

Safeguarding Women's Rights and Dignity in Kerala: The Role of the Press in the Pre-Independence Period

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Abstract

Malayalam newspapers played a transformative role in Kerala's social reform movements, particularly in advocating for women's dignity and challenging oppressive caste traditions. Though early journalism had limited influence during struggles like the Channar Revolt and Achippudava Samaram, during the latter half of nineteenth century newspapers became powerful tools for social change. Publications such as Kerala Panchika, Mithavadi, and Malayala Manorama exposed social injustices, mobilizing public opinion and reformist action. Journalists like Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, Mitavadi Krishnan and V.T. Bhattathirippad used the press to challenge patriarchal norms, denounce caste oppression, and push for gender equality. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Malayalam women's magazines played a crucial role in addressing women's issues and advocating for their rights. Keraleeya Sugunabodhini marked the beginning of this movement, followed by publications like Lakshmi Bhai, Mahila, Sarada, Sreemathi, Sthree, Mahilaratnam, Muslim Vanitha, Vanithakusumam, and Sumangala. These periodicals not only reflected prevailing ideals of womanhood but also provided a platform for discussions on education, social reform, and empowerment, contributing significantly to women's integration into public discourse. Malayalam journalism evolved beyond reporting to become an active force in shaping societal progress, cementing its role as a catalyst for change.

Key Words: Caste discrimination, subjugation, Malayalam Newspapers, Dignity of Women, Kerala.

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I. Introduction

In the 19th century, Kerala had a highly rigid and hierarchical social structure, with Brahmins (*Namboothiris*) and Nairs holding dominance over land ownership and religious institutions. Lower-caste communities, including Ezhavas and Dalits, faced severe discrimination, denied access to education, temple entry, and economic opportunities. Women, especially from marginalized groups, had minimal rights and were subjected to restrictive customs, limiting their independence. This caste-based rigidity created a stagnated society where progress was nearly impossible. Superstitions, untouchability, and ritualistic restrictions reinforced inequalities, preventing social mobility. Customs like *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal inheritance) shaped family structures but did not guarantee gender equality. The absence of reformist ideas kept Kerala bound to outdated traditions. Regardless of caste differences, women faced relentless oppression—upper-caste women were restricted through rigid domestic confinement and enforced purity norms, while lower-caste women endured systemic exploitation, including forced labour, social exclusion, and vulnerability to sexual violence.

Several newspapers and magazines circulated in Kerala since the last half of the 19th century by the Christian missionaries and natives of Kerala challenging and opposing evil social customs, caste and religious superstitions. The spread of news culture in Kerala can be considered the beginning of the Renaissance in Kerala. In Kerala, Press had created a good platform for public reactions by moulding the reading public (Jeffrey, 2009). Along with it, an invisible reading public, who were mostly illiterate and often tied to the soil, evolved. They realised their inner strength and dignity as human beings. This self-realisation placed these groups actively fit into place in societal discourses and gave momentum to society. In this context, the press raised its voice against the then-existing social evils and inequality and denial of human freedom to lower caste people. Press created a textual space for the formation of public opinion and the creation of new reading public in Kerala society. Malayalam journalism, which began in the middle of the 19th century by Christian missionaries intending to propagate Christianity and European Enlightenment values, outgrew its infancy and reached trustworthy journalism by the end of the century.

The press is undoubtedly the most powerful and proficient mechanism for preferred and progressive changes in society. It is vital in creating awareness of social emancipation and awakening among the people of Kerala. The press provided a common platform to discuss the critical issues of the masses and matters of public importance. It has a far-reaching influence on the public sphere of Kerala society. Newspapers successfully used their editorial pages for this purpose. Newspapers and periodicals focused on reporting news related to the need to uplift the depressed class. They have directly or indirectly supported many struggles and agitations of the people for their rights and dignity. It is evident from the interferences of the press in reporting, criticising and reacting to rulers and authorities on various agitations and revolts led by the lower class and suppressed in Kerala.

II. The Restriction and Subjugation of Women in Traditional Kerala

In traditional Kerala, women's lives were shaped by a deeply patriarchal society, where their roles were largely confined to domestic spaces. Education was largely inaccessible to them, and oppressive customs such as child marriage and ill-treatment of widows were rampant. In traditional Kerala, lower-caste women endured systemic oppression that permeated every aspect of their lives. Their exclusion from public spaces and fundamental rights reinforced their inferior social status. Many Dalit and tribal women were subjected to untouchability practices, which dictated not only where they could go but how they presented themselves in society (Bhaskaranunni, 1988). In some regions, they were forbidden from covering their upper bodies, a humiliating rule designed to symbolize their caste-based subjugation. They were denied access to temples, wells, and roads frequented by upper-caste individuals, forcing them into physical and social isolation. The mere presence of these women was considered polluting, further restricting their ability to interact with the dominant caste groups. These customs ensured that lower-caste women remained economically and socially disadvantaged, trapping them in cycles of poverty and exclusion.

In traditional Kerala, upper-caste women, particularly those from the Namboothiri Brahmin community, lived under strict patriarchal control that severely limited their personal freedom (Bhaskaranunni, 1988). Their lives were dictated by customs that prioritized family honour over individual freedom, confining them to the household and restricting their interactions with the outside world. Mobility was heavily regulated, with women expected to remain indoors, rarely stepping beyond the boundaries of their homes. Even when they ventured outside, they were required to cover themselves with palm-leaf umbrellas to avoid being seen by men. This rigid confinement ensured that they remained dependent on male family members, with little opportunity for personal growth or social engagement.

Marriage customs further reinforced their subjugation. The *Sambandham* system, a form of marital arrangement, often resulted in polygamous unions where older men married multiple young women. These relationships were frequently short-lived, leaving many women abandoned and socially vulnerable. If an upper-caste woman was suspected of infidelity, she was subjected to *Smarthavicharam*, a humiliating public trial that determined her fate. If found guilty, she was excommunicated, stripped of her social identity, and forced into destitution. Education was another area where upper-caste women faced severe restrictions (Gopalakrishnan, 2012). Intellectual pursuits were discouraged, and their primary role was confined to managing household affairs. While men in their families engaged in scholarly and religious studies, women were denied access to formal education, reinforcing their dependence and limiting their ability to challenge societal norms.

III. Press: a catalyst for social transformation

The emergence of the press in Kerala was deeply intertwined with the arrival and influence of Christian missionaries. Missionaries played a crucial role in introducing printing technology to Kerala, recognizing its potential to spread literacy and awareness. The establishment of printing presses, such as the CMS Press at Kottayam in the early 19th century, marked the beginning of Malayalam journalism. Missionaries actively published newspapers, periodicals, and educational materials, promoting progressive ideas, social reforms, and women's empowerment. Their efforts in translating and printing religious texts eventually expanded into secular and reformist publications, catalysing discussions on education, rights, and societal change.

Newspapers and periodicals played a crucial role in spreading ideas of modernity and driving social reform. Early Malayalam newspapers, influenced by missionary initiatives, became platforms for advocating gender equality. They challenged oppressive traditions, called for women's education, and encouraged their participation in public life. Newspapers like *Jnananikshepam* and *Nasrani Deepika*, initiated by Christian missionaries, not only educated readers but also raised awareness about the importance of women's rights. The synergy between the press and missionary-led social movements reinforced the spirit of Kerala's renaissance, ensuring that the demand for justice and dignity for women was not just a fleeting cry but an enduring legacy. During the latter half of the 19th century, several magazines emerged that specifically addressed women's issues and highlighted their needs. The first Malayalam women's magazine, *Keraleeya Suguna Bodhini*, was published in 1892, paving the way for a wave of similar publications. In the early decades of the 20th century,

numerous women-centric magazines, such as *Lakshmi Bhai*, *Mahila*, *Sarada*, *Sreemathi*, *Sthree*, *Mahilaratnam*, *Muslim Vanitha*, *Vanithakusumam*, and *Sumangala*, gained prominence. These periodicals were closely aligned with contemporary notions of the ideal woman and were designed exclusively for female audiences (Vinayan & Raj, 2019).

Early Women's Magazines and Their Influence

The first Malayalam women's magazine, *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini*, was established in 1888. This marked the beginning of a movement where periodicals became a medium for discussing women's rights, education, and societal roles. Other significant publications included *Sharadha* (1904), *Lakshmi Bhai* (1906), *Bhasha Sharadha* (1914), and *Mahila Ratnam* (1925). These magazines were often owned, edited, and authored by early feminists in Kerala, making them instrumental in shaping public discourse. While these magazines covered topics such as cooking, art, and decoration, they also engaged in deeper discussions about women's education, social mobility, and dignity. They provided a counter-narrative to the dominant patriarchal ideology that sought to confine women to domestic roles. The publications recorded the responses of the emerging modern Malayalee community, particularly its women, to the notion of the "ideal Malayalee woman". This was crucial in challenging entrenched societal norms and advocating for women's rights.

The press played a vital role in empowering women by giving them a voice in public discussions. Many of these magazines were run by early Malayali feminists who sought to redefine gender roles and push for progressive changes. The content of these publications reflected the caste-class nexus and patriarchal ideology that influenced Kerala's colonial modernity (Lelkar, P. B. 1999). By highlighting issues such as education, employment, and social justice, these magazines contributed to the broader movement for women's empowerment. The first volume of *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini* featured *Sthree Vidhyabyasam*, a poem by Kerala Verma Valiyakoyi Thamburan, which underscored the importance of women's education in a society where they faced systemic marginalization (Krishna Kumari, 2010). *Sarada*, the second women's magazine, dedicated its pages to various aspects of women's lives, covering education, beauty, cooking, health, literature, and drama. Its *Sthreelokam* (Women's World) section regularly featured important issues concerning women, ensuring a space for discussion and engagement. An article in *Sharada*, titled *Malayalikalum Sthree Vidhyabyasavum* (Malayalis and Women's Education) by K. Padmavathiamma, strongly advocated for women's education, emphasizing its role in shaping capable homemakers. She highlighted the importance of English education for women and pointed out that, in countries like Europe and America, women enjoyed equal educational opportunities and freedoms alongside men. Padmavathiamma stressed that national progress depended on improving women's conditions through education and urged the government to establish specialized schools and prioritize women's education (Krishna Kumari, 2010). *Mahilaretanam*, another women-centric magazine published in Thiruvananthapuram in 1916, provided a public sphere for women to express their talents and skills. Although this magazine primarily focused on women's issues, its content was largely contributed by renowned male writers such as Kumaran Asan, Ulloor, and Moorkoth Kumaran, reflecting their support for gender equality and women's integration into society. Ramakrishna Pillai further reinforced this idea in his article *Sthreekalum Pathrapravarthanavum* (Women and Journalism), where he praised *Sarada* for addressing women's diverse talents, concerns, and challenges. He discussed how women could contribute to journalism, emphasizing that writing on fashion and lifestyle could serve as a viable source of income. He also noted that, in countries like the United States and Great Britain, women dominated press literature and enjoyed both economic and social advantages. Through his article, Pillai encouraged women in journalism and invoked the European proverb, "*The hand that rocks the cradle will rule the world*," to inspire their participation in the field (Krishna Kumari, 2010).

Vakkam Abdul Khadar Maulavi took a significant step in promoting Muslim women's education through *Muslim Magazine*. He invited scholars to contribute insightful articles on the subject, emphasizing that women's enlightenment through education was vital for societal progress. He advocated for the indispensability of public education and stressed that women's growth and cultural development had a greater societal impact than men's. His efforts sparked a wave of revolutionary thought among the Muslim community in Travancore, with his newspapers playing a crucial role in advancing this cause (Aboobacker, 2018). Mathrubhumi newspaper and Weekly were very careful in exposing the weaknesses and difficulties of women in society. An article in *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, '*Muslim Streekalude Avasathakal*' exposes the plight of Muslim women in the community (Mathrubhumi Weekly, 1937).

Newspapers played a key role in driving progressive change among Brahmin women, who had long been confined within their Illams. Exposure to periodicals like *Yogakshemam* broadened their understanding of the world, leading them to advocate for their rights. In 1929, a Brahmin women's meeting in Karunagapalli called for the abolition of polygamy and urged Brahmin men to marry within their own caste. They also resolved to organize an All-Kerala Brahmin Conference. *Malayala Manorama*, in its editorial *Antharjenangalude Unercha* (Awakening of Namboodhiri women), supported this awakening and urged society to extend full support to their cause (Malayala Manorama, 1929). *Malayala Manorama* also raised its voice

against the dowry system in the state through its editorial (Priyadarsanan, 2014). *Sthree Dhanam* (Dowry) on 15th March 1905 and *Sthree Dhanam* on 5th September 1906 were examples of this. An editorial published by Malayala Manorama *Sthrikalum Sammadhidana Avakasavum* (Women and Voting Rights) points out the need to grant voting right to women for social equality and to stop atrocities against women folk. In connection with the *smartavicharam* of Kuryedath Tatri, Mammen Mappilla published an editorial, '*Smarthavicharathinnu Edavaruthunnathinte chila Karanangal*' (Some reasons to the smartavicharam), exposing the problems related to the *smartavicharam*. Malayala Manorama strongly opposed this inhuman practice (Malayala Manorama, 1905)

Right to dignity of women: The involvement of Press

The Channar Revolt, popularly known as *Maaru Marakkal Samaram*, was the pioneer movement for the women dignity lead by Nadar women in Travancore. They intended to get the civic right to wear upper-body clothes to cover their breasts. In 19th Century Kerala, lower caste women were not permitted to cover their upper body in public places. This was considered as the denial of their dignity and created discontent among women, which led to their objection. Channar women hid their breasts and appeared in public streets and markets with their breasts covered (Rajan, E. 2019). The movement they preceded came to be known as the Upper Cloth Revolt. Another incident that was brought to the attention of the public was the *Achippudava Samaram*. *Achippudava Samaram* was the agitation by lower caste people for the right to wear a particular type of smooth white cotton cloth with a beautiful golden border. Lower caste people, especially Ezhavas, were the weavers of this cloth. Even though Ezhavas weaved such clothes, they had no right to wear them; instead, only higher-caste women had the right to wear them (Saradamony, K. 1980). The agitation started when the higher caste people harmed some Ezhava women who wore this particular cloth. Moreover, lower-caste women were not allowed to wear dresses below their knees. Such dressing to the bottom of legs was dressed by the women of higher castes as a mark of distinction (Devika, 2005). If anyone violates this rule, they will be punished brutally. Once, an Ezhava woman wore *Achippudava* and walked through the paddy fields in Kayamkulam as a sign of protest. Soon the woman was attacked and harassed. This led to the outbreak of the agitation, and it was led by Aarattupuzha Velayudha Panicker in 1858. Malayalam journalism was in its infancy stage at the time when the *Channar Agitation* and the *Achippudava strike* started. Therefore, the press could not make effective interventions at that time. But by the end of the 19th century, newspapers began to protest against social injustice and human rights strongly. But the *Achippudava struggle* became an inspiration for further struggles for the rights and was highlighted in the newspapers as a symbol of struggle for women dignity and social justice

During the temple festival at Sri Padmanabha temple, the Nair women of some families should escort the temple procession without covering the upper part of the body. In 1902, Swadesabhimini Ramakrishna Pillai wrote an editorial in the *Kerala Panchika* requesting the King of Travancore to stop this practice, and he mentioned that it creates a bad image of Nair women among other castes (Rajan, E. (2019).

The Kallumala agitation in Travancore is a landmark in the social history of Kerala. It was a fight to protect the modesty of the women and to attain the right to wear whatever clothes they wanted. It was one of the first attempts of the untouchable community against evil social customs. Pulayas, Pariyars and such inferior castes were prohibited from wearing new or clean clothes. Before wearing new clothes, lower-caste people had to smear them with soot to make them look old and dirty, reinforcing caste-based discrimination. They also strung together smooth stones and glass pieces to create Kallu and Mala, necklaces that symbolized their subservience. In some cases, these stone necklaces even served as a covering for their upper bodies, highlighting the extreme restrictions placed on their clothing choices.

Ayyankali found these ornaments to be explicit signs of slavery and subservience. He asked the Pulaya community to abandon the Kallu and Malla, the symbols of slavery and servitude (Velayudhan, M. 2018). As a result, Kallu and Malla were abandoned in various parts of Kerala. In Perinad, a meeting was conducted by *Sadhu Jana paripalana Sangam* to discard the Kallu and Malla (Chentharassery, 2013). Gopaladasan was the chief organiser of this meeting. Several meetings were born in the different parts of Kollam, like Prakkulam, Thazava, Anchalumoodu, and Karuva. After successfully conducting these meetings, the Pulayas decided to meet in Cherumoodu in Perinad on 24th October 1915. The Nair feudal lords disturbed the meeting, ultimately leading to a bitter clash between Nairs and Pulayas. When the Pulaya youth were attacked by the Nairs, the Pulaya women came to the rescue of their men. They attacked the offenders with sickles (Panikkassery, V. 2003).

It became the need of the hour to bring about a change in the chaotic situation and pacify the conflicting caste groups in the region. A *Sarva Samudaya Sammelanam* (All Community Conference) was convened on 10th December 1915 to provide a platform for voicing concerns and asserting the social rights of the downtrodden masses (Panikkassery, V. 2003). Changanassery Parameswaran Pillai and C Raman Thampi were at the forefront of conducting the meeting. The meeting also had the support from the government. After the end of Ayyankali's speech in the meeting, Changanassery Parameswaran Pillai, the president of the meeting, sanctioned the discarding of *Kalla* and *Mala* on behalf of all those who were present there. Amidst applause, two *Pulaya* girls

were called into the stage. They were clad in *Rouka*, a kind of Blouse. Ayyankali told them to remove their *Kalla* and *Mala*, and the girls took the sickles that were tucked into their waist cloth and cut off the *Kalla* and *Mala*. Thousands of Pulaya women who gathered also did the same and made a five-foot pile of stones within a minute (Velayudhan, M. 2018). The *Mitavadi* reported this as a great gathering for social change. An unpleasant incident took place after the meeting: A lower caste woman was stopped on the road by an upper caste man, and he cut off her ears for discarding the *Kallumala* (Zachariah, 1987). *Mitavadi* (1916) reported this incident and expressed grief and shock.

In 1942, during World War II, a group of Australian soldiers were stationed in Kochi. On February 16, they entered the home of Koder, a Jewish merchant and a member of the Cochin legislative council and looted his shop. The next day, February 17, the soldiers attacked a group of female students who were on their way back from school. The atrocities of the Australian troops were brought to light by Mathrubhumi which published an editorial titled "Kochiyilevellapattalakkur" (Rajasekharan, 2021). Although the government inquired about this incident, the report was against Mathrubhumi, resulting in its ban from 26th March to 2nd April 1942.

Marriage-related Issues among Namboothiris and involvement of Press

In traditional Kerala society, gender and caste played a significant role in shaping social hierarchies and personal freedoms. While women were often regarded as the "fairer" sex, societal structures were far from fair to them. Among the most affected were Namboothiri women, who endured severe restrictions due to rigid customs surrounding marriage and family life. The traditional *Sambandham* system, practiced among Namboothiris and allied communities, often placed women in vulnerable positions. Unlike men, who could have multiple partners, women were expected to adhere strictly to monogamous norms, leaving them with little control over their lives. Many Namboothiri women faced isolation, social stigma, and limited mobility, with their futures dictated by their families and the prevailing customs.

Marriage expenditure was also high, and the unaffordable dowry system has pushed many impoverished Namboothiri families into trouble. Those who could not pay enough dowry remained unmarried even after the age of forty and had to live in the interior of their *Illam*. It led to the state of affairs of one Namboothiri having many wives. A description in this regard was provided by *Malayala Manorama* (Priyadarsanan, 2014). The marriage system prevailed among the Namboothiri community, which permits only the eldest son of the family to marry from his own community, leading to occasions when the age-old Namboothiri, in his 90s, married young teenage girls. The Namboothiris usually married two or three times. This eventually led to the breakdown of their families. Many of the young Namboothiri girls have become the wives of the aged and many of them became widows at younger age Namboothiris while most remained as spinsters. The life of widows was highly miserable. They were not permitted to attend public functions or to wear neat clothes (Devika, J. 2005). *Malayala Manorama* came forward to support the cause of Namboothiri women. *Malayala Manorama* published an editorial *Antharjanagalludeunercha* (*Malayala Manorama* 1929 June 6) appreciating the reform movements started for the upliftment of Namboothiri women. *Malayala Manorama* wholeheartedly supported the Namboothiri Bill introduced in Cochin legislative council and highlighted the speech of Parvathy Nenmenimangalam (*Malayala Manorama*, 1932).

V.T. Bhattathirippad utilised the medium of the press to criticise several Namboothiri customs like *Sambandham*, Gender Inequality, Dowry and Male dominance. *Udbuddha Kerala*, started in 1937 under his editorship, upheld the above-stated anti-struggle. Through it, he ruthlessly attacked ill-treatment meted out to women of the community. He encouraged widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage. He urged, through the press, the Namboothiri youth to marry women of their own caste so as to avoid spinsterhood in their community (Sheeba, K. M. 2006). Kummini Krishnan Namboothiri strongly protested against the heinous customs that prevailed among the Namboothiris. He severely criticised the observance of *Sambandham* in a meeting of *Yogakshema Sabha* conducted on 24th September 1920. He openly announced that the Sabha should be committed to ending the practice of *Sambandham*. He argued that those still practising *Sambandham* should be boycotted from society (Yogakshema, 1920). The progressive section of Namboothiri youth stood for the reforms in the community and advocated for endogamy, and vehemently opposed *sambandham*. Yogakshema meeting discussed the marriage of Mullappally Aphin Namboothiri, who had married a Namboothiri girl. As the younger member of the community, he had no right to marry a Namboothiri girl. So, the marriage was against the prevailing custom in the Namboothiri community. The couple was denied to enter into the *Illam* by the Karnavar. (Ganesh, K. N. 2004) A concurrent faction was also in progress among the Nair community for endogamy. They also asserted the rights of the wife and children for the property of the husband or father. The clamour for reform grew and the 14th Conference was held at Chengannur under the Presidentship of Mathur Vasudevan Namboothiripad, passed a resolution permitting *Parivedhanam*.

The Namboothiri social stigmas were exposed through the literary writings of the period. *Unni Nambudiri*, in its editorial titled '*Rajadharmathepatti*', criticised those who have opposed the reform of the Namboothiri community (Unni Nambudiri, 1923). Yet, in another article, *Unni Nambudiri* takes a stand against all those who were against the Cochin Namboothiri Kudumba Regulation. The article titled

'*ItharamBandhukkalilinnuRakshikkane*' criticised the opinion of leaders (Unni Nambudiri, 1926). It attacked the views of PaliathKunjunni Achan and BrahmasriKuroor Narayanan Namboothiripad. The official organ of the Nair Service Society, '*Service*', reacted against the Nambudiri Kudumba Regulation presented in Cochin Legislature. It argued that the freedom of the people was curtailed. Among the Nairs, this criticism shaped a request for social reform. It was in tune with the reform urges of other communities.

VT Bhattathiripad continuously advocated for the upliftment of Brahmins and worked earnestly for the revival of the Namboothiri community. His work *Rajneerangam* was to expose the difficulties faced by Namboothiri women. His play *AdukkalayilinnuArangathekku* exposed the inherent weakness of society. Through his writings, he strongly protested against the system of marriage among the Namboothiris. Lalithambika Antharjanam's *Agnisakshi* depicts a woman's struggle against traditional rituals. V.T. Bhattathiripad's '*AdukkalayilinnuArangathekku*' was staged in 1929 on the occurrence of 22nd Anniversary of Yogakshema Sabha, and it highlighted the mainstreaming of women in the society by breaking the outdated traditional rituals (Malayala Manorama, 1920). Other milestones in this category were those of M. P. Bhattathiripad's *Rethumathy*, *Aphante Makal* by MuthiringotBhavthrathan Nambudiripad etc. A new generation of thinking within the Namboothiri community emerged, opposing many of the practices prevailing in the Namboothiri community. They raised their concern through their writings. *Nambudirimarude Durnadappu* of A.K.T.K.M. Valiya Narayanan Namboothirippad severely criticised the *Sambandham* practices that prevailed in the Namboothiri community during that time. MozhikkunnamBrahmadathan Namboothirippad, in his article '*PenkidangaludeNarakamochanam*', criticised the traditions and practices of *Namboothiris* as barbaric (Puthuppalli, R.985). M.RamavarmaThampan's article named '*Unni NambudirimarudeoruUlbodanam*' raised queries to Namboothiri youths. It wants to know whether they are satisfied with their present status

IV. Conclusion

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Malayalam newspapers played a crucial role in advocating for women's dignity and exposing oppressive social customs in Kerala. While early journalism had limited reach during movements like the Channar Revolt and AchipudavaSamaram, newspapers later became powerful platforms for social change. Publications such as *Kerala Panchika*, *Mitavadi*, and *Malayala Manorama* reported on injustices that had long been ignored, sparking debate and reform. In 1902, *Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai* openly criticized the practice of forcing Nair women to escort temple processions with uncovered upper bodies, urging the Travancore monarchy to abolish it. Likewise, the Kallumala agitation in 1915, which led Pulaya women to discard their stone necklaces in protest against caste oppression, was covered by reformist newspapers, ensuring widespread awareness. By the early 20th century, the press had evolved into a forceful advocate for reform, with writers like V.T. Bhattathiripad and Ayyankali using journalism to challenge patriarchal traditions, denounce caste oppression, and promote women's rights. Malayalam women's magazines of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were instrumental in shaping public discourse around women's rights and social reform. Beginning with *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini*, followed by *Lakshmi Bhai*, *Mahila*, *Sarada*, and others, these publications offered women a platform for intellectual engagement. They addressed critical issues like education and empowerment, encouraging women's participation in broader societal movements. Malayalam journalism evolved beyond reporting to become a driving force in societal progress, actively shaping public discourse, pressuring authorities, and mobilizing activism. Through this transformation, press not only informed but also played a pivotal role in Kerala's history, reinforcing their influence as a catalyst for meaningful social change.

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