

Debates on Gender and Sexuality: A Sociological Study of Female Sexual Minorities in Kerala

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled "Debates on Gender and Sexuality: A Sociological Study of Female Sexual Minorities in Kerala" submitted by SHAHLA P bearing Reg. No. 20SSHL04 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in Sociology is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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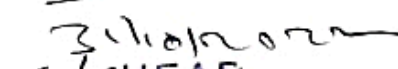


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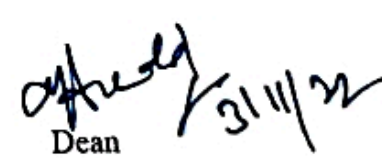
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DECLARATION

I, SHAHLA P, hereby declare that this Dissertation entitled, "**Debates on Gender and Sexuality: A Sociological Study of Female Sexual Minorities in Kerala**", submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Prof. Anurekha Chari-Wagh is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or institution to award any degree or diploma.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Female as gender and with alternate sexualities are living most difficult. These women have to fight gendered and sexual oppression rooted in social structure. Patriarchy controls women and their choices, while hetero-patriarchy restricts choice on sexuality. Sexuality is an abstract aspect of human behaviour and interactions that defines a person as a whole, as a complex terrain that should be understood from the societal formulations and power relations. The gender and sexuality debates can be traced back to social reform movements in Kerala's 19th and 20th century, mainly in the line of essentialist. The reform movements and related debates will give how it made female sexuality a homogenized subject. It rejected all the conjugal practices that gave women a say in familial relations. The reform movements in this period can also be called community-based movements. Gender relations were regulated by all elements associated with colonialism, social reform movements, national struggles, English education, missionary work, and state and class formation.

“The community-based movements of this period were mostly oriented towards disciplining the diverse conjugal practice in this region, and the consolidation of normative citizenships that could be contained within the moral fold of the nation”. The evolution of postcolonial national modernity in India was premised on a rigorous disciplining of sexualities and their rehabilitation into a hetero-patriarchal morality (Arunima 2003; Chatterjee 1993; Menon 2008).

In the connected rhetoric of civilization, progress, modernity, and nationalism, reformers saw women's emancipation as a prerequisite to national regeneration and an indicator of national achievement. The nationalists reinterpreted the home in accordance with made-up categories of tradition, just like earlier reformers. The family, the house, and the women who lived there were emphasised in the early expressions of nationalism as the centre of "Indianness" and the politically powerless male elite's sole source of autonomy. Thus, nationalists opposed the domestic's subjugation to the civilising scrutiny of colonial missionaries and bureaucrats as

well as the modernization's transformational will (Sen, 1993; P.Chatterjee, 1989; D. Chakrabarty, 1994).

By the late 19th century, there had been a considerable departure from reformism in the definition of the domestic as the domain of nationalist opposition to colonial invasion. Agreements and confrontations between the colonial bureaucracy and the colonised middle class were now played out in front of women. Political legitimacy could no longer be granted to the colonial state as the author of legislation that violated the idealised boundaries of the family. Early nationalists rejected colonial interference in gender relations because they believed they were anti-traditional and hence anti-national (particularly in the family's structure)(B.Ramaswamy, 2013). The nationalist protection of tradition served as their response to reform. Women were moved from being a measure of social ills (as in the language of colonial missionary reformists) to becoming an embodiment of moral order by the prevailing ideology that was being developed during this phase. The morally upright, chaste wife and mother, strengthened by spiritual fortitude, came to symbolise the country (Sen, 1993).

“Scholarship in several fields has shown that earlier forms of sexuality, family and property arrangements that did not conform to modern bourgeois patriarchal ideals, were reconstituted to fit these ideals by a strange partnership of British colonial institutions and the modernizing nationalist elites who opposed the British”.

In order to understand what is currently referred to as "sexuality" in India, one must first acknowledge the complexity of the activities that modernity homogenised. A significant body of feminist scholarship contends that the 19th-century "social reform movements" articulated complex and contentious relationships between "women" on the one hand and emerging notions of citizen, nation, and community on the other, demonstrating anxieties about control over women, their bodies, and their sexuality(Menon, 2008).

The desire for normative order and families could be seen in various debates in Kerala. The same desire for the normative- patriarchal nuclear family can be seen in the debates regarding the abolition of the matrilineal practice. It has the unique status of the only kinship system legally abolished.

Both the colonial state and the postcolonial Kerala state made a number of legislative changes that helped end the matrilineal kinship system in Kerala. Matrilineal families made for about 50% of the Malayali population in the 19th century, representing many castes and

communities¹. Many readings of matriliney in Kerala merely downgrade matriliney as a mark of being less developed or barbaric, and they engaged with the questions of 'normativity' and 'natural'.

The 'reformers' or the proponents of marriage legislation were influenced by the ideology of social evolution in which communal property, polygamous relationships and matrilineal descent were the vestiges of a savage past (Menon, 2008). Nair as a dominant caste group in Kerala, legislations regarding them served as a precedent for other communities in 'family-centred' laws and regulating similar changes.

As the centre of enquiry, research on the family has been a significant aspect of the historiography of European societies for the past three decades as well as community-based movements. Earlier research on matriliney and family within the western historiography shrunk to a search for the "western family norm". Later assessments pointed out the mistake of assuming a historical continuity in its structure and asserted that the term "family" was inherently ambiguous. In Malabar, the matriliney was a dynamic social structure that underwent several transformations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This transition gave rise to the laws of the 20th century, which were the result of a complex interaction of political, economic, and ideological forces. (Arunima, 2003)

Arunima (2003) pointed out that Nairs in Malabar (a region in Kerala) described by foreign travellers as "most lecherous and unchaste nation in all the orient" and of course, both men and women were promiscuous, but what shocked the European mind was the absence of "chastity and shame" in Nair women.

Between 1887 and 1896 witnessed protracted debates on marriage, morality and matrilineal families when an educated minority of the Malayali elite displayed a growing faith in legislation and the liberal principles of contract, the liberal principle emphasis on need for law on marriage. The Malabar marriage act, enacted in 1896, produced of this changing perception. The law that achieved this was passed in 1896 and was a product of the liberal discourse of progress, freedom, and individual identity that dominated the broader nationalist discussions of "social reform" in the 19th century. All of these discussions revolved around the issue of

¹ (Joseph Tharamangalam and Elzy Tharamangalam, "capitalism and patriarchy: The transformation of the matrilineal system of Kerala" (paper presented at the international congress on Kerala studies, 27-29 August 1994, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala).

marriage in various ways (Menon, 2008). Matriliny as a conjugal practice is in contrast to 'modern home', the father is the natural guardian of women and children in a modern home and the women expected to give service to her husband and family for the marital stability. While the mother-centred matrilineal household and associated practices and rituals on gender, sexuality is viewed as 'unnatural'.

The contention that matrilineal communities were merely an avuncular form of patriarchy, where the figure of the uncle replaced the husband/ father is also untenable (Arunima, 2003) Women's status in Kerala is generally linked to the matrilineal past; women in matrilineal homes assumed, they had more privileges and power than women in patrilineal systems giving them a distinct position. The society was under domination of male despite matrilineal system and that men held all power in the society and family is important for feminist analysis of the matriarchal system. 'One cannot talk about the past emancipation of Nair women in kerala without considering the social realities and political analysis of the man who responsible for the property' (sreekumar, 2001). At the same time, Nair women had a different place in their own houses unlike women in paternal system (Saradamoni 1999).

The critiques of matrilineal practice viewed management and control of the property as under the control of the uncle (brother of the woman), life under the shadow of his caused significant limitations. Women had little power to take advantage of the property in their name or cover their expenses. It was the uncle who decided on a relationship in the form of marriage as a polygamous relationship instead of Nair woman. In the case of Nair women, polygamy is a practice in which a woman stays in her own house.

Even though these women have a relatively better position in the maternal order, as they did not have to endure domestic violence and persecution like the women in the paternal order, women and children do not have any rights over the Namboothiri (upper caste men equal to Brahmin) with whom the specific women had kept Sambandham (a form of marriage). So women had a desperate need for maternal succession and support for their physical and mental condition and their survival.

The Sambandham with Namboothiri was impossible when it was not liked by the uncle, even if it was liked by the women. The fact is that in such a situation, the choice of women regarding their own body and sexuality, in general, did not have much independence in the maternal system either. The realities surrounding the 'Golden age' of Nair women in Kerala have now

been subjected to feminist research studies. Connecting gender into these debates by considering these readings allows a critical reading of the existence and evolution of matriliney.

The reformation of the legislation was intended to place the father in the centre of the family by replacing the many powers of women/mothers. Reformers viewed the marriage and sexuality practices as 'immoral'; the reformers consisted of young educated upper caste men who wanted to void customs of polyandry and bring stable patrilineal nuclear families. These laws were helpful to disgruntled men within the maternal order, as control over family, property and unequal rights between men over inheritance would be resolved. They also wanted to control the women's bodies, sexuality and reproduction through marriage.

The promiscuous and polyandrous practices among Nair women hindered the formation of 'natural families' and saw matriliney as the source of immortality. "The conjugal monogamous patrilineal nuclear family and the sexual and gender norms in it- were elevated to the ideal standard. This model of marriage and family, along with the sexual norms that it implied, was recognized as not only culturally desirable, but also naturally ordained" (Arunima, 2003). The analytical categories employed by the Nair reformers derived their theoretical insights from the extant Victorian debates on the nature of the family and property. The dominant refrain was a diatribe against the 'promiscuous polyandry' of the community's 'barbarous past'; the rallying cry of creating a new community based on monogamous marriage and conjugal co-residence. Arunima (2003) argues that strategic utilization of the theories of Victorian social evolution provided the Nair reformers with a powerful tool to counter both the customs of their community and the perceived indignity of hypergamous relations with Namboothri men.

The transformation of matriliney in Kerala offers instance of the hegemonizing drive of Victorian norms of conjugality, but curiously inflected by the context of that specific political economy (Menon, 2008). As per the Malabar marriage act of 1896, to become a legal marriage the relationship was to be registered accordingly. It is the sole responsibility of the husband to pay for the expenses of his wife and children. With the advent of legal proceedings against matriliney; the right to inheritance, right to receive expenses from women's own family, and special right of women to maintain family and joint family was almost denied. One of the main arguments for registering a marriage was that women could stay in the marriage with their husbands or with their husband's families (Arunima, 2003).

Moreover, the relationship life led by Nair women has equated adultery with relating and defining chastity with the use of the law. Community-based reform movements put forward

models of such modern family relationships. The social reform movements felt that it was essential for the betterment of the community to preserve the chastity of Nair women. They actively worked for changes to the more sophisticated, progressive and modernized form of family, monogamous family and patrilineal inheritance.

The ideological basis for the new familial institutions in the reformed world consists of the husband as the legal guardian of women and children that rejected various conjugal practices. As the natural guardian, the husband gains control over female sexuality and procreation through marriage, leading to children's guardianship. Social reform and community-based movements hang on family and disciplining in conjugal practices. The questions of marriage, divorce, lineage and maintenance and various views emerged in this period. The negotiation of gender also changed with the new familial pattern; gender and sexuality reawaken to the natural norm of 'progressive' from 'uncivilized'. Exogamous marriages, authority structures, and lineages were attacked mainly by the caste movements among Nair and Namboothiris.

The temperament demanded and expected from women in the modern family structure was ideally put forward by the community reform movements that emphasized values around sexual morality. The rights to women's education and liberty were raised for the need to modernize women to suit modern men. There was a strong perception that the place of women and men, their responsibilities and duties were encompassed within the ideals of masculinity and femininity. That the women's first and foremost place as the family, given that it was hospitality, delicacy, impersonality and submission, male protection and obedience. Modern perspectives on the women's body, sexuality and marriage are built around these values.

The reform movements that emerged in the first decades of the 20th century called for the participation of women; as the participation of those who were able to express the psychological and intellectual reform that could show obedience and submission to male leadership (J.Devika 2010). It neither questions the male leadership within the social movements or the family for so long nor claims an equal share of power in decisions. There was a direct and indirect implication of reformism, calling for it that women should seek and express reform to satisfy the family, the husband, his interests and pleasures. All community movements have focused on cultivating these exemplary 'values' put forward by modern Brahmanical supremacy. "In the mid 20th century missionary discourse on the family in Kerala, and later in the discourse of social reform, pioneered by the modern educated elite, the alleged threat to procreation was that free-flowing sexual desire posed continually highlighted along

with the instrumentality of the disciplined family to modern regimes of production and wealth creation” (Kodoth 2001).

The modernization of communities was predicated on the creation of a desexualized and procreative, if active, ideal of womanliness, which was identified as the centre and the driving force of the modern home, according to recent feminist research into community reform initiatives of the early 20th century in Kerala (Devika 2007; Kodoth 2001).

Reformist authors insisted that aesthetic women should be fully subsumed within the housewife role. The ideal female subject projected in many writings was inevitably a desexualized figure; in contrast, women in traditional marital arrangements, such as in matrilineal families, were thoroughly sexualized and, therefore, found incapable of healthy procreation. The ideal woman, it came to be asserted, would possess a procreative body and a mind too, which, however, would be ruled by her naturally feminine inclination towards the domestic and sentimental spheres of life. The ideal woman was not imagined as lacking in rationality. However, her capacity for reason was strictly deployed for her family's welfare and limited to the home's space. Indeed, one of the significant shifts in the modern imagining of ideal femininity in Kerala in the 20th century was adding an aesthetic element to the domestic ideal. The aesthetic element was to enable the woman to also function as the provider of pleasure in order to cement conjugality through ensuring pleasure. The ideal woman thus is expected to remain strictly domestic and maternal. However, she was also to provide aesthetic pleasure to her husband, such pleasure being recognized as an instrument to marital stability. The ideal woman was not imagined as lacking in rationality. However, her capacity for reason was strictly deployed for her family's welfare and limited to the home's space. The aesthetic element was not generally emphasized in reformist and developmental discourse; it was accessible only to elite women (J.Devika, 2009)

The early post-independence development programmes placed a high priority on developing female reproductive bodies and making them useful to the mission. Women were generally considered family caretakers in the 1950s community development initiative. A lot of effort was put into developing these talents, which encouraged income generating through home-based businesses. In the second plan, the central social welfare board fostered the formation of women's associations that mostly addressed household issues and launched social welfare extension programmes (Eapen 2000: 4).

Many women also dismiss the concept of 'ideal women' and 'ideal wife'. Many women had also been vigilant in opposing women who questioned the power relations of patriarchy. The practices and debates among women regarding 'ideal women' have always gone with great intensity; it is incomplete without discussing the women who came to the newly formed social debates. Parvathy Nenmimangalam, Sharada Bhanumathiyamma, Parvathy Amma, Kalikutty Ashatti and Gaurikutty were prominent in this regard. The matters of discussion were women's education, employment and legal rights in the different community movements. In addition to organizing temple entry meetings, banquets and demonstrations, these women also held discussions on the role of women within the family. Addressing the gender division of labour within the family, Parvathi Ayyappan said that women's intellectual expression is essential for the development and progress of society. She argues that in a civilized family, men and women have to come together for particular natural virtues and that women and men, as husband and wife, have to make intelligent expressions that do not discriminate between men and women. This attitude includes concerns and defences about femininity, masculinity, ideal family, marriage and gender segregation, which are shaped by the reform movement and colonial liberal values².

Social reformers saw the growth of women's education as the basis for the social change of the 20th century in the community, politics, national affairs and the workplace. They argued that education is necessary for the full development of the personality. The women activists could see the danger in educated men who thought knowledge of women should be accompanied by the virtues of compassion, patience, forbearance, husbandly care, housekeeping and child-rearing. The men wanted only educated women suitable for the newly formed patriarchal system and modern family structure. As early as the 1930s, women in the reform movements recognized these issues and sought to play a leading role in activities that redefined the social and familial role of women. The women, who aspired, wrote, preached and worked for the complete identity and rights of Malayalee women. Many contributed to the creative and new political-ideological dimensions of women's emancipation in Kerala and have played a historical role in determining the modern age of women's movements.

² Self-translated from a Malayalam book 'Keralathinte sthree charithrangal, sthreemunnnettangal (2019)' (women's history and women's movements in Kerala) by C.S Chandrika

There was a tendency to control the free personality and aspirations for freedom of women who had entered the public and social spheres through making definite women's 'questions', which they labelled as 'masculinized women. Women who advocated freedom and rights and entered spheres that were supposed for men, these women were accused of being deprived of men's rights. The denial of femininity was presented as the most effective weapon to ridicule the feminist debates. Feminist women are ridiculed for trying to be like men; the tendency was not only out of fear of feminist thoughts and actions in general but also as a reminder that freedom as always a right of men and to assert that authority.

Female body

It is thought that Kerala model development's discourses on the female body are progressive. Women's contributions to Kerala's social development were highlighted by Jeffrey (2003). The gendered aspect received an appraisal along with education, healthcare and low mortality rates. Through education, the culturing of female minds caused birthrates' brought down through artificial contraception.

Escalating patriarchal violence toward women has the political expediency of a rigorous, critical investigation into our normative imaginations concerning sexuality and gender. Some of the public discussions that overtly or implicitly on gender and sexuality in decades after the 1960s through that some crucial paradigm shifts that took place in the perceptions (Tharayil, 2014)

Kerala is known for its 'developmental model' among other Indian states and other countries. The social progress in low per capita income, peaceful social change in the third world and the state could decrease its infant mortality rate, population growth and high crude death rate. Kerala maintains a better sex ratio than other Indian states, and high life expectancy indicates state development. Women's experience in developmental discourses has much discussed and acclaimed in plenty of writing. These discussions saw the improved condition of women's lives in health and education, bringing down the birth rate through effective contraception. Lack of superstitious fear and enlightened acceptance of small family as norm benefitted in this regard. Are the high social indices giving agency and autonomy to women to their bodies? How do women negotiate their experience? Is the category of women a monolithic one; does not caste, class, sexual orientation and religion matter? Which women are represented in the category of 'empowered Kerala women'?

Thornton (2001) defines “developmental idealism as the ideology that informs the various forms of activism that emerged from the modern European habit of reading 'history sideways' with cross-cultural data. He points out that developmental idealism has been a strong force in changing living arrangements, marriage, divorce, gender relations, intergenerational relationships, and fertility behaviour in many parts of the world during the last few centuries”. As an ideology of developmental idealism that essentially abject sexuality, this cultural paradigm incorporates a set of ideas and values- it has specific goals to attain development. In developmental idealism, maternal health was mostly the emphasis of women's health issues, and the term "healthy" female body is most frequently used to describe the mother body. Between the middle of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, this ideology was a major forming factor in the development of Malayalee modernism.

Conceptual framework

“Gender and sexuality received only scant attention within classical sociology and have only recently been established as 'proper' topics for sociological inquiry. It is helpful to consider why it took so long for gender and sexuality to be included within what C.Wright Mills calls the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). Part of this absence is the lack of 'presence' of both women and those of diverse sexualities in academia”.

To address the debates on sexuality, it needs to address the gender discussions that happened throughout the time. Both gender and sexuality are intertwined. In sociology, no perspective has fully equipped to define human sexuality and answer the questions concerning different sexual orientations. There are many other sexual orientations apart from society-approved male-female unions. The concepts of sexuality and sexual orientation are twist in some aspects and easily get confused because of its blurred line, though there is a difference in usages.

The WHO has defined sexuality as "a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors". (WHO, 2006a)

“Sexual orientation refers to physical, romantic, and emotional attraction towards other people. Sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity. Sexual orientation is comprised of three elements: sexual attraction, sexual behaviour and sexual identity. Sexual orientation is most often defined in terms of heterosexuality to identify those who are attracted to individuals of different sex, and homosexuality to identify those who are attracted to individuals of the same sex”. (WHO).

In society, hetero-sexuality is the most approved and recognized sexuality, sexual or romantic attraction between opposite sex or gender. The heterosexual person is commonly referred to as straight. Homosexuality is the opposite of heterosexuality, and bisexuality refers to people who feel sexual feelings toward both genders. Non- heterosexual individuals, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, are known as sexual minorities, and their societal experiences are blatant discrimination.

Debates around human sexuality make most people uncomfortable, and most of them carry predetermined notions grasped from the social construction of dominance. Sexuality debates have become highly political because of the various movements and emerging voices. Sexuality, sexual orientation and related terms ended up being the dichotomy of ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ or ‘normal’/ abnormal. The many cultural productions on sexuality view it as not to discuss in public; even if they do, that should be through the normative lens. The essentialist approach to sexuality considered it a homogenized subject with natural implications. For many years, the silence regarding sexuality was because of the dominant essentialist notions of sexuality.

The sociological concepts of social structure, culture, identity, social hierarchies, and inequalities can be used to understand the notions of gender and sexuality. Biological reproduction is seen as the significant function of marriage and romantic unions; in that sense, the feelings of same-sex people are considered immoral and recognized as pervert. The preferences given to male-female unions, male supremacy in social structure, and exclusion of homosexuals are justified by the 'law of nature.

Each theoretical model has emerged out of different practices and interactions; some models are a continuation of the reflection of the population, and others question the dominant models that existed in time. The social constructionist model is based on the thought that everything around us, including the social establishments, has been constructed by people through various social interactions. Therefore no absolute reality or truth exists. This construction should be

discussed from a critical standpoint. People constructed binaries and categories to perceive and comprehend things quickly; in a way, these are not static, and our understandings should change over time and space. Hoped that by approaching the research with the assumption that everything is socially constructed, one would be better able to detect hegemonic debates.

According to the Foucauldian perspective on power, those with knowledge have the authority to establish the discourses we employ to interact with our environment. In order to show how power and knowledge are interconnected and dependent upon one another, Foucault uses topics like medical procedures, sexuality, the archaeology of knowledge, and governmentality to examine the social reality of Europe (Foucault, 2003) “In western academia, queer feminist theorists like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick pioneered critiques of gender that deconstruct and transcend the hetero-normative gender binary, thus expanding culturally constructed notions of gender to incorporate gender variance and transgender identities (Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990). Ethnomethodology has been influential in sociological discussions of gender as an everyday achievement, while symbolic interactionism has given rise to a useful theory of sexual scripts. Materialist feminism, which first emerged in France during the 1970s, combines a radically anti-essentialist approach to gender and sexuality with a socio-structural analysis informed by Marxism’ (Adkins, 1996; Delphy, 1984; Jackson, 1998a, Momin Rahman).

Rahman, M (2010) puts, since the 1970s, individuals desiring to investigate how gender is achieved through action and interaction have embraced ethno-methodological approaches. The "sex/gender distinction," which Robert Stoller created in 1968 and Ann Oakley and others later accepted for feminism, was never addressed in ethnomethodological studies of gender.

In the history of female partnerships, it is similarly challenging to define the borders between sex, commitment, and intimacy. A modern "lesbian" identity, according to some historians, should be interpreted as predominantly sexual, signifying a woman's sexual activity with other women and her departure from conventional sexual norms (Momin Rahman, 2010). Others, however, caution against defining "lesbian" in exclusively sexual terms, contending that doing so ignores historical continuity and various facets of women's commitment to one another. Following Adrienne Rich's (1980) concept of the 'lesbian continuum', they argue that “intimacy between women is likely to remain invisible if the particularities of sexuality between women form the sole focus of enquiry” (Jeffreys, 1989; Laurie, 1987).

“The 'second wave' of Indian feminism in the 1980s appears to have crested with making visible sexuality in the public arena in the form of heterosexual violence on women, seeking and attaining legal remedies of different kinds” (Agnes 1992).

However, as we moved through the 1990s and into the early years of the new century, sexuality started to take on different guises in feminist politics and scholarship. While it was still primarily concerned with sexual violence, but it was increasingly recast as desire that transcended heteronormativity. Feminists continue to write, theorise, and agitate about sexuality in relation to reproductive health, rape and domestic violence, caste and communal conflict played out on the bodies of women, state violence manifested in sexual assaults by army and police, as well as about more commonplace forms of gender violence, such as sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. The term counter-hetero-normative acquire in the academic circle in 1990s. Questions about history begin to emerge, points of origin turn to be elastic definitely. Is it impossible to look backward in time except through the categories that we have already produced? The feminist politics destabilized by the counter-hetero-normative politics in India (Menon, 2008)

“The term 'counter-heteronormative' is used to refer to a range of political assertions that implicitly or explicitly challenge heteronormativity and the institution of monogamous patriarchal marriage. Such assertions are seen around the demand for the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which penalizes 'sexual acts against the order of nature', and various kinds of political action around issues related to the lives and civil liberties of hijras (a traditional community of male-to-female transgendered people), kothis (a traditional identity assumed by men who perform femininity with male lovers but may also be married to women and have children), gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people and sex workers” (Menon, 2008)

Self-identified gay and lesbian individuals appeared occasionally in the public eye, Bacchetta traces to the late 1970s and 1980s are derived from a citizens' report on homosexuality prepared by an activist group in 1991. Until the report was published, these incidents had remained merely scattered sensational newspaper items. “What do we mean by the term 'sexuality'? In one of the earliest collections of Indian feminist work on sexuality, the editors Mary John and Janaki Nair refute the idea that sexuality is a question of silence” (Menon, 2008)

Following Foucault, they argue that “A focus on the conspiracy of silence regarding sexuality in India, whether within political and social movements or in scholarship, blinds us to the multiple sites where "sexuality" has long been embedded. In the spheres of law, demography

or medicine, for instance, sexuality enjoys a massive and indisputable presence that is far from prohibited” (John and Nair 1998)

Why the 1990s? The ‘time of AIDS’ in India had its beginnings in 1986, when serological testing found HIV positive in female workers in Chennai. The earliest confirmed cases of HIV infection were concentrated in Chennai, Tamil Nadu and also in Mumbai, Maharashtra. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s some governmental and private health authorities downplayed the significance of the spreading epidemic. In those early days it was thought to be a ‘western problem’ which would not affect India very much because (it was believed) of lower rates of multi-partner sexual activities and other risky behaviors among Indians (Verma, Pelto, Schensual, & Joshi, 2004)

In Kerala, the visibility now female sexual minorities have today gained through various social movements occurred globally and nationally; the impacts also could see in regionally. To look into sexuality politics, it needs to explore the various gender debates; the study specifically unravels the debates in Kerala. Various social and political developments broke the silence on gender and sexuality.

Various social movements tried to establish the law of nature by disciplining the family. Reform movements in Kerala mainly focused on reforming families. Family as the center of inquiry, diverse conjugal practices and familial structure yearned for a normative family. The norm for the normative family is considered western family morality by researchers. All the debates went on anxieties over female sexualities, and its disciplining, free flow of sexuality of women in matrilineal households made reformers conclude that unchaste and immoral female desire will stand hurdle for normative family. The dominant domestic ideology cemented through these movements around female sexuality has focused on the need for women to stay in households for marital stability and denied women a space in the public sphere. The ideal woman was supposed to give pleasure and care to her husband and the women who came to occupy the public sphere were targeted by calling ‘masculinized women’; desexualized- procreative body was the ideal. The women do not follow what these structures imposed on, subjected to over-sexualization of bodies. The research will analyze various gender and sexuality debates that broke the silence and how all these interventions reopened the rigorous debates; feminist debates and sexuality politics in Kerala. Both shake the normative imagination cemented through dominant domestic ideology.

Feminist movements opened rigorous discussions regarding gender in Kerala. In contrast, the sex workers' movement and collectives of non-binaries, especially the role of Sahayatrika (an organization for non-binary women), broke the silence regarding sexuality. Both movements challenged the dominant domestic ideology on women's sexuality at the time of the abolition of matrilineal practice and diverse conjugal practice, which resulted in disciplining of hetero-patriarchal families. Both movements challenged the patriarchy, while non-binary movements challenged hetero-patriarchy.

The discrimination female sexual minority is facing should understand from the lens of compulsory heterosexuality, defined by Adrienne Rich in her essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian existence'(1980) the idea that hetero-sexuality is enforced by a patriarchal and hetero-normative society where all values are centered on this, and most often people of sexual minorities forced to adopt this. Rich (1980) has concerned with two matters as well: first, "how and why women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, and the tribe has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise; and second, the virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a wide range of writings, including feminist scholarship".

The discrimination, hatred and prejudices toward sexual minorities are because of the heteronormativity view of society. Hetero-normativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the natural form of sexuality; it is the default and preferred mode of sexual orientation. Hetero-sexism and homophobia result from heteronormativity; heterosexual privilege is used to discriminate, oppress the rights and recognize their sexual orientation as anti-natural or deviant. It is institutionalized in family, religion, law, education, and historical terms through dominant discourses and practices; these institutionalized practices systematically marginalize these minorities without addressing the human rights and sexual orientation

Feminist movements addressed family as the oppressive system which controls women and their free choices. The supremacy given to males in social structures such as state, religion, family, and marriage was questioned by feminist movements. They focused on the violence women endured from all these structures. There are many aspects put forward by these movements, sexuality marginalized from the mainstream, though, the sexuality of females and its question dealt by feminist movements? have they dealt with this issue and considered it like any other aspect of women? In the 1980s and 1990s, various autonomous women's movements emerged in various parts of Kerala; Sahayatrika, an organization for female sexual minorities,

started its work in early 2000s. They explicitly focused on female sexuality, possibilities of alternate sexualities, and the constraints of imposed sexuality on women. What made them form such an organization for women amid many women's movements? Sahayatrika challenged patriarchy, heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality prevalent in the cultural, social and political system. Both feminist movements and Sahayatrika addressed the issues of family and its relations. The research will analyze debates around female sexuality and feminist movements which formed as a natural ally to sexuality movements late, how feminist movements addressed the questions of female sexuality. What are the aspects of women's movements? The research questions used to lead the study are:

Research questions

- How did the women's movements address the issues of sexuality in Kerala?
- How do queer movements like Sahayatrika (organization) speak about sexual minorities in Kerala?

Objectives

- To understand female sexuality and various sexuality debates in Kerala
- To explain the activities of Sahayatrika by focusing on queer women and their multiple marginalities
- To translate the fact-finding report published by Sahayatrika.

Methodology

The research is a qualitative study dealing with gender and sexuality debates in Kerala. That includes community-based movements, and related debates started to orient towards disciplining female sexuality and domestic ideology afterwards. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data includes interviews conducted by the researcher with social activists involved in feminist movements in Kerala from its inception to various phases. Moreover, the data collected from Sahayatrika includes both empirical and textual. Fieldwork was conducted at various times between January 2021 to March 2022.

The secondary data involved textual data from Sahayatrika, magazines from Anveshi (feminist organization), previous dissertation, and available texts in Malayalam. Sahayatrika is located in Thrissur, Kerala; they are not publishing magazines or related kinds regularly, so they gave secondary data related to the organization apart from primary data from the interaction. Interviews were collected from activists in their workplaces. The activists were divided into various districts, so there was no specific place for data collection. The researcher conducted five in-depth interviews and interview schedule is used for that. Hence secondary data is dominant in this research.

Activists and academicians are connected to each other that they are working in the similar area so that I could connect through the contacts they have given. So, snowball sampling procedure is used for the study. But the accessibility issues became a problem while the fieldwork.

Limitations of the study

Throughout the study, the researcher did not interact with sexual minorities directly; hence as a heterosexual person, studying sexual minorities' issues constantly reminded me of being an outsider to them. The fieldwork included data collection from Sahayatrika and interviews with the activists involved in feminist movements in Kerala.

Sahayatrika allowed me to visit there, but everyone who bears the position in office belongs to the queer community that remained my heterosexual identity. I heard them, talk to them, but I am not among them. I have theories but not lived experiences like them, like the debate between Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukai. I went through the conflict between who has the right to theorize and is lived experience needed to theorize?

Amid one of the interviews with activists, one said there is a growing intelligentsia among queer community we must respect that, which questioned the purpose of my whole research: who am I to research them? Interviewing the activists involved in feminist movements was also tricky for me; some are academicians, many are not interested in interviews, and some are tired of frequent questionnaires with many students. They told me that students view queer subjects these days as fashion.

One of the respondents asked me how it would be beneficial for the specific community members. That reminded me of the limitations of social science research that is not spontaneous. When I asked questions to them, they gave suggestions to read books related to

the field and were reluctant to speak extensively regarding the topic. Sometimes many points will get from face interviews, especially the experience of activists with real emotions which usually absent in merely book reading. Some telephonic interviews disconnected further; I did not get the rest of the data from them.

Covid-19 and lockdown also made travelling and access to activists difficult that some were not interested in telephonic interviews and other modes of online interviews. Throughout the fieldwork, I constantly remained my position as a researcher, the purpose of my research, debates between experience and lived experience.

Chapterisation

This thesis has four chapters. In the first chapter introduction to sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual minorities are given and also the study located in Kerala. How the gender and sexuality debates started in Kerala. Modernity has homogenised the familial relations and women's positions. But how specific debates in Kerala caused politicization of gender and sexuality. The conceptual framework, objectives, and methodology are also included here; the second chapter deals with the feminist movements in Kerala and their aspects and how they looked into the aspect of sexuality. The third chapter is about debates about sexuality, Sahayatrika and its politics is included, a fact-finding data of Sahayatrika team translated from Malayalam is the last section in this chapter. Summary, discussions and conclusions are designed in chapter four.

Chapter 2

Feminist Movements in Kerala: Aspects and Challenges

Feminism in Kerala was too late in making a social change compared to other parts of India. Following the third phase of the women's movement in India, which began after a lull of activities following the post-independence period, several autonomous women's movements formed in Kerala in the 1980s. What distinguished this phase from other phases was that many autonomous movements emerged in various states, which had no affiliation to any political party, which made them capable of independent existence, working and were active in various political issues.

However, in the early 1980s, women activists in new civil society movements that emerged in Kerala began to join the national women's movement through workshops. However, it was only in the second half of that decade that feminist groups formed here. Feminism, which has been present here long before the slogan of 'making gender a part of the mainstream, had significantly transformed. The question naturally arises as to whether this transformation was worth to feminist politics, although this can only be answered through a broader discussion. (J.Devika).

Women and men who were rooted in the alternative leftist socio-political movements of the 1980s emerged as the advocates of political feminism. In addition, many women activists who were born here at the same time and were involved in civil society movements were attracted to it. However, they did not try to create big organizations. Political feminism emerged here as an informal network of small feminist groups forming in small towns and cities in various parts of Kerala. These groups did not excel in consistency and size. Therefore, they were dynamic, minimal in terms of resources, and sustained only a period, but they effectively established an active presence in the Kerala public sphere. Small groups of feminist activists established informal relations and overcame significant opposition. Numerous concerns, including dowry, violence against women, and sexual exploitation, were effectively addressed. They also

received media attention. In the early 1990s, feminism found an inescapable position in the public sphere.

Political feminism is that strongly distinguishes itself from the prevailing and mainstream ideology of Kerala. The progressive social change of Kerala in the last century has achieved a great deal of social justice; hence the high status of women was intensely questioned. The feminists at that time tried to point out that the social change in the 20th century was incomplete, and shortcomings were there in public discussions regarding women—the feminist groups connected with the national women's movements to strengthen the critical awareness further. The fourth national conference (1991) of the Indian feminist movement held in Kozhikode was evidence of that. The women from different parts of India were come to attend the conference.

K. Ajitha, activist and founder of Anveshi counselling centre, said, Feminists understood patriarchy as control of production, reproduction and sexuality by men. That is not only a cultural system; it's political, economic and social. The small women's groups have raised the bomb of a feminist perspective in society against such hegemonic ideas. Although there had been women's movements before, though, it was these small groups that brought up the new concept of women's liberation in Kerala politics. Kerala has been familiar of the women's movement since 1986. They were lively little groups. Initially, activists called attention to how undemocratic the relationship between men and women was, which prompted the necessity for women's collectives.

One of the activists, Reshma Bharadwaj has said women raised the need for reservation of women in government jobs because they are capable of doing household work; why not in public and political spheres? Violence against women was said to be the main agenda of the day.

K. Ajitha said that the family is not a private space but a public space from a feminist perspective. That is, family issues and family relationships need to be viewed as political. The main slogan then was 'personal is political'. They started work at a time when the concept of a woman being the very conservative and indestructible structure of the family and the husband as the God, it was not a problem that women were beaten by their husband.

It was when the women's movements formed in Kerala when ongoing collectives' activities carried on nationally. A feminist organization called 'Manushi' was formed in Pattambi in the Palakkad district of Kerala in 1985, and a conference of women from various parts of Kerala

under the leadership of Manushi was organized. After this conference, small feminist groups aimed at women's liberation activities formed in various districts of Kerala. 'Bodhana' in 1986 at Kozhikode, 'Prachodana' in Thiruvananthapuram, 'Prabudhatha', 'Anveshi women's counselling centre', 'Sakhi women's resource centre' were some of the women's organizations.

Manushi

Sara Joseph, a teacher from Govt. college Pattambi and a writer, Sumangalakutty, Parvathy, K.A Indira teachers from the same college and a group of students from various student organizations led the Manushi.

Manushi took a strong stand in the incident where a woman named Balamani in Thrissur district was tortured by a high-ranking community member in the name of a border dispute, stripped naked in the street and even denied the right to enter her own house. Balamani wrote a letter to Manushi when she was in the hospital and asked for help. Activists of Manushi intervened and brought the issues to the public; they went into the house for the campaign even though that was a complex operation. She regained her legal right to return home under police protection through the activities of Manushi. Despite the oppressive nature and Casteism of the male leadership in the community organization, the movement was led only by women and their participation. This was a turning point in Kerala when new forms of gender political struggles led by feminist organizations were first introduced to the mainstream in Kerala (Chandrika, 2019)

Manushi's involvement and the campaign were strong in the activities carried out by women activists in response to the gang rape by the police in the village of Thankamani in the Idukki district. Unlike in the past, feminist organizations including Manushi have been able to raise the issue of gender politics by tackling the politics of rape and the occupation of the state.

It was the night of October 22 1985 that the women of Thankamani, who were happy to receive the road and bus service, were subjected to constant harassment by the locals. The Idukki district superintendent of police, additional district magistrate and the assistant collector were involved in the atrocities in Thankamani. About 600 policemen in 40 police vehicles reached Thankamani that day. Police abducted children as young as thirteen, including the elderly. The men in the houses went into hiding out of the fear of the police, followed by the attacks on women. Most of the homes raided by police between the ages of ten to fifty were subjected to

sexual harassment. After the incident, the mentally disrupted woman had become so exhausted and not able to speak or eat anything (Chandrika,2019)

During this time, the intervention and activities of feminist organizations helped to bring relief to the women of Thankamani and to take a stand against the government among women all over Kerala. Manushi's activists marched from Pattambi to Thankamani, carrying out poster campaigns and returned to Pattambi to launch a hunger strike to draw public attention to the issue. The people of Pattambi provided financial assistance to the women of Thankamani through manushi, which shows an example of the humanitarian support the people had for this struggle.

Manushi made great efforts to bring social attention and visibility to women's issues by forming a women's theatre troupe and performing street plays. A group of about 20 women performed in the streets with drama and songs. The main activities were concentrated in the Palakkad district and organized under women's leadership. The play was written and directed by Sara Joseph and published magazine by the same name. Other activities carried out by 'Manushi' were mostly related to dowry deaths. One method was to hold protests demanding the arrest and punishment of criminals with the cooperation of the people by creating civic committees. The hunger strikes continued with extensive female participation until the arrest of the human culprits involved in the rape cases. Manushi, strongly involved in the rape and murder of a 15-year-old girl named Latha in Muthalamada in Palakkad district, was able to get the participation of political parties. The accused was an activist of Bharathiya Janata Party (BJP). A few BJP workers protested against not expelling him. Activists left the party and joined in the strike; the reason for the BJP's heavy defeat in that election was the background of this popular struggle. Manushi could put strong political pressure on many issues (Chandrika, 2019)

In the early days of Manushi, it was beyond class. Women from any economic background had a place in the organization. However, a definite political stance became necessary in some cases. At each stage, those who did not have a definite stand parted ways and caused various indifferences among the members because some belonged to political parties. The political party of Yuvajana Vedi made an open statement regarding the issue of the Mavoor Rail strike³.

³ Mavoor rail strike was a struggle of communities where soft drink manufacturing factories function or the mafia in sand mining areas. The strike reflects the connection and conflict between labour, environment and community

without knowing the whole members of Manushi. The statement was like Manushi as the women's wing of CPI (ML) and realized the tendency to assimilate or use Manushi to join the political party. Manushi gradually became inactive; its activists have had the experience of encountering conflict and isolation amidst various levels of attacks by powerful forces such as political parties, the media and the police. At the same time, Manushi has carried out activities that include streams of socialist feminism and radical feminism.

Bodhana

One of the main organizers of the activities of 'Bodhana' was K.Ajitha, who was part of the Naxalite movement in Kerala. In the late 1960s, women who sided with the Naxalbari movement in India took part in the revolutionary activities, which had repercussions in the states of Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Kerala. The first conflict with the CRP (Central Reserve Police) was in 1967 in Naxalbari, and seven women were killed. By 1972, thousands of women had been abducted during a strong Naxalite uprising among students and tribals. Women were brutally beaten, raped and killed. Ajitha started her career in Kerala with her father and mother from this political arena. Ajitha was the only woman involved in more than 50 men in the attack on the Thalassery Pulppally police station by a party decision. Ajitha and her mother Mandakini were arrested along with others in the case. While in custody, Ajitha was tortured and humiliated. Ajitha, who lived under the threat of sexual assault at any time, was imprisoned as a lone prisoner during the emergency. Ajitha was released on July 22, 1977, after living eight years in prison (Ajitha 2005). This is what Ajitha says about her experience in jail:

Police said that Ajitha's body was being used for the sexual needs of the comrades. Although this was untrue, it was confirmed that my comrades had repeatedly tried to assault me sexually. Did they see me as a sexual body instead of as a comrade? Was the party aware of women's rights and partnership?

Ajitha became the organizer of the feminist movement as part of her response and inquiry into these questions. Ajitha and S.Ganga initiated the formation of Bodhana in Kozhikode. The most notable activity of the time was the protest against the death of Kunjibi, who killed at the Kozhikode women's police station. The action committee was by civic workers and went to the Bangladesh colony (a colony in Kozhikode city), where women were sexually exploited and made their living by sex work. Kunjibi was one among them, and Bodhana

organized them to protest. Other activities included supporting the struggles to reopen the Mavoor factory, which had been closed for three years and intervening in dowry death cases (Chandrika,2019)

Prachodana

The activities of Prachodana conducted by the team A.K Jayasree, J.Geetha, S.Ganga, A.K Rajasree and Indira, rape and abuse against women were significant aspects in which they participated. In 1986 the central government passed a bill of the Muslim women's 'protection' act against Muslim women, and members of Prachodana burned the bill in front of the secretariat to get attention. Discussions about family, sexuality and morality were seriously discussed within the feminist groups.

It was until the 1980s that the decay and decline of the left in Kerala was fully exposed in dealing with women's issues; it was no coincidence that the formation and activities of feminist organizations emerged in Kerala during the period. Women and girls who were working and sympathizing with the left parties and student organizations formed the feminist organizations in Kerala at the stage and led the women's liberation movement. Feminist activities in Kerala in the 1980s were generally motivated by the environment in which women were recognized, questioned, taught and stood apart from the patriarchal structure of revolutionary parties. The vision of socialist feminism was prevalent in feminist activities in Kerala at that time (Chandrika, 2019)

In 1986 Prachodana re-published Flavia Agnes' book entitled 'My Story...Our story of Rebuilding Broken lives' in Malayalam conveys their political stance.

Women are subjected to socio-economic and political oppression in a capitalist society. At the same time, male-dominated rules have given women a second-class social structure based on the idea of a male-dominated society. The family structure based on the idea of patriarchy is today a political tool for the oppression and exploitation of women in society. Women can be liberated as a section of society only when the social structure has transcended. Only then can a society advance to a socialist sense of freedom. So capitalist exploitation must collapse to build a society based on a socialist perspective and the male capitalist dominance we see today. This view is the socialist content of the women's liberation movement.

However, many desirable trends have emerged in the women's liberation movement. This is a section within the women's liberation movement which theorizes that the only reason for the particular oppression of women in the existing society is male domination. Therefore, they focus their struggle on men rather than on the struggle for capitalist rule. This creates an unscientific perception in society that men are against women. In this way, the struggle of the forces of struggle is not formed, and thus the struggle against capitalism is crushed (ibid).

While describing the tragic life experiences, Prachodana mentions that Flavia does not touch the capitalist order that underlies those experiences and the anti-communist and anarchist sentimentality of her feminism should be reversed. The limitations that viewing women's issues within the framework of such strict socialist feminism are in the activities of feminist organizations in the 1980s. Moreover, the communist parties in Kerala tried to use the socialist leadership of feminist organizations for their struggles and interests because the feminist organizations were unable to overcome these limitations. This assimilation has primarily contributed to the demise of feminist organizations by the late 1980s (C.S Chandrika, 2019)

The use of Manushi's participation in the Mavoor agitation by CPI (ML), the pro-CPM stance among some activists of 'Bodhana' and the constant involvement and influence of communist men were significant setbacks to the progress of the feminist movement in Kerala. It was the women's liberation activists who were able to resist these setbacks, overcome the crisis and learn from the experience, they could take the feminist movement in Kerala to the next level.

Anveshi women's counselling centre

Bodhana in Kozhikode became inactive, and Anveshi was formed in 1993. K.Ajitha was the president, and K.K Savithri was the secretary. Women activists realized that women need a place to talk openly and find comfort in discussing the family matters that are considered their most private. They realized that it was their duty to highlight the politics of the problem faced by women and to take action to transform women and make them capable of resisting it. The occasional gatherings of women culminated in the formation of Anveshi women's counselling centre.

The lesson they learned from the experience of Bodhana is that what needs to be done among women is not occasional interactions as Bodhana did, but daily activities. An office that should open every day from 10 AM to 5 PM; accepts women who have problems and understand that

and deals with them so that they can manage the situation somewhat. For an organization to be able to do that, it must first be registered. The experience from Bodhana shows that registered organizations are eligible for donations and grants from the government.

Anveshi addressed and intervened directly in violence against women in Kerala, initially the Anveshi as the space to come and share their experience. When they collaborated with other NGOs in Kerala, they received a grant from UNPA. Its reach expanded to counselling, legal aid, community work, library, law classes, seminars and workshops. Since 2003 they have been getting funds from Ratan Tata (financial support). Anveshi started their short stay home facility at this point. The Anveshi created an immediate temporary support system for women by setting up a short stay home where women and children could stay safely in extreme conditions. Unlike short stay homes under the government, Anveshi short stay home operated from a feminist perspective. The way they sorted out the issues greatly relieved activists are working among women. Women faced severe domestic violence and sought help; after a while, activists were compelled to return them to the same environment, which made these women insecure. However, Anveshi resolved this mental conflict to an extent by their stay homes.

They conducted effective networking by focusing on villages and towns in the northern districts of Kerala and worked and provided psychological and physical support to the women. Anveshi's interventions have also exposed violence against women in Kerala and sex rackets involving high-ranking profiles.

The women's movement not only intervened in the atrocities against women in Kerala society but also took the initiative to create shelter for them. Anveshi in Kozhikode and its short stay home are an example of this. It was the dream of all women liberation activists to have a place to stay for the oppressed women and those who had nowhere to go back. It is an excellent comfort that Anveshi has an extensive shelter system, legal aid and counselling for women who are on the verge of suicide and destitute.

Apart from these activities, Anveshi and its founder Ajitha fought a battle against Ex-Minister P.K Kunjalikutty. No one in Kerala does not know the long history of the struggles in connection with the ice cream parlour sex racket case. During the ten-year term, which had been dismissed as unsubstantiated by the supreme court, foul play at various levels of government, including the police, the courts and the political leaders, became history. Such an experience of wiping out a criminal case through coups is rare in the history of legal battles. This is because the prosecution and the government usually advocate for the complainants. It

was part of the prosecution's attempt to isolate and attack the investigator's organization (Anveshi), which has come forward to fight for several girls who have been denied justice here, with the defendant or even more heroically (K.Ajitha)

Sakhi women's resource centre

Eliyamma Vijayan founded the Sakhi women's resource centre in the 1990s, located at Trivandrum, with a three-year fellowship from the MacArthur foundation.

Sakhi has acted as a bridge between the grassroots women's organizations in Kerala and the national and international organizations or as a raw organization that spreads information. Sakhi's activities focused on studies, gender training programs, advocacy and lobbying. Studies on gender training manual, gender planning, budgeting, auditing, handbooks and adolescent training manual, and reproductive health manual, studies on women in institutions also included. Other work areas for Sakhi include legal aid for women victims of violence and networking of women's organizations.

Minority women's movements.

In 1986, the supreme court turned the Travancore Christian law on succession, recognizing women's paternal property rights. According to the paternal order, the daughter had no significant right to the father's property. The daughter was only entitled to a quarter or five thousand rupees of son's share, whichever was the smallest. If the dowry has been paid, this share right will also be forfeited.

This law was overturned in a 1983 appeal by Mary Roy to the Supreme Court. This ruling was unwise for patriarchy and political parties within the Christian community to accept. In this context, the Kerala government sought to legislate in 1996 to overturn this ruling under pressure from some of the leading political parties with Christian support and power. The original content of the amendment was to deny the property from 1951 to 1986 as per the court order and to deny the title to the property by will after 1986. Hundreds of women's complaints reached the courts after the Supreme Court ruling, prompting pressure to amend the law.

The government had to postpone the introduction of the amendment bill due to widespread women's struggles led by the forum of Christian women for women's rights. Christian women's forum made complaints to the bishop and the president. The fact remains that the court order

has not been enacted into law, or the complainant women have not been given the right to family property. The efforts of the Christian women's forum to keep the issue of women's rights activists were notable. Led by Annamma George, Annamma Joseph, Akkama Paul and Reginamma. The organization has expanded its reach to other areas of women's issues. The women's organization had been active in various activities, including classes on feminism and sexuality, Christian personal law, discussion on the women's reservation bill, book publishing, and awareness classes for women in documentary filmmaking and organizing joint events related to the women's commission.

Muslim women are the ones who have suffered the most from the growing Hindu communalism in India in the form of fascism. Since the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, minority religious fundamentalism, which has been gaining strength in self-defence, has imposed more restrictions on women. Religious institutions tightened restrictions on women's dress, education, employment, marriage, pregnancy, divorce and property at all levels of life. The religious leadership and the Waqf board thought Muslim women had no problems. According to the 1985 Shabanu case judgement, the husband is liable to pay the stated expenses. Women lost their nominal rights when the central government passed the Muslim women protection act in 1986 in protest and pressure from religious fundamentalists that the Supreme Court had misinterpreted the Quran.

In 1997, a feminist organization named NISA was organized in Kozhikode under the leadership of V.P. Suhra; they dealt with Muslim women's issues by standing in the community. They joined with other feminist organizations and conducted activities which showed the visibility of feminist voices of Muslim women. NISA raised issues such as marriage, divorce, polygamy and inheritance. Despite threats from religious fundamentalists against NISA's activists, it continues to discuss the need to change Muslim personal laws, child marriage, issues of women who are working abroad and also Arabic marriage.

Dalit feminism

Dalit subaltern counter publics in Kerala has formed in response to the exclusionary nature of counter public of feminist politics. As Nancy Fraser (1990) highlights "Subaltern counter-publics are discursive arenas that develop in parallel to the official public spheres and where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs".

One of the highlights of that decade was the Dalit feminist movement emerged were identified that the Dalit women's issues were not the same as those of upper caste women. During this period, Dalit women openly stated that all women are not equal. When it comes to women's issues, the public never recognizes the lives of a Dalit woman or an Adivasi woman and the struggles of Dalits and Adivasis are trivialized. When women's experiences are discussed, the experiences of the subaltern women never discussed, even a woman representative from that community came late. Slavery and severe caste oppression were the realities of Dalit women, feminist struggles that had been carried out these facts in disguise and ignored. They stood alone because they were completely alienated from everywhere. In this way, the Dalit feminist perspective of the early nineties was active in Kerala by criticizing the women's liberation movement, other-socio political revolutionary movements and the patriarchal Dalit collectives. The challenge faced by the mainstream feminist organizations was the harsh criticism of Dalit feminists that the women's liberation movement here was as Brahmanical as any socio-political movement in Kerala. Dalit women are deprived of wealth, resources and knowledge theories or analytical projects and are denied access to good education and jobs. These serious criticisms provoked non-Dalit writers at that time were the success of Dalit feminist movements in the 1990s. In the last years of 1990s, the activities of the Dalit feminist organization started down, lost continuity and faded the inherent creativity. The organized political and cultural activities of Dalit feminists in Kerala's public sphere are yet to come powerfully.

The Adivasi women's leadership and protests in Kerala

The resistance strategies and protests started within the tribes due to the century's old state occupation and exploitation. The organized protests were for their existence and survival, and they lived in a specific social system, economic system, nature worship, agricultural practices, subsistence and eco-system. The advancement of tribal women in the history of struggles became important in women's history. The role of tribal women was crucial in leadership and participation. C.K Janu, a tribal leader who has grown from Manathavady (a place in Kerala) to the national level; through her activities, she organized women and men to lead protests.

The initial method of land struggle was to seize the forest land and build huts. In 1994, they seized land in Panavalli and Chingeri in Wayanad and faced several cases and police harassment. Fifty women, including four children, were among those arrested and taken to jail that day. At that time, there were no women's movements for tribal women. C.K Janu's critique

was mainly directed at the feminist movement in Kerala. As a woman from the lower castes, she was confronted with the problems of oppression and domination within the tribal organization. Prejudice from own group because of a woman and from society for being a tribal woman. Problems of tribal women who were sexually exploited and abused by men in public were discussed in the media in the mid-1990s under the leadership of C.K Janu. The Adivasis, who have become poor without land or employment, depend on local employers; they lure the women by offering to marry them. Among those who exploit tribal women in this way are the elite and influential persons. This includes bureaucrats, police, alcoholics, capitalists, politicians and locals. It was common for pregnant women to have forced abortions amid sexual assault and exploitation. Tribal women are being raped and sexually exploited amid land grabbing, wage exploitation, evictions, poverty, unemployment, starvation, malnutrition and disease.

Many news reports came at that time that more than a thousand women in tribal areas became pregnant and had to give birth due to these sexual assaults. The experiences of tribal women were that the perpetrators were not punished even though they filed complaints before the legislative committee, the human rights committee and the women's commission. During this period, the news of Wayanad's unmarried mothers became active in newspapers. In the article 'Children of Tribal Unwed Mothers and Their Non-Legitimate Origin: A Social Exclusion Perspective' Shanuga Cherayi, Justin P. Jose, and Sreejith Sudhakar (2019) used phenomenological design to study "children of unwed mothers about their social identity in the context of non-legitimate origin, aspects of psychosocial disability and exclusion. They found that the children of unwed mothers explicitly deviate and breach traditional tribal boundaries, thus victimized by ascribing the social identity of non-legitimate origin, in addition to their poorly valued social identity as tribal. As a result, non-legitimate children experience conflicts in social relationships, poor social integration, reduced support, poor peer acceptance, and exclusion that characterize everyday communal and school life. These children internalized negative social (non-legitimate) identities, psychosocial disabilities, and exclusion in neighborhoods and schools". In the first phase, the newspapers reported that the number of unwed mothers in Wayanad was between 600 and 1,000. In Wayanad, more than 1000 women have lodged complaints with the legislative committee, the human rights committee and the people's council for social justice.

Later, the state women's commission took steps to collect evidence for DNA testing; there was ample evidence that women were constantly being exploited. The police system, laws and the

courts paid scant attention to the justice for women. In Wayanad and Attapady, the major tribal areas of Kerala, girls as young as 11 have become mothers. The Kerala society very naturally accepts the children as 'unmarried mothers'. This recognition was not due to the decent and free developed moral consciousness of the Malayalees, but inflicting the concept of motherhood and denying the agency. It was a criminal attack on women's bodies, but the non-tribal and civilized society exploits tribal women and recognizes them as 'unmarried mothers'. It involves the patriarchal zeal of a criminal attack on a woman's body, destroying all her other female identities and establishing a complete mother if she has given birth to a child.

The struggles of the Adivasis in the 1990s arose out of criticism from the mainstream community and fierce opposition to the regime, demanding that the real solution to the oppressed lives of the Adivasis, to the return of their land and agriculture and the autonomy of the Adivasi areas following article 244 of the constitution. The Adivasi land act, 1975, passed by the Kerala legislative assembly as per the particular directions of the central government, did not contain any rules for controlling tribal land transfer and reclamation of alienated land till 1986. Not only did the Adivasis not get the alienated land, but the encroachments on the Adivasi land continued. In addition, the Kerala legislative assembly unanimously passed a law in 1999, considering the definition of tribal land as agricultural land, undermining the tribal act.

Any external factor interfering with the tribal habitat becomes a factor in the encroachment of tribal land. The encroachment of tribal women and the government's forest laws played an important role in destroying the tribal habitat. For the Adivasis, the forest is their livelihood that was wiped out by early forest laws and encroachments. From 1990 to 2001, more than 100 tribal people in various districts of Kerala experienced starvation. Hundreds of Adivasis staged a sit-in protest in front of the chief minister's residence and secretariat after a series of land grabs. For the first time, the active participation and support of mainstream feminist leadership in Kerala in the tribal struggle was apparent; the committee was formed in solidarity with the struggle that lasted 48 days before the secretariat.

During the period, new forms of democratic struggle of the Adivasis were created to gain the support of the political and civil society. The Gotramaha sabha formed on this occasion, and its chairman C.K Janu also posed a significant challenge to the upper caste supremacy and patriarchy in Kerala's mainstream political sphere. The Adivasis questioned and rejected all claims of the 'Kerala Model'.

In this context, the Adivasis led by Janu started a land struggle in February 2003 at Muthanga in Wayanad. The agitation was organized in a completely democratic manner by building huts for 6,000 families in the Muthanga forest. They built small huts in Muthanga. Four kindergartens were set up to educate the children. Screw pines were planted to revive the river that had dried up in the forest. It was a struggle for survival. The agitation lasted from January 5 to February 19, 2003, in Muthanga. The government/ police held fire on February 19 to counter the strike, an Adivasi was killed, and several were subjected to torture. On the 17th, the police entered the forest and set fire to the huts. Many women and children who participated in the Muthanga struggle had been imprisoned.

The tribal struggles led by Janu are not only at the forefront of dynamizing the history of the tribal women's movement in Kerala but also creating new political struggles in Kerala. Panavalli land strike, Tribal strike in Kundala, Strike against the Taj Hotel network built in the Adivasi habitat at Nagarhola, Aralam Land strike at Ambukuthi in Mananthavady, Chingeri project land agitation, strike in Kodaikanal Tamilnadu and the Adivasi agitation carried out by Thoovapathi on the Kerala- Karnataka border. Kerala saw the real-life struggles of the Adivasis under the leadership of C.K Janu, who introduced to the Malayalees a new language of knowledge, thought and forms of democratic struggle with a new outlook and zeal. The tribal movement led by Janu sparked new political debates in Kerala, saying that her struggles' primary aim was to recognize the Adivasis as human beings. However, there was no consistent and active intervention or support on the part of the feminist movement on the specific issues of tribal women in Kerala.

Mayilamma

Plachimada in Palakkad, a district of Kerala, has attracted the attention of environmental activists all over the world. The people of Plachimada went on strike against the coco-cola company when there was no fresh water for drinking and cooking. In Plachimada, the Adivasis were the primary victims of the coca-cola company's infringement. As in many other cases, the women and children suffered the most when there was no drinking water. The active leadership of women's struggle of the Adivasis for water arose in Plachimada.

Mayilamma, who rose to the leadership by Plachimada agitation, was incredibly strong that had a separate space in Kerala's political history. Mayilamma, who led the struggle for drinking water against the cocoa-cola company in Plachimada, died on January 6, 2007. The cause of death was severe psoriasis. The disease that affected Mayilamma resulted from environmental

pollution and drinking water contamination as part of the coca-cola company's activities. Kerala had seen one of the most significant struggles/defence was the aboriginal women, Mayilamma, with the water struggle. Mayilamma became known to people at the world water conference held on January 21-22, 2004, in Plachimada, against the coca-cola company's water exploitation. The company had promised that the lives of thousands of unemployed and poor people would be saved, just as foreign companies propagate when they take root in one place. The Adivasis and locals, including the panchayat and Mayilamma, sincerely believed this promise would come true. The coca-cola company drained the groundwater in Plachimada. People quickly realized from experience that the drinking water was contaminated with toxic solid waste and gave deadly diseases and toxic gases.

With the rise of women's leadership in the tribal struggles, the public could understand how each issue affected the women and children of that community. The leadership of struggles by political parties and other social and community organizations has always been under the control of men. It does not reflect the problems or lives of women and children. The tribal struggles were motivated by the criticism that the lack of space for women in the leadership, participation and decision-making process of mainstream political and civil society organizations was detrimental to the political integrity of these struggles.

Why Kerala?

What distinct the women's movement in Kerala from other parts of India? The women's movements were formed after many social movements in Kerala. Movements' issues, styles and strategies are determined by the political nature of the state. Kerala is a politically tempestuous state. As mentioned in the first chapter, many social movements and reform movements shaped the state's contemporary gender and sexuality movements. Women's movements do not happen in a vacuum. They have emerged to break various dominant ideologies and the state's patronizing nature. The political atmosphere where two dominant political parties took power in consecutive elections meant no hegemony for any political party in Kerala. Though Marxist ideologies have a firm root in Kerala, equal political space for every ideology gave space to autonomous women's movement; another strand is state-sponsored developmental feminism. The specific gender and sexuality debates happened here and not anywhere. In the same state, two strands of the women's movement succeeded in raising and addressing issues at the same time failed in some aspects.

In the work 'Fields of protest: women's movements in India' (1999), Raka Ray puts an example of two Indian cities and why specific women's movements happened in that social location and not in other parts. She took Bombay and Calcutta for comparison, she says, "in the same country, yet how activists engage in women's issues, the nature of the issues and indeed activists' understandings of what constitutes a legitimate women's movement are fundamentally different". Calcutta has strong left political hegemony, a concentration of power and homogenous culture, so most organizations are affiliated with left political parties, and autonomous women's movements are significantly less compared to Bombay; heterogeneous nature and fluid field of Bombay made more autonomous movements there. Likewise, political feminism as an autonomous movement and developmental feminism as state-sponsored has emerged in Kerala. It can be understood in the way Raka Ray has put.

In the mid of 1980s, two strands of Keralite feminism emerged. Some of the women who worked in the organizations in left political parties and those active in the public sphere through civil society politics were ready to view feminism with interest. Many became active participants in 'political feminism or developmental feminism in the long run. These two different strands of feminism gave different answers to the questions such as 'which are the spaces to counter patriarchy' 'what are the discussions to use for this? (J. Devika)

Political feminism had two main characteristics. The first is that it has established itself as a political entity that recognizes masculinity as a form of authority that is equally present in all three spheres; state, civil society and market, and feminism tried to resist this in all possible ways. The mass protest against the Thankamani incident in 1986 and the protest organized by Bodhana to gain justice for Kunjibi who died through a police attack. Women's movements viewed feminism as resistance to the patriarchy of the state. In spaces of civil society, small groups of activists with feminist interventions appeared. Likewise, political feminism rejected the dominant framework of gender and critically engaged.

The cultural activities of 'Manushi' and Sara Joseph and whose interventions in the literary public sphere and political feminism fixed their presence in the Malayalam public sphere and critically engaged with family-community spaces. At the same time, movements were apparent against male dominance in the market. SEVA movement emerged in 1983 as a response to the patriarchal attitudes of the trade unions. SEWA came forefront to respond to the changes of women in the labour market and to make fair treatment in wages, working conditions, and social positions to those women who were part of the unorganized sector. The independent

fisher labour movement, whose women wing 'Coastal women's forum', was part of political feminism. In the 1980s, political feminism recognized masculinity as a form of authority in the state-civil society-market sphere and worked to resist it in all these spheres.

Developmental feminism, which later became another stream of feminism, was far different from political feminism. The 1980s was the time when women belonging to dominant left political parties joined the *Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad*⁴, which was allowed more independent activities. The *Parishad* was widely regarded as a 'civil place' and suitable for women. After the mid-1980s, there was a thought that women members should increase in numbers, while feminist ideas were enthusiastically debated within the organization, and the importance of education was prevalent.

Developmental feminism had three characteristics. One, it emphasized civil character and civil spaces; second, it did not hesitate to align itself with the formal forces of the state in development. Third, in the early years, many of those who emerged to criticize the dominant notions did not sustain as strong. Apart from that, they did not question state-based women's patronizing nature inherent in Kerala Model.

The political diversity of Kerala made possible for the independent existence of autonomous movements and homogenized developmental feminism, likewise Bombay and Calcutta. The political feminism raised much questions and various political parties unanimously resisted these movements which caused anxiety and assertion towards gender and sexuality politics among people in Kerala. But the developmental feminism and its alignment with left political parties debased many gender questions while they focused on education and literacy.

Premature immobility and reasons

The women's liberation movement of the 1980s emerged from different walks of life with its divergent views and activities and sought to bring to the mainstream the issues of women's life in Kerala society. Especially the exploitation and violence faced by women within the family and society. The women's liberation movements had been responsible for raising the specific issues of women, which no political party was willing to take up or raise. In particular, the fierce protests and struggles against rape and dowry deaths were categorized here as women-only issues that should be taken up by women alone. With this, the sectarian attitudes of

⁴ The progressive outfit in the state conceived as a people's science movement

political parties and their aversion to gender politics were exposed and criticized. The feminist movements' interventions have illustrated that political parties only take on women's issues when there is a power struggle, such as an election.

The majority of those who took the initiative and rose to prominence in the face of the women's liberation movement of the 1980s were the upper middle class, highly educated and employed, which is remarkable. The Dalit feminist organizations of the 1990s revealed that Dalit women, who defected from patriarchal, political and social organizations, joined feminist organizations and then also faced alienation there. In the 1980s, women's secondary status as a general feminist issue, as well as discriminatory personal laws, property rights, police-judiciary, sexual assaults, anti-feminism, dowry deaths, and rape in media were raised in the political arenas by these movements. The vigorous activities of the feminist organizations formed in the 1980s slowly decreased in the 1990s. Even though assimilation strategies, aggressive campaigns, and efforts of left political parties against feminist organizations were the main reason, the limitations of small groups, the particular circumstances of women, and the ideological complexities also contributed to this stagnation.

The left movements was hostile to the women's liberation movements at that time. Because the women who worked in left political parties were started to ask the 'women's question'. Many women were beginning to come to terms with their issues as a woman, they encouraged women's liberation movements. It has to be said that the left parties feared the women's liberation movement made the women more assertive.

Feminist groups have intervened in several local issues and strategically dealt with political parties. However, these groups were not ready to share the agenda of political parties—that is why they earned resentment from CPM in its initial time. The early feminist groups worked hard to preserve their independence from major political parties such as CPM and other smaller political organizations.

With the fourth national conference of women's liberation organization's held at Kozhikode in 1990, the first phase of the independent women's liberation organizations' activities in Kerala came to an abrupt and temporary halt (C.S Chandrika, 2019). "Today the women's movement in India is deeply cleaved. There is, nevertheless, a vigorous search for viable feminist politics. To succeed, feminists must develop transformative politics, managing and (hopefully) transcending class, caste and community differences" (Rajan, 1999).

In this chapter, the women's movement in Kerala analyzed, the aspect of caste and sexuality are the aspects which left unrecognized and least focused by feminist movements in Kerala initially. In the coming chapters, debates on female sexuality will be the focal area. Apart from analyzing feminist movements, the research will also look at how these movements have responded to the issue of sexuality and how sexuality politics explicitly launched in the state.

Chapter 3

Making Sexuality into the Public: Confronting Normativity and Questions of Female Sexuality

Sexuality has been visible in the public life of Kerala not as desired but devoid of the margins of 'respectable' boundaries. The sexualization of female bodies has been utilized as a strategy to deal with the 'autonomous women' who transgress social norms. “Besides the unwillingness to explore the costs accruing to women in the foregrounding of procreative female Sexuality in social development, there is also scant attention paid to sexual and health rights and issues of sexual minorities and other groups like sex workers, despite the interventions around HIV/AIDS. Historically, Sexuality has been marginalized in Kerala and projected onto prostitute bodies; in the 1990s, the fear of 'unbounded' Sexuality had been a prominent feature of public discourse. J. Devika opens up this obscuring of Sexuality in dominant development discourse by examining the intertwining of two specific histories: developmentalism in Kerala and modern gender. It will form an illuminating backdrop for the critical examination of public discourse on Sexuality in Kerala in the 1990s, in which the fear and abjection of Sexuality are more than apparent”(J. Devika, 2009).

There are, however, other marginalized groups that remain invisible to the dominant development discourse. To Whom J.Devika has called abjects of development, upon these groups which Sexuality is projected. Thus, “abjection refers to a very specific form of social exclusion and marginality: that which involves the shaping and designating of a domain of abnormality and impossibility. The prostitute, the 'incurable nymphomaniac', people belonging to sexual minorities, the HIV/ AIDS patient, and others—being abjected marginals—are rarely discussed (but frequently denounced) in the elite public” (J Devika).

By 'abjection' Devika (2009) meant “the social process by which the normal, the possible, the dominant, the sensible and the mainstream are produced and supported by the creation of a domain of abnormality, impossibility, subservience and marginality. Abjection, remarks Judith Butler (1993: 3), 'designates "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life, which are

nonetheless densely populated by those who are not enjoying the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject'. Drawing on Kristeva, one could argue that socially stigmatized groups signify 'dirt' and 'disorder' to the dominant. The abject, therefore, remains beyond the pale of reformist efforts. It is located at social strata lower than the outlier and, hence, the latter often has to make a decided effort to avoid being pushed into the former, thus rendered invisible within the field of vision of the state" (J. Devika).

After the long-term remark of abject, the N.G.O. and AIDS prevention activities made to talk about Sexuality and sex workers in Kerala. Those activities made politicization of female sex workers; various initiatives were to mobilize them; the stark realities of sex workers were that they belonged to lower economic strata and were vulnerable to social realities. The social ignorance of sex workers in the unorganized sector and their gross human right violation led many social activists to launch support for them. Establishment of the organization *Jwalamukhi* was the first step in this regard. The sex worker's movement disturbed the moral frameworks and puritanical mindset. The social activists associated with the movement break the notion that sex workers should be ignored. "The fear of Sexuality, in general, has been evident in public life, especially prominent in fear of the sexualization of female bodies".

Since the late 1980s, as AIDS awareness has grown, it has been more acceptable to discuss sex outside of the fields of law, demography, and medicine—and not just as violence against women or as a means of "population control." Although AIDS is a disease that is also discussed in the medical community, its origins allowed for the discussion of sex (Menon, 2008). The silence around Sexuality is no longer able to keep because, in terms of AIDS and related activities, Sexuality outside the realm of these discourses, such as alternate sexualities and desires, stayed outside, which needed to be addressed and theorized more.

Sexuality politics, Sahayatrika and its inception

Sahayatrika is an organization that started its work to support lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in light of the increasing joint suicides of female couples in Kerala in the late 1990s. They explicitly talked about hetero-normativity, compulsory heterosexuality, desires and alternate sexualities. For those years, when incidents of lesbian suicides kept coming in, at least a handful of people tried to draw attention to it, and it was formed in 2001. The organization's main areas of focus include community organising, counselling, and assisting women from sexual and gender minority groups to survive; later, its wings widen into various activities such

as crisis management and legal support to those in need. It was formed from the sexual minority experience abroad and concerns about friends in Kerala by the founder Deepa Vasudevan, a Canadian immigrant Malayali. It can be said that the 'Sahayatrika' project was a new social and political experiment to any indices of Kerala.

Deepa Vasudevan collaborates on LGBT public awareness-building programs. She came to Kerala from Canada in 1990. Before that, she was a member of the women's movement in Canada. She also served as a counselor in an organization that worked against domestic violence, which was a non-profit organization. Although she was the daughter of Malayalee parents, born and raised in Canada. When she came to Kerala, she didn't know much about the culture and language, but she wanted this country's influence on her growth. She had a queer identity in Canada. At that time, she doesn't know how people with queer identities live in Kerala. While coming to Kerala, she was isolated because she had close queer personalities in Canada. And she met the women who work in Kerala with feminist ideas and attempted to speak in the beginning; she thought that Kerala would be progressive. The rights of sexual minorities in Canada were part of the feminist movement; such organizations received strong support from the feminist movement. But the response from some mainstream feminists in the first phase was disappointing; many social activists at the time considered homosexuality a mental disorder.

Similar many networks

In 1999, the "Sangama" organisation was founded in Bangalore for those who were subjected to discrimination because of their sexual inclination. They put a special emphasis on the issues facing sexual minorities from underprivileged backgrounds who do not understand English and who have little to no access to information and assistance. Apart from the diversity in sexual orientation, they acknowledge that people come from diverse social classes, castes, genders, religions, languages, cultures, ethnicities, and political origins. Sangama favours an integrationist strategy to include non-homophobic heterosexuals in order to secure their sexual rights.

For lesbians in Delhi, there existed a group named "Sangini" in addition to the Sangama. The only registered group in Eastern India fighting for women, Trans men, and others who are sexually disenfranchised is Sappho, which was founded in Kolkata in 2003. They strive for a society in which sexual minorities' rights are upheld and sexuality-based prejudice is eradicated.

Deepa met and talked to many community members; she was invited to attend a workshop for sexual minorities in Bangalore. She started a helpline, 'Sangini' for lesbian in Delhi, with the help of an organization called 'fame', worked among sex workers in Trivandrum and Sangama in Bangalore; Sahayatrika first started a ten-month project to create a helpline to support same-sex lovers and help in the times of crisis, many of whom were reluctant to come forward to the public and identify themselves was an experiment at that time. The 'Sameeksha' magazine, published in Thrissur, featured lesbian suicides in Kerala. she was beginning to understand the accurate picture of Kerala society. That was when the news came that two girls from Idukki district had committed suicide from tribes who wanted to get married and live together, while 'Sahayatrika' wished to do more research on this issue. The inquiry into why sexual minorities seek suicide in Kerala was politically significant.

In many respects, such inquiries seemed to help uncover the actual situation in Kerala with Dr. Jayasree, Reshma Bhardwaraj and Meena Gopal (activists in this field) conducting fact-finding on lesbian suicides in Kerala. They went to the house of the girls who committed suicide. One girl's family responded, '*it would be better for her daughter to die than for such a relationship*'. Family members also told them their daughter would not have died if they had intervened earlier. During these years, the group 'Sahayatrika' had to go through many stages; as a funded N.G.O., and without funding, it had to work for the underground network. It became an independent registered organization in 2008.

The main goals of Sahayatrika are to establish a support network for supporting women of sexual minority and provide them with counselling and legal assistance, investigate suicide and other human rights violations and document the marginalization of lesbian/ bisexual women in Kerala. A few fact-finding efforts have been made based on reports in local newspapers over the years and provide support and assistance to women who contacted by letter, email and phone.

Struggles

After the first project, they turned down the fund for political reasons and continued to meet and talk to sexual minorities. Many lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have sought the organization's help and intervened and assisted them. Unlike many urbanized lesbian groups in India, people who sought help from Sahayatrika were largely backward in the economic context.

The stories of those who sought Sahayatrika were no different from those who feared suicide. The experience of Sahayatrika is quite different from that of the urban lesbian groups in India. Unlike many lesbian groups in India, this organization was not formed by lesbians. Those who came in contact with Sahayatrika were from all walks of life. It is different from those groups who have urban, middle-class women characters.

All those experiences strengthened the connection with politics. It had the support of organizations and politicians who supported our leading workforce in various ways, including women with diverse backgrounds and identities. The recognition and awareness that need to be gained through the public sphere must ensure the privacy and security who work with 'Sahayatrika'. Sahayatrika has realized that its politics is not only about gender and Sexuality but also about race, religion and caste, those who sought help of Sahayatrika disadvantaged with these too. All of this has led to the questioning of our perceptions of feminism.

Many of the women-loving women were not aware of the very term 'lesbian'. Many identified themselves as transgender or transgender from male to female and vice versa (Shah, Merchant, Mahajan, & Nevatia, 2015). In response to the constant insulting news coverage in the media, a lesbian couple came out in 2004, and they started their helpline with the help of 'fame'. Any action for sexual rights in Kerala is possible only by addressing the dilemmas of advertising and defaming content. There were more dangers involved in media publicity and portrayal. For the media, it's a kind of sensational item which they gave with over-sexualization. Because of the inclined portrayal of media, ordinary people kept aside from public visibility (Reshma).

Sahayatrika is an organization with no spokespersons. They had to rely on and use the same media that created dangers and manipulation. Hence, through the same media, many people get know about Sahayatrika and also women loving women could find it.

During 2003-2007, Sahayatrika did not receive formal funds. Yet the organization survived. People who came to the community and approached for help used Sahayatrika's name. Deepa Vasudevan's house for a few years in Kottayam became the office of 'Sahayatrika'. LGBTQ people used the house as a shelter and for informal gatherings. In the meantime, they have supported the women and transgender community in Kerala through their network of political friendships, support and assistance as much as possible. Sometimes the interventions can be a release from house arrest or compulsory psychiatric treatment; it can be legal aid, police cases or the basics of subsistence. Deepa Vasudevan collected newspaper clippings of news related to queer topics, participated in some conferences and shared her experiences, tried to present

real situations in many places. It should be noted that all these activities were carried out at a time when the N.G.O.s working among H.I.V. affected and the mainstream women's movement in Kerala was reluctant to understand or support the issues faced by the queer people⁵.

Although a small fund was received in 2007, it was not enough to pay the office rent or salary. With that, meetings were held in parks, hotel rooms and friends' homes. Sahayatrika was registered as an independent organization in January 2008. In 2009 an office was started. To change the public consciousness, Sahayatrika participated in various rallies with various political rights movements in support of the rights of sexual minorities. By participating in the organization of the sexual self-Determination convention held in Thrissur and holding public meetings and queer film festivals. In 2010, the queer pride march was launched in Kerala for the first time, which has been campaigning to withdraw IPC 377.

Amidst all these attempts, they maintain friendly relations with the feminist movements in Kerala and youth movements and help each other. As a queer activist and person with queer identity, Deepa Vasudevan understood the difference between many preconceived notions that discriminate against them and create problems. In the early years of talking about Sexuality and sexual minorities in public and political spaces in Kerala, Deepa was subjected to personal gossip and criticism about her foreign status; she was not a professional, strict feminist.

“Certainly, the dominant metaphors of feminist critiques of society are familial in origin, the word 'patriarchy' itself, familiarly ensconced at the center of the feminist lexicon, locate power in literal and metaphorical fatherhood and define family as the scene”. (Michie, 1992) As Helena Michie noted, (1992) “feminism has come to occupy a contradictory place with regard to the family and to the familial drama at the heart of all psychoanalytic and some sociological accounts of gender. Critics will accuse by tagging being anti-family, feminists have become, in the idiom of, homewreckers”. Certainly, this is how society views feminists, and no wonders that Deepa who subjected to harassment. Any woman who stepped into public will constantly experience personal harassment, calling them as less feminine by comparing ideal women, say whose appropriate space is domestic.

Deepa Vasudevan revealed her sexual identity only in the spaces where she generally feels safe. This was the tactic used by many queer persons in Kerala. Society is not homogenous;

⁵ Self Translated from a Malayalam book Mithyakalkkappuram: Swavarga Laigikatha Keralathil, 2009 (Beyond myth: Homosexuality in Kerala) by Reshma Baradwaj.

some people support homosexuality and gender differences, even in the initial time, who secretly support each other. Some said the organization is for sex trafficking, which can turn down the supporters because of the defaming they will receive from the public. The worst case is that community members from the grassroots, especially transgender people lose their place of residence and job due to their identity (ibid).

But slowly, LGBT rights and related issues gained more acceptance in Kerala. There is a lot of public debate about this issue happening today, and perceived it as a denial of human rights, people coming forefront to support and address the issue. Sahayatrika remembers the atmosphere when IPC 377 was acquitted by Delhi high court. Many youths and organizations supported the high court decision, but the reactions were entirely different from when they spoke out against the law in 2001-2002. Lesbian and trans-men face double barriers as sexual minorities because of the identity of 'female' in the home. Patriarchal restrictions on freedom and movement, and their sexual behaviours are monitored; householders see them as an object of protection needed utmost. When parents find their daughter has a homosexual relationship, the first thing to do is to put her under house arrest, subject to compulsory psychiatric treatment, forcing the relationship to separate.

According to Kemp & Squires (1999), "Sexuality is a domain of exploration, pleasure and agency as well a domain of restriction, repression and danger. Radical feminist perspectives characteristically castigate heterosexuality as an oppressive socially constructed patriarchal institution forcibly imposed upon women. Heterosexuality perceived to be the primary sphere of male power, male control of female Sexuality of being foundational to patriarchal power".

As Adrienne Rich (1980) the failure to examine "heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including by physical violence and false consciousness". To sustain the institution of family, as pointed out by Reshmi (2016), who says that the patriarchal system imposes a clear divide between men and women in a dichotomous system, with men at the center of the system and women pushed to the fringes.

The social justice of sexual and gender minority women is not only the recognition of their differences, but it is deeply tied to the social freedom of women. If the position of women is changed in society, the space to self-determination will gradually get. In Kerala society, Trans-men and women face many innate social weaknesses. There is no cultural atmosphere here to recognize the Hijras as the other states of India do. Trans-women have their community in

other states; many migrated to other states in their initial stage of identity revealing. Transgender men do not have a traditional community in other states like transgender women. Trans-men's lived realities will be more difficult, as pointed out by Shah, Merchant, Mahajan, & Nevatia, (2015) their embodied experiences made them women not their bodies. Even though they are subjected to the supervision of even progressive political societies; many of them force to hide their identities. Many rights of citizenship are denied to transgender people because they live within the gender of their choice.

Different social movements, the feminist and queer movements, have different histories in other societies. LGBT movements emerged in the wake of Stonewall protests in the west in the 1960s against the backdrop of numerous movements for the liberation of blacks and women. The sexual revolution was the creation of various cultural and political contexts. When Sahayatrika begins to talk about the problems of sexual minorities in Kerala, the women's liberation movements face a different historical context.

Lesbian suicides

Positive media coverage was the most effective way for women to learn about Sahayatrika. The observation from the letters received demonstrates the various facets of the institutional and emotional marginalisation lesbian and bisexual women in Kerala experience.. The investigation into suicides created the conditions for the Sahayatrika to bring up the rights of lesbian sexual minorities politically in Kerala. They made suicide reports from eight-year-olds with solid references of homosexuality. The initial limitation was that they could only investigate the suicides that came to media attention. There were, of course, other incidents that went unnoticed and committed.

The lesbian suicides and oppression of lesbians can be understood through Adrienne Rich's framework (1980). She attempted to "integrate an analysis of sexual violence within a framework of enforcing compulsory heterosexuality. She argues that heterosexuality must be examined, historically and cross-culturally, as a social institution within which men use various forms of control, coercion and force to ensure sexual access to women".

Cynic people said Sahayatrika gained publicity because lesbian identity has become commodified and sexualized, especially in popular publications, such as internet bleach and other popular media outlets. This is somewhat true that any sexual minority group or individual in the public sphere will be immediately subjected to torture and hyper-sexualization. In the

case of homosexuals, this generally comes down to non-violent gender stereotypes. At first, socio-political activists reacted negatively when Sahayatrika fellows tried to talk about lesbian suicides. Doubts and objections were raised by many. The main question is whether the people who committed suicide are really lesbians. Another tendency is to compare the figures they present with suicides in general and trivialize, 'is this a big problem?' The homicides need to be understood in the context of the problems and great violence that female homosexuals generally experience.

A young feminist conference took place in Hyderabad that was for the first-time women activists in Kerala had seen and interacted. Deepa Vasudevan, a young feminist and founder of Sahayatrika, were there with them. After the conference, Sakhi, a women's resource centre, conducted a gender training conference; at that time, Deepa came across the joint suicide of two tribal girls in news reports, which shocked her. She went rest of the feminists of Sakhi, they trivialized the issue, and that did not affect them as it was to Deepa; they did not conduct any protest. Deepa wondered why feminist movements did not take any interest in this regard. It shows the feminists' reluctance in involving in sexuality matters.

“Newspaper reports of double suicides among women companions unwilling to be separated are probably the most visible indicators of the difficulties endured by women-loving women in Kerala. Other news stories have also appeared in the mainstream press, of women asking courts for permission to live together, or students being evicted from schools or hostels for having lesbian relationships” (Deepa,2005)⁶.

Lesbian suicide can be seen as claiming recognition for a non-normative sexual relationship through an ultimate stepping out of the social. The ending of life here becomes a desperate act of visibility, a slashing of the social sphere by staging a public death. The wandering bird does not cry (Deshadana Kili Karayarilla, 1986), a film was released before the series of joint suicides of the lesbian couple got the attention of dominant political sphere, opened a multiple sexual imagination but did not set a film as 'lesbian' initially. It was one of the rare Malayalam films from the eighties which portrayed the suicide of 'two females' at the end. This film is vital in the face of the concern around lesbian suicides. The only desperate measure same-sex couples can take in the absence of any existing recognition is to die together.

⁶ Essay by Deepa Vasudevan in 'Because I Have a voice: queer Politics in India' edited by Aravind Narrain and Gautham Bhan (2014).

The suicide in Deshadana Kili Karayarilla can be read within the “conventions of climaxes in romantic films and literature in Malayalam. This plot resolution is reminiscent of endings in other celebrated heterosexual romances in Malayalam literature and film, where the ultimate triumph of love is to die together, especially in the face of social opposition” (Mokkil, 2009).

Politicization of death says that the sheer disparity in how individuals in positions of power decide who lives and dies. In this context heteronomous families and systems plays as power structure which decides who to live and not. All humans will die at some point but the sheer inequality created by power can decide the destiny. There are many causations for this like conflict in self-image created in hetero-normative systems, difficulties in come-out and apparent negligence of alternate desires.

The over-emphasis of homosexuals in marginalized communities on media portrayals has led to their sceptics about fact-finding, which brought new insight. Most of those who committed suicides were women from Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and O.B.C.s. Most are low-income, such as factory workers, sewing workers, agricultural workers, and wage workers. Many argue that Sexuality and the rights of the sexual minority are not as important for those who live in extreme poverty. One perception hidden in such a contradictory statement is that sex is a middle-class/ theoretical issue that rural and submissive women have nothing to do with.

Maya Sharma (2006) explains that so many women from economically disadvantaged strata unravel their alternate sexualities and desires through the battle they are live in. Their intimate companionships in many aspects intertwining with heteronomous family, patriarchy and various power structures. Sharma (2006) “successfully challenges the dominant imagery of the homosexual subject in India — as urbane, westernised, college-educated and English-speaking middle class, that a sole focus on pride parades, gay queer collectives and gay bars seem to project”.

Inquiries of Sahayatrika have often provided an opportunity to discuss the politics of Sexuality in different communities. They could talk openly about their efforts with the various community members who have taken a stand on the issue. The 'Kudumbasree' called them to talk about their activities of them. Inquiries into the numerous suicides in marginalized communities have unequivocally proved that some claim that it is only a problem of the elite is entirely baseless. Marginalized communities are overrepresented in suicide reports. Middle-class women have incomparable resources and potential. Wealthy women can work, live and

leave their families as they like. It is a fact that upper castes can keep their children's suicides secret and watch without any public propaganda. The remarkable thing here is that social prejudices were strong enough to force a person to commit suicide accused of being a lesbian. The general notion is those female homosexuals have no right to privacy. The media and public perception see lesbians as ineligible for confidentiality. Women who do not follow the 'so-called' female mannerisms and look like men have faced many problems; they lose their jobs and places of residence. This is especially difficult for financially backward female homosexuals.

As Barbara Smith (1982) noted, “feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, older women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism but merely female self-aggrandizement”.

Aspect of Sexuality through feminist eyes

It is the feminist movement that asserts that the family is not a holy concept but an institution that is oppressive to women. Without evaluating the feminist movement in its inception, assess the current sexuality movement as neither realistic nor objective and scientific; it's like an evolution, not a sudden development. The main concern of those days was that the movements undertook the task of breaking down the family structure and exposing the exploitation of women in the workplace, sexual harassment and rape in society through a feminist perspective. This was the basis of today's sexuality movement. Feminist movements led to the second stage, which is Sexuality. To an extent, it has broken many morals, said feminist activist K.Ajitha said.

I have been there since the beginning of Sahayatrika, said Dalit feminist Rekha Raj; she was one of the first feminists to associate with Sahayatrika since its inception. The response of the women's movement in Kerala to the Sahayatrika has to be told in several phases. At the first time, it was sceptical. Many people had no idea about it. Nevertheless, there have been discussions about Sexuality since the 1980s. A workshop on Sexuality was held in 1993; women sat together and discussed Sexuality. But there was no political atmosphere to move those discussions forward. Because sex racket cases in Kerala rose very fast by the mid-1990s, it became a legal battle. It lost much of the energy of the feminist movements in Kerala in connection with the public litigation related to the sex racket case. Energy goes into the

discussions about sexual harassment, rape and consent; the feminist movement did not reach the discussion of homosexuality or compulsory heterosexuality. The important thing is that feminists had focused on other things. In the ice cream parlour case, all the energy of Anveshi is gone. She was involved in direct protest against the government and went to jail in her 17th year.

In Kerala and India, questions about Sexuality being asked too late, equality, and violence were more or less dominant aspects. The issues of various identities, such as gender and Sexuality of women, were not addressed much but gradually opened up. In the time of the inception of the feminist movement, when it comes to the aspect of Sexuality, activists usually asked why we involve in this. Feminism is already misunderstood as family wreckers, and as men haters, Sexuality will intensify the misunderstanding that was prohibited from public speaking. K.M. Sheeba, academician and activist, said there were many corrections in the international women's movement. Despite the 200 years of feminism in Europe, only with the second wave of feminism, many serious questions are being asked. International feminism in the 1960s asked feminism in the 1960s asked where African women were, where lesbians were and why the question of Sexuality is not raised.

K.M. Sheeba said, Do you want free sex? Feminism is for the sake of sex were some of the derogatory questions raised against feminism for two decades. With so many such allegations, they felt they were not ready to take up the subject of Sexuality at that time. However, gradually, it has moved forward, and society has taken over this. There have been many setbacks, but they have been able to take it slowly.

As already stated, sex work (labour aspect) and AIDS prevention programmes gained space for debates in the public sphere before the Sahayatrika (identity aspect of Sexuality) gained its space. Bodhana, a feminist organization in Kozhikode, had protested against the death of Kunjibi, a sex worker killed at the Kozhikode women's police station. Kunjibi, a mother of two, was a victim of the widespread talaq system at the time. Kunjibi was a helpless woman who had to leave her home along with her children. The poor women, who had no idea about the outside world, finally reached Kozhikode. Many agents in the city pushed women into sex work, especially at the bus stands and public places these agents were located. They could easily trap these women with whom their husbands or lovers cheated.

Once caught in sex work, they will never get rid of it; if they want to do any other job, who would be willing to give them a job? Society sees them with contempt. Furthermore, the agents

who put them in this trap will never allow them to escape. Such a woman needed the favour and cooperation of such agents and the police and other goons for survival. Bangladesh colony, one of the slums in Kozhikode where Kunjibi lived, is inhabited by thieves, robbers, pickpockets, and sex workers. One day the Kozhikode town S.I. caught her and took straight to the women's station and put her in lock up. The following day the outside world heard that Kunjibi hung up in the lock-up. Her accomplices told the world that several police officers had sexually assaulted her last night, that the women police and town S.I. had been severely beaten, and that they had been locked up and hung up when she died.

Civil rights activists formed an action committee to organize demonstrations in the Bangladesh colony, Bodhana took the initiative to form an action committee. The main objectives of the action committee were to investigate the case properly and conduct a judicial inquiry to dispel the mystery of this death. The fellow workers of Kunjibi also participated in the protest; that was the first time sex workers had organized a protest; before then, they were marginalized and 'invisibilized' from the mainstream (K.Ajitha).

K.M. Sheeba said Sex work or prostitution was a hotly debated issue in Kerala in the 1990s. At the same time, people involved in this organized to get recognition of it as a profession. *FIRM* is an organization working to control AIDS, and they would do condom distribution. They tried to organize a 'festival of pleasure'; hence, they had to drop the plan last time. There was controversy then as to whether it should be seen as a profession, and such controversies continued to be intense. A group of people argued that prostitution should look at through the lens of patriarchy and capitalism and the women trapped in it. Another group of people realized that it is a profession.

Whether it can be seen as a job, like any other profession or should it be seen as a job of women trapped in the patriarchy, capitalism that gives and buys the body. Do we need to normalize the profession? Personally, it is not easy to accept it as a profession. It needs to uphold the angle of patriarchy and need to protect their rights. It is essential to understand that the hands of patriarchy appear when it recognizes as a profession, said K.M. Sheeba.

According to K.M. Sheeba Sahayatrika is an organization established in Kerala which launched issues of sexual minorities in Kerala. Dr Reka Raj, a Dalit academician, said she has a personal connection with Sahayatrika. Anveshi started its magazine publication in 2010 named Sangaditha, devoted an entire magazine to Sahayatrika. It has carried out a very revolutionary mission in the society of Kerala. Sahayatrika conducted much discussion and engagement

about women and sexual minorities when there was no platform to speak openly about Sexuality. The revolution it has created in the Kerala public consciousness cannot be underestimated. It is through people realized that such Sexuality exists in Kerala; they worked hard to establish that each Sexuality is natural and not unnatural. Small organizations existed in the late 1990s and early 2000s and brought such issues to the public attention, it has changed in a big way. There is a similar background in making transgender policy. Such thoughts on the government's side are part of severe discussions in Kerala and the initiative Sahayatrika took. Looking back, it may seem easy today, but the effort they took was played as bearing the torch.

Feminist organizations in Kerala looked at women's issues through the lens of exploitation. Sexual violence was initially the focal area—sexual violence in the domestic sphere and sexual atrocities in public spheres were serious issues for feminist movements. Women were attacked brutally by police in the Thankamani violence; they beat women in their houses. At that time, many groups came together in the name of Kerala Sthree Vedi. They went to Thankamani and made fact-finding and prepared a detailed report, even though the network diminished after one year.

K. Ajitha is not ready to see sex work as work. They have human rights that have to be protected. There are many social reasons why women fall into this, it is the result of the patriarchal structure of society. Feminists say that one has the right to decide how one wants to have sex and how to love. Family and marriage need to be democratized, another need of feminists. When it is said that the structure must be reformulated, the woman should have the right to choose her partner, but there is no choice in sex work. She has a different opinion on reading LGBTQ+ and sex work together. Once the stigma of sex work is gone and normalized, there are many problems. One of the feminist activists said she has no coherence with Sahayatrika and its politics. Deepa Vasudevan, the founder of it, came from Canada and her style was per.

Fact-finding by Sahayatrika

Self-translated from a Malayalam book 'Mithyakalkkappuram: Swavarga Laigikatha Keralathil' (Beyond Myth: Queer lives in Kerala), in which Sahayatrika has published a fact-finding report.

Ten years of newspaper reports from 1990 to 2000 prepared by Sahayatrika revealed that 31 girls in Kerala committed suicide after falling in love with women. In addition to the imaginative notes of media, they have received rave reviews ranging from why they came out to the sympathetic solidarity of international activists. The fact-finding group consisted of seven people with different sexual orientations and political differences.

In Kerala, which has a strict conservative stance on women, it is necessary to see what obstacles women face in expressing their daily desires, love and freedom in their daily lives and their personal and political sense. It is necessary to realize that homosexuality is a reality in everyday life, even when it is entirely invisible. Beyond mere truth-seeking, fact-finding provides an opportunity to understand the general perceptions of female homosexuals, the insults they face and the resistance they are making. As outsiders, Sahayatrika had many limitations in this investigation.

"Meera and Ammini were two girls who were relatives and neighbours. The family did not like the closeness between them. Ammini's father and Meera had an argument over it. After an argument, Meera and Ammini decided to stay at Meera's house and went there at night. As per the police case filed by Ammini's father, the two were taken first to the police station and then to a psychiatrist. Two months later, their bodies were found on the banks of a nearby river after they had committed suicide by consuming poison".

There are different narratives about this incident. It revolves around various stories from different social, emotional and official backgrounds. Some of the narratives are two girls who love each other, two who were close friends, and got trapped in a sex racket trying to seduce an innocent girl. In the narrative of Meera's mother about her daughter, there was an attempt to establish that the relationship between Meera and Ammini was not lesbian but just friends. In the narration of Ammini's father Narayanan, there was a reluctance to talk about this in the first place. Sahayatrika's team exposes the violence and complexities through these narratives of how moral crusaders adjust the living and the dead to social 'correctness'.

Those who oppose them thought it was a sexual relationship, and those who supported them firmly believed they were just close and friendly. This is because of the general belief that lesbians are bad women. The Incident cannot be said of lesbian invisibility; the relationship between them was known to everyone there, before and after death. Only a handful of people

could publicly acknowledge and say that the relationship was acceptable and possible. In a short time, the attitude of those who accepted everything would be 'all right from deviant'.

A large crowd has gathered to see Meera's dead body to confirm whether she is male or female. How a lesbian couple will have children, whether they will get absolute sexual pleasure, and social security are significant mainstream concerns. They are eager to repeat that a lesbian relationship is impossible and unnatural.

Through the suicide, it can be understood how the police intervention and medical treatment caused mental distress. Police narratives could not be included because they were not allowed to record. The police officers talked about their relationship's whole 'abnormality' and the need for treatment. Although the psychiatrist was relatively sympathetic, he felt that if they became separated, the problem would be solved and would accept only if there is no way. Like many psychiatrists in India, he thought that a person's sexual orientation could be treated through aversion therapy, the doctor's only objection to the therapy was that it was wasting time unnecessarily.

In narratives from outside the community, in addition to being lesbian, identities such as tribal women and poor young women were mixed in. Alcoholism, drug abuse and sex racket were linked to the issue. Those who have no personal relationship with deceased women spoke like this. People accuse the literacy and poverty of their parents as the cause. Undoubtedly, the tragedy was due to the community's intolerance and the general public that two women living together are in no way acceptable.

Going through the fact-finding of Sahayatrika, the researchers could draw some of the arguments assumed by the people related to the deceased.

1. Strong woman called as a boy.

Meera worked at Shailaja's house as a maid. Saraswathi was a local political leader who assisted the Sahayatrika team in this fact-finding and established contact with those in the area. Shailaja's response to the Sahayatrika team reveals that women who are bold if they transgress the gender roles are considered boys.

Shailaja: She is like a boy in everything. That is, only in appearances, but nothing inwardly. She was very bold. In her home, she was the youngest sibling among three daughters. It seems that their parents raised her as a boy, which is apparent in

her dresses and character... she could do all the work that was supposed to do by a boy. At that time everyone thought this was a boy.

We are told that intimacy with Ammini is like friends that usually feel everyone. Everyone misunderstood this and said, 'that was a boy'. Everyone thought it was an attachment between two opposite sex. They always want to see each other, talk to each other, like that.

Sahayatrika: Didn't you say that Meera behaved like a boy was misunderstood, what did Meera tell you about the same?

Shailaja: Everyone says she is a boy, other than that there was no particular problem with it. However, all the people... everyone saw Meera in the wrong way.

One of the neighbours, Mini's responses to Meera's attire

Sahayatrika: Did you grow up with Meera? You know well about her? At any time, did you wonder why Meera dressing up like this?

Mini: We grow up together. I felt that sometime in childhood she used to wear a skirt and blouse, at a certain stage she started to wear shirts and dresses of men. Then she acts like men.

2. Hetero-normativity

In the words of Meera's mother, Santha's hetero-normativity is very evident; she tried to establish the relationship between Meera and Ammini as close friends.

Santha: . Ammini parents had rivalry to my child, they are the people. Meera gone, she was only there for me, now... Ammini's parents saw Meera and Ammini hold hands each other and stays together at many times. It was nothing but just friends that were not serious to me. If they are close friends, things will be like this; I did not said anything in this regard. However, Narayanan and his wife were restless about this. They started to make quarrel with Meera and asked, 'why are you sitting after school time here? Do not you go home?' the same thing happened many times.

I only said, 'take care of your things; go to her only for serious matters. She had some more teen friends, nobody here for her for free time, but they both were too close, unlike the rest of her friends.

One of the neighbours Mini said that because they are girls, the relationship between the two girls is wrong.

Mini: Girls should not do like this, but I read in Manorama (newspaper) about this... between two men and two women... Meera showed me after she read the newspaper. After that, she told me to show this to her mom; I said, 'I do not have time; if it is your need, you should. She will take examples from Manorama to get accepted from the family and asked, 'what is the problem?' I do not know anything but this is not acceptable.

3. Girls should behave like the gender roles attributed to them.

Girls should not do this; it is bad. If it is a male and female, it's okay; what to do with two girls behaving like this ?If I say something, these girls will ignore it, they will not respond. What can we do then said one of the neighbours, Mini said.

Sahayatrika: How did Mini get to know about their relationship?

Mini: I know it through their behaviour...Nowadays, they were showed in physical proximity holding each other and put hands on the shoulder. After I saw this, my doubt grew gradually. I thought its a new act from them; earlier, things would not be like this. Then we told them to act like this; if they are from the opposite gender, that is acceptable; not supposed to be two girls. But they did not obey.

4. Compulsory heterosexuality

The conversation between Sahayatrika and Narayanan (Ammini's father) explicitly shows the compulsory heterosexuality people must follow.

Sahayatrika: Do you have a complaint against the doctor?

Narayanan: no, why should I complain?

Sahayatrika: The doctor's medicine made them tired and exhaustive.

I took them to the doctor...

Sahayatrika: Is anyone told to take them to the police station? Or is the decision from home?

Yes. Ammini and Meera were very persistent about that, and then I decided. They did not come down even after the police came.

Sahayatrika: If everyone leaves them alone for a while, would you think everything would be okay?

If so, it would not be right.

Sahayatrika: Ever heard of any other such relationship?

No. We opposed this because it was between two girls. How to marry a girl to a girl? If it was a boy, we could have done that.

Sahayatrika: Can't they live together? Meera is a working person. Ammini, too can work. Then what? Can't families sustain themselves without men?

That.....

Sahayatrika: What did the doctor say when you consulted?

They are not old to live together, just 16. To get married when they reach 18, told to wait until then.

Sahayatrika: What did you feel?

I said I do not see it this way.

The conversation between Sahayatrika and the psychiatrist.

Sahayatrika: What treatment did you give them?

Doctor: I gave some anti-anxieties them. That, too, I think they discontinued it. Two were shown the same sort of reaction. Not a reaction that was conversion symptom. Meantime, one was staying at 13 Km. Difference. Conversion symptoms came to them at the same time, and both of them was brought at the same time in the causality. I felt like a kind of miracle. I felt like that was an accidental coincidence.

When i looked at the behaviour and conversation of the children, the dealings are very much like mature couples. That sixteen-year-old girl and her behaviour were like that of an old mature woman from an orthodox Hindu family, very controlled, not silly. Relatives were so curious, i put them outside and talked to them with one of my female staff inside. They had a kind of contempt for these girls.

Sahayatrika: Did you talk to the relatives?

Doctor: Spoke. No. I said, no matter what you say, it will take time to change. They love each other. If you think they are wrong, separate them and stop. If that intensity of love is still there, it is useless for us to make big steps. If it is a boy and a girl, they will register the marriage. Even if that relationship is unacceptable, we will have to accept it. Alternatively, if they do something dangerous, it will not be easy.

Sahayatrika: If there had been a little support, they would not have committed suicide.

Doctor: I think they will not do this; there was little support.

Sahayatrika: Did they openly talk to you?

Doctor: They spoke openly. They came to me very scared. I told them, 'you girls do not need to be afraid. You feel at ease. Why so scared? Humans make mistakes; no need to worry; we can correct this. We will take responsibility that no one harasses you here, and the police will not tell any bad comments. It would be complicated to tell the police that you have sexual contact. Age can also be a problem. If you are very close, try to separate for six months. Even if it continues, it is for you to decide and in the meanwhile, you can have a talk with me. Now i am prescribing some medicine for you, do not think I made you sick by giving this. Now you have some unnecessary anxieties, giving this to reduce.

Sahayatrika: Did you talk to the parents?

Doctor: They were not interested. They behave it is like a disease. They are not educated, and even educated people cannot accept them. I am a psychiatrist and frequently work in the field to understand them. However, if I say the same things to my family, they will not accept it; what will be my old parents' reaction?

Sahayatrika: Have you got cases like this before?

Doctor: Yes

Sahayatrika: Have you given counselling to them?

Doctor: Yes

Sahayatrika: What kind of counselling did you give them? What will you tell them?

Doctor: Barely two people came to me with the need to get married.

Sahayatrika: Are women coming to consult?

Doctor: Yes, women used to come... two women came even after marriage. They want to... a woman who got married, and her husband in the Middle East and her neighbour came, they want to get married.

Sahayatrika: Did they come by themselves?

Doctor: Yes.

Sahayatrika: Why they came there? What was the concerning problem?

Doctor: They cannot separate. She wants to divorce her husband. 'We want to stay together; they said their loneliness has created this thing'.

Sahayatrika: Do they want to change the situation?

Doctor: No, they do not want to change that situation. They will not come for treatment continuously.

Sahayatrika: If they do not want to change, why did they come to you then?

Doctor: She was a relative of a clinical psychologist. The other woman was more wavering though they did not want to change; her husband would be back soon. The fear is that if the husband finds out, he may harm the girl. After I talked, she wanted to continue the relationship with another woman and planned to continue the marital relationship simultaneously.

Sahayatrika: Are male partners coming to you? What is the reason for coming?

Doctor: They are the most came to me. Some people want to get married to change prevalent sexual problems; others want to change this at a particular stage.

Sahayatrika: Is there any treatment you did to change this?

Doctor: There are different kinds of methods, anxiety counselling and role-changing models; some are done with photographs.

Sahayatrika: about aversion therapy?

Doctor: Usually, I do not do this; in cases, I refer clinical psychologists, it is a time-consuming thing. And it takes a lot and time and needs to put interests too. Different kinds of aversion are there, clinical and physical aversion

Sahayatrika: It is a time when there is much debate going on about the rights of homosexuals. Many countries plan to implement laws allowing women or men to live together. What is the doctor's opinion about you doing therapy and counselling to separate them in that context?

Doctor: It is contextual; it depends on is they have motivation. Most of them are bisexuals. Just reach here circumstantially; people like them can make a change. Even the laws are there, people have families, wives and children, and if they abandon them and leave with a guy... in those circumstances, we will try our maximum. Sometimes we are given some antianxieties or medicine to change our mind (he talked about homosexuality related to specific diseases).

Sahayatrika: Is there any effect on antianxieties?

Doctor: Absolutely, it can reduce internal anxieties.

Sahayatrika: To change sexual orientation possible?

Doctor: If you are going to write an exam because you are tensed and cannot perform well. If I give you some antianxiolytic medicine your anxiety component will decrease. So you can improve the performance. It will not be receptive if you are tensed and anxious; if you are at ease, it becomes receptive.

Sahayatrika: If you give medicine, will they become more self-confident and assertive?

Doctor: No, I can describe both sides of this naturally; in that stage, they will understand it from the neutral stage. On one side is the family and on another side is the lover. If your parents do dangerous and self harming things, how will you be able to cope with that? Likewise, i will convince with negative and positive points. We should not take theory only; we have to be practical.

Sahayatrika: Suicide rates in Kerala are high. Is this also causing for the increase in the number?

Doctor: This is one reason I did not get any satisfying suicide reports until now. Police writing unauthentic reports, government hospitals dealing with many suicide attempts, women from financially sound families hiding their suicides by treating in private hospitals at any cost, is anyone reporting that? How many homicides are becoming suicides and vice versa in reports?

Sahayatrika: The girls who suicide made that how many days after they consulted you?

Doctor: With a gap of three months

Sahayatrika: After consulting you, they went to some other hospital for treatment. Do you know?

Doctor: I do not know; I did not get any details. They came one evening, and I admitted them. The next day at eleven clock, I sent the parents home with details. After two days, they came with conversion symptoms, I saw that in causality. After discharging, with no details about them, I saw the suicide in the newspaper.

Sahayatrika: Why did they come again?

Doctor: They had neck pain, then it has gone. "They just told that they have some restlessness feeling and then the eye is rolling up,... the body itself is losing control like that. Actually... the drug which was given was diazepam. Diazepam does not have the reaction also because the drug we use for such restlessness is diazepam, which too just 2 mg. I have not given an adult dose, i have just given 2 mg., half in the morning and one in night.

Sahayatrika: So you gave them diazepam, and they had this effect?

Doctor: No, actually, they did not take the medicines...somehow or other, they had a sort of restlessness.

Sahayatrika: And they had this simultaneous side effect?

Doctor: Yes, not side effect... they were having some symptoms for which they came to the causality. That too, both of them were not staying together at that time; they were from separate places, but somehow it happened the same time, and they were brought almost simultaneously to the causality. How and why it has come, I do not know.

Sahayatrika: And so when they were readmitted to the hospital?

Doctor: Not readmitted. No, I did not readmit the patients. I just gave a placebo, and vitamin tablet and sent the patient back.

Sahayatrika: Did their tension change?

Doctor: It changed a little bit. I gave vitamin tablets only. We are one hundred per cent sure this was not a drug-induced reaction. Why should we just give medicines? So that they should feel that they will get better by taking medicines, we just gave them a vitamin tablet and B complex tablet.

Sahayatrika: And you did not feel it was necessary to investigate them. Like why...

Doctor: No, no, no

Sahayatrika: If it was some sort of drug-induced problem?

Doctor: No, no, no... there is no use. 'We know that it is now daytime. Then why am I go to that detail to confirm and prove that it is daytime'. Because I am one hundred per cent sure and confident it is not drug-induced... and why spend money also. They are poor people. To go to the laboratory and even then it will not...

(...)

Sahayatrika: One of the girl's fathers said that when they returned from the hospital, they were so changed that they were almost dead... is it because?

Doctor: They are ignorant about these things... now that the children are no more, they want to get the sympathy of the public... otherwise, these parents are harassing these children like anything, and there was nobody to help except for a few good police people and our hospital authorities. In the hospital also, even certain people were looking at them as if they had done a wrong thing. I made them understand that they deserve sympathy. They require consolation. We people have to help them in these matters. Moreover, they were never drugged, walked very smartly, and were very happy. That is further misinterpretation or to get further sympathy from the people.

(Team Sahayatrika explaining about them to the doctor, the intention of the network to support women from sexual minority)

Doctor: if you are supporting, you are encouraging this. Are we needed to encourage these things?

Sahayatrika: is it just because we encouraged? There are many reasons for this.

Doctor: most homosexual acts can be seen in military barracks because of close association; situations promote this. To move towards this because habit formation, if we change the situation, can divert the situation and will lead to heterosexual relationships

Sahayatrika: situations causing heterosexuality too?

Doctor: yes, yes

Sahayatrika: we customized our minds by teaching heterosexuality is the norm.

Doctor: if we say that, we have our own culture, right?

Sahayatrika: we will share you in how many places homosexuality had mentioned in our culture after the tape stopped.

The conversation with the doctor shows that he is sympathetic to those girls, but he is very hetero-normative and believes in compulsory heterosexuality. He believed it could be cured through various treatments. Homosexuality is against the culture, according to him. During data collection, Dr Reka Raj, the feminist activist, said that even doctors believe homosexuality is abnormal, so there is no wonder that feminists believed the same at that time.

Chapter IV

Summary and Conclusion.

This study was an attempt to engage in the feminist movement and sexuality politics in Kerala. The debates on female sexuality emerged long before sexuality politics as a collective happened, but it was in the line of essentialism. Social reform and community-based movements tried to discipline sexuality and related practices. All these reform movements tried to modernize the community. Niveditha Menon (2008) “finds it impossible to engage with what is referred to as sexuality in contemporary India without acknowledging its passage through the complexities of practices homogenized under the name of modernity”.

The family is viewed as controlling female sexuality and related practices, so family-centred laws and monogamous hetero-patriarchal families are viewed as essential for family stability. It could contain the women's choices and sexuality within the moral fold; hetero-patriarchal families are viewed as the norm in this regard. The anxieties of control over women, their bodies and sexuality, desire for normative families resulted in the abolition of matrilineal families, unlike the patriarchal system; here women had some autonomy. The series of legislative interventions and its proponents viewed matrilineal kinship as unnatural and were influenced by Victorian morality. They viewed the formation of natural families hindered by these practices and the enforcement of legislation needed to discipline it. The new familial institutions attributed the husband as the natural guardian of women and children, gaining control over female sexuality, marriage and procreation. The first and foremost place of women was family according to these ideals.

Recent feminist investigations of 20th-century community reform initiatives in Kerala highlighted the modernization of communities based on the shaping of desexualized female bodies (Devika, 2008). The major concern of feminist and sexuality politics is to destabilize family and marriage, which they consider oppressive to women. They challenged the dominant domestic ideology and viewed it from a constructionist perspective. Women's movement focused on various aspects and how they view the aspect of sexuality is one research question.

The women's movements in Kerala were too late to make a social change compared to other parts of India. After 1985 various autonomous movements started to function. Two strands of feminism emerged; political feminism and developmental feminism. Both feminisms motive was different. Political feminism viewed patriarchy as a significant threat that needs to be destroyed, and the state has its inherent patriarchy. At the same time, developmental feminism had no problem aligning with various state forces. Feminists viewed patriarchy as control of production, reproduction and sexuality by men. The existing familial relations and dominant domestic ideology need to destruct for feminists who emerged during reform movements. Bodhana, Prachodana, Prabudhatha, Anveshi women's counselling centre, and Sakhi women's resource centre are some feminist organizations that existed in the 1980s and 1990s. Some of them are still in function.

Feminist activists responded to sexuality differently. One of the respondents said that without looking at the feminist movements evaluating the current sexuality movement, it is neither realistic nor objective. Both feminist and sexuality movements called the family the oppressive institution. Feminist politics started to destabilize and call out the undemocratic nature of family. So, the feminists paved the way for sexuality politics in Kerala, though their motives were different.

Another activist said that the response of women's movement to sexuality should understand through several phases, sceptical to understanding. In the 1990s, many sex racket cases emerged, and many feminist groups launched legal battles against the culprits. Anveshi organization fought at the forefront. They lost much energy in these legal battles and could not possibly lead any unconventional debates further.

The questions of sexuality were too late in asked in the public sphere. The public saw feminist activists as family wreckers, less famine and for free sex, and they openly called it as such. Feminists feared that taking up the issue of sexuality would intensify the misunderstanding. At that time, feminists were unable to support women's desires and lead these discussions. Even international feminism also was very late in taking the issue of black women, lesbian women and the question of sexuality. One activist said she has no coherence with Sahayatrika and its politics; they function like foreign countries. As Deepa Vasudevan said, some feminists saw her as imported from somewhere and suspect her status and feminist position.

The significant aspects of women's movements were rape, dowry deaths, police violence against women, and sexual exploitation. They extensively intervened in sexuality in terms of

sexual violence; the Thankamani incident was an example. Bodhana, a feminist organization, protested the death of sex worker kunjibi, as stated in the second chapter. Sexual exploitation is the violence aspect of sexuality, while sex work is the labour aspect. It cannot be said that feminists not considered sexuality as an aspect. Desires and alternate sexualities come in terms of the identity aspect of sexuality. Sexuality is not a homogenized subject; it has various sub-themes that they have considered lately as a feminist issues.

The second research question examines how non-normative movements like Sahayatrika, an organization for female sexual minorities, speak about them and their trajectories in Kerala. Both feminist and non-normative movements are against patriarchy, while non-normative movements went one step further, that is, hetero-patriarchy. Activists involved in feminist movements understood sexuality differently.

Sahayatrika organization emerged in light of increased lesbian suicides in Kerala; the political atmosphere of Kerala at that time was very narrow in speaking and dealing with these issues. They prepared ten years newspaper report with a solid reference to homosexuality. They talked about same-sex relationships, desires, compulsory heterosexuality, and hetero-normativity of various institutions, including feminist movements. Sahayatrika struggled to establish sexuality politics in Kerala; it can be said that Sahayatrika's attempt is the first one explicitly talked about in this regard.

Sahayatrika's main goals are to establish a support network for women of sexual minority and to provide them with counselling and legal assistance, to investigate suicide and other human rights violations, and to document the marginalization of lesbian/ bisexual women in Kerala. A few fact-finding efforts have been made based on reports in local newspapers over the years to provide support and assistance to women contacted by letter, email and phone.

Understanding various sexuality debates in Kerala is one objective; various sexuality debates include reform movements to feminist and non-normative movements and Sahayatrika is already explained. To explain the activities of Sahayatrika by focusing on the lesbian women and their multiple marginalities is the second objective.

Sahayatrika's fact-finding shows that marginalized women are over-represented in lesbian suicides, which made rethinking of its politics. Dalits, Adivasis and Muslim representation and its over-emphasis on media made dangers. Marginalized women are already disadvantaged with their woman identity, then caste/class/ religion and the sexuality content add

marginalization into multiple levels. It is not true that women from well-to-do families have no lesbian inclination or do not have any suicidal tendencies, but the resources and social status protect them. Educated, English-speaking women could move out of Kerala and can live as they wish. The suicides of middle-class women can keep hidden from media propaganda. The Sahayatrika's politics was not only for sexuality but caste, class and religion.

The final objective of this study is to translate the Malayalam fact-finding report published by Sahayatrika. The fact-finding they prepared with ten years of newspaper reports from 1990 to 2000, 31 girls committed suicide. These fact-findings were the turning point of Sahayatrika; the public started to recognize them through this. Fact-finding made it possible to understand how people understand homosexuality, female desire and the insults they face daily.

'Meera and Ammini were two girls and relatives who fell in love'. The researcher has translated one of the fact-finding reports published by Sahayatrika. The report gives different narratives about the incident; the narratives are from Meera's mother, Ammini's father, Narayanan, Mini, one of the neighbours, the Psychiatrist who consulted them and Shailaja, in whose house Meera worked as a maid.

People considered Meera as a boy, showing that strong women are tagged as a boy, but society still cannot view strong women and their personalities. The strong hetero-normativity can be seen in Meera's mothers' words. She tried establishing it as a close friendship. The neighbour Mini believed and conveyed her thought that girls should behave according to societal norms. Ammini's father, Narayanan was very persistent in this relationship; the conversation with him proves the strong heterosexuality people are thinking, inflicting and following. Sahayatrika's conversation with the Psychiatrist shows he was sympathetic to those girls but was very hetero-normative, and the culture crusade believed in norms.

This study is the connection between feminist and sexuality politics in Kerala in what terms they have coherence and in what terms they parted ways, the various layers of the feminist movement and politics of female sexuality debates in Kerala.

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- Emergence of various women's movements in Kerala.
 - Time, causes
- Aspects of women's movements in Kerala.
 - Aspects, ideology and who constitute this?
- Political scenario of Kerala when these movements started to work.
- Movements and its struggles.
 - Response of political parties
 - Response of various organizations and establishments.
 - Movements and public sphere
- What were the major changes these movements could bring to larger scenario?
 - Politically, cultural context, public consciousness and other.
 - The political issues exposed by feminist movements in Kerala.
- Kerala known for its developmental model and its political consciousness. How gender politics has addressed?

- How the issues of women sexual minorities were addressed by various women's movements?
 - Major aspects of feminist's movements.
 - Is the aspect of 'sexuality' considered as a women's issue?

- Response of women's movements towards the sexual minorities?

- Emergence of non-heteronormative discussions; Sahayatrika, Its politics?

- Sahayatrika set up in the light of increased lesbian suicides. What are the intersecting multiple marginalities of women?

- What were the future and impact of it the members of Sahayatrika aimed at?

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