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**FROM MATRILINY TO THE MARRIAGE MARKET:
A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE GROWTH OF
WOMEN'S TERTIARY EDUCATION IN KERALA, INDIA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to assess the different motivations for women who are pursuing their master's degree in English literature at a university in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Kerala has the highest rate of female enrolment in higher education within India. A case study, with reference to current studies, was carried out. The study was qualitative in nature, using semi-structured interviews with 16 female respondents and 4 male respondents. The results of the study indicate that the respondents, who are largely middle-class, wish to pursue white-collar jobs, which is acceptable and even encouraged by their families. Macro-level factors, including globalisation, have led to the belief among the respondents that white-collar are acceptable and even beneficial in the marriage market. The marriage market also has a further role to play in the respondents' educational motivations; the respondents believe that a highly educated woman will attract a highly educated man and she will have less dowry to pay because her qualifications, highly valued in Keralite society, serve to enhance her appeal as a well-rounded, understanding future bride.

Forward

I would like to thank first of all my advisor, Sidsel Hansson, for all of her time and hard work. My thanks also goes out to my respondents, who took time out of their busy schedules to talk with me. I would also like to thank my classmates, especially Melissa and Anna, for all of their support and all of the fun times we've had abroad. Much love goes out to all of my friends and family spread throughout three continents.

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I. Introduction

In the southern state of Kerala, girls and women are pursuing education, especially higher education, at a much higher rate than the rest of India. In order to understand this unusual development, it is necessary to trace the rise of female education within this state throughout its history, from pre-colonial matrilineal family structure, schooling policies during colonial times and, more recently, Communist influence on female education. Still, historical factors alone cannot fully account for the high number of females currently pursuing tertiary education in Kerala. Recent theories have postulated that women are pursuing education because of Kerala's restrictive job market or because it enhances their value on the marriage market. In order to understand why so many women are pursuing higher education, I decided to carry out a case study at a state university with women who were aspiring for their master's degree in English Literature. No previous study has asked female university students why they have enrolled, and no in-depth study has analysed this enrolment in any thorough manner.

II. Methods and Selection

A. Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate and understand the motivations behind women's pursuit of higher education in Kerala, India, with special attention to previously unexplored factors. This is done through a case study at the Institute of English at Thiruvananthapuram University (pseudonym) with students pursuing the master's Degree in English Literature. By “motivation”, I am referring to different factors that have led to a student's enrolment. I am working under the assumption that in addition to personal motivations, societal factors, including kin and economics, affect a person's situation. I will present two sets of theories relevant to the research area in section V.C.; one postulating that women may be prolonging their education due to an unstable job market (Eapen and Kodoth 2002) and another postulating that women are pursuing higher education in order to secure a better marriage partner (Chacko 2003, Pernau 2003 and Erwen 2003).

B. Research Questions

My primary research question asks what motivates women in Kerala to pursue their master's' degree. Other questions include: do the women have plans to further their education? If so, what further qualifications are they seeking and for what reason? More questions look at the role the job market may play in educational decisions: Do the women have plans to enter the job market? If so, what are their job aspirations? What role does the current job market, with high unemployment, play in their educational decisions? I also have questions that attempt to uncover the role that the marriage market plays in regards to women's education: What are the marriage expectations of girls and women? Is it considered detrimental or beneficial to have a high level of education as a future bride? What level of education is seen as desirable for and by women, and for what reasons?

Further two question looks at how gender roles in Kerala may be shaping education: What type of education (i.e., liberal arts, sciences, etc) is seen as desirable for and by women, and for what reasons? Does the location of the school play a role in their enrolment? Other questions look at the background of the female students and whether this plays a role in their education: Does the parents' level of education have any influence on their level of education? What is the economic background of college-educated females? One last question looks at the views others may hold on women's tertiary education in Kerala: What do others, including researchers, see as factors for women's' enrolment in higher education?

III. Methods and Selection

A. Methods

In order to carry out my study, I chose to take a qualitative approach to my research question. I elected to use this approach over a quantitative approach because I felt that I would like to take a focused look at a small group of people and also because of resource constraints. I didn't feel that a questionnaire alone was appropriate for my research question because it would only provide a limited amount of data using pre-determined responses. Instead, I wanted to gather rich data in order to uncover all the different factors that motivate women to pursue their post-graduate degree. Using the qualitative method I conducted semi-structured interviews and administered a questionnaire on the respondent's family background. The interviews were usually conducted in small groups; this allowed the women to feel more at ease with the researcher; this format also allowed the respondents to build on each other's

responses, sometimes affirming and sometimes contradicting each other. The number of respondents being interviewed at a given time varied from one person to a group of five people. Unfortunately, this method did not allow me to spend a long period of time with individuals; I may have missed valuable information because the respondents did not wish to share particular kinds of information in front of their peers because they may have felt embarrassed if they felt that a particular response might be considered unusual by others. The length of the interview was usually about 45 minutes to one hour. The respondents were asked the same basic questions phrased the same way. I also spoke with a scholar, Mridul Eapen at the Centre for Development Research in Thiruvananthapuram, in order to look at the research question objectively.

B. Selection

In order to find respondents, I chose to carry out my study at Thiruvananthapuram University (pseudonym). Thiruvananthapuram University is a public college that charges very little in the way of fees; by choosing this school I hoped to be able to select a range of respondents from different family and economic backgrounds. I chose to specifically find respondents at the Institute of English at Thiruvananthapuram University because I felt that this particular programme would provide me the opportunity to speak first-hand with the respondents, who would be able to discuss my questions in an articulate manner and give expressive responses. Despite its reputation as a “soft” subject, across Kerala, the gender composition of English master's students roughly matches the average of all colleges: 30% male and 70% female (Government of Kerala 2004:Appendix 11.9). I chose to study females pursuing their post-graduate degrees rather than their Bachelor Degree because the number of women in Kerala pursuing their master's degree is much higher as a percentage than elsewhere in India, and I felt that this trend deserves attention.

In order to meet my respondents, the director the programme formally introduced me to the students of the programme. During this introduction, I attempted to arrange interview times with all of the respondents present. Less than five students were unable to arrange an interview time because of family constraints over the next week. Later I discovered that a few students had not been present at the introduction but I was able to meet with many of these students after meeting them through classmates later. I was able to interview over half of the entire programme, which is comprised of junior and senior level students pursuing their Master's in English Literature. Although I will not be able to draw any general conclusions for women in Kerala as a whole, I felt that by carrying out a case study I will play a small part in contribute to the understanding of the issue.

IV. Design of the Study

A. Data Sources

Most of my data comes from primary sources. I carried out semi-structured interviews with sixteen female students and four male students. These students also filled out questionnaires that I had designed in order to assess their background. I have also used secondary data in the form of research articles in peer-reviewed academic journals, books, articles from anthologies, reference texts and official government data. The interviews were conducted in English so no translator was necessary. I did not want to use a translator because I felt that in the process of translation, important data might be lost because the translation process may encourage simplistic answers and not facilitate any meaningful discussion.

B. Approach

I chose to begin with a deductive approach which led to an inductive approach. I set out to test theories about why women were pursuing higher education. In order to obtain reliable data, I asked the same basic questions to all my respondents and phrased the questions in the exact same way. Because the respondents were fluent in English, I felt that they were all about to adequately understand and interpret the questions in roughly the same way. The respondents were also given the same surveys which asked the same questions about their backgrounds. In order to obtain valid data, I asked the principal question (“What is your motivation for pursuing higher education?”) in different forms. I also attempted to solicit viewpoints from not only the female students themselves, but also from their male peers and a scholar working in this area. My study is qualitative in the sense that I solicit information from university students about their own personal lives, but also quantitative in the sense that I analyse data from academic and government sources in order to understand the full picture. When analysing the data, I looked not only at other researcher's viewpoints but at government statistics. I have attempted to make a reliable and valid study by comparing my results to those of other recent studies and government data and also discussing my findings with the programme director of the university where the study was conducted. My study does not attempt to represent all females pursuing higher education in Kerala; rather, my study attempts to represent the females within the English Institute Master's Programme in English Literature at Thiruvananthapuram University.

C. Limitations

When conducting my research I faced some limitations on resources, including time and money, which influenced the breadth of my study. I was only able to focus on one programme in higher education. I could not look at a range of programmes across Kerala or programmes in different cities throughout Kerala. Due to time constraints, I could not conduct interviews with all of the students at the English Institute. I was not able to compare my study to other programmes in other states in India or throughout the world. Also, I was not able to speak with the parents of the respondents because of time constraints. If I was able to interview the parents about their daughters' education, it would add another dimension to my case study.

D. Ethical Considerations

I obtained permission from respondents and the university before carrying out interviews. When carrying out interviews, I distributed a confidentiality statement that assured respondents that their responses would be confidential. I also assured my respondents that they would have an anonymous identity in my findings. All recordings and notes made were confidential and I have changed all of the names of the respondents in addition to the school name and location. I will destroy my records of interviews when my research is completed in order to maintain confidentiality. Any identifying features of my respondents have been omitted in the study.

V. Research Frontier and Analytical Framework

In order to understand the progression of female education in Kerala, I will first provide a general overview and statistical background of female education in Kerala in Section A. Then I will analyse the historical roots that led to the rise of female education in Section B. Afterwards, in Section C, I will review current studies on female education in Kerala.

A. Overview of Female Education in Kerala

The southern state of Kerala has consistently outperformed other Indian states in regards to the education of women and girls. Although statistics are notoriously unreliable during colonial times and early independence, Kerala is consistently noted for a high number of girls and women attending

school. Kerala consistently has the highest female literacy rates in all of India, climbing from 76% literacy in 1981 to 87% literacy in 2001 (Latta 2005:25). In all of India for the year 2001, less than 50% of girls and women were literate (World Bank Group 2005). This striking contrast demonstrates Kerala's uniqueness when compared to the rest of India.

All levels of schooling demonstrate gender equity within Kerala, which is unusual throughout India. Kerala's primary school net enrolment also shows little gender disparity, especially when compared with the rest of India. Throughout India, less than half of all females were attending school compared to the majority of males. Within Kerala, about two-thirds of females were attending school in Kerala, which is roughly on par with their male counterparts (Human Development in South Asia 2002:166).

The high number of women pursuing higher education in Kerala continues into the tertiary level. Today, female enrolment in colleges and universities is higher than male enrolment: during 2003, over 60% of students were women (Government of Kerala 2004:273). Across India, only 40% of higher education students are women (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2005:256). In Kerala, post graduate courses have an even higher rate of female enrolment: 67% of students are women (Government of Kerala 2004:273). Women have been pursuing higher education at a steady, climbing rate: percentage of females compared to males enrolled in Keralite universities rose from 55.7% in 1994 to 61% in 2000 (Government of Kerala 2001:92). Kerala's educational achievements in regards to women's education have yet to be surpassed in India.

Education positively affects women throughout their lives and the lives of those around them. Women with more education are more likely to marry later and have their first child later (Chacko 2003:53). Female education also influences fertility decisions and leads to the reduction of child mortality and morbidity (Sen 2001:5). Women's education also furthers better communication between partners about contraception and better health care for children (ul Haq 2000:110). Kerala's statistics seem to bear witness to these benefits: in 1997 the United Nations development programme stated that Kerala had "both the highest position on the Human Development Index (HDI), and the highest position on the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), among Indian states. Basic demographic indicators in the state, such as life expectancy, are almost on par with those of the developed world" (Chacko 2003:52). Kerala is also the leader in female life expectancy and fertility reduction (Chacko 2003:52). Table 1 demonstrates Kerala's uniqueness in statistical form when compared to the rest of India.

Table 1. Kerala's Social Indicators in Comparison to the Rest of India, 1981 and 2001				
	<i>India</i>		<i>Kerala</i>	
<i>Year</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>2001</i>
Sex Ratio (Female /1000 Male)	935	933	1032	1058
Life Expectancy at Birth	54.7	65.3	71.8	74
Mean age at marriage	18.3	19.5	20	22
Birth Rate (per 1000)	--	27.2	26.4	16
Death Rate (per 1000)	12.7	8.3	6.4	--
Infant Mortality Rate	79	71	41	15.3
Maternal Mortality Rate (per lakh)	468	407	--	140
Literacy Rate (%)	29.76	54.16	65.7	87.86
Work Participation Rate	19.7	25.7	16.6	15.3
Source: Government of Kerala (2004).				

B. Historical Roots of Women's Education in Kerala

Kerala's high rates of female literacy and enrolment can be traced back to three major factors in its history: matrilineal and matrilocal heritage, political activism, and specific school policies. Although there is no doubt that countless different factors have encouraged the growth of female education in Kerala, these three different factors in particular are more than partly responsible for the general acceptance and rise of female education across society in Kerala. These historical factors also provide a basis for understanding the growth of female tertiary education in Kerala.

The practice of matrilineality played a role in educating Kerala's women and girls. Matrilineality, or descent traced through the female line, was practised by the Nair caste (Erwen 2003:106). This practice was by no means matriarchal, as some scholars ascribe it to be, because women did not have the ultimate say in family matters. The oldest male was in charge of the household unit, called a Taravad (Erwen

2003:106), so women did not have the ultimate say in household matters. Although women may have had lower status than men, their autonomy was much greater than in other parts of India. Women had greater inheritance rights which gave them greater economic security. Living in or near their mother's home allowed them recourse if they suffered injustice from their husband or husband's family, and they were given a place to live should they become a widow. This family atmosphere undoubtedly encouraged women's autonomy and encouraged them to pursue education with little hindrance.

Matriliny not only encouraged women's autonomy but also encouraged women's schooling. Robin Jeffrey finds a direct relationship between female school attendance and matriliney: "Matriliny, the keystone of old Kerala, meant that girls often attended local schools, even before the establishment of centralised educational systems in the 1860s. Having permitted their girls to go to the old schools, matrilineal families let them go to the new ones as well" (Jeffrey 1993:55). The practice of matriliney declined due to outside pressures, including Christian missionaries, British influence, and pressure from the rest of India. In 1975 the *Kerala Joint Hindu Family System (Abolition) Act* was passed. This law effectively put a legal end to matrilineage.

Political activism also had a large role to play when it came to educating females. Political activism within Kerala took the form anti-caste movements, pro-land reform and stress on universal education for men and women of all castes. James Manor makes note of Kerala's uniqueness in regards to the rest of India when he writes that "in terms of cultural, social and economic history, Kerala and West Bengal seem to stand at one remove from the rest of India, from what we might call mainstream India. The left parties' lack of success at penetrating other regions to any substantial degree bears witness to this" (2004:202). Calls for universal free basic education came early in Kerala when compared to the rest of India. Free education for all lower castes was introduced in 1908 (Jeffrey 1987:455). Amartya Sen attributes such early implementation of free basic education and other educational reforms as a result of political reaction to pre-existing caste inequalities (Sen 2001:11).

The state of Kerala began funding education early on in its history. Sen writes that "public policy in [Kerala] put much greater emphasis on general education and literacy than was the case in the rest of India, and the emphasis on female education was particularly exceptional" (2000:2). The state of Kerala offered incentives for girls to attend school as early as 1898 (Jeffery 1987:454). When already-established missionary schools encountered financial problems, the government agreed to provide funding in exchange for oversight of the schools. This benefited those in the upper and lower castes who felt that the schools were tools for Christian conversion (Desai 2005:471). The different state

policies enacted throughout Kerala's history encouraged female school attendance.

These policies continued with Communist influence and spread general education to more women. The Communist government, elected in 1957, placed special priority on investment in human capital with an emphasis on education (Erwen 2003:120). By consistently placing an emphasis on education in the decades following their election, the Communist and other left parties kept education for all as a normal part of everyday life. Even though the Communist party may not be in power today, state emphasis on education continues. 37 per-cent of Kerala's annual budget is spent on education, which is much higher than other Indian states (Raman 2005). By investing in educational programmes, Kerala's government contributed to the higher number of females enrolled and the high percentage of literate females.

Early schooling policies also attracted and maintained high female attendance and literacy rates. The decision to educate the children of Kerala in their native tongue, Malayalam, was unusual compared to the rest of India. The British renounced the use of vernacular in the classroom setting because they believed that important concepts could only be conveyed in the English language (Chapman 2003:132). Because the British did not arguably have such a strong hold on Kerala, the use of vernacular escaped their attention, and the policy of teaching in Malayalam continued throughout Independence. The traditional "old village school" was also kept alive throughout colonial times and into Independence. The goal of literacy was not originally a main feature of the curriculum. Instead, students were taught "the customs of old Kerala. The schoolmaster taught them songs, poems and stories, as well as a little arithmetic, astrology, ayurvedic medicine, and even perhaps some 'ornamental sewing' (Jeffrey 1987:452). This type of schooling, which was not associated with British imperialism and outside influence most likely helped increase female attendance rates because it was not threatening to families.

Kerala has consistently employed a high number of female primary school teachers which also helped to maintain a high level of female enrolment. In other parts of India, such as Uttar Pradesh, only 18 per cent of primary school teachers are female yet Kerala's teachers are mostly female (Sen 2000:45). It is probable that having a female teacher helps assuage any fears the girls' family may have about the appropriateness of education or the educational environment. Today, the high number of female teacher continues; over 50% of college professors are female (Government of Kerala 2004:274). The history that has led most people in Kerala to embrace female education has undoubtedly influenced the number of women attending university.

C. Female Tertiary Education in Kerala Today

Many scholars now believe that women's higher education in Kerala may be driven by the marriage market and that higher education is being used to enhance a bride's "marriageability." The tightening of the marriage market has led to stiff competition and "especially among middle-and upper-class families, the acquisition of a bachelor's degree by young women is seen as an essential step in acquiring a husband who is an educated professional" (Chacko 2003:53). With this view, procuring a degree serves foremost to aid a woman's chances on the marriage market.

Education may also enhance the status of the woman and her family and thereby increase a woman's chance for a good match. By financing their daughter's graduate or post-graduate degree, the family can demonstrate their wealth and position in a very concrete manner; her education also serves to benefit the status of her future spouse's family: "In essence, a women's education and work capacity are to enhance the reputation first of her original family in the marital arrangement, and then the position, honour and material well-being of her in-laws, of which she feels and becomes an integral part" (Pernau 2003:51). By acquiring a degree, a woman in Kerala can increase the status of herself and her family.

These scholars generally believe that women are not becoming highly educated in order to pursue a career; rather, the value of the education lies in their status as a professional woman, and this status is appealing to grooms and their families. These scholars question whether women will enter the workforce with their new degrees: "Generally women show a very good performance with high marks at the university, but the education is mainly an investment for marriage. Women return to the domestic sphere, hence not making 'use' of the education outside the home [sic]" (Erwen 2003:131). Rather than education enhancing a woman's earning potential, these scholars believe that the ultimate goal of a degree is a high-status husband.

Many researchers also reason that traditional gender roles encourage highly educated women home with the family rather than pursuing a degree. In Toshie Awaya's 2003 study of women's magazines in Kerala, the gender roles assigned to men and women seem to reflect beliefs common throughout Kerala: that women belong in the home, while men's skills should be put to use in the public sphere. "an ideal female education... would make a woman 'a good Grihani [housewife], a leader and teacher to her child, a comrade and adviser to her husband... a good human being to all'" (Awaya 2003:55).

Women's work participation rates in Kerala remain dismally low compared to the rest of India despite the high number of women who hold professional degrees. It is questionable whether women are rejecting paid, outside work in favour of housework, as Awaya's study would suggest, or whether they are unable to obtain steady, outside employment. Table 2 details women's work participation rates through the last four decades in Kerala and in India.

<i>Year</i>	<i>1971</i>		<i>1981</i>		<i>1991</i>		<i>2001</i>	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Kerala	45	13.5	44.9	16.6	47.6	15.9	50.4	15.3
India	52	11.9	52.7	19.8	51.6	22.3	51.9	25.7

Source: Government of Kerala (2004)

Others question whether highly educated women may not be pursuing work because of Kerala's currently high unemployment rate and economic rut. Currently, Kerala is in the midst of an economic downturn. Employment in the state is decreasing: "Reckoned in terms of all the three measures of unemployment - usual status, currently weekly status and current daily status - used by NSS, Kerala has the highest incidence of unemployment for both males and females and in rural as well as urban areas. Educated unemployment in the State is even more severe" (Devi 2002:7). Eapen and Kodoth have postulated that girls are being educated because they cannot currently obtain suitable employment (2002:26). In this view, higher education serves the purpose of enhancing their employability while young women sit out the current economic recession. If this view is taken then one will assume that women will enter the workforce in larger numbers once the economy improves. As my findings will demonstrate, the marriagability of a woman and the economy plays a role in her education, but there are many other unexplored factors that will influence the pursuit of higher education.

VI. Findings

A. Background of the Respondents

I interviewed sixteen females and four males at the English Institute of Thiruvananthapuram University. The programme admits 25 students every year; there are approximately 150 applicants every year for the master's in English programme. Marks at the undergraduate level largely determine which students will be admitted to the programme. Most began school at age five, then had basic

education for ten years, two years of upper secondary school and spent three years pursuing their Bachelor Degrees. This 10+2+3 system is common throughout in Kerala (Mukundan and Bray 2004:229). For the females, the youngest two respondents are 20 years old and the oldest respondent is 23; the average age is 21.3. There are ten Hindus and six Christians. The most common caste is Nair (5), followed by Catholic (2), Ezhava (2), Samantha (1), Viswakarma (1), Orthodox (1), Latin Catholic (1) and Nambiar (1). Two do not identify with a particular caste.

Ten of the respondents are in their second year of the programme (referred to as “seniors”), while six respondents are in their first year of the programme (referred to as “juniors”). Nine respondents come from Thiruvananthapuram, one was born in the Middle East and the rest come from other parts of Kerala. Most of the respondents' mothers hold degrees: only three mothers did not graduate college or university, while thirteen hold a Bachelor's degree and two hold master's degrees. Of their mothers, five actively work jobs, ten are housewives and one is deceased. As for the respondents' fathers, thirteen hold bachelor degrees, two hold master's degrees and three do not have any qualifications. Six fathers are actively working, seven are retired and three fathers are deceased. All respondents had small families; while ten of the respondents have a brother or sister, six did not have any siblings. None of the respondents had more than one sibling. Eleven of the respondents live with their families while attending universities while five live at the university hostel.

The respondents come from mainly well-educated, middle-class backgrounds. It is striking that none of my respondents, even those from Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe backgrounds, identify as lower class nor mention costs as a factor for their enrolment. Fees at this university are particularly inexpensive; about 800 rupees will pay for a semester (including exam fees and other fees). Despite these low costs, no one mentioned this as a motivating factor for choosing this particular programme or pursuing their master's degree. When asked about the costs, all said that neither they nor their parents consider cost a factor and all stated that they are supported financially by their families. A few of my respondents even applied for programmes with considerably higher fees, such as chemistry, but were not accepted. Unwittingly, my case study focuses mostly on middle-class women.

B. The Allure and Acceptability of White-Collar Jobs

Contrary to previous studies already explored, including Chacko, Erwen and Awaya, the respondents stated that they all planned on pursuing careers. This desire for white-collar jobs may be an isolated trend among my respondents or may mark a new trend within middle-class Keralite society. The respondents' ambition to work is closely linked with consumerism and the marriage market.

All of the female respondents plan on pursuing careers. The most popular career choice is “college lecturer”, while others wish to teach English at the upper secondary level and others plan on attempting to join the civil service. Muniya told me that she would like a government job which requires her to take the Union Public Service Commission in order to join the Civil Service. The exam is very difficult but she wishes to take this route because she would like to have “a very powerful post” and have an “active role to play”. She also feels that the post held a permanency.

My respondents also note that their parents (and often times they themselves) disapprove of “risky” jobs. Risky jobs are either jobs that would take them away from their family (either their parents or their spouse), jobs that require long hours, or jobs that hold little permanency, like call centre jobs. The women I spoke to mentioned call centre jobs but look at these posts with disdain; they feel that these jobs are not only easily lost but do not provide enough benefits. Rachel mentions that these jobs pay “10,000 [rupees] a month but after you turn 25 they fire you”. Mary was offered a job that paid between four and ten thousand rupees a month. The post required her to stop attending school; she turned it down because she felt that “I need to stand on my two legs.” By getting her master's degree, she would be qualified for a higher post with “security”. Security not only includes the length of service, but also the opportunity for pensions, family leave, and recourse if a family member is ill.

Family is a powerful force within these women's lives. The family's influence on the respondents' educational decisions cannot be underestimated and deserves some exploration in general terms. Rachel told me that she “can't even lift a leaf without [my family's] permission.” Although a few feel constricted by their families' power over them, none felt that their parents were leading them down the wrong path. Mary told me that their families “want the best for us.” All of the respondents stated that their parents are fully supportive of their educational path or even responsible for their enrolment in the master's programme. Malti was not the only woman to tell me ““It was their plan to put me into a master's degree.” I was told repeatedly that their families wanted them to get good jobs, and a post-graduate degree is considered a necessary foundation for any “good” work. Lakshmi, who wished to eventually pursue animation, said that

the post-graduate degree has the quality that wherever you go, you will get a job... the basic qualifications that they need for a good job is a post-graduate degree. So [my family] said, 'just take a degree and after that, you can go for any other field, so even if it doesn't click, you have something to stand on.'

My respondents also mentioned that education in itself is looked favourably upon within their families. Chadra said that her family considers education “an essential part of one's life.” I believe this attitude,

apparently common among most of Keralites, comes from the long history of female education, which has previously been discussed.

Many also remark that promotions are often based on the degree attained; Hemali stated that “it was my father's dream that I should pursue higher education. He was very much sad that he had only a degree [sic]. Hence he never got a good promotion. Because of that he wanted me to get a good degree.” In my respondents' eyes, the degree alone is more important than the actual knowledge when it comes to obtaining desirable employment.

This desire to work may have been spurred by consumerism that began a little over a decade ago in Kerala:

Since its introduction in 1991, foreign electrical goods have appeared in local shops, bringing down the price of Indian brand-names. At the same time, banks have either introduced or expanded the scope of existing 'consumer loans'. An integral part of the controversial policies of economic liberalization introduced in 1991, and intended to encourage the growth of an internal consumer-goods market, these loans have enabled those who are in permanent employment, but with a modest disposable income, to borrow money for the acquisition of televisions, fridges, vehicles and so on. The most dramatic consequence of these 'consumer loans', aggressively marketed on the television and in every newspaper and magazine, has been a sudden increase in the number of cars and motorbikes and, importantly, of the number of televisions. There are now televisions in a quarter of non-labouring households, while in 1991 televisions were present only in one house in ten (Osello and Osello 1999:1009).

The growth of consumerism began with economic liberalisation in 1991 and was furthered by waves of migration to Gulf countries, which bring remittances; the media has also played a role in strengthening the desire for consumer goods and other, “modern” products (Eapen 2005). With this new consumer culture within Kerala, it appears that my respondents felt that a working wife is no longer controversial despite traditional gender roles that encourage women to stay at home and tend to the house and family. Lakshmi told me that “Nowadays, both the couples should be working in order for the family to go on. Because of financial problems, with only one spouse working and other staying at home, there will be a big problem financially. That's one reason why men prefer a working woman as a wife.” The men I talked to also spoke highly of an employed female, not only because of her earning power, but because of the emotional comfort she could provide. Badru told me that he preferred a working woman because “Depending on one salary really creates a burden on the main partner. It will help her to understand our feelings better than an uneducated girl. So it's nice to have an educated, employed... understanding wife.” Ajit, another male student I spoke with, mentioned the stress that the consumerist society has

caused for couples in Kerala, saying “In this modern world we need so much money... we cannot meet expenses with one salary, you know. We have to be a part of the system.” The rise of consumerism within Kerala is enhancing the acceptability of a working, middle-class wife in my respondent's eyes.

Murickan's study on 400 college-educated young couples in Kerala seems to confirm my respondents' responses regarding the acceptability of working women: half of respondents saw only men as breadwinners, while the other half viewed both husband and wife as breadwinners (2002:73). Murickan notes that "In the traditional society in Kerala, only women of lower classes worked as wage earners. The middle and upper class women were not employed and it was considered demeaning for the women to be employed outside the home" (2002:73). It is possible that new trends in consumerism allow middle-class women, such as my respondents, to pursue careers as long as they are “acceptable” careers, with status and a good salary, and teaching careers fit within this mould.

Almost half of the respondents also felt that jobs would bring them psychological benefits in addition to the monetary value of their work. For these women, they looked forward to the thought of interacting with different people as opposed to staying at home. One respondent told me that having a job would be much better than “sitting at home, watching the TV and wasting away.” Another respondent said that the work of teaching would be emotionally “satisfying.” All but one of the respondents has held a job, so it appeared to me that they saw white-collar jobs in a very optimistic if unrealistic light. My respondents also linked careers with independence. Many of my respondents mentioned that with a job would come “independence.” Although they planned on getting married, they still felt that with a job they would not be a “burden” to their families. Priti told me that “A career gives you financial security and independence. Makes you a freer person.” Badru said that “educated women [can] get a job, she can go to an office, and earn independently, and she is free; she is economically free. There is no need to ask for money for her.” Karuna mentioned that having a steady job would give her some reassurance in life: “I feel that if I am left espoused for some reason, I should have something to fall back upon.” One male student recognised this attitude by saying “the girls are more aware of what's happening around them and they know how important it is to have a career and... they find it important that they have to do something in their future, and not to depend upon other people.” The desire for independence does *not* mean that they would remain unwed; all planned on getting married within a few years. Instead, independence is linked to financial freedom from relatives, which is seen in a positive light.

Official government statistics demonstrate that my respondents' career plans may be part of a larger

trend within Kerala; educated women are at least *attempting* to pursue well-paid, reliable jobs: in 2003, the largest number of job-seekers in the Thiruvananthapuram District, by a margin of 3:2, were women (Government of Kerala 2004:383). Unfortunately, because these jobs are so sought after they are difficult to get:

the high registration in the Employment Exchanges reveals a marked preference for white collar government jobs. Over the years the focus on education enabled people to acquire not only school but also general college education. However there is a limit to generating jobs which are appropriate for people of such educational background. Because of this, Kerala has a paradox of high wage unskilled labourer and low wage educated worker (Government of Kerala 2004:380).

This paradox was not mentioned by any respondents as a detriment to their career plans. All of my respondents felt that they would have good chances of obtaining the job they desired after completing their education.

It is questionable whether my respondents will be able to fulfil their career plans due to Kerala's poor economy, and there is little chance that they will opt for other, lower-status positions if they cannot fulfil their goals due to the disapproval of their families. "I think that most of the women do want to work but then... their choice of work is so constrained by their own norms... finally they end up doing nothing" (Eapen interview 2005). Certain jobs are considered completely unacceptable by the respondents' families. Rachel told me that "I have no problem waiting on tables... but my parents do." Kerala's *Economic Report 2004* observes this trend throughout Kerala: "the 'educated' labour in the state seeks full-time, life-time employment in government (preferably) or in the organised sector and considers itself unemployed otherwise" (Government of Kerala 2004:380). This is why scholar Erwen believes that most educated women in Kerala do not use their education for employment opportunities but instead become housewives (2003:131). If my respondents become a part of this trend, it is likely because no career opportunities that are acceptable to the women themselves and their families have presented themselves. Since my respondents are from the middle class, they will most likely be able to survive on the income of the husbands if his position pays decently.

The women studying at the English Institute may have better career opportunities than students of other programmes; English is not only being given a new push in science-oriented courses, but also new English teacher standards have been recently set at the school level. A new law was instituted that decreed that English teachers in schools must have an English language background; previously, English teachers could come from any academic background (i.e., physics). This newly enacted law created new opportunities within the school level, and after completing a post-graduate degree in

English, the only further requirement is a Bachelor of Education, which constitutes a one-year programme. Four respondents expressed a desire to teach at the school level and planned on pursuing their B. Ed or had already completed their B. Ed; the choice for college lecturer was more popular with six. In order to be qualified for a lecturer position, it is necessary to pass the National Eligibility Test. Those interested in the lecturer position all wish to pursue their M. Phil and some even plan on opting for a Doctorate in English.

My respondents are pursuing their master's degree with the intent to obtain steady, white-collar employment, preferably as a lecturer. The women are either attending because of their parents' wishes or with the full support of their parents. Women working in white-collar jobs are now considered attractive to suitors due to economic liberalisation and new forms of consumerism. Higher education also serves to attract a better husband and may lower their dowry as it will be demonstrated in the next section.

C. Further Influence of the Marriage Market

Within Kerala and throughout most of India, arranged marriage is the preferred method of finding a partner. The family looks for a potential partner through family connections, or even a source such as the local newspaper or the internet, and attempts to find a good match for their daughter or son. Families often specify certain requirements for age, marital status (never-married, divorced, or widowed), complexion, employment and income. According to my respondents, the level of education a woman has is becoming increasingly important for attracting a suitable partner, a trend highlighted by Chacko and Pernau. Further reasons why education has become a driving factor in the marriage market for the respondents are explored below.

Another benefit of higher education for my respondents is the ability to attract a better husband. This seems to be a large factor in their parents' support; I was told by many of the younger students that although they were not currently thinking about marriage, "but it's on our parents' minds." The women envisioned themselves getting married in 2-5 years, so this means that they hope their marriage will take place after completing their post-graduate degree. As I already mentioned, they felt that the possibility of a woman employed in a white-collar job was a plus in the marriage market, but male students also see other benefits. Ajit expressed a strong preference for a woman that would have a graduate degree but emphasised how the education has shaped her character over her potential earning power by saying "I have an image of an educated woman in my mind who knows how to live, how to

cope with situations, how to control our expenses, how to be sympathetic, how to be cooperative.” This high regard for educated women who may not pursue a career seems to be a general trend within the state of Kerala and possibly the rest of India. Dube writes that

a certain delinking of women's education and employment seems to occur in the upper and middle classes. Girls are educated to become efficient housewives and mothers who can properly socialize their children. They also become more attractive in the marriage market by offering better companionship and supportive social roles to their prospective husbands (1997:146-147).

While my respondents all emphasised the importance of pursuing a career, their families and potential suitors believe that education enhances a woman's character and makes her a better wife.

By being so appealing within the marriage market, my respondents felt that they would gain a husband that was either as educated as them or more, who could provide financial security for the women and their future family, keeping them among the middle or upper class. All of my respondents expressed a strong preference for potential suitors who were *at least* as educated as them. Rachel said her first requirement for a spouse would be the income he brought because “you cannot be among good people if you are not financially secure.” If my respondents are unable to attain the white-collar position they desire, at least they will still have status within their families and society by marrying a professional man.

My respondents also noted that the level of education they receive may also lower the amount of dowry their families will pay. My respondents felt that the more education a woman has, the less dowry she will have to pay for a man of the same educational background or, preferably, higher. Within Kerala, following the elimination of official matrilineage with its emphasis on cross-cousin marriage and the rise of migrant workers and the remittances they bring, many families have embraced the practice of dowry, which was previously absent in Kerala: “Dowry payments have soared in Kerala in recent years. Even young men with uncertain incomes and limited prospects command dowries of several thousand rupees. Rates for professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and officers in the prestigious Indian Administrative Services, are usually hundreds of thousands of rupees” (Chacko 2003:56). These dowries are more likely to include consumer electronics and cash rather than property, which would give women some security (Eapen and Kodoth 2002:22). This reduction in dowry is probably present in the respondents' parents' thoughts while encouraging or pushing their daughters into higher education.

My respondents also state that every year a few women are pushed into higher education because their parents want to give them something to do while waiting to be married. The head of the English Institute stated that every year, some women are enrolled because “their marriages are not fixed after their graduation.... Instead of sitting at home doing nothing, their parents send them for a P.G. [post-graduate] course. So for them it is just a time gap. Because some of them may drop out while they are doing the programme to get married.” Within the master's programme, the head estimated that two or three students are present for this reason every year.

Many of my respondents feel that they are different from other women pursuing post-graduate degrees because of their desire to work. One respondent expressed this notion by saying “Maybe the husband works, maybe they think that's enough for them... but I'd like to work.” Some expressed disdain for a “lower class” attitude that the marriage market is the central factor for pursuing higher education; Mary felt that the lower class feels that “their sole aim is to get married” while those in higher classes can be concerned with loftier ambitions, including career and status. Some felt that the degree alone was a factor in pursuing higher education; Chadra said “Most of them don't end up getting jobs, but I mean the degree is really important for them.” Apparently, if this attitude is common at all, it is because education is looked so highly upon in Kerala; Beth said that attaining a good degree in Keralite society “is also a matter of prestige.” Because of the nature of my case study, it is not possible to determine whether my respondents' motivations are considered unusual or normal within Keralite society.

VII. Conclusion

After carrying out the case study, I now propose that the respondents are motivated by a combination of the pursuit of white-collar careers and a good match on the marriage market. White collar jobs are now considered acceptable and even encouraged by their families and their potential spouses because of new economic pressures from globalisation and Gulf migration. Steady, respectable employment is even considered an advantage in the marriage market because of the increased earning power a highly educated woman may be able to demand. Education also enhances their attractiveness on the marriage market because of supposed emotional benefits they can provide to their husbands and future families and the opportunity to pay less dowry for a highly educated mate.

It is difficult to determine how relevant my findings are for the rest of college women in Kerala, including those outside of Thiruvananthapuram, those in other economic classes, and those studying in different educational programmes. These findings may signal a larger trend within Kerala that would

help account for the large number of women throughout the state pursuing higher education. Future research should look at what factors motivate Keralite women from the lower class and women in science programmes. Since the parents and families play such a crucial role in women's lives in Kerala, future research should also focus on their reasons for encouraging women to pursue higher education. It is likely that Kerala's new consumer culture and the search for independence also play a role in other women's educational decisions, and these factors have been previously under-explored.

It would be interesting to speak again with the same women in 5 or 10 years. Will they be working, as they planned? Did they go on to attain their M. Phil, or for some, a PhD? Did their families find them good matches with well-educated, professional men? If they are working, are they in the profession that they desired? Or, are they housewives? Are they satisfied with their lives, and the opportunities that having a master's degree has given them? And, if they have daughters, do they want their daughters to follow the same educational path as them? While my respondents have lofty ambitions for careers and marriages, it is questionable how far these youthful ambitions will take them.

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IX. Appendix

A. Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Please note: ALL INFORMATION IS **COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL**. Please **print clearly** and be **as detailed as possible**. Please use the backside of the paper if your responses do not fit into the spaces provided. Thank you for your participation.

Section 1

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Marital Status:

Religion:

Caste (if applicable):

Job (if any):

Personal income from job:

Are you a Junior or Senior?

Planned graduation date:

City and state of birth:

Do you come from an urban or rural area?

How are you financially supported (i.e., by the government, family, parents, etc)? Please give details:

Please describe the people in your household by filling in the following information. If there is not enough space to describe all household members then please use backside of the paper.

A. Mother

Highest level of schooling:

Qualifications:

If employed, job title and job description:

B. Father

Highest level of schooling:

Qualifications:

If employed, job title and job description:

C. Sibling 1

Age:

Gender:

If in school, year in school:

Name of school:

Course/programme (if attending university or college):

D. Sibling 2

Age:

Gender:

If in school, year in school:

Name of school:

Course/programme (if attending university or college):

E. Sibling 3

Age:

Gender:

If in school, year in school:

Name of school:

Course/programme (if attending university or college):

If you have more siblings, please describe them on the backside of this paper.

Please describe other family members included in your household (i.e., mother's mother or father's brother):

Do you currently live with your family or in the hostel?

What is your family's approximate income?

Would you consider your family lower class, middle class, upper class, or somewhere in-between?

Is it possible to contact you by e-mail or telephone with further questions? If so, kindly give

E-mail:

Telephone Number:

Thank you for your participation! Your time and effort is **greatly** appreciated. The questionnaires will be collected on **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18TH.**

If you have any questions, comments, or anything you'd like me to clarify then you can reach me by e-mail at lyndsay@safe-mail.net. THANK YOU AGAIN!!!!