

**Depictions of the Conflict between Tradition and
Modernity in the Select Novels of O. Chandumenon and
Lalithambika Antharjanam**

**A Dissertation submitted to the Central University of Punjab in partial
fulfilment of the degree of**

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by

Rakhi Krishna S.

Under the Supervision

of

Dr. Dinesh Babu P.

**Department of Languages and Comparative Literature
School of Languages, Literature and Culture
Central University of Punjab, Bathinda**

May 2018

CERTIFICATE

I declare that the dissertation entitled “Depictions of the Conflict between Tradition and Modernity in the Select Novels of O. Chandumenon and Lalithambika Antharjanam” has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Dinesh Babu.P, Assistant Professor, Department of Languages and Literature, School of Languages Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

Rakhi Krishna S

Department of Languages and Comparative Literature

School of Languages, Literature and Culture

Central University of Punjab, Bhatinda

Date: 28 May 2018

CERTIFICATE

I certify that Rakhi Krishna S. has prepared her dissertation entitled “Depictions of the Conflict between Tradition and Modernity in the Select Novels of O. Chandumenon and Lalithambika Antharjanam” in the partial fulfilment of the award of M.A. degree in English from the Central University of Punjab, under my guidance. She has carried out this work at the Department of Languages and Literature, School of Languages Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab.

Dr. Dinesh Babu P.

Department of Languages and Literature,

School of Languages Literature and Culture,

Central University of Punjab

Date: 28 May 2018

ABSTRACT

Depictions of the Conflict between Tradition and Modernity in the Select Novels of O. Chandumenon and Lalithambika Antharjanam

Name of student: Rakhi Krishna S

Registration No.: 16maengs11

Degree for which submitted: M.A.English

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Dinesh Babu P.

Name of Centre: Centre for Languages and Comparative Literature

Name of School: School of Languages, Literature and Culture

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The study undertaken attempts an analysis of the conflict between tradition and modernity as depicted in O. Chandumenon's *Indulekha* and Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Agnisakshi*. Both the texts make a clear demarcation of tradition and modernity, through the characters of different generations and the transition in the belief system and perceptions of the respective generations on various events and occurrences. The study enables a better understanding of the tradition of Kerala and the functioning of tharavads.

By: Rakhi Krishna S

Supervisor: Dr. Dinesh Babu. P

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Tradition and modernity has always been at constant strife. Both are in a state of flux, that everything modern the present day forms a part of the tradition later. Modernisation is obvious in all the spheres of life which can be seen in the social, economic, cultural, and political level. In the social level, it facilitated in the amelioration of caste inequalities, enhancement in the condition of women and the underprivileged, etc... There has been a transition from the system of sacred values to a system of secularism and rationalism. A society undergoing development has to undergo resistance and tension. These tensions are a result of the conflict between the past and the present.

Literature has been able to freeze the past and preserve it in the lines of the texts. Thus, a keen study of the early literary texts offers a good window to know more about the customs and practices of a place. Literature provides us a chance to relive the times the work discusses through the experience of the characters. In Malayalam literature, there has been a range of literary works which were able to include in them the fine spirit of the early times, a range of intricately portrayed characters and the events and practices of the time. “Tharawads” form an inevitable part of Kerala tradition. “Tharawad”, which means the ancestral home was the house where the joint family lived. Social and spatial mobility as demanded by the advent of education and pursuit of jobs mainly contributed to the disintegration of the “tharawads”. The customs practised in Kerala were designed to accord with the “tharawad” structure. Many works in Malayalam literature, depicted the life in tharawads and the prominent writer M.T Vasudevan Nair’s works *Kaalam*, *Naalukettu*, *Asuravithu* and the works has also shown how the tharawads were disintegrated during the passage of time, and the decline of the feudal system. Earlier, Kerala practised the matrilineal system of succession which gave women the rights to own property. Being the custodian of properties, which was the only or major source of income in the past granted women with liberty.

The texts chosen to work on are O. Chandumenon’s *Indulekha* and Lalithambika Antharjanam’s *Agnisakshi*. Both the texts have upper caste women in Kerala as their protagonists and the struggles they face and deal in their lives form the significant part of the plot. In Kerala, the hierarchical classification of castes in the Hindu religion, places the castes

of Namboothiri and Nair at the higher strata. In the Namboothiri families, their custom permits only the eldest of the brothers to marry. The subsequent brothers are expected to establish sambandams, which is an informal relationship, with the women of other superior castes, especially the Nair women, so that the wealth of the family remain unaltered and will stay within the family without getting divided. For the Nair women, the alliances were a matter of prestige and social status. The Namboothiri could have more than one sambandam, meanwhile the practice bestows the women with immense freedom to dissolve an alliance and move to another as freely as they choose. Sambandam was also established to prevent Nair men from engaging themselves in serious relationships and commitments, as they are expected to be equipped for warlike services.

In the sambandam, it is not necessary for the father to look after and provide for the children, and the child is considered illegitimate and it assumes the caste of its mother. That threatened the relationship between the father and the child, for the parents can have such multiple relationships and the customs permitted it. In the matrilineal system, it is the child's maternal uncle who has to provide for the child. Thus the child who is of inferior caste is not supposed to have any rights over its father, and it cannot even touch its father since it is considered as "pollution".

Colonialism had imparted significant changes in the lives of the people, that led to an increased affinity to the English language in the young generation. The advent of English education increased the chances of earning a job, that required the migration of the job seekers. From the feudal system, and tharawads there came a need to move spatially and work. That caused a trouble for the older generation, since such mobility required the acceptance of new values, and customs. The jobs ensured financial independence to the members of the younger generation and thus the power exerted by the elders of the family began losing its assumed significance, making it a threat to their decision making power. But the education enabled it easy to handle the legal and financial matters of the tharawads.

Even when women were the property holders and they had the freedom to dissolve an alliance, the power patriarchy exerts on their everyday activities is very high. The decisions made on sambandams are highly influenced by the norms of the society, as the women are a part of construction, and the customs are moulded in favour of the men. The decisions within a tharawad is taken by the eldest male of the house, which everyone is obliged to follow, since they are in charge of the finances. In the cases when the eldest male is absent, the decision

making power is attributed to the eldest woman of the family. Even in such a case freedom and personal wishes of the women are not granted since the woman in charge is only a product of the patriarchal construction, who has grown with all the restrictions exerted on her and has grown reading, if at all she knows how to read, the texts signifying the fragility and feebleness of women. Even the early texts like *manusmriti*, the extracts of which is even highly quoted in the present era, are highly patriarchal in nature, and these texts have a tendency to establish themselves as the ultimate truth. *Manusmriti* recommends that women should always be under the control of men, as the text claims them to be weak and to be protected. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many writers, including men and women emerged with a set of literary works that upheld the need of women's liberation for the betterment of society. The writers including Ulloor S. Parameswara Ayyar, V. T Bhattathiripad, Balamaniamma, Lalithambika Antharajanam were the early writers who acted as the flag bearers of reformation.

Feminism is the belief of equality among sexes in the economic, social, cultural, and political front. Throughout the history, women are attributed the status of secondary citizens and thus the access to the public space is restricted for them. These restrictions are imposed either under the pretext of their safety or based on the thought that women are inferior to men and they can never be men's equals. The feminist theory attempts to account the subjugation of women, and many writers and thinkers including Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Mary Wollstonecraft etc... made reports on the same. The feminist movements, along with the feminist literature attempted to propagate the right of equality of women in the society. The society of the contemporary world is patriarchal in nature, and it always had been. Thus analysing the reasons behind the prejudiced attitude against women, and bringing out the possible solutions to ameliorate the intensity of the situation is significant.

In India, the castes are widely classified into four: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras. But, caste system in Kerala is different from that practised in the rest of India. In Kerala, the Brahmins are given prominence while every other castes are regarded as Shudras or untouchables. This makes it important to study the caste system and practices of Kerala.

A summary of the chosen texts of O. Chandumenon's novel *Indulekha* (1889) and Lalithambika Antharjanam's novel *Agnisakshi* or *Fire, My Witness* (1976) is given below:

Indulekha depicts the life of an educated Nair woman Indulekha, and her lover Madhavan. The novel, which essentially narrates the love story of them, is a strong statement on the need of educating women. Both of them are highly educated, and Madhavan is presented as the

representative of the rising upper class Nairs, who have received education from other places. Madhavan received his education from the University of Madras, and even when he dresses up in a Western style, he still follows many of the customs earnestly. The same can be seen with Indulekha, who confidently expresses her desires, without leaving behind the customs and requirements as necessitated by the traditions. While Madhavan is away in search of a job, Indulekha's grandfather arranges a sambandam for Indulekha with a Namboothiri. Indulekha blatantly rejects the proposal, as she had already promised Madhavan of marrying him, and that she was deeply in love with him. The rejected Namboothiri establishes a sambandam with a girl much younger than him. Later arises the conflict, when Madhavan misconceives the whole event and believes Indulekha to have accepted the Namboothiri. He leaves his home, as to not come back, and during his journey he had to face many trials, while Indulekha awaited his arrival. To the last, the lovers get united in spite of an oath taken by Indulekha's grandfather Panchumenon. Through the novel, O. Chandumenon creates an image of an ideal woman, who is a product of the novelist's imagination, since women were not granted the freedom, Indulekha is shown to have. Even when she appears to be strong willed, and independent, deep down it can implicitly be seen as to how the woman is bound by the social forces. *Indulekha* depicts the state of functioning of matrilineal tharavads, feudalism and how the eldest person of the family is expected to take the decisions for everyone.

The novel *Agnisakshi* of Lalithambika Antharjanam sheds light on the severe practices within the Nair communities. Even when the caste is hierarchically higher, the women of the community had to face several ordeals. The novel presents two heroines, Thankam, and Devaki Manampalli. Thankam is born out of a Namboothiri-Nair sambandam, and the children born like that don't have any rights over their father, since he would be of a higher caste. The main part of the novel is recollected through Thankam. Devaki is married to the Manampalli Illam, where the inmates followed rigid traditional rules, and she, being brought up in the company of her elder brother, who is a freethinker, finds it difficult to cope with the situations of the mana. Devaki's husband, Unni, though a virtuous and pure soul, was obsessed with *karma* and *dharma* that he spends the major part of his day in religious practices and with the family elders. Unni was like a brother to Thankam, and even when she prompted him to spend time with Devaki, he rejected her request claiming that he and his wife had different impressions on love. Meanwhile, Thankam protests for her higher education, and upon Unni's recommendation, succeeds in the attempt. Devaki leaves the *illam* to take care of her sick mother, and was declared an outcaste since her brother was an outcaste who doesn't observe pollution and fights

for the rights of women. Devaki later turns to be a social reformer, and a Gandhian worker. Finding peace nowhere, she finally turns her path to *sanyasam*. By the time, Thankam, depressed by her father's death, stopped her education midway and married an employed man. The novel ends as the two women meet each other, and they exchange their most precious things to each other. Devaki finds her son in Thankam's son, and she hands over her wedding pendant to Thankam's granddaughter Devu. *Agnisakshi* depicts the struggles of Namboothiri women shackled by the bonds of customs, the issues faced by the children of Namboothiri-Nair sambandam, and the issues of caste, money, and social changes.

Review of Literature

The following articles and theses related to the chosen topic were read in addition to the primary texts. A short summary of them are given below:

V. Saratchandran Nair's "Feminist Writing in Malayalam Literature- A Historical Perspective", studies the history of feminism in Malayalam literature. The author analyses the condition of women with respect to the historical and sociological backgrounds. Though the matrilineal system granted women with the rights over property, women still held a secondary position to men. Many writers wrote famous works extolling the necessity of educating women and the urgency of the emancipation of women. These writers include Ulloor Prameswara Ayyar, K. Saraswathiyamma, Lalithambika Antharjanam, V.T Bhattatiripad etc... The customs in practice were barbaric and confined Namboothiris within their houses denying them the right to make a choice. The political and social events against the unequal and biased practices are discussed. The stratification of society based on castes, and the struggles of it with respect to the unpleasant experiences of the character Thankam is discussed. The children are considered untouchables since they are of lower castes, but ironically their mothers were found approachable by the same Namboothiri. Antharjanam's novel had made known the influences of nationalist movements and Gandhian ideals. Even women can be seen as acting as the enemies of women through the characters of *Agnisakshi*. The author covers up many of the women writers ranging from the earliest of the writers to the post-modern writers and concludes with the question of whether women reached an equal foot of men despite the numerous struggles and movements.

In "From Veneration to Virulence: A Case for a Women's Literary History in Malayalam", the author Jancy James makes a study on how the voice of women were marginalized in literary works. The paper attempted to denote the scope, and relevance of such an inclusion of female

discourses. Women literature has been suppressed in history and attempts were made to retrieve and consolidate the lost and ignored works. The earliest contribution of women in Malayalam literature was made by the women in the royal families of the nineteenth century. Many women writers of impact emerged in the twentieth century of which Lalithambika Antharjanam was one of the most important writers. Through her short stories and a novel *Agnisakshi*, she unveiled the social inequalities and severe customs of the Namboothiris, which earned her the position of a spokeswoman of the mistreated women. The author gives a general notion of women's literature and its development to demonstrate how the culture of women, along with their literature evolved from submissiveness to resistance.

The article "Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change" by Joseph R. Gusfield examines the linear theory of social change in the context of Indian society. It verifies the assumption of existing institutions and values as the hindrances to modernization. The author also discusses seven fallacies in the assumptions of tradition-modern polarity. The ideas of tradition and nationhood is also explored in the context since tradition is closely associated with nationalism. The author winds the paper up by suggesting an inclusive approach, which doesn't promote the ignorance of the past altogether. Instead, the positive perceptions of the past to be incorporated in the modern endeavours.

In the review of literature, the articles of V. Saratchandran Nair and Jancy James make an analysis of the literary history of the writings by and about women, and the latter also analyses the role literary works like *Agnisakshi* had in the reformation of Kerala. Gusfield's article suggests an inclusive approach for tradition and modernity so that both could co-exist to bring about better changes.

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Chapter 2

Conflict between Tradition and Modernity in *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi*

The study undertaken attempts an analysis of the conflict between tradition and modernity as discussed in O. Chandumenon's *Indulekha* and Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Agnisakshi*. Both the texts make a clear demarcation of tradition and modernity, through the characters of different generations and the transition in the belief system and perceptions of the respective generations on various events and occurrences. Pascal Boyer in his *Tradition as Truth and Communication* comments on the conservative nature of societies which fail to accept changes.

As for the question of modernity, the common answer is that some groups and societies are 'conservative' or 'traditionalistic'; they are so organised that change is ruled out or deemed dangerous or interpreted as a threat to the social order. (4)

The traditional societies turn a blind eye towards change and they regard change as a corruptive force, which takes form as a threat to the social order. According to those societies, social order is maintained when the society accords to the norms and rules set by them, and no one attempts to overturn the established code of conduct. In *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi* a staunch conflict between tradition and modernity is exhibited, where throughout the novels the representatives of tradition attempt to subdue the advent of the modernists.

Indulekha engages in the discussion of multiple aspects varying from religion, gender, caste etc...The effects of colonialism and the reaction of the characters towards it is given prominence in the novel. The novel begins with the description of a dispute between Panchumenon and Madhavan, who could be considered the representatives of tradition and modernity respectively. It is not expected from a young man like Madhavan to talk back to the 'karanavan', the head of the family. Madhavan is advised to let Panchumenon have his way, even when what Madhavan demanded was education for Panchumenon's sister's son. The system of matrilineal tharawads and 'marumakkathayam' gives the responsibility of the children of 'sambandam' to the maternal uncles. Panchumenon misuses his power by depriving education, and even the basic amenities to some of the sister's children. In addition to it, the people are unaware of the necessity of education and thus leaves the decision of Shinnan's education to Panchumenon. The influence of the West and the resentment English education has caused in the traditionalists can be observed in their attitude to the modern, educated and equipped people like Madhavan, and Indulekha. At one point, Shankaramenon wonders if

Madhavan's insolence was the cause of his English education. This uneasiness is witnessed in almost all the characters in the novel who advocate tradition, who have a tendency to lay the blame on the character's "faults" on their English education. But, Madhavan with his logical outlook questions the authority of Panchumenon, the questioning that tradition prevents.

I have never required that *valiammaman* spend even a single coin that he has earned from his own toils. I have only said that the money left in his hands by our ancestors for our prosperity and betterment should be used for our well-being...I cannot let this happen; I will take him along with me and make sure he gets a proper education. (3)

The people in power doesn't find it appropriate when someone tries to question them, and thus they label it as arrogance, for what all decisions they would have made would be the most suitable in their opinion. Madhavan, being an educated man, knows the importance of education and he understands that only education could facilitate an upward movement. Shankaramenon attempts to prevent him by saying: "You may have studied a little English, Appu, and become smart but that is no reason why you should forget our customs, traditions, and ways of life." (4) Even, Madhavan's mother doesn't evoke a reply as she leaves everything to the discernment of her maternal uncle, Panchumenon. Thus, the injustice is left unquestioned by majority of the characters, who don't voice their opinion and blindly adhere to the rules set by the elders. Panchumenon cannot admit anyone questioning his authority, and when Madhavan dares to do so, feels that it is because of the age in which they belong, and the effect of English education.

Shankara, everything here is amiss. I think it is because of *kaliyugam*. Didn't you get to know how that rascal Madhavan insulted me. At an ill-fated moment, I gave him an English education; this is the unfortunate result of that. That apart, now this brat, Gopalan, who doesn't know west from east is answering back. (42).

Panchumenon had been enjoying the privilege of being the elder of the tharawad and no one has questioned him when he exercised his whims and fancies. Even Panchumenon can be seen as bound by the tradition, as he was left with no other options than to follow what has been prescribed by the previous generations. Govindapanikker, Madhavan's father, is a man who had a modern mindset, but he knew the tactics of handling the anger of Panchumenon, and even when he was inwardly in favour of his son, appears to be supporting Panchumenon's views and needs.

If youngsters receive an English education, they become insolent. Moreover, if they have cleared some examination and such things and happen to live in Madras, they think no end to themselves. I heard that he used some questionable words while speaking with you. I did not like it one bit. I did not ask him about this matter – what is the use of questioning him? (45)

Corresponding to Panchumenon of *Indulekha* is the character of Aphan Namboodiri. Thankam was the only child of Aphan, and after she passed her tenth exam she began receiving marriage proposals from many and when one was almost fixed, Thankam voiced her interest in further studies.

Recalling P.K.P Namboodiri's words , the sixteen-year old Thankam said, 'Amme, I too will improve our tharawad. But, it won't be through alms from Namboodiris or thampurans. I will study. Study more and come through successfully. And then, I will get an honourable job and improve the lot of the family. Do tell Father that before I achieve this, I will not marry. Chengannattappan is my witness' (43)

Thankam's need was more than necessary for Aphan's ego to be hurt. He slapped her and locked her inside a room. Aphan assumed the authority, and thus it made him furious to cause any change in his decisions. Aphan felt his authority questioned when Thankam voiced her interest in pursuing her studies. Aphan was not even willing to provide her the primary education, but it was through the insistence of Netyamma that it happened. It required Unni's persistent requests to make Aphan allow Thankam to be sent to college. But as he acceded to it he thought of himself being defeated, for he had been exercising unchecked power in the house. Aphan's spirit broke when the younger generation overpowered him. His downfall began with Thankam's insistence on getting educated. Then his daughter-in-law went from the illam, and the news about her actions and movements began pouring in. Aphan's attempts to outcaste her didn't turn successful, nor did he succeed in convincing Unni for a remarriage. He lost many of the court cases, and above all what affected Aphan the most was Aniyann's attempts to arrange the entry of the lower castes to the temple.

In *Indulekha*, the character of the title character can be seen as the site of conflicts on which modernity and tradition is at strife. Indulekha had received an education in English, and she was also aware of her Malayali identity. She followed everything that tradition demands, and that has formed a part of her lifestyle. She was looked after by her uncle Kochukrishnamenon who was strict about her education, and believed that she could choose a suitable husband

herself after the completion of her education. Panchumenon attempts to convince Kochukrishnamenon of considering a *sambandam* for her when she turned fifteen, which he refused for he wanted Indulekha to be educated first. The conflicts operating within Indulekha can be seen in her conversation with Madhavan, as she says: “Yes, I should do as he wishes and that I certainly will do. However, in certain matters I can only do as I wish. Unfortunately, this matter of the oath is one of those.” (35) Indulekha, in comparison to other characters, is at an advantaged position, as Panchumenon despite being a man of extreme anger and fury won’t get angry at her. Indulekha possessed all the virtuous attributes expected from an “ideal” woman, and she was Panchumenon’s only link to his dead son Kochukrishnamenon. Along with this has she got the advantage of education, and access to books. Thus, she gets the courage to voice her opinions. But at another instance as Indulekha talks with Lakshmikuttyamma, she lets her know how she would request Panchumenon to let her have Madhavan as her husband, than openly neglecting Panchumenon’s oppositions.

Another significant event in *Indulekha*, is the oath taken by Panchumenon. Because of his anger at Madhavan, he swears that he would not allow the marriage of Indulekha and Madhavan. Here, it can be seen how a traditionalist like Panchumenon attempts to fight modernity with the help of the medium of religion. He makes the promise upon the goddess that Madhavan may hesitate to proceed in the matter of Indulekha, even when he was aware of the love between the two. But once he made the oath, he got confused as if it doesn’t work out, it will demean him. “Indulekha is a very stubborn girl who had studied English.” (33). He knows of the obstinacy of Indulekha, and attributes it to her English education.

Tradition lays the weight of responsibility on its succeeding generation, and the later generation is bound to follow the customs and trends paved by their predecessors.

The earlier karnavars had been wealthy and capable, and the present ones were forced to follow the pattern established by them. As a result, there was heavy expenditure; there were two rest houses that fed the Brahmins and the workers twice a day, and then there was a cost of maintaining the Bhagawati temple and other places that had been set up for various ceremonies. (30)

The next generation were unable to break away from the norms that had already been established by the past generations. A similar situation can be seen in the case of Unni in *Agnisakshi* where the customs act as a villain in Unni’s relationship with his wife Devaki Manampalli. Devaki had to leave the illam to visit her sick mother, and since her brother was

declared as an outcaste, visiting her home would make her an outcaste too. Despite the threats Devaki left the illam, and when Thankam asked Unni about his decision on Devaki she could find how tradition has shackled Unni.

‘Thankam, no one can abandon anyone. How can man separate what God has united? I used to say this to your Edathi also, Thankam. For those born into the Brahmin clan, life is a sacrifice. More than one’s own pleasure, they will have to accept others’ wishes. I was born a Brahmin. And she became my wife. But, we have always differed in our understanding of dharma.’

‘Dharma! ...’ she flared. ‘Why are you talking about this dharma at every possible opportunity! The dharma which takes no note of the times, let it go its way. If you were asked to kill your mother, would you, like Parasurama, do that also?’” (59)

Thankam attempted to convince Unni of the futility of what he was holding on to, but her efforts turned unsuccessful. Along with his fear of tradition and God had he, the emotional attachment for his family. He was not ready to defy the established customs of his religion.

‘How sad my Aphan is? How innocent and straightforward. He is stubborn and insists that the view he holds whether right or wrong should win through. If that stubbornness is broken, he will also break. In his whole life, he was defeated but once: by you – no, by me – but since then, his heart has grown feeble. Now, if I defeat Aphan in the matter of Tethikutty also, he won’t survive, Thankam. Who will take the responsibility for that sin?’ (60)

Aphan was half willing to call Tethi back to the illam, but Unni’s mother was totally against it, as she asserted that only either of them would live in the illam. If Tethi would come back she won’t live their anymore. Thus Aphan was forced to look for another bride for Unni’s remarriage. He failed to convince Unni into it, and thus Unni doesn’t want to worry Aphan anymore.

The irony of tradition is exemplified with the case of Panchumenon, and Sumitrananda as they relate to the incidents of their past. Panchumenon narrates a story of his childhood to Govindapanikker. In his childhood, he had a friend Kunjalikutty, who gave him a pair of chappals. Their tradition forbids the use of chappals, and thus he wore the chappals secretly without the knowledge of his uncle. His uncle caught him one day, and began beating him.

“Have you become so insolent as to wear chappals, you rebel?” (46) Panchumenon recollects how he stopped wearing chappals after the threat of his uncle.

Think of the youngsters of today – Madhavan walks about only in chappals...If children become lawless like this, what will we do? There is no greater stupidity than educating children in English. Indulekha would have been a better girl if she had not received an English education. But what is it that can be done? Most unfortunately certain accidents happen. Observing the people who are English-educated, those who have not learnt English have also taken to their ways (46).

Even when Panchumenon had attempted to wear chappals in his childhood, and is aware of the desire to wear one, he finds fault with Madhavan who did the same act as his, and he even blames Madhavan’s English education for that, but though he hadn’t acquired any, wanted to wear chappals. In the case of Devaki, she began practising sanyasa and assumed the name Sumitranandayogini. She tried to forget her past, as an ascetic is required to shear all the links to the past.

When the steel wires, which had tightened the knot of her mind loosened, there was something she understood. No one is ever completely free. The bondage of custom. The bondage of law. The bondage of desire. even the bond of love feels a shackle. Does the pitiable human soul ever get a release from this? (117)

Sumitrananda though tried to renounce her past identified the incidents of past infiltrating her memories, and she finds how one’s past binds one. She broods over how she had conquered the emotion of lust. Her husband Unni had always been very engaged in his religious rituals and dharmic practices and so she didn’t get enough sexual gratification from him. Her dissatisfaction of sex in her bedroom made her hate and discard it. She grew furious at the word ‘kaamam’, and it can be seen how a custom is formed. Those coming to her asram would be asked to hate the emotion just like she has been doing, and Sumitrananda was becoming none other than another version of Unni’s mother who had thought that the union between a man and woman should only be for the cause of producing children, and not for pleasure. Ironically she becomes the practitioner of what she had actually hated.

The shoulder to shoulder existence of tradition and modernity can be seen at many instances in both the novels. At the beginning of the *Agnisakshi*, Thankam is at the banks of the river Ganga at Allahabad, and she meets her sister in law, Devaki Manampalli who has turned into an ascetic. Thankam immersed herself in the thoughts of her past after their meeting, and her son

exclaims whether Thankam too will renounce life and practise sanyasam. When Thankam asked him whether he believed in destiny, he declared that he doesn't, and that it was for her sake that he takes part in the rituals.

Suddenly, struck by a thought she asked, 'My child, do you believe in destiny?'

'No, Isn't that what all of you have jointly taught me? I believe that there is nothing beyond or greater than man. The physical sciences declare so. But, for your sake, Amma, I go through all these artificial rituals.' (9)

Thus, it can be seen how Thankam's son accepts his mothers beliefs eventhough he hadn't had any belief in them. When Thankam expresses her wish to stay back for two more days at the place, he easily accedes to it. Similarly, Thankam expects that her granddaughter might have got bored while accompanying her. "She might even be bored. The gap between sixty and sixteen is considerable" (10) Thankam is ready to accept their differences each generation possess and she doesn't attempt to impose her beliefs forcefully upon anyone. In Thankam's relationship with her mother Netyamma too can the convergence of perspectives be cited. Thankam had been the link between Devaki and her brother P.K.P. She carried the letters they wrote to each other and later she herself began to slid in some notes to Kuttan without the knowledge of Devaki. She began to worship his heroism, and learnt from him many of the occurrences in the political and social domains. Thankam had the space to discuss several topics in the letters with Netyamma, and she was thus able to influence her thoughts to a great extent. This triggered Netyamma to console Devaki when she worried about Kuttan being jailed.

'Kuttikkavu, stop crying. After all, what has happened! Your elder brother set out to achieve something good. How many people do that and return after remedial purifications. What then happens these very people who talk so much will welcome him back' (39)

Thankam restrained herself from consoling Devaki in her distress. Netyamma soothes her by justifying the actions of Devaki's brother. She also asks Unni to buy sari and blouse to Devaki. Though it was for material purposes, Netyamma had identified how important education is and it was upon her insistence that Thankam was sent to school.

In *Indulekha*, the character of Lakshmikkutyamma and her relationship with Indulekha is notable, as she provides her with immense support in her decisions. Though from an older

generation, she understands Indulekha well and discusses with Indulekha how much fun it would have been if Madhavan was there at the time of sambandam which Panchumenon had arranged for her. She even asks Indulekha to get ready for the battle with the Nambuthiripad. She was also very happy for her daughter's relationship with Madhavan, but at the same time feels sorry for her old father Panchumenon.

The acceptance of conflicting perspectives by Panchumenon is pertinent, as it resulted in the merry reunion of Indulekha and Madhavan. Indulekha fell sick upon hearing the news of Madhavan going away, and she dreamt of him being murdered by some thieves. Panchumenon who had been obdurate till then about Indulekha's relationship with Madhavan, couldn't bear anything sad happen to Indulekha, and thus he was ready to violate his oath and do penance for the violation. The priest asked Panchumenon to make gold or silver images of the letters he used to make the oath as the penance, and distribute it among the Brahmins. It can be perceived how customs and practices are designed in favour of the privileged few, that in effect these customs turn out to do something beneficial for that privileged class. It was after the penance that the telegraphic message acquainting the news of Madhavan arrived. Panchumenon believed it to be the blessing of the goddess while Indulekha could see no connection between the penance and the telegraphic message. Panchumenon, was willing to do anything that would make Indulekha happy, and she in turn doesn't violate his wishes, but seeks his permission. Thus he compromised with the tradition of sambandam and the violation of his oath for the sake of Indulekha's happiness.

Aphan's relationship with Thankam is a complicated one since they were of different castes. Eventhough the coexistence of tradition and modernity occurs in their case, it is not evidently accepted by the character of Aphan. When Thankam returned home from her college on her first vacation, Netyamma met her at the house and while they were conversing they felt the shadow of Aphan Namboodiri at the other side of the wall listening carefully to their conversation. Aphan's reticent nature and the traditions that bound him stopped him from openly expressing his love and concern for his daughter. At night as Thankam was lying down Aphan thinking her to be asleep approached her, kissed her forehead and caressed her. Even till his death, Aphan couldn't express his love for his daughter openly. Aphan is in a way similar to Unni, as both had to work in opposition to their wills, to satisfy the needs of tradition. Traditions appear as a barrier throughout everyone's life in *Agnisakshi*. Though Thankam was the daughter of the Brahmin Aphan Namboothiri, it is her mother's condition that applies to the children. Her mother Netyamma was a Nair, and thus Thankam was also a Nair. When

Unni got married, Thankam was not allowed to enter the house where the ceremony of the installation of the bride took place. “You have touched everything and polluted them. You will make us all go blind. Just because you are Aphan Namboodiri’s daughter, do you cease to be a Sudra woman? (13)

Thankam had to wait for four more days to see Unni, as custom demanded him not to leave his illam for four days. Thankam couldn’t even touch her father as he is a Brahmin. Every time one touches a lower caste, one has to take bath. Thus, right from her childhood Thankam has been asked not to touch her father, for he has arthritis and couldn’t take bath that often.

Even so, she could barely remember the occasions when her father had touched her or carried her. Aphan Namboodiri was a strict practitioner of the customs and habits observed by an orthodox Namboodiri family. His meals were at his illam, his religious rituals at the temple. (17)

Since the practice of untouchability was there since her childhood, Thankam grew accustomed to it. Thankam was called from the college as Aphan Namboodiri was on his deathbed, and even in such a situation neither the mother nor the daughter could approach Aphan. Aphan’s spirit broke when the younger generation overpowered him. Thus, while Aphan was on his deathbed Thankam went near him. On seeing him she fainted and fell upon him, thereby polluting him right before his death. After the Namboodiri’s death, Netyamma and Thankam were not allowed to see him, and custom demanded their departure before the last rites to start. They had no claims on their father, and no rights on the house. It was the custom dictated for the Nair women, after the Namboodiri’s death, and Netyamma also knew it very well that she and her daughter do not have any place at the illam, and that they should bear the Namboodiri’s children and ultimately return to their own house. This is how every tradition and custom deeply fixes its roots in a society. An infant is given birth to a society that already has a range of beliefs and customs, and as a child it won’t question what’s around it, and hence grows accustomed to it.

In *Indulekha*, after Panchumenon made the oath he arranged for a sambandam for Indulekha with a Nambuthiripad. Many of the villagers express their opinions about the Nambuthiripad, and they felt that horoscopes can be influenced by money, and since the Nambuthiripad is rich, it wouldn’t matter whether the horoscopes match or not. They felt that Indulekha might have been enthralled by seeing the money of the man. It was also opined that it was a waste to teach Indulekha English, as they thought that the education was only for money.

The Nambuthiripad arrives and he was also a traditionalist who held a negative opinion on English education. He had never seen a woman who had learnt English. "If women learn English they lose their sense of cleanliness: that is a big drawback." (66). The traditionalists haven't had proper idea of what English education is, and thus blames it with random accusations. His narrow-mindedness can be seen as he narrates about Mackshaman's wife, where he could think only of inclination and physical affinity when he sees her. He even proudly announces how he didn't promote a relationship between them as the scriptures prevented associations with such women.

During the Nambuthiripad's first conversation with Indulekha, he was enamoured by the beauty of Indulekha. He was startled to hear Indulekha representing herself using the first person pronoun "I" as he has been accustomed to be respected by Nair women, and thus was taken aback for a while. The conflict arises when he didn't expect her to say like that, but Indulekha was not concerned of her saying like that and thus haven't had further thoughts on that. He ignored it only because of her beauty. When Indulekha began to laugh during their conversation he was convinced that she had fallen in love with him. He viewed everything through his narrow-minded perspective, and thus thought that she loved him. When Indulekha stopped their talk in between due to lack of interest and went to bath, he felt that it was a mistake to teach women English. When the Nambuthiripad saw Indulekha's mother Lakshmikkuttyamma, he was also attracted to her in the first instant itself, and he felt that she is different from Indulekha who had certain mannerisms and English education, while her mother doesn't have all that. Nambuthiripad finds it unacceptable to hear that Indulekha would sit on a chair to sing, and labels it as the danger of English education. He also held the concept that studying English is fatal for the feelings of love. The Nambuthiripad associates everything he dislikes in Indulekha with her education, but fails to see how he is from within. He doesn't find any fault in his character of getting captivated easily by the women, and he takes advantage of the custom of sambandam to establish relationship with different women. Thus when he finally decides on Kalyanikkutty, he made sure that the girl didn't know English. She was brought up in a traditional way: "I do not want that self-assured one who has learnt the language of those who eat beef. Kalyanikkutty is a very nice girl. Her age is extremely special. Nowadays, I desire women of this age" (131).

Soori Namboothiripad takes care to enquire whether the girl is educated in English, and he felt that English education made women headstrong. He was even more happy to know that Kalyanikkutty was a girl of merely thirteen years. It can also be seen how Indulekha questions

whether Kalyanikkutty is aware of the sambandam that is to be made with her. The tradition blinded people cared only about the age-old customs, and status of the tharawadu that they didn't take efforts to let Kalyanikkutty know of the proceedings made in the case of the Nambuthiripad. The young girl was pushed into the room where the Nambuthiripad waited like a predator.

After the sambandam Madhavan came back from Madras, and was misinformed that Indulekha's sambandam was over. Thus, without spending much time at Malabar he went back to Madras. On hearing this, Panchumenon was happy and said that everything bad will happen to a rebel like Madhavan. He even thought that Madhavan might've gone back in fear of Panchumenon's vow of not giving Indulekha to Madhavan. Panchumenon feels a sense of triumph as he hears the news of Madhavan's retreat. For him, it was the triumph of tradition over modernity.

The clash of tradition and modernity in *Indulekha* can explicitly be seen in the conversation Govindapanikkar, Govindankuttymenon, and Madhavan has between themselves at Babu Kesabchandra Sen's house. In the conversation, each one of them expresses their perspectives on English education, religion, god, science etc... Govindapanikkar feels that though English education has many advantages, it spoils an individual equipped with it. He blames that the youngsters read some books and learn certain things that make them ignore their customs, religion, and its workings. Further, they become disrespectful to their elders, and the trust and love they had for the elders will be destroyed. He said that, even Madhavan's idea of running away from home is the idea his English education had imparted on him. According to him, people should have faith and trust in God, which will guide them to have respect for their elders. He conveyed that Madhavan was born to Hindu parents and thus he should practice the religion. But seldom does he see Madhavan going to the temple and applying holy ash on his body. Govindankuttymenon felt it wrong for one to be asked to follow a religion, just because one's parents have practised it, without thinking much about its good and bad aspects. He accepts himself as an atheist, and he doesn't find any reason to believe the presence of God. Madhavan, though wasn't an atheist, couldn't find the accurate relation between applying sandalwood paste on one's body and one's respect to God. Govindankuttymenon and Madhavan displays an array of scientific facts in front of Govindapanikkar to convince him about the origin of life. Govindapanikkar was reluctant to believe what the young generation suggested, as he thought that their English education has corrupted them to a great extent. They

also discussed about castes, and other religions, and neither those who advocated tradition nor who advocated modernity could convince each other regarding their outlook and belief.

The conflict can further be observed as Panchumenon comments on Indulekha's reading choice as he believed that the children will be spoilt if they read stories other than those from the Ramayanam and Bhagavatam. Panchumenon found Indulekha reading a story on a girl's obstinacy in her love life, and he feels that such kind of stories are not to be read by the children, and that they will spoil them. He even wonders whether the children will convert into Christianity because of their English education.

The attitude towards English education is almost similar to most of the characters belonging to the older generation in *Indulekha*. Kesavannambuthiri shares his thoughts on the functioning of train and steam engine to Lakshmikuttyamma and he felt that it would be good if the Englishmen had taught them the tricks behind all these. But he also contradicts himself when he said: "They do not teach all this in school. If that were so it would have been good. All that they do at school is spoil our children...When one child learns English he becomes ashamed of all the people at home. English education is good only for that" (57).

But Lakshmikuttyamma has a more open mindset to accept English education open heartedly, "these children know a great deal more than us – maybe it is because they know more about things that they are ashamed of us." (57)

In Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Agnisakshi*, a tutor was arranged to teach Thankam English, and its ultimate aim was to get her suitable alliances. When Netyaramma, Thankam's mother asked Aphan Namboodiri to teach English to Unni as well, he prevented it.

When a tutor was hired to teach Thankam English, her mother had said, 'Let Unni also learn the language. In future, when he goes to the court to manage the family affairs, shouldn't he know the language?'

But Aphan Namboodiri forbade it. 'The Namboodiris of Manampalli Illam have not yet been reduced to learning that barbaric language. Or, if it ever becomes that vital, there is always Aniyam. He will do.' (18)

Learning English was considered uncivilized and barbaric, and it was unacceptable for Aphan Namboodiri to educate Unni with English, as for him it will spoil the nature of people. Thus when Thankam went to college Aniyam was also sent with her to which Aphan didn't express any displeasure. Custom permitted only the elder son to be the head of the house. So, Aniyam

had acquired education, and he thought differently from Unni. But Aniyam was poles apart from the character of Unni, and ““Fear not, Thankam. These are not unique events. Very soon, I too will cut this top-knot of mine. Then I will also be declared an outcaste. I am practising patience only because Aphan holds the key to the treasury.”” (51)

The contrast between the characters of Unni and Aniyam can be seen at a variety of instances. When Aniyam attempts to fire a cracker at a temple premise, Unni asked him not to since the temple may catch fire. He also related to a story when the temple caught fire and their great grandfather saved the idol and was reinstated later. The deity and the illam became powerful after that, according to Unni. What Aniyam caught from the conversation is that, if the temple burns down again, it will be built again making the deity more powerful and the illam prosperous. When the Manampalli mana was partitioned, Aniyam got the illam. He got married to a woman who wore sari and blouse, attended public meetings, and didn't observe pollution. The women in the house didn't protest against Aniyam's deeds as he knew to keep them at their places.

The life of Unni's wife, Devaki Manampalli, was different at the illam. She was brought up in an unorthodox house, and by a progressive brother, and so she found it difficult to cope with the proceedings at Unni's house. The anthapuram of the illam was controlled by the women who were struck by the archaic customs and thus it was a wrong place for Devaki to be. Unni's mother was not in favour of the alliance as Devaki's brother is a revolutionary. But their marriage was fixed based on the matching horoscopes, and Aphan Namboodiri was particular that the marriage should happen. Thus, being an alliance of her dislike she made use of all the chances to prove that Devaki was not the suitable match for Unni. She also insisted Unni to perform certain rituals every day that would prevent him from accessing their bedroom. In her opinion, the physical relation between a man and woman should only be for the sake of producing children. “Edathi said calmly, ‘He married only to keep the family going. It was done strictly to maintain the state of a householder. For the rituals, you need a wife. My elder brother used to always say, one who is not enough for this world, will not be good enough for the next one either. But here, I think everything is done for the sake of the next world.’” (22)

Unni spent much of his time in the prayer room, reading from the religious texts. He was greatly concerned about *dharma* and thus he was doing the preparations to fulfil it. Devaki felt herself restricted under the surveilling eyes of the elders of the house, and the absence of her husband. Devaki was very interested in reading, that she was more worried of the unavailability of

magazines and newspapers for her to read, than the absence of Unni. The women in the illam were expected to read only the puranas, and when Devaki's wooden box was found with books and papers, it caused displeasure in the elders.

The bookshelf, placed against the wall, was stacked with thick books in Sanskrit. Below that, on a wooden box, modern novels and books of poetry lay piled up. Thethi Edathi's huge box was not filled with clothes. There was a general complaint that it held only bits of paper. (24)

The author creates a contrast between the tradition and modernity, as the Sanskrit texts and modern novels are juxtaposed to each other. Devaki also didn't concern much about pollution, as she willingly spend her time with Thankam in her room. She also took care of the boy 'Unnaman', and bathed him clean to send him to school. Even when Unni's mother displayed dislike and scolded her for the pollution, she bought him books and slate with her own money and educated him.

Devaki's brother P.K.P was a revolutionary who had asked the antharjanams, namboothiri women, to stop hiding behind the umbrella and come forward. As his practices and needs were against the customs, the traditional people hated him.

The traditional people considered P.K.P an outcaste from the community. Everyone, from Muthassiamma to Aphan Namboodiri said, 'What a pity! We have installed the sister of this man as the bride of our illam, this man who moves around, sharing meals with outcastes a man who has broken his sacred thread, and is the companion of Pulayas and Muslims!' (33)

P.K.P's interaction with the people of other caste and religion was intolerable to the older generation, and so when he asked the Namboodiri women to stop using umbrellas and to start wearing saris and blouses, it was an open and outspoken manner of protesting against the age old practices. Unni's family was agitated by his ways and they searched in Devaki's wooden box for sari and blouses, and they tore the papers she used to read and abused Thankam for supplying her with books and magazines. P.K.P's revolutionary actions forced him to be jailed. As per the customs, one will be an outcaste when one is jailed. Thus, when Devaki left the illam to reach her house, her return was not invited by the family elders.

When Aniyam met Devaki after she left and asked her to return to the illam, she said that she would return if Unni will be ready to come forward a little. She said that she wouldn't use an

umbrella, wouldn't observe pollution, and would attend public meetings which won't be welcomed by Unni and his mother. When Unni was reported of what Devaki has said, he asked Aniyam to ask Devaki to ascend. For both Unni and Devaki the idea of progress was entirely different. The heat of the revolution in which Devaki and P.K.P were a part took over the land for a while, and it receded even faster. The people became more conservative, than they had been. The antharjanams who had given up their umbrellas took it back and covered themselves further with shawls and went to pilgrimage.

Thankam realized how important it is to replace the obsolete traditions with new ideas.

She knew that only if some of the outdated customs and beliefs were destroyed, could something new be built in their place? And when those new customs become outdated, they too may have to be changed. The revolutionaries of the previous generation equated God with certain ideals. Freedom of the country freedom of the individual freedom of the society... sacrificing oneself for these ideals was their life. (66)

Many people had to sacrifice their lives for the revolution. P.K.P's wealth dwindled and he married a poor girl, while Devaki became a Gandhian disciple. They sacrificed their well-being for the upliftment of the society. The new generation feels many of the ideas of their predecessors as archaic. This can be exemplified when Thankam's granddaughter expresses her discomfort with her own name, being it an old-fashioned name: "Ammamma!' Devu used to ask, 'Why did you give me this old-fashioned name? Devu, Devaki. I feel ashamed to even say it to outsiders. I am going to change it to Devika'" (75).

Thankam could see how differently her granddaughter sees the name which she values much. Devu doesn't know the importance of the name, and the reason behind why she had named her so. Everything old is viewed by the upcoming generation in the similar manner. But here, Thankam doesn't assert herself upon her granddaughter. Thankam gets a retrospective view of the events of her life.

The revolution of Nair Veetil Thankam attending college was forgotten. Also forgotten was that Aniyam Namboodiri had sheared off his top-knot. The act of a Namboodiri woman discarding her veil and emerging into the open, overshadowed every previous shocking act that broke social codes. (66)

Thankam realized how each revolution turned insignificant with the passage of time. It caused a furore when Thankam expressed her desire to study and be independent. Similarly, Aniyam's

action of cutting his tuft of hair, and even Devaki's social movements lost its importance as new events took place. Thankam's children were taught Hindi by Kalyani Devi, an early disciple of Gandhi. She was an eccentric and was looked down upon by Thankam's children for the way she sat, walked and talked. Kalyani Devi recounted the story of the daughter of a freedom fighter, whom she had seen emerging from a hotel heavily drunk, hanging on to the shoulders of a foreigner. The girl invited Kalyani to accompany her, which she felt as a great insult. Thankam's granddaughter Devu felt that everything Kalyani said was like a preaching, and that for her everything good was in the past and the present time is corrupted and depraved. The freedom fight which would be of great importance for a person in the past, would find it difficult to let the other people know the place it had held in one's heart.

Tradition and modernity are constantly changing concepts in a volatile society. A side by side existence of tradition and modernity enables the smooth functioning of the society. When one of these tries to dominate over the other, the result would be disruptive. In *Indulekha*, Panchumenon's willingness to allow the relationship of Madhavan and Indulekha, led to a happy ending, while the stringent adherence to tradition costed the lives of many in *Agnisakshi*.

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Chapter 3

Patriarchy and the Identity of Women in *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi*

The identity of an individual is greatly dependent upon the society to which he or she belongs to. Patriarchy has been penetrating its root since a long time, and women had to struggle for the achievement of their rights and gain independence. O. Chandumenon's *Indulekha* and Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Agnisakshi* discusses the stance of women in a male-oriented society where all the decisions in one's life is made by the elder male of the house. In Kerala, the castes Namboodiri and Nair are deemed to be upper in the hierarchy of the caste system. The Nair ancestral homes practised the matrilineal system of succession, and thus women had the power to make decisions on making or diluting an affair with a desired person. In *The Second Sex*(1949), Simone de Beauvoir examines how men assumed power throughout the history.

History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy's earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other. (193)

Beauvoir establishes how women were relegated to the status of the Other, while men enjoy the primary position they favourably arranged for themselves. In the select novels, even when the it is the system of matrilineal succession that is followed the authority and custody of the property was under the control of the eldest male member of the family. That makes women dependent on the men, and that dependence naturally privileges one over the other.

In *Indulekha*, the main woman character is the title character. The novel begins with a quarrel that stems between Panchumenon and Madhavan. Panchumenon was hesitant to give education to his nephew Shinnan and when Madhavan insisted on educating Shinnan, Panchumenon was offended by it. The matrilineal system of succession gives the authority of property to the eldest person of the house and thus, here Panchumenon is the custodian of the money and property. He misuses his authority, and degrades Kumminiamma and her children to the status of servants of the house. He deprived them of English education, and their chances of getting jobs were narrowed. The system makes the children entirely dependent on their uncles, and their mothers cannot do anything in their case. At one point, Madhavan asks his mother Parvathiyamma of her opinion on educating Shinnan, but she evades his question saying that it's not under her control to decide that.

The description of the beauty of Indulekha is given prominence by the author, where she is described as an object of pleasure. The author has given more importance to develop on the beauty of Indulekha, than on developing the nuances of her character. Indulekha has received education in English and Sanskrit, and she was equipped with the customs and knowledge of an English lady. She had been dear to Panchumenon, as she was fostered by his son Kochukrishnamenon who died during Indulekha's teenage. By his character, Panchumenon was a short-tempered man, and it could be seen as a result of the acceptance of his mood and anger by everyone else in the house, submitting themselves to his authority. He has been habituated to this submission that he gets irritated and infuriated easily. It was only to Indulekha that he doesn't get angry, as she was Kochukrishnamenon's foster child, and she also possessed certain qualities. Indulekha, though was educated in English was aware of her Malayali identity, and thus behaved in a manner that's expected from a Malayali woman. But the parameters of how a woman should be, how should she look like and how should she perform is set by the male-centred society. Even the beauty of a woman is measured by the set standards of the society, and women often sacrifice their identity and strive to achieve the ideal state, where the "ideal" is determined by others. The author stereotypes those who had learnt English to be contemptuous of others, and he presents Indulekha as an exception as she hasn't had any disrespect to others, and she paid strict attention in following the established traditions and customs. Even when she is described as to be behaving in her own convenient manner, she doesn't disrupt the deep-rooted notions advocated by the traditionalists. Her behaviour had always conveyed a sense of humility, and she was able to please everybody. Even though Indulekha didn't like to wear much ornaments, she wore them on certain occasions upon the insistence of her mother and grandfather. Their insistence can be observed as an example of how women's identity is being shaped into presenting herself as an object of pleasure. In the instance of Indulekha's conversation with the Nambudiripad, her grandmother asks her to wear some ornaments to please the man which she refuses to do. Only in the incident of the Nambudiripad does Indulekha appear to disrupt the requests of the elders, but in that case as well the silent inclination of the grandfather towards her decision is made evident. No one in the house voiced anything against the desires of Indulekha, but it could also be found that her desires had always complied to the wishes of the elders of the house.

Indulekha was under the foster care of her maternal uncle Kochukrishnamenon. When Indulekha turned fifteen, her grandfather Panchumenon suggested Kochukrishnamenon to seek a sambandam for her. The sambandams arranged at that time were a matter of prestige and

thus, when an alliance is formed, the decision is taken solely by the elder of the house without seeking the opinion of the woman for whom the sambandam is sought. The women usually come to know of the alliance only when she is forced into the room of the man who is waiting for her to initiate the sambandam through physical relationship. In most of the alliances formed, the aspect which is given importance is the wealth and status of the man than his nature and character. There might be huge difference between the age of the man and the woman, and the man might have multiple sambandams with different women simultaneously. The alliances weren't based on love, but on money and prestige. Thus when Kochukrishnamenon was asked to seek an alliance, he was of the opinion that she should complete her education first, and then she would find a suitable man herself. Even when Kochukrishnamenon might have had in his mind Madhavan as the suitable partner for Indulekha, he didn't voice it before his death. He gave priority to equip Indulekha with education than getting married to someone else. The decisions about the marriage, education etc... is made by the head of the family and women don't have a platform to express and experience their wishes.

Everyone has recognized Madhavan as the suitable husband for Indulekha, but the both of them hadn't admitted their love for each other at the beginning. Indulekha restricted herself from expressing her love for him so as not to hinder his studies, while Madhavan was both shy and perplexed in expressing his feeling for her in the fear of rejection and in the awareness of the presence of alliance seekers who are of rich origin. Indulekha's reticence is an attribute expected from an ideal woman, since the tradition and norms prevented a woman from expressing her inner feelings to others. Indulekha didn't let any signs of affection to escape from her so as to be recognized by Madhavan as her love. Indulekha and Madhavan whiled away their time playing chess or reading poems or slokas. The slokas they read are evident examples of objectification of women, when women are expected to appear pleasant, beautiful, attractive and pure. One of the slokas they discuss describes woman as a flower that hasn't been smelt, and a jewel that hasn't been pierced. This connotatively refers to the state of a woman, who is a virgin and devoid of all social and physical contacts. When Madhavan asks Indulekha to sit with him, she declined it saying that they weren't young anymore. They had grown up to be a young man and woman, that they cannot behave like how they used to be in their past. But the same Indulekha asks Madhavan to come to her room at night which he refused to do restating the same opinion Indulekha had made earlier.

Indulekha: Are you abusing the moon? This room also gets lots of moonlight. Do you have anything against coming up here?

Madhavan: I am not coming up. If you are against sitting on the same couch together with me, aren't you against both of us being in the same room at night?

Indulekha: Yes, that is right; I am opposed to it. I said it without thinking I shall come down to the courtyard. (16)

Indulekha could be observed as airing conflicting opinions on their being together, but it is also evident to the readers that she liked Madhavan to be with her. The thought which forced her to prevent sitting with him is rooted from the expectations that patriarchy has set on women. Women are always expected to be self-restrained, and thus they are to sacrifice their real feelings and hide them. Thus, Indulekha asks Madhavan both not to sit with her, and also to come to her room at night. One is her forced self, while the other is her real self. But as Indulekha approached near Madhavan, he was enamoured by her physical beauty.

Indulekha came down from her room upstairs and stood near Madhavan in the beautiful moonlight. In her hand was a string of jasmine which she herself had strung in the evening. When Madhavan saw Indulekha's face, lush hair and form in the fair moonlight, his mind began to whirl. Madhavan thought, 'Oh God, if this beauty loves me who will be lucky as I am? If she does not, why should I live? It would be best to die now. (16)

Madhavan measures Indulekha based on her physical appearance and every time he sees her he feels overwhelmed by her beauty. The act of Madhavan tying the jasmine string on her hair indirectly alludes to how Indulekha is observed as an object of pleasure by Madhavan. Indulekha was his only woman acquaintance, and in addition to that the fact of her being beautiful attracts Madhavan towards her. Madhavan feels that Kamadevan had used his arrows upon him, and he also doubts whether women aren't hunted down by these arrows.

Madhavan: I think these days Kamadevan's weapon is not being used on women.

Indulekha: Aren't women, poor things, actually cowards? Maybe Kamadevan was moved by pity and decided against it.

Madhavan: If that is so, I will say that Kamadevan is not only cruel but also a fool. If he does not use his weapons on women out of pity, what does he gain by using it on men? Why should he attack men without any reason?

Indulekha: Perhaps Kamadevan does this because he thinks men are strong and if he attacks them, they would inevitably attack women on their own. (17)

In their conversation, Indulekha makes a vivid distinction between men and women, by classifying the former as “strong” and “hunters”, while the latter as “cowards” and to be hunted. Being a woman, Indulekha herself attributes all the resilient qualities to men while women are labelled as “poor things”. Indulekha is influenced by the benchmark set by the patriarchal society and when Madhavan discusses of himself being attacked by Kamadevan’s arrow she opines that men are attacked so, because they would in turn attack women. She gives him prominence and justifies the action of men dominating women. She also suggests that it is not the women who should express their feelings, but men. When Madhavan is asked what the cause behind his distress is, he attempts to convey his emotions. He says that the medicine to cure his sufferings is with Indulekha. There also he objectifies her, and he asks her lips and breasts as his medicine. He suggests that with that medicine, he would be lucky throughout his life. Thus, the identity of a woman is reduced rather to her physical appearance than her innermost characteristics. Madhavan feels confused in Indulekha’s attitude toward him.

Possibly she loves me, but I still doubt whether she is in love with me. More than that, there are so many men more suitable and richer, who desire her. She herself knows this. So, she might like to get acquainted with someone like that and then marry him. How is it possible to know a woman’s mind? However educated she is, isn’t mystery a woman’s very nature? (20)

Madhavan associates mystery to be an aspect of Indulekha’s character. Mysteriousness had always been an attribute stereotypically associated with women, and this prevents men from trying to understand the feelings and emotions of women. Madhavan also is no better than the men who associates mystery with women. He fights with the conflicting emotions, as he was not able to conclude whether Indulekha is in love with him. He makes certain presumptions, but still he was aware of the suitors waiting in line for an alliance with Indulekha. Indulekha, on the other hand, leaves herself mysterious by complying to the notions set by the patriarchy without revealing her love for Madhavan, and distressing him even more. Madhavan feels that as many rich people are eager to begin an alliance with the beautiful Indulekha, she might not wait long enough for him to secure a job. He presumes that the worry will destroy his manliness. Similar to a woman who strives to be “ideal” in a patriarchal world, a man is also compelled to be “manly” so as to be accepted and given prominence. Madhavan feels

unconfident with Indulekha's feelings for him, and he feels that she would discard him when someone rich approaches her. He passes the comment on the women of Kerala as being infidel, as the practice of sambandam provides the women with the freedom of accepting or declining their husbands as they wish.

Madhavan: It is not quite that. The women of this region are not faithful to their husbands like women of other lands. They take and discard their husbands as they please, they have other freedoms also. Therefore, what I said was that the women of this region have certain arrogance. (24)

Madhavan deduces that with this freedom, women would not stay faithful to their husbands. He terms them arrogant, and thereby typecasts them. Indulekha advocates the position of women and attempts to convince Madhavan of the reality behind the picture he had in mind. It alarms her to see Madhavan being an educated and knowledgeable person passing such rude remarks on women. Indulekha accuses the mentality of the society that labels the male acquaintances of an educated married women as her lovers. She asserts that a woman could be independent and be amicable with other men without being infidel to her husband. In Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*(1990), she asserts how gender performativity is forced upon an individual and how he/she is dictated to perform in definite ways.

Sociological discussions have conventionally sought to understand the notion of the person in terms of an agency that claims ontological priority to the various roles and functions through which it assumes social visibility and meaning. (16)

The conventions have determined the ways in which a person belonging to each gender should perform, and those who don't accord to the prescribed ways are considered deviant and even dangerous. Thus, in *Indulekha* when Madhavan tries to prevent himself from crying so as not to masculinity, the expectation of men not to be crying gets revealed. Madhavan doesn't want to lose his masculinity by crying for Indulekha. Similarly, Unni in *Agnisakshi* doesn't spend much time with his wife as he doesn't want people to be gossiping of him spending a lot of time in the women's quarters. It is also expected from the women not to study much, and they are forced to consider, or made to believe marriage as the ultimate objective of a woman's life. Gender stereotyping is a major aspect that begins in the life of an individual right from, or even before his/her birth.

Panchumenon being the custodian of the property was reluctant to spend money from his savings. But he gave from his savings, a huge sum to his daughter Lakshmikuttyamma and her mother Kunjikuttyamma. Thus Indulekha was under his care, and he had built the house for Indulekha to live in after the death of his son Kochukrishnamenon. His authority of being Indulekha's guardian urged him to make the oath of not giving Indulekha to Madhavan. Panchumenon was aware of the relationship of Indulekha and Madhavan, and out of his anger after being provoked by the quarrel between Madhavan and him, he made the oath. The next moment did he feel regret, for he knew how determined a lady Indulekha is and if he couldn't fulfil his oath, it'd be demeaning to him. Panchumenon made the oath as if Indulekha was a property that is to be handed over to someone else. Thus, so as to drive away her attention from Madhavan, Panchumenon decided to seek a sambandam for Indulekha as suggested by Kesavannambudiri. Kesavannambudiri has convinced Panchumenon that the moment Indulekha lays her eyes on the suitor, she'll forget her "craze" for Madhavan and will be captivated by the man. He even termed it "Indulekha's tremendous luck!" and the "taravad's good fortune!" to have an alliance with the Namboodiri.

Madhavan and Indulekha have a conversation regarding the oath made by Panchumenon.

Madhavan: Was an oath taken here yesterday?

Indulekha: Yes, but do you know that the discussion and decision took place without consulting me!

Madhavan: Madhavi, why should anyone ask you? Shouldn't you conduct yourself according to valiammaman's wishes?

Indulekha: Yes, I should do as he wishes and that I certainly will do. However, in certain matters I can only do as I wish. Unfortunately, this matter of the oath is one of those.

(35)

Madhavan enquires Indulekha of the oath, and she informs him how she wasn't included in the discussion of making the decision even when the matter was concerned to the marriage of Indulekha itself. Madhavan asks her the relevance of informing her for it was naturally expected from a woman to obey the orders and decisions made by the elder males. To this question of Madhavan, Indulekha responds that it was right that she should accede what Panchumenon asks her, but in certain matters the discretion is hers. The conversation clearly demarcates how women are not supposed to voice their opinions and are expected to be servile

and submissive in nature. Even though Indulekha says that she should have to disobey the elders, at another instance she says how she'll request Panchumenon to accept her need to marry Madhavan. As a continuation of his quarrel with Madhavan, Panchumenon gets angry with Shinupattar as well. Shinupattar was Shinnan's father, and when Madhavan took Shinnan to Madras for education, Panchumenon gets infuriated and he orders the lands given to Kummini and her children to be taken away and he wanted to see them living like servants. Kummini and her children had equal rights on the property, but the power to distribute the property was vested upon Panchumenon who misuses his power and deprives them of money. Panchumenon also discusses with Govindapanikker, how Indulekha's reading choice corrupts her. He once saw her reading the story of a girl who was stubborn and who insisted on getting married to a man of her wish. The influence of patriarchy even on the reading choice of a woman is witnessed here, as men like Panchumenon wants women to read from the discourses that are traditionally accepted. The discourses are phallogocentric in nature, and thus when a woman reads these discourses her thoughts get shaped accordingly. Panchumenon and Kesavannambudiri visits Indulekha to discuss about the sambandam they've arranged for Indulekha with the Namboodiripad.

Kesavannambudiri: We have arranged a sambandam for you.

Indulekha: Who decided that?

Kesavannambudiri: Your grandfather himself.

Indulekha: All right, then let him decide.

Kesavannambudiri: Is this agreeable to you, Indulekha?

Indulekha: Is consent necessary for something that has already been decided upon? (53)

Indulekha was asked whether the sambandam was agreeable to her or not only after they had sent the invitation to the Namboodiripad. Indulekha curtly responds how unimportant her opinion is since the decision is already taken without consulting her. In most cases, women are unaware of the alliance arranged for them until it took place. Here also, Indulekha's consent was not sought after before sending the invitation. The case of Namboodiripad also is no different from Panchumenon, as when he heard about the beauty of Indulekha he decides to bring Indulekha to his house right the next day after their sambandam. It doesn't matter whether the woman is convenient with the decision or not, and he doesn't even consider asking the opinion of the woman he is going to have an alliance with. The Namboodiripad was fascinated

that he hasn't met a woman who knows English, and though he was sheer libertine in nature, he thought of not having alliance with any other woman again than Indulekha, after bringing her home after the sambandam. The sense of authority than marriage and other similar institutions gives men makes them assume importance over the other, and make decisions for the woman. But, as the Namboodiripad reaches the illam, Panchumenon feels confused whether Indulekha would like the man or not, and thus he attempts to convince everyone that he hasn't vowed anyone of handing Indulekha over to Namboodiripad. The final decision will be Indulekha's, whether to select him or not. The treatment of women similar to property is again presented as starting of a woman's alliance is shown similar to that of selling a property off. The difference in the behaviour of women and men can also be observed when the Namboodiripad reaches the illam, as the women stayed within their rooms and looked at the Namboodiripad through the windows while the men headed to the front of the house, by keeping Panchumenon in the front. Thus the hierarchy is manifested through the arrangement off the members of the house. In the case of the servant women, they hid themselves behind the banana trees and peeped from behind. Women aren't encouraged to come to the forefront, and thus, when the Namboodiripad arrived only the men were expected to do the activities, while women should stay indoors. As Kunjikuttyamma, Indulekha's grandmother, considers the alliance she feels that if Indulekha doesn't consent the alliance, no greater calamity could befall them. Kunjikuttyamma measured his worth based on his gold, and status and so she asks Indulekha to talk to him politely, and adorn herself with ornaments to impress the Nambudiripad: "Nothing more fortunate can happen to my child. If women become prosperous, they will make their taravads prosperous. Women should take good husbands – eventually it is wealth alone that counts; there is nothing greater than wealth" (86).

Kunjikuttyamma held the opinion that Indulekha should forget her fascination for Madhavan as the Namboodiripad is reach, and she tries to convince Indulekha that wealth is what matters the most. Many of the people believed that Indulekha was ready for the sambandam, and they blamed her of being capricious when she saw a man with some money. Some even held the opinion that even her education was for money, and no matter what education has she received, she was captivated by the Namboodiripad's wealth. Shankarashastrikal cursed Indulekha for easily forgetting Madhavan, and his doubt was solved even more when Kunjikuttyamma informed him how happy Indulekha was as she gave a golden *thali* to one of the servants.

Kesavannambudiri warns the Nambuthiripad of how Indulekha doesn't know to talk in a polite manner.

Kesavannambudiri: Indulekha does not know how to speak according to the established custom and manner.

Nambuthiripad: Having learnt so much English, doesn't she know even this? Even Meghadantan sayiv addresses me in the established manner. Never mind, if she agrees to be my wife, I will teach her all that. Let her speak in any manner now.

Kesavannambudiri: Yes, that is right. You are very wise!

Nambuthiripad: The moment she becomes my wife everything will be as I wish. (101)

The Nambuthiripad finds it strange when he heard this, but he felt that here impolite manner is due to her English education. The upper hand men are given in a social system is presented as the Nambuthiripad expresses how will he teach Indulekha of his ways, and mould her according to his wishes. This shows how women's emotions and perspectives are disregarded and the attempts of the male dominated society to assert themselves. He even felt it a mistake to teach women English, and it startled him to notice her self-representation using the first person pronoun "I". Even when he had decided not to go behind any other women, the moment he saw Indulekha's mother, he drew attracted to her. In her, he found good repartee unlike in Indulekha who spoke in an indecorous manner. Thus his approaches to everyone failed, he decided to start a sambandam with Shinupattar's daughter Kalyanikutty. Kalyanikutty was a young girl of thirteen years and a sambandam was fixed without her knowledge of it.

Indulekha: Has Kalyanikutty been informed of this matter?

Parvathiamma: I have not seen her. I do not know whether *jeshtathi* has told her. She seemed extremely happy.

Indulekha: It is a pity! Shouldn't that girl be informed when a sambandam is going to be started for her? (149)

The case of Kalyanikutty is different from Indulekha as the former wasn't aware of the sambandam till the moment it took place, and she was forced into the room where the middle-aged Nambudiripad was waiting for her like a tiger waiting for its prey. What the Nambudiripad found fascinating in her is her lack of English education, for he felt that the English education would make one insolent. The contrast for how the girl was locked into a palanquin and how the Nambudiripad entered his palanquin is to be noted, as the sambandam for that young girl became a process of being caged. When Madhavan came back from Madras

to hear the misinterpreted news of Indulekha's sambandam, he felt it to be the hypocrisy of women, and was triggered to leave Malabar and go for a journey. When Indulekha fell ill upon hearing the news of Madhavan's retreat, Panchumenon was ready to do penance for his oath and thereby permitting the marriage of Indulekha and Madhavan. For Indulekha, it was really a *swayamvaram* as the groom was the personal choice of Indulekha itself. *Indulekha* ends with the happy marriage of Madhavan and Indulekha, which was also supported by her grandfather.

The novel *Agnisakshi* has two main women characters, who are Thankam and Devaki Manmpalli. Both the characters had to undergo several ordeals in their life under different circumstances. At the beginning of *Agnisakshi*, Thankam is at the banks of the river Ganga. She saw her sister-in-law Devaki or Sumitrananda as a sanyasin and the meeting elicited a flow of memories of her past. As she saw Devaki, she felt to stay at the place for a longer time so as to arrange another meeting with her. Devaki, who hasn't requested anything to her son asked him to allow her to stay there. Women as always under constant guardianship is evident here. Women is considered the weaker sex and thus it is thought that they should always be under the authority of someone who is a male. The discourses like *manusmriti* attributes this authority to the men. After their reunion, Thankam recollected the day of installation of Devaki as the bride of the house. The process itself is similar to the activity of bringing an inanimate object to the house, and all the relatives and neighbours are invited to evaluate the features of the object. For the people of the *mana*, the succession of the tharavad depended upon the bride and it was for that and the rituals that a bride is being brought. The people who had come to the ceremony made remarks on Devaki's physical attributes and behaviour. They gave importance only to the external aspects and not on the qualities of one's character. The match was fixed as the horoscopes matched, and all that mattered was the status, horoscopes, and appearance. Unni introduced Devaki as a present for Thankam. The ascription of inanimate qualities is again made through this. Days after her marriage, Devaki realized that Unni married her only to keep the family going Unni always prepared for the other world, and thus he forgot about the life he had to live with his life in this world. Thus, due to Unni's beliefs Devaki had to sacrifice her needs of sex and motherhood. The *anthapuram* was controlled by the women who strictly adhered to age-old customs, and they were particular that the traditions should be followed. Devaki's brother was progressive and a revolutionary and being born in such a setup, Devaki found it difficult to cope with the situations in the *mana*. Unni's mother held the view that the union between a man and a woman should only be for the production of children. The Namboodiri men had opportunities to satiate their sexual desires by having multiple

sambandams with the women of other communities, while the Namboodiri women had no other way for that than through her husband. But here, women as declined only to the role of a child producing machine, and thus suppress their desires. The women in the house included Unni's mother, grandmother, and an aunt. The aunt was insane and her insanity was a result of her marriage with Muthaphan. Muthaphan had already had another wife and children, and thus he spent his nights at his previous wife's house. When it became a habit, the younger aunt would go to their house and asks her husband to come back. This always ended in a fight, and Muthaphan would slap her, in which the aunt finds solace as she could feel his touch at least when he slaps her. The women in the *mana* were also expected to read only the epics and religious texts. The reading choice of Devaki is questioned here, as the author creates a contrast between the bookshelf of Unni piled with Sanskrit texts while, Devaki's box filled with novels and poetry. Devaki felt her life at mana like that of a caged animal.

She was like a caged civet cat. She walked restlessly in the kitchen section, prayer room, and the grounds in front of the bathing house. If Ettan's mother asked her to do something, she would obey. After that, she would go upstairs and begin to read and grow thoughtful. (32)

It tortured Devaki more the lack of materials to read, than Unni's absence. Her brother used to provide her with journals and books, and when she was not supplied with enough of it she felt disoriented. Thus, Thankam used to give her the journals after Netyamma has read them. Once Devaki entrusted Thankam with the duty of posting a letter to her brother P.K.P, and that has to be secretly done, as P.K.P was a revolutionary, and he was thus declared an outcaste. Devaki was unable to act according to her wishes and was afraid of being caught in the act of sending letters. P.K.P had pronounced that the Namboodiri women should discard their umbrellas and should start wearing saris and blouses. When he was caught by the police and jailed for his revolution, Unni's family members examined the contents of Thethi's wooden box and tore the pages she had brought with her. Through the action, they are asserting that the women don't have privacy and that they cannot go against the wishes of the patriarchy. Within Thethi burned a volcano, which has been suppressed by the family.

Reading about her elder brother's speeches and deeds in the newspapers, she would say enviously, 'Thankam, I often think if only I had been a man. If I were a man, I would free not only my wife but all women. I would have given my life for the freedom of the country and for humanity.' (35)

Devaki felt restrained at Unni's house and she felt it would have been better if she were a man. P.K.P often wrote to Thankam to ask Unni to love Devaki since she is not a wooden doll. He even feels bad of having shared ideals of freedom and knowledge to her, and if she'd not known them and had read the traditional texts, she'd have find it alright to stay at her marital home. But her upbringing by her brother made her aware of the rights and therefore feel uncomfortable to be bound by the traditions. When Thethi cried upon hearing the news of P.K. P's detention, Aphan Namboodiri asked her to stop crying saying that the illam of her birth is no longer there. A woman has to leave behind her ancestral home to be a part of her marital house. The patriarchy thus devises plans to distance a woman from her close relatives. It was Netyaramma who consoled Thethi when she cried, and the ideas Netyaramma had in her head was P.K. P's which she had received from Thankam.

Aphan Namboodiri had established a sambandam with Thankam's mother Netyaramma in her prime, and Thankam was the only child that survived in their relationship. In Netyaramma's tharavad, men from prestigious tharavads sought liaisons, and women did penance and waited for suitable Namboodiris to approach them. Women are convinced to consider marriage or an alliance with a man as the ultimate aim of their life.

Aphan Namboodiri had been reluctant to have Thankam learn English; reluctant too about her being educated in modern ways. But, Netyaramma had insisted. In the days to come, Namboodiri or thampuran bridegrooms might not be available for their daughter. If they wanted a good bridegroom, she should be suitably educated. (26)

Netyaramma viewed the necessity of educating Thankam, for achieving the end of getting her married. Aphan was not willing to educate her since education was considered unnecessary by him. It was upon Netyaramma's insistence that she was sent to school. At school, she was fascinated by the world of books and the knowledge they provide.

Besides politics and romance, how many other things were discussed in her books! She wanted to study, wanted to pass with first class and to continue studying. She had wanted to pass the BA and the MA examinations. After that, get a job and be independent and self-sufficient. It was the lack of it that made people like Ettan and Edathi suffer so much. (40)

The idea of independence and self-sufficiency was imparted in her by P.K.P. Through their letters, he passed on to her information regarding various movements and his outlook as well. But as soon a Thankam completed her tenth education, many proposals came for her from well-

known thampurans. One of the alliances was fixed and Netyamma tried to convince her how good the groom is in his appearance and wealth. She explained her that it was always the women who improved the fortune of a family through suitable alliance. But, with the influence of P.K.P on her ideas, Thankam upheld her need to study further and be independent.

Recalling P.K.P Namboodiri's words, the sixteen-year old Thankam said, 'Amme, I too will improve our tharavad. But, it won't be through alms from Namboodiris or thampurans. I will study. Study more and come through successfully. And then, I will get an honourable job and improve the lot of the family. Do tell Father that before I achieve this, I will not marry. Chengannattappan is my witness' (43)

Aphan Namboodiri who was making arrangements for Thankam's wedding was offended to hear her demanding education. The male authority prefers women to be naïve and thus wants to prevent them from attaining knowledge. When Thankam expressed her confidence in being independent and improving the fortune of her tharavad, it sounded odd for women are supposed to improve their tharavad's fortune only through marriage. This provoked Aphan to lock her in the room, and prevent her access to the outer world. It was upon the insistence of Unni that Aphan finally accepted his request to send her to college. Aphan felt it the beginning of his degradation. His health began to deteriorate while he tried both to outcaste Tethikutty and arrange a remarriage for Unni.

During Thankam's college days, many incidents occurred and that included the retreat of Devaki to her ancestral home to attend her sick mother, Devaki's transformation into a social movement leader etc... Thankam wondered whether Tethi had such a powerful volcano within her that burnt the surroundings where its sparks fell. Even when Aphan expressed displeasure in educating Thankam, he was ready to forgive her, though not overtly. Thankam and Aphan struggled in the mesh of traditions and even during the time of Aphan's death couldn't she transcend these boundaries.

When Thankam saw Netyamma sitting quietly in a corner of the verandah wiping her nose, she understood for the first time how insignificant they were in this house. Her beloved father was on his deathbed. They could neither touch him, nor take care of him, nor even approach him. This man was no one to them, nor they to him. Netyamma hugged her daughter and wept, 'My beloved daughter, it's all over for us... everything... every single thing...' (70)

Netyamma knew the place of Nair women once the Namboodiri is dead. The woman and her children wouldn't have any authority over anything. Thus, she had procured enough wealth for their needs before Aphan's death, and after that they left to Netyamma's ancestral home. As the novel ends, Thankam gets married to an official and gives birth to her children, Unni dies of old age, Devaki renounces the world and assumes the name Sumitrananda.

The women in both the novels had to face distinct fates. For Indulekha, she got a life with the man she loved, while Devaki even though she was married lawfully to Unni couldn't find satisfaction in their relationship. Thankam was aware of her love for P.K.P and even in her old age she recognizes him to be the only man she had ever loved. But both the women Devaki and Thankam had to restrict their desires and wishes to comply the needs of patriarchy. They make attempts to breach the norms but had to meet an unfortunate end. Meanwhile, Indulekha voices her opinion without out transgressing her grandfather, and what she received was a happy union with the man of her choice.

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Chapter 4

Portrayal of Man-Woman Relationships in *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi*

Human beings are social animals, and thus relationships are inevitable among humans. There are a gamut of relationships practised, and it could either be natural or formed as a part of social or cultural practices. In the case of relationships between two people of opposite gender, one gender may attempt to dominate over the other based on their age, experience, knowledge etc...Our society being highly patriarchal in nature, naturally asserts poignancy to the males and thus, in a relationship which includes a man and a woman, the man usually assumes authority. The novels *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi* presents a number of man-woman relationships varying from the relationship between a husband and wife, to one between a father and a daughter. Society endows men with certain privileges, based on nothing but their biological differences, which in turn declines the status of women to the Other, while men will always be the Self. In the seminal text of Feminism *The Second Sex* (1949), the author Simone de Beauvoir argues how women are delegated to a position inferior to men.

No subject posits itself spontaneously and at once as the inessential from the outset; it is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One posited itself as One. But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreignpoint of view. Where does this transmission in woman come from? (27)

Beauvoir examines as to when did this delegation began. She identified men as the ones who subdued the women by relegating them to the status of “the Other”, and assumed the prominence of “the One” or the Self. Women are forced to be subjects of men, and the same mode of subjugation can be witnessed in the novels of O. Chandumenon and Lalithambika Antharjanam.

In *Indulekha*, the prominent man-woman relationship is between the title character Indulekha and Madhavan. They both are lovers, and had been acquaintances since their childhood. In their relationship though both are on almost equal footing, Indulekha has certain superiority over the other. Indulekha and Madhavan have received English education, and they both had been familiar with the modern ways of living. In their appearance as well, they well suited to one another. Indulekha was brought up under the care of Kochukrishnamenon, her maternal

uncle. Kochukrishnamenon was of the opinion that Indulekha should receive her education first and then should find a suitable husband for her. It would've been in his mind that Madhavan should be her husband, as he held a good opinion on Madhavan and was also aware of the affection between them. At first, even when they were in love with each other they didn't disclose it for varied reasons. Madhavan was continuing his education, and Indulekha didn't want her love to be a hindrance to his studies. As for Madhavan, he was aware of the long list of suitors waiting in demand for Indulekha, and they varied from rich landlords to tampurans. Madhavan was shy and was also perplexed about the love of Indulekha. Madhavan had been desperate as Indulekha hadn't divulged her feelings and he wanted her to be his wife. They spend their free time together playing chess or reading poetry, and during these moments Madhavan unconsciously expresses his innermost feelings to her. But Indulekha pretended not understanding his advances and evaded them. Once when they were playing chess, he expressed his discomfort as he couldn't concentrate on the game. He said that he might've been affected by a peculiar disease, and he asked Indulekha to sit with him in the couch. Indulekha declined his request saying that they weren't small children anymore, but were a young man and woman.

Indulekha saw Madhavan depressed in many instances, but even then she kept her love for him as a secret. The same Indulekha who prevented them sitting together, asked Madhavan to come over to her room when she saw him watching the moon. Then, Madhavan reiterated what Indulekha had said earlier and withheld himself from going to her room. When Indulekha approaches him he expresses his concern about how only men are being attacked by Kamadevan's arrow. Indulekha opines how women are weak creatures, and thus when Kamadevan's arrow attack them, they in turn have to attack the women themselves. Through this Indulekha indirectly alludes to him that he should disclose his love for her. Even when Madhavan loved her, he hasn't revealed it to her in the fear of rejection. Madhavan suggests her that the medicine for his peculiar disease is with Indulekha, and if only she agrees to be with him that he'll be cured. Madhavan catches himself oscillating between doubting whether Indulekha loves him or not. He feels women as a mystery, and he stereotypes women by categorising them as mysterious no matter how educated they are.

“Indulekha: Tell me what this frustration is.

Madhavan: I will. The reasons for this frustration are: one, you think that I have not reached a high position; second, you know that there are many wealthy men, many lords, and many kings who desire you.

[...] Indulekha: That is enough. You are indeed a clown – you are sure that I am in love with you but even then you assume that just because kings and lords want me, I will accept one of them and go against my love and feelings. It is really a shame, you are so stupid.” (24)

Madhavan was apprehensive since he feels inferior to the other suitors of Indulekha, as he doesn't have enough wealth while the others who seek her are from rich backgrounds. Thus the categorisation of women as both mysterious and materialistic can be observed here. Madhavan feels that Indulekha may go beyond her love for Madhavan when she indulges herself in the pursuit of money. Even after Indulekha admits her love, Madhavan accuse the womenfolk of Kerala as infidel to their husbands. The practice of sambandam vests enormous amount of freedom upon the women, as they could dissolve an unwanted alliance whenever they wish. Indulekha advocates this since she finds sambandam as liberating and that the narrow-minded people would always see an educated married woman's company with other men as illegitimate.

The affiliation between Indulekha and Panchumenon is a warm one. Panchumenon was Indulekha's grandfather. Indulekha was the daughter of the King of Kilimanoor and she was fostered by her maternal uncle Kochukrishnamenon till her teenage, and it was then that he died. After his death, Panchumenon built a house for Indulekha, and her mother to live. Panchu had great affection for Indulekha since it is with her presence that he coped with the death of his son Kochukrishnamenon. Panchumenon, by nature is a furious and short-tempered man, and it was only with Indulekha that he didn't lose his temper. Even the novel begins with a quarrel between Madhavan and Panchumenon, and infuriated by the dispute the latter takes an oath in which he promised not to allow the marriage of Indulekha and Madhavan. Panchu was very well aware of the degree of fondness they had for each other, and he also knew the stubborn nature of Indulekha. He felt sorry the next moment after he made the oath, and thought it to demeaning to discard the oath. Thus he decided to arrange a sambandam for Indulekha with Soorinamboodiripad. But even before the arrival of the Namboodiripad, Panchumenon declared it to others that the sambandam will take place only if Indulekha consents. Even when Panchumenon strongly wished the sambandam to take place, after seeing the deeds of the

Namboodiripad, he felt that he won't be a right choice for Indulekha. The Namboodiripad was a libertine, and had easily fluctuating desires for every woman he set his eyes on. Thus, when Indulekha declined the Namboodiripad and when he decided to start a sambandam with Kalyanikutty, Panchumenon was ready to approve that.

Before going to Madras in search of a job, Madhavan and Indulekha have a conversation on the oath Panchumenon has taken.

Madhavan: Was an oath taken here yesterday?

Indulekha: Yes, but do you know that the discussion and decision took place without consulting me!

Madhavan: Madhavi, why should anyone ask you? Shouldn't you conduct yourself according to valiammaman's wishes?

Indulekha: Yes, I should do as he wishes and that I certainly will do. However, in certain matters I can only do as I wish. Unfortunately, this matter of the oath is one of those.
(35)

Indulekha ascertains Madhavan that even though she is bound to obey her grandfather she has certain discretion in some matters. Indulekha is aware of Panchumenon's love for her, and neither does she want to hurt Panchumenon nor she wants to lose Madhavan.

Lakshmikuttyamma: I do not have any objection to my daughter going anywhere with Madhavan. My poor dear, for how many days have you been distraught. Even then, I fear that Father will be displeased.

Indulekha: You need not worry about that, Mother. My grandfather is a very simple man. He is also very fond of me. If I fall at his feet and cry he will listen to me and accept the fair request I place before him – I am convinced about that. (89)

Even though Indulekha had informed Madhavan that she would have to disobey Panchumenon in certain matters, she doesn't do so. She promises Lakshmikuttyamma that as her grandfather is extremely fond of her, he won't be able to disregard her request. Thus, the sambandam of the Namboodiripad with Kalyanikutty took place and the young girl was taken away in the pretext that it's Indulekha. When Madhavan returned from Madras, he had to confront the news of Indulekha's sambandam and he was left heart broken. Madhavan decided to go back where he had come from and then to commence a tour from there. Upon hearing the news of

Madhavan's retreat, Indulekha was hurt more because he believed her to have accepted the Namboodiripad, than of anything else. But, Panchumenon felt happy for he was already offended by the arguments put forward by Madhavan and he thought that things like this would happen to a rebel like Madhavan. Panchumenon had thought that Madhavan had left as he grew afraid of the oath taken by him.

Panchumenon could not witness Indulekha grieving in the absence of Madhavan, and when he was convinced that she would marry only Madhavan, he prepared himself to do penance for not ensuing the oath he had made. Panchumenon made golden images of each letters he had uttered while making the oath, and when the telegram informing Madhavan being found came, he believed it to be the effect of his penance. Indulekha, who saw no connection between the penance and the telegram felt it better to be left unsaid. Madhavan returned once again to Malabar and it was through the unspoken words they conveyed through their eyes that they talked the most. Finally, Indulekha was able to marry the man of her choice and hers was indeed a swayamvara. The intensity of love Madhavan and Panchumenon had in them for Indulekha was so much, but Madhavan failed to understand Indulekha much. He was startled to hear from his father that Indulekha and his mother are waiting for him at home. In the beginning, Madhavan failed to realize Indulekha's love for her, while towards the last even though she had admitted her love for him and promised him to be only his wife, Madhavan easily believes Shankarasatrikal when he misinforms him of the sambandam.

The two relationships which run parallel in *Agnisakshi* to those discussed in *Indulekha* are the marital relationship of Unni and Devaki Manampalli, and the relationship between Aphan Namboodiri and Thankam. Devaki was brought up by her progressive thinking elder brother Puthusseri Kuttan, and when she had to live at Unni's house she found it difficult. The *anthapuram* of Unni's house was ruled by women who stuck on to archaic customs.

Unni was a highly religious person, and though the couple loved each other Unni's stringent adherence to the traditions and customs prevented them from having a smooth relationship. Devaki often felt that the marriage between them happened only to keep the tharawad going. For the rituals, a wife is required and thus Unni married. The succession of the tharawad depended on Devaki, as Unni is the eldest son and among the Namboodiris only the eldest son is expected to marry. The younger ones should establish sambandam with other women, and they are not meant to provide for the children in those relationships. Unni was unable to spend time with Devaki since the tradition demanded him to read the almanac before entering the

bedroom. Aphan Namboodiri had begun to engage Unni in many matters of the *illam* and these engaged Unni most of the time, restricting him to spend time with Devaki.

Unni introduced Devaki to Thankam as a present that he is going to bring for her. But once the installation ceremony of the bride was over Unni didn't get enough time to spend with his newly wedded bride. Devaki kept on waiting for him, but the time he spent performing the rituals consumed their opportunity to be together. She felt isolated and the more troubled she was with the unavailability of materials to read than the absence of Unni. Devaki had in her, the knowledge and ideals of freedom instilled by her elder brother, and thus she felt like a caged animal within the rooms of the *illam*. The inmates of the *illam* were extremely traditional people and they found Tethi's behaviour unacceptable. Unni's mother was reluctant to accept the marriage and it was through Aphan Namboodiri's command that the marriage took place. The horoscope of Unni and Devaki matched, and thus nothing else mattered for them. Unni's mother upheld the view that the union between a man and woman should only be for the sake of producing children. Thus, Devaki had to suppress her feelings of lust which later in her life turns to the emotion she despised: 'I don't think Ettan loves anyone. He is afraid of everything and everyone. Aphan, mother, traditions – why, God himself! Like my elder brother said, if I continue to live here, I too might go mad with fear' (25).

Unni strictly obeyed the requirements put forward by tradition, and according to Devaki it was out of his fear of everything that he conforms to them all. Unni valued Brahmin *dharma* to a great extent and he also didn't want others to talk about him as always being in the women's quarters. Unni always considered the life of a Brahmin as a sacrifice, and thus he lived for the pleasure of others. During the time when Thankam had gone for her higher education, Devaki's mother fell sick. Devaki's elder brother, being a revolutionary and a person who doesn't follow untouchability, was declared an outcaste. Thus customs prevented her to return to her house, defying which she too will be an outcaste. Her mother fell sick, and Devaki was in dire need to visit her mother, when the people of the *illam* arose threats to outcaste her. Devaki determined to leave the *illam*, and thus she went to her home. Even though the husband and wife weren't together they loved each other despite their absence. Aphan's deteriorating health prevented Unni from calling Tethi back to the *illam*, for Aphan wanted to outcaste her and arrange a second marriage for Unni. But Unni was never ready for a remarriage. As Devaki moved out to join the social reformation movements, she belonged more to the society. Unni's brother Aniyam tried to bring Tethi back to the *illam*, but she said that she'd return to the *illam* only if Unni would come forward. But when Unni was informed of Tethi's reply, he asked

Tethi to come forward. The husband and wife had different notions of *dharma* and thus, their thoughts contradicted to each other. The illam began to disintegrate after Tethi's departure, and when years after Thankam met Unni he expressed how he was regretful of sacrificing many good things in his life for the sake of certain beliefs.

Ettan shook his head, 'No, Thankam. No. I know that you love me. There is no one else who loves me as much. But my time is over. For a few meaningless beliefs, I pushed aside the good fortune of life. But I received one thing in exchange. The instinct to love this universe through God. Today, I realize that Man and God are one and the same. With that, I have retrieved everything I gave up.' (99)

Unni feels satisfied that, even though he has lost many things he gained the realization of God. He began to sense the presence of God in everything. When Thankam invited him to accompany her so that they could go for pilgrimage in their old age, he declined it affectionately as for him the universe is the God, and he has found out that human beings and God are equal. In the case of Tethikutty, even after she renounced the common world and she kept the sacrificial fire in her ashram burning. She fed it with food, and for her the act was a sacrifice to Unni to whom she should have cooked food and served. The gender roles are deep rooted in the society where the activities are classified based on specific genders. Thus, Tethi was unable to control the feelings of her inner self, and thus kept the fire ablaze. Fire was important to Unni as well since he also invoked fire before taking his food, and he was not ready to give up his wife whom he had married fire as witness.

Thankam's relationship with her father Aphan Namboothiri is a troubled one. Aphan Namboothiri belonged to the Brahmin community, and the custom permitted Brahmins to have multiple sambandams with upper caste women. But the father is not required to provide for his children, but it was the duty of the child's maternal uncle to provide for the livelihood of the children. The children assume the condition of their mother, and in Thankam's case her mother was a Brahmin, and thus they were considered untouchables among the Brahmins. Despite their relationship being that of father and daughter, she didn't get the care and affection of her father as tradition restricted it. Even during the event of Unni's marriage when Thankam attempted to see the bride, the women of the house kept her at bay. Aphan Namboothiri loved his wife and daughter though his love didn't find outward expression. He built a house for them near his mana, but the women in the mana disliked it.

Aphan was strongly against providing education for Thankam, as he didn't want her to be educated in modern ways. It was upon the insistence of Netyamma that she was sent to school till tenth. But when she expressed her desire to continue her studies even after that, and be independent it grew Aphan angry. He slapped her and even locked her away in a room for many days. Even though a traditionalist, he loved her so much that he too didn't take food for those many days Thankam was inside the room. But when Unni finally requested him to send Thankam to college, he gave in considering it the beginning of his defeat.

At last, Thankam went to the college and when she came home on vacation, she saw Aphan's shadow silently listening to the tidings she shared with Netyamma. And while Thankam was laying on her bed, Aphan approached her without making any noise. He caressed her and kissed her, and then she realized that her father had forgiven her. After she returned to the college, one day Aniyam hastily reported her of Aphan falling sick, and when she reached the house she understood how negligible the importance they had at her father's house. She was not allowed to touch her father and even approach him even when he was in his deathbed. She has been treated in the same manner since her childhood, and the custom permitted the last rites to be performed only when the wife and child has left the house. Thus, the relationship between the father and daughter was a struggled one, and custom prevented them from expressing their love for each other.

In the relationships the text discusses, even when Unni and Devaki are married, they aren't given their private space, and tradition and customs always intruded their relationship. Meanwhile Indulekha and Madhavan loved each other, and despite the interference of tradition they tried to overcome its influence to head into a happy union. In the father-daughter relationship, Indulekha was brought up by her foster father and grandfather while the information regarding her biological father is not provided other than his social standing as the King of Kilimanoor. Both Thankam and Indulekha are products of Namboodiri-Nair sambandam, but both gets different treatment since they are brought up differently: Thankam by her biological father, while Indulekha by her grandfather.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

The analysis of the texts *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi* enabled a better understanding of the tradition and cultural practices of Kerala. The castes in India are widely classified under four categories: Brahman, who are priests by profession; Kshatriyas, who are the warriors; Vaishyas, who were the commoners and Shudras, the servants. In Kerala, in the hierarchy of castes, the Brahmins and Nairs are deemed upper castes, while the other castes are considered in the lower strata. The study of the texts is divided into three main chapters which deal three different aspects of the texts. They include the conflict between tradition and modernity, patriarchy and the identity of women, and the portrayal of man-woman relationship.

Indulekha depicts the life of a Nair woman and her relationship with a man Madhavan of the same caste. During that time, only sambandams with prestigious Namboodiri men were entertained for Nair women. Thus Indulekha's desire to marry Madhavan had to meet with certain trials. In *Agnisakshi*, the lives of both Devaki Manampalli and Thankam are presented. Caste plays the role of a villain in all the women's lives, and the conflict between tradition and modernity is high since caste is concerned. Indulekha stays within the limits of tradition with her modernist outlook, and she doesn't make attempts to outbreak the traditions. Instead she made use of a sustainable approach, thereby respecting both tradition and advocating modernity as well. Panchumenon had made an oath of not allowing the marriage of Indulekha and Madhavan, but when he saw the suffering and grievance of his dear granddaughter he compromised with his obstinacy and allowed their marriage. But both Devaki and Thankam, with their modern perspectives left tradition outright and met with undesirable fate. Even when Devaki had made several attempts to adjust within the household, the attitude of the people at her marital home was totally against her. She was left with no other options than to leave the house to assist her sick mother. The character of Devaki had to take certain revolutionary steps to continue her education, but when her father Aphan died she stopped her wanting to get education and be independent. In her case, Aphan Namboodiri forgave her even though he was against her getting educated. He felt that he was of no benefit for his daughter later in his life. But the fights she had made turned futile with the death of Aphan. Aphan's spirit began to deteriorate counting from Thankam's stubbornness to continue her education. In *Indulekha*, just like Indulekha had made attempts to respect tradition, Panchumenon reciprocated his

respect to modernity as well. Thus, a sustainable existence of both tradition and modernity is possible and may produce desirable effects when one doesn't attempt to dominate over the other.

In the third chapter, "Patriarchy and the Identity of Women", it is described how patriarchy influences the identity of women. Patriarchy has always been a dominating force, and it is capable of turning even women against women. Each woman is a part of the construction, and it is not easy to escape the mould of the construction that had always been there. The discourses are determined by people in power, and they decide what knowledge should be considered the right. The identity of women are extremely influenced by the patriarchal society which determines what knowledge should be propagated, and what should women read. In both the texts, it is evident that how a woman's reading choice is questioned and controlled by the male authority. The texts that they commonly suggest women to read are the epics. The Indian epics like *Ramayana* and other religious texts always treat and instruct women to be secondary to men. They also discuss the need of women to be faithful to their husbands, the duties a woman should fulfil as a wife, etc... Indulekha, being an educated and well-read woman was intelligent and sensible so as to make a proper decision on the choice of her husband. Panchumenon didn't want the marriage to happen only because of the quarrel that had stemmed between Madhavan and him. Devaki was restrained within the households of Unni and her identity was highly influenced by that of the behaviour of Unni. Unni was the victim of tradition and patriarchy, and his victimisation in effect made Devaki the victim. In Indulekha's case, eventhough she had the upper hand and decision making power in her relationship with Madhavan, she felt her identity questioned when Madhavan left her. More than her distancing from Madhavan, what worried her most was the fact that he had believed her to be unfaithful.

Betty Friedan in her poignant work *The Feminine Mystique*(1963) makes it a point on how women are bound primarily by the shackles of their own mind and spirit. Women had long been under the authority and control of the patriarchal society and way of living that the facts are manipulated in the way convenient to men.

But the chains that bind her in her trap are chains in her own mind and spirit. They are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices. They are not easily seen and not easily shaken off. (31)

In *Agnisakshi*, Unni's mother and the other women of the tharavadu were seen as opposing Devaki when she attempted to outbreak the customs dictated by the patriarchal society. The

presence of the influence of patriarchy is quite evident here, since Unni's mother held many of the ideals which were favourable to the male-oriented society. The physical union of a man and woman for pleasure was unpardonable to her since she was a part of the construction, and she had live her whole life like that, to cause any change that would've resulted in the betterment of the destiny of women. Even when Aphan was half-willing to bring Tethi back, it was Unni's mother who prevented such an act.

In the study of the man-woman relationships, in the "Portrayal of man-woman relationships", the marital relationship of Unni and Devaki of *Agnisakshi* is analysed. Their relationship is caught by the shackles of tradition and Unni being a strict practitioner of tradition was unable to spend time for her. While Madhavan and Indulekha had enough time to spend together, and they both reciprocated their love for each other, and were expressive with their emotions. Unni was afraid of everything and he didn't want to hurt anyone. So he kept pleasing everyone by sacrificing his own happiness even when he had loved Tethi.

The relationship between Aphan Namboodiri and Thankam is also analysed. Thankam and Indulekha were the products of Namboodiri-Nair sambandam, but both receive varied treatment from their house. Thankam was brought up by her biological father who was of another caste, and thus custom prevented the affection between them. Indulekha's biological father was a king, and beyond that she doesn't have any relationship with him. She was brought up by her foster father, and maternal uncle Kochukrishnamenon. After his death, she was under the care of her grandfather Panchumenon. Panchumenon who didn't spare his money for his sister was ready to built a house for Indulekha for he felt the love he had felt to his son to Indulekha. The practice of sambandam was prevalent in Kerala during the nineteenth century. At present it has declined to a non-existent state. It solely depended on status and appearance. The texts also discusses many other relationships that include the brother-sister affection between Thankam and Unni, and Devaki and P.K.P. In Thankam's case, P.K.P was the man she had loved, but such a relationship was not entertained by the community primarily because he was an outcaste, and then that they were of different castes. Even after many years of marriage, when Thankam sees P.K.P she recognizes that he was the only man she had ever loved. She sacrificed her wishes, and she too in a way conceded to the demands of tradition like Unni, and Aphan.

The study sheds light on the practice of sambandam, human relationship practised at that time, the power distribution in a matrilineal system of tharavadu. *Indulekha* and *Agnisakshi* are two

prominent novels in the history of Malayalam fiction. The novels written at a gap of almost a century, *Indulekha* discusses the story of a woman who apparently enjoys the freedom she desires, while the women characters in *Agnisakshi* are deprived of the freedom as enjoyed by their male counterparts. The character of Indulekha is developed by O.Chandumenon, not as the reflection of the society of that particular era, but she was the product of O.Chandumenon's sheer imagination to show it to the world, the necessity of educating women. Lalithambika Antharjanam portrays the real face of Kerala of the 1960s, and the life of the women belonging to the communities of Namboodiri and Nair. In reality, the fate of women didn't witness much significant changes, as even when Indulekha was provided as a model, the condition of the women remained almost the same when *Agnisakshi* was written. The role the works played in the renaissance movement of Kerala is vital. The provision of the right to education for men and women, women's liberation movement, and the introduction of English education contributed to an improvement in the status of the women, though they were not granted equal voice and rights as men. Many of the practices observed earlier, are no longer practised and thus the reading and analysis of the texts through multiple aspects give a better understanding of the past of Kerala. The different practice of the Indian caste system in Kerala is also analysed through the study of the practice of Namboodiri-Nair sambandam which privileges the Brahmin caste over the other and relegates every other castes below it, irrespective of the relations it may result in.

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