

THE ‘HOME SCIENCE’ OF GENDERING FOOD: A COLONIAL CONSEQUENCE

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Abstract

The topic ‘Gender and food’ has vast importance. Most of the societies consider women responsible for nurturing. This paper focuses on the transformation that came over in the gender roles, in connection with food and cooking, in colonial Malabar under the project of colonial modernity. It also analyses the various discourses involved in the construction of gender in colonial India. The Victorian ideologies in colonial rule the act of cooking much more gendering than pre-colonial period. The colonial education policies also encouraged the imperial domesticity in the Colonised people.

Key words: Gender, Colonialism, Home Science, Cooking, Curriculum, Domesticity,

Introduction

The age of colonial rule in Malabar has been a time of great transformations and transitions. It has been the period in which she entered modernity. In the beginning of 20th century the social landscape of Malabar started changing rapidly. The nation witnessed tremendous and far reaching changes during this period. Among other things the power centres in the society were greatly affected. There was a re-location of power in the society. In Kerala, as in various other parts of India, feudal families were greatly affected by the rules and regulations of the colonial power. During the course of the nineteenth century, the pattern of women’s life began to changeⁱ. By the end of the nineteenth century a number of women who were educated, articulate and mobile started increasingly involving in public activities. The involvement of women in education is an important yard stick in measuring the qualitative social changes. The enforcement of laws and regulations and the protection of women were of considerable importance during this period. Indian reformers, European missionaries and colonial government encouraged female education.

In Colonial India, Christian missionaries and Indian social reformers had been credited for the majority of the schools established during the nineteenth century. During the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the colonial administration became more active in founding and expanding schools. . Female education, in particular, was thought to be a powerful way of encouraging political activism because it extended imperial modernity into the home.ⁱⁱ The first missionaries who started their activities in Malabar were the Basel Evangelical Mission society. They arrived in Malabar in 1839. The Protestant Basel Mission, established in 1839, founded churches and schools in Cannanore, Tellichery, Calicut, and Palaghat. In addition to this some branches also established by them such as Chombala, South Tellichery, and Kodakal near Vettattapudiangadi.ⁱⁱⁱThe Basel Mission gave timely encouragement for female education. The Basel missionaries took initiative to start girls

schools at Malabar District. They founded a number of girls schools in all important towns in Malabar. The primary education was made compulsory for female converts.

The attitude of Indian reformers and educated middle class to promoted female education was noticeable one. The middle class promoted female education because they wanted women to be better mothers, better wives and equip them better for the house works.^{iv} These newly educated youth realized the importance of women's education in the process of modernization. The 19th century middle class women were produced by the male discourses and were the part of construction and reproduction of higher values.^v G. Forbes observes that in reality the concept of the 'perfect wife' was being redefined. First there was modification in the appropriate activities for a female at different stages of her life. Second the appropriate arena for female action was expanded, and third, there was a new and growing approval of Individualism.^{vi}

Schools, one of the main institutions for socializing, mainly depend upon the prescribed textbook taught at various classes. These text books are instrumental in helping the students in socializing and preparing them to be the true representatives of their culture. The colonial curriculum was designed with the aim to create a group of people who would support colonial administrative policy. They also intended to make them the followers of the culture of the colonial masters. A separate curriculum was prepared for the male and female students. The agenda of the nationalist and modernist in this endower was to produce the discourse of Victorian domesticity in their culture. The pedagogy of home science introduced in the female schools of colonial India was one of this endower.

Home Science and Colonial Curriculum

Home science had its roots in the training in domestic art offered in women's schools and as a part of home education by European missionaries and teachers.^{vii} The missionaries understood the importance of women's education in their attempt to reform the traditional society. Through education, they were able to influence the kitchen as well as the kith and kin of the natives. The syllabus of school included not only textual knowledge but also knowledge of cooking, needlework and family management.^{viii} Thus, women's education was one of the ways the colonial modernity found to enter in to the households of the natives.

The syllabus taught at girls schools conveys the aim of the colonial masters to enter our traditional cultural structures. The missionaries followed a curriculum as modified from what was taught in England in the 19th century. The connection between women's education and motherhood was made as early as the mid 19th century. This was also connected to their belief in the civilizing power of the West and the cultural backwardness of the Indians. The teaching at the boarding schools, managed by the wives of missionaries in Malabar, gave the female students necessary domestic training. In their syllabus they included domestic science as an important subject along with other subjects. Mary Hancock in her study, *Home Science and Nationalization of Domesticity in Colonial India*, discusses the making of womanhood in Colonial India during the late 19th century. She argued that domesticity itself could make home visible in public life. British educators in Madras endorsed domestic Science for girls because it seemed political and its practicality was consistent with the scientific outlook that they sought to instil in Indians.^{ix}

Home science was included in their curriculum and Sunday classes were started for female students. Domestic training mainly comprised of needlework – embroidery spinning, lacework, sewing and cooking. They were trained in pounding rice and assisted in cleaning the school's living quarters. For instance Joseph Mooliyil in his novel *Sukumari* gives a detailed description of the system of education in the Missionary school (*Sala*) at Chirakkal in Kannur.

The syllabus for the schools in Travancore and Cochin government also prepared a separate curriculum for girls. The curriculum was divide as domestic, general and sports. The domestic lessons contained economic management of home, hygiene, child caring, cooking, interior designing of home and also the basics of agriculture.^x The text books in the schools were also a necessary tool for the new crop of gender relations based on the patriarchal ideology followed by the Victorian way of life. The text books not only aimed at teaching students how to read and write but also to instil virtues valued by society, implied in the term hidden curriculum. The text books were instrumental in socializing children and training them to be the representatives of their culture. The collection of essays *Mahathikal* (Great Women) was a textbook used in Malabar in 1922 and in 1940. It contained short biographical accounts of Queen Victoria, Chand Bibi, Tarabai, Florence Nightingale, Queen Alexandra, Krishna Kumari, Sarah Martin, Rani Padmini, Bharati, Yohanna (Joan of Arc), Maharani Swarnamayi, and Rani Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi. Queen Victoria represented a femininity centred on family, motherhood and respectability. She was also considered the personification of marital stability and domestic virtue. The chapter gives a brief sketch of her life with focus on her different roles as wife, mother and queen. There is a romancing of the domestic life especially in the descriptions of Queen Victoria's life in the country, instances of her daughters cooking and keeping house for their parents.^{xi} The lessons and stories mainly try to define the sphere of women's activities in the household. Similarly, a number of books related to the manners and etiquette were published in English at that time. These texts chiefly intended to teach the students how to behave in various situations in public and private sphere. Most of the instructions addressed young unmarried girls. *Book of Etiquette* published in 1921 in English gives instruction to children to observe table manners and other behaviours are to be practiced in the domestic and public spaces.^{xii} *A Text book of Domestic Science for High Schools* by Matilda G. Campbell provides a number of recipes and asserts the importance of diet and nutrition in human life with detailed descriptions.^{xiii} The colonial text books and literature emphasises the role of women as home makers.

Educational policy framed in the colonial period mainly focused on basic learning, improvement of domestic skills, moral education, and the study of religious texts. Education was also the means of setting the middle classes apart from the lower castes. The first cook book appeared in Malayalam in this context. The very first cook book, *Pachakachinthamani* by Velupillai, was published in 1893 with the finical assistance from the Rajas of Travancore.^{xiv} This book was included as a text book in the girls schools of Travancore. The book, full of the recipes collected from the royal house hold of Cochin and Travancore, was suitable for the ordinary middle class homes. Apart from the culinary skills in colleges and schools, various domestic manuals and women's journals began publishing recipes for the benefit of modern women. Other than this a number of periodicals and monthly magazines, English as well as Malayalam, published a number of recipes.

The introduction of new curriculum on cooking in educational institutions made the middle class women praise the act of cooking in the 19th and 20th century through the magazines and periodical edited by them. Towards the end of 19th century women of India emerges beyond their enclosed domestic space to large public sphere of literary activity. J. Devika assigned that the significant development of the late nineteenth century Kerala was the emergence of English educated class, which began to review the existent social order, ideas and institution in sharply critical terms.^{xv} Scholarly attention focused upon the gradual emergence of a reading public, stressing the increasing circulation of news papers and magazines, and also emergence of modern literature in Malayalam. This print culture promoted the ideals of culinary science through publication of recipes and other instructions for cooking. The printing press and other developing technologies made a new genre of cook books possible in colonial India. These cookbooks were mainly for the middle class urban women. Vandana Gavasakar notes that most of these cook books were conceded around the world by European colonialist.^{xvi} Victorian influence could be seen in the social and cultural articulation of the sphere of domesticity in the British homes and this became indistinguishable with the establishment and maintenance of Empire.^{xvii} British subjects, here women, were to make home in the image of Empire. The cook books were one of the instruments to assert their identity in India.

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