

## HISTORICAL VIEWS OF KINSHIP AND MATRILINEAL SYSTEM IN KERALA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper focuses on the origin, features, characteristics and theories related to the matrilineal system. This paper also makes an in-depth study of its introduction, reasons for the origin and advantageous of marumakkathayam and the historical views of kinship and matrilineal system in Kerala. This study in general demonstrates that social transformations and changes happened in the society are mainly in correspondence to the socio- economic developments, social demands and cultural requirements of the society. This study highlights the changing processes operating in the social order and institutions at various dimensions over time. The study shows that patrilineal and matrilineal system co-existed in Malabar a few decades back, especially before the 19th century and a cultural turn over in this regard happened mainly during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Actually the matrilineal system existed as part of the wider socio-cultural entity of Malabar. Kerala's matrilineal legacy is just one of those anomalies. The nineteenth century witnessed a social awakening of far reaching importance. The spread of western education and rational thinking brought about radical changes in the existing social practices and pattern of life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Customary Practice, Matrilineal, Patrilineal, Gender, Property Rights, Kerala, Colonial Law, Tharavad, Marumakkathayam*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Matrilineal system has historically existed in different parts of the world, although it was mostly restricted to isolated communities with in the non-Western world. The modern study of kinship can be tracked back to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century interests in comparative legal institutions and philology. Matrilineal is a line of descent from a female ancestor to a descendant in which the individuals in all intervening generations are mothers. In a matrilineal descent system, an individual is considered to belong to the same descent group as their mother. The features of matrilineal system are descent through mother, family name through mother, matrilocal residence system; husband lives in wife's residence and inheritance of parental property by daughter. The matrilineal advantages are the likelihood that children will have a closer relationship to their maternal grandparents and especially to their maternal grandmother than to their paternal grandparents.

The matrilineal system of Kerala was known by the name Marumakkattayam and it has been the dominant system of inheritance in Kerala. It is descent through the female line or through sister's children. In this system, a man's heir is not his son; but his nephew. The tharavad property is the joint property of all. Malabar was known throughout the world for its exotic system of marriage and family relations. The term Marumakkattayam came from Marumakkal- nephews and nieces. The word has been coined due to the unusual relationship between uncle and his nephews and nieces. This particular system is built upon women. This was a system in which women were central to all family relations and property rights

vested on women. Women and her children were the inheritors of the property.

Family and marriage always played significant roles in determining the life and status of women throughout the world. Kinship rules marriage laws and descent patterns are important criterion in the creation of women's life. Matrilineal system existed in Kerala during the last centuries. Marumakkattayam gave protection to women compared to their counterparts in patrilineal families. Women were the stock of the land title and it was through her that the tarawad name was transmitted one generation to another. She had a birth right over tarawad property and this lasted throughout her life. One of the major matrilineal castes that had existed in the Kerala was the Nair's. The Nair women and their children lived in the tarawad as the matrilineal house hold.

Marumakkattayam was mainly followed by all Nair caste, some of Ambalavasis, Mappila Muslims of coastal region and tribal groups. The similarities between of Muslim customs and the Nair matrilineal practice are strikingly similar in terms of kinship terms and practices. Nair's had a particular system of marriage within the format of marumakkattayam and was structured by the then existing land relations. Women's roles status images and symbols are important while dealing with the matrilineal system of Kerala. The study of family and marriage largely focused on the institution of marriage. One such marriage that found worldwide attention was that found among the Nair's of Kerala. There were two types of marriage for a Nair girl-talikkettukalyanam and sambandham. Talikkettukalyanam was performed before attaining puberty and when she attained maturity she entered into a sambandham union. The marriage system of Malabar was definitely related to the existing land relations to conceive of significance of Nair marriage; first of all we should have a picture of the system of marriage that had existed in the Nambuthiri community

A distinctive feature of the social organization of Kerala till recently was the prevalence of marumakkattayam or the matrilineal system among certain castes and communities. It involved inheritance and succession through the sister's children in female line. The antiquity of the system has been a theme of controversy among scholars. The traditional view propagated by the Brahmin aristocracy and expounded by the authors of the Keralaolpathi is that marumakkattayam is of hoary antiquity and the makkathayam or the patrilineal system of inheritance was unknown to ancient Kerala and that marumakkattayam came in to vogue at a later period in Kerala history under the impact of some compelling forces. The most important feature of matrilineal system was the joint family. Under the joint family the eldest male member of the family was the manager of the property and all over members of the joint family got their maintenance. In these joint family though women is the actual owner of land, on her behalf the eldest male member manages everything. The joint family under the matrilineal system is known as tarawad and formed nucleus of the society in Malabar. A big tarawad was composed of several numbers of residences and vast land property. Some tarawad enjoyed quasi-judicial privileges which kept the cultivating population its thrall. The present study is confined to two land owing communities of Kerala, namely nair's and mappila's of Malabar, who followed this system. How these two communities were influenced by the socio-economic developments in Kerala is traced. The impact of colonial interventions in Kerala introduced changes and these changes are analysed in the light of available sources. Special importance is given to the light of women. An attempt is made to trace the living conditions and status enjoyed by women of these two communities. This study attempts to analyse the status of Nair women and their so called "celebrated" freedom they enjoyed in their tarawads. There was a notion regarding nair women that, they unlike their counterparts in other castes, were free to take decisions on various issues including their marriage. In a patriarchal Indian society this was in conceivable. But this notion seems to be dwindling in the light of certain other sources. Status of women in the family and their rights were under the strict control of the eldest male member of the family, the karanavar

## **METHADODOLOGY**

In this present study, historical methodology is used for analysing the source materials and arriving at historical inference. The methodology adopted in this study can be characterized as critical, analytical, descriptive and interpretative. The nature of the study needs consultation of archival materials for conducting these studies both primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources include biographies, autobiographies, newspapers and archival sources. The secondary sources are English published works; Malayalam published works, articles, and journals and unpublished PhD theses. Wherever necessary and relevant, a historical and deductive method is resorted to in order to reach conclusions pertinent to the present thesis.

### **Sources**

The present study is based on primary and secondary sources. Interview gave valuable information about the colonial modernity and social reform movement in of matrilineal family in Malabar. The books available from archives used to get information about Malabar. Secondary sources from libraries also used for more information about matrilineal system. The advent of protestant Christian missionaries in the beginning of the 19 century marked a turning point in the history of Kerala. In their zeal for spreading education, abolishing slavery and forced labour, fight for women's liberation and

eradication of caste difference and un-touch ability. They became precursors of social reform movements in Kerala. The Basel Evangelical Mission played a significant role to bring social change in the 19th century Malabar. The paper also discuss with the changes in society and the decline of marumakkathayam. Marumakkathayam which was the strength of joint families in Kerala got challenged by the post 16th century developments. These developments make many changes in matrilineal system in Malabar. This studies on the attribute the legal interventions of colonial and indigenous states as responsible for bringing the end of marumakkathayam without considering certain internal factors.

One of the important developments during the period was the organized trade after the advent of the Europeans. Contrary to the earlier centuries this period witnessed organized trade under Portuguese, Dutch and British administrators. This enabled the local people to enhance their economic position. Indigenous trade and commercial relations introduced money economy. There was an urge for self- earned income among them .This self- earned income which was given to wives and children of the male members of joint families automatically weakened the matrilineal system.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To explore the origin of matrilineal system in the Nair community.
- To unravel the theories of marumakkathayam
- To understand its relation to polyandry
- To analyse the reasons for the origin of this system
- To formulate and present the findings on marumakkathayam

## ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

The origin of the matrilineal system is a moot point in Kerala history. The period of its origin is keen subjects of controversy. According to scholars, makkathayam or patrilineal system was the original system of inheritance in Kerala. The early Cheras, the Ays and the Kulasekharas followed the makkathayam. K.P.Padmanabha Menon asserts that it began in Kerala only in recent times due to some special circumstances unknown to us. None of the foreign travellers who visited Kerala has mentioned the existence of the marumakkathayam till the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

### Relation to Polyandry

Some scholars are of the opinion that some tribal people in Kerala had followed polyandry and it gave rise to the matrilineal system. This statement is of doubtful validity. Marumakkathayam is found among the Kshatriyas, the Vellalas and the Muslims also, but polyandry was never practised by them. At the same time polyandry was uncommon among the Buddha's and Jains of Kerala and all of them follow marumakkathayam.

It has been suggested by some that the Tamil society in Kerala in the Sangam age was inclined to give prominence to women and that kalavu was symptomatic of freedom for women, which led to matriliney in Kerala. It must be remembered that fidelity to the chosen man was a cardinal trait of the Sangam age. Hence it was not at all a legacy from the Sangam age.

There was a touch of matriliney among the Sathavahanas who were more or less contemporaries of the Sangam Cheras, according to them, the mention of the mother's name along with that of the king indicates the matrilineal system. Some scholars hold the view that marumakkathayam was introduced to prevent partition and destruction of family property and keep the Nair tharavads intact.

## THE TRANSITION TO THE MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

Elamkulam cites a few instances of the patrilineal system giving way to the matrilineal system. Pandalam royal family, the early Chera kings of the Sangam age, the Aye kings followed the patrilineal system in the beginning but their descendants follow the matrilineal system. These examples clearly prove that due to the force of compelling circumstances, people under the patrilineal system might change over to the matrilineal system. All the available pieces of evidence, positive and negative indicate that the marumakkathayam had not been adopted in Kerala before the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. it is logical to think that the introduction of marumakkathayam in Kerala was a gradual process. The records now available indicate that the matrilineal system spread from the North to the South. It first emerged in the Malabar and Cochin areas where the nambudirie's had the greatest power and prominence.

## REASONS FOR THE ORIGIN OG MARUMAKKATHAYAM

The basic factor responsible for the origin of marumakkathayam in Kerala was the desire on the part of the nambudiri's to strengthen and propagate the proprietorship over the landed estates. With that aim, they introduced the practice that the eldest son alone should marry from their own community. Naturally he alone would inherit the entire property. An inevitable consequence was that the younger sons of the nambudiri family had to make sambanda alliance with the families of Nair's. This practice compelled the Kshatriyas and Nair's to adopt the matrilenial system of succession. In course of time, it became a uniform custom among the members of these two communities. Thus, marumakkathayam in Kerala was a

by-product of the capitalistic ambition of the nambudirie's. It was the abnormal circumstances created by the Chola-Chera war of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. that led to the decline of the patrilineal system and the adoption of matrilineal system in course of time.

The political and religious ascendancy of the nambudiri Brahmins during the Chera-Choila war, their rise to economic ascendancy as the jennis of Kerala, the introduction of the compulsory military service and the formation of the chaver army to meet the threat of the Chola invasion were some of the compelling circumstances which brought about the adoption of marumakkathayam by the people of Kerala in the 11th century A.D. As religious heads the nambudiries made use of the opportunity to propagate new doctrines of morality during this period as priests and religious heads, the nambudiries succeeded in getting the assent of the rulers and chieftains to this system. The subsequent social, political and economic changes made it the dominant system of inheritance in Kerala. Royal influence also helped to popularise this system. From the 14th century onwards, the kings of Kerala seemed to have encouraged the marumakkathayam. The kings of Venad encouraged and perhaps compelled people of several castes under their sway to adopt this system. As a result of various influences, this system was adopted by a number of religions and castes in Kerala.

The matrilineal kinship and family system in traditional Kerala society assimilated most of its features from the social and economic relations of production that existed during the post 11th century in the region. As in other parts of world, it must have had its origins in the primitive social structures. In most parts of peninsular India the process of agrarian expansion and expansion of trade had ushered in the emergence of state with all its ritualistic and functional performance. The society had started evolving as distinct patriarchal entities. But in the case of Kerala, we notice that the continuation of the matrilocal structure late into the medieval times.

Malabar was known throughout the world for its exotic system of marriage and family relations. Matriliney of Malabar was known by the name marummakkattayam. The term came from marummakkal – nephews and nieces. This was a system in which women were central to all family relation and property rights vested on women. Though it is fundamentally associated with Nair communities of Kerala, even the Nambuthiris, Pothuvals, Mappilas etc., had followed this system. The elder male was considered the head known as karanavar and the entire assets of the family was controlled by him as if he was the sole owner. The joint family under the matrilineal system is known as tarawad and formed a nucleus of the society in Malabar. A big tarawad was composed of several numbers of residences and vast landed property.

Some tarawad enjoyed quasi-judicial privileges which kept the cultivating population in its thrall. A big tarawad continued to be composed of several residences; the more land it had, often not just its economic status. Most relations of production in interior were cantered on the households of the landed elite. There was a proverb in Kerala of nineteenth century states that 'even if one is a Nair one should be born in a taravadu'. In a way, this provides an important clue to understanding and privilege. A popular and the more powerful it was however the real test of a tarawad in country. Significantly, inheritance rules were an expression of the practices of propertied groups, even though poorer Nair's would also have followed matrilineal kinship. For instance, the muthal sambandham, or the ties of property, that characterized the relation between the kindred within a tharavadu would have had no resonance in the lives of the poorer Nair's. It was traditional belief that family members should not perish even if a member of their family dies. The goal of matriliney is to keep the tarawad at any coast. Every child is born at mother birth place. Since the tarawad is joint family every members has to right its property. No one has the right to ask for the part but, if everyone in agrees, the part will take place. Many

people live together in a tarawad. But the right always belong in to the women, but the power with the man.

Administration of tarawad was in the hands of the eldest male. Transfer of property will only take place with the consent of the nieces. No one has the right to remove him from his headquarters except in case of any family tragedy. The women do not have the right to earn her income or spend on her own. In traditional Hindu society, the joint family, the caste the linguistic group and village were the main units. Until recent times, the Malabar economy mainly depended on agriculture where little specialization of labour and scientific knowledge was essential. Under such an environment a stable way of life with tradition and custom as its dominant feature could be developed, and the joint family in its ideal form existed, identification with certain group each individual certain security and as well as some psychological satisfaction. The indispensable basis for the joint family was accumulation of the property. The land owned by the family promoted the family unit. Land ownership was also enjoyed by prestige value.

The tarawad as a joint family fulfilled a large range of varied functions. It was more family–centered and was characterized by intimacy and mutuality of interests. One of the most important problems of Kerala history is the origin of the system of inheritance and succession known as marumakkattayam. Makkattayam or the patrilineal system is prevalent in most parts of India. How then, did inheritance and succession to property in Tulunad and Kerala become different from that in other places. In Tulunad history, this question is easily answered. Marumakkattayam or the matrilineal system commenced there only at the end of 13th century and it received royal reorganization at the hands of the Saluva kings only after 1444. This has been established beyond any possibility of doubt. Even now, more and more people in Tulunad abandon the makkattayam system and embrace marumakkattayam. The origin of marumakkattayam in Kerala is, however, not so clear as in Tulunad hence it is even now a theme of controversy.

K.P. Padmanabha Menon, the doyen of Kerala historians has dealt with this question in detail. He was firmly of the opinion that marumakkattayam began in Kerala only in recent times due to some special circumstances unknown to us now. His view was based on the following arguments. Among Nair's the major share of a man's self- earned property is bequeathed to his children and a latter performs the funeral rites for their father. If Nair's were marumakkattayis from the beginning, the children would not perform these rites for their dead fathers. In no society does the practice exist of persons having no right to the property performing funeral rites for a departed soul. Moreover, none of the foreign travellers who visited Kerala before the 14 century was the first foreign visitor to refer to the peculiar laws of inheritance in vogue in Kerala after him Ibn Batuta, Abul Razzak (1442) Nicolo Condi (1444) and others all mention this peculiarity. Since visitors till the 14th century are silent on this on this point, while visitors it logical to assume that till the 14th century, the system of inheritance in Kerala was patrilineal as in other countries. Conclusion based on such negative evidence, need not, of because always be correct, but when the views of men like B.A Saletore and K.P. Padmanabha Menon who spent long periods of time in research in the history of Tulunad and Kerala of the prince among historians of ancient Tamil Nadu, P.T Sreenivasa Ayyengar, coincide in this matter they merit serious considerations.

### **SOME THEORIES**

Sociologists and anthropologists like Engals, Morgan and McLennan have put forward the theory that in the early stages of human history, the matrilineal system was the common basis of inheritance and succession and the patrilineal system evolved only later. The matrilineal system prevailed in all countries till the commencement of the age of civilization which marked the introduction of the patrilineal system. Wester Marck observes that it is not possible to say anything

definite about the system of inheritance in the primitive and pre-historic period about which we have no recorded history. In the light of these counter arguments, it is not possible for us to accept the view of Engels with regard to the origin of marumakkathayam in Kerala.

The advocates of various theories seek to explain the origin of marumakkattayam in their own ways. Those who subscribe to the brahmanical theory attribute to the system a divine origin by arguing that Parasurama, the legendary founder of Kerala, ordered sudra women 'to put off chastity and the cloths that covered their breasts' and do their best to satisfy the desire of the Brahmins. This argument served the interest of the Brahmin aristocracy admirably well because among the namboothiris only the eldest male members could marry from within the caste and all the junior members who were condemned to lie long bachelorhood had to consort with women of Nair families in the vicinity of their illams. A loose union known as sambandham which was in the nature of concubines came into existence and the Namboothiris could enjoy all the pleasure of matrimony with none of its obligations. The fear of divine wrath prevented the senior male members of Nair families from questioning the right of the namboothiries to cohabit with their women and sambandham from marriage consequently came to have to general acceptance.

The brahmanical theory like the Parasurama legend relating to the origin of Kerala is more fanciful than convincing as an Explanation of the origin of marumakkattayam. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai argues that marumakkattayam existed in Kerala till 11th century. His argument is in the special circumstance of the 11th century, after the outbreak of in Chera- Chola war makkattayam become a marumakkattayam. There across many criticism regarding Kunjan Pillais argument. He could fail to prove that makkattayam existed among the rulers of Kerala before the Chera- Chola war. There are two more theories regarded to matriline system in Malabar. The first of these may be called the 'brahmanic theory'. According to this theory the origin of marumakkattayam is ascribed to the nambuthiri Brahmins of Malabar. Brahmins of Malabar, usually called nambuthiries. Their laws strictly ordain that only the eldest member of a house hold shall be left free to enter lawful wedlock with a woman of their own caste, the younger members being left to shift for themselves in this matter.

A second and less commonly accepted theory in regard to the origin of marumakkattayam is what may be called the 'property theory'. According to this theory the system was instituted in order to secure the property of the Nair families intact. A system of valid marriages and male kinship would have meant partition and consequent dissipation of property in these families; and having this in view, the founders of the system declared property impartibly which would have been impossible had the system of kinship been reckoned exclusively in the male line. Hindus and Muslims were mainly following the matriline system in Malabar. The nomenclature "mappila" in general used for Muslims of Malabar. The organization of family, kinship system and customs of inheritance are different among mappilas to such an extent that mappilas of interior southern Malabar follow patrilineal kinship, whereas their mappilas in the coastal region ranging from south Malabar to north Malabar, and south Canara predominantly followed matrilineal descent and inheritance or marumakkattayam.

The matrilineal Muslims of Malabar who converted to Islam with the influence of Arab trading merchants in the Indian Ocean. The similarities between of Muslim customs and the Nair matrilineal practices are strikingly similar in term of kinship terms and practices. Behind this, there is a history of conversion, political dynamics within small kingdoms and trade in the Indian Ocean. Matrilineal custom let us begin with of the institution of tarawad or matrilineal joint family.

Mappila tarawad functioned as an exogamous community held together by the relations of real or fictive kinship. Members are related to each other through two ties called *mudhalsambandham* and *pulasambandham* ties. *Pulasambandham* implied the observance of common rituals at the event of birth and death. The kin bound through *pulasambandham* are called *attaladakkam* heirs or the heirs who inherit the property at last in the absence of immediate female heirs. *Mudhal sambdham* implied the observance of common rights over property and that consists of the kindred not sever their affective and economic ties with their natal homes. Second children irrespective of sex belonged to the member's joint family. Third women inherited the matrilineal joint property. One can understand the Nair matrilineality only in the background of the marriage system of the two dominant castes in Kerala – the Nambuthiri and Nair. There were two types of marriage of marriage for a Nair girl – *talikettukalyanam* and *sambandham* .

*Talikettukalyanam* was performed before attaining puberty when she attained maturity she entered into a *sambandham* union. The marriage system of Malabar was definitely related to the existing land relations, when a female child grew up and was to attain puberty it was the concern of the mother to conduct her *talikettukalyanam*. The Nair's of one village or two adjacent villages formed a neighbourhood group of six to ten lineages. Each lineage held linked by hereditary ties of ceremonial co-operation with two or three lineages in the neighbourhoods. These linked lineages were called *enangan*. Every ten or twelve years each lineage held a grand ceremony of *talikettukalyanam* during which immature girls of one generation was ritually married by men drawn from their *enangan* lineages. It was an elaborate ceremony for four days.

The *enangan* tied a *tali* around the neck of girl. After this each couple was secluded in private for three days and here sexual relation might take place (regional variation existed). A girl belonged to an age group of 5-10 or even less than that was expected to have sexual relation. This was a highly ridiculous ceremony. On the fourth day the *enangan* left the house and had no further obligations to the girl. *Talikettukalyanam* was essential for a girl. It marked various changes in the social position of a girl; she was given the status of a woman. After the *tali* rite she should observe all the rituals of a Nair woman and was to be addressed only as *amma*, in public. It was an occasion to display the pomp and glory of *tarawad*. It was an expensive ceremony that lasted for four days. *Tarawads* had to sell or mortgage property to meet the expenses of the ceremony and *tarawads* plunged into huge debts. *Sambandham* was an informal mode of marriage system followed by *nair's*, *kshatriya's* and *ambalavasi's* with *nambuthiri's* in what is the present day state of Kerala. All of these were matrilineal communities.

Bound up with the system of *marumakkattayam* was the institution known as '*sambandham*' the loose from marriage which entails no responsibility or legal obligation on the part, of '*husband*' towards his' wife and children'. Whoever studied about Nair's criticized the *sambandham* relations as it created no perpetual relationship between man and women. *Sambandham* ceremony was very simple – a *pudava* was given to the woman as gift by the bridegroom. Neither party to a *sambandham* union there by a member of the others family and the offspring of the union belong to their mother's *tarawad* and have no sort of claim to the share of father's property. If a Nambuthiri *janmi* begins a *sambandham* with a Nair woman, it was not possible for his to take her to his *illam*. Hence women and her children remained in their own *tarawads* , where they had right on *tarawad* property.

One of the major concerns of the scholars who dealt with Nair marriage was that of polyandry. During sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was a practice among Nair women to have three or four husbands as well regular husbands. One of the main points projected by the scholars was that in the case of *sambandham* relations women had the right to decide their partner. But in practice it can be seen that it was the decision of the *karanavan* . 'Women' could give her

opinion but it was not the girl who was getting married but her mother. If the karanavan desired to have a relation with a nambuthiri, women were forced to enter into a sambandham union regardless of his age, physique, etc. Here there was no option for a woman other than being obedient to the karanavan. In the same manner if karnavan had some misunderstanding with a women's husband, she was forced to end the relation. Here also women's choice never turned up. In earlier days the concerned Nabuthiris had a salary. The ladies who belong to Nair had to be proud in their concern. The dowry is the necessary culture for marriage of Nambuthiris. The son of elder brother also had the right to do the funeral procedure of his father and of the afters. Sons have no right in the properties of fathers, who born in sambandham. The elder Namboothiri was polygamist, the elder Namboothiri was known by the name moose. The variations of the sambandham are the pudamuri, vastradanam, uzhamporukkuka, vitaram kayaruka etc., which are local expression hardly understood.

The meaning of this phase which means to marry is understood throughout Kerala in the same way and there can be no ambiguity or mistake about it. Thirandukalyanam, thalikettu kalyanam and sambandham were the essential rites of passage in matrilineal woman's life that shaped not just her but the entire Nair community. Both thirandu and thalikettukalyanam were puberty rituals. Both celebrated female fecundity and fertility albeit in slightly different ways.

The Nair's consider the members of their mothers tarawad only as related to them by blood and however distant the degree of the relationship, marriage between members of the tarawad does not take place. They do not consider their fathers family as related by blood to them. Being matrilineal relationship comes only from and is calculated through females. Marriage between members of tarawad (even distantly related) was incest, because the couple were related by blood, Exogamy was but a minor corollary of the wider concept of kinship. There were no taboos against cross-cousins marrying, because they belonged to different tarawad and were outside the kinship circle. Cross cousins were the preferred mates as well. The members of the same tarawad observed pula (ritual pollution) on occasions like death or birth in the family and upon receipt of the information of death (or birth) in the family, entered into a period of ritual pollution. They would not eat with nor touch other Nair's, enter the temple or other places or the bathe in the public pools of their caste. The stricter death pollution (pula) and the milder birth pollution (valayma) cut off the tarawad from participation in the social life of the caste. It isolated the members as a group, set them apart in a special and dangerous ritual condition, which had to observe taboos for their own and each other's safety.

## **RESULTS**

The adoption of the Marumakkathaym brought in its trail certain important consequences. It was a kind of socialistic pattern of family life. The thatavad became a cohesive unit and each member had a place in the organization and management of the family. It contributed to the social solidarity and economic well-being. But, in course of time, evils crept in and weakened the solidarity of the family. The chief defect of the system was that it gave rise to frequent disputes among the members of the tharavad. In many cases the high-handedness of the karanavar became intolerable. Some, times the karanavar denied the junior members, the right of education and share of the property. He would build his own nest at the expense of the taravad property.

The revolt of the younger generation disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the tharavad. Under this system, the conjugal union of a Nair female with a male sanctioned by custom was not regarded by courts as legal marriages. As a result, there was no legal obligation on the part of the husband or the father to support his wife or children in any way. The Nair acts of Travancore and Cochin have gone a long way in wiping out the evils of this system. The Hindu succession act

of 1956 gave equal rights to Hindu men and women to inherit the property. Monogamy also became compulsory for all Hindus. Now the Nair's and Ezhava's have virtually become makkathayis.

## CONCLUSIONS

Major changes began to ensue in the descent system in the nineteenth century due to a number of legislations, social mobility, opportunities for education, introduction of market oriented economy and diversification of caste bound occupational structure.

Thus a number of outmoded social institutions get disintegrated and transformed along with the patterns of family units, marriage pattern, authority structure and rules of inheritance of property. Later on, independent India found a number of legislations which are related to the major social institutions like marriage, family and kinship. The shift altered the locality and practices of the people and disturbed the novel structure of performance and other religious observances. Along with the abolition of marumakkathayam system, marriage from within the caste group set widely as a norm among the upper caste groups.

Status of women and the nature of marriage are closely related. Usually it is the pattern of marriage that determines the nature of family and the role of women in it. Women were central to marumakkathayam and the system entrusted several responsibilities on her. Women were responsible for rearing their children as the partner had no such legal obligation. There was no room for the recognition of the relationship of husband and wife and of father and child. Women of marumakkathayam families differed from their counterparts in patrilineal families because even after her marriage right and claim to property of tarawad was not altered. More over her children irrespective of their sex belonged to her husband and his group. Among Nair's because of the concern with boundary maintenance as essential feature of the caste there were definite mechanisms to ensure that women chose their males only from among accepted levels of caste.

As general presumption it seems to be true that women in matrilineal societies are not under any intensive and oppressive control. On the other hand that woman, the owners of tarawad property, was strictly under the control of the eldest male member of the boundaries created by males. Even the sexuality of Nair women hegemonic ideology that period was that of the patriarchal Nambuthiri's. In such an ideological frame work women would not be given indefinite freedom or rights. The vigour of the society along with various legal enactments helped in this respect. As a result of this, changes and transformation happened in the traditional agrarian relations at wider level and legislation of marriage, rights of children to properties etc. occurred. The power of karanavar in the matrilineal system collapsed with the implementation of the Marumakkathayam Act of 1933. However, it is seen that the power shift mainly occurred in the economic sphere and the religious sphere remains. Unaffected the responsibility of the father and husband in the family system got prominence with the passing of the Hindu Succession Act of 1956.

There was much demand to abolish these outlandish practices from society. In 1925, when shove came to push, the queen of Travancore, the indomitable Setu Lakshmi Bayi signed the historic Nair Regulation Act. The customary law of inheritance was codified by the Madras Marumakktheyam Act of 1932, Madras Act No. 22 of 1933 published in the Fort St. George Gazette on August 1933. The system of inheritance is now abolished by the Joint Family System Abolition Act of 1975, by the Kerala State Legislature.

Moreover it is seen that gendered stratification in decision making power prevails even at the family level, but its rigidity dissolves corresponding to the nuclearisation of the family, participation of women in income generation etc. There for, decision making in most of the dual-earner families, found to be more or less egalitarian than families where the earner is only educational status have an important place and these resources would generate a social stratification where there is no hierarchy with regard to gender or economy.

The study argues that to ensure a gender balanced society the settlement of division of labour and family responsibilities equally for women and men are imperative. The study points out that women's labour force participation increased significantly now days and the gap between women and men participation is narrowing down. The diversification in economic spheres also helped the female members to reach the higher crest of the work force. The increase in women labour force participation has been an input on the way to gender equality both at residence and in the work place. Male dominance or male oriented inheritance of property and rights in societies has regularly been recognized as a particular state affecting largely women status especially, social economic, religious and political status. Actually male dominance was the net result of patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, men's control of economic resources and so on.

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