**SUICIDE AMONG WOMEN IN KERALA:**

**A HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL**

**ANALYSES (1956-2010)**

***Major Research Project***

*Submitted to the University Grants Commission*

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**Preface**

The project entitled “**SUICIDE AMONG WOMEN IN KERALA: A HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSES (1956-2010)”**attempts to undertake a comprehensive investigation of the socio-historical perspectives of suicide among the womenfolk in Kerala. It is a macro as well as micro level study on the socio-economic impact of suicide with special reference to Kerala.Suicide is a universal phenomenon that had its repercussions in Kerala, the God’s own country which is situated at southern most part part of the Indian subcontinent. It is a crime of self murder causing virtual death and destruction to one’s own life. It is aganist the laws of God, man and nature. Usually it is mostly caused through frustration and despair. It is an action resorted by the cowardice not by the courageous people. Despite the high literacy rate and other positive impulses, Kerala is not an exception.

The state of Kerala is having the highest suicide rate since 1984. Thesuicide continues as a social malady that deserves the immediate invention of the governmental and non-governmental organisations for the betterment of the society. Women folk of Kerala who once held a predominant position were greatly marginalised and became the victims of several atrocities including domestic violence that forced them to think in terms of suicide.

So far there is no attempt to investigate the socio-historical base of suicide among the womenfolk in Kerala. The historians and scholars who dealt the history of Kerala mostly left this great socio-historical catastrophe unnoticed. The antiquity of suicide in Kerala can be traced from very early days.However, as a fraction of total suicides, violence against women – such as domestic violence, rape, incest and dowry – accounted for less than 4% of total suicides. It is a pioneer study to unravel the history of suicide in Kerala at its corrct socio-historical perspective. The study is largely based on a variety of documentary sources supplemented by non-documentary sources including interviews, questionnaires and field studies.Data about the incidents of suicides have been collected from the periodical reports published by the National Crime Records Bureau, New Delhi and State Crime Records Bureau, Thiruvananthapuram.

At the outset I record my sincere gratitude and indebtedness to the University Grants Commission, New Delhi for granting the needed financial assistance towards the completion of such a challenging project. For the completion of this project, I have been supported bythe scholars and veterans from the different stratasof society. The sources were collected from the different libraries and research centres in India. Among them special mention should be made about the National Archives of India,New Delhi; State Archives of Tamilnadu, Chennai;State Archives of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram; Jawaharlal NehruUniversityLibrary, New Delhi; DelhiUniversityLibrary, Delhi; Department of HistoryLibrary, Kariavattom; Kerala University Library; State Central Library; Centre for Development Studies, Ulloor, Thiruvananthapuram besides the crime records from the National Crime Records Bureau, New Delhi and State Crime Records Bureau, Thiruvananthapuram.I express my heartfelt thanks and respect to Dr. V.Sathish, Head, Department ofHistory, University of Kerala, Kariavattom, Thiruvananthapuram who remained a perpetual source of support. I am very much grateful to all the faculty members in the Department ofHistory, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram and my fellow teachersin the Department ofHistory, Government Women’s College,Thiruvananthapuram for their valuable support at the different stages of the work.

**G.Suraj**

**Introduction**

The land of Kerala,the garden of India and the God’s own country is situated in the extreme south-west of Indian sub-continent.[[1]](#footnote-2) It has been well-described as the brightest land.[[2]](#footnote-3) It forms an irregular triangle leading its apex towards Cape Comerin. It is situated between 8º 4’ and 10º 22’, north latitude and between 76º 13’ and 77 º 38’ east longitudes.[[3]](#footnote-4) Kerala in geographical appearance diminishes its width towards the southern end. Itformed the southernmost part of the west-coast of India.The coastal strip is a low country, a region of small abounded hills of varying size and shape intersected by long narrow valleys.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The land which is covered with dense plantations of coconut palms constitutes the most important wealth of the land. The whole surface is having an appearance of waves. A series of low hills and valleys traversed from east to west by numerous rivers. The southern end of the tract is studded with clusters of houses, palmyra groves and extensive paddy fields. It commanded an impressive topography which generated in the viewers’ mind a perception of an ineffaceable natural beauty and vigour of life. It came to be known as a fairy land.

The word ‘suicide’ derives its origin from the Latin term *suicidium.* Suicide is "the act of taking one's own life".[[5]](#footnote-6) In Indian languages it is popularly known as *atmaghata.*Views on suicide have been influenced by broad themes such as religion, honor and the scope of life. The ancient Greeks treated suicide as an appropriate solution to any stressful situation such as dishonour, depression, loss of love and painful conditions in old age. The Romans also treated suicide as an acceptable solution. Judaism and Islam condemned the practice of suicide. The religions like Christianity traditionally consider suicide as an offense against God, due to the belief in the sanctity of life. Hinduism and Jainism were not totally against the practice of suicide. In ancient Tamilakam suicide was popular even among the rulers who met defeat in the battles. Ritual suicide is performed in a prescribed way, often as part of a religious or cultural practice.Self-immolation was carried out as a ritual known as Sati in certain parts of  India, where a Hindu wife immolated herself in her dead husband's funeral pyre, either voluntarily or by coercion. Attempted suicide or non-fatal suicidal behavior is self-injury with the desire to end one's life that does not result in death. In the words of Goethe “Suicide is an incident in human life which however much disputed and discussed, demands the sympathy of every man and in every age must be dealt with anew”.

The Government of India classifies a death as suicide if it meets the following three criteria:

* it is an unnatural death,
* the intent to die originated within the person,
* there is a reason for the person to end his or her life. The reason may have been specified in a suicide note or unspecified.

If one of these criterions is not met, the death may be classified as death because of illness, murder or in another statistical.

In 2010 the number of suicides in India had increased to 230,314. Suicide was the most common cause of death in both the age groups of 15–29 years and 15–39 years. About 800,000 people die bysuicide worldwide every year, of these 135,000 (17%) are residents of India, a nation with 17.5% of world population. Between 1987 and 2007, the suicide rate increased from 7.9 to 10.3 per 100,000, with higher suicide rates in southern and eastern states of India. Among large population states, Tamil Nadu and Kerala had the highest suicide rates per 100,000 people in 2012. The male to female suicide ratio has been about 2:1.

The state of modern Kerala is having the highest suicide rate since 1984. The suicide continues as a social problem that deserves the immediate invention of the governmental and non- governmental organisations. Women folk of Kerala who once held a prime position were greatly marginalised and became the victims of several atrocities including domestic violence that forced her to think in terms of suicide.

Factors that affect the risk of suicide include mental disorders, drug misuse, psychological states cultural, family and social situations, and genetics. Mental disorders and substance misuse frequently co-exist. Other risk factors include having previously attempted suicide, the ready availability of a means to take one's life, a family history of suicide, or the presence of harrowing brain injury. For example, suicide rates have been found to be greater in households with firearms than those without them. Socio-economic problems such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and discrimination activate the suicidal thoughts. About 15–40% of people leave a suicide note.  Genetics appears to account for between 38% and 55% of suicidal behaviors.

A person who is experiencing or could experience suicidal thoughts may show the symptoms like feeling or appearing to feel trapped or hopeless, feeling intolerable emotional pain, having or appearing to have an abnormal preoccupation with violence, dying, or death, having mood swings, happy or sad, talking about revenge, guilt, or shame, being agitated, or in a heightened state of anxiety, experiencing changes in personality, routine, or sleeping patterns, consuming drugs or more alcohol than usual, or starting drinking when they had not previously done so, engaging in risky behavior, such as driving carelessly or taking drugs, getting their affairs in order and giving things away, getting hold of a gun, medications, or substances that could end a life, experiencing depression,panic attacks, impaired concentrationincreased isolation, talking about being a burden to others, psychomotor agitation, such as pacing around a room, wringing one's hands, and removing items of clothing and putting them back on, saying goodbye to others as if it were the last time, seeming to be unable to experience pleasurable emotions from normally pleasurable life events such as eating, exercise, social interaction, or sex, severe remorse and self criticism, talking about suicide or dying and expressing regret about being alive or ever having been born. A significant number of people with suicidal ideation keep their thoughts and feelings a secret and show no signs that anything is wrong.

Suicidal ideation can occur when a person feels they are no longer able to cope with an overwhelming situation. This could stem from financial problems, death of a loved on, a broken relationship, or a devastating or debilitating illness.The most common situations or life events that might cause suicidal thoughts are grief, sexual abuse, financial problems, remorse, rejection, a relationship breakup, and unemployment.

The following risk factors may have an impact on the probability of someone experiencing suicidal ideation:

* a family history of mental health issues
* a family history of substance abuse
* a family history of violence
* a family history of suicide
* a feeling of hopelessness
* a feeling of seclusion or loneliness
* being gay with no family or home support
* being in trouble with the law
* being under the influence of alcohol or drugs
* for children, having disciplinary, social or school problems
* having a problem with substance abuse
* having a psychiatric disorder or mental illness
* having attempted suicide before
* being prone to reckless or impulsive behavior
* possessing a gun
* lack of sound sleep
* knowing, identifying, or being associated with someone who has committed suicide

Conditions that are linked to a higher risk of suicidal ideation include:

* adjustment disorder
* anorexia nervosa
* bipolar disorder
* body dysmorphic disorder
* borderline personality disorder
* dissociative identity disorder
* gender dysphoria, or gender identity disorder
* major depressive disorder
* panic disorder
* post-traumatic stress disorder(PTSD)
* Social anxiety disorder
* generalized anxiety disorder
* substance abuse
* exposure to suicidal behaviorin others

Genetic factors may increase the risk of suicidal ideation. Individuals with suicidal thoughts tend to have a family history of suicide or suicidal thoughts.

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Mental disorders, including depression, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, vices like alcoholism and the use of benzodiazepines are the risk factors. Some suicides are impulsive acts due to stress due to stress, such as from financial difficulties, troubles with relationships, or bullying.  Those who have previously attempted suicide are at a higher risk for future attempts. Effective suicidal preventive efforts include limiting access to methods of suicide—such as firearms, drugs, and poisons; treating mental disorders and substance misuse; proper media reporting of suicide; and improving economic conditions. Even though crisi hotlines are common, there is little evidence for their effectiveness.

Suicides resulted in 828,000 global deaths in 2015, an increase from 712,000 deaths in 1990. This makes suicide the 10th leading causes of death worldwide. Approximately 0.5% of people die by suicide. In a given year this is roughly 12 per 100,000 people. Three quarters of suicides globally occur in the low and middle income countries especially among the third world countroes.   Rates of completed suicides are generally higher among men than among women, ranging from 1.5 times as much in the developing world to 3.5 times in the developed countries. Suicide is generally most common among those over the age of 70; however, in certain countries, those aged between 15 and 30 are at the highest risk. Europe had the highest rates of suicide by region in 2015. There are an estimated 10 to 20 million  non-fatal attempted suicides every year. Non-fatal suicide attempts may lead to injury and long-term disabilities. In the Western world, attempts are more common among young people and among females.

**Objectives of the Study**

* To explore the problems of women in the social spectrum ofKerala from the ancient days of human history with particular reference their pre-eminent status. Women held a predominant position in the society almost like a Goddess and a mother. They were treated as custodians of affection, love and care.
* To find out the causes of suicide likedepression, panic attacks, impaired concentration, increased isolation severe remorse and self criticism.
* To examine the nature of psychological, biological and hereditary aspects of suicide.
* To sketch the circumstances that led to the eclipse in their respectable status that reduced them to a lower position and became the victims of several social restrictions. The women who once occupied such a pivotal position in the society became the victims of exploitation and confined within the four walls of the kitchen.
* To examine the role of Sastras and Samhitas in the context of Sati, female infanticide, child marriage and other restrictions in the field of education, worship, dress and the use of public comforts.
* To investigate the different catalysing agencies like evangelisation, socio-religious reformers and introduction of modern system of education towards the betterment and emancipation of women.
* To highlight the career and achievements of certain selected women activists who dedicated themselves to the empowerment and emancipation of women.
* To review the impact of the governmental measures initiated by monarchical and democratic regimes towards the eradication of suicide.

**Hypotheses of the Study**

* Women held a dignified and honourable status till the advent of the Aryans with their concept of *varnashrama dharma* which led to the loss of the original status and reduced to a subordinate position.
* Domestic violence is a major risk factor for suicide. However, as a fraction of total suicides, violence against women – such as domestic violence, rape, incest and dowry.
* Suicidal ideation can occur when a person feels they are no longer able to cope with an overwhelming situation. This could stem from financial problems, death of a loved on, a broken relationship, or a devastating or debilitating illness.
* The most common situations or life events that might cause suicidal thoughts are grief, sexual abuse, financial problems, remorse, rejection, a relationship breakup, and unemployment.
* Women became the victims of a variety of customs and practices like samadham, smartha vicharam, pulappedi, parappedi, mannarpeddi, sati, female infanticide, child marriage and devadasi system which undermined their vitals.
* The condition of the women from the higher strata became worse than the women who hailed from the lower strata of the society. At times the condition of women from the higher strata became the worst victims.
* Thepeople of Kerala pioneered itself in the liberation of women from the clutches of the fossilized and borne out customs and systems through the intervention of a variety of factors and forces.
* The popular movements like the upper cloth agitation and temple entry agitation assumed greater importance. The attempts for the abolition of slavery, samadham, smartha vicharam, pulappedi, parappedi, mannarpeddi, sati, female infanticide, child marriage and devadasi system led to the empowerment of women.
* Though the government issued a series of proclamations and legislations the attitude of the people continued without any apparent change.
* Kerala, the highly literate state is having the highest rate of suicide especially among the women who once held an honourable status in the society.

**Methodology and Theory**

The study is largely based on the primary and secondary sources collected from the archival and other research centres in Tamilnadu and Kerala. It is basically a data based study. Empiricism forms the hallmark of the study. A rigorous process of scrutiny of the sources has been undertaken largely based on the norms of historical research. The critical and analytical historical research methodology is employed to unfold the facts pertaining to the study. The study is both analytical and descriptive in nature. Most of the records have been collected, suitable hypothesis has been framed and scientifically analysed and presented in an objective manner. Maximum attention has been given to make the study dispassionate and impartial. The primary as well as secondary sources employed are provided with genuine footnotes in the respective pages as per the canons of research methodology. The Bibliography is appended at the end.

Maximum attention has been given to collect almost all the sources pertaining to the topic of research. The collected sources underwent a thorough system of external as well as internal criticism. Both the lower and higher level criticisms enhanced the authenticity and originality of the documents. The veracity of the sources were analysed in a most dispassionate and objective style. The continuous processes of reading and rereading made the synthet3ic operation very easy. With the help of collected sources, the chapters have been designed in a systematic manner. The final format of the thesis comprises of five chapters besides the introduction and conclusion.

The concept of public sphere demands certain socio-cultural and political pre-conditions that facilitate the citizens to enjoy social freedom- the right to access and intervene in the social, political and administrative life, the right to enter public spaces without discrimination of any caste or gender and the freedom to express opinion. Usually creative public sphere became difficult due to the caste-based traditional social structure. The nineteenth century witnessed certain social, political, economic, educational and cultural changes which were favourable to the formation of public sphere. The socio-religious reformers, organisations and media made significant contributions towards the rise and growth of public sphere. Usually the women were kept aloof from the main stream public sphere.

**The theoretical base of suicide**

Emile Durkheim, a French philosopher born on 15 April, 1858 carried out the pioneer study on the phenomenon of suicide. In 1897, Emile Durkheim – the founder of sociology – presented the first notable theory of suicide, which focused on suicide at a societal level. The key variables he identified were social integration and social regulation, and he examined how these variables played out in relation to the four types of suicide that he identified. The first type, **Egoistic**suicide, is seen in individuals who lack social integration and are detached from traditional social bonds or society. These people are also often isolated and lack a sense of belonging. **Altruistic**suicides – the second type –  occur when individuals are too fully socially integrated, and, thus, they feel that their death would benefit society. Examples of altruistic suicides could include kamikaze pilots during Second World War or contemporary suicide bombers. The third type is **Anomic** suicides, which most often happen in societies where there is minimal social regulation. This lack of social regulation results in a failure to instill a sense of meaning – or a failure to provide a moral framework – in the lives of its citizens and results in a state of social and economic disorder. Camus’ “absurd hero”, described above, would fit into this paradigm. The fourth and final type is **Fatalistic** suicides, which occur in societies where social regulation is extreme and authority is oppressive and controlling. Suicidal persons in these situations would rather die than continue living in such stifling conditions. Examples of this type could include a prisoner who cannot tolerate prison conditions, or an unwilling young woman in a patriarchal society who is forced into an arranged marriage.

**Egoistic suicide:**

According to Durkheim, when a man becomes socially isolated or feels that he has no place in the society he destroys himself. This is the suicide of self-centred person who lacks altruistic feelings and is usually cut off from main stream of the society.

**Altruistic suicide:**

This type of suicide occurs when individuals and the group are too close and intimate. This kind of suicide results from the over integration of the individual into social proof, for example – Sati customs, Dannies warriors.

**Anomic suicide:**

This type of suicide is due to certain breakdown of social equilibrium, such as, suicide after bankruptcy or after winning a lottery. In other words, anomic suicide takes place in a situation which has cropped up suddenly.

**Fatalistic suicide:**

This type of suicide is due to overregulation in society. Under the overregulation of a society, when a servant or slave commits suicide, when a barren woman commits suicide, it is the example of fatalistic suicide

**Critical** **evaluation of Durkheim’s theory**:

Although Durkheim’s theory of suicide has contributed much about the understanding of the phenomenon because of his stress on social rather than on biological or personal factors, the main drawback of the theory is that he has laid too much stress only on one factor, namely social factor and has forgotten or undermined other factors, thereby making his theory defective and only one sided.

#### What is Suicide?

Explanation requires comparison; comparison requires classification; classification requires the definition of those facts to be classified, compared, and ultimately explained. Consistent with The Rules of Sociological Method**,** therefore, Durkheim began his 1897 work with a warning against notiones vulgares, together with an insistence thatour first task... must be to determine the order of facts to be studied under the name of suicide... we must inquire whether, among the different varieties of death, some have common qualities objective enough to be recognized by all honest observers, specific enough not to be found elsewhere and also sufficiently kin to those commonly called suicides for us to retain the same term without breaking with common usage.

Durkheim's initial effort at such a definition indeed followed common usage, according to which a "suicide" is any death which is the immediate or eventual result of a positive (e.g., shooting oneself) or negative (e.g., refusing to eat) act accomplished by the victim himself.[2](http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/suicide.html#pgfId=625) But here Durkheim immediately ran into difficulties, for this definition failed to distinguish between two very different sorts of death: the victim of hallucination who leaps from an upper story window while thinking it on a level with the ground; and the sane individual who does the same thing knowingthat it will lead to his death. The obvious solution -- i.e., to restrict the definition of suicide to actions intendedto have this result -- was unacceptable to Durkheim for at least two reasons. First, as we have seen, Durkheim consistently tried to define social facts by easily ascertainable characteristics, and the intentions of agents were ill-fitted to this purpose. Second, the definition of suicide by the end sought by the agent would exclude actions -- e.g., the mother sacrificing herself for her child -- in which death is clearly not "sought" but is nonetheless an inevitable consequence of the act in question, and is thus a "suicide" by any other name.

The distinctive characteristic of suicides, therefore, is not that the act is performed intentionally*,* but rather that it is performed advisedly -- the agent knows that death will be the result of his act, regardless of whether or not death is his goal. This criterion is sufficient to distinguish suicide, properly so-called, from other deaths which are either inflicted on oneself unconsciously or not self-inflicted at all; moreover. Durkheim insisted that such a characteristic was easily ascertainable, and that such acts thus formed a definite, homogeneous group. Hence Durkheim's definition: Suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result***.***

This definition, however, was subject to two immediate objections. The first was that such foreknowledge is a matter of degree, varying considerably from one person or situation to another. At what point, for example, does the death of a professional dare-devil or that of a man neglectful of his health cease to be an "accident" and start to become "suicide"? But for Durkheim to ask this question was less to raise an objection to his definition than to correctly identify its greatest advantage -- that it indicates the place of suicide within moral life as a whole. For suicides, according to Durkheim, do not constitute a wholly distinctive group of "monstrous phenomena" unrelated to other forms of behavior; on the contrary. They are related to other acts, both courageous and imprudent, by an unbroken series of intermediate cases. Suicides, in short, are simply an exaggerated form of common practices.

The second objection was that such practices, however common, are individual practices, with individual causes and consequences, which are thus the proper subject matter of psychology rather than sociology. In fact, Durkheim never denied that suicide could be studied by the methods of psychology, but he did insist that suicide could also be studied independent of its individual manifestations, as a social fact sui generis. Indeed, each society has a "definite aptitude" for suicide, the relative intensity of which can be measured by the proportion of suicides per total population, or what Durkheim called "the rate of mortality through suicide, characteristic of the society under consideration." This rate, Durkheim insisted, was both permanent (the rate for any individual society was less variable than that of most other leading demographic data, including the general mortality rate) and variable (the rate for each society was sufficiently peculiar to that society as to be more characteristic of it than its general mortality rate); and, just as the first would be inexplicable were it not "the result of a group of distinct characteristics, solidary with one another, and simultaneously effective in spite of different attendant circumstances," so the second proved "the concrete and individual quality of these same characteristics, since they vary with the individual character of society itself." Each society, Durkheim thus concluded, is predisposed to contribute a definite quota of suicides; and it was this predisposition[5](http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/suicide.html#pgfId=1212) which Durkheim proposed to study sociologically.

Thus defined, Durkheim's project again fell naturally into three parts: first, an examination of those extra-social causes sufficiently general to have a possible effect on the social suicide rate (but which in fact influence it little, if at all); second, the determination of the nature of the social causes, the way in which they produce their effects and their relations to those individual conditions normally associated with the different kinds of suicide; and third, the more precise account of the "suicide aptitude" described above, of its relation to other social facts, and of the means by which this collective tendency might be counteracted.

#### Social Causes and Social Types

Durkheim's argument so far is a perfect example of his characteristic "argument by elimination" -- the systematic rejection of alternative explanations of a given phenomenon in order to lend authority to the "sole remaining" candidate. He thus claimed to have shown that, for each social group, there is a specific tendency to suicide that can be explained neither by the "organic-psychic constitution" of individuals nor by the nature of the physical environment; and as his discussion of geographic and seasonal variations of suicide has already hinted, the tendency in question must thus be, in itself, a collective phenomenon, and must depend upon social causes.

But is there, in fact, one "single, indestructible" suicidal tendency? Or are there rather several, which should be distinguished from one another and then studied separately? Durkheim had already pondered this difficulty in Book One, in his discussion of suicide by insanity, and his solution there was repeated here. Briefly, the suicidal tendency, single or not, is observable only in its individual manifestations (individual suicides); thus, Durkheim proposed to classify suicides into distinct "types" or "species" according to their similarities and differences, on the assumption that there would be as many types as there were suicides having the same essential characteristics, and as many "tendencies" as there were types.

This solution, however, immediately raised another problem. In his treatment of suicides by insanity, Durkheim had at his disposal many good descriptions of individual cases -- of the agent's psychological state prior to the act, of his preparations to commit the act, of the manner in which the act was performed, etc. But such data were almost completely unavailable for suicides committed by sane people, a fact which rendered classification by external manifestations impossible. Durkheim was thus forced to alter his strategy -- indeed, to "reverse the order of study" altogether, adopting an "etiological" rather than "morphological" system of classification. Assuming, as always, that any given effect has one, and only one corresponding cause, Durkheim argued that there must be as many special types of suicide as there are special causes producing them: "Without asking why [these types of suicide] differ from one another," Durkheim proposed, "we will first seek the social conditions responsible for them; [we will] then group these conditions in a number of separate classes by their resemblances and differences, and we shall be sure that a specific type of suicide will correspond to each of these classes."

How, then, do we determine the causes of suicide? One answer was simply to rely on statistical records of the "presumptive motive of suicide" (apparently construed as a cause) kept by officials in most modern societies; but, despite its obvious convenience and plausibility, Durkheim rejected this resource for at least two reasons. First such "statistics of the motives of suicides" were actually statistics of officials opinions of such motives, which thus embodied not only difficult assessments of material fact, but still more difficult explanations and evaluations of actions performed at will. Second, regardless of the credibility of such reports, Durkheim simply denied that motives were true causes, a characteristic position he supported by pointing to the contrast between relatively constant proportions of different classes of "motive explanations" (both over time and across occupational groups) and extremely variable suicide rates themselves (over the same time period and across the same occupational groups). These "reasons" to which suicides are ascribed, Durkheim thus insisted, are only apparent causes, individual repercussions of more general states which they only imperfectly express: "They may be said to indicate the individuals weak points, where the outside current bearing the impulse to self-destruction most easily finds introduction. But they are no part of this current itself, and consequently cannot help us to understand it."Disregarding such individual repercussions, therefore, Durkheim turned directly to the "states of the various social environments" (religious confessions, familial and political society, occupational groups) across which the variations in suicide rates occur, and within which their causes might be found.

**Psychological Theories**

From the developing field of psychology at the beginning of the 20th century came the first major theories of why people die by suicide on the “individual” level. Freud believed that an individual possesses a “death instinct” which, in turn, is balanced by a life instinct, and is most often externalized as anger. When anger is culturally contained through societal mores and laws, its expression toward others is repressed and turned inwards. In extreme cases, this repression results in suicide – or self-murder. Freud’s ideas continued to have an influence on later suicidal theory. Karl Menninger in the 1930s and Herbert Hendin in the 1990s, for example, expanded on Freud’s ideas about the attachment of aggression and suicide to death in their respective work.

**Psychological model of suicide called the escape theory**

In 1990, Roy Baumeister proposed a psychological model of suicide called the “escape theory”. It has been widely influential, particularly in explaining adult male suicides. Baumeister explained suicide as a sequential process, involving the following six steps:

1. **Falling short of standards** occurs when a person fails to meet unrealistically high life expectations or experiences negative life experiences or setbacks.
2. **Internalization of self-blame** these failures are internalized as being solely the individual’s fault and help to cause low self-esteem.
3. **Aversive sense of self** is when a harshly negative view of self, versus a positive view of others, is firmly established.
4. **Negative affect and/or negative consequences** – these are the consequences of the previous step that can manifest as depression, anxiety or anger.
5. **Cognitive constriction** is an escape of negative consequences by either intentional or unintentional avoidance and rejection of “meaningful thought”. The individual focuses on day-to-day needs at the expense of forward thinking, and, thus, experiences narrowed thinking or “tunnel vision”.
6. **Reckless behaviours, absence of emotion,**and**irrational thought** comprise the last step of the theory. These factors often surface as substance abuse, self-harm, risky behaviours, and/or social withdrawal. The notion of suicide becomes less fearsome. Sometimes this need to escape escalates to suicidality (Baumeister, 1990).

**Edwin Shneidman and psychache**

Pioneering suicidologist Edwin Shneidman (1918-2009) believed that the central factor in all suicides is the presence of “psychache”, and the influence of psychache on theoretical thinking of suicidality has been enormous. Psychache is defined as the “hurt, anguish, soreness, and aching psychological pain in the mind”. It is “the pain of shame or guilt, or humiliation, or loneliness, or fear, or angst, or dread of growing old”.

Suicide is not necessarily the wish to die but is rather a means to ending the psychological pain.Psychache results when an individual’s vital needs are not met or are frustrated. Shneidman believed that the majority of suicides were due to frustrated needs experienced in the following four ways:

* **Thwarted love, acceptance or belonging;**
* **Excessive helplessness** or the feeling that one has no control;
* **Damaged self-image** invokes feelings of avoidance, shame, defeat, and humiliation; and
* **Damaged relationships,** accompanied by subsequent feelings of grief.

It is important to note that each person has a different threshold for enduring psychache. When that threshold is reached, or when the individual deems the psychache to be unbearable and overwhelming, the most drastic effort to reduce it – suicide – emerges as the answer.Shneidman’s theory stresses that suicide is not necessarily the wish to die but is rather a means to ending the psychological pain.

**Antoon Leenaars and the multidimensional models of suicide**

Antoon Leenaars is a leading proponent of multidimensional, evidence-based models of suicide. They are also sometimes referred to as “ecological models”.Leenaars, along with Shneidman before him, is a leading researcher of psychological autopsies – a term that Shneidman first coined. He is also a leading authority on the analysis of suicide notes. These investigations are extremely effective in understanding, retrospectively, why someone has taken his or her life.When Leenaars undertakes a suicidal analysis, he employs **idiographic (specific)**and **nomothetic (general)**elements. This is essential to capture a more complete illustration of the lost life. He draws on resources such as personal documents, interviews with survivors, official government reports, suicide notes, and any other available sources.He interprets both intrapsychic and interpersonal features to decipher what drives an individual to suicide:

**Intrapsychic**

* Unbearable psychological pain
* Cognitive construction rigid thinking, tunnel vision
* Indirect expressions ambivalent thoughts toward living, contradictory feelings
* Inadequate adjustment cannot cope with problems, losses and weakened ego

**Interpersonal**

* Interpersonal relations frustrated relationships
* Rejection/aggression loss or abandonment, aggression turned inward
* Identification/egression strong attachment to another that is not met, need to escape (Leenaars, 1996).
* For Leenaars, suicide is a “multidimensional malaise”, or a combination of “biological, psychological, intrapsychic, interpersonal, social, cultural and philosophical” elements, as opposed to the simple escape from pain. In his view, a penetrating investigation into the person’s lived experiences gives us much more of the “why” someone died by suicide.

**Thomas Joiner’s Interpersonal Theory of Suicide**

A popular contemporary theory of suicidal behaviour is Thomas Joiner’s Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (2005), which has been especially useful in explaining the prevalence of suicide in older adults and – in particular – older adult males.There are 3 factors which need to be present for a suicide:

* **Thwarted Belongingness**: an absence of meaningful connections to others or a strain of a loss of previously strong relationships.
* **Perceived Burdensomeness:** a perception that someone feels that he or she is a burden on. They believe that they fail to make meaningful contributions to society and that they are a liability. These 2 combined factors create the **desire for suicide.**
* **Acquired Capability for Suicide:** the degree to which an individual is able to initiate a suicide attempt. A habituation to fear and pain is a prerequisite for serious suicidal behaviour. A person can become desensitized to the formidable notion of suicide by repeated exposure to painful events and behaviours such as self-injury.

**Aaron Beck and the Hopelessness Theory**

Aaron Beck posited the Hopelessness Theory of suicide in the 1970s. He asked what possible force could drive a person to violate and override the “survival” instinct to kill him or herself. That force turned out to be hopelessness– the “catalytic agent” that drives the suicidal desire. He found that **hopelessness** is a stronger indicator of suicidal intent than depression.

The individual has a stored reservoir of negative models which determine how they will perceive and interpret new information. In the case of suicidal thoughts, these models exacerbate feelings of hopelessness at the expense of positive, productive information.Beck has been pivotal in devising measurements to aid clinicians in assessing mental illness and suicidality. Some of these include: The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Suicide Intent Scale (SIS), and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS).Beck believes that cognitive change, in addition to behavioural change, is crucial to effective treatment. This is evident in the practice of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy(CBT), which he helped develop. He also feels that clinicians should target a patient’s feelings of hopelessness for more positive treatment outcomes.

**Marsha Linehan’s theory of Emotion Dysregulation**

Marsha Linehan’s theory of Emotion Dysregulation is often referred to as a “bio-social” theory, as biological and physiological elements figure prominently in an individual’s responses to stress and emotion regulation. An afflicted person is characterized as experiencing intense emotions and an increase in sensitivity – even hypersensitivity – in upsetting situations. These extreme emotional states are intense and aversive. Sufferers desperately attempt to manage their symptoms. Sometimes these efforts to cope or regulate the pain manifest as self-injury, and in extreme cases suicide can result.

Linehan developed Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) to help patients treat their emotional dysregulation.  In this treatment, behavioural skill deficits are taught within a problem-solving and skills-training framework, and there is an emphasis on skill building and behavioural change. Selfvalidation and hopefulness are the desired outcomes.

**Epistemological Critique**

The historians and scholars who dealt with the history of India in general and Kerala in particular did not find any reference about suicide in Kerala, though the state of Kerala is having the highest suicide rate since 1984. The suicide continues as a social malady that deserves the immediate invention of the governmental and non- governmental organisations for the betterment of the society. Women folk of Kerala who once held a predominant position were greatly marginalised and became the victims of several atrocities including domestic violence that forced them to think in terms of suicide.

*Suicide in London: An Ecological Study* by P.Sainsbury published by Chapman and Hall, London in 0955; ‘Occupational Status and Suicide’ by E.H.Powell an article in *American Journal of Sociology* in 1958; *Attempted Suicide* by Stengel E.Cook in 1958; ‘Durkheim’s one cause for Suicide’ by B.D.Johnson an article in *American Journal of Sociology* in 1965; ‘Murder and Suicide in 40 non-literate societies’ an article in *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Political Science* in 1965; *The Sociology of Suicide* by A. Giddens published from London in1971; ‘The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide’ an article in *American Sociological Review* in1974; *Reformulating Durkheim 100 years later* edited by D.Lester in 1991 from Philadelphia; *The Psychology of Suicide* by J.GeberthVernon in 1996; *History of Suicide* by Georges Minois published from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore in 1999; *Political Integration, War and Suicide* by Frank Van Tubergen from the University of Utrecht in 2001 etc shed light on the general background of suicide in different parts of the world but no reference about Kerala.

*Suicide Prevention Meeting the Challenge Together*, edited by Lakshmi Vijayakumar is an excellent treatise on Suicide Prevention with a determination to meet the challenge. It represents a collection of tweny learned articles on a multitude of problems associated with suicide and its prevention. Among the tweny articles special mention should be made about National strategies for suicide prevention: Educational aspects by Lars Mehlum and Religious, cultural and philosophical perspectives of suicide by A.Venkoba Rao deserve special mention.

*The Suicide: Problems and Remedies* by Shamim Aleem published from New Delhi in 1994 traces the reasons for committing suicide. They are usually classified by the crime reprt in more than a dozen categories such as poverty, unemployment, dreadful diseases, dowry disputes, failure in examination etc. But the act of suicide is a chain reaction of a number of events, that can not be separated easily from each other.

A. S. Altekar, in his famous work, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization,* attempts the evolution of women’s status in society from a historical perspective. In this work Altekar discussed the multiple roles of women as daughters, wives, scholars and politicians as well as her ceremonial role in religious customs. Altekar studied the lifespan of women- birth, marriage and widowhood. His perception of women’s role is strictly conservative and all her relationships are viewed in accordance with the customs and conventions of the society. He leaves an impression that, the ideal role of a woman is the one assigned by the scriptures.

Contemplating Suicide The language and ethics of self harm authored by Gavin J.Fairbatrm is a classical work on the different facets of suicide including morals and means, varieties of suicide, autonomy, paternalism and intervention of suicidal acts. The language and ethics of suicide provides a comprehensive account about the taxonomy of suicidal self harm, living dangerously, heroism and euthanasia. It provides a general background to the study of suicide in Kerala.

A Malayalam book titled *Manorogangal* by Varghese P.Punnoose is a study about mental diseases in the context of Kerala. Out of the fifteen chapters there is a separate chapter on the prevention of suicide. It also sheds light on the different factors and forces that lead to the tendency of suicide. As a practicing doctor he is thorough with the genetic diseases and its related problems.

P.K.B.Nayar’s edited work *Widowhood in Modern India* Livia Holden’s, *Hindu Divorce: A Legal Anthroplogy* ; A.Mahadeva Sastri’s *The Vedic Law of Marriage or Emancipation of Women;* K.G. Kawale’s Divorce  *Problems, A Sociological Analysis*;R.Usha Devi’s *Divorced Women;* J.N.Chowdhary’s *Divorce in Indian Society;* K.M. Kapadia’s *Marriage and Family in India;* Vasudha Dhagamvar’s *Women and Divorce;The Status of Women in Ancient India* by Professor Indra of the Punjab Universityand *Status of Muslim Women in India : A Case Study of Kerala* byM.Indu Menon; *Women and Social Reform in Modern India:A Reader* edited by Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar; Pratima Asthana’s*Women’s Movement in India;* Bagchi’s edited work *Indian Women* : *Myth and Reality*; Malladi Subhamma’s *Women Tradition and Cultur*e; *Islam and Women;* M.Usha Apte’s *Sacrament and Marriage in Hindu Society, From Vedic to the Dharmasastras;*J.Puthenkalam’s *Marriage and Family in Kerala*; P.N.Radha’s *Hindu Social Organization* andSyed Ameer Ali’s *The Spirit of Islam: A History of Evolution and Ideals of Islam* represent different dimensions of women but there is no reference the problem of divorce among the women in Kerala.

The writings of scholars like Meenu Agrawal’s edited work *Women Empowerment andGlobalization*, *A Modern Perception;* N.Jayapalan’s, *Women and Human Rights;* Paul Appasamy’s *Legal Aspects of Social Reform;* RashmiSharma’s *Women Law and Judicial System;* Mohit Chatterjee*’s Women’s Human Rights*; Latika Menon’s *Women Empowerment and Challenge of Change;* U.B.Singh’s *Empowerment of Women in Urban Administration: Experiences and Strategies*; S.K. Singh and U.K. Singh in their combined work*OBC Women Status and Educational Empowerment;* Edward Thompson’s *Suttee:A Historical and Philosophical enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burnings* and Ramola M.Buxamusa’s ‘The Existiong Divorce Laws among Muslims in India’ printed in Zakia A. Siddiqi and Anwar Jahan Zuberi’s edited book, *Muslim Women – Problems and Prospects*; S.Pothen’s *Divorce: Its Causes and Consequences in Hindu Society* discusses the concepts of human rights, empowerment and emancipation.

Certain studies pertaining to Kerala like Robin Jeffrey’s *Decline of the Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908;* K. Saradamoni’s *Matriliny Transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore;* Koji Kawashima’s *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore1858-1936*; *The History of London Missionary Society in Travancore 1806-1908,History of Women’s Education in Kerala* and *A People’s Revolt in Travancore* by R N Yesudas;*En-gendering Individuals: The Language of Reforming in the Early Twentieth Century Keralam* (2007) by J. Devika;*Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* byAbbe, J.A. Dubois, *Land and Society in Malabar*by Adrian, L. Mayur *Slavery in Travancore* by K.K. Kusuman, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* by Edgar Thurston, *Social Change in Modern India* by M.N. Srinivas, *Modernity and Tradition* by Rudolph and *Politics andSocial Conflict in South India* by Eugene Irschick, *Land of Charity* by Samuel Mateer, *Caste and Race in India* by G.S. Ghurye, *Caste in India* by J.H. Hutton shed lighton social conditions of the people with special reference to family, marriage besides certain passing references about divorce but there is no reference about divorce among the women in Kerala.

**Design of the Study**

The project titled “Suicide among Women in Kerala: A Historical and Sociological Analyses (1956-2010)” are designed in five chapters besides the introduction and the conclusion. The introductory chapter is calculated to spell out the scope and relevance of the study at its correct historical perspective. It attempts to highlight the nature of suicide. The introduction analyses the scope, relevance and significance of the study at its social and historical context. Besides it represents the hypotheses, review of literature, research methodology and a design of the study.

The first chapter dwells on the historical background of Women andSuicide in Kerala analyses the circumstances that led to the eclipse in the status of women. The suicide continues to be a worldwide phenomenon. At times Kerala occupies a pioneering position among the Indian states with regard to suicide. The percentage of suicide in Kerala is at the rate 25 for one lakh. The establishment of the Brahmanical hegemony brought about far reaching changes in the social structure of Kerala. With the introduction of varnashrama dharma the Brahmins became dominant and they declared that the duty of a woman was to serve her husband and remain within the kitchen. As a result the social status of the womenfolk underwent drastic changes that undermined the vitals of their freedom. They became the victims of the caste rules and regulations that reduced them to a subordinate position. The women irrespective of the higher- lower status became the casualty of such prejudices. There were almost confined to the four walls of their houses. Such a situation made the women who hailed from the different strata of the society to think in terms of suicide.

The second chapter Causes and Methods of Suicide among the Women examines the different causes and methods of suicide in detail.The most common situations or life events that might cause suicidal thoughts are grief, sexual abuse, financial problems, remorse, rejection, a relationship breakup, and unemployment. Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Mental disorders, including depression, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, vices like alcoholism and the use of benzodiazepines are the risk factors.  A series of methods like Cutting, Wrist cutting, Drowning, Suffocation, Hypothermia, Electrocution, Jumping from high altitudes, Firearm, Suicide by hanging, Suicide through vehicular impact, Self Strangulation, Poison, Drug Overdose, Carbon monoxide, Ritual suicide, Starvation, Dehydration Suicide attack, Egoistic Suicide, Altruistic Suicide and Anomic Suicide were adopted for committing suicide. The chapter dwells in great detail about the classical views of Emile Durkheim about suicide.

The third chapter harps upon Socio-Historical milieu of Kerala. Suicide popularly known as *atmaghata* find erratic references in the Vedas, epics, Upanishads and Dharmesastras. The Brahmin writers on law propounded a model of the caste system which placed them at the apex of the social hierarchy and gave them the privilege of declaring the duties of other castes, including the kings. In order to proclaim their spiritual superiority and temporal welfare, they gerrymandered customs and conven­tions, administrative and socio-economic systems and brought the entire society under the provisions of the Sastras. The large scale migration of the Aryans led to the division of the society into Brahmins, non-Brahmins and untouchables. The Aryan theory of four *varnas* or castes i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra was totally foreign to the southerners. There were no genuine Kshatriyas or Vaisyas in the peninsular India and the use of these categories in this area are referred only to local castes which had successfully claimed Vaisya or Kshatriya status. The introduction of the inferior and superior status led to a competition among the different commu­nities to receive the sacramental recognition of the Brahmins for their claims. The condition of women who hailed from the different strata of the society became very pathetic and they began to think in terms of suicide. Among large population states, Tamil Nadu and Kerala had the highest suicide rates per 100,000 people in 2010. Kerala is something of a role model in welfare-oriented development, and yet the State has been reporting one of the highest suicide rates in the country.

The fourth chapter Vicissitudes of Women in Kerala is calculated to bring about far reaching changes in the life of the women who hailed from the different castes and communities. The women from the higher communities became the worst sufferers associated with*Smarthavicharam,* Sati, Child Marriage, Female Infanticide, Devadasi system, Dowry system, Purdah system, *Samdandham, Pulappedi* and *Pulappedi*. On the other hand the women from the non-caste communities became the most terrible victims of slavery, untouchability, unseeability and several other social restrictions and disabilities. Such a situation increased the rate of suicide among the women in Kerala.

Last chapter deals with the Measures for the prevention of suicide. It attempts to examinethecauses that contribute to the rapid increase in the number of suicides among the different sections of the society irrespective of castes, communities and religions.The chapter harps upon the challenges confronted by the society especially the dependents of the persons who committed suicide. The extent of mental and emotional trauma that can be created by suicide in the minds of their off springs is beyond description. Suicide reduces the child to an abnormal family situation. It explores the need of empowerment and emancipation of women as an effective remedial measure to safeguard the women and children from the challenges and problems associated with suicide. Likewise, the process of legislations played a decisive role as a remedial measure. The concluding part of the study undertakes a summary of the major findings. Still the question of suicide continues to disturb the peaceful life of the people.

**Chapter I**

**WOMEN AND SUICIDE in Kerala**

The history of suicide is almost as long as the history of mankind itself. The first act of suicide probably occurred before the beginning pf written records. It can be traced from the pre historic days. In order to explore the history of suicide with any understanding, one must have some conception of the prevailing taboos and attitudes toward the behavioral phenomenon.Historically, society’s attitudes toard suicide and suicidal act reveal a wide range between a rational one of acceptance, an irrational one of superstition, and a hostile one ofpunishment.[[6]](#footnote-7)

The suicide is a world wide phenomenon.[[7]](#footnote-8) It is one of the leading causes of death across the world, especially in the fifteen to thirty five year age groups.[[8]](#footnote-9)As per the report of the World Health Organisation at least 1, 60,000 people die by committing suicide in each year.[[9]](#footnote-10) The word ‘suicide’ comes from two Latin roots *sui*(of onself) *cidium* (a killing or slaying)*.* It is the deliberate or intentional killing of oneself. It is the destruction of oneself self killing orself merder in the legal sense.[[10]](#footnote-11) It is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows would produce this result. Suicide does not just occur. It is more often the end result of a process that has developed over a period of time.[[11]](#footnote-12)At times Kerala occupies a pioneering position among the Indian states with regard to suicide. The percentage of suicide in Kerala is at the rate 25 for one lakh.[[12]](#footnote-13)

The suicide can be seen as a sign of social pathology, and there was increasing interests in the effects on the family of all manner of social pathology, and there was increasing interests, in the effects on the family of all manner of social and economic change: industrialisation, urbanization, the decline of religious observance, changes in morality and the liberalization of marriage and divorce laws. The associations of women were given particular attention and the suicide rate was often explained in terms of women emancipation generally and of the expansion of women employment in particular. Thousands of popular and scholarly books, articles in mass circulation of magazines and academic journals, radio, and television, documentaries together with public and private research reports have focused on suicide its causes and its consequences.

**Table 1**

**Suicide rate in India per one lakh in 2010**

| **S.No** | **State** |  | **Rank** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Andhra Pradesh | 12.1 | 16 |
| 2 | Arunachal Pradesh | 10.4 | 20 |
| 3 | Assam | 10.0 | 21 |
| 4 | Bihar | 0.5 | 36 |
| 5 | Chhattisgarh | 27.7 | 4 |
| 6 | Goa | 15.4 | 12 |
| 7 | Gujarat | 11.6 | 19 |
| 8 | Haryana | 13.0 | 15 |
| 9 | Himachal Pradesh | 7.7 | 24 |
| 10 | Jammu and Kashmir | 3.0 | 31 |
| 11 | Jharkhand | 2.5 | 32 |
| 12 | Karnataka | 17.4 | 10 |
| 13 | Kerala | 28.6 | 8 |
| 14 | Madya Pradesh | 13.3 | 14 |
| 15 | Maharashtra | 14.2 | 13 |
| 16 | Manipur | 1.4 | 34 |
| 17 | Meghalaya | 6.2 | 27 |
| 18 | Mizoram | 11.7 | 18 |
| 19 | Nagaland | 0.9 | 35 |
| 20 | Odisha | 9.7 | 22 |
| 21 | Punjab | 3.6 | 30 |
| 22 | Rajasthan | 4.8 | 28 |
| 23 | Sikkim | 37.5 | 2 |
| 24 | Tamil Nadu | 22.8 | 7 |
| 25 | Telangana | 27.7 | 5 |
| 26 | Tripura | 19.6 | 9 |
| 27 | Uttar Pradesh | 1.8 | 33 |
| 28 | Uttarakhand | 4.5 | 29 |
| 29 | West Bengal | 15.7 | 11 |
| 30 | Andaman and Nicobar Islands | 28.9 | 3 |
| 31 | Chandigarh | 6.9 | 25 |
| 32 | Dadra and Nagar Haveli | 25.4 | 6 |
| 33 | Daman and Diu | 11.8 | 17 |
| 34 | Delhi | 8.8 | 23 |
| 35 | Lakshwadeep | 6.3 | 26 |
| 36 | Puducherry | 43.2 | 1 |

Women became the worst victims of suicide. The women whoheld a predominant status in the society enjoyed vaste privileges in the beginning. In the course of history they lost their pre-eminent position and became the victims of several social disabilities and restrictions. In the midst of stresses and strains some of women resorted to the extreme step of suicide. Kerala is having the highest suicide rate since 1984. Women folk of Kerala who once held a predominant position were greatly reduced to subordinate position and became the victims of several atrocities including domestic violence that forced her to think in terms of suicide.

There is no world without women. They decided the destiny of mankind right from the days of its genesis. Thereafter "Man for the world, and woman for man" became the popular pronouncement. Universally it was accepted in the society that men were born to rule and the women to be ruled. All social norms and interactions between man and woman perpetuate this ruler - subject relation.[[13]](#footnote-14)Man is the maker of the world and woman's duty is to make him a home. "War and politics for men, property and children for women” remained the popular belief. The roots of this prejudice spread back into pre-history. *Vanitha* meaning ‘Lady’, a family magazine brought out that in the 387 suicide cases reported in the Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram for a period of six months, 39 % were women below the age group of 25 years. [[14]](#footnote-15)

In many societies around the world women never belong wholly to themselves; they are the property of others throughout their lives. With her gentle manners and natural tenderness or her lack of physical hardness she has always found herself hidden behind a mist of illusions.[[15]](#footnote-16) There was a notion that woman has no place in the world of work outside her home. The overwhelming majority of labor that sustains life is done by them. This work accorded low status and no payment. In spite of their incessant and laborious work they earn only ten percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property.[[16]](#footnote-17) The progress and prosperity of a nation is judged from the socio-economic status of its population especially of the weaker sections of the society who suffer from abject poverty, hunger, disease, unemployment, expoitation etc.[[17]](#footnote-18)

In the nomadic tribal societies there was the absence of gender discrimination. Power was accorded to women. The position of women was therefore not low. They were not oppressed. Nowhere there was a special category of people set apart to rule others.In the initial stages cultivation was done by them. Numerous terracotta figurines of women discovered from Harappan cities reveal that women were respected in the society. The main deity of the Harappans was 'Mother Goddess', looked upon as the Goddess of fertility.[[18]](#footnote-19)Though the Rig Vedic society was a patriarchal one it is held that women enjoyed considerable freedom and their social status was desirable. It is believed that women had attended the clan based Assemblies like the Sabha and functioned as decision making bodies in the Early Vedic period. In Later Vedic times popular Assemblies lost their importance and women were no longer permitted to sit in the Sabha which was dominated by nobles and Brahmans. However, a close analysis of historical evolution would reveal the fact that women enjoyed considerable freedom and mobility in the pre-historic Indian society as elsewhere in the world.

Time has helplessly watched excesses done on women in the form of discrimination, oppression, degradation, aggression and humiliation. The male dominated world society always was and is very vigilant to keep women away from political power and authority, though rare exceptions are there. To improve the lot of the women community a few among them began to come forward in the late eighteenth century with Women's Liberation Movement or Feminist Movement. They started a series of campaigns for reforms. The movement's priorities vary among nations and communities. It has gone through three waves. First wave feminism was oriented along the station of middle or upper class white women and involved suffrage and political equality. Second wave feminism attempted to further combat social and cultural inequalities.

Third wave feminism includes renewed campaigning for women's great influence in politics. Due to the dedication and strong will of some brave women leaders who dared to question the glaring injustices inflicted on women there emerged the ‘new woman’. Whether in education, knowledge or work efficiency she has traversed a hundred years in one generation. She has acquired her right to participate in the activities of the outer world. In many activities they are as good as men.[[19]](#footnote-20) This indeed is a great achievement. At the same time the women liberation movement failed to obtain the share due to women in government and administration. Their political participation is inadequate and disproportionate to their number in the population structure. The unfavorable economic and social condition of women is directly reflected in the level of their participation in decision making process at all levels. Women are either unrepresented or underrepresented in the decision making bodies. It is a reality that women are more active at the informal levels, which are closer to their social problems than in formal political activity. The political participation of women is an indicator of their status in society. Earlier governments and political parties approached to women's issues from the view of social welfare rather than the establishment of gender justice and equality. Most of the women organizations also confined their activities in the field of social welfare works.

As agricultural civilizations developed over time and became more prosperous and more elaborately organized, the status of women deteriorated from its initial level. Egyptian civilization gave women more credit and produced a number of powerful queens.Hutshep Sut, the first woman ruler in history belonged to ancient Egypt. Nefertiti, the beautiful wife of Akhenaton, seemed to have been influential in the religious disputes. But even these matrilineal societies held women inferior to men.Thus as agriculture improved with the use of better techniques, women's labour became less important though it was still absolutely vital. Women held a predominant status in the social structure of ancient Tamilakam. They commanded equality with men in all walks of life. The Sangam literature furnishes a variety of references to substantiate such a dignified position. They continued to retain such a remarkable place till the establishment of the Brahmanical supremacy supported by their Sastras and Samhitas.

Suicide popularly known as *atmaghata* find sporadic references in the Vedas, epics, Upanishads and Dharmesastras. Kumarila Bhatta, the great Mimamsa advocate of the Vedic period entered into the funeral pyre lighted by him. He was convinced that his mission in life was successful after establishing the supremacy of the vedic doctrines. Suicide behaviours were referred to in the Indian epics- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In Ramayana, prince Rama while in exile entertains the ideas of suicide after being separated from his wife. Suicide behavior was seen among Madri, Arjuna, Bhishma and Vidura in the Mahabharata. Arjuna threatened to commit suicide following the death of his son Abhimanyu in the battle of Kurukshetra.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Dharmasastras treated those who commit suicide by poison, fire, drowning or falling from a cliff or a tree should be classed with those who commit cardinal sins (*maha patakas*). Such persons should not be cremated nor burial rites performed. Certain exceptions were there for the religious suicides like self-immolation (*sahamarana*) or after (*anumarana*) cremation of the husbands; drowning at the confluence of sacred rivers and oceans like Ganga, Yamuna and Kanyakumari; incurable diseases; extreme old age etc.[[21]](#footnote-22)

A historical analysis reveals that men and women had enjoyed equal rights in the beginning stages of the Sangam society. In the early Sangam period high social status was accorded to women. They enjoyed complete freedom of movement as well as the right to full education. Women also had the freedom to follow the occupation of their choice. It is with the transition of the society from tribal to kinship the position of women was lowered and their social mobility restricted. They began to withdraw from public life in the medieval period. Caste- ridden hierarchical society saw their secluded life devoid of any political rights. It is meaningless to think of the political participation of women in the administrative affairs in the colonial period since the native people as a whole were denied any political rights.[[22]](#footnote-23)

A deliberate attempt was made to create religious and judicial injections to reinforce and perpetuate gender inequalities in the society. The caste ridden hierarchical society dominated by the elite classes had not sanctioned permission to women to exercise considerable political freedom. At the same time a few experienced, strong willed and matured women asserted their rights in the decision making bodies. But their presence is not conspicuously visible. Even younger women pull the strings from behind. However, in the final analysis male dominance is not seriously questioned by them.Occasionally women of the character and personality of Sultana Raziya, Chand Bibi or Ahalyabhai Holkar reigned in India. But they were exceptions to the general pattern and failed to cause any change in the prevalent system.[[23]](#footnote-24)

Social position was decided by one’s birth, where in merit and ability was rather insignificant. The rigid caste rules and regulations stood on the way of social progress and curbed the vitals of the human resources of the time. The influx of Aryans brought the caste system here, which eventually became deep rooted. It brought Brahmin hegemony into the soil of Kanyakumari District, which divided the society in the form of *avarnas* and *savarnas.*  All those things put enough restrictions up on the human rights and hindered the social, political, religious and cultural advancement of the people for a long period. It created social tensions and turbulences to a great extent. The enormities committed by the upper castes were such that the lower castes feared them like chickens at the sight of the kite.[[24]](#footnote-25)

The non-caste Hindus were not allowed to dress properly, restricted to walk on public roads and even their physical proximity to the higher castes was considered as a serious offence. They were denied of the right of education and not even allowed to assume Sanskrit names which were the privileges of the caste Hindus. They were kept at a distance from the higher castes, which segregated and excluded from the ordinary life of the community. “They were not allowed to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments, to carry pots of water on the hip, to build houses above one storey height, to milk cows or even to use ordinary language of the country. Their services were often demanded to labour or carry burdens for the Sudras and the native Government for which they were often unpaid or received a mere nominal sum”.[[25]](#footnote-26) In agriculture, wages were usually paid in kind and at the lowest possible rates. According to Ward and Conner “their name is connected with everything revolting, shunned as if infested with the plague, the higher classes view their presence with a mixture of alarm and indignation, and even towns and markets would be considered as defiled by their approach”.[[26]](#footnote-27)

The caste Hindus considered the customs more important than the life of the non-caste Hindus. They were denying entry to schools, market places, to touch public wells and canals or approach temples. “When I saw with my own eyes” exclaimed Gandhiji during his first visit to Travancore in 1925, “what the state was what a cultured ruler and what a cultured Diwan it had, this existence of inapproachability staggered and puzzled me. How such a state, with such a sovereign, such a Diwan and such a people, baffled me, as it still baffles me”. If the so-called untouchables walked on the roads, round sacred temples, the temples would be pollute or as the position was later revised, the devout temple goers would be polluted by their shadows as revealed by the Vaikam Satyagraha.[[27]](#footnote-28)

Untouchability and unapproachability continued to remain a curse that the society from the days of Aryanisation onwards. It could be said that the condition of women who hailed from all the strata’s of the society including the Nambudiri Brahmins remained almost the same.[[28]](#footnote-29) These evil practices affected the non- caste Hindus in all walks of life including their lifestyle, language, dress, habits, customs and manners. They had faced many serious disabilities and restrictions like denial of right to walk along public roads, to enter public schools, law courts, Government offices and temples. On the side of the public roads near temples, palaces, *kavus* and abodes of Brahmins signboards were put up by the Government prohibiting lower castes from entering the area. It indicated the uneven justice based on injections of caste regulations, imparted by the rulers and their eagerness to perpetuate the caste race superiority of the *savarnas.*[[29]](#footnote-30) Those who felt most suffocated in this state of degeneration and sought an immediate end to it, were the non- caste Hindus.[[30]](#footnote-31) Among them, there were many voices against untouchability, unapproachability and similar restrictions.

Having seen the extreme rigidity of caste rules and the miserable condition of the women in this part of the God’s own country Gandhiji expressed the view that "in a place so beautiful, so lovely, there should be unloveliness in man against man was and is a matter of deepest grief to me. The world outside has a right to measure Hinduism by its manifestation in this State. Unfortunately for Hinduism, unfortuna­tely for the State, and unfortunately even for all India there is not much credit to the State in the matter of untouchability".[[31]](#footnote-32) In *Young India* he wrote “This removal of untouchability is much more than building a temple of brick and mortar. Hindus must bleed for it, must pay for it. They must be prepared to forsake wife, children and all for the sake of removing the curse”.[[32]](#footnote-33)

The feelings of Swami Vivekananda were more throbbing and humiliating which made him to address this beautiful part of the world as a veritable lunatic asylum of India. He wanted to know “was there ever a sillier thing before the world than what I saw in Malabar country. The poor Pariah is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high caste man, but if he changes his name to a hodge-podge English name, it is all right; or to a Mohammedan name, it is all right. What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums, and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better. He felt shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed”.[[33]](#footnote-34)

Unequal gender relations and injustices on women have attracted the attention of social reformers even in the medieval period. Saint poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth century India preached the gospel of extending more humane and just treatment to women. The humanitarian and egalitarian impulses of the nineteenth century had its repercussions in India. Western educated social reformers of the period started a powerful movement to improve the position of women. While some appealed to doctrines of individualism and equality others declared that true Hinduism or Islam or Zoroastrianism of India did not sanction the inferior status of women. The reform leaders and organizations founded by them worked hard to spread education among women and to improve their lot.Through education the missionaries provided inspiration for the ideology of liberation and empowerment of women.[[34]](#footnote-35)

The movement for the liberation of women received a great stimulus in the twentieth century with the rise of militant national movement. Women played an important role in the freedom struggle. Their participation deserves special mention in the agitation against the partition of Bengal and the Home Rule Movement.[[35]](#footnote-36) They took part in political processions, picketed shops selling foreign cloth and liqour and propagated khadi. They went to jail, faced lathis, teargas and bullets. They showed keen interest in voting elections to the legislatures and even stood as candidates.[[36]](#footnote-37)

The increased inflow of Aryans from North India and the consequent Aryan colonization of the South ushered in a new era marked by significant socio- economic and political changes.[[37]](#footnote-38)The Aryan immigration injected the distinctions based on upper and lower status into the body politic of the South Indian society. It might have naturally developed a doubt in the minds of all the professional groups, which led to regular confrontations. The Brahmins who formed the microscopic minority emerged as the greatest arbitrators and peacemakers and extended their counsel to the reigning kings too. By virtue of their spiritual authority, they commanded considerable influence in the society.[[38]](#footnote-39) With the establishment of the Brahmanical ascendency the sons of the soil lost their freedom.

The social background of Kerala totally differed from the conventional system of *varnashrama dharma* that prevailed in North India. Upto their migration, the people of Keralalike the rest of South India appeared happy with their respective professions. They never thought of their superior or inferior status. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote: "The Brahmins did not succeed in arranging the people of Southern India as members of the four *varnas* as they did in Northern India. It only led to the confusion of caste and the prevalence of social jealousies that have characterised the life of South India for a thousand five hundred years".[[39]](#footnote-40)

The Brahmin writers on law propounded a model of the caste system which placed them at the top and gave them the privilege of declaring the duties of other castes, including the kings.[[40]](#footnote-41) In order to proclaim their spiritual superiority and temporal welfare, they gerrymandered customs and conven­tions, administrative and socio-economic systems and brought the entire society under the provisions of the Sastras. The essential principles of caste system traditionally observed in Hindu society are unchangeable inequality based on birth, the gradation and inequality of vocational professions and restrictions on marriage outside one's own group. In essence one's birth into a particular caste decided all spheres of his activity. Whether this system is a theoretical division of society, a sociological fiction or a Platonic myth, it hasworked definitely to the advantage of the Aryan immigrants.[[41]](#footnote-42) Further the position afforded to the Brahmins by the local kings and the increasing use of Sanskritic forms provided the base for the introduction of the hierarchical organisation of caste into the society.[[42]](#footnote-43)

Following the large scale migration of the Aryans to the South, the society was divided into Brahmins, non-Brahmins and untouchables. The Aryan theory that mankind is divided into four *varnas* or castes--Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra—was wholly foreign to the southerners.[[43]](#footnote-44) There were no genuine Kshatriyas or Vaisyas in the peninsular India and the use of these categories in this area are referred only to local castes which had successfully claimed Vaisya or Kshatriya status.[[44]](#footnote-45) The introduction of the inferior and superior status led to a competition among the different commu­nities to receive the sacramental recognition of the Brahmins for their claims. The local people who stood with the Brahmins became the touchable and those who opposed the Brahmins were reduced to the position of outcastes.

The Brahmin was to be invested with the sacred thread (*upanayanam)* in the seventh year of age, the Kshatriya in the eleventh, and the Vaisya in the twelfth. Restrictions were also placed on the pursuit of professions and callings. The Brahmin was prevented from becoming a shopkeeper as that would trench upon the rights of the Vaisya. He was forbidden to carry arms (which were the privilege of the Kshatriyas) except in self defense. He had to avoid marital relationship with non-Aryan women. The Brahman who usurped any of the functions of the other castes was to be regarded as a Sudra. There was differentiation in the ceremonies to be performed; for instance, the Sudras were forbidden to have the *upanayanam* performed. In course of time the functional basis of caste changed in to a hereditary one.

Below the Sudras were the early representatives of the people who were later called untouchables, outcastes, depressed classes, or scheduled castes. Buddhist literature and the early Dharma sutras show that several centuries before Christ there already existed groups of people, who though serving the Aryans in very menial and dirty tasks, were looked on as quite outside the pale. Some times they were called the ‘Fifth Class” (*panchama*), but most authorities rejected this term, as it to insist that they were to be excluded from the Aryan social order together.[[45]](#footnote-46) Numerous groups of these people are mentioned, by names which are non-Aryan in origin, and were probably those of aboriginal tribes which came under the sway of the advancing Aryans

Untouchability was the most dangerous social result of the Brahminical caste system. The untouchables, the indigenous conquered population, became the most despised section of the Hindu population and became hereditary caste of untouchables. The untouchables were assigned such low functions as those of scavengers or removers of dead cattle. They were socially and legally debarred from any other profession. The low caste people had no right to study Vedas and if anybody attempted he should be punished with the pouring of boiled lead into his ears. He was denied access to the temples and comforts of orthodox caste Hindus. They had to reside in separate area in a village or town and had no freedom to use public wells and tanks which the caste Hindus used. He was punished for a crime by the law of the Hindu state or the village tribunal composed of the caste Hindus. The legal system for the Brahmins and other high caste were entirely distinct from the low castes. For a simple crime, the low caste people were inflicted with rigorous punishments, most commonly death penalty. Brahmins were excluded from death penalty and for a crime even murder, he was only punished with penalty of some amount of money, and in rare cases they were punished with loosing of caste.The untouchables find no place in the sacred classified society. Their touch would defile the members of the higher groups and developed a consciousness of keeping them out of touchability. They were imposed to do all kinds of menial and laborious work.

As per the custom of the country, if a high caste man was polluted by the touch of a low caste he had to undergo purification ceremony. Hence, the low castes were commonly spoken as “out castes or untouchables”.[[46]](#footnote-47)The disabilities of the low castes were not restricted to the social sphere but extended to the economic sphere also. They did not have the permission to engage in the professions of the higher castes. Their conventional occupations were dirty and soiled and their means for earning their bread and butter well limited They were mostly land labourers, semi serfs or engaged in worst occupations. They suffered from two fold evils- economic and social which are interconnected. The low social position accentuated their economic exploitation and their miserable economic conditions to stabilize their low social status.

Merciless exploitation of the labourers, menial workers, the artisans and craftsmen and many others compelled them to think in terms of suicide. They had no economic and intellectual progress, since economic and intellectual opportunities were denied to them. The rigidity of the caste system despised them as *mlechchas*. According to J.H. Hutton, “Avoidance of pollution through water, food or contact, use of temples, birth and death tabooed, marriage rules, clothing and ornaments, language, house etc are the chief features of caste system. Every caste began to be governed by its own rules and regulations which became different from other castes.

It was even believed that girls who study the three Rs namely reading, writing and arithmetic would become widows and widowhood was the bitterest misfortune for women.[[47]](#footnote-48) So education was forbidden to them. They were not allowed to cover the upper part of their body.[[48]](#footnote-49) The kings who were the protectors of the rights of the people could not do anything in this regard. If at all they were interested to protect the people, the high castes opposed them. In addition most of the kings were pleasure seekers, who were under the control of the feudal lords. So they would not treat the low castes on par with the high castes, if it happened, the high castes opposed the kings and considered it as treason. Any violation was dealt with severely. Sometimes they suffered deportation. Thus the low caste people were vainly looking for a savior to save them from these evil practices.

Aryan ideas of womanhood began to gather momentum in gradual course. Education of women was banned. With the introduction of *varnashrama dharma* the Brahmins became dominant and they declared that the duty of a woman was to serve her husband and remain within the kitchen. The dogmas and doctrines that governed the social fabric of ancient Tamilakam were replaced by the Brahmanical sastras and samhitas. As a result the social status of the womenfolk underwent drastic changes that undermined the vitals of their freedom. They became the victims of the Brahmanical rules and regulations that reduced them to a subordinate position. The women irrespective of the higher- lower status became the casualty of such prejudices. The birth of a female child began to be regarded as a curse and a bad luck. There were almost confined to the four walls of their houses.

The period witnessed further deterioration in women’s position in society and their subjugation in the religious and legal spheres. It propagated that women were unfit for freedom and deserved no independence. They should be kept under the authority of men in all stages of life.[[49]](#footnote-50) The purdah system, which was not practiced as a rule in the Indian society, became prevalent due to uncertain socio-political reasons.[[50]](#footnote-51) The growing incidence of female infanticide, the custom of child marriage, and the inhuman practice of sati became a part of the social culture, along with the religious ban on widow remarriage. Kerala has the highest suicide rate in India and a substantial margin of three times the national average and 50 per cent more than the second highest state.[[51]](#footnote-52) It is paradoxical in view of the fact that Kerala has the lowest overall death rate in India. The most common causes of suicide in Kerala are almost same as elsewhere in the world. The high level of education, coupled with unemployment and under employment, growth of secularism, rationalism and erosion of religious faith besides dreadful diseases, quarrel with spouses, love affairs etc lead to the extreme step of suicide.

**Chapter II**

**CAUSES AND METHODS OF SUICIDE AMONG the Women**

People harm themselves for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways and sometimes their self harm results in death.[[52]](#footnote-53)Suicide can be explained in terms of several factors such as social, biological, psychological and economic. From the analysis of data, it is evident that the social and biological factors played the most decisive role leading to suicides. Durkheim suggested that there are two kinds of extra-social causes sufficiently general to have an influence on the suicide rate. First, within the individual psychological constitution there might exist an inclination, normal or pathological, varying from country to country, which directly leads people to commit suicide. Second, the nature of the external physical environment (climate, temperature, etc.) might indirectly have the same effect. The main causes of suicide are personal disintegration and the consequent imbalance of personality.[[53]](#footnote-54)

The annual rate of certain diseases, like the suicide rate, is both relatively stable for a given society and perceptibly variable from one society to another; and since insanity is such a disease, the demonstration that suicide is the consequence of insanity (a psychological fact) would successfully account for those features of permanence and variability which had led Durkheim to suggest that suicide was a social fact sui generis. Durkheim was thus particularly concerned to eliminate insanity as a probable cause of suicide, and he did so by attacking that hypothesis in its two most common forms: the view that suicide itself is a special form of insanity, and the view that suicide is simply an effect of various types of insanity. The first Durkheim dismissed by classifying suicidal insanity as a "monomania" -- a form of mental illness limited to a single act or object -- and then arguing that not a single incontestable example of such monomania had yet been shown to exist. The second he rejected on the ground that all suicides committed by the insane are either devoid of deliberation and motive altogether or based on motives that are purely hallucinatory, while many suicides are "doubly identifiable as being deliberate and springing from representations involved in this deliberation which are not purely hallucinatory. There are many suicides, therefore, not connected with insanity.

But what about psychopathic conditions which fall short of insanity -- neurasthenia and alcoholism -- but which nonetheless are frequently associated with suicide? Durkheim responded by showing that the social suicide rate bears no definite relation to that of neurasthenia, and that the latter thus has no necessary effect on the former; and alcoholism was discarded as a putative cause on evidence that the geographical distributions of both alcohol consumption and prosecutions for alcoholism bear no relation to that of suicides. A psychopathic state, Durkheim concluded, may predispose individuals to commit suicide, but it is never in itself a sufficient cause of the permanence and variability of suicide rates.

Having dismissed pathological states as a class of causes, Durkheim turned his attention to those normal psychological conditions (race and heredity), which, again, are sufficiently general to account for the phenomena question. The view that suicide is the consequence of tendencies inherent in each major social type, for example, was undermined by the enormous variations in social suicide rates observed withinthe same type, suggesting that different levels of civilization are much more decisive. But the argument that suicide is hereditary had first to be distinguished from the more moderate view that one inherits a predisposition to commit suicide; for the latter, as in the case of neurasthenia, is not an "explanation" of suicide at all. The stronger argument -- that one inherits a semi-autonomous psychological mechanism which gives rise to suicide automatically -- was then rejected on the grounds that its most dramatic manifestation (the regularity with which suicide sometimes appears in the same family) can be explained by other causes (contagion), and that as within racial types, there are patterned variations within the same family (between husbands and wives) which on this hypothesis, would be rendered inexplicable. Suicide is influenced by a number of factors including the religious and cultural context.[[54]](#footnote-55)

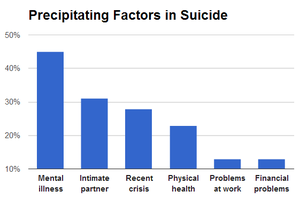
**Table 2**

**Causes for suicide in India In 2010**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | |
| **Causes** | **No of people** |
| Parental pressure in youth education | 32,308 |
| Marriage Related Issues (total) | 6,773 |
| (including) Non Settlement of Marriage | 1,096 |
| (including) Dowry Related Issues | 2,261 |
| (including) Extra Marital affairs | 476 |
| (including) Divorce | 333 |
| (including) Others | 2,607 |
| Failure in Examination | 2,403 |
| Impotency/Infertility | 332 |
| Other Family problems | 28,602 |
| Illness (total) | 23,746 |
| (including) AIDS/STD | 233 |
| (including) Cancer | 582 |
| (including) Paralysis | 408 |
| (including) Insanity/Mental illness | 7,104 |
| (including) Other prolonged illness | 15,419 |
| Death of dear person | 981 |
| Drug abuse/addiction | 3,647 |
| Fall in social reputation | 490 |
| Ideological causes/Hero worshipping | 56 |
| Love affairs | 4,168 |
| Poverty | 1,699 |
| Unemployment | 2,207 |
| Property dispute | 1,067 |
| Suspected/Illicit relation | 458 |

**Table 3**

**Risk Factors**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Suicide_cases_from_16_American_states_(2008).png)

**Symptoms**

**Mental illness**

Mental illness is often present at the time of suicide with estimates ranging from 27% to more than 90%. In Asia, rates of mental disorders appear to be lower than in Western countries.Of those who have been admitted to a psychiatric unit, their lifetime risk of completed suicide is about 8.6%. Half of all people who die by suicide may have major depressive disorder; having this or one of the other mood disorders such as bipolar disorder increases the risk of suicide 20-fold. Other conditions implicated include schizophrenia (14%), personality disorders (8%), obsessive compulsive disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Others estimate that about half of people who complete suicide could be diagnosed with a personality disorder with borderline personality disorder being the most common. About 5% of people with schizophrenia die of suicide. Eating disorders are another high risk condition. Among approximately 80% of completed suicides, the individual has seen a physician within the year before their death, including 45% within the prior month.Approximately 25–40% of those who completed suicide had contact with mental health services in the prior year. Anti depressants of the SSRI type appear to increase the frequency of suicide among children but do not change the risk among adults.

There are several causative as well as immediate issues and forces that are responsible for suicide. The notable among them is biological factors. Marriage unties two persons of opposite sex and enables them to fulfill their biological need. In marriage, attitudes and values with respect to the patterns of existence emerge. The sexual relationship is one such aspect of marital adjustment. This relationship was found to be severely affected by three factors. They are illicit relations, impotency and barrenness. Lack of proper sexual satisfaction might lead to suicide.

Sexual satisfaction with partners is a pre-requisite of a martial life, it is not merely a physical, but it is the involvement for psychological satisfaction also. It is the backbone of martial life. Frigidity in the form of lack of desire or lack of organism capacity, painful sexual contact, unmatching of sex organs, unmatching of pairs, goondaism, infertility, impotency, adultery, cruelty, black magic and demon, illness, lack of moral pressure, criminal acts, lunacy, debauchery, prestigious and ego clashes, night shifts, overwork, lack of privacy for sexual intercourse, doubt about pregnancy etc. adversely affected the sexual satisfaction with their partners. Some were found to have strong appetite for sex that they want to have sex again and again. Inability to maintain erection and sexual immaturity caused problems. When the sexual life is not normal it would lead to several other problems including suicide.

No aspect of human behaviour is fraught with greater possibility of personal ill-relationship than unconventional and illicit sexual-relations. There is a great deal of flaws in contemporary attitudes towards sex. Rigid notions of sexual contacts are incorporated in the moral values. The premium on illicit sex conduct is secrecy and if it is proved or discovered, it may become for a married man or a women, sure ground for filing a suit for seeking divorce under adultery. Such cases would lead to suicide*.*

A complicated and involved expression of personality, difficult in sexual relationships concerns the problem of impotency. By impotency means the inability of man for sexual relations. It is the physical incapacity of either party to consummate the marriage. The term impotency is usually applied to men and frigidity to women. The cases of natural and intrinsic impotency went without any remedy and it led to either divorce or suicide.

One important source of stress and conflict for the partners arises out of the fact that frequently they may be required to participate in a variety of social roles. For instance, a woman is expected to play the role of wife, a mother, a companion and a life partner. Different roles require different types of behavior. In families where the traditional role patterns remain strong, conflict may arise when the life attempts to assume a new role not consistent with the traditional role. Many husbands object to any assumption of authority by their wives in a field the husbands consider as their own. When such role conflicts persist, suicide becomes the only way to escape.

Physical assault is another valid reason for suicide. Many men beat their wives on silly matters. In some cases, the parents play a significant role in antagonizing their son against his wife. They complain against her on trivial matters such as getting update, being lazy, lack of interest in cooking, beating children, disobeying in-laws etc. The husband also finds himself in difficult situation, particularly, when he is accused of being a hen-pecked husband. It results in frequent quarrels between the spouses and the wife is beaten by the husband at times. It leads to strained relations between the husband and the wife and ultimately lands in suicide.

With all exception about 10 to 15 percent of all suicides in the world are dissolved on the ground of childlessness (barrenness). For such barrenness it is extremely difficult to accept with registration. In some instance, the attitudes and behavior of parents and in –laws become an important aspect of the problem, particularly when the desire for children is strong. Further, it is possible for the husband and wife to blame each other for their childlessness. Thus the relationship between the spouses becomes more strained. The partners generally have no knowledge of his or her sterility. The Hindu philosophy has stressed on the necessity for a couple to have children. If a woman does not become a mother in her marital life she is deprived of sacramental right of social life.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Table 4**  **Causes of the suicide**  The question of dowry  Complex of complexion  Ego- centric attitude  Adultery  Extramarital sex  Infidelity  Domestic violence  Midlife crisis  Addictions like alcoholism and gambling Workaholism  Chronic diseases  Suppression of physical deformities or defects at the time of match-making  Physical assault  Differences in the occupational status income levels  Immaturity at marriage and wide age disparity between the spouses  Lack of privacy  Poor living conditions in overcrowded and cramped joint families  Education  Question of children  Cruelty  Problems in adjustmenting with the in-laws Economic hardships and problems  Marriage against the wishes of the spouse | A common cause  Among the non-castes  General  General  General  General  Common  Lower sections  Employed sections  Special cases  Selected cases  Common  Educated  Selected cases  Selected cases  Selected cases  Common  Selected cases  Selected cases  Selected cases  Selected cases |

Chronic diseases also contribute for the emergence of suicides. Suppression of physical deformities or defects at the time of match-making is indeed a serious negligence that to grave consequences. Quite often such negligence is the result of the tendency to ignore such defects to the keenness to find a match especially a groom. However, some of these problems may develop after marriage, such as chromic headache, stomach trouble or veneral disease. Such diseases may prohibit the partners to have physical contact. In most cases, the wife is an unfortunate victim. She is too shy to make the fact known she cannot confide of take it over and the husband ill-treats her. She may carry a fear that this might bring her martial life to an end. But one can file a divorce suit on the ground of chronic disease which is proved to be of permanent nature and incurable.

Another responsible factor for suicide is family structure and inadequate home life. Decent living conditions play an important role in the success of a marriage. Lack of privacy, poor living conditions in overcrowded, cramped joint families can be the major cause of disagreements between spouses. Difference resulting from expectations of goals, values and way of life can develop in strained relations of husband and wife. When privacy is threated, the wife develops a defensive attitude, is irritable and becomes non-commital in her behavior towards other family members. This results in continual mental stress and setting resentment causing rifts and tension in the martial relationship. Women coming from nuclear families find it exceedingly difficult to adjust in crowed and cramped living styles of large joint families.

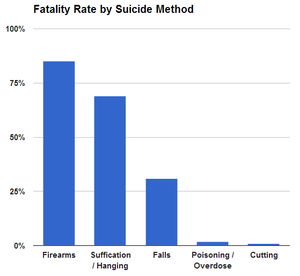
There were instances where wide age disparity between the spouses had become the cause of suicide. The emotional neglect of wife or husband not taking his wife out for movies etc. affected the home and home roles to the extent that they develop a feeling ‘we can’t go along’.

Dowry is another problem which engulfed the spouses that paved the way for suicides. Dowry is a social evil where a constant demand for more and more money from the bride’s parents is made. The dowry is given/taken both in cash and kind. However, majority of persons were inclined towards taking dowry in cash. The amount of dowry was usually jeweled well in advance of the marriage. The dowry that the bride brought was sometimes considered insufficient when the in-laws discovered that the bride parents were richer than they had expected. The bride was not allowed to keep any part of dowry that they brought with them except for a few pieces of jewellery. Their dowry was, in many cases, utilized to give dowry for her sister-in-law. All these had been the main cause of conflicts between such wives and their in laws and later on between the two families.

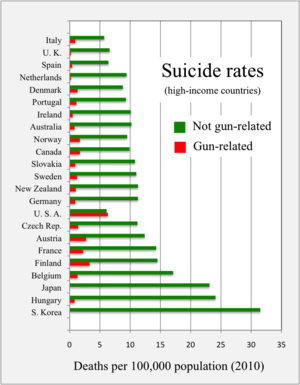
There is nothing so beautiful on this earth as the smile of a child. Every married woman aspires to have a child. A few things are sadder in life than the degree of helplessness or the amount of suffering a childless woman has to undergo. To be a mother, is the basic need of a true woman. It is fact that childless couples at times think in terms of suicide out of despair.The fact is that the presence or absence of children in a marriage does not tend to be related to marital success, but rather the desire to have children is found more frequently among the successfully married and the lack of describe for children is found more frequently among the unsuccessfully married. Similarly, the inability to have children might be an area of marital conflict. Children are considered to be the strongest link between the parents and this helps to strengthen the emotional attachment of spouses.

**Table 5**

**Methods of Fatal Suicide**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SuicideCFR.png)

Case fatality rate by suicide method in the United States

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:2010_suicide_rates_-_gun_versus_non-gun_-_high-income_countries.png)

Deaths by gun-related suicide versus non-gun-related suicide rates per 100,000 in high-income countries in 2010.[[113]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide" \l "cite_note-AJM201603-113)

**Suicide methods**

The most commonly used methods of suicide vary between countries, and is partly related to the availability of effective means. Common methods used for suicide include hanging, pesticide poisoning and firearms.  These differences are believed to be in part due to availability of the different methods. A review of 56 countries found that hanging was the most common method in most of the countries, accounting for 53% of the male suicides and 39% of the female suicides. Worldwide, 30% of suicides are estimated to occur from pesticide poisoning, most of which occur in the developing world.The use of this method varies markedly from 4% in Europe to more than 50% in the Pacific region. It is also common in Latin America  due to easy access within the farming populations. In many countries, drug overdoses account for approximately 60% of suicides among women and 30% among men. Many are unplanned and occur during an acute period of ambivalence.The death rate varies by method: firearms 80–90%, drowning 65–80%, hanging 60–85%, car exhaust 40–60%, jumping 35–60%, charcoal burning 40–50%, pesticides 60–75%, and medication overdose 1.5–4.0%. The most common attempted methods of suicide differ from the most common methods of completion; up to 85% of attempts are via drug overdose in the developed world.

**Cutting**

Suicide by cutting might involve exsanguinations, infarction, septic shock  from certain ruptures such as appendicitis or drowning from a lung contusion.Exsanguination involves reducing the volume and pressure of the blood to below critical levels by inducing massive blood loss. It is usually the result of damage inflicted on arteries. The carotid, radial, ulnaror or femoral arteries may be targeted. Death may occur directly as a result of the desanguinationof the body, wherein the blood volume in the circulatory system becomes too low and results in the body shutting down.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_methods#cite_note-1)

Those considering a suicide attempt, or trying out the weapon to ascertain its effectiveness, may first make shallow cuts, referred to as *hesitation wounds* or *tentative wounds* in the literature. They are often non-lethal, multiple parallel cuts.

**Wrist cutting**

Wrist cutting is sometimes practiced with the goal of  self harm and not suicide; however, if the bleeding is copious or allowed to continue unchecked, cardiac arrhythmia, followed by severe  hypovolemia, shock, circulatory collapse  or cardiac arrest , and death may ensue, in that order.

In the case of a non-fatal suicide attempt, the person may experience injury of the muscles of the extrinsic flexor muscles, or the ulnar and median nerves which control the muscles of the hand, both of which can result in temporary or permanent reduction in the victim’s sensory or motor ability and also cause chronic somatic or autonomic pain. As in any class IV hemorrhage, aggressive resuscitation is required to prevent death of the patient; standard emergency bleeding control applies for pre-hospital treatment.

**Drowning**

Suicide by drowning is the act of deliberately submerging oneself in water or other liquid to prevent breathing and deprive the brain of oxygen. Due to the body's natural tendency to come up for air, drowning attempts often involve the use of a heavy object to overcome this reflex. As the level of carbon dioxide in the victim's blood rises, the central nervous system  sends the respiratory muscles an involuntary signal to contract, and the person breathes in water. Death usually occurs as the level of oxygen becomes too low to sustain the brain cells. It is among the least common methods of suicide, typically accounting for less than 2% of all reported suicides in the United States.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_methods#cite_note-WISQARS-5)

**Suffocation**

Suicide by suffocation is the act of inhibiting one's ability to breathe or limiting oxygen uptake while breathing, causing hypoxia and eventually asphyxia. This may involve an exit bag (a plastic bag fixed over the head) or confinement in an enclosed space without oxygen. These attempts involve using depressants to make the user pass out due to the oxygen deprivation before the instinctive panic and the urge to escape due to the hypercapnic alarm response..

It is impossible for someone to commit suicide by simply holding their breath, as the level of oxygen in the blood becomes too low, the brain sends an involuntary reflex, and the person breathes in as the respiratory muscles contract. Even if one is able to overcome this response to the point of becoming unconscious, in this condition, it's no longer possible to control breathing, and a normal rhythm is reestablished.

Because of this, one is more likely to commit suicide through gas inhalation than attempting to prevent breathing all together. Inert gases such as helim, nitrogen, and argon, or toxic gases such as carbon monoxide are commonly used in suicides by suffocation due to their ability to quickly render a person unconscious, and may cause death within minutes.

**Hypothermia**

Suicide by hypothermia is a slow death that goes through several stages. Hypothermia begins with mild symptoms, gradually leading to moderate and severe penalties. This may involve shivering, delirium, hallucinations, lack of coordination, sensations of warmth, then finally death. One's organs cease to function, though clinical brain death can be delayed.

**Electrocution**

Suicide by electrocution involves using a lethal electric shock to kill oneself. This causes arrhythmias of the heart, meaning that the heart does not contract in synchrony between the different chambers, essentially causing elimination of blood flow. Furthermore, depending on the value of electric current, burns may also occur. Electrocution inflicts intense pain and agonizing suffering.

**Table 6**

**Frequency of Suicide**

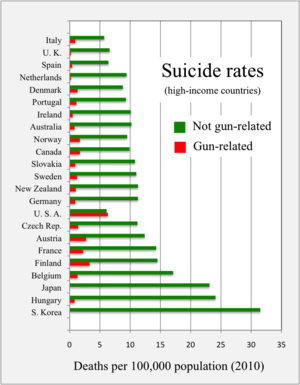
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Methods Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent** | | Hanging 62 59.0 59.0 59.0 | | Poison 31 29.5 29.5 88.6 | | Self immolation 8 7.6 7.6 96.2 | | Railway track 1 1.0 1.0 97.1 |   Other means 3 2.9 2.9 100.0 |
| Total 105 100.0 100.0 |

**Jumping from high altitudes**

Jumping from height is the act of jumping from high altitudes, for example, from a window (self-defenestration or auto-defenestration), balcony or roof of a building, cliff, damor or bridge. This method, in most cases, results in severe consequences if the attempt fails, such as paralysis, organ damage, and bone fractures.

**Table 7**

**Suicide rates**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:2010_suicide_rates_-_gun_versus_non-gun_-_high-income_countries.png)

**Firearm**

Comparison of gun-related suicide rates to non-gun-related suicide rates in high-income OECDcountries, 2010, countries in graph ordered by total suicides. Graph illustrates how the U.S. was the only high-income OECD country in which gun suicide rates exceeded non-gun suicide rates.

A common suicide method is to use a firearm. Generally, the bullet will be aimed at point-blank range, often at the temple or, less commonly, into the mouth, under the chin or at the chest. Worldwide, firearm prevalence in suicides varies widely, depending on the acceptance and availability of firearms in a culture. The use of firearms in suicides ranges from less than 10% in Australia to 50.5% in the U.S., where it is the most common method of suicide.

**Suicide by hanging**

Suicide by hanging was the most common method, as it was believed that the rage involved in such a death permitted the victim's spirit to haunt and torment survivors. It was used as an act of revenge by angry and oppressed women and of defiance by powerless officials, who used it as a "final, but unequivocal, way of standing still against and above oppressive authorities".The victims would often approach the act ceremonially, including the use of proper attire.

When hanging one's self, the subject uses some type of  ligature, as in a rope or a cord, to form a  loop around the throat, with the opposite end secured to some fixture. Depending on the placement of the noose and other factors, the subject strangles or suffers a  broken neck. In the event of death, the actual cause often depends on the length of the drop; that is, the distance the subject falls before the rope goes taut.

In a "short drop", the victim may die from strangulation, in which the death may result from a lack of oxygen to the brain. The victim is likely to experience hypoxia, skin tingling, dizziness, vision narrowing, convulsions, shock, and acute respiratory acidosis. One or both carotid artteries and/or the jugular vein may also be compressed sufficiently to cause cerebral ischemia and a hypoxic condition in the brain which will eventually result in or contribute to death. Hanging survivors typically have severe damage to the trachea and larynx, damage to the carotid arteries, damage to the spine, and brain damage due to ceregral anoxia.

In a typical "long drop", the subject is likely to suffer one or more fractures of the cervical vertebrae, generally between the second and fifth, which may cause paralysis or death. In extremely long drops, the hanging may result in complete decapitation. Hanging is the prevalent means of suicide in  pre- industrial societies, and is more common in rural areas than in urban areas. It is also a common means of suicide in situations where other materials are not readily available, such as in prisons.

**Self Strangulation**

This method involves tightening a ligature around the neck so as to compress the carotid arteries, preventing the supply of oxygen to the brain and resulting in unconsciousness and death. The technique is also associated with certain types of judo holds and restraints, and auto-erotic asphyxiation. This also may be done with twist ties.

**Suicide through vehicular impact**

Another way of committing suicide is deliberately placing oneself in the path of a large and fast-moving vehicle, resulting in fatal impact.Suicide is accomplished by positioning oneself on a railway track when a train approaches or in advance, or driving a car onto the tracks. Failed attempts may result in profound injuries, such as massive fractures, amputations, concussion and severe mental and physical handicapping.

**Poison**

Suicide can be committed by using fast-acting poisons, such as hydrogen cyanide, or substances which are known for their high levels of toxicity to humans. Poisoning through the means of toxic plants is usually slower and is relatively painful.

Worldwide, 30% of suicides are from pesticide poisonings. The use of this method, however, varies markedly in different areas of the world, from 4% in Europe to more than 50% in the Pacific region. Poisoning by farm chemicals is very common among women in the Chinese countryside, and is regarded as a major social problem in the country. When access to the chemical was restricted, other methods replaced it, leading researchers to conclude that restricting certain suicide methods does little to impact the overall suicide rate.

**Drug Overdose**

Drug Overdose is a method of suicide which involves taking medication in doses greater than the indicated levels, or in a combination that will interact either to cause harmful effects or increase the potency of one or other of the substances. An overdose is often the expressed preferred method of dignified dying among members of right-to-die societies. Death by helium inhalation however is the more common method preferred in practice, largely owing to its reliability.

**Carbon monoxide**

A particular type of poisoning involves inhalation of high levels of carbon monoxide. Death usually occurs through hypoxia. In most cases carbon monoxide (CO) is used because it is easily available as a product of incomplete combustion; for example, it is released by cars and some types of heaters. A failed attempt can result in memory loss and other symptoms. Carbon monoxide is a colorless and odourless gas, so its presence cannot be detected by sight or smell. It acts by binding preferentially to the hemoglobin in the victim's blood, displacing oxygen molecules and progressively deoxygenating the blood, eventually resulting in the failure of cellular respiration, and death. Carbon monoxide is extremely dangerous to bystanders and people who may discover the body, so “Right to die” advocates like Philip Nitschke recommend the use of safer alternatives like nitrogen.

In the past, before air quality regulations and catalytic converters, suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning would often be achieved by running a car's engine in a closed space such as a garage, or by redirecting a running car's exhaust back inside the cabin with a hose. Motor cae exhaust may have contained up to 25% carbon monoxide. However, catalytic converters found on all modern automobiles eliminate over 99% of carbon monoxide produced. As a further complication, the amount of unburned gasoline in emissions can make exhaust unbearable to breathe well before losing consciousness.

The incidence of suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning through burning charcoal, such as a barbecue in a sealed room, appears to have risen. This has been referred to by some as "death by hibachi".As with other suicide methods, charcoal burning suicide attempters can live from the attempt, which typically leaves a person with severe brain damage due to cerebral anoxia.

Detergent-related suicide involves mixing household chemicals to produce hydrogen sulphide or other poisonous gases. The suicide rates by domestic gas fell from 1960 to 1980. At the end of the 19th century in Britain there were more suicides from carbolic acid than from any other poison because there was no restriction on its sale.  Several creatures, such as spiders, snakes, and scorpions, carry venoms that can easily and quickly kill a person. These substances can be used to conduct suicide

**Ritual suicide**

Ritual suicide is performed in a prescribed way, often as part of a religious or cultural practice.Self-immolation was carried out as a ritual known as Sati in certain parts of  India, where a Hindu wife immolated herself in her dead husband's funeral pyre, either voluntarily or by coercion. The Latin root of "immolate" means "sacrifice", and is not restricted to the use of fire, though in common US media usage the term immolation refers to suicide by fire.

This method of suicide is relatively rare due to the long and painful experience one has to go through before death sets in. This is also contributed to by the ever-present risk that the fire is extinguished before death sets in, and in that way causes one to live with severe  burnings, scar tissue, and the emotional impact of such injuries.

**Starvation**

Starvation may ultimately lead to death. Starvation has been used by the Hindu and Jain monks as a ritual method of penance or as a method of speeding up one's own death.  This method of death is often associated with political protest. Anorexia nervosa has been referred to as a subconscious form of suicide. However, an anorexia nervosa death caused by self-starvation is not listed on death certificates as suicide. In the UK, refusal to adhere to norms regarding food and drink consumption can lead to being detained, treated and even force fed under section 3 of the Mental Health Act 1983. The effects of this can be substantial and may result in sectioning, with some cases demonstrating a level of persistence from mental health professionals in the resistance of such methods.  The women themselves claiming the process was "frightfully indignified". The moral issues faced by medical professionals handling such treatments are still present today.

**Dehydration**

Death from dehydration can take from several days to a few weeks. This means that unlike many other suicide methods, it cannot be accomplished impulsively. Those who die by terminal dehydration typically lapse into unconsciousness before death, and may also experience delirium and deranged serum sodium. Discontinuation of hydration does not produce true thirst, although a sensation of dryness of the mouth often is reported as "thirst." The evidence this is not true thirst is extensive and shows the ill feeling is not relieved by giving fluids intravenously, but is relieved by wetting the tongue and lips and proper care of the mouth. Patients with edema tend to take longer to die of dehydration because of the excess fluid in their bodies. Terminal dehydration has been described as having substantial advantages over physician-assisted suicide with respect to self-determination, access, professional integrity, and social implications. Specifically, a patient has a right to refuse treatment and it would be a personal assault for someone to force water on a patient, but such is not the case if a doctor merely refuses to provide lethal medication. But it also has distinctive drawbacks as a humane means of voluntary death. One survey of hospice nurses found that nearly twice as many had cared for patients who chose voluntary refusal of food and fluids to hasten death as had cared for patients who chose physician-assisted suicide. They also rated fasting and dehydration as causing less suffering and pain and being more peaceful than physician-assisted suicide. Other sources, however, have noted very painful side effects of dehydration, including seizures, skin cracking and bleeding, blindness, nausea, vomiting, cramping and severe headaches. There can be a fine line between terminal sedation that results in death by dehydration and euthanasia.

**Suicide attack**

A suicide attack is an attack in which the attacker (attacker being either an individual or a group) intends to kill others and intends to die in the process of doing so. In a suicide attack in the strictest sense, the attacker dies by the attack itself, for example in an explosion or crash caused by the attacker. The term is sometimes loosely applied to an incident in which the intention of the attacker is not clear, though he is almost sure to die by the defense or retaliation of the attacked party. Such attacks are typically motivated by religious or political ideologies, and have been carried out using numerous methods. For example, attackers might attach explosives directly to their bodies before detonating themselves close to their target, also known as suicide bombing.

But if normal or abnormal psychological predispositions are not, by themselves, sufficient causes of suicide, might not such predispositions acting in concert with cosmic factors (climate, seasonal temperature etc.) have such a determinative effect? The conjunction of such predispositions with climate, Durkheim answered, has no such influence; for while the geographical distribution of suicides in Europe varies according to latitude and thus roughly according to climate as well, these variations are better explained by social causes. Montesquieu's suggestion that cold, foggy countries are most favorable to suicide was equally discredited by the fact that, in every country for which statistics were available, the suicide rate is higher in spring and summer than in fall and winter.

Is suicide, then, as the Italian statisticians Ferri and Morselli believed, an effect of the mechanical influence of heat on the cerebral functions? Durkheim here objected on both conceptual and empirical grounds -- that this theory presumes that the constant psychological antecedent of suicide is a state of extreme excitation, where in fact it is frequently preceded by depression; and, in any case, that the suicide rate is in decline in July and August, and thus does not vary regularly with temperature. The "revised" Italian argument -- that it is the contrast between the departing cold and the beginning of the warm season that stimulates the psychological predispositions -- was equally rejected by Durkheim as inconsistent with the perfect continuity (steady increase from January to June, steady decrease from July to December) of the curve representing the monthly variations of the suicide rate.

Consistent with the argument of The Rules (Chapter VI) Durkheim insisted that such a perfectly continuous variation could be explained only by causes themselves varying with the same continuity; and, as a first clue to the nature of these causes, he pointed out that the proportional share of each month in the total number of annual suicides is perfectly parallel with the average length of the day at the same time of the year. Other clues follow: suicide is more common by day than by nights in morning and afternoon than at midday, and on weekdays than on weekends (except for an increase of female suicides on Sundays). In every case, Durkheim observed, suicide increases in those months, days of the week and hours of the day when social life is most active, and decreases when collective activity declines. Anticipating the argument of Book Two, Durkheim thus suggested that suicide is the consequence of the intensity of social life; but before he could proceed to explain how such a cause might produce such an effect, Durkheim had to deal with one other "psychological" theory -- Tarde's argument that social facts in general, and suicide in particular, can be explained as the consequence of imitation.

The term "imitation," Durkheim began, is used indiscriminately to explain three very different groups of facts: (1) that complex process whereby individual states of consciousness act and react upon one another in such a way as to produce a new, collective state sui generis (2) that impulse which leads us to conform to the manners, customs and moral practices of our societies; and (3) that largely unpremeditated, automatic reproduction of actions just because they have occurred in our presence or we have heard of them. The first, Durkheim insisted, can hardly be called "imitation," for it involves no act of genuine reproduction whatsoever; the second involves an act of reproduction, but one inspired both by the specific nature of the manners, customs, and practices in question, and by the specific feelings of respect or sympathy they inspire, and thus one ill-described by the term "imitation"; only in the third case, where the act is a mere echo of the original, and subject to no cause outside of itself, is the term warranted. Hence Durkheim's definition: " Imitation exists when the immediate antecedent of an act is the representation of like act, previously performed by someone else; with no explicit or implicit mental operation which bears upon the intrinsic nature of the act reproduced intervening between representation and execution.***"[[55]](#footnote-56)***

Thus defined, of course imitation is reduced to a purely psychological phenomenon; for while the synthesis of individual consciousnesses into a collective state sui generis and conformity to obligatory beliefs and practices are both highly social, "imitation properly so-called" is mere repetition, creating no intellectual or moral bond between its agent and his antecedent. We imitate other human beings in the same way that we reproduce the sounds of nature, physical objects, or the movements of non-human animals; and since no clearly social element is involved in the latter, neither is there such an element in the former. To suggest that the suicide rate might be explained by imitation, therefore, was to suggest that a social fact might be explained by a psychological fact -- a possibility Durkheim had already denied in The Rules.

Durkheim's definition clearly reduced the number of suicides attributable to imitation. But it did not eliminate them; on the contrary. Durkheim insisted that there was no other phenomenon so "contagious" as suicide. But it did not follow that this contagious quality necessarily had social consequences -- affected the social suicide rate -- for its consequences might instead be merely individual and sporadic: and if imitation did not affect the suicide rate, it was doubtful ( paceTarde) that it had any social consequences whatsoever, for no phenomenon was more affected by imitation than suicide.

If, on the other hand, imitation does influence suicide rates, Durkheim suggested, this should be reflected in the geographical distribution of suicides -- the rate typical of one country should be transmitted to its neighbors; and, indeed, contiguous geographical areas do reveal similar suicide rates. But such a geographical "diffusion" of suicides might equally well be explained by the parallel "diffusion" of distinctively social influences throughout the same region. In addition to similarity of rates in geographically contiguous areas, therefore, the "imitation hypothesis" further requires that there be a "model" of particularly intense suicidal activity, and that this activity be "visible" enough to fulfill its function as a model to be imitated. These conditions are in fact fulfilled by the major urban centers in western European countries; thus, we ought to expect the geographical distribution of suicides to reveal a pattern of concentration around major cities, with concentric circles of gradually less intensive suicidal activity radiating out into the countryside. Instead, we find suicide occurring in roughly homogeneous masses over broad regions with no central nuclei, an observation which suggests not only the complete absence of any local influence of imitation, but the presence of the much more general causes of the social environment. Most decisive, however, is the fact that an abrupt change in that social environment is accompanied by an equally abrupt change in the suicide rate. one which is not reflected beyond the bounds of the social environment in question, and thus one which could hardly be explained as the consequence of imitation.

But Durkheim's argument in fact went much further than this denial that, its individual effects notwithstanding, imitation is an insufficient cause for variations in the suicide rate; for, in addition, he insisted that imitation alone has no effect on suicide whatsoever. This extension of his argument was the consequence of Durkheim's more general theoretical commitment to the view that the thought of an act is never sufficient to produce the act itself unless the person thinking is already so disposed; and the dispositions in question, of course, are the result of social causes. Imitation, therefore, is not a real cause, even of individual suicides: "It only exposes a state which is the true generating cause of the act," Durkheim concluded, "and which probably would have produced its natural effect even had imitation not intervened, for the predisposition must be very strong to enable so slight a matter to translate it into action."

**Egoistic Suicide**

Durkheim first asked the different religious confessions affect suicide. If we look at a map of Western Europe, for example, we see that where Protestants are most numerous the suicide rate is highest, that where Catholics predominate it is much lower, and that the aptitude of Jews for suicide is lower still, though to a lesser degree, than that of Catholics. How are these data to be explained?

Again, Durkheim escorted the render through an argument by elimination. In many of the societies under observation, for example, Jews and Catholics are less numerous than Protestants; thus it is tempting to explain their lower suicide rates as the consequence of that rigorous moral discipline which religious minorities sometimes impose upon themselves in the face of the hostility of surrounding populations. But such an explanation, Durkheim observed, ignores at least three facts: first, suicide is too little an object of public condemnation for religious hostility to have this effect: second, religious hostility frequently produces not the moral conformity of those against whom it is directed, but rather their rebellion against it; and third, the reduced suicide rate of Catholics relative to Protestants is independent of their minority status -- even in Spain. Catholics commit suicide less frequently.

The last point in particular suggested an alternative explanation -- that the cause for lower rates of suicide is to be found within the nature of the religious confession itself. But such an explanation, Durkheim insisted, cannot refer to the religious percepts of the confession. for there Catholics and Protestants prohibit suicide with equal emphasis; rather, the explanation must proceed from one of the more general characteristics differentiating them, and that characteristic -- indeed, "the only essential difference between Catholicism and Protestantism" -- is that the latter permits free inquiry to a greater degree than the former.[[56]](#footnote-57)

But if the proclivity of Protestantism for suicide must thus be related to its spirit of free inquiry, this "free inquiry" itself requires explanation, for it brings as much sorrow as happiness, and thus is not "intrinsically desirable." Why, then, do men seek and even demand such freedom? Durkheim's answer: "Reflection develops only if its development becomes imperative, that is, if certain ideas and instinctive sentiments which have hitherto adequately guided conduct are found to have lost their efficacy. Then reflection intervenes to fill the gap that has appeared, but which it has not created." In other words, Protestantism concedes greater freedom of thought to the individual because it has fewer commonly accepted beliefs and practices. Indeed, it was this possession of a common, collective credo that, for Durkheim, was the essence of religious society itself, and that distinguished it from those merely temporal bonds which unite men through the exchange and reciprocity of services, yet permit and even presuppose differences; and, precisely to the extent that Protestantism lacked such a credo, it was a less strongly integrated church than its Roman Catholic counterpart.

Durkheim then suggested that this explanation is consistent with at least three other observations. First, it would account for the still lower suicide rates of Jews who, in response to the hostility directed against them, established strong community ties of thought and action, virtually eliminated individual divergences, and thus achieved a high degree of unity, solidarity, and integration.[[57]](#footnote-58) Second, of all the great Protestant countries England has the lowest suicide rate; and it also has the most "integrated" of Protestant churches. And third since knowledge is the natural consequence of free inquiry, we should expect that suicide increases with its acquisition, and Durkheim had little trouble demonstrating that this was the case.

But this last demonstration did raise an anomaly: the Jews, who are both highly educated and have low suicide rates. But for Durkheim, this was the proverbial exception that proves the rule. For the Jew seeks to learn, not in order to replace traditional beliefs with individual reflection, but rather to protect himself from others' hostility through his superior knowledge. "So the exception," Durkheim observed "is only apparent";

It even confirms the law. Indeed, it proves that if the suicidal tendency is great in educated circles, this is due, as we have said, to the weakening of traditional beliefs and to the state of moral individualism resulting from this; for it disappears when education has another cause and responds to other needs. Finally, it should be noted that the combined effect of these observations on religious confessions and suicide was an implicit celebration of the Third Republic in general and its program of secular education in particular. For, as Durkheim was pleased to make clear, the long-acknowledged correlation between the growth of knowledge and suicide could not be taken to mean that the former "causes" the latter; on the contrary, knowledge and suicide are independent effects of a more general cause -- the decline of traditional beliefs. Moreover, once these beliefs have declined, they cannot be artificially reestablished,[[58]](#footnote-59) and thus free inquiry and the knowledge that results become our only resources in the effort to replace them. Finally, Durkheim had shown that the prophylactic effect of religion on suicide owed little to its condemnation of suicide, its idea of God, or its promise of a future life; rather, religion protects man from suicide "because it is a society. What constitutes this society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are," Durkheim concluded, "the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value."

But if religion thus preserves men from suicide because it is a society, other "societies" (e.g., the family and political society) ought to have the same effect. After developing a statistical measure of the immunity to suicide enjoyed by various groups, for example, Durkheim was able to show that, while marriage alone has a preservative effect against suicide, this is limited and benefits only men; the larger family unit, on the other hand, provides an immunity which husband and wife share. Similarly, when one marital partner dies, the survivor loses a degree of suicidal immunity; but this loss is less a consequence of the severing of the conjugal bond alone than of the more general shock to the family that the survivor must endure. Finally, the immunity to suicide increases with the size of the family,[[59]](#footnote-60) a fact Durkheim attributed to the greater number and intensity of collective sentiments produced and repeatedly reinforced by the larger group.

Similarly, the examination of political societies showed that suicide, quite rare in a society's early stages, increases as that society matures and disintegrates. During social disturbances or great popular wars, by contrast, the suicide rate declines, a fact that Durkheim claimed is susceptible of only one interpretation -- that these disturbances "rouse collective sentiments, stimulate partisan spirit and patriotism, political and national faith alike, and concentrating activity toward a single end, at least temporarily cause a stronger integration of society."

Suicide thus varies inversely with the degree of integration of the religious, domestic, and political groups of which the individual forms a part; in short, as a society weakens or "disintegrates," the individual depends less on the group, depends more upon himself, and recognizes no rules of conduct beyond those based upon private interests. Durkheim called this state of "excessive individualism" egoism, and the special type of self-inflicted death it produces egoistic suicide.

But why does individualism thus cause suicide? The traditional view -- that man, by his psychological nature, cannot live without some transcendent, eternal reason beyond this life -- was rejected on the ground that, were our desire for immortality so great, nothing in this life could satisfy us; whereas, in fact, we do take pleasure in our temporal lives, and the pleasures we take are not merely physical and individual, but also moral and social, bath in their origin and in their purpose. Durkheim thus returned to the conception of the duality of human nature first found in The Division of Labor:... social man superimposes himself upon physical man. Social man necessarily presupposes a society which he expresses or serves. If this dissolves, if we can no longer feel it in existence and action about and above us.whatever is social in us is deprived of all objective foundation... Thus we are bereft of reasons for existence: for the only life to which we could cling no longer corresponds to anything actual; the only existence still based upon reality no longer meets our needs... So there is nothing more for our efforts to lay hold of, and we feel them lose themselves in emptiness.[[60]](#footnote-61)

It is in this social (rather than the earlier. psychological) sense therefore that our activity needs an object transcending it; for such an object is implicit within our moral constitution itself, and cannot be lost without this constitution losing its raison d'être to the same degree. In this state of moral confusion, the least cause of discouragement gives birth to desperate self-destructive resolutions a suicidal tendency that infects not only individuals but whole societies; and, precisely because these intellectual currents are collective they impose their authority on the individual and drive him even further in the direction he is already by internal disposition inclined to go. Ironically therefore, the individual submits to the influence of society at the very moment that he frees himself from it: "However individualized a man may be, there is always something collective remaining -- the very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated individualism."[[61]](#footnote-62)

**Altruistic Suicide**

But if excessive individuation thus leads to suicide, so does insufficient individuation: thus, among primitive peoples, we find several categories of suicide -- men on the threshold of old age, women upon the deaths of their husbands, followers and servants upon the deaths of their chiefs -- in which the person kills himself because it is his duty. Such a sacrifice, Durkheim argued, is imposed by society for social purposes; and for society to be able to do this, the individual personality must have little value, a state Durkheim called altruism, and whose corresponding mode of self-inflicted death was called obligatory altruistic suicide.[[62]](#footnote-63)

Like all suicides, the altruist kills himself because he is unhappy; but this unhappiness is distinctive both in its causes and in its effects. While the egoist is unhappy because he sees nothing "real" in the world besides the individual, for example, the altruist is sad because the individual seems so "unreal"; the egoist sees no goal to which he might commit himself, and thus feels useless and without purpose while the altruist commits himself to a goal beyond this world, and henceforth this world is an obstacle and burden to him. The melancholy of the egoist is one of incurable weariness and sad depression, and is expressed in a complete relaxation of all activity the unhappiness of the altruist, by contrast, springs from hope, faith even enthusiasm, and affirms itself in acts of extraordinary energy.

Altruistic suicide thus reflects that crude morality which disregards the individual, while its egoistic counterpart elevates the human personality beyond collective constraints; and their differences thus correspond to those between primitive and advanced societies. But altruistic suicides do occur among more civilized peoples -- among the early Christian martyrs and the French revolutionaries -- and in contemporary French society, Durkheim insisted, there even exists a "special environment" in which altruistic suicide is chronic: the army Military suicide thus represents an evolutionary survival of the morality of primitive peoples: "Influenced by this predisposition," Durkheim observed, "the soldier kills himself at the least disappointment, for the most futile reasons, for a refusal of leave, a reprimand an unjust punishment, a delay in promotion, a question of honor, a flush of momentary jealousy, or even simply because other suicides have occurred before his eyes or to his knowledge."[[63]](#footnote-64) The "contagious" suicides ascribed by Tarde to psychological causes Durkheim thus insisted, are rather explained by the moral constitution which predisposes men to imitate one another's actions.

Finally, Durkheim's discussion of altruistic suicide aptly illustrates some of the most characteristic arguments of the work as a whole -- his rejection of any definition of suicide which appeals to subjective mental states (motives purposes, etc.), his suggestion that self-inflicted deaths reflect the most general moral sentiments of the societies within which they occur, and the view that such suicides are thus merely exaggerated expressions of behavior which, in more moderated form, would be labeled "virtuous." However pure the motives which led to the "heroic" suicide of Cato, for example, it was not different in kind from that of one of Frazer's primitive Polynesian chiefs; and where altruistic suicides reflect a courageous indifference to the loss of one's life (albeit to the loss of others' lives as well), its egoistic counterpart exhibits a praiseworthy respect and sympathy for the suffering of others (albeit a concern to avoid one's own suffering and sacrifices as well).

**Anomic Suicide**

Egoistic and altruistic suicide, as we have seen, is the respective consequences of the individual's insufficient or excessive integration within the society to which he belongs. But quite aside from integrating its members, a society must control and regulate their beliefs and behavior as well; and Durkheim insisted that there is a relation between a society's suicide rate and the way it performs this important regulative function. Industrial and financial crises, for example, increase the suicide rate, a fact commonly attributed to the decline of economic well-being these crises produce. But the same increase in the suicide rate, Durkheim observed, is produced by crisis resulting in economic prosperity; "Every disturbance of equilibrium," he insisted, "even though it achieved greater comfort and a heightening of general vitality, is an impulse to voluntary death." But how can this be the case? How can something generally understood to improve a man's life serve to detach him from it?

No living being, Durkheim began, can be happy unless its needs are sufficiently proportioned to its means; for if its needs surpass its capacity to satisfy them, the result can only be friction, pain, lack of productivity, and a general weakening of the impulse to live. In an animal, of course, the desired equilibrium between needs and means is established and maintained by physical nature -- the animal cannot imagine ends other than those implicit within its own physiology, and these are ordinarily satisfied by its purely material environment. Human needs, however, are not limited to the body alone; indeed, "beyond the indispensable minimum which satisfies nature when instinctive, a more awakened reflection suggests better conditions, seemingly desirable ends craving fulfillment."[[64]](#footnote-65) But the aspirations suggested by such reflections are inherently unlimited there is nothing in man's individual psychology or physiology which would require them to cease at one point rather than another. Unlimited desires are, by definition, insatiable, and insatiability is a sure source of human misery: "To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable," Durkheim concluded, "is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness."

For human beings to be happy, therefore, their individual needs and aspirations must be constrained; and since these needs and aspirations are the products of a reflective social consciousness, the purely internal, physiological constraints enjoyed by animals are insufficient to this purpose. This regulatory function must thus be performed by an external, moral agency superior to the individual -- in other words, by society. And since the constraints thus applied are borne unequally by a society's members, the result is a "functional" theory of stratification resembling that of Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore-- society determines the respective value of different social services, the relative reward allocated to each, and the consequent degree of comfort appropriate to the average worker in each occupation.

This classically conservative doctrine is tempered by two qualifications. First, the scale of services and rewards is not immutable, but rather varies with the amount of collective revenue and the changing moral ideas of the society itself; and second, the system must secure some degree of legitimacy -- both the hierarchy of functions and the distribution of these functions among the population must be considered "just" by those subject to it. These caveats entered, however, Durkheim insisted that human happiness can be achieved only through the acceptance of moral (that is, social) constraints.

But what has this to do with suicide? Briefly, when society is disturbed by some crisis, its "scale" is altered and its members are "reclassified"[[65]](#footnote-66)accordingly; in the ensuing period of dis-equilibrium, society is temporarily incapable of exercising its regulative function, and the lack of constraints imposed on human aspirations makes happiness impossible. This explains why periods of economic disaster, like those of sudden prosperity, are accompanied by an increase the number of suicides, and also why countries long immersed in poverty have enjoyed a relative immunity to self-inflicted death.

Durkheim used the term anomieto describe this temporary condition of social deregulation, and anomic suicide to describe the resulting type of self-inflicted death; but in one sphere of life, he added, anomie is not a temporary disruption but rather a chrome state. This is the sphere of trade and industry, where the traditional sources of societal regulation -- religion, government, and occupational groups -- have all failed to exercise moral constraints on an increasingly unregulated capitalist economy. Religion, which once consoled the poor and at least partially restricted the material ambitions of the rich, has simply lost most of its power. Government, which once restrained and subordinated economic functions, is now their servant, thus, the orthodox economist would reduce government to a guarantor of individual contracts, while the extreme socialist would make it the "collective bookkeeper" -- and neither would grant it the power to subordinate other social agencies and unite them toward one common aim. Even occupational groups, which once regulated salaries, fixed the price of products and production, and indirectly fixed the average level of income on which needs were based, has been made impotent by the growth of industry and the indefinite expansion of the market. In trade and industry, therefore, "the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it," Durkheim concludes, "since its goal is far beyond all it can attain."[[66]](#footnote-67) And thus the industrial and commercial occupations are among those which furnish the greatest numbers of suicides.

Quite aside from such economicanomie, however, is that domesticanomie which afflicts widows and widowers as well as those who have experienced separation and divorce. The association of the latter with an increased tendency to suicide had already been observed,[[67]](#footnote-68) but had been attributed to marital selection -- divorced couples are more apt to have been recruited from individuals with psychological flaws, who are also more apt to commit suicide. Characteristically, Durkheim rejected such individual, psychological "explanations" for both suicide and divorce arguing instead that we should focus on the intrinsic nature of marriage and divorce themselves.

Marriage, Durkheim explained, ought to be understood as the social regulation not only of physical instinct, but also of those aesthetic and moral feelings which have become complicated with sexual desire over the course of evolution. Precisely because these new aesthetic and moral inclinations have become increasingly independent of organic necessities, the moral regulation of monogamic marriage has become necessary: "For by forcing a man to attach himself forever to the same woman," Durkheim observed, "it assigns a strictly definite object to the need for love, and closes the horizon."[37](http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/suicide.html#pgfId=2877) Divorce would then be understood as a weakening of this matrimonial regulation, and wherever law and custom permit its "excessive" practices the relative immunity to self-inflicted death thus guaranteed is undermined, and suicides increase.

As we have already seen, however, the immunity guaranteed by marriage alone is enjoyed only by the husband, both partners participating only in the immunity provided by the larger domestic society; similarly, it is husbands rather than wives who are afflicted with increased suicide rates where divorces are "excessive." Why don't divorce rates affect the wife? Durkheim's quintessentially Victorian answer was that the mental life of women -- and thus the "mental character" of their sexual needs -- is less developed than that of men; and since their sexual needs are thus more closely related to those of their organism, these needs find an efficient restraint in physiology alone, without the additional, external regulation of that monogamic matrimony required by males. This was an observation however, from which Durkheim derived an un-Victorian inference: since monogamic matrimony provides no suicidal immunity to the wife, it is a gratuitous form of social discipline which she suffers without the slightest compensatory advantage. The traditional view of marriage -- that its purpose is to protect the woman from masculine caprice, and to impose a sacrifice of polygamous instincts upon the man -- is thus clearly false; on the contrary, it is the woman who makes the sacrifices, receiving little or nothing in return.[[68]](#footnote-69)

To this "etiological" classification of suicides by their causes, Durkheim added a "morphological" classification according to their characteristic effects or manifestations. Suicides like that of Lamartine's Raphael, for example, committed out of a morbid mood of melancholia -- were considered the consequence and expression of egoistic suicide, as were the more cheerfully indifferent "Epicurean" suicides of those who, no longer able to experience the pleasures of life, see no reason to prolong it. Altruistic suicide, as we have already seen, is characterized by the serene conviction that one is performing one's duty, or a passionate outburst of faith and enthusiasm; while anomic suicide***,*** though equally passionate, expresses a mood of anger and disappointment at aspirations unfulfilled.

Just as there are different types of suicide distinguishable by their causes, therefore, there are different species of moods or dispositions through which these types are expressed. In actual experience, however, these types and species are not found in their pure, isolated state; on the contrary, different causes may simultaneously afflict the same individuals, giving rise to composite modes of suicidal expression. Egoism and anomie, for example, have a special "affinity" for one another -- the socially detached egoist is often unregulated as well (though usually introverted, dispassionate, and lacking in those aspirations which lead to frustration), while the unregulated victim of anomie is frequently a poorly integrated egoist (though his boundless aspirations typically prevent any excessive introversion). Similarly, anomie may be con joined with altruism -- the exasperated infatuation produced by anomie may coincide with the courageous, dutiful resolution of the altruist. Even egoism and altruism, contraries though they are, may combine in certain situations -- within a society undergoing disintegration, groups of individuals may construct some ideal out of whole cloth, devoting themselves to it to precisely the extent that they become detached from all else.

Durkheim found no relation whatsoever between the type of suicide and the nature of the suicidal acts by which death is achieved. Admittedly, there is a correlation between particular societies and the popularity of certain suicidal acts within them, indicating that the choice of suicidal means is determined by social causes. But the causes which lend one to commit suicide in a particular ways Durkheim insisted are quite different from those which lead one to commit suicide in the first place; the customs and traditions of a particular society place some instruments of death rather than others at one's disposal, and attach differing degrees of dignity even to the various means thus made available. While both are dependent on social causes, therefore, the mode of suicidal act and the nature of suicide itself are unrelated.

#### Suicide as a Social Phenomenon

At any given moment, therefore, the moral constitution of a society -- its insufficient or excessive degree of integration or regulation -- establishes its contingent rate of voluntary deaths, its "natural aptitude" for suicide; and individual suicidal acts are thus mere extensions and expressions of these underlying currents of egoism, altruism, and anomie. Moreover, the terms that Durkheim employed in making this argument -- "collective tendencies," "collective passions," etc. -- were not mere metaphors for average individual states; on the contrary, they are "things," sui generis forces which dominate the consciousnesses of individuals. In fact, the stability of the suicide rate for any particular society could have no other explanation:... the numerical equality of annual contingents... can only be due to the permanent action of some impersonal cause which transcends all individual cases.... The proof that the reality of collective tendencies is no less than that of cosmic forces is that this reality is demonstrated in the same way, by the uniformity of effects.

Such an argument, Durkheim admitted suggests that collective thoughts are of a different nature from individual thoughts, that the former have characteristics which the latter lack. But how can this be if there are only individuals in society? Durkheim's response was an argument by analogy alluded to in The Division of Labor***[[69]](#footnote-70)*** and developed more fully in "Individual and Collective Representations" (1898). The biological cell, Durkheim observed, is made up exclusively of inanimate atoms; but surely this doesn't mean that there is "nothing more" in animate nature. Similarly individual human beings, by associating with one another, form a psychical existence of a new species, which has its own manner of thinking and feeling: "When the consciousness of individuals, instead of remaining isolated, becomes grouped and combined," Durkheim observed, "something in the world has been altered. Naturally this change produces others, this novelty engenders other novelties, phenomena appear whose characteristic qualities are not found in the elements composing them."[[70]](#footnote-71) Social life, Durkheim thus admitted, is essentially made up of representations; but collective representations are quite different from their individual counterparts. Indeed, Durkheim had no objection to calling sociology a kind of psychology, so long as we recall that social psychology has its own laws which are not those of individual psychology.

Moreover, it is simply not true that there are "only individuals" in society. First, a society contains a variety of material things (e.g., written laws, moral precepts and maxims, etc.) which "crystallize" social facts, and act upon the individual from without; and second, beneath these immobilized, sacrosanct forms are the diffused, mingling subjacent sentiments of which these material formulae are the mere signs, and which are equally external to the individual conscience. The result was a critique of Quetelet reminiscent of Kant's rejection of any empiricist ethics. Struck by the statistical regularity of certain social phenomena over time, Quetelet had postulated "the average man" -- a definite type representing the most generalized characteristics of people in any given society. Such an approach, Durkheim insisted, makes the origin of morality an insoluble mystery; for it conflates the collective type of a society with the average type of its individual members, and since the morality of such individuals reaches only a moderate intensity, the imperative, transcendent character of moral commands is left without an explanation. Beyond the vacuous conception of "God's will," Durkheim insisted, "no alternative exists but to leave morality hanging unexplained in the air or make it a system of collective states of conscience. Morality either springs from nothing given in the world of experience, or it springs from society."[[71]](#footnote-72)

In fact, these three currents of opinion -- that the individual has a certain personality (egoism), that this personality should be sacrificed if the community required it (altruism), and that the individual is sensitive to ideas of social progress (anomie) -- coexist in all societies, turning individual inclinations in three different and opposed directions. Where these currents offset one another, the individual enjoys a state of equilibrium which protects him from suicide; but where one current exceeds certain strength relative to others, it becomes a cause of self-inflicted death. Moreover, this strength itself depends on three causes: the nature of the individuals composing the society, the manner of their association, and transitory occurrences which disrupt collective life. The first, of course, is virtually immutable, changing only gradually over a period of centuries; the only variable conditions, therefore, are social conditions, a fact which explains the stability observed by Quetelet so long as society remains unchanged.

The decisive influence of these currents, however, is rarely exerted throughout an entire society; on the contrary, its effect is typically felt within those particular environments whose conditions are especially favorable to the development of one current or another. But the conditions of each individual environment are themselves dependent on the more general conditions of the society as a whole -- the force of altruism in the army depends on the role of the military in the larger civilian population; egoistic suicide increases among Protestants to the extent that intellectual individualism is a feature of the entire society; and so on. No collective sentiment can affect individuals, of course, when they are absolutely indisposed to it, but the same social causes that produce these currents also affect the way individuals are socialized, so that a society quite literally produces citizens with the appropriate dispositions at the same time that it molds the currents to which they will thus respond. Durkheim did not deny, therefore, that individual motives have a share in determining who commits suicide but he did insist that the nature and intensity of the "suicidogenic" current were factors independent of such psychological conditions. Indeed, this was why Durkheim could claim that his theory, however "deterministic," was more consistent with the philosophical doctrine of free will than any psychologistic theory which makes the individual the source of social phenomena; for the intensity of his currents, like the virulence of an infectious disease, determines only the rate at which the population will be affected, not the identity of those to be struck down.

The last remark hinted at what we have seen to be one of Durkheim's preoccupations -- his repeated efforts to resolve philosophical quandaries by sociological means; and he soon turned to another: Should suicide be proscribed by morality?[[72]](#footnote-73) This question, Durkheim observed, is typically dealt with by formulating certain general moral principles and then asking whether suicide logically contradicts these or not. But Durkheim insisted instead on an empirical sociological approach, examining the way in which real societies have actually treated suicide in the course of history, and then inquiring into the reasons for this treatment. This examination indicated that suicide has been long, widely, and severely condemned, but that such condemnations fell into two categories, indicating two historical stages. In antiquity, suicide was a civil offense, and though the individual was forbidden to end his own life, the state might permit him to do so on certain occasions. But in modern societies, suicide is viewed as a religious crime, and the condemnation is thus both absolute and universal. The distinctive element in the second stage, Durkheim insists, is the Christian conception of the human personality as a "sacred" thing; henceforth, in so far as he retains his identity as a man, the individual shares that quality sui generiswhich religions ascribe to their gods: "He has become tinged with religious value; man has become a god for men. Therefore any attempt against his life suggests sacrilege."[[73]](#footnote-74)

To Montesquieu or to Hume, such an argument, based on a religious premise, was less than compelling. But to Durkheim, agnostic though he was, the religious vestments of the argument were purely symbolic and did little to discredit it; on the contrary, for Durkheim, every symbol (however mystical) must correspond to something real, and the reality to which the "sacred individual" corresponds is that body of collective sentiments which, with the growth of social volume and density, the division of labor, and individual differences, has elevated the individual personality above that primitive, homogeneous community within which it was literally non-existent.[45](http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/suicide.html#pgfId=1956) This view that the human person is in some sense sacred, Durkheim insisted, is virtually the only common bond joining a modern society's members; far from injuring only himself, therefore the man who commits suicide violates the most fundamental maxim of the social orders a transgression which is reflected in and in turn justifies, its severe moral prohibition.

Such an appeal to the sacredness of individual life necessarily raised the question of the relation between suicide and homicide; and this in turn led Durkheim to another attack on the "Italian school" of Ferri and Morselli, for whom such acts were the result of the same psychological cause (moral degeneracy) under different social conditions (suicide is simply a homicide which, repressed by a pacific social environment, is directed back toward the self). Durkheim denied of course that the causes of suicide and homicide are either "psychological" or "the same," and also that the social conditions under which they occur are so consistently different; for, as we have seen there are different kinds of suicide with different, non-psychological causes, and while some of these are identical to those of homicide others are quite opposed to them. Egoistic suicide, for example results from conditions of disintegration and social indifference which, by reducing the intensity of the passions and increasing the respect for the individual, decreases the tendency to homicide. Altruistic suicide, by contrast, springs from a reduced respect for the individual life, as does homicide; but these are the social conditions of primitive rather than civilized societies. Anomie suicide however is produced by that more modern mood of exasperation and world-weariness which is equally conducive to homicide; and which kind of death will result is largely determined by the moral constitution of the individual in question. If suicide and homicide vary inversely, Durkheim thus concluded it is not **(** pace Ferri and Morselli) because they are differing social expressions of the same psychological phenomenon; on the contrary, it is because most modern suicides result from conditions of egoism which are hostile to homicides. And if the relationship between suicide and homicide is not perfectly inverse, it is because the special social conditions which favor either anomie or altruistic suicide are also favorable to homicide.[[74]](#footnote-75)

Here was another sociological answer to a venerable philosophical question -- i.e., whether our feelings for others are mere extensions of our feelings for ourselves or, by contrast, are independent of such selfish sentiments altogether. Durkheim's answer was that both alternatives are misconceived. Feelings for others and feelings for us are not unrelated, but neither does one spring from the other; on the contrary, both are derived from a third source: that estimate of the moral value of the individual rendered by the conscience collective at any point in time. Where that estimate is low, as in primitive societies, our indifference to the pain and sadness of others, for example, is matched by our indifference to our own; but where that estimate is high, as in advanced societies, our concern for our own comfort is balanced by a concern for that of others. Our egoistic instincts, of course, will weaken feelings when applied to the first, and strengthen them in application to the second; but the same moral condition exists and is active in both cases.

Like The Division of Labor in Society**,**Suicide concludes with some thoroughly practical questions: What attitude should modern societies take towards suicide? Should reforms be undertaken to restrain it? Or must we accept it as it is? Again as in The Division of Labor, Durkheim's answers to these questions depended on whether the current state of suicide is to be considered "normal" or "abnormal," and, as he had already shown through the example of crime in The Rules of Sociological Method, the "immorality" of suicide did not necessarily point to the latter. On the contrary, the statistical data going back to the eighteenth century, as well as legislation surviving from still earlier periods, suggested to Durkheim that suicide was a normal element in the constitution of all societies. In primitive societies and the modern military, for example, the strict subordination of the individual to the group renders altruistic suicide an indispensable part of collective discipline. Again, in societies where the dignity of the person is the supreme end of conduct, egoistic suicide flourishes. And again, in societies where economic progress is rapid and social restraints become slack, anomie suicides are inevitable.

But don't such currents of altruism, egoism, and anomie cause suicide only if excessive? And might such currents not be everywhere maintained at the same level of moderate intensity? Durkheim's initial response echoed his discussion of crime in The Rules**-**- there are special environments within each society which can be reached by such currents only if the latter are strengthened or weakened far above or below the more general societal norm. But again, as with crime, these special modifications of the current are not merely necessary; they are also useful, for the most general collective state is simply that best adapted to the most general circumstances, not to those exceptional circumstances to which a society must also be adapted. A society in which intelligent individualism could not be exaggerated, for example, would be incapable of radical innovation, even if such innovation were necessary; inversely, a society in which such individualism could not be significantly reduced would be unable to adapt to the conditions of war, in which conformity and passive obedience are elevated into virtues. It is essential, therefore that such "special environments" be preserved as a part of the more general existence, so that a society might both respond to particular conditions and evolve gradually over time.[[75]](#footnote-76)

Thus the spirit of renunciation, the taste for individuation, and the love of progress each have their place in every society, and cannot exist without generating suicide. But this does not mean that every suicido-genic current is "normal"; on the contrary, these currents must produce suicides only in a certain measure which varies from one society to another as well as over time. Here Durkheim was particularly concerned to dismiss the view that suicide, the rate of which had increased exponentially in western Europe since the eighteenth century, was the "ransom money" of civilization, the inevitable companion of social progress. The rash of suicides which accompanied the growth of the Roman Empire, Durkheim admitted, might support such a view; but from the height of Rome to the Enlightenment, suicide rates increased only slightly, while Roman culture was assimilated and then surpassed by Christianity, the Renaissance, and the Reformation. Social progress, therefore, does not logically imply suicide, and the undeniably rapid growth of suicide in the late nineteenth century should be attributed not to the intrinsic nature of progress, but rather to these special conditions under which this particular phase of progress has occurred; and even without knowing the nature of these conditions, Durkheim insisted that the very rapidity of this growth indicated that they are morbid and pathological rather than normal.[[76]](#footnote-77)

How, then, was this "pathological phenomenon" to be overcome? Durkheim clearly considered the present indulgence toward suicide excessive, but felt that increased penalties for self-inflicted deaths would be inefficacious. The proposed imposition of severe penalties, for example, ignored the fact that suicide is but an exaggeration of acts regarded as virtuous, which a society could hardly be expected resolutely to condemn; and the milder moral penalties (e.g., refusal of burial, denial of civil, political, or familial rights), like education, fail to touch suicide at its source. Indeed, both the legal and the educational systems are themselves products of the same currents that cause suicide itself.

The recent, pathological growth of suicide must thus be attacked at its egoistic and anomie.[[77]](#footnote-78) The rapid increase of egoistic suicides, for example, could be attributed to the increasing failure of society to integrate its individual members; and it could be counteracted only by re-establishing the bonds between the individual and the social group: "He must feel himself more solidary with a collective existence which precedes him in time, which survives him, and which encompasses him at all points."[[78]](#footnote-79)

Which social groups were best prepared to exercise this reintegrative function? Certainly not the state, Durkheim insisted, for political society is too distant from the individual to affect his life forcefully and continuously. Neither is religion a binding force; for while the Roman Catholic Church once exercised an integrative influence, it did so at the cost of a freedom of thought it no longer has the authority to command. Even the family, traditionally the central cohesive force in the life of the individual, has proved susceptible to the same disintegrative currents responsible for the rapid increase of suicide. In fact, the state, religion, and the family were able to prevent suicides only because they were cohesive, integrated societies in themselves; and, having lost that character, they no longer have that effect.

But there is a group -- the "occupational group" or "corporation" -- that has enormous integrative and thus preventative potential. "Its influence on individuals is not intermittent," Durkheim emphasized for "it is always in contact with them by the constant exercise of the function of which it is the organ and in which they collaborate. It follows the workers wherever they go.... Wherever they are, they find it enveloping them, recalling them to their duties, supporting them at need. Finally," he concluded, "corporate action makes itself felt in every detail of our occupations, which are thus given a collective orientation."[[79]](#footnote-80)

To fulfill this potential, however, the occupational groups must become a recognized organ of public life, outside of (though subject to) the state, and be granted definite social functions -- the supervision of insurance, welfare, and pensions; the settling of contractual disputes; the regulation of working conditions; etc. But above all, the occupational group must exercise a moralfunction: "Besides the rights and duties common to all men," Durkheim explained, "there are others depending on qualities peculiar to each occupation, the number of which increases in importance as occupational activity increasingly develops and diversifies. For each of these special disciplines," he concluded, "an equally special organ is needed, to apply and maintain it."[[80]](#footnote-81)

But if this is the best way to combat "corrosive individual egoism," it is also the best means to combat anomie; for the same groups that re-integrate the individual into social life can also serve to regulate his aspirations: "Whenever excited appetites tended to exceed all limits," Durkheim explained, the corporation would have to decide the share that should equitably revert to each of the cooperative parts. Standing above its own members, it would have all necessary authority to demand indispensable sacrifices and concessions and impose order upon them.... Thus, a new sort of moral discipline would be established, without which all the scientific discoveries and economic progress in the world could produce only malcontents.

The pathological increase in suicides is thus a result of the "moral poverty" of our age, Durkheim insisted, and a new moral discipline is required to cure it; but as always, he insisted that this moral poverty itself had structural causes, and thus a reform of social structure (i.e., decentralized occupational groups) was required to relieve its most morbid symptoms.

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#### Critical Remarks

As the first systematic application of the methodological principles set out in his "manifesto" of 1895, Suicide reveals their limitations as well as their advantages, and thus provides an occasion for considering a number of difficulties -- argument by elimination, petitio principii, an inappropriate and distortive language, etc. -- which, though typical of Durkheim's work as a whole, are perhaps most clearly seen here. Durkheim's characteristic "argument by elimination," for example, pervades both The Division of Labor and The Elementary Forms, but there is no better example of its power to both persuade and mislead than Durkheim's discussion of "extrasocial causes" in Book One of Suicide**.** Briefly, the argument consists of the systematic rejection of alternative definitions or explanations of a social fact, in a manner clearly intended to lend credibility to the sole remaining candidate -- which is Durkheim's own. Durkheim's use of this technique, of course, does not imply that his candidate does not deserve to be elected; but as a rhetorical device, argument by elimination runs at least two serious risks: first, that the alternative definitions and/or explanations might not be jointly exhaustive (other alternatives may exist); and, more seriously, that the alternative definitions and/or explanations might not be mutually exclusive (the conditions and causes they postulate separately might be conjoined to form perfectly adequate definitions and/or explanations other than Durkheim`s' "sole remaining" candidates). Durkheim's persistent use of this strategy can be attributed to his ineradicable belief, clearly stated in The Rules, that a given effect must always have a single cause, and that this cause must be of the same nature as the effect.[[81]](#footnote-82)

Petitio principii -- the logical fallacy in which the premise of an argument presumes the very conclusion yet to be argued -- is, again, a feature of Durkheim's work as a whole. In The Elementary Forms, for example, Durkheim first defined religion as a body of beliefs and practices uniting followers in a single community, and later he concluded that this is one of religion's major functions. But there is no clearer instance of this style of argument than Durkheim's "etiological" classification of the types of suicide, which of course presupposes the validity of the causal explanations eventually proposed for them.

Durkheim's repeated insistence that sociology is a science with its own, irreducible "reality" to study also led him to adopt a language that was both highly metaphorical and systematically misleading. This is first evident in The Division of Labor**,** where abundant biological metaphors continuously suggest that society is "like" an organism in a variety of unspecified and unqualified ways; and it is still more pernicious in The Elementary Forms, where the real themes of the work -- the social origin of religious beliefs and rituals, their symbolic meanings, etc. -- are frequently disguised beneath the obfuscatory language of "electrical currents" and "physical forces."[[82]](#footnote-83) Suicide combines the worst elements of both; and in particular, this language made it difficult if not impossible for Durkheim to speak intelligibly about the way in which individual human beings perceive, interpret, and respond to "suicido-genic" social conditions.[[83]](#footnote-84)

Finally, it might be argued that Durkheim's central explanatory hypothesis -- that, when social conditions fail to provide people with the necessary social goals and/or rules at the appropriate levels of intensity their socio-psychological health is impaired, and the most vulnerable among them commit suicide -- raises far more questions than it answers. Aren't there different kinds of "social goals and rules," for example, and aren't some of these dis -harmonious? What is socio-psychological "health"? Isn't it socially determined, and thus relative to the particular society or historical period in question? Why are disintegrative, egoistic appetites always described as individual, psychological, and even organic in origin? Aren't some of our most disruptive drives socially generated? And if they are, aren't they also culturally relative? Why are some individuals rather than others "impaired"? And what is the relationship (if, indeed, there is one) between such impairment and suicide? The fact that these questions and others are continuously begged simply reiterates an earlier point -- that Durkheim's macro-sociological explanations all presuppose some social-psychological theory, whose precise nature is never made explicit.

**Chapter III**

**SOCIO-HISTORICAL Milieu OF KERALA**

Having seen the extreme rigidity of caste rules and their harsh enforce­ment in Kerala Swami Vivekananda called it "is a veritable lunatic asylum of India".[[84]](#footnote-85) Gandhiji expressed the view that "in a place so beautiful, so lovely, there should be unloveliness in man against man was and is a matter of deepest grief to me. The world outside has a right to measure Hinduism by its manifestation in this State. Unfortunately for Hinduism, unfortuna­tely for the State, and unfortunately even for all India there is not much credit to the State in the matter of untouchability".[[85]](#footnote-86) The agrarian system in Kerala at the time when the Communists came to power in 1957 was marked by a highly skewed distribution of land, huge number of landless agrarian households, existence of small and dwarf peasantry were allotted small picces of land and who are characterised as bonded owners.[[86]](#footnote-87)

Kerala lies along the coastal line of the Arabian Sea on the southern peninsula of India, surrounded by Tamilnadu in the south and east and Karnataka on the north.[[87]](#footnote-88) It has a total area of about 38,863sq kms, forming 1.04 percent of the total area of India.[[88]](#footnote-89) Kerala was formerly divided into three areas: Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The southern part of Kerala formed the old Venad and later it came to be known as the state of Travancore. The central part of Kerala, the old Cochin state, was independent until Travancore and Cochin were integrated as one unit on July 1, 1949.[[89]](#footnote-90) Malabar, which was a part of Madras province until 1956, lies north of Cochin. The re-organization of the states of India on the basis of spoken language brought the Malayalam speaking areas of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar in to one single state, Kerala on November 1, 1956.

The most rigorous and utmost defiled caste system polluted the Kerala society till the first half of 20th century. The migrated Nambutiris made the society suitable for their enjoyment and pleasure. They transformed the casteless society into caste ridden society with their sharp and crooked intellectual and selfish nature. They subordinated all other natives of Kerala under them and manipulated several codes of laws to restrict the other people from interfering in their matters, and to maintain their status quo as superiors as in North India. But unlikely in North India, the Brahmins and their subordinates fabricated more strict rules and thus the Hindu society of Kerala became more polluted and degenerated to the status of a lunatic asylum. Innumerable castes and sub castes together hastened the process of degradation of Hindu Society of Kerala.The first ministry of E.M.S.Namboodiripad has played a major role in removing to a great extent the illusions about climbing the social ladder through mutations in the caste system.[[90]](#footnote-91)

The caste rules operated with the utmost rigour. The upper castes like the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Nairs observed them strictly as otherwise they would have been treated as outcastes and sold to Christians or Muslims under royal orders. The evils of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability were observed in the most irrational manner.[[91]](#footnote-92) Since pollution might be incurred by contact through food or drink it is not surprising that it should be carried by mere bodily contact. Thus contact with a woman during her monthly period a women within the tabooed period after child birth, a man who had lit a funeral pyre, and is therefore stained by death pollution till purified, or persons in a similar state of ceremonial impurity or taboo, cause pollution and make it incumbent on a Hindu of caste to bathe and wash his clothes before eating or before undertaking any act requiring ceremonial purity. Similar purification is strictly speaking necessary as a result of contact with certain low castes whose traditional occupation, weather actually followed or not, or whose mode of life places them outside the pale of Hindu Society. Such castes were those commonly spoke of as out castes or untouchables.[[92]](#footnote-93)

Castes lower than a Brahmin was generally speaking less easily defiled, but the principle was the same. Thus if a Cheruman, or Pulayan, be touched by a Parayan, ‘he is defiled and must wash his head and pray.[[93]](#footnote-94) According to Barbosa, a Nair woman touched by a Pulayan was an outcaste for life and had to leave her home for fear of polluting her family.The conditions of the low castes were heartbreaking. They were treated worser than wild beasts. In keeping up ceremonial observances and caste distinctions, South India, particularly Travancore and Cochin took the sin of pride in the matter of extending the limits of caste pollution to unapproachability and even unseeability. The caste Hindus believed that not only the touch but even the approach of certain classes of people would cause pollution to them. In the words of E.M.S.Namboodiripad [[94]](#footnote-95)the characteristic pre-imperialist socio-economic structure was not the ‘Asiatic Mode of Production’ but a modified form of feudalism very probably unique in India.

The caste-Hindu preserved the scale of distance within which they would be polluted if the lower caste approached them. Many castes regarded as polluting by proximity, and were not allowed to approach within certain distances of Hindu temples; so much is this the case that common expressions of special measurement are, or were, Tiyapad, Cherumapad, etc., indicating a distance equivalent to that within which a Tiyan or a Cheruman, as the case may be of course, must not approach a man of high caste. At the same time this spatial measurement must be anything by exact, as not only was the polluting distance less for a Nair, for instance, than for a Brahmin, but different standards were mentioned by different authorities.[[95]](#footnote-96)

Logan in his Malabar Manual mentioned the prescribed distance at which the low caste kept away from the Brahmin; The Nayadi (dog-eaters) 72 feet, the Pulayan (agricultural slaves) 64 feet, The Tiyya (toddy tapers) 36 feet, the Mukkuvan (fishermen) 24 feet.[[96]](#footnote-97) Jonathan Duncan, in his Remarks on the Coast of Malabar, says that a Nair may approach a Nambutiri Brahmin, but must not touch him; a Tiyyan must remain 36 paces off; a Malayan (ie, Panan) must remain three or four paces farther; a Pulayan must keep 96 paces from a Brahmin. A Tiyyan must not come within 12 paces of a Nair; a Malayan must keep three or four paces farther off, and Pulayan kept 96 feet from a Nair as well as a Brahmin. A Panan may approach but not touch a Tiyyan but a Pulayan must not even approach a Panan. If any low caste people wish to address a man of higher caste, he must stand off and ‘cry aloud’. Mateer, in 1861, give 36 paces of distance within which a shaman must not approach a Brahmin, and 96 as the distance for a Pulayan; from a Nair, a Shanan must keep a distance of 12 paces and a Pulaya 66 paces.[[97]](#footnote-98) Francis Day, writing in 1863, says that an Ilavan (Ezhavan) must keep 36 paces from a Brahmin and 12 from a Nair, while a Kaniyan (astrologer) pollutes Nambutiri Brahmin at 24 feet, and a Nair by touch.[[98]](#footnote-99) In the words of Wilson a Nair must not come within 3 feet of a Nambutiri Brahmin, an Ilavan or Shanan within 24 paces and a Pulayan and other untouchable communities within 36 paces, while C.A. Innes, in the Malabar Gazetteer of 1908, says that artisans must keep about 24 feet from a Brahmin, while a Nayadi must keep 74 feet away. There may naturally, of course, have been some changes during the hundred years covered by these reports.

Pollution however acquired by the near approach of a low caste men or by touch, can only be washed out by complete immersion in water. Even to use hot water seems to be against the canon. The water must be in a natural tank or stream; even Ganges water if confined in a tub would perhaps fail to wash away pollution. The strictly orthodox were some times driven to emptying bid bottles of boiling water in to the stream above the place of bathing in order that the health of the bather may not suffer when a journey in a cool climate. The orthodox fashion was to hold the nose with finger and dip completely under the surface. The bath was necessary before food can be taken, or a sacred place entered, or several other acts performed.[[99]](#footnote-100) If a Pulayan touch a Brahmin, the Brahmin must at once bathe, read much of the divine books’, and change his Brahminical thread called poonool. A Nair, on the other hand, or any other caste polluted by a Pulayan’s touch, need only bathe to purity himself.

Unseeability is the most peculiar and most heinous caste pollution in Kerala. According to this, even the sight of certain castes of people will pollute the high caste Nambutiris. Thus they were secluded and isolated in to certain areas by naming them as unseeables. A. Ayyappan (in his Anthropology of Nayadis) recorded that the Nayadis were the most pollutant caste in Kerala. Ayyappan again noticed that the Nayadis when traveling has to avoid not only people of other castes, but dwellings, tanks, temples, and even certain streams when people were bathing in them. If a Nayadi touches the water in which men of higher castes were bathing, the water loses its purifactory qualities so long as the Nayadi is in contact with it within the sight of the bathers. At Vilayur there is a *tindal para* or pollution rock, which marks the limit within which the Nayadi may not approach the villager. It is three furlongs from there to the nearest Hindu house.

The low caste people’s movement in certain areas was prohibited. The rules did not allow the low castes to use public ways and roads. Thus James Forbes wrote; “The Pulayas are not permitted to breathe the same air with the other castes nor to travel in the public road, if by accident they should be there and perceive a Brahmin or Nair at a distance, they must instantly make a loud howling, to warn him from approaching until they have retired or climbed up the nearest tree.[[100]](#footnote-101) According to Francis Pyrad, the Nairs were in the habit of warding off the untouchables by crying ‘po.po’ that is they should get out of the way, otherwise, they should chance to touch them, they would resent it and would strike them. Victims of this social injustice were the school children belonging to the low castes, had to walk for hours to cover a short distance from home to school and vice-versa. High caste Hindus frequently harassed the low castes. The government did not interfere with the matter of the untouchables. The caste Hindus believed that it was their right to preserve their superiority. Even a slight variation of the caste rules was disallowed by the caste-Hindus and it was invariably followed by punitive punishments.[[101]](#footnote-102)

Therefore the unfortunate low caste men were made to trample along the marshes in a deep mud often went up their hips to avoid polluting their caste superiors. The failure on the part of the members of the lower castes to make way for those of the higher order would invite even death penalty. A Nair was by custom, not expected to take pity on an avarna who broke the pollution rule. If a Nair pardoned such a law breaker, and the same came to the notice of the king, the Nair was put to death. It may be noticed that this two kinds of pollution “by people whose very approach within certain distances caused atmospheric pollution, and by people whose very sight caused pollution to those of the higher caste, distinguished the malayali system of caste pollution from the Indian system as a whole.[[102]](#footnote-103)

There were also manifold restrictions in regard to their language, dress, ornaments, mode of conveyance, use of domestic vessels, manner of construction of houses etc. The language and expressions of the caste Hindus could not be used by the avarnas. An avarna must address a caste-Hindu male as Thampuran (my Lord) and female as Thampuratti (My lady). He should not refer himself as ‘I’ but only as adiyan (your slave).[[103]](#footnote-104) They can’t use the common language and were compelled to use the most object and degrading language. When speaking he must place the hand over the mouth, lest the breath should go forth and polluted person whom he is addressing. The downtrodden people were denied the Sanskrit names as Rama, Krishna, and Ganesa except in their crude form.[[104]](#footnote-105)

With regard to their personal comfort and deportment, the only dress of the degraded class of people was a piece of coarse cloth fastened round the lions. The men as well as women of the lower castes were forbidden to wear any clothing whatever above the waist. They should not wear gold or silver ornaments like the high caste people. The ornaments must be no more valuable than brass or beads. They couldn’t use umbrellas to shelter the body from the scorching heat of the sun. They must not have the right to wear shoes to protect the feet from the horns and sharp stones. They denied the right to build houses like the upper caste Hindus. The *avarnas* could not ride on horse back or to travel on palanquin. The poor avarnas could not attend schools, visit open markets, touch and draw water from public tanks and wells etc. Individuals among them who wanted to enjoy privileges in these matters had to make payments to the sarkar or to the *naduvazhi* and obtain licenses. *Menippon, mulaivila* (the payments to get the privilege to wear gold ornaments and to cover the breast of the low caste women respectively) etc., were the examples of such payments. This arrangement led to a series of inequitable imposts which imposed an intolerable burden on the members of the backward communities.[[105]](#footnote-106)

A peep into the social milieu would show that the people in ancient Kerala were accustomed to the occupational division of the society and were not familiar with the traditional fourfold classification of society or chatur varna system. On the other hand, geography had its decisive impact upon the society. Based on the fertility of the soil and its geographical location, the land was divided into five natural divisions, viz., *kurinchi* (hilly region), *palai,*(barren region), *marutham*(cultivable land), *mullai*(pastoral lands) and n*eythal*(coastal area). The people who inhabited in these regions were Vettuvar (hunters), Maravar (warriors), Ulavar (peasants), Ayar (cowherds), and Paradavar (fishermen) respectively.

Within these settlements there were corporate companionships or brotherhoods of elementary families comprising the members of the clans who regarded one another as relative of the common lineage and the kins within the elementary family who were known as okkal, kelir, urror or tamarin the sense that they were affinal relatives.[[106]](#footnote-107) Free social movement existed among the different groups. The ancient Dravidians were regarded as the direct ancestors of the Tamils, Telugu, Malayalam, Canarese and other tribes who occupied the greater part of South India.The earliest Dravidians were not primitive tribals, but settled people who tilled the ground and raised crops of various kinds. They were agriculturists by nature.[[107]](#footnote-108) It was a harmonious classification for the effective functioning of the society. No distinction was made on the basis of birth and everything was decided on merit, ability and personality. Untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability and similar customs were unknown to the ancient Tamils. Caste distinctions, disputes and religious dissensions were unheard of.

The Aryans who were familiar with the conventional system of Varnashrama dharma in North India found an entirely different social set up during their migration to South India. Upto their migration the people of South India appeared contented with their respective professions. They never thought of their superior or inferior status. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote: "The Brahmins did not succeed in arranging the people of Southern India as members of the four varnas as; they did in Northern India. It only led to the confusion of caste and the prevalence of social jealousies that have characterised the life of South India for a thousand five hundred years".[[108]](#footnote-109) It injected the distinctions based on upper and lower status into the body politic of the South Indian society. It might have naturally developed a doubt in the minds of all the professional groups which led to regular confrontations. The Brahmins who formed the microscopic minority emerged as the greatest arbitrators and peace makers and extended their counsel to the reigning kings too. By virtue of their spiritual authority, they commanded considerable influence in the society.

During the Sangam age a change in anybody’s class status could be possible. A Kurava lived in the kurinji region would become an Idaya when he reaches the mullai region and became a Vellalaor Uzhava when he went to marudam and accept the occupation of that respective regions. The sharp division of population into castes and communities were conspicuous by its absence. Dignity of labour was recognized everywhere and no person were looked upon as inferior in social status on account of his occupation. Such communities the Panas, the Kuravas, the Parayas, the Vetas, and others held in high esteem by the kings and nobles. The Panas were superior to the Brahmins of the day in their intellectual and cultural accomplishments. The condition, however, changed in the later Sangam age when the division of society into castes on the basis of occupation came into vogue. The four fold division of the Hindu Community was not prevalent in Kerala.[[109]](#footnote-110) The institution of caste is the product of centuries of evolution. Most of the historians are of the opinion that Brahmin migration brought caste system in to Kerala, which began even before the commencement of Christian era. According to William Logan, the celebrated author of Malabar Manual, the beginning of a well established, clear-cut caste system may be traced to the 8th century A.D. when Nambudiri Brahmins finally came to power.[[110]](#footnote-111) The caste system had its origin in Kerala by about the 8th century A.D. when the influx of Brahmin immigrants reached its peak. William Logan also opined that the social and economic changes brought about the Chola-Chera war of the 11th century A.D. strengthened the basis of the caste system. The Nambudiri Brahmins who were at the apex of caste hierarchy attained a position of primacy in social and religious matters. With the overwhelming domination of Brahminical system, Jainism and Buddhism both advocated a casteless society practically disappeared and Hindu society came to be organized on the basis of castes and sub-castes. *Keralolpathi*also refers that caste system with the principle of treating each group following a particular occupation as a separate caste and prohibiting intermarriages and inter dining between them, was introduced in Kerala by the Aryan immigrants.[[111]](#footnote-112)

Caste system which became very prominent in North India came to the Dravidian South comparatively later, for the earliest Tamil literature shows a society divided in to tribal groups with little sense of precedence of one over the other. Succeeding centuries saw the gradual hardening of class, until south Indian Brahmins became even stricter in their ritual observances and South Indian untouchables even more debased than those of the North.[[112]](#footnote-113) Early Tamil literature gives no evidence of caste, but the growth of Aryan influence and the development of a more complex political and economic structure produced a system in some ways more rigid than that of the North.[[113]](#footnote-114) There were no unanimous opinions among historians about the origin of caste system in Kerala.

Tradition ascribes the creation of caste to Parasurama, the leader of the first Brahmin colony. The scheme attributed to him consists of sixty four divisions evolved by permutations and combinations. T.K.Velu Pillai, in his Travancore State Manual, states that, the early Aryan society introduced the four fold division of caste in to Kerala. The immigrants claimed superiority in caste and refused to recognise any class of inhabitants of the land as Brahmins. The ruling families were however, recognised as Kshatriyas, The bulk of the people were stigmatized as Sudras, while a few were recognised as Vaisyas. In course of time, the newcomers of the Nambudiri class adopted many of the customs and usages of the older inhabitants and imposed on them some of their own. Socially, a distinction was maintained between the different sections of population. The Nambudiris being the priestly order wielded great influence over the others. Society was divided into groups according to the nature of the occupation followed by the members.

The consensus of opinion among scholars is that the process of Brahminisation of South India which began about 4th century BC and reached a decisive stage by the later Sangam age, brought caste diversity in to Kerala. We have the evidence of the Sangam works that Aryan influences were at work in Kerala Society in the early centuries of Christian era. Even some of the Sangam poets were Brahmins and were generously patronised by Chera kings.[[114]](#footnote-115) Later Sangam works shows the symbols of highly ritualistic and orthodox Nambudiri domination and caste system in making. The social framework of Kerala began to collapse during this period. In the 8th century AD the Aryanisation of Kerala reached its climax. The caste system was foisted on a casteless society by the Aryan immigrants with extra ordinary missionary zeal in spreading the Aryan ideology based on the primacy of chaturvarna. It was impossible for the Brahmin missionaries to achieve their aim completely without destroying Buddhism and Jainism, the most flourishing popular religions at the time. Thus they needed the support of naduvazhis and business lords. As a first step they propagated that which ever be the tribe, all the *naduvazhis* belonged to the same caste, and all business men were another caste, and the rest were the lower castes than the earlier two. There is reference in *Tolkappiyam* which mentioned *arachajaati* and *vanika jaati* – the ruling caste and trading caste respectively.[[115]](#footnote-116) The princely and merchant classes who were thus brought within the sphere of Aryan influence were made to believe that they constituted two superior castes, the former ruling caste (Kshatriyas), and the later the trading caste (Vaisyas).[[116]](#footnote-117) Eventually these castes began to look upon their kinsmen who followed other occupations as inferior to them in the social scale. The Brahmins also succeeded in creating in the minds of these two castes a feeling that the former were superior to the latter and as such deserved the allegiance of all classes of people. Even in the later Sangam age the protection of the Brahmins was seem to have been held up a great virtue of the rulers. At the same time the toiling classes like the Panas, who held higher position than Brahmins, and the Vetas, the Kuravas etc., whom held high status during the early Sangam age came to be looked upon as low castes.[[117]](#footnote-118) The priestly Nambudiris created a new caste, within the Hindu fold, called Sudras for doing service to the higher castes. They elevated the Nair community to the status of Sudras for their protection. The introduction of caste system brought about a deadlock in Kerala society. The social status of a person came to be determined on the basis of occupation which he followed. Those who were engaged in occupations involving physical exertion were relegated to the lower strata of society and came to be looked down.

The Nambudiris attained supremacy in social and religious matters during the Kulasekhara dynasty which ruled Kerala in the ninth and tenth centuries. According to a myth propagated by the Nambudiris, it was Parasurama, a legendary Brahmin hero, who created Kerala by reclaiming the land from the Arabian Sea. Then he gave it to the Nambudiri Brahmins whom he brought from outside. By means of this myth, the Nambudiris could convince the kings and the people that they were the real owners of the land. By composing new legal codes such as SankaraSmriti, they introduced the concept of untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability among different communities of Kerala. These concepts were implemented by the rulers as the social codes to be followed by different castes.[[118]](#footnote-119) The Brahmin legislators appeared to have changed the matrimonial laws that in addition to the right of marrying from their own caste, secured the privilege of taking wives from certain other castes such as the Kshatriyas, the Nairs, and the Ambalavasis.[[119]](#footnote-120) The conjugal relation of Brahmin males with females of certain other caste Hindus created new castes. The union of Kshatriya with Nair women gave rise to the caste Samanthar, who by caste were Nairs, differentiated in their social position and observance of hypergamy with the Nambudiris. The caste in Kerala thus grew from racial, marital and functional basis.

With the establishment of the supremacy of the Brahmins, there might have been consequent changes in the social milieu. Some might have moved closer to the victors, and some others, drifted away. Those who got linked up with the victorious Brahmins might have got certain privileges, positions, advantages etc., as concession or compromise. Others might have been subdued, excluded and rigorously kept under. The former appears to be the caste-Hindus and the latter non-caste Hindus and the depressed classes. So from the same stock of people emerged the distinction such as Nairs, Ezhavas, Pulayas and others.[[120]](#footnote-121) The most striking feature of the newly emerged society was that the predominance of the upper castes and the relatively subordinate position occupied by the lower castes. The works of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British writers throw light on the social organization of Kerala during the period from the 16th to the 19th century. It may be seen that the Brahmins stood at the top of the social hierarchy and among them the Nambudiris occupied the highest rank.[[121]](#footnote-122)

The predominance of the Nambudiris created a condition of general degradation. Moral torpor and social malaise bedeviled the Hindu population in Kerala and produced intellectual, cultural and economic stagnation for more than half a millennium before the first quarter of the twentieth century.[[122]](#footnote-123) Hindu society had not registered any change from what it was in the twelfth or thirteenth century. Caste System, in all its severity and rigidity, divided Hindu Society in to innumerable exclusive groups mutually hating and co-operating only to degrade the other. The debasing quality of this institution made the higher classes to despise the lower strata and push them out of the pale of the civilized society. Thirty million people living in the fifteen thousand square miles of territory with their tradition, culture, inheritance, language, hopes and aspirations, problems and possibilities, assets and liabilities constitute the Kerala society, an integral but distinct part of Indian society.[[123]](#footnote-124) The structure of Kerala society of yesterday where caste and landlordism were very relevant and society was rigidly assorted into numerous mutually exclusive castes and communities. Divisive and centripetal forces were more than cohesive forces and were several. Three religions divided among themselves almost entire population-Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. While the Hindus were inextricably mixed up with the feudal structure, Christians and Muslims were not. Hindus did not form a homogeneous group. On the contrary, there were about 773 divisions and subdivisions among them on the basis of caste and sub caste. The influence of caste was all pervasive and did not spare the Christian and Muslim communities from its influence.

For an effective analysis of the caste framework in Kerala Society, which is very much peculiar and highly stigmatized, an understanding about the meaning, origin and growth and spread of Caste System in India is strictly inevitable. A great deal has been written about caste and more or less from this aspect. Caste in its fullest sense is an exclusively Indian phenomenon. No comparable institution to be seen elsewhere has anything like the complexity, elaboration and rigidity of caste in India.[[124]](#footnote-125)

Caste is one of the characteristics of Hindu Social System. The word ‘caste’ has obtained wide currency in the literature of sociology. The word ‘caste’ comes from the Portuguese word ‘casta’ signifying breed, race, or kind.[[125]](#footnote-126) The Indian term is *jathi* or *varna*. When the Portuguese entered in to relations with the people of Malabar Coast they were quick to observe that the Hindus were divided in to a great number of exclusive hereditary groups distinguished by their special occupations. It was to these sections that the Portuguese gave the name of caste.[[126]](#footnote-127)

No society in the world is free from the clutches of division. Every Society is caste ridden and in one form or the other caste system exists even among the most advanced societies of the world. Unfortunately in India, Caste system became very close and has degenerated itself and therefore has become a subject of criticism throughout the world. In advanced societies caste system is used for social control and also for determining the status of individual in society. From the available records one can come to the conclusion that caste system existed in ancient Egyptian, Mexican, Persian, and many other societies.

The Brahmin was to be invested with the sacred thread (*upanayanam)* in the seventh year of age, the Kshatriya in the eleventh, and the Vaisya in the twelfth. Restrictions were also placed on the pursuit of professions and callings. The Brahmin was prevented from becoming a shopkeeper as that would trench upon the rights of the Vaisya. He was forbidden to carry arms (which were the privilege of the Kshatriyas) except in self defense. He had to avoid marital relationship with non-Aryan women. The Brahman who usurped any of the functions of the other castes was to be regarded as a Sudra. There was differentiation in the ceremonies to be performed; for instance, the Sudras were forbidden to have the *upanayanam* performed. In course of time the functional basis of caste changed in to a hereditary one.

**Table 8**

**Caste based frequency of Suicides**

|  |
| --- |
| Caste Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent |
| Nair 21 20.0 20.0 20.0 |
| Ezhava 26 24.8 24.8 44.8 |
| Christians 7 6.7 6.7 99.0 |
| SC/ST 20 19.0 19.0 63.8 |
| OBC 30 28.6 28.6 92.4 |
| Others 1 1.0 1.0 100 |
| Total 105 100.0 100.0 |

Below the Sudras were the early representatives of the people who were later called untouchables, outcastes, depressed classes, or scheduled castes. Buddhist literature and the early Dharma sutras show that several centuries before Christ there already existed groups of people, who though serving the Aryans in very menial and dirty tasks, were looked on as quite outside the pale. Some times they were called the ‘Fifth Class” (panchama), but most authorities rejected this term, as it to insist that they were to be excluded from the Aryan social order together.[[127]](#footnote-128)

Numerous groups of these people are mentioned, by names which are non-Aryan in origin, and were probably those of aboriginal tribes which came under the sway of the advancing Aryans. Chief of these groups was the Chandala, a term which came to be used loosely for many types of untouchables. The Chandala was not allowed to live in an Aryan town or village, but had to dwell in special quarters outside the boundaries. According to the law books the Chandala should be dressed in the garments of the corpses he cremated, should eat his food from broken vessels, and should wear only iron ornaments. No man of higher caste might have any but the most distant relations with a Chandala.[[128]](#footnote-129)

By the beginning of Christian era the outcastes themselves had developed a caste hierarchy, and had their own outcastes. Untouchability was the most dangerous social result of the Brahminical caste system. The untouchables, the indigenous conquered population, became the most despised section of the Hindu population and became hereditary caste of untouchables. The untouchables were assigned such low functions as those of scavengers or removers of dead cattle. They were socially and legally debarred from any other profession. The low caste people had no right to study Vedas and if anybody attempted he should be punished with the pouring of boiled lead into his ears. He was denied access to the temples and comforts of orthodox caste Hindus. They had to reside in separate area in a village or town and had no freedom to use public wells and tanks which the caste Hindus used. He was punished for a crime by the law of the Hindu state or the village tribunal composed of the caste Hindus. The legal system for the Brahmins and other high caste were entirely distinct from the low castes. For a simple crime, the low caste people were inflicted with rigorous punishments, most commonly death penalty. Brahmins were excluded from death penalty and for a crime even murder, he was only punished with penalty of some amount of money, and in rare cases they were punished with loosing of caste.It is said that even the Sudras has no rights of property. The untouchables find no place in the sacred classified society. Their touch would defile the members of the higher groups and developed a consciousness of keeping them out of touchability. They were imposed to do all kinds of menial and laborious work.

The disabilities of the low castes were not restricted to the social sphere but extended to the economic sphere also. They did not have the permission to engage in the professions of the higher castes. Their conventional occupations were dirty and soiled and their means for earning their bread and butter well limited. Thus A.R. Desai rightly says, the untouchables were the poverty stricken section of Indian production. They were mostly land labourers, semi serfs or engaged in worst occupations. They suffered from two fold evils- economic and social which are interconnected. The low social position accentuated their economic exploitation and their miserable economic conditions to stabilize their low social status.

Supremacy and selfishness of the priestly class, fantastic and supernatural explanation perpetuated the superiority of the savarnas and the very local position of the avarnas. Merciless exploitation of the labourers, menial workers, the artisans and craftsmen and many others compelled them to lead an infernal life. They had no economic and intellectual progress, since economic and intellectual opportunities were denied to them. The rigidity of the caste system despised them as mlechchas or Chandalas. Sea voyage was forbidden and social contacts with high castes were tabooed. Spirit of fatalism has gripped the lower caste. They were even denied to speak the language spoken by the Brahmins. In a nut shell, According to J.H. Hutton, “Avoidance of pollution through water, food or contact, use of temples, birth and death tabooed, marriage rules, clothing and ornaments, language, house etc are the Chief features of caste system. Every caste began to be governed by its own rules and regulations which became different from other castes.[[129]](#footnote-130)

The main caste communal groupings may be summed up as caste Hindus, noncaste Hindus and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes each having innumerable sub-divisions.[[130]](#footnote-131) Caste Hindus formed the upper bloc of the hierarchy. They were the upper caste, the savarnas, the ruling class. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Nairs, Ambalavasis and Samantas constituted the caste Hindus, the privileged section of the Hindu population. The non caste Hindus, the avarnas, were the castes from Ezhavas down to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, viz., Pulaya, Paraya, Cheruma, Pana, Kurava, Ulladan, Irulan, Malavedan, Nayadi etc.

**Brahmins**

Brahmins occupied the apex of the caste hierarchy. They were broadly divided in to two classes Nambudiris or Malayala Brahmins, indigenous to the country, and Foreign Brahmins, originally from other parts of India, especially from Canara, Mahratta, Tulu and Tamil countries, but are now settled in Kerala.[[131]](#footnote-132) Malayala Brahmins were subdivided in to six categories, of which Nambudiris stood at the apex. The sub-divisions were so fantastic that among the Nambudiris themselves there were not less than ten sub-divisions.[[132]](#footnote-133) The foreign Brahmins include two classes - Pancha Dravida Brahmins, and Pancha Gauda Brahmins. Though comparatively few in number, they are the only class that are free from all social and religious disabilities and enjoy perfect liberty of action. The whole framework of Hinduism has been adapted to the comfort and exaltation of the Brahmin. His word is law; his smile confers happiness and salvation, his power with heaven is unlimited. He is the professedly the pure and exalted priest, separate from all that is “common or unclean”.

The Nambudiri Brahmins were regarded as peculiarly sacred, and was exalted far beyond the foreign Brahmins. They claim to be the aboriginal proprietors of the soil, to whom the ancestors of the present rajahs and chiefs were indebted for all that they possessed. Their headquarters are at Alvancheri in the Cochin State, where the Chief Nambudiri resides. The highest class of Nambudiris, with rare exceptions, refuse to reside under the sway of the Sudra king of Travancore, and any of the female going South of Quilon are said to lose caste. Hence the Nambutiris resided within the limits of Travancore was not recognised as the purest class.[[133]](#footnote-134)

These proud and arrogant Brahmins were not numerous in the South, but chiefly inhabited in the Central and Northern provinces of Travancore, and Cochin and Malabar area. Their manner of life is usually very secluded, and many devote themselves especially to the performance of religious ceremonies in connection with the temples. In all the great religious observances of the Rajah, these priests are the principal celebrants, and are treated with every mark of reverence and respect. They rarely entered the arena of political life, and it was only in 1863 that the first instance occurred of a youth of this caste entering the high school at the capital, for the purpose of learning English. In consequence of their seclusion, caste prejudices, and strict attention to ceremonial purity, these Brahmins were inaccessible to the European missionaries.[[134]](#footnote-135)

The Nambudiri Brahmins were often wealthy, and resided in large comfortable houses. Their women were carefully concealed from the public gaze; and, when venturing out of the house, were enveloped in clothes, or covered by an immense umbrella. The Females were said to be distinguished by their beauty, and they enjoyed the privilege of wearing golden bracelets. The eldest son alone in a family was allowed to marry in regular form with a female of his own caste. The others, the junior members had such temporary connections, sambandham marriage relations, with Nair ladies, who regard it as a high honour to receive the visits of a Nambudiri.[[135]](#footnote-136)

The low morality that struck Hindu Society in Kerala had its roots in the Brahmin profligacy.[[136]](#footnote-137) Craze for sex among the Nambdiris brought about degeneration in the Kerala Society. They transformed the honoured female servants of Gods, devadasis, in to legal prostitutes and the honour and purity of temples became degenerated. *Sambandham* alliance, which granted the junior members of the Brahmin family the freedom to cohabit with any Sudra or Nair Women and the Nairs regarded it as a high honour to receive the visits of a Nambudiri.[[137]](#footnote-138) They took it for granted that women of their community and that of the lower tiers were created for their enjoyment. Absolute freedom in sexual life was the right of every male Brahmin and absolute surrender for female. Smarthavicharam was introduced to maintain the purity of this caste. Such smarthavicharams for checking the prostitution of Nambudiri women were common in ancient days.[[138]](#footnote-139)

There was no bar with regard to his debauchedness with Nair women. Brahmins did not hesitate to brand as immoral and immodest those women of the humbler castes who refused to expose, at the approach of the Brahmin, their breasts, ripping open their upper cloth. Till recent times, the custom of the lower caste women, going to the Nambudiri *illoms*, removing the upper garment, was strictly observed throughout Kerala.

The Nambudiri Brahmins were the real rulers of Kerala from the 11th century to the 16th century. The kings were the servants of the Nambudiris. They were masters in the arts and sciences of war as well as learning and scholarship and this enabled them to establish their supremacy over kings and rulers. They were the law makers and hence they were above the king and outside the orbit of law. They owned allegiance to only their caste chief, Alvancheri Thamprakkal, who had the exclusive authority to punish them. The law spared the Brahmins from the death penalty even for most heinous crimes, while members of untouchable castes who committed such ordinary offences as theft were punished with death penalty.[[139]](#footnote-140) According to sacred laws to kill Brahmin was equivalent to Brahmahatya, the most heinous crime.

The upper caste Brahmins enjoyed several immunities and privileges which were denied to the lower castes. Political power and authority in the land lay concentrated in the hands of the Brahmins. The existence of royal families which had matrimonial connections with Kshatriyas, Nairs, etc., eventually learned heavily from the Brahmin officers, who were imported from outsides for assistance in the discharge of their duties, helped the upper castes to get themselves entrenched in position of authority. It was the special privilege of the Brahmin Judges, vaidikar as they were called, to pass judgments in all important cases.[[140]](#footnote-141)

From 11th century to 18th century dominance was established by Brahminical Hinduism with its ceremonies, beliefs, witchcraft, practices, traditions, etc. They became the masters of the temple centered society. They were the temple authority and administered the temple lands. Rulers and common peoples were obliged to bow before the Brahmins. They hold large acres of landed property by personal and administered Devaswam lands. When the practice of *Brahmadeyam* and *Devadanam* became popular they become more powerful. This management of temples and mismanagement of temple properties made the Brahmins the Janmis during this period. In the medieval period the Brahmins introduced a feudal set-up based on the monopolistic military service of the Nairs. Kerala witnessed worst form of land lordism during the period. As priests and trustees of temples, they became owners of temple lands and assumed the status of Janmi or landlords. Nambutiris became both temporal and spiritual heads and accumulated incalculable wealth which degenerated their status. The domination of degenerated Nambutiris created a degenerated society in medieval Kerala. Till the establishment of British paramountcy and starting of Indian renaissance this state of affairs continued unabatedly in Kerala.

**Kshatriyas**

The Kshatriyas constituted only a microscopic minority in Kerala.[[141]](#footnote-142) The caste of Kshatriyas in Kerala comprises a few families, some of which were sub-divided in to smaller branches and were closely related to one another. In Cochin State the Kshatriyas were included in the members of the family of His Highness the Raja. The members of the family of the chief of Crangannur and others were called thambans and thirumulpads. The principal Thamban families were related to the ruling families, and superior in social status to those of the Thirumulpads.[[142]](#footnote-143)

The Kshatriya caste may be described according to the Sastras, as a sankara or hybrid caste originating from the sexual connection of the Brahmins with Kshatriya women. But in Kerala the fact is that, there were no Kshatriya caste as such. They were created by the Brahmins during the day of their domination. Brahmins were not the rulers of this state. They formed only the minority people residing in their 64 gramas. The rulers and ruling class of this native land was the indigenous people. When the Brahmanisation process spread to the Dravidian land the non-Kshatriya ruling classes were transformed into Kshatriya class by the Brahmins.[[143]](#footnote-144) Records dated even after tenth century AD shows that Aay rulers of Vizhinjam, the Venad Rajas, Odanadu Rajas of Kandiyurmuttam, the rulers of Karikkad, the Kizhmala Raja, etc., were Idayas. The Eradis of the Eralnadu also comes under this category. Most of these rulers got Kshatriya status by receiving the aanayatheettu from the Brahmins. Alvancheri Thamprakkal, the chief of the Nambutiris of Kerala, is the authority to issue this certificate of elevation. For that the rulers had to perform some ceremonial rituals such as *hiranyagarbham, thulapurushadanam, murajapam*etc.[[144]](#footnote-145)

Other than the ruling class, the traditional functions of Kshatriyas were performed by some chieftains and military organizations, especially the Nairs. Nairs with local variations were the fighting class, the ruling class and the managerial class.[[145]](#footnote-146) As military organizations such as *moovayirathuvar, ayyayirathuvar, arunuttuvar, munnuttuvar,* etc., and as protectors and supervisors of the landed property of the temples as well as Brahmins, Kanakkar, the Nair carried the duty of Kshatriyas in Kerala.

L.K.Ananthakrishna Iyer, in his CochinTribes and Castes opined that “the Kshatriya Community is an intermediate caste between the Nambudiris and the Sudras (Nairs). The Nambudiri class (Aryans) had become Dravidianised and Dravidian Nair population has become Aryanised though in a lesser degree. The intermediate caste therefore must be the Aryans more Dravidianised or Dravidians more Aryanised, i.e., the Aryans degraded or Dravidians more elevated, more probably the latter”.[[146]](#footnote-147)

**Table 9**

**Religion based frequency of Suicides**

|  |
| --- |
| Religion Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent |
| Hindu 81 77.1 77.1 77.1 |
| Muslim 9 8.6 8.6 .85.7 |
| Christians 15 14.3 14.3 100.0 |
| Total 105 100.0 100.0 |

**Nairs**

As there was no Kshatriya community as such below Brahmins and Nairs became Kshatriyas in caste hierarchy. Nairs were included under the category of caste Hindus. They were not a caste, but a community. Not less than thirty sub-divisions existed among them. At the top were the Samanthans.[[147]](#footnote-148) The distinction between these subdivisions was often whimsical but the more capricious they seem the more persistently they observed. Great feudal nobles in Kerala came from the Nair Community. Traditionally they were the warriors who formed the military. Being the martial class, they were more influential to the kings and priestly class. They acted as protectors of Brahmins, supervisors of landed property, the kanakkar, and at some period the supervisors of KaralarSabha. They were the overseers or supervisors of the nadu, and they seem to have been employed in this capacity as collectors of the share of produce of the land originally reserved for government purposes. The remuneration for this service and for their other functions as protectors, another share of the produce of the soil seems to have been reserved especially for them.[[148]](#footnote-149)

There are divergent views regarding the origin of Nairs. K.P. Padmanabha Menon one among the great historians of Kerala, argued that Nairs were the descendants of Nagas a prominent and dominant tribe in India once upon a time. He pointed he Naga worship and kavu related to ancient Nair tharavad as evidence to prove this view.[[149]](#footnote-150) Some others viewed that Nair is said to be derived from the Sanskrit nayaka, a leader, and to be cognate with Nayakas of Vijayanagar. Another argument in favour of the origin of Nairs was that they may be the descendants of the Uzhavar, Paravathar, and Vellala of Sangam age, as there was no reference about Nair in any of the Sangam literature.

With the ascendancy of Brahmins, Nairs become more influential class with their extra ordinary martial skills. A temple centered society emerged as a result of the Brahminical domination and temples became centers of social, economic and cultural activities. Then the economy of the state began to be determined by the temples. Through land grants, temples become the largest owners of landed property. Thalis and thaliyathiris emerged as a result of the temple centered land ownership. At earlier times Brahmins were the thaliyathiris of all thalis. When time passed the Brahmins faced difficulty in the management of the temple property as the land grants to the temples became increasing. Thus they entrusted Nairs as kanakkar (supervisors) to look after these temples as well as Brahmaswam lands. Thus the Nairs, even though were not the real masters of the land, became the supervisors of Brahmin land. With the collapse of the Perumals of Mahodayapuram the Nairs became more powerful. They became Janmis,naduvazhikal and then desavazhis with the help of their martial skill. They were the ‘the eye’ “the hand” and “the order” of the state administration.

The Sudras, the Nairs, were the middle class of Travancore and Cochin states. The greatest portion of land was in their hands and until the prohibition of slavery by the government; they were also the principal owners of slaves. They form the magistracy and holders of most of the Government offices the military and police, the wealthy farmers, the merchants, and skilled artisans of the country.[[150]](#footnote-151)

The Nair customs with respect to marriage were most singular and licentious character. In early youth the girl goes through the ceremony of marriage by having the taali, or marriage cord, tied round her neck, but this is not followed by cohabitation. It is a mere formality, and simply sets her at liberty to exercise and follow out her own inclinations in more mature years. When arrived at a marriageable age suitors present themselves and the favoured individuals offers to the young woman a cloth and other presents and resides with her. This is called mundukoduthuparpikka, giving a cloth and residing together, and is the only practical substitute for marriage amongst these people. It differs widely from the marriages of Brahmins and Shanars. The woman is at liberty to dismiss the man or the man to dismiss the woman, on very easy terms.[[151]](#footnote-152)

The Marumakkathayam system of inheritance among Nairs was equally strange. The children of a Sudra woman inherit the property and heritable honours, not of their father, but of their mother’s brother. They are their uncles nearest heirs, and he is their legal guardian.[[152]](#footnote-153) The monstrous custom was polyandry, or of one woman having several husbands was some times practiced. Nair women enjoyed a position in society since they had connection with the Brahmins. But they had to uncover their upper part of their bodies in the presence of persons of rank and position and the royal family.[[153]](#footnote-154)

The Nairs also kept the pollutant caste from approaching them. They kept the Ezhava twelve paces off and the Pulaya at sixty four paces off. But the Nairs could not touch the Brahmin. Brahmins considered the touch of a Nair as polluting. At some areas the Nairs even can’t approach the Brahmins within six feet distance.Because of their highly reputed position as militia and the influential relation with Brahmin and ruling class they enjoyed numerous privileges and titles. They followed certain rituals and practices of their superiors with slight variations. High born Nairs had the privilege to keep kudumi as like the Nambudtiri men on his head. They can use umbrellas, chapels, golden ornaments etc. They can wear dress above their waist, except in front of the Brahmins. Historians argued that the *sambandham* relation with the Brahmins was the greatest privilege of the Nairs. The Nambudiri Brahmins elevated the Nair community to the status of Sudras through this system of liaison marriage. As a consequence of this system, the Nairs became servants of Brahmins and the kings and there with powerful and influential in the society.[[154]](#footnote-155) Their titles varied according to places. Known as Panicker, Unnithan, Valiathan, Kaimal, Kurup, Kartha, Mannadiar and Menon, they exercised local political power based both on feudal holding of land and compulsory military service. The common people among Nairs were cultivators. Some Nairs were managers, rent collectors, clerks, and petty officers of Brahmin landlords, temples and royal courts. Poor Nair families provided domestic servants.[[155]](#footnote-156)

*Marumakkathayam* descent and inheritance, impartible joint family, absolute control over the family by the karanavar, the eldest male member, children having no right to the properties of their father, husband living in wife’s house, children’s loyalty and love more to their maternal uncle than their father, no responsibility to the husband to look after his wife and children, very loose marriage ties, polygamy and polyandry, in several places, sambandham alliance with Brahmins, etc. characterized the Nair family organisation.

**The Ezhavas**

The Ezhavas were not caste Hindus. They were at the top of the non-caste Hindus. They were spread evenly all over Kerala. Basically a cultivating class, traditionally Ezhavas were associated with growing and tapping coconut trees.[[156]](#footnote-157) Ezhavas, also called Izhuvans, were a widespread tribal people inhabiting Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. Known as they are under different names with more or less variations in their customs and manners, they form one and the same caste.[[157]](#footnote-158) In Travancore they are called ‘Ezhavas’, in Cochin area they are known by the name ‘Chekava’ or ‘Chovans’. In Malabar they are called ‘Tiyyas’, while in present Kasargode and in (South Canara) Tulunadu they known as ‘Billavas’.[[158]](#footnote-159) They are believed to be closely allied to the Tamil speaking Shanars of the Tinneveli District. Numerically, they occupy a high position in the population of the state. There were farmers, cultivators, Ayurvedic and Siddha Physicians, Soldiers, warriors, Kalari Trainers and Traders. Some were also involved in liquor business, textile manufacturing, and toddy tapping. They were the planters of the ancient Hindu constitution, and this character still to a very large extent retain, as they hold to the present day - a practical monopoly of tree climbing and toddy drawing from palm trees.[[159]](#footnote-160) The ‘Chekavar’ a warrior section within the community, were part of the militias of local chieftains and kings. There were also renowned Kalaripayattu experts among them.[[160]](#footnote-161) All these three, but the same, categories of people who inhabited all over the length and breadth of the state of Kerala now popularly and unanimously called by the name ‘Ezhava’.

The word ‘Ezhava’ believed to have derived from ‘Ezham’ or ‘Ilam’. The word is of such an antiquity; its etymological origins are difficult to be ascertained. These words believed to have related linguistically or socio-linguistically to group of words Elu/ Hela/ Seehala/ Sinhala/ Salai/ Seiladibe/ Serendib, pointing all to the Island of Sri Lanka. Among this group of words, the usage of ‘seehala’ is the earliest attested by epigraphical evidence. A second or third century inscription found at Nagarjunakonda of Andhra Pradesh refers to a Buddhist monastery as seehala vihara, monastery either built by people from seehala or occupied by people from seehala. The discipline of linguistics and examples found elsewhere may help to understand how not only the Ezham, Ila, Elu, He’la, Seehala and Sinhala but also the greek word ‘Salai’, and ‘Seiladiba’, the Arab ‘Serendib’ and the colonial ‘Ceylone’ are actually cognates. The all primarily stood for the geographical identity of an Island or Sri Lanka. But the original word, its etymology, its meaning, and how that original word became the name of the Island under discussion are still elusive.[[161]](#footnote-162)

The word ‘Ezham’ presented today in Malayalam or Tamil books stands for the geographical identification of the entire Island of what is called Sri Lanka today. The earliest use of this word is found in a Tamil Brahmi inscription as well as in the Sangam literature, both datable to the dawn of the Christian era. The Thirupparangkunram inscription in Tamil, found near Madurai in Tamil Nadu and dated on paleographical grounds to the first century BC, refers to a person as householder from Eezham, Eezha Kudumpikan. The Sangam work Pattinappalai, assigned to the first century AD, mentions Eezhathunavu, the food stuff coming from the Island of Eezham to Kaverippompattinam, the port of the Cholas.

Ezhavas formed the largest enterprising community of Kerala. In the early days the Ezhavas enjoyed a high status along with Nairs. They, the Nairs and Ezhavas, formed the civilized group of Sangam age. They lived together in fraternity following same customs and social life. With the advent of Brahmins one group, the Nairs supported the Brahmin ascendancy and the second group, the Ezhavas, revolted against them and marched closer to Buddhism. When Hinduism began to regain its past glory under the Perumals of Mahodayapuram and propagation by Nambutiri Brahmins, Buddhism lost its existence and the followers were severely persecuted by the Brahmins and other high caste people. When caste system became a social institution, the Ezhavas, who showed reluctance to support the Brahmins, were suppressed and degraded into low caste and untouchable.

With the establishment of the supremacy of the Brahmins there might have been consequent changes in the social milieu. Some might have moved closer to victors, and some others, drifted away. Those who linked up with victorious Brahmins might have got certain privileges, positions, advantages etc; as concession or compromise. Others might have been subdued, excluded and rigorously kept under.[[162]](#footnote-163) The Ezhavas, who were either the revolters against Brahmanism or the followers of Buddhism, were kept away from the mainstream and degraded as untouchable.

The Ezhavas and Thiyyas had high status in the ancient past. There are many evidences to show that the Thiyyas, in ancient days, belonged to the ruling class. In Northern Malabar, in ancient days there was a Mannanar[[163]](#footnote-164) (tiyya) dynasty with five palaces in Yeruvesi to the North west of Thalipparamba. Because of five palaces they were called Anch-Aramanakkar (five palace rulers). In Kerala only the palace of the Mannanar was called aramana. All the houses of other rulers were called kottaram or kovilakam.[[164]](#footnote-165) Here is a substance that might be pointing out that all other rulers at the time were vassals to Mannanar, their overlord. And it can be imagined that the Mahabali, who was crushed by the Aryan leader Parasurama was none other than Mannanar of the days.[[165]](#footnote-166) Last Mannan who had no power died in 1077 ME (1903 AD).

Mannanars belonged to the Thiyya community. It is not known when the Mannanar dynasty arose and when exactly it lost its rule. Since Sangam age does not say anything about Mannanar dynasty, the ruling power of the dynasty might have been lost before the First Century BC itself. There is no reference in Chera’s history also. Anyway the Mannanar’s aramana in destroyed conditions and the descendants of the dynasty are there in Yeruveri. Logan and some other writers also mentioned about Mannanars. There are many other examples to show that the Thiyyas were the ruling class before the ascent of the Nambutiri Brahmins to power. One such example is the use of the title Channar by the Ezhavas. ‘Channan’ was the topmost central position in power among Ezhavas in ancient period. The word channan was derived from the Chantor, meaning ‘head’.[[166]](#footnote-167) The word chantor also had a meaning “the noble man’. Chantors were the toddy drawing class of the Sangam age who got mixed up with the Ezhava Community. Liquor or toddy making was a ‘noble profession’ in the Tamil country. At royal receptions toddy was a most essential drink. As the people who gave origin to the toddy or as the toddy drawing class they had a high position at that time.[[167]](#footnote-168) There is no wonder that those who generated toddy, under such circumstances became rich in the economy and noble class in the community.[[168]](#footnote-169) In later days some kings had conferred the title Channar to many Ezhavas. This clearly shows that Ezhavas had nobility in the ancient days.

Some historians link the Ezhava Thiyya community with ancient Chera rulers. P.K.Gopalakrishnan argued that, “Chera Rajas were Villors”. They linked the Villors, Chantors, and Izhavas etc., very much. A poet mentions a Chera king as ‘Chantor Perumakan’, meaning Chantor clan’s prominent son.[[169]](#footnote-170) V. Kanakasabhai, in his the Tamils Eighteen Hundred years ago mentioning that Villors founded the Chera kingdom and the Chera king was addressed as Villavar kon.[[170]](#footnote-171) This also reveals the high status held by the Ezhavas in the ancient times.

It is said that the status of Ezhavas began to degrade after the 8th century when the Brahmins began to dominate every field of life. But records show that even though their condition degraded after 8th century AD, their complete degradation was only after 10th or 11th centuries. Therisappalli copper plate inscription given by Ayyan Atikal Thiruvatikal in 848-49 AD during the reign of Stanu Ravi mentions about Ezhavas. It gives some exception of certain taxes like thalakkanam, enikkanam, menippon, polippon, and taxes to that their houses etc to some four Ezhava families. It also gives permission to these Ezhavas entry in to the market, for trade, in their carts. Varakat Thiyyas who belonged to the Mannanar group were allowed by the Nambutiris to move about freely in palanquin. The Tantan, the Mooppan, or Karanavar etc., of the Thiyya community also had freedom to use palanquin.[[171]](#footnote-172) All these shows that the Ezhavas though were unprivileged had nobility.

During 11th and 12th centuries, when the institutions of caste system and feudalism became so rigid and intolerable, Ezhavas lost all its glory and status completely and lost all their hold on their landed property. Some historians argued that Ezhavas had no right to own landed property since very ancient period. But temple record engravings from 9th to 13th centuries AD, shows that people of all walks of life donated their landed property to temples.[[172]](#footnote-173) This shows that till that period most of the non-Brahmin groups had the right of ownership of land. Most of all rulers collected one sixth or one fifth of gross produce as land tax. The small land owners misruled by the Brahmins donated their land to the temples as Devadanam to get exemption from the payment of land tax.[[173]](#footnote-174) Those who fell in to this Brahmin created order became landless and later deprived of the right to own even a piece of land. In course of time the temples became the largest owners of landed property and finally fell into the hands of Brahmins. Administration of these lands by karalars and uralars brought feudal set up and janmi system into Kerala. When these systems began to tighten its thread, Ezhavas and other low castes fell in to servitude.[[174]](#footnote-175)

Up to 18th century the Ezhavas continued as the most populous landless community. Their lot had been slavery, untouchability and unapproachability.[[175]](#footnote-176) Though they were not agrestic slaves, ascribed to the state of vassalage in which they have been soon long held.[[176]](#footnote-177) They had not only cultivated the land but also rendered uzhiyam services for their masters.[[177]](#footnote-178) This system only harassed the Ezhavas. No one dared to resist or refuse to work. If, however, any one dared to resist or refuse, he would be crushed and humbled so as to serve as an example to others.[[178]](#footnote-179)

The general circumstances of the Ezhava population have long been continued as humiliating and degrading. Their social condition is by no means degraded into deplorable that of the slave castes. They had to keep untouchability rules and pollution distance. They were not allowed to carry umbrella, to wear shoes, or golden ornaments, to carry pots of water on the hip, to build houses above one storey in height, to milk cows, or even to use the ordinary language of the country.[[179]](#footnote-180) The caste system, feudalism and land system thus made the social and economic life of the Ezhavas a miserable one.

**Pulayas**

The Pulayas are one of the important communities among the scheduled castes. They are also known as Cheramar and Cherumar. The very name expressed the idea of impurity and was derived from the word ‘Pula’, that is funeral pollution.[[180]](#footnote-181) According to modern Kerala historians the word ‘Pulayan’ did not mean a caste but it means cultivator. Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai explains that the word pulam means field, place or country. They are supposed to be the descendants of the aborigines who preferred slavery in the plains to freedom and starvation in jungles.

It is interesting to note that during the early periods of history this polluting community enjoyed a very high status in the Kerala society. The Pulayas are said to have been owners and rulers of the land in olden times. Sangam literature mentioned about the Pulayas as land owners as well as holders of high status in the society. Quoting L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, Edgar Thurston reports that once upon a time the Pulayas had dominion over several parts of the country According to this report, a persons called AyikkaraYajaman or Ayikkara Tamara (king), whose ancestors were Pulaya kings, was still held in considerable respect by the Pulayas of North Travancore, and acknowledged as their chieftain and Lord. The existence of Ayikkaranad (Ayikkara country) in the Kunnathunadu Taluk near Cherthala is still a remainder of this historical fact.[[181]](#footnote-182) He was the head of the Pulaya community and had a lace cap, believed to have been presented by the Cheraman Perumal. In Trivandrum, on the banks of the Lake Veli, there is a hill called Pulayanar Kotta, where a Pulaya king is believed to have been once ruled. In the course of history the Pulayas were defeated by other castes who gained power. The land of the Pulayas was encroached upon and they began to be treated as slave labourers.[[182]](#footnote-183)

The Pulayas were divided in to Thanta Pulayans (Vettu Pulayans), Kana Pulayas, Padinjaran Pulayas (Western Pulayas), Kizhakkan Pulayas (Eastern Pulayas), Thekkan Pulayas (Southern Pulayas) and Valluva Pulayas. The Padinjaran Pulayas were considered to be superior to the Kizhakkan Pulayas. According to the legend, the Kizhakkan Pulayas were the slaves of Duryodhana while the Padinjaran Pulayas were the slaves of Pandavas. The defeat of Duryodhana caused degradation of the Kizhakkan Pulayan. The Padinjaran Pulayans were divided into a number of *illoms* (Clans). Children assume the illom of mother. Endogamy at community level and exogamy at illom level is practiced by the Pulayas.[[183]](#footnote-184) In the Palakkad area, they had an assembly known as the Kannati Kutti Vattal, which had jurisdiction over the caste matters and minor offences of the community members.[[184]](#footnote-185)

But the influx of people from other parts completely changed the life style of the Pulayas. In course of time the Pulayas occupied a very low position in society and were subjected to all kinds of social disabilities. The only dress of the degraded Pulayan is a piece of coarse cloth fastened round the loins, and a small piece tied around the head as head-dress. To women as well as men it was forbidden to wear any clothing whatever above the waist. The ornaments must be no more valuable than brass or beads; umbrellas must not be used to shelter the body from the scorching heat of the sun, nor shoes to protect the feet from the thorns and sharp stones.[[185]](#footnote-186)

The Pulayas had no education. The language which he was compelled to use was disgraceful, humiliating and degrading. He never dared to say ‘I’ but adiyan, “your slave”; he dared not to call his rice ‘choru’, but karikkadi – dirty gruel. His house is called madam, a hut, and his children he speaks of as ‘monkeys’ or ‘calves’; and while speaking he must place the hand over the mouth, lest the breath should go forth and pollute the person when he is addressing.

The Pulayas were prohibited from entering the markets and bazaars. In 1931, Poikayil Yohannan, an avarna member of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly of Travancore complained that “men and women belonging to the depressed classes had no convenient place in Trivandrum, the capital city, to sell their wares in the shape of bundles of grass, straw, baskets, mats etc. They spread them for sale on the borders of roads, necessarily subjecting themselves to be beckoned away by the police at any time. They had to run about the town and often failed to realise the due price”. [[186]](#footnote-187)

All castes, Brahmins, Sudras, Ezhavas, and Shannars possessed Pulaya slaves. While some masters treated their slaves with consideration, others greatly oppressed them. For faults or crimes they were cruelly confined in stocks or cages, and beaten. For not attending work very early in the morning, they were beaten up and flogged severely. Awful cruelties were sometimes perpetrated. Cases are known in which slaves had been blinded by lime cast into their eyes. Slaves were not only bought and sold outright, but also mortgaged like lands. Female slaves were valued at double price; on account of the ‘produce’ the children – half of which went to the seller and half to the purchaser.[[187]](#footnote-188) A Cheruma or Pulaya could not approach a Brahmin Village or temple or tank. Even while using the public road, if he happened to see his lord and master, he had to leave the ordinary way, it may be in the mud, to avoid his displeasure by accidentally polluting him. [[188]](#footnote-189)

**Parayas**

Parayas were low caste basket makers and agricultural labourers. They were generally known as slaves or serfs. They were the outcastes of the society. They are also known as Sambavar. They have three sub-divisions, namely param, pullani and chakkali, and do not intermarry with the Pulayas. Probably they were the ‘Classic’ Scheduled Caste of South India.[[189]](#footnote-190) They were treated as even below the Pulayar; though they would not accept cooked food from them. Only the Nayadi and the Ulladan were perceived to be below or at par with them. Their presence carried pollution within about a furlong.[[190]](#footnote-191) They used to live far away from other communities, in huts thatched with palmyra leaves, in the most in hospitable portion of the terrain.

The facts seem to show that the Parayans priests (Valluvans), and the Parayans as a race were very ancient, and ten centuries ago they were a respectable community, and many were weavers. The privileges they enjoyed were relics of an exceedingly long association with the land. The institution of the paracheri points to original independence, and even to possession of much of the land. With the colonization of South India by the Brahmins the Parayans lost the land and that their degradation as a race began.[[191]](#footnote-192)

Among the Parayan, social division existed at kulam level, which is an exogamous unit. Community endogamy, like the Pulayar, and kulam exogamy is the marriage rule among the Parayas.[[192]](#footnote-193) The Parayas are non vegetarians and eat beef and because of which they were considered by high caste Hindus as unapproachable and unseeable.

Though the Government issued orders of throwing open to all government schools to all classes, the admission continued to be denied to the non-caste students. In 1904, Arthur T.Foster, a missionary send eight boys who were converts from the Paraya caste and finished their course in the village school to the Middle School at Neyyattinkara, with a letter to the Head Master. But they were denied admission.[[193]](#footnote-194)

The Parayas were very inferior race that their proximity or contact would entail the most alarming contamination. ‘Their very look is contamination’.[[194]](#footnote-195) They have to stand away at a great distance of 72 feet. They were not allowed to walk along the public roads, approach the vicinity of the houses of the higher caste etc. Orthodox Caste Hindus had to take bath five times and let blood flow in order to be purified from contamination caused by the touch of the Parayas.

When Indian of any other caste permits a Paraya to speak to him, this unfortunate being was obliged to hold his hand before his mouth, lest the Indian might be contaminated with his breath; and, if he was met on the highway, he must turn on one side to let the other pass. On the sight of the high castes, Parayas run away in to jungles deserting their huts.[[195]](#footnote-196)

The flesh of cattle left dead by the road-side and it is their partaking of this food that excited the abhorrence of ordinary Hindus, who venerate the cow. The Parayas were employed chiefly in field labour. They were zealous devil-worshippers and dancers. They made great pretensions to sorcery and magical powers. They were employed by Sudras and Shanars for casting out devils and counteracting enchantments. In North Travancore, their condition seems to be at the lowest, as they enter in to the Malayalam Country, and had fewer opportunities of escape from their caste degradation and bitter servitude.[[196]](#footnote-197) Later many of them were converted to Christianity, mainly to escape from the cruelties of their masters.

Nambudiris were polluted by the touch of all castes below them and by approach of all lower than Nairs. A man or woman of lower castes was supposed to uncover above the waists as a token of respect when approaching a Nambudiri and was supposed to use special terms of respect when referring to anything belonging to him. A Nair should not go nearer than six paces to the Nambudiri, lest his holiness would be polluted by his proximity; a man of barber caste should not go nearer than twelve paces, a Tiyya thirty six and Pulaya, the lowest caste ninety paces.[[197]](#footnote-198) Pollution was observed even among the different sub-castes within the Brahmin Community. A Tamil Brahmin by touch caused pollution to Nambudiri. Thus Nambudiri Brahmins considered themselves superior to other Brahmins too.The social scene of Kerala, in fact presented many paradoxes.

Among large population states, Tamil Nadu and Kerala had the highest suicide rates per 100,000 people in 2012. The male to female suicide ratio has been about 2:1. India accounts for more than a third of global suicide deaths among women. Suicide is the top cause of death among Indians aged between 15 and 39 years.Young adults are taking their own lives in alarmingly high numbers, constituting a public health crisis. The suicide death rates among men and women aged above 70 years have risen for reasons still unclear. Kerala is something of a role model in welfare-oriented development, and yet the State has been reporting one of the highest suicide rates in the country.[[198]](#footnote-199)

**Chapter 1V**

**VICISSITUDES OF WOMEN IN KERALA**

Regarding the position of women, Manu holds “Women be a young or an adult or an old, should not do anything independently without permission of her guardian. Before marriage the girls should be under the care of the father, in youth husband, and if the husband dies under the son, she should never be independent.” The father protects her in childhood, the husband in youth and the son in advanced years. A woman is never fit to depend upon herself. In addition to that Manu has discouraged widow remarriage. The Brahmin priests who performed the *yanja* on behalf of the chieftains received land grants by way of reward for their performance. This induced more and more Brahmins to come and settle down in the South.[[199]](#footnote-200) Their active support to the monarchs brought them further benefits in the form of new lands and privileges.

The Brahmin settlements were characterized by the emergence of temple oriented villages. The increase in agricultural production led to economic prosperity. They patronized small industrial and mercantile communities, who accepted subordinate position. These Brahmin villages called *Brahmadeya* or *Caturvedimangala* were gradually given autonomy in local administration. The new kings were surrounded and dominated by their Brahmin councilors who acted as court astronomers, family priests and even commanders of forces and formed the power behind the throne. The practice of sati, self immolation in the funeral pyre of the dead husband became very popular. It was a kind of suicide which had its sacramental sanction. It was believed that those who committed voluntary suicide would live with their husbands in the heaven.

Across the world, men commit suicide at a higher rate than women, and India is no different. But India’s female suicide problem is particularly bad. India has the sixth highest female suicide death rate in the world.In the course of political uncertainty due to change of dynasties and territories and economic fluctuations on account of periodic famines and pestilence, the Brahmin temples with their immunity from taxation and oppression remained stable. Gifts in terms of gold, cattle and land poured into their hands from kings, merchants and the local gentry. By 12th century A.D., with the collapse of the second Chera Empire, the Nambudiri epoch became very solid and the practice of sati gathered more momentum.

The Bhakti Movement helped to consolidate the orthodox Hindu community and it did not help the emancipation of women. As a result of the Bhakti wave, the pockets of Jain and Buddhist influences were wiped out of existence. With the progress of Sanskritisation, it’s by product of *caturvarnya* social order had effectively been implemented.[[200]](#footnote-201) The Arya Brahmins who moved into the centre of social order won a key role in politics as legislators and advisers. Huge temples with classical features of architecture and sculpture sprang up. They became the physical and spiritual centers of upper class community and emerged as the new fortresses serving its appetite to luxury and self indulgence, safe from the attacks of the outcastes.

The temples decided the social status who hailed from the different sections of the society. One section of the indigenous people co-operated with the Arya-Brahmins and became their tenants and servants. Though lower in status, proximity with Aryans made them enjoy considerable power and prestige. The Nairs and Vellalas belonged to this category.[[201]](#footnote-202) Those who resisted were suppressed by the kings and chieftains. Those who remained outside this new Brahmin-Nair combine were pushed into the forest or subjected to serfdom and vassalage. They formed the large number of manual workers, condemned to hard labour in order to support a small group of fortunate elite. In the midst of poverty and starvation at times the poor people were resoted to suicide.

The on-set of feudalism began with the establishment of royal control over communal lands. Royal ownership accorded the king the liberty to transfer the lands to spiritual and temporal heads.[[202]](#footnote-203) Vast estates were transferred to the temples and priests.[[203]](#footnote-204) The uninterrupted process of land grants and the subsequent acquisition of land control led to the rise and growth of feudalism. This process continued uninhibited for centuries together till it was firmly established. The Brahmins became the managers of the temple lands with enormous wealth. Their control over lands was total and absolute and by the 13th century A D, feudalism became a vital institution wielding enormous powers and profound influence.[[204]](#footnote-205)It led to a series of vicissitudes in the social formations of Kerala.

The Brahmin profligacy transformed the honoured female servants of Gods, *devadasis*, in to legal prostitutes and the honour and purity of temples became degenerated. *Sambandham* alliance, which granted the junior members of the Brahmin family the freedom to cohabit with any Sudra or Nair women and the Nairs regarded it as a high honour to receive the visits of a Nambudiri. They took it for granted that women of their community and that of the lower tiers were created for their enjoyment. Absolute freedom in sexual life was the right of every male Brahmin and absolute surrender for female. *Smarthavicharam* was introduced to maintain the purity of this caste. Such *smarthavicharams* for checking the prostitution of Nambdiri women were common in ancient days.[[205]](#footnote-206)

There was no bar with regard to his debauchedness with Nair women. Brahmins did not hesitate to brand as immoral and immodest those women of the humbler castes who refused to expose, at the approach of the Brahmin, their breasts, ripping open their upper cloth. Till recent times, the custom of the lower caste women, going to the Nambudiri *illoms*, removing the upper garment, was strictly observed throughout the region.

The Brahmanical society exhibited a social hierarchy at the top of which stood the Brahmins. The Brahmins were prosperous and wealthy held tax-free proprietorship of land. They availed vast privileges and lived at the cost of the non caste Hindus. The so called non caste Hindus were reduced to a very humble status and were subjected to terrible restrictions and disabilities. They were the descendants of the true sons of the soil who once exercised vast privileges. Following the Aryanisation of South India they lost their pre eminent status and reduced to the condition of virtual slaves. For several centuries together they thrived under the yoke of feudalism and slavery. Their women were also called upon to face all such ordeals in life.

**Brahmin**/ **Nambudiri Women**

Among the Hindus, the Brahmins formed the apex of the social ladder. They are divided into two groups, the larger being the Malayalam speaking Nambudiri Brahmins who are supposed to be the earlier immigrants and regarded as superior and the smaller group, the Tamil speaking Brahmins, from across the mountains. The Tamil Brahmins constituted a small group in South Kerala. They were well educated, clever and industrious and first came to assist the Rajas in the administration. They usually retained their roots in Tamil country and rarely identified themselves with the local people.[[206]](#footnote-207)

A woman of lower castes was supposed to uncover above the waists as a token of respect when approaching a Brahmin and was supposed to use special terms of respect when referring to anything belonging to him. A Nair should not go nearer than six paces to the Brahmin, lest his holiness would be polluted by his proximity; a man of barber caste should not go nearer than twelve paces, a Tiyya thirty six and Pulaya, the lowest caste ninety paces.[[207]](#footnote-208) Pollution was observed even among the different sub-castes within the Brahmin Community. A Tamil Brahmin by touch caused pollution to Nambudiri. Their office is stated to be to teach, preach, perform religious ceremonies and make or expound laws.[[208]](#footnote-209)

The Brahmins were exempted from the punishments like death and imprisonment. Fines and degradation of caste were the only punishments given to them. The Nairs who murdered the person below them were fined for the first time. But the members of the lower strata of the society received cruel punishments like death, mutilation and driving the iron nail into the body, a form of crucification (*cithravadham*) for the minor offences like theft and relation with the women of higher classes. “There was no written code, but the punishments assigned by custom fitted the crimes, and they varied with the status of caste and of the person. The nobles enjoyed the privilege of freedom from confinement. “The punishment of death was reserved for sacrilege, the murder of the Brahmin, and a cow”.[[209]](#footnote-210)

The community was in the whirlpool of several such practices like *smartavicaram,* child marriage, *sambandham* and polygamy. The practice of Sati was very much popular among the Nambutiri women. *Smartavicaram* was the most shocking practice where the Namboodiri women underwent a humiliatory trial and conviction when her chastity was in question. *Smartavicaram* was the court of enquiry in to allegations for the transgression of the rules of chastity by the Namboodiris.[[210]](#footnote-211) At times it became worse than virtual death. *Vicaram*means caste trial. It was presided over by the *Smartan* (Vedic Judge). Hence it was called *Smartavicaram*. According to L.K. Anantakrisha lyer "the Namboodiri women were kept in the strictest seclusion. Of all the virtues, chastity is accounted the highest and any violation of this, in man or women, entails loss of caste, social status and separation from the family. Enquiries into cases of conjugal infidelity are conducted by Smartan (Judge) and hence the name *smarthavicharam* by which the caste trial is known.[[211]](#footnote-212) The suspected *antharjansm*(Nambudiri woman) of the *Smartavicharam*was called *Sadhanam*. *Smartavicaram* was worse than thepractice of suicide.

The caste council which conducted the *smartavicharam*consisted of caste-elders such as Smartan, Vaidikans, Mimamsakas, Akakkoyma and Purakkoyma. He belongs to Samantan caste (upper- caste Nair).The Akakkoyma, the local headman at the village level was to be also presented in the trial because it was he who first reported the case to the *Smartan* of the *Gramam.* He had to make also necessary arrangements at the *Illam* of the accused for holding the *smartavicharam*.[[212]](#footnote-213)

There are six phases of the *Smartavicaram* viz., Dasivicharam, Ancampuravilakkal, Vicharam, Svarupam Collal, Udakavicchedam and Suddhabhojanam. When the chastity of Namboodiri woman was suspected the matter was immediately reported to the headman of the local village council either by the head of her own family or by any caste elder of the neighbouring *illam* for necessary enquiry in accordance with the caste rules. The Nayar maid servant attached to the Namboodiri woman would be at once interrogate by the local headman (*akakkoyma*) in order to get satisfactory evidence in support of the allegation. In a Namboodiri family the Nayar maid servant was generally attached to a Namboodiri woman. The preliminary trial of the Nair maid servant (*dasi*) by the local headman was called *dasivicaram*.[[213]](#footnote-214)

In case the evidence of *Dasi* was found satisfactory about the allegations and the local headman was convinced of the alleged offence, the accused Nambutiri women would be lodged in the *Ancampura* [literally, a fifth house]. *Ancampura* refers to an outer house away from the main *Illam* of the Nambudiri and *akkal* (lodging). She was there after cut off from all free movements in the family and the whole family likewise placed under a temporary ban.[[214]](#footnote-215) The local headman then would submit his report to the *Smartan,* the president of the *Gramam* council about the evidence of the offence. The case then had to be referred to the local Raja by the *Smartan,* for royal sanction to hold the *Smarthavicharam*on receipt of the complaint, the local Raja, the judicial head of the Namboodiris in caste matters used to give his order for holding the *Smarthavicharam*.

The third phase of the trial was *Vicaram*. At the very outset of the trial, the dasi would be asked by the Smartan, whether her mistress was present in the *ancampura*. The rule was that the Nayar maid servant should stand at the door of the *ancampura* during the whole period of the trial (*Vicaram*). Then a number of questions were put to the defendant Namboodiri woman through the Nayar maid servant, by the *Smartan*. The rule was that the *Smartan* should neither put questions directly to the accused Namboodiri woman nor would he be allowed to see her during the trial. Above all, the *Smartan* was not allowed to put unnecessary and unwanted questions to the accused. It was one of the duties of the local headman to see that the questions put to the defendant Namboodiri women by *Smartan* were proper and relevant. But the custom was that he should not speak anything during the trial. If the questions put to the accused Namboodiri were found to be irrelevant, the local headman would immediately put off his tort (piece of white cloth) from his shoulder. Seeing this, the *Smartan* used to correct himself by realising the fact that the question he had asked as irrelevant. It was only then the local headman would put on his tort back again on his shoulder.[[215]](#footnote-216) Every day in the evening on account of the entire proceedings was to be given by the local headman to other caste-elders of the village council and receive their suggestions and the nature of questions to be asked.

The moment the defendant confessed her quilt and disclosed the names of persons with whom she had illicit sexual relations, she would be brought out of the *Anccampuram* and was cross-examined very minutely about the time, place, circumstances and personal identification marks of her paramours. In case the defendant woman was found innocent of the allegations leveled against her, the plaintiff [the members of the caste council who conducted the *Smartavicaram* would solicit her pardon. She was the readmitted into the caste along with her family. The persons accused by the woman are never permitted to disprove the charges against them, but the woman herself is closely cross examined and probabilities are carefully weighed. And every co-defendant except the one who, according to the woman's statement, was the first to lead her astray, had a right to be admitted to the boiling oil ordeal as administered at the temple of Sucindrum in Travancore.[[216]](#footnote-217) If his hand is burnt, he is guilty; if it comes out clean he is judged as innocent. The ordeal by weighment is scale is also at time resorted. The order for submission to these ordeals is granted by the president (*Smartan*) of the tribunal. Money goes a long way towards the favourable issue in the ordeals. But according to Cerumukku Vaidikan, all co-defendant Nambutiris except the accused Nambutiri woman had the right to refuse the allegation and has also the right to be admitted to the boiling oil ordeal as administered at the temple of Sucindram.

The next phase of the *Smarthavicharam*trial was *Svarupam Collal*. The *Smartan* would then submit his findings of the trial to the local Raja and also to the other members of the caste-council. When the guilt was proved, the verdict of the *Smarthavicharam*would be announced. This announcement of the verdict of the trial was called *Svarupam Collal*.[[217]](#footnote-218)*Collal* means announcement and *Svarupma* refers to the verdict of the *Smarthavicharam*. On receipt of the report of the *Smarthavicharam*, the local Raja pronounced the order for the excommunication of the defendant woman from the caste. On receiving this proclamation the judges fix a day for its due execution. She is taken near a tank set apart especially for the purpose and temporary ceiling is put up, from the top of which a specially selected person reads loud the proclamation. It was the duty of the *Smartan* to read the verdict of the trial. The striking feature of the announcement of the verdict was that the *smartan* should tell the circumstances and reasons for lodging the culprit in the *ancampura,* the date and evidence of *dasivicaram*, the royal sanction for holding the *smarthavicharam*, the name of the caste-elders participated in the trial and finally the evidence in support of the verdict of trial. It is interesting to note that it was degradation for *Smartan* or any other Nambudiri to announce the name or names of persons who had sexual relations with the accused women. The s*Smartan* would merely say that the seducer's name would be announced by the *kuttipattar* (Tamil Brahmin), who was especially appointed by the caste council for the purpose. After performing this duty the Tamil Brahman would jump into the water and so do all Nambudiri spectators, including the *smaratan*. The belief was that this would wash away the sin they had contracted. The defendant woman would also take her bath and would also take her palm leaf umbrella with which all Nambudiri women used to conceal them. The accused Nambudiri woman henceforth became an out-caste and she could no longer be called *antarjanam* but a *sadhanam*(thing).The *Nittu* records of central Archives at Trivandrum give evidence for *smartavicaram* trial. In the *Nittu* of Diwan Seshayya there is reference about *smartavicaram* in the travad of Chittattangal Amanthuruthi.[[218]](#footnote-219)

*Udakavicchedam* refers to the severance of the right of the kin of the excommunicated persons in performing obsequies when the latter die. When an offender was excommunicated from the caste, his kin had to perform immediately the *udakakriya* (obsequies) of this ceremony the kin of the ostracised person had the right to observe pollution and perform several rites like obsequies according to the caste rule. But once the rite of *udakakriya* was performed, they would sever their rights to observe pollution and obsequies, even if the excommunicated was dead. Thus the severance of the rights of the kin of the ostracised person for performing *udakakriya* was called *udakavicchedam*. It was normally celebrated during the night. The kin, particularly the husband and children of the excommunicated woman, had to observe fast for the whole day prior to the ceremony. This ceremony was conduced by the *smartan*. As soon as the ceremony was performed, the excommunicated person had severed relation from the *illam*, villages and country.[[219]](#footnote-220)

The last phase of the *smartavicaram* was the performance of the rite of *suddhabhojanam* (purificatory feast). It was conducted immediately after the accused persons were ostracised from the caste. The children and the other kinsmen of the ostracised woman had to undergo elaborate and expensive purificatory rites and to arrange for sumptuous feast to the caste-elders. At this feast, the kin of the ostracised woman had to undergo elaborate and expensive purificatory rites and to arrange for sumptuous feast to the caste-elders. At this feast, the kin f the ostracised woman would be permitted for the first time to eat in the company of the caste-elders like Smartan, Vaidikan, Mimamsaks, Akakkoymas etc.

The eldest member of her family should wash the feet of the caste elders, given *daksina,* and feed them after worshipping Mahavishnu. It was only then the kin of the excommunicated would be welcomed to the caste nonetheless with the permission of the local Raja.[[220]](#footnote-221)Since the Nambudiris were at the top of caste hierarchy, they thought that they should set an example to others. So the Nambudiris forced their women to observe chastity by conducting such severe caste trials as the *smartavicharam* generally in male dominant society’s men chiefly used the weapons of chastity to control or suppress women. The Nambudiris were no exception to this. It can be noted that, they used this trial to suppress their women. Under such circumstances the accused women resorted to suicide.

There is not a single example of a woman proved chaste after *smarthavicharam*. The interrogations were in such a way that the accused could only answer the questions of the *smarthan.* She cannot ask anything to him. Moreover she cannot answer directly to the caste council; she has to answer through the *dasi*. Because of this she was not given a chance to explain her position clearly. Inspite of that in the early times cruel devices such as letting of rats and snakes into the woman's apartment were practised in order to extort her confession.[[221]](#footnote-222) Even innocent woman at times admitted the charges on such occasions. EMS Namboodiripad found that this caste trial was conducted just for name sake, the real motive being their total suppression.

The purity of the race is rigidly guarded that the least suspicion as regards the conduct of a Nambutiri woman forms the subject of elaborate and rigorous enquiry. The *Sankara Smriti* says that the whole world rests on the chaste conduct of woman, and the country where Brahman woman are not chaste cannot claim to be property governed. So the Raja should always be on the look out for suspects and punish them severely. From this punishment she was considered dead and the family performed her funeral rites.[[222]](#footnote-223) Adultery between a Nambudiri woman and a man of inferior caste is perhaps the most serious of all caste offences.[[223]](#footnote-224)

After the sentence was pronounced the excommunicated adulteress was taken to a secluded locality far away from the village she lived on the order of the King. The conveyances should be arranged for the *Sadhanam* and the police constables and maid servants who escorted her. As soon as the *Sadhanam* reached its place either she was lodged in a house, other wise a house was built of mud walls and bamboo roofing with door and lock, and with no opportunity to have any sort of intercourse with any one. She was given one measure of rice with necessary accompaniments daily, for the rest of her life. These were done as per the orders given by the local King, at the behest of the relatives of the convicted woman. She is also prevented from touching tanks, wells etc. In the district of Malabar, according to William Logan, woman driven out went wherever they liked.

Some were looked after by their seducers, some became prostitutes, and a few were purchased and taken as wives by the Chettis of Calicut and a few found homes in institutions specially endowed to receive them. This last mentioned institution is that of Muttedetta Aramanakkal in the Chirakkal taluk with extensive jungle endowments. The members of the institution are of Thiyya caste. If the connection has been with the men of lower caste than the Thiyya, the woman are sent to another institution called Kutiramala, situated deeper in the jungles of the Western Ghats.[[224]](#footnote-225)

If the children were born to her by her legal husband any time after she had committed adultery and the children of her paramour's wives had to undergo expensive expiatory rites conducted by the *Smarthan*. Even after the performance of this purificatory rite they were not readmitted into Nambudiri Caste, on the contrary they were degraded into two lower castes - Chakiar and Nambiyar.[[225]](#footnote-226) If the excommunicated is a widow her sons were readmitted in the caste after performing Udakavichadakam and Suddhabhojanamdaughters had to live with the mother.

On the whole it is inferred from whatever sources there are that the conditions of the convicted Nambudiri woman in*, smarthavicharam* were not happy. Ostracism and out casting were regarded as equal to death by the Nambudiri. The fate of the convicted though secure in certain cases, yet was most unpleasant even in cases like those when some of these Nambudtiri women were taken as wives by the Chetti merchants for they had lost their caste and privileges along with it. In such situations they preferred suicide as the most effective solution from the miseries.

**Nair Women**

TheNair women were very proud by virtue of their relations with the Brahmins. The cases of suicide were comparatively limited among the Nair women. As there was no Kshatriya community in Kerala as such below Brahmins and Nairs became Kshatriyas in caste hierarchy. Nair women were included under the category of caste Hindus. They were not a caste, but a community. Not less than thirty sub-divisions existed among them. At the top were the Samanthans. The Nairs claimed themselves the caste Hindus and placed in the social hierarchy next to the Brahmins. The non-caste Hindus, the Nadars the Ezhavas, Mukkuvas, Arayas, Pulayas and Parayas constituted the *avarnas.* They were generally regarded as untouchables, unapproachable and even unlookables. They were subjected to several social disabilities and considered as polluting communities. Commenting the miserable situations of these people Col. Macaulay wrote: “if the poor wretch who tills the soil and reaps the grain should happen accidentally and ignorantly to cross any Nair in his path, the monster draws his sword and kills him on the spot with impunity; the insecurity of property and miserable servitude of the peasantry in parts of Maharashtra, Arcot countries, and some Poligar pollams are well known but the state of independent and exalted happiness when contrasted with the wretchedness and degradation of the beings in human shape who have misfortune to be born in Malabar or Travancore.”[[226]](#footnote-227)

“When the Nairs go about the town”, says Francois Pyrard, “and come across the villains, they cry, Po, Po, that is, that they should get out of the way, otherwise, if they should chance to touch they would resent it, and would strike them.”[[227]](#footnote-228) Barbosa also stated that if the peasants did not change the way the Nair might kill them without penalty.[[228]](#footnote-229) The enormities committed by the upper castes were such that the lower castes feared them like chickens at the sight of the kite.[[229]](#footnote-230) Abbe Dubois recorded “the state of bondage is at its worst along the coast of Malabar, as are several other customs peculiar to the country. The reason is that Malabar owing to its position has generally escaped the invasions and revolutions which have so often devastated the rest of India and has thus managed to preserve unaltered many ancient institutions which in other parts have fallen into discuss.” According to Ward and Conner “their name is connected with everything, revolting, shunned as if infested with the plague, the higher classes view their presence with a mixture of alarm and indignation, and even towns and markets would be considered as defiled by their approach”.

Having seen the extreme rigidity of caste rules and their harsh enforcement in the region the persons like Swami Vivekananda expressed the view that in a place so beautiful, so lovely, there should be unloveliness in man against man was and is a matter of deepest grief to me. The world outside has a right to measure Hinduism by its manifestation in this state. Unfortunately even for Hinduism, unfortunately for the state, and unfortunately even for all India there is not much credit to be the state in the matter of untouchability.[[230]](#footnote-231)Mostly the Nair women had contacts with the people from the higher strata of society. On the other hand they treated the people who hailed from the lower strata with contempt and hatred.

The Nair customs with respect to marriage were most singular and licentious character. In early youth the girl goes through the ceremony of marriage by having the *taali*, or marriage cord, tied round her neck, but this is not followed by cohabitation. It is a mere formality, and simply sets her at liberty to exercise and follow out her own inclinations in more mature years. When arrived at a marriageable age suitors present themselves and the favoured individuals offers to the young woman a cloth and other presents and resides with her. This is called *mundukoduthuparpikka*, giving a cloth and residing together, and is the only practical substitute for marriage amongst these people. The woman is at liberty to dismiss the man or the man to dismiss the woman, on very easy terms.[[231]](#footnote-232)

The *marumakkathayam* system of inheritance among Nairs was equally strange. The children of a Sudra woman inherit the property and heritable honours, not of their father, but of their mother’s brother. They are their uncles nearest heirs, and he is their legal guardian.[[232]](#footnote-233) The monstrous custom was polyandry, or of one woman having several husbands was some times practiced. Nair women enjoyed a position in society since they had connection with the Brahmins. But they had to uncover their upper part of their bodies in the presence of persons of rank and position and the royal family.[[233]](#footnote-234)

*Marumakkathayam* descent and inheritance, impartible joint family, absolute control over the family by the *karanavar*, the eldest male member, children having no right to the properties of their father, husband living in wife’s house, children’s loyalty and love more to their maternal uncle than their father, no responsibility to the husband to look after his wife and children, very loose marriage ties, polygamy and polyandry, in several places, *sambandham* alliance with Brahmins, etc. characterized the Nair family organisation.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| *Sambandham*was a marital system primarily followed by the Nairs and Ambalavasi, the matrilineal communities. The custom is known in alternate names like Pudavamuri, Pudavakoda, Vastradanam, Vitaram Kayaruka, Mangalam and Uzhamporukkuka in different regions.[[234]](#footnote-235)The Madras Marriage Act, 1896, defined Sambandham as "an alliance between a man and a woman, by reason of which they, in accordance with the custom of the community to which they belong, or to which either of them belongs, cohabit or intend to cohabit as husband and wife."[[235]](#footnote-236) On a suitable date fixed by an astrologer, the groom and his family would arrive at the house of the bride. They would be entertained in the southern hall of the house, which would be specially decorated for the ceremony. Two big brass oil lamps and paras of paddy would be kept in the centre of the room, with a bunch of coconuts in front of the lamp. The groom would be seated before the lamp. At the auspicious hour, an elderly woman would bring in the bride before the groom. With the permission of the elders of the bride, the bridegroom would present the bride a wedding shawl or pudava. Once the bride receives the cloth, she presents the bride groom with *thamboola* (betel leaves and arecanut). Following this a feast would be given in the house, and the ceremony would be concluded. A *sambandham* might take place only if the bride had already had the elaborate ritual marriage known as *kettu kalyanam*.[[236]](#footnote-237) |  |  |

While marriage is generally expected to bind the man and woman involved in a permanent alliance, the *marumakkathayam* law did not consider this kind of lifelong alliance to be the most important part of marriage. Sambandam marriages were more contractual and could be dissolved at will by either party. By the late 18th century, changes started appearing in the system and the Sambandam started becoming more regularised. Under this matrilineal or matriarchal system, women had property rights; children inherited from their mothers and not their fathers. As a result, fathers were excluded from almost any responsibility in the upbringing or care of their children. The maternal uncles of the children were more important to their upbringing. *Sambandam* was a ceremony to establish the right to cohabit and acknowledge a sort of partnership between a man and a woman. Families arranged these, which did not depend on individual choice, though divorce could also be contracted. A woman could have *sambandam* with a male of her same caste or of superior caste. But, *sambandam* cannot be considered synonymous to concubinage. It was regulated because it could only be contracted after certain rituals for the bride, which was mandatory on the pain of excommunication.[[237]](#footnote-238)

Although the theory of the law sanctions freedom in these relations, conjugal fidelity is very general. Nowhere is the marriage tie - albeit informal - more rigidly observed or respected.Nowhere it ismore jealously guarded or its neglect more savagely avenged. The very looseness of the law makes the individual observance closer; for people have more watchful care over things they are liable to lose. Thus there were no chances for suicide among the womenfolk of the Nair community.

**Ezhava and Nadar Women**

The Ezhavas and the Nadars, the two predominant erstwhile indigeneous groups were reduced to the status of non-caste Hindus following the establishment of the Brahmanical supremacy. The chief occupation of both the Nadars and the Ezhavas remained toddy-tapping. Some of them laboured on land and worked on the lands of the powerful Nair land lords.[[238]](#footnote-239) They were considered to be inferior to the Brahmin but superior to the Parayas.[[239]](#footnote-240) Their women were noted for hard work and marital fidelity. But they became the victims of casteism and feudalism. In the course of poverty, starvation, unemployment and diseases sometimesthey were forced to seek relief through suicide.

Among the different castes and tribes in the social hierarchy women occupied an important position by enduring extensive changes in the course of history. They belonged to the Proto-Dravidian stock who traced their antiquity even from the Lemurian days. In the course of the socio-political, ecological and topographical vicissitudes they witnessed tremendous trials and tribulations. From the status of nobles and landlords they were reduced to the humble state of palmyra climbers and toddy tappers. They became the victims of several social disabilities and restrictions and reduced to the status of untouchables.

The manufacture, sale and use of toddy and similar intoxicating drinks continued to flourish without any restrictions till the establishment of the Brahmin hegemony. It was not tabooed during those days. It formed an integral part of all important ceremonies and entertainments. “The pleasures of drink were unrivalled and the lovers of toddy undertook pilgrimage to the drink house”. Toddy and similar intoxicants were prepared in private houses also.[[240]](#footnote-241). Eating of mutton was accompanied by drinking of toddy. In the public places and markets toddy was sold separate places and their location was announced by waving flags. Toddy was regarded as a noble drink and manufacturing of toddy vas a noble profession. The Brahmanical literature like Dharmasastras of Manu and Yajnavalkya condemned the manufacture, sale and use of all intoxicating drinks and treated as one of the five greatest crimes or *panchamahapatakas.[[241]](#footnote-242)* Irrespective of the social and economic status all those who were associated with the manufacture, sale and use of toddy were labeled as untouchables and were subjected to several social disabilities and restrictions.

Caste based discrimination existed even in the construction of houses also. The Nadars and other low castes should never construct a house on the upper caste model.[[242]](#footnote-243) However, Thurston refers to old houses of the Ezhavas which had some resemblance to those of the Nairs. But all these buildings were found only in the houses of rich Nadars, the poor satisfying themselves with one roomed thatched huts.[[243]](#footnote-244) Before 1861, as like other lower castes, Nadars were not allowed to construct tiled roofs. If anyone wanted to build a two-storeyed or tiled house, special permission had to be obtained from the king or chieftains by paying a fee and giving presents.

In 1895, the Ezhavas complained that “public service, which must be admitted as the strongest incentive to education in this country, is entirely denied to them in Travancore, and to this day, the government has not shown any encouragement worth the name to an educated Tiyya, whatever, his qualification may be. Even low places, such as those of office peons, police constables, public work maistries and hospital and Jail wardens, are denied to them on the score of their caste, eventhough they possess more than the necessary qualifications.[[244]](#footnote-245) At the same time, the Government was of the view that “the Ezhavas as a community were slow to take advantage of the available opportunities”.[[245]](#footnote-246)

In the matter of hair style too there was clear caste discrimination. Only women of the higher castes had the right to tie their hair into knot leaning towards the left side of head. The low caste women had to tie the hair into a knot next to the temple and above the right ear.[[246]](#footnote-247) They were not allowed to wear ornaments worn by women of upper castes. They were allowed to wear only beads or ornaments made of metals other than gold. Thurston reports that in the olden days, a Thiyya woman could wear an ornament appropriate to Nairs by paying a fee. [[247]](#footnote-248)

Use of shoes and umbrellas were also denied to the Nadars and other low castes. It was the sole monopoly of the Nambudiris. People of lower castes not to use banana leaves or *pala*, the bark film of an areca palm leaf.[[248]](#footnote-249) Bhaskaran Unni writes that the Ezhavas could use umbrellas at the beginning of 20th century. But weather it was raining or sunshine, they were not permitted to hold the umbrellas straight up but only in a slanting position, with the result that they got wet. When travelling with an umbrella they had to say ‘*vazhiye, vazhiye’* (a polluting fellow is walking on the way’) so that savarnas could recognize them and avoid becoming polluted. Otherwise they were beaten up.[[249]](#footnote-250)

In the native state they were allowed only to feed the cattle, but not allowed to milk even their own cows. They were prohibited from possessing calves with red horns; with a white mark on the forehead; or twins: these ought to be sent to the nearest pagoda or to the house of a high caste man.[[250]](#footnote-251) Even during the first decades of the 20th century, Nadars were barred from milking the cows for fear of them polluting the milk, which was either offered to God or consumed by people of higher castes. However, the cow could be fed and reared by a Nadar, but as soon as it delivered a calf, it was to be sent to the nearest Nair chief. When the cow stopped giving milk, the Nairs would inform the owner and took it back. The owner got only one meal as remuneration. They were permitted to extract oil from their coconuts eventhough the Syrians and Romo-Syrians claimed the monopoly of this trade. If somebody opposed this practice, he was tied up in a tree and beaten.[[251]](#footnote-252)

Not only men and temples, but objects like roads, tanks, wells and foodstuffs belonging to the *savarnas* were polluted by the *avarna* approach. Cases of pollution of pagodas were decided by the Huzur and if the *avarnas* were unable to pay the sum required for s*udhikalasam*(purificatory ceremony) some other punishments followed.[[252]](#footnote-253) Even courts of justice upheld as valid the irrational practice of pollution and favoured the *savarnas*.[[253]](#footnote-254)

At the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy, below the backward communities, therewere the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Curiously enough, they were untouchables and unapproachable even to those who suffered the same indignity from the caste Hindus.[[254]](#footnote-255) Their very sight would pollute a caste Hindu, especially the Nambudiri, it was believed. These sons of the soil, the aborigines, who were leading a sort of primitive life, were also not spared from the influence of caste. Among the scheduled castes there were nearly seventy five categories. Tribes in the forests were also divided into nearly forty categories. The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes together constitute nearly ten percent of the population. Most of these depressed classes were landless people, under the category, tenants at will. The depressed classes who constituted the basic communities of Kerala were noted for their honesty and sincerity. They were subjected several trails and tribulations. In the midst of trails and tribulations, some of them tried to find consolation in suicide.

**The Pulaya and the Paraya Women**

The Pulaya and the Paraya women who formed the erstwhile sons of the soil became the worst victim of slavery. Slavery at its most acute form prevailed in the Kanyakumari District. The women from the lower classes, especially the Pulayas and the Parayas were treated as slaves. They were destined their lives as slaves till their last breath and they were not permitted to enter the markets and bazaars. “Men and women belonging to the depressed classes had no convenient place in Trivandrum, the capital city, to sell their wares in the shape of bundles of grass, straw, baskets, mats etc. They spread them for sale on the borders of roads, necessarily subjecting themselves to be beckoned away by the police at any time. They had to run about the town and often failed to realise the due price”. [[255]](#footnote-256)

There were also manifold restrictions in regard to their language, dress, ornaments, mode of conveyance, use of domestic vessels, manner of construction of houses etc. The language and expressions of the caste Hindus could not be used by the *avarnas*. The women of the lower castes were forbidden to wear any clothing whatever above the waist. They should not wear gold or silver ornaments like the high caste people. The ornaments must be no more valuable than brass or beads. They couldn’t use umbrellas to shelter the body from the scorching heat of the sun. They must not have the right to wear shoes to protect the feet from the horns and sharp stones. They denied the right to build houses like the upper caste Hindus. The *avarnas* could not ride on horse back or to travel on palanquin. The poor *avarnas* could not attend schools, visit open markets, touch and draw water from public tanks and wells etc. Individuals among them who wanted to enjoy privileges in these matters had to make payments to the *sarkar* or to the *naduvazhi* and obtain licenses. *Menippon*, *mulaivila* (the payments to get the privilege to wear gold ornaments and to cover the breast of the low caste women respectively) etc., were the examples of such payments. Such an arrangement led to a series of inequitable imposts which imposed an intolerable burden on the members of the backward communities.[[256]](#footnote-257)

The Paraya women were of two types Pooram Parayas and Nonnay Parayars.[[257]](#footnote-258) The vast majority of Parayas were landless agricultural labourers. The society was divided by customs caste-prejudice and religious beliefs. The life of the lower class people was miserable. The higher class exploited their services and even their products. Another group of people lived in the region was Vellalas. They were also working under the Brahmins. Along with the Vellalar, the Ambattars, the Vannan, the Nayakkars and the Parayas claimed that they belonged to the right hand caste.[[258]](#footnote-259)

The women continued under the yoke of the feudal restrictions of the medieval period as elsewhere in India till the concept of social freedom, justice and equality for lower classes gather momentum. Western educated social reformers of the period started a powerful movement to improve the position of women.[[259]](#footnote-260) The work of the socio-religious reformers against social evils like suicide, sati, child marriage, female infanticide, Devadasi system, Dowry system, Purdah system, Sambandham, Smarthavicharam, Thalikettukallyanam, Thirantukallyanam, Polygamy, Marumakathayam, Pulappedi, Parappedi, caste system, untouchability, unapproachability and idol worship awakened the consciousness of the people.

It is significant to note that the conversions had the character of a movement, for it was the people who approached the missionary to request him to open schools and churches for them.[[260]](#footnote-261) After centuries of oppression, they got ready to regain their previous status with the support of the European missionaries. They came down as a catalyzing agency to liberate them from the clutches of casteism. They became socially awakened long before the spread of the socio-religious movements which fought for the removal of their social disabilities imposed by the caste Hindus. Arnold Toynbee’s concept of challenge and response can be applied to review the emancipation of women and the social change in its proper perspective. A genuine and widespread desire for reform was rampant in the minds of the unprivileged classes by the bigininng of the nineteenth century. Its outcome was a revolt against the tyrannical expoitation of perprtuated by the privileged classes.[[261]](#footnote-262) The social practices and religious beliefs prevalent in the nineteenth century acted as impediments to progress.[[262]](#footnote-263) All men are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social action.[[263]](#footnote-264)

But health researchers who conducted the study say social isolation, depression, functional disability and the feeling of being a burden on the family are among reasons that have been independently cited as factors contributing to suicides among the elderly. Multiple factors such as personal problems, domestic violence, financial troubles and alcoholism might havecontributed to suicides."The suicide rate among women was unexpectedly and unusually high compared with the global average".[[264]](#footnote-265)

The suicide rate among women for India was about 15 per 100,000, more than double the global average of 7 per 100,000. The suicide death rate among men for India - 21 per 100,000 - was also higher than the global average of 15 per 100,000."We still need to understand why we're seeing these patterns - both the unusual high prevalence rates among women and variations across the states,"

India’s first state-level estimates of non-communicable diseases that reflect trends over the past quarter century and reveal what they say are disturbing rises in heart disease, strokes, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and cancers.

The numbers of persons with diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease have doubled. Heart disease and stroke have increased in every state measured through number of years of life lost due to illness or deaths. One of the main causes for suicide attempts by the women is the premenstrual syndrome (PMS), the physical and emotional upsets faced by a large section of women during the runup to the monthly menstruation.[[265]](#footnote-266)

Clinical conditions (Eg: Depressive Disorder). Socio Economic Factors (Eg: migrations, debt traps) and Socio-Cultural settings (Eg: disintegrating traditional social support systems, aspirations disproportionate to resources) contribute to suicide intentions along with the other hitherto unknown causes. Hence only a wholistic approach can be expected to have any significant effect for any prevention programmes. Suicide of entire family members appears to be a new phenomenon in our state. The reports appearing in mass media point to an alarming rise in the figure. No scientific study has so far been conducted to illuminate neither the magnitude nor the causes of this problem.

In 70s the suicide rates in India was between 5.9 to 7.8 . The figures for Kerala for corresponding period was 14.4 to 19.8 . For both the regions there was a tendency of fall from the beginning of the decode to end of the decode. In 80s the suicide rates in India was between 5.8 to 8.5 and for Kerala it was 14.9 to 24.5. The rates in both the regions showed a tendency to rise to wards the end of the decade. In 90s the rates in India varied between 8.9 and 11.20 and for Kerala, varied between 26.3 and 30.5. The figures for both India and Kerala showed a definite rise from the beginning to the end of the decade.[[266]](#footnote-267) It is frequently quoted that Kerala is unique to have a higher suicide rates when compared to the corresponding figures of India.

The gender difference in the causes is evident as financial and occupation related problems contributing for male suicides, while that role is for interpersonal problems in case of females. As one assumes financial responsibility at middle ages and interpersonal problems are more likely in teenage, the gender difference in age groups could be appreciable. Unemployment was cited as a cause in only one case. This could be due to the possibility of truth remaining unappreciated when it is too familiar or it may be due to underemployment not unemployment which is really the problem.

Maximum number of suicides happened for the age group was 20-39 years. This was followed by 40-59 groups, above 60 and the least was from the age group below 19. For males the highest were from 40-59 age group, the others remaining the same as for the whole group. For females, first and second highest groups were similar to that of the whole group, while below 19 qualified for 3rd place and above 60 years had the lowest rank. Out of 112suicides victims, 40 preferred to die by poisoning, which was the highest preferred mode. This was followed by burns, hanging, drowning, rail track and jumping from height. For males, burns had fifth rank after rail track. Women also resort to rail track. Mary, a casual employee of ISRO committed suicide by jumping in front a train.[[267]](#footnote-268)Most females preferred burns (59.1%). This was followed by poisoning, hanging and drowning. News paper reports didn't mention the reason for suicide in 76 cases (67.9%), out of the remaining 36 cases where the reason was mentioned, death of near one was the commonest. This was closely followed by committing murder and then suicide (family suicide), marital disharmony and scolding by parents. Death of a dear one, committing murder, financial difficulty, unemployment and trouble with police were reported in case of males only, while failure in exam, eve teasing, can't have children, mental illness and patients objection to desired mariage were reasons exclusively for females.

The age distribution of those who commit suicide is different when compared to National diagues. The figures of teenagers in Kerala (9%) are strikingly lower than that of Indians as a whole. In the National Crime Records Bureau reports of 1993, 9469(11.29%) of all suicide victims (84244) in India were teenagers. The corresponding figures were Kerala were 351(4.3%) and 8124 respectively. This lower contribution by teenagers could be explained in terms of difference in demographic profile. Male predominance over females in the overall suicide rates are in accordance with established figures elsewhere. The 1993 National figures showed a Male to Female ratio of 689.9 for all suicide victims while it was 422.3 for Kerala.

**Chapter V**

**MEASURES FOR THE PREVENTION OF SUICIDE**

Suicide cuts across all barriers and affects people of all communities and social status. Failure to achieve something that is fervently desired or fear to face certain life situations can be brought to the background of most suicidal attempts. It is not good to treat suicide as a universal phenomenon and to keep aloof from the methods of prevention. In Kerala, suicide has emerged as one of the newer health problems, hence the rate its rate is more than of any other state in Inaia, even greater than that of some of the developed countries. In terms of quality of life such as educational status, infant mortality rate and life expectancy, Kerala is far more advanced than other states. But with regard to prevention Kerala is lagging behind some of the other countries. The ego-centric attitude is a major factor. People are rather reluctant to share their personal problems like sexuality, marital disharmony, chronic diseases and psychiatric problems. The attitude of the society to such people is usually based on a social stigma. Such a negative from the part of the society should be changed. The solution lies both at the individual and the society levels. The individual should be able to make his life more pragmatic and energetic; and society should contain the various socio-economic and cultural forces pulling it in different directions and trying to threaten its stability.[[268]](#footnote-269)

The misconceptions about suicide should be corrected. Harmful false assumptions are still there in Kerala. Social and religious workers,educational institutions and councilling centres are in a better position to dispel such myths and harmful notions. An opportunity should be provided to ventilate their feelings and grievances. It is the collective responsibility to address the increasing incidence of suicide especially on grounds of poverty, unemployment, psychotherapeutic problems and spouse abuse particularly towards women. There should be a humane consideration towards the victims of suicde. There were attempts to manhandle the victims who at times escape from the thresh hold of death.[[269]](#footnote-270) Depression drives many families to mass suicides.[[270]](#footnote-271)

Some of the measures towards the prevention of suicide are the following

1. Communicative skill
2. Interpersonal relationship skill
3. Self awareness
4. Empathy
5. Decision making skill
6. Problem solving skill
7. Creative thinking
8. Critical thinking
9. Control of stress
10. Control of emotions[[271]](#footnote-272)

Life skill training forms one of effective methods towards the prevention of suicides. The methods were suggested by the United Nations World Health Organisation. The things like rope, poison, dangerous medicines, chemicals, fire items and other destructive weapons should be kept away from the reach of such persons. The guidelines and services of the governmental and non-governmental agenciers can be properly ulitised to avoid such situations. Regular discussions and meetings can also avert such conditions. It is better to keep aloof from the circumstances that lead to the tendencies of suicide. Empowerment of women would definitely enhance their social, economic, spiritual and political status that would in turn make them mentally sound and alert.

The intellectuals are those who transform the incoherent and fragmentary feelings of those who have a particular class position into a coherent and rational account of the world as it appears from that position.[[272]](#footnote-273) In the words of Robert W. Cox, “they perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organization which bind together the members of a class and of an historic bloc into a common identity”.[[273]](#footnote-274) Organisational capacity of an intellectual is of great importance as far as the subaltern classes are concerned, because it is their inability to organize, which is exploited by the feudal powers of the society. For any group to achieve dominance and to make its conception of the world, hegemonic and then to reproduce the hegemony demands organization.[[274]](#footnote-275)

For centuries, caste-Hindus considered it an insult if a ‘lower caste’ woman dared to appear before them covering her bosom.[[275]](#footnote-276) “There is never a tailor to cut coat or stitch it seeing that everybody goes naked: for decency only do they wear a scrap of cloth; and so it is, with men and women, with rich and poor, of all ages”. The bare breast was considered a symbol of respect shown to ‘higher castes’.The practice gathered reater momentum following the establishment of the Brahmanical hegemony. For instance, the Nairs bared their breasts before the Nambudiri Brahmins and the Brahmins did so only before the deity.[[276]](#footnote-277) The women of all other ‘lower castes’, were categorically forbidden to cover their breasts at any time as the proper salutation from females to ‘high caste’ men was to uncover the bosom.[[277]](#footnote-278)

The status of women in the society was deplorable as in the case of untouchables. The women were denied right to property, divorce freedom and independence under the caste hierarchy the condition of women became pathetic.[[278]](#footnote-279) The upper caste Nambudiri Brahmins enjoyed superior position in the society. It was reflected in their marriage system and the law of inheritance. In the Nambudiri families only the eldest son was permitted to marry within the caste. The younger one established *sambandham* with the Nair women. It was not a legal and a social relation. It was only a semi- permanent arrangement. The relationship could be broken without notice of any party. It created a large number of unmarried women among the Nambudiri community and many of them faced the fate of death with. At the same time a high caste or other caste men is labeled with shame. Such a lady had to face trial by ordeal and it was severe process and of the trial she was excommunicated from her caste. The trial was called *smartha*. If the lady, who faced *smartha*was found guilty, she was secluded and transferred to a separate house built for this purpose. The hellish life of the Nambudiri ladies was not questioned any authority. Just like dowry system, child marriage and polygamy had caused untold miseries to the women. Girls were married off before reaching puberty fearing excommunication and degradation of caste. If a girl crossed the age of ten, the parents feared that they would be excommunicated from the society and caste.

The social condition of the women was poigant and disgrace. They were subjected to many social customs and traditions. The low caste women were not allowed to cover their breast. The sight of women moving about freely with no sense of shame about their exposed bodies was noted by many visitors of South India since Marcopolo. He tries to find a link between nakedness and sin; man and women; they are all black and go naked all save a fine cloth about the middle.[[279]](#footnote-280) They look not on any sin of the flesh as a sin. The missionary W.T Satyanathan who was on a trip from Madras to Malabar, writes, “on entering Palghat I noticed a change in costume, language, and manners of the people. The women were also sparsely dressed with just a piece of cloth around the waist and another small piece thrown loosely over the shoulder… we may hope that as education spreads, and gospels elevate these people in the scale of society, civilization …will emerge from the social and gospels elevate these people in the scale of society, civilization…will emerge from the social and moral degradation in which they are sunk…I may briefly allude to a conversation I had with the station master at Palghat, who endeavored to defend the customs and habits of these people. He said that they were simple and more in accordance with nature, with a state of primeval innocence, and not ill- adapted to the climate. He forgot that savages lived in a state of nature his idea of clothing compatible with innocence.[[280]](#footnote-281) But in reality bare-breastedness was very common in the Kanyakumari area during those days.

The limitations forced upon the clothes worn by low caste women was a kind of encroachment upon the natural human rights exercised by these womenfolk who once held a better position. Jacobus Center Visscher, the Dutch Chaplain between 1717 and 1723.A.D noted it in his letters that the petty Rajas, subordinate to the Raja of Cochin must thus show their respect to him, and they should remove their upper garment in his presence and remain bare-shouldered till he gives them permission to resume it. The women make the same obedience as the men to letting fall their veils or coverings and folding their arms in front.[[281]](#footnote-282)

There the garment called the upper cloth was allowed to be worn only by a Nair and other high caste man women. Brahmin women had the right to cover their breast. The pre-Brahmin history has been characterized as one in which women commonly used a *mulakkacha* (a garment covering the breast) and a light upper cloth irrespective of caste.[[282]](#footnote-283) But later the rights and freedom of women were suppressed and trampled upon and degraded. A tax was imposed upon the breasts of women viz *mulakkaram*, a breast tax levied by the upper class from the low caste women from the time of attaining puberty.[[283]](#footnote-284) Undoubtedly this was one of the inhuman customs making the women expose their breasts was one of the inhuman laws existed in those time in that society. The constant servility, unquestionable obedience, disregarding of subsequent disgrace destroyed in lower caste women their self- confidence and self pride as ordinary human beings. Ultimately, the upper cloth disturbance was the culmination of such inhuman practices experienced by the helpless women.

The Nair ladies covered their bosom with a light cotton cloth, which was worn loosely across the breast and over one shoulder when they went out. But they had to expose their bosom before the Brahmins and royal family men. Robin Jeffrey writes, the Nair girl was taught to bare her breasts as a mark of respect before such incarnate deities (ie, Brahmins); her greatest pleasure should be giving pleasure to them. The Nadars and other low castes such as Ezhavas, Parayas and Pulayas were forbidden not only to wear the upper cloth but also to cover the upper part of their bodies. Their women were compelled to keep the upper part of their bodies bare as a token of submission.[[284]](#footnote-285)

Violation of the custom is an intolerable offence and liable for severe punishment. It is a paradox to note that even upper class women did not like the low class women to cover the upper part of their body in front of them. A lot of women were tortured for the simple act of covering their breasts by a piece of cloth. This restriction caused a number of revolts in the 19th century. For example, while Rani was going to attend a temple festival, women of lower caste appeared in front of her with upper part of her body covered with cloth. On seeing her, Rani got angry and ordered that her breasts should be cut off.[[285]](#footnote-286) World history has no parallel to such an atrocious act by a woman against women.

The contact with Europeans raised their social status and the women began to cover their bosoms. The converted people had improvement in wealth and education and they demanded equality with the privileged classes like the Brahmins, Nairs and Vellalas. Colonel Munro the capacity of Resident and Dewan again issued an order in the year 1814 thus “I have heard that the women of Ezhava and such like castes who have embraced Christianity have been prevented from covering their bosoms; but as I have granted my permission to the women converted to Christianity to cover their bosoms as obtains among Christians in other countries, you will take steps that there be no obstacle put to the women converted to Christianity wearing cloths over their breasts”. [[286]](#footnote-287)

Womanhood was condemned and gained no respect both among the *savarnas* and the *avarnas*. The era showed a decline in the prestige of Nair dominance, certainly due to evil impacts of their custom, pattern of inheritance and marital bonds. The practice of *marumakkathayam*, the complexity of joint family system and conjugal infidelity of matrimonial relationships led to their deterioration. These aspects were the stumbling blocks on the intellectual and educational progress of a major section of people- the women population. In order to understand the status of women in those days, we leave to unveil the religious condition of Travancore during 18th and 19th centuries. Religious freedom was different from caste to caste and religion to religion. From upper to the lower caste women had nothing to do with religion. Even though they worshipped female deities’ women were not permitted to do ritual duties.

In the case of economic field the Brahmin women had no right to inherit property. But the Nair women enjoyed the right to own property and the right of inheritance. They followed *marumakkathayam* system. Under this system, the mother and all her children, all grand children by the daughters, all her brothers and her sisters and descendants on the sister’s side lived together in the same home and enjoyed all her property. Though every one of the members of the matriarchal family had a right in the property, none was entitled to partition. Since the women were considered incapable of family management, the eldest male member of the family known as the *karanavar* was vested with the right of managing the property. However, there was a general belief among the people that economic independence of women would lead to the spread of immorality among them and disruption of domestic life. Thus the woman who was a member of the upper caste was the slave of the man and the woman who was a member of the lower caste was the slave of the society.

The social condition of the Nambudiri womenfolk was so pathetic. A total transformation in society is necessitated by the existing circumstances. Primarily these changes come through social and religious organisations. While Nambudiri community was within restrains of the orthodox, other communities like Ezhavas, Nadars, Pulayas, Nairs etc. were making rapid change in the social and economic fields by the formation of organisations like S.N.D.P. Yogam, Nadar Mahajana Sangham, Sadhujana Paripalana Yogam and the Nayar Service Society respectively. Due to its orthodox outlook the Nambutiri community was suffering from serious drawbacks. They considered idea of education especially English education as a taboo. Under the existing system of marriage, the eldest brother alone married from the Nambutiri families while the youngsters chose their wives from other castes. Moreover the condition of women was deplorable. They were denied of the benefit of education and immersed in ignorance and superstition. Due to *Sambandham* system a large number of women remained as spinsters. They were also denied the chances to participate in festivals and other ceremonies.

The Nambudiri women are getting educated and are moving about freely without any restrictions. Educated Nambudiri girls are now in many spheres of human activity. If they find lovers in other communities, they do not shy at it, but are emboldened to walk out of the community to marry them if they so desired. They are equal with their male counter parts in overstepping social restrictions and barriers which were once considered sacrosanct. Smartha investigation process has become obsolete and no one now bothers to run after any Nambudiri, male or female with the 'fatwa' of excommunication for any social misconduct. The Nambutiri's, in course of time were getting more civilised due to the works of radical reformers like V.T and E.M.S Namboodirippad. The Nambudiri's re-shuffled their traditional ways of family life and give up rigid caste system based on *caturvarnam* and began to adopt modern and refined ways of life.

The Nambudiris irrespective of their age held marital relations with other community ladies and their ladies were compelled to have only Nambudiri husbands. The reform movement at that stage never touched the Nambudiri women. They had no hope of getting any relief from the age old customs and traditional practices of the community. Even the men folk of the community who were calling for reforms never bothered over the fate of the Nambudiri women. For instance the Sabha which passed resolution in favour of learning English by the Nambudiri boys never intended the same for the Nambudiri girls.[[287]](#footnote-288)

In the words of Nambudiris “One specific form of popular agitation propaganda adopted by the radical Nambudiri youth was the staging of dramas exposing the evil customs and practices within the community”. [[288]](#footnote-289) The first of these under the title *From the Kitchen to the Stage* had its focus on (a) school education, (b) protest against the existing evil practices concerning marriage,(c) abolition of *purdah* system, etc. The story of the play *From the Kitchen to the Stage* was that: The eldest Nambudiri of Vilayur family had a son and a daughter Kunchu and Thethi respectively. In the Vilayur house there was a young Nambudiri resident- student called Madhavan, learning Veda ritual. Madhavan and Thethi develop mutual affection and love. Neither the parents nor the relatives know anything about this. Even if they had known, it would not have been of any avail. Applying the rule that “one does not wait for the permission of the cake to eat it”, Thrthi’s marriage was fixed somebody else without consulting her, much less with her consent. Of all the horoscopes read, examined and compared by the astrologer, Uzhthra Warrier, it was the horoscope of Karkidamkunnath Achan Nambudiri that was found to be most compatible. This Nambudiri was an old and senile person, and already a proud possessor of many wives from assorted communities, some of them as old as Thethi’s mother. On the basis of the petition filed in the Court that the bride was unwilling for this alliance, the Court issues an injection to stay the wedding. The old bridegroom ignorant of the injection jubilantly moves towards the bride’s house in procession. At the entrance he is served with the Court order and stopped. Finally Madhavan carries Thethi at the appointed time.[[289]](#footnote-290) The play was calculated to convey the evils polygamy and untold miseries confronted by the Nambudiri womenfolk.

Changing the then existing customs and conventions on marriage was good not only for the Nambudiri community, but for all others also. Because the very same the Nambudiris who marry the daughters and sisters of persons in other communities forbid the entry of their own sisters and daughters into non Nambudiri families. The system was nothing but a symbol ofNambudiri supremacy over others.[[290]](#footnote-291) The Nambudiri men had no responsibility of maintaining their own wives and children. They had no definite purpose in life except to go about and get wives, temporary or permanent, from any family they chose and hover places of feasts and festivals. He said “This had totally to be changed, and one –woman- for- one- man system should come and that could come only if the present one was abolished”.[[291]](#footnote-292)

Towards the social resurrection of the Nambudiri women, prime importance was bestowed to the problem of educating the Nambutiri youth –boys as well as girls- was focused in a statewide *Yachana Yatra* ( beggars’ march) with the ostensible purpose of collecting donations ( both in kind and cash) for educating the poor children.[[292]](#footnote-293) EMS Namboodiripad wrote “Our immediate aim was to make modern education universal and thereby equip every Nambudiri boy and girl to make his or her living and then give them facilities to choose their own life partners irrespective of any restriction. Once this infrastructure was provided we were sure that the future would take care of itself as far as the system was concerned”.[[293]](#footnote-294)

One more progressive step to be adopted was the discarding of the *purdah* (umbrella made of cadjan leaf) by the Nambudiri women.[[294]](#footnote-295) The drama “the Hell behind the Purdah” authored by M.P.Bhattathiripad [[295]](#footnote-296)tried to convey the message against the practice. It depicted the anguish of a young wife among many wives of an old man. The success of the social dramas was not confined to propaganda alone. It really made an impact on the minds of the Nambutiri community as a whole. Several youngsters came forward practically to implement the social reforms which were propagated by the drama such as stopping of plolygamy, breaking the restrictions imposed on Nambutiri youth from marrying from their own community, preventing marriage where there was great disparity in age etc.[[296]](#footnote-297)

Nambudiri Yogakshema Mahasabha, a revolutionary group of Nambutiris founded in 1908, from 1919 agitated for all Nambutiris to marry within their own community. The Sabha declared the marriages of younger brothers from within the community as official, irrespective of whether the elder brothers were married or not. They decided to boycott *Sambandams*. The Madras Namboothiri Act of 1933 confirmed this change. In the same year, the Madras Marumakkathayam Act was passed, by which Sambandam was acknowledged as a regular marriage, conferring on the children rights of inheritance and property as held by children whose parents were both Nambudiris. The enforcement of these Acts led to a sudden decline in the number of *Sambandam* marriages and thus the practice died out within a decade.

The term Modernity is used to represent the cultural manifestations of the nineteenth century.[[297]](#footnote-298) It marked the beginning of the global capitalist economy.[[298]](#footnote-299) Modernity is the perfect example of a cultural hybridism and it is merely the by product of colonial modernity.[[299]](#footnote-300) Mass media especially the newspapers played the most decisive role in the processes of modernity. The arrival of the ‘print society’ at the end of the nineteenth century had extensively advanced the procedure of the improvement of group personalities and public sphere in Kerala.[[300]](#footnote-301) Jurgan Habermas made a distinction between literary public sphere and political public sphere.[[301]](#footnote-302) The political public sphere assumed greater importance.

A person who is experiencing or could experience suicidal thoughts may show the following symptoms:

* feeling or appearing to feel trapped or hopeless
* feeling intolerable emotional pain
* having or appearing to have an abnormal preoccupation with violence, dying, or death
* having mood swings, either happy or sad
* talking about revenge, guilt, or shame
* being agitated, or in a heightened state of anxiety
* experiencing changes in personality, routine, or sleeping patterns
* consuming drugs or more alcohol than usual, or starting drinking when they had not previously done so
* engaging in risky behavior, such as driving carelessly or taking drugs
* getting their affairs in order and giving things away
* getting hold of a gun, medications, or substances that could end a life
* experiencing depression,panic attacks, impaired concentration
* increased isolation
* talking about being a burden to others
* psychomotor agitation, such as pacing around a room, wringing one's hands, and removing items of clothing and putting them back on
* saying goodbye to others as if it were the last time
* seeming to be unable to experience pleasurable emotions from normally pleasurable life events such as eating, exercise, social interaction, or sex
* severe remorse and self criticism
* talking about suicide or dying, expressing regret about being alive or ever having been born

A significant number of people with suicidal ideation keep their thoughts and feelings a secret and show no signs that anything is wrong.

**Suicides andMarital Instability:-**

Marital Instability leads to suicide.The focus on the socio-economic background of suicides is primarily based on rural-urban background, caste, education, occupation, age, marital span, family pattern, income and number of children.

**Table10**

**Suicides and Marital Instability**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Marital Instability** | | | | |  | |
|  | | |  | |
|  | | |  | |  | |
|  | | | Divorce Separation Desertion | | | |
| Causes | | | | | | |
| Economic Social Biological Personality | | | | | | |
|  |  |  | |  | |  |
| Dowry Cruelty Infidility Temperamental Problems | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
| Property/ Alcoholism Sexual Personality | | | | | | |
| Money Problems Incompatibility Disorders | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
| Poverty/ In-law Barrenness Mental | | | | | | |
| Non-support problems Illness | | | | | | |

**Suicides andFamily structure:-**

Whether it is joint family or nuclear family, the treatment of in-laws with the wife is an important aspect of the environment. From the date, it is indicated that over fifty percentage of the suicides were found living in a nuclear family while about 42 percent were found living in a joint family. Of the 35 respondents whose marital duration was more than five years, about three fourth respondents were found living in nuclear family against one-fourth in the joint family. Similarly, of the 35 respondents whose marital duration was found less than on year, 54.3 percent respondents were found living in joint family while 45.7 percent respondents were living in nuclear family.

It has been noticed that when a woman finds different type of environment in her husband’s family, it produces a situation of stress impeding marital adjustment. It was found that such a situation arises in a family when a member’s repertory of knowledge and skill does not readily yield new ways of adaptation that seem personally satisfying effective or socially acceptable. There is another possibility when personal motivations of capacities of a member of the family are not immediately appropriate to the performance of the familiar role prescribed did she adapts to a role in an unsatisfying in effective or unacceptable manner. It naturally created a feeling for suicide.

**Suicides andRural-Urban background:-**

It is assumed that urban society is based upon on a system of secondary, in partial and highly formalised relationship while rural society is found on personal intimate and informal relationships.

Among the husbands, about two-thirds were from urban areas and one-third was from rural areas, little more than two-fifth was from rural areas. And little less than three-fifth was from urban areas.As might be expected many background factors seen to have an effect upon the duration of marriage of divorces. Such factors do not often differentiate sharply with reference to family behaviour. After all, they are only one set of elements that constitutes concrete family experience used as fundamental elements. These have been recorded as both urban both rural, husband, urban’s wife and rural and husband rural wife urban. This classification could provide a useful analysis of the data.

Statistics showed that only 1 out of 100 Indian marriages lead to suicide which is quite low in comparison to America’s 50% of marriages turned out into breakups. The suicide rate in Indian villages is even lower in comparison to urban India.

**Table – 11**

**Relationship between Rural-Urban background**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Rural-Urban background of couples** | **Marital Duration** | | | | |
| **Less than 1** | **1-3** | **3-5** | **5+** | **total** |
| Both Urban | 18(51.4) | 16(42.1) | 9(52.9) | 17(48.6) | 60(48.0) |
| Both Rural | 5(14.2) | 13(34.2) | 8(42.1) | 6(17.1) | 32(25.6) |
| ‘H’Urban ‘W’ Rural | 7(20.0) | 7(18.4) |  | 8(22.9) | 22(17.6) |
| ‘H’Rural ‘W’ Urban | 5(14.3) | 2(5.3) |  | 8(11.4) | 11(8.8) |
| Total | 35 | 38 | 17 | 35 | 125 |

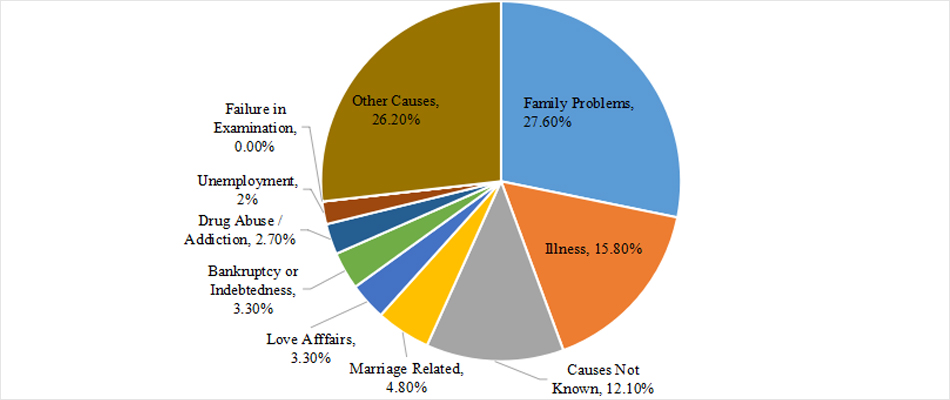
Considering husbands and wives together as couples, the proportion of urban and rural cases instead of increasing, decreased considerably. The table given above point out that both men and woman, not only from urban areas but even from rural areas, use courts for breaking their marriage legally through people in rural areas use it less than those in the urban. Again it is seen that, the marital duration was found longer among the couples of similar backgrounds than the couples of different backgrounds. The table shows that urban areas reflect more suicides than the rural areas. This might mean that marital expectations were higher and that couples were more individualistic among urban dwellers, hence, higher marital frustration was likely to be experienced by urban dwellers, than among the rural dwellers. Most of them indulge in comparisons with the partners of their friends and neighours that ultimately land them in suicide.

**Suicides andCaste**

Each caste follows different traditions and values in the Indian cultural milieu. Therefore, in view of cultural heterogeneity, the rule of suicide is likely differing from one caste to another. Among the sample of seventy five couples comprised of 52.8 percent higher caste, 20.8 percent inters mediate caste, 8.8 percent lower caste, 14.4 percent scheduled caste and 3.2 percent scheduled tribe couples. These figures show that on the one hand suicide is now permitted.

**Table 12**

**Percentage Share of Various Causes of Suicides**



During the early period, normally monogamy was prevalent in society, but among the rich, polygamy was a common occurrence. The widows could not marry again. The birth of a girl child was regarded as a bad omen, resulting, in the practice of female infanticide. Divorce was not allowed in the higher castes, however the women of lower castes were forced to divorce and remarry. Even widow marriages were permitted among them. Devadasi system also prevailed among the Hindus. Beautiful unmarried girls were offered to Gods in temples.Where they passed their lives as maid servants of Gods, the position of woman suffered a further set base when the Rajputs started the practice of having harems.

Though a series of laws were adopted with a view to ensuring equality of status and opportunity for women, the number of suicides still continues to increase and the conditions of women continues to deteriorate. The practice of suicide in India is very much restricted. In certain Hindu communities it is possible for the husband and the wife to obtain divorce without recourse to court. They are only required to follow some customary practice, like making a declaration before the elders of the community or the headmen of the tribe that they no longer desire that their marital relationship to continue.[[302]](#footnote-303)

Alarmed at the rapid disintegration of the family, the UN initiated efforts in 1994 to enhance the importance of the family and to stress the vitality of the basic unit of society. The United Nations designated 1994 as the International Year of the Family. The Secretariat for the International Year of the Family in Vienna launched the year with the motto, “family is where the future lives’. In his message to mark the occasion Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary General stressed the role of families as a source of stability and promise.

During the present century, the tremendous progress of science and technology has presented a grave challenge to certain traditional institutions, e.g.: family, marriage etc. In the wake of the rapid industrialization and urbanization, the old family structure has undergone far reaching changes in regard to the criteria of values and standards of behavior. The spread of education has further loosened the medieval control of men over women.

In Kerala the large scale migration of people to the Gulf and other foreign countries contributed to the increase in the number of suicides. Women suffer mental agony and depression due to the prolonged separation from their husbands. Such long duration of separation lead to doubts and create mutual suspicion and distrust between the spouses. Globalisation and the influence of western culture have tremendously affected the value system of the younger generations in Kerala. It found its manifestations in the family that ultimately leading to suicides.

Mahatma Gandhi's entry by the second decade of the twentieth century gave a fresh air and strength to the empowerment and liberation of women. Women's involvement played an important role to make it a real mass movement. Gandhiji said to Mridula Sarabhai, a valiant fighter for the causes of women and freedom, "I have brought the Indian women out of the kitchen, it is up to you (the women activists) to see that they don't go back". The statement shows his commitment to the upliftment of the downtrodden women section of the society.[[303]](#footnote-304) Political participation by women in the massive popular struggles opened up new vistas of possibilities that a century of social reform could not. The image of woman changed from a recipient of justice in the nineteenth century, to an ardent supporter of nationalist movement in the early twentieth century.[[304]](#footnote-305) Women had participated in all streams of the national movement from Gandhian to socialist to communist to revolutionary terrorist. Thus they were emboldened to face ordeals in life.

Gandhiji was sympathetic towards the poor sections of the society. Among them the chances of suicide were more. He believed that Hinduism would reach its perfection only when the untouchables become not only touchables but thoroughly merged into the Hindu mainstream and also through the uplift of the downtrodden women. Gandhiji graphically states the condition of untouchables through the columns of *Harijans* “socially they are lepers. Economically they are worse than slaves. Religiously they are denied entrance to place we miscall ‘house of God’. They are denied the use, on the same terms as the caste Hindus, of public roads, public schools, public hospitals, public wells, public taps, public parks and the like… The wonder is that they are not able to eke out an existence or that they remain within the Hindu fold. They are too downtrodden to rise in revolt against their suppressors”.[[305]](#footnote-306)

His campaign against suicide became an integral part of his political move for *swaraj*. Gandhiji’s entry into India’s political scene witnessed a total transformation in the working of the Congress Party and its programmes. He deliberately included removal of untouchability as one of the vows of the satyagrihis. For him, removal of untouchability means love and service to the entire society and thus merges into *ahimsa*. Removal of untouchability would break barriers that separated man from his brother.[[306]](#footnote-307) He regarded untouchability as excrescence, blot and plague, which ruined the vitals of Hinduism.[[307]](#footnote-308) His attitude against untouchability shocked the foundations of Hindu orthodoxy.

Gandhiji’s concept of varnasrama dharma is subjected to criticism among the scholars. Gandhiji wrote: “Varnasrama enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be the Hindu, Muslim. Christian, Parsi whatever he is. My varnasrama accommodates a Pariah girl under my own roof as my own daughter. My varnasrama accommodates many panchama families with whom I dine with the greatest pleasure to dine with whom are a privilege. My varnasrama refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my varnasrama compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face”.[[308]](#footnote-309)

Education remained the backbone for the emancipation and the social advancement of women. Education satisfies the needs of society by developing human material and drafting this material into the nation’s service.[[309]](#footnote-310) The role education assumed greater significance for the so called outcastes and untouchables because for them it is essential for social change and for enabling them self-confident and inner strengths to face new challenges and opportunities. Empowerment of women cannot be made without education. An intelligent folk of women would be made only through proper and systematic processes of education.[[310]](#footnote-311) It would definitely empower them to face the sufferings in life.

Education played the most decisive role in deciding the emancipation and empowerment of women. They realized the importance of education as early as the Sangam age.[[311]](#footnote-312) Women were held in high esteem and respect. Women enjoyed their lives fully, involving themselves in poetry, music and dance.[[312]](#footnote-313)The Chera kings liberally patronized poets and singers. They came from both sexes and from all castes and classes.

Education was gradually progressed during the Sangam period. In ancient times *Pial* Schools[[313]](#footnote-314) existed to cater to the educational needs of the common folk. The pupils sat on small mats on the floor strewn with sand as writing on. Writing was also done on dried palmyra leaves with the aid of pointed iron styles. Palm-leaf scripts served them as books.[[314]](#footnote-315) The alphabet was known as *nedumkanakku*. The teachers were called *kanakkayar*.[[315]](#footnote-316) There was no class gradation. Loud reading and group recitation was the distinctive feature’s to start with. The education of those days afforded great scope for improving memory. However, information regarding the number of schools in each village or the number of pupils who attended each school is not available. But the system of education remained common and universal in the SangamAge**.**

The condition of women was pathetic at the hands of the dominant classes of men, and they could not gain strength to fight against the evil practices and predominant belief in the inferiority till the reach of English system of education. The development of consciousness, dominant or contending, in a society formed one of the major themes of colonial history.[[316]](#footnote-317) The year 1817 A.D. marked the beginning of the modern era in education

While the general suicide rate has been decreasing gradually compared to other states, the suicide rate among youngsters and family suicides are on the rise in the state. The latest in the series is a young girl who took her life by jumping off her hostel building in Thiruvananthapuram the other day. However, preliminary inquiry suggests it is a case of suicide. As per the records available with the government, 12, 988 persons committed suicide since May 2016 due to various reasons. Of this, 2,946 were women and 401 children. As many as 822 persons committed suicide due to financial reasons, 4,178 due to family problems, 28 because of mounting debts and 2,325 due to health problems. Experts say the victims are mainly teenagers and youths. However, the suicide rate in the state has come down to 21.5 per cent per lakh population for the first time in the past 25 years. Though the state witnessed a dip in the suicide rate the average number of suicides is double than the national rate in the state.[[317]](#footnote-318)

**Remedial Measures**

The steady rise of suicide through out the world from the end of the nineteenth century, and their acceteration since the 1960s, led to serious studies, analysis, comments and speculations. As scientific analyses of divorce- or analyses couched in the language of the social sciences- emerged, divorce was discussed and explained in social and social psychological terms. Suicide like divorce and criminality, was seen as a sign of social pathology, and there was increasing interest in the effects on marriage and family of all manner of social and economic change: industrialization, urbanization, the decline of religious observances, changes in morality and liberalization of marriage and divorce laws.[[318]](#footnote-319)

**Empowerment as a means to control suicide**

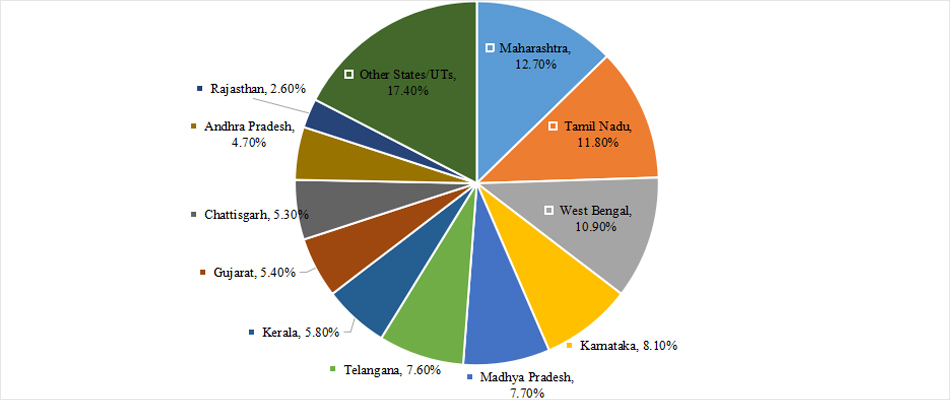
Empowerment of women would definitely inject a spirit of confidence in their minds that would enable them to think against suicide.The term Empowerment denotes acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and to fulfil positions as equal members of the society. The United Nations Development Fund for Women defined Empowerment as “acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed; developing a sense of self –worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life; gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power; developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.[[319]](#footnote-320)

Empowerment of women means making of women conscious of their rights, enabling them to take decisions by themselves developing confidence in themselves as individuals and as members in the society. Empowerment to women means the removal of feeling of helplessness in them and the investing of power to act on their own behalf to resist exploitation that degraded them. Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information resources.[[320]](#footnote-321) Empowerment is calculated to create safe and proper environment for women's physical, mental and moral development, to develop skills for taking self-decision, to create capability to present their position in the society effectively, to create awareness among women to be truly ambitious and to dream for betterment, to develop independent identification of women, her position should not be determined by her husband, father, brother etc., to create, feeling of self-pride so that they should not feel week, helpless, powerless, comparatively to their men counter part, to increase awareness in women for their over all development, to use their latent talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole, to create sound and proper environment for women's pride, prestige and healthy physical and mental development, and to make efforts in organizing the women for fighting against the problems and difficulties related to them.[[321]](#footnote-322)

The steady increase in suicide can be prevented or it can be restricted through the processes of empowerment and emancipation of the women. In the midst of the trials and tribulations the womenfolk irrespective of their higher- lower and caste Hindu- non caste Hindu distinctions became the victims of a multitude of social maladies like *smarthavicharam*, sati, child marriage, female infanticide, Devadasi System, Dowry System, Purdah System, *samdandham*, *pulappedi* and *parappedi*. The women who hailed from the different segments of the society were called upon to face the ordeals and discriminations with added vehemence during the medieval period. They continued to remain under the yoke of feudalism till the advent of the European powers. A series of factors and forces contributed to the beginning of the change that empowered them to restore their premier status. The breakthroughs they achieved in abolishing these practices directly placed them on the road of empowerment. But in the course of their struggle for emancipation and empowerment, divorce came down as a major hurdle and they are in the whirlpool of its implications.

**Table 13**

**State/UT-wise Major Percentage Share of Suicides in India**



The empowerment of women is calculated to enhance their social, economic, spiritual and political status. The suicide at times undermines the processes of empowerment and emancipation. In such a situation empowerment intends to instil the ability to take their own decisions and to bring improvement in one’s own capabilities. It is calculated to enable them to initiate proper decisions, to promote positive way of thinking and to undertake active participation in the processes of transformation. Further it would control the negative impulses and build up a positive energy of one self. It is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which facilitate them to move towards life with greater dignity and self assurance. Gandhiji felt that the legal and customary status of women is bad enough throughout and demanded radical alteration.[[322]](#footnote-323) In the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.” Empowerment has been a basic aim of feminism and can be viewed as a carrying forward of developmental paradigms. Gender developmental strategies proceed as a socio-economic framework. The concept of women's empowerment throughout the world has its roots in the liberation of women.

**Aims of Women Empowerment**

* + To create safe and proper environment for women's physical, mental and moral development.
  + To develop skills for taking self-decision.
  + To create capability to present their position in the society effectively.
  + To create awareness among women to be truly ambitious and to dream for betterment.
  + To develop independent identification of women, her position should not be determined by her husband, father, brother etc.
  + To create, feeling of self-pride so that they should not feel week, helpless, powerless, comparatively to their men counter part.
  + To increase awareness in women for their over all development, to use their latent talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole.
  + To create sound and proper environment for women's pride, prestige and healthy physical and mental development, and
  + To make efforts in organizing the women for fighting against the problems and difficulties related to them.[[323]](#footnote-324)

Universally it is accepted in the society that men were born to rule and the women to be ruled. All social norms and interactions between man and woman perpetuate this ruler - subject relation.[[324]](#footnote-325)Man is the maker of the world and woman's duty is to make him a home. In many societies around the world women never belong wholly to themselves; they are the property of others throughout their lives. With her gentle manners and natural tenderness or her lack of physical hardness she has always found herself hidden behind a mist of illusions.[[325]](#footnote-326) There was a notion that woman has no place in the world of work outside her home. The overwhelming majority of labor that sustains life is done by them. This work accorded low status and no payment. In spite of their incessant and laborious work they earn only ten percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property.[[326]](#footnote-327) The progress and prosperity of a nation is judged from the socio-economic status of its population especially of the weaker sections of the society who suffer from abject poverty, hunger, disease, unemployment, expoitation etc.[[327]](#footnote-328)

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001, is an attempt to institutionalise the gains of women's movements across the country. Taking the constitution as its point of departure, the national policy outlines the historical context within which it is located, this interestingly, is the historical context of the women’s movement as well. The international conferences of Mexico (1975) through Nairobi (1985) to Beijing (1995) and the follow up on Beijing the women's movement and the widespread network of non government organisations with a mass base, the landmark status of women documents in the country-towards equality.[[328]](#footnote-329)

The objectives and goals of the National Policy include the creation of an enabling environment for women through economic and social policies, of rights equations to decision making and social sector needs, strengthening institutional support systems and legal machinery, and forging partnerships within civil society. In short, it represented the active and committed elimination of all forms of discrimination against all women. These objectives, which the policy affirms will be realised through a review and formulation of positive measures in the judicial legal system, decision-making through the economic and social empowerment of women. The policy gives the impression that it is a feminist charter. A more careful consideration throws up the basis for that likeness, the policy incorporates all the major concerns and issues that the women’s movement has engaged with over the past two and a half decades: domestic violence, rape, poverty, conditions of work, employment, representation, support and solidarity networks, access to credit, health, nutrition, child care, education, housing, rights, the adverse impact of globalization, prostitution, single women, property rights and so on.

The goal of the national policy for the empowerment of woman is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The specific objectives of this policy are: (a) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential, (b) Equal access to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance etc., (c) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.[[329]](#footnote-330)

The policy also provides for economic empowerment through poverty eradication, micro-credit programmes, training of women to facilitate them in playing efficient role in agriculture and industry. The social empowerment of women is facilitated through effective provisions of education, health, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, gender sensitization, elimination of all forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, tradition and accepted practices.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles of state policy. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) there is a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.

The National Commission for Women was set-up by an act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in some parts of the country.

Though the empowerment of women gathered greater momentum through the democratic processes, the problems associated with divorce continued to increase. A woman always remained a minor before the law. As a girl she was under the tutelage of her parents, an adult of her husband, and as a widow, of her sons. Even under the liberal rules of Buddhism, a nun was always subordinate to the youngest novice. Early law books assessed a woman's status in the society as equivalent to that of a Sudra, whatever her class.[[330]](#footnote-331) They were economically and socially dependents on men. The benefit of education was denied to them, though with rare exceptions. Moreover women were taught to accept their subjugation and even to welcome it as a badge of honor.[[331]](#footnote-332) It is the patriarchal families of ancient India that led to the cruelties related with gender discrimination in the society. The father was the head of the house and headship descended in the male line. The intense family feeling of Hindu India enhanced the desire for son, without whom the line would disappear.[[332]](#footnote-333) No desire was shown for the birth of girls. This ideology of subordination linked mainly to Hinduism pervaded in Islam and Christianity too.

Women's struggle for equality entered a new phase following the attainment of independence on 15 August 1947. Indian freedom was the beginning of a process of decolonization which has proved irresistible, at least so far political independence is concerned.[[333]](#footnote-334) To see the people of India together in a democratic union of self governing states a constitution was framed. The basic objective of the Republic is to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty and equality. Article 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution guarantee the complete equality of men and women. The Constitution declared monogamy mandatory both for men and women. It provides women equal right to work and to get employment in state agencies. The Directive Principles of the Constitution ensure equal pay for equal work. Thus Indian Constitution accepts equal right to women and safeguards against discrimination.[[334]](#footnote-335) Thus the Constitution of India envisages a society that assures equal opportunities to all its people irrespective of their gender. But the ideal remains still a mirage. Gender discrimination is an obvious reality in India and women are its victims. It is the usual practice to set aside the constitutional provisions that safeguard the rights and privileges of the womenfolk. Male dominance is deep rooted in India and its exponents are hesitant to share power with women. Empowerment and emancipation of women would be one of most effective remedial measures to safeguard the women and children from the multitude of problems associated with the practice of suicide.

**Table 14**

**Number of Suicides and Rate of Suicides in India 2011 to 2015**

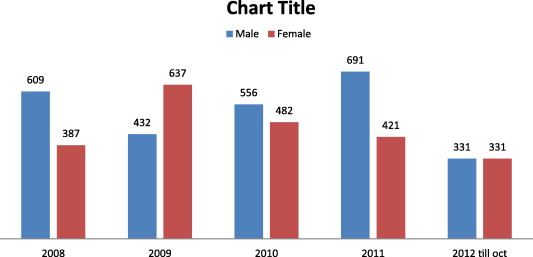
|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sl. No** | **Year** | **Number of Suicides** | **Rate of Suicide** |
| 1 | 2011 | 1,35,585 | 11.2 |
| 2 | 2012 | 1,35,445 | 11.2 |
| 3 | 2013 | 1,34,799 | 11.0 |
| 4 | 2014 | 1,31,666 | 10.6 |
| 5 | 2015 | 1,33,623 | 10.6 |

**Remedial Meaures through the process of Legislation**

Classical Hindu law permittedsuicide on religious grounds. While the British colonial regime hesitated to get involved in this touchy subject, it broadly accepted the axiom that Hindus have no right to divorce. The modernist agenda of the post colonial state were focused on freeing Hindu men and women from the shackles of a traditional law that seemed to tie spouses together not only in this life, but also for all lives to come.[[335]](#footnote-336) Such a trend paved the way for process of a new legislation to liberate such persons from such shackles.

**Table 15**

**The big bad female suicide problem**



**Abolition of Sati**

Sati is an obsolete funeral custom where a widow immolates herself on her husband's pyre or takes her life own life in another fashion shortly after her husband's death. Sati stones started appearing in large numbers from 11th century. From 12th to 19th century and also in the late modern era, there were incidents when it often occurred in large numbers, especially as a reaction to military conquests by foreign militaries. The number of women burning themselves however always remained low in relation to the number of people. Resolute support for Sati by some authors only appears from 15th century, however there were also many in opposition to it. The practice was particularly prevalent among some Hindu communities. The practice was never widespread throughout India, nor did it have scriptural sanction.

The British East India Company initially tolerated the practice, with William Carey noting 438 incidences within a 30-mile (48-km) radius of Calcutta, in 1803, despite its ban within Calcutta itself. Between 1815 and 1818, the number of *sati* in Bengal province doubled from 378 to 839. Under sustained efforts of   Christian missionaries like William Carey and Hindu reformers like RamMohan Roy, the provincial government banned sati in 1829.

Attempts to limit or ban the practice had been made by individual British officers in the 18th century, but without the backing of the British East India Company.  These movements put pressure on the company to ban the act. The British authorities within the Bengal Presidency started systematically to collect figures on the practice in 1815.The ban of sati, effected by Lord William Bentinck in 1829, was largely due to the efforts of both Christian and Hindu reformers

In 1828 Lord William Bentinck came to power as Governor of India. When he landed in Calcutta, he said that he felt “the dreadful responsibility hanging over his head in this world and the next, if… he was to consent to the continuance of this practice (sati) one moment longer.” Bentinck decided to put an immediate end to *Sati*. Ram Mohan Roy warned Bentinck against abruptly ending *Sati*. However, after observing that the judges in the courts were unanimously in favor of it, Bentinck proceeded to lay the draft before his council. Charles Metcalfe, the Governor’s most prominent counselor expressed apprehension that the banning of *Sati* might be “used by the disaffected and designing” as “an engine to produce insurrection.” However these concerns didn’t deter him from upholding the Governor’s decision “in the suppression of the horrible custom by which so many lives are cruelly sacrificed.”

Thus on Sunday morning of 4 December 1829 Lord Bentinck issued Regulation XVII declaring *Sati* to be illegal and punishable in criminal courts. It was presented to William Carey for translation. His response is recorded as follows: “Springing to his feet and throwing off his black coat he cried, 'No church for me to-day... If I delay an hour to translate and publish this, many a widow’s life may be sacrificed,' he said. By evening the task was finished.”

On 2 February 1830 this law was extended to Madras and Bombay presidencies. The ban was challenged by a petition signed by “several thousand… Hindoo inhabitants of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa etc” and the matter went to the Privy Council in London. Along with British supporters, Ram Mohan Roy presented counter-petitions to parliament in support of ending Sati. The Privy Council rejected the petition in 1832, and the ban on *Sati* was upheld.

**Suicide and the Fundamental Rights**

As fundamental rights of the constitution of India constitute a limitation on government, the major problems that Supreme as well as lower courts tried to achieve a reconciliation of rights of the individual with those of the State or Society as a whole, to create a proper balance between individualliberty and social control. Articles 14 and 21are the two fundamental rights on which the constitutional validity of Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code was challenged. Article 14 points out that the State shall not deny to any person equality before law or equal protection of laws. Articte 21 states that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty.

**Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code and suicide**:

In India, suicide was illegal and the survivor would face jail term of up to one year and fine under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code.

A four pronged attack to combat suicide suggested in a 2003 monograph was

(1) Reducing social isolation,  
(2) Preventing social disintegration,  
(3) Treating mental disorders, and  
(4) Regulating the sale of pesticides & ropes.

The Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code lays down the punishment for attempted suicide.

There have been appeals to remove the section from different sources. In the Gian Kaur Case in 1996, a five judge bench of the Supreme Court of India had ruled that the section 309 was not violative of article 21 of the constitution of India. The law commission of India had also recommended removal of the section from the statute. A bill in this regard was introduced in the parliament, but was not made into law. The Supreme Court in 2011 recommended to Parliament to consider the feasibility of deleting this section from the statute. Even though the section has not been removed, the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 and the rules under the act have effectively decriminalized attempted suicide with effect from July 2018.

Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code was set to be limited in effect by the Mental Health Care Bill, 2013. The Mental Health Care Bill was introduced to the Rajya Sabha on 19 August 2013 and provides, in article 124, that "Notwithstanding anything contained in section 309 of the Indian Penal Code, any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to be suffering from mental illness at the time of attempting suicide and shall not be liable to punishment under the said section." It also provides that the Government shall have the duty to provide medical care to any such person attempting suicide. The Bill, therefore, does not repeal Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code, but merely provides the presumption of mental illness.

The bill was referred by the Rajya Sabha to a Standing Committee on 18 September 2013, which submitted a report on 20 November 2013. In its report, the Standing Committee had three concerns on this provision: firstly, that the presumption of mental illness would subject persons to 'mental health treatment', secondly, concerns about the consequences on Section 306 of the Penal Code, which concerns abetment to suicide, and thirdly, concerns regarding the "institutionalization in silencing victims of domestic violence." In response, the Ministry proposed amendments which would change the language of this provision to one concerning the "presumption of severe stress in case of attempt to commit suicide".The Committee accepted this recommendation, noting that there was still ambiguity regarding the stage at which this presumption would operate.

In response to a question by Vivek Gupta in the Rajya Sabha on decriminalization of suicide on 10 December 2014, the Minister of State for Home Affairs replied that "it has been decided to delete Section 309 of IPC from the Statute book." However, pending the passage of the Mental Health Care Bill 2013, Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code was yet to be limited or repealed. However, the government of India decided to repeal the law in 2014.

On 24 February 2015, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Haribhai Parathibhai Chaudhary, said that a proposal to delete Section 309 from the Indian Penal Code had been sent to the Legislative Department of the Ministry of Law and Justice for drawing up a draft Amendment Bill.Attempted suicide was decriminalized with the passage of the Mental Healthcare Bill. The Rajya Sabha passed the Bill on 8 August 2016, and the Lok Sabha on 27 March 2017. The relevant provision of the Mental Healthcare Act,2017  states, "Notwithstanding anything contained in section 309 of the Indian Penal Code any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code." The act commenced in July 2018. But the problem of suicide still continues without noticeable changes. It invites more solid measures from part of the society. People’s initiative for a ‘no-suicide zone assumes greater importance. The initiative should come from the people as a part of the people’s planning through the local panchayats, municipalities, district administration and the NGOs.

# **Conclusion**

The history of suicide is almost as early as the history of mankind. It is a sign of social pathology, and there isincreasing interests in the effects on the family of all manner of social pathology, and there is increasing interests, in the effects on the family of all manner of social and economic change: industrialisation, urbanization, the decline of religious observance, changes in morality and the liberalization of marriage and divorce laws. The first act of suicide probably occurred before the beginning pf written records. In order to explore the history of suicide with any understanding , one must have some conception of the prevailing taboos and attitudes toward the behavioral phenomenon.Historically , society’s attitudes toard suicide and suicidal act reveal a wide range between a rational one of acceptance, an irrational one of superstition, and a hostile one of punishment.

Suicide popularly known as *atmaghata* find sporadic references in the Vedas, epics, Upanishads and Dharmesastras. Kumarila Bhatta, the great Mimamsa advocate of the Vedic period entered into the funeral pyre lighted by him. He was convinced that his mission in life was successful after establishing the supremacy of the vedic doctrines. Suicide behaviours were referred to in the Indian epics- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Dharmasastras treated those who commit suicide by poison, fire, drowning or falling from a cliff or a tree should be classed with those who commit cardinal sins (*maha patakas*). Such persons should not be cremated nor burial rites performed. Certain exceptions were there for the religious suicides like self-immolation (*sahamarana*) or after (*anumarana*) cremation of the husbands; drowning at the confluence of sacred rivers and oceans like Ganga, Yamuna and Kanyakumari; incurable diseases; extreme old age etc.

Several theories of suicide are surveyed here, there are many more left unmentioned. These include theories stemming from research in other disciplines. For example, huge advances have been made in the study of the brain in the neurosciences in the last 20 years. We have a better understanding of how the brain works and consequently how chemicals in the brain influence how we think and behave. This is positive because we now have a better idea of how suicidal thoughts are formed, and how these thoughts result in suicidal behaviours.

It is important to note that no single theory can explain the complexities of suicide or suicidal behaviour, regardless of whether the theory is rooted in sociology, psychology, or even medicine. It is also unfeasible to conclude that every theory can be used effectively to treat suicidality.It is important to note that no single theory can explain the complexities of suicide or suicidal behavior.

Particular theories may influence newer ones or may fall out of favour altogether. What remains constant is the evolving understanding of why people take their own lives. We get this understanding from the tireless research that goes into formulating theory and its practical application.As theoretical efforts in suicide prevention continue and our practical treatment of suicidal individuals improves, more people who are suffering will hopefully begin to experience lives that are not quite as painful and intolerable. When this happens, they may no longer feel like Sisyphus, endlessly pushing the rock, rather, they can be, as Camus imagines Sisyphus, content and happy to be alive.

Durkheim was very famous for his study of suicide. He defined the four types of suicide and supported his theory that changes in nonmaterial social facts cause differences in suicide rates. Durkheim’s theory consisted of finding a problem which was suicide. He then came up with a dependent variable which was the suicide rate. The social forces became the independent variable. The hypothesis would be what the suicide rate would vary with. When he collected his date Durkheim would go into detail about each individuals life and any uprising problems that he could find. He would then analyze the data into four categories which are the three most common types of suicide (egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide and anomic suicide). After looking at the date and matching it up with the proper suicide type Durkheim would then draw conclusions or form a theory. These are the details of the three most common suicides. Egoistic suicide is committed by people who are weak and supported by membership in a cohesive social group. They start to depend a huge amount on themselves than on group goals and rules of conduct to sustain them in their lives. When stressful times are around they feel isolated and helpless. Altruistic suicide is committed by people who are extremely committed to group norms and objectives and who notice their own lives as insignificant. These suicides involved dying for some type of cause.

Rejecting most of the accepted theories of suicide, Durkheim on the basis of his monographic studies claims suicide as primarily social phenomena in terms of the breakdown of the vital bond of life. Durkheim in his classical study of ‘Le Suicide’ which was published in 1897, demonstrates that neither psycho-pathic factor nor heredity nor climate nor poverty, nor unhappy love nor other personal factors motivate along form sufficient explanation of suicide.

According to Durkheim, suicide is neither an individual act nor a personal action. It is caused by some power which is over and above the individual or super individual. He viewed “all classes of deaths resulting directly or indirectly from the positive or negative acts of the victim itself who knows the result they produce” Having defined the phenomenon Durkheim dismisses the psychological explanation. Many doctors and psychologists develop the theory that majority of people who take their own life are in a pathological state, but Durkheim emphasises that the force, which determines the suicide, is not psychological but social. He concludes that suicide is the result of social disorganisation or lack of social integration or social solidarity.

Durkheim acknowledged Comte as his master. On a sociological perspective when Comte and Spencer were considered as the founding fathers of Sociology, Durkheim is considered as the grandfather and the systematic approach to study the society began with him.Durkheim’s theory of ‘suicide’ is related in various ways to his study of the division of labour. It is also linked with the theory of ‘social constraint’. Durkheim has established the view that there are no societies in which suicide does not occur.

Durkheim’s influence was vast, and his was the first theoretical attempt to examine suicide in non-moralistic or judgmental terms. Ultimately, he attempted to “specifically identify types of suicide and ascribe reasons” for why they happen. Emile Durkheim classified different types of suicides on the basis of different types of relationship between the actor and his society.

It is true that men like Edmund Burke, Warren Hastings, Sir William James and the historians like William Robertson perceived the essential viability of Indian values, laws, traditions and institutions, which had survived and served their purposes for centuries with reasonable adequacy and therefore had to be respected. Burke and James Mill offered a comprehensive understanding of India. But most others were rather superficial in their understanding and limited in their interest. The missionaries for example, concentrated on the rudimentary idea as the local people needed Christianity as a prerequisite for a good society and government and John Bright and the Manchester School relied on ‘laissez- faire’ in much the same way. A portion of British attitudes represented an effort to synthesize divergent viewpoints. Munro and Elphinstone hoped, by introducing certain liberal principles, into their conservative approach. With a mass and variety of opinions confronting it, the British public could not escape the political problem of India, though it had difficulty in choosing among conservatism, imperialism and westernization, the right solution to the problem.

Thus, it must be pointed out, that the wave of sympathy, its values, traditions and institutions did not extend to every example of them. However, the process of understanding the east, many a times accompanied with the racial arrogance and superiority complex of the west, riding on the belief of the “white man’s burden” continued throughout the nineteenth century. The gap between the east and the west further widened. It is relevant in this context the attention to the contribution of western women, who played sometimes a formidable role towards the empowerment of women.

Factors that affect the risk of suicide include mental disorders, drug misuse, psychological states cultural, family and social situations, and genetics. Mental disorders and substance misuse frequently co-exist. Other risk factors include having previously attempted suicide, the ready availability of a means to take one's life, a family history of suicide, or the presence of harrowing brain injury. For example, suicide rates have been found to be greater in households with firearms than those without them. Socio-economic problems such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and discrimination activate the suicidal thoughts. About 15–40% of people leave a suicide note.  Genetics appears to account for between 38% and 55% of suicidal behaviors.

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Mental disorders, including depression, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, vices like alcoholism and the use of benzodiazepines are the risk factors. Some suicides are impulsive acts due to stress due to stress, such as from financial difficulties, troubles with relationships, or bullying.  Those who have previously attempted suicide are at a higher risk for future attempts. Effective suicidal preventive efforts include limiting access to methods of suicide—such as firearms, drugs, and poisons; treating mental disorders and substance misuse; proper media reporting of suicide; and improving economic conditions. Even though crisis hotlines are common, there is little evidence for their effectiveness.

A person who is experiencing or could experience suicidal thoughts may show the symptoms like feeling or appearing to feel trapped or hopeless, feeling intolerable emotional pain, having or appearing to have an abnormal preoccupation with violence, dying, or death, having mood swings, happy or sad, talking about revenge, guilt, or shame, being agitated, or in a heightened state of anxiety, experiencing changes in personality, routine, or sleeping patterns, consuming drugs or more alcohol than usual, or starting drinking when they had not previously done so, engaging in risky behavior, such as driving carelessly or taking drugs, getting their affairs in order and giving things away, getting hold of a gun, medications, or substances that could end a life, experiencing depression,panic attacks, impaired concentration increased isolation, talking about being a burden to others, psychomotor agitation, such as pacing around a room, wringing one's hands, and removing items of clothing and putting them back on, saying goodbye to others as if it were the last time, seeming to be unable to experience pleasurable emotions from normally pleasurable life events such as eating, exercise, social interaction, or sex, severe remorse and self criticism, talking about suicide or dying and expressing regret about being alive or ever having been born. A significant number of people with suicidal ideation keep their thoughts and feelings a secret and show no signs that anything is wrong.

It is essential to treat suicide as a universal phenomenon and initiate methods for its prevention. In Kerala, suicide has emerged as one of the major health problems, hence the rate its rate is more than of any other state in Inaia, even greater than that of some of the developed countries. In terms of quality of life such as educational status, infant mortality rate and life expectancy, Kerala is far more advanced than other states. But with regard to prevention Kerala is lagging behind some of the other countries. The ego-centric attitude is a major factor. The misconceptions about suicide should be corrected. Harmful false assumptions are still there in Kerala. Social and religious workers, educational institutions and councilling centres are in a better position to dispel such myths and harmful notions. An opportunity should be provided to ventilate their feelings and grievances. It is the collective responsibility to address the increasing incidence of suicide especially on grounds of poverty, unemployment, psychotherapeutic problems and spouse abuse particularly towards women.

Life skill training forms one of effective methods towards the prevention of suicides. The methods were suggested by the United Nations World Health Organisation. The things like rope, poison, dangerous medicines, chemicals, fire items and other destructive weapons should be kept away from the reach of such persons. The guidelines and services of the governmental and non-governmental agenciers can be properly ulitised to avoid such situations. Regular discussions and meetings can also avert such conditions. It is better to keep aloof from the circumstances that lead to the tendencies of suicide. Empowerment of women would definitely enhance their social, economic, spiritual and political status that would in turn make them mentally sound and alert. The attitude of the society to such people is usually based on a social stigma. Such a negative from the part of the society should be changed. The solution lies both at the individual and the society levels. The individual should be able to make his life more pragmatic and energetic; and society should contain the various socio-economic and cultural forces pulling it in different directions and trying to threaten its stability.

The modernist agenda of the post colonial state were focused on freeing Hindu men and women from the shackles of a traditional law that seemed to tie spouses together not only in this life, but also for all lives to come. Such a trend paved the way for process of a new legislation to liberate such persons from such shackles. In India, suicide was illegal and the survivor would face jail term of up to one year and fine under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. However, the government of India decided to repeal the law in 2014. In April 2017, the Indian Parliament decriminalised suicide by passing the Mental Healthcare Act,2017 and it recommended for a more humane treatment and consideration considering it as a psychiatric problem and not as a manifestation of criminal instinct.

The health researchers who conducted the study came to the conclusion that social isolation, depression, functional disability and the feeling of being a burden on the family are the factors contributing to suicides among the senior people. Multiple factors such as personal problems, domestic violence, financial troubles and alcoholism contributed to suicides. One of the main causes for suicide attempts by the women remained the premenstrual syndrome (PMS), the physical and emotional upsets faced by a large section of women during the runup to the monthly menstruation.

The suicide rate among women was unexpectedly and unusually high compared with the global average. Clinical conditions like Depressive Disorder, socio- economic factors like migrations, debt traps and socio-cultural settings including disintegrating traditional social support systems, aspirations disproportionate to resources contribute to suicide intentions along with the other hitherto unknown causes. So a holistic approach can be expected to have any significant effect for any prevention programmes. he reports appearing in mass media point to an alarming rise in the figure. No scientific study has so far been conducted to illuminate neither the magnitude nor the causes of this problem.

It is frequently quoted that Kerala is unique to have a higher suicide rates when compared to the corresponding figures of India. The gender difference in the causes is evident as financial and occupation related problems contributing for male suicides, while that role is for interpersonal problems in case of females. As one assumes financial responsibility at middle ages and interpersonal problems are more likely in teenage, the gender difference in age groups could be appreciable. Unemployment was cited as a cause in only one case.

Maximum number of suicides happened for the age group was 20-39 years. This was followed by 40-59 group, above 60 and the least was from the age group below 19. For males the highest were from 40-59 age group, the others remaining the same as for the whole group. For females, first and second highest groups were similar to that of the whole group, while below 19 qualified for 3rd place and above 60 years had the lowest rank. Out of 112suicides victims, 40 preferred to die by poisoning, which was the highest preferred mode. This was followed by burns, hanging, drowning, rail track and jumping from height. For males, burns had fifth rank after rail track. Usually it is held that women did not resort to rail track suicide.But Kerala is having cases that women also resort to rail track. For instance, Mary, a casual employee of ISRO committed suicide by jumping in front a train. Majority of women preferred burns. Poisoning, hanging and drowning are also adopted based on the circumstances. It was closely followed by committing murder and then suicide (family suicide), marital disharmony and scolding by parents. Death of a dear one, committing murder, financial difficulty, unemployment and trouble with police were reported in case of males only, while failure in exam, eve teasing, can't have children, mental illness and patients objection to desired mariage were reasons totally for females.

People’s initiative for a ‘no-suicide zone’ through the model of people’s planning assumes greater scope and importance in the present context of Kerala. The initiative should come from the people through the local panchayats, municipalities, district administration and the NGOs. There should be at least one suicide prevention and counselling centre each in every panchayat and municipality. Seminars, workshops and awareness camps should be arranged on periodical basis. Above all, there should be a humane consideration towards the victims of suicide from the part of the public and press. There were attempts to manhandle the victims who at times escape from the thresh hold of death.

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**Interviews, Field Study**

**GLOSSARY**

Adiyan Your slave

*Antharjansm* Namboodiri woman

*Anumarana* Cremation

*Atmaghata* Suicide

*Avarna* A term used to designate polluting castes including and below Nadars and Ezhavas.

*Brahmadeya* Gift to Brahmnins, specifically a grant of village income and management to Brahmins.

*Dasi* Nair maid servant

*Dasivicaram* The local headman

*Devadana* Gift to Gods, specifically the endowment of income from land or a village to a temple.

*Devasvam* Religious endowments and property belonging to temples.

*Illam*  The house of a Nambudiri.

*Jenmi* One who holds janman land.

*Kara* Village

*Karikkadi* Dirty gruel

*Kurinchi* Hilly region

*Maha patakas* Major sins

*Marutham* Cultivable land

*Mullai* Pastoral lands

*Muraikarar* One who holds the office in turn.

*Mulakkacha* A garment covering the breast

*Mulakkaram* A breast tax

*Marumakathayam* Matrilineal System

*Mlechchas* Untouchables

*Naduvazhi* Local Ruler

*Nedumkanakku* Alphabet

N*eythal* Coastal area

*Orthu* Think

*Palai*  Barren region

*Pallikudams* Schools

*Panchama* Fifth Class

*Parappedi* Fear of the Parayas by high caste once in a year.

*Pial* Verandah

*Pulappedi*  Fear of the Pulayas by high caste once in a year.

*Purohitya* Priest-craft

*Puthuvallands* Sirkar lands newly assigned to private parties.

*Sahamarana* Self-immolation

*Salais* Educational institutions

*Sambandham* Illegitimate relation of Nair Women with the Nambudiris

*Sastri* One who is well versed in Sastras.

*Shantronmai* A kshatriya virtue of nobility.

*Smartan* Judge

*Smarthavicharam* Trial of a Nambudiri womanon chargesof illegal relation.

*Savarna* Caste Hindus.

*Suddhabhojanam* Purificatory feast

S*udhikalasam* Purificatory ceremony

*Thampuran* My Lord

*Thampuratti* My lady

*Tindal para* Pollution rock

*Trairajyavyavahara* Lawand usage

*Udakakriya*  Obsequies

*Udakavicchedam* Severance of the right

*Uliyam* Forced labour demanded by the Sirkar.

*Upanayanam* Sacred thread wearing ceremony

*Vicaram* Caste trial

*Viruthi* Land granted at concessionary rent or tax in return for the performance of certain services.

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36. . Legislative Councils in India had no real official power till 1920. In the Indian Councils no proper representation was given to the Indians. Certain nominated members were admitted to the councils. The Indian nominees did not represent the Indian people or Indian opinion. Elections were conducted in British - India in connection with the 1919 enactment of the Montague - Chelmsford Reforms. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
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54. . Ibid., p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. . 1897b: 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. . 1897b: 157. Here Durkheim was not denying the idealistic nature of Roman Catholicism by contrast, for example, with Greco-Latin polytheism and Hebrew monotheism; rather, he was arguing that Protestantism stresses religious individualism and freedom of personal interpretation, while "all variation is abhorrent to Catholic thought" (1897b: 158). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. . Durkheim thus acknowledged the role of minority status, not because religious hostility Imposes some "higher morality," but because it forces the minority to achieve greater unity and integration (cf. 1897b: 159-160). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. . Cf. the similar point in The Division of Labor(1893: 409). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. . Durkheim thus rejected the Malthusian connection between limitation of family size and general well-being: "Actually [this restriction] is so much a source of the reverse condition that it diminishes the human desire to live. Far from dense families being a sort of unnecessary luxury appropriate only to the rich, they are actually an indispensable staff of daily life" (1897b: 201). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. . 1897b: 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. . 1897b: 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. . "Obligatory" altruistic suicide is the essential type, from which two others derive -- i.e., "optional" altruistic suicide, in which a concurrence of circumstances makes self-inflicted death praiseworthy, thus encouraging it without requiring it; and "acute" altruistic suicide (of which "mystical" suicide is the "perfect pattern"), in which the individual kills himself for the pure joy of sacrifice and self-renunciation (cf. 1897b:222-225). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. . 1897b: 238-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. . 1897b: 247. This argument -- that desires are simple and few in the "state of nature," but multiply with advancing civilization -- is one that we (and presumably Durkheim) owe to Rousseau's Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (1755). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. . Durkheim used the term "repressive anomy" to describe the condition produced by a reclassification downward in the social hierarchy, and "progressive anomy" to describe its upward counterpart (cf. 1897b: 285). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. . 1897b: 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. . Cf. the study of Bertillon (September. 1882), summarized by Durkheim on p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. . Cf. the study of Bertillon (September. 1882), summarized by Durkheim on p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. . Cf. 1893: 96-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. . 1897b: 310-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. . 1897b: 318. Durkheim insists that the alternative view -- that a whole is qualitatively identical with the sum of its parts, and an effect qualitatively reducible to the sum of its causes -- would render all change inexplicable; and he again attacks what he takes to be Tarde's defense of this position (cf. 1897b: 311-312). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. . See, for example, the famous arguments against such proscription presented in Montesquieu's Persian Letters (1721) and Hume s "On Suicide" (1783). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. . 1897b: 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. . Durkheim recognized that the homicides produced by conditions of anomie and those produced by conditions of altruism could not be "of the same nature"; like suicide, therefore. homicide "is not a single, individual criminological entity, but must include a variety of species very different from one another" (1897b: 358). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. . *Ibid.*, pp. 98-104. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. . *Ibid.*,Cf. 1897b: 85-107. To these symptoms of pathology, Durkheim adds the rise of philosophical pessimism. Comparing his own intellectual milieu with that of Zeno and Epicurus, he points to the systems of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, and the more broadly based intellectual movements of anarchism, aestheticism, mysticism, and revolutionary socialism as evidence of a "collective melancholy" which "would not have penetrated consciousness so far if it had not undergone a morbid development" (1897b: 370). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. . *Ibid.*,The causes of altruistic suicide, as we have seen, played no role in the "morbid effervescence" of nineteenth-century suicides, and appeared instead to be declining. Fatalistic suicide was already a subject of merely historical interest. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. . *Ibid.*,pp. 373-374. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. . *Ibid.*,1897b: 379. Cf. the important Preface to the second edition of The Division of Labor (1902) which extends this argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. . *Ibid.*,1897b: p.380. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
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82. . In his defense of The Elementary Forms before the Société francaise de philosophie (1913), Durkheim insisted that his primary concern had been to point out the "dynamo-genic" quality of religious belief. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
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