illogicality in asking the queen to accept her subordination to another person the priest asked the queen whether to avoid this custom from the occasion. But the queen replied that she is marrying in her role as a woman and not as a queen and that she is all willing to take the oath[33]. In yet another edition of Lakshmi Bai two articles appeared with drastically contrasting views on woman's autonomy – one on the significance of allowing enough autonomy for women in all walks of life including education, employment and so on and the other emphasizing the difficulties associated with women joining the

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workforce. The second article explicitly demanded that women should not take up any sort of employment as it could pose difficulties for them in looking after the family and, particularly, in taking care of their children. In the emerging modern space these were all questions that seemed significant. However such paradoxes served to naturalize gender roles and the newly emerging modern form of monogamous family.

Unnatural desires and gender non-conformity

The rigor with which the remaking of gender, woman, sex, desire, and the morals that would regulate them was carried out led this space to draw support from science as well. It also involved the definition of what would constitute natural and unnatural in terms of desire. Conceptions of gender categories as water-tight compartments were always accompanied by notions of an impure and a contaminated category of gender. The progressive reformatory narrations were keen to engender social spaces to mark the feminine and masculine as completely dissociable from each other as part of the project of modernity (Kodoth 2001: 21-24; Devika 2005: 12-13). As I mentioned earlier the making of the new women involved, as an inevitable other side of the same narrative enterprise, the making of the new man as well. Striking a balance between desire and progress, a new regulatory framework within which the body and the self was to be inherently constituted, had always identified the problematic of defining bodies, habits and practices that remained invariably outside of this model. Apart from local practices that resembled sexual anarchy, a stark exemplar of deviance from the monogamous heterosexual Victorian model of dealing with the question of desire was gender non-conformity. Drawing heavily

upon 19th century European science this narrative space accredited everything that did not adhere well to either the feminine or masculine models of self as unnatural. The making of this 'unnatural' self was a complicated task involving a great amount of conditioning process of the modern progressive ideals by redefining the natural/cultural differentiations. If the kshethram (temple/cultivable land) - that is the woman, and the kshethranhnan (priest/farmer) - that is the man, can't mix with each other then both will enter into unnatural activities and thus shall be susceptible to nature's penalties. It has been sometime since humans have started working against nature . . . Ever since the origin of this universe humans have been involved in the process of studying and making records of what, and what do not, suit the nature. All that our ancestors have decided to be the moral principles for us to follow are suitable for the nature as well. Since there are many areas where progress and moral laws are not compatible with each other it is for sure that unnatural activities are on the rise[34]. These narrative spaces contained exhaustive elaborations of the constitution of, and differentiations between, the natural and the unnatural. In this particular context the author, beginning from observations of plants, animals and unanimated objects, refers to medical science demonstrating the drastic consequences of the emerging trend amongst the young to indulge in unnatural practices. Quoting substantially from an article written by Elener Glen, an English author, in an English magazine called 'Peer Sense', MRKC shows how unnatural practices like smoking and drinking among women in Europe have resulted in jeopardizing their conjugal relationships and thus leading them to further indulge in other unnatural practices closely linked to their desire. " The female body, structured to suit reproductive functions,

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and her physical charm, essential in order to attract men, both would be ruined if she were to indulge even in physical exercises, forget about other habits like smoking and drinking". The inability to attract men towards them results in attempts to derive pleasure from other unnatural means. The article spoke about unnatural desires and relations as a result of these "modern ways of life" which in turn "affects family life first and then reproduction in society"[35]. Although the patriarchal interests never allowed the male body to be a direct topic to be discussed about in this regard, the implicit message essentially emphasized its larger connotation in the wider context cutting across the male/female and adult/child divides. A conscious opposition between the East and the West was also being shaped within this whole process. Progress or transformation towards modernity (parishkaaram) was not an unconditional exercise to be undertaken; nor would a blind imitation of the West in this context be in any way justified[36]. However this narrative space never challenged the very concept of progress or modernity as such; hence the concern was around the issue of conditioning a 'local modern paradigm' which should not in any way affect the local moral realm. This was because the local moral realm was already defined and had to be kept immune against the invasion of unnatural tendencies that had already erupted in the West. In other words unnatural practices and then unnatural desires were prima facie areas invoked not only to condition and restrict the liberal paradigm inherently associated with progress and modernity but also to be projected as the other side of a standard moral realm and which therefore needed to be consciously defended against. Even as early as in 1902 we find articles written in magazines where the dangers of the female body indulging in unnatural

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practices were singled out as a potential threat for the prevailing moral structures[37]. Women and children had been the primary sites chosen to project the natural/unnatural divides, the deviant selfhoods and practices, and the dangers of transgression. However the question of same sex desire or same sex practice was never a central concern in these writings. On the contrary the attempt was precisely to make it practically ‘unthinkable’ by writing extensively on unnatural orders and disorders and their social consequences. I said orders and disorders because the ‘unnatural’ was considered to be an order in the West whereas it would still be a disorder in the local cultural terrains. The term prakruthi viruddham (against the nature) was part of a regular usage to signify a range of specific activities including smoking, drinking and unconventional masculine or feminine bodily and mental habits, orientations and practices. Simultaneously it also attempted to catalogue a range including other prakruthi viruddha aacharangal or pravarthikal (customs, practices, activities against nature) that was always a result of these[38]. While the use of ‘unnatural’ invoked distinct connotations of sexual desire and practices, it simultaneously kept any discussions of the same out of its purview and cognizance. Instead care was given to essentialise, unnaturalise and isolate the presence of deviant bodies and practices in society by addressing the etiological curiosities that surrounded such a presence. In an article on garbha samrakshaneeyam (care during pregnancy) in the magazine Laksmibhai the author narrates how the mother’s physical health and mental balance during her pregnancy and the health of the child are correlated. Not only her [mother’s] health is important for the child but more important [during pregnancy] is the extent to which she is willing to forsake her own physical desires and devotes

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herself to god's worship. Most of the women withdraw from their regular daily activities in the final phase of pregnancy. However it is very important to remain recluse from the normal material life even from the beginning of this period [pregnancy] itself. This is because the formation of embryo in the uterus occurs in the beginning stage itself . . . In a normal intercourse when a woman becomes pregnant the embryo would become hard or soft (like contractile organs in human body) or cancer (mamsa pintam) [a hard, flesh like thing] within the first seven months of pregnancy. These transformations are subject to the following rule: the hard embryo is male and the soft one is female, and the cancer one indicates that the infant is a napumsakam [androgyny] . . . While no explanation can suggest, other than the divine intervention of god, why an embryo would become hard or soft the Western experts have already proved that the third one, that is the cancer one, is a necessary outcome of mother's negligence. . . It has to live an unnatural life[39]40. The above quote illustrates how female body was targeted in the reform discourse as part of its larger project to introduce new practices with the help of Western science. It not only naturalises sex between the opposite sexes within the modern ' home' but also expunges gender non conformity from the social order. Such essentialisations, with the help of Western knowledge and filling in the gaps with divine interventions, effectively isolated and excluded aberrant bodies from any consideration in mainstream social thinking. In fact essentialising and unnaturalising the presence of bodies that did not conform to the heterosexual, monogamous model of sexual morality and treating them as exceptional cases was a moral practice, consolidated as a part and parcel of the local common sense, by this early narrative space in Keralam. In other words the melting pot of unnatural,

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while comprising both sexual and asexual practices, still had a strong resonance for bodies that deviated from the heterosexual, monogamous model.

Conclusion

The narrative space in the magazines was primarily contributing to the creation of a public sphere where a consolidated identity of Malayali as a progressive category was being formulated. Such a consolidation was made possible by ordering the multiple elements in a hierarchy of which a consciousness of moral universe and a standard segregation between genders stood in the top. Sadacharam or this moral universe conveyed a totality of the prescribed qualities and moral values that laid the foundation for claims of being a progressive and reformed region. In the early print culture we find the language of moral progress attaining common proportions and even popular to the extent its configuration was effected at the level of daily practices. The narrative praxis of the magazines was more oriented towards laying out a language of progress and modernity that conceived normative sexual forms as occupying a central space of that language. Reformation was an inevitable process for the society to undergo as undoing the yesteryears' non-normative sexual practices was projected as the first step towards constructing normative subjects. The production of a print culture with moral anxieties situated at its centre stage resulted in a blind endorsement of heterosexual institutions like marriage and family as the only legitimate forms of desire. What informs this project in general, as an overarching conceptual framework, is the Foucauldian argument that deviancy does not derive from any one category of sexuality. Rather it is a

function of regulatory power in general. A project seeking to explore the specific genealogies of how this regulatory power and modern discourses of sexuality was translated into daily practices cannot overlook the different registries that have made this translation a possible event. The making of the subject and the self in the colonial interface was clearly preoccupied with drawing an indiscrete relationship between the social and the self. The deployment of a new value realm and a modern progressive rationality, emerging from within the power relations that defined and informed the colonizer/colonized paradigm, had enabled the public sphere to engage, in a rather straight forward manner, in a process that defined not only a new self but also the abject. The spaces of these progressive magazines contained the blueprints for carrying out the civilizing mission and for embracing a new rational order. They strictly remained within the discursive paradigm of the decadence of the local and debated about the methods through which this could be resolved and overcome. Strictly speaking they were the direct outcomes of the earlier colonial politics that was guided under the "belief that in the end Indians themselves must come to believe in the unworthiness of their traditional customs" (Chatterjee 1989, 623). Nonetheless these magazines were astutely specific with regard to the making of a new self; in purporting bodily practices and in rationalizing a new order of desire. On the other hand the complexities of the task they undertook were determined by the incongruities that still prevailed in abundance between the local tradition and practices and this new realm of values. Precisely for the same reason the bifurcation into rational and irrational was a carefully executed task albeit still managing to display black and white illustrations. This incisiveness was as much a result of the larger discursive paradigm as it was an

obsession with the question of progress and a new moral order. The early construction of self provides us with deeper insights for some of the major shifts in paradigm that occurred in the later periods in Keralam. The edifice of progressive morality has been critical in the whole interrogation processes around the questions of sex and desire, and body and the subject in throughout the 20th century. In the next chapter I undertake a critical analysis of the local practices that remained close to local understandings of sex, morality and chastity and the modern representations of the early practices.